

Where are the JIACGs today?

by Jan Schwarzenberg

The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States held in its findings “The 9/11 Commission Report” that a contribution to the events of September 11th, 2001 was the inability of government agencies to cooperate with each other on terrorism. Focus and budgets had been concentrated more upon criminal activities. Furthermore, barriers had been in place actually preventing information sharing amongst federal agencies. Subsequent to the attacks of September 11, the President directed all federal agencies to plan and execute counterterrorist activities jointly and fully share information and intelligence. What had heretofore been an olio of independently functioning agencies were now being forced into a new paradigm of collaborative action and sharing. The Department of Defense (DoD) approached this mandate by creating internal organizations peppered with representatives from the other federal departments and agencies. This article takes advantage of the passage of time to review how the military’s geographic combatant commands around the globe implemented the mandate by creating Joint Interagency Coordination Groups (JIACG) and how those initial efforts evolved over time.

While the JIACGs all started from the same concept they have diverged greatly due to bureaucratic pressures and different approaches by individual combatant commanders. They were originally conceived and organized to support the DoD counterterrorism mission, but have since morphed into supporting the full-spectrum of military operations. As they evolved since 9/11 each has followed a different path: from robust to essentially non-existent at Pacific Command (PACOM); to simply a means of communication and coordination in the event of a national disaster in Northern Command (NORTHCOM); to integrating U.S. government activities in an active combat zone in Central Command (CENTCOM); to exploring a completely new paradigm in Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) analogous to a mega-embassy where day-to-day operations of many agencies functioning in the region are closely coordinated with each other. Such vigorous

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participation in activities beyond the traditional role of the military raises the question of the degree to which the military is affecting the international engagement of the United States. And in so doing, is DoD perceived as usurping the State Department's traditional diplomatic role, or indeed supporting it through active participation?

One answer to the latter question is testimony offered to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in July 2008 by then Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Ambassador Eric Edelman. Ambassador Edelman described the ultimate in interagency mutual support. He cited then Secretary of Defense Gates, in command of the "hard tools" of national power, as one of the largest advocates of program funding for the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), instruments of "soft tools." Ambassador Edelman averred that success in conflicts will extend beyond any one agency by saying: "We cannot afford to make bureaucratic distinctions between war and the use of armed forces and the essential peacetime activities once the sole purview of diplomats, but must integrate our political and military tools into a cohesive national effort."

Comparing the JIACG structures at the different combatant commands, it is important to utilize two viewpoints – then and now. When the JIACGs were first established, two factors were readily apparent as indicators of future success. First, the status and rank of the JIACG leader, and secondly, to whom the JIACG reported. At five of the six geographic combatant commands, the JIACG was led by a member of the federal Senior Executive Service (SES); the equivalent of a military admiral or general officer. Add to that mix the civilian representatives from other agencies, primarily the Departments of State, Justice, and Treasury, all working side-by-side with the military. Going beyond merely contributing their expertise

to a decisional process, the JIACG civilians helped the commands execute their policies and programs in a manner complementary to other agencies' efforts in executing foreign policy. To what extent this is still true today will be individually examined.

When it was first designed, Africa Command (AFRICOM) included in its organizational chart a JIACG reporting directly to the Deputy Commander, who was intended to be a Senior Foreign Service Officer, to ensure clear guidance from senior levels while also encouraging achieving cooperative results at the action officer level. Since then, however, the most senior of the Senior Foreign Service officers, one of four at AFRICOM, has stepped aside to assume the position of deputy to the commander for civil-military activities. Likewise, the interagency representatives were to all be located within the JIACG and work across directorate lines and activities encompassing all the directorates' different efforts with their own

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agency goals. Today, the approximately thirty representatives from thirteen different agencies are spread throughout the staff directorates with AFRICOM claiming itself to be but a part an interagency team representing United States interests in the region.

