

# PROFESSIONAL READING LIST

The Defense Acquisition Professional Reading List is intended to enrich the knowledge and understanding of the civilian, military, contractor, and industrial workforce who participate in the entire defense acquisition enterprise. These book recommendations are designed to complement the education and training vital to developing essential competencies and skills of the acquisition workforce. Each issue of the *Defense Acquisition Research Journal* will include one or more reviews of suggested books, with more available on our Website <http://dau.mil/library>.

We encourage our readers to submit book reviews they believe should be required reading for the defense acquisition professional. The books themselves should be in print or generally available to a wide audience; address subjects and themes that have broad applicability to defense acquisition professionals; and provide context for the reader, not prescriptive practices. Book reviews should be 450 words or fewer, describe the book and its major ideas, and explain its relevancy to defense acquisition. Please send your reviews to the managing editor, *Defense Acquisition Research Journal* at [DefenseARJ@dau.mil](mailto:DefenseARJ@dau.mil).

## Featured Book

*Victory on the Potomac: The Goldwater-Nichols Act Unifies the Pentagon*

**Author:** James R. Locher III

**Publisher:** Texas A&M University Press

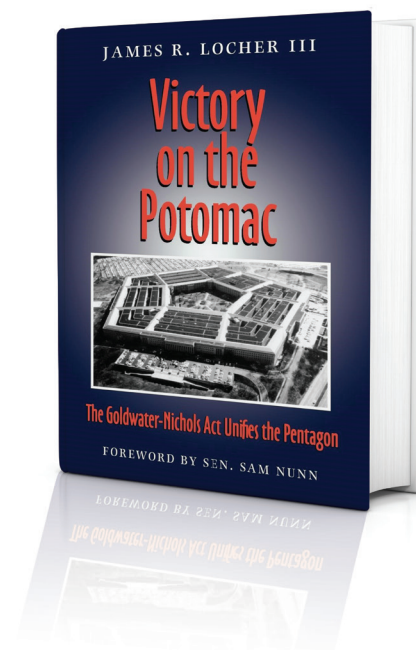
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**Reviewed by:** Moshe Schwartz,  
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National Security and Resource Strategy



## Review:

The Goldwater-Nichols Act represents one of the most sweeping changes to the Department of Defense since the National Security Act of 1947. In *Victory on the Potomac*, James Locher provides an insider's view of how the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 came to be from the vantage point of a Congressional staffer intimately involved in its development. Written in a style that will keep you reading late into the night (at least for defense wonks inclined to read a book subtitled *The Goldwater-Nichols Act Unifies the Pentagon*), it is a must read for anyone interested in Congressional-military relations.

The book explores the personalities and idiosyncrasies of key players, and lays bare the tough political battles required to initiate such far-reaching reorganization of DoD.

Locher paints the pre-Goldwater-Nichols military as a loose confederation of Service fiefdoms, arguing that the lack of unified central leadership and organization significantly hampered military operations in World War II and subsequent conflicts, including Vietnam and Korea. Efforts to reform DoD's organization date back to the Eisenhower administration and were pursued on and off, with little progress. It was the failed attempt to rescue Americans held hostage in Iran in 1980, the Marine Barracks bombing and other events in Lebanon in 1983, and operational challenges in Grenada in 1983 that prompted Congress to act.

Then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Air Force Gen David Jones is credited with promoting and planting the seeds in Congress for JCS reform, as is Rep. Richard White for early attempts to pass legislation that kept "the issue of organizational reform alive until others could initiate more powerful efforts" (p. 80). Other key proponents of reform included Army Chief of Staff GEN Edward Meyer and Navy ADM William Crowe. But generally, the military services vehemently opposed far-reaching reform that would loosen their control, as did Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger. Typifying DoD opposition, Marine Corps Gen P. X. Kelley is quoted as stating, "If this bill were enacted, I would have deep concerns about the future security of the United States. I know of no other document which has concerned me more in the 36 years of uniformed service to my country" (p. 9).

