

**Air Force Support for the Joint Military Environment:
A NATO Allied Command Operations Headquarters
Case Study**

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I have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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Abstract

The nature of joint and international military service is built on a foundation of multiple service components sending their best officers to support, develop, and strategize for operational impact. If leaders fail to support sending or training their officers in a joint context, then military defense may become myopic, stemming from an internal focus on air or land functionality instead of an external focus on joint air and land functionality. While several studies have highlighted the need for greater support in the joint officer community, there seemed to be other factors that contribute to senior leaders guiding absence of deliberate joint post support for subordinates, contrary to congressional requirement. A fundamental question is whether or not leaders influence their subordinates to volunteer for joint posts, which could affect operational output, capability, and defensive posture for the United States and NATO allies. To assess this question a case study of NATO's joint environment was conducted that included twenty interviews with officers in the rank of major and lieutenant colonel. Findings showed that while officers were encouraged to serve in joint posts they experienced a lack of senior leader mentoring, insufficient training, NATO cultural bias, and ignorance of the difference between international and joint duty by leaders. To mitigate these issues leaders could deliberately implement joint education across the Air Force early in officers' careers as well as afford officers designators that honored their joint-international duty experience.

Key words: NATO, Joint, International, Manning, Mentoring, Career Support, Defense.

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by

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Doctoral Research Project – Case Study

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Strategic Leadership

Liberty University, School of Business

Aug 2022



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August 4, 2022

Date



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9 AUG 2022

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Acknowledgements

The first person I need to thank is Christ who said with Him all things were possible! This learning journey put a greater and deliberate inclusion of Christ in my military leadership, where He revealed Himself. A really close second is my helpmate and love, Jeanna. She read every word I wrote and patiently gave feedback, refined my grammar, and made what I wrote understandable to the layman. I really could not have done this without her encouragement and assistance! My third thanks goes to my supportive and patient children, Sierra and Ian. As we journeyed the pandemic and Liberty Online together, we took breaks, walked in the sun, and focused on our studies as only online students could. I cannot wait to see you walk your own commencement.

My professional thanks extends to several professional and academic doctors that *inspired* me through the years. Dr. Arthur Heinz, my Chair, had a steady hand in encouraging, keeping standards, and providing feedback to me through the entire process. Dr. Joe Page encouraged me to not worry about whether I became a Ph.D., an Ed.D., or any other title, but to just start. Dr. Marty Baker, Burke Community Church senior pastor, took post-sermon Sunday time regarding priorities and life-task importance; certainly a center of gravity. Dr. Shawn Basco (Colonel, USMC) took time to explain perseverance and outline expectation management regarding perceived and actual intelligence during the doctoral process. Lastly, Dr. Tim Hodge, challenged me saying, “you need to finish it”. His words never left me the entire time.

Finally, my dad, Steven Hamilton, wanted more for his family than he knew he could give. He never knew he gave me the best gifts of all: confidence, drive, and the desire to strive for excellence, thanks dad. My earnest hope is that Christ will use this degree for His purpose and that my family is inspired to enlarge their borders.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

This study researched United States Air Force leadership support of the joint environment, specifically at Allied Command Operations (ACO) in Mons, Belgium. Over the years, the Air Force has struggled to fill its required posts and those jobs serve as a means to support NATO allies. Each of the thirty countries that provide officer manning to collectively form NATO's defense do so knowing that their efforts stave off hostile actions from rival countries and paramilitary groups. Each post at ACO is bid on by respective allies and filled through a promissory manning conference. These joint or international postings have suffered from indeterminate support and experienced limited fill rates, with no projected resolution for their manning deficiency.

Assessing senior military leaders' support for these positions is key to understanding if collective allied defense might suffer. I have served at two NATO commands and observed that several posts remain unfilled for undetermined periods of time. This impetus for questioning NATO fill rates for posts vis-à-vis other joint posts, and how Air Force officers then influence NATO operations, is foundational to understanding why vacant posts go unfilled.

Therefore, through a specific research paradigm, I revealed several areas which deconstructed the issue of leadership support for joint posts. This paradigm encompasses the background of the problem, problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions that enabled an examination of the literature and acted to familiarize the reader with certain aspects of military terminology through a definition of terms. Additionally, a discussion of design and method aided in the triangulation of researched data, then outlined concepts, theories, actors, and military constructs assisted with understanding the framework of the project. Research participants (i.e., the actors) engaged with specific questions to elicit responses using an

interview guide. The study collected data via participant-researcher interview, followed with a focus group to validate and confirm the data. These data were triangulated with a review of known literature which was juxtaposed with the findings. Additionally, data was coded to reveal themes and related both research questions and research framework. Professional practices for improving general leadership and potential implementation strategies were discussed. The findings culminated in recommendations for further study and reflections that included a biblical perspective.

Background of the Problem

Within NATO there exists frictions that span officer capability, capacity to add value to operations, and willingness to fill manning positions. I started to assess the potential problem of the value Air Force leadership placed on joint capability and wondered whether it may stem directly from an internal culture department. For instance, Magruder (2018) discussed the lack of joint officer development over the last several decades; rhetorically, he queried how the Air Force goes about preparing its leaders to fill joint roles that it simultaneously does not fill. Strikingly, Magruder (2018) answered this question; in “2010, [Air Force Secretary] Wynne admitted the [Air Force] would save “our ‘A’ people for the Air Force staff and the ‘B’ people for the joint staff” (p. 55). Determining if this mindset was still prevalent within the Air Force was difficult since it required assessing if a culture shift had occurred, specifically away from Secretary Wynne’s statement uttered not long ago. Of note, any cultural shift can cause havoc to officers’ careers since it takes years to reach a certain level of proficiency for promotion (Rand Corp., n.d.; USAF Pamphlet 36-2506, 1997) as officers strive to become high performing. A shift can reset the proficiency clock and move the goal post for promotion criteria. Nolan and Overstreet (2018) discussed the very nature of recognizing, developing, and promoting high

performance officers (HPO) in their interpretation study and listed criteria for individuals to achieve the demanding level of HPO based on job responsibility, breadth of experience, etc.

As such, officers have traditionally been vectored to remain within the Air Force construct, but even while operating within that construct, they effectively receive limited training that would directly support their personal capability. Hardison et al. (2019) studied and dissected the Air Force's need for training; the study highlighted that training adjustments are required and captured the dissatisfaction with the type of training that certain career fields, such as cyber officers, receive. Apart from training, officers can harbor *a fear of missing out*, which may exist within their career field. The fear of peers' continued advancement exacerbates the reticence of leaders and officers to volunteer for joint jobs, essentially jobs outside of their career field, since the time taken to build proficiency within one's career is *most* valued and would take *priority* over external (i.e., joint, or international) career field demands. Additionally, Hardison et al. noted a compounding problem of training and assignment mismatches, which often desynchronizes qualified officers from a job posting that requires a particular skillset. Hardison et al. linked training, along with career development, to job satisfaction. While Hardison et al. focused their attention on the cyber field mismatches, this friction exists and is replicated across several Air Force career fields. Magruder (2018) identified another problem, in which a frictional dilemma exists between tactical and strategic knowledge; it revolves around an officer who wants to remain a functional expert and who also needs to broaden their skills as a joint planner. This friction clouds training, support from senior leaders, and career fulfillment for officers.

To counter career dystopia, Nolan and Overstreet (2018) stated there may be a tendency for officers to remain in proximity to senior leaders for visibility purposes, which enables those leaders to assess and challenge officers (i.e., HPO's). Conversely, officers in the joint community

may not be in proximity to senior leaders for this assessment; there may be actual physical distance between leader and subordinate in a joint posting. The joint and international environments operate across diverse locales, proximal leadership, and mission sets. Affirming this dichotomy, Cornett (2020) discussed the challenge that NATO had with its dispersed logistics function, stating that without the right personnel, which contributing NATO nations supply, the operational mission may struggle and suffer. Effectively, NATO operations would suffer from individuals not filling jobs or understanding command relationships in a joint environment that spans Europe. This could occur if officers lack support from their leaders or officers feel that serving in a joint post would hinder their promotion.

A possible solution to supporting joint service is seen in advocating the importance of joint capability from senior leadership, as Gaare and Manchester's (2021) essay on innovation asserted. They discussed Secretary of Defense Mattis and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joe Dunford considering the impact on the joint community through innovation. Mattis and Dunford asserted that amassed knowledge improves budget execution and man-hours to "meet tomorrow's challenges" (Gaare & Manchester, 2019, p. 48). Additionally, Dilanian and Howard (2020) went on to discuss Air Force Lt. Gen. Giovanni K. Tuck's view of the joint force and his encouragement for NATO support via a capable and innovative force trained through war games and exercises. This is done by individuals who understand how processes work, not only between United States military services but also allied nations; joint force exercises in logistics then identify gaps in processes that would ultimately support operations.

Problem Statement

The general problem addressed was that Air Force leadership currently placed insufficient value on joint capability and planning, resulting in a shortfall of officers filling joint

positions and a lack of Air Force influence on joint military operations. Lee et al. (2017a) identified that the Air Force culturally focuses on grooming its officers for positions inside the service rather than encouraging its officers to seek joint assignments, thereby affecting strategic experience and leadership in high-level joint commands. Magruder (2018) supported these views by making the reader aware that the Air Force effectively has no officers championing strategy in the joint environment. Hardison et al. (2019) added that there is frustration with functional skills mismatch, as well as insufficient joint planning knowledge, that contributed to retention problems within the Air Force. Crosbie (2019) then explained that joint leadership and joint capability, to include NATO, are hard and poorly understood by staff officers who operate in its construct, since the environment includes command lines, culture, and often egos, making it a complex and evolving dynamic. The specific problem addressed was that Air Force leadership potentially placed insufficient value on joint capability and planning for NATO, resulting in a shortfall of officers filling joint positions at NATO Allied Command Operations (ACO) Headquarters in Belgium and a lack of Air Force influence on joint international military operations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this flexible single case study was to reveal and describe whether a disconnection between the mandate to provide joint officers and the actual support for joint service was displayed by Air Force leaders. While several studies have highlighted the need for greater support in the joint officer community, there may be other factors that contribute to senior leaders guiding subordinates contrary to requirements. This research adds to the literature by exploring unknown factors for joint support or those that may hinder joint support. Additionally, the importance of determining such support through officer training or mentorship,

revealed whether officers contribute substantive operational capability to NATO's military planning and effects.

Research Questions

The results suggest that most individuals use their skills to support organizational effects. The ability to assess that support revealed how the Air Force can aid and influence effective planning. Robson and McCartan (2016) stated that research questions should be clear, focused and display relationship. Thus, the following research questions attempted to clarify a leader's role.

RQ1

In what ways do Air Force leaders value or undervalue capability and planning for joint duty at NATO ACO HQ?

RQ1a

What leadership actions or behaviors deter support for the joint environment?

RQ1b

What leadership actions or behaviors encourage support for the joint environment?

RQ1c

What actions are needed to encourage leadership to increase the value on joint capability and planning for NATO?

RQ2

In what ways are the fill rates for Air Force joint positions at NATO ACO HQ different than fill rates for other joint positions in the Air Force?

RQ3

How is Air Force influence important to NATO joint operations?

Discussion of Research Questions

RQ1 took the stance of addressing leadership's attitude toward joint capability and planning. It sought to attribute specific examples revealed via research that supported whether leaders value or undervalue positions outside the formal organizational Air Force. Extensionally, sub questions RQ1a and RQ1b sought to determine if there are substantive actions or behaviors that leaders exert for or against joint position support. RQ1c sought to assess activities that influenced top leadership behavior and therefore encouraged a shift in attitude for joint capability. These questions comprised a way to determine if an internal Air Force vis-à-vis external joint focus existed and manifested itself as a culture.

RQ2 sought to assess the nature of manning fill rates. Air Force fill rates for NATO might be higher than fill rates for other joint commands (e.g., European Command or Pacific Command). Determining where NATO ranks with respect to joint manning revealed the general support Air Force leaders give joint positions.

RQ3 aimed to attach meaning to Air Force contributions to military operations. Determining if the Air Force contributes specific capability that other US military services cannot provide would be beneficial to understanding support emphasis leaders place on filling their positions and preparing officers.

Taken together, these questions dissected the specific problem statement regarding Air Force leaders' support for NATO ACO HQ. While the Air Force contributes to various other joint functions, the specific problem addressed NATO support and whether it is highly valued. If it is valued, there may be blind spots in deliberate support that leaders do not see or there may be a culture that exists against NATO support; these were discovered by further research.

Nature of the Study

There are several methodologies which researchers use to assess, evaluate, and complete research. This project's schema for problem analysis was analogous to military problem set dissection and ways of thinking; fortuitously, I personally matured professionally and cognitively within the military's educational system. In beginning any study, critical analysis is required to identify the ontology in order to capture the approach to the research. Therefore, assessing which of the four predominant paradigms (e.g., positivism, post-positivism, constructionism, pragmatism) to utilize, as well as which methodology is most appropriate when conducting research, was fundamental. After the assessment, both the paradigm and methodology were then incorporated with the research topic in order to build a foundation.

Discussion of Research Paradigms

My research paradigm was pragmatism because real-world solutions matter. To a military officer, the pragmatic nature of problem solving is the default mechanism to tackle problems quickly without too much time taken to postulate or theorize (Robson & McCartan, 2016) why a problem exists because, often, there is no time to postulate. The speed with which problem solving occurs can sometimes be breakneck. Military officers are trained to identify that a problem exists, assess it, negotiate a solution with available tools at hand, implement the solution, and reassess if the problem has been fixed adequately to proceed. Problem resolution and the credit given for the solution are also independent of who thought of it or what method was used (Creswell & Poth, 2018) in the outcome; success is a resolved problem, not accolades for those who solved it.

The construct of using any available tool is directly contrasted to the positivist view, which states that there is only one way to achieve problem resolution. The singular reality of

positivism (Ryan, 2018) is too constrictive when using group dynamics, since it may hinder innovative thinkers and restrict alternate views. Military thinkers have a basis to begin with, generated from their education, but welcome and encourage new ideas to a group discussion, therefore negating a single view of right or wrong.

While post-positivism seeks to adjust and incorporate new evidence, which is beneficial, a researcher who uses this type of paradigm for military solutions would never be able to implement a result. Post-positivism advocates that as new evidence is introduced, the group constantly readjusts (Robson & McCartan, 2016) to incorporate the latest data or sudden changes (Gamlen & McIntyre, 2018) that occur. Additionally, social-political group dynamic factors would also hinder progress, based on group dismissal of subject matter experts' input. These experts may not be of equal standing or rank with group decision makers, thus causing internal conflict.

Alternatively, constructivism leans heavily on an individual's personal experiences (Teytarev et al., 2019), whereby the problem set to be solved has to be interpreted and constructed through objective reality (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This type of nebulous use of interpretation and individual skills (Charmaz, 2017) would prove detrimental to a military environment, causing constructivism to be impractical to the assessment, and ultimately implementation, of real-world fix-actions to joint capability.

Discussion of Design

This study was conducted with a flexible design using qualitative methods, specifically a single case study design was used. Yin (2015) confirmed that qualitative research includes case study research design and continued that a feature of this type of research is that it includes its participants thoughts in the study, which is different than quantitative methodology. For this

reason, qualitative methodology was more in-line with this study's problem statement that stipulated Air Force leaders either value or undervalue joint capability and planning.

Extensionally, the idea was to pinpoint why leaders value or undervalue joint experience.

Therefore, feedback was needed to understand why leaders potentially failed to support NATO jobs or the reason for possible participant reluctance to volunteer for certain positions.

Types of Design. Notedly there are three types of design that can be used in research, they are fixed, flexible, and mixed methods. Fixed design is a stringent formula of research that seeks to separate the researcher from the subject being studied (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The nature of removing researcher bias is the objective for this design, which can be problematic since individuals possess some form of bias toward their research. The fixed design method incorporates a quantitative design to stoically associate numerical value in order to measure subject matter. However, while associating numerical value to research questions does have worth, it also inhibits adjustment when new data is found during the study. Therefore, the data introduced is deliberate, such as seen in experimental and non-experimental approaches, whereby the researcher introduces some form of variable to observe its influence. The resulting outcome of fixed designs attempts to validate study research questions through repeatable processes and fight subjective external casual influence (Robson & McCartan, 2016) that might skew data.

Conversely, flexible design method leverages the researcher's newfound information and allows adaptation for the study. Once new information is identified through the evolution of the study (Robson & McCartan, 2016), adjusting research questions can occur in order to take advantage of new data. In this way a flexible design proves useful as it welcomes ideas into the study. Flexible design also incorporates qualitative design, thus facilitating a more adaptable

method to data. Flexible designs pair with ethnographic studies, grounded theory, and case studies since these approaches usually form new realities and capture nuanced human behavior (Robson & McCartan, 2016) as research progresses.

Extensionally, mixed method designs combine the two previously discussed design methods and facilitate the use of fixed and flexible designs thereby blending qualitative and quantitative aspects together when appropriate. Robson and McCartan (2016) discussed that using a mixed method design often aids in addressing data found during a study and can also substantiate triangulation to validate data. Pragmatic research uses this method since it allows a wider range of questions that could aid in an overall holistic approach (Robson & McCartan, 2016), which could answer more complex question sets.

Flexible Design Use. I chose to use the flexible design method with the single case study since it allowed my research to change as I revealed new data. This study's research questions (RQ) attested to how a flexible study emphasizes how such areas as Air Force leadership practices (i.e., RQ1), the assessment of encouragement for NATO manning fill rates (i.e., RQ2), and Air Force influence on joint military operations (i.e., RQ3) could change over time. These research questions are an exemplar of micro-study problems by which certain points of interest within a culture could be highlighted (Stake, 2010), as a case study, to enable greater focus within a specific military body.

The nature of using a flexible design nests well with the construct of military operations. Since Robson and McCartan (2016) offered that as a researcher progresses, new data may be revealed and, therefore, the approach may shift to accommodate that new data; variables such as the military adjusting to government directives can be smartly included. For example, in light of the change of presidential administration, the support for NATO operations seemed to change

based on the United States leadership's political climate and a flexible design was beneficial to capture that change.

I determined that fixed and mixed methods were not appropriate because of both time and actor constraints I might face during research. Fixed design would preclude a quantitative approach to personnel, and attempting to measure similar attributes that influenced career decisions would have been overwhelming and problematic since no two careers are alike. Relying solely on numeric data does not tell the complete story, it only captures *what is*, not the *why*. Mixed method design, while tempting, would have taken too much time to complete since both qualitative and quantitative data collection would have to be accomplished and then compared.

Discussion of Method

Several types of research methods are typically used in qualitative designs, with the most prominent being narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. These pair with the qualitative approach and have repeatedly been used in research over the last several years (Creswell & Poth, 2018); they are systematic in nature. These methods usually include contextual information (Creswell & Poth, 2018) that assists the researcher to associate meaning of environment to actors, in order to understand the construct of research relevance. To understand these methods, I will briefly discuss their paradigm.

Types of Methods. The narrative method captures an individual's personal experience through a storyline form. Narrative method lends itself as a natural means to gather actor influences and then uses the data to build a comprehensive picture from multiple aspects. These aspects may include social artifacts and take time when interacting with individual actors

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). Mobley et al. (2019) found this method beneficial when attempting to understand military veterans' first person accounts of the difficulty when seeking education.

Phenomenology method differs from narrative method by assessing several common themes from multiple individuals through a common experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Multiple interviews are usually accomplished between researcher and actor. Themes are then categorized from actor responses. For example, Hawkins and Crowe (2018) found this thematic method the most appropriate for their research on female veterans and community integration.

Grounded theory method uses collected data to generate a theory (Chun Tie et al., 2019) toward a solution. From the onset of research, its focus is to seek facts to render conclusions. The process of understanding commonality from actors is what Strauss and Corbin (1998) sought to explain through causal phenomena. Achieving direct relevance between a study and result encourages researchers to use this method; theory development that explains an event or phenomena via discussion or hypotheses is characteristic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). King and Snowden (2020) used this method when studying military mental health care. They established that training, resources, consultation, and clinic climate directly influenced decision making and behavior of medical providers and military leadership.

Ethnography emphasizes a complete cultural description over a course of time (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher utilizing ethnography essentially observes group dynamics and group changes to explain group culture. Through patterns and rituals of actors, done via fieldwork, the researcher may surmise why groups emit certain habits. This occurs insomuch that Wolcott (2005) directed researchers to amass observations rather seek data and to finish a single day's observations at a time in order to create a bridge between individual experiences. Jansen

and Kramer (2019) used this technique to understand mores and practices of military culture at the Netherlands Defence Academy over a series of eighteen months.

Alternatively, the case study method seeks to narrow a single issue within a culture. The case study examines a real-life scenario within a time parameter for deeper data collection, usually from several research sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach grants wide latitude by which to gather and examine any information that supports the study. Through the use of interviews, articles, or observations, details then emerge (Robson & McCartan, 2016) as the study progresses. Bardenheier et al. (2016) used this method to research possible linkages between the Anthrax vaccine and rheumatoid arthritis for vaccinated active duty military members between January 1998 and December 2005; their research showed negligible association.

Single Case Study Use. The appropriateness and nature of conducting the single case study within a military community (Creswell & Poth, 2018), specifically the Air Force, allowed targeting a subset of a larger body, specifically the Department of Defense, which is comprised also of the Navy, Marines, and Army, but focuses on purely United States military vis-à-vis including the international military population within NATO. This focus facilitated research into Air Force culture and led to better understanding of officer career motivation and choice of assignment. It also narrowed how the Air Force contribution toward allied defense influenced NATO operations.

The other previously mentioned methods were not used in this study because of their constrained nature. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that the narrative method necessitates the researcher possess considerable background knowledge of the actor and the context that that actor plays in the study. They then described several challenges with phenomenology, inasmuch

that establishing abstract concepts are difficult and picking actors for the study should be very deliberate, which was not consistent with this case study. Grounded theory was not the best choice since actors possess disparate careers and those differences may have influenced personal choices for joint duty. This diversity of experience might also have inhibited a common cause of leadership support. Lastly, ethnography simply takes time. Creswell and Poth discussed ethnography's complexity in observation since what the actor *does* and what the actor *ought to do* in their culture can become distracting. Therefore, when determining leadership's support, variables of an officer's career awareness (i.e., the *does* and the *ought to do*) would overrule leadership support for joint postings.

Discussion of Triangulation

Taken together, Renz et al. (2018) discussed the nature of qualitative research and that it encompasses several observational factors that effectively weave together to tell a story. Specifically, this reasoning undergirded the applicable use of the case study which then acted as a vehicle to gather data. Upon collecting the data, it must be coded, or grouped into general categories, and then analyzed to make sense of it all through a systematic (Renz et al., 2018) process. However, as information is gathered through the research process, that data remains independent. To validate research there must be more than one source by which research can support its findings. Triangulation is the means by which this qualitative research project validated gathered data.

Denzin (2009) discussed the process of triangulation. Principally, triangulation takes several methods, such as interviews, a focus group, and peer reviewed literature and compares them to each other in order to corroborate data. This pragmatic way of assessing whether data actually fulfilled research criteria ensures that data is contextual (Denzin, 2019) and situational.

Therefore, I used triangulation of data, via the aforementioned methods, to assess if data supported the proposed research question about leadership's support for the joint environment. After conducting actor interviews, to gather answers to open-ended questions, I then determined if similar themes were present from multiple officers' experience across different career fields. Secondly, a follow-up focus group, as described by Noble and Heale (2019), acted to validate or negate data gathered by interviews through selecting multiple key words or themes. The group reacted to these words or themes and gave additional feedback to identify blind spots (Miller, 2019) missed by the interview questions, thereby acting to fill research gaps. Lastly, peer review literature, presented in the literature review, acted to support interviews and group results, thus ensuring a closed loop of validated research.

Summary of the Nature of the Study

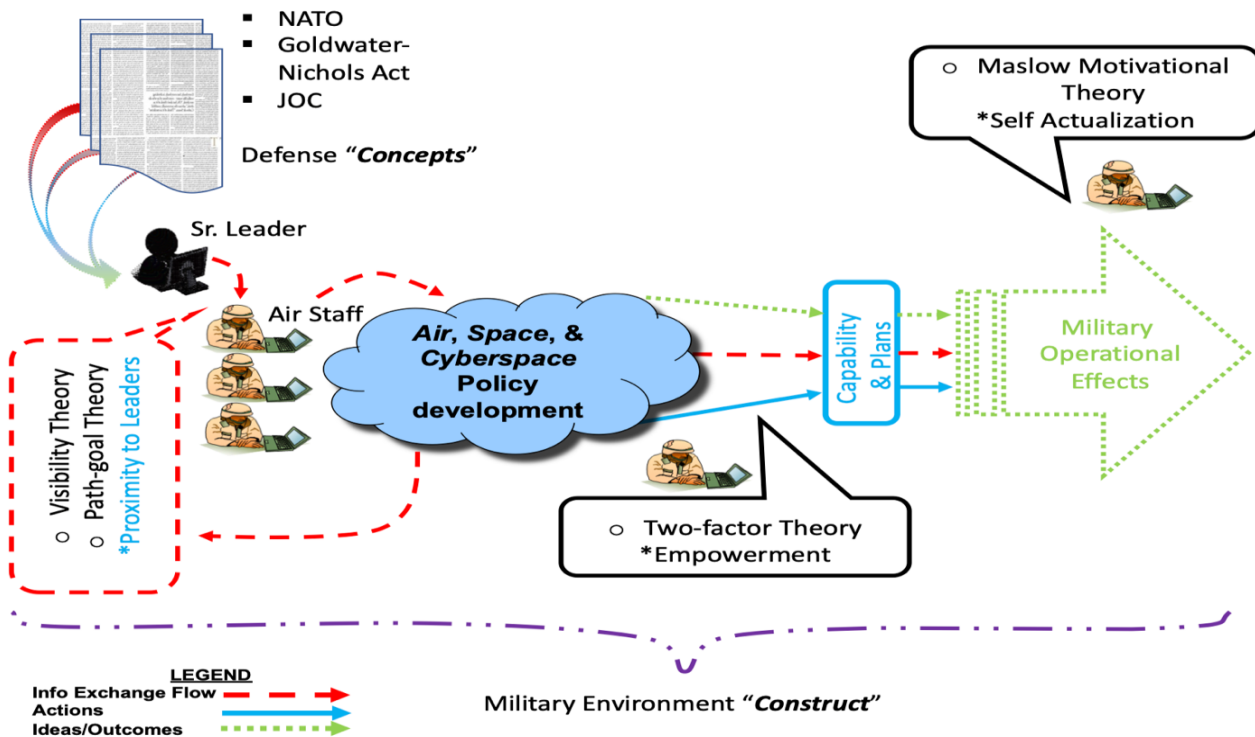
Taken together, the use of a flexible, single case study design that utilized a qualitative methodology based on pragmatic ontology worked best to examine the military environment. The ability to adapt future research based on any new data enabled an approach that could be adjusted as needed. Moreover, an effect of using pragmatism was that military officers understand and often use it, which readily facilitated the understanding of the study by its intended audience. Additionally, using a single case study to comprehend the NATO environment limited the scope of the study and enabled it to detect actions that needed to change, as seen in sub questions RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ1c, in order to adapt support for joint military operations.

Research Framework

To grasp the military environment, my research framework functioned as the foundation to understand military concepts and thereby the nature of military operations. There are three

concepts from which I extrapolated that intent, they are the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, the Department of Defense's Joint Operations Concept, and NATO's Deterrence and Defence [sic] strategy. These governing body works guide political and military strategists, enable military operations planning, and employ forces in action. The information presented in the concepts link to a construct which acted to bolster the framework by discussing attributes found within it. Synthesizing and understanding the concepts that shape military planning, both in the United States and the international theater, extensionally includes actors (i.e., military officers) who bring specific KSA's to form relationships with leaders. These relationships are personified via four theories: the Visibility theory of Promotion, the Path-goal theory, the Two-factor theory, and Maslow's Motivational theory.

Figure 1 shows the relationships between the concepts, theories, actors, pathways for information flow, and outcomes or effects. For instance, the proximity between leader and subordinate is shown on the left denoting a relationship and information flow, via the red dotted line, that exists between the two. Each of the concepts, theories, actors, and constructs is subsequently discussed more in depth to elaborate how each component connected to this project's problem statement. Notedly, the framework did not change during the course of the study, remaining constant since it was set upon a military foundation.

Figure 1*Military Operational View***Concepts**

The following concepts encapsulate the notion of the United States' defense stance, its approach to the joint concept, and how NATO anticipates its allies interpret common defense, as seen in the upper left of Figure 1. These three concepts comprise the underpinning of defense through which military officers understand strategic concepts (Owens, 2015; Veneri, 2008), act competently, and develop skills (Roennfeldt, 2019) necessary to interaction with those concepts. While they possess different aspects of defense capability, their real impact comes from how each supports the other, and therefore are complimentary when understood and applied. I summarized each to provide a general lay understanding.

Goldwater-Nichols Act Concept. Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 wholly changed the way United States military services interact with

each other (*Sen. John McCain Holds a Hearing on 30 Years of Goldwater-Nichols Reform*, 2015). The concept was formed after the botched attempt to rescue American hostages from Iran (Bowhens, 2012) in 1980. It enacted a deliberate interchange to foster better communication, acquisition, and operations that promoted and encouraged exchange and cooperation between military services rather than continue internally focused or stove piped military service planning and operations. This matters because as joint emphasis increases, better strategic integration results (McInnis, 2016), thereby increasing the Air Force's influence on military operations. This directly links operational influence to Air Force support, as stated in the specific problem statement, since the Goldwater-Nichols Act mandates joint interoperability (JCS, 2018; McInnis, 2016). It stresses that support for joint functions will increase effectiveness. The first of the three concepts, it is the foundation for joint schema and supports NATO's Deterrence and Defence concept.

Joint Operations Concept (JOC). The United States operates military maneuver under a joint centered construct that stems from the aforementioned Goldwater-Nichols Act. The DoD placed greater emphasis on its joint planning and operation capability after the Act went into place. The JOC captures how the service components should support operations through delineating lines of effort and focus (Stephens, 2004) that each service facilitates and functionalizes. Therefore, a direct correlation exists that as joint emphasis increases, joint experience increases; thereby, in an Air Force centric focus, jointness facilitates greater integration of air power in joint military operations (DoD, 2006). Extensionally, an assertion can be made that deterrence through joint security cooperation lowers the overall United States and Allied cost for defense, therefore freeing the Air Force to employ adaptable strike operations (DoD, 2006). Lastly, deterrence in defense increases integration of air forces in Allied operations

to protect United States and Allied interests (DoD, 2006). These statements discuss jointness and the influence that the United States Air Force can have on military operations when leveraged in planning and capability, as the specific problem statement infers.

NATO Deterrence and Defence Concept. NATO endeavors to practice Collective Defence [sic] and strives to coordinate thirty independent national concepts as an Allied force posture to dissuade aggression (NATO PDD, 2021b) from external threats (Keller, 2017), which it does through Deterrence and Defence. Aurelian (2008), a Romanian strategist, discussed NATO's position of defense and introduced several JOC concept points to signify areas of cohort (i.e., Allied) effects that create an advantage over adversary in air, sea, and land capabilities. His assertion was directly derived from and supported by United States joint policy while being employed via an international perspective. Therefore, without contributing Air Force personnel into the joint environment, functionalities (i.e., policy development, etc.) such as NATO air defense capabilities, space utilization, or cyberspace readiness may decrease. These can be seen in Figure 1's central cloud, where effort is focused, which outlines functions to be leveraged for defense. This supports the specific problem statement inasmuch that NATO's capability and planning are affected without the proper personnel to accomplish defense, readiness, or operative functions.

