“All Hands on Deck”
A Whole-of-Government Approach

by Jeffrey A. Bradford

A catastrophic earthquake has struck the New Madrid seismic zone. Eight states within the region are affected by the devastation. Within the zone, tens of thousands of people are dead or injured; hundreds of thousands of buildings are damaged or destroyed; thousands of bridges and roads are damaged or impassable; and millions of people are displaced. This is the moment the United States government (USG) has dreaded for years. This is the “all hands on deck” moment. Every agency of the USG will respond, led by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The USG will need a whole-of-government approach to quickly and efficiently respond to the devastation wrought by this earthquake. This approach requires that all government capabilities and resources be shared, leveraged, synchronized, and applied toward the strategic end state. In order to do this, interagency members must, to the greatest degree possible, resist seeing their resources as belonging to a single agency, but rather as tools of government power.¹

Whole-of-government planning is probably the most vital aspect to the success of the approach. Dwight D. Eisenhower noted, “Plans are worthless, but planning is everything. There is a very great distinction because when you are planning for an emergency you must start with this one thing: the very definition of “emergency” is that it is unexpected, therefore it is not going to happen the way you are planning.”²

To optimize the use of various instruments toward achieving the operation’s goals, all stakeholders in an anticipated operation must participate in the planning and consultation.³ Addressing the different planning capacities and cultures of civilian agencies in contrast to the Department of Defense (DoD) is another planning challenge. For example, DoD uses the Joint Operations Planning and Execution System (JOPES), while the Department of Homeland Security

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The 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS) directed the USG to use a whole-of-government approach to improve the integration of skills and capabilities within its military and civilian institutions, so they complement each other and operate seamlessly. This requires a deliberate and inclusive interagency process. Agencies must integrate their efforts to implement and monitor operations, policies, and strategies. The 2010 NSS concept of a whole-of-government approach drew from the 2009 DoD Quadrennial Roles and Missions (QRM) Review report, which states:

The desired end state is for U.S. government national security partners to develop plans and conduct operations from a shared perspective. Toward this end, the Department will continue to work with its interagency partners to plan, organize, train, and employ integrated, mutually-supporting interagency capabilities to achieve unified action at home and abroad.

Chapter 1 of Joint Publication 3-08, Interorganizational Coordination during Joint Operations, identifies how interagency and interorganizational coordination can help achieve the desired end states by facilitating unity of effort, achieving common objectives, and providing common understanding. One difficulty noted is determining appropriate counterparts and exchanging information among U.S. agencies when habitual relationships have not been established. Organizational differences exist between the U.S. military and other government agencies’ hierarchies, particularly at the operational level where counterparts to the military joint force commander seldom exist. Further, overall lead federal authority in a crisis response and limited contingency operation is likely to be exercised not by the geographic combatant commander, but by a U.S. ambassador or other senior civilian, who will provide policy and goals for all government agencies and military organizations in the operation. This is especially true of domestic...

(DHS) uses the Integrated Planning System (IPS). While different, both systems are evolving to improve interagency planning efforts.

Unity of effort is a term that is always mentioned when conducting domestic operations. The phrase briefly well and is the buzzword of our time, but execution is sometimes lacking. The definition of unity of effort is coordination and cooperation toward common objectives, even if the participants are not necessarily part of the same command or organization. Unity of effort is the crux of any domestic, civil-support operation conducted within the U.S. Attaining unity of effort at the operational and tactical levels saves lives, protects property, and mitigates suffering.

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is the synchronization and/or integration of joint, single-Service, special, multinational, and supporting operations with the operations of other government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations to achieve unity of effort in the operational area.
operations, since a USG civilian agency will always be designated the lead federal authority.

So how do we get a whole-of-government response for a catastrophic disaster that is well planned, more integrated, mutually-supporting, and provides for unified action in order to achieve unity of effort? The answer at the operational and/or tactical levels is establishing a standing joint interagency task force (JIATF) or interagency coordination center that provides linkage across the whole federal government.

