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## The Future of the Joint Warfighting Headquarters: An Alternative Approach to the Joint Task Force

Eric Bissonette

Thomas Bruscano

Kelvin Mote

Matthew Powell

Marc Sanborn

*See next page for additional authors*

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**Authors**

Eric Bissonette, Thomas Brusino, Kelvin Mote, Matthew Powell, Marc Sanborn, James Watts, and Louis G. Yuengert



Military Innovation

# COLLABORATIVE STUDIES

# THE FUTURE OF THE JOINT WARFIGHTING HEADQUARTERS:

## An Alternative Approach to the Joint Task Force

**Eric Bissonette, Thomas Bruscano,  
Kelvin Mote, Matthew Powell,  
Marc Sanborn, James Watts,  
and Louis Yuengert**

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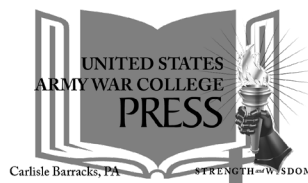


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#### US Navy, Royal Thai Navy participate in CARAT Exercise 2021

Description: Royal Thai Navy ship HTMS *Naresuan* (FFG 421) leads a battle line of warships during an exercise for Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) Thailand 2021 with the amphibious transport dock ship USS *Green Bay* (LPD 20). In its 27th year, the CARAT series is comprised of multinational exercises, designed to enhance US and partner navies' abilities to operate together in response to traditional and nontraditional maritime security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.

US Navy Photo by: Petty Officer 2nd Class Darcy McAtee, Command Destroyer Squadron 7, Gulf of Thailand

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**2021 US Army Best Warrior Competition**

Description: Sergeant First Class Brian Ringrose, a Special Forces engineer representing US Army Special Operations Command, loads a fresh magazine during the stress shoot of the Army Best Warrior Competition held at Fort Knox, Kentucky, Oct. 5, 2021. The best from the US Army compete annually for the title of Best Warrior. Representing seven geographic commands and 22 functional commands, soldiers spend a week competing in a variety of challenges including firing weapons, land navigation, the Army Combat Fitness Test, and various mystery events. These challenges will ultimately test their capabilities and combat readiness.

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**Exercise Baccarat - 2021**

Description: US Marine Corps Second Lieutenant Dakota Smith, a native of Tampa, Florida, and a platoon commander for 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division (2nd MARDIV), waits with a French Legionnaire during Exercise Baccarat in Lozère, Occitanie, France, October 20, 2021. Exercise Baccarat is a three-week joint exercise between 2nd MARDIV and the French Foreign Legion that challenges forces with physical and tactical training and provides the opportunity to exchange knowledge that assists in developing and strengthening bonds.

US Marine Corps Photo by: Lance Corporal Jennifer E. Reyes, US Marine Force Corp Forces, Europe and Africa, Lozère, 1, France

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**Back Cover**

**Joint Task Force Liberia Harrier**

Description: A US Marine Corp AV-8B Harrier aircraft, deployed with the 398th Air Expeditionary Group (AEG), takes off at Freetown International Airport, Sierra Leone. The 398th AEG is currently in Sierra Leone to provide personnel recovery and emergency evacuation capability for the Humanitarian Assistance Survey Teams (HAST) and the Fleet Anti-terrorism Security Teams (FAST) in Liberia, during Joint Task Force (JTF) Liberia.

Official Department of Defense Photo by: First Sergeant Justin D. Pyle, Communications Directorate, Freetown, Sierra Leone

Photo Date: August 14, 2003

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## Foreword

Coming out of the long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States military began to turn its attention to great-power competition with near-peer adversaries. Given the broad and diverse challenges presented by China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and violent extremist organizations, the United States has adopted as broad an approach as possible across the competition continuum. America's long record of military intervention, coupled with real Chinese military threats in the South China Sea and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, suggests the United States military must be prepared for armed conflict.

In 2020, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed professional military education institutions, especially war colleges, to focus more intently on the problems of Joint warfighting. Written by a team of civilian and military faculty and students from the US Army War College Carlisle Scholars Program and across the Joint Force, this collaborative study took the Joint Chiefs of Staff's direction to heart. What began as a classroom study of the makeup of Joint Task Forces, the effectiveness of the Joint Planning Process, and service and Joint warfighting concepts grew into full-blown recommendations for reform. The team concluded the current systems, which rely on overworked combatant commands and ad hoc Joint Task Forces that are headed by quickly repurposed service headquarters, are not ideal for the challenges of rapidly developing Joint warfare in the twenty-first century.

Relying on a wide variety of American historical examples and recent experiences, we recommend the creation of a new type of permanent Joint warfighting command and headquarters called an "American Expeditionary Force."

Thomas Brusino  
Department of Military Strategy, Planning,  
and Operations, US Army War College

Louis G. Yuengert  
Department of Command, Leadership,  
and Management, US Army War College



## Executive Summary

How will the United States military maintain a competitive advantage in future wars? As its adversaries are developing the capabilities to fight and win more rapidly, the US military must become a superior and sustainable Joint Force sooner than its adversaries and move toward establishing standing expeditionary headquarters as its primary warfighting headquarters instead of Joint Task Forces (JTFs). The US military should formalize the American Expeditionary Force as the principal Joint warfighting headquarters to respond to crises requiring military intervention. Successful implementation would require these headquarters to align with the nature of Joint warfighting, take advantage of the strengths of the services, minimize additional force structure requirements, and aid current Joint and service concept development.

Existing combatant commands have not been optimal Joint warfighting headquarters because they devote most of their time to military diplomacy, theater security cooperation, and support to great power competition. Current reliance on Joint Task Forces to fill the gap is problematic because the postcrisis activation of such formations requires significant formation time, and Joint Task Force headquarters are primarily drawn from single-service headquarters that lack the experience and training necessary to conduct complex, Joint operations.

The US military should establish American Expeditionary Forces as the principle Joint warfighting headquarters. These headquarters should be standing; numbered; regionally aligned with geographic combatant commands; and drawn from existing, regionally aligned service headquarters and formations. The proposed American Expeditionary Forces would function with American Expeditionary Force component commanders in Joint command decision making in a command council with the American Expeditionary Force commander; be organized with a functional staff, rather than by J-codes; and use a Joint warfighting operations process whereby the command council and their functional staff develop the Joint operational approach and component command staffs engage in detailed planning and orders production.

A principal benefit of the American Expeditionary Force concept beyond Joint warfighting in a contingency is the ability to align and experiment with both service and Joint operational concepts to enable force management. Standing American Expeditionary Forces are ideally suited to experiment with, evaluate, and develop Joint warfighting concepts and service-specific concepts and integrate the space and cyber domains in Joint warfighting. As regionally aligned, continuously established, Joint formations, the American Expeditionary Forces could most effectively test these concepts against the doctrine and capabilities of potential adversaries.

In the future, the US military's ability to respond to its adversaries' actions quickly, effectively, and Jointly will be a strategic deterrent. Although establishing standing warfighting headquarters that are modeled after the current Joint task force organization would help address some of the efficiency and effectiveness inadequacies of the current approach, this solution is not a complete one. In addition, receiving service buy-in, aligning

with current Joint concept development initiatives, or undergoing successful implementation without adding additional force structure would be unlikely. Therefore, the US military should formalize the American Expeditionary Force as the principle Joint warfighting headquarters to respond to crises requiring military intervention.

## Introduction

In great-power competition, geographic combatant commands play a critical role in developing strategic partnerships within their areas of responsibility and developing and executing campaign plans in support of a whole-of-government approach. Geographic combatant commanders are responsible for military operations in their respective regions during peacetime and war.<sup>1</sup> Although essential, the combatant command's global competition role is distinctively different from its Joint warfighting role. In times of crisis, current practice relies on establishing a Joint Task Force (JTF) headquarters to execute military operations and solve complex national security problems. The use of the Joint Task Force allows combatant commanders to delegate command and control of contingency operations while focusing on day-to-day competition within their regions. Once fully operational, the JTF headquarters can leverage the expertise inherent within the assembled command to maximize the synergy of the Joint Force's capabilities.

Reliance on Joint Task Forces is complicated because the application of US military power is expeditionary while simultaneously requiring a prompt response. Given the geographic position of the United States, the Joint Force is not likely to engage another great power on American soil. Furthermore, quick land grabs have increasingly become the strategy of choice for coercive interstate territorial transactions, requiring the US military to have the capability to respond quickly to adversarial actions that threaten national interests.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the American military's ability to project military power rapidly into a contested theater and sustain the power as a coherent Joint Force represents a significant competitive advantage in great-power competition.

To ensure an enduring competitive advantage, the Joint Force must minimize the time required to begin Joint operations. Although the model of post-crisis JTF formation is effective, its *ad hoc* constitution introduces several systematic inefficiencies. These inefficiencies translate to lost time, increasing the risk of degradation in military effectiveness.<sup>3</sup> At present, the US military maintains technological and doctrinal advantages over adversaries, masking the risk incurred with the *ad hoc* construction of a Joint warfighting headquarters. As adversaries close these gaps, the US military must reduce Joint warfighting inefficiencies. In short, the American military can do better in maintaining its competitive edge.

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1. Kathleen J. McInnis, *Defense Primer: Commanding US Military Operations*, IF10542 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, updated November 8, 2021).

2. Dan Altman, "By Fait Accompli, Not Coercion: How States Wrest Territory from Their Adversaries," *International Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (December 2017): 490–522.

3. Timothy M. Bonds, Myron Hura, and Thomas Young, *Standing Up a More Capable Joint Task Force Headquarters* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011), 1.

The Joint Force can capitalize on the ongoing modernization efforts of the individual services and move toward establishing standing Joint Force expeditionary headquarters to execute Joint warfighting in the Indo-Pacific and European theaters. These headquarters would realize the full potential of design thinking by providing the organizational structure to develop, debate, and experiment with service and Joint concepts, playing to the strengths of both the services and the Joint Force. Moreover, establishing enduring headquarters elements aligned against an identified threat would provide a concrete basis for planning—and thus improve—the robustness of contingency plans. Finally, once a headquarters has been established, commanders and their staff officers could experiment with innovative headquarters design concepts that foster critical command-staff relationships among the officers' respective service force providers and other US governmental and international agencies. Formalizing an enduring organizational structure is the first step in optimizing the implementation of other ongoing, service-led initiatives designed to increase jointness.

Calls for standing Joint Force headquarters are not new. The demonstrated military effectiveness of the JTF model, coupled with increasing service-specific resource requirements and tightening fiscal constraints, has resulted in little evolution in Joint Force headquarters construction since the end of World War II.<sup>4</sup> The zero-sum federal budgeting processes force the services to compete for resources. Because of their influence on the defense budget and their important domain-specific demands, internal concept development and programs take precedent over Joint Force requirements, especially as those requirements relate to Joint expeditionary warfighting. Therefore, relying on an “economy of force” warfighting headquarters so services can reallocate resources elsewhere is appealing.<sup>5</sup>

This collaborative study describes the challenges associated with current approaches to Joint warfighting, including the use of the combatant command as a warfighting headquarters and the insufficiency of the Joint Task Force in responding to a crisis. Analysis of the Joint Task Force includes response time, manning, and training and readiness issues. Additionally, the study discusses the challenges of Joint warfighting, including the critical differences between single-service and Joint warfighting and the unique aspects of Joint command and control. Subsequently, the authors propose an alternative, standing Joint warfighting

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4. Charles Krulak, “Commandant’s Planning Guidance,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 79, no 8. (August 1995): A-5; Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, September 30, 2001), 33–34; Craig A. Barkley, *The Standing Joint Force Headquarters: A Planning Multiplier?* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, 2006), 1; Mark D. Mandeles, “Imposing Order on Chaos: Establishing JTF Headquarters,” *JCOA Journal* (Summer 2010): 21–32; Chris Dougherty, *More Than Half the Battle: Information and Command in a New American Way of War* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, May 2021), 2; and Bradley Lynn Coleman and Timothy A. Schultz, “The Cornerstone of Joint Force Transformation: The Standing Joint Force Headquarters at US Southern Command, 2001–2011,” *Journal of Military History* 85 (October 2021): 1029–68.

5. Michael G. Kamas, David W. Pope, and Ryan N. Propst, “Exploring a New System of Command and Control: The Case for US Africa Command,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 87 (4th Quarter 2017): 83.

headquarters, provisionally called the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), that has been developed within the constraints described in the preceding paragraphs. Discussion of the American Expeditionary Force includes a potential organizational construct, the roles of critical elements in the Joint operations process, and how the organizational framework could be applied within select combatant commands. Finally, the study discusses the implications of having standing headquarters that can analyze and experiment with current service and Joint operational concepts to be best postured for future conflict.





# Challenges with Current Joint Warfighting Approaches

## The Combatant Command as a Joint Warfighting Headquarters

Since the end of World War II, the United States has executed command and control of its military forces through the Unified Command Plan, which integrates the 11 unified combatant commands.<sup>6</sup> The Department of Defense can use the combatant command headquarters as a Joint warfighting headquarters, but empirical historical analysis suggests maintaining unity of command, a tenet critical to effective Joint warfighting, suffers under this organizational structure.<sup>7</sup> In the Korean War, the first test of the Unified Command Plan, the command was hardly Joint, despite having US Army, Navy, and Air Force component commands. In addition to being the Far East commander, General Douglas MacArthur retained command of all Army forces in Korea, though he was charged with the primary responsibility of defending Japan.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the Far East Command staff “was essentially an Army Staff, except for a Joint Strategic Plans and Operations Group (JSPOG), which had Air Force and Navy representation.”<sup>9</sup> Finally, the formation of United Nations Command (which MacArthur commanded) was also supported by Far East Command, further confusing command relationships. Conversely, the US military experience in Vietnam demonstrated a different approach to ensuring unity of command.