However, as frequently happens, there are detractors questioning the presence of interagency representatives at AFRICOM as

well as its stated mission purpose posted on its website: “U.S. AFRICOM, in concert with other U.S. government agencies and international partners, conducts sustained security engagement through military-to-military programs, military-sponsored activities, and other military operations as directed to promote a stable and secure African environment in support of U.S. foreign policy.” Specifically, in a letter to then Secretary of Defense Gates, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs echoed a complaint from the House Armed Services Committee that AFRICOM is usurping the foreign policy role of the State Department and USAID. Under the guise of interagency

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cooperation, employees detailed from other federal agencies are actually employees falling under the DoD chain of command and cease representing their parent organizations. Further, the Committee asserts that foreign assistance projects undertaken by the military do not fall under the purview of the Foreign Affairs committee, thus they actually undermine the authority and efforts of diplomatic leaders to support local governments. It alleges the danger lies in the confusing situation of the U.S. military bolstering local militaries when in fact U.S. foreign policy might be to buttress local civilian agencies to provide humanitarian assistance.¹

In his excellent article “Why AFRICOM?” Ambassador (Retired) Edward Marks notes the military attempt to better U.S. government efforts in Africa, but fears the process as proposed by AFRICOM will over-militarize U.S. policies and programs. Marks contends that security is not enhanced by better equipped and trained military forces but rather by better governance. Military engagement as a means of institution building will be counter-productive unless “subordinated to broader political and economic developments.”² While military-to-military programs are one good means to build partner relationships, they are not the goal in themselves. Such programs should be undertaken by the military only when they support U.S. foreign policy as determined by the civilian leadership. In Marks’ view, AFRICOM effectively presents itself as the center or focal point of U.S. foreign policy in Africa, which is exactly the wrong image for the United States to promote overseas. He also wryly notes that an organization of some 2,000 military personnel with only 30 civilian non-DoD government officers, can hardly claim to be a balanced representation of government policy that is anything other than military in nature.³

In a similar fashion, experimenting with the relatively new concept of a JIACG, SOUTHCOM transformed itself entirely into a civilian-military mix of interagency cooperation in 2007. Rather than being touted as a military command with liaison officers from civilian agencies, performing both oversight and coordination, SOUTHCOM proudly pointed to its unified stance of whole-government response to international events in the southern hemisphere.⁴ From Southern Command’s Strategic Plan for 2018 (written in 2007) came the statement of its intent to mold itself into “an interagency oriented organization seeking to support security and stability in the Americas.”⁵ Applicable here is the adage about leaning so far forward as to fall on one’s face. The cited

statement suspiciously resembles the purpose for an embassy. In ensuring cooperative U.S. partner relationships, SOUTHCOM will “work with interagency partners on U.S. government actions to strengthen and form strategic partnerships with key regional nations.”⁶

SOUTHCOM was enmeshing itself as an equal partner in developing national policy vis-à-vis international relationships, well outside the realm of simple war fighting. From its strategic plan came the directive “Engage interagency partner decision-makers and integrate personnel from these agencies into the SOUTHCOM staff while providing similar liaisons to our partners’ staffs.”⁷ SOUTHCOM embraced not just civilian oversight of its plans and actions but also detailed involvement of civilians in the very development of its policies. At the same time, it demonstrated its commitment by reducing its own staff, relocating those officers to other agencies and departments of the government, lending their knowledge and expertise to pre- and post-conflict nation development.

In the last two years, however, SOUTHCOM has reorganized itself again, creating a Partnering Directorate, whose goal is to foster “...whole-of-government solutions... by integrating U.S. government, private sector, and public-private organizations into the shared mission of ensuring security, enhancing stability, and enabling prosperity.”⁸ Such a statement can lead one to surmise SOUTHCOM is interested in molding interagency solutions that contribute to its mission, but not necessarily the other way around.

