



Developing 21st Century Department of Defense
Senior Executive Service Leaders



THOUGHT LEADER FORUM
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Introduction

The mission of the Department of Defense (DoD) is to provide the military forces needed to deter war and protect the security of the United States.¹ This mission is executed by maintaining an unmatched high-quality military and civilian force, deterring war in the most dynamic environments known, and protecting the interests of the United States in domains previously unimagined.² For such an essential mission and in such times of challenge, the quality and caliber of executive leadership can be the difference between organizational success and failure. Therefore, it is the responsibility of enlightened leadership to see that systems and processes are designed, implemented, managed and continuously transformed to create the quality and caliber of executive leaders needed to overcome the challenges facing the organization.

The DoD Senior Executive Service (SES) leaders are a key and valued leadership resource for the Department. They bring to bear extraordinary abilities and skills in executing the mission of the Department of Defense. However, at times the SES leaders are an underutilized executive resource. Their career path can be arbitrarily segmented and unpredictable, without clear, continuous and systematic approaches that would maximize their potential. Dynamic world realities, the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) 2006, and societal demographics constitute an imperative for the Department to reevaluate how SES leaders and those in the pipeline for SES positions are recruited, selected, developed, utilized, and managed. These realities also constitute an imperative to transform and reorient leadership capabilities to meet the complex challenges in the years ahead.

Like their General/Flag Officer (G/FO) counterparts, SES leaders must be capable and ready to execute the national security mission successfully. Today, success requires the ability of the U.S. Government to bring to bear all elements of national power at home and to work in close cooperation with allies and partners abroad.³ Consequently, the Department's 21st Century leadership team - military and civilian - must be adept at integrating our Nation's global efforts into a unified strategy, and be fully capable of leading DoD's efforts within a larger national security context. Further, they must be adept in other broader enduring competencies, such as leadership, business acumen, critical thinking, and problem solving for successful executive management.

The DoD Strategic Plan for Joint Officer Management and Joint Professional Military Education sets the framework to identify and inculcate these new competencies for its Military officers. The Department's initiative presented here – "Developing 21st Century DoD Senior Executive Service Leaders" – is a corollary effort to ensure the appropriate executive leadership competencies and a transparent, credible, and effective framework for the career lifecycle management of civilian executives and those in the pipeline for SES positions.

Background

¹ Introductory Overview of the Department of Defense, Available at: <http://www.defenselink.mil/admin/about.html>

² U.S. Department of Defense, Strategic Plan for Joint Officer Management and Professional Military Education, April 3, 2006

³ "Achieving Unity of Effort," Quadrennial Defense Review, U.S. Department of Defense, February 6, 2006. p. 83

The last major change for the Department's civilian leadership came in 1978 when the Civil Service Reform Act established a new category of senior leaders, the Senior Executive Service (SES). As a result of that change, the Department's leadership team became a triumvirate (political leaders, G/FOs, and career members of the SES). CSRA envisioned a senior executive corps with solid executive expertise, public service values, and a broad perspective of the Government. The purpose was to: "Ensure that the executive management of the Government of the United States is responsive to the needs, policies, and goals of the nation and otherwise is of the highest quality." The Office of Personnel Management's history document recounts the transition to SES from the super grades as follows:

- ◆ SES envisioned as high-prestige, high-reward, and somewhat high-risk service.
- ◆ Rank tied to person to facilitate movement from position to position, agency to agency.
- ◆ Executives should be able to manage any program based upon their leadership skills and move more quickly and easily from position to position, agency to agency.
- ◆ Perspectives of Government executives would be broadened and their responsibilities viewed in the context of the larger corporate and public policy interests.