During the Vietnam War, the combatant commander delegated command authority to a subordinate unified command. Command of US forces in Vietnam was initially split between United States Pacific Command and Strategic Air Command, with United States Pacific Command delegating responsibility to the commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam; commander in chief, Pacific Air Forces; and commander in chief, Pacific Fleet.<sup>10</sup> Because of the complexity involved in coordinating these commands, United States Pacific Command eventually established commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam as a subordinate unified command with naval and air component commanders. Commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam had responsibility for a Joint operational area that included South Vietnam and the surrounding

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6. Edward J. Drea et al., *History of the Unified Command Plan, 1946–2012* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS], 2013), 1; David Jablonsky, *War by Land, Sea, and Air: Dwight Eisenhower and the Concept of Unified Command* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); and Thomas A. Cardwell III, *Command Structure for Theater Warfare: The Quest for Unity of Command* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1984).

7. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, Joint Publication 1 (Washington, DC: JCS, updated July 12, 2017), V-1.

8. Drea et al., *Unified Command Plan*, 15–16.

9. Drea et al., *Unified Command Plan*, 16.

10. Drea et al., *History of the Unified Command Plan*, 25; and Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (Washington, DC: US Army Center for Military History, 2006), 35–69.

coastal waters. Anything outside the established Joint operational area required coordination with United States Pacific Command and its corresponding components.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the US military did not rely on the combatant command as the warfighting headquarters in Vietnam and would not do so again until the Gulf War, during which the command structure was again complex and confusing. (For detail, see “Command and Control in the 1991 Gulf War,” below.)

Recent history has also shown the use of combatant commands as warfighting headquarters continues to muddle unity of command. A recent study of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars notes the principle of unity of command “seems to have been bypassed in the development of disjointed command and control structures.”<sup>12</sup> Defense Secretary Robert Gates observed as late as 2007 that the command structure in Afghanistan was a “jerry-rigged arrangement [that] violated every principle of the unity of command.”<sup>13</sup> In sum, the complexity of the geographic combatant command’s area of responsibility, combined with the complexity of Joint warfighting, renders the development of effective command-and-control structures extremely difficult for combatant commanders.

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11. Drea et al., *Unified Command Plan*, 26.

12. Richard D. Hooker Jr. and Joseph J. Collins, “Introduction,” in *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, ed. Richard D. Hooker Jr. and Joseph J. Collins (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2015), 10.

13. Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Knopf, 2014), 206.

### **Afghanistan and Iraq: Requirement for Subordinate Warfighting Headquarters**

Following al-Qaeda's terrorist attacks on 9/11 and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, United States Central Command (CENTCOM), the geographic combatant command responsible for the area, was committed to planning for and conducting operations in Afghanistan in October and November 2001. The CENTCOM commander, General Tommy Franks, committed US Army Central (also known as Third US Army) as the ground component headquarters to oversee combat operations in Afghanistan. At the same time, United States Central Command maintained overall command and control of the intervention in Afghanistan. To achieve unity of command, Franks reorganized the service components into functional commands: Coalition Forces Air Component Command, Coalition Forces Land Component Command, etc. As a result, Franks combined "all of the ground forces—US Army, US Marines, and Coalition ground forces—into a single command under a single commander."<sup>14</sup> Third US Army, once US Army Central and now Coalition Forces Land Component Command, assumed responsibility for all ground forces and became fully committed to the war in Afghanistan. Joint integration and synchronization, however, remained at the CENTCOM level.

In late November 2001, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld pressed United States Central Command for an updated plan for a regime change in Iraq. As planning progressed, Lieutenant General Paul Mikolashek, the Coalition Forces Land Component Command commander, was responsible for overseeing the prosecution of the war in Afghanistan and for planning, preparing, and executing the invasion of Iraq as the "tactical headquarters."<sup>15</sup> In late summer 2002, Franks relieved Mikolashek because he was "too cautious to oversee an aggressive invasion campaign."<sup>16</sup> In addition, more tellingly, Franks agreed to activate "a separate combined Joint Task Force for Afghanistan . . . so that CFLCC could focus entirely on Iraq for the time being."<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, United States Central Command could not effectively manage two disparate contingencies. As the Iraq War progressed beyond the initial invasion, United States Central Command transitioned command and control of operations in Iraq by giving Coalition Forces Land Component Command the additional role of Combined Joint Task Force – Iraq before later transitioning responsibility to the Army's V Corps, which would become Combined Joint Task Force - 7. Although these headquarters were called combined Joint Task Forces, they consisted of Army and Marine forces, but not air or maritime forces.<sup>18</sup> This transition allowed Coalition Forces Land Component Command and United States Central Command to resume a broader theater perspective.<sup>19</sup> Recent experiences continue to highlight the importance of a Joint warfighting headquarters below the level of the geographic combatant command.

14. Joel D. Rayburn and Frank K. Sobchak, eds., *The US Army in the Iraq War* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College Press, 2019), 1:33.

15. Rayburn and Sobchak, *Iraq War*, 55.

16. Rayburn and Sobchak, *Iraq War*, 55.

17. Rayburn and Sobchak, *Iraq War*, 56.

18. Rayburn and Sobchak, *Iraq War*, 135–36.

19. Rayburn and Sobchak, *Iraq War*, 136–38.

Beyond geographic and Joint warfighting complexity, the role of the combatant command continues to expand. Currently, geographic combatant commanders and their staffs are instrumental in developing strategic partnerships in their areas of responsibility, developing and executing commanders' campaign plans, and preparing their respective theater sustainment infrastructure in the event of a crisis. Should a crisis emerge, the geographic combatant commands play a critical role in managing regional partners and allies and maintaining a broad perspective of the conflict or crisis, none of which is easily accomplished if the command is myopically focused on the crisis itself. While all these activities are important, they differ distinctively from Joint warfighting.

The historical record highlights the challenges associated with relying on the combatant command to serve as a warfighting headquarters, particularly when the command is managing multiple crises in disparate regions within an area of responsibility. Recognizing the competing priorities associated with a return to great-power competition, demonstrated challenges in maintaining unity of command during complex combat operations, and the responsibilities associated with sustaining a theater, the US military primarily relies on a JTF headquarters model when responding to crises. This model assigns the mission and the responsibility to a single commander and frees the combatant commander, staff, and service-component commands to maintain a theater-level military diplomacy perspective.<sup>20</sup>

## Insufficiency of the Joint Task Force

While a Joint Task Force offers the strategic flexibility of tailored force packages, these organizations—particularly at the headquarters level—suffer from significant inefficiency during large contingency operations. The *ad hoc* construction of the JTF headquarters results in the juxtaposition of multiple talented, service-specific professionals, all experts in their service's capabilities and organizational culture. But because the group has not trained together, it cannot reap the collective benefits that emerge in highly cohesive teams.<sup>21</sup> In this sense, the JTF headquarters is like a pickup team of five elite professional basketball players from different teams. If matched against a college team, the professional athletes, despite miscommunication and a lack of cohesiveness, will likely prevail. Pitting the players against an equally capable professional team, however, will likely cause them to lose.

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20. *Hearing to Receive Testimony on 30 Years of Goldwater-Nichols Reform, Before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, 114th Cong. (2015) (statement of John J. Hamre, president and chief executive officer of the Center for Strategic and International Studies); and George Stewart, Scott M. Fabbri, and Adam B. Siegel, *JTF Operations Since 1983*, CRM 94-42 (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, July 1994).

21. Richard A Lacquement Jr., "Welding the Joint Seams," *Proceedings* 128, no. 10 (October 2002): 82–85.

The current process of establishing a JTF headquarters results in an initial crisis response time that is too slow. Further delays in fully manning the headquarters reduce the effectiveness of Joint operational planning and execution. To mitigate this risk, the Department of Defense temporarily designates one of the service component commands to serve as the base headquarters element. Although Joint Enabling Capabilities Command is available to augment this nascent headquarters, this intervention is insufficient. The designated service component command headquarters must continue to execute its daily theater responsibilities while building a Joint Task Force and planning future combat operations. Additionally, inefficiencies in manning and an inability for Joint collective training contribute to an accumulating risk to military effectiveness.

## *Crisis Response Time*

### **Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve Response Time**

The following excerpts from an after-action review of the Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve formation and transition highlight the significant response time that results from using “JTF-capable” and designated service headquarters as Joint Task Forces.

“In June 2014, the situation in Iraq reached a level of crisis and the United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) was directed to commence military operations against Daesh (also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant or ISIL). The USCENTCOM commander designated the Army component, the United States Army Central Command (ARCENT), as a joint force land component command (JFLCC) for operations in Iraq.”<sup>22</sup>

“USCENTCOM designated CJFLCC-I as Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), eventually becoming a combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) in mid-October [2014]. The joint manning document (JMD) was created to sustain a CJTF while continuing theater army responsibilities for a command that was also designated as a combined joint forces land component command (CJFLCC) by USCENTCOM for operations in the joint operations area. The time frame from submission of the JMD until boots on the ground was anticipated at 120 days from the Secretary of Defense’s approval.”<sup>23</sup>

“From the start of USCENTCOM’s operations against Daesh, to the deployment of U.S. Army III Corps as the CJTF, 15 months had passed. In this time, ARCENT was designated as a CJFLCC, and then later also served as the ARFOR and ultimately CJTF-OIR.”<sup>24</sup>

As the adversaries of the United States close the technological capability gap, the US military will rely more on the rapid projection of ready, Joint military forces to achieve competitive overmatch. Inherently, forming a Joint Task Force leads to an inefficient response, requiring the newly designated commander and staff to conduct the following complex tasks simultaneously: crisis response planning; headquarters formation; Joint, interagency, and coalition coordination; and subordinate force

22. US Army Combined Arms Center and Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), *ARCENT Transition to Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve: Lessons and Best Practice*, Initial Impressions Report no. 16-10 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: CALL, March 2016), 1.

23. US Army Combined Arms Center and CALL, *ARCENT Transition*, 1.

24. US Army Combined Arms Center and CALL, *ARCENT Transition*, 2 (emphasis added).

preparation.<sup>25</sup> Accomplishing these tasks incurs a considerable time cost, compressing the planning and preparation time for weeks to months after JTF activation.<sup>26</sup> Seventy percent of Joint Task Force headquarters have less than 35 days from initial notice to operational employment.<sup>27</sup> As the pace of great-power competition accelerates, a future contingency will likely provide even less lead time, considering the increased use of rapid land grabs as an adversary's strategy of choice.

To mitigate initial JTF activation risks and fill the gap, the US military has come to rely on "JTF-capable" headquarters. These headquarters are frequently service component commands in the combatant command. However, these headquarters are often ineffective because of manning, training, and readiness gaps. Figure 1 shows the gap between the ideal JTF-capable headquarters and the historical trend.<sup>28</sup> This comparison is not a criticism; instead, it highlights that because the service-specific command is filling dual roles, managing these roles in great-power competition in their theater while preparing to serve as a Joint warfighting headquarters is difficult. The need to transition responsibility from the JTF-capable headquarters to a designated Joint Task Force only complicates the Joint Force's response. A standing headquarters focused solely on warfighting and crisis response would minimize the manning, training, and readiness gaps in the current paradigm.

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25. Deployable Training Division, *Forming a JTF HQ* (Suffolk, VA: Joint Staff J7, September 2015), 3.

26. Bonds, Hura, and Young, *Joint Task Force Headquarters*, 1.

27. Bonds, Hura, and Young, *Joint Task Force Headquarters*, *Joint Task Force*, 1.

28. Deployable Training Division, *Forming a JTF HQ*, 10.



Figure 1. JTF-capable headquarters' historic readiness

Giving commands dual roles and collocating them constitute an additional readiness concern. Although giving commands dual roles or collocating them accelerates JTF activation, improves communication flow, and receives praise as a result, this consolidation comes at a cost. For example, in the case of Joint Task Force Odyssey Dawn, the Joint Task Force and Joint Force maritime component commander were collocated onboard the USS Mount Whitney. This arrangement led to key leaders playing dual roles. The N2 Navy intelligence officer was also the J2 Joint officer, the N5 Navy plans officer was also the J5 Joint officer, and the Navy surgeon became the Joint surgeon, etc.<sup>29</sup> Many on the staff reported they were “burned out,” raising questions about the long-term sustainability of such an arrangement. Giving command teams dual roles also reduces the availability of forces to respond to another contingency. If other contingencies arise, forming another Joint Task Force would be problematic, and the dual-hatted command teams would struggle to respond with available forces and the appropriate bandwidth.

29. Joe Quartararo Sr., Michael Rovenolt, and Randy White, “Libya’s Operation *Odyssey Dawn*: Command and Control,” *PRISM* 3, no. 2 (March 2012): 149.



### Joint Task Force Haiti: A Case for Standing Joint Task Forces

Lessons learned from the US response to the 2010 Haitian earthquake exemplify the benefits of a standing Joint headquarters. On January 12, 2010, a 7.0-magnitude earthquake in Haiti destroyed vast areas of the nation's capital, killing as many as 300,000 people and leading to one of the largest deployments of US forces for disaster relief in US history. Mass and initiative enabled a prompt, robust response. Critical to this response was United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) maintaining a Standing Joint Force Headquarters that had forces stationed in proximity to Haiti (though the standing force was not manned to full strength). Lieutenant General Ken Keen, commander of the Standing Joint Force Headquarters, quickly determined initial requirements and communicated a broad operational approach that resulted in resources being assigned to the relief effort quickly and ahead of formal processes before Operation Unified Response officially began on January 14, 2010.