Theories

Post concept introduction, I turn to four distinct theories that support the military nature of this research project, they are: Visibility theory of Promotion, Path-goal theory, Two-factor theory, and Maslow's Motivational theory. Each theory forms a partial picture of *what* decisions and *why* decisions may be made in a military construct. Nested together, these theories fuse to create the attitude and culture of military officers. Several leadership theories are taught to, or

employed to, influence officers via formal instruction, mentor sessions, or direct interaction with superiors (Elshaw et al., 2018). However, the following theories are the most relevant in showing *how* supervisors and subordinates interface.

Visibility Theory of Promotion. Visibility theory links subordinate distance and repetition to leader knowledge of the subordinate for proximity comfort. Moore and Trout (1978) discussed military career progression and stipulated that making oneself visible to superiors is prominent in stimulating one's career decisions. This occurs insomuch that individuals choose specific assignments, tasks, or work relationships; these actions ultimately drive how a superior evaluates and interacts with those subordinates. Moore and Trout (1978) included seven variables in visibility theory that affect decisions, they are: seniority, source of commission, performance report, actual performance, billet, chance, and visibility. As seen in the red dotted balloon in Figure 1, this theory characterizes itself with proximity; the leader and staff are close, so any policy development creates a visible feedback loop. As such, two theory variables, namely billet, sometimes called posting, and performance reporting directly connect with the problem statement, since the authors state certain military billets are considered premium over others and performance reports lose value based on subordinate distal proximity to superiors who may or may not support their efforts.

Path-goal Theory. House (1996) stated that a motivational relationship exists between superior and subordinate, such that payoffs for appropriate behavior reward modifying decision-making behavior. Figure 1 notes the close proximity leaders and subordinates have; this is similar to visibility theory, but this theory on supervision is applicable to the study and problem statement through the functionality that is demonstrated in a military construct of direct appeasement of the supervisor-subordinate relationship. Simply put, the mentorship relationship

that occurs influences tasks, posting locations, and attitude in subordinate roles. House (1996) affirmed that a leader's behavior through subordinate coaching generates reward and therefore shapes a subordinate's behavior.

Two-factor Theory. Herzberg's (2008) two-factor theory, also known as motivation-hygiene theory, highlighted his research to discuss two specific areas of influence, namely, motivators and hygiene. Motivators drive job satisfaction, such as being advanced or promoted, but could also include experiencing achievement. Hygiene could include job security, as found in Maslow's motivational theory, or reduction of work policies. The application to the problem statement links these factors to military leaders who seek to motivate subordinates and accommodate their dedication through concerted effort to reward high motivation and hygiene. For instance, Miner (2005) noted a study Herzberg accomplished at Hill Air Force base in Utah that identified two-factor theory through job enrichment; it resulted in a cost savings of several million dollars through the dedication of workers who felt that leaders were supportive through listening and empowering. Figure 1 shows this theory's placement after the central policy development cloud and results in empowerment of the subordinate, thus beginning a fulfillment phase of job enrichment.

Maslow's Motivational Theory. Maslow postulated five stages of hierarchical psychological progression that fulfill personal needs beginning with basic or survival requirements and also including safety, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization; Tchitchinadze (2020) discussed how these fit within the military educational environment through a motivation and reward mechanism. Schuler and Cangemi (1978) also discussed the linkage between motivation of subordinates and the influence that motivation has, generated by a superior's input. Summarily, Schuler and Cangemi (1978) equated basic needs to food and

military shelter, safety to military rules, belongingness to the uniform and its inclusion of identity, esteem to promotion, and self-actualization to personal growth and excellence integrated with a superior's expectations. One may see, at the right of Figure 1, the dedication to the organization an officer exhibits; essentially an officer's career fulfillment is posited by the direct influence on the organization's military operational effectiveness.

Actors

Actors are defined as the individuals who produced responsive data in this study; they are the Air Force officers with whom I sought to extrapolate joint service information from their perspective. I interacted with, polled, and interviewed officers stationed at the NATO headquarters level, specifically mid-tier (Galway et al., 2005), field grade Air Force officers in the ranks of major and lieutenant colonel. The actors represented multiple Air Force Specialty Codes (i.e., job identifiers that align with a skill set, such as 17D cyber or 14N intelligence officers), in order to maximize the population set. These officers usually had several years of experience within the corps Air Force but had not necessarily been assigned to a joint billet or possessed international staffing knowledge. Their experience of interacting with fellow Air Force officers might have been mature, as seen in Figure 1 with proximity to senior leaders and high levels of planning, but that maturity did not necessarily translate to the joint or international environment. This interaction aspect provided a mechanism to determine their KSA's or training that should have provided the necessary skills to navigate an international environment with all of its intricacies, which includes a general knowledge of international mores. Notedly, the intricacies of effective information flow between leaders and officers that enable them to develop policy is annotated by the red dotted arrows in Figure 1.

Constructs

The construct was the United States Air Force military, specifically an international environment. In this construct, there are rulesets to guide behavior, extending across international boundaries. For example, the United States military environment depends on trust (Wheeler, 2018), as do other countries' militaries. Additionally, the interaction of leaders and subordinates, the feeling of camaraderie, the obligation to duty for country (Hattke et al., 2018), or a reward that motivates subordinates all form the military environment and feeling of belonging. The sum of its parts can be viewed as a whole, which Figure 1 expresses at the bottom bracket that stretches across all phases of military involvement. Notedly, these feelings of belonging usually cross international lines and, for the majority of officers, this sense of duty motivates their careers. For United States Air Force officers, valuing either an internal focused culture or external inclusive culture is a decision point which may affect career progression. Mid-tier officers, per the Goldwater-Nichols Act, are encouraged to seek joint billets (McInnis, 2016); as such the Air Force military environment will either support or hinder expansion into the joint environment based on their level of leadership support.

Relationships Between Concepts, Theories, Actors, and Constructs

Therefore, when annotating the importance of why the aforementioned concepts, theories, actors, and constructs were selected to represent items of jointness and its degree of support, a convergence amongst them can be characterized by several factors that comprise each. This intersection occurs to form a relationship. While a complete one-for-one linkage is not feasible, points are indeed shared across what military planners call lines of operation (JCS, 2018). Using a military planning mechanism, the concepts, theories, actors, and constructs are lines of operation that all point toward a common goal of military operational effects (i.e., the

end-state or goal that actors work toward), as seen to the right in Figure 1. While each of the concepts, theories, actors, and constructs occur at a different time from left to right, they are neatly *nested* and can be categorized further into what, where, who, and why. Note: numerical superscript denotes items that sequence together to link attributes.

Concepts form the *what*. It is the foundation by which military direction is laid and generates an outline for operation. For example, the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 (McInnis, 2016) effectively *states*, requires, and directs joint manning in billets. The Joint Operational Concept (DoD, 2006) *depicts* how support is provided for jointness. The NATO Deterrence and Defence Concept (NATO PDD, 2021b) *employs* the joint concept in an international environment. These combine from the genesis of what defense should be, establishing a framework that facilitates transitioning to a more solidified construct.

The military construct is the *where*. Effectively, the military, whether acting in a United States or international capacity, gives form and boundary in which actors operate. It not only employs politics by other means (Lindsay & Gartzke, 2020), but possesses attributes like professionalism (Paterson, 2019) which actors bind to, internalize, and exhibit. The military construct includes motivation¹, reward², leader-subordinate³ relation, trust⁴, belonging, duty, and camaraderie. This construct may be employed globally as military officers deploy and may interact with various foreign militaries.

Actors form the *who*. The actors within the military construct make effects transpire, such as seen when translating defense concepts to defense end-states. The actors are officers who choose what to do in their careers to gain reward², what proximity to leaders³ they want to have, or belongingness to an organization by internalizing its values (Sosik et al., 2019). These actors are officers who possess professionalism (Paterson, 2019), often work with other military

services, understand or practice multiple skillsets, and have assorted experiences (Robbert et al., 2019). They then leverage and build on their experiences to create a pathway for planning and operational execution (see Actions blue line in Figure 1) toward end-state effects of defense. Their knowledge, skills, and abilities directly enable deterrence through their practiced competence (Roennfeldt, 2019).

Theories then frame the *why*. The four aforementioned theories invariably give substantiation for actors as well as construct lines of operation, intensifying the human connection of decision making; they are why actors are motivated¹ to choose one position over another or sacrifice time or effort for the mission. To begin, Maslow's Motivation theory is comprised of motivation¹, esteem², self-actualization, safety⁴, belonging, and shelter. These effective motivators generate significant self-analysis when balancing career choices with satisfaction and fulfillment. Likewise, Two-factor theory inherently possesses motivation¹ that equates to satisfaction and hygiene that equates to security⁴, thereby complimenting Maslow's theory. Alternatively, Visibility theory relies on two attributes for actor decision making, namely leader-subordinate reward² and proximity³. It could be asserted that this theory is more passive in nature since the subordinate seeks a leader's reward vis-à-vis the leader feeding into a subordinate. Closely linked is the Path-goal theory comprised of motivation¹ through the leader-subordinate relationship and reward² mechanism of the relationship³, which shape the actor's behavior. This, however, is more active in nature since the relationship translates a leader's desired behavior modification for the subordinate into response action.

These four lines of operation possess attributes that cross-connect to ultimately shape an actor's behavior for career success (Robbert et al., 2019) while simultaneously progressing toward end-state effects. The theories, as seen in Figure 1, can be linked to an actor's internal or

external motivation¹, since they are placed at distinct locations in relation to defense end-state, requiring maturity in planning and operational knowledge and employment. Nominally, an actor's career or service motivation could be associated with three military operational effect reward² areas that range across personal (actor), governmental (USAF), and international (NATO) outcomes and therefore may influence what choices actors make based on the positive or negative exchanges within the leader-subordinate relationship.

Summary of the Research Framework

When nested together, the concepts of defense necessitate leveraging capable and adroit planning, so that whatever organization utilizes its military forces, the *effects* of deterrence can be leveraged before kinetic hostility ensues. Essentially, the actors who plan military effects become prized for their astute application of capabilities and therefore often become high-performing officers. These officers employ several leadership theories without the full understanding that they are doing so. The Visibility and Path-goal theories are representations of proximity to a leader. However, as planning matures and begins to extend beyond the immediate sphere of the leader's influence, officers engage in Two-factor theory, which considers motivation and career hygiene; these officers are happy to continue building capability. Maslow's Motivational theory involves an officer's movement and fulfillment, often outside the leader's proximity. The organization can continue to reap benefits from this officer, but enrichment comes not from a leader's motivation or hygiene but by the officer's self-actualization (upper right of Figure 1) in association with the organization's operational effect.

The critical piece centers on actors; the officers are people and serving in a military construct is a choice. They simply want to be value added, make a difference, and be rewarded for their effort (Robbert et al., 2019). The communication and interaction that a leader has in this

construct is formidable. Extensionally, the leader often has the ability to shape behavior (Sosik et al., 2019), prepare a subordinate to operate externally to a native environment, or promote defense concepts in order to deter conflict.

Definition of Terms

The research conducted was military in nature and was comprised of many terms only found within this cultural construct. The following terms introduce the reader to military vernacular often used as shorthand during everyday speech. If equivalent civilian terms were available, they were used in lieu of military terms for ease of reading and digestion of material.

Air Force Specialty Code

An Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) is an alphanumeric code used to identify specific Air Force jobs (Schofield et al., 2018).

Collective Defence Construct

The Collective Defence Construct is the assembly of military forces that provide cumulative support in order to stave off enemy threat and aggression (Chivvis, 2009; NATO PDD, 2021a).

Company Grade Officer

A Company Grade Officer (CGO) is the lowest commissioned officer category of ranks in a military, it includes Second Lieutenant, First Lieutenant, and Captain (Galway et al., 2005).

Course of Action

A Course of Action (COA) is often a series of deliberate actions that may be taken toward goal completion (Hardison et al., 2019), usually done after a systematic analysis.

Commissioned Year of Service

Commissioned Year of Service (CYOS) is the year an officer was commissioned (Hardison et al., 2019).

Cultural Concept

A Cultural Concept is the embodiment of attitudes, methods, and modeling to form an environment which an actor operates within (Eliason, 2017; Harrington et al., 2016).

Department of Defense

The Department of Defense (DoD) is an organization charged with defending United States national interest through military means, comprised of civilians and six service components (Hardison et al., 2019).

Field Grade Officer

A Field Grade Officer (FGO) is the mid-tier commissioned officer category of ranks in a military, it includes Major, Lieutenant Colonel, and Colonel (Galway et al., 2005).

Headquarters Air Force

Headquarters Air Force (HAF) is the headquarters unit of the United States Air Force located at the Pentagon responsible for policy, budget, and direction of Air Force forces (USAF, 2015).

Joint Force

Joint Force is a structure by which specific military service components, such as the Air Force, or Navy work together for operational effects (Lee et al., 2017b).

Joint Service

Joint Service is the mechanism by which members serve with other military service components or nations to support operational effects (Lee et al., 2017a).

Knowledge, Skills, Abilities

Knowledge, Skills, Abilities (KSA's) are abilities and attributes that an individual possesses that contribute to their career field or mission (Carter, 2013).

Military Construct

The Military Construct refers to the people, policies, and culture that encompass the holistic nature of military defense, embodied through layers of leadership hierarchy, working individually within their service component or together to form joint service effects (Dalzell et al., 2019).

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a military organization mandated by international treaty for collective international military defense (NATO PDD, 2021b).

Operational Effects

Operational Effects are military outcomes to produce a response, that may include deployment of personnel, equipment, or resources to achieve a political goal (Hamre & Conley, 2017).

Strategic Concept

A Strategic Concept represents the highest level of planning and operation capability within the military construct for enacting operational effectiveness (JCS, 2018; Keller, 2017).

These key terms are only a small subset of the vernacular by which the United States military operates. Terms may be service specific and take on specific meaning or connotation in order to communicate rapidly.

Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations

The research included in this study possessed three components that influenced the parameters of interaction between data, actors, and artefacts. They also acted as necessary boundaries for research structure. The three areas are assumptions, limitations, and delimitations as follows.

Assumptions occurred within this study to form the rudimentary structure. Leedy and Ormrod (2018) offered that assumptions are a foundation of *truth* which aid individuals when digesting research, and used to evaluate data as they bring their innate assumptions while grasping the study's material. Assumptions are the lens that impacted the study from the outlined military construct via a professional military perspective.

Limitations occurred within this study as possible weaknesses to the research. However, limitations have a two-fold purpose, insomuch that McCaslin and Scott (2003) outlined that limitations not only give credibility to research but also stipulate disadvantages of the research. Effectively, limitations were what I decided to accomplish within my study that affected the outcome. Limitations impacted the study since recognition of those areas helped to mitigate error or extraneous data that could have acted as a distractor to the core research.

Delimitations occurred within this study as a threshold. Hancock and Algozzine (2016) stated that delimitations *are* boundaries of the *case* the researcher investigated. Delimitations are what I decided to not accomplish (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018) within the study. Overall delimitations facilitated focus in the study and set the scope. Delimitations impacted the study because the military construct is large and comprises several layers of joint service; this section clarifies my centralization effort.

Assumptions

Within the study there were five assumptions which *helped* to form the study boundaries. First, when collecting data via interview, all officers answered truthfully; this was based on the Air Force core value of *Integrity* that undergirds professionalism (Li et al., 2017) within the officer corps. A risk of individuals not answering truthfully was possible. To mitigate this risk a follow-up focus group acted to triangulate data collected from the interview via face-to-face dialog. This secondary data collection was compared to interviews for validation. A second assumption was that officers understood various aspects of internally focused vis-à-vis externally focused Air Force perspective (Asch, 2019). A risk was that an officer would not understand this perspective. To mitigate this risk an interview question asked if the officer understood these focus areas, which was then validated via the focus group. A third assumption was that officers understood the concept of the joint force (Li et al., 2017) construct and how the Goldwater-Nichols act dictates joint service for advancement (McInnis, 2016). A risk was that an officer would not understand this concept. To mitigate this, officers were selected at the FGO level who had undergone professional military education, whereby this concept was previously discussed. A fourth assumption was a majority of the officers had not previously served at a NATO posting (not including a deployment to the Afghanistan theater of operations) and might have limited cross-cultural understanding (DeCostanza et al., 2015). A risk was that officers would have knowledge of these areas and therefore could have been biased when answering the interview questions or interacting in the focus group. To mitigate this risk a question within the interview identified if the officer had previous joint or NATO postings, which was addressed and compared against their previous experiences. The fifth and last assumption was that I anticipated most officers had a foreign supervisor/leader in the NATO hierarchy, as well as a United States

military evaluation rater (Carson, 2017), thereby introducing a complex work environment. A risk was that officers would only have a United States supervisor, making the environment less complex, which would bias their interview response. To mitigate this risk, including foreign interactions with senior leaders during the interview and focus group portion added value regarding how they navigated daily NATO work differently than an officer who had a direct foreign supervisor/leader.

Limitations

There are five limitations within the study. First, I specifically polled twenty Air Force offices within the specific FGO grade, since they were the highest affected *pool* or sample (Hardison et al., 2019; Leedy & Ormrod, 2018) of officers, but mitigated the limited sample by including multiple officer AFSC's. The second limitation was the use of an open-ended question interview as the *mechanism* to gather data, assess the data, and then conduct a single follow-up focus group with a sample set of officers. This limitation was strengthened by conducting a focus group to cross validate data (Noble & Heale, 2019), however, as I anticipated, military operations (e.g., Russia-Ukraine conflict) complicated this effort. I mitigated this disruption by best effort schedule de-confliction, including a follow-up group session with participants between operational obligations to triangulate data (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). A third limitation was researcher-to-actor proximity for enabling interviews to gather *data* and *experience*, since similar reasoning regarding personal schedules applied. I mitigated this through interacting with one participant via Microsoft Teams to facilitate interview interaction (Buonpane et al., 2020), thereby granting more allocated time (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016) as his schedule allowed. A fourth limitation occurred by restricting my research participants to officers who had been, or were presently, posted to ACO in NATO to gain their *perspective* (Lee

et al., 2017b) of preparedness and motivation. I could have included other joint postings, such as the United States European Command, but there are limited exchanges between Air Force and international officers at that location in Stuttgart, Germany. I mitigated this by including one officer attached to United States European Command posted at ACO in Belgium, since he had direct NATO involvement. A fifth limitation could have been my personal *bias* (Renz et al., 2018) possibly affecting interactions with officer participants, stemming from my previous experiences at a United States joint posting and later at a NATO posting. I may have *adapted* to a joint or international environment vis-à-vis officers who are presently serving at ACO, who may have a different attitude toward NATO, or who sought a different outcome by volunteering to serve at NATO then me. I mitigated this by offering a full disclosure to participants that I have previous joint experience which may have differed from theirs.

Delimitations

This study was delimited in three instances. First, it was delimited to specifically focus on Air Force officers in NATO. There were additional United States military officers available within ACO, such as Army or Navy personnel, however, their scheme for mentorship and promotion criteria (i.e., service component artefacts) is significantly different from Air Force criteria. This rationale necessitated a scoping focus on Air Force officers, since I personally cognize the Air Force construct. Second, this research was delimited inasmuch that while other NATO commands include Air Force officers, constraining the study to ACO limited the sample geographically in order to capture a known environment with similar factors involving officer posting. Focusing on ACO also facilitated greater interchange between myself and the actors. Third, this research was delimited to exclude CGO's from the pool of actors, thereby limiting the officer pool. The rationale to exclude was that a CGO filling a joint posting is ordered by an

assignment officer and their post does not count against joint manning, as dictated by the Goldwater-Nichols Act.

Significance of the Study

This study possesses significance in determining how leaders affect subordinate career decisions, which ultimately affects NATO operational effectiveness. The impetus behind determining research gaps was to confirm if other studies had been accomplished that supported joint motivation in leadership. While research gaps were apparent in leadership, they existed for multiple reasons, essentially because no formal studies exist that reveal the linkage between leader, subordinate, and operational effectiveness. Extensionally, when assessing what the Bible states regarding leadership, combined with the aforementioned theories that discuss subordinate actions, areas of godly and self-centered practices were discovered. This is important since leaders still make mistakes similar to kings David and Solomon today and must use personal examination when interacting with subordinates. The significance for the study is when leaders function as an effective mentor, then subordinates are positively affected, resulting in a motivated workforce and successful military operations.

Reduction of Gaps in the Literature

There were several recent pieces of literature or anecdotal news *articles* which discussed the importance of jointness. However, there were few *studies* within the military structure that actually discussed the importance of jointness or discussed leadership change in behavior promoting jointness. The Rand Corporation (Chivvis, 2009; Dalzell et al., 2019; Galway et al., 2005) conducted studies over several years which covered aspects of jointness that included calls for more joint assignments, including NATO, as a means of jointness, but no studies assessed leaders' influences on jointness. While areas of international trust (Hughes et al., 2009), joint

operational strategy (Lindsay & Gartzke, 2020), and a lack of Air Force leadership (Lee et al., 2017a), had been discussed, these studies failed to address other aspects that may influence acceptance of a joint attitude. This study sought to reduce the gap in literature by including the underlying motivation of staff officers through the conduit of their career mentors and leaders.

For example, Hardison et al.'s (2019) fine study on cyber officer retention only mentioned motivation twice, rather it focused on the Air Force's *desired characteristics* of cyber personnel, not on what the officer wanted. Alternately, Hattke et al. (2018) at least discussed the bureaucracy with military and civil service; they did not limit their work to military personnel but focused on human resource management practices and motivational theory in relation to the workforce. Therefore, when assessing whether military leaders are at the crux of influencing their subordinates to seek joint and international posts, this study adds to existing literature when addressing United States Air Force posture in the joint environment.

Lastly, while Yannakogeorgos and Geis (2016) assessed the human side of cyber and how leader stereotypes affect that career field, I had difficulty in finding proponentcy of jointness across other AFSC's. Promoting joint warfare (Priebe et al., 2018) or understanding the HPO is essential to Air Force individuals contributing to the operational mission. However, when discussing what is needed to become an HPO, Nolan and Overstreet (2018) fell short when discoursing motivation of officers; they relied more on how a leader can identify *if* an officer is *worth* the time to propel into the HPO realm (an internally focused perspective). These types of individuals may have much to offer an externally focused NATO operational sphere and this study narrows the gap that exists in determining if leaders positively influenced their subordinates to volunteer for NATO posts.

Implications for Biblical Integration

Integrating biblical principles into this study conveys how God seeks to use His word to influence leaders. For example, Daniel 2:21 stated one must acknowledge that God "...removes kings and sets up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding" (*English Standard Version*, 2001). Further, in Merida's (2015) commentary, godly leadership principles offered guidance which present-day leaders may use; kings David and Solomon (Weigle & Allen, 2017) are an exemplar of the struggle that leaders face when applying their skills and talent in leadership. For instance, David erred as a military leader and coveted his best officer's wife, Bathsheba, causing him to alter his moralistic direction based on personal desire (Weigle & Allen, 2017). Later, his son, Solomon, (Friedman & Friedman, 2019; Merida et al., 2015) struggled in his leadership and presented examples of both good and bad leadership practices, which were marginal at best when scrutinized, even though he was deemed both well-known and wise.

Notably, Jennings and Stahl-Wert (2016) stated "people won't do their best for leaders who violate their own principles" (p. 145). This assertion becomes most relevant when discussing military leaders and subordinates. Similar to the aforementioned kings, military leaders have been well educated, have wisdom from years of study, have interacted with mentors, and have collaborated with other leaders to make the best decisions they can, but they still often fail in their application of godly principles when making ethical or moral decisions, such as when several retired general officers acted questionably in 2006 when criticizing civilian leaders' decisions instead of remaining militarily neutral (Binkley, 2020).

Biblical Theories and Research. Therefore, the process of identifying leadership best practices and determining biblical principles in military leadership via personal beliefs and

leadership actions begins with the application of scripture (Barna Group, 2017). This is important because the military's hierarchal structure fills a role in military leadership, which Goodwin et al. (2018) assessed involves teams of people; these people are the structure upon which the military construct is built, as seen with Uzziah's military structure in 2 Chronicles 26:11. Importantly, inside the military the action of mentoring subordinates in career, life, and belief structure is a key aspect of a serving leader (Jennings & Stahl-Wert, 2016), thusly championing certain characteristics of maturity that contribute toward deliberate leader-subordinate interaction and replicate the Path-goal theory. Hence, a leader's support for the joint environment would demonstrate that that leader acts as a servant supporting their subordinate's career, which might chaff against internal Air Force requirements. This directly relates to biblical fulfilment in modeling (Weigle & Allen, 2017) the ethical and moral application of personal witness.

However, as Visibility theory is juxtaposed with Path-goal theory, the passive Visibility interchange relies on subordinate actions, which leaders might eventually reward if subordinates are seen enough. This theory seems akin to the prideful acts and self-seeking that Philippians 2:3 warns about; "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves" (*English Standard Version*, 2001). This pairs with James 2:1-7, showing that misplaced vanity could cause embarrassment and misjudgment of others who are equally capable.

Christ-centered leaders therefore glorify God through application of business prowess, whereby non-Christians may be influenced by Christian leaders who operate and work unto God as Colossians 3:23 directs "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men" (*English Standard Version*, 2001). This amplified state of working for a higher calling can be

associated with Maslow's Motivational theory insomuch that reward becomes much greater than the self-seeking actions. Moreover, associating fulfillment through godly action may increase self-esteem and belonging within the military construct.

Likewise, Two-factor theory compliments Maslow's Motivational theory and can be illustrated via Joseph and Pharaoh's exchange in Genesis 41:14-52. Whereby Joseph eventually received *esteem* and honor from Pharaoh (v. 39), which led to greater *satisfaction* (v. 51) in saving Egypt and led to Joseph saving his family through his efforts. This biblical narrative typifies how individuals may receive reward, acknowledgement, and belonging from leaders, as is also found in the military construct.

Leaders and Biblical Perspective. Paralleling biblical kings like David and Solomon with today's leaders aids in understanding how biblical influence applies to Air Force leadership practices to identify positive or negative business practices from a Christian perspective. Integration of biblical narrative reveals the culture that Air Force leaders perpetuate; a culture that could add value to or detract from leader-subordinate interaction. Charan et al. (2015) corroborated this by summarizing business culture as, "Businesses don't create value; people do" (p. 63).

Christians are challenged to use their gifts and leverage their godly moral compass (Groothuis, 2014), which non-Christian leaders are not impelled to do. For example, the parable of the talents, found in Matthew 24:14-30, illustrates how a Christian leader might use gifts and wisdom toward military operational goals. In sum, the obligation to use biblical perspective in research is denoted by Merida (2015) insomuch that "obedience to God's word will look strange to casual observers, but we must take it seriously" (p. 160).

Benefit and Relationship to the Leadership Practice

Leaders are encouraged and expected to enact informed decisions, using sound information, by which their actions impact an organization's culture. Dubey et al. (2019) offered that organizational culture comes from its mission, structure, and leadership amongst other things. Therefore, one may surmise that military leaders have a deliberate organizational role to fill, which influences subordinate or organizational decision-making stemming from their accumulated years of experience (Schofield et al., 2018). The aspect of this study noted that leaders function as mentors to peers and subordinates specifically because of that experience, which extends to encouraging subordinate behavior (Arenas et al., 2017). Leaders within the international environment also face the same challenges of influence (Arenas et al., 2017; Fuhrmann, 2020) that can shift both resource application and the focus of an organization.

With leaders carrying so much weight regarding personnel decisions, organizational goals, and their outcomes, it stems to reason that leader input would be the greatest proponent or hindrance toward operational outcomes (Cakiroglu et al., 2020), especially in light of Path-goal theory (Cote, 2017). Thus this study related leadership practices to NATO's operational effectiveness (Hamre & Conley, 2017) since leaders performed the aforementioned functions of mentorship, decision-making, (Nolan & Overstreet, 2018) and organizational goal influence. Likewise, Coleman (2020) advocated for Air Force officers to use the joint planning process for its ability to capture planning gaps and utilize sister service (i.e., Army, Navy) capabilities. It is gaps in planning, such as Coleman identified, that are internally Air Force focused, which Air Force leaders can leverage, turning them into externally focused operational effects. For example, Air Force Lieutenant General Tuck (Dilanian & Howard, 2020) functioned to modify subordinate behavior as he understood his role in the joint environment by sending a clear

message regarding how to act personally to ultimately support the NATO mission.

Summary of the Significance of the Study.

Reducing the gaps in current literature is essential when conducting research. This study sought to achieve that goal by discussing how leaders' influence can positively or negatively affect decision-making and how that influence would motivate or demotivate subordinates within their career. While various studies have assessed several aspects of jointness, they have fallen short when discussing motivation. Additionally, integrating a biblical construct in research is applicable when assessing leadership. Understanding that there is historical precedence of biblical kingship that offers parallels to current-day leaders enables a litmus test for right decision-making. Juxtaposing biblical kings with current day leaders' best practices offers a direct correlation to determine if serving leadership is being applied, thereby driving the culture of an organization. One may surmise that subordinates then take their lead for behavior from the culture which surrounds them. This is clearly visible when linking the four theories using a biblical perspective; it can offer a true north when engaging in career decision-making or for military operations that are directly affected by career choices.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

In order to facilitate discourse in this study a thorough review of academic literature was accomplished to reveal any information gaps pertinent to this work. Leedy et al. (2018) noted a literature review not only tells the researcher what is *not* known but may reveal what *is* known for a given study topic. Insomuch that additional reasons to accomplish a literature review extend beyond identifying information gaps; it also aids in finding new and relevant studies within the field which may yield support for one's research; or as Creswell and Poth (2018) stipulated, reviewing literature exposes certain characteristics or similarities of studies which may reveal

artefacts. This is important when assessing one's own research since juxtaposing it with a study on support for the joint environment could have real-life ramifications for officer career choices. The nature of accumulating academic literature lends credibility to a study such as this one and removes the risk of personal bias during research. Having stated the latter, Yin (2015) warned that literature reviews can benefit studies or introduce a type of bias into an essay and advised caution when accomplishing this important step. Therefore, combing through literature facilitates the building of a framework for understanding that transverses similar data; this data may not align exactly with one's research, nevertheless developing an understanding of the theory baseline (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018) assists in the *reasoning* for a study.

In order to gather literature from a broad spectrum of sources, several databases were utilized. I leveraged the Jerry Falwell library and paired that with Google Scholar. When a direct research query from the Jerry Falwell library produced limited results, I then searched Google Scholar and fed results back into the Jerry Falwell library search engine; this often produced more results. I also used Defense Technical Information Center for many military related queries. With its large database of military specific documents, it helped to both steer research and refine documents relevant to this study. I also used NATO's e-Library and NATO's Multimedia Library as a means to uncover specific data and research associated with it as an international body. Other databases such as ProQuest, Sage Journal, and Gale were used as necessary.

I constrained my research literature parameters to keep a majority of the articles and journals within a near-term five-year period. Additionally, within the five-year window, I endeavored to constrain most utilized literature to the last four years or less. This was done to restrict information in order to maintain the latest data on the joint environment. If literature was

outside the five-year constraint, it was used: 1) if the data was unchanged, such as public law or treaty or 2) if the data added to this study in such a way that it continued to affect areas like military culture or officer motivation.

To aid in understanding the path of literature research, the literature review section included essential leadership practices that encompass military and nonmilitary leaders. I moved on to discuss the problem that literature presents with respect to joint support, which included training, joint requirements, and the influence on operations. I then moved on to concepts of the study which included leadership support and operations support. Next theories and constructs, to include collective defense, were reviewed and I then covered related studies that recently assessed the joint concept. I summed with anticipated themes from the literature review covering multiple aspects of joint support, including inwardly focused HPO's and operational effectiveness as well as possible new support for joint service and operations.