Following the example of the other geographic combatant commands and riding the wave created by Secretary Rumsfeld in establishing JIACGs, the PACOM JIACG initially translated national level decisions made by civilian leadership into military plans, which were then implemented through synchronized execution of military programs. The possibility of multiple military programs, diplomatic

plans, and international agreements executed by separate agencies arriving at the same end goal might seem highly unlikely. However, that the efforts arrived at the finish line together and not successively, as in diplomacy first followed by military, indicated that committed professionals were sharing and coordinating their expertise in a complementary manner across agency boundaries.

Cleverly designed were the different programs or “lines of operation” by which PACOM engaged foreign partners. Instead of representing them as being the responsibility of the operations directorate or training directorate, etc., they were known simply by their program names, making them a shared responsibility of the entire command. This further embraced the concept of a single-voiced DoD effort engaging as a full partner in the daily execution of foreign policy, occasionally presumptively assuming the role of senior partner. PACOM believed

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that with an area of responsibility covering fifty-one percent of the earth’s surface and over forty countries, the regular interaction and cooperation amongst militaries builds bridges of communication and partnership that help to prevent miscommunication and the onset of conflict. In addition, the U.S. military is able to provide resources, especially in the domain of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, which directly support diplomatic and strategic communication policies. Where U.S. government aid is intended to win favor with other governments, it is the military which

is often tasked with delivering that aid, in the form of building projects, medical assistance, security training, etc.

Previously there had been a clear demarcation between the Departments of State and Defense, with the combatant commander speaking only with the ambassador, and the officers in the staff directorates speaking directly to the military officers within the embassies. The PACOM JIACG, however, interacted with

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both the entire embassy country teams and the State Department Bureaus in Washington. Originally, any plan developed by the military requiring interaction within a specific country had to first go up the military chain for approval to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, then cross over to the Secretary of State for review by the appropriate State Department Bureau, and then reverse its course with whatever response was being offered. Instead, the PACOM JIACG was able to communicate directly with State Department entities normally at a higher level. These relationships eventually reached such levels of success, particularly with the State Department’s Office of the Coordinator for Counter Terrorism and the East Asia Pacific Bureau, that the PACOM JIACG was admonished to perhaps try to achieve the same level of cooperation and communication with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, ostensibly in their own military chain of command!⁹

Sadly, with changing leadership and a preference to return to business as it has been doctrinally known, the PACOM JIACG bounced between the J3 Operations and J5 Plans directorates and now exists in name only as just one division within the new J9 Outreach Directorate, with only one officer assigned, and military at that. The directorate is chaired by a Senior Foreign Service officer who also oversees the Public Diplomacy Advisor, Legislative Affairs and the Washington Liaison Office. Those other agency representatives that do still exist at PACOM work independently with the staff divisions where they are located, and not in a coordinated manner via the JIACG.

European Command (EUCOM) took a slightly different approach. Getting away from the term “JIACG” they adopted a new term from the beginning – Commander’s Interagency Engagement Group (CIEG). It too hints of an “us vs. them” mentality with the military engaging the rest of the government while forgetting, or overlooking, that DoD is a part of the interagency, not apart from it. Nonetheless, a wide spread of other agency representation is located within the CIEG, available as a resource for the EUCOM staff to tap into as they develop their military support plans for the region, providing contextual reference without committal authority for their parent organizations. In this role, the interagency representatives act as advisors to the commander’s efforts in executing theater security cooperation. EUCOM interagency officers are contributors to the decision process and execution of foreign policy, but not necessarily partners at the table. They are engaging their interagency colleagues, but not necessarily cooperating with them. EUCOM is developing and executing military plans and efforts, utilizing the other agency representatives to ensure they remain coordinated, without always returning the favor of supporting non-DoD plans, efforts, or programs.

In time this has become even clearer with the transformation of the CIEG into the ECJ9, Interagency Partnering Directorate, with an SES director. The purpose of this “new” division is to lead the EUCOM effort to integrate interagency, academia, NGOs, and private sector partners to better execute the EUCOM mission through a “whole-of-society” approach. Its intent is to accomplish this by actively building relationships to create a network of key Pentagon, EUCOM, interagency, and external actors that work together to advance EUCOM goals. Attention is invited to the emphasis on EUCOM goals and not what U.S. goals EUCOM may contribute to. From EUCOM’s website describing the directorate comes the statement the members of the ECJ9 are “to protect EUCOM equities at interagency meetings, shape agendas and advocate EUCOM positions.”