The Standing Joint Force Headquarters' response during the Haitian earthquake demonstrated that these standing formations provide the foundation for the collaboration required in Joint, interagency, and multinational operations before a crisis occurs. Keen's recommendations and observations emphasize the value realized when existing Joint headquarters elements support disaster relief operations.<sup>30</sup> Such elements can help develop doctrine; facilitate planning, training, and exercises with interagency partners; monitor the readiness of specialized units; and maintain historical knowledge of unit operations.

Although not representative of a Joint warfighting scenario, the experiences of Joint Task Force Haiti demonstrate the efficiency the US military can gain through standing Joint formations focused on crisis response within a combatant command's area of responsibility.<sup>31</sup>

### *Manning*

Regardless of the mission, a JTF headquarters' primary asset is people. A diverse mix of properly trained personnel is vital in the early stages of the operations cycle. Rapidly manning the Joint Task Force provides a competitive advantage. But this advantage is rarely realized, partly because JTF headquarters often lack staff in important specialties when the headquarters begins operations. Obtaining all personnel required to carry out planning, intelligence, logistics, communications, and the primary command and control necessary for operations can take a JTF headquarters up to six months. In practice, the mission-specific capabilities gained from low-density, highly specialized military professionals are rarely present when operations begin. This process is lengthy because leaders must

30. P. K. (Ken) Keen et al., "Foreign Disaster Response: Joint Task Force-Haiti Observations," *Military Review* 90, no. 6 (November–December 2010): 85–96.

31. Gary Cecchine et al., *The US Military Response to the 2010 Haiti Earthquake: Considerations for Army Leaders* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013).

first design the JTF headquarters, develop a Joint manning document, obtain the combatant commander's approval of this document, and have the Joint Staff J1 validate the document to reach the desired manpower level.<sup>32</sup>

### Manning Issues in Joint Task Force Liberia

In 2003, Liberia was in its 23rd year of civil war, and short but violent engagements between rebel and government forces marked the first half of the year. The security situation in the capital city of Monrovia collapsed, forcing the UN and other humanitarian organizations to leave the country just as thousands of frightened civilians migrated toward the capital to secure food and safety.<sup>33</sup> As the situation continued to deteriorate in March, United States European Command (EUCOM) began posturing forces in the region to prepare for future operations. On July 17, the command sent the US Army Southern European Task Force (Airborne) warning orders to establish a Joint Task Force by July 25.

The mission objective of Joint Task Force Liberia was to provide the necessary support for a regional entity, the Economic Community of West African States, to mitigate the humanitarian crisis in the vicinity of Monrovia. The US mission in Liberia succeeded, but this encouraging outcome required overcoming significant manning inefficiencies through the fortuitous arrival of training personnel. The supporting mission for US forces meant a smaller footprint than may have been required for more direct US involvement, yet manning was still one of the most challenging aspects of forming the Joint Task Force. The Southern European Task Force experienced delays in filling the EUCOM-approved Joint manning document billets, negatively affecting the initial planning effort. As mission analysis, which occurred early in the planning process, was noted as the most important phase, the effect of the manning delays was exacerbated. The Southern European Task Force was training arriving staff personnel at the same time the JTF establishment warning order was issued. Part of this training was led by personnel from the Army's BattleCommand Training Program from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; these trainers helped in the initial augmentation of the JTF staff.<sup>34</sup>

Joint Enabling Capabilities Command, now a part of United States Transportation Command, was established partially to address these sorts of manning issues. (In 2008, United States Joint Forces Command approved the establishment of Joint Enabling Capabilities Command. In 2011, Joint Enabling Capabilities Command was reassigned to United States Transportation Command due to United States Joint Forces

32. Bonds, Hura, and Young, *Joint Task Force Headquarters, Joint Task Force*, 1.

33. Delphine Marie, "Tens of Thousands Displaced by Fighting near Monrovia," Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (website), June 6, 2003, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2003/6/3ee0a6a57/tens-thousands-displaced-fighting-near-monrovia.html>.

34. Blair A. Ross Jr., "The US Joint Task Force Experience in Liberia," *Military Review* 85, no. 3 (May-June 2005): 60-67.

Command’s disestablishment.)<sup>35</sup> Through its Joint Planning Support Element and Joint Communications Support Element, Joint Enabling Capabilities Command “provides planners, public affairs specialists, and communications capabilities to Combatant Commanders to enable the rapid establishment of a Joint Force Headquarters or in support of other missions, exercises, or planning efforts.”<sup>36</sup> Joint Enabling Capabilities Command provides tremendous value in this arena, but the command has limited resources. Planners and communicators from the command are overextended and underresourced as current humanitarian crises, which are not likely to abate soon, monopolize command manpower.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, supporting a contingency that required a tailored capabilities package to counter a threat across multiple domains would be difficult for the command. Even if the command could rapidly respond to such a contingency, their ability to respond to multiple contingencies simultaneously is limited—especially if the command was required to engage in fast-paced, intensive operations against great-power competitors.

### *Collective Training*

The readiness and availability of JTF forces are also suboptimal under the current construct.<sup>38</sup> Establishing a Joint Task Force during a time of crisis requires the primarily single-service staff to learn and develop these foundational Joint elements while executing the mission. The roles, responsibilities, processes, and command-and-control relationships of a Joint headquarters differ significantly from those of a single-service headquarters. Many single-service headquarters have little experience coordinating and executing different command relationships for other service units. For instance, in the case of Joint Task Force Odyssey Dawn, the staff’s doctrinal understanding of operational control, tactical control, and direct support was lacking.<sup>39</sup> The need for the Joint Task Force to coordinate across both United States Africa Command and European Command combatant commands compounded this problem. The lack of understanding and coordination *in situ* introduces inefficiencies and wastes time. Previous Joint Task Forces succeeded in their missions despite these handicaps because services efficiently carried out their various functions, and all involved provided herculean efforts to get the job done. These efforts may not be enough in future crises in which the pace of operations exceeds that of previous JTF missions. Training as a Joint Task Force before the crisis also allows for the inclusion of more capabilities in readiness preparation.

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35. “JECC History,” Joint Enabling Capabilities Command (website), accessed on May 26, 2021, <https://www.jecc.mil/Command-History/>.

36. “Mission Capabilities,” Joint Enabling Capabilities Command (website), accessed on June 25, 2022, <https://www.jecc.mil/About-the-JECC/Mission-Capabilities/>.

37. Michael Hutchens, “The Joint Planning Support Element and JTF Formation” (briefing, Carlisle, PA, May 7, 2021).

38. Lacquement, “Welding,” 82–85.

39. Quartararo, Rovenolt, and White, “*Odyssey Dawn*,” 147.



# Challenges of Joint Warfighting

## Joint versus Service Warfighting

The history of Joint warfighting continuously reinforces one undeniable tenet: Command in Joint warfare is qualitatively different from command within the different services. The individual services are specialized because of the unique attributes of their primary physical domains. The services follow their theories, doctrine, and processes—all of which take a career in the given service to master. The working structure of American Joint warfighting commands implicitly recognizes this reality. Air Force, Navy or Marine, and Army commanders lead the so-called “Joint” air, maritime, and land commands. For example, the Joint Force land component commander, maritime component commander, and air component commander represent service headquarters in actuality and are Joint in name only. Indeed, the headquarters do not have Joint staffs; rather, they operate with their respective G, N, and A staffs.

The lesson—not a critique but an observation—is that no individual, not even the most well trained, well educated, and experienced, is prepared for all considerations the command of a truly Joint force comprises. For instance, it is hard to imagine an Army officer proficient in directly commanding a Navy fleet, Air Force wing, or Marine Expeditionary Force, just as picturing an Air Force or Navy officer in direct command of an Army corps or division would be difficult. (General John Lejeune of the US Marine Corps commanded an Army division in World War I, but he did so under special circumstances. Lejeune was a graduate of the US Army War College, and his 2nd Division was made up of an Army brigade and a Marine brigade.)<sup>40</sup>

Further, in doctrine and much recent practice, the United States military has relied on a Joint staff organized in the J1 through J8 structure, built up with various centers, cells, working groups, etc., to help the new Joint warfighting commander fill the gap. This approach leads to two problems. First, staff members have no better grasp of the intricacies and interactions of all parts of the Joint Force than the commander. Indeed, in practice, the core of a newly created JTF staff comes from whatever service-specific headquarters that becomes the JTF staff. For example, if an Army commander is designated as the JTF commander, his or her G staff becomes a J staff overnight. Although this J staff is supplemented by representatives from the other services and enablers, the staff is still dominated by officers with an Army perspective.

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40. Merrill L. Bartlett, *Lejeune: A Marine's Life* (Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute Press, 2012).

The second problem extends beyond personnel limitations to the doctrinal structure and processes of Joint warfighting headquarters. Historically, the Joint staff structure (J1 through J8) and processes (the Joint Planning Process) developed most directly from the Army's field G staff and the Military Decision-Making Process.<sup>41</sup> While the other services have adopted superficially similar structures in their N and A staffs, these commands and staffs plan and issue guidance to their fighting forces in significantly different ways. A fleet does not fight like a division, a wing, or even a Marine Air-Ground Task Force, and vice versa. Trying to make these service-specific formations the same would be foolish.

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41. Kelvin Crow and Joe R. Bailey, eds., *Essential to Success: Historical Case Studies in the Art of Command at Echelons above Brigade* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Army University Press, 2017).

## Joint Warfighting and Unique Service Approaches

The experiences and operations of the Air Force in Joint commands illustrate the nuances of unique service approaches. Contrary to popular belief, the air commander in Joint Task Forces is rarely the Joint Force Air Component Commander and holds a position as either the Joint Air Component Coordination Element or, as in recent instances, the Air Expeditionary Task Force commander.<sup>42</sup> Either way, and in keeping with airpower theory and doctrine, the Joint Force Air Component Commander role remains at the wider theater level. The specifics of the exact command relationship depend on the circumstances.<sup>43</sup> Air operations are not run through a process like the Joint Planning Process (JPP); instead, air operations are run through the air tasking order. In the Persian Gulf War, General Charles Horner used the air tasking order to maintain a nearly service-specific level of control of air fires, partly because this characteristic of air operations was opaque to commanders and staff from other services, even in Joint commands.<sup>44</sup>

Similarly, General Dwight Eisenhower, in an exception to the rest of his straightforward command relationships in his Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), dealt with specific matters concerning airpower. The US Strategic Air Forces refused to take orders from Eisenhower's subordinate air commander based "upon the conviction that a Tactical Air Commander, who is always primarily concerned with the support of front line troops, could not be expected to appreciate properly the true role and capabilities of Strategic Air Forces and would therefore misuse them."<sup>45</sup> As the Joint Force commander, Eisenhower had to fight for command of the Strategic Air Forces "for the preparatory stages of the assault" and secure the establishment of the beachhead.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, Eisenhower recognized that direct command would be limited to the crisis period, and only then because the D-Day endeavor was exceptionally perilous. Normally, airpower's ability to attack targets nearly anywhere in support of the overall objectives of the war made confining activities to the support of a single land operation foolish.<sup>47</sup>

## Command and Control

The second and more important problem with the Joint staff organization and processes is based on the unheeded lessons of experience, both historical and recent.

. Alex Grynkewich and Antonio J. Goldstrom, "The AEFT Today: Enabling Mission Command of Airpower," *Air & Space Power Journal* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 4–19.

43. Brien Alkire et al., *Command and Control of Joint Air Operations in the Pacific: Methods for Comparing and Contrasting Alternative Concepts* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018).

44. Richard Mackenzie, "A Conversation with Chuck Horner," *Air Force Magazine* 74, no. 6 (June 1991): 57–64; Rebecca Grant, "Horner's Gulf War," *Air Force Magazine* 99, no. 3 (March 2016): 22–26; and Tom Clancy and Chuck Horner, *Every Man a Tiger: The Gulf War Air Campaign* (New York: Berkley Books, 1999).

45. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe: A Personal Account of World War II* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1952), 221–22.

46. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 221–22.

47. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 221–22.

Namely, neither the decision-making processes nor the guidance at Joint warfighting headquarters matches what these headquarters actually do or should do.

The record is clear and overwhelming. Most guidance issued by Joint warfighting headquarters takes on the nature of the commander's intent, leaving the traditional detailed planning and execution to the air, maritime, and land commands, often with the staffs of these subordinate commands liaising directly with one another as necessary. As General John Yeosock, former US Army Central commander, stated clearly about the matter after the Persian Gulf War, "The CINC [General Norman Schwarzkopf] said, 'I'm the concept man, you all work out the details.' That was the key to the absolute trust and confidence we had in each other and to our extremely close teamwork."<sup>48</sup> This aspect of Joint warfighting staffs might seem counterintuitive because these staffs conduct an enormous amount of planning and orders production. Most of that work is very actionable and thorough, but it is also not correctly focused.

The problem's root lies in the Joint warfighting command's functioning through J-structure staffs and the associated doctrinal planning processes. On paper, this process starts with the Joint Force commander providing guidance or intent to his or her Joint staff and the staff, under the direction of the chief of staff, entering the Joint Planning Process. The process usually involves some combination of the J3 (Operations), J35 (Future Operations), and J5 (Plans) leading a planning effort whereby courses of action are produced, evaluated, adopted, fleshed out, and turned into orders under the direction of the commander. The concern is twofold. This process is based almost solely on the Army's approach to leading its specific formations in war and is primarily driven by an inexperienced staff dominated by the members of the service headquarters converted into the Joint headquarters. In other words, the structure and functioning of Joint warfighting headquarters emphasize Army-specific detailed planning and does not facilitate—and sometimes actually impedes—a Joint approach.