Leadership Practices

Leadership field pioneers Kouzes and Posner (2017) posited two basic leadership practices questions, asking “what are our core principles?” and “what do we believe in?” (p. 66). These elemental questions range across military and non-military organizations. In a military context Arenas (2017) helped to answer these core questions by stating that moralistic and ethical conduct were principles that leaders counted on from officers and, extensionally, he affixed morals and ethics to Air Force core values. He noted that a leader who leveraged morals and ethics generated superior leadership. Arenas then connected leaders to subordinates, whereby he asserted that principles and practices need affirmation, especially in young officers, effectively connecting the necessity of an upright character to leaders and their success.

Further, by reviewing Kouzes and Posner's (2017) *leadership practice* table, it can be seen that "strengthen[ing] others by increasing self-determination and developing competence" is key to exhibiting exemplary leadership skills by "enabling others to act" (p. 24). Kouzes and Posner expanded this one practical thought of leadership action as they stated that leaders employ subordinates or stakeholders, engage them, and convey to them what activity or action is worthwhile. Leaders continue investing in subordinates by creating a shared vision for followers (Kouzes & Posner, 2017), which develops a practice of dialog exchange; through this interaction a leader possesses the ability to shape a subordinate's job into an adventure and to encourage a subordinate's departure from their comfort zones. Military leadership practices accomplish a similar result, whereby a leader stimulates an individual's passion; that passion often turns into perseverance (Kouzes & Posner, 2010) because resiliency develops through personal challenge, difficulty, or demand.

Therefore, it stands to reason that promotion of HPO's (Nolan & Overstreet, 2018) is directly attributable to hard work through leadership recognition. Interestingly, Nolan and Overstreet stipulated that an officer's hard work and potential are identified by senior leadership early in an officer's career; however, they warned that this leadership practice can be a problem when an officer succeeds at one level of responsibility and does not succeed at a higher level of responsibility. Moreover, a complexity develops between leadership practices of ethics, leader-subordinate exchange, stimulation, and early identification of potential. This complexity could explain Bowhens' (2012) dissatisfaction with how leaders prepare their officers, such as when leaders focus on specific career training, by which officers then receive training only if they are considered promotion worthy. Even more complex is identifying officers for training and releasing them to attend training early from their current high-visible post; also problematic is

releasing officers after they arrive in their new joint position, since those leaders need staff officers for strategic planning (Bowhers, 2012); each of these scenarios seem to oppose the aforementioned ethical leadership practices.

The Problem

In Bowhers' (2012) research, he noted a tendency for leaders to not necessarily prompt subordinate joint training, but rather focus the officer to operate primarily in a specific and defined projected career path internal to the Air Force. However, both preparing and training officers to adequately navigate joint positions and requirements, in order to support joint positions, is needed in cross cultural environments (Febbraro et al., 2008). When preparation does not occur, staffs experience a degraded performance from officers on joint staffs (Bowhers, 2012). Additionally, Robbert et al. (2019) highlighted the *promotion aspect*, adding complexity to joint support, by which four factors contribute to dissatisfaction in an officer's career; the causes are poor performance evaluations, a behavior or weight problem, not obtaining a specific PME, or assignments that lead to loss of experience. However, Robbert et al. noted that officers who took career broadening assignments or joint posts were not precluded from promotion; exceptions to accepting the aforementioned posts occurred if the posts were mis-timed in an officer's career, whereby the *timing*, not the post, could impact promotion. Hence, there is a notion of a traditional career path, insomuch that Robbert et al. found that officers who took a nontraditional path could be negatively affected through other experience deficiencies when compared to peers. Nolan and Overstreet (2018) tended to affirm the notion of career paths, as such supported a natural tendency of leader-subordinate proximity during career development. Adding to the confusion of postings, career tracks, and leader proximity are development teams that scrub officer records and recommend assignments. Nolan and Overstreet inferred that

conflicting guidance, especially when involving a suspected HPO, factors into a senior leader's direction, influence, and guidance to their officers.

An additional factor in senior leader support to the joint environment for NATO could also be the conflict between internal and external focused capability. Hamre and Conley (2017) found that the link between United States and NATO capabilities are *complimentary* rather than *integrated*. They found repeated use of United States forces added strength to United States equipment, for centralist American capability, rather than adding to NATO strategic interest.

There was difficulty in how much support NATO wanted from the United States post-Cold War, insomuch that it wanted to decrease the United States' influence in order to create its own future (van Hooft, 2020). However, this also posed a problem with United States involvement in small conflicts (van Hooft, 2020) and with the promulgation and deemphasization of NATO Collective Defense. This shift in policy has been more complicated since the United States took an increased role in European Defense post-Cold War, in which Van Hooft (2020) proposed that it aided in building conflict between allies, since a United States president openly claimed that European leaders were weak and needed American presence in the European theater. Van Hooft (2020) summed by offering a glimpse into why American leaders may be reticent to support NATO, since Presidents Bush, Clinton, and Obama renegotiated American strategy in the post-Cold War environment.

The author added that the 2003 Berlin Plus Agreement contributed to the contradiction by exacerbating an on-again off-again attitude of United States support to Europe, in which the United States may withhold military support or assets for conflicts, functions, or policies it deems contentious or that are not necessarily in American interests. Van Hooft seemed to argue that United States support to NATO was more about building the NATO body with historic

Warsaw Pact members for European stabilization and reducing troop size and posture, rather than building United States capability; consequently force planners wrongly forecasted troop requirements as well as the threat Russia posed to allied defense.

Training. Bowhers (2012) stated there was a *management-education disconnect* and highlighted that Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) is supposed to prepare officers for joint service. However, Bowhers noted specifically that military service components had a lack of support for education, instead focusing on and preparing for single-service promotion and preparation, therein creating a disconnect between training, education, and joint preparedness. Bowhers argued that leaders who send their officers to joint training need to do so in order to develop KSA's required for high level planning and not to fill a box for promotion. Moreover, Magruder (2018) acknowledged the lack of Air Force senior leader focus on joint officer development; he called for expanding officer capability beyond their AFSC into what that officer could bring to the joint environment. For example, Magruder suggested expanding fellowships, international relations, or studying at foreign schools to increase a *cross-section* of HPO's with joint experience. Interestingly, the Air Force's Strategic Master Plan (USAF, 2015) previously called for joint training, and training infrastructure, to enhance both planning and operational capabilities but enacting these concepts is effectively left to senior leaders and commanders, which can be adjusted in lieu of training events or exercises, negating the requirement.

Requirements. A requirement for training exists in the form of the Goldwater-Nichols Act (*Sen. John McCain Holds a Hearing on 30 Years of Goldwater-Nichols Reform*, 2015) and hence stated why the Act was drafted; effectively the Act came about from each military component acting as a stovepipe with little to no collaboration or coordination between the service components, resulting in operational failures like Grenada, Vietnam, and Iran hostage

rescue. The 2015 Congressional Hearing affirmed that: the Joint Staff was created, military operations were empowered, and joint duty requirements within each military component were enacted. Interestingly though, the Act only *required* that general officer selects, and no other officer ranks, needed joint posting experience (McInnis, 2016). McInnis then noted there has been a call to modify the original Act to raise the general officer joint requirement to Major General (O-8) and Lieutenant General (O-9), since it is often difficult to align a post for a brigadier to obtain joint credit. Adding to the mix, McInnis (2016) captured recommendations for empowering military components to enable joint capability as the services balance their manning to meet agile warfighting capabilities (McInnis, 2016).

In light of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, Lee et al. (2017b) studied general officer fulfillment of joint positions and noted a consistent deficiency of Air Force senior leaders across joint postings, see Figure 2. Lee et al. found that while each military component offered a fair share of its general officers to lead various Joint Staff posts, Air Force generals were notably absent. Lee et al. asserted the notion that the lack of representation at key joint leadership positions could stem from an internal Air Force preparation of its officers, instead of senior leaders advocating for joint service. While Lee et al. acknowledged that several general officers plan to foster more joint advocacy, the plan is late in coming. Lee et al.'s research found that between 2004-2008 Air Force representation fell in both warfighting and non-warfighting posts since capable generals lacked any previous joint experience; unsurprisingly there has been a lack of joint support since the early 1990's.

This could also explain Harrington et al.'s (2017) study on Air Force manning that possibly exposed why senior leaders focus inwardly, wherein they stated the Air Force could not fulfill its operational requirements without supplementing its forces with reserve officers.

Harrington et al. asserted that the Air Force had not adjusted or reduced its historical commitments and still possessed too many *individual requirements* to fill.

To help understand this, Knopman et al. (2020) were charged with assessing the newly founded 2018 Air Force Warfighting Integration Capability (AFWIC) to determine how support for USAF requirements could be levied and fulfilled. Knopman et al. found that since the organization was charged with enabling the Joint Force (effectively the JOC), it sought how senior leaders could support it. Effectively, Knopman et al. found the team's requirement for success came with a call for greater senior leader focus and support through planning, programming, and manning, which would enable it to add value to joint warfighting capability. As such, Knopman et al. offered that AFWIC recognizes and vocalizes the need for the Air Force to deliberately integrate NATO systems for interoperability. Extensionally, Air Force interoperability connects capability for operational effect through its *forces* as it integrates into the Joint Force construct (Knopman et al., 2020). Their research also hailed the need for adequate and prepared Air Force members to contribute to, and integrate with, NATO or other *indigenous forces*.

In line with preparing officers to integrate with other forces, Bowhars (2012) noted that JPME is required by the Goldwater-Nichols Act and through it prepares officers for their joint duty. Bowhars called on leaders to send officers to JPME upon selection to a joint post as a preemptive requirement for preparedness, which would obligate service components to send more qualified officers to these posts. Nolan and Overstreet (2018) discussed a requirement for a standardized approach to evaluate CGO's as well, which is important when assessing if an officer is a HPO, since there seems to be selective career support. Nolan and Overstreet suggested that HAF had not defined promotion requirements for HPOs, adding to the confusion

of senior leader support, and therefore tracking and preparing officers for the next higher rank poses problems without some type of *model* for assessment.

Influence on Operations. Air power requirements often affect areas such as logistics operations (Cornett, 2020) and cyber operations (Febbraro et al., 2008; Keen, 2015); these mission areas are critical to NATO's, as well as the United States', defense. Air effects are key to the joint commander, as advocated by Magruder (2018), insomuch that the Air Force contributes the greatest result to conflict resolution, even if it is not the biggest force entity during an operation. This could explain why Magruder noted that several general officers affirmed the need for air planning in joint roles. Moreover, joint planning in operations is a requirement that affects joint partners as well as the kinetic effects of targeting (Magruder, 2018), therefore necessitating that an officer possess a certain amount of joint knowledge. Bowhens (2012) earlier cautioned that even though JPME graduated officers in-line with joint requirements, dictated by the Goldwater-Nichols Act, the concerted effort of graduating relatively few officers created the unforeseen effect of readying officers for promotion rather than increasing joint staff planning competence in joint matters. This compounds the joint planning deficit, especially since several NATO countries possess limited knowledge or limit support for NATO's purposefulness (Hamre & Conley, 2017), particularly when compared to Cold War era levels.

Concepts

When scrutinizing which concepts support the indication of jointness, a few extents become readily apparent and relevant, such as the aforementioned notion of culture, as seen in the military construct, through which, when separated into generalized themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018), concepts can be studied and grouped. Two such subsequent concepts are leadership and operational support for the joint environment; these are undergirded by structural military

constraints (Magruder, 2018) that may value leadership over operational support, or conversely these may be dependent on each other, each being contingent on the latest perspective of the political environment (Lanoszka & Simón, 2021). To introduce these two concepts I begin with national government leadership.

Leadership Support. In 2017 President Trump declared NATO “obsolete” (Daugirdas & Mortenson, 2017) and requested nations fulfill their promised Collective Defense pledge contribution, based on an “America First” policy (Sperling & Webber, 2019). Daugirdas and Mortenson went on to discuss several other NATO leaders’, such as German Chancellor Merkel and Italian Foreign Minister Alfano, reaction to President Trump’s social media Tweets about their continued support for defense and NATO spending; there was support for America but irritation at Trump’s words. Additionally, Daugirdas and Mortenson reported that Secretary of Defense Mattis echoed Trump’s sentiment toward reduced United States support to allies who did not fully contribute to NATO spending. The authors quoted NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg’s agreement with Trump by stating that, while the alliance had made progress in NATO budget contributions, Stoltenberg called on nations to raise their amount sent to NATO based on an international 2016 agreement. Lanoszka and Simón (2021) also highlighted President Trump’s criticism of NATO, expressing that Europeans should pay more for their defense as well as honor their monetary promise toward their defense. Lanoszka and Simón went on to discuss Trump’s change in European policy which, interestingly, caused Allies to shift focus toward Russia; Trump mentioned a decreased reliance on NATO and a possible shift toward more bi-lateral agreements vis-à-vis an alliance. Moving toward a new bi-lateral focus, Lanoszka and Simón highlighted that the Trump administration even began to withdraw military forces from Germany, prompted by Germany’s meager defense spending in NATO. However,

Trump's dialog might have been an effort to generate momentum on alliance spending since he, only months later, reaffirmed the United States' support to NATO in April 2017 when he stated "I said it was obsolete; it's no longer obsolete"; President Trump later talked with Romania's President in June of 2017 (Daugirdas & Mortenson, 2017) and affirmed United States support to NATO's Article 5 Collective Defence.

Similarly, Ricketts (2020) captured French President Macron's November 2019 comment of NATO being "brain dead" (Dobbins, 2019; Sarcinschi, 2019; van Hooft, 2020) with its inability to have internal coordination or cross-allied support, thus providing insight regarding other national leaders' misgivings for troop support. Ricketts described Macron's attitude that NATO lacked a strategic objective and that Macron still held President Trump's aforementioned comments as offensive. According to Ricketts, internal allied dialog was deficient, as seen by Turkish President Erdogan's attack on Kurdish forces after an American withdrawal from Northern Syrian, through which France had no prior warning of Turkey's intentions. Earlier NATO alliance leaders experienced fluctuation in United States support as witnessed with President Obama's movement of the United States to a supporting NATO role in Libya (Ricketts, 2020) operations. Ricketts then noted that American defense policy began to shift away from terrorism and on to power competition, as evidenced by Secretary of Defense Mattis' January 2018 statement, causing more concern to allies.

Sarcinschi (2019) confirmed the previous concerns that transpired between NATO allies, and queried if there was indeed cohesion within the alliance, citing Turkey, the United States, and other nation's difficulties when supporting conflict efforts. Sarcinschi also noted several nations halted export of goods to Turkey for fear they would produce conflict or war materials; NATO Secretary Stoltenberg decided not to comment on Turkey or the United States' roles in

contested zones. The author also discussed that French President Macron chaffed at the thought of additional French monies contributing to NATO, as demanded by President Trump, adding that Macron sought dialog with Russia, which directly clashed with several NATO allies' diplomacy efforts. Despite these friction points, Sarcinschi (2019) summed allied leaders' positive steps pertaining to national coherence, insomuch that in 2019 NATO agreed on several key points to Collective Defense, such as patrolling the Black Sea, increased effort against terrorism, and stating space was a new domain; in short, with unity there was still contention.

Alternatively, in a departure from the Trump administration's frictional relationship with NATO, the Biden administration sought to reverse Trump's policy by halting the previous administration's Pentagon 2020 plan (Lanoszka & Simón, 2021), which refocused military efforts. The authors noted that while the Trump administration targeted allied defense and their budget contributions through tough talk, the Biden administration took a different tack. Lanoszka and Simón stipulated that Biden sought to repair relations with allies by shelving the contentious Pentagon 2020 plan which sought to reduce military troop numbers across the European theater, shift some air support from historical countries (e.g., Germany) to different European countries, and reinforce troop rotations in the Black Sea theater of operations. The authors argued for President Biden to assess the plan and not outright scrap it, however, Biden campaigned on strong NATO support and Pentagon 2020 chaffed against it. Lanoszka and Simón discussed the difficulty that President Biden has with supporting NATO since countries like Germany have often accommodated Russia. However, as Biden backs NATO and a strong joint United States-Germany partnership, there may be some hurdles to overcome regarding Collective Defence; the authors called for small military presences in Poland or other Baltic states to act as a joint force, which could align Biden's desire for NATO against Russian aggression.

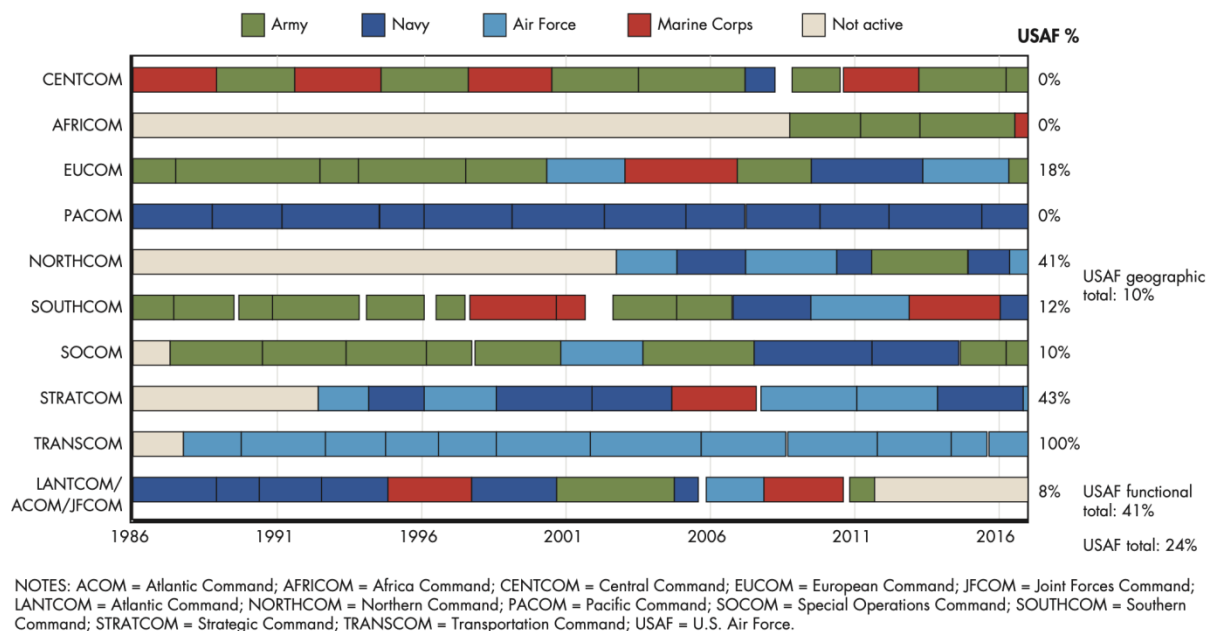
Preemptively, as the Air Force readied to augment European allies, an interview with Air Force Chief of Staff General Goldfein (Eliason, 2017) stated the Air Force practiced joint capability and support but cautioned that internal service requirements are too big to fill all of the joint obligations currently. However, Eliason (2017) captured Goldfein's assertion that joint capability was an obligation rather than a competition, done to ensure the commander on the ground gets what they need. The author also portrayed Goldfein's desire to strengthen the ability to grow leaders as well as teams, with new officers being better adept at planning and integrated domain understanding. Eliason noted how Goldfein stressed the need to start early, such as in reserve officer training, the Air Force Academy, and Basic Military Training in order to foster the necessary attitude and culture for jointness, even offering that integrating a joint officer career path was viable. Overall, the author ended with Goldfein's attitude toward bolstering jointness as an *moral* obligation so that Airmen would be trained, equipped, and ready for the joint force environment, making it akin to Air Force readiness (Eliason, 2017).

The previous literature discussed, captured, and depicted contentious United States support for jointness, especially NATO, but Magruder (2018) added to the literature and noted there is a reluctance to send HPO's to joint jobs by senior leaders. Magruder noted that several Air Force leaders generated an atmosphere of *have and have-not's*, including a previous Secretary of the Air Force who advocated for an internal Air Force culture that coveted HPO's, effectively relegating the Joint Staff to a less desirable place to serve. Additionally, Magruder offered an example of the historical lack of joint mindedness by stating that between 1947 and 2013 only seven Air Force generals lead combatant commands, which is partly captured in Figure 2. Extensionally, Nolan and Overstreet (2018) discussed the proximity and visibility of HPO's to immediate supervisor-leaders, acting as a means of assessing a HPO's capability.

However, proximity or visibility become poor rating devices for KSA's (Nolan & Overstreet, 2018). Disturbingly, Magruder (2018) cited that few officers could add value to strategic planning; they were uncreative and more focused on present day military capability. Positively, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff called for a "*Joint Force Next* initiative" to assess all military components' education, training, and overall experience that would ultimately lead to a joint minded officer for *future* engagements; lately General Goldfein embraced the call (Lee et al., 2017a) and began the effort of assessment for Air Force forces (Magruder, 2018). The author stated that Air Force leaders had not historically developed officers for jointness and therefore do not have a core officer skillset to fill joint leader posts. Magruder continued that while several military conflicts have not solely relied on air power to win wars, the general theme to joint leadership is selecting the best leader to fill a role regardless of their service component, effectively championing the notion that any leader should be able to fill any role. The author quoted a previous Air Force Chief of Staff who called for greater jointness from the Air Force and warned that if more leaders did not think jointly, then it might negatively influence national security. For example, Magruder cited an Air Force general who noted that only three lines mentioned air power in a 145-page planning document, which substantiated a noticeable absence of Air Force planners during the planning phase of a military engagement. The author asserted that national leaders choose joint leaders under the *most qualified* model, thereby embodying the dearth of joint prepared officers.

Complementing Magruder's (2018) assertion that joint leader posts should be filled via the most qualified model, the concept of leadership support for the joint environment is solidly outlined by Lee et al. (2017a), insomuch that the authors posited senior posts might not be filled with Air Force leaders because those leaders are underqualified for those postings. Lee et al.

(2017a) offered that senior leaders may choose officers for promotion or position based on mirroring themselves on the candidate; this may lead to inadvertently choosing someone with similar attributes. The authors also theorized that Air Force leaders may indeed *not qualify* their subordinate officers for joint posts because of an internally focused leadership scheme, whereby the senior leaders may actually hinder joint duty in order to make officers proficient on Air Force matters. Lee et al. called for the Air Force to transform its culture of internal focus and cultivate development of joint capability, which would place greater emphasis on joint leader posts rather than singular development of Air Force leader posts. Quite strikingly, Figure 2 (Lee et al., 2017a) denotes the effect of the lack of Air Force representation in joint leadership positions, with the noted exemption of TRANSCOM, which is primarily an Air Force command and naturally prepares leaders for their role. Lee et al. advocated that to attract officers to serve in joint posts, the Air Force could include high-visibility positions (akin to proximity theory and visibility theory) making posts more attractive. They also offered institutionalizing joint development to balance both Air Force knowledge and joint knowledge in order to expand capabilities across geographic or functional lines.

Figure 2*Airmen Are Consistently Underrepresented in Geographic Commands*

Operations Support. General Goldfein (Eliason, 2017) specified there is an ongoing comprehensive review of how the Air Force develops operational leaders to support United States' multi-domains of defense. Goldfein confidently stated that Airmen are present in most joint cyber, surveillance, or air operations. However, the general expressed the desire to build a bigger capability for all six operational domains, comprising air, sea, land, space, cyber, and undersea (Eliason, 2017). This is poignant because, General Goldfein subsequently stated that he wanted to build joint planning proficiency and capability in order for officers to successfully lead joint operations (Magruder, 2018) while operating in those domains.

The United States Air Force aimed to define how it would support joint operations when it published a Strategic Master Plan (USAF, 2015) that stated a requirement to support foreign defense efforts, squarely in the interest of the United States, covering organizing, training, and equipping several mission sets to “strengthen global deterrence and assure allies and partners” (p.

B-22). The Strategic Master Plan (USAF, 2015) discussed a desire to project power globally but acknowledged that uncontested projection is a thing of the past. The plan also stated that international partnerships were integral to international Cooperative Security which could be achieved through organizing, training, and equipping Airmen for operations. Conversely, the Strategic Master Plan indicated only five domains (2015) as opposed to General Goldfein's six domain concept discussed earlier (Eliason, 2017). The Strategic Master Plan continues to advocate the need to integrate joint partners to ultimately employ Global Vigilance, Global Reach, and Global Power. The plan affirmed overseas basing, positioning of assets, and decoys for strategic posture with joint partners for operational effects in order to reduce United States costs and increase foreign relationships. The Strategic Master Plan freely conveys that preparing and growing Airmen with a coalition mindset, as well as shifting from just-in-time or insufficient training which is usually accompanied with an *ad hoc* attitude, can facilitate Airmen to obtain a viable outcome during operational planning. Lastly, it deliberately outlined the need for joint and international preparation to meet and influence United States objectives.

Converse to the Air Force's Strategic Master Plan, which advocated for a deliberate and integrated international capability, Ricketts (2020) noted that with NATO's involvement in Afghanistan, several alliance members wondered aloud why their national armies have been embroiled in conflict operations. The author recounted that while it seemed countries such as France called for a stronger European defense force to facilitate operating separately from the United States, there was little overall support for such a prospect. However, Ricketts (2020) discussed a noticeable interest from NATO allies in support for a Common Defence when crises occur, such as after Russia's invasion and subsequent annexation of Crimea in 2014. Ricketts

called for nations to continue to utilize and contribute toward resources in planning, logistical support, and command and control to thwart threats.

Operational Effectiveness. A shift in operational effectiveness may have begun post-Cold War as the large-scale reduction in forces occurred. Boston et al. (2018) confirmed this when discussing the imbalance of military forces in Europe and stated that ground forces have indeed reduced significantly, as has high intensity conflict, since the Cold War. Similarly, Hamre and Conley (2017) added there is “ambivalence and hesitation” for trans-Atlantic cooperation. Since nation-threats now exist in a greater way, Hamre and Conley (2017) called for an increase partnership cooperation in operations. Strikingly, as it appeared from Bonds et al.’s (2019) assessment of NATO forces, the operational effect the United States plans to use is native Air Force and not NATO air forces. Bonds et al. assumed that additional Air Force capability could augment NATO defense if needed. It also seemed that the United States’ defense plan accepts that NATO forces cannot react fast enough if aggressed, and therefore assumes American leadership of NATO forces (Bonds et al., 2019), thereby making NATO less effective for a possible conflict.

Continuing this thought, Ricketts (2020) added that NATO’s survival depends on changing its ability to create a new strategic purpose and then to socialize and communicate that purpose to national allied governments. The author suggested that NATO include civil emergencies into their operations matrix and lead these efforts, since the alliance has conflicting views on using ground forces in operations such as Iraq. Likewise, Magruder (2018) advocated for Airmen to contribute toward multi-domain planning across air, land, and sea to meet the commander’s intent on force maneuver during joint operation execution. This mindset was carried over to Airmen, amassing not only Air Force but also joint planning competencies,

whereby they could be employed for the joint organization to effectively support and contribute to national security.

Theories

When annotating what theories drive the discussion of jointness and how contribution to the joint or international community then drives policy, three specific theories were found. Collective Defense Free Riding, Collective Security and National Identity, and Mission Creep. Each theory found in literature has specific benefits, as well as detractions, when juxtaposed with the joint environment. Additionally, readers could conjecture reasons why the United States possesses a cautious relationship with joint military organizations, notably the Air Force, as it seeks to find value in joint planning skills.

Free Riding. The benefit of NATO as an organization has been confirmed through its peace efforts (Fuhrmann, 2020). However, Fuhrmann (2020) posited a theory that Collective Defence encourages *free riding* amongst allies and that certain nations do not pay their *fair share* toward defense, therefore contributing to leaders undervaluing troop contribution to joint posts. Fuhrmann spent considerable effort to explain that common funded goods produce lower than expected turnout. Hence, as the author stated, if smaller allied nations pledge budget contributions but do not follow through and contribute fewer monies, then larger nations still pay budget requirements, since the operational defense mission continues across all nations, regardless of contribution profit from NATO.

Fuhrmann captured President Obama's frustration uttered in 2016, when he verbalized his annoyance toward free riders and limited fair share efforts toward defense, when referring to NATO. The author continued his theory of free riding and acknowledged that leaders with a business background might do worse than other leaders when it comes to contributing their

national fair share because they understand collective agreements. Of note, the author added that even when President Trump took office, his overall effect on influencing the world stage of politics had less effect than originally believed, since the governmental body as an institution moves and motivates vis-à-vis a singular leader. Therefore, Fuhrmann posited that a leader's background, belief, and education may affect overall behavior when it comes to decision making. He equated a military alliance, such as NATO, to a *public good* whereby, when an additional ally is added, deterrence to attack is increased for that nation. Therefore, the author stipulated that a cost savings toward singular national defense would be realized; a nation then benefits from the whole, as they join the NATO alliance and utilize the public good. Fuhrmann (2020) summed that allied nations act differently regarding their amount of free riding, possibly tying their support to their nation's cultural behavior or economy, while other allied nations seek a cooperative approach. Thus, allied nations who pursue equity see contributing their fair share or *burden sharing* as investing more into the public good. The author inferred that this notion could explain why President Trump equated the NATO defense alliance to a business contract by which it could be easily nullified if not fulfilled as agreed.

National Identity. Distinctly different than the United States concept of leading conflict actions, Stéfanie and Fortmann (2020) theorized that a state's national identity replaced Collective Security as defense changed throughout the post-Cold War era; nations have reshaped themselves into smaller military forces to support European continent based operations. This theory of national identity conflicts with a fair share theory insomuch that Stéfanie and Fortmann argued that as threats increase, collective security decreases. The authors posited that newer NATO members, effectively historical Warsaw Pact members, do not have the same mindset toward security. Since the NATO alliance began, it has evolved into an international body,

exacerbated by the nature of Collective Security, which leans more toward managing a global security posture (Stéfanie & Fortmann, 2020). While the authors confirmed that central European nations modernized their militaries after joining NATO, they questioned whether the post-Cold War efforts of NATO acting as a Collective Security matrix can coalesce with the old central European mindset. Stéfanie and Fortmann asserted that NATO nations closest in proximity to Russia have internal conflict with the rest of the allied body, thereby creating dissonance within the alliance. Not surprisingly, the post-Cold War United States sought to decrease its presence in NATO, but European military capability was not well established. Therefore, the authors stipulated that as NATO shifted to a new mission of Collective Security, it did so to entice new joining members, but also did so without a way to socialize requirements for these nations; it did not create rulesets for behavior.

Stéfanie and Fortmann likened NATO to a club that a nation could join, but late joining nations did not understand western values, as these values did not translate to those proximal Russian states mentioned earlier. The authors noted that nations focused on the viability of out-of-area operations, like Afghanistan, and sought to devalue NATO's Article 5 clause of common defense. Effectively, the fear of abandonment by NATO allies seemed to be the root for shifting to national identity and self-interest (Stéfanie & Fortmann, 2020). Stéfanie and Fortmann added that Russia's annexation of the Crimean peninsula raised anxiety across NATO allies, whereby notions like Collective Defense and Collective Security became ill defined stemming from NATO's non-action against Russia. Summarily, Stéfanie and Fortmann's literature articulated that late joining NATO nations continued to think of self-defense as a national and regional obligation.

Mission Creep. Deni (2019) theorized that NATO has difficulty when validating its value to allies and has done so only by adding various missions to its inventory, without eliminating previous requisites, thus resulting in a loss of operational focus. Moreover, Deni stated that the NATO alliance has endured long after its initial threat mandate and still has nations waiting to join. The author also discussed that as time went on NATO evolved from its original function and then included new member state interests, which added to collective complexity. Deni confirmed NATO's military force truncation and adaptation over the years but highlighted that several other initiatives began, including the Mediterranean Dialogue with North African states and the Istanbul Cooperative Initiative with gulf states. The author offered that NATO then overreached and added non-state issues to its portfolio, such as energy security. Given the total amount of missions, partnerships, and other operational actions, Deni sought to assess NATO's history through its endurance of today. The author noted that several nations have chaffed against NATO, as seen in President Trump's 2017 comments, Turkey's several coups, Poland and Hungary's marginal democratic practices, and Greece's departure from reform, as well as other nations who have contributed to defense but suffered politically. Therefore, NATO has meandered through its mission of European defense, whereby Deni writes that new tasks were added to the overall list without the notion of reviewal to remove old tasks.