While these objectives are still valid today, they were nevertheless created for an environment that the Federal Government at large and DoD in particular faced in the last quarter of the 20th Century. The new 21st Century environment that we face today is different. It is one that is characterized in great part by its asymmetric challenges, requiring increased urgency of action, precision of execution, unity of effort among multi-national security partners, and concerted efforts -- both nationally and internationally. QDR 2006 highlighted some key indicators and competency requirements for this environment:

While the CSRA's objectives are still valid today, the Department needs to combine these original objectives with new ones that address the 21st Century

Indicators

- ◆ September 11, 2001
- ◆ Global War on Terror
- ◆ Multiple, Asymmetric Threats
- ◆ Global and Domestic Disasters
- ◆ Global Partnership
- ◆ Humanitarian Necessities
- ◆ Uncertainty and Surprise
- ◆ Public Accountability

Competency Requirements

- ◆ Wartime Sense of Urgency
- ◆ Rapid and Adaptive Planning and Execution
- ◆ Multifaceted Responses
- ◆ Comprehensive and Tailored Solutions
- ◆ Integrated Approaches
- ◆ Enterprise-Wide Perspective
- ◆ Creativity and Imagination
- ◆ Shaping Choices

Current Executive Management and Development

Career DoD SES leaders remain steadfast in their commitment to public service as they lead the Department through times of great transformation and reformation. Department of Defense Components seeking to maximize leadership resources have instituted various levels of reforms to more deliberately identify, develop, and manage the SES corps. Some even have focused on ways to increase the focus on “joint” knowledge and preparation of members for key joint positions. They have achieved success and their practices will be considered in the development of the new executive management framework. An assessment of today’s SES management and development system largely could be characterized as follows:

- ◆ Recruitment into the SES is a local decision, and new members are selected because they are a perfect fit for a specific opening.
- ◆ There are virtually no corporate level development programs or continuous learning opportunities for senior executives.
- ◆ There is no real ownership of the talent pool; there is no systematic understanding of the talent in the DoD SES pool, and there is little corporate succession planning.
- ◆ SES leaders typically are left to “fend for themselves” in terms of planning their career assignments and developmental opportunities.
- ◆ Continuity of knowledge is framed and valued in the context of the current job rather than in the context of the broader Component or Department.

Compare that with General/Flag Officer management, which more closely resembles executive management found in successful private sector companies. G/FO and private sector executive management are deliberate processes which employ a variety of strategies to purposely create a deep bench of executives. These systems typically include provisions for:

- ◆ Diversity of work experiences through a hierarchy of positions.
- ◆ Periodic, systematic talent reviews/assessments.
- ◆ Deliberate investment in development to create a pipeline that feeds the executive ranks.
- ◆ “Ownership” of talent at the highest level of the organization.
- ◆ Processes to leverage skills and talents against corporate or military requirements.

To effectively address this disparity is a challenge. But best business practices imply the Department must move its SES management and development from a largely ad hoc to a deliberate process.

The New Demands and Expectations for 21st Century DoD Leaders

The DoD vision for developing 21st Century executives is consistent with the original concept behind the creation of the SES. The SES was created to be a cadre of executives with shared values, a broad perspective of government, and possession of solid executive skills. The goal was portability of the executive resources across Government which could provide greater agency flexibility for selecting and developing Federal executives within a framework that preserved the larger corporate interests of Government. To accommodate a dynamic environment, the Department needs 21st Century leaders who are drawn from the best of America's diverse population and exhibit the highest levels of leadership, integrity, character, motivation, and desire to serve. They possess:

1. Adaptive leadership skills tested and proven in circumstances of discontinuous, disorienting, disruptive change; where the rules of the game are completely invalidated and new rules must be invented, applied, and modified continuously. Their leadership shall promote a culture that encourages and rewards creativity, innovation, intelligent risk-taking and critical thinking throughout the Department.
2. A variety of experiences leading to an understanding of the interplay and interaction of operations and policy that contributes to a broader cultural awareness, and enables effective communication in the global operating environment of the Department;
3. Enterprise-spanning perspective: ability to operate across functional and organizational lines; ability to align local organizations with the enterprise perspective; expertise to exert influence and make decisions crossing disciplines and diverse environments; and
4. Skills in matters involving the integrated use of military forces relative to national military strategy; strategic and contingency planning; and command and control of operations under unified command, which may be conducted with multi-service and/or multi-national, interagency and non-governmental partners under unified action across domains such as land, sea, air, space and cyberspace.

The Way Forward

In the spring of 2006, the Department embarked on a premier undertaking in enhancing the performance and jointness of its career senior executives. "*Developing 21st Century DoD Senior Executive Service Leaders*" is a DoD initiative that seeks to instill, institutionalize and systematize the deliberate development and management of the career lifecycle of DoD senior civilian executives.