A better approach, often informally and imperfectly adopted (without doctrinal guidance) by historical and recent Joint warfighting commands, refocuses the structure and decision-making processes on the more conceptual nature of high command and planning. Joint *ad hoc* command team meetings with the Joint commander making decisions and issuing guidance in close cooperation with the air, maritime, and land commanders in conference is the simplest form of this process. Although referred to by different names ("war councils," "command councils," or, as in Eisenhower's Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, "Supreme Commander's conferences"), in these meetings, senior commanders collaborate to develop their intent and make decisions as to the overall

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48. JCS, *Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States*, Joint Publication 1 (Washington, DC: JCS, January 10, 1995), A-4.



Joint operational approach.<sup>49</sup> These commanders bring their component perspectives and staff planning efforts to the meetings. The commanders then take the agreed-upon Joint operational approach back to their respective service headquarters to guide detailed planning and the issuance of orders by the air, maritime, and land command staffs via their processes and best practices. Regular meetings drive an iterative process whereby the developing situation guides and reshapes the concept.

Absent such an *ad hoc* arrangement (and even given daily videoconferences between the Joint commander and the component commanders, at best), the current process has the individual Joint commander serving as the single filter through which all component perspectives on the mission are shared with his or her Joint staff. Then, as described earlier, the staff (with all its limitations) develops the concept while following a process focused on detailed planning. This process occurred in the Persian Gulf War, for example, when multiple Joint and service-specific planning staffs worked on detailed plans independently (see “Command and Control in the Persian Gulf War”).

The repeated examples show the Joint operational approach concept is the main business of Joint warfighting commands at the highest levels. These more conceptual approaches are developed by the Joint commanders working together. Meanwhile, the component command staffs handle the detailed planning and order production. In the current system, the two functions are out of sync; as a result, the structure and processes at the Joint headquarters need reworking.

This problem is not new. After World War II, the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia, began producing the Staff Officers’ Manual for Joint Operations for educational purposes. Unlike more recent versions and the equivalent Joint doctrine, the first manual focused on the functioning of Joint commands for armed conflict. The 1949–50 edition includes a telling graphic (see figure 2).<sup>50</sup> Then, Joint warfighting commands had two structures: one for command and another for the staff. These organizational structures are still in place today. The problem then—and today—is linking these two structures.

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49. Forrest C. Pogue, *The Supreme Command*, United States Army in World War II: The European Theater of Operations (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1954).

50. Armed Forces Staff College, *Staff Officers’ Manual for Joint Operations*, 2nd rev. ed. (Norfolk, VA: Armed Forces Staff College, 1949), 4.

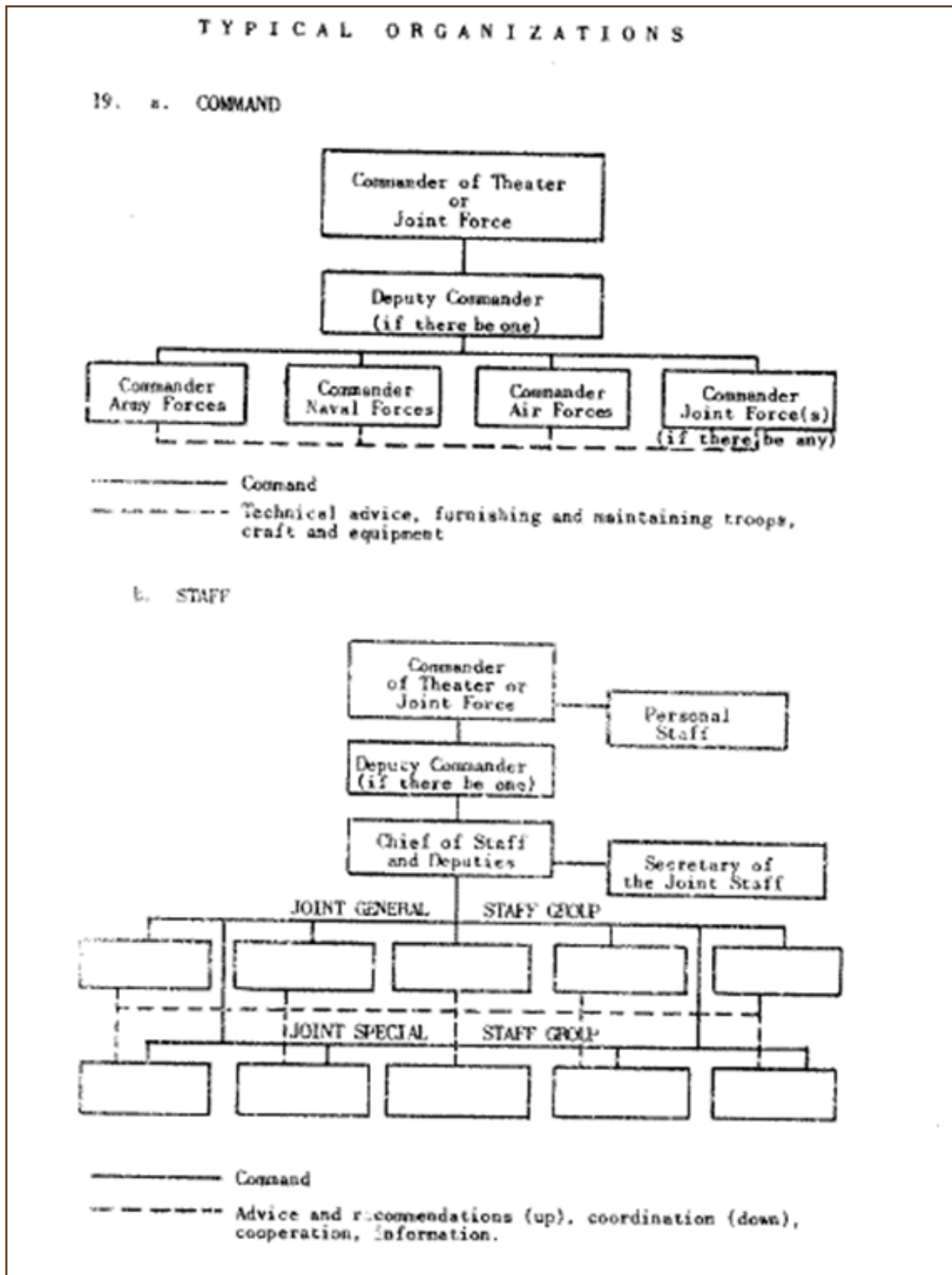


Figure 2. Joint command organization, Staff Officers' Manual for Joint Operations, 1949

## Command and Control in the Persian Gulf War

For the Persian Gulf War, what became the full, four-phase campaign plan was two separate plans grafted together over a period of at least five months. The first three phases were the air campaign, developed by the Air Staff in Washington, DC, and adjusted by the US Air Forces Central staff, all beginning in the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. The fourth phase was a ground campaign to liberate Kuwait.

The planning for the ground phase began in September under the direction of General Norman Schwarzkopf (the CENTCOM commander in chief), along with his chief of staff and J5 (Plans) chief, but with the major work being done by a team of four School of Advanced Military Studies planners under Lieutenant Colonel Joe Purvis. United States Central Command hastily assembled this team from around the world in mid-September. Luckily, the team had months to develop and plan options for the conduct of the ground war.

The ad hoc Purvis planning cell floated among commands. While General Yeosock (US Army Central) was not designated as the land commander, his responsibilities included acting as the Third US Army field army commander. In this capacity, Yeosock received updates from the Purvis cell and other elements of Schwarzkopf's headquarters, but Yeosock had no direct control over these key planners for the ground campaign. Likewise, the Purvis team worked with some air planners but with limited direct contact with General Charles Horner, the air commander, and little-to-no contact with General Walter Boomer, the marine commander, or Admiral Stanley Arthur, the naval commander.

Instead, the major components and planners at various levels worked together through a complicated *ad hoc* system of liaisons, briefings, and informal meetings. During the planning period in 1990–91, no regular process existed for bringing the component commanders together. The Army commanders and their staffs—from Schwarzkopf to Yeosock to the corps and divisions—worked in concert to influence Schwarzkopf's thinking, but the component commanders did not develop the Joint concept of the campaign together. Schwarzkopf's team worked for two months and shifted from the one-corps to two-corps approach to the ground war before even talking to General Boomer and the Marines, let alone the Navy commanders. Likewise, General Horner ran the air campaign, even into the ground phase, at best in parallel to the work of the Purvis group. Once combat began, Schwarzkopf held daily update briefings with his coalition and component commanders or their representatives—not as councils, but to share Schwarzkopf's decisions.<sup>51</sup>

51. Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1995); Steven Weingartner, ed., *In the Wake of the Storm: Gulf War Commanders Discuss Desert Storm* (Wheaton, IL: Cantigny First Division Foundation, 2000); Frank N. Schubert and Theresa L. Kraus, eds., *The Whirlwind War: The United States Army in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm* (Washington, DC: US Army Center for Military History, 1995); Robert H. Scales Jr., *Certain Victory: United States Army in the Gulf War* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1993); Richard M. Swain, "Lucky War": *Third Army in Desert Storm* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Press, 1997); and Clancy and Horner, *Every Man a Tiger*.

The component commanders only acted jointly on a case-by-case basis—such as when Boomer relied on Yeosock to handle supply matters. These periodic cases worked well enough because the individual commanders emphasized trust in personal relationships. Admiral Arthur supported this claim when he said, “[W]hat carried the day was that we, the component commanders, shook hands and said ‘We’re not going to screw this up, we’re going to make it work’. And it did.”<sup>52</sup> Arthur had a point, but Joint command should depend upon more than a handshake.

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52. JCS, *Joint Warfare*, A-4.

# An Alternative Approach: The American Expeditionary Force

## Organization of the American Expeditionary Force

The recommendation then becomes to build the American Expeditionary Force by combining the two charts—to place the component commanders formally in the Joint headquarters between the Joint commander and the chief of staff. The component commanders form a command council within this organizational structure, together with the Joint commander and deputy commander. The Joint commander still makes the final decisions, but together, the command council, not the Joint staff, develops the concept for the Joint operational approach.

Such an approach would also require reorganizing the AEF headquarters. Current Joint doctrine for the formation of JTF headquarters explicitly recognizes the standard J-staff structure has not been ideal. Joint Publication (JP) 3-33 offers different options, including organizing the staff around planning, communication, protection, sustainment, and information management or missions such as political, military, reconstruction, communications synchronization, and security. Similarly, when Joint Enabling Capabilities Command prepares its general-purpose planners to spin up JTF staffs, the command does not organize them by J-codes. Instead, it bins them in the functions of knowledge management, operations, intelligence, public affairs, planning, and sustainment, while also sending separate experts to set up communications systems.<sup>53</sup>

This idea of reorganizing around functions more closely aligned with Joint command problems has a long pedigree. For example, although Eisenhower's staff under General Walter Bedell Smith was built around the standard G-staff structure, the staff included new sections and cells created as necessary to deal with specific matters, such as psychological warfare and civil affairs.<sup>54</sup>

These other organizational options that abandon the J-codes in their entirety have rarely, if ever, been adopted, but the problem persists—which is why JTF headquarters have created a cumbersome system of functional or mission cells and centers imperfectly aligned with the J-staff structure. Figure II-6 in JP 3-33, “Notional Joint Task Force Staff Organization” (see figure 3 below), illustrates the result—

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53. JCS, *Joint Task Force Headquarters*, Joint Publication 3-33 (Washington, DC: JCS, January 31, 2018).

54. Pogue, *Supreme Command*, 66–97.

a labyrinth of headquarters and staff positions and relationships.<sup>55</sup> More to the point, this busy structure does not depict the relationships of the JTF headquarters to the air, land, maritime, etc., component commanders, headquarters, and staffs. Slaving the headquarters to the J-staff (really, the G-staff) structure overcomplicates an already complicated problem.

The complexity of figure 3 shows how a J-staff structure is not ideal for Joint warfighting headquarters. Instead of relying on the traditional J-staff structure, the American Expeditionary Force is built to provide a headquarters that is optimized for decision-making support to the commander through direct interaction from the deputy commander and the component commanders.

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55. JCS, *Joint Task Force Headquarters*, II-22.

