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THE DECISIVE EDGE: SETAF AS A STANDING JTF

By

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College of the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract of

THE DECISIVE EDGE: SETAF AS A STANDING JTF

The United States Army Southern European Task Force (SETAF), located in Vicenza, Italy, is a major subordinate command of the United States Army Europe. It has the mission to become the core of a Joint Task Force (JTF) headquarters ready to deploy within seventy-two hours. As the JTF, it is European Command's headquarters of choice for forcible entry, noncombatant evacuation, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief missions. SETAF must be prepared to deploy anywhere within the area of responsibility from Northern Europe to Cape Horn, an area that encompasses some of the most volatile regions of the world.

U.S. doctrine calls for establishment of JTFs for specific limited objectives and states that the ad hoc nature of the JTF headquarters allows for flexibility and ability to tailor for the mission. History demonstrates that in practice, U.S. forces have had difficulty in responding to rapidly emerging crises with ad hoc headquarters. The headquarters are initially inefficient and may be incapable of coherently conducting simultaneously phased operations across the continuum of time and space due to lack of initial cohesion, capability, and regional focus.

Due to the nature of its missions that call for rapid response to protect American lives and property, and American interests, SETAF can be most effective if organized as a Standing Joint Task Force.

INTRODUCTION

The United States Army Southern European Task Force (SETAF), located in Vicenza, Italy, is a major subordinate command of the United States Army Europe (USAREUR). SETAF's mission is "to provide trained forces and/or the core of a joint task force headquarters, all deployable within 72 hours, to conduct joint and/or combined warfighting or stability operations within the USEUCOM area of responsibility (AOR)."ⁱ Once ordered to provide the core of a joint task force (JTF) headquarters, one mission is "when directed, SETAF JTF deploys and conducts forcible entry operations in the Joint Operations Area (JOA) to evacuate qualified noncombatants and re-establish a secure environment for the resumption of UNHCR Humanitarian relief efforts. On order, hands over operations to the follow-on UN Peace Enforcement Force. Upon completion, redeploys."ⁱⁱ

SETAF must be prepared to deploy anywhere within an AOR that ranges from Northern Europe to Cape Horn and encompasses the Balkans and Sub-Sahara Africa, two of the unstable areas of the modern world. The need to respond is generated by a crisis that is, by its very nature, time-sensitive and demands immediate action. SETAF can best provide the necessary response in this highly critical, demographically diverse, and geographically expansive AOR by permanent organization as a Standing Joint Task Force (SJTF) headquarters. This paper will present U.S. joint doctrine, historical examples of JTF shortcomings and successes, and then present recommendations for improvement. For purposes of this paper, the abbreviation "JTF" stands for Joint Task Force Headquarters.

U.S. joint doctrine states that a "JTF may be established on a geographical area or functional basis when the mission has a specified limited objective and does not require overall centralized control of logistics. The mission assigned to the JTF should require execution of responsibilities involving a joint force on a significant scale and close integration of effort." Doctrine also states, "A JTF is dissolved by the proper authority when the purpose for which it was created has been achieved or when it is no longer needed."ⁱⁱⁱ According to doctrine, a JTF, is by definition, an ad hoc organization. While doctrine also states that this gives flexibility and the ability to tailor the organization to the mission, history demonstrates otherwise. A senior British officer, addressing the Falklands experience, stated that "the things we did on the basis of well-tried and proven formations worked, and the ad hoc arrangements turned out much less happily."^{iv} The American experience has also demonstrated this fact and is replete with examples that demonstrate the utility of standing JTFs to react to crisis and specifically that of SETAF as a SJTF.

