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The Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF) Conundrum: Cooperation among Competitors, is harmony achievable through trust and understanding?

By

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of 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 or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract

Joint Interagency Task Force East (JIATFE) is an example of a multiagency, interdisciplinary approach that uses various elements of national power to accomplish an objective. This process is necessary to our country in a time when the military is shrinking and the world changing. In order for a JIATF to be successful in achieving the operational or strategic objectives, there must be cooperation and coordination among all its supporting agencies. A JIATF can also enhance cooperation at the operational level by enhancing trust and understanding among the federal agencies.

This paper will address several options that a commander/ director can use to get different organizations, with distinctly different goals and philosophies to work together efficiently and eliminate competition. The analysis will include successful interagency operations as well as a look at other similar arrangements that were set-up for the purpose of cooperation. The research will examine the interagency process starting with the operational objectives that required the integration of multiple agencies in conjunction with the military. The many solutions to the problem of the “JIATF Conundrum” will help the new Department of Homeland Security in accomplishing its strategic and operational objectives.

The Secretary, Department of Homeland Security, can take the example of JIATFE to heart on how he can meld the distinct federal agencies in combating the transnational threat of terrorism. The interagency approach to conducting operations especially in the area of Homeland Security is not perfect and requires cooperation among multiple agencies to achieve the objective. Cooperation can be achieved through trust and understanding.

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Introduction

Response to the challenges facing the Nation today most often requires a multiagency, interdisciplinary approach that brings the many diverse skills and resources of the Federal Government and other public and private organizations to bear. While the requirement for coordination is not new, the need to use all capabilities is growing with the complexity and multidimensional nature of the new world order and with shrinking military resources.¹

Joint Interagency Task Force East (JIATFE) is an example of this multiagency, interdisciplinary approach that uses various elements of national power to accomplish an objective. In order for a JIATF to be successful in achieving the operational or strategic objectives, there must be cooperation and coordination among all its supporting agencies.

The new Department of Homeland Security will consist of “22 agencies and 170,000 employees.”² This new department has “Joint Interagency Task Force East ...fast becoming an important model for officials who are engineering the largest re-organization of the U.S. government in a half century.”³ The secretary will face the same challenges as a JIATF Director: improving cooperation and reducing counter productive competition while working toward the objectives. There are a myriad of studies addressing interagency operations that agree that success is not achievable without cooperation. There are also many military and joint publications that neglect interagency operations or don’t fully address the coordination or cooperation issues that the commander will encounter.

Can the commander achieve harmony and increase the cooperation of all involved? The military commander even though he is not in “command” of the supporting agencies is the best suited to lead the interagency process and has many tools⁴ available to achieve an acceptable level of cooperation among organizations that are distinctly different. These organizations or agencies are not set up like the military, so they must be approached differently.

There are multiple ways to improve cooperation as well as coordination: one of the ways is through trust and understanding among the components of the command. This paper will address several options that a commander/ director can use to get different organizations, with distinctly different goals and philosophies to work together efficiently and eliminate competition. The analysis will include successful interagency operations as well as a look at other similar arrangements that were set-up for the purpose of cooperation. The research will examine the interagency process starting with the operational objectives that required the integration of multiple agencies in conjunction with the military. The many solutions to the problem of the “JIATF Conundrum” will help the new Department of Homeland Security in accomplishing its strategic and operational objectives.

Interagency Overview: Two Scenarios

There is a tip from high intelligence sources that a merchant ship of certain size, color and flag is departing an unknown port in Columbia at an unknown time, on unknown heading with 2800 kgs of cocaine on board destined for an unknown port. An E2C Airborne Early Warning (AEW) aircraft is airborne, controlling a U.S. Navy (USN) P3C Orion patrol aircraft in the designated search area. Simultaneously it is also controlling a U. S. Coast Guard (USCG) helicopter in the surrounding area. For several days this scene is repeated in a different search area adjusting for estimated speed and course of the drug vessel. There is also a British warship with its helicopter and a Dutch P3 aircraft in the surrounding areas conducting their own searches for this critical target of interest. Several days into the operation the suspect ship is located off the Caribbean coast of South America. The P3C Orion keeps the ship under surveillance until it runs low on fuel and has to depart the area, but not before passing the final position to the E2C on station, which then

