



CAITLIN LEE, STEPHEN WEBBER, ALICE SHIH, MICHAEL SPIRTAS

Running the Joint

Air Force Efforts to Build a Joint Task Force Headquarters



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Published by the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available for this publication.

ISBN: 978-1-9774-0708-5

Cover: Pfc. Daniel J. Alkana/U.S. Army.

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Preface

In 2016, General David Goldfein, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, called on 9th Air Force (9 AF) at Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina to develop a Joint Task Force Headquarters (JTF HQ) capability, with the expectation that other numbered air forces would follow. After declaring initial operation capability in December 2018, 9 AF began to move toward full operating capacity. In the spring of 2020, 9 AF was called on to lead Task Force–Southeast, supporting the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic and Southeast. In August 2020, wings and direct reporting units from 9 AF and the 12th Air Force were integrated to form the 15th Air Force (15 AF), which continues the 9 AF mission to prepare to deploy as a service-retained JTF HQ or Air Expeditionary Task Force headquarters.

Before 9 AF was integrated into 15 AF, 9 AF leadership and Headquarters Air Force (HAF) asked the RAND Corporation to examine how JTF HQs are formed and identify those factors that influence the selection of a unit to lead a Joint Task Force (JTF). RAND was also asked to explore how the U.S. Air Force (USAF) can prepare for the unique requirements of leading joint operations. This report outlines those issues associated with “getting ready” (how the USAF can prepare to lead joint operations) and “getting the call” (how the USAF can posture itself to increase and enhance its JTF leadership opportunities). RAND conducted this research through discussions with 9 AF staff, observation of ongoing unit training, engagement with individuals across the U.S. Department of Defense, quantitative analysis of trends in JTF formation from 1990 to 2017, and case studies of the recent joint operations Joint Task Force Odyssey Dawn, Joint Forces Command–United Assistance, and Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve.

This study provides insights for 15 AF personnel as they continue the work of 9 AF to prepare for the JTF HQ mission. It also supports USAF leaders, particularly those engaged in policy formulation and resource allocation decisions, by framing the organization, training, and equipping issues that influence the USAF’s ability to stand up a JTF HQ. More broadly, it may be of interest to airmen, other military personnel, and members of the larger defense community who seek to better understand the operational level of war, the JTF construct, and the USAF’s efforts to enhance its joint leadership capabilities. It builds on a previous RAND study, *What It Takes: Air Force Command of Joint Operations*, which sought to help the Air Force understand the requirements of an effective JTF HQ.

This research was funded by 9 AF and HAF, sponsored by the 15 AF commander, Major General Chad Franks, and initiated by his predecessor, the 9 AF commander, Major General Scott J. Zobrist (Ret.). It was conducted within the Force Modernization and

Employment Program of RAND Project AIR FORCE as part of a 2019–2020 project, “Running the Joint: Air Force Command of Joint Task Force Headquarters.”

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This report documents work originally shared with the DAF in June 2020. The draft report, issued in June 2020, was reviewed by formal peer reviewers and DAF subject-matter experts.

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Summary

Issue

In 2016, General David Goldfein, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF), called on 9th Air Force (9 AF) at Shaw Air Force Base (AFB) in South Carolina to develop the capability to serve as a Joint Task Force (JTF) Headquarters (HQ), with the expectation that other numbered air forces would eventually develop similar capability. In August 2020, 9 AF and 12th Air Force (12 AF) direct-reporting units and wings were integrated to form 15th Air Force (15 AF), which now continues to carry out the mandate to develop a JTF HQ capability.

This project examines the U.S. Air Force's (USAF's) efforts to develop a JTF capability that maximizes airpower's contribution to joint warfighting—one that has the organization, training, and equipment required to effectively carry out a JTF HQ mission when called on to do so.

Approach

The research team conducted literature reviews, engaged in discussions with subject-matter experts, attended multiple staff exercises at 9 AF headquarters at Shaw AFB and at Robins AFB in Georgia, and generated three case studies of operations in which the staff of the JTF HQ consisted of a cohesive preexisting or “core” unit like 9 AF. The team also examined a data set of 88 JTF HQs activated between 1990 and 2017 to gain insight into the causes and conditions that typically result in JTF HQ formation and to understand the factors that shape JTF HQ mission sets, selection processes, and their duration.

RAND's findings and recommendations reflect research conducted prior to 9 AF's integration into the new 15 AF, but they remain relevant to 15 AF personnel and others interested in understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with USAF efforts to stand up a JTF HQ.

Findings

- The USAF's JTF HQ mission scope is not well defined.
- The plurality of USAF JTFs between 1990 and 2017 involved humanitarian relief/noncombatant evacuation operations (HR/NEO) missions, which often require JTF HQs and draw on USAF strengths.
- Units selected to serve as a JTF core are most often aligned with a Combatant Command.
- Joint integration and collaboration are critical to JTF HQ success.
- There is tension between the USAF's JTF HQ construct and its emerging force presentation model.
- The USAF contributes to the joint command and control (C2) at the component level and is attempting to play a larger role.

- USAF resourcing decisions constrain JTF HQ initiative.

Recommendations

This research supports recommendations in three main areas: (1) scope 9 AF's mission set; (2) choose a force presentation model aligned with 9 AF's mission set; and (3) address broader institutional-level issues related to USAF-wide culture and budget issues, as follows:

Scope the Mission Set

- Come to formal agreement on JTF HQ mission and function.
- Focus on HR/NEO mission sets before considering mission set expansion.
- Affiliate the JTF HQ capability with a geographic combatant command.
- Reconsider if worldwide deployability is an appropriate goal.
- Increase training opportunities in collaboration with military and civilian partners.

Choose a Force Presentation Model

- Acknowledge and reconcile the JTF HQ's relative C2 priorities.
- Increase JTF HQ staff over 9 AF staffing levels.
- Choose a transparent force generation cycle that balances USAF JTF HQ limitations with the needs of joint force.
- Clarify Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve funding and authorities to meet the JTF HQ mission.
- Engage in long-range planning to align Guard and Reserve mobilization with JTF HQ force presentation needs.

Resolve Broader Institutional Issues

- Make a unique contribution to joint command.
- If leading JTF HQs is critical, promote it in USAF culture.
- Ensure that 15 AF is an attractive assignment.
- Prioritize funding for the JTF HQ effort.
- Follow CSAF guidance to establish a program of record for the JTF HQ capability.
- Enhance advocacy for JTF HQ funding.

Acknowledgments

We thank the dozens of men and women involved in the 9 AF Joint Task Force Headquarters effort who took time to provide invaluable insights on the experience over the past year. In particular, Major General Scott J. Zobrist (Ret.), Colonel Donald Brunk, Lieutenant Colonel Rob Husmann, and Colonel Rhude Cherry (Ret.) played an integral role in championing this project and shaping the RAND Corporation's understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing 9 AF. Colonel Phillip Walker, Wing Commander Philip Holdcroft, and Lieutenant Colonel Erica Meyer provided valuable perspective in multiple conversations. We are also grateful to our sponsor, Major General Chad P. Franks, for his time and support throughout the project, as well as the Air Staff and Air Combat Command officials who contributed to the study. We also appreciate critical inputs from several retired U.S. Air Force and U.S. Army general officers. We thank Dr. James Chow for support in guiding this project to completion in his capacity as director of the RAND Project AIR FORCE Force Modernization and Employment program. Finally, we thank our reviewers, Caroline Baxter and Lieutenant General Robert Elder (Ret.), for their invaluable input.

Abbreviations

9 AF	9th Air Force
12 AF	12th Air Force
15 AF	15th Air Force
17 AF	17th Air Force
82 ABD	82nd Airborne Division
101 AD	101st Airborne Division
ACC	Air Combat Command
AFB	Air Force Base
AFCENT	U.S. Air Forces Central
AFRICOM	Africa Command
AFSOUTH	Air Forces Southern
ANG	Air National Guard
AOC	Air Operations Center
AOR	area of operations
ARC	Air Reserve Component
ARCENT	Army Central
C2	command and control
C3	command, control, and communications
CAOC	Combined Air Operations Center
CCDR	combatant commander
CENTCOM	Central Command
CFACC	Combined Forces Air Component Commander
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
CJFLCC	Combined Joint Force Land Component Command
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
CJTF-HOA	Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa
CJTF-OIR	Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve
CJTF-UP	Combined Joint Task Force–Unified Protector
C-NAF	Component Numbered Air Force
COCOM	Contingency Response Force
CRF	Combatant Command

CSTC-A	Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan
DAF	Department of the Air Force
DCOM-O&I	Deputy Commander for Operations and Intelligence
DFE	Dynamic Force Employment
DoD	Department of Defense
DRT	Directed Readiness Table
DSCA	defense support of civil authorities
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease
EXORD	execute order
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FY	fiscal year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GCC	geographic combatant command
GFMAP	global force management and allocation process
GRF	Global Response Force
HA/DR	humanitarian assistance and disaster relief
HAF	Headquarters Air Force
HAF/A3	Headquarters Air Force A3
HQ	headquarters
HR/NEO	humanitarian relief/noncombatant evacuation operations
IA	Individual Augmentee
IRF	Immediate Response Force
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
JADC2	Joint All-Domain Command and Control
JAOP	joint air operations plan
JECC	Joint Enabling Capabilities Command
JFACC	Joint Force Air Component Commander
JFC	Joint Force Commander
JFC-UA	Joint Forces Command–United Assistance
JFLCC	Joint Force Land Component Commander
JFMCC	Joint Force Maritime Component Commander
JHOC	Joint Humanitarian Operations Course

JIATF-South	Joint Interagency Task Force South
JMD	joint manning document
JPP	joint planning process
JTF	Joint Task Force
JTF HQ	Joint Task Force Headquarters
JTF-OD	Joint Task Force Odyssey Dawn
LoE	line of effort
MAGTF	Marine Corps Marine Air-Ground Task Force
MITAM	mission tasking matrix
NAF	Numbered Air Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NAVEUR	Naval Forces Europe
NEO	noncombatant evacuation operation
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
OODA	observe–orient–decide–act
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
PAF	Project AIR FORCE
POM	project objective memorandum
RegAF	Regular Air Force
RMSE	Rear Mission Support Element
SECDEF	Secretary of Defense
SME	subject-matter expert
SOUTHCOM	U.S. Southern Command
STAFFEX	staff exercise
TF-SE	Task Force Southeast
USAF	U.S. Air Force
USAFE	U.S. Air Forces Europe
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USAID-OFDA	U.S. Agency for International Development Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance
USARAF	U.S. Army Africa
USEUCOM	U.S. European Command
USTRANSCOM	U.S. Transportation Command

1. Introduction

Background

In the fall of 2016, the U.S. Air Force (USAF) launched a new initiative to strengthen joint leaders and teams.¹ Gen David Goldfein, then Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF), called for the effort based on a concern that service-centric approaches and operations were no longer sufficient to confront the rising challenges posed by peer competitors and violent extremist organizations across warfighting domains and geographic regions.² USAF leaders called for the service to develop the ability to fold into a synergistic team, “integrating and simultaneously employing the capabilities of [America’s] armed forces seamlessly with interagency, intergovernmental, and coalition partners.”³

To achieve this goal, the USAF adopted two separate lines of effort (LoEs) under the banner of its Strengthening Joint Leaders and Teams initiative: one focused on improving joint leader development, and the other focused on enhancing joint teams.⁴ This report focuses on Gen Goldfein’s vision of providing USAF leaders and staffs to effectively run Joint Task Forces (JTFs). Gen Goldfein called for developing airmen “able to optimize every component of a JTF,” demonstrating their ability to “quickly and effectively integrate, influence and lead at any level of joint warfare.”⁵

In June 2020 the U.S. Senate confirmed General C. Q. Brown to replace Gen Goldfein as the CSAF, and it remains to be seen whether the Joint Task Force Headquarters (JTF HQ) effort will remain a CSAF priority. However, ongoing discussions regarding the USAF’s new force presentation model, which will be discussed in Chapter 3, suggest that the JTF HQ construct will endure in some form. And even if the JTF HQ effort itself were to dissolve entirely, the tensions it has raised between delivering unique airpower advantages versus folding into

¹ David S. Goldfein, “Remarks at the 2016 Air, Space and Cyber Conference,” speech delivered at the Gaylord Convention Center, National Harbor, Md., September 20, 2016a.

² David S. Goldfein, “Strengthening Joint Leaders and Teams . . . A Combined Arms Imperative,” video, YouTube, October 2016b; B. Chance Saltzman and the Air Force Strategic Integration Group, *Strengthening Joint Leaders and Teams*, Washington, D.C.: Air Force Strategic Integration Group, January 2018, p. 2.

³ Saltzman, p. 2.

⁴ DAF, “Memorandum for all Commanders and HAF [Headquarters Air Force] Staff, July 23, 2018,” in B. Chance Saltzman and the Air Force Strategic Integration Group, *Strengthening Joint Leaders and Teams*, Washington, D.C.: Air Force Strategic Integration Group, January 2018b, p. 12. For RAND Corporation work on strengthening joint leaders, see Caitlin Lee, Bart E. Bennett, Lisa M. Harrington, and Darrell D. Jones, *Rare Birds: Understanding and Addressing Air Force Underrepresentation in Senior Joint Positions in the Post-Goldwater Nichols Era*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2089-AF, 2017.

⁵ Goldfein, 2016a; Saltzman, 2018, p. 2.

existing joint constructs are enduring ones. The USAF will have to wrestle with striking this balance as it seeks to find its role in the U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD's) emerging concept of Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2), which requires the military services to engage in coordinated action across the domains of warfare.

The DoD quest to build effective joint C2 structures—and, in fact, the JTF HQ concept itself—dates back to the days immediately after World War II, when the Joints Chiefs of Staff first acquired legislative standing under the 1947 National Security Act.⁶ Since then, joint leadership of military operations has frequently taken place in a JTF HQ, loosely defined in doctrine as “one of several command and control options for conducting joint operations.”⁷ DoD has often turned to JTFs when more than one service is required to handle a complex operation in a given geographic area, particularly when the staff of the combatant commander (CCDR) has to focus on broader regional and global issues.⁸

In 2001, then-Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald Rumsfeld called for each combatant command (COCOM) to develop a standing JTF capability to avoid building JTFs from a “dead start.”⁹ A few years later, the USAF commissioned a RAND Project AIR FORCE (PAF) study on how to optimize a USAF JTF HQ, which included several recommendations on JTF systems, people, and processes, including one recommendation to consider developing different types of JTF HQ optimized for different mission sets.¹⁰

In the decade since the last such RAND study was released, discussions about the USAF's role in JTF formation and employment have continued to evolve. While past efforts focused on effectively integrating into a joint team and organizing to lead a JTF if asked to do so, Gen Goldfein's vision looks forward, calling on the USAF to develop a JTF HQ capability on its own initiative and to actively seek out opportunities to employ it anywhere in the world, on short notice. The vision is driven by Gen Goldfein's view that airmen bring a unique perspective to joint operations,¹¹ one rooted in what General Henry Hap Arnold called “airmindedness”—a global, strategic vision of the battle space that is not constrained by geography, distance,

⁶ DoD, *Organizational Development of the JCS*, Washington, D.C.: DoD, December 31, 1970.

⁷ Joint Staff, *Joint Task Force Headquarters*, Washington, D.C.: Joint Staff, Joint Publication 3-33, January 31, 2018, p. xi.

⁸ Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, *Forming a JTF HQ: Insights and Best Practices Paper*, Suffolk, Va.: Joint Staff J7, September 2015b, p. 1.

⁹ DoD, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington, D.C.: DoD, September 30, 2001, pp. 33–34; Donna Miles, “Core Elements Improve Crisis Response, Combat Ops,” press release, American Forces Press Service, March 23, 2006; DoD, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington, D.C.: DoD, February 6, 2006.

¹⁰ Michael Spirtas, Thomas Durrell-Young, and Rebecca Zimmerman, *What It Takes: Air Force Command of Joint Operations*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-777-AF, 2009, pp. 75–76.

¹¹ Goldfein, 2016b.

location, or time.¹² In addition, because airmen are not constrained by terrestrial presence, they may be able to offer some strategic and operational alternatives that other services cannot, providing speed, range, flexibility and reduced risk to force. The thinking is that the USAF has an obligation to stand up and lead an effective JTF HQ because airpower's advantages and perspective are inherently unique and therefore essential to maximizing the warfighting edge of U.S. forces engaged in joint operations. Gen Goldfein called on 9th Air Force (9 AF) at Shaw Air Force Base (AFB) in South Carolina to take the lead in developing a JTF HQ, with the expectation that other Numbered Air Forces (NAFs) would eventually develop a JTF HQ capability as well.¹³ As a service-retained organization—opposed to one affiliated with a geographic combatant command (GCC)—9 AF could be deployed worldwide and would not be bound to any particular mission set. In a 2018 implementation plan, Gen Goldfein provided the USAF with more specific guidance, directing it to build both supporting formations and structures to lead and support that JTF capability and develop doctrine to support joint proficiency.¹⁴

The guidance set specific goals for 9 AF JTF HQ formation. It tasked Air Combat Command (ACC) to “design, train, and certify a core JTF HQ” at 9 AF and called for the 9 AF commander to be certified as a JTF commander by the Joint Staff J7 by December 2018. Upon certification, the guidance called for 9 AF’s JTF HQ capability to “be placed in the Global Response Force” (since renamed the Immediate Response Force, or IRF), meaning it would need to be ready to respond rapidly to crises anywhere in the world. Gen Goldfein called for 9 AF to be made available on the Global Response Force (GRF; now IRF) “for tasking by SECDEF and the CJCS [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] to meet global contingencies.”¹⁵ The guidance also called on Headquarters Air Force A3 (HAF/A3, the operations directorate) to work with major command leadership to identify additional candidate Component Numbered Air Forces (C-NAFs) to stand up a JTF HQ capability.¹⁶

¹² DAF, *Air Force Doctrine Publication 1*, March 10, 2021. For more on the cultural and rational incentives that have driven the USAF to pursue or, at times, eschew, joint requirements, see Caitlin Lee, *The Culture of Air Force Innovation: A Historical Case Study of the Predator Program*, dissertation, London: King’s College London, 2016.

¹³ Goldfein, 2016b.

¹⁴ DAF, 2018b, pp. 12–13. For more on USAF/joint doctrinal alignment, see Miranda Priebe, Laurinda L. Rohn, Alyssa Demus, Bruce McClintock, Derek Eaton, Sarah Harting, Maria McCollester, *Promoting Joint Warfighting Proficiency: The Role of Doctrine in Preparing Airmen for Joint Operations*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2472-AF, 2018.

¹⁵ DAF, 2018b, pp. 12–13. Note that the GRF concept has since been replaced with a new Dynamic Force Employment (DFE) concept, which includes the IRF construct. The IRF plays the former role of the GRF as well as other functions.

¹⁶ DAF, 2018b, pp. 12–13.

Objective

This study is intended to contribute to the USAF's efforts to develop a JTF capability that emphasizes the unique contributions that airpower provides to joint warfighting—one that has the organization, training, and equipment required to effectively carry out a JTF HQ mission when called on to do so. It describes 9 AF's efforts to stand up a JTF HQ capability as of mid-2020; highlights precedents about effective JTF selection, formation, and employment; and discusses the implications of these findings for the USAF's overall effort to develop a JTF HQ capability.

Approach and Methods

To achieve this objective, the RAND PAF team examined 9 AF's efforts to optimize for JTF HQ formation and selection given historic precedents and accepted tenets of successful JTF formation, as described in doctrine and the literature on joint military operations. The team first developed a baseline understanding of 9 AF's efforts to organize, train, and equip a JTF HQ. It then explored other sources—such as historical data, doctrine, and discussions with those familiar with 9 AF JTF HQ activities—to identify key lessons learned regarding JTF HQ formation. Drawing from these sources, the team developed an understanding of 9 AF's approach and also identified potential opportunities for 9 AF to adjust course based on the lessons learned as the USAF's JTF HQ initiative continues to evolve.