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

Operation "Eagle Claw" was conducted by an ad hoc JTF in an attempt to rescue the American citizens held by the Iranians in 1980. The mission was a failure. That failure led to a great loss of national prestige and the decision of President Carter not to run for reelection. The administration directed the formation of a military review group to investigate the raid that was known as the Holloway Investigation. Among the findings was the fact that the ad hoc command and control system was flawed. The first specific recommendation made by the Holloway Investigation to correct shortcomings was that the "Department of Defense form a counter-terrorist task force, with a

permanently assigned staff and certain assigned forces.”^v This led to the formation of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) as a SJTF to correct this shortcoming.

Operation “Urgent Fury” was conducted in 1983 to protect and evacuate U.S. nationals and stabilize the internal situation in Grenada. Command Joint Task Force (CJTF) 120 was activated to conduct the operation. Because of the short lead-time of the crisis, only about 15 of the 88 personnel assigned to the paper organization became involved in the operation.^{vi} Command, control, and communications were all flawed as demonstrated by CJTF commander and staff’s unfamiliarity with the AOR and with their assigned forces and capabilities. This led to the inability to synchronize operations among the component forces on the island and resulted in an inability to communicate, a fratricide incident, and other problems. Fortunately, Grenada was close to the United States and within immediate reach of overwhelming combat power. The JTF successfully completed the mission in spite of the lack of cohesion and synchronization to achieve the synergy that U.S. doctrine states that joint forces can develop.

The 1989 invasion of Panama, Operation “Just Cause”, was proof of the utility of JSOC as a highly specialized standing JTF and also of XVIII Airborne Corps as an ad hoc JTF. Actual operations consisted of the near-simultaneous attack on approximately forty objectives in a masterful execution of synchronization and application of overwhelming joint combat power concentrated from air, land, and sea. JSOC, as the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF), controlled an extensive list of joint forces against key targets. This mission clearly demonstrated the evolution of American command and control for special operations since Desert One in 1980. This operation

and others conducted by JSOC have clearly demonstrated the ability of a SJTF to rapidly deploy and provide high-resolution command and control to the employed forces.

The XVIII Airborne Corps as an ad hoc JTF was also a highly skilled organization that provided the balanced, experienced, and responsible staff required to ensure the unity of effort and accomplishment of the assigned mission as required by doctrine. As the Army's Contingency Corps, it had the ability to rapidly transition to JTF structure, but getting ready for Panama wasn't a no-notice mission.

The crisis that led to "Just Cause" evolved over a period of years. As the situation deteriorated, and in accordance with U.S. doctrine, planning for the overthrow of the Noreiga government began with the United States Army South (USARSO) as the JTF headquarters. As planning and rehearsals began, it became apparent that USARSO, with its fillers drawn from diverse, unaligned sources in CONUS, was not able to execute the mission to the level of resolution required, in spite of what joint doctrine and the assigned mission said they should. The XVIII Corps was then chosen as the JTF and a number of nearly full-scale rehearsals were conducted in preparation for the operation.^{vii} While still a masterful example of execution, it was not an ad hoc JTF activated to rapidly react to an emerging crisis. It was an experienced, rehearsed organization that executed a complex mission with forces that habitually worked together, commanded by officers who knew each other personally and often had commanded the units directly subordinate to their present command. In other words, it may be considered a doctrinally formed JTF by definition, but hardly a typical "base case".

A recent example of a successful JTF execution of a non-combat role is Honduras-based JTF-B's humanitarian assistance/disaster relief efforts in the wake of

Hurricane Mitch in Central America. The Hurricane Mitch After Action Review (AAR) and report to Congress found one of the lessons learned was the value of a forward deployed standing JTF, especially the regionally oriented and experienced command and control headquarters. The key to success was the existence of a forward-deployed organization with exportable command and control, familiar with the region, doing forward mission analysis, and prepared to receive, support, onward move, and integrate deploying forces. As forces are increasingly pulled backed to CONUS, selected, small standing JTFs such as JTF-B allow for a rapid task-oriented return to a region for a large range of humanitarian actions, disaster relief, peace keeping, or other contingencies.^{viii}

The Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command (CINCPAC) has constructed a two-tiered strategy for JTF structure and training for immediate response that the Joint Warfighting Center has found to be the most effective existing method for forming JTFs.^{ix} CINCPAC as tier one concentrates on the tasks of enabling the JTF, providing strategic guidance, and synchronizing JTF and theater actions. The second tier consists of the headquarters designated as a core JTF. Upon activation, a deployable joint task force augmentation cell (DJTFAC) from the CINCPAC staff augments these headquarters. The augmentees are handpicked and trained to provide joint area expertise and are specially trained in CINCPAC crisis action procedures at the operational level. In essence, the DJTFAC allows the core headquarters to transform its staff to a JTF.^x

The Marine Corps also has recent experience with a standing JTF. GEN Krulak, USMC Commandant, issued planning guidance for the formation of a "fully capable expeditionary Joint Task Force (JTF) Headquarters organized and equipped to move out at a moments notice to meet the uncertainties of a chaotic world."^{xi} The headquarters

existed for about two and a half years. The Marines felt that it proved the concept that a SJTF is preferable to an ad hoc JTF. The Marine SJTF deployed to both the SOUTHCOM and EUCOM AORs for exercises and provided trained personnel to deployed JTFs. It was also the JTF headquarters for USACOM Exercise "Unified Endeavor. In spite of its success, the Marine SJTF was not embraced by the Department of Defense or by the Warfighting CINCs because it was too closely tied to the roles and missions debate between the services. Even more importantly, it was not regionally focussed, thereby losing one of the key advantages of an SJTF.

Besides the U.S. SJTF experience, there is other precedence in the world for a SJTF. The British have activated their own SJTF that is similar to that tried by the Marine Corps. The British SJTF is called the Joint Force Headquarters (JFHQ) and has the mission to deploy, with or without augmentation, anywhere in the world. It is fully supported by the Ministry of Defense and is fully manned by representatives of all branches of the British Armed Forces.^{xii} It lacks regional focus, but with a few forward-deployed forces and fewer commitments, it fills a shortfall in capability that was identified during the Falklands War.

SETAF

SETAF itself has had much recent experience as a JTF. European Command (EUCOM) Directive 55-11 designates SETAF as the Army core headquarters for expansion into a JTF for conduct of forcible entry, NEO, Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief operations. Staff augmentation is provided by a DJTFAC as in PACOM. Annual staff training, semi-annual exercises, and annual certification are conducted in accordance with EUCOM directives. The JTF core is thoroughly exercised

and has been activated as a JTF on several contingency operations to include operations “Support Hope” in Rwanda, “Guardian Assistance” in Rwanda/Burundi, and “Guardian Retrieval” in the Congo.^{xiii} The missions consisted of one humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) and two non-combatant evacuation operations (NEO). All three missions were successfully executed across a great continuum of time and space, but all had operational problems from the ad hoc structure, in spite of great efforts to prepare. In both “Guardian Assistance” and “Guardian Retrieval”, forces were deployed before the JTF was formed. The trained staff augmentees were often not available, deployed late and/or to the wrong location.^{xiv} The lack of continuity and teamwork led to delays in training, integration, and operations of the JTF headquarters. Organizational shortfalls existed that could not be readily remedied. Communications elements provided to the JTF were insufficiently equipped and manned to provide the links required. The joint intelligence support element was “too Army”, and not able to provide the right kind of intelligence to the other service components. Also, the intelligence communications support was insufficient to provide access to all available sources.^{xv} Serious consequences could have emerged in more intense scenarios that may be faced in the future.

DISCUSSION

Some common threads emerge when examining the cited examples of the successes and difficulties in unity of command and command and control. First, the advantages of the ad hoc JTF type of command organizations are that the headquarters can be activated and deactivated quickly, and can be tailored for the specific mission. It can be provided the precise capabilities required in a building block fashion, with

elements provided by the service components. The chain of command is simple, and organizationally flexible, and unburdened with administrative and logistical responsibilities. It is supported by joint doctrine and has proven successful in many contingencies.