The Department stood up a SES working group which brings together senior executives from all of DoD Components to act as a forum for executives to engage and provide input on the initiative.

The initiative was launched with a focus group conference of DoD

SES leaders that was convened on May 9, 2006. At that time, the Department sought some initial reactions and ideas from its SES cadre on how best to approach executive talent management. As a product of this meeting, four broad ideas emerged. One, the participants recognized that with the Global War on Terror under way, the Department was up against a new set of challenges and requirements that necessitated a new and urgent sense of unity of effort. Two, SES leaders expressed their support for full integration with General/Flag Officer and political appointees in the Department's leadership. Three, career executives emphasized the need for more training and career development once they enter the SES.⁴ Finally, the participating SES leaders, nevertheless, also stressed that the Department had not yet made the business case for change.

The Department also stood up an SES working group in May 2006, which convenes regularly. The working group brings together senior executives who not only represent all of DoD Components, but also act as agents of change within their entities in introducing, obtaining feedback on and communicating the initiative. The working group has served as a practical and useful forum for executives to engage and provide input on the initiative, thus ensuring broad participation by SES leaders over the effort and a robust vision for the way forward.

Using the ideas and the feedback from its SES leaders, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Honorable Gordon England, signed a Concept Paper outlining the case for change and key performance parameters. Deputy Secretary England went a step further and wrote to the SES community encouraging them to engage the initiative, participate in the discussion, and provide input to help shape the ideas.

The Deputy Secretary of Defense signed a Concept Paper that outlines the business case for change and describes the vision for a new joint and robust DoD SES Corps.

On January 29, 2007, Deputy Secretary England, convened a second SES forum, a workshop, for over 150 DoD SES leaders to discuss "*Developing 21st Century DoD Senior*

⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, Summary Report: Developing 21st Century DoD SES Leaders Conference, May 9, 2006. www.cpms.osd.mil/sespm/docs/dod_ses_ldrshp.pdf

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Executive Service Leaders: The workshop updated the SES community on the progress of the initiative and sought its input for further refinement of the proposals.

As the Department socialized the initiative internally, it also engaged external experts to help and advise it on how best to enhance the performance of SES leaders, particularly in joint matters. The Department hired the McKinsey Group to provide an independent, informed perspective on talent management strategy, particularly in executive leadership. They provided best practices from business and industry and national and international firms which the Department considered and used in shaping a new framework for executive management.

The new proposed foundational principles that will underpin this initiative are:

1. SES leaders must be exceptional

leaders. Senior executives will be highly competent, adaptive, and innovative leaders whose skills and abilities have been tested and proven in joint environments – multi-service, multi-agency, international, non-governmental and **with** other partners.

They lead and manage in circumstances of continuous change, ambiguous surroundings, and against systematic challenges. They are recognized and respected as agents of changes. They are sought after as leaders across the DoD enterprise.

"Developing 21st Century DoD Senior Executive Service Leaders" is a DoD initiative that seeks to instill, institutionalize and systematize the deliberate development and management of the career lifecycle of senior civilian executives at DoD.

2. SES leaders will have a DoD-wide perspective and knowledge of joint matters. All SES positions will require knowledge of joint matters, sensitivity to the integration of joint perspectives in decision making, and a clear understanding of roles in relation to the broader DoD mission (enterprise perspective). There will be a set of SES positions that have unique demands of scope and breadth; have significant levels of latitude and responsibility, as indicated by degree of policy and decision making authority; require an enterprise-wide perspective; and have significant responsibility for operating with multi-service, multi-agency, international, non-governmental, and other DoD partners. These positions will be referred to as Enterprise Positions (EPs). These positions will require significant competencies in joint matters and enterprise-thinking. Gaining broad exposure

across and outside the Department is valuable for executive decision making. To increase joint knowledge and enterprise perspective, a broad portfolio of experiences will be expected of our leaders.

The initiative envisions stratification of SES positions at DoD, with a selected number of positions – considered to have the most influence on the national security mission and Department's strategic priorities, and which require the most significant knowledge and experience of jointness – designated as joint Enterprise Positions (EPs).

3. SES leaders are critical Defense "Enterprise" talent assets. SES leaders are DoD executive leaders first. Senior executives serve both the broader

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DoD mission and their specific Component's role in that mission. SES leaders will be hired both for their ability to fulfill specific position responsibilities and for their potential ability to contribute to the broader DoD mission across the DoD enterprise.