To develop its understanding of 9 AF's current efforts, we engaged in discussions with 9 AF leaders, Headquarters Air Force (HAF), and ACC officials, as well as others familiar with the JTF HQ initiative. To further enhance our understanding of 9 AF's efforts to organize, train, and equip, the study team also attended multiple staff exercises (STAFFEXs) at 9 AF Headquarters (HQ) at Shaw AFB in South Carolina and at Robins AFB in Georgia.

To analyze 9 AF efforts given the accepted DoD norms, guidelines, and precedents for JTF HQ formation, we reviewed literature on joint operations and doctrine. We also examined quantitative data on JTF HQ selection between 1990 and 2017 to gain further insight into the causes and conditions that have contributed to DoD decisions to employ JTFs. Informed by the factors that shape JTF HQ mission sets, selection processes, and duration, we then conducted three case studies of operations in which the staff of the JTF HQ consisted of a cohesive preexisting or "core" unit like 9 AF. The specific JTF HQ operations selected for the case study analysis were similar to the missions for which 9 AF was currently training.

Limitations

This study does not seek to assess the effectiveness of 9 AF efforts to develop a JTF capability for three reasons. First, 9 AF efforts to organize, train, and equip a JTF HQ were still in the development stages when this research was conducted; thus, any attempt to "grade" 9 AF against established JTF-capable units would be immature and might impede creative ideas to further mature the USAF's JTF HQ concept.

Second, it is generally difficult to measure the effectiveness of C2 organizations even after they have been extensively battle tested. While RAND research has made some methodological inroads in this area, a central challenge remains the difficulty of disaggregating performance of the C2 organization from the contributions of other components involved in large-scale air campaign planning.¹⁷

Third, there are no existing benchmarks for assessing the effectiveness of units that are formed and selected to serve as JTF HQs. Historical precedents, JTF HQ selection trends, and doctrinal guidelines can provide an overarching sense of what has worked well in the past, but these indicators do not necessarily provide an accurate picture of the future demand for JTF HQs or of the requirements for their successful operation.

Given these caveats, this study seeks to draw on historical analysis and discussions with stakeholders involved in JTF HQ formation to contribute to the USAF's understanding of the role of a JTF HQ in joint operations and the conditions under which JTF HQ formation and selection have been successful.

Outline

Chapter 2 examines the genesis of the USAF's effort to establish 9 AF as a JTF HQ as a way to better understand the underlying rationale for the effort. Chapter 3 examines how that rationale informed key decisions in the standing up of the USAF's current JTF HQ capability. Chapters 4–7 examine literature, doctrine, and historical precedents to convey a broader sense of “what it takes” to stand up an effective JTF HQ capability. In particular, Chapter 4 draws on joint doctrine and military theory to discuss how effective commanders and staffs lead at the operational level of war; it provides a conceptual framework for discussing how JTFs are formed and employed in practice, as well as detailed analysis of specific military operations. Chapter 5 provides an overview of JTF requirements: How does doctrine describe the JTF HQ role, and what do other studies reveal about the role of a JTF HQ staff? Chapter 6 shows the results of quantitatively assessing trends in JTF activation and duration over time. Chapter 7 presents case studies that focus on three separate JTFs built around a core unit that is similar to 9 AF, with the goal of highlighting various opportunities and challenges to forming and employing a JTF. Finally, Chapter 8 discusses the findings of this analysis for 9 AF (now 15th Air Force, or 15 AF) and the USAF and presents recommendations for how the latter might improve its ability to lead joint operations.

¹⁷ Brien Alkire, Sherrill Lingel, Caroline Baxter, Christopher M. Carson, Christine Chen, David Gordon, Lawrence M. Hanser, Lance Menthe, and Daniel M. Romano, *Command and Control of Joint Air Operations in the Pacific: Methods for Comparing and Contrasting Alternative Concepts*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1865-AF, 2018, p. xii; the report also contains discussion of a useful candidate framework to evaluate C2 constructs.

2. Historical Background and Context for the USAF's Efforts to Increase Its Role in JTF HQ Formation

In recent years, former and current senior USAF leaders have expressed a deep concern that airpower solutions are not sufficiently represented in the joint community because of a lack of USAF leadership in command of both GCCs and JTFs.¹ RAND analysis (as described in Chapter 4) indicates that the U.S. Army most often leads JTF HQs. Between 1990 and 2017, RAND identified a total of 88 JTF HQs: the Army led 44 of these, while the U.S. Marine Corps led 16, the USAF led 13, and the U.S. Navy led 12 (there were also three additional JTF HQs that were not led by these services).²

The USAF argues that the relatively low representation of airpower in JTF leadership substantively detracts from American warfighting capabilities because the USAF brings a unique problem-solving perspective and, in turn, unique warfighting constructs and capabilities, to joint operations. The USAF's position is that its globally oriented C2 capabilities, its ability to mass firepower quickly and with a small footprint, and its strategic flexibility put the service in a strong position to lead JTF HQs. To capitalize on its unique warfighting edge, the USAF must deliberately develop the capacity to integrate into, influence, and lead joint teams to solve future security problems.³ Under the leadership of Gen Goldfein, one of the first steps in that process was to establish 9 AF as a service-retained, JTF-capable HQ.

Like the other services, the USAF brings unique advantages to joint operations, but it is beyond this scope of this study to judge the relative value of airpower versus other types of combat power in leading JTF HQs. There are many ways the USAF can contribute to joint operations, and building a JTF HQ is just one of them. In this study, RAND seeks to inform USAF decisions about the relative benefits of leading JTF HQs so they can be weighed against other types of joint participation. We place USAF efforts to build the JTF HQ capability in their broader context, examining how the motivations and choices driving the USAF's JTF HQ effort are informed by broader debates about the role of airpower in joint operations.

This chapter examines the genesis of the USAF's effort to establish 9 AF as a JTF HQ as a way to better understand the underlying rationale for the effort and to help explain the broader

¹ Lee et al., 2017.

² These include a Canadian-led JTF, a U.S. Coast Guard-led JTF, and a contingent (on-call) JTF HQ that any service can fill based on the needs of U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM).

³ Representatives of 9AF, personal communication with the authors, April 30, 2020.

institutional considerations that drove key decisions in the standing up of the 9 AF JTF HQ capability. It begins with a discussion of the USAF's initial attempts to increase its role in JTF HQs during then-Lieutenant General Goldfein's time as director of the Joint Staff from 2013 to 2015. Next, it discusses the USAF's attempts to regroup with a strategic approach to developing a JTF HQ after initial efforts faltered. Drawing on this historical experience and discussions with senior leaders involved in the 9 AF JTF HQ, the chapter closes with a discussion of the broader institutional tensions within the USAF shaped 9 AF's decisionmaking as it sought to build a competitive and effective JTF HQ capability.

Initial Efforts to Bolster the USAF's Role in Leading Joint Teams: 2013–2015

In 2012, after ground forces left Iraq, the USAF began to raise the idea of the U.S. Air Forces Central (AFCENT) commander serving dual roles as JTF HQ commander and Combined Forces Air Component Commander (CFACC) for what the USAF saw as increasingly air-centric operations taking place in the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) theater. AFCENT began to prepare for this mission by developing its own JTF HQ readiness metrics and by planning a JTF HQ validation event at the June 2013 Blue Flag exercise. However, this effort was derailed in the midst of sharp budget cuts required under sequestration, and further complicated by the crisis emerging in Syria with the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).⁴

Aware that CENTCOM was about to stand up an HQ capability to confront ISIS, the USAF decided to refocus its efforts on positioning AFCENT to take command of what would become Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) in 2017. Air Combat Command (ACC) and AFCENT JTF operational planning teams, led by Col Rhude Cherry, then the 9 AF vice commander, began to strategize on the question of how to increase USAF representation in influential positions on the CJTF-OIR joint manning document (JMD).⁵ The tiger team engaged the Marine Corps and Navy to negotiate a new “USAF version” of the JMD (the Army, as the JTF HQ command, was less willing to participate). In that JMD, which the Joint Staff ultimately approved, the USAF successfully negotiated for six positions at the grade of O-6 and one at the grade of O-5. Perceived by the USAF as critical because of their central roles in strategy development and operations, these positions included intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance director; targeting director; chief of operations;

⁴ Current and former 9 AF officials involved in early formation of JTF HQ capability, personal communication with the authors, September 20, 2018.

⁵ Current and former 9 AF officials involved in early formation of JTF HQ capability, personal communication with the authors, September 20, 2018.

fire support coordinator; deputy chief of staff; cyber director (all at the grades of O-6); and deputy chief of operations at the grade of O-5.⁶

At the same time, then-Lt Gen Goldfein, in his former role as director of the Joint Staff, undertook separate efforts to raise the possibility of the USAF leading a JTF HQ. In 2013 he offered a USAF JTF HQ capability for Operation Unified Assistance, the U.S.-led effort to fight the emerging Ebola crisis in western Africa, and in 2015 he offered a USAF JTF HQ capability again for CJTF-OIR, the U.S.-led mission to retake territory seized by ISIS. Yet in both cases the CJCS selected Army units, which were viewed as being able to more readily source units to replace the previous Army units that initially held responsibility for both of these missions. The USAF, in contrast, had no candidate unit in the geographic area or one ready to deploy quickly to take over these responsibilities.⁷

For the Ebola mission, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) initially delegated its Army component, U.S. Army Africa (USARAF) to lead Joint Forces Command–United Assistance (JFC-UA) given its ability to provide an immediate command presence in theater.⁸ As DoD prepared to transition command from USARAF, then-Lt Gen Goldfein suggested to the then-CJCS, GEN Martin Dempsey of the Army, that the USAF could offer a JTF HQ replacement given the service’s capabilities in the areas of mobility, logistics, medical support, and security.⁹ Lt Gen Goldfein proposed that the USAF would select a commander and establish an HQ staff in theater in about a week; however, GEN Dempsey pointed out that the Army’s 101st Airborne Division (101 AD) was ready to leave the next day.¹⁰ Because of this readiness advantage, 101 AD was ultimately selected to take command of the JFC-UA mission about 40 days after USARAF stood up the operation.¹¹

Lt Gen Goldfein’s efforts to support AFCENT in its bid to offer a viable JTF HQ for CJTF-OIR also met resistance. In 2015, as the Army’s III Corps prepared to transition command, he suggested a move away from the Army’s HQ model for a JTF to an Individual Augmentee (IA) construct. The concept would involve the USAF building a JTF HQ staff

⁶ Current and former 9 AF officials involved in early formation of JTF HQ capability, personal communication with the authors, September 20, 2018.

⁷ Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020.

⁸ Joint Staff J7, *Operation United Assistance: The DoD Response to Ebola in West Africa*, Suffolk, Va.: Joint Staff J7, January 6, 2016, p. 6.

⁹ Retired 9 AF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 9, 2020; representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020; leader from 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, August 20, 2019.

¹⁰ Retired 9 AF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 9, 2020; representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020.

¹¹ Joint Staff J7, 2016, p. 10.

from scratch through a JMD rather than selecting a preexisting unit to fall in on the JTF HQ function, as had been the case with III Corps.¹² Under this construct, IAs would have filled out an initial 20-person JTF HQ staff led by a USAF three-star general.¹³ Yet, once again, readiness and availability concerns prevented his proposal from gaining traction. The CJCS and the Joint Chiefs questioned whether the time required to pull together the JMD might lead to a lack of continuity during a critical phase in operations as coalition forces attempted to push ISIS out of Mosul.¹⁴ In September 2016, the Army's XVIII Airborne Corps assumed authority of CJTF-OIR from III Corps.¹⁵

Ironically, while the CJCS and Joint Staff expressed concern that the USAF was not in a position to rapidly field a fully manned JTF HQ, initial reports on both JFC-UA and CJTF-OIR suggest that the Army itself was not immune to the readiness challenges associated with standing up a new JTF HQ. Army component HQ staff—USARAF in the case of Unified Assistance, and U.S. Army Central (ARCENT) in the case of Inherent Resolve—initially launched both operations. The components benefited from preexisting relations with the relevant GCC. But in both cases, staff size was limited, and after-action reports for both operations called on the Joint Staff to develop off-the-shelf JMD packages that include key billets—such as targeting intelligence, cyber, and information operations—for a contingency HQ of small, medium, and large size.¹⁶

This call for a high-readiness JTF HQ capability reflected long-standing Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) concerns about the need to speed up JTF HQ standup timelines. As was discussed in Chapter 1, as early as 2001, SECDEF Rumsfeld had called for the development of a Standing Joint Force Headquarters with representation from across the services.¹⁷ While this effort subsequently fell out of favor with the dissolution of Joint Forces Command in 2011, the concept of a standing capability—or at least some off-the-shelf JMD solutions—continued to resonate based on lessons learned in JFC-UA and CJTF-OIR.

¹² Current and former 9 AF officials involved in early formation of JTF HQ capability, personal communication with the authors, September 20, 2018.

¹³ Retired 9 AF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 9, 2020.

¹⁴ Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020.

¹⁵ Center for Army Lessons Learned, *ARCENT Transition to Combined Joint Task Force—Operation Inherent Resolve: Lessons and Best Practices*, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Center for Army Lessons Learned, Initial Impressions Report No. 16-10, March 2016a, p. 1.

¹⁶ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2016a, p. 3.

¹⁷ Spirtas, Young, and Zimmerman, 2009, pp. 34–35.

Developing a Strategic Approach to USAF JTF HQ Formation: 2016–2018

Recognizing the vacuum in readily available JTF HQ capability, Gen Goldfein, in his position as USAF chief of staff, launched a new initiative in 2016 known as Strengthening Joint Leaders and Teams. The goal was to provide a cohesive capability more quickly than the DoD-reported average of 75 days to JTF HQ standup. One part of this effort was the continuation of the efforts to staff CJTF-OIR with greater USAF representation as part of what became known in 2016 as the Rear Mission Support Element (RMSE) initiative. In 2017, a main focus of the RMSE became providing training for USAF personnel selected to augment the Army at CJTF-OIR. Air University agreed to develop and administer the JTF Staff Basic Course at Shaw AFB for the 9 AF RMSE.¹⁸ During this course, airmen spend a week completing expeditionary skills training, including chemical warfare and small arms qualification. Then, in the last week, airmen participate in an exercise to develop knowledge of the staff processes required to work effectively in a JTF HQ.¹⁹

In the longer term, however, the USAF priority remained standing up an organic, “big box” JTF HQ capability to avoid the internal politics required to lobby for more USAF billets on the CJTF-OIR JMD.²⁰ In 2016, Gen Goldfein announced his plan to transition 9 AF into a “core JTF HQ.”²¹ The ACC-led operational planning team presented him with more detailed courses of action to consider at Corona South 2017, an annual springtime meeting of USAF leadership.²² One option was to form a worldwide-deployable JTF HQ aligned with the GRF, which has since been replaced by the IRF; both constructs involve selecting a DoD force package containing specific forces capable of deploying anywhere in the world in short order to respond to a crisis.²³ A second option was to establish the 9 AF HQ as a “component enabler,” meaning the JTF HQ capability would be a small enabling cell affiliated with the USAF components of a specific GCC.²⁴

¹⁸ Current and former 9 AF officials involved in early formation of JTF HQ capability, personal communication with the authors, September 20, 2018.

¹⁹ Diana M. Cossaboom, “9th AF Provides First Rear Mission Support Element Training,” press release, U.S. Air Force, April 5, 2017.

²⁰ Current and former 9 AF officials involved in early formation of JTF HQ capability, personal communication with the authors, September 20, 2018.

²¹ Goldfein, 2016b; Saltzman, 2018, p. 2.

²² ACC, “USAF (9 AF) JTF HQ COA Approval: Evolving HQ 9 AF into an Expeditionary JTF-Capable HQ,” PowerPoint presentation, Corona South 2017, MacDill AFB, Florida.

²³ DAF, 2018b, pp. 12–13. The GRF was replaced by the IRF, a key pillar of DoD’s new DFE concept, in 2019. For a more detailed description of the DoD transition from the IRF to the GRF, and its implications for 9 AF, see Chapter 3.

²⁴ ACC, 2017.

At the Corona meeting, Gen Goldfein decided to pursue the first option. In July 2018 he released guidelines framing what he expected the USAF to accomplish to stand up a core JTF HQ capability. He ordered ACC to “design, train and certify” 9 AF—a service-retained unit not tied to any particular functional or GCC—as a core JTF HQ. He indicated that once the capability was ready, the USAF should secure a spot for the JTF HQ as a GRF capability.²⁵ The initial plan was for the USAF to provide an air-centric JTF HQ capability, supplementing, but not replacing, ground-centric JTF HQ capabilities on the GRF.²⁶

Making Choices: The Role of USAF Bureaucratic, Political, and Cultural Debates in Shaping 9 AF JTF HQ Formation

Gen Goldfein’s decision to develop a service-retained, GRF-aligned JTF HQ capability reflected a long-standing and widespread concern across DoD about the lack of dedicated capability and capacity for the JTF HQ role. The USAF saw the construct as a way to reduce the burden on components at GCCs, who in the past had stepped into various HQ roles with limited and overstretched staff.²⁷ Also appealing was the opportunity to provide dedicated training and exercises for a dedicated JTF HQ staff rather than trying to task already overstretched components with additional JTF HQ training.²⁸ As a service-retained NAF, the former 9 AF was not attached to any particular component and therefore its organizational construct seemed to readily lend itself to a global perspective rather than a focus on a component at a particular GCC.

Yet while the decision to build a service-retained, worldwide-deployable JTF HQ offered some perceived benefits to the USAF, it also forced 9 AF to wrestle with a series of operational decisions that reflect broader political, bureaucratic, and cultural tensions with the USAF as an institution. Many aspects of these tensions are epitomized in the larger debate in the USAF about the future of force presentation, a term that is not well defined but which generally refers to how the USAF provides forces, equipment, and resources to meet COCOM commander requirements.²⁹ The USAF is in the midst of reforming its force presentation model to strike a balance between maintaining the inherent flexibility of airpower and ensuring that its forces can readily organize, train, and equip to integrate into a joint environment.

²⁵ DAF, 2018b, pp. 12–13.

²⁶ Air Staff, personal communication with the authors, August 13, 2019; retired 9 AF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 9, 2020.

²⁷ ACC, 2017.

²⁸ ACC, 2017.

²⁹ Alan J. Vick, *Force Presentation in U.S Air Force History and Airpower Narratives*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2263-AF, 2018.

Today, the USAF employs a force presentation model that is highly flexible, allowing small packages of forces (unit type codes, which can be as small as one single person) to be “mixed and matched” to quickly deploy. However, these forces do not necessarily organize, train, and equip together in the same way an Army battalion, for example, might do. Because USAF units do not train together as a larger team, they do not report readiness in terms of their capability and capacity to work together, nor do they execute a training, exercise, and inspection plan that ensures their ability to fight together.³⁰

The advantage of this legacy force presentation model is that it leverages the inherent flexibility of airpower to allow the service to meet the highest demands of combat operations relatively swiftly and efficiently. But it also makes it difficult for the USAF to measure the readiness of its diverse forces and to effectively communicate the readiness and availability of those forces to the joint community.³¹ Recognizing this problem, Gen Brown has continued Gen Goldfein’s efforts to develop a coherent, standard force presentation model. The ongoing effort, known as the Air Force Force Generation Cycle (AFFORGEN), builds force packages from the squadron up and places those packages into larger rotational “buckets” in varying states of readiness. The new construct is designed to align with DoD’s DFE model, introduced in the 2018 National Defense Strategy.³² That concept seeks to balance “operational unpredictability”—the idea of seizing opportunities to increase adversary’s uncertainty about what U.S. forces will do—while also increasing readiness and maintaining the ability of U.S. forces to respond to contingencies.³³

DFE pools U.S. forces into bins at various stages of readiness, as depicted in Table 2.1. Most relevant to the discussion of the JTF HQ is the IRF because forces in that bin must be ready for global deployments on short notice—the same mandate that Gen Goldfein proposed for the JTF HQ. Like the former GRF, the purpose of forces assigned to the IRF is to respond quickly to a crisis anywhere in the world; however, in addition to that role, IRF forces can also be used in other ways, such as to proactively shape the environment through planned deployments or to fall in as a second-echelon force in response to a major regional conflict.³⁴

³⁰ Mike Pietrucha and Jeremy Renken, “Bringing the Air Division Back to the Future, *War on the Rocks*, April 22, 2019.