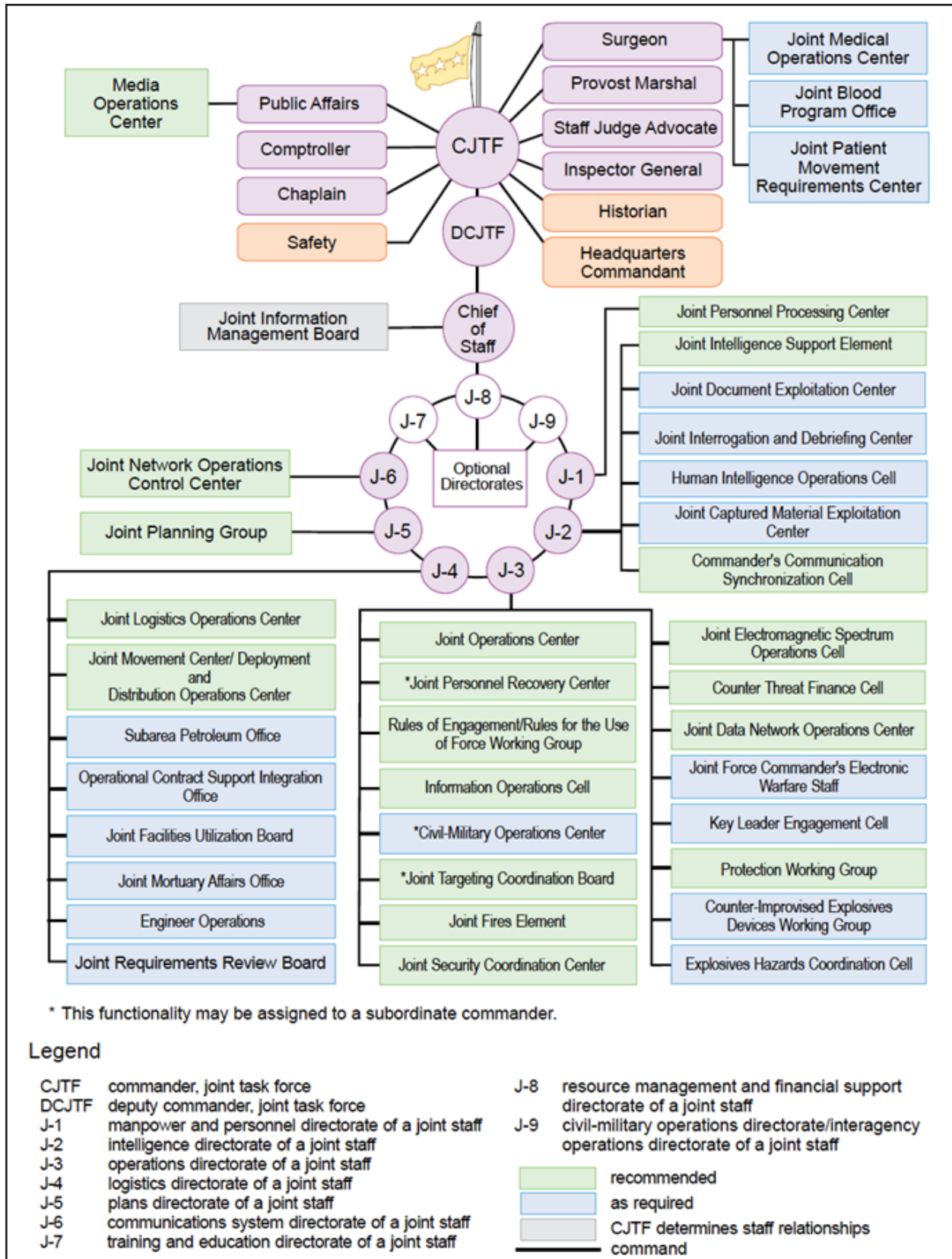


Figure 3. "Notional Joint Task Force Staff Organization" from JP 3-33

This organizational structure does not attempt to reinvent the wheel. Besides bringing the component commanders more directly into the organization and clarifying how they work with the Joint commander, much of this organization is familiar.

The core of the headquarters is the commander; the deputy commander, and the command council, which consists of the component commanders and, if necessary, the service force commanders, coalition force commanders, and other commanders as required. The command council could include special operations, cyber, US Space Force, and artificial intelligence, etc. As a baseline, the component commanders should consist of a maritime commander, an air commander, and a land commander. A special operations commander and one or more allied commanders are often required in combined operations. These commanders simultaneously sit on the command council to participate in the AEF headquarters activities and command their specific components.

Because the actual responsibilities within Joint Task Forces have often not followed the exact Joint Force Air Component Commander, Maritime Component Commander, and Land Component Commander naming conventions and associated doctrinal responsibilities, the recommendation here is to give these positions the simpler and more universally accurate titles of air commander, maritime commander, land commander, special operations commander, and marine forces commander, etc. For instance, this naming convention would allow the AEF air commander to focus on the mission and operations of the American Expeditionary Force while coordinating with the theater-level Joint Force Air Component Commander to establish a greater balance of theater-wide and global air missions.

### Eisenhower's Command Council

Eisenhower said the following about the functioning of his headquarters:

“[W]ith command over ground, air, and naval forces, we had understood and studied certain desirabilities in a truly integrated staff with approximately equal representation from each of the ground, air, naval, and logistic organizations. . . . We finally abandoned the idea as being expensive in personnel, and not necessary in our situation. The scheme which we found most effective, where it was possible for all commanders to meet together almost instantly, was to consider the naval, air, and ground chiefs as occupying two roles. In the first role each was part of my staff and he and his assistants worked with us in the development of plans; in the second role each was the responsible commander for executing his part of the whole operation.”<sup>56</sup>

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56. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 221.



Historical and recent experiences, along with ongoing efforts in the Joint Force, point to the necessity of creating another command-level position in Joint warfighting headquarters: the sustainment commander. The United States' first modern expeditionary force identified this problem. As a result, General John Pershing created a Services of Supply for the American Expeditionary Forces. Pershing saw their role as so important that he put General James Harbord, his trusted first chief of staff, in command of the organization.<sup>57</sup> The various World War II headquarters dealt with the same issue. They also struggled to figure out what to do with the variously named services of supply, communication zones, theaters of operation, and theater armies. In recent years, this ongoing concern has led to an effort to assign the primary sustainment responsibility to the theater army—usually, the theater Army service component command. Problems, however, may arise from assigning the main sustainment responsibility to the theater army. For instance, General Yeosock, commander of US Army Central during the Persian Gulf War, struggled to balance his responsibilities as the Army component, theater army, and numbered field army commander.<sup>58</sup>

In sum, Joint warfighting headquarters require a sustainment commander on the command council to provide essential input and command of sustainment within the area of operations, but, like the component commanders, this commander would have responsibilities beyond the council. The critical difference is the commander's other responsibilities do not just narrow to the component; they broaden out to the theater.

The proposed members of the command council should be considered provisional and subject to testing via experiment by the American Expeditionary Forces. Various American Expeditionary Forces might find the component commands should be more functional than domain-based. American Expeditionary Forces might also opt for a mix of functional, component, and senior service force commanders. Regardless, a Joint command council is essential to these recommendations. Figure 4 depicts a generic framework for organizing an American Expeditionary Force.

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57. Leo P. Hirrel, *Supporting the Doughboys: US Army Logistics and Personnel during World War I* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2017), 41–69; and Leo P. Hirrel, "World War I and the Emergence of Modern Army Sustainment," in ed., Keith R. Beurskens, *The Long Haul: Historical Case Studies of Sustainment in Large-Scale Combat Operations* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Army University Press, 2018), 1–14.

58. John J. Yeosock, "Army Operations in the Gulf Theater," *Military Review* 71, no. 9 (September 1991): 3–15; and John Bonin, "Echelons above Reality: Armies, Army Groups, and Theater Armies/Army Service Component Commands (ASCCs)," in Crow and Bailey, *Essential to Success*, 251–69.

## Confusion in Sustainment Commands

For all the positive attributes of General Eisenhower's command arrangements in the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, the incorporation of sustainment remained unsettled and unclear throughout the campaign. The story is convoluted, but it involved Eisenhower ordering the consolidation of Headquarters, European Theater of Operations, US Army, with Headquarters, US Army Services of Supply, into a larger European Theater of Operations, US Army headquarters commanded directly by Eisenhower (in addition to his role as SHAEF commander). With Eisenhower focused on SHAEF business, European Theater of Operations, US Army, was run by General J. C. H. Lee, the former US Army Services of Supply commander, who had direct connections with the Army's national Army Service Forces.

Once established on the continent, Lee would command the Communications Zone, the Army's doctrinal overseas supply formation. Despite attempts by the Department of War and Walter Bedell Smith, Eisenhower's SHAEF chief of staff, the roles and responsibilities of these relationships—especially the connection of the sustainment headquarters with the G1 and G4 at SHAEF headquarters—were never delineated. The muddled command-and-control structure could not synchronize national, service, and coalition sustainment efforts, let alone with the combat operations directed by the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force. As a result, supply issues plagued the force from the Normandy Invasion to the end of the war in Europe.<sup>59</sup>

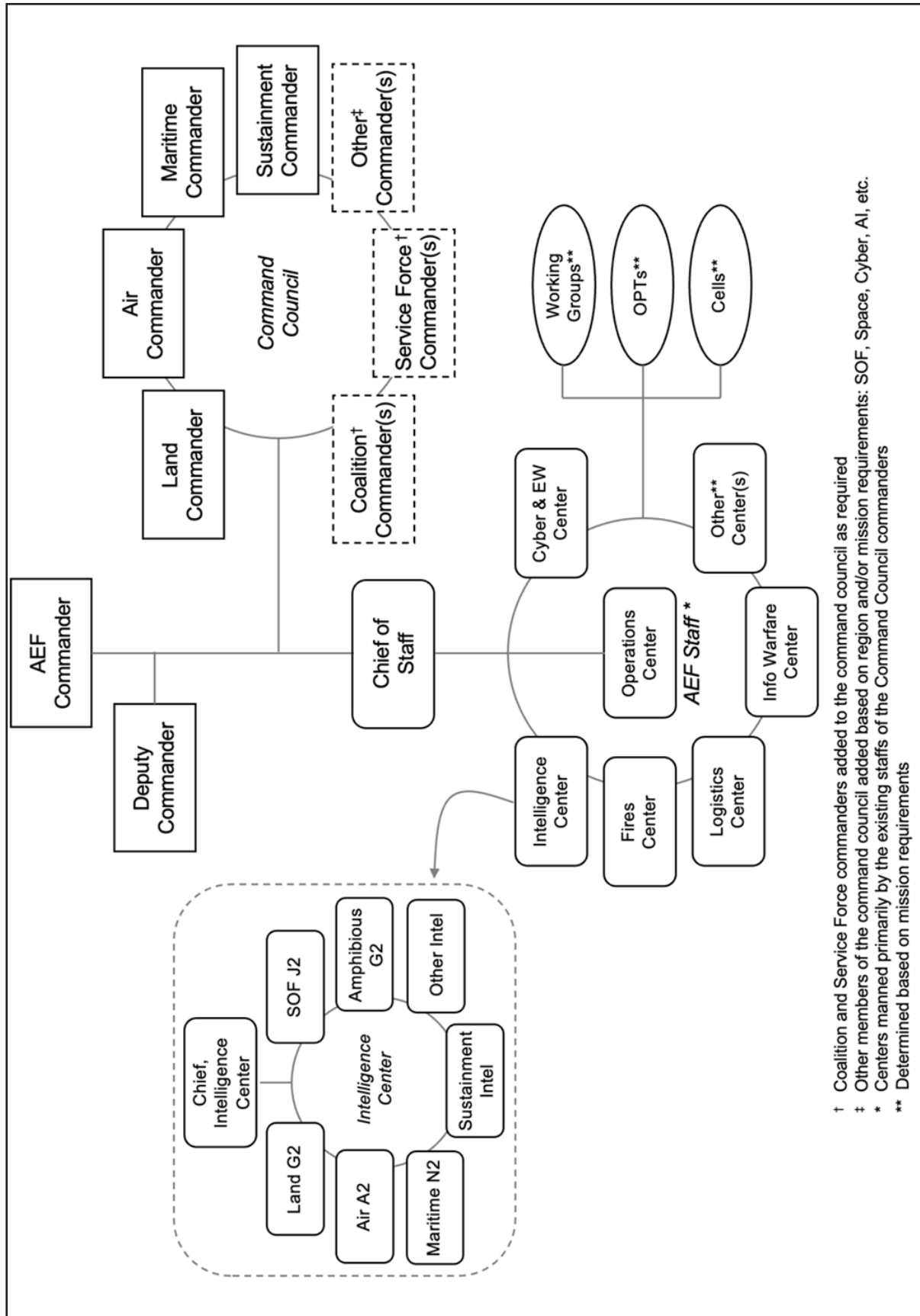
Such organizational confusion marked sustainment efforts in the Pacific theater, and the confusion has continued to the present day, in part because of the confusing name and role of the theater army. Similar to Eisenhower commanding the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force; the European Theater of Operations, US Army; and the land components, in the Persian Gulf War, Yeosock commanded “three armies”: the Army component command (US Army Central), the theater army, and Third US Army. As the theater army commander, Yeosock had to work with a labyrinth of national Joint and service support entities and theater Joint, service, and subordinate “echelon above corps” headquarters.

The key to Yeosock's sustainment efforts in theater was the creation of the US Army Central Support Command (also called 22nd Support Command) under General William Pagonis. Pagonis effectively became the Joint sustainment commander and did impressive work in that role. As in several other Joint commands discussed throughout this study, the element of luck was involved in Pagonis's selection. Pagonis had been at US Army Forces Command; the Army brought him in at the start of the crisis as a “hired-gun” (in his words).<sup>60</sup> Pagonis had never been to United States Central Command, and only through his vast experiences and Joint and service contacts did he manage to make Yeosock's theater army work.<sup>61</sup>

59. Pogue, *Supreme Command*, 73–74; and D. K. R. Crosswell, *Beetle: The Life of General Walter Bedell Smith* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 612–757.

60. William G. Pagonis, *Moving Mountains: Lessons in Leadership and Logistics from the Gulf War* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1992), 74.