Overall, Deni (2019) discussed how an *all-of-the-above* approach to national interests reigns, by which the indication is to simply add more complexity to what NATO is tasked to accomplish. The author asserted that the mash of mission requirements has increased by its addition of new members, and those additions only added to its program of work. Deni concluded the political environment that fostered multiple missions has only worsened by nations offering unequal budget submissions, combined with strained burden sharing ideologies

harkened specifically by the United States; ironically the outcome of mission effectiveness may be in the hands of enemy threats, such as terrorists, jihadists, or Russian aggression, as external factors appear to be the only proper motivating tool to prompt NATO adaptation.

Constructs

Forbes and Avis (2020) suggested that constructs can be *created* by researchers, to effectively *answer* research questions, and constructs can also be *shaped* by questioning. Wolgemuth et al. (2017) posited that constructs are comprised of disciplinary assumptions along with cultural, social, and historical influences that then produce contexts. When accomplishing the literature review there were at least two additional constructs, relative to the aforementioned military construct, that became apparent; I nominatively assessed them Joint Doctrine and Collective Operations.

Joint Doctrine. Priebe et al. (2018) discussed joint doctrine insomuch that the authors attested it is essential to gaining joint proficiency. The authors stated that military members must at least understand its principles, even if they do not actively utilize joint doctrine, and it must be taught early in an officer's career. Priebe et al. specified that each service component uses joint doctrine, often independently, in their operational planning; therefore it is best to have a working knowledge of joint doctrine in order to create a mindset of jointness. However, the authors juxtaposed Air Force doctrine and joint doctrine and found several divergences between the two, such as numbering schema, military terms, and practical gaps, which often misaligned Air Force concepts with joint concepts. Another problem between Air Force doctrine and joint doctrine is documental structure, whereby the two cannot be cross referenced and therefore may cause confusion to Airmen. Compounding this problem was an *internal focus* toward Air Force centricity rather than how air power fits into the joint construct; interestingly, Priebe et al. found

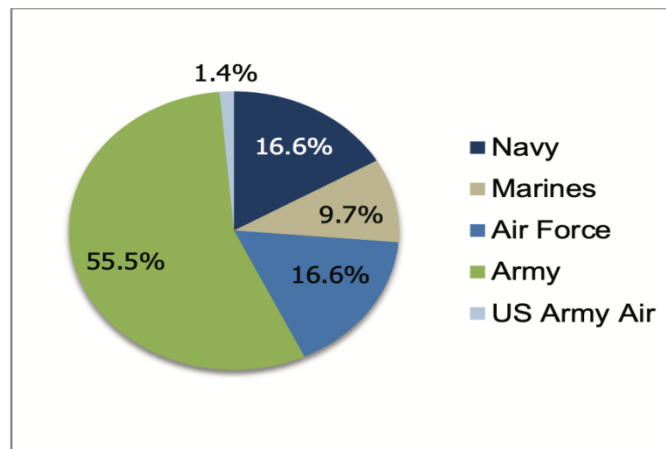
senior leader anecdotes that indeed support Air Force introversion. The authors also discovered that the Air Force tended to write doctrine in a superior tone to joint doctrine thus creating an Air Force elitist attitude.

Priebe et al. (2018) noted that Air Force operational doctrine has not been a priority. Extensionally, Airmen have not learned joint operational planning effectively while remaining inside the Air Force construct, since Airmen learn joint doctrine too late in their overall careers to make a substantive difference in joint war planning. When Priebe et al. assessed Air force doctrine, notably absent was terminology referring to international capability; the closest reference was an Annex called *Foreign Internal Defense*, which squarely fit into the annex's joint categorical column. The authors noted that Airmen needed to understand joint doctrine to become successful leaders in joint operations, but if they were not familiar with jointness, any planning they accomplished was done rather blandly. Priebe et al. highlighted that senior Air Force leaders need to assess Airmen development through a holistic lens in order to prepare Airmen for joint roles, such as changing promotion initiatives or emphasizing jointness within the Air Force in order to change Air Force culture. Lastly, the authors confirmed the Air Force lacks influence on joint doctrine, insomuch that a preponderance of joint doctrine comes from Army leaders. Air Force representation within joint doctrine is simply absent, as seen in Figure 3 where the Air Force only comprises a little over sixteen percent of all service leaders referenced in joint doctrine. The authors stated that Airmen arrive at joint posts and may have the opportunity to attend a joint planning course (e.g., JPME II), but this is not a given because many come unprepared to work in the joint environment, unable to speak the same lexicon, or plan effectively. The authors challenged Air Force senior leaders to encourage and deliberately engage Airmen with joint doctrine to strengthen air power in joint planning, however, this may

conflict with current service-specific goals. Alternatively, Priebe et al. stated that there may be some times when Air Force operational requirements necessitate a break from utilizing jointness in order to reach its service-specific goals, but this is only when fundamentals like air flexibility are needed for employment.

Figure 3

Services of Service Leaders Referenced in Joint Doctrine



SOURCE: Collected from all joint operational doctrine documents, except for classified or For Official Use Only documents.

Perkins and Holmes (2018) asserted that each of the service components took a separate stance toward the joint concept approach. For instance, they identified that the Army took a physical based approach to threats, antithetical to the Air Force taking a functional based approach, thusly freeing Air Force planners to span geographic limitations. They championed the notion that there must be a common operating picture for multiple service components, which includes beginning with a multidomain mindset vis-à-vis a traditional stovepipe service component structure. Effectively, the authors argued, since the Army and Air Force think and act differently, there is a necessity to create centralized joint command and control capability that each can understand. They stated that a change is required to speed decision-making as well as

enable rapid planning to then leverage a converged framework for the battlefield. Perkins and Holmes advocated for an integrated joint doctrine to aid service components with scalable units, policy, and communications for future commander requisites.

Collective Operations. The reviewed literature revealed construct and requirement for Collective Operations in the joint world, insomuch that Perkins and Holmes (2018) suggested combining frameworks, which the Army and Air Force have commenced by aligning their methodologies for warfare. As seen in Collective Defense and Collective Security (NATO PDD, 2021b; Olsen, 2020) approaches, the requisite for a joined force approach, such as in Collective Operations, to thwart adversaries is a real, constant, and pressing need. Perkins and Holmes (2018) showed that an integrated and converged collective approach (Mills et al., 2015) for future *evolving threats* across the domains of war matured both the air domain for the Air Force and the land domain for the Army, thereby unifying their approaches for defense capability. Identifying another challenge for collective operations, Perkins and Holmes (2018) noted the cyber domain has matured differently within each service component, and they called for each service to reform their cyber methodology to include a more common picture toolset so that multiple services can operate more effectively via the information presented by cyber tools.

Similarly, Keen (2015) presented that NATO's allied Collective Defense against cyber-attacks needed a strategy that included a United States component. The author referred to NATO's Locked Shields cyber exercise, which employed forces to fend off aggressor attacks in the cyber domain of operations. This is poignant because the article noted there is still limited allied agreement as to how much force or how far NATO would allow defense against such attacks; it questioned whether conventional forces could react against cyber-attacks. For example, Hamre and Conley (2017) assessed that several NATO allies did not support an

adversarial conflict, such as with Russia, thusly countering Collective Defense; knowing this shortfall, Russia uses fear to its advantage and exploits conflict in the European theater, necessitating United States involvement in exercises and operations to counter its aggression.

The notion of defense against aggression is linked in Keen's (2015) essay, wherein he detailed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dempsey's declaration that the historical definition of war has changed; this change could be beneficial when employing Collective Defense, but equally muddies the water when attempting to form a common response to aggression against a nation state. To help nations proceed with defense, Keen raised that United Nations Articles 2 and 42 helped to define national sovereignty and the use of force by which a collective defensive approach could be used, like when territory, a breach of peace, or act of belligerence is witnessed. This could be interpreted as a shared approach to defense, as Goodwin et al. (2018) suggested when discussing collective cognitive abilities that teams demonstrate, whereby they aid each other to *maximize efficiency* through their collaboration, thus making a Collective Defense when a singular defense is ineffective.

Related Studies

Kuo and Blankenship's (2021) study on joint exercises sought to answer if exercises contributed toward conflict escalation or war. The authors stipulated that officers played a part in the readiness actions of staffs, which facilitated battlefield capability, missions, or Cooperative Security operations with partners. Rather than increasing the risk of war, exercises send signals to other nation states about the preparatory capability entities like NATO possess. NATO allies then benefit from exercises as officers prepare and integrate with other joint staffs or commands (Kuo & Blankenship, 2021). The authors offered that a general willingness for allies to exercise militarily together is therefore not a byproduct but a primary message to adversaries that nation

states can and will join forces to multiply their capability, and their staffs will train together for operational effectiveness as a deterrence mechanism.

However, there may be frustration from allies functioning in a theater of operations when some nations states do not commit to the same level of effort as other countries (Frost-Nielsen, 2017) when coordinating planning or battlefield actions. Frost-Nielson explored the friction allies, such as Norway, the Netherlands, and Denmark experienced as these NATO militaries operated together. Since NATO is a political-military organization, contributing nations have the inherent power to restrict what actions, capabilities, or functions their troops contribute to. The author described the difficulty and limitation within NATO operations, like Afghanistan, for forces to engage in full offensive or kinetic warfare. Frost-Nielson indicated a mixed signal emits from allies, since they contribute troops but limit their ability to function. For example, when troops act merely as staff officers but do not engage in fighting hostile forces. The author suggests that nations fear political ramifications if native troops, for instance, engage the wrong target or lose their own forces, which could send the wrong narrative and smudge their national image in the world spotlight. Therefore, the risk of political fallout could overshadow a joint operation and extensionally hinder the ground commander's ability to fulfill their mandate, set by a governing NATO body. Frost-Nielson questioned whether his nation of Norway would try to distally manage troop use through caveats if they did not trust the ground operational commander. He concluded that common objectives become difficult when filtered through political caveats and could hinder allied operational coherence or effectiveness; those caveats may ultimately endure because of national sovereignty.

A counter argument to United States and NATO Collective Defense, Biscop (2017) asserted that Europe writ-large does not need the United States for its defense. The author

stressed that the European Union could manage its own defensive posture without, what Biscop deemed, an arbitrary budgetary national contribution of two percent of gross domestic product toward NATO's budget. However, he admitted a limitation in rebuffing American enablement, insomuch that several nation states may not even want to deploy military troops, since the United States willingly deploy troops, as seen in the 2011 Libya operation. Biscop plainly stated that Europe relies heavily on United States force generating ability, and left to Europe's own devices could marginally force generate capability. But the author championed that if Europe stopped its fragmented military spending, and joined their military forces, then Europe could support their own Collective Security efforts without American pressure in burden-sharing.

Discussed previously, Bowhens (2012) accomplished a study on the effects of JPME and the readiness it fostered for officers filling joint posts. The general take-away from the essay was that joint duty posts were designed for promotion rather than adding to joint unit capability. This is simultaneously different and complimentary to Machain's (2020) study on allied use of United States PME, by which partners are encouraged or even mandated to study joint warfare concepts at United States military war colleges, with the sole purpose of bringing back updated and lethal employment of conflict. It is complimentary, since attendance equates to promotion, as Machain advised that these American military colleges are so sought out that many international officers who attend go on to become their represented nation's military chief of staff. It is also different vis-à-vis Bowher's addition of capability, because of United States war colleges' direct influence on foreign officers. Interestingly, he advocated to use war colleges as American soft power by which use of these schools could influence foreign policy, since officers who attend became accustomed to United States thinking, therefore making them a promoter of American ideology. In Machain's study he acknowledged that whether an officer serves in the United States or

another country's military they speak the same military language and possess similar military component experiences; this link connects American and foreign officers when conducting planning, information exchanges, or exercises. A consistent theme for Machain was that building professional links, networks, and English skills resulted in a lasting influence on officers of different nations, in turn making them more proficient in war planning and operations while reducing their bias against the United States.

Anticipated and Discovered Themes

During my review of literature, I anticipated that the theme of United States joint service was still alive and advocated for but seldom acted upon. While I did not find this theme surprising, I did find the theme of jointness perplexing since several reports, articles, and commentary stated the need for a joint focus in operational planning and execution. I anticipated that the Army would be the most involved with joint force planning and the Air Force would have marginal focus, which was confirmed by the findings. I am familiar with the nature of jointness and therefore queried resources to find joint oriented literature, which confirmed aspects of jointness I had experienced. The following sub-areas explain in more detail these revealed themes.

Inwardly Focused Vector for HPO's. While it was difficult to incorporate non-HPO's in research, I anticipated that the United States has an inherently inward focused approach that thwarts international duty experience for HPO's. Indeed, this anticipated theme presented itself through joint topical literature. I was surprised to discover another facet of why HPO's may not be exposed to joint planning; the facet of keeping high performers closer to leadership to utilize their KSA's instead of offering their skillsets to a joint or international staff was surprising. This supported an inwardly focused approach to Air Force planning and execution, in addition to a

secondary effect of career control and influence by senior leaders. Additional research might hint that non-HPO's do not matter to senior leaders as much as known HPO's, therefore freeing non-HPO's to explore joint posts.

Inwardly Focused Operational Effectiveness. I anticipated that European defense is most important to Europeans and of selective interest to the United States. This became greatly evident as the literature review progressed. Not only did European writers and analysts champion a European centric cause to change defense capability, but the authors also seemed to become more vocal in sidelining United States influence in Europe. The United States also seemed to host international officers to war colleges as a means to influence European planning and operations. A pointed example was when Russia annexed Crimea and the United States reacted to Russia in a limited fashion, but when a tumultuous Libya might have fostered terrorism, the United States led the charge in bombing operations.

New Support for Joint Service. An unforeseen discovery was finding that the Air Force made a deliberate call to encourage jointness, including a new support toward a deliberate and involved joint planning process. Pointedly, General Goldfein generated a new focus on joint development in order to lead joint military operations. I also discovered that the United States is politically moving toward greater jointness and international support with new political and military leadership, stemming from a changed presidential administration. The notion of involving Air Force officers to purposefully grow joint planning was started, but may continue in the near future as the value of air power in joint operations is realized.

New Support for Joint Operations. I discovered the United States, based on political change, is moving toward greater support for European defense, including more Air Force operations. The absence of air power and air capability in joint or international planning has

incrementally been grasped. With several general officers championing joint force planning before the onset of hostility, a new mindset of delivering air capability with land force capability is slowly becoming accepted.

Discovered Themes. One of the aforementioned themes from the literature review was present in this study, namely Internally focused. This theme equivalated to one discovered theme, namely NATO Bias. NATO Bias revealed that senior leaders would rather vector an officer to another Air Force post rather than vector them toward a NATO post. However, several other themes were also discovered. Theme one: Joint is Important, Just Not NATO, found that leaders placed value on joint posts but did not place value on NATO posts. Theme two: Inconsistent Joint Support found that some career fields encouraged joint posts while others were ambivalent about joint posts; this could be linked to senior leaders' advocacy or lack thereof. Theme three: Influence and Feedback found senior leaders indeed influenced career decision-making but lacked in providing subordinate feedback. Theme four: Advocation and Education About NATO found that senior leaders usually advocated for NATO only if they themselves had previous experience in the NATO construct. Officers then possessed limited NATO knowledge within their career field. Theme five: Manning Fill Rates found that the literature showed a steady decline in posting officers to NATO. Theme six: Lack of Training and Preparation found senior leaders did not advocate or prioritize officer training, therefore officers often took it upon themselves to study NATO specifics in order to become effective in operations and planning. Theme seven: NATO Bias found officers faced a certain amount of unfairness concerning their careers. Officers found it difficult to overcome an internal Air Force focus vis-à-vis the same consideration for promotion inter alia than officers of the same rank. Lastly, theme eight: Difference Between Joint and International found that officers served at a higher level of

responsibility unequal to their peers. While joint service could typify duty in conjunction with the Army, Marines, or Navy, joint-international posts add a political complexity not found in simple joint duty.

Summary of the Literature Review

The literature review focused on several key points that encompassed leadership, since the ability to understand the problem of leadership support for the joint community requires an assessment of where the problem originates. This is important because senior leaders may have real-life impacts on a subordinate's career decision based on a senior leader's influence. Research within current literature seemed to substantiate career influencing theories. These findings make for a complex environment since leaders need to demonstrate ethical practices via leader-subordinate exchange because leaders will indeed affect young officers.

This affect could be a problem when officers are not vectored or prepared for joint posts. In addition to reticence in filling joint positions, there are promotion doubts, possibly stemming from an American *internally focused* capability rather than on NATO interests. Compounding the issue, there may be a disconnect between training, education, and joint preparedness as Air Force senior leaders lack focus on joint officer development, even though the Goldwater-Nichols Act mandated jointness. This can be verified through the consistent deficiency of Air Force senior leaders in joint appointments. Extensionally, competencies are then absent because of fewer officers graduating from joint training, directly effecting NATO since its allied body possess limited operational knowledge.

It was apparent that leadership support for NATO has ebbed and flowed, as seen via several presidential administrations, but a refreshed call for joint readiness came from not just a senior Air Force general but other key leaders as well. This countered a previous *Air Force first*

mindset and began support for new joint planning through the *Joint Force Next* campaign. The idea of air power across all domains of operation is being introduced, to include support for foreign defense via joint partners for operational effect.

However, apprehension of United States support for NATO as a foreign partner stems from the hesitation of nations engaging in a *Free Ride* rather than burden-sharing to achieve a Collective Defense against adversaries. Moreover, as nation states shifted to promulgate national identity post-Cold War, that identity replaced Collective Security against threats. Therefore, in an effort to stay relevant, NATO changed to an *all-of-the-above* approach across its operations, thus contributing to United States skepticism of operational effectiveness.

Concepts like Joint Doctrine and Collective Operations explained how the Air Force views and promotes jointness. Effectively, there is a disconnect between current joint doctrine and Air Force doctrine that needs to be rectified to aid future commander requirements. This translates to Collective Operations via the Army and Air Force's collaborative effort to align warfare methodologies but extends to allied cooperation too, even though several allies are apprehensive about engaging in conflict.

Related studies sought to juxtapose other literature in an attempt to balance the approach of jointness for joint sake. One study delved into the critical question of whether joint force exercises exacerbated conflict but found that it served to promote officer readiness and acted as a signal to adversaries instead. Extensionally, not all allies think the same and operational effectiveness is inconsistent when NATO militaries operate together but engage caveats, thereby limiting their operational capability, which ultimately increases friction between allies. A later study countered the idea of American dominance on the world stage and advocated that the European Union could fix its own problems. This assertiveness acknowledged that United States

forces and assets were essential to European defense but also championed that European defense is for Europeans, thereby negating American influence on the continent. Ironically, American military colleges are key to allied preparation for planning and defense operations, causing a link between the schools' prestige and promotion opportunity for foreign partners. Again, the motivation for educating international militaries might really be for United States influence in internal international maneuver via officer KSA's and professional networks.

I summed the literature review with anticipated themes covering multiple aspects of joint support, including inwardly focused HPO's and operational effectiveness as well as possible new support for the joint service and operations. The review of literature provided a foundation for this study through assessing a historical and current mindset toward joint support. By massing literature that focused on both United States service components' view on jointness as well as an international view, a cross pollination of support, effort, and effect was connected. The review revealed several layers of complex leader support for a joint perspective with which to assess officers' decision making.

Summary of Section 1 and Transition

Section 1 covered the background of the problem, both the problem and purpose statements, and research questions within the military service construct as well as the notion of jointness. The nature of this study indicated that a flexible, single case study design utilizing a qualitative methodology based on pragmatic ontology would work best to examine the military environment. This is because military officers understand and often use pragmatism in decision-making, especially in a limited-scope NATO environment. To enable the audience to understand military oriented terminology, a definition of terms was presented. The section then revealed how to successfully assess the effects of senior leader influence on a subordinate officer's career,

as the researcher employed assumptions, limitations, and delimitations within context of the study, which was visualized by referencing Figure 1. Several theories were examined to delineate their associative value with career progression; in short, while Visibility and Path-goal theories were representations of proximity to a leader, officers then engaged in Two-factor theory, akin to Maslow's Motivational theory, involving an officer's fulfillment independent from leader proximity.

Overall, this study aimed to reduce the gap in literature by understanding the motivation of staff officers via the conduit of their career mentors and leaders. This study then added to existing literature by questioning Air Force posture in the joint environment. Section 1 research also highlighted that an officer's career path may produce nuances of fulfillment but may also impact (either positively or negatively) volunteerism and preparedness for joint posts.

Additionally, Christ called on leaders to act apart from the world because of the influence leaders may have on subordinates (Thomas, 2018). Christ-centered leadership may affect believers and non-believers alike and that weightiness can ultimately affect military operations. By reviewing literature, one can see established biblical precedent for leader responsibility, thereby calling for joint support and a need for prepared joint planners for operational capability.

Section 1 integrated an in-depth review of current literature. It sought to assess the mindset, both historically and currently, toward joint support in order to frame jointness. Reviewing the body of literature culminated with anticipated and discovered themes that covered multiple aspects of joint support and revealed political perspective.

Section 2 of the study builds on the previous work insomuch that it includes the role of the researcher, thereby framing study participants, study population, and sampling aspects. Two other aspects are introduced, notably, outlining projected research methodology and discussing

why a flexible design works best within the NATO paradigm. Lastly, areas comprising data collection, data analysis, and reliability are examined as well as the mechanism for validation. Naturally, the section finishes with a summary and transition to Section 3, which outlines the application to professional practice.

Section 2: The Project

This study examined a leader's support for the joint environment and the linkage that exists between a leader and a subordinate. The leader's role in influencing joint assignments, either positively or negatively, could produce a secondary effect on operational planning and execution. This study, therefore, delved into reasons why leaders may or may not support jointness from a United States Air Force perspective. In this next section of the study, the role of researcher, research methodology, participants, the population and sampling, data collection, data analysis, as well as understanding reliability and validity are discussed in detail. This is done in order to confirm the gathered data, that represents the research, was assessed correctly and effectively.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this flexible single case study was to reveal and describe whether a disconnection between the mandate to provide joint officers and the actual support for joint service was displayed by Air Force senior leaders. While several studies have highlighted the need for greater support in the joint officer community, there may be other factors that contribute to senior leaders guiding subordinates in support of or contrary to requirements. This research adds to the literature by exploring unknown factors in joint support. Additionally, the importance of determining such support through officer training or mentorship, revealed that officers contributed substantive operational capability to NATO's military planning and effects.

Role of the Researcher

McCaslin and Scott (2003) stated the that role of the researcher should be fundamentally clear, not only to the reader but to the researcher as well, in order to enable research understanding regarding a study. This researcher sought to determine how a leader in a military

organization could influence decisions made by subordinates. Additionally, translating military terminology to a lay reader, as well as to indigenous Air Force officers, produced greater insight regarding decision-making for career choices, and extensionally aided organizations outside of the Air Force construct in understanding its nuances.

Researcher Actions

The researcher took several actions to conduct the study, such as developing a research pool, crafting probing interview questions (Charmaz, 2017) in such a way that it minimized bias, working with participants within a defined timeline to obtain results, gathering and coding data via a theme-oriented approach, and coordinating and conducting a focus group for triangulation. The role of the researcher expanded beyond research; it included facilitating, messaging, and gathering (Englander, 2012). As researcher, the effort was to understand the behavior, thinking, and culture (Yin, 2015) that exists within the military construct, and seek to learn in what way respondents react to it. Extensionally, in order to understand this unique construct, the researcher navigated NATO's political-military structure from an internal (Jansen & Kramer, 2019) and personally known perspective (Aspers & Corte, 2019) that civilians may not be privy to. This occurred through face-to-face discussion with United States military representation for permission to research, dialogue with, and invite actors to participate in research interviews, and conduct a follow-up triangulated focus session to validate researcher gathered themed interview responses.

Bracketing

The researcher realized that a familiarity to subject matter, as Aspers and Corte (2019) discussed, could both benefit and complicate research, therefore steps were taken to mitigate potential bias. When a researcher brings their own bias into a study it can complicate how

research is assessed or possibly interweave a certain complacency (Charmaz, 2017) stemming from preexisting knowledge of the subject matter. Englander (2012) stated that best way to bracket research assumptions is to include a certain amount of *criticism* of narrow theories and welcome general theories instead (Gregory, 2019) to broaden one's aperture of data. Data familiarization can also be beneficial since it allows for more direct interaction with subject matter and processes (Aspers & Corte, 2019), thereby permitting a researcher to progress with the study and lessen time taken to deconstruct functions or cultures before advancing in research (McNarry et al., 2019). One way to enact bracketing is through epochē or the removal of one's tacit knowledge in order to set oneself aside and let the data speak for itself, however McNarry et al. stated that this rigidity is unrealistic and rather advocated for researchers to use reflexive dialog, openness, and self-criticization when discussing their research to readers as a bracketing process. Therefore, this researcher utilized the aforementioned processes as well as leveraged peer (Moser & Korstjens, 2018) officers with equivalent rank (i.e., Colonel) to assess if there were other mechanisms which might be employed to reduce personal influence during the study process. No relevant mechanisms were found.

Role of the Researcher Summary

While the role of researcher might seem straight forward it is essential to deliberately state what actions the researcher will take during the study. This researcher cultivated an environment to craft questions for actors to respond but did so with time and function in mind. The researcher also interacted with participants but triangulated data through the aforementioned methods to reduce personal bias as much as possible. Extensionally, the researcher also bracketed through reflexiveness via an open discussion of research principles as well as elicited feedback from fellow officers. These aims in reduction of bias undergirded the study to reduce or

detach emotion (Gregory, 2019) of the researcher and supported a more rational and factual study.

Research Methodology

Chun Tie et al. (2019) informed researchers that the purpose of research is to add to a body of knowledge in a systematic way through defined methods. With this in mind, a single case study employing a qualitative method was utilized for this study. This method fit best when attempting to assess the positive or negative effects that military senior leaders had when interfacing and influencing their officer subordinates. It also worked well within the military construct since officers operating within that construct make personal and professional life choices, whereby the choices of any two officers could be generated by different motivations, which then act to separate individual responses from one another. This separation then facilitates aligning responses thematically, rather than quantitatively, when considering data since themes act to corroborate human factors (Stahl & King, 2020) with their decision-making, thus linking data with the research questions (Gamlen & McIntyre, 2018). To understand this linkage in greater detail a discussion of the design and triangulation follows.

Flexible Design and Single Case Study

This study was conducted with a flexible design, utilizing a single case study. These two items allowed for exploration within an organization, in this case NATO, and accordingly, entertained the possibility of change with its flexible design. A flexible design is thusly appropriate to this study since the objects of research (i.e., senior leaders, officers) may indeed modify behavior or interaction with external factors such as changes to the military mission, United States political direction, or personal fulfillment. Flexible design allows further identified of artefacts through the research process and enables inclusion of previously unidentified data as

research progresses (Robson & McCartan, 2016), competencies change, or ideas shift (Wildman & Griffith, 2015). Therefore, as Robson and McCartan (2016) stipulated, using a flexible design for this research aligns with qualitative data gathering, since direct officer interviews act to gather respondent communiqué, thereby resulting in initial collection of data. Since this researcher collected data via interviews through face-to-face sessions and a video teleconference session, incorporating flexibility as respondents answer questions allowed for that data to be included vis-à-vis a fixed design. This was important because this researcher could not assume to know an officer's motivation for career decisions.

A case study was thereby appropriate to this research since it facilitated ongoing events (Surace, 2019) of senior military leader and subordinate officer interaction. Interestingly, Yin (2015) suggested it could be argued that a case study, such as the one this researcher undertook, deserved to be studied because of its uniqueness, and that uniqueness then contributed to its justification to be studied. Effectively, the information residing in this real-world study is unique since the military construct is foreign to most of the general civilian population (Cooper et al., 2018) and does not always translate well into civilian vernacular. Further, the ability to employ a case study within military context, in order to discuss senior leader influence on subordinates, generates the ability to peek into a segment of society that is most familiar to military service members but abstract to those external to the military construct. This case study offers the opportunity to parity military leader-subordinate interaction with similar civilian relationships.

Triangulation Appropriateness

In any study it is important to believe the accuracy of gathered data so the reader understands both the purpose of the study as well as its outcome; this believability is done via triangulation (Gamlen & McIntyre, 2018), namely by taking research objects of the study and

juxtaposing them. Further, triangulated data helps readers trust data methods rather than taking research at face value. Stahl and King (2020) discussed the nature of generating trustworthiness of gathered data when conducting a qualitative study in order to give credibility to any study.

Therefore, the methods I used to validate data were through reviewed literature as well as through a post-interview focus group; these are two examples of the many forms of data triangulation. Previously reviewed literature established groundwork through adjacent research and therefore added information and linked preexisting data to this study.

Subsequently, the appropriateness of conducting a focus group acted to validate interview data but did not mitigate all questions (Noble & Heale, 2019). However, conducting a focus group provided a natural extension to research interviews which occurred preemptive to the follow-up group session. The personal exchange between researcher and actor done during the focus group was apt for validation because of the personal nature of life and career choices made by military officers (Hall, 2011). Organizing interview thematic notes and then taking time to validate whether they were what the researcher indeed heard during interviews denoted objectivity and acted to welcome feedback for clarification.

Research Methodology Summary

The research methodology in this study employed a flexible design in the lens of a case study. Understanding that change happens as research progresses is common sense, and accepting that actors enact personal choices, which cannot all be factored into a study's initial design, is self-evident. Acknowledging change in research and including it allowed newly discovered data to shape the study. This equates to Robson and McCartan's (2016) notion of how politics, or other things that influence choices, can impact the outcome of research. Extensionally, employing a case study in a relatively obscure segment of society, for example the

military construct, revealed interesting and relevant data that was not only different but similar to civilian equivalent leader-subordinate roles. These methodological aspects of using a flexible design and case study offered fluid data inclusion as actors relayed their stories. Thus, utilizing triangulation to validate data through themes, as those themes were posited to the focus group, aimed to verify accumulated data.

Research Summary

This section discusses the role of the researcher and research methodology. The role of the researcher should be clear, unbiased, and translate data to the lay reader. Since this researcher is familiar with the organizational military construct and its elements, as Scott et al. (2007) discussed, then the challenge was to bracket personal bias from research and welcome interviewee input stemming from their personal perspectives. This research adds to the body of knowledge through a deliberate approach (Chun Tie et al., 2019) via a flexible design and case study, supported by a qualitative methodology. The study presents a real-world tack into an obscure construct not necessarily known to the public. Military specific data gathered through interviews was then validated or triangulated through reviewed literature and a follow-up focus group to ensure the researcher massed thematic valuable data, thereby exposing that data to external analysis as Renz et al. (2018) suggested. This study used validation because the researcher in fulfilling their role, as well as the actors in fulfilling their roles, formed a parity pertaining to commonly gathered information (Chan et al., 2013) regarding their choices and influence from the leader-subordinate relationship.

Participants

The participants whom this researcher interacted with, polled, and interviewed were officers stationed at NATO's ACO headquarters and one located at Joint Force Command (JFC)

Naples, specifically those in the mid-tier (Galway et al., 2005), or FGO level who predominately fell into the ranks of major and lieutenant colonel. These participants typically possessed 9-17 years of commissioned service (Air Force, 1997). These officers may or may not have previously developed joint proficiency but usually did have some form of command experience within the Air Force. They had typically served on staffs at different levels (Crosbie, 2019; Galway et al., 2005) and therefore possessed a foundational amount of professional knowledge regarding planning and operations. These officers had all undergone career specific courses (Conley & Robbert, 2009) to professionally educate them in order to operate effectively in their respective fields.