JIATFs have existed for many years, with the most well-known example being U.S. Southern Command’s JIATF–South, based in Key West, Florida, whose mission is to conduct interagency and international detection and monitoring operations and facilitate the interdiction of illicit trafficking and other narco-terrorist threats in support of national and partner nation security. A JIATF is a force multiplier that uses a unique organizational structure to focus on a single mission. Like most task forces, a JIATF is formed for a specific task and purpose. JIATFs are formal organizations usually chartered by the DoD and one or more civilian agencies. They are guided by a memorandum of agreement or other founding legal documents that define the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of the JIATF’s members. The JIATF is staffed and led by personnel from multiple agencies under a single commander or director.

JIATF–South has earned a reputation as the “gold standard” and “crown jewel” of interagency cooperation and intelligence fusion. In Munsing and Lamb’s excellent case study on JIATF–South’s operations, they highlight the success of JIATF–South’s cross-functional teams and how they can be duplicated. In the push to find whole-of-government solutions to problems, understanding how and why JIATF–South is so effective would be a key to exporting the structures, processes, and procedures to other aspects of government response to various national security challenges.

JIATF–South contains personnel from all branches of the military, nine government agencies, and eleven partner nations. Personnel perform many different functions but do so as a team. It has been widely acknowledged that interagency collaboration within the USG needs to improve and that interagency teams are a promising means toward that end. Interagency teams are cross-functional. As the commander of U.S. Southern Command recently noted:

A JIATF - Joint Interagency Task Force - is a force multiplier that uses a unique organizational structure to focus on a single mission.
set. The ten variables were organized by their scope, beginning with three organizational-level variables—purpose, empowerment, and support. Then they considered team-level variables—structure, decision-making, culture, and learning. Finally, they looked at the individual-level variables—composition, rewards, and leadership. Figure 1 provides a quick definition of each variable.

Analyzing each variable as Munsing and Lamb applied it to JIATF-South would be lengthy and unnecessary for this paper; however, their research suggests that some performance variables are more important than others, and practitioners can garner some practical lessons learned from JIATF–South’s experience.

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<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Variables</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>The broad, long-term mandate given to the team by its management, as well as the alignment of short-term objectives with the strategic vision and agreement on common approaches within the team.</td>
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<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Access to sufficient, high-quality personnel, funds, and materials and an appropriate amount of authority that allows for confident, decisive action.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>The set of organizational processes that connect a team to other teams at multiple levels within the organization and other organizations and a wide variety of resources the team needs to accomplish its mission.</td>
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<td>Structure</td>
<td>The “mechanics” of teams—design, collocation, and networks—that affect team productivity.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Decision-Making</td>
<td>The mechanisms that are employed to make sense of and solve a variety of complex problems faced by a cross-functional team.</td>
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<td>Culture</td>
<td>The shared values, norm, and beliefs of the team—behavioral expectations and level of commitment and trust among team members.</td>
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<td>Learning</td>
<td>The ongoing process of reflection and action through which teams acquire, share, combine, and apply knowledge.</td>
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<td>Composition</td>
<td>What individual members bring to the group in terms of skill, ability, and disposition.</td>
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<td>Rewards</td>
<td>Material incentives and psychological rewards to direct team members toward accomplishing the team’s mission.</td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
<td>The collection of strategic actions that are taken to accomplish team objectives, to ensure a reasonable level of efficiency, and to avoid team catastrophes.</td>
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Figure 1.
• Lesson 1: Get a mandate from higher authority. The mission and team must have sufficient legitimacy—that is, sanctioned by a higher authority as a priority—to gain cooperation from other organizations.

• Lesson 2: Tailor a holistic solution set to a discrete problem. It is easiest to forge collaboration around a discrete, clearly identifiable problem with a meaningful and measurable outcome. The organization must take an end-to-end approach to conceptualizing the problem and the functional capabilities required for its solution and then recruit the support required for the mission.

• Lesson 3: Know your partners. To build a coalition of partners willing to collaborate, the JIATF–South leadership had to learn about its proposed partner organizations. Leadership had to understand their equities and appreciate what it would take to develop a trust relationship with them.