In practice, the deficiencies of the JTF are much more pronounced. The organization is generally service based and not functionally oriented because the JTFs are normally formed around a component headquarters. Other service representation is purely symbolic and those members are often untrained, unknown, and unintegrated in the organization and procedures. Even worse, the JTF can be totally ad hoc and capabilities built from ground zero. Communications are inadequate because the service-unique systems must be augmented and the interfaces between components are difficult. The interface problems and service parochialism can lead to duplication of effort and capabilities, and compromises in decision-making. The components and staff are not familiar with each other, and may not be familiar with the AOR.^{xvi}

A JTF faces a life cycle that is not a series of sequential phases in a smoothly synchronized operation, but is most apt to be simultaneous phases that greatly conflict and can disrupt execution as demonstrated in the historical examples. A crisis erupts and the CINC orders the activation of a JTF. That JTF must form, plan, rehearse, deploy, employ, transition, and redeploy. The problem arises from the fact that many of these events happen simultaneously, especially when dealing with HA/DR. When the order for activation is given, either an assessment team or advance party (ADVON) must deploy immediately into the JOA. Planning must begin even before the augmentees are activated and integrated into the JTF. Planning, deployment of forces, and possibly even

employment of combat forces continue before the JTF becomes operational as a joint entity. In truly rapidly emerging crises, combat actions can happen, fought by uncoordinated components before the JTF exists.

A SJTF provides the capability of rapid reaction to crises that can avoid the previously discussed problems in operational sequencing. JTFs fight the operational level of war for the regional CINC. A regional CINC such as CINCEUR must focus on the theater strategic level of war, and not the operational level. A SJTF allows the CINCs staff to focus on the proper level and face the multiple crises in the AOR, and not become enmeshed in the operational level while waiting for the JTF to activate and become fully mission capable. With the JTF focussing at the operational level of war, the components or functional commands can plan, deploy, and operate at the tactical level as doctrine says they should. With the existence of separate headquarters that focus on all three levels of war, planning is greatly facilitated at a much faster pace and with expectations of greater resolution. Parallel planning at all levels, facilitated by an exchange of liaison officers, allows components to become involved early in the process, provide input to higher levels and produce a quality product in a more timely manner. That can allow U.S. forces to react rapidly to get inside the enemy's decision cycle for combat, evacuate our citizens, or save lives in an HA/DR scenario. An instructor at the U.S. Naval War College said "Unity of command is key in modern, fast-paced, limited, casualty-adverse warfare." Deploying under the control of the SJTF, and not receiving guidance from the inappropriate level headquarters, avoids a transition of command and control during the operation and supports the unity of command.

SETAF has faced all these problems to varying degrees. As the U.S. military has become a CONUS-based, power projection force, it has made rapid reaction and strategic reach across time, space, and force even more critical and difficult. EUCOM faces crises today in the Balkans and it is highly likely that it can require the rapid activation of another JTF to face expanded conflict. Sub-Sahara has at least eight conflicts ongoing that could require intervention in the form of NEOs or humanitarian action. The forward-deployed headquarters have become increasingly committed, and the operations tempo does not appear to be slowing. SETAF, as the lead JTF for forcible entry, NEO, and humanitarian action/disaster relief, must be prepared to execute a wide range of contingencies and can best do so as a standing JTF.

SETAF as an operational, standing joint task force provides great utility to the NCA and EUCOM for execution of missions across the spectrum of conflict. There are a number of ways to approach the solution of providing the capabilities presently assigned to SETAF. These options include: continuing following doctrine and expanding the headquarter by use of DJTFAC; fully manning SETAF as a joint headquarters; and manning SETAF to the "least common denominator" level, that is, the minimum capability required in common with situation dependant, ad hoc structures.

