

Bagram air base,
Afghanistan.
AP / Wide World Photo
(Mikhail Metzel)



The Global War on Terrorism

A Regional Approach to Coordination

By CHARLES N. CARDINAL, TIMBER P. PANGONAS, and EDWARD MARKS

According to Ecclesiastes, "Of the making of books there is no end." Much the same can be said of military organizations and the acronyms by which they are known. The Joint Interagency Coordination Group is an example. The term can claim dual parentage, U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) and U.S. Joint

Forces Command (JFCOM). Both commands have wrestled with implementing national security policy in recent years. Segregating diplomatic and military efforts was problematic during the Cold War and became more so in its aftermath.

By the end of the 20th century the Armed Forces had taken joint warfighting to new heights and refined their abilities to mount coalition operations. Civilian agencies also made serious progress in facilitating interagency coordination. Such integration has a long history and was a rationale for establishing the National Security Council

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Report Documentation Page			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188		
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 2002		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2002 to 00-00-2002	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The Global War on Terrorism. A Regional Approach to Coordination			5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
			5b. GRANT NUMBER		
			5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S)			5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
			5e. TASK NUMBER		
			5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 260 Fifth Avenue SW Bg 64 Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
			11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 5	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

(NSC). Presidential Decision Directive 56 issued by the Clinton administration attempted to institutionalize a formal procedure for interagency planning and management of contingency operations. Moreover, the war on drugs has been conducted by a mix of civilian and military instruments. Nevertheless, the stovepipe nature of the Federal bureaucracy was an obstacle to pursuing national interests in a globalized world.

The war on terrorism has galvanized the move toward organizational innovation and reform to improve interagency coordination. The enhanced integration of civilian and military agencies on the operational level was

9/11 led to changes needed for a proactive campaign against international terrorism

under consideration at JFCOM before September 11, 2001. Both the organizers and participants in Universal Vision '01 grappled with the issue of coordination. By the end of the exercise, the concept for an interagency staff directorate on the regional command level had emerged. It was advanced under the command joint experimentation staff and in a white paper, "A Concept for Improving U.S. Interagency Operational Planning and Coordination," which appeared in March 2002. Known as the Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG), it was also tested in Millennium Challenge '02. The final report on the exercise was favorable in its view of JIACG, and JFCOM has been instructed to prepare the concept for operational use in 2004.

In the wake of 9/11, Admiral Dennis Blair, who was then Commander, U.S. Pacific Command, was concerned that military power alone would have limited effects against decentralized non-state terrorist groups. Thus he proposed organizing the Joint Interagency Task Force-Counterterrorism Asia Pacific, with a broad interagency mandate as well as coordinating authority. Other combatant commands submitted similar proposals for some sort of coordination mechanism.

The Joint Staff considered these proposals and then submitted a concept paper on JIACG to the NSC

deputies committee which approved it. The commands were instructed in February 2002 to implement the concept: "JIACGs will be organized to provide interagency advice and expertise to combatant commanders and their staffs, coordinate interagency counterterrorism plans and objectives, and integrate military, interagency, and host-nation efforts."

The combatant commands had already responded by forming joint counterterrorism offices. They were officially renamed JIACGs in spring 2002 following an instruction by the Joint Chiefs, except for U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), which retained the title of joint interagency task force.

Although each group has the same focus, their structure and activities vary with the area of responsibility. While PACOM, CENTCOM, and U.S. Special Operations Command have located the function in the directorate of operations (J-3), JFCOM has created a free-standing element on the command staff, and U.S. European Command (EUCOM) has created an independent directorate under civilian leadership (along the JFCOM model). JFCOM has two JIACGs—the experimental unit mentioned above and an operation element like other commands. The latter will eventually be transferred to U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM). These groups are focused on somewhat different aspects of counterterrorism, with CENTCOM mainly concerned with Afghanistan while EUCOM looks at nonmilitary courses of action and PACOM concentrates on emerging terrorist threats.

JIACGs were authorized for an initial period of six months. Despite the differences among these groups, each is intended to provide the following benefits, as originally outlined by JFCOM:

- strengthen multiagency planning for complex mission tasks
- establish a mechanism to synchronize agency efforts and eliminate waste and duplication
- keep all agencies informed of agency efforts and prevent misconceptions
- provide real time feedback between civilian and military agency efforts.

The Vision

While 9/11 may not have been the first battle of the war on terrorism, it was a cataclysmic event that led to changes needed for a proactive campaign against international terrorism. PACOM previously employed an active defense but had a reactive strategic approach. The first change in command guidance came with a restatement of the regional approach by Admiral Blair:

We will transition to the offensive rapidly; playing defense simply buys time for decisive offensive strikes. . . . The offensive will be proactive vice reactive and must ensure the elements of military power we control are fused synergistically with all elements of national power. The keys to success will be found in changing our mindset to one that is aggressively offensive and relentless in our pursuit of actionable intelligence.