• Lesson 4: Get resources. The National Security System was not designed with teams in mind, and it will require extra work to make sure your team is adequately supported. This means getting top-down support in the form of resources and minimally-sufficient levels of legal authority to use those resources with flexibility.

• Lesson 5: Build networks. Beyond the irreducible core of collaborating organizations that must be wooed; forging additional partnerships with varying levels of intensity is important. The complex problems national security teams tackle often require them to build networks with diverse sets of interested parties. These networks should be both horizontal and vertical.

The final analysis also highlights some of the top mistakes to avoid:

• Don’t command the presence of interagency personnel on your team.

• Don’t segregate interagency staff in separate buildings.

• Don’t disrespect smaller partners, because they can make big contributions.

• Don’t demand binding agreements on cooperation (at least initially).

• Don’t ignore any partners’ need to feel they make a contribution.

• Don’t make binding decisions without substantial vetting and support.

• Don’t forget to build a culture of trust and empowerment.

• Don’t take the credit for collaborative success.

Munsing and Lamb conclude that while challenges still exist to establishing interagency teams, JIATF–South has demonstrated that interagency and multilateral collaboration is possible and effective precisely at a time when many national leaders are arguing that better interagency or whole-of-government solutions are essential for U.S. security.¹⁵

Another interagency success story is the outstanding coordination and collaboration conducted at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, Idaho. NIFC is the nation’s support center for wildland firefighting. Eight different agencies and organizations are part of NIFC: Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fire Administration, National Weather Service, and the National Association of State Foresters. NIFC makes decisions using the interagency cooperation concept because it
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has no single director or manager. Working together with all levels of government agencies involved with wild-land fire management, NIFC coordinates and manages issues from safety and planning, to science, preparedness, operations, strategy development, logistics, intelligence, emergency response, and more. Within the NIFC, the National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC) is the focal point for coordinating the mobilization of resources for wild-land fire and other incidents throughout the U.S. This coordination center also provides intelligence and predictive services-related products designed to be used by the internal wild-land fire community for wild-land fire and incident management decision making.

Wildfire suppression is built on a three-tiered system of providing additional support to firefighting. The first tier to respond are the local assets and area firefighters. The next tier is one of the eleven geographic areas that are established around the nation. Once all the resources in the geographic area are exhausted, a national level response, led by the NICC, would provide any and all additional support to an incident. The U.S. military is normally requested when national civilian resources are committed to fires and there is the need for further resources. The decision to request military support rests with the NIFC. As needed, the military will send a liaison officer (usually a defense coordinating officer [DCO]) to the NIFC, to coordinate closely with the NICC, which in turn coordinates and tracks national firefighting requirements and plays a key role in mobilizing military resources. The U.S. military may provide aerial and/or ground resources. This process works well, due to the limited military forces usually needed to support wildland firefighting in the U.S.

The method of responding to incidents or natural and man-made disasters is based on the DHS’s National Response Framework (NRF). This framework guides how the nation conducts all hazards response. It is built upon scalable, flexible, and adaptable coordinating structures to align key roles and responsibilities across the nation. It describes specific authorities and best practices for managing incidents that range from the serious but purely local, to large-scale terrorist attacks or catastrophic natural disasters.

The NRF is designed to handle disasters and emergencies at the lowest level possible. Typically, if local authorities are overwhelmed in the initial disaster, they can request help from the state. Once a state’s assets, to include the National Guard of that state, have responded and still cannot stabilize the situation, the state would call on other states through Emergency Management Assistance Compact agreements. These compacts are state-to-state agreements that allow one state to supply various material or personnel to support another state, if requested. If those additional assets fail to stabilize the situation, civilian federal assets coordinated through FEMA would respond.