NORTHCOM, with responsibility for the military component of homeland defense, understandably has the largest contingent of non-military agency representatives. Included on its roster are state, local, and tribal authorities, along with non-governmental and private sector organizations. Participating whole-heartedly in execution of national policy, NORTHCOM puts itself forward as the agent of many principals. Its JIACG has evolved into the Interagency Coordination Directorate which provides interagency context to the commander’s decision process. Furthermore, this directorate provides interagency perspective to the entire NORTHCOM staff while simultaneously offering military perspective to their partner civilian agencies. NORTHCOM’s JIACG and its current manifestation always was and remains under the direction of an SES officer.

CENTCOM was the first combatant command to formally organize a JIACG in accordance with Secretary of Defense direction. Understandable, insofar as CENTCOM was engaged in combat operations first in Afghanistan

and then Iraq. At one point, the CENTCOM JIACG encompassed four subordinate offices around Iraq, manned by representatives from many U.S. government agencies, primarily intelligence and law enforcement with 70 FBI agents alone. The CENTCOM JIACG’s greatest contribution was to serve as an intelligence fusion center. As assigned members came across forensic information and intelligence in the course of their activities, it would be shared with intelligence analysts who were able to build whole pictures. With agents from FBI, Customs and Border Protection, the State Department’s Diplomatic Security Service, New York Joint Terrorism Task Force, Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms, and others, the combined efforts achieved results out of all proportion to its size. When he visited the JIACG offices in

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Bagram, Afghanistan in February 2002, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers said: “This is exactly what the Secretary [of Defense] and I had in mind.”¹⁰

Since its initial inception, the CENTCOM JIACG has learned, as have all the JIACGs, that the changing face of the enemy and the complex global environment demand constant internal adaptation. Having passed through the early experimental stages, and groped its way through the paradigm shattering points of open cooperation with other agencies, which heretofore had jealously guarded their agendas

and jurisdictions, the CENTCOM JIACG has moved even further in embracing interagency cooperation.

In moving from a joint organization serving as a fusion cell sharing information and intelligence amongst representatives from different agencies, the CENTCOM JIACG has evolved into the Interagency Task Force for Irregular Warfare (IATF-IW). It is fair to say that in prosecuting foreign policy which currently includes open warfare, CENTCOM has moved even further in its interaction and synergy as part of a total, combined, whole-of-government approach toward execution of U.S. policy. It has gone beyond merely being

decisions to the military could be fraught with peril in that it potentially precludes initiating long-term programs more aligned with the U.S. government policy approach.

Rather than expressing an attitude of executing a military mission with subsequent occupation and perhaps reparation, CENTCOM went fully to the opposite extreme, in the IATF-IW being the agent of the State Department. This subordination to State Department lead ensured rebuilding Iraq would occur according to a U.S. government view rather than a U.S. military view.

Conclusion

The over-riding question remains: Where is our military today and what has it learned in using the JIACGs as a vehicle to contribute to the execution of coordinated foreign policy?

I would submit the current crop of military leadership has learned it must be intimately involved in the development and application of foreign policy. The military must be involved upon the international stage long before any application of traditional military arms is administered. The civilian leadership has equally learned the value of military skills in developing plans and the very deep resource and capability pockets of the Department of Defense. JIACGs have demonstrated in the last decade that they are a highly effective means to jointly and interactively conduct whole-of-government operations successfully, when they are allowed to fully function.

Considering how relatively new and recent are the appearance of the JIACGs, there is a dearth of academic research available. Compounding the complexity of producing or developing any academic foundation for JIACGs is how quickly they adapt. First, in that no two are alike, their mission dependent wholly upon the regional demands in which they operate. And secondly, as world events and politics change, so do the JIACGs.