Organizational and procedural shortcomings were quickly identified. For PACOM to work effectively on the interagency level, assets had to be reallocated to meet assigned and implied tasks. Blair directed the creation of a group to implement the command vision and refocus the operational counterterrorism capability. Functioning under the director for operations (J-3) and providing one-stop shopping, this new organization would include operators, intelligence analysts, and planners with expertise in special operations, intelligence, information operations, and civil affairs as well as staff support. Most importantly the group would seamlessly involve other critical players. Efforts by the Departments of State, Treasury, and Justice and the Central Intelligence Agency would be critical. The Joint Interagency Coordination Group/Counterterrorism (JIACG/CT) was organized around representatives from all these organizations.

Building on the words of President Bush, that the global war on terrorism would last years rather than months, this group was a new and integral part of the command, not an appendage patched together to focus on a single crisis.



Filipino rangers,
Basilan Island.

AP / Wide World Photo (Ed Wray)



Photos of terrorists,
Philippines.

AP / Wide World Photo (Bullit Marquez)

Getting Started

Initially PACOM organized an operational planning team to develop responses to national directives and the regional situation. It functioned as an ad hoc organization and was not intended to have a permanent role, but rather to give birth to an integrated staff team on counterterrorism.

The value of an organization lies in the people who make it up. The command picked talent from across the staff to generate traction. The gravity of the task assuaged any hard feeling among staff sections which lost personnel in this restructuring. In addition, given the nature of the group, there was a challenge to acquire personnel who could coalesce as an inter-agency team.

An assertive mindset was central to the vision. A process was needed to reshape the time-tested targeting board process for counterterrorism. The rigor and methodology of this model kept

the targeting focused. Much was learned about threats, available tools, and requirements for solid connectivity. The reorientation of the intelligence apparatus to actionable targeting information, supported by indicators and warning, fed the process. It provided operational focus from the start and forced integration with interagency and coalition partners in the field. It furnished the connectivity for victory when actionable intelligence was garnered from millions of intelligence reports searched over by the targeting team.

There was commitment to build a cohesive team. Two factors contributed to the necessary relationships. First, it was known that little would happen in Honolulu; the action would occur in the field. The focus was placed on key nations in the area and relationships with ambassadors and country teams. The counterterrorism liaison program put tailored teams in American embassies to provide bilateral communication between JIACG/CT and diplomats and the interagency community

in the field. To avoid being obtrusive, these teams serve under the operational control of command representatives in country (defense attachés or military group commanders).

Ambassadors are sensitive to the size and footprint of country teams and must be convinced that their efforts are value added. The task of making the case for the program fell to group leaders who also exposed nations within the region to this new approach.

The second key was linking agencies that were orchestrating counterterrorism on the strategic level. This task involved communicating the new approach and obtaining a commitment

to and participation in the interagency group being organized at Camp Smith. These relationships involved the Joint Staff, U.S. Special Operations Command, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, Central Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Departments of State and the Treasury. While the program was embraced by all players, the devil was in the details. The bureaucracy was simply not agile enough to rapidly support JIACG/CT. A quantum leap in cooperation was needed, but it had to be achieved incrementally as agencies identified personnel and fiscal

JIACG/CT developed intelligence which led to a series of victories against terrorists

requirements. Early relationships proved invaluable. The response of the intelligence community was significant and the Department of the Treasury made an early commitment.

While initial efforts in the war on terrorism often played to a dark house, JIACG/CT facilitated a series of shadow operations. Perhaps the earliest successes in the regional campaign were arrests in Singapore and Malaysia of Jemaah Islamiya cells that were well rehearsed in the press. The arrests occurred in December 2001 after evidence of operational planning against U.S. and allied targets in Singapore was found in the residence of Mohamed Atef in Afghanistan. The rapidity with which the interagency apparatus coordinated with coalition nations led to a series of actions that demonstrated the value of interagency coordination. The discovery of a videotape in Afghanistan was tracked as actionable intelligence. Responses generated by the targeting process were quick and thorough, ensuring that all regional players had access to the information and that requisite actions and coordination were achieved. Prior to the advent of interagency coordination, positive action based on such an intelligence find would have been fraught with difficulty. Unlike December 2001, the effort was crisp and nearly frictionless.