These officers were eligible to be included in the study because they fit the criteria for a mid-tier officer. They also possessed core KSAs by which their skillset could be employed in most global Air Force posts which require their AFSC and the expertise that accompanies it. The officers who participated in the study were also able to discern whether accepting an assignment to NATO resulted in a career benefit or distractor to promotion and whether they believed their KSAs were then utilized effectively to support NATO planning and operations. Lastly, because they consciously made a choice to accept or seek posting to NATO, their responses added value to understanding the mid-tier officer population in NATO.

Population and Sampling

When assessing a respective population and then a sampling, it is essential to understand the difference between the two. While population examines a larger research group (Yin, 2015), the sample examines a subset of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018) of that group for data collection. Data massed for this study was taken from a population comprised of United States Air Force military officers. This specific population set was limited because of the density of Air

Force officers in NATO as an organization. To narrow this further, the *accessible population* (Asiamah et al., 2017) was restricted to Air Force officers at ACO headquarters and one from JFC Naples across all AFSCs. From the accessible population a sampling then relegated participants to FGOs, specifically in the major and lieutenant colonel ranks.

Discussion of the Population

The population across all NATO is inherently military in context and ranges into the hundreds of officers. One may surmise that Air Force participants therefore share a culture and similar experiences (Jansen & Kramer, 2019) and thus may respond similarly, or at least within a distinct response range, when answering questions during the interview process. Hence, narrowing the general Air Force population further into an accessible population set, since attempting to interface with several geographically dispersed command headquarters was impractical, restricted the participant pool to ACO headquarters, located in Mons, Belgium and one participant located at JFC Naples, Italy. This accessible population comprised several different areas of responsibility for military operations and contributed to the whole of defense, with sufficient officers to interview for this study.

The accessible population set was comprised of just over one hundred officers. Notedly, these participants included one complimentary officer who previously served at ACO headquarters but had since transferred to the continental United States for another assignment, and recently retired from active duty. This complimentary officer added to the existing accessible population since similar experiences in the joint community were still relevant to the study and understanding of joint service.

Discussion of the Sampling

Leedy and Ormrod (2018) stated that a summation of data can be derived by using a respondent sample instead of using a whole population group. Typically the larger the sample, the greater the certainty of the information (Kutzner et al., 2017) from respondents; this concept makes sense when the population is significantly large, or when time cannot support interfacing with the entire population set. Therefore, the limited Air Force accessible population group located at ACO, offered a sample group of eligible FGOs (i.e., majors and lieutenant colonels), that comprised twenty actors. Nominally, this group made up the majority of the mid-tier officers across multiple AFSCs available to interview within the organization. It also fulfilled project requirements for a sample ranging between fifteen to thirty study participants; twenty participants was the optimal number, and gave the study more data granularity.

Hence, this group acted as non-random *purposive sample* (Robson & McCartan, 2016), or rather a *target population* (Asiamah et al., 2017) because of the criteria necessary to assess joint support and training. With this limited sample size, each response could be viewed as being more heavily weighted, as Kutzner et al. suggested, since the sample group possessed keen insight based on respondents' maturity and understanding regarding their joint experience. Of note, Bjørnstad and Ulleberg (2017) emphasized in their NATO military behavior study that to counter a limited sample size the researcher must employ consistency amongst their respondents. Therefore, administering the interview with similar questions, time constraints, and setting to the sample group worked to ensure a consistent experience.

Gaining Access to the Sample. This researcher gained access to the sample by two mechanisms. First was the notion of physical access. Physical access was accomplished via literal proximity to participants since the researcher was posted at ACO headquarters along with

the sample officers. This physical proximity acted as a natural conduit for shared experiences with jointness as well as understanding any difficulties they faced within the international environment. Second was the notion of logical access. Logical access was accomplished via discussion with this researcher's project per the United States' National Military Representative (NMR) at ACO. Relaying how the study benefited the United States with an understanding of motivation, training, or choices that officers experience when volunteering for a joint post, resulted in approval from the NMR. Since the NMR has administrative control over all United States officers posted at ACO, receiving approval to freely interface with and interview Air Force officers acted to establish a foundation of trusted and authorized work. This authorization affected how sample group participants responded to interviews and the focus group session, since participants understood the study was officially sanctioned, effectively acting as a *privacy by design* framework (Hadar et al., 2018) to ensure trust exchange between this researcher and the sample officers.

Summary of Population and Sampling

Effectively understanding who was eligible, and why that population met criteria for areas such as interviews or a follow-up focus group session added relevance to the study, helped to scope it (Morse, 2000; Sim et al., 2018), and narrowed research in order to obtain a conclusion. This section outlines the participant path starting with a general population, restricted to an accessible population, and ultimately narrowed toward a sample of participants. These actors encapsulated a culture of jointness that facilitated interfacing with a specific pool of respondents. While the general NATO population of Air Force officers comprised several hundred officers, the narrowed scope of sampled ACO headquarter FGOs, and a single JFC Naples FGO, acted to accumulate data from majors and lieutenant colonels and capture their

experience on their decision path to joint service, ultimately constricting participants to a sample set of twenty officers. Additionally, achieving access to the FGO sample was straightforward since proximity to these officers was a fortuitous advantage of serving at the same headquarters. Lastly, achieving NMR concurrence to the study for researcher-respondent interaction enticed participants to engage with this research and share their experiences regarding joint service.

Data Collection

The next steps taken in this study were to generate data. The collection process included an interview guide, participant interviews, and a follow-up focus group. During the interview process, two challenge areas existed, the first was to elicit true and honest responses (Hibben et al., 2020) from participants and the second was putting participants at ease; both areas required trust between interviewee and researcher. The overall intent of data collection, especially a face-to-face interview, was to gather trustworthy data (Schober, 2018). This researcher endeavored to methodically gather data, assess it, and then proceed to code it to ensure the aforementioned research questions were indeed valid and determine if newly presented data offered discovery from the interviewees' joint perspective.

Data Collection Plan

Moser and Korstjens (2018) stated that common data collection methods include observation, interviews, and focus groups. While this researcher did not include observation, participant interviews and a follow-up focus group were used. Firstly, a semi-structured (Robson & McCartan, 2016) real-time interview was conducted with multiple participants in order to create a mechanism of repeatable and objective data gathering. This was accomplished by sending a personal invitation to respective participants, with a date range of their choosing and a face-to-face request for the interview, where feasible, to explain the interview and address initial

questions. Secondly, this researcher conducted a follow-up focus group session in order to re-introduce information to participants; this smaller group of participants was invited to validate data. Both the interview sessions and the follow-up focus group were recorded (Renz et al., 2018) to permit post-meeting data coding.

These mechanisms were appropriate for this study because each participant had made individual choices in their life and career, therefore capturing participant reasoning for their feeling of joint support or training was important; it helped determine if common themes existed across several participants. Conducting and recording interviews facilitated data gathering (Creswell & Poth, 2018), vis-à-vis taking copious notes, so that this researcher could interact with participants with more fluidity.

Separately, assessing archive data revealed whether a history of jointness previously existed in NATO and helped with the foundational understanding of jointness in this study. To support these efforts, several instruments were used to facilitate data collection, such as the interview setting and interview guide, as well as delving into NATO archive data.

Instruments

It is important to identify instruments in data gathering, much like picking tools out for a job, since instruments are the research tools (Wilkinson, 2002) of studies; they act to ease the work to be accomplished. With this in mind, participant interviews, the most interactive instrument, contained a few parameters. For example, interviews lasted under an hour, when conducted in-person, and were hosted in an office or space that was mostly free from distraction, such as Creswell and Poth offered as best practice (2018). Alternatively, the distant interview was conducted via Microsoft Teams, which aided with transcription. To help structure the interview, a guide acted as an instrument to connect interview questions to research questions,

thereby constraining participant-researcher interaction and focusing discussion on jointness.

Another subsequent instrument was the follow-up focus group that acted to collect data independently from the one-on-one interviews. Lastly, archive data was used, thereby acting as an instrument to link historical behavior to current behavior.

Interview Guides. This researcher created an interview guide (see [Appendix A](#)) to act as a template when conducting participant interviews. This was important since several interviews were conducted spanning similar military FGO ranks; its role was to create consistency. The questions were deliberately linked to this study's research questions, comprising twenty-five in total. The guide broke up the questions in four sections.

The first section began with conversational questions as an icebreaker and to gather *demographical data* (e.g., gender; hometown; rank; etc.). Subsequent questions then fleshed out more detailed data from the broad research questions. Hence, the second section addressed RQ1 *Air Force leadership practices* (e.g., hearing a senior leader discuss jointness; witnessing a leader discuss NATO; etc.). RQ1a asked about *leadership actions or behaviors that deter joint environment* (e.g. leaders hindering efforts for joint support; witnessed deterring joint support; etc.). RQ1b addressed *leadership actions that encourage joint environment* (e.g., positive influence to volunteer for joint posts; establish the need for ACO / NATO during mentoring; etc.). RQ1c asked what *actions are needed to encourage leaders to increase joint capability and planning* (e.g., what actions could leaders take to encourage officers to volunteer for joint posts; leader behaviors to encourage joint volunteer service). RQ2 delved into an *assessment of encouragement for ACO / NATO manning fill rates* (e.g., compare prior Air Force joint fill rates with Air Force internal fill rates; compare prior joint fill rates for FGOs compared to your current environment; etc.). RQ3 then sought to gain perspective on *Air Force influence on joint military*

operations (e.g., were you prepared to fill a planning or operational role before being posted; did you attend any courses prior to your posting; have you actively contributed to NATO planning or operations; etc.).

Lastly, the guide included a summary question that asked participants whether they would like to add any further information. This question acted as *closer* and subsequently filled unforeseen gaps by the researcher. Of note, the interview was structured to use open-ended questions (Moser & Korstjens, 2018) to engage and encourage participants to develop their responses beyond a simple yes or no answer.

Focus Group. Similar to the one-on-one interviews, this researcher conducted a focus group session that acted as a parallel data gathering instrument. Cyr (2017) stipulated that focus groups serve to compliment other data collection, encourage interaction, and gather participant thought processes. Krueger et al. (2020) confirmed this idea and stated that focus groups pair with qualitative studies and offer insights into perceptions and attitudes. However, while the two instances of questioning participants sought similar outcomes, they did so through different means. This delineation is important to this study insomuch that the focus group was independent to the interviews but yielded thematic outcomes similar to the interviews.

The methodology was to interact with four individual officers, pose conversational questions, and elicit their feedback; this feedback acted to validate or negate thematic one-on-one interview data. Construct of the focus group was random selection from interviewees. The focus group utilized an interview guide (see [Appendix B](#)), tailored to fit a small group of officers, as Krueger (2014) suggested. The guide was broken up in three sections and had ten open-ended questions vis-à-vis the twenty-five found in the interview. The reasoning for fewer focus group questions was to compensate for the number of participating officers. Notedly, these questions

aligned with research questions (i.e., R1, R2, etc.), as previously seen in the interview guide section. While focus group questions were similar to participant interview questions, they were tailored to stimulate the group's synergistic responses as Krueger (2014) guided. Lastly, the focus group session culminated with a summary question that captured any additional discussion points.

Archive Data. Archive data acted as a historical and independent mechanism (Robson & McCartan, 2016) that augmented this study's other collected data. While NATO did not possess study data to directly compare with the interview data, it did possess archive data that seemed to show a consistent requirement to support defense posture from its inception. The following documents offered insight into how NATO included jointness in its planning within official correspondence.

One released document referred to a requested reorganization of Higher NATO Military Structure. This early NATO internal document stipulated that the United States' NATO Ambassador should have a joint staff to act as advisor based on this reorganization request (Abblitt, 1957). While no numeric of staff was asserted to fill the role, this interesting data point denoted that a joint staff or presence was value added long before the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act; the joint staff construct of support relates to RQ1b.

Another archive document discussed the appropriate number of Joint Communications Support Unit manning that would directly support two NATO commands (Pistotti, 1968). This document gave specific numbers of 26 officer and 609 other enlisted ranks as manning requisites to support joint communications for headquarters. The act of filling a complex communications team with joint officers in 1968 signified that a technical team was required to assure defense in the European theater. This concept strongly links to RQ3.

Extensionally, NATO undertook a plan to initiate a large-scale network for air defense. The NATO Information Service (1972) released their numerics that comprised NATO's newest joint civil-military venture. The document outlined a grid of 84 radars, 8,800 operators and programmers, 200 facilities, and data links to seamlessly track enemy aircraft and pass information to various Allied pilots, stations, or personnel. The document touted that through a combined effort of partnership, standardization, and training, NATO's operational readiness would be assured. This air defense information sounded strikingly similar to the previously mentioned joint communication unit's mandate that also resulted in readiness and defense through joint activities; these actions associate with RQ1b and RQ3.

Lastly, another document discussed the commissioning of a joint pilot training function for NATO located in Texas with the capacity to train 320 Allied pilots (NATO Press Service, 1980). NATO expressed that this functional training supported a standardized and interoperable approach to defense and readiness. To show the dedication to readiness and intensity of training, the course encompassed 55 weeks of activity with over 240 hours of instruction. Notedly, this training function was highlighted in order to align air capability and planning for NATO's defensive posture and directly relates to RQ1b and RQ3.

Data Organization

The object of collecting data was to use it effectively, this necessitated organizing qualitative data (Moser & Korstjens, 2018) in order to retrieve it and assess it. This researcher recorded audio during interviews (Wolcott, 2005) and stored it via .mp4 files with appropriate naming conventions for retrieval. Additionally, the audio files were uploaded into Microsoft Office 365 in order to transcribe each interview or focus group session, which then separated respondent dialog from interviewer dialog in transcript format. The distance interview session

via Microsoft Teams was similarly recorded and named for retrieval and processing. For this study, the nature of gathering data via recording instead of note taking freed the researcher to focus on the interview instead of writing or typing; Robson and McCartan (2016) suggested that interviewers should listen more and speak less. With this in mind, the general practice of audio recording collected more data for this study, and logically enabled data collection when recording and conducting interviews distally during Microsoft Teams application use.

Summary of Data Collection

Effectively, the data collection process began with a solid construct that included the interview guide, participant interviews, and follow-up focus group. Archive data from NATO's own database was introduced to show historical precedence regarding NATO's view on jointness. As the researcher established the groundwork to gather data, a framework was established for participant-researcher interaction. The interview guide acted to focus dialog and deliberately link research questions to interview questions. Participant interviews fleshed out more detail from the interviewees' personal experience to reveal added data not previously known to this researcher. Similarly, the focus group acted to collect data parallel to interviews. Whether interviews were conducted face-to-face or conducted via an application-based interface, the interviews and focus group were recorded to aid in collecting and organizing data for later retrieval.

Data Analysis

The process of gathering qualitative data from multiple sources and then analyzing that data for themes (Gioia et al., 2013) is key to validating research or, as Robson and McCartan (2016) offered, it helps to retrieve the *message*. As post-interview transcripts were organized, the next step was to get to the message through data analysis, which helped to assess and triangulate

the data. Notedly, Leedy and Ormrod (2018) argued that researchers should constantly question their data through analysis. Therefore, juxtaposing data through a qualitative analysis process and then triangulating the data via a tertiary method acted to validate and introduce rigor to case study research (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Qualitative Analysis

When conducting a qualitative analysis of interview and focus group data, a mechanism must be put in place to assist with the vast quantities of dialog gathered over multiple interviews (Gioia et al., 2013). Creswell and Poth (2018) offered that part of the process for analysis is to interpret data through themes and coding. Creswell and Poth advocated that one of the best ways to do this is by utilizing a computer application such as NVivo. Hence, once interviews and the focus group session were complete, the next step in analysis was to load and transcribe them by using Microsoft Office 365; the participant-researcher broken-out transcription was then loaded into the NVivo application to generate themes by coding.

Coding Themes. Alam (2020) explained this multi-step, methodic data transfer is part of the analysis process through which loading of interviewee data takes the form of real-time thematic coding with key words. For example, a response to RQ1 was coded with key words such as *positive value*, *negative value*, or *intent*. These key words were then processed and collated by NVivo to build a themed picture across multiple interviews, and thereby yielded a value associated with senior leader intent.

Emergent Themes. Next, since the process of observing and identifying data from coding often reveals emerging themes, it was important to capture key word association appropriately. To do so, association occurred after population data was coded, which then produced emergent themes through narrowing of like-data key words gathered from respondent

transcripts. These strings of similar data sets *emerged* as the researcher teased out data (Sim et al., 2018) sets. This is in contrast to working with preidentified themes, as Sims et al. discussed, by which a researcher starts with a set of preordained key words they wish to use, vis-à-vis letting emerging themes reveal themselves. The point of leveraging emerging themes has merit since it lets the data speak for itself; nominally, relationships often emerge (Gioia et al., 2013) from interviews and participant-researcher interaction through interpretation of data.

Interpretations. Gammelgaard (2017) wrote about qualitative case studies and how to go about assessing data; he stated that a case study is more about information captured and its analysis than about the number of cases studied on a subject. Gammelgaard also emphasized case study quality and the research process, which is effectively its analysis. Thus, when assessing data it was important to be consistent when coding to ensure the researcher had established repeatable definitions that guided theme identification, as Gioia et al. (2013) instructed. It was also important to note the relationship the researcher had with study data (Chun Tie et al., 2019) and that that relationship did not bias theme outcomes. Therefore, while acknowledging that data interpretation could influence thematic outcomes, it was likewise important to relegate assumptions (Chan et al., 2013) as much as possible.

Data Representation. During analysis the researcher included an understanding of where participant influence originated from. For instance, Hadar et al.'s (2018) study identified that organizational climate was a factor in representing data. Similarly, the genesis or motivation for making certain choices for or against volunteering for joint assignments could also be the military's *climate*, visualized in Figure 2 regarding representation of joint Air Force leadership roles. Hence, observing and grasping how data is represented (Gamlen & McIntyre, 2018) during data analysis or coding was foundational.

Analysis for Triangulation

Alam (2020) offered that by using triangulation, flaws from one data source could be identified by juxtaposing that source with another. Lee and Ormrod (2018) stated that triangulation acts as a checkpoint to test findings; this thought process is why this researcher employed a follow-up focus group functioning as a mechanism to triangulate data collected from face-to-face interview dialog. Effectively, this secondary data collection utilized key themes just like the primary data collection, but these data were *compared* to interviews for validation. Similar to the interviews, focus group data was input into NVivo and coded in order to gather themes; these themes were compared qualitatively. The literature review has already been presented and performed one leg of the three-legged stool for triangulation, whereby, once interview and focus group thematic data was compared, it was then juxtaposed with researched and reviewed literature from the military construct field.

This data differed from quantitative triangulation, which used more deductive thinking and statistics and testable communication sets (Gioia et al., 2013). Leedy and Ormrod (2018) also distinguish the difference between both methods of research inasmuch that qualitative, the act of interpreting data, and quantitative, the act of validating data, stand apart for comparison. Since this study leant on interpreting data from participants, it therefore utilized the qualitative method for triangulation purposes.

Summary of Data Analysis

Data analysis is key to ensuring research is objective and delivering the research message to readers (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Questioning data, as Leedy and Ormrod (2018) asserted, should be forefront in a researcher's mind and therefore necessitate a methodologic approach. This was especially important when gathering large amounts of data, in this case via interviews

and a focus group, to separate and code it, ultimately yielding commonalities via themes. These themes were then interpreted qualitatively to make sense of participant responses through emergent themes data. To aid in this work, transcription automation was used as well as a coding application. Once themes were generated from participant data, those themes were compared with reviewed literature to determine any similarity or dissimilarity (Sim et al., 2018). Lastly, understanding how data representation could be influenced in analysis was essential, since themes themselves do not stand alone but are generated from pre-postured participant reasoning and decision-making.

Reliability and Validity

The next aspect of data collection addressed three areas that deliberately affected data trustworthiness (Morse et al., 2002) and interpretation during this study, they were reliability, validity, and bracketing. Leedy and Ormrod (2018) stressed that, contingent on the research undertaken, both reliability and validity take distinctive forms based on the problem and data to be gathered. While both of these concepts were active during research, using a rigorous approach to confirm data integrity for this study was key. Furthermore, bracketing sought to reduce researcher bias as much as possible since, as Wadams and Park (2018) noted, bias cannot be fully eliminated. The strategies to employ these three mechanisms during research (Morse et al., 2002) are discussed as follows.

Reliability

Jude et al. (2018) summarized reliability as being rooted in data adequacy across participants. Robson and McCartan (2016) warned that qualitative researchers must be cautious when employing their methods and have to assess their research practices. Wolcott (2005) added that a researcher must take care to ensure their procedures are consistent throughout research in

order to generate reliability as an artefact within the study itself. For this study's purposes, reliability was accomplished by this researcher taking extra care through thoroughly examining documentation and a computer application, such as the one used for transcription, to ensure audio recordings were transcribed correctly. This researcher accomplished this by listening to audio segments from interviews and the focus group session and comparing what was heard with what was transcribed. Any errors were fixed appropriately before coding started to ensure high quality transcribing took place, which integrated rigor into the data process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This resulted in a reliable and trustworthy process that produced valid data. There were four elements that influenced this outcome, data credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

Credibility. Effectively, data gathered and generated from a study should be sound and have credibility as it forms from emergent themes (Gioia et al., 2013). This study's credibility was generated through its use of a focus group to ensure data was reliable via member-checking (Morse et al., 2002). This study's credibility was defined through its population (Asiamah et al., 2017). Essentially, the population was appropriate for this study since the officers who participated had the right CYOS, rank, and cultural concept. These actors were able to truthfully respond to questions from a first-person account of decision-making, adding validity to data.

Transferability. Gioia et al. (2013) also stated that transferability expands a study's findings to a larger audience than originally intended as the authors introduced *portable principles*. A trustworthy study and its data should be able to *port* over to a similar *domain* and show relevancy. Likewise, Morse et al. (2002) included transferability in their essay on establishing reliability and validity; extensionally, they discussed criteria that encompassed qualitative rigor in a study, such as using data from one area and applying it to another.

Likewise, it could be beneficial for a study about jointness to be flexible enough to be used in an adjacent military study regarding leadership support for that domain of operations. This study's data could thusly be leveraged cross functionally once credibility is established.

Dependability. According to Guest et al. (2012) dependability of data is described as being *confident* of one's findings. Guest et al. suggested that a researcher's behavior and how they report findings is as important as the data itself. Hibben et al. (2020) similarly offered that establishing credibility with respondents through their understanding of a study's goals and purpose also increases their honesty. For this study, this type of participant-researcher exchange occurred via following the interview guide (see [Appendix A](#)).

Confirmability. Wadams and Park (2018) warned about introducing bias when assessing data and skewing perceived outcomes with preconceived notions. When including reliability in a study confirming data integrity, data saturation, and systematic data checking, these all sum together to form confirmability (Morse et al., 2002). In fact Morse et al. discussed the notion of *inching forward* to verify and validate data, which is a very deliberate approach. Livari (2018) included participant involvement in data checks and confirmability to both challenge and confirm study outcomes as a validation method. With this in mind, logically, validity of data will be discussed next.

Validity

Robson and McCartan (2016) discussed that in a qualitative study the data presented must be true and accurate; this is what makes the study valid. Therefore, the iterative process of validating research is reached by introducing rigor to a study through verification methods (Jude et al., 2018; Morse et al., 2002). For example, the use of recording and transcription (Robson & McCartan, 2016) for interviews acts as a method to ensure valid data capture; mentioned earlier,

it is this precise mechanism that was employed for this study vis-à-vis hand notetaking, through which data could be lost or misconstrued.

Jude et al. (2018) summed that validity is linked to data appropriateness for participant experiences in a study. Extensionally, Robson and McCartan (2016) introduced the notion of prolonged involvement with participants for validity. Both of these concepts are relevant since the military construct, which all participants and this researcher operate within, deals with this study's topic of jointness and therefore the officers understood the appropriateness, as it related to the joint lexicon and further, of the implications of relational influence with military leadership. Additionally, involvement or proximity to actors was key, since many of the participants had either interacted with or worked directly for this researcher, therefore, participants had some form of awareness and trust of this researcher, such as Robson and McCartan (2016) discussed. This trust was then used during interviews and the focus group session to communicate a form of *readback* to participants on key takeaways. This readback acted to validate what was *heard* with what was *said* as a way to measure accuracy of information (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018), therefore making what was *found* more credible (Wolcott, 2005). Three elements that fed this study's validity are data saturation, triangulation, and member-checking, discussed next.

Data Saturation. A central aspect of Alam's (2020) case study methodology is to use themes to establish a concept that illuminates data to the reader. Alam argued that proper case study analysis occurs when the source data exhausts identifying new themes, which generates a point of data analysis called *saturation*. Carrying this thought further, Chun Tie et al. (2019) discussed saturating *categories* as a means of analyzing data. This occurs when no further themes can be identified during coding, but it also happens when rendering data from the

participant sample set (Morse, 2000), whereby no further data emits from that sample. This validation action transpired from the follow-on focus group as it acted as a saturation method for data validation (Hadar et al., 2018).

Triangulation. Leedy and Ormrod (2018) discussed that triangulation ultimately helps the researcher answer research questions. For instance, including participants interactively to a study helps to define themes and aids in triangulating data (Mobley et al., 2019). As data is triangulated, it gains strength and should act to bolster the study, which is the aim of dispassionate and confident research (Noble & Heale, 2019).

Member-checking. To encourage study validity, a relatively new form of parity includes respondent participation. Effectively, participants assess the data in order to independently validate research (Livari, 2018) themes from data coding. For this study, this type of participant-researcher interaction was done, but respondents did not receive fully coded themes to independently assess. Rather than allowing respondents to assess whether the researcher coded *correctly* in their estimation, this researcher reintroduced outcomes from previously conducted interviews during the focus session as a means of validation, hence the previously mentioned readback concept.

Bracketing

Research may be influenced by researcher bias; bracketing acts to reduce it (Wadams & Park, 2018). Chan et al. (2013) continued this assertion by stating researchers need to put aside their preconceived notion of their research to reduce bias but admit that doing so is quite difficult in the formulation, and often vague in the attempt. Since this researcher had prior knowledge of, and had previously worked with, the participants this interaction acted to introduce bias as respondents answered interview questions.

This researcher took action to mitigate bias as much as possible. Two possible solutions could have been used. One way was to hold interviews away from the researcher's office and locate to an area more sterile of military surroundings. Another solution, paired with the first, was to avoid the wear of military uniforms while conducting interviews. The reasoning for identifying these two items was because they could have had unforeseen effects with participants, since this researcher is of higher rank than the FGO sample. The use of the researcher's office could be seen as being summoned to answer questions, which could have hampered participants' full disclosure, since this researcher falls into the definition of senior leader. Additionally, mitigating the use of uniforms would remove visible military rank from the equation, since Air Force rank is worn front and center on the jacket; removing uniforms removes the blatant rank advertisement and places participant-researcher on more equal ground. This was done to the fullest extent when possible.

Additionally, Chan et al. (2013) suggested a bracketing technique in which researchers *actively think* about bracketing and possible bias through reflexivity during the research process. Similarly, McNarry et al. (2019) discussed the removal of tacit knowledge through epoché (Creswell & Poth, 2018), but this becomes quite difficult; a more employable technique is through reflexivity. Effectively, in a qualitative study this researcher used reflexivity to disclose personal data to participants in an effort to disarm hidden bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Wolcott, 2005). This researcher used this disclosure technique (see [Appendix A](#)) with participants before the interview in order to establish a foundation of knowledge for the joint environment. This facilitated a certain participant freedom of maneuver through which they responded with their personal insight and story (Mobley et al., 2019) with full knowledge of researcher history.

Summary of Reliability and Validity

The aspects of reliability, validity, and bracketing are meant to ensure research is trustworthy, that it uses processes and procedures appropriately, and that researcher bias is mitigated as much as possible. As qualitative studies have matured, collected data has also undergone iterations of maturity, as seen in Morse et al.'s (2002) study. Relaying the importance of a study's reliability and validity during the research process and not waiting until after data is gathered resulted in a more robust rather than weak (Robson & McCartan, 2016) outcome from research, data, and coding. When assessing a study's data, four elements should be included to ensure data trustworthiness such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability; these areas allow for using a study's data for cross domain research as well as ensuring that the data itself is above reproach and reliable. To ensure data validity, other elements should be active such as data saturation when coding themes, triangulation with other sources to strengthen data, and a form of member-checking to authenticate data themes. Lastly, to aid in reducing bias, this researcher employed bracketing during the data gathering process. This was done by utilizing a reflexive process that Creswell and Poth (2018) introduced and lessened researcher data skew in this qualitative case study; reflexivity encouraged participant discussion when they relayed their story and thoughts on jointness.

Summary of Section 2 and Transition

Section 2 covered the role of the researcher, participants, study population, and sampling aspects. Also discussed were facets of the projected research methodology and why a flexible design works best for NATO's archetype. Lastly, areas comprising data collection, data analysis, and reliability and validity were examined to understand how data will be addressed.

Foundationally, the role of the researcher should be clear, dispassionate, and act as a way to interpret study data to the reader. The role of researcher includes bracketing which acts, as Scott et al. (2007) discussed, to reduce personal bias in research. The role of researcher is also deliberate in nature (Chun Tie et al., 2019), via a flexible design and case study, and supported by a qualitative methodology to deliver, in this case, obscure military specific data through interviews. That gathered data was validated or triangulated through reviewed literature, interviews, and a focus group to frame themes, which exposed collected data to analysis, as suggested by Renz et al. (2018).

Extensionally, understanding why a study's chosen population meets criteria for interviews or a focus group helps to add relevance and scope (Morse, 2000; Sim et al., 2018). It tapers from large to small, just as an organizational population narrows to a participant sample. For example, NATO's United States Air Force officer population comprises several hundred people, however, the narrowed sample at ACO headquarters includes FGOs totaling twenty participants, which made a robust sample set in order to collect data.

Summarily, for this study, data collection included several items, such as the interview guide, participant interviews, and a follow-up focus group; notwithstanding, archive data from NATO's database was examined, which showed historical joint focus. The interview guide created a framework for participant-researcher interaction that linked research questions to interview questions for data gathering via interviews. In parallel with interviews, a focus group similarly collected data; as an instrument, the interviews and the focus group were recorded for data organization and retrieval.

After data collection, the next phase was data analysis. It delivered the research message to readers (Robson & McCartan, 2016). When gathering data, via interviews and a focus group,

the data was separated and coded in order to reveal any themes. These themes were interpreted qualitatively through transcription automation and a coding application to compare thematically with reviewed literature.

Lastly, properties of reliability, validity, and bracketing were discussed; these ensured research trustworthiness through processes and procedures. These processes and procedures all worked to reduce researcher bias iteratively and ensured data was clean and usable. For example, using a reflexive process, per Creswell and Poth (2018), diminished researcher data skewing in this qualitative case study.

Section 3 endeavors to outline the application to professional practice for the study. Section 3 continues to explore the problem through a phased approach, including the overview of the study, the presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, recommendations for further study, and ending with reflections.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice

The encompassing project focus was to explore how senior leaders' support for the joint environment did or did not influence subordinate officer career decisions, determine if NATO joint fill rates were hindered, and determine if Air Force officers influenced NATO operational planning and execution for Collective Defence. This section seeks to outline and relay the presentation of those findings through an overview of discovered themes via an analysis of qualitative data. Additionally, the findings will be juxtaposed with key areas of the research proposal itself, such as the research questions and framework to identify anticipated themes and assess whether the literature supports or opposes the findings. Lastly, a summary of the findings coalesces and highlights any conclusions then drawn from the findings.

Presentation of the Findings

The researcher conducted a flexible single case study within NATO to reveal and describe whether a disconnection between the mandate to provide joint officers and the actual support for joint service was exhibited by Air Force senior leaders. To facilitate this query a series of twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher in a one-on-one mode using secluded conference rooms and workspaces. The interviews were recorded for subsequent transcription and an interview guide was used to ensure consistent questioning spanned the twenty participants; one interview integrated the application Microsoft Teams (Fouda, 2020) to record the dialog because of great physical distance between the researcher and that participant. After all interviews were conducted, a focus group of five participants were invited to assemble, from a random selection of interview participants, with four ultimately joining; that group was presented a subset of questions from the original interview guide to elicit data for triangulation and encourage group discussion.