61. Pagonis, *Moving Mountains*, 74; and Yeosock, “Army Operations,” 8–13.



† Coalition and Service Force commanders added to the command council as required  
 ‡ Other members of the command council added based on region and/or mission requirements: SOF, Space, Cyber, AI, etc.  
 \* Centers manned primarily by the existing staffs of the Command Council commanders  
 \*\* Determined based on mission requirements

Figure 4. Proposed AEF command and staff structure

With the command council in place, the new AEF headquarters requires a staff to support the headquarters. This staff should be organized into Joint centers and cells, not J-staff sections. The headquarters processes and products will be covered in more detail later, but the essential concept is organizing the staff to optimize support for the more concept-heavy decision making of the command council. Further, any structures and processes recommended here should maximize flexibility in the staff organization so each command council can shape and reshape a structure best suited to the council's unique missions.

Two implications arise from these assertions. First, most centers and cells should not solely focus on the details of various associated activities and operations. Instead, their primary role is to act as a clearinghouse, collator, and synchronizer of their activities and those of the component headquarters in the expeditionary force. This role points to creating an intelligence center or intelligence support element, a logistics operations center, operations center, a targeting or fires center, a cyber and electronic warfare center, and an information warfare center. The staff could create working groups to fill temporary needs that may become cells or even centers if a need becomes persistent. Second, the headquarters structure cannot take over the development of concepts from the command council, which places significant restrictions on the duties of traditional planning and operations sections. Both implications—the organization of the centers and the planning and operations sections, which need to be restricted—require a greater explanation that intersects with the reformed approaches to command and planning in Joint warfighting commands.

### Setting the Theater with the American Expeditionary Force

Given the historical tendency for the Army to take the lead in theater sustainment and the recent assignment of sustainment responsibilities to the Army, one possibility is that the position of sustainment commander could be held simultaneously by the Army service component commander or the deputy commander of the theater.<sup>62</sup> Deploying the Army service component command as the core of a hastily formed Joint Task Force has almost always overburdened the headquarters as it attempts to meet its day-to-day responsibilities. But, in this proposed arrangement, the assumption of an active role on an AEF command council aligns with the Army service component command's day-to-day responsibilities for setting the theater, allowing the sustainment commander to provide input to the council and direction to the forces that balances the needs of the theater area of responsibility and the AEF Joint operations area.

62. Duane A. Gamble, "Anticipating Joint Force Requirements," US Army (website), May 24, 2021, [https://www.army.mil/article/246742/anticipating\\_joint\\_force\\_requirements](https://www.army.mil/article/246742/anticipating_joint_force_requirements).

## **The American Expeditionary Force and the Joint Warfighting Operations Process**

While components of the current Joint Planning Process are useful for command and planning within the proposed American Expeditionary Force, the process as a whole does not match the needs of a Joint warfighting command for three main reasons. First, as discussed earlier, the process emerges from and is optimized primarily for Army operations, leading to varying degrees of disconnect with the thinking and processes of the other services and impeding Jointness as a result. Second, in recent years, and especially in current Joint doctrine, the Joint Planning Process has become almost solely dedicated to planning at the combatant command level, which is oriented toward a definition of campaigns as long-term efforts for ongoing competition and cooperation across the competition continuum. The mechanics of such extensive planning at combatant commands is beyond the purview of this paper, but suffice it to say that it does not match the dynamics of command and planning performed at Joint warfighting headquarters for and in armed conflict. For example, flexible deterrent and response options are central to planning for competition, but they are largely irrelevant to Joint warfighting. Third, to the degree the Joint Planning Process does deal with command and planning in armed conflict, the process is not optimized for the proposed structure of the American Expeditionary Force, in which Joint decision making is led by a command council.

The American Expeditionary Force thus requires its own Joint warfighting operations process. While this study will not produce a fully developed doctrinal manual for such a process, some essentials can be outlined. Fundamental to this process is the understanding that within the American Expeditionary Force, the decision making and guidance from the command council begin as conceptual and grow more detailed as they work the way down through the centers and component commands to the tactical units. In turn, the development of the details at the tactical units, component commands, and centers gets fed back to the command council to inform the refinement of the concepts. Figure 5 shows how this process might work in an American Expeditionary Force.

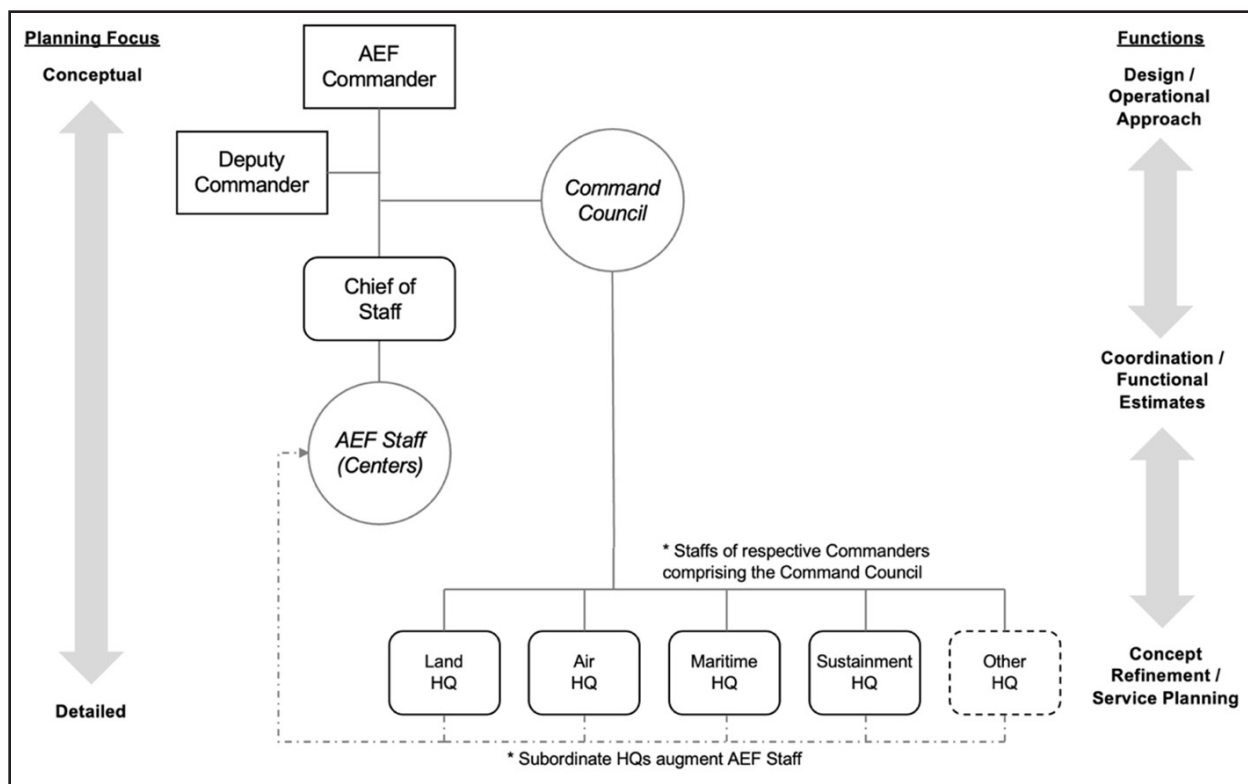


Figure 5. Proposed Joint warfighting operations process

### Role of the Command Council

In practice, the command council should focus on the developing and producing command intent, not detailed operation orders. To put the concept in existing Joint terms, the command council should focus on interpreting strategic guidance, gain a fuller appreciation of the strategic and operational environment, grasp and define the dynamics of the problem, and develop an operational approach for the Joint command. Expressed differently by the different services, these efforts fall within any commander’s mandate to understand, decide, act, and assess, all with an eye toward decentralized execution. In terms of actual products, the command council’s decision making produces command directives, concepts of operations, base plans, or similar products as the situation demands. The command council’s ongoing discussions should not be oriented on any more detail than required to populate these types of documents.<sup>63</sup>

63. Navy Warfare Development Command, *Naval Warfare*, Naval Doctrine Publication 1 (Norfolk, VA: Navy Warfare Development Command, April 2020), 37–53; US Air Force Doctrine, *The Air Force*, Air Force Doctrine Publication 1 (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: US Air Force Doctrine, March 10, 2021), 12–14; Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC), *Warfighting*, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1 (Washington, DC: HQMC, April 4, 2018); and Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), *Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces*, Army Doctrine Publication 6-0 (Washington, DC: HQDA, July 2019).

Fundamentally, the command council should maintain a longer-term focus on achieving goals, establish conditions for favorable crisis resolution, and transition post-crisis to improved conditions in competition and cooperation below the level of armed conflict. To accomplish these tasks, the command council would define and refine the command's expressed objectives and military end states and consider how these objectives and end states support national and theater-level intent across the competition continuum.

### **Role of the Command Council in Doctrine, Concepts, Design, and Planning**

The arrangement and focus of the AEF command council are ideal for a dynamic and integrated application of nonsynchronous Joint and service efforts on doctrine and concepts. Joint doctrine offers numerous ideas, including principles of Joint operations, Joint functions, factors of operational design, and elements of operational design, to merge into operational design. The Joint Force also regularly develops new versions of the Joint warfighting concept, which, although provisional, includes additional considerations for the conception of Joint operations. At the same time, each of the services has developed its doctrine and best practices for designing campaigns and operations in armed conflict while following its cycle of producing future warfighting operating concepts.

These designs and concepts are valuable precisely because they are not the same. They represent what the specific Joint and domain experts have determined are the best ways for their forces to fight inside and out of a Joint command. Instead of trying to force an artificial alignment of the doctrine and concepts of the Joint Force and various services, which would erode capabilities optimized to a particular domain, the command council brings together the whole menu of doctrine and concepts. More importantly, the council brings the doctrine and concepts together at the right point—where the services fight together as a Joint Force. As the AEF commander, with the help of the command council, craft the command's intent to drive the production of command directives, concepts of operations, and base plans, the commander and council will consider the relevant Joint operational design factors and concepts. Each commander will also bring his or her service's campaigning factors and concepts. Depending on the command and its specific mission and problem set, some service-specific approaches might be more widely applicable, while others may not. The work of command councils in trying to apply the variety of doctrine and concepts to their real-world warfighting problems thus becomes a better way of practicing Joint command and an ideal way of experimenting with and developing doctrine and concepts.

Similarly, the command council is an ideal place to practice and apply design thinking. The introduction of design thinking into service and Joint doctrine over

the past few decades has not gone smoothly because of the esoteric and often baffling nature of theory behind design and systems approaches. As such, design has often been treated as the practice of a select few experts schooled in the theory and assigned to special cells buried in plans shops. Many do not see design's value or think it is something military headquarters already does in its normal planning processes. Design and systems thinking remains, in one form or another, in Joint doctrine and education and the doctrine and education of most of the services.

The makeup and conceptual focus of the AEF command council make it a perfect place to practice design thinking. Joint design focuses on understanding strategic guidance, the operational environment, and the problem and developing operational approaches. The AEF commander would continue to serve as the primary conduit of formal strategic guidance to the command. The other commanders on the council, drawing on their own experiences and directions, are better suited to assist the commander in interpreting the guidance than more junior staff planners in traditional Joint Task Forces. Likewise, the command council, drawing on senior experts in a various services and domains, provides a richer picture for understanding the totality of the operational environment and problem.

Most important, and often missed, in design thinking is the value of considering, applying, and adjusting various operational approaches, not just developing them. Because of their background and supported by their command and staff, each member of the command council will have a different preferred operational approach for the proposed AEF campaign or operation. These different approaches—aired out, thought through, debated, and picked apart in the command council—act as mental experimentation with the system, forcing the commanders to consider what they might do and how the system might react. These experiments (mental war games) provide an enriched understanding of the environment and problem and will no doubt produce a balanced, hybrid operational approach. In other words, when all service commanders participate, they create a truly Joint operational design.

The AEF headquarters does not require a traditional planning section with a functioning command council. The command council takes the long-term, holistic view and then develops and adjusts the commander's intent accordingly in a way even the best planners would struggle to achieve.

### **Role of the AEF Staff Centers and Components**

What do the centers on the AEF staff do? The AEF staff centers sit in the middle of the conceptual-to-detailed spectrum, thereby linking the concepts of the command councils to the more detailed planning and operations of the components. As such, the staff centers serve two mutually reinforcing purposes. First, the staff centers bring together and coordinate the efforts of the appropriate staff liaisons



from the components and other relevant organizations related to the center's function. Second, the staff centers prepare and provide center estimates to support the decision making of the command council.

It is perhaps best to think of each center as a mini-command council, only as a functionally aligned staff council (see figure 4). A chief at the AEF headquarters leads each center, supported by administrative staff as required. The center's key members would come from the components or other related organizations. Together, the key members develop the center's estimates. For example, an intelligence center (or intelligence support element) would regularly bring together intelligence officers from each component and representatives from other intelligence services as required. These individuals would share the more detailed products of their respective commands' intelligence efforts and help produce Joint intelligence estimates for use by the command council. Then, intimately informed by the Joint efforts in their center, these individuals would bring that perspective back to their components with an improved awareness of how to accomplish their more detailed intelligence efforts in concert with the other components. The other AEF centers would operate similarly and with a similar purpose.

The centers internal to the AEF staff need cross-functional activities. All staff activities would develop a battle rhythm under the direction of the chief of staff, starting with the individual centers regularly meeting with representatives from the various functionally similar components and organizations. Then, by necessity and guided by the chief of staff, the centers would set up cross-functional meetings to enable an integrated perspective in the preparation of their estimates. The centers would then develop and deliver their estimates to the command council. The council would make the necessary decisions and refine command guidance as required.