SETAF is presently given the mission to become a JTF under EUCOM Directive 55-11, "Joint Task Force Headquarters Policies, Procedures, and Organizations." The directive delineates the six service-based core headquarters for expansion to JTF. The directive provides each with a Deployable Joint Task Force Augmentation Cell of up to twenty-seven "battle rostered" personnel to expand the core staff to one with joint capabilities. "Supplemental" personnel provide additional capabilities if needed and are

drawn from EUCOM or other component headquarters. It is similar to that of Pacific Command but the nature of the theater provides different results. In the directive, EUCOM states that its "theater is one of conflict. Current conflicts combined with the potential for rapidly occurring crises within the AOR requires the command to be able to rapidly stand up and then sustain the JTF." The historic optempo of the AOR has led to a 45-day constraint on DJTFAC personnel to JTF assignment before replacement personnel from worldwide sourcing are used as backfills. The short timeframe before the joint plug must depart leaves little time for the JTF to become completely established before beginning to transition in new personnel that mostly like will come from outside the theater with little familiarity with the JOA and mission.^{xvii} This places a significant burden on the core staff to train and integrate new personnel immediately while deployed on a mission that could last months or even years as a HA/DR or peacekeeping mission often can. Additionally, there is only one DJTFAC team and multiple commitments. The fact that the DJTFAC is one deep, combined with the optempo and commitments within the EUCOM AOR, has led to problems in manning the JTF when needed. The result is shortfalls in experience, familiarity, and late integration into the JTF of the fillers when needed because the last person trained has often not been the one to deploy. As highlighted in the AARs, SETAF has faced these problems in all of the recent contingency operations.

Reorganizing SETAF as a fully operational SJTF would solve all the problems identified in the use of ad hoc JTFs. Parallel planning could start as a crises begins to emerge rather than waiting for it to develop and the CINC's staff to issue an execute order (EXORD) for the activation of the JTF. By its existence, days can be shaved off

the timeline for deployment. The ADVON could be a fully joint operation, ready to establish the JTF forward and begin deployment of forces into the joint area of operation (JOA). Operations could begin with a synchronize plan, executed under the command and control of the headquarters that will have ultimate responsibility for the operation. The JTF would have the full range of capabilities, such as an assigned joint intelligence support element with all necessary equipment to provide systems linkage, and communications elements to fully integrate C4I. Most importantly, the staff would have the ability to train at the operational level of war. The personnel assigned could become fully knowledgeable as joint staff officers, building trust at the staff level, and with higher and component staffs.

A fully manned and organized SJTF is the optimal solution but not very likely to happen. In this age of constrained resources across the services, there is little chance of the resources becoming available, even if the idea could be sold. SETAF as a SJTF is not as highly specialized as JSOC, and the need for redundant capabilities is difficult to justify because all capabilities imbedded in a fully capable SJTF are not required for all contingencies. Some sections can better be utilized and trained on a day by day basis in a service-based organization rather than assigned to a headquarters where the need is only intermittent. Some elements, such as the Battlefield Control Element are highly specialized, unique organizations in theater that are absolutely too expensive to replicate.

RECOMMENDATION

The "least common denominator" organization for the JTF headquarters is one that would incorporate those functions that are common to all JTF organizations. It would allow the headquarters to organize at a level that enables all staff functional areas

to operate with sufficient joint expertise to plan for, deploy, and employ joint forces for most contingencies and rapidly integrate augmentation of specialized capabilities as required. While the actual manning and organizational structure will require some detailed development, a basic framework of the common structure is developed in Joint Pub 5-00.2, "Joint Task Force Planning Guidance and Procedures." The framework identifies key elements across the staff functions that are necessary in all JTF structures. The staff sections that would be jointly manned would include the joint intelligence support element (JICE), joint operations center (JOC), rule of engagement cell (ROEC), joint operations planning and executions system cell (JOPES), joint planning group (JPG), and the joint communications control center (JCCC). Additionally, a joint communications support element (JCSE) of communications equipment and operators is essential to support the headquarters and a joint personnel reception center (JRC) to administratively support the J-1. These sections provide sufficient joint capability to allow a truly joint planning and execution capability for the headquarters in all key essential areas. Representation of all services with the addition of liaison cells from components would allow the rapid development of plans through the conduct of joint parallel planning at the strategic, operational, and tactical level. The communications equipment would exist for the rapid transfer of intelligence products, orders, and requests for information (RFIs) that flow rapidly during the crisis action planning.