As outlined in Figure 4, all participants were Air Force officers in the grade of either major or lieutenant colonel possessing a significant amount of YOS and various numbers of joint assignments, with a few having more than one NATO assignment. The participants also spanned both race and sex demographics; no “full” colonels (i.e., O6’s) were used. Emulating this construct, the focus group participants consisted of three males and one female but consisted of only lieutenant colonels.

Figure 4

Participant Data List

Participant #	Focus Group Participant	NATO Command	Rank	AFSC	Years of Service	Years Overseas	Joint Posts	NATO Posts	Sex	Race
1		JFCNP	Lt Col	17D	25	10	2	1	Male	Hispanic
2		ACO	Lt Col	17D	22	4.5	3	1	Male	White / Black
3		ACO	Lt Col	17D	23	6	3	2	Male	Filipino
4	✓	EUCOM	Lt Col	17D	29	6	2	1	Male	White
5		ACO	Maj	17D	13	4.5	2	1	Male	White
6		ACO	Lt Col	62E	20	1	2	1	Male	Hispanic
7		ACO	Lt Col	13N	15	8 mo	1	1	Female	White
8		ACO	Lt Col	62E	19	2.5	2	1	Male	White
9		ACO	Maj	11B	14	1.75	1	1	Male	White
10	✓	ACO	Lt Col	51J	17	2.5	1	1	Male	White
11	✓	ACO	Lt Col	17D	16.5	4.5	3	3	Female	White
12		ACO	Lt Col	21A	15	8 mo	1	1	Male	White
13		ACO	Lt Col	32E	15	6	1	1	Male	White / Korean
14		ACO	Lt Col	17D	23	1	2	1	Male	White
15		ACO	Maj	16F	12	7	1	1	Female	White
16		ACO	Lt Col	65W	17	8	1	1	Male	Filipino
17		ACO	Lt Col	14N	27	22	5	2	Male	White
18	✓	NCISG	Lt Col	15A	16	6	2	1	Male	White
19		ACO	Lt Col	11S	16	1.75	2	1	Male	White
20		ACO	Lt Col	17D	25	9	5	1	Male	Hispanic

Two types of coding were used, they were deductive coding, which employed a set of predetermined codes, and inductive coding, which revealed codes; what resulted was a hybrid approach to coding (Xu & Katina, 2020) which is often used in qualitative interview driven data.

The coding itself had three phases. The first phase was initial coding to loosely group responses with questions and then into key words. The second phase was a paring down of similar concepts from key words. The third phase consisted of associating concept value with research questions; these formed the actual themes. Extensionally, coding methodology was aided by the program NVivo. Nominatively the application NVivo is a derivative of the term “in vivo”, which means to derive meaning and insight from a participant’s own words (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tracy, 2018). Therefore, this type of program application naturally aided in the hybrid approach to coding and in the thematic alignment during the post interview process.

Overview of Themes Discovered

To elicit data, participants responded to semi-structured interview questions and then four participants agreed to a follow-up focus group with similar questions; their combined responses nested to form core themes. Once interview transcripts were coded, a natural alignment to the project’s three main research questions (i.e., RQ1, RQ2, RQ3) occurred; this ensued for the three subset research questions (i.e., RQ1a, RQ1b, RQ1c) as well. Notedly, unanticipated themes were discovered (Cassell & Bishop, 2019), stemming from the capstone interview question for both the initial interviews (i.e., Question 25) and from the focus group session (i.e., Question 10). Whereby similar structured capstone questions, which will be discussed further, inquired for additional thoughts from participants. Hence, when grouped together, eight core themes are highlighted for discussion as follows:

1. Joint is Important, Just Not NATO Focused
2. Inconsistent Joint Support
3. Influence and Feedback
4. Advocation and Education About NATO

5. Manning Fill Rates
6. Lack of Training and Preparation
7. NATO Bias
8. Difference Between Joint and International

Discussion of Themes

The researcher will expand upon each theme in order to extrapolate and relay what participants intended via their responses. Additionally, based on the sample of participants derived from the population, the term *majority* is used to describe responses. Therefore, to gain an understanding of majority, if roughly twelve participants responded similarly out of the twenty participants, those responses would constitute a *majority*, since other participants may have only tallied a singular response. As themes are discussed, their relevance to, and understanding for, participant thoughts and meaning may be augmented by a study participant's own words; therefore, quotations are used when appropriate to substantiate a highlighted theme (Lemon & Hayes, 2020).

Discovered Theme 1: Joint is Important, Just Not NATO Focused. The term joint refers to a multi-service construct with elements from more than a single service (Crosbie, 2019). When discussing the term joint with participants, and whether senior leaders placed value on the joint environment, a majority affirmed that they indeed witnessed their senior leaders encourage joint, with a minority of participants offering that leaders placed less value on the joint environment. Participants asserted their understanding that serving in a joint post was important to promotion and growth during an officer's career.

Placing Value on Joint. There were several participants who stated their leader placed positive value on the joint environment. Such as what Participant 12 offered:

Yes. I think by and large, most of my experiences in the joint environment have been positive. Most of the senior leaders that I've come across, that have described the joint environment see it as a positive endeavor for an officer.

Participant 13 added, "... sir, hate to use you as an example, but...you've stressed jointness throughout our, ... time together at NATO. I've also served in Korea, where I've had colonels asked me to think jointly with our Korean allies". Participant 19 asserted, "I think every O6 I've had the opportunity to sit down with has been exceptionally involved in pushing people towards joint operations, staff, etc."

Placing Less Value on Joint. However, some participants stated the opposite experience, such as Participant 1, who plainly said, "I have seen an Air Force leader place less value on a joint, in a joint billet or a joint assignment". Participant 16 caveated that earlier in his career a senior leader negated his contribution since, "mostly at my level as a lieutenant ... because my commander didn't put value on my experience ... he was just looking at my rank". Additional perception of negative value is proportional to the limitation of joint assignments as Participant 8 stated:

Where I hear of *not having value* is the fact that joint assignments are limited. And so all of the negativity that I have seen has been based on the fact that it's hard to get a joint decreed assignment.

Supporting the notion of reduced value, half of the focus group participants responded that Air Force senior leaders placed less or no value on the joint environment. Such as Focus Group Participant 2 who stated, "joint is like a necessary evil, I guess. That's what I've been told, not in those many words ... there's been no emphasis placed on it other than you have to do it at some point in your career". Focus Group Participant 3 described the idea of filling requirements

as, "... if the Air Force, in general, looks at ... Joint Service as ... we have to fill these billets ... we'll fill these billets then ... it's a negative, you know?" Focus Group Participant 1 supplemented Focus Group Participant 3's response and included senior officers serving on promotion boards perception:

...And to go over that point, even though it's [joint service meeting] the board, the senior leaders make up the board. Those are colonels. So they're making those choices. By default they are saying that joint is not as valuable as big Air Force.

Jointness Discussed. Hence, if there has been a majority of support for the joint environment, senior leaders should have had interactions with participants that resulted in an effort to discuss the idea of jointness (Priebe et al., 2018). General Colin Powell, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, emphasized training, fighting, and winning as a team (Powell, 1993) to promulgate the idea of jointness. Perkins and Holmes (2018) similarly advocated that leaders had to change service cultures toward jointness. With this in mind, a majority of participants affirmed that senior leaders had indeed discussed jointness.

Participant 1 detailed joint discussions as, "very often, to be honest with you, I mean I would say from my perspective it is, it is not omitted when a senior leader communicates with officers at large because they recognize the importance of jointness". Participants 4, 5, 16, 18, and 20 used terms like "often, daily, or all the time" referring to joint discussions. Participant 9 hinted at the progressive nature of jointness during one's career, "...I think in the ... as I've paid attention to it more, as a captain, senior captain, and major, then I've been more aware of that term being used".

Jointness Not Discussed. The remaining participants stated that there was very limited or no discussion with them at all referring to jointness but it is uncertain whether or not this was typical of their career field. Such as Participant 6, who stated that:

I can't think of a single discussion, outside of a formal briefing, that was done by either my functional or through like A1 [personnel section] types, the distributions of information. Uhm, that I was explicitly addressed, [regarding] joint assignments or joint activities.

Interestingly, the topic of jointness sometimes seemed constrained until an officer was actually serving in a joint post. Such as Participants 18 and 20 who stated that jointness is rarely discussed in a non-joint environment. Similarly, Participant 3 offered that jointness was only brought up regarding “administrative purposes”. Even though this was not the majority of participants, it causes concern when considering the sample of the interview population.

Separately, two focus group participants stated that there really is no value they have experienced, driven by senior leaders, either for or against joint service time. For instance, Focus Group Participant 4 noted, “in the Air Force JAG [legal] corps there's no emphasis on joint assignments at all. There's just no discussion topic. It's neither valued nor devalued”. Focus Group Participant 1 offered, “it's really just not ... it's joint is just joint. They don't really push it one way or another unless it is Joint Staff at the Pentagon”.

NATO Discussed. As jointness was discussed, this led to the question of deliberate introduction of NATO as a joint option for service, since the United States is looking to expand NATO in its foreign policy (Shiffrinson, 2020). Here participant responses which demonstrated senior leader interaction to promote NATO were less than half of the participants. While some did have discussions about NATO or knew about postings, the deliberate nature of discussing

NATO was uncertain. Participant 10, an Air Force lawyer, offered a mixed critique of NATO postings stating, “the NATO assignments are highly coveted. They're very competitive and they're viewed very favorably, and I believe that's largely because they're located in Europe outside of the conventional Air Force locations in the EUCOM region”. Participant 13 offered they had heard of NATO as an option but relayed:

Senior leaders have discussed it before in conversation about NATO and ACO, and most of their conversations unfortunately have been negative in nature. I've heard terms as "career killer"; "this is where we send our leftovers"; "... not much promise in a NATO assignment.

Participant 18 had a similar experience regarding his NATO posting as he revealed, “... most of it was just focused on Belgium and saying, oh, you'll get to travel a lot and see some stuff and have a relaxing tour. There wasn't much of ... anything else like job or importance of NATO”. Participant 2 offered a different perspective on postings regarding a United States approach to defense:

I have not witnessed any senior leaders have any type of discussions about NATO for the most part. ... I don't personally think that we, give any kind of weight and value to NATO, mostly because we typically will keep within the US channels and the benefits that we can gain from developing US-centric solution sets in order to meet our national objectives.

One of the more candid responses was posited from Participant 20, who explained in detail regarding his witnessing senior leader discussions and support for NATO as follows:

You know, well NATO's where you go to die. That's, that's pretty much what they said.

You know, I was always told stay away from NATO ... do we send our talent to NATO?

Not necessarily. Not that I've seen, there's been in some cases where you know... And not necessarily the headquarters, but other spots within NATO, people go just because, you know, toward the bottom, it seems like we don't send our superstars, when we look at some of the [biographies] of folks who have made O6 and O7. There is not necessarily NATO time there.

So, while there seems to be support for the joint environment, the level of effort appears to decline when it includes NATO as a body for joint service. Participant responses regarding NATO discussions affirm that most had not heard about the organizational body, had heard about NATO in the form of Afghanistan deployments with its linkage to NATO, or had heard about NATO and did not have a positive experience. As a sum to the aforementioned responses, there seemed to be a dearth of deliberate support for NATO.

Discovered Theme 2: Inconsistent Joint Support. The 2018 Summary of the National Defense Strategy deliberately outlines the United States' support for NATO in concert with the *Trans-Atlantic Alliance* (Mattis, 2018) with its call for adaptation regarding threats. However, Zimmerman et al. (2019) describe the Air Force's lack of leadership positions in key operational areas in the joint community, insomuch that the Air Force is relegated to filling support roles like the J8 (i.e., finance and budgeting). Zimmerman et al. add that the Air Force is in a state of constant socialization, marketing its services to congressional decision-makers to remain a first-choice option in military operations. Therefore, one may perceive that senior leaders indeed seek to support the joint environment per guidance given from higher-level governance. When assessing officers' perception of senior leader support, the question of consistent support is forefront.

Non-Hindered, Non-Deterred, Encouraged. About three quarters of the participants stated that there was encouragement for the joint environment from senior leaders and the same amount stated that they were not deterred from seeking joint posts. For example, Participant 1 responded regarding senior leader support by stating, “hindering no. I think it's always encouraged, because again, it can only benefit i.e., a mission or something larger that might not be overtly expressed”. Participant 15 agreed about senior leader non-deterrence, “no I can't think of a time where a senior leader has obstructed that [jointness] deliberately”. Participant 6 explained senior leaders’ mindset further as, “I haven't heard any senior leader badmouth a joint assignment or NATO. They all have enjoyed it. Most tend to talk about the surrounding aspects of the job being in the area rather than the job itself”. Participant 11 extended her pride of Air Force service, and the absence of deterrence as, “I have not, because ... we're all talking about Air Force. I have not heard a senior Air Force leader ever deter joint anything”. Lastly, Participant 13 discussed senior leaders actively encouraging jointness:

Overall, I've been in a fortunate position, where again, I've served overseas for six years and all those six years I've received senior leader vectoring. Encouraging me to actually be more joint and encouraging jointness in the last six.

Hindered, Deterred, Non-Encouraged. However, there was a minor sample of individual participants who stated that they had faced hinderance, deterrence, and no encouragement for joint support. Participant 6 expressed frustration regarding joint service and the non-encouragement aspect when, “... what's out there; what the possibilities are, if it's not mentioned by the senior leaders in your chain, it's only paid lip service by your functional, so getting any kind of real practical knowledge ... is missing”. Participant 16 also offered his frustration with a senior leader in response to aiding a NATO aircraft maintenance fix action stating, “I got shut

down because I um, ... I was informed that although technically it's a good way around, however the leader at that time didn't want to engage with NATO because of the bureaucracy”.

Focus Group Participant 2 bluntly answered “against” when asked about senior leader encouragement. A similar response came from Focus Group Participant 4 who stated, “there's no vectoring at all. No Senior Leader encouragement”. Focus Group Participant 3 then offered an alternate perspective on primary and alternate postings regarding jointness as:

So, when somebody says ... well you should have done this job or this job or been ... at this location ... I'm like, hey, yeah exactly! Those are the places that I wanted to go ... but big Air Force told me I'm gonna go do joint. I mean they didn't push back when they said, hey, you know, go do a tour in in Belgium. And I didn't say no ... I mean how do you turn down a tour ... if you have no excuse not to take it?

Participant 4 gave an example of a senior leader hindering jointness regarding schools as, “I've seen senior leaders deny joint schools to individuals that required that education to be in a joint environment along with their counterparts”.

This last example reinforces Magruder's (2018) argument that Air Force officers lack the ability to add value to the strategic discussion within the joint community compared to other joint service officers. Magruder adds that Army officers are grown differently, often command more and possess more joint service when compared to Air Force officers, which contributes to the lack of Air Force officers' joint immaturity. While the majority of participants stated they were encouraged and not hindered in their joint service, it should be noted that a quarter of officers experienced senior leader joint deterrence or hindrance. When assessing the sample, it seems as if the Air Force is headed down the right path, but there is still work to do to fully encourage joint service.

Discovered Theme 3: Influence and Feedback. Magruder (2018) asserted that Airpower has been the *most influential* force in military operations apart from training or advising. Taking this assertion into account, one would deem that military leaders are charged with offering feedback to officers for career development, mentoring, or personal growth (Priebe et al., 2018). Surace (2019) counseled that leaders can offer feedback that is either positive or negative in value to the recipient, in this case the officer, and that leaders should be timely when providing feedback.

Feedback. When questioned about senior leader influence on officers' careers or the feedback officers received from senior leaders, participants offered frustrated responses. A majority, around three quarters, of participants stated they have received no feedback from senior leaders and had not gotten *none* regarding NATO.

For example, Participant 3 curtly offered, "they've never done that. In fact, I've never had any feedback sessions in the five years I've been in NATO". Participant 6 stated, "so feedback and mentoring for me since I've been here, I give it a thumbs down so far". Regarding feedback or discussions of NATO, responses like "no discussion whatsoever", "I didn't know what ACO was", "none at all", or "none whatsoever" were mentioned. Focus Group Participant 2 offered that:

Nobody says you should do one [joint post], and be done, and get out and move on ...

there was no career advice in that sense, and so then when the board comes back and goes well ... she's been out of main Air Force for too long

When NATO was discussed openly or during feedback, Participant 9 offered, "well ... my current boss, who is an Air Force two-star has been the one who has voiced the most, and I don't

remember encouragement or support for NATO ACO coming from other senior leaders”.

Participant 11 reflected on mentor conversations this author has had with her:

Well, I mean, we've had discussions about, how being in NATO is positive especially in the outside world because you get, you gain this experience with working with all these different nationalities, and you broaden your perspective on instead of focusing on simply U.S. military.

Similar to Participant 9, Participant 20 added, “I had a great experience in the fact that it happened to be that my NATO boss also worked in my area, both times”.

Therefore, one may assess that a predominate number of participants had little to no feedback. For the officers who had feedback, it seemed that their supervisors had NATO experience and subsequently offered positive reinforcement to NATO as an option within one's career path. However, with the dearth of feedback to this level of officers, at this time in their career, one may surmise a negative connotation regarding NATO is predominate in several AFSC's.

Influence. Extensionally, when one looks at the connection between feedback and influence, there is little doubt of their relation to how the officer feels about their posting. Hardison et al. (2019) noted this phenomena and that an individual's perception of an artefact directly affects that individual's behavior, therefore leading to some form of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their environment. A majority of participants responded they had not received positive influence from their senior leaders regarding NATO. As such, Participant 17 described his interaction with senior leaders as more of an absence of leadership; “well, I don't, I don't know that any of them ever really, positively influence or had any influence at all in it, quite honestly”. Participant 17 stated that, “it would have been not advised to take the job at

NATO”. As well as Participant 20’s description of cautionary influence for his NATO posting choice as, “... did they recommend NATO? No, not, not at the time. They actually said, again, you know, if you want to make O6 be very careful about going NATO”. Likewise, Participant 14 sought out his NATO posting as he described:

And for this assignment it was um, I mean the senior leader who was involved in helping with my assignment, helping this assignment ... I mean it was, it was kind of warned, but my discretion, he said if I want to go NATO, go for it.

Assessing, the support for NATO is mixed. Senior leaders may encourage joint duty, and they may encourage NATO to a point, but the level of support is intermittent. While a majority of participants were not swayed from joint duty, NATO was not exactly encouraged either. Several participants had neutral senior leader support or simply sought out their posting independently. Therefore, the signal that senior leaders may be sending is neutral. If senior leaders state that jointness is important but leave posting choices up to officers and then do not offer feedback, it may set the stage for negative perception of the joint environment.

Discovered Theme 4: Advocation and Education about NATO. Senior leader actions to encourage joint capability and planning produced common responses from participants to deliberately emphasize NATO through education, place value on NATO postings, and advocate NATO. Interestingly, when searching doctrine in Joint Publication 3-0 (JCS, 2018), there is mention of both NATO and the United Nations (UN), with the UN being slightly more prominent.

Education. One might assume that with these organizations noted specifically in joint doctrine, more deliberate emphasis would be placed on inclusion of planning and operations.

This is uncertain however, and Participant 6 intimated two solutions for senior leaders' advocacy for greater NATO awareness as:

Number one, I've mentioned it previously, they [senior leaders and officers] have to be made aware of the opportunities and so, that's the first step. So, drawing people in is just to make them know that there are things out there that are feasible for their career field to get into, because that's not always clear. ... Number two, they do also need to be ... instructed or made aware that these things were viewed favorably by the system that they're in, so certainly all of the career guidance that is pushed out by our functional.

Participant 8 specifically suggested that senior leaders needed a greater working knowledge of NATO with his suggestion:

But again, I don't think right now, especially in my area, our senior leaders don't understand the relationship of NATO. So, in order to get NATO as a priority, we have to educate our senior leaders on what NATO gives us and what the purpose for NATO [is] and for us serving within NATO, and maybe even back-to-back tours, and not a one and done type situation. They need to understand that so that they can help our junior forces understand, prepare, and try to go serve here.

Participant 17 summed that "there's not a widespread understanding of NATO or I don't think it's something that comes up that often". Focus Group Participant 1 strongly advocated for JMPE II education sooner rather than later:

I think sending [officers] to JPME II initially before we arrive, so that we have a little bit more knowledge of a joint-combined-NATO style environment and also get that credit after the tours, to say hey, we are now fully joint complete ... without having to wait the two or three years to get that training.

Placing Value on Postings. An even greater number of participants stated there should be value placed on NATO postings. Hughes et al. (2009) described an inherent cultural trust that exists between international militaries, despite any national cultural boundaries. Hodges (2018) added that the United States' participation in international activities, such as NATO, stabilizes and brings a security mindset to its partners. Hodges discussed that because of United States' investments in defense, other allies are investing in defense. Therefore, one may extrapolate a message of investing in officers too, such as Participant 10's response to value in postings:

I think that joint posts in an international environment, like NATO, need to be assignments where we send our very best people. You and I have had this conversation before. I think it's an extremely important conversation to have. It's in these kind of multinational environments with our allies that we make lasting impressions with people who matter. These are senior officers in North Atlantic Alliance, who may or may not have had extensive interactions with their American colleagues in the past, and the impressions we make will influence their inclination to remain allies with the United States and also influenced ... the degree to which they support their relationship with the United States.

Additionally, Participant 20 emphasized a need for action as, "I think we need to see an emphasis on the importance of NATO ... but somehow, we need to show that it's important". This is an interesting assertion since American presidential policy has shifted between reducing NATO presence and then supporting various key elements of NATO defense (Lanoszka & Simón, 2021), which could be seen as mixed signals to senior leaders. Two participants offered suggestions to senior leaders. Participant 3 stated, "I think senior leaders probably value it, but

maybe they're not pushing it hard enough to the assignments folks to force people into that, or to advertise it more, maybe. Participant 4 opined,

when you tell an officer that they have been in joint too long and they need to be re-blued, then that's a negative indication to me that being joint, and carrying what blue that I have, is not welcome nor needed.

Focus Group Participant 4 discussed frustration about the value of his joint service as:

I have been to the Republic of Georgia with the Marines training Georgian personnel before they go off into Afghanistan. I did a lot of that as a Captain and even some as a Major, but I don't receive any credit beyond what's in my Vector for that, and that also takes a senior leader person to vouch for your experience.

Focus Group Participant 3 encapsulated his thoughts on jointness and what senior leaders could do for its support as, "... we've all served ... most of us have served with, you know other nations and other counterparts, and ... joint tours. If it's not special, then don't call it special". Therefore, one could assert that placing value on joint and NATO postings, and then rewarding those postings, could equate to the level of importance officers place on serving in similar organizations during their careers.

Advocating NATO. Amidst the plethora of obligations the Air Force faces, stipulating the advocacy of NATO is difficult; a balancing effect of acumen and force readiness (Venable, 2020) is always present. However, as discussed regarding NATO's value, extensionally, advocating joint posts is the next step. Multiple participants offered how senior leaders could advocate, with several stating that talking to officers, emphasizing joint posts, pushing joint posts as a priority, or simply leading by example should be foremost in joint advocacy. For instance, Participant 15 stated, "emphasizing, prioritizing joint postings will continue to make them

prestigious postings”. Participant 19 continued that, “encouraging NATO participation in things that would be an observable behavior, that would be encouraging”. Centering on one’s career aspect, Participant 4 stated, “senior leaders, can ya know... advocate for these positions and advocate a follow-on position that basically furthers the growth of that officer”. Similarly, Participant 5 offered, “senior leaders at the O6 level can ensure or re-emphasize to the field grade level that, hey, this really is a good thing on your record; it is a good experience”.

Discovered Theme 5: Manning Fill Rates. This theme sought to assess if participants were able to gauge manning levels in NATO and compare them to Air Force levels as well as previous joint manning fill rates. When compared to Johnston’s (2017) discussion about NATO’s post-cold war reduction, Lanoszka (2020) disputed the idea of reduced manning and discussed NATO’s enlargement, specifically to counter against Russian aggression. However, it is uncertain whether an emphasis exists to fill NATO posts, or if post fill rates have recovered based on new allied threats. As interview and focus group discussions transpired, what seemed to unfold was a lack of overall post fill rate knowledge or any real understanding of fill rates by participants, save from a few responses.

Fill Rates Good. Without direct knowledge, participants generally considered fill rates were as good as Air Force posts or previous joint posts, with a minority simply having no knowledge regarding fill rates. Participants 9, 10, 13, 15, 17, 18 affirmed current fill rates with joint or Air Force fill rates were good, with anecdotal responses. Examples include Participant 13 offering, “so in in my perspective it seems like Air Force fill rates are pretty high here in NATO”. Participant 17 presuming, “yeah, it's hard for me to say, like across the career field, but our fill rates, at least from my career field, is, is pretty high here”. Lastly, Participant 18 stated “I

believe the Air Force fill rates are on par, if not better, at least in my career field for the, the joint assignments”.

Fill Rates Poor. Again, few responses had direct knowledge of fill rates, and offered that fill rates could be negatively linked to joint credit and therefore filling with volunteers becomes difficult. This can be seen with Participant 9’s response:

I heard that the US side had denied the credit or the JDAL credit for a number of billets not offered the, whatever it is, the approval or the stamp...to give a billet that credit and that is a fluctuating thing, year to year and then at this time a few months ago it seemed to be that they had not approved a lot of billets, which was discouraging for people who are looking for that credit and looking to get a joint assignment.

Participant 20 seemed to confirm this thought by stating manning rates as, “so I'd say lower. And again, the issue is not only fill rates, but the issue is retention rates. How many of those, you know, personnel ... receive their joint officer qualification through, you know, time on station”.

Participant 11 intuited fill rates for 17D’s as grim:

I do know that we are short on 17D officers across the board, so a lot of positions, especially NATO positions, are not being filled like they need to be filled because they're not seen as critical as, you know, the Pentagon ... DISA. That's who gets all of the all the officers for the most part, like those are the critical fills. NATO kind of takes a back seat on that, I think.

Participant 1 had knowledge of manning fill rates, having spent time on a functional manning team suggesting:

I think joint fill rates are going to be statistically less than an Air Force internal fill rate and I say that more from experience than conjecture or gossip or just taking of

randomness. If I'm not mistaken. Our NATO fill rates were slightly below that of Air Force fill rates.

FGO Fill Rates. However, there was a disconnect in responses from overall fill rates when compared to FGO fill rates. A majority of participants stated that FGO fill rates were good or comparable (i.e., Participants 5, 17, 18). Other participants could not definitely answer; there seemed to be an inconsistency such as Participant 4 conflicting himself from his previous statement regarding manning fill rate statement as, “I don't know that, ...I don't know the...yeah, it is the MOA [memorandum of agreement]?”, and then stated “currently, this joint environment is below the fill rate for joint officer billet”. Alternately, Participant 8, who advocates for the newly created Space Force manning stated:

I have a position here locally that is a dedicated Space Force person, and until now they have refused to even list the position within the [Vulnerable to Move List]. So, there is a negative connotation to filling positions within NATO. I understand we have a limited force availability. However, ... because the positions are not valued, they take second order effect to any state site or any Space Force or Air Force specific positions.

Focus Group responses were negative for knowledge of fill rates, including Participant 2 who admitted, “no, 'cause I don't know what the manning is and fill rates and such, so I couldn't tell you”.


Therefore, the general consensus was speculative and inconclusive regarding FGO fill rate knowledge, apart from the few participants who had previously worked to fill manning posts and had direct knowledge of officer allocations rates. During an Air Force cyber community *Spread the Word* briefing, a cautionary message was socialized by the assignments team stating that, “due to significant [number] of FGO requirements, O3s will continue to fill O4 positions,

O4s will fill O5 positions, etc.” (Air Force, personal communication, February 13, 2015).

Additionally, referencing Figure 5 one can see that the joint community, which includes NATO, is prioritized almost last in the entitlement fill column.

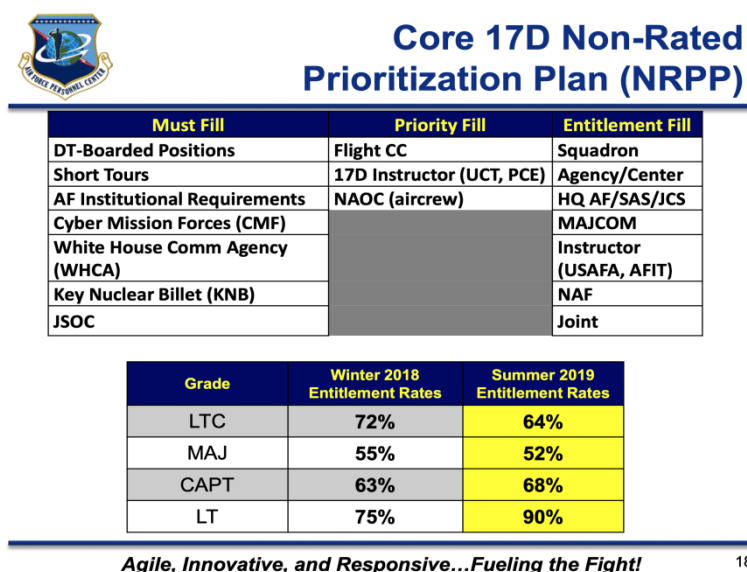
Figure 5

17D Spread the Word February 13, 2015

 17D Non-Rated Prioritization Plan (NRPP)		
Must Fill	Priority Fill	Entitlement Fill
DT-Boarded Positions	DO	Agency/Center
Short Tours	Flight CC	HQ AF/SAF/JCS
AF Institutional Requirements		Instructor
Cyber Mission Forces (CMF)		MAJCOM
White House Comm Agency (WHCA)		NAF
		Joint
		Sq Level
Grade	Previous Entitlement Rates	FY15 Entitlement Rates
LTC	85%	90.5%
MAJ	49%	42.6%
CAPT	89%	69.6%
LT	100%	100.0%

One Team, One Family, One Mission

When one then assesses the same information for joint fills in 2018, an individual may see changes as the overall population of officers change too. There is a sizable decrease in O5's (LTC) and a small increase of O4's (MAJ), and joint fills have also fallen to the bottom of the fourth column, symbolizing a decrease in value. Notedly, these examples are for one AFSC, the 17D career field, adding multiple other AFSC manning rates is beyond the scope of this study.

Figure 6*17D Spread the Word November 2018*

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Continuing this trend, in 2021 HAF/A6 Air Force General O'Brien, the senior 17D Cyber Functional released a memo stating that, "the 17X career field has a current shortfall of 570 officers below its sustainment inventory, primarily across the ranks of O4 and O5" (O'Brien, personal communication, November 12, 2021) as can be seen in Figure 7. Interestingly, Figure 7 stipulates Group B as *Priority Fills* which actually moves this group up in importance in relation to other organizations or units for fill rates, since the three priorities areas are *Must Fills*, *Priority Fills*, and *Fills*. One may surmise the fill rate increased between the interim years between Figure 6 and Figure 7. However, Figure 7 indicates the trend in fill rates based on the included plus and minus signs. Therefore, one may now see that with the shortfall of officers, all organizations considered joint *affiliated* have a negative fill rate trend continuing from 2021 to 2022, including NATO, which moved further downward (at least for O5's) compared to 2018 rates.