4. **SES positions vary in scope and influence.** SES positions are different in terms of their responsibilities and influence within the Department and across the external national security environments. They vary in their technical, functional and executive requirements. Some positions, because of their broad and significant influence on national security and DoD strategic priorities, will require an enterprise-perspective, and substantive experience, breadth of responsibility, and in-depth knowledge of joint matters.
5. **SES leaders will have a deliberate framework for identification, development and management that will ensure continuity and visibility of executive talent.** Our executive personnel policies must be transparent, known, and understood throughout the Department. They must be guided by a consistent set of standards and a common executive management framework to ensure continuity of a high caliber of executive talent for the Department and its missions.
6. **SES leaders will be drawn from the best of America's diverse population.** SES leaders will represent the full spectrum of qualified, diverse talent available in the United States. The diversity of SES leaders contributes to a broader cultural awareness and fosters effective communication in the global operating environment of the Department. SES leaders will exhibit the highest levels of leadership, integrity, character, motivation and desire to serve.

These foundational principles will be embedded in a common Executive Management Framework which establishes standards for the career lifecycle of all SES members, including:

- ◆ Enterprise-wide set of strategic precepts and policies for recruiting, selecting, and developing people to fill SES positions, including those that have unique demands of scope, breadth and jointness;
- ◆ Development of succession plans and roadmaps to fill select SES positions, including through the creation and maintenance of databases and resources that increase transparency across the Components with regard to the SES talent pool;
- ◆ Development, sustainment and continuous improvement of a pipeline of highly qualified SES leaders to meet DoD executive leadership requirements; and
- ◆ A policy and functional advisory body that brings together senior leadership from the components to exchange knowledge and experience on SES development and management, and provide strategic guidance and advice to DoD leadership on SES matters.

The initiative also proposes the creation of a senior-level DoD body that shall serve a two part advisory mission: 1. on topics related to talent review and succession planning for EPs, and 2. on policies for ensuring best-practice career lifecycle management for all career SES. This entity will have visibility on the career executive talent found across the Department, thus

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ensuring cross-component recruitment and joint developmental assignments. It will also provide policy advice to the leadership of the Components and the Department.

Finally, while not the focus of "*Developing 21st Century DoD Senior Executive Service Leaders*," the Department has begun to shape two of its DoD enterprise-wide leader development programs. The programs are Executive Leadership Development Program (ELDP) and the Defense Leadership and Management (DLAMP).

ELDP is geared toward mid-level career civilians and military officers. Its objectives are to promote greater understanding of the overall DoD mission and culture, provide hands-on leadership training that parallels selected military training and ensure cross-Component exposure. It is a rigorous 10-month-long program offered annually, blending experiential and academic learning, with hands-on exercises focused on the role of the war fighter.

DLAMP, on the other hand, seeks to develop capable senior civilian leaders. Its objectives are to ensure senior leaders with DoD-wide perspective; with substantive knowledge of national security mission; with shared understanding, trust, and sense of mission with military leaders; and with strong leadership and management skills.

As part of the refocusing of the curriculum and training, the Department developed a comprehensive and systematic approach to leader development that has at its core a future-focused framework of competencies, based on the OPM Executive Core Qualifications, but strengthened with DoD-unique requirements that will enable the Department to accomplish its national security mission in the 21st century and beyond. We transformed this competency-based framework into a progression model for DoD-wide civilian leader development across the continuum from entry level to senior executive.

Existing programs, such as the DLAMP and ELDP, as well as any new programs, both DoD and Component-sponsored, will be reviewed against this framework and model to ensure that each provides the appropriately tailored competency-based training to prepare our leaders, and a succession pipeline to create new leaders who excel in a joint, total force environment. To further strengthen the plan, we will assess the competencies of the current leadership cadre and succession pipeline against the new competency framework and model, enabling us to identify gaps and devise strategies targeted to filling those gaps, thus ensuring the essential DoD leadership capacity for the future.

All of these initiatives point out to the degree of seriousness with which the Department approaches the management of its human talent. The development, management and utilization of the civilian workforce are issues that DoD spends significant time and resources looking at and seeks to continuously adapt and improve.