If the scope and scale of the incident or disaster were of such magnitude that FEMA assets were not enough, active-duty military forces would be called on to respond. For the purposes of this paper, the term Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA) will be used to identify all domestic assistance missions the military may conduct in support of civil authorities. According to Joint Publication 1-02, DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated...
Terms, DSCA is defined as:

Support provided by U.S. federal military forces, Department of Defense civilians, Department of Defense contract personnel, Department of Defense component assets, and National Guard forces (when the Secretary of Defense in coordination with the governors of the affected states elects and requests to use those forces in Title 32, United States Code, status) in response to requests for assistance from civil authorities for domestic emergencies, law enforcement support, and other domestic activities, or from qualifying entities for special events.21

For a disaster of the scope and scale of a New Madrid earthquake, the typical response would be too slow to save the maximum number of lives, protect property, and mitigate suffering. The government must bring all response forces to the area faster and earlier; however, without strong interagency and interorganizational coordination structures in place, the government could have the same problems organizing a coherent response it experienced responding to Hurricane Katrina.

In 2008, FEMA launched a pilot program, Task Force for Emergency Readiness (TFER), to address some of the issues associated with the Hurricane Katrina response. It was designed to strengthen state preparedness for catastrophic disasters by facilitating greater capacity in and more comprehensive integration of planning efforts across all levels of government. It ended in August 2011. TFER emphasized integrating planning efforts across sectors, jurisdictions, and functional disciplines, as well as among state, regional, and federal agencies, primarily FEMA and DoD.22 Planning is a key component in national preparedness, and it is particularly important in a catastrophic incident that results in extraordinary levels of casualties or damage or disruption that severely affects the population, infrastructure, environment, economy, national morale, or government functions in an area.23

First envisioned by senior DoD leadership, the TFER program was to address the national planning scenarios and strengthen each individual state’s catastrophic disaster preparedness. Since DoD is always a supporting element for disaster responses/incidents in the homeland, FEMA was designated to lead the pilot program and emphasize coordinating and integrating state, FEMA, and DoD plans.

The program was on the right track in developing coordinated and integrated plans that cover the full spectrum of disaster response. According to the Government Accountability Office report, all states made progress in building relationships with stakeholders such as FEMA, state agencies, and the National Guard, but coordination with federal military stakeholders was limited.24 At the onset of TFER, DoD provided training to planners and state officials on civil-military planning integration and how U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) could support TFER efforts. After the initial training, the levels of integration and coordination varied depending on a variety of issues including the timing of work schedules, availability to meet, and status of state response plans.25 While TFER is an excellent start, a more concerted effort would be needed to fully prepare the states and federal agencies to quickly and efficiently respond to a catastrophic incident, such as the New Madrid scenario.

Creating a JIATF–North under NORTHCOM for DSCA response could be a
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Increasingly, JIATFs are being formed to achieve unity of effort and bring all instruments of national power to bear on asymmetric threats. Because they use more than the military instrument of power, JIATFs are generally not a lethal asset but rather develop and drive creative nonlethal solutions and policy actions to accomplish their missions.26 A JIATF would be tailor-made to integrate DSCA operations in the U.S. The JIATF would use the federal agency personnel expertise to ensure DSCA was more timely, integrated, and efficient. The JIATF would use the planning expertise of the military to help guide state and federal agencies that needed help to shape and optimize their response plans. Establishing a JIATF would also help the military identify USG counterparts and establish habitual relationships with many federal agencies.

There are already many DoD units and agencies conducting planning and providing DSCA to government agencies on a daily basis. Some are doing a better job than others, but regarding catastrophic disaster planning and operational support, the ad hoc nature of coordinating and collaborating will still slow the response times to an unacceptable level. NORTHCOM has many military units under its command that could be used to establish the JIATF.

Joint Task Force-Civil Support (JTF-CS) based in Fort Eustis, Virginia, plans and integrates DoD support to the designated primary agency for domestic chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, or high-yield explosive consequence management operations. When approved by the secretary of defense and directed by the commander of NORTHCOM, it deploys to the incident site and executes timely and effective command and control of designated DoD forces, providing support to civil authorities to save lives, prevent injury, and provide temporary, critical, life support.