coordinates for a helicopter from the nearest ship, which turns out to be British. Just as the E2C is running low on fuel, the British helicopter re-locates the ship. JIATFE meanwhile is taking all this information and coordinating with all the agencies required, including the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the U. S. Customs Service (USCS), the USCG, the USN, to get aircraft and ships into the area for the boarding and searching of the ship on the high seas. The initial boarding did not yield any contraband, but the continued searching by the USCG Law Enforcement Detachment which was assigned to the British ship yielded approximately 2380 kilograms of cocaine.

Another day in the same area of responsibility, the phone rings as the E2C crew is briefing for the next scheduled counter-narcotics surveillance flight of the day in the Caribbean. They are told to stand-by for new higher priority tasking from JIATFE. A few minutes later the JIATFE Operations Duty Officer is re-tasking the crew to a different area of the Caribbean on a completely different mission. Meanwhile, the Squadron Intel Officer is being briefed by the FBI, the Immigration and Naturalization service (INS) and the USCS on the intelligence required for the mission. The intelligence officer briefs the crew on the details of the mission: locations, departure points, search area and the critical target of interest. The crew delays for several hours, until sunset, before taking off to accomplish the missions. While airborne, the crew is communicating with JIATFE, USCS and USCG. There is also coordination through JIATFE on several aircraft and ships in the area of operation which are verified as friendly or suspect. It doesn't appear to be a different mission, but tonight, they are flying to a different location in search of terrorists trying to enter the United States.

The preceding scenarios were based on actual experiences in the U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility to illustrate the coordination and cooperation required to accomplish a

joint interagency mission as well as to illustrate the correlation of the counter-narcotics mission and the homeland security mission. In the first scenario, the JIATFE is focused on the counter-narcotics mission, while in the second JIATFE is concurrently coordinating the counter-narcotics mission as well as the counter-terrorism/ homeland security mission. The success in the first scenario could not have been achieved without the cooperation and coordination of all organizations involved. Cooperation among U.S. Ambassadors, U.S. Combatant Commanders and civilian agencies, in addition to the law enforcement detachment who discovers the contraband (drugs, terrorists), played an essential role in finding the proverbial “needle in a haystack.”

The interagency initiative is not a new concept; it can be traced back to the Constitution and the National Security Act of 1947 (NSA 47).⁵ The creation of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) was established by the National Narcotics Leadership Act of 1988 (public law 100-690)⁶ in order to unify the counter drug operations of over 30 Federal Agencies and innumerable state, local and private authorities.⁷ The National Defense Authorization Act of 1989 designated the Department of Defense (DOD) to be the lead agent for detection and monitoring of illegal drug shipments into the United States in support of law enforcement, tasked to create an integrated command, control, communications and intelligence network to link the armed forces and various civilian law enforcement agencies.⁸ This led to the creation of Joint Task Force 6 (JTF-6) in 1989 to support interagency drug efforts throughout the United States and JTF-4 to support efforts in the Caribbean. In 1994, JIATFE was created from JTF-4 as a result of Presidential Decision Directive 14 which ordered a review of the nation’s command and control, and intelligence centers involved in international counter-narcotics operations.

JIATFE was created to achieve unity of command by bringing together the resources of participating agencies for execution of the counterdrug strategy under one single commander.⁹ This was seen as a solution to the problem of “who is in charge” [that] still vexes interagency efforts.¹⁰ Although less than perfect, “the new headquarters represented the U.S. Government’s best hope that it could defy operational lines of demarcation and agency stove pipes and blend capabilities of various agencies and the military services into a synergistic whole.”¹¹ The JIATFE commander is still challenged with bringing the distinct elements of an interagency task force together in order to reach the objectives.