The specifics of the American Expeditionary Force's battle rhythm are best left to each AEF staff, leaving room for it to develop its own best practices. Experience shows that well-developed personal relationships are the best enabler of cooperation. Permanent American Expeditionary Forces that regularly plan and exercise together will have already developed these personal relationships and will bypass the need to establish them on the fly. Further, such an arrangement would allow for experimentation with the greater use of artificial intelligence in the production of estimates, aggregation and interpretation of data; the linking of cross-functional activities; war gaming; and the development of assessments.<sup>64</sup>

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64. Kathleen McKendrick, *The Application of Artificial Intelligence in Operations Planning* (Brussels: NATO Science and Technology Organization, October 2017); and Forrest E. Morgan et al., *Military Applications of Artificial Intelligence: Ethical Concerns in an Uncertain World* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020).

### D-Day: Staffs Informing the Command Council

When Eisenhower's command team was already well developed, his conceptual guidance well established and widely known, and his components had already issued and set in motion the detailed orders for D-Day, the team came together in regular Supreme Commander's conferences in late May and early June to receive weather briefings from Group Captain J. M. Stagg, the chief of the Meteorological Committee, and to make the final decision whether to launch the invasion. Throughout the conferences, the requisite staff center gave the team the details, and the component commanders made recommendations based on the weather's effects on their domain. Still, the decision was the commander's, and in the early morning of June 5, with the full support of his command council, Eisenhower made the final call to go.<sup>65</sup>

Essential to these staff efforts is an understanding that producing detailed plans and orders in line with current contingency operation plans (OPLANs) and crisis operation orders (OPORDs) is not the job of the AEF headquarters. Current planning doctrine is imperfect in precisely defining the intention. As noted earlier, the AEF headquarters focuses on no more detail than required to produce intent along the lines of requirements in current command directives, concepts of operations, base plans, and, perhaps, fragmentary orders. The specific format of AEF-level command directives and plans is beyond the purview of this study and can and should be developed by experimentation in the headquarters. For example, the current commander's estimate is problematic because the doctrinal format requires mission analysis, centers of gravity, and courses of action, all of which are concepts that point toward an abbreviated Joint Planning Process, which is not ideal for Joint warfighting command for the reasons described earlier.

Along these lines, it is important to note there is no AEF "planning center," and the AEF operations center would not take on the responsibilities of the current J3 or J5. Instead, the AEF operations center would be focused more closely on the role of the current Joint operations center, which focuses on the flow of information with the intent to monitor, assess, and produce physical estimates, plans, orders, and fragmentary orders for direction. This role perhaps points to the creation of an assessment cell or war-gaming cell—enabled by artificial intelligence—in the center that manages assessment and war games in the preparation of estimates for the command council. The operations center is the main information clearinghouse for the command headquarters. It tracks the execution and progress of the fight in concert with the staff members from the components who have a similar function. The operations center does not do the planning. Its staff members do not prepare

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65. Pogue, *Supreme Command*, 169–70; Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 249–50; and Tom Rives, "‘OK, We’ll Go’: Just What Did Ike Say When He Launched the D-Day Invasion 70 Years Ago?," *Prologue* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 36–43.

the draft operational approach, commander's intent, estimates, plans, or orders for approval by the command council. The members of the command council do their own planning at the conceptual level; their approaches and decisions are captured by representatives from the operations center, put into the appropriate format, and published for dissemination to the command.

### **Additional Roles and Products of the American Expeditionary Force**

This thumbnail version of the proposed Joint warfighting operations process points to an additional important role for the permanent American Expeditionary Forces in the Joint Strategic Planning System related to the responsibilities of the operations center. Although the focus here has been on the organization and functioning of American Expeditionary Forces for the dynamics of warfighting, their nature as a permanent headquarters means that in competition below armed conflict, they will be engaged in preparation for various contingencies within their assigned theaters. In other words, American Expeditionary Forces are also well suited for writing and testing contingency operation plans, a responsibility currently residing at the combatant commands.

Pushing at least part of this responsibility to the American Expeditionary Forces is vitally important. Eisenhower said, "Peace-time plans are of no particular value, but peace-time planning is indispensable" because the warfighting plans developed in peacetime never match the actual war, but the planning during peacetime causes the planners to gain an invaluable appreciation of the types of problems they will confront and the possible means and ways they will have to pursue the mission in war.<sup>66</sup> "That is the reason it is so important to plan," Eisenhower advised, "to keep yourselves steeped in the character of the problem that you may one day be called upon to solve—or to help to solve . . . you must plan, you must learn, you must steep yourself in these problems."<sup>67</sup> The authors of this study have not found a single instance in which a Joint Task Force used a combatant command contingency OPLAN in the current system, and those who produced the OPLANs have rarely (if ever) been members of the Joint Task Forces that dealt with the contingency. In other words, neither the peacetime plans nor the planning have had any value in the sense Eisenhower meant.

The production and validation of OPLANs in the current system represent an enormous effort on the part of the same combatant command staff members who are also responsible for the essential task, as evidenced by a new JP 3-0 focused entirely on the matter of developing theater strategies and command campaign plans across

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66. Eisenhower to Hamilton Fish Armstrong, December 31, 1950, in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, ed. Louis Galambos (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 11:1516.

67. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower: 1957* (Washington, DC: Office of the Federal Register, 1958), 818–19.

the competition continuum. The OPLANs in the current system are of limited use in the initial design and designation of Joint Task Forces. The OPLANs are most valuable for providing combatant command input on force development. Pushing at least part of the contingency planning to the permanent American Expeditionary Forces would be more beneficial for force development and a perfect example of the value of peacetime planning in Eisenhower's view.

The requirement to produce complete contingency OPLANs warrants an addendum to the proposed AEF Joint warfighting operations process and the responsibilities of the operations center. In competition below armed conflict, the process would still function as described, with the command council focused on conceptual planning and the centers gathering the details produced by the components. For the production of the complete contingency OPLANs, the operations center would collect, format, and publish the complete orders. Ideally, as many of these plans as possible would be war-gamed and exercised by the American Expeditionary Forces. Just as they are in the current system, the final products would be used by the combatant commands, the Joint Force, and the Department of Defense. In addition to being better for force development and informing the combatant commands' approach to guiding and supporting the operations of the American Expeditionary Forces, such contingency OPLANs would provide the national command authority, the chairman, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff with the real-world pieces that go into a globally integrated national strategy for the entire competition continuum.

### **Application of the AEF Framework to Combatant Commands**

The continuous nature of American Expeditionary Forces compared with *ad hoc* Joint Task Forces results in two distinct modes of operation: contingency and crisis response and peacetime operations. Understanding how an American Expeditionary Force would operate during these different modes is important in articulating how the relationship of the force to a geographic combatant command is structured. Directing how combatant commanders would control the operations of an American Expeditionary Force for different contingencies in various AORs would not be productive here. Showing advantages an American Expeditionary Force would have offered in prior operations, analyzing possible AEF proposals for current and future operations, and providing recommendations for how an American Expeditionary Force can be best used during peacetime operations are useful.

Although the smallest of the geographic combatant commands, United States Southern Command provides a case study in which many of the tenets within the AEF construct were partially applied and can be analyzed. During his time as the USSOUTHCOM commander from 2016–18, Admiral Kurt Tidd identified three areas that comprised the bulk of United States Southern Command's

main efforts: countering transregional and transnational threat networks, rapidly responding to crises, and building relationships within the region.<sup>68</sup> Joint Task Force Bravo, a forward-based, standing expeditionary task force within the USSOUTHCOM AOR, was involved with countering transregional and transnational threat networks and routinely responded to crises within the area. Using an expeditionary and continuously operating Joint command to handle contingency operations allowed the USSOUTHCOM commander to focus on building relationships, arguably the most vital area during peacetime operations.

United States Southern Command also put together different “communities of interest” and “cross-directorate teams” to counter the transregional and transnational threat networks mission successfully. These groups included multiple nations and interagency partners, and the members spanned J-codes within the USSOUTHCOM staff.<sup>69</sup> The purpose of the groups was like the one envisioned for the AEF centers (operational, intelligence, logistics, etc.). Even with only a partial application of the AEF structure and processes, United States Southern Command experienced outsize success. But Joint Task Force Bravo is not an American Expeditionary Force. No command council provides guidance to the Joint Force commander, and the centers described earlier are neither established at the Joint Task Force nor structured in a manner that facilitates more efficient Joint operations.

United States Central Command and United States Africa Command are well versed in conducting military, humanitarian, and stability operations via a Joint Task Force. These operations have been performed professionally, and most have achieved incredible successes. But, as many of the callout boxes throughout the study (Afghanistan and Iraq, Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve, Joint Task Force Liberia, and the Persian Gulf War) have highlighted, these successes were achieved despite significant inefficiencies in Joint headquarters operations and structure. Establishing an American Expeditionary Force or multiple American Expeditionary Forces within these AORs would enable a dedicated Joint command to focus on the myriad military operations while allowing the geographic combatant commanders to focus on day-to-day operations and regional stability. Political, religious, economic, and diplomatic conditions within the regions will likely lead to more conflicts and crises, further illustrating the need for fundamental changes in how Joint operations are conducted.

But the conflicts and crises in United States Central Command and United States Africa Command are small-scale compared to those possible within United States European Command and United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM)

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68. Kurt W. Tidd and Tyler W. Morton, “US Southern Command Evolving to Meet 21st-Century Challenges,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 86 (3rd Quarter 2017): 12.

69. Tidd and Morton, “US Southern Command,” 13.

in an increasingly multipolar world. Although wars against Russia and China are not likely, such wars would be far more dangerous, and the US military must be ready for possible large-scale combat operations. The USINDOPACOM area poses a unique, robust set of challenges to which an American Expeditionary Force could provide advantages. The region is dominated by malign Chinese influence, weak governments, and periodic environmental or humanitarian crises. Aggressive Chinese behavior in the South China Sea and the various responses by neighbors in the region further complicate operations there.

Establishing an American Expeditionary Force focused on protecting Taiwan and providing environmental disaster relief may alleviate the burdens on the USINDOPACOM commander and advance the four critical areas of the command's strategy (see "The American Expeditionary Force in the USINDOPACOM AOR"). With an American Expeditionary Force focused on planning for Taiwan and natural and humanitarian disaster response, the USINDOPACOM commander could concentrate on countering aggression within the South China Sea and building a coalition of regional neighbors to support the effort. Because many of these neighbors would be wary of partnering with a Joint command focused on the defense of Taiwan, an American Expeditionary Force with a natural and humanitarian disaster response mission would give the neighbors a degree of separation from directly challenging China's claim on Taiwan and provide them with the opportunity to support a more stable South China Sea.

Similarly, an American Expeditionary Force in the EUCOM AOR could further relationships and provide the posture necessary to deter Russian aggression in the region (such as the Russian invasion of South Ossetia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022). Forming an American Expeditionary Force in the EUCOM AOR would be more complex than developing such a force in other regions because of NATO's presence and the sheer number of partners and allies in the region. Determining precisely how an American Expeditionary Force would fit into any combatant command is beyond the scope of this study. It is important, however, to highlight the American Expeditionary Force to help manage the daily requirements directly tied to future Joint warfighting for the combatant commander.

### The American Expeditionary Force in the USINDOPACOM AOR

The USINDOPACOM AOR would greatly benefit from an American Expeditionary Force in the region. In the USINDOPACOM 2021 posture statement to Congress, Admiral Philip Davidson states the following:

Absent a convincing deterrent, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) will be emboldened to take action to undermine the rules-based international order and the values represented in our vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The combination of the PRC’s military modernization program and willingness to intimidate its neighbors through the use, or threatened use of force, undermines peace, security, and prosperity in the region.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, Davidson highlights four critical areas for addressing great-power competition to advance American interests in the region.

- Increasing Joint Force lethality.
- Enhancing design and posture.
- Strengthening Allies and partners.
- Modernizing exercises, experimentation, and innovation programs.<sup>71</sup>

The American Expeditionary Force would provide a Joint headquarters that could focus primarily on increasing Joint Force lethality, enhancing design and posture, and engaging in exercises, experimentation, and innovation, freeing United States Indo-Pacific Command to focus on military diplomacy and providing a convincing deterrent.

Contingencies and crises that do not fall within an American Expeditionary Force’s assigned mission or threat will arise, just as events occur today that require the establishment of a Joint Task Force. In these instances, the American Expeditionary Force would still provide improved flexibility and distinct advantages over the current construct due to its standing expeditionary headquarters within the AOR. Even without the previous planning and execution experience associated with the specific contingency or crisis, the American Expeditionary Force would already be operating with the relationships, processes, and structures needed to be built from scratch to form a Joint Task Force. Depending on the scale of the crisis, an American Expeditionary Force could also form a Joint Task Force from within its components to address the issue. Another option would be for the combatant commander to form an entirely new Joint Task Force outside the American Expeditionary Force if he or she anticipated the risk resulting from the degradation of the AEF’s primary missions as being too high.

70. United States Indo-Pacific Command, *Before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, 117th Cong. (2021) (statement of Philip S. Davidson, commander, United States Indo-Pacific Command).

71. United States Indo-Pacific Command.

Their mission to execute military operations for various contingencies notwithstanding, American Expeditionary Forces would likely spend much of their time outside of contingency and crisis response. Historical efforts like the AEF construct have failed to succeed because the role of such an entity was not well understood or defined. After World War I, General Pershing led an effort to reorganize the Army General Staff into the standard G structure with an added War Plans Division. During peacetime, this division would produce war plans. In war, the intention was to shift the War Plans Division into the core of a warfighting headquarters, most likely under the command of the Chief of Staff. The War Plans Division did a lot of war planning, but the division never deployed or even prepared to serve as a warfighting field headquarters. Day-to-day responsibilities within the interwar Army left the War Plans Division with neither the time nor the senior personnel to serve such a role, and Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall scrapped the idea at the outset of World War II.<sup>72</sup> The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 was another effort to find a solution to Joint warfighting during times of crisis. Combatant commanders in each region would lead Joint warfighting commands in any contingency. The commanders' day-to-day responsibilities, however, consistently overwhelm their decision cycle and the bandwidth of their staff.