³¹ John A. Tirpak, “Leaders to Tackle Revamp of Air and Space Expeditionary Force at Corona,” *Air Force Magazine*, June 1, 2020.

³² Air Staff, personal communications with the authors, June 17, 2019.

³³ Jim Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge*, Washington, D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2018, p. 7.

³⁴ Michael Santacrose, *Joint Strategic & Operational Planning: Planning for Planners*, Lakeland, Fla.: Lightning Press, 2019, pp. 3–10.

Table 2.1. DFE Force Management Framework

Bin Title	Description
Institutional Forces	Forces assigned to a military department or U.S. Special Operations Command for carrying out Title 10 responsibilities of that organization
Force Generation Forces	Forces that are being trained, equipped, and resourced to meet future Threshold Forces, IRFs, and Contingency Response Force (CRF) requirements or operational commitments
CRFs	Forces ready to deploy within specified time periods to defeat aggression by any adversary when combined with IRFs and Force Generation Forces
IRFs	Forces ready to deploy to (1) proactively shape the strategic environment, (2) respond to contingency, or (3) in conflict, contest enemy objectives until CRFs arrive
Threshold Forces	The minimum forces assigned or allocated to a COCOM; the SECDEF does not intend to go below the threshold in the event of an operation plan execution in another theater

SOURCE: Information derived from Michael Santacrose, *Joint Strategic & Operational Planning: Planning for Planners*, Lakeland, Fla.: Lightning Press, 2019, pp. 3–10.

The USAF’s new force presentation model is still emerging, but the discussion about building large rotational packages versus adhering to a more flexible model raises a fundamental question. How much should the USAF conform to joint expectations regarding force presentation versus presenting forces to maximize the unique capabilities of airpower in a joint context? While this may not be an entirely “either/or” question, trade-offs are involved, and striking the balance between these two priorities emerged as a central theme in discussions regarding 9 AF’s standing up of a JTF HQ capability. In the sections that follow, we discuss in detail how these tensions have played out in the context of 9 AF decisionmaking.

“Always-On-Call” Versus “On-Call in a Deployment Window”

When Gen Goldfein called on 9 AF to develop a standing, worldwide-deployable capability in 2018, the USAF was already considering new force generation constructs built around larger rotational force packages in varying stages of readiness. One interpretation of the CSAF’s mandate was that it would require 9 AF JTF HQ forces to be available only during preplanned, predictable deployment windows for major operations. The implication of this for 9 AF was that, if it were to follow this model, it would only be available for a JTF HQ mission during a specific window; the rest of the time, it would train to deploy for a JTF HQ mission. Under this interpretation, 9 AF would be aligned to the former GRF and vulnerable for deployment on a 1:3 deploy-to-dwell cycle (for example, every three years for a one-year period).³⁵ The GRF has since been replaced by the IRF, but the USAF could still ask the Joint Staff to place a JTF HQ capability on the IRF during a particular deployment window.

³⁵ Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, June 4, 2020.

However, in addition to this model, there was also a second interpretation of the CSAF's call for GRF alignment. Some within 9 AF read the guidance as requiring 9 AF to be literally "always on call"—in other words, ready at a moment's notice, anytime, as opposed to only being available during a preplanned IRF window.³⁶ While it was unclear how exactly this model might have worked, one interpretation was that different subcomponents of 9 AF might be ready at any given time to provide an "always on call" JTF HQ capability.

Both approaches would require long-term planning to ensure sufficient personnel are available and trained for a deployment. But the "always on call" approach is particularly demanding, requiring long-term planning and highly synchronized deploy-to-dwell cycles. Indeed, the 82 Airborne Division (82 ABD), which has historically been "always on call" as a GRF (now IRF) asset, is only able to accomplish this feat by rotating three Infantry Brigade Combat Teams through alert, train, and support cycles.³⁷ Nevertheless, 9 AF chose to adopt the "always on call" model, deploying a small team to support the DoD response to the COVID-19 crisis. This demanding posture was made possible in part by the fact that 9 AF was already spinning up for a later-canceled deployment to Iceland for the Northern Viking joint exercise. And, even so, the COVID-19 response was coordinated with difficulty, as Air National Guard (ANG) and Air Force Reserve forces could not be accessed in time to participate in the mission, as will be discussed in Chapter 3.

The 9 AF debate over the appropriate force generation cycle reflects the broader USAF debate over force presentation. On the one hand, being literally available at any time enhances the USAF's reputation as a flexible force. On the other hand, it is complicated to align forces for 24/7 readiness—particularly a small number of forces—and a unit may not have incentives to communicate true readiness if the force presentation model creates the expectation that it should always be ready and available.

An Expansive Versus Focused Mission Scope

A second major tension facing 9 AF concerned the overall mission of the JTF HQ. Because 9 AF's mandate was to be globally responsive, it both eschewed affiliation with any particular GCC component and stopped short of formally limiting its efforts to organize, train, and equip to focus on any particular mission set. The 9 AF's initial training guidance called on the 9 AF to meet the demands of expeditionary taskings for the Global Response Force. And even after the GRF was replaced by the even more demanding IRF, the expansive scope of the 9 AF mission did not change. The original thinking behind this decision was that the USAF did not want to become pigeonholed into any particular mission set. Thus, while "air-focused"

³⁶ Operations Working Group, Shaw AFB, S.C., December 18, 2019.

³⁷ Representative of 82 AD, personal communication with the authors, June 16, 2020.

missions were obviously ones that 9 AF would aim to lead, the USAF did not limit 9 AF to particular air-focused missions or to affiliation with particular GCCs.³⁸

As discussed further in Chapter 3, however, it has become increasingly apparent that it is difficult for the 9 AF to maintain such a broad mission set. As such, to develop training and readiness standards, the new 15th Air Force (15 AF) may need to focus on specific mission objectives and the ways and means to achieve them. Some familiar with 9 AF efforts to stand up a JTF HQ also argue that there are certain missions in which airpower can clearly make a more powerful contribution and that therefore these are important mission areas for the new 15 AF to pursue if it wants to increase its odds of JTF HQ selection.³⁹ The question is, if 15 AF adopts a model focused on a niche missions set, or in a particular geographic region—will it affect the chances of “getting picked”? Again, the question of force presentation comes to the fore, because the USAF seeks to strike a balance between packaging forces to maximize airpower’s advantages while also seeking to ensure that USAF forces are ready and accessible to meet joint force demands.

A Stand-Alone Unit Versus Component Affiliation

Some familiar with the 9 AF effort have raised concerns about the decision for 9 AF to eschew building formal relationships with component commands affiliated with the GCCs.⁴⁰ As we will discuss in the Chapter 3, although 9 AF made some efforts to engage with GCCs and other rapid-reaction forces, such as 82 ABD, it lacked the command relationships, geographic advantages, and personal connections that components tend to have with their GCCs. Because of the apparent importance of these connections, some involved with the 9 AF effort questioned whether a 9 AF affiliation with a particular GCC component might boost the odds of JTF HQ selection.⁴¹ More than half of the JTF HQs formed between 1990 and 2017 were affiliated with a GCC, either through formal command structures or habitual relationships. Every one of the USAF’s 13 JTF HQs formed in that same time period was affiliated with the GCC. Like the questions about what it means to be on-call and what the scope of 15 AF’s mission should be, the previous debate about 9 AF affiliation with a GCC reflects the broader tension in the USAF about how much the USAF should “look like” the Army when it builds forces for joint operations—that is, choosing not to affiliate based on the

³⁸ Retired 9 AF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 9, 2020.

³⁹ Retired 9 AF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 9, 2020.

⁴⁰ Representatives from HAF/A3, personal communication with the authors, October 30, 2019.

⁴¹ Representatives from HAF/A3, personal communication with the authors, October 30, 2019; Retired 9 AF senior leader, personal communication with the authors January 9, 2020.

service-retained 82 ABD—versus doing what might work best for the service based on precedent, which in this case might mean affiliating, formally or informally, with a GCC.

Preparing Airmen for Joint Versus USAF-Centered Operations

Another tension concerns the “joint” focus of the JTF HQ mission set. Chapter 3 discusses the difficulties that 9 AF had in recruiting, training, and promoting officers to ensure they had the sufficient and appropriate experience to lead and influence joint teams. While there are a variety of factors that impinge on the selection of joint leaders, credibility—based on education, training, and operational experience—is certainly one of them. If 15 AF lacks the training pipeline to produce such leaders, it could lower the odds of JTF HQ selection and overall effectiveness.

The struggle to develop an effective training pipeline for joint leaders may be related to a broader USAF tendency, documented in previous RAND research, to promote the accumulation of individual technical expertise as a means to excel in leadership positions; in contrast, the Army tends to value the ability to command increasingly large numbers of individuals.⁴² In discussions with current and former USAF officials, a common theme that emerged was that while the USAF’s organizational construct—which prioritizes centralized control and decentralized execution—empowers individuals, it may not give leaders the experience required to command and control joint forces.⁴³

One current USAF leader offered the contrast between a USAF one-star wing commander in a deployed setting versus more junior officers in the Army. The USAF general might be responsible for base administration and flight scheduling, but he or she typically does not have target engagement authority or the responsibility to command fielded forces at multiple echelons. In contrast, Army officers begin commanding fielded forces far earlier in their careers and are given an area of responsibility, mission command, and a responsibility to dialogue with higher HQs and give orders to subordinate units.⁴⁴ Because planning and directing forces are skills that individuals in the Army develop at every echelon, the Army has a large, trained pool of individuals to source a core JTF HQ staff.

The USAF’s emphasis on building individual skills as opposed to leadership skills is reflected in its organizational structures. The Army’s division and corps staffs align with the J-code structure used for joint operations, thus providing soldiers with an opportunity to gain

⁴² Lee, et al., 2017; S. Rebecca Zimmerman, Kimberly Jackson, Natasha Lander, Colin Roberts, Dan Madden, and Rebecca Orrie, *Movement and Maneuver: Culture and Competition for Influence Among the U.S. Military Services*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2270-OSD, 2019.

⁴³ USAF leader affiliated with CJTF-OIR, personal communication with the authors, December 10, 2019; current and former 9 AF officials involved in early formation of JTF HQ capability, personal communication with the authors, September 20, 2018.

⁴⁴ USAF leader affiliated with CJTF-OIR, personal communication with the authors, December 10, 2019.

experience in those positions at multiple echelons.⁴⁵ In contrast, the USAF's squadrons, groups, and wings do not uniformly align with the J-code structure (although it should be noted that at the NAF level, 9 AF had recently converted to one to better align with the joint community). While the USAF's unique leadership organization at the wing-level and below is well-tailored to the USAF's operational requirements, it comes at the cost of easy integration into joint constructs.

Command and Control: Strategic/Operational Focus or Tactical Enabler?

A final tension that emerged from 9 AF efforts to stand up the JTF HQ concerns the USAF's organizational and cultural approaches to command and control. As discussed in Chapter 3, there was a debate about whether 9 AF should serve as both a JTF HQ, providing command at the operational level of war, and as a tactical C2 capability that could deploy forward with USAF wings under the emerging force presentation model. This proposal to give 9 AF a more tactical role on top of its JTF HQ responsibilities seemed to reflect the USAF's historical preference for a more tactical approach to C2.

Since the Vietnam War, the USAF has tended to undervalue the command of fielded forces across echelons and military services. During that war, the USAF advocated for a centralized system for commanding airpower across the military services, but it internally struggled to centralize even its own operations. While fighters were divided into route packages controlled by NAFs, Strategic Air Command controlled its own separate resources.⁴⁶ In the wake of the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act, which dramatically strengthened the U.S. military's joint institutions, the USAF developed a new C2 construct known as the Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC). The introduction of the JFACC in Operation Desert Storm in 1991 effectively centralized airpower, but in shifting the locus of operational C2 to the JFACC, the NAF lost the operational role it played in Vietnam. Over time, its responsibilities were limited to administrative control.⁴⁷

Under the leadership of Gen Goldfein there had been a growing interest in sharpening the USAF's ability to command and control fielded forces across military domains and across echelons. According to the latest USAF doctrine update, the emerging concept of JADC2 involves "the art and science of decision making to rapidly translate decisions into action, leveraging capabilities across all domains and with mission partners to achieve operational

⁴⁵ Current and former 9 AF officials involved in early formation of JTF HQ capability, personal communication with the authors, September 20, 2018; former USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, June 6, 2019.

⁴⁶ John T. Correll, "Disunity of Command," *Air Force Magazine*, May 17, 2008.

⁴⁷ Former USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, June 6, 2019; staff of 9 AF HQ, personal communication with the authors, December 18, 2019.

and information advantage in both competition and conflict.”⁴⁸ Yet despite this expansive view of C2, some officials involved in the 9 AF JTF HQ standup worry that the service remains overly focused on tactical C2.⁴⁹ Again, force presentation appears to play a key role; was 9 AF presenting a C2 capability at the operational level for JTF HQs or a more tactical capability optimized for C2 of air operations?

Conclusion: Finding a Balance

The USAF’s efforts to develop a JTF HQ over the last four years reflect the struggle to make a unique, air-minded contribution to joint campaigns while still maintaining an awareness of, and respect for, the joint community’s operational and organizational requirements for JTF HQ capabilities. Under the leadership of Gen Goldfein, the USAF sought to respond to a long-standing DoD-wide concern that manning a JTF HQ takes too long and that therefore prepackaged capabilities—in the form of ready units or existing JMDs—could fill an important capability gap. However, the USAF’s decision to fill this gap with a service-retained, globally deployable JTF HQ capability involved trade-offs that reflect broad and enduring tensions within the USAF related to force presentation. An examination of the choices the USAF made about the standing up of the 9 AF JTF HQ capability, which are the subject of Chapter 3, can therefore provide significant insights and lessons learned for the USAF as it seeks to develop the 15 AF as JTF HQ.

⁴⁸ DAF, “USAF Role in Joint All Domain Operations,” Air Force Joint Doctrine Note, March 5, 2020.

⁴⁹ Staff of 9 AF HQ, personal communication with the authors, June 21, 2019.

3. The 9th Air Force's Efforts to Organize, Train, and Equip to Provide a JTF HQ Capability

It is in the context of the broader bureaucratic, political, and cultural tensions described in Chapter 2 that the USAF has sought to organize, train, and equip a JTF HQ. Current and former officers familiar with the JTF HQ initiative have noted that the effort represents perhaps the USAF's best opportunity to systematically establish a capability to compete for leadership of joint warfighting operations. But they have worried that limited time, resources, and a lack of consistent and vocal support from higher USAF HQs may continue to cause delays and generally make it more difficult for the USAF to stand up the JTF HQ.¹

In this chapter we provide an overview of USAF efforts to build a JTF HQ as of mid-2020, prior to the deactivation of the former 9 AF and the establishment of the new 15 AF. A major theme that emerges is that, across the USAF, there been uneven support for a USAF JTF HQ effort, which made it difficult for 9 AF to develop planned JTF HQ capabilities. Facing growing defense budget constraints and competing strategic priorities, the USAF and 15 AF must now make difficult choices. Only USAF senior leaders can decide whether a concentrated effort to overcome the challenges facing the standing up of a new USAF JTF HQ is necessary.

Our purpose here is to describe progress as of mid-2020 and highlight opportunities for USAF leaders to make explicit choices about how a USAF JTF HQ might fit into the USAF's broader efforts to organize, train, and equip for joint operations. The chapter begins with an overview of 9 AF resource challenges, followed by a discussion of the unit's struggles to gain credibility—both within the USAF and in the broader joint community—by articulating a clear mission set and viable plan to validate its capabilities. The chapter then moves to a discussion of 9 AF's efforts to identify its role within evolving force presentation constructs and its efforts to ensure adequate force development efforts were in place to groom airmen with experience in leading joint operations. The penultimate section of the chapter details how 9 AF seized a major opportunity to establish credibility during its first operation, a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, it closes with some thoughts on the implications of 9 AF progress as of mid-2020 for the establishment of a USAF JTF HQ capability.

¹ Retired 9 AF senior leader, personal communication with the authors January 9, 2020; 9 AF representative, personal communication with the authors, May 20, 2019; 9 AF ANG representative, personal communication with the authors, June 21, 2019; Air Staff budget expert, personal communication with the authors, July 15, 2019; ACC official, personal communication with the authors, July 25, 2019; CJTF-OIR leader with USAF perspective, personal communication with the authors, December 10, 2019; officials from Air Force Lessons Learned, personal communication with the authors, Curtis E. LeMay Center, July 16, 2019.

Resource Challenges: Time, Advocacy, and Money

Lack of Time to Mature the JTF HQ Capability

The timeline for building the JTF HQ capability has been aggressive relative to the resources provided. After conducting a mission readiness exercise in December 2018, the 9 AF commander at the time, Maj Gen Scott J. Zobrist, along with Gen Goldfein and the ACC commander, Gen Mike Holmes, declared initial operational capability for the JTF HQ.² Guidance stated that the 9 AF commander, Maj Gen Chad Franks (who later became the commander of the 15 AF), could declare full operational capability when the JTF HQ has 90 percent of the required people and 100 percent of the required equipment on hand. The original goal was to achieve these milestones in time to declare full operating capacity by December 1, 2020, according to CSAF guidance.³

As of mid-2020, 9 AF had not reached those milestones. Given the austere DoD budget climate—which is forcing difficult choices for all the services that may become only more so in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic⁴—9 AF experienced funding delays, as will be discussed further herein. The COVID-19 crisis also led to the cancellation of the unit’s plans to serve as JTF HQ at a joint exercise—U.S. European Command’s (USEUCOM’s) Northern Viking in Iceland—in April.

Advocacy Issues

Standing up a purpose-build JTF HQ in garrison, absent extensive operational experience, proved time-consuming for 9 AF in part because of the challenges of gaining buy-in from internal USAF stakeholders. One of the reasons DoD’s effort in 2001 to develop a standing JTF HQ capability was unsuccessful was that none of the military services wanted to pay for something that was not in operational use. A similar problem has arisen in the USAF, where the need for the JTF HQ capability—relative to other priorities—has been called into question; this has raised prioritization problems that have, in turn, made it more challenging to stand up the capability on the mandated timeline.

Between competing priorities and a relatively flat budget, ACC has struggled to find dedicated funding for the JTF HQ and other start-up programs, as well as programs previously funded through overseas contingency operations accounts that are moving into the base budget.⁵ HAF officials noted that the JTF HQ has to compete with other USAF priorities, including

² Representative of 9AF, personal communication with the authors, December 18, 2019.

³ Representatives of 9AF, personal communication with the authors, April 30, 2020.

⁴ Daniel Egel, Howard J. Schatz, Krishna Kumar, and Ted Harshberger, “Defense Budget Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic,” RAND Project AIR FORCE memo to Air Staff, April 3, 2020.