Objectives

The National Security Strategy (NSS) objectives are to enhance America’s Security, bolster America’s economic prosperity, and promote democracy and human rights abroad.¹² The NSS specifically states that our objectives related to the transnational threat of drug trafficking are to:

1. Shield Americas border from drug trafficking.
2. Break the drug traffickers sources of supply.¹³

The JIATF mission is focused on the above objectives which are source and transit zone objectives in line with “the National Drug Control Strategy [which] aims to cut illegal drug use and availability in the United States by 50% by 2007, and reduce the health and social consequences of drug use and trafficking by 25% over the same period.”¹⁴ JIATFE’s primary mission is to plan and execute interagency detection and monitoring of air and maritime drug smuggling activities within the U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility.¹⁵ JIATFE is also responsible for three other missions:

1. Plan and conduct flexible operations to detect, monitor, disrupt and deter the cultivation, production and transportation of illicit narcotics
2. Utilize and integrate C4I systems to efficiently coordinate operations and intelligence with other agencies and other partners
3. Collect, fuse and disseminate counterdrug information from all participating agencies to the forces for tactical action.¹⁶

The JIATFE director is faced with multiple challenges when establishing unity of effort among disparate units. The mission requires him to coordinate and communicate with all supporting agencies, remaining resourceful while directing the efforts in pursuit of the objective.

Agencies

Even though JIATFE consists of personnel from over 30 federal agencies, only a representative example of the primary agencies will be addressed in the following illustration. The listed agencies and all other JIATFE supporting agencies have their own command structures. The JIATFE commander reports directly to Commander, U.S. Southern Command while agency leaders report directly to their respective departments. For example, the FBI and DEA fall under the Department of Justice while the U.S. Customs Service reports to the Department of Treasury. The respective Departments then communicate with the Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) on matters relating to counterdrugs. The Director, ONDCP is responsible for interagency coordination at the national level and reports directly to the President on the performance of the federal agencies in supporting the Counterdrug Strategy. Meanwhile, the JIATFE commander is responsible for coordination and communication between the agencies at the operational level. Each counterdrug player is essential because of their core competencies and as a force multiplier in the achievement of the objective. There is interdependence among the agencies that are combating this transnational threat starting in its origin country all the way to the streets of

the United States. They – the agencies – bring skills and expertise that is limited or lacking in the military.

The above mentioned agencies, with their different objectives, missions, command and control (C2) structures work to accomplish the objective of reducing the narcotics smuggling into the United States as part of the JIATF. These distinct agencies which compete for money, prestige and power, and are required to combat the narcotics problem, but lack unity of command at the operational level. This translates into a greater focus in cooperation and coordination among the agencies to accomplish the objective. In the interagency process the role of the combatant commander or the subordinate commander, in this case JIATFE, is instrumental to the success of the operation.

Interagency Success

If the interagency process is to be successful, it should bring together the interests of multiple agencies, departments, and organizations. This cohesion is even more complex than the multidimensional nature of military combat operations viewed in isolation. When the other instruments of national power – economic, political and/ or diplomatic – are applied, the dimensions of the effort and the number and types of interactions expand significantly.¹⁷

Operation Uphold Democracy is considered an interagency success as the objectives were accomplished with minimal casualties and fine order.¹⁸ This is just one of many interagency operations that can be labeled a success, because it illustrates a good level of interagency coordination among numerous agencies.¹⁹ There are a few studies that analyze the success of the Haiti operation with lessons learned that are being applied to other interagency operations. Uphold Democracy wasn't a JIATF operation, but it has applicability to most interagency operations.

Operation Uphold Democracy can be broken down into good and bad in relation to interagency cooperation. There was planning by individual agencies and it did involve

interagency coordination.²⁰ The emphasis remains on “interagency coordination” during the planning of the permissive entry plan into Haiti. Interagency coordination in the planning phase, however, was included late in the process due to security concerns. It was compartmentalized until the Administration’s policy changed to consider the use of force.²¹ This translated to the creation of a second plan at the operational level. There was coordination and cooperation at the strategic level with the direction from the President which should have been brought down to the combatant commander. The tactical level military/ interagency cooperation contributed to the overall success of the mission.²²

Many of the aforementioned difficulties encountered could easily have been avoided through trust and understanding among the many participants of the operation. The concept of trust and understanding is not some intangible concept that is developed over night; it takes time to eliminate suspicion and ignorance among the many components of a JIATF.