Joint Task Force–North, based at Biggs Army Airfield, Fort Bliss, Texas, is the DoD organization tasked to support our nation’s federal law enforcement agencies in the interdiction of suspected transnational threats within and along the approaches to the continental United States. U.S. Army North’s (ARNORTH) ten Defense Coordinating Elements (DCE), each led by a DCO, works daily within the FEMA...
regions to plan for and conduct civil support operations. NORTHCOM’s operations division has the lead on managing and developing the dual-status commander program and regularly engages with state National Guard Joint Force Headquarters and JTF staffs. The engagements are designed to establish habitual relationships with National Guard partners, should an incident occur within their state or territory. A dual-status commander is usually a National Guard general officer that is given dual authority to command and control both National Guard and federal military forces that respond to an event or incident within a state or territory, once federal military forces are requested and approved. This operational construct goes a long way toward better integration and coordination of DSCA operations and is designed to provide better unity of effort.

Organizing JIATF–North should take into account the NRF, National Incident Management System, and the Incident Command System (ICS). The latter system is the standard for incident response structures around the nation and a field-level, incident command post is organized around four cross-functional sections: Operations, Plans, Logistics, and Finance/Administration.

From 2003 to 2011, the military had similarly structured adaptive-staff organizations in the form of Standing Joint Force Headquarters (SJFHQ). Each geographic combatant command (GCC) had one assigned to it, and before they were disbanded, they were structured much the same way as ICS organizations. Each GCC, however, utilized and organized its SJFHQ in different ways to suit its command’s needs. The SJFHQ consisted of a special staff and four cross-functional teams: a Joint Operations Team, a Joint Plans Team, an Information Synchronization Team, and a Joint Support Team. A JIATF that incorporates a combination of the SJFHQ and ICS organizational constructs could be useful for DSCA responses.

By combining JTF–CS, JTF–North, the 10 DCO/DCEs, and NC/J36 personnel from USNORTHCOM/USARNORTH to provide the initial military structure of the JIATF and DHS, FEMA and Justice to provide initial federal civilian structure, JIATF–North could provide coordinated and integrated federal response capability that is fast and efficient. The staff sections and subordinate branches would have a mix of military and USG agencies. If a chief is USG agency personnel, his/her deputy would be military. A USCG 2-star admiral would be the ideal flag officer to lead the JIATF given his/her ability to work in both the DHS and DoD arenas. A National Guard 1-star general and a DHS Senior Executive Service 1-star equivalent could serve as the Deputy and Vice Directors respectively, which would provide for a leadership team that can better work in both the DHS and DoD realms. In order to provide the seniority necessary to drive the operational aspects of the JIATF, the operations section chief could be a 1-star general. Of note, the deployable aspect of the JIATF is a key element to its success. It must be able to deploy on scene and provide the required interagency coordination needed by all USG entities in order to ensure unity of effort. (See Figure 2, pg. 42)

This article illustrates that a whole-of-government approach to planning and operations provides the best chance of success in any USG operation. The current strategy and doctrine guiding the USG’s response to any
event, incident, or major disaster are designed to achieve unity of effort. Examples of JIATF–South and NIFC illustrate that interagency and interorganizational coordination are the right way to do business, and they have proven very effective in achieving unity of effort. More opportunities exist, however, to utilize interagency coordination structures for other mission sets, such as DSCA and disaster response operations. If a JIATF had existed for Hurricane Katrina or the Deepwater Horizon response, would unity of effort have been achieved more quickly? Establishing JIATF–North in the NORTHCOM area of responsibility in conjunction with DHS, FEMA, and the Justice Department could provide the necessary coordination and collaboration structure to provide a faster, more efficient, deployable whole-of-government response to events, incidents, and major disasters that might occur in the homeland. IAJ

NOTES

2 Dwight D. Eisenhower, speech to the National Defense Executive Reserve Conference in Washington,

3 Joint Publication 3-08, p. II-2.

4 Ibid.


8 Joint Publication 3-08, p. I-3.


11 Joint Publication 3-08, p. E-1.


13 Ibid., pp. 4–5.

14 Ibid., p. 32.

15 Ibid., pp. 83–85.


23 Ibid., p. 2.

24 Ibid., p. 29.

25 Ibid., p. 31.

26 Joint Publication 3-08, p. E-1.