Figure 7*17X Non-Rated Officer Prioritization Plan November 12, 2022*

Priority Fills – Group B				
ORG	GRADE	FY21 NROPP	FY22 NROPP	NROPP CHANGE
	O-5	60%	60%	=
EUCOM	CGO	85%	98%	+
	O-4	80%	70%	-
	O-5	90%	60%	-
HAF	CGO	85%	98%	+
	O-4	80%	70%	-
	O-5	90%	60%	-
INDO-PACOM	CGO	85%	98%	+
	O-4	80%	70%	-
	O-5	90%	60%	-
JFHQ-DODIN	CGO	85%	98%	+
	O-4	80%	70%	-
	O-5	90%	60%	-
JOINT STAFF	CGO	85%	98%	+
	O-4	80%	70%	-
	O-5	90%	60%	-
JOINT AIC	CGO	85%	98%	+
	O-4	80%	70%	-
	O-5	90%	60%	-
LREC	CGO	60%	98%	+
	O-4	45%	70%	+
	O-5	60%	60%	=
MPEP	CGO	60%	98%	+
	O-4	45%	70%	+
	O-5	60%	60%	=
NATO (AFELM EUR)	CGO	85%	98%	+
	O-4	80%	70%	-
	O-5	90%	60%	-
NORAD	CGO	70%	98%	+
	O-4	60%	70%	+
	O-5	70%	60%	-
NORTHCOM	CGO	70%	98%	+
	O-4	60%	70%	+
	O-5	70%	60%	-

With this general data available to research, officers have the ability to understand fill rates in their respective organizations; whether they actually pull that data is undetermined. With

respect to this sample of data from the cyber community, Latici (2018) discussed how the *European Deterrence Initiative* had been created to enhance readiness and cover joint training and exercises, as well as the importance of the cyber domain. However, with inconsistency of officers' working knowledge of manning fill rates, as expressed especially in the 17D AFSC sample area, there seems to be additional work needed to solidify and socialize overall support for joint service postings.

Discovered Theme 6: Lack of Training and Preparation. Coleman (2020) recently highlighted the need for officers in the joint arena to learn and understand the Joint Planning Process in order to gain a better understanding of the joint environment and prepare officers for joint duty. Additionally, a recent study conducted by the Rand Corporation identified that senior Air Force leaders are advocating the need for training, to include joint training, to ensure Airmen have what they need for high-end warfare (Zimmerman et al., 2019). However, Rand's study also notes that Air Force officers typically do not serve in joint posts as often when compared to their sister services and therefore lack the overall knowledge of the joint environment.

Training. While joint training, and the requirements that often surround it, are often difficult to parley, Starling et al. (2021) advocated that military education and training with United States' international allied partners specifically aides in building trust and strength for defense. Comparatively, based on participant feedback, it seems as if training in particular has been a difficult requirement for officers to tackle, especially because of joint training and the terminology that often accompanies it. Substantiating this assertion, when participants were polled, they overwhelmingly responded that no training was provided prior to being posted to NATO. Participant 6 stated his irritation as, "so the...formal answer is no. In my job description there were four required classes. I had none of them prior to coming here, nor was I aware of

them before I showed up”. Participant 9 added, “right, just the in-correspondence JPME I. Which I didn't think did a very good job”. Participant 15 outlined more directly their personal and their immediate organization’s training absence as:

No, sadly there were a whole, a whole number of courses that I was supposed to attend prior to coming to this post, but I only found that out from reading my job description after arriving here, but from what I gleaned from my coworkers, that's not an uncommon occurrence and it seems like less than 25% of the people in the J4 [logistics] have completed their mandatory training prior to showing up on day one.

Separately, while a few officers had attended Joint Professional Military Education II, most had not. Participant 4 expressed his confusion with the timing of support for attending JPME II that, “... an officer selected to go to SOCOM ... in that joint environment, they're supposed to attend Joint PME II prior to ... doing their tour. But I was sent at the end of my tour”. Alternatively, Participant 11 responded that they had attended a NATO course from an earlier assignment and offered, “... the only [training] I have attended was the NATO staff officers course, and that was probably my first year when I was at NCIA in Brunssum”. Not surprisingly, focus group participants responded in like fashion, except for Focus Group Participant 4 who affirmed that, “I was assigned to attend a cyber course about two months prior to shipping”. Notwithstanding, the dearth of training fundamentals appeared to correspond to an officer’s attitude regarding their preparedness for planning at NATO.

Preparedness. In the 2018 Summary of the National Defense Strategy, Secretary of Defense Mattis outlined several initiatives to bolster defense efforts for the United States (Mattis, 2018). In that report he addressed the need to fundamentally revisit the nature of JPME II and its *stagnation* in order to move past the course operating as a box checking mechanism and into a

method to prepare officers as strategic assets in war. As officers responded, the majority did not feel like they were prepared to fill a joint NATO post. The minority who currently felt prepared often had either a prior NATO post or leveraged JPME II as their mechanism for effective planning, such as Participant 3 who stated their opinion regarding effective planning as, “here, yes, in Izmir [Turkey] at LANDCOM, no”. Participant 5 offered that, “... when I was at Air University, I had the opportunity to take ... [the] Contingency War Planning Course, which kind of gave me a little bit of background on planning, though I haven't ... been in a planning environment”. Participant 20 expounded:

So, by the time I got to, you know, later, joint assignments or an international assignment like NATO, I was pretty prepared. I understood the way the US did its joint planning, which of course is not the way NATO does its joint planning and I was quick to, to get the NATO book and try to remember and figure out what are the similarities, where their differences and how can I quickly learn this process and speak the international language so that I can be effective.”

Several officers did not feel prepared, such as Participant 10’s response:

No, I don't think I was sufficiently prepared, in that that we received no formal preparation or training in advance of a joint assignment, in a multinational environment, and I think this is a huge shortcoming, of the way the DoD does business.

As well as Participant 13 who plainly stated, “no I don't. I don't think I was prepared. I think JPME II maybe would be a class to take or even JPME I before I come here. Maybe TDY enroute would have better prepared me”.

Other officers relayed their self-confidence and the ability to adapt to NATO’s environment, like Participant 11 who stated, “so do I feel like I was ... capability wise, yes, I'm

absolutely capable, but I feel like the training was not there to help me hit the ground running a little faster if that makes sense”. Participant 15 added, “so yeah, I feel like I am suited for the position, but I was not specifically prepared for a strategic logistics role in NATO”.

In spite of their limited training or preparation, officers endeavored to adapt to their NATO postings and a majority of officers affirmed that they did contribute to operations and planning. Such as Participant 2’s positive contribution to operations statement as, “I do. I have been involved in multiple planning sessions at the strategic and somewhat at the operational level”. Additionally, Participant 15 confidently stated that, “... four months in now I do. I do feel like I'm having a positive impact”. The noted differences were Participants 5, 8, and 11 who operated, what they considered, outside their normal AFSC role and therefore did not contribute to operations in a traditional sense. Specifically, a majority of the focus group responded that they felt they were adapting and contributing to operation and planning as they navigated limited time or training. Focus Group Participant 1 summed his experience so far as, “it has helped via the lessons learned [process] in the evaluations [section]. It works to improve the operations for the group that I'm involved in”. Additionally, Focus Group Participant 4 confidently stated: “I feel like I've had a big impact!”

Therefore, the assessment is that officers either had an assignment that aided in their overall capability to plan or that they would have benefited from some sort of training. Secondly, officers who felt they were contributing to operations and planning did so out of their own assertive character and the innate will to succeed. As a link between training and preparedness is apparent, it is unknown why, if the DoD stated a change was needed in its education of officers in 2018, individuals who were posted in 2020 or later did not receive formal training to aid in planning.

Discovered Theme 7: NATO Bias. NATO is aligned within the joint construct (JCS, 2018; Mattis, 2018) as seen in Figure 5 and 6. However, several participants insinuated they felt leaders possessed bias toward NATO, such as Participant 6 who stated, “there is probably, a definite bias towards just talking about the job, when it comes to jointness”. However, it seems that being posted inside of NATO had a secondary maturing effect on participant’s attitude toward jointness too. This seems to have occurred with Participant 9 after serving in NATO; “I’ve seen the value in NATO that I never saw before and the value of the joint environment”.

Cakiroglu et al. (2020) discussed bias in leadership and posited that older leaders possess more bias than younger leaders. This mindset may have been promulgated within an Air Force centricity, as Priebe et al. (2018) discussed, even as leaders encourage jointness. Participant 2 seemed to agree with this delineated process and offered a distinction between the typical joint post and a NATO post by stating, “I think there is definitely more focus on preparing people to work in a joint environment, more so than the NATO environment”. This was later confirmed from Participant 20 who offered his perspective:

“... as you come up to O4 and O5, you really see ... if you served at CENTCOM or PACOM, or EUCOM and, you know, well that's, that's ... OK, you're on your way! But if you say, well, I served in Naples or Brunssum or Mons ... oooh! You went to school in residence, what happened?

Similar to Priebe et al.’s discussion on joint warfighting, Lee et al. (2017a) discussed that reform was needed for senior Air Force leaders to encourage a joint mindset, which would enhance networking and foster joint experience. Contextually, Participant 4 expressed frustration with bias while serving in the joint environment; “... joining the joint environment takes a long time to become accustomed to. So, when an officer is told that they've been joint too long it

hinders...it hinders their record and it's held negatively". Changing this mentality is exactly what Priebe et al. (2018) championed in their essay.

Further to reducing bias, van Vliet and van Amelsfoort (2008) advocated for greater international interaction and encouraged inasmuch when international military serve together it acts to disarm bias and reduce an *us versus them* mentality. Participant 19 suggested this in his experience as, "from a joint perspective, I've learned the importance of working with partners and making allowances for partner [limiting factors] and caveats and perspectives ... So overall my joint experience has been very horizon broadening and eye opening for me". Therefore, while it is uncertain to what levels of NATO bias is exhibited from certain senior leaders, it is being challenged; albeit bias still remains for officers who serve in the joint NATO community.

Discovered Theme 8: Difference Between Joint and International. While the Air Force connotes the terms *joint* to include the term *international*, a few participants asserted that there was a *difference* between the two and they should be recognized or managed differently. This could answer the formidable question regarding attitude toward joint postings discussed so far. This question has been discussed to the extent by which it includes an organization's culture. A ten year study by the German-Netherlands Corps (Hagen et al., 2006) introduced topics such as international military operations, intercultural and international co-operation, and differences in risk and trust, all of which are used to a greater extent than the term *joint*. The United States seems to ubiquitously use joint to refer to international as well as *interservice*, often stringing them together as essayists and researchers discourse the joint perspective (Febbraro et al., 2008; JCS, 2018; Kuo & Blankenship, 2021). Participant 17 clarified the differences between joint and international by expressing:

I think a joint experience is one thing, but then when we talk about the multinational NATO experience, that's sort of a whole another kettle of fish ... because it, it influences very differently when you have not only just the sort of different joint perspective, but the international perspective from, you know, potentially 29 other countries.

Likewise, Participant 20 expressed the need to clarify between the two terms during the interview and did so with conviction:

You said joint, do you mean international, or do you mean joint? I still see them as they're viewed very differently within. Because joint and international are not the same, and if people are saying that they're synonymous, you know, I think that's a mistake, and if that's your initial thought, then your foundational ... some of your key assumptions are flawed. ... I think joint and international are radically different, and I don't think we necessarily look at it that way. ... However, when we work in those areas and we work with those foreign partners and foreign nations, I'm sure we have the same challenges, so it's not just a NATO centric problem and I'm hoping that it's not approached that way.

Focus Group Participant 3 likewise highlighted the differences between joint posts and international posts through his example of interactions officers face with various national entities as, “you know foreign militaries and dignitaries and foreign civilians, we are the, you know, the tip of the spear for what they think America is all about”. These types of interactions may not necessarily be present in standard joint specified posts but may be included within analogous NATO or international engagements (Febbraro et al., 2008). Focus Group Participant 1 agreed with this thought process and extensionally stressed the importance of sending the right officer and putting the right emphasis on that individual’s service since, “I mean we end up being the

first, maybe not the second, but we're we are Americans or Air Force officers to the international community”.

Currently there is only one AFSC, (i.e., 16F/P) that stipulates special requirements to interact with the international community (Harrington et al., 2017). However multiple AFSC's are assigned posts in NATO (see Figure 4) at various levels of responsibility and therefore may interface with assorted nationalities from different service components, which adds to the complexity of interpersonal communication and social exchange (Sosik et al., 2019). Such as Participant 2 who offered perspective on the complexity associated with NATO service as, “I just think that we as a country neglect the Alliance focus, and it's probably because of the politics that's usually involved, and working in a multicultural environment”. Focus Group Participant 4 characterized the specialty of the work NATO accomplishes and equated it to a United States standard as, “this is functionally the Pentagon of Europe. ... I think that the DoD should give it [the] appropriate priority, particularly assigned personnel”. Focus Group Participant's 2, 3, and 4 agreed with this assertion.

Perhaps specialized training, other than JPME II, could be provided to prepare officers for NATO postings, as DeCostanza et al. (2015) proposed utilizing *Joint Readiness Training Centers*. Participant 2 suggested as much by stating, “understanding the European theater is probably extremely beneficial prior to coming to NATO”. Participant 10 reinforced this notion by his comment:

I really believe that the personnel we sent out here need to undergo a period of training in matters relating to intercultural relations and the importance of maintaining our reputation as a nation and as a partner with valued allies. ... There are instances when we have people come to these assignments with some blind spots, and these blind spots pose

a risk of friction with our allies, and to the extent that we can avoid these types of frictions based on cultural differences, then all the better. There's always a risk that I think Americans will come into assignments like this with a certain attitude about our place in relation to our allies, particularly when we're talking about a superpower.

Therefore, the difficulty rests not just with matching the right officer for the right post, but it may extend to the right officer with the right *ability* to negotiate the international environment. It is unknown why individuals combine joint posts with international posts, but it could be that those individuals responsible for assigning officers do not appreciate or understand the *nuances* between the two. However, officers within NATO seem to understand the differences once posted to this organization, as seen by the interview comments. Ultimately, senior leaders need the skills to articulate the differences and assist in positioning officers smartly.

Relationship of Findings

Each of the aforementioned themes are linked to study research questions, support the research proposal, are in-line with the research framework, and should connect with introduced literature. This researcher will show how the findings intertwine or relate to key areas from the research proposal for better understanding of the study itself. Since the findings are generated by officers within the NATO organizational construct, they should ultimately compliment the proposal and literature.

The Research Questions. The three main and three dependent research questions sought to probe whether senior leaders support the joint environment at NATO ACO. A linkage between the findings and research questions should flesh-out and address perspectives regarding senior leader attitudes from a junior officer viewpoint. Each research question will be successively reviewed for this connection.

Research Question 1. This question sought senior leader attitudes or practices for joint capability and planning and whether they valued or did not value attributes found in NATO ACO HQ joint posts. The following thematic finding associated with this question was the primary theme (1) of *Joint is Important, Just Not NATO*, with supporting discussions that included *Placing Value on Joint*; *Not Placing Value on Joint*; *Joint Discussed*; *Joint Not Discussed*; and *NATO Discussed*. Each of these themes acted to reinforce or question senior leader interactions or modeling for subordinate officers. Lanoszka (2020) discussed the need for NATO expansion to thwart Russian aggression and asserted that only through allied commitment would collective defense succeed.

The themes then linked senior leader interaction with officers who felt the effects of leaders valuing jointness but really seeking to use officer capabilities for Air Force-centric duty. An example of this thought process comes from Participant 8 who stated that, “there always is the focus of, and I don't know whether it's political or not, it's the, not what can the Air Force or the Space Force do for NATO but what can NATO do for them”. Understanding whether Air Force senior leaders place value on joint posts, or do not place value on joint posts, undergirds the motivation they impart to subordinate officers, which then brings expertise and capability or inhibits capability. Further, whether NATO was discussed with officers hints at a senior leaders’ understanding of NATO as a partnering agent in American defense. For example, Menon and Ruger (2020) argued that European’s rely too much on American power projection and need to increase spending for their own defense; this implies that United States presence is pivotal to current defense strategy. Therefore, as joint posts are discussed, research revealed that leaders have not encouraged NATO as a means of service as highly as other joint posts.

Research Question 1a. This question sought leadership actions or behaviors that deterred the joint environment. The following thematic finding associated with this question was the primary theme (2) of *Inconsistent Joint Support*, with supporting discussions that included *Non-Hindered, Non-Deterred, Encouraged*; and *Hindered, Deterred, Non-Encouraged*. Each of these themes acted to determine if senior leaders, in their promotion of jointness, offered support or did not offer support for officers and the organizations they served within. Effectively, senior leaders did support the joint environment and the officers within those organizations but did not support consistently. Interestingly, Priebe (2018) explained that Air Force doctrine also discussed jointness inconsistently; some doctrine discussed joint concepts and others persisted with an internal approach to air operations, which may be problematically influencing disparate senior leader approaches to joint support.

Even though most officers responded positively to senior leaders supporting the joint environment, what became noteworthy were cases where participants offered examples of leaders hindering joint or NATO support. For instance, when asked if a senior leader hindered joint capability, Participant 16 affirmed some hindrance affecting a mission, stating, “Yes, operationally so, because some of our Afghan Air Force pilots couldn't do their mission”. Based on the sample set of responses these cases should cause further investigation into joint understanding and encouragement.

Research Question 1b. This question sought leadership actions that encourage the joint environment. The following thematic finding associated with this question was the primary theme (3) of *Influence and Feedback*. This theme acted to assess leader impact and influence on subordinates, since leaders likewise influence subordinate decision-making and organizational culture (Li et al., 2017; Mayer et al., 2009). This was also the case for assessing how senior

leader feedback either reinforced or changed actions regarding subordinate choices, especially to serve in the joint community, which were relayed via participant responses. Since about three quarters of study participants responded they had not received feedback either before or after their NATO posting, this undoubtedly influenced their attitude as well as their career choices. Referencing a previous example, Participant 3 responded that, "... I've never had any feedback sessions in the, five years I've been in NATO". Additionally, as Participant 7 said, "it would have been not advised to take the job at NATO"; that seems to convey deficient actions regarding the joint environment.

Research Question 1c. This question sought actions needed to encourage leaders to increase joint capability and planning. The following thematic finding associated with this question was the primary theme (4) of *Advocation and Education About NATO*, with supporting discussions that included *Education*; *Placing Value on Postings*; and *Advocating NATO*. Within the 2018 United States National Defense Strategy, Secretary Mattis expressed commitment to NATO and discussed the need for it for common defense (Mattis, 2018). Each of these themes acted to assess if senior leaders carried that assertion forward. Officers encouraged leaders to discuss the importance of NATO, to place value on NATO posts and hold those posts positively as a career option, and to advocate for NATO along with other joint posts. These actions would then positively socialize NATO artefacts aimed at officers, even early in their career. For instance, Participant 15 suggested, "I think that would be outstanding if, even at ... SOS stages, we start talking about NATO and what acting in the multinational environment is like". A secondary effect on educating and advocating to officers early in their career would be the possible inclusion of NATO planning earlier as a deliberate act, effectively enacting to change Air Force culture to become more NATO positive.

Research Question 2. This question sought to assess the encouragement for NATO ACO manning fill rates. The following thematic finding associated with this question was the primary theme (5) of *Manning Fill Rates*, with supporting discussions that included *Fill Rates Good*; *Fill Rates Poor*; and *FGO Fill Rates*. Each of these themes acted to determine if participant perception for Air Force fill rates were similar or dissimilar to current or previous joint posts. Priebe et al. (2018) offered insight into manning levels that included joint support and ironically stated that the LeMay Center, the Air Force's Center for basic and operational doctrine, which contributes to joint doctrine as well, was experiencing officer manning shortages thereby affecting its ability to shape and publish doctrine.

When querying participants about their level of understanding of manning levels, many stated they thought FGO levels were filled adequately compared to Air Force fill rates. However, participant understanding of manning rates were inconclusive since officers may not have had an actual working knowledge of filling posts. For example, Participant 7 replied that, "I have no idea how many billets we have and how many are filled or not filled. But like I said my AFSC has no billets here". Comparatively, research found that fill rates changed over time and often decreased compared to previous years fill rates. Therefore, manning support for the joint environment had not necessarily increased per senior leader encouragement or was dependent on AFSC specific allocation rates to fill joint posts.

Research Question 3. This question sought Air Force influence on joint military operations. The following thematic finding associated with this question was the primary theme (6) of *Lack of Training and Preparation*. This theme acted to determine if participants felt trained and prepared to support NATO planning and operations for its collective defense line of operation. As such, Hanser et al. (2021) discussed that formal military education should have

policies, procedures, and objectives deliberately instructed to bring officers to a common level of understanding for joint roles. However, this theme revealed that participants overwhelmingly did not receive adequate training prior to their posting to NATO. To illustrate training deficiency and frustration, Participant 7 offered that, “I did not go to protocol training before I showed up to the posting, and I’m almost a year in and I still have not attended NATO training”.

While most officers felt they contributed to planning and operations, their overall preparation to do so was considerably lacking or had been filled by personal initiative to read, study, or seek information independently from formal methods. Additionally, while most felt that they contributed to operations, Participant 11 stated that she had not yet contributed fully to NATO but that, “... it’s coming because I figured it out, and so now because I’ve figured it out, I will be able to actively contribute and hopefully, positively get things moving in the right direction without beating my head against the wall”. With this assertion one may see that officers strive to actively involve themselves to influence NATO planning and operations.

The Research Framework. Four areas comprise the research framework; it assists to detail how senior leaders influence and engage subordinates regarding overall support for the joint environment at NATO ACO. A linkage between the findings and research framework should address how the concepts, theories, actors, and constructs shape perspectives regarding senior leader attitudes and behaviors. Each portion of the research framework will be successively reviewed for these connections.

Concepts. Three concepts (*the what*) act as a foundation for the study. This researcher used the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, the Department of Defense’s Joint Operations Concept, and NATO’s Deterrence and Defence strategy; these operated as the genesis and pivot point for research questions and various aspects of the study. These concepts outline defense strategies

and the importance of cooperation and collective defense to thwart military aggression. Military officers, therefore, should be knowledgeable about defense concepts; the findings suggested that the actors, or participants, indeed understood the need for defense and the need for joint service. Further, post-interview findings agreed that participants knew there were United States joint and international concepts. The findings then suggested that officers desired to operate within a joint construct and were supported by their senior leader to do so but that offices received little guidance in navigating *dissimilarities* between Air Force and joint-international service during their posting.

Theories. Additionally, four theories (*the why*) supported these concepts; the Visibility theory of Promotion, the Path-goal theory, the Two-factor theory, and Maslow's Motivational theory acted to generate left and right boundaries for thematic findings. These theories acted as the glue to link officer responses to research questions and then to themes, since how an officer acts or the decisions officers make are often related to either internal or external stimuli. In this case, stimuli were senior leader support and the understanding of the joint community. The findings then suggested that officers associated and operated with several theories.

The findings showed that participant responses included exhibition of self-pride, often associated with Visibility theory of Promotion. In certain cases offices were frustrated by not being able to access senior leaders, demonstrated by the absence of superior-subordinate feedback. Not having interaction with senior leaders for several months, or even years, while serving in a complicated joint-international post seemed to demotivate officers.

Officers also exhibited partial Path-goal theory, this specifically associates with the military construct of direct appeasement within the supervisor-subordinate relationship. While a majority of participants stated that they had no prior NATO knowledge or had received no senior

leader feedback, there was a minority of officers who had indeed received both. Represented in the findings, this minority set of officers seemed to make career decisions based on their senior leaders' encouragement or explanation of NATO, extensionally hinting of leader appeasement.

A minority of participants exhibited Two-factor theory; this theory effectively features one's drive as *job satisfaction*, which then ultimately links with hopes of advancement or promotion. Interestingly, the theory's *hygiene* aspects of *job security* or reduction of work policies were absent in discussions with these participants, since these features did not seem to exist. However, what was discussed was that a few study participants seemed to face non-promotion prospects while posted to NATO. The findings showed that whether their joint posting was ill-timed, out of the norm for their AFSC, or tainted with NATO bias, some participants voiced concern regarding promotion.

Lastly, participants exhibited Maslow's Motivational theory in relation to their career fulfillment and the progression of their career from an internal perspective. They exhibited this by way of self-study and self-fulfillment that occurred regardless of any training they received or did not receive. Effectively it seemed that officers possessed personal internal motivation, in the absence of proximity and feedback, that contributed to their success in NATO.

Actors. The interactive portion of the study involved actors (*the who*), which are those individuals who operate within NATO itself. The findings were possible through open and candid discussion with actors during the interview process; the actors were officers who served in NATO and possessed first-hand knowledge of interactions, modeling, or discussion with senior leaders before and after their posting to NATO. Findings showed that these actors cared about defense actions to enact operational capability and planning, even employing self-study to effectively contribute towards both of these aspects of defense.

Constructs. Lastly, the construct of the military (*the where*), whether representing United States service components or NATO as an Allied body, was evident and readily understood by actors, and that that construct should facilitate both interpersonal trust (Wheeler, 2018) and personal duty (Hattke et al., 2018). The findings showed, via direct responses, officers were well versed in the military construct but were not necessarily versed in nuances that comprise an international posting. The international posting was a construct they acclimated to, and then were able to navigate through, within NATO's unique environment. Findings showed that participants often took extended time to adjust to its specific culture and only then started to contribute actively toward operations and planning. Findings also showed that participants expected a form of parity between the United States and NATO constructs regarding senior leader engagement and were therefore surprised by their perceived lack leader engagement or influence.

In sum, the findings showed understanding of joint concepts, an application of theories, and a stimulus to an actor's career decision-making. While all actors were professional in their interview interactions, several were passionate about how they perceived senior leader behavior, senior leader career engagement, or personal career achievement in the joint military environment construct.

Anticipated Themes. As the researcher coded and gathered themes (Alam, 2020) to ultimately produce findings, responses then aligned with each of the research questions. Assessing each finding, the researcher anticipated that participant responses would also support the general framework but discovered a few findings were either greater or lesser than anticipated. They will be discussed as follows.

The researcher anticipated less overall support for the joint environment than what was revealed, with a higher level of support and value from senior leaders being found, extending the

anticipated theme of new support for joint service and operations. Similarly, a certain level of joint dialog was anticipated between senior leaders and officers; this was affirmed by participants as they sought joint posts based on senior leader encouragement. Extensionally, when juxtaposing the latter with senior leader discussion, specifically regarding NATO, senior leaders had limited interaction with officers to advocate NATO as a viable organization and therefore leaders did not focus on NATO; this could support the anticipated theme of senior leader support for HPO's. The researcher also anticipated low interaction between senior leaders and officers, antithesizing HPO involvement. Notwithstanding, this low interaction assuredly influenced officer decision-making regarding their careers. Research questions anticipated that officers volunteered for NATO posts, in fact a high number of volunteers fill NATO posts, since officers desire to serve in the NATO environment to experience and grow differently than their fellow officers within their respective AFSC communities.

Differences. A stark difference in the anticipated finding regarding manning fill rates came in the form of participant knowledge of post-to-AFSC allocation rates for NATO. It was anticipated that officers had a working knowledge of fill rates and could compare between previous and current posts, but they could not effectively do so. A more active role on behalf of the participant was needed, therefore this finding was supported by responses from those who had previous knowledge of manning allocation rates and Air Force published rates.

Additionally, NATO was not necessarily portrayed as a viable post and examples emerged of hindrances to joint support. These friction points of hindrance may or may not extend into anticipated lack of training for officer operations and planning preparation; it was surprising to find that most officers had not attended almost any required training. To remedy this gap,

officers called on senior leaders to support the Air Force community in order to increase a general working knowledge of NATO.

Unanticipated Themes. Two main unanticipated themes were discovered during the capstone interview question and resulted in findings that conferred possible NATO bias (theme 7) and, separately, called to distinguish between joint and international service (theme 8). As NATO bias surfaced it brought to light proximity theory. The fact that there is separation from senior leaders who can positively enact with officers for future career choices makes this theme unanticipated but not surprising. As officers navigate their careers, the question of whether or not NATO can add value to their careers becomes prominent, rather than how can NATO enhance their personal planning ability. Additionally, since NATO is located within the joint allocation tier, one may begin to blindly equate joint to international. This equivalency could lead leaders to underestimate the preparation officers need to contribute to NATO's mission effectively. This unanticipated theme from participants demanded a clarification between the joint and international service.

The Literature

The known literature previously used to frame the discussion of leadership practices offered several leader-subordinate relationships to consider and explore within the context of the career growth and joint service and posts. Annotated participant responses should thusly compliment formerly presented literature. This researcher will discuss areas of similarities and differences.

Within the realm of leadership practices the findings show a direct effect between an officer's decision to serve, feedback they received, and preparation training. Arenas et al. (2017)

discussed the connection that exists between the leader-subordinate relationship, and this is shown by how officers were encouraged to serve in a joint post, to include NATO.

Nolan and Overstreet (2018) discussed the difficulty that organizations, such as the Air Force, have to grow HPO's and how to best leverage that experience. However there seems to be frustration from officers who serve at NATO who felt they were left to decipher the joint world alone. These officers had a lack of direction since several received little feedback and no training. Yet a difference remains in whether officers at NATO consider themselves as an HPO. It could be that the Air Force's definition of an HPO and how officers at NATO perceive themselves is disconnected.

Bowhens (2012) discussed career training and how training is freely given when individuals are *considered* promotion worthy, this thought effectively introduces uncertainty into whether NATO officers are promotable. With the dearth of officer training, this finding is unresolved with Bowhens assertion that training is essential for those serving in the joint environment. Febbraro et al. (2008) asserted that cross-cultural training should occur since leadership gets even more complex in an international environment. Participants agreed with this assertion since there seems to be a difference between joint and international experience.

Hambre and Conley (2017) suggested the United States and NATO are more complimentary than integrated regarding defense and policy. This seems similar to responses from participants who felt there was a NATO bias in terms of the level of priority for manning, having several examples of both supporting and hindering joint capability, and championing NATO as a viable joint post.

Specifically regarding senior leaders, Knopman et al. (2020) discussed the need for greater senior leader focus and support through planning, programming, and manning, to

effectively enable joint warfighting capability; this supported the finding in which participants urged senior leaders to place greater value on joint posts, especially NATO. Cornett (2020) had discussed the influence logistics had on NATO operations; logistics officers confirmed Cornett's assertion as they stated their positive impact to NATO operations and planning.

Daugirdas and Mortenson (2017) discussed the irritation allied nations felt regarding President Trump's policy to equalize allied national contributions toward Collective Defense. However, there seems to be a disparity between how literature portended his *pay-up or else* policy and how officers continue to prepare in order to support defense operations. Officers have taken action to learn their jobs regardless of political policy but despite their commitment, it seems as if leaders have not endeavored to reward or consistently support NATO serving officers' commitment to duty.

Therefore, as a whole, the reviewed literature supported the findings regarding senior leader support. Yet, it seems senior leaders have not fully rewarded officers who professionally worked toward a collective defense. There seems to be a friction between Air Force joint duty encouragement and underlying NATO bias. This may be occurring even as officers contribute toward functional areas like logistics or air planning but may not receive commensurate leader acknowledgment.

Summary of the Findings

The overall purpose of this research study was to examine United States Air Force leadership support of the joint environment, specifically at Allied Command Operations in Mons, Belgium. To do so required conducting a series of interviews, as well as a follow up focus group, in order to gather data which was then thematically aligned. These data were amalgamated into

findings to answer three primary and three dependent research questions regarding leader support for the joint environment.

The general problem that was addressed was whether Air Force leadership placed insufficient value on joint capability and planning, resulting in a shortfall of officers filling joint positions and a lack of Air Force influence on joint military operations. The findings did not support this general problem statement regarding the joint environment. Findings showed that officers were encouraged to seek joint posts and serve in joint roles during their career. In a majority of responses during interviews officers had interacted with senior leaders and stated overall support for the joint environment was anticipated or expected sometime in their career. Therefore, when assessing joint roles not involving NATO, several officers had previously served in joint posts and contributed to operational capability.