The AEF concept overcomes these efforts' shortcomings through the conduct of constant warfighting improvement. During peacetime operations, American Expeditionary Forces would serve as warfighting labs for Joint and service concepts, thus becoming key players in force development. The AEF headquarters would also engage in OPLAN planning and run these plans through repetitive, arduous exercises and war games to validate them. The exercises and war games would involve varying degrees of participation from the components, and participation would be determined by the combatant commands, AEF commands, and component commands. With the benefit of assigned forces, American Expeditionary Forces would also develop different component packages and rotate them as they are available and appropriate for different problems. In this way, the American Expeditionary Forces would not be simply planning entities in peacetime; rather, the forces would be active leaders in the force development of Joint and service forces. American Expeditionary Forces would be better equipped to succeed in this fashion because they would not be burdened by many of the essential, numerous, day-to-day requirements for which combatant commanders are responsible.

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72. James E. Hewes Jr., *From Root to McNamara: Army Organization and Administration, 1900–1963* (Washington, DC: US Army Center for Military History, 1975), 50–78; Ray S. Cline, *Washington Command Post: The Operations Division, United States Army in World War II: The War Department* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1951); and Thomas Bruscano, *Developing Strategists: Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Interwar Army War College*, ed. Jessica J. Sheets (Carlisle, PA: US Army Heritage and Education Center, 2019).



## Implications and Conclusions

### Implications of the American Expeditionary Force for Concept Development

The Joint Force has asked the services to help to align efforts to maximize efficiency and effectiveness. The disparate efforts, however, are still service-specific and focused on allocating resources rather than Joint warfighting. The services “are working to develop next generation capabilities from unmanned logistics platforms to expanded mobility capabilities [that] will allow greater operational reach and flexibility to maneuver commanders and planners.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, each service has been tasked with a portion of the Joint Warfighting Concept that entails researching, developing, and implementing a capability to be shared across the Joint construct. The Air Force is handling Joint All-Domain Command and Control, the Navy is responsible for Joint fires, and the Army is focusing on the concept of contested logistics.<sup>74</sup> Each of these efforts is aligned with the strength of the service assigned, enabling the use of established resources and concepts to further explore the capabilities.

The Joint Warfighting Concept and service efforts are not the only effort underway at the Department of Defense, Joint, or service level to solidify the Joint warfighting concept. The incorporation of a Joint fires element in geographic combatant commands has been a useful exercise in ensuring Joint coordination during operations and planning phases. As an integral part of the planning process, one must question who owns Joint fires during combat operations. Does the value of the Joint fires to the combatant command outweigh the coordination they could bring to combat operations if Joint fires were to fall under an established Joint Task Force? Although vital to the planning process, the critical Joint fires element would most likely be even more effective under a Joint Task Force that was executing sustained combat operations to coordinate across the platforms in the region.

Since the early 2000s, decision dominance has been conceptualized as a means for the United States to deprive an enemy of the ability to make decisions, thus removing enemy leadership options to use available forces fully. In 2003, the stated goal of decision dominance was to remove all viable options for enemy leadership, not to destroy fielded enemy forces.<sup>75</sup> As of 2021, the concept had transformed into

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73. Frank Wolfe, “Joint Warfighting Concept Assumes ‘Contested Logistics,’” *Defense Daily* (website), October 6, 2020, <https://www.defensedaily.com/joint-warfighting-concept-assumes-contested-logistics/pentagon/>.

74. Gamble, “Joint Force Requirements.”

75. Merrick E. Krause, “Decision Dominance: Exploiting Transformational Asymmetries,” *Defense Horizons* 23 (February 2003): 1.

the ability for US or allied commanders to sense, understand, decide, and act faster than the enemy.<sup>76</sup> This transformation is not simply a matter of semantics; it shifts the capability focus inward rather than on capabilities meant to degrade or disrupt enemy operations. Achieving decision dominance in current or future combat operations will require a fully Joint effort to ensure all services are supporting the commander at the right time and in the desired manner. Disparate efforts across the Joint Force cannot achieve this effect without seamless coordination by the warfighting commander.

Each service is also involved in the development of service-specific warfighting concepts that interact across domains and must be validated in Joint operations. The Army's effort in this arena is the multi-domain operations (MDO) concept.<sup>77</sup> The purpose of multi-domain operations is to force an enemy to respond to multiple complementary threats individually, and the focus of these operations is on the combination of dilemmas vice pure overmatch. The concept centers on the future operating environment, including efforts in space and cyberspace that increase the speed and potential lethality of operations at all levels of conflict. Exercising this concept in a standing, Joint command, such as an American Expeditionary Force, would dramatically increase the likelihood of Joint Force interoperability and enable effective maneuver in all domains.<sup>78</sup> Exercising this concept would provide Joint command and control across all domains, synchronize intelligence activities theater-wide, test analytic methods of high-volume data from intelligence collection assets, and connect sensors to service-specific "shooters" in support of strategic and operational objectives.<sup>79</sup> Executing MDO through the AEF construct also has added advantages that derive from a potentially reduced footprint. Compared with larger, traditional Joint forces, the American Expeditionary Force could be smaller yet just as capable and more agile. This decreased size would drive budgeting and acquisition benefits and potentially gain ally or partner-nation support more easily than a larger, more disruptive US footprint on the ally or partner nation's soil.

Recent naval (combined Navy and Marine Corps) warfighting concepts include distributed maritime operations (DMO) and expeditionary advanced base operations (EABO). Admiral Phillip Sawyer, then-deputy chief of naval operations for operations, plans, and strategy, described distributed maritime operations as "a combination

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76. Sydney J. Freedberg Jr., "Army's New Aim Is 'Decision Dominance,'" *Breaking Defense* (website), March 17, 2021, <https://breakingdefense.com/2021/03/armys-new-aim-is-decision-dominance/>.

77. US Army Training and Doctrine Command, *The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, US Army Training and Doctrine Command Pamphlet 525-3-1 (Fort Eustis, VA: US Army Training and Doctrine Command, December 6, 2018), v-xii, 5-48.

78. Brian McCarthy, "Can an Army Multi-Domain Task Force Really Be Multi-Domain?" (white paper, US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 2021), 24.

79. McCarthy, "Multi-Domain Task Force," 24.

of distributed forces, integration of effects, and maneuver. These operations will enhance battle space awareness and influence; generate opportunities for naval forces to achieve surprise, neutralize threats and overwhelm the adversary; and impose operational dilemmas on the adversary.”<sup>80</sup> The EABO concept involves the employment of mobile expeditionary forces from a series of temporary locations within a contested maritime area to support fleet operations and access.<sup>81</sup> These concepts offer great warfighting potential, but they require refinement. In peacetime, the United States knows how to command and control distributed forces as required for DMO, but it must be practiced within a Joint construct in potentially contested or denied environments to ensure efficacy.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, EABO, still in the predoctrinal considerations phase, must undergo experimentation to be perfected.<sup>83</sup>

Like MDO, DMO, and EABO, operations in the cyber and space domains involve the dispersion of forces and effects, which relies on trust and confidence within the command structure. This chain-of-command trust and confidence are fundamental to the AEF concept. As with the understanding, intent, and trust required for mission command, the American Expeditionary Force will have to rely on guidance being translated into mission-specific plans and operations.<sup>84</sup> The command council develops the overall strategy and then disseminates it to the component staffs for detailed planning, enabling the service-specific chains of command for these warfighting concepts to remain intact. Operations may be conducted in accordance with the service concepts as a part of the Joint strategy. The services need this freedom to refine and test the concepts the services are developing. While using a service-specific concept to accomplish the mission might make sense, a Joint concept may be better aligned with the commander’s intent. Freedom of effort will be critical to the American Expeditionary Force’s effective, Joint operations.

While the specific services will fund and research these efforts, the proposed organizational change presents a unique opportunity to test and evolve the Joint warfighting efforts. The AEF structure will offer room—and, more importantly, time—to test these concepts as a continuously established Joint Force. Each service can and should bring its concepts and constructs to the American Expeditionary Force to determine what is best suited for the region, enemy, or forces provided. An example construct to enable this experimentation is to assign different American Expeditionary Forces as focused Joint warfighting

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80. Edward Lundquist, “DMO Is Navy’s Operational Approach to Winning the High-End Fight at Sea,” *Seapower* (website), February 2, 2021, <https://seapowermagazine.org/dmo-is-navys-operational-approach-to-winning-the-high-end-fight-at-sea/>.

81. HQMC, *Tentative Manual for Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations* (Washington, DC: HQMC, February 2021), 1-3-1-4.

82. Lundquist, “Navy’s Operational Approach.”

83. HQMC, *Tentative Manual*, 1-1.

84. Martin E. Dempsey, “Mission Command” (white paper, JCS, Washington, DC, April 3, 2012).

centers for service and Joint constructs. For instance, a EUCOM American Expeditionary Force could be the lead for MDO, a USINDOPACOM American Expeditionary Force could be the lead for DMO and EABO, and a CENTCOM or United States Africa Command American Expeditionary Force could be the lead for irregular warfare and stability operations experimentation. Regardless of how the experimentation process is constructed, the American Expeditionary Force would provide the Joint Force with a testing site for these individual concepts to be coordinated and executed at the tactical and operational levels, thus providing continuous feedback to the services.

## Conclusion

Analysis of the historical record has shown, for several reasons, that Joint warfighting is best conducted with a subordinate Joint warfighting command to the geographic combatant commands. The complexity of the theaters and the demands of great-power competition precludes the combatant commands from effectively serving as Joint warfighting headquarters. Recognizing these conditions, the US military has come to rely on the Joint task force as the principal warfighting headquarters. But this reliance is problematic because the *ad hoc*, post-crisis activation of Joint Task Forces inherently puts the United States at a strategic and operational disadvantage. In the future, the US military will maintain its competitive advantage by being a superior and sustainable Joint Force sooner than its adversaries.

Although establishing standing warfighting headquarters modeled after the current JTF organization would address the efficiency and effectiveness inadequacies of the current approach, such a solution would not be complete. In addition, receiving service buy-in, aligning with current Joint concept development initiatives, or undergoing successful implementation without adding additional force structure would be unlikely. Therefore, the findings suggest the US military should formalize a standing Joint warfighting headquarters—the American Expeditionary Force—around a command council and a staff organized into Joint centers and cells.

The core of the headquarters would consist of the commander, the deputy commander, and the command council, which would consist of the component commanders and, if necessary, the service force commanders. The command council comprises existing commands drawn from service formations that are already aligned to specific theaters, and Joint centers and cells would largely be staffed from these commands. Therefore, such an option would not require a significant change in force structure. Furthermore, the American

Expeditionary Force would provide the organizational structure to develop, debate, and experiment with service and Joint concepts, playing to the strengths of the services and the Joint Force. These are broad baseline recommendations; they are not tailored to specific circumstances. Thus, they can and should be built upon to adapt them to real-world circumstances.

## About the Contributors

**Colonel Eric Bissonette** is a US Air Force pilot assigned to United States Forces Korea as the deputy commander's executive officer. He holds a bachelor's degree from the US Air Force Academy and master's degrees from the Touro University Worldwide, the US Air Force Air Command and Staff College, and the US Army War College.

**Dr. Thomas Bruscano** is an associate professor of history in the Department of Military Strategy, Planning, and Operations at the US Army War College. He holds a PhD in military history from Ohio University. He is the author of *A Nation Forged in War: How World War II Taught Americans to Get Along* (University of Tennessee Press, 2010), *Out of Bounds: Transnational Sanctuary in Irregular Warfare* (CSI Press, 2006), and numerous book chapters and articles on operational warfare.

**Colonel Kelvin Mote**, a US Army information operations officer assigned to United States Forces Korea, holds a master's degree in national security from the University of Maryland Global Campus, a master's degree in strategic studies from the US Army War College, and a doctorate in organizational leadership from Creighton University.

**Commander Matthew B. Powell** is a US Navy submariner who currently serves as the commanding officer of the PCU Iowa. He holds a bachelor's degree from the Georgia Institute of Technology, a master's degree in engineering management from Old Dominion University, and a master's degree in strategic studies from the US Army War College.

**Colonel Marc J. Sanborn** is a US Army engineer officer assigned to the Office of Security Cooperation – Iraq at the US consulate in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. He holds a bachelor's degree from the United States Military Academy, a master's degree in engineering management from the Missouri University of Science and Technology, a master's degree in civil engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology, and a doctor of philosophy in structural engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology. He is a distinguished graduate of the US Army War College and holds a master's degree in strategic studies.

**Colonel James "Jimmy" Watts** (US Army) is a graduate of the US Army War College and the Carlisle Scholars Program. He is board-certified in cardiovascular medicine and is a fellow of the American College of Cardiology and currently serves as the consultant to the surgeon general for cardiovascular medicine.

**Professor Louis G. "Lou" Yuengert** (colonel, US Army retired) is an associate professor of practice in the Department of Command, Leadership, and Management at the US Army War College, where he specializes in defense management and talent management. He holds a master's degree in operations research from the Georgia Institute of Technology and a master's degree in strategic studies from the US Army War College.

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