Trust and Understanding

A definition of these terms is in order for the purpose of clarity and dispelling any appearance of the “touchy feely” which is sometimes difficult to accomplish or measure. Trust can be defined as reliance on something to provide correct information, perform an operation correctly, keep a secret, perform a protocol correctly and not to misuse resources or information where something is an individual, organization or a service.²³

Understanding in concrete terms can be defined as the act of one who understands a thing, in any sense of the verb; knowledge; discernment; comprehension; interpretation; explanation. To understand in this definition is to be apprised or have information of, to learn, to be informed of, or to hear.²⁴ In other words, having knowledge or intelligence to be able to accomplish a task.

The Joint Publication 3-0 briefly explains that in order for an interagency operation to be successful there must be trust, understanding and cooperation.²⁵ It is still up to the commander on how to achieve the previously mentioned concepts. The operational level commander can take advantage of informal mechanisms for coordinating different organizations in the same domain.²⁶ According to Chisholm,

“Informal channels of communication, informal bargains and agreements, and norms of reciprocity all contribute directly or indirectly to the processes of coordination. They also form the foundation for formal schemes of coordination, especially promoting consensus in situations initially characterized by conflict and dissension.”²⁷

These informal channels can be used to foster trust in an organization like JIATFE. Trust takes time to develop. The more frequent the contacts of agency players, the more apt they are to trust each other, which according to Shay “...is the cornerstone of cooperation” and “...a function of familiarity and respect.”²⁸ Personnel from different organizations must establish contact for informal channels to develop.²⁹

A prime example of the development of mutual trust through informal channels as part of formal contacts is seen at the tactical level of JIATFE which can be applied at the operational level. Initially the P3C Orion crew will not follow the control from the E2C controller because they don't know the person or understand the capability of the E2C aircraft, so there is a lack of trust. The P3C Orion Crew will continuously seek to verify the information being provided or not even follow the directions of the controller. Only after there has been frequent contact through briefings, exercises and planning will there be mutual trust. The relationship develops to the point where the P3C Orion crew follows without hesitation because they understand the capability of the E2C aircraft and know that the controller can be trusted to provide the correct information. There is a “trust of competence”³⁰ that is developed over time after a few successful missions. The P3C crew trusts the controller:

meaning he trusts the skills of the controller or competence of the person. The E2C controller also knows that he can depend on the P3C crew to find the contact of interest because there is reliability of information which is a product of trust.

Cooperation is accomplished through trust. Prior to the cooperation there are inefficiencies due to duplication of efforts which can be attributed to lack of trust. For example: if there is trust, then the P3C Orion crew will continue on the vector without an actual contact on their system or just a symbol on the display. The P3C Orion crew is confident of two things: first, that they will eventually run into the contact because of the trust of competence and secondly that the E2C controller has the big picture. Harris and Provis state, "...the first sort of trust [competence trust] is just as important in everyday life: family settings, in organizational politics, in sport and in many other spheres, the extent to which we are willing to commit ourselves to a course of action on the basis of others' stated commitments and intentions depends often on our estimate of their competence...."³¹The group interactions, through training, planning and exercises contribute greatly to trust and understanding; it allows the informal channels to develop by increasing the opportunity for contact on a regular basis through formal settings.

The discussion of informal channels to develop trust – necessary ingredient within teams and organizations to increase cooperation – would be incomplete without a look at the norm of reciprocity. This is the case because "the norm of reciprocity provides the foundation for their development and persistence as effective mechanisms for coordination."³² In layman's terms, one is expected to help those who help you.⁴⁶ In other words: I did you a favor now you owe me. An example of this theory is seen at JIATFE.

Ten years ago, the supporting agencies of JIATFE refused to share any information on a drug case if the agency was not going to get credit for the drug bust.³³ Federal agencies would not cooperate, resulting in a duplication of effort on a single case. In order to obtain the cooperation necessary to be successful, the task force would give the agency that originated intelligence on a drug case considerable leverage on dissemination of the intelligence. Supporting agencies that contribute to a successful mission now receive credit for involvement in the drug case. There is an underlying trust that allows this transaction to occur. The agency that originates the intelligence expects to have control of the information as well to share in the success of the mission. If the agency holding the intelligence is not given power to control the information or given credit for participation, then distrust among all parties involved results. On the other hand, if the task force director complies with the agreement, then trust is enhanced.