The specific problem that was addressed in this study was whether Air Force leadership potentially places insufficient value on joint capability and planning for NATO, resulting in a shortfall of officers filling joint positions at NATO ACO Headquarters in Belgium to determine if there was a lack of Air Force influence on joint international military operations. In several ways the specific problem was validated as true. Officers at ACO felt they had a lack of feedback, a lack of training, no discussion of NATO prior to posting at NATO, some cases of senior leader hindrance in NATO operations, and NATO bias vis-à-vis ubiquitous joint environment support. In the majority of cases there was support for the joint environment and not hindrance reported but based on the number of participants who had experienced negative instances, those cases were greater than expected.

The purpose of this flexible single case study was to reveal and describe whether a disconnection between the mandate to provide joint officers and the actual support for joint

service was displayed by Air Force leaders. Findings showed that officers had a limited working knowledge of joint post allocation rates and could not definitively state if senior leader support for manning allocations was positively or negatively influenced. What was revealed was a NATO bias for joint service and lack of senior leader interaction for support functions like feedback or mentoring. These items left officers feeling isolated in their career navigation.

Subsequently, each research question drew data from findings to determine if senior leaders supported or valued joint capability in NATO. RQ1 addressed leaders' attitudes toward joint capability and planning. As joint posts were discussed, research revealed that leaders have not encouraged NATO as a means of service equal to other joint posts. Sub-questions RQ1a and RQ1b sought to determine if there are substantive actions or behaviors that leaders exert for or against joint position support. Effectively, RQ1a found that even though most officers responded positively to senior leaders supporting the joint environment, there were some cases of leaders hindering NATO support. Interestingly, RQ1b found that a majority of participants had not received feedback either before or after their NATO posting; this undoubtedly influenced their attitude as well as their career choices. RQ1c sought to assess activities that may influence leader behavior and therefore encourage a shift in attitude for joint capability and manifest itself culturally. The findings showed that participants encouraged senior leaders to discuss the importance of NATO, to place value on NATO posts and hold those posts positively as a career option, and lastly to advocate for NATO alongside other joint service posts.

RQ2 sought to assess the nature of manning fill rates and where NATO falls in fill rate allocation, revealing Air Force leader joint position support. The findings showed participant comprehension of manning rates was inconclusive, since officers may not have had an actual

working knowledge of post fills, but further Air Force literature showed a steady decrease in joint fill rates compared to core Air Force fill rates.

RQ3 aimed to attach meaning to Air Force contributions to military operations.

Determining if the Air Force contributes specific capability that other US military services cannot provide would be beneficial to understanding support emphasis leaders place on filling their positions and preparing officers. The findings revealed that a large majority of participants did not receive adequate training prior to their NATO posting. Officers often self-educated and eventually contributed to operational planning over time.

These data were derived from participant interaction and foster enlightenment regarding their experience in NATO and the joint environment. Driven by a common military construct, the participants engaged in individual career tracks but experienced much the same results regarding senior leader joint support, career involvement, or personal mentoring. Participants offered solutions to senior leaders for an Air Force culture change that included educating officers and leaders and encouraging NATO as a valuable joint service posting.

Application to Professional Practice

Senior military leaders' span of influence is considerable (Arenas et al., 2017) inside the military construct. When compared to their civilian counterparts' leadership influence, military leaders are able to delve deeper into personal lives of subordinates (Cooper et al., 2018); they are able to ask personal questions, discuss personal and professional topics, and counsel subordinates through, what Arenas et al. described as, *individual consideration*. When evaluating study data, one may gather that not only do leaders have a determinable influence on subordinate motivation and decision-making but that subordinate officers also seek guidance for personal and professional practices. Therefore, improving senior leader practices should have a direct,

impactful, and influential result on subordinate life choices; notwithstanding is the importance of how leaders implement their influence.

Improving General Leadership Practice

This study has shown that senior leaders have direct influence through their positional power and implied power (Cooper et al., 2018; Meerits & Kivipõld, 2020). Through this power leaders can either positively or negatively change their environment (Arenas et al., 2017), or leaders can choose the laissez-faire approach (Farhan, 2018) through which a leader changes nothing. Building on Yukl's (2018) definition of leadership, military senior leaders should strive to influence and motivate their subordinates toward a common goal. Combining with participant responses, one may derive that senior military leaders are charged with adapting to new situations and therefore must take some action to influence change when presented with new data (Hyllengren, 2017). Three areas will be discussed that could improve general leadership practices; they are personal gaps, time and value, and cultural change.

Personal Gaps. Effective improvement of general leadership practices should begin with identifying personal gaps in one's leadership employment strategy. When senior leaders receive new data, or in this case feedback from subordinates, they can begin the process of change and adaptation in order to fill these gaps. Study participants stated they were deficient in leader feedback, training, and international environmental understanding. Leadership practices in NATO could be changed to include a more deliberate interaction between leader and subordinates, not necessarily dependent on Path-goal or Proximity theories but through altruistic interactions, such as serving leadership (Jennings & Stahl-Wert, 2016). Employment of serving leadership could affectively shift the interaction between leader and subordinates, with the leader's proverbial *reach out if you need me* stance shifting to a *reach out anytime* stance.

Time and Value. A leader's time is one of their most valuable resources, insomuch that without sufficient time, leaders become change averse (Ahituv et al., 1998) to remain within their comfort level. The simple notion that senior leaders should just take the time to perform feedbacks or to advocate for training and the joint environment is more difficult than it sounds. This researcher posits that senior leaders already possess quantities of information on leadership practices that include the aforementioned feedback and advocacy realizations, since they reached senior military rank levels based on their previous successes. However, senior leaders face a plethora of decision items to prioritize, therefore, they have to *value* an item, thereby finding it worthy, to spend time working on it (Keinan et al., 2019). If leaders could understand how training, joint advocacy, promotions, or feedback affects their subordinates, then leaders could adjust their focus and prioritize their thought process as well as schedule functional time to direct attention to subordinate growth and resourcing.

Cultural Change. Lastly, senior leaders could drive positive cultural change regarding NATO. This effect could translate into deliberate support for the joint-international environment and prompt active leadership practices within Air Force culture, fostering joint development for officers. If senior leaders become change catalysts (Gaare & Manchester, 2021) and that change results in placing greater value on the joint environment, then a new leadership construct may flourish within NATO. As leaders drive and advocate NATO opportunities, officers may then react to leader changes and help drive second and third order effects within the joint-international realm. Notably, Gaare and Manchester argued that Airmen possess innovation and change energy but can get easily stifled by senior leadership. The impetus for positive leadership practices is the need to adjust and change, and a leader possessing the ability to shift focus, promote experiences, such as the joint environment, and utilize officers who live that experience

daily would accomplish this change. Leading the charge to promote NATO and leverage Airmen with an internal desire to serve in an international community of professionals could prove to be valuable for officers and the Air Force, since growing officers requires time investment. Leaders who understand the cultural change that promotes diverse careers, would affect multiple AFSC's and result in elevating fellow senior leaders' opinions of the joint environment, thereby positively modifying leadership practices between the leader and subordinates. Lastly, greater influence could also be placed on joint-international operations and planning at the forefront of posting rather than relying on officer self-study for effectiveness.

Potential Implementation Strategies

In order to translate practices into reality, leaders should implement strategies intentionally to accomplish these greater focus points. This study identified three strategies for employment. They are implementing purposeful feedback, post sourcing, and joint advocacy, which will be described in the following sections.

Purposeful Feedback. One mechanism that senior leaders could implement is to take time to survey subordinate needs in order to perform substantive feedback; this is explained in Air University's Commander's Guide (2015), which outlines parameters for both giving and receiving feedback. This deliberate and interpersonal exchange easily sets the tone within the leader-subordinate relationship. Further, employing a 360 degree feedback (Sosik et al., 2019) could be implemented in a forum such as a town hall, or an Officer Professional Development meeting and could include deliberate question and answer sessions. These feedback sessions would occur immediately after an officer's arrival and continue periodically through the year; this gesture of senior leader time allocation would greatly enhance the leader's ability to outline

organizational vision and goals to subordinates and reciprocally give subordinates the ability to identify resource gaps to leaders.

Post Resourcing. A second mechanism is to change the way posts are resourced. Innovation and change is encouraged by Air Force senior leaders, to include adjusting processes, training, education, or organizational functions (Dougherty, 2018). Shelton (2001) advocated for education and training and asserted that both were essential to obtain a fully equipped officer. Therefore, if value is placed on the joint-international environment, then officers should be armed with the best planning data and best training (Eliason, 2017) available, via JPME II, to effectively influence operations. These essential skills (Charan et al., 2015) are not only valuable, they are required to facilitate immediate officer capability for defensive operations (Crosbie, 2019). Therefore, after leaders ensure officers have either attended JPME II or have served on the Joint Staff, then those officers could fill international posts like NATO. When value is equated to these posts, then officers could vie for the right to serve at *Europe's Pentagon*.

Joint Advocacy. A third mechanism is to openly advocate for joint and international posts. Magruder (2018) encouraged leaders to include early adoption of joint capability in officer's careers so they would be ready for joint posts. This early adoption of joint capability would mimic the Army's methodology of educating their captains with joint planning early in their careers through PME. Similarly, selecting and sending qualified officers to joint posts should be a priority rather than just a step to place bodies in spaces; it should be a deliberate step in career advancement. Senior leaders could campaign and advocate for joint and international posts at events such as Squadron Officers School where captains imbue themselves in Air Force policy and history.

What is telling is the abundance of joint advancement literature published by both the Army and Air Force Command and Staff Colleges. Any researcher could conduct a query on joint topics and find several results, but if results are not acted upon by leaders, then the results remain impotent. Hamilton et al. (2008) discussed this very idea in regard to cultural change and organizational transformation. Senior leaders need to employ a joint mindset as a component of Air Force strategy, source it, reward it, and value joint capability in parallel with internal Air Force capability so as to find synergy rather than friction between the two. Officers who desire to live the international experience could receive a higher promotion rate allocation to denote the significance of their position. Additionally, senior leaders could reward multiple NATO posts in the same way; minimally leaders could designate all international posts as 16G/F posts, in this way the promotion board would readily understand the level of responsibility these officers serve at.

Summary

This study identified areas that could improve general leadership practices; this information was generated by participant responses. Senior leaders could start with areas such as assessing personal gaps in leadership employment strategy, prioritizing their time and value, and instituting cultural change in order to adapt to new data and situations. Employing serving leader practices, valuing officers with joint-international experience, and then utilizing officers with that experience could improve the attitude of leaders and motivate officers serving in the NATO environment. Additionally, turning practices into reality comprises implementing purposeful feedback, as outlined in Air University's Commander's Guide, resourcing NATO posts with trained and capable officers to serve at Europe's Pentagon, and then advocating joint posts with a

special designation to openly show and reward officers; all may be actionable implementation strategies for change.

Recommendations for Further Study

Three areas exist for recommended further study, namely NATO Bias and Joint Service, Fill Rates, and Explore the Difference Between Joint and International posts. These areas were left more open-ended or were out of scope for this study. Therefore, they may benefit from additional scrutiny so as to eliminate variables from the joint support equation.

NATO Bias and Joint Service. When assessing the sample of participants, it seemed as if the Air Force encouraged joint service. However, the difference between serving with sister-services (i.e., Marines, Navy) and serving in NATO, is significant in nature. Air Force senior leaders have encouraged joint service but the observed bias regarding NATO could stem from its slowness of change or policy adoption (Menon & Ruger, 2020; Olsen, 2020) when compared to traditional United States military structure. Therefore, there is still work to do to fully encourage joint-international service through studying why this phenomena continues after seventy years (NATO PDD, 2022) of United States contribution to the alliance. Specifically, the results of this study suggest participant responses should cause further investigation into joint-international understanding and senior leader encouragement for this unique environment.

Fill Rates. Inconsistency of officer knowledge regarding manning fill rates may need additional study. Assessing multiple career field fill rates for NATO relative to internal Air Force requirements compared to standard joint requirements could solidify and socialize overall support for joint service postings (Febbraro et al., 2008; Priebe et al., 2018). Specifically, the results of this study suggest a disparity of officer knowledge for joint requirements. This gap

may exist at either similar or dissimilar rates when compared to other joint environments, thereby substantiating greater or lesser NATO bias.

Explore the Difference Between Joint and International. Participants conveyed the need for clarification between the joint and international military service. There seemed to be a complexity to matching the right officer for the right post, as well as the right officer with the right *ability* to negotiate the international environment. Greater education may need to be accomplished to understand why assignment representatives or senior leaders combine joint posts with international posts. Specifically, the results of this study suggest a difference exists between the two posts and therefore specialized training is often needed, such as cultural awareness training, to navigate an international environment more effectively (DeCostanza et al., 2015). Individuals responsible for assigning officers may not appreciate or understand the *nuances* between the two and further study would benefit those officers assigned to both joint and international postings.

Reflections

During this study the author has experienced areas of maturation in both personal and professional growth, such as considering how leadership practices tie in with a biblical perspective. Looking back across the span of time necessary to conduct this study, several aspects became apparent, some surprisingly so. Interestingly, during several course introductions this researcher stated Liberty University was impacting NATO writ large based on academic material as well as the incremental development of this study. Moreover, biblical perspective iteratively integrated with professional growth.

Personal & Professional Growth

This researcher absolutely experienced both personal and professional growth during the evolution of this research project. How exciting, frustrating (Idrus et al., 2018; Waring, 2017), challenging, and utterly rewarding the entire process has been. When this researcher undertook the project there was a preconceived notion of both what the project involved and how the project was going to transpire; that faded quickly. Academic maturation began with the rigor of defining the problem (Idrus et al., 2018), which took considerable effort. A transformation from a personal agenda toward a keen interest in knowing what problems, if any, truly existed and at what level between senior leaders and their subordinates then took hold. This process was similar to what Deegan and Hill (1991) described regarding doctoral students and their dissertations, whereby the candidates matured through research uncertainty and reached life-changing results in their education.

In addition to inculcating a new level of research ability, a positive grasp of identifying, assessing, and conquering unknown areas of academia occurred. For example, during several phases of the research project, the researcher faced unfamiliarity with topical areas, such as delimitation and bracketing, or had to delve deeply to investigate specific functional areas, their meaning, and why they were important to the project. This type of thoroughness, while frustrating to project advancement, turned out to be the point of the project itself; it was also a deliberate step in building the foundation for doctoral legitimacy. Notedly, while this researcher is quite independent and self-motivated, receiving expectation management regarding doctoral completion and hurdles researchers face when completing their research project was helpful; these combined with feedback and encouragement from faculty (Ghoston et al., 2020) contributed to the personal determination to complete the project.

The delineation between personal and professional growth was virtually non-distinct. This study dove into the personal and daily manifestation of officership at NATO. The Air Force describes practicing officership in the Profession of Arms (Cobbin & Burrows, 2018; Hackett, 1986; Stavridis et al., 2016) as an equivalency to other professions such as lawyers and doctors, since officership is not simply what one does, but it is rather who one is. As such, this researcher personally invested in, interfaced with, and mentored officers within the NATO construct (Elshaw et al., 2018), spanning multiple AFSC's, in order to discuss career opportunities, thereby extending the research project to those officers as both a personal and a professional developmental concept. Therefore, the growth this researcher experienced while developing personally through the educational journey had a direct effect on interfacing and mentoring people's lives. Additionally, while serving as NATO's Director of Operations for its deployable communications assets, the attributes of senior leader interaction with subordinates directly influenced headquarters staff level collective defense discussions and policy that this researcher participated in and subsequently developed.

Biblical Perspective

Proverbs 27:23 offers that Christian leaders have the responsibility to “know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds” (*English Standard Version*, 2001). This verse equates to business functions of the leader-subordinate relationship represented in this study through participants responses in relation to senior leader mentorship, training, advocacy, organizational culture, and attitude. Effectively, if participants have a negative perception of the NATO environment in which they serve, then their motivation to serve selflessly might also be negatively affected. As such, leaders should know their flocks and delve deeper into deliberate support regarding subordinate career vectoring, to include cross functional understanding. One

may observe this as God calls leaders to work at a higher standard; James 3:1 warns, “not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (*English Standard Version*, 2001), effectively requiring leaders to grow more understanding than their current body of knowledge. If leaders take time to understand subordinate concerns, including their environmental challenges, then that scrutiny should generate positive support for subordinate decision-making.

Additionally, Christian leaders should also be salt and light (Mathew 5:13, *English Standard Version*, 2001) as they operate in their environment, which extensionally should act to resolve personal or organizational conflict. This salt and light inspiration should spiritually inspire subordinates insomuch that those subordinates ultimately produce results toward organizational goals. As such business functions like defensive operations and planning knowledge directly connect to subordinate KSA's, as 2 Corinthians 8:12 demonstrates: “For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have” (*New International Version*, 1973), thereby facilitating flexibility as officers fill various roles and belief in their organization's goals.

Therefore, leaders must balance their task of acting as a serving leader (Jennings & Stahl-Wert, 2016) with the task of producing capable officers in complex international environments. 1 Peter 5:2b-3 guides leaders in how they should make decisions and interact with subordinates, “not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock” (*English Standard Version*, 2001). This results in advancement of God's purpose because selfless leaders set aside their ego in lieu of a godlier calling, just as Christ emulated in His selfless sacrifice.

However, Weigle and Allen (2017) remind leaders and subordinates that a partnership exists between the former and the latter. They offer that subordinates have a responsibility to help leaders make sound decisions, ultimately resulting in strong leadership that helps subordinates. While business functional areas such as training and joint advocacy certainly are required for advancement, other areas require participants to take an active role (Idrus et al., 2018) such as seeking career advice from sources outside the NATO construct. Proverbs 11:14 offers that “[w]here there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety” (*English Standard Version*, 2001), which is keen advice that officers should use to rightly identify readiness gaps, seek feedback from various sources, or gain encouragement from leaders who previously navigated the joint environment.

Hence, if NATO serving officers face a difficult cultural environment, then it should be within their grasp to partner with senior leaders to influence and cause attitudinal change. Galatians 6:9 encourages workers, “...let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (*English Standard Version*, 2001). This verse shows individuals that even if there are business functions that pose difficulty in an environment, leaders who partner with their subordinates should be able to positively affect that environment. To accomplish this feat, senior leaders at NATO have a responsibility to care for subordinate officers and facilitate their career milestones (Nolan & Overstreet, 2018); this thoughtful stewardship should then matriculate into other areas officers feel are deficient in support, thereby producing respect and honor from subordinates, such as Hebrews 13:17a states, “[o]bey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account” (*English Standard Version*, 2001).

Summary

This researcher has gone through personal growth, matured in thought, and developed both academically and professionally. While academic maturity occurred, this was woven together with a Christian worldview inside the military construct through the Profession of Arms. Moreover, the doctoral process naturally moved the researcher past frustration, integrated feedback, and changed assumptions into intrigue to discover what data would be revealed from the study. Distinctly, the biblical perspective revealed that senior leaders have a responsivity to their subordinates and a requirement to advocate for them, but subordinates also have a responsibility to support their leaders. This partnership could directly aide in operational planning effectiveness and broaden influence in officers' decision-making.

Summary of Section 3

Section 3 covered the presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, recommendations to further study, and reflections. Also discussed were discovered themes of the study, relationship of the findings and findings relation to the literature. Lastly, areas comprising improving general leadership practices and implementation strategies were discussed to determine how the data could encourage change in real-life decision-making.

This research study examined Air Force leadership support of the joint environment at NATO Allied Command Operations. This researcher conducted interviews, followed by a focus group, to gather data, thematically align it, and produce findings to answer research questions focused on the joint environment.

The general problem addressed whether senior leaders placed insufficient value on joint capability and planning, resulting in a shortfall of officers filling joint positions and a lack of Air Force influence on joint military operations. Intriguingly, the findings did not support this

general problem statement, rather the findings indicated officers were encouraged to seek joint posts. Parallel to this finding, when assessing joint roles not involving NATO, several officers stated they had previously served in joint posts and had contributed to operational capability.

The specific problem sought whether senior leaders potentially placed insufficient value on joint capability and planning for NATO, resultant in a lack of officers filling joint positions at ACO Headquarters, and to determine if a lack of Air Force influence on joint-international military operations existed; this problem was validated as true. Respondents identified a lack of feedback, lack of training, no NATO discourse, cases of NATO operations hinderance, and NATO bias.

To gather this information, research questions drew data from findings to determine if senior leaders supported or valued NATO's capability. Effectively, research revealed leaders had not encouraged NATO as an equivalent to other joint posts. Also, participants stated they had not received feedback either before or after their NATO posting, which may have affected both their attitude and career choices.

Effort was spent to determine participant manning rate knowledge, but this was inconclusive. However, Air Force literature indicated a decrease in joint fill rates when compared to core Air Force fill rates. Findings also revealed participants did not receive adequate training prior to their NATO posting but often self-educated so they could then contribute to operational planning. Their drive for excellence was undeterred by perceived senior leader support shortcomings. To counter shortcomings, interviewees wanted senior leaders to assert a culture change that discussed NATO's significance, place positive value on its posts, and advocate for NATO as they do for other joint posts.

As such, senior leaders could improve general leadership practices, like assessing personal gaps in leadership employment strategy, prioritizing both time and value, and instituting cultural change in order to adapt to fresh data and fluid situations. Senior leaders could also employ serving leadership, value joint-international experienced officers, and then utilize those officers. These practices could lead the way for fellow senior leaders and motivate NATO officers. Strategies for change could be straightforward as leaders conduct deliberate career feedback, fill NATO posts with proficient officers, and advocate that joint posts possess a special skill designation.

Throughout this study this researcher's biblical and academic maturation occurred simultaneously, connecting a Christian worldview with a military construct. The doctoral process navigated the researcher through stages of personal desire into data discovery. Ultimately, as biblical perspective highlighted a leader's responsibility for their subordinates through the study, it also revealed subordinate responsibility to support their leaders, effectively creating a symbiosis to influence operational planning, in this case NATO's common defense.

Summary and Study Conclusions

The aim of this study was to determine Air Force senior leader support for the joint environment at NATO. This question for support is important because subordinate officers who support the bulk of military planning and operations make career decisions to serve in joint posts, including NATO posts. Notwithstanding, those who serve in NATO joint posts must be treated similarly to other joint posts, since NATO's joint posts include the complexity of international culture, which is unusual to other joint service.

This study sought to assess joint service support and therefore utilized a case study at NATO ACO headquarters that included twenty participants and semi-structured interviews.

These participants interacted with the researcher based on standardized research questions that applied to a military construct spanning a defined rank structure across multiple AFSCs. These participant officers offered their honest feedback from their joint support perspective. Whether or not participants had previously served in joint posts, common themes of NATO bias, lack of training, limited feedback, and the absence of senior leader advocacy within the NATO environment presented themselves. Officers also felt they possessed limited knowledge of NATO and the international requirements before their posting.

To undergird the study, literature was reviewed, to include historical literature, that discussed the joint perspective and the support senior leaders openly stated they had for jointness; this revealed a disconnect between their spoken support and actionable support. Additionally, proper biblical perspective offered how leaders should exemplify traits that subordinates want to follow. Notedly, the leader-subordinate relationship indeed influences, both positively and negatively, career decisions that officers make, indirectly causing effects on NATO planning and operations.

The results of this study thereby stipulated that Air Force senior leaders needed to deliberately advocate joint and international service, including recognition for officers who serve at such a distinct operational and planning defense level. Training and feedback is important to readiness, as is competent officers who feel needed. Without such focus from senior leadership, United States Air Force influence across the European theater of operations remains in-flux and inconsistent.

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Appendix A

One-On-One Interview Guide

The following interview questions were meant to set the tone and overall tempo of the semi-structured interview. The first section gathers simple demographic information. The second section sets the flow of questions intended to elicit background data from respondents to derive personal choice or themes based on influence; these questions are linked with RQ1, RQ1a, RQ1b, and RQ1c. The third section discusses respondent perspectives on postings within their work environment; these questions link with RQ2. The fourth section addresses respondent experience in their joint posts to operations; these questions link with RQ3.

Rules of Engagement:

1. Please be open and honest.
2. Your name and any data will be confidential.
3. Ask for clarification at any time.

Disclosure:

The researcher / author has served in three joint posts, attended Joint Professional Military Education II, and possesses knowledge about the joint environment construct. The researcher / author has mentored FGOs in assignment choice and has interfaced with various senior leaders regarding assignment choices for FGOs.

Demographic information:

1. What gender are you?
2. What is your hometown?
3. What rank are you?
4. How long have you served overseas?

5. How long have you been in service?

Air Force leadership practices (RQ1):

6. For this interview, an Air Force senior leader(s) refers to an officer in the rank of colonel and above. Have you witnessed an Air Force senior leader placing value or not placing value on the joint environment? Can you give an example?

7. How often have you heard a senior leader discuss jointness?

8. Have you witnessed senior leaders discussing NATO prior to being posted to ACO? If so, what have they said?

9. Are you familiar with the difference between internally focused vis-à-vis externally focused Air Force capability and planning? Can you comment on a situation in which a senior leader discussed ACO / NATO's operational capability and planning versus the same for just the Air Force?

Leadership actions or behaviors that deter joint environment (RQ1a):

10. Have you experienced Air Force senior leaders hindering efforts for joint support? If so, in what way?

11. Are there senior leader behaviors that you have witnessed deterring joint support?

12. Have you been deterred or swayed from joint posts by senior leaders? If so, can you describe the situation?

Leadership actions that encourage joint environment (RQ1b):

13. How have senior leader(s) positively influenced you to volunteer for joint posts, to include ACO / NATO posts?

14. In what way have leader(s) established the need for ACO / NATO to you during feedback or mentoring?

Actions needed to encourage leaders to increase joint capability and planning (RQ1c):

15. In your assessment, what actions could senior leaders take to encourage officers to volunteer for joint or ACO / NATO posts?
16. In your assessment, are there specific behaviors senior leaders could display to encourage joint volunteer service?

Assessment of encouragement for ACO / NATO manning fill rates (RQ2):

17. Is this your only joint posting? If not, what other joint postings have you had?
18. Were you a volunteer for ACO / NATO, or were you assigned?
19. Thinking of your joint post work environment, how have Air Force joint fill rates compared with internal Air Force fill rates?
20. Assessing your joint experience, how have your prior work environment fill rates for FGOs compared to your current environment FGO fill rates?

Air Force influence on joint military operations (RQ3):

21. Do you report to a U.S. supervisor or a foreign supervisor? If foreign, how has that relationship influenced your contribution to operations or planning?
22. Do you feel that you were you prepared to fill a planning or operational role before being posted to ACO / NATO?
23. Did you attend any courses prior to your ACO / NATO posting to prepare you for a joint environment? If so, what did you attend?
24. Do you feel that you have actively contributed to NATO planning or operations while posted to ACO / NATO?

Any other thoughts:

25. Is there anything you would like to add not covered by the previous questions regarding your joint experience?

Appendix B

Focus Group Interview Guide

The following focus group questions are intended to parallel one-on-one interviews in the data gathering process. The focus group will be asked questions similar to the ones used in one-on-one interviews, thereby, allowing officers to provide independent feedback via their synergistic group setting. From this interaction this researcher hopes to eliminate or corroborate officer perception of senior officer support for the joint community. This data should expand upon or possibly reveal additional data not elicited from previously conducted interviews. By conducting a focus group this researcher should be able to gather thematic outcomes from the conversation, which can then be compared to interview themes.

Since several officers who previously were interviewed, will participate in the group, a subset of interview questions will be used, and no demographic data will be gathered. The session is estimated to last approximately one hour. The first section of questions elicits background data from respondents to derive personal choice or themes based on influence; these questions are linked with RQ1, RQ1a, RQ1b, and RQ1c. The second section discusses respondent perspectives on postings; these questions link with RQ2. The third section addresses respondent experience regarding their joint posts and operations; these questions link with RQ3.

Rules of Engagement:

1. Please be open and honest.
2. Your name and any data will be confidential.
3. Ask for clarification at any time.
4. Be respectful of other participants and their comments

Disclosure:

To reiterate, the researcher / author has served in three joint posts, attended Joint Professional Military Education II, and possesses knowledge about the joint environment construct. The researcher / author has mentored FGOs in assignment choice and has interfaced with various senior leaders regarding assignment choices for FGOs.

Air Force leadership practices (RQ1):

1. Have you witnessed an Air Force senior leader placing value or not placing value on the joint environment? Can you give an example?
2. Thinking about internal and external Air Force capability and planning, can you describe a situation when a senior leader discussed ACO / NATO's operational capability and planning versus the same for just the Air Force?

Leadership actions or behaviors that deter joint environment (RQ1a):

3. Have you been deterred or swayed from joint posts by senior leaders? If so, can you describe the situation?

Leadership actions that encourage joint environment (RQ1b):

4. How have senior leaders encouraged you to volunteer for joint or ACO / NATO posts?

Actions needed to encourage leaders to increase joint capability and planning (RQ1c):

5. What actions or behaviors could senior leaders take to encourage joint or ACO / NATO volunteerism?

Assessment of encouragement for ACO / NATO manning fill rates (RQ2):

6. Did you seek out an ACO / NATO post?
7. Assessing your joint experience, can you compare previous FGO fill rates to your current location fill rates?

Air Force influence on joint military operations (RQ3):

8. Did you attend any courses prior to your ACO / NATO posting to prepare you for a joint environment? If so, what did you attend?
9. Do you feel that you have actively contributed to NATO planning or operations while posted to ACO / NATO?

Any other thoughts:

10. Is there anything you would like to add not covered by the previous questions regarding your joint experience?

Appendix C

Organization Permission Request Letter



17 January 2022

Colonel Phillip Forbes
United States National Military Representative
Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe
Mons, Belgium

Dear Colonel Forbes,

As a doctoral student in the Business Department at Liberty University pursuing a Doctor of Strategic Leadership, I am conducting research to examine the value Air Force senior leaders place on joint capability and planning for NATO, and the possible shortfall of officers filling joint positions at Allied Command Operations, to determine if there is a lack of Air Force influence on joint international military operations. I will do this by, asking why Air Force leaders may undervalue joint duty at NATO, if there are behaviors that could change to support the joint environment, researching billet fill rates for NATO, and ascertaining how Air Force influence impacts military operations. The working title of my research project is *“Air Force Support for the Joint Military Environment: A NATO Allied Command Operations Headquarters Case Study”*, and my study method will be a Case Study.

This is a Doctoral Research Project and neither the research project nor the results will be published. At the completion of the study, I will provide your organization with a final manuscript and be available to make a presentation of the research project and results.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at your organization and contact Air Force officers on staff to gain their participation in this study. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time. I welcome an opportunity to discuss this with you further and to answer any question you might have.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, I will need a signed statement indicating your approval. For further clarification, I can be reached via email at: jamilton@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

James Hamilton
Doctoral Student
Liberty University School of Business

Appendix D

Organization Permission Request Response Letter



OFFICE OF THE U.S. NATIONAL MILITARY REPRESENTATIVE
SUPREME HEADQUARTERS ALLIED POWERS EUROPE
SHAPE BELGIUM 7010

USNMR

19 January 2022

Colonel James Hamilton
NATO CIS Group J3
Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, Mons, Belgium

Dear Colonel Hamilton,

Thank you for your letter requesting permission to conduct research and the subsequent use of Air Force personnel stationed here at NATO. I see the value in your project and support your request. As you conclude your study I would be interested in the results and may ask you to present your findings to my office, in order to better enlighten our Air Force leadership, which may then address any shortfalls affecting our officers.

I understand that your research project results will not be published and are indeed voluntary. I know that you will pass this information on to study participants to ensure their trust and surety in contributing toward the project.

In accordance with your request, please use this letter as confirmation and approval to begin your project research and survey work. If further clarification or additional support is needed, I can be reached at email: [REDACTED]@army.mil.

Best of luck in your endeavors during your research!

Sincerely,

A rectangular box with a thick black border, used to redact the signature of Philip M. Forbes.

PHILIP M. FORBES
Col, USAF
USNMR