The JTF deployment timeline for EUCOM JTFs could be significantly shortened if the headquarters possessed the imbedded ability to plan, coordinate, deploy, employ, and communicate. Presently, the timeline calls for the JTF planning cell to form and initiate crisis action planning on N+1/N+2 with N-Day as the day the EXORD is issued.

The ADVON or JSOTF for in extremis use deploy simultaneously with the formation of the planning cell and yet the headquarters does not receive JTF augmentation until D+3 to D+5. They are received then only if available and not committed to another deployment or unavailable for some other reason. A minimum SJTF capability would allow for up to 4 days to be shaved off that timeline and the ADVON to deploy with a joint capability and initial guidance formulated by the CJTF and the staff. The staff would truly exist when mission handoff with EUCOM takes place on N+4.^{xviii} Other improvements in timeliness and quality of staff actions would result from initial involvement of a coherent, trained, and trusted staff.

EUCOM has six service core headquarters that can be expanded by the DJTFAC to JTFs when needed. EUCOM could greatly expand its capabilities by selecting those headquarters mostly likely to deploy on short notice and facilitating their organization as SJTFs to the least common denominator. Identifying the key billets needed to become a functional joint staff and exchanging those positions within EUCOM could do this. Cost to the components can be almost completely eliminated by exchanging the necessary personnel between the EUCOM core JTF headquarters to provide the joint capabilities to those headquarters most likely to deploy. Coding these billets as joint and truly training "purple-suited" joint officers at the operational level would support the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986. There are presently few opportunities for officers to gain this experience with the present doctrine of ad hoc JTFs and support to the effort from the Department of Defense level would make great strides in developing the joint officer corps of the future.

Both the Commanding General of SETAF and GEN® Lindsay, the Senior Observer/Controller for Joint Task Force Operations evaluations, support the concept of the “least common denominator” for SETAF, specifically due to its assigned missions and previously discussed shortfalls in activating a JTF headquarters.^{xixxx} The instability of the multi-polar world and the increased potential for rapidly emerging crises requires an increased capacity to protect U.S. lives and national interests at short notice. A SJTF has the ability to execute the simultaneous phases of joint operations from planning to deployment and employment of forces. It can be the cohesive team with the unity of command and the synchronization of effort for the components to achieve the synergistic effects that joint forces can achieve. SETAF as a SJTF provides a decisive edge across the EUCOM AOR to do so.

Endnotes

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- ^v Paul B. Ryan, The Iranian Rescue Mission (Maryland: Naval Institute Press 1985) 122.
- ^{vi} Joseph Metcalf III, "Decision Making and the Grenada Rescue Mission," in Ambiguity and Command (Marshfield, MA: Pittman Publishing, 1986), 279.
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- ^{viii} Col Charles H. Jacoby Jr., Commander of JTF-B, telephone conversation with author, 2 April 1999.
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- ^x Jay B. Yakely III and Harold E. Bullock. "Training the Pacific Warriors," Joint Forces Quarterly, Summer 1996, 17.
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- ^{xix} MG P.T. Mikolashek, Commanding General of United States Army Southern European Command, telephone conversation with author. 28 March 1999.
- ^{xx} GEN@ J.J. Lindsay, Senior Observer Controller, Battle Command training Program, Team D, telephone conversation with author, 26 April 1999.

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