⁵ Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020.

major acquisition programs like the F-35 Lightning II joint strike fighter.⁶ HAF officials also point out that Gen Goldfein's decision to develop a holistic, stand-alone JTF HQ capability with requisite manpower, equipment, and training placed even more pressure on the budget than a smaller capability affiliated with a GCC component would have.⁷

The 9th AF's ability to advocate for JTF HQ priorities in this challenging environment was limited to two JTF HQ liaison positions—one at ACC and one at HAF.⁸ Limited advocacy within ACC and the HAF meant that officials working in these HQ organizations were often unfamiliar with JTF HQ initiatives and the rationale driving them, which, in turn, made it harder for 9 AF to make a convincing funding argument. These time and advocacy issues have been further compounded by the JTF HQ's lack of a dedicated funding stream.

Budget Challenges

CSAF guidance called for ACC to establish a JTF program of record, a designation that normally leads to widespread recognition and dedicated funding. However, given competing funding priorities, ACC and HAF have not been able to plan for such a dedicated program of record. Instead, the JTF HQ effort has been funded through two distinct program elements: manpower and C2.⁹

JTF HQ manpower, operations, and maintenance have been funded in one program element as part of Air Force Forces.¹⁰ In 2016, 9 AF requested 33 Regular Air Force (RegAF) billets through Air Force Forces. Meanwhile, JTF HQ command, control, and communications (C3) systems and related manpower have been funded through another program element dedicated to C3 systems.¹¹ The 9 AF requested \$16 million plus six additional manpower billets for the C3 equipment for fiscal year (FY) 2019.¹²

Manpower Funding Delays

The 9 AF JMD for the JTF HQ required a total of 110 manpower billets, with RegAF funding 55 billets and the ANG and Air Force Reserve component funding the other 55 (27 from the ANG and 28 from the Reserve).¹³ In FY 2019, a total of 39 RegAF manpower

⁶ Air Staff representative, personal communication with the authors, July 15, 2019.

⁷ Headquarters Air Staff representatives, personal communication with the authors, July 15, 2019.

⁸ Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020.

⁹ See Defense Acquisition University, "Program of Record," Defense Acquisition University Glossary, web database, undated.

¹⁰ Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020.

¹¹ Representative of 9 AF involved in planning, Email exchange with the authors, February 24, 2020.

¹² Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020.

¹³ Staff of 9AF, personal communication with the authors, June 21, 2019.

billets were funded.¹⁴ The remaining 16 of the 55 RegAF billets were to be filled in FY 2021, with a 9 AF project objective memorandum (POM) request for additional manpower to support the C3 package.¹⁵

However, the 55 ANG and Reserve component billets were not funded in the FY 2019 or FY 2020 POMs. ANG and Reserve leaders did not request the funding because they were waiting for a signed agreement between the ACC commander, Gen James Holmes, and ANG and Reserve leadership. That agreement was signed in August 2019, which was too late to be included in the FY 2020 POM cycle. While the ANG agreed to internally fund the billets until JTF HQ-dedicated funding kicked in the FY 2021 POM, the Reserve chose to wait to fund the billets until the dedicated funding stream became available in FY 2021.¹⁶ The implication of the delayed funding for the ANG and Reserve, together known as the Air Reserve Component (ARC), was that no ARC units were formally aligned with the JTF HQ. Mobilizing ARC forces for 9 AF JTF HQ activities therefore often devolved into a “pickup” game in which 9 AF sought out ARC members on a volunteer basis.

C3 Funding Delays

C3 funding was also delayed. The HAF’s C3 program element underexecuted its budget in FY 2017 and FY 2018, thus prompting the HAF to cut the funding. When 9 AF staff discovered the funding gap, they tried to explain to the HAF that the money was needed in FY 2019 to buy C3 systems for the JTF HQ capability, but it was too late to reprogram the money for that fiscal year. Instead, HAF reprogrammed the money over two years, providing \$8 million in FY 2020 and \$9 million in FY 2021.¹⁷ One positive aspect of the funding delay was that it prompted 9 AF to reevaluate the C3 systems that were selected for funding in 2016. Realizing that the Deployable Joint Command and Control system they were planning to purchase had become outdated, 9 AF was able to work with 5th Combat Communications Group to identify a newer system with lower manpower requirements—a system known as a flexible communications package. As of mid-2020, 9 AF was planning to buy two flexible communications packages instead of the Deployable Joint Command and Control system.¹⁸

Lack of Training Funds

Funding for training was another problem for 9 AF. In February 2020, 9 AF conducted a STAFFEX in Iceland to prepare to lead a JTF at Northern Viking, a USEUCOM joint exercise

¹⁴ Representative of 9 AF ANG, personal communication with the authors, June 21, 2019.

¹⁵ Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020.

¹⁶ Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020.

¹⁷ Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020.

¹⁸ Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020.

that was scheduled for April 2020 but which was subsequently canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because there was no internal 9 AF training fund available, 9 AF asked ACC for the funds; ACC, in turn, found the funds by cannibalizing resources set aside for 9 AF facilities renovations. The 9th AF also had to ask ACC and HAF to help with funding for Northern Viking itself. Typically, such joint exercises have separate funding sources, but USEUCOM's request for funding was denied in the FY 2020 POM; this meant that exercise attendees would have had to pay their own way if the exercise had gone forward.¹⁹

Reflecting on the reasons for the lack of funding prioritization, 9 AF HQ staff acknowledged in mid-2020 that the USAF was under significant budget pressure and that establishing any new programs of record at this time would be a challenge.²⁰ At the same time, however, the staff also highlighted other factors related to the broader institutional tensions, as was discussed in Chapter 2. In their view, the USAF's perceived focus on the tactical level of C2—as opposed to operational and strategic C2—created a priorities mismatch that disadvantaged the JTF HQ in budget discussions.²¹ A variety of personnel affiliated with 9 AF during JTF HQ establishment specifically cited the USAF's emphasis on tactical C2 weapon systems, such as the Air Operations Center (AOC), as a reason for ACC's ambivalent approach to prioritizing funding for an organization geared toward the operational level of war: the JTF HQ.²²

JTF HQ Credibility: Evolving Mission Focus and Lack of Understanding of Certification Processes

Evolving Mission Focus

Because Gen Goldfein tasked 9 AF to organize, train, and equip for a GRF-aligned capability, 9 AF originally set out to build a JTF HQ that could rapidly deploy anywhere in the world on short notice to meet a wide variety of missions sets across the spectrum of conflict. However, it quickly became apparent to Air Staff and 9 AF representatives that 9 AF would need to offer a unique JTF HQ capability to become competitive.²³ As a compromise,

¹⁹ Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020.

²⁰ Former 9 AF officials involved in early formation of JTF HQ capability personal communication with the authors, September 20, 2018; representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020.

²¹ Representative of 9 AF ANG, personal communication with the authors, June 21, 2019.

²² Former 9 AF officials involved in early formation of JTF HQ capability, personal communication with the authors, September 20, 2018; representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020.

²³ Former 9 AF officials involved in early formation of JTF HQ capability, personal communication with the authors, September 20, 2018.

9 AF and HAF agreed that the capability would focus on airpower missions, but seek to avoid being pigeonholed into any one mission type. In this way, 9 AF would theoretically retain enough of a broad appeal to serve as a viable option to relieve the Army's XVIII Airborne Corps and 82 ABD from relatively frequent rotations on the former GRF.²⁴

Over time, however, the 9 AF mission concept continued to evolve as it became clear that a worldwide-deployable tasking might not be feasible for certain high-end mission sets given 9 AF manpower and equipment shortages.²⁵ Additionally, focusing on a narrower set of missions for the JTF HQ was seen as a way to more easily facilitate the development of joint mission essential tasks used to measure the readiness of the JTF.²⁶ In light of these constraints, early JTF HQ developers decided to focus on specific missions that were not readily met by other services; that were perceived as favoring the Air Forces' strengths; and that an Air Force Forces commander could credibly argue for based on having preponderance of forces with supporting components required for the mission.²⁷

This decision led 9 AF to settle on specific missions outlined in 9 AF training guidance. The guidance tacitly acknowledged a tension between mission flexibility and airpower-oriented missions. It suggested that while the theoretical mission set should remain expansive, in practice 9 AF should scope its training efforts to five types of missions in which the USAF has historically played a significant role:

- joint targeting and interdiction
- countering air and missile threats
- global recovery operations
- enforcement of exclusion zone and joint security operations
- humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) and defense support to civil authorities.²⁸

While 9 AF JTF HQ training focused on this mission set, 9 AF's joint mission essential tasks remained broad, reflecting a worldwide-deployable model designed for a spectrum of missions rather than a construct focused on a particular geographic area or more limited mission set.²⁹ The decision to scope training simply meant that 9 AF would have more

²⁴ Retired 9 AF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 9, 2020.

²⁵ Representative of the 9 AF involved in interagency coordination, personal communication with the authors, May 20, 2019.

²⁶ Retired 9 AF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 9, 2020.

²⁷ Former 9 AF officials involved in early formation of JTF HQ capability personal communication with the authors, September 20, 2018; 9th Air Force Joint Task Force, "9 AF Joint Training Guidance FY 20–21," memorandum, November 27, 2019, pp. 11–12.

²⁸ Headquarters, 9 AF, "FY20–FY21 Commander's (9AF/CC) Joint Training Guidance," November 17, 2019, p. 2.

²⁹ Phillip Holdcroft, "Proposed JMETs and Measures of Effectiveness," slide briefing, U.S. Air Combat Command, 9 AF, Shaw AFB, S.C., December 10, 2019.

experience and expertise in some mission areas as opposed to others. As was discussed in Chapter 2, striking the appropriate balance between the mandate to provide an “anywhere-anytime” capability versus the desire to more narrowly focus the mission based on function and geography continues to be a subject of debate in the USAF.

While the original intent behind the JTF HQ guidance was to take the lead in major, resource-intensive, combined arms operations like CJTF-OIR, some USAF representatives began to reconsider the value of a more modest approach. One alternative was to affiliate the JTF HQ with a GCC air component, focus on air-centric missions, and narrow the training focus to specific missions relevant to the given GCC.³⁰ In particular, Air Staff representatives suggested affiliating with AFRICOM, which relies on USEUCOM for air component resources and therefore may be interested in a stronger affiliation with an airpower-centric JTF HQ capability.³¹ Another alternative, introduced at the 2017 Corona conference and subsequently raised in some discussions with those familiar with the 9 AF effort, was to revisit the second course of action for the JTF HQ that was originally presented to Gen Goldfein. Under this approach, 9 AF would have become a “component enabler”; rather than standing up a JTF HQ itself, it would have provided an enabling capability to train, certify, and assist GCC air components as a JTF HQ capability.³²

Joint Task Force Certification

Another issue related to the broad mission focus of the JTF HQ is the question of how to gain credibility in the joint community. Initially, Gen Goldfein called for the 9 AF JTF HQ to seek formal certification as a JTF HQ from the Joint Staff J7.³³ However, after discussions with the Joint Staff, 9 AF subsequently realized that the J7 does not actually perform this certification process.³⁴ Rather, the J7 is responsible for JTF HQ formation training and doctrine. The Joint Enabling Capabilities Command (JECC), which is a subunified command of USTRANSCOM, can augment a JTF HQ with planners, public affairs, knowledge management, and joint communication capabilities in the early days of JTF

³⁰ HAF/A3 representative, personal communication with the authors, October 30, 2019; retired 9 AF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 9, 2020.

³¹ HAF/A3 representative, personal communication with the authors, October 30, 2019. Whether to affiliate with a COCOM has been a subject of debate in the USAF. One plan under consideration was to have 9 AF remain service retained but to build subsequent JTF HQ capabilities that would be aligned with COCOM. In this model, C-NAFs would build JTF HQ capabilities that would be certified by the service-retained 9 AF JTF HQ. Representative of 9 AF, email to the authors, July 7, 2020.

³² Representative of 9 AF, email to the authors, July 7, 2020. This approach appeared to be gaining some traction as this report was nearing completion in mid-2021, but it was still unclear exactly what a certification role for the JTF HQ would look like.

³³ DAF, 2018b, pp. 12–13.

³⁴ Joint Staff representative, personal communication with the authors, August 14, 2019.

formation, but it does not train or certify JTF HQs.³⁵ Rather than receiving JTF certification from an external organization, JTF HQs have historically self-certified following a major exercise conducted under the auspices of a combatant command.³⁶ For example, I Corps, the only Army corps assigned to a combatant command (U.S. Indo-Pacific Command) certified as a JTF-capable HQ after completing a bilateral exercise with the Australian military in 2015.³⁷

While such self-certification is one way to gain credibility, it is not a prerequisite. As discussed in Chapter 5, GCC-affiliated units that have not been certified as JTF HQs per se may still be selected to form the HQ of a JTF based on a variety of factors, such as preexisting formal and informal relationships with the higher HQs, geographic location, and readiness in terms of staff size and skills to conduct the mission at hand.³⁸ These factors relate to some of the reasons why current and former USAF officers familiar with 9 AF JTF HQ efforts suggested that 9 AF reconsider a narrowing of the mission scope to accommodate formal or informal affiliation with a GCC air component.³⁹ While both narrowing the mission scope and affiliating with a GCC would cause the USAF's JTF HQ capability to diverge significantly from the Army's 82 ABD model, precedent suggests that it might increase the odds of the USAF's selection to provide a JTF HQ capability.

The Unclear Role for 9 AF in Evolving USAF and Department of Defense Force Presentation Concepts

In addition to wrestling with questions about mission scope and credibility, the USAF's JTF HQ must also address the question of how it will present forces to deploy. As was discussed in Chapter 2, the USAF is developing a new force generation model designed to align USAF force readiness and availability with the new DFE concept. Growing out of the 2018 National Defense Strategy, DFE seeks to create “operational unpredictability” for adversaries by developing a slate of forces—known as the CRF and IRF—that can rapidly respond to crises around the globe.⁴⁰ While the USAF's new force generation concept and the DFE framework are still evolving, both are likely to have implications for the USAF's presentation of a JTF HQ capability.

³⁵ JECC representative, email exchange with the authors, August 5, 2019.

³⁶ Air Staff official with JTF certification experience at a combatant command, personal communication with the authors, June 17, 2019.

³⁷ Cheryl Pellerin, “Army's I Corps Supports DoD Asia-Pacific Rebalance,” U.S. Department of Defense, August 21, 2015.

³⁸ Lee et al., 2017, pp. 34–35.

³⁹ HAF official, personal communication with the authors, October 30, 2019; retired 9 AF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 9, 2020.

⁴⁰ HAF official, personal communication with the authors, October 30, 2019.

The 9th Air Force's Emerging Role in the New Force Generation Model

As of mid-2020, the USAF's new force generation model, AFFORGEN, involved the rotational use of "buckets" of forces at different levels of readiness. Over a fixed time span, each task force would rotate through four buckets that are roughly aligned with the DFE concept. These buckets include reset, prepare, ready, and commit. Forces remain in each of the four buckets for the same amount of months, allowing for about a one-to-three deploy-to-dwell ratio for the RegAF.⁴¹

AFFORGEN is still evolving. The number of buckets in the force generation model could change, and there are ongoing discussions between ACC and HAF about what constitutes a "task force"—that is, whether it is a discrete entity or a composite force package that is pulled together for a given rotation.⁴² However, regardless of how this and other questions are settled, it appears likely AFFORGEN will have an impact on the USAF's efforts to stand up a JTF HQ. If the JTF HQ is aligned with AFFORGEN, it might also be credibly aligned with the DFE concept. The USAF could ask the Joint Staff to add the JTF HQ to the Joint Staff's new Directed Readiness Tables (which dictate which forces are available in the various bins at any given time), making it vulnerable to deploy as an IRF asset within a given deployment window. In this instance, the USAF would then need to align the JTF HQ's readiness and availability requirements with those of forces on the IRF rather than with internal USAF standards.

The JTF HQ's Potential Role on the Immediate Response Force

At the heart of DoD's new DFE concept is the IRF, which is designed to carry out three functions. First, the IRF is intended to act as a proactive force that demonstrates "operational unpredictability," thus complicating the decision calculus for adversaries. Second, the IRF replaces the GRF with a new menu of rotational forces that can be tasked for a short duration within a window of vulnerability to respond to contingencies. Third, the IRF can be used as a forcible entry force in the first days of a major regional conflict. Specific forces—which could range from fighters, to aircraft carriers, to other enabling forces—are assigned to the IRF on the DRTs.⁴³

As was discussed in Chapter 2, the USAF originally planned to align the 9 AF JTF HQ with the GRF. In 2018, citing the need for 9 AF to gain operational experience, the Air Staff made the decision to delay its request for GRF alignment to FY 2021 or FY 2022 following 9 AF's completion of its first joint exercise, Northern Viking, scheduled to take place in the

⁴¹ Air Staff representative, personal communication with the authors, October 26, 2020.

⁴² Representatives from HAF A3/Checkmate, personal communication with the authors, October 30, 2019.

⁴³ HAF/A3 OD War Dawgs staff, personal communication with the authors, March 12, 2020; Air Staff representative, personal communication with the authors, August 13, 2019.

spring of 2020 but, as noted, canceled because of the coronavirus epidemic.⁴⁴ In 2019, DoD made the decision to replace the GRF concept with the new IRF.

With the GRF now defunct, efforts to include the USAF's JTF HQ as a viable C2 force element with the Joint Staff and OSD appear to have lost some momentum. The Air Staff planned to add 9 AF as a service-retained JTF HQ capability on the Joint Staff's Fiscal Year 2021 assignment tables, which are updated yearly and typically assign specified forces to COCOMs. The logic behind this plan was that including 9 AF on the assignment tables might raise the profile of the 9 AF JTF HQ with the Joint Staff, which ultimately decides the number and type of force elements available on the DRTs for IRF deployments.⁴⁵

As of mid-2020, however, it remained unclear whether being included in the FY 2021 assignment tables would provide enough visibility to elevate 9 AF's status to inclusion on the IRF. While there is no historical data to examine how often IRF-aligned capabilities are selected as JTF HQ, we do know that there is *not* a significant correlation between inclusion on the GRF and selection as a JTF HQ capability. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, since the inception of the GRF, there have been only three GRF-aligned JTF HQs.⁴⁶ Being a service-retained, worldwide-deployable capability does not seem to significantly correlate with selection as a JTF HQ.

Readiness Reporting Challenges Associated with the Immediate Response Force

If the USAF continues to model its JTF HQ capability on credible readiness for worldwide deployability—a requirement for units on the GRF (now IRF)—then it will have to iron out significant readiness reporting challenges. A JTF-capable service-retained unit, such as the Army's III Corps, is certified to serve as a JTF HQ by the service, which sets its mission essential tasks and oversees its organization, training, and equipping.⁴⁷ Because 9 AF was service retained, this is the approach that it took to developing mission essential tasks.

However, units assigned to the former GRF, such as 82 AD, have historically reported readiness to the SECDEF and must meet certain readiness requirements based on specific scenarios.⁴⁸ DoD-sanctioned readiness standards also exist for the new IRF model, though it is not clear they are built around specific scenarios. Regardless, a USAF JTF HQ capability would need to adhere to these OSD standards of readiness to become a viable force on the

⁴⁴ Air Staff, personal communication with the authors, August 13, 2019; retired 9 AF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 9, 2020.

⁴⁵ Air Staff, personal communication with the authors, August 13, 2019.

⁴⁶ U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Military Readiness: Actions Are Needed to Enhance the Readiness of the Global Response Force to Support Contingency Operations*, Washington, D.C.: GAO Report 18-81, October 2017.

⁴⁷ Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, 2015b, pp. 4–5.

⁴⁸ Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, 2015b, pp. 4–5.

IRF, as opposed to adopting 9 AF's approach, which was internal to the USAF and not necessarily aligned with the OSD standards.