Another example of the new relationships was the coordination with

the Federal Bureau of Investigation on intelligence gleaned from interviews and interrogations. This information is used in developing targets to strike with lethal or non-lethal means. Relations with bureau case officers have led to unprecedented cooperation. The benefits of shared rather than protected information are a testament to this new organization.

The Office of Foreign Asset Control also became a powerful tool. It was introduced to bad actors in the area through a full-time officer in JIACG/CT who aggressively connected the dots on the flow of resources. Incorporating activities of this office provided an appreciation of its tools to combat terrorism. It likewise gained a perspective unavailable to officers in Washington.

A singleness of purpose can be a huge advantage. The group understood the origins of terrorism within the region. Knowing the structure, resources, and goals of terrorists enabled the prediction of their next steps with accuracy. With the same rigor a brigade applies in analyzing the terrain for a combined arms attack, JIACG/CT developed intelligence preparation of the battlespace for all organizations, countries, and targets, which led to a series of regional victories against terrorists.

Looking to the Future

Although the group is a work in progress, it has been considered operationally capable and additive from the outset. There can be no reversion to stovepipes, dysfunctional coordination, and diffusion of efforts on the interagency level. The proliferation of terrorism presents complex problems: asymmetrical, multi-dimensional, and nonlinear. The counterterrorism campaign utilizes JIACG/CT to seek threat neutralization by maximizing capabilities and developing new resources in the area. The key to optimization is interagency synergy.

Compared with ad hoc action, sustained programmatic interagency coordination is difficult. But there is a

tradition of interagency cooperation, including in countering terrorism. JIACG/CT is developing a framework to reach beyond the military into diplomatic, law enforcement, and fiscal matters. As its mission statement indicates, this group "synchronizes and coordinates all [U.S. Government (USG)] and combined operations in PACOM . . . to develop targets for operations, plan regional and country CT campaigns, and enhance USG and host nation CT capabilities and capacity to support the war on terrorism."

To transition from the immediacy of actionable intelligence, the group has prepared for the long haul and developed a targeting concept aimed at terrorist leaders, finances, and infrastructure. As the status of the threat becomes clearer, such targets can be exploited, neutralized, or destroyed with all the instruments of national power.

In addition to targeting, JIACG/CT is planning an outreach program to expand and enhance the counterterrorism effort within the Government and the international community. Tasks will be pursued by increased awareness and information exchange as well as coordination of training and assistance programs. As previously noted, the group will not implement most of these activities but rather serve as a clearing house.

The improvement in counterterrorism capabilities includes the theater security cooperation plan, security assistance, foreign military sales, exercises, and international military education and training. Other agencies also have their own means, such as the antiterrorism assistance program of the Department of State. Not all these tools are appropriate for every nation. Collaboration will be required to tailor counterterrorism packages. Working with the diplomatic missions, the command will shape mission performance plans to reflect country-specific priorities for the war on terror.

There are obvious difficulties in pursuing this task. JIACG/CT does not have the authority to mandate or direct participation. Agencies do not operate differently simply for arbitrary reasons; they have legislative mandates and specific responsibilities.



Searching for victims
in Bali, Indonesia.

AP / Wide World Photo

Camp X-Ray,
Guantanamo Bay.

Fleet Combat Camera, Atlantic (Shane R. McCoy)

Staffing problems also exist among civilian agencies. Personnel assigned to groups range from ten to fifty, although NORTHCOM reportedly contemplates a larger organization. While the JIACG/CT concept calls for participation by civilian officials, staffs are overwhelmingly military (including Reservists on active duty). Most civilian agencies have fewer personnel available to assign than the Armed Forces, which means that the group lacks the optimal level of civilians.

Moreover, JIACG/CTs face technical issues related to interagency communication. Problems with secure connectivity and electronic collaboration

among proprietary classified information systems have inhibited staffs from communicating with their parent agencies and each other. Even transferring security clearances between agencies is cumbersome. Finally there is a problem in differentiating between liaison and coordinating functions, an area that may determine the future of interagency organizations.

PACOM stresses simultaneous interagency efforts to counter terrorism across the region by applying instruments of national power in an integrated and synchronized manner. The command aims to coordinate international efforts to produce an effective regional counterterrorism campaign. The prerequisite for success is capitalizing on strengths of like-minded, responsible governments to spearhead the global war on terrorism within their own borders.

The scope of cooperation is remarkable. One could hardly have foreseen the overwhelming response to date. But much remains to be done on many fronts. The international and interagency landscapes are fertile ground on which to seek victory. Many security challenges will require new relationships and agreements for effective cooperation. The time is ripe to take cooperation in the region to the next level: seizing the opportunity and employing instruments at hand to defeat terror and the threat to civil society in law-abiding nations.

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