Understanding is one of the contributors to cooperation among organizations composed of competing agencies with distinct goals and cultures. As stated earlier, understanding is in reference to having knowledge or learning. If the DOD understands all capabilities, cultures, goals and missions, then it can efficiently integrate the agencies into the interagency process to efficiently accomplish the objectives. Problems encountered with the Haiti scenario described above could have been avoided if the military was aware of the limits and capabilities of the federal agencies involved in peace operations. Problems with logistics, duties, planning and so forth could have been contained if the agencies had a clearer understanding of each other. Joint Pub 3-08 points out, that “in many cases, the military commander will discover that resistance and disagreement are based on a lack of information or difference of perception, which can be corrected by ensuring constant communication

between and with all parties concerned.”³⁴ The interagency cooperation could be enhanced by improving trust and understanding in the organization.

Cooperation

Individual countries, organizations, governments, officials with conflicting views, culture, language and values have gained cooperation by improving trust and understanding. These illustrations can be used as a kick off point for the interagency improvement process. The following examples illustrate disparate entities using trust and understanding to realize an objective.

The first applicable example to the interagency process is the System of Cooperation among the American Air Forces (SICOFAA), a multinational arrangement. In SICOFAA, some of the informal channels are used to improve cooperation by enhancing trust and understanding among the Air Forces of the Western Hemisphere. The SICOFAA initially started as a forum to establish an ongoing dialogue, this in turn led to the development of close personal relationships among aviators whose holistic perspective became the foundation of the organization they later formalized.³⁵ The environment of the SICOFAA encouraged mutual confidence and trust among senior aviators of countries throughout the Americas.³⁶ The organization is an American continental organization that provides an opportunity for communication among equals to explore methods of fostering cooperation and trust.

“The purpose of the SICOFAA is to promote cooperation among American air forces through the cultivation of valued personal relationships.”³⁷ Mutual trust and understanding is accomplished through personal contacts and the exchange of information and ideas.³⁸ The

results are a product of sharing knowledge and information, exchange programs, combined exercises, real world operations and integrated approaches to shared problems.

In another case, several city officials from different cities in the state of California conducted studies in “Building Trust and Understanding in your Community.”³⁹ Two of the study’s conclusions can be applied to a JIATF: education and taking the show on the road.⁴⁰ The idea that education increases understanding is simple. Taking the show on the road relates to physically going out to the constituents and keeping them well informed. The leadership must provide the forum that conveys information to the components.⁴¹

A final example of successful improvement in cooperation through trust and understanding is the construction of the Atlanta Olympic Park, a product of “Partnering in the public sector.”⁴² The success was attributed to building trust within the project team by creating a common bond between previously disparate parties which was achieved by each party developing a mutual understanding of the parties’ interest and goals in the project while maintaining a team focus on the objective.⁴³ The government instilled a new attitude of openness and communication with the parties involved to make the project a success.⁴⁴

Recommendations

The goal is to improve the interagency process more specifically through increased cooperation among the agencies. Reorganizing might not help the situation instead, it might make it worse. JIATFE is an organization that has grown over the past nine years to illustrate the successes of interagency cooperation. It is marked by successes such as when a multiple ton shipment of cocaine is interdicted after careful coordination and cooperation of the agencies involved, as well as stories of failures as when a civilian becomes a casualty in the jungle over Peru or on the U.S. border.