The Potential for the New Force Generation Model to Expand 9 AF's Command and Control Role

To support the new AFFORGEN construct, the USAF shifted more operational wings under the administrative control of 9 AF in 2020.⁴⁹ The idea was that consolidation of these might make it easier for the USAF to pull together force packages for the AFFORGEN cycle, even if those wings did not physically move to Shaw AFB. In addition to taking on "conventional NAF" administrative responsibilities for those wings, the USAF also expected 9 AF to leverage its C2 capability, inherent in its JTF HQ mission, to deploy with those wings to perform an additional tactical C2 mission as part of a task force.⁵⁰ In late 2020, the USAF implemented this plan, deactivating 9 AF and activating 15 AF to provide a C2 capability and administrative control of the wings and direct reporting units formerly under 9 AF and 12 AF.

ACC's effort to "reinvigorate the NAF," starting with increased responsibilities for 9 AF (now 15 AF), reflected a desire to adjust the USAF's force presentation model in a way that provides more cohesive operational packages to joint commanders.⁵¹ But 9 AF staff expressed several concerns with this approach prior to the change. First, they worried that the plan for 9 AF to provide a C2 capability to units when they deployed might detract from 9 AF's ability to maintain a ready JTF HQ. This is because the requirements to provide a C2 capability for deployed wings are different from the requirements for maintaining a JTF HQ capability. Most notably, the former involves a more USAF-centric approach, focused on aircraft scheduling, while the latter demands a broader view informed by joint planning processes (JPPs).

Second, 9 AF officials worried that they lacked the staff to deploy *either* a JTF HQ capability *or* a C2 capability for USAF wings while still maintaining expanded administrative control over wings in garrison.⁵² The 12th Air Force, dual-hatted as AFSOUTH—the air component to U.S. Southern Command—was the first GCC component scheduled to release

⁴⁹ In August 2020, 9 AF and 12 AF direct reporting units and wings were integrated as planned to form a new NAF, 15 AF; the latter now continues to carry out the mandate to develop a JTF HQ capability. It also bears responsibility for organizing, training, and equipping ACC's conventional forces, which include all of the wings that previously fell under the now deactivated 9 AF and 12 AF, and will now focus on its component role for U.S. Southern Command as 12 AF/Air Forces Southern (AFSOUTH). See ACC, "Fifteenth Air Force Activates, Consolidates ACC's Conventional Forces," press release, U.S. Air Force, August 20, 2020. AFCENT will be redesignated 9 AF/AFCENT.

⁵⁰ Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020.

⁵¹ Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, December 18, 2019.

⁵² Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020.

administrative responsibility of its wings to 9 AF. Once those five wings fell under 9 AF, the unit would then have administrative responsibility for 13 wings. With a staff that consisted of just 68 personnel at the height of training for the now canceled Northern Viking exercise, 9 AF staff noted it would be difficult to deploy a C2 capability while at the same time managing administrative responsibilities for such a large number of forces in garrison.

Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Mobilization

Another force presentation concern for standing up a USAF JTF HQ relates to the role of the ANG and Reserve component, together known as the ARC. ARC integration was essential to standing up 9 AF as a JTF HQ. As will be discussed below, half of the 9 AF's JTF HQ billets (55 of 110) were to be resourced by the ARC.⁵³

Whether the USAF JTF HQ adopts an “always on call” model or builds readiness over time to deploy with a preplanned window, long-term planning and funding to integrate ARC capability likely will be required. In particular, if the USAF wishes to align its JTF HQ force generation cycle with the IRF, then it must plan to mobilize ANG and Reserve forces within particular windows of vulnerability. When forces are on the DRTs as part of the IRF, they must maintain readiness to deploy within days. ANG and Reserve forces need more than 30 days' notice for an involuntary mobilization, unless the president of the United States declares a national emergency and orders them to mobilize in a shorter time frame. Therefore, to use ANG and Reserve forces for an IRF, 9 AF would need to have organized, trained, and equipped that unit for this special case and have access to the right funding and authorities to keep them at a high readiness level for the entire time they are scheduled to be on the IRF rotation.

Maintaining ARC readiness for the IRF could be expensive. ANG and Reserve components would have to pay to keep those forces on alert for however long the IRF window lasts, with no guarantee that they would deploy as a JTF HQ. To date, ANG and Reserve funding delays have already stretched out the timeline for the ANG and Reserve to be ready to deploy as part of a JTF HQ in 2024⁵⁴—three years after the 9 AF's original full operating capacity was scheduled to be declared in December 2020.

JTF HQ Force Development

Force development—specifically, building forces optimized to operate in joint environments—also raises a complex set of issues for the USAF as it builds a JTF HQ capability. The 9 AF staff pursued efforts to carry out training guidance, report readiness,

⁵³ 9 AF Operations Working Group, December 18, 2019, Shaw AFB, S.C.

⁵⁴ ANG representative, personal communication with the authors, January 22, 2020.

gain joint planning expertise, groom personnel with appropriate education and skills, and sufficiently staff the JTF HQ. But in addition to the resource constraints affecting the USAF broadly, these 9 AF efforts have arguably been even more deeply affected by long-standing bureaucratic, political, and cultural tensions, as discussed in Chapter 2. Amassing the political capital, cultural support, and funding to develop airmen explicitly to lead and influence joint operations is an ambitious goal, and one that is not always a clear priority within the USAF as an institution.

Personnel Development Challenges

As was discussed in Chapter 2, the process of building joint leaders starts early in a soldier's career, but this is not necessarily the case for airmen. Soldiers begin to use formal planning methodologies at the tactical level, continuing to leverage the JPP at the operational and strategic levels as their careers progress.⁵⁵ Officers in the Army and Marines are also not normally expected to maintain weapon system proficiency as they rise through the ranks; instead, advancement involves demonstrating the ability to direct others and process mission command orders appropriate for their level of command.

In contrast, the USAF's focus in recent decades on tactical C2, exemplified in its development of the AOC, means that airmen do not necessarily have the same opportunities to build command experience at the operational and strategic levels. In addition, the USAF's major commands—including the warfighting commands Pacific Air Forces and U.S. Air Forces Europe (USAFE)—have assumed the role of operational JFACCs, meaning they are internally and tactically focused on commanding the AOC rather than commanding at the strategic level through interactions with other countries and government agencies. As a result of these developments, airmen may not have access to planning and directing experience until they reach a four-star command billet.⁵⁶ In light of these considerations, 9 AF staff expressed concerns that personnel may lack the knowledge and skills necessary to perform in key JTF HQ positions, such as chief of operations.⁵⁷

Another concern is that the USAF's organizational structure and culture may be mutually enforcing a preference for internal leadership development. Airmen may not place as much value on joint command opportunities, which inherently require JPP skills and the ability to command across echelons and domains, because their career paths do not readily expose them to these experiences.⁵⁸ For 9 AF, this dynamic manifested itself in two different ways.

⁵⁵ Official from 82 AD, personal communication with the authors, September 12, 2019.

⁵⁶ Former USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, October 8, 2020.

⁵⁷ Current and former 9 AF officials involved in early formation of JTF HQ capability, personal communication with the authors, September 20, 2018.

⁵⁸ Lee et al., 2017.

First, 9 AF airmen were leaving the JTF HQ before they could leverage that experience and share it with others.⁵⁹ The institutional norm is for airmen to serve in joint assignments for just one year. The USAF therefore intended to bring top officers to Shaw AFB to serve in JTF HQ J-code positions for a year, but this is not enough time to impart knowledge to incoming airmen. Second, the USAF intended for 9 AF airmen to spend the year after their 9 AF assignment deployed to CJTF-OIR once the JTF capability reached initial operational capability. After two years—one at 9 AF, and one deployed—those officers would then be given an opportunity to command.⁶⁰ However, the 9 AF JTF HQ had difficulty finding officers in the O-6 grade willing to deploy to serve in one of the influential billets that the USAF had secured on the CJTF-OIR JMD. Officers with significant staff experience were opting to retire rather than pursue these billets, leading the USAF to question whether the correct incentives were in place to ensure the USAF’s “best” were being selected for the JTF HQ assignment.⁶¹

A related problem has been the marginalization of the NAF in USAF culture. As was discussed in Chapter 2, the NAFs have lost relevance since the Vietnam War because their operational responsibilities are minimal, especially for those like 9 AF that were not C-NAFs. Therefore, USAF officers do not typically expect demanding leadership experience or specialized skills when assigned to a NAF. Serving on a NAF staff is generally considered a less desirable assignment and a setback to one’s career, if not the planned route to retirement. These factors further contributed to 9 AF’s struggle to balance a need to acquire high-performing officers with a need to keep staff members in key leadership billets for a significant amount of time. The USAF recruited high-performing leaders to 9 AF, but to support their career progression, they stayed for only a short tour before moving on to assignments considered more conducive to their advancement.⁶² This made it harder to transform 9 AF from a NAF with minimal operational responsibilities to a cohesive team ready to lead joint operations.

Staffing the Joint Manning Document

Another personnel challenge for standing up a JTF HQ capability relates to staffing the JMD. The staff of the 9 AF tailored a unique JMD for each exercise or deployment it planned to undertake; however, it drew from a core resource pool of 55 RegAF and 55 ARC airmen,

⁵⁹ Former USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, June 6, 2019; staff of 9 AF HQ, personal communication with the authors, December 18, 2019.

⁶⁰ Former USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, October 8, 2020.

⁶¹ William Spangethal, “CORONA South Exec Sessions Tasks.” PowerPoint presentation, Corona South 2017, MacDill AFB, Florida.

⁶² Discussion during 9 AF Working Groups regarding JTF training, Shaw AFB, S.C., December 18, 2019.

for a total of 110 personnel on its JMD.⁶³ This baseline JMD could be augmented with additional personnel in the event that 9 AF was tasked to provide an operational JTF HQ.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, 9 AF had a relatively light core staff when compared with, say, the Army's I Corps, which provides a scalable C2 capability in the Indo-Pacific region. During a recent exercise, for example, I Corps deployed an HQ staff of 400 personnel, along with 50 Reserve and joint augmentees, to support an early entry command post.⁶⁵

For any given event, the 9 AF's JMD contained many of the unique billets needed for a joint HQ at the operational level of war, some of which reflect niche skill sets (e.g., cyber, information operations, foreign area expertise, and engineering). Still, given the small size of the staff, getting sufficient depth at the right skill sets for a given mission was a challenge. Airmen with such skills sets are low density across the force, making it difficult for both RegAF and ARC units to recruit, train, and retain them.

Because of these realities, 9 AF continually suffered from a lack of reliable staffing. ANG mobilization schedules were not yet synced with JTF HQ training and short-notice deployment requirements, so 9 AF could not assume that the ANG would be able to send personnel with particular types of expertise required for a given deployment or exercise.⁶⁶ Leaders from 9 AF noted that, as a JTF HQ, they would need to absorb a significant amount of manpower from the joint force. While they could begin work to identify areas of likely support, the type and amount of personnel they received from other services would never be entirely within their control.

Training Guidance

Training is one way to ensure that JTF HQ personnel have the appropriate skills. Training guidance, released in 2018, required 9 AF JTF HQ staff to execute multiple training events, including a JTF Staff Basic Course (formerly known as the RMSE, and relocated to Maxwell AFB in Alabama in 2019); attendance at a COCOM JTF exercise; internal academics and STAFFEXs; and deployment training. Once initially qualified, individual personnel were to maintain staff qualifications by participating in a CCMD JTF exercise and/or a four-day 9 AF STAFFEX annually and by maintaining global deployment readiness.⁶⁷ The 9 AF held several STAFFEXs, and 9 AF staff also developed baseline knowledge of HA/DR through

⁶³ Former USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, June 6, 2019; staff of 9 AF HQ, personal communication with the authors, December 18, 2019.

⁶⁴ Representative of 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, July 21, 2020.

⁶⁵ Robert B. Brown and Jason N. Adler, "I Corps: Pacific Command's Newest Asset," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Vol. 77, April 1, 2015.

⁶⁶ Former USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, June 6, 2019; staff of 9 AF HQ, personal communication with the authors, December 18, 2019.

⁶⁷ Headquarters, 9 AF, November 17, 2019, p. 2.

the Joint Humanitarian Operations Course (JHOC). The 9 AF also sought to train collectively for this mission by planning to exercise with AFSOUTH.⁶⁸

While 9 AF carried out a robust internal training schedule, accessing USAF funds for joint exercises or other joint opportunities appears to be an ongoing challenge. If 9 AF's difficulty in obtaining USAF funds to attend USEUCOM's now canceled Northern Viking joint training exercise is any precedent, it may be difficult to access resources for joint training in the future. As DoD faces an increasingly austere budget environment, the attendance of a USAF JTF HQ at joint exercises, offered as either part of the Joint Staff's exercise program and/or as part of a GCC's long-term planning, is likely to require internal USAF resources.

Lack of Joint Planning Expertise

From a practical standpoint, JTF HQ personnel need not only have training but the *right kind* of training to effectively execute a JTF HQ mission. One challenge for 9 AF was developing the “muscle memory” required to effectively and efficiently complete a mission analysis—a key JTF HQ function. RAND researchers attended a 9 AF JTF HQ STAFFEX in the fall of 2019. The 9 AF JTF HQ staff broke into operational planning teams to conduct mission analysis in response to a plan order issued by the 9 AF Joint Planning Group. Joint planning doctrine calls on military members to develop a plan by establishing a shared understanding of the operational problem that allows an effective mission statement to be created.⁶⁹ With limited time and training, however, 9 AF staff were unable to focus entirely on the substance of the problem and spent considerable energy on delivering planning products on tight timelines. As a result, a relatively small portion of the STAFFEX was devoted to a discussion of the linkages between strategy and operations.

Another issue was 9 AF's limited interaction to date with other service units with more extensive joint C2 experience. STAFFEXs at 9 AF featured some joint representation, and certainly Northern Viking would have provided that same interservice interaction. However, in general, there was no formal effort to incorporate other units with significant JTF HQ experience into these exercises or to send 9 AF members to other service's JTF HQ training events. The Army's Mission Command Training Program, for example, conducts periodic warfighter exercises to hone the C2 skills of core units preparing for the possibility of serving as JTF HQs. During these events, the USAF's 505th Command and Control Wing facilitates closer connections and training opportunities between airmen and Army units training for JTF HQ responsibilities.

⁶⁸ 9th Air Force Joint Task Force, 2019; 9 AF representative, email to the authors, July 7, 2020.

⁶⁹ Joint Staff, *Joint Planning*, Washington, D.C.: Joint Staff, Joint Publication 5-0, 2017a.

The 9th Air Force's Role in the Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The 9 AF's ability to manage the range of challenges described above was put to the test during the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020. On March 26, 9 AF received a vocal order to stand up Task Force Southeast (TF-SE) supporting the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) response in FEMA regions III and IV, which includes most of the mid-Atlantic and the Southeast. In that role, 9 AF moved quickly to stand up a 24-hour operations center to command and control active-duty forces preparing to deploy to states to provide medical assistance. Subordinate to U.S. Army North, TF-SE provided C2 for joint reception, staging, and onward movement and integration of forces that would fall under "dual status" commanders that have both federal and state responsibilities.

A central theme that emerged out of the TF-SE crisis response was the practical problem of responding on a short timeline to an emergent requirement. Most notably, 9 AF faced obstacles to effectively manning the operations center. Under its existing mandate, 9 AF's JTF HQ mission was expansive and demanding, requiring a joint headquarters that could deploy anywhere in the world on short notice. The TF-SE experience indicated that, from a force presentation perspective, 9 AF needed, at a minimum, its full complement of RegAF staff and access to ANG and Reserve forces, bringing its staff size to 110. Without access to the full staff, 9 AF risked resorting to fallback processes when it was called up for a crisis, such as submitting requests for forces within DoD's global force management system for additional personnel.

At the time of 9 AF's COVID-19 response, only 37 of 55 RegAF JTF HQ billets were manned. The situation was even more dire for the ARC, which could not be readily mobilized in the TF-SE COVID-19 response.⁷⁰ Considerable foresight is needed to incorporate these ANG and Reserve forces, who must receive adequate training and funding and also align their deploy-to-dwell cycles with the demands of a JTF HQ. Just a few weeks before the standing up of TF-SE, ACC convened a "mobilization sprint" to examine these issues.⁷¹ But detailed planning was not yet complete; thus, ARC volunteers who had already trained with 9 AF JTF HQ were not available for tasking for TF-SE.

The 9 AF issued a request for forces through the global force management system, which resulted in the allocation of additional RegAF forces. However, 9 AF representatives noted that the process was cumbersome, and of course, inherently slower than having the full complement of 110 staff readily available. They also noted that while TF-SE did provide some operational experience, it did not fully test 9 AF's JTF HQ capability in the same way that Northern Viking, a major joint exercise involving fielded forces, might have done.⁷²

⁷⁰ Some ANG and Reserve members were able to participate in TF-SE, but they were not mobilized through ARC orders; 9 AF representative, email to the authors, July 7, 2020.

⁷¹ Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, May 18, 2020.

⁷² Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, May 14, 2020.

Despite these initial challenges, however, 9 AF's performance was effective enough to prompt General Terrence O'Shaughnessy, the CCDR of U.S. Northern Command, to ask 9 AF to remain on a "prepare to deploy order" to assist with hurricane response or a second wave of COVID-19 in the future.⁷³ Even this apparent success brought its own additional complexities, however. By responding to Gen O'Shaughnessy's request, 9 AF was agreeing to adopt an "always on call" model that requires highly synchronized funding and planning. While this model quickly built 9 AF credibility, it might have been difficult to sustain in the long term given the size of the 9 AF JTF HQ staff, even at its full complement of 110.

The 9 AF experience with the COVID-19 response reinforces the need for the USAF to address head-on a first-order question: What type and scope of missions should the USAF's JTF HQ capability be ready to accomplish? Once that question is answered, other choices about the JTF HQ's force generation cycle, training requirements, personnel development, staff size, and resource requirements may be easier to make. In the chapters that follow, we discuss precedents, norms, and doctrine guiding JTF HQ formation and their implications for scoping the USAF's JTF HQ mission set.

Conclusion: Assessing Costs and Benefits of Building a JTF HQ Capability

While 9 AF's COVID-19 response showed the potential value that the USAF can bring to joint operations, it also highlighted some of the major challenges 9 AF faces in regard to funding, manning, and force presentation. A variety of factors impinge on the USAF's ability to stand up a credible JTF HQ. The service faces growing budget pressure and mounting strategic demands. At the same time, the USAF is in the midst of reforming its force presentation model to optimize it for the emerging strategic context—a shift likely to have significant consequences across the force, not just for the JTF HQ capability. And the USAF is wrestling with all of these challenges in the context of underlying bureaucratic, political, and cultural tensions (as discussed in Chapter 2) related to striking the appropriate balance between leading joint operations versus making a unique airpower contribution to joint operations.

As the USAF considers its role in joint operations more broadly, a first-order question is what role, if any, a JTF HQ should play. To the extent that forming a JTF HQ remains a priority, it may be helpful to consider what has made the USAF's JTF HQs effective in the past and whether adjustments to current guidance might better capitalize on the USAF's strengths while simultaneously improving the likelihood of JTF HQ selection. In the chapters that follow, these precedents and lessons learned from other JTF HQ formation and selection experiences will be discussed in detail.

⁷³ Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, May 18, 2020.

4. Requirements for Joint Task Force Leadership: What It Means to Lead at the Operational Level of War

Having examined the choices facing the USAF as it builds a JTF HQ capability in Chapters 2 and 3, this report now looks beyond 9 AF experience to identify broader historical and theoretical precedents for effective JTF HQ formation. As will be discussed in Appendix C, the concept of the operational level of war is not universally accepted; however, at a minimum, it does provide a helpful mental model for commanders and staff of a JTF HQ, who must translate strategic objectives into tactical action. The discussion is particularly relevant as the USAF pursues the new JADC2 concept, which requires bringing together capabilities across functional domains to achieve military effects. In recent decades the USAF has tended to focus its C2 efforts on AOC, a tactical weapon system responsible for execution management of air capabilities. However, JADC2 will require the USAF to develop C2 capabilities to plan and direct forces across functional domains to translate strategic guidance into military effects—the essence of operational art.