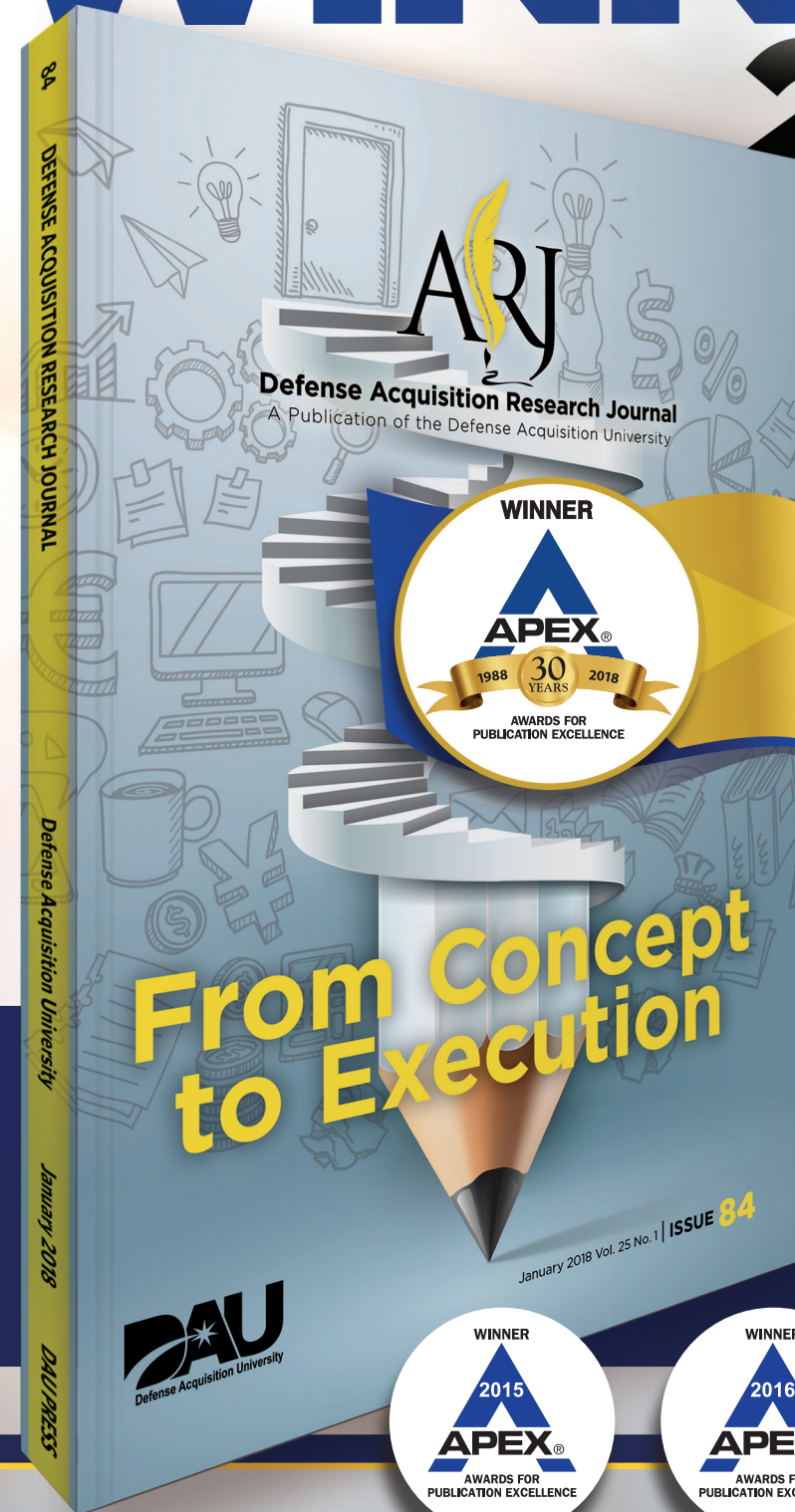
Faced with such opposition, without the forceful and dogged bipartisan leadership of Senators Goldwater and Nunn, and support of key, then-current and retired military personnel, the Goldwater-Nichols Act would never have come about.

Given the multiple efforts to reform acquisition, few of which had the impact of Goldwater-Nichols, the book may provide insight and guidance, with lessons for Congress and DoD: The military is not always right and cannot always be left to its own devices to fix itself. When Congress sets its collective mind to do something, it can—and on occasion will—take bold steps to reform or reorganize the Pentagon, even without DoD support. But perhaps the most important lesson is that reform—real change—is hard, and requires a few key players in both DoD and Congress to work together and display the political courage necessary to challenge the status quo. In such circumstances, DoD—and the nation—may be better off.

**Author Note:**

*The views expressed here are those of the author and not those of the Congressional Research Service or the Library of Congress.*

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