This idea is along the line of Chisholm's conclusion on the subject:

Reorganization has no intrinsic value; it is used simply to fix something that is diseased. It follows that before any modification of an organization system is attempted the ailment to be relieved should be carefully diagnosed. Then specific cures for specific problems may be proposed, selected and implemented. Careless tampering with a healthy organization may destroy its vitality and bring into being new and unexpected problems.⁴⁵

A primary means to improve understanding is through education. DOD planners must be educated about the agencies involved in the interagency arena. The DOD must know the limits and capabilities of said agencies in order to integrate the federal agencies into the solution or plan. This could be accomplished through staffing with expert liaison officers (LNO). The LNO must be able to provide inputs on the inner workings of the subject agency. If the LNO doesn't possess the knowledge, then the LNO must be the conduit between the staff and the agency for the information. It would be ideal to have the LNO's training documented, databased and accessible to the director. The LNO's record should be screened in order to assure the candidate possesses the proper skills, training and knowledge required by interagency. The LNO would be the focal point for information on integration, limits and capabilities. This key person should be kept up to date on any changes in its agency in order to provide timely and accurate information to the director or commander on how to best utilize the LNO's parent agency. A civilian LNO permanently assigned to a staff perhaps should attend a course similar to the Naval War College, to gather the proper knowledge to be fully integrated into the combatant commander's staff, but this might be cost prohibitive. The LNO, needless to say, must be trained in the subject of military planning prior to reporting to a military staff. This LNO also brings along established contacts and relationships that contribute to cooperation, trust and understanding.

Education can be achieved by composing a mobile training team that goes out to the components and provides baseline information to the agencies involved. The team can consist of component agency representatives traveling around conveying basic information on the agencies that composed an interagency task force. Information provided can include size, C2 structures, differences, objectives, capabilities and limitations. The traveling teams also can provide the differences in cultures not only between the military and federal agencies, but also among the different services and agencies.

There are already informational pamphlets in existence, but a pamphlet might not have all the answers to the questions that go beyond the basic premise of “here is what we do.” There is no substitute for the face to face “here is what the agency can do for the organization” and “I’m the person that can help you get the answers.”

If the “show can’t go on the road,” then bring the audience to show. JIATFE already has the infrastructure to provide this sort of education to the military as well as the federal agencies. There is an overview brief of JIATFE which provides the basic who we are and what we do. The brief can be expanded to include informational topics about the component agencies resident at JIATFE. This concept is very simple in that it wouldn’t require anything extra besides some prior coordination. Everything required is already residing at the command. All units reporting to the area of responsibility (AOR) should visit the staff for the briefs from all the agencies working with the task force.

Through out the education process which can be a formal part of the organization, the informal channels that can help in the area of trust are simultaneously being developed. The educational settings can help establish relationships, informal communications, bargains and agreements that can assist in the achievement of the objectives. The informal channels are

inherent to the education process, so there is the ability to allow these informal processes to mature to the point of contribution to both understanding and trust. The opportunities to identify and exchange ideas with other interagency players are enhanced through actual contact on a regular basis.

Joint interagency planning is another strategy that the interagency task force can use to develop informal channels to help increase trust in the interagency arena. This planning arena allows members to meet frequently, share ideas and expand relationships. The commander can have frequent planning conferences that bring agency members together. Planning is not only an educational or integration process that can be used by the military to teach the federal agencies about planning for operations, but it also provides the forum to build trust.

The planning process allows members to build trust of competence. Planners work together, build relationships and gain knowledge which can be used in future operations. Planning allows each of the parties to demonstrate knowledge and capabilities in the task at hand. This demonstration of skills contributes to greater trust among the players. The planning process allows the opportunity to build bonds which facilitate mutual trust among the disparate parties because it allows them to focus on a common objective while learning about the goals and interests of the parties involved. Each of the members will have a stake in the plan, an obligation to cooperate for success.

Conclusion

The interagency process brings all the tools of National Power together in order to combat the challenges facing our nation today. This process is necessary to our country in a time when the military is shrinking and the world changing. The Secretary, Department of

Homeland Security, can take the example of JIATFE on how to meld the distinct federal agencies in combating the transnational threat of terrorism to heart. The interagency approach to conducting operations especially in the area of Homeland Security has yet to be perfected and requires cooperation among multiple agencies to achieve the objective.

Cooperation can best be achieved through trust and understanding. The examples previously illustrated have utilized trust and understanding to obtain better cooperation from disparate entities with distinct objectives, cultures and languages. A JIATF can also enhance cooperation at the operational level by enhancing trust and understanding among the federal agencies. Cooperation is essential to the success of the interagency process which if not achieved will lead to inefficiencies among the supporting agencies of the new Department of Homeland Security.

Notes

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