In this chapter we review the literature on operational art and how it pertains to leading at JTF HQ. Drawing on joint doctrine and military theory, the chapter provides a conceptual framework for discussing how JTFs are formed and employed in practice and detailed analysis of specific military operations. By first considering the broader requirements of leading at the operational level of war, we can move toward a more detailed understanding of how the USAF can enhance its joint leaders and teams and how the USAF can best prepare for the JTF HQ mission.

Leading a Joint Task Force

When a commander is selected to lead a JTF, he or she becomes responsible for developing a coherent plan to integrate the capabilities of multiple subordinate organizations to solve a complex problem in accordance with the higher commander's intent. The commander's staff serves as an extension of the commander, processing information on his or her behalf. This involves developing plans and orders to bring coherence to the effort and monitoring the execution of those orders to coordinate across components and provide information to the commander.¹ Simply put, the JTF HQ provides the connective tissue between the strategic

¹ James Hittle, *The Military Staff: Its History and Development*, Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole, 1961, pp. 3–4, 8–9; Joint Staff, 2017a, II-1–II-2; William A. Stofft, “Leadership at the Operational Level of War,” in Clayton R. Newell and Michael D. Krause, eds., *On Operational Art*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1994, pp. 193–194.

and operational levels of war, translating broader guidance into an approach that can enable more detailed operational planning by subordinate components.

The effectiveness of an HQ can be judged by its ability to process information to enable decisionmaking by the commander and subordinates. At the operational level of war, the decision cycle is critical.² USAF military theorist Colonel John Boyd popularized the model of an individual's or organization's decision cycle as an observe–orient–decide–act (OODA) loop.³ The better an organization is at taking in information, determining how to properly interpret it, making decisions, and carrying them out, the more effective it becomes. The speed of the OODA loop matters, but so does its quality (how well the organization processes information) and control (the organization's ability to determine what is important and use it correctly).⁴

In his report *Organic Design for Command and Control*, Boyd posited that theories of effective command and control had become too technical and hardware-centric. He argued instead for a model that would become central to the maneuver warfare philosophy and consistent with the practice of mission command (decentralized execution based on commander's intent, enabled by trust). In Boyd's "design," the "control" in C2 is mislabeled. Rather than *control*, the commander relies on *appreciation*—sensing and perceiving the environment. His or her main job is to provide leadership (clear, concise intent). Subordinates are empowered to act within the commander's intent and to monitor and respond to the environment as conditions change. Imposing control on the organization focuses it inward on itself rather than outward toward its environment. Orienting subordinates upward on the HQ with unnecessary constraints, insatiable demands for information, or bureaucratic barriers to information flow or decisionmaking (explicit command relationships) prevents them from understanding their environment and reacting to it. In essence, an ineffective HQ slows down the collective decision cycle of the force and the individual OODA loops of each individual component and subordinate unit.⁵ An effective HQ helps a commander perceive what is important and communicate clear intent, while setting conditions for subordinate units to plan and carry out operations at the lowest level practical.

In practice, this means that the JTF HQ has a unique set of requirements. While each JTF HQ should be organized, trained, and equipped differently, there are certain capabilities that should be resident in a staff leading at the operational level of war.

² Edward Luttwak, "The Operational Level of War," *International Security*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Winter 1980, p. 70.

³ John Boyd, *Organic Design for Command and Control*, Atlanta: Defense and the National Interest, May 1987, p. 243.

⁴ Chet Richards, "Boyd's OODA Loops: It's Not What You Think," March 21, 2012, pp. 4–12.

⁵ Boyd, 1987, pp. 219–241.

Operational Art and the Commander's Decision Cycle

First, an effective JTF staff practices operational art. As was discussed, operational art refers to problem framing: the cognitive process of moving from conceptual to tangible, aligning broader goals with the concrete actions needed to achieve them.⁶ While this occurs at every level of war and at every echelon, it is particularly important for the commander and staff leading a joint operation, because they are the first link from strategic leadership's direction and the formations that will actually carry out this guidance. This means understanding the context of the missions, including higher-level strategy and even political considerations.⁷ It also means understanding how the capabilities of different services and organizations can work together to achieve objectives.

Joint planning requires identifying centers of gravity and developing lines of effort that link actions to desired effects. These processes allow for the general setting of priorities and for follow-on planning. To do this, planners need to understand the context of the mission and where they are operating. It is tempting for a commander and staff to delve too deeply into detailed operational planning, thus constraining component commanders.⁸ It is also possible for commanders and staffs to become disoriented by strategic considerations beyond the scope of the JTF's authority, responsibility, or span of control. An effective HQ tries to strike a balance between the two: understanding strategy and translating that strategy into a coherent operational approach.

It is not possible to strike this balance perfectly, because the extent of a JTF HQ's involvement in strategy or component operations should vary based on the nature of the mission. In Chapter 7, for example, we will examine how one operation (Joint Task Force Odyssey Dawn, or JTF-OD) saw the JTF commander focused firmly on the operational level, while the CCCR stayed focused on strategy and political considerations. Then again, we saw that another JTF commander (from CJTF-OIR) had to frequently consider the theater strategy and even international politics as he engaged with host nation political bodies and partnered armed forces to maintain a military coalition and develop capacity in partner forces.

Closely related to the idea of operational art is the centrality of the decision cycle. An effective JTF HQ supports the decision cycle of the JTF commander, the subordinate components, and the higher HQs (the CCCR, higher-level JTF, and/or national command

⁶ Clayton R. Newell, "On Operational Art," in Clayton R. Newell and Michael D. Krause, eds., *On Operational Art*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1994, p. 14.

⁷ Paul F. Gorman, "Operational Art in a Low Intensity Theater," in Clayton R. Newell and Michael D. Krause, eds., *On Operational Art*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1994, pp. 154–156; Charles F. Donnelly, "The Air Commander's View," in Clayton R. Newell and Michael D. Krause, eds., *On Operational Art*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1994, pp. 114–117.

⁸ Glenn K. Otis, "The Ground Commander's View—I," in Clayton R. Newell and Michael D. Krause, eds., *On Operational Art*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1994, pp. 34–36.

authority). While the JTF commander must take in the right information, contextualize it, make sound decisions, and act on them, the HQ staff must maintain the quality, rapidity, and control of the decision cycle.⁹ One of the main challenges of a staff is maintaining a balance between planning and execution or future plans and current operations. The staff must be able to monitor execution with enough expertise to coordinate across the components to solve problems or provide options for quick, informed decisions by the commander as necessary. At the same time, the staff is developing future options for the commander's approval and orders for subordinate components. There should be a tight feedback loop between the two: plans should drive operations, but by monitoring current operations (or appreciating the environment, to Boyd), current operations should directly inform future plans. A JTF with a strong OODA loop is able to adjust the operational approach as the environment changes to remain in line with the commander's intent.

In the USAF, opportunities to master operational art are limited to a select few who attend advanced education programs such as the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies at Maxwell AFB, Alabama. The service tends to emphasize honing tactical art through education and training, including Weapons School, which trains tactical experts to exploit specific weapon systems, and command and control training, which prepares airmen for AOC assignments. As a result, airmen leading a JTF may not have the knowledge and skills required to step back and solve the operational problems the JTF may be facing.

Process and Technology

Operational art is practiced, and the decision cycle is enabled, through the technical aspects of an effective HQ. These can be thought of in two groups: process and technology. An effective JTF HQ can communicate through joint processes and is enabled by the technology and infrastructure required for the mission at hand. It is essential that a service-retained JTF HQ consider how to develop the individual and collective skills needed to lead a joint operation, as well as equipping to maximize the ability to communicate and manage information given the conditions. (Full connectivity is unrealistic; even in the best of circumstances, degradation, disruption, or denial will likely be the norm for future operations.)

Mastering the language of joint operations is critical to leading a JTF. This means that individuals assigned to the staff must be trained in formal planning and educated to develop a broad perspective from which they can approach complex problems. Collectively, the staff must commit the JPP to muscle memory, along with the development of clear, concise orders in a standard format. The staff should be able to man, and manage, a variety of operational planning teams and the myriad of working groups, cells, and boards that manage persistent

⁹ Luttwak, 1980, p. 70; Boyd, 1987, p. 243; Richards, 2012, pp. 4–12.

issues and solve problems for the commander. By training (individually and collectively) to joint processes, the staff is maximizing its ability to conduct operational art and support the commander's decision cycle.

The JPP provides a mechanical process and analytic framework for breaking complex problems down to achievable tasks and generating orders that subordinate forces can execute.¹⁰ This will be the established language of a joint operation, and if a staff cannot easily understand the level of analysis necessary at every step and the types of products needed to enable decision and action, the JTF will be incapacitated. It is important to note here that JPP is not an end in itself; all too often staffs get bogged down in the details of the process rather than the cognitive approach it is intended to stimulate or on the products produced rather than the decisions they are meant to enable.¹¹ This is the trap Boyd referred to in his *Organic Design*—orienting inward hinders one's ability to respond to the environment.¹² A criticism of military planning is that it is overly mechanical and linear, making it insufficient for the complexity of modern war.¹³ It is best that staffs have a strong baseline in the process for producing decision materials and clear orders, which will allow them to focus on the hard thinking needed to solve problems rather than adhering rigidly to process and format. Formal planning schools, along with providing constant “sets and reps” in exercises and garrison training, allow a staff to develop a strong baseline in JPP from which they can evolve to apply creativity and true operational art.

As was discussed in Chapter 3, 9 AF airmen spent considerable time in STAFFEX events practicing JPPs rather than directly grappling with operational problems. Again, because the USAF tends to emphasize the tactical level of war in career development, airmen may not have a solid foundation in joint planning. Airmen in 9 AF did their best to learn and memorize JPP on the fly, but this absorbed considerable energy that was then not available to wrestle with the substance of the operational problems 9 AF was facing.

Similarly, equipping is necessary to the success of a JTF-capable unit. The HQ must be able to take in and transmit information. As Boyd warns, human relationships, not technical systems, are at the core of effective command.¹⁴ Still, it is communications equipment, software architectures, and the appropriate facilities that facilitate the transfer of information and support the connections between people and organizations. To provide the core of a JTF, a unit should have a preplanned idea of the technical requirements for different missions, or at

¹⁰ Joint Staff, 2017a, pp. V-1–V-60.

¹¹ USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 2020; Stofft, 1994, pp. 193–194.

¹² Boyd, 1987, pp. 237–241.

¹³ Ben Zwiebelson, “One Piece at a Time: Why Linear Planning and Institutionalisms Promote Military Campaign Failures,” *Defence Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 2015, pp. 360–374.

¹⁴ Boyd, 1987, p. 219.

least a plan to acquire the right hardware and software on short notice. In a joint environment, the HQ will need to communicate with organizations that will most likely not use the same networks, and it may operate in environments where it does not have access to sophisticated infrastructure. Understanding likely missions and proactively developing the needed technical systems for them is essential to preparing for the JTF mission. The extent to which a JTF can provide connectivity in areas where it will certainly be disrupted is an important metric of readiness for the JTF mission.

As was discussed in Chapter 3, acquiring communications equipment was also a challenge for 9 AF. Aside from that, however, a broader challenge for JTF HQs, which will be discussed further in Chapter 7, is establishing communications and relationships with non-U.S. military and nonmilitary agencies.

Conclusion: Thinking About Joint Task Force Leadership

For the USAF, leading at the operational level of war requires consistently producing commanders and staffs that practice operational art and process information in support of a robust decision cycle. This means creating individuals and teams that can think broadly and deeply about problems while communicating clearly in a way that will enable concrete decisions and actions through detailed operational planning by subordinate components. These two main functions of a JTF translate into two types of requirements: operating according to joint processes, and coming equipped to enable joint operations.

As was discussed in Chapter 3, 9 AF struggled to master joint planning practices and had only limited opportunities to practice joint planning with representatives from other military services. As a result, precious attention was diverted from operations to education and training of JTF HQ staff members. Similarly, equipping 9 AF with the appropriate communications equipment to enable joint operations also proved a challenge because of resource shortfalls and funding delays. If the USAF maintains a focus on building a JTF HQ going forward, it will need to build a JTF HQ staff with the “muscle memory” required to master joint planning and the communications technology to enable it. Beyond the fact that history, doctrine, and theory suggest that mastering operational art requires good planners and interoperable technologies, there is also the simple reality that effective joint planning and technologies are prerequisites for winning credibility as a JTF HQ, which must adopt practices in sync with joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational stakeholders.

5. JTF HQ Selection and Formation: Current Practice and Joint Doctrine

Joint doctrine, other government publications, and academic literature suggest a variety of guidelines and best practices for selecting and forming JTF HQs. However, these are not set in stone, because JTF HQs processes are built around mission requirements, which can vary dramatically, as we see in the empirical discussion of JTF HQ types in Chapter 6.

Yet understanding the basic norms and principles that guide JTF HQ formation is important for the USAF, which seeks to lead joint operations amid a highly competitive rivalry among the services for joint leadership. In a 2009 study RAND found that the USAF is underrepresented in JTF HQ leadership,¹ and empirical analysis conducted for this study, as described in Chapter 6, suggests that this trend has continued. There are many possible reasons for this underrepresentation; such reasons are related to both objective factors, such as ensuring “fair share” representation in leadership across senior joint positions, and subjective factors, such as the personal biases of selection authorities for or against particular military services.² The 9th Air Force cannot control for all of these factors, but by understanding the processes that drive JTF HQ selection, it can at least understand the context in which it is competing for a JTF HQ and make informed decisions about how to organize, train, and equip based on doctrine and precedent.

To this end, this chapter begins with a discussion of the broader C2 structure under which JTF HQs typically function. It then moves into a discussion of JTF types, followed by a description of who determines JTF composition and the factors that influence how C2 architectures are established. Finally, it discusses some broad criteria that JTF HQ establishing authorities might employ to choose a JTF HQ based on doctrine and precedent.

The Joint Command and Control Structure: What Does a JTF HQ Look Like?

For joint operations, a Joint Force Commander (JFC) runs a joint HQ, which could be a geographic or functional combatant command or a JTF HQ. Forces within the joint HQ are usually organized by service and/or by function. For example, component commands organized around function—such as air, land, maritime, and/or special operations component commands—would report to the JFC.³

¹ Spirtas, Young, and Zimmerman, 2009, p. 10.

² For a detailed analysis of the factors that drive selection of officers for the most senior joint positions, see Lee et al., 2017.

³ Joint Staff, *Joint Task Force Headquarters*, Washington, D.C.: Joint Staff, Joint Publication 3-33, July 2012, pp. I-1–I-2.

While each of these functional components is joint (in the sense that it has representatives embedded in it from other services), they are generally led by the service that provides the preponderance of forces in a particular functional domain. For example, the JFACC will generally be a USAF officer with a staff consisting mostly of airmen, rounded out with some joint representation. Similarly, the Joint Force Maritime Component Commander (JFMCC) will tend to be a Navy officer, with a predominantly naval force and some joint representation. Combatant commands usually organize and operate within this construct, as do most JTFs.

What Are the Joint Task Force Types, What Do They Do, and What Are Some Examples?

JTFs are C2 architectures that allow joint forces to be employed for a specific mission or set of missions. There are generally three kinds of JTFs:

- **Operational JTFs** are established for a particular mission and are generally disestablished following that mission.
- **Standing JTFs** are established for long-term, ongoing missions.
- **Contingency JTFs** are prepared to be activated in the event of a specific crisis or scenario.⁴

Most JTFs are operational, which means that they are established to conduct a specific military operation.⁵ Examples include a JTF established to conduct a humanitarian relief operation, such as Joint Task Force Unified Response, which conducted HA/DR operations in response to the 2010 Haiti Earthquake, or Joint Task Force Katrina, which supported civil authorities in response to Hurricane Katrina in 2006.⁶ Combat JTFs, such as Joint Task Force Noble Anvil in the Balkans and Combined Joint Task Force–Unified Protector (CJTF-UP), which led the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervention in Libya, were also operational JTFs.⁷ At times, an operational JTF can remain in place for longer than expected and, thus, become more like a standing JTF.⁸ Sometimes the line between the two can become blurry. For example, CJTF-OIR, which is designed to counter extremism in the Middle East,

⁴ Joint Staff, 2012, pp. I-8–I-9.

⁵ Joint Staff, 2012, pp. I-8–I-9.

⁶ David DiOrio, *Operation Unified Response—Haiti Earthquake 2010*, Norfolk, Va.: Joint Forces Staff College, 2010; Lynne E. Davis, Jill Rough, Gary Cecchine, Agnes Gereben Schafer, and Laurinda L. Zeman, *Hurricane Katrina: Lessons for Army Planning and Operations*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-603-A, 2007.

⁷ Jeffrey Hukill, Larry Carter, Scott Johnson, Jennifer Lizzol, Edward Redman, and Panayotis Yannakogeorgos, *Air Force Command and Control: The Need for Increased Adaptability*, Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air Force Research Institute, 2012, pp. 90–102; Karl P. Mueller, ed., *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-676-AF, 2015.

⁸ Joint Staff, 2012, p. I-9.

has been in place nearly six years and is manned on a rotational basis, despite having been formed as an operational JTF.

A standing JTF is established to conduct an ongoing mission and remains in place for an extended period of time. Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-South), for example, works with partners in Latin America to interdict narcotics, while Joint Task Force North supports domestic agencies conducting law enforcement and homeland security operations in the United States.⁹ Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) has provided C2 for capacity-building missions in AFRICOM since 2006.¹⁰

A contingency JTF is prepared to conduct a specific mission on an on-call basis. Joint Task Force–Port Opening is a contingency JTF under the command of USTRANSCOM to provide logistics nodes in the event of crisis, deploying with capabilities tailored to the mission (which may include opening airfields and/or sea ports). Joint Task Force–National Capital Region is another contingency JTF, which is prepared to support civil authorities during disaster response.¹¹

Who Forms a Joint Task Force, and Why?

The most common establishing authority for a JTF HQ is a CCDR.¹² To stand up a JTF, the CCDR appoints a commander and staff to serve as the HQ and, depending on the situation and the individuals involved, helps shape how it is composed. This will often entail reverting to preplanned architectures or a dialogue with the JTF commander on how the command should be organized.

There are also other authorities, including the SECDEF, a JTF commander who needs a subordinate joint command to manage a particular part of its operation, or a state governor, in the case of some defense support of civil authorities (DSCA) operations and/or National Guard activities.

A JTF allows the CCDR, higher-level JTF commander, and/or national command authority to create an operational HQ between him- or herself and the task at hand.¹³ This allows the COCOM to engage more at the strategic level, focusing on how the operation relates to national goals, and his or her staff to carry on the day-to-day functions of a COCOM staff.¹⁴ There also may be multiple problem sets within a CCDR's area of operations (AOR), which makes it more effective and efficient to create subordinate joint HQ with the authority

⁹ Joint Staff, 2012, pp. I-4, I-9.

¹⁰ CJTF-HOA, "2018 Command Year in Review," 2018.

¹¹ Joint Staff, 2012, pp. I-8–I-9.

¹² Joint Staff, 2012, pp. I-1, II-2.

¹³ Joint Staff, 2015, p. 1; Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, August 2019.

¹⁴ Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, August 2019.

and ability to focus on those problem sets. For example, in alignment with national strategy, the focus of a CDR today will be long-term strategic competition with peer adversaries.¹⁵ The degree of this focus will likely vary by AOR. A top concern will be the readiness of forces within the AOR to deter and respond to crisis. If the CDR receives a mission, such as humanitarian assistance or capacity building, he or she will most likely empower a commander to lead that operation with the relevant forces.