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an advisor participating in the development of foreign policy plans. With the introduction of the IATF-IW, CENTCOM is actively developing and promoting plans in conjunction with the civilian entities of government.

The conflict, or danger, in Iraq is that the military was effectively the government in Iraq. With the Ba'ath party out of power, there was a vacuum that permeated all facets of life in Iraq. It fell primarily to the military to re-build the infrastructure, to turn on the lights, and get the water flowing. It was also necessary to re-constitute a police force and local governance. To its credit, in short order more communities in Iraq enjoyed electricity, fresh water, and sewage than they had known in years under Saddam. But relegating the majority of development

Some quarters have interpreted Clausewitz to say that the military exists to resolve foreign conflict once diplomacy has ceased or failed. The 21st century modern military has effectively put that mindset to rest. While the military professionals are certainly expected to continue to be the recognized experts in the military realm, their duties, and consequently contributions, encompass much more now.

Utilizing the military to engage in efforts beyond the conduct of war has brought the military into the circle of coordinated international efforts. Training the military to conduct peace keeping or stability operations, versus projecting warfare, is but one element of the entire government toolchest of foreign policy. Creating a career path for service members who engage local inhabitants in restructuring or building their capacity for self-sufficiency is to develop a skill set entirely different from the warrior's manual of arms. Providing academic outlets, at many levels, that pursue avenues other than simply the science of warfare ensures that military officers with highly credentialed backgrounds are able to assume positions within the State Department as well as interact with all the U.S. government agencies whilst developing and executing foreign policy according to the dictates and guidance of our civilian leadership. By the same token, attendance at military staff colleges by civilian government officers from the Departments of State, Justice, Treasury, and Commerce, just to name a few, creates a cadre of civilians who can effectively influence combatant commands by their knowledge of military organization and priorities.

The JIACG concept is the product of a military that has matured to the point of realizing its full potential. While the Congress expressed its concern to Secretary Gates that the military is usurping foreign policy in hosting JIACGs, the military is actually further subordinating itself to civilian control while contributing to the execution of national policy in the foreign arena. Rather than being the objective body awaiting dispatch, the military is, through the coordinated actions of the JIACGs, helping to create, develop, enhance, and implement foreign policy.

In an environment of programs competing for ever shrinking resources, it will be those projects that have been tried and tested which will survive. The JIACG's are still relatively too new for any professional officer to gamble their career and potential for promotion. Just as it took two generations of officers for the tenets of Goldwater-Nichols and joint duty to be fully accepted, if the JIACG's survive at all it will be many years before they are allowed to fully demonstrate their worth. Until then, it will take a small cadre of dedicated leaders, more interested in being effective in their assignments and willing to put their own advancement at risk in favor of promoting the entire U.S. government's goals. Then only will the JIACG's become a normal and accepted method of integrating the United States military's capabilities into the larger foreign policy team. **IAJ**

Notes

- 1 Letter from U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs to SECDEF Gates, September 16, 2008, pp. 2-4.
- 2 Edward Marks, "Why USAFRICOM?" Joint Forces Quarterly, Issue.52, 1st Quarter 2009, pp. 148-149.
- 3 Ibid., pp. 150-151.
- 4 David H. Gurney, "An Interview with John G. Stavridis", Joint Force Quarterly, Issue 50, 3rd Quarter

2008, pg. 128.

5 United States Southern Command, Command Strategy 2018, June 2008, p. 10.

6 Ibid., p. 13

7 Ibid., p. 15

8 United States Southern Command website, J9 Partnering Directorate, <http://www.southcom.mil/AppsSC/pages/staff.php?id=26&flag=1>, accessed July 5, 2011.

9 Memo from Major General Gardner, USMC, PACOM J-3, to PACOM JIACG, 2004.

10 Matthew F. Bogdanos, "Joint Interagency Cooperation: The First Step" Joint Force Quarterly, Issue 37, 2nd Quarter, 2005, pp. 11, 137-138.