Doctrine suggests that in cases where a JTF is directed by the SECDEF, the JTF may serve to address a challenge of national significance that political leadership determines must be handled by a new military formation. Yet while the SECDEF has the authority to designate a component or a unit as a JTF HQ or to direct the formation of a new command structure, instances of such appear to be rare. In fact, of the 88 cases of JTF HQ selection and formation that we examine in Chapter 6, there were no clear instances of the SECDEF playing the lead role in JTF HQ selection. More commonly, the decision is the result of ongoing dialogue and decisionmaking at the GCC level, in coordination with the SECDEF and Joint Staff entities. (That said, the SECDEF does sometimes issue the final orders for the establishment of a joint command, as was the case with both Operation Unified Assistance and Operation Inherent Resolve, which are both discussed further in Chapter 7.)

To provide a specific example of multiple JTFs conducting simultaneous operations, the CENTCOM AOR currently has multiple joint HQs. CJTF-OIR is currently carrying out a campaign against terrorist groups in Iraq, Syria, and outside the AOR. Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A, a two-star HQ) is currently charged with developing the Afghan National Security and Defense Forces as part of the broader NATO Resolute Support Mission (a four-star HQ), both of which are led by U.S. Army officers.¹⁶

Doctrine and Precedent: Who Gets Picked, and Why?

The exact command relationships and task organization of a JTF is situation dependent and is driven by the establishing authority and JTF commander. HQ units are staffed according to the mission at hand and the available resources, and forces are assigned to the JTF based on the required capabilities. Selecting the right commander and staff is an essential first step.

According to joint doctrine, official publications, and academic literature, the formation of a JTF should work within established C2 architectures as much as possible to minimize disruption to the current chain of command while leveraging relationships that already exist.¹⁷

¹⁵ Mattis, 2018.

¹⁶ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Divided Responsibility: Lessons from U.S. Security Sector Assistance Efforts in Afghanistan* (Washington, D.C.: Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction), June 2019, pp. 44–46; CJTF-OIR, “History,” webpage, undated.

¹⁷ Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, 2015b, p. 1.

Another guideline is that the service with the preponderance of forces involved in the operation should generally provide the commander and staff.¹⁸ This will not always be the case because of the operating environment and resource constraints, but it is generally conducive to appropriately leveraging the relevant service capabilities.

Selection of JTF HQs Based on COCOM-Affiliated Units

For these reasons, CCDRs will generally direct one or more of their service components to prepare for the JTF mission. The commander can then oversee their training, certification, and readiness to lead a JTF if called on.¹⁹ These will often be linked to potential scenarios and established plans so that forces in the AOR can quickly organize tasks in the event of a crisis. CCDRs will also frequently turn to units that are aligned to their command structure or that habitually operate in their AOR.²⁰ These would include numbered fleets, such as Sixth Fleet; NAFs, such as 3rd Air Force; or Marine Corps Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs), such as II Marine Expeditionary Force, which are all aligned to USEUCOM. We further investigate this in Chapter 6 to determine to what extent service components and COCOM-aligned units are selected to lead JTFs when compared with other units.

Selection of Service-Retained Units

At times, a unit from outside the COCOM architecture is called on to form the core of a JTF HQ. Such a unit would be an Army corps, brigade, or division—which are, in theory, capable of providing C2 of joint forces.²¹ The Army’s III Corps, for example, is advertised as being “America’s contingency corps” and is currently filling the HQ requirement for CJTF-OIR on a rotational basis. Divisions, such as the 10th Mountain Division and 101 AD, have both provided the core of a Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) HQ in Afghanistan (see the JTF data set in Chapter 6).

When a service-retained unit is selected for the JTF mission, it is sourced through the global force management allocation plan (GFMAP).²² The SECDEF issues the sourcing orders, but the sourcing decision can be adjudicated at lower echelons, up to the JCS level, and may be informed by inputs of the service’s major commands.²³

If a military service directs that a service-retained unit become JTF capable, it is up to that service to define the requirements for manning, training, and equipping that unit. Readiness for the JTF mission will be defined, reported, and assessed through service channels. Such is

¹⁸ Joint Staff, 2018, p. II-10.

¹⁹ Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, 2015b, p. 5.

²⁰ Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, 2015b, p. 4.

²¹ Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, 2015b, p. 4.

²² Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, 2015b, p. 1.

²³ 9 AF, Staff Working Groups, Shaw AFB, S.C., December 2019.

the case with Marine Corps MAGTFs, such as a Marine Expeditionary Force or a Marine Expeditionary Brigade that are designed to be JTF capable.²⁴ Marine Expeditionary Units also often lead joint operations (see the data set in Chapter 6). MAGTFs blur the line between service-retained units and COCOM-aligned units because they are aligned geographically and have established relationships with combatant commands, making them similar to numbered fleets or C-NAFs in that regard.

Selection of JTF HQs from Units on the Former GRF

There are also JTF-capable units that are ready to deploy immediately and that form the core of HQ on demand. These units are part of what was known until recently as the GRF,²⁵ which is now transitioning to a new IRF construct (as was discussed in Chapter 3). Rather than following the usual channels of the GFMAP, these forces were activated through a GRF execute order (EXORD).²⁶ To be part of the former GRF, a unit was designated by the SECDEF and directed to organize, train, and equip for certain mission sets. These units aligned their readiness to SECDEF-directed mission essential task lists, to which they trained regularly. Readiness was reported up to OSD through the Defense Readiness Reporting System. Mission essential task lists for units on the GRF were derived from specific scenario planning, and these units routinely train to these tasks.²⁷

RAND found a common misconception in the USAF is that the former GRF units have frequently been called on to provide a JTF HQ. But according to a GAO report, this has happened only three times.²⁸ While the GAO does not specify which particular operations it is referring to, we were able to identify three times when units that were GRF-aligned formed the core of a JTF HQ (see Chapter 6). Whether each of these deployments involved a GRF EXORD or the typical GFMAP is not publicly available, although it is highly likely that at least one of them did involve immediate activation through the GRF (the 2010 earthquake in Haiti).²⁹

Because the mission essential task lists and the associated training and readiness reporting for units that were aligned with the GRF is scenario-based and aligned to specific plans, joint C2 is part of what they do. For example, XVIII Airborne Corps and 82 ABD train for joint forcible entry operations. In exercises, XVIII Airborne C2 elements will practice serving as a higher echelon for 82 ABD. The division is focused on C2 of its division for these missions, which takes place in a joint C2 architecture.³⁰ XVIII Airborne, which is currently rotating

²⁴ Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, 2015b, p. 5.

²⁵ Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, 2015b, pp. 4–5.

²⁶ Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, 2015b, p. 5; Joint Staff, 2015, p. I-2.

²⁷ Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, Washington, D.C., September, 2019.

²⁸ GAO, 2017, p. 1.

²⁹ DiOrio, 2010, pp. 9–10.

³⁰ Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, Washington, D.C., September 2019.

with III Corps as the core element of the CJTF-OIR HQ, has a reputation for being highly proficient at the JTF mission because of both its former GRF status and associated mission readiness.³¹ The XVIII Airborne HQ provided a core element for Joint Task Force Unified Response, which involved humanitarian operations in response to the 2010 Haitian earthquake. In this case, XVIII Airborne staff fell in as part of the joint staff of the U.S. Southern Command's deputy commander, Lieutenant General Ken Keen. Similarly, 82 ABD provided the core element of a CJTF in Afghanistan (assumed as part of a rotation with the 10th Mountain Division and 101 AD) and provided a staff element for the Haiti earthquake response.³²

While SECDEF-designated units are well positioned to deploy and provide C2 of joint forces, the GRF and now, the IRF, represent just one avenue of sourcing a JTF HQ. The unique readiness model of these units is not appropriate for all HQs, and the perception that they perform a significant portion of JTF HQ missions is not supported by our data (see Chapter 6).

Selection of JTF HQs Built Around Individual Augmentees

Finally, an HQ can consist primarily of IAs, who deploy from different units across the services to fill a JMD.³³ While preexisting HQ units selected for the JTF HQ mission often absorb many IAs to provide critical skill sets and meet manning requirements, building an entirely new JMD from across multiple organizations is always an option. But doing this on short notice creates significant time delays, and it is generally recognized as good practice to begin with a core unit to build a JMD around.³⁴

However, for a standing JTF, a JMD can evolve over time, making the IA model a more natural fit. CJTF-HOA, which was originally manned with a core unit and then transitioned to a JMD consisting primarily of IAs, shows how JTF manning can evolve. Forces from II Marine Expeditionary Force and Sixth Fleet each led the JTF, which now has a joint HQ led by an Army general officer with a USAF general officer deputy and a joint staff that rotates on individual timelines.³⁵ Other Joint IA HQs include JIATF-South and CSTC-A, both long-term stability operations.³⁶

³¹ Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, 2015b, pp. 4–5.

³² DiOrio, pp. 9–10.

³³ Joint Staff, 2012, p. II-3.

³⁴ Joint Staff, 2012, p. II-3.

³⁵ David Melson, “The Horn of Africa: Building the Future,” *JAG*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2011, pp. 8–9; CJTF-HOA, 2018; CJTF-OIR, undated.

³⁶ Evan Munsing and Christopher J. Lamb, *Joint Interagency Task Force-South: The Best Known, Least Understood Interagency Success*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic Research, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, June 2011; Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2019.

In sum, a JTF HQ can either be formed around a preexisting core unit (affiliated with a COCOM, service-retained, or aligned with the GRF), or can be created primarily from IAs. Those HQs that are formed around core units tend to be affiliated with a COCOM, either as the service component or through an established relationship. To inform the USAF JTF initiative, we tested this assertion (drawn from joint doctrine, discussions with military leaders, and academic publications) with our quantitative analysis, which is presented in Chapter 6. Knowing what the current thinking is will allow the USAF to make conscientious decisions about where it makes sense to conform to this model and where it is better to depart from this model to provide a unique C2 capability.

Conclusion: Applying Joint Doctrine and Precedent to 9 AF's Joint Task Force Capability

Doctrine and precedent play an important role in shaping the JTF HQ selection and formation process. As depicted in Table 5.1, these guidelines inform three main elements in JTF HQ selection—the establishing authority, the type of JTF HQ, and its organization. Chapter 7 will discuss in greater detail how varying guidelines are often followed depending on the context of a given operation, and formal and informal command relationships play a critical, unwritten role. Nevertheless, as the USAF seeks to build a credible JTF HQ capability, these guidelines can provide a relevant framework for shaping choices about how to organize, train, and equip to build an effective JTF HQ capability.

In fact, based on this analysis, it becomes readily apparent that some assumptions under which 9 AF has been operating under may need to be reevaluated. Most notably, doctrine and other sources highlighted here suggest that CCDRs are most often the establishing authorities for selection of JTF HQ commanders and staffs. This suggests that the USAF may want to reconsider its decision for its JTF HQ capability to eschew COCOM affiliation in favor of a service-retained, worldwide-deployable construct modeled on the former GRF. Indeed, maintaining worldwide-deployable status has no clear advantage given that units on the GRF had rarely been selected to serve as JTF HQs, and the IRF is so new that there is no evidence about whether it is a good vehicle for JTF HQ selection. These findings are further reinforced by a quantitative analysis of JTF HQ formation from 1990 to 2017, as detailed in Chapter 6.

Table 5.1. Options for JTF HQ Formation

Establishing Authority	Type	Organization
• CCDR • SECDEF	• Operational • Standing • Contingency	• Preexisting core unit: – COCOM-affiliated units – Service-retained units – Units on the former GRF • IAs

6. JTF HQ Selection and Formation: An Empirical Analysis of Key Trends from 1990 to 2017

While doctrine and precedent provide insight into JTF selection and formation practices, an empirical analysis of data on JTF HQ formation and selection over an extended period can provide a “ground truth” understanding of whether these guidelines are followed in practice. This chapter analyzes trends in JTF HQ formation and duration, mission types, service leadership of JTFs, and the extent of JTF HQ alignment with combatant commands to inform USAF’s understanding of the factors that have most often led to JTF HQ selection and formation. The trends are tracked across 88 cases of JTF selection and formation between 1990 and 2017.

Of course, these past trends do not predict the future. Factors or circumstances correlated with JTF HQ selection in the past may no longer be relevant given that threat environments, bureaucratic considerations, and myriad other factors will continuously evolve. Joint leaders who face new operational challenges, different DoD priorities, and other considerations might make different types of choices when choosing JTF leadership and might also even eschew the use of the JTF construct altogether. The USAF may decide to take a different approach to JTF HQ formation based on its own assessment of the emerging threat environment and the needs of the joint force. Nevertheless, an understanding of the factors that have influenced JTF HQ selection in the past can help to inform those decisions as the USAF moves forward with its efforts to build a JTF HQ capability. This chapter first discusses the approach we used to do the analysis and then discusses our findings.

An Approach to Analyzing Key Trends in Joint Task Force Selection

We collected data on JTF HQs formed between 1990 and 2017, using official reports, academic papers, and news articles.¹ For each JTF HQ in that time period, we identified the number of years it was operational, the primary mission set, the commander’s rank and service branch, and the core element of the JTF HQ staff (usually the unit selected to lead the JTF by providing both the commander and staff). This allowed us to analyze the data and identify trends in four key areas:

1. frequency and duration of JTF HQ formation
2. frequency of JTF HQ mission types
3. frequency of JTF HQ leadership by service
4. frequency of JTF HQ alignment with COCOMs.

¹ A full list of references to our sources can be found in Appendix A.

Choosing to analyze JTF HQs for the time frame of 1990–2017 allows the data to continue to be relevant, because it was not until the late 1990s that the USAF started “deliberate efforts to bolster its ability to effectively command and control air operations.”² Although there were many JTFs before 1990, the data needed to be applicable to a modern USAF. Our inclusion criteria for a JTF was that a new joint HQ was established for a distinct mission. If a JTF changed structure or nomenclature over time, we still counted this as one JTF. For example, Combined Joint Task Force 76, Combined Joint Task Force 82, and Combined Joint Task Force 180 were counted as a single JTF because it simply changed names as different units assumed responsibility; the unit remained largely the same in structure and mission.

To identify the JTFs, we started with an existing database: a RAND study that identified JTFs between 1990 and 2002.³ We then conducted targeted Google searches for the terms “JTF” and “Joint Task Force,” followed by each numeric year in the scope of research (i.e., “Joint Task Force 2010”). For each JTF named in a public source, we located additional sources such as scholarly articles, service journals, DoD reports, think tank reports, and media sources to verify the JTF HQ and code it based on whether the JTF HQ was formed around a core unit or primarily from IAs, and whether or not the core unit of the JTF HQ was aligned (either formally or habitually) with a global combatant command. We also coded each JTF by the service selected to lead the JTF HQ (or, the service that lead the JTF for the longest period of time).

We briefed the JTF HQ list, as well as an analysis of the various trends that emerged from that data collection effort, to the leadership of 9 AF during an interim progress review and final briefing, during which time we were able to solicit feedback on any possible omissions and the counting criteria that we employed.

Based on the RAND methodology, we identified a universe of 88 JTFs established between 1990 and 2017 (see appendix B for the full data set).

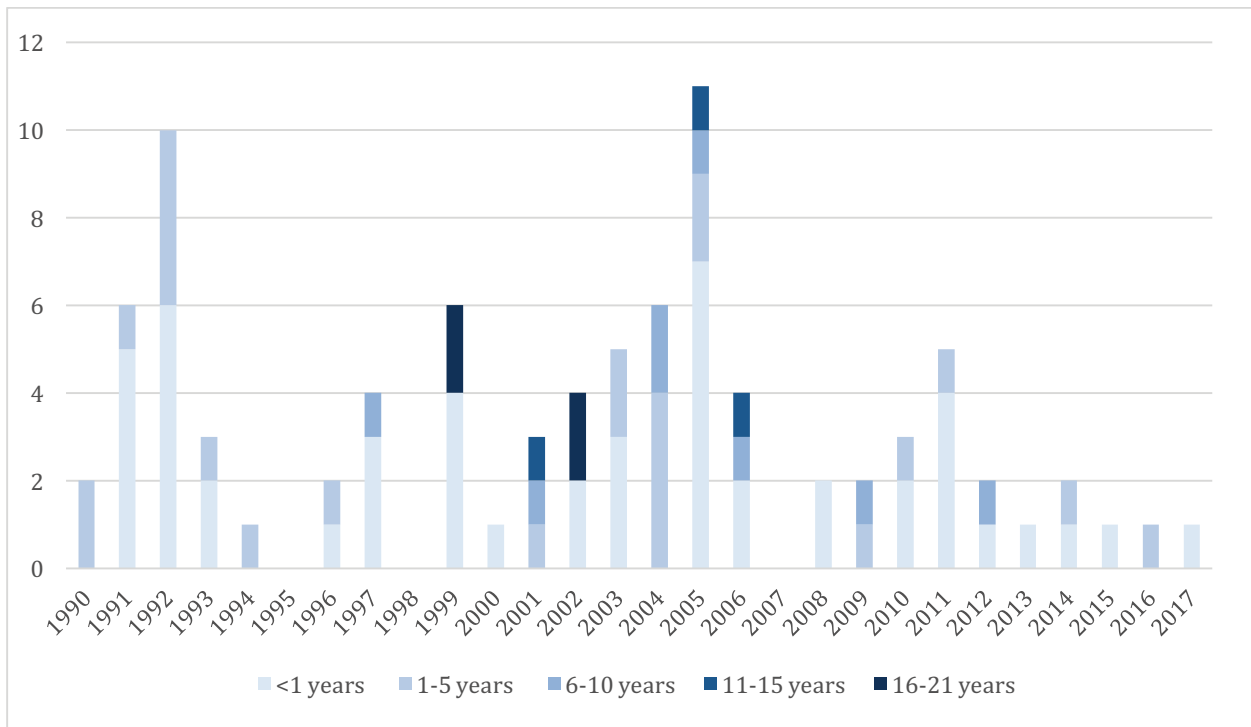
Trends in JTF HQ Formation and Duration

JTF HQs are most often formed based on contingencies (such as a natural disaster) and have short durations. Figure 6.1 presents an overview of the timeline of JTFs since 1990; it illustrates both the activation and duration of JTFs in a particular year. The y-axis indicates how many JTFs have been activated in that year, while the shading of the bar signifies how long the JTFs lasted. From 1990 to 2017, there were four JTF HQs that lasted 16–21 years, three JTF HQs that lasted 11–15 years, eight JTF HQs that lasted 6–10 years, 24 JTF HQs

² Spirtas, Young, and Zimmerman, 2009, p. xiii.

³ Spirtas, Young, and Zimmerman, 2009, p. 93.

Figure 6.1. Activation and Duration of JTF HQs Since 1990



that lasted one to five years, and 49 JTF HQs that lasted less than a year. A few conclusions can be made about JTF HQs based on these numbers.

First, given that JTF formation is typically tied to the emergence of a contingency requiring a focused C2 effort, it is not surprising that the number of JTFs formed in a given year varies considerably based on world events. The figure indicates a notable surge in JTF HQ formations for the years 2001–2006, with a spike in 2005. This upsurge represents the government’s decision that year to dedicate significant resources to Afghanistan and Iraq during the Global War on Terror. Over time, as the number of forces deployed in support of operations in the Middle East began to stabilize and then eventually draw down, there was a commensurate decrease in the number of newly formed JTF HQs. The number of long-duration JTF HQs has also declined in recent years, also reflecting the winding down of long-duration missions in the Middle East (as shown in the lighter shadings of the bars in recent years).

Another trend is that JTFs conduct mostly short, high-tempo missions, usually in response to an unforeseen crisis that requires quick action. As was mentioned in Chapter 5, most JTFs are operational, meaning they are formed in support of an operation and then are dissolved once the operation concludes. Figure 6.1 illustrates that the plurality of JTFs from 1990 to 2017 lasted five years or less. This finding is consistent with the trend that JTF HQs are most frequently tasked with assisting in humanitarian relief efforts, which tend to be of short duration, as discussed further below.

Given these findings, it appears that absent a major conflict, JTF HQs are more likely to be formed on an ad hoc basis as contingencies short of war arise. The recent decline in the duration of most JTF HQs further suggests that JTF HQs can expect to remain in place for a limited amount of time, as opposed to commanding a long-term operation or serving as the core of a standing JTF. The future security environment is unpredictable, but the USAF can posture its JTF HQ capability based on how other JTF HQs tend to be employed. Because the data show that most JTF HQs are formed in response to a contingency operation, organizing a JTF HQ with short-notice, short-duration missions in mind might be the most effective posture.

Trends in JTF HQ Mission Types

If JTF HQs are forming more sporadically and operating for shorter time periods, what kind of missions are they conducting? To identify trends in mission types across the JTF HQ data set, we categorized JTF HQ operations into combat, humanitarian relief/noncombat evacuation operations (HR/NEOs), and stability operations. If any JTF HQ in our data did not fit neatly into those three categories, it was coded as a “miscellaneous operation.” We define the terms as we used them in our report below.

Combat Operations

Combat operations consist of “operations against a capable adversary,” such as Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom; no-fly zones to “preclude an adversary’s unmolested use of airspace”; limited strikes to mean joint air and missile operations for “coercive purposes”; and instances of a show of force to “demonstrate resolve or military capability.”⁴

Humanitarian Relief/Noncombatant Evacuation Operations

This category captures operations in which DoD provided humanitarian operations in support of several distinct interagency mission sets, including DSCA, foreign humanitarian assistance (defined as DoD activities outside the United States to directly relieve or reduce human suffering, disease, hunger or privation),⁵ and disaster relief operations. Noncombatant evacuation operations involve DoD operations to evacuate noncombatants from a threatened area abroad, including areas facing actual or potential danger from natural or man-made disaster, civil unrest, imminent or actual terrorist activities, or hostilities.⁶

⁴ Alan J. Vick, Paul Dreyer, and John Speed Meyers, *Is the USAF Flying Force Large Enough? Assessing Capacity Demands in Four Alternative Futures*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2500-AF, 2018, pp. 4–5.

⁵ “Foreign Humanitarian Assistance,” in DoD, *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Washington, D.C.: DoD, January 2021, p. 86.

⁶ “Noncombatant Evacuation Operations,” in DoD, 2020, p. 154.

Many of the HR/NEO JTFs were formed in response to a disaster, such as a hurricane, typhoon, or refugee crisis.

Stability Operations

Stability operations include stability, security, transition, and reconstruction operations. Examples of stability operations include, but are not limited to, training, equipping, and advising indigenous forces; counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations; and maintaining order in states and regions during peace and conflict.⁷

Miscellaneous Operations

Miscellaneous operations do not have a definitive definition, but examples of such are detainee operations, logistics, and security for special events such as Joint Task Force Olympics.

Trends in Mission Sets

Given these definitions, the study team found that although JTFs were formed across the four categories, HR/NEO comprised the most frequent missions for JTFs. Figure 6.2 shows that out of the 88 JTF HQs from 1990 to 2017, there have been 39 HR/NEO missions, 22 combat operations, 18 stability operations, and nine miscellaneous operations. Natural disasters will occur regardless of trends in the security environment, and, doctrinally, a JTF HQ allows a commander to maintain focus on combat readiness while addressing immediate challenges that arise. The plurality of HR/NEO JTF HQs in our data suggests that these mission sets are those for which JTFs are most likely to be formed. Figure 6.3 illustrates that, like many of the JTF HQs formed between 1990 and 2017, HR/NEO missions tend to be of short duration, with the majority lasting less than a year.

When we consider both the discussion above, about the tendency for JTF HQs to form sporadically on short notice and exist for a limited amount of time, along with the overall trends in HR/NEO missions, as depicted in Figures 6.2 and 6.3, several trends become apparent:

- New JTFs are most often established for HR/NEO missions.
- HR/NEO missions tend to be shorter in duration than other mission areas.
- JTF HQs established for HR/NEO missions are disestablished upon mission completion.
- There is a persistent demand for HR/NEO JTFs, and the establishment of new HQs for these missions does not correlate with global trends or the domestic political environment in the way that combat and stability operations do.

⁷ Timothy M. Bonds, Myron Hura, and Thomas-Durrell Young, *Enhancing Army Joint Force Headquarters Capabilities*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-675-1-A, 2010, p. 45.

Figure 6.2. JTF HQs Missions by Type, 1990–2017

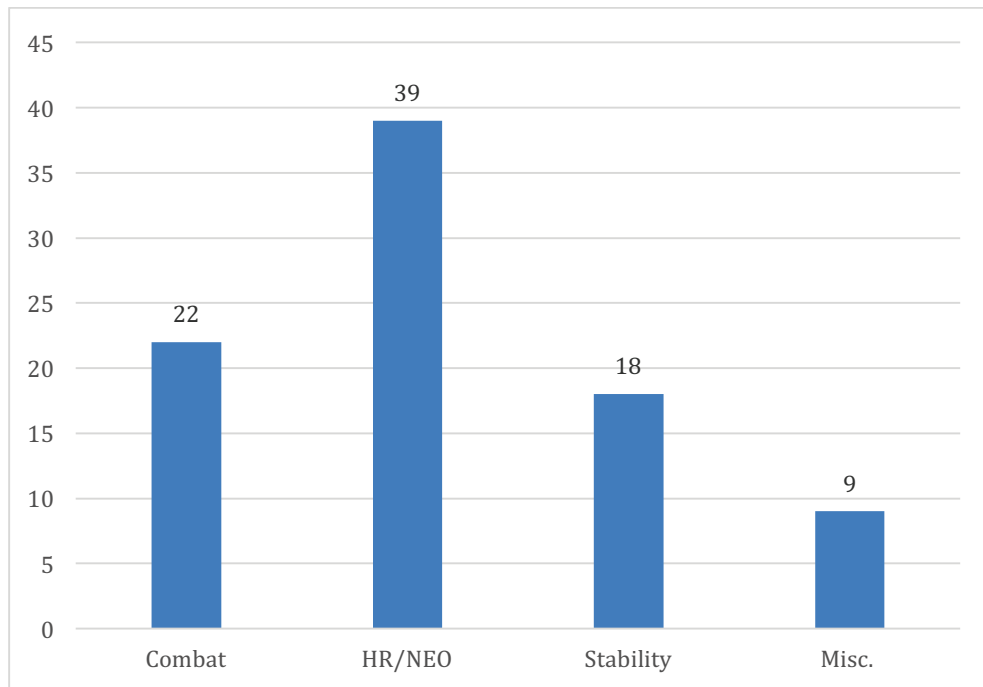
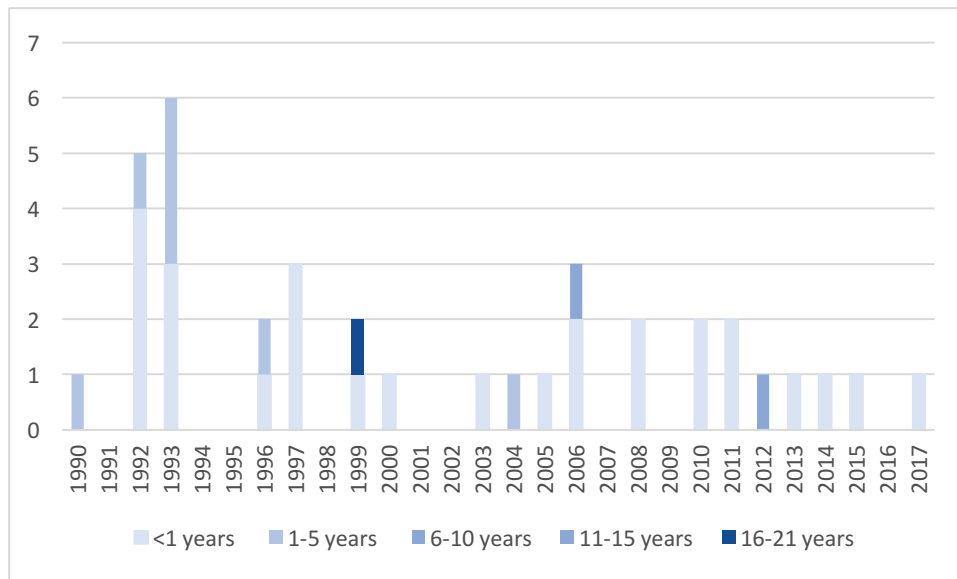


Figure 6.3. Activation and Duration of HR/NEO JTF HQs



If these past trends hold, the USAF may expect to see a variety of opportunities to offer a JTF HQ capability for HR/NEO missions. These missions could include support to civil authorities, support to foreign humanitarian assistance, and/or movement of U.S. personnel and/or U.S. partners persons during a crisis. While the timing of these humanitarian crises is

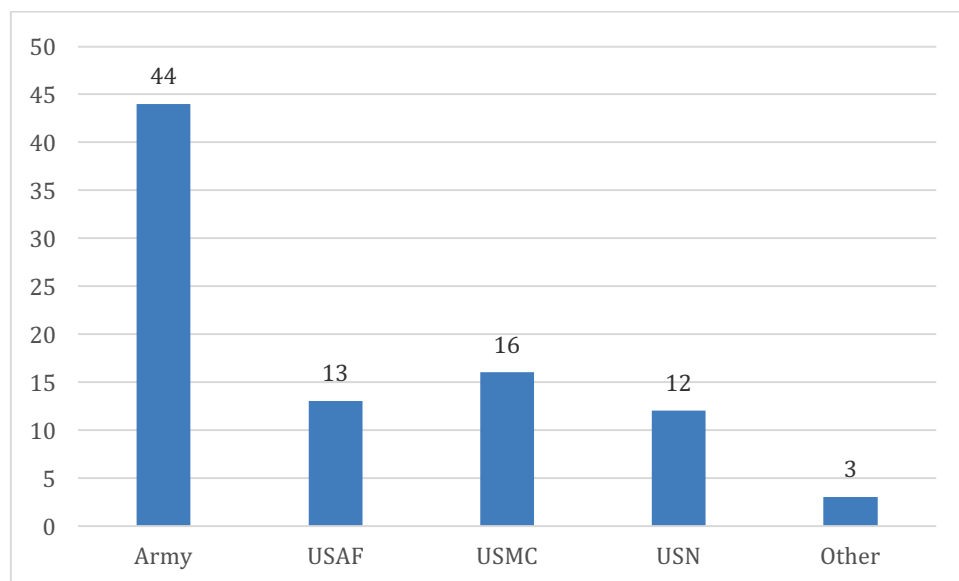
unpredictable, history indicates that they constitute an enduring requirement for JTF HQ formation.

Trends in JTF HQ Leadership by Service

As the USAF seeks to build leaders and teams capable of leading joint operations, it is important to examine how JTF leadership is distributed among the services. RAND determined JTF HQ leadership based on the service that provided a commander for the JTF. A Navy JTF HQ, for instance, is defined by the fact that the JTF was led by a Navy commander. It is important to note, however, that most if not all the JTFs include staff from multiple services to “help provide expertise across the range of mediums, platforms, and capabilities needed for the conduct of the operation.”⁸ Additionally, many JTF HQs were ad hoc, made up of IAs rather than a military unit, such as Joint Task Force 510, Joint Task Force Guantanamo, and JIATF-South, among many others. Therefore, the simplest and most consistent way to code the data was based on which service *led* the JTF HQs.

We found that the USAF, along with the Marines and the Navy, is underrepresented in JTF HQ leadership when compared with the Army. Out of the 88 JTF HQs in the data set, the Army has the plurality, leading a total of 44 JTFs, as can be seen in Figure 6.4. JTF HQs can also be led on a rotational basis, in which responsibility for leadership transitions from one

Figure 6.4. Joint Task Forces by Service



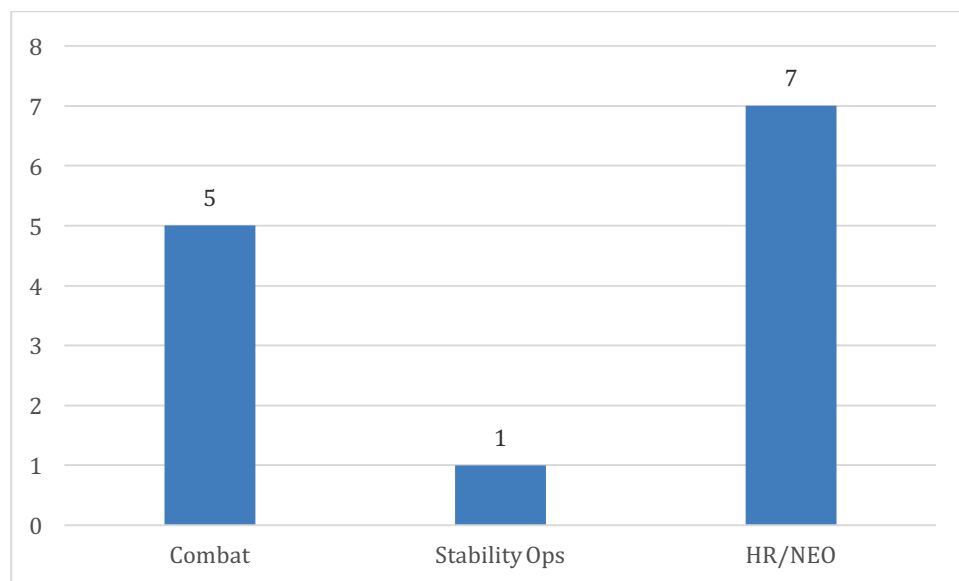
⁸ Spirtas, Young, and Zimmerman, 2009, p. 9.

commander and staff to another and not infrequently between services. From 1990 to 2017, there were five JTF HQs led on a rotational basis. We decided to account for these five JTF HQs in the Army count, as they operated under Army command for the greatest length of time.

For the remaining JTF HQs, the USAF, Marines, and Navy have led around the same number of JTF HQs each (13, 16, and 12, respectively). The three in the “Other” category include a Canadian-led JTF, a U.S. Coast Guard-led JTF, and a contingent (on-call) JTF HQ that any service could fill based on the needs of USTRANSCOM.

Figure 6.5 presents a closer analysis of the types of JTF missions the USAF has led. Of the 13 USAF-led JTF missions, the plurality—seven—were for HR/NEO. These missions involved providing airlift and logistical support. The USAF led four JTFs for combat operations, consisting of no-fly zone and air combat operations. Finally, the USAF led one stability operation—JTF 510, an irregular warfare unit with a JTF HQ core element consisting primarily of IAs. Gen Goldfein’s original intent for the JTF HQ was to manage major combat operations that span domains, such as CJTF-OIR. However, as this analysis indicates, the USAF’s experience leading JTF HQs is limited to air-centric operations. Furthermore, as was discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the USAF’s development, education, and training does not emphasize planning and directing joint operations across domains and echelons, which is critical for commanding major combat operations. These limitations and the USAF’s more robust track record in commanding HR/NEO missions further reinforce the idea that the USAF may want to emphasize the HR/NEO mission set as it scopes its JTF HQ mission focus and sets its readiness and training requirements.

Figure 6.5. USAF-Led Joint Task Forces by Mission



Trends in JTF HQ Alignment with COCOMs

Finally, units selected to serve as the core element of a JTF HQ were examined based on their alignment with a GCC. For this report, *alignment* means that the unit is habitually assigned to an AOR or is formally part of the GCC architecture. One example of a JTF HQ being formally aligned with a GCC can be found in the command structure for JTF-OD, the 2011 no-fly zone operation over Libya, which fell under the USEUCOM AOR. The JTF HQ was led by USEUCOM's naval component, Naval Forces Europe (NAVEUR). Similarly, III Marine Expeditionary Force, which is habitually aligned with U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, provided the core of the JTF HQ for CJTF-536, an HR/NEO mission.

If a JTF HQ is not aligned, it could mean a few different things. A nonaligned JTF could be made up of IAs, meaning that a new JMD was created with personnel from many units as opposed to building from a preexisting unit. Multi-National Security Transition Command–Iraq, a JTF that trained and equipped the Iraqi Security Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) during the Iraq War, was a JTF HQ made up of IAs.

Additionally, a nonaligned JTF HQ could have a core unit (meaning it is not made up of IAs) but no GCC alignment. This includes the 101 AD-led JFC-UA. In this case, 101 AD is not part of the GCC architecture and does not maintain a habitual alignment to the AFRICOM AOR. As was discussed in previous chapters, units have deployed as part of the GRF to form JTF HQs. Yet we identified just three instances in which GRF-aligned units formed the core of a JTF HQ (82 ABD and XVIII Airborne Corps).⁹ While the worldwide-deployable GRF was an option, it appears that commanders have largely preferred to work within established command relationships when forming a JTF HQ.

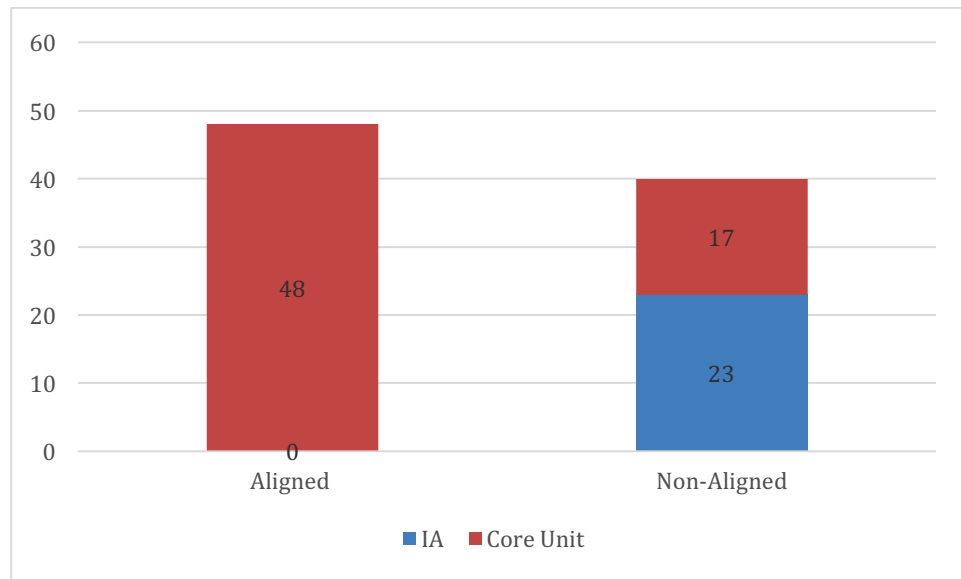
Joint doctrine and recognized best practices suggest that commanders will try to minimize chain of command disruptions by relying on existing command relationships to the greatest extent possible. As depicted in Figure 6.6, JTF formation and employment between 1990 and 2017 suggests that these practices have been adhered to: units selected as the core of JTF HQ staffs tend to be aligned with preexisting GCC COCOM C2 architectures more than half the time.¹⁰

Of those JTF HQs not built around GCC-aligned units, 17 were built around preexisting core units not aligned to the GCC (such as 9 AF), and 23 were built around new JMDs consisting mostly of IAs. Overall, JTF HQs tend to be built around preexisting core units (65 out of 88 between 1990 and 2017). This core unit is usually affiliated with a COCOM; 48 out of the 65 units chosen to lead JTFs were either part of a GCC architecture or habitually aligned to its AOR.

⁹ GAO, 2017.

¹⁰ Although there are combatant commands that are not geographic, we only mention geographic combatant commands for alignment because JTF HQs have never been aligned with a nongeographic combatant command.

Figure 6.6. Joint Task Forces by Alignment



As of mid-2020, 9 AF was not affiliated with a particular GCC, and the USAF had not communicated any plans to prioritize a particular GCC relationship or geographic alignment. Based on our data, only two out of the 13 USAF-led JTFs have not been aligned to a GCC. The USAF may want to consider the implications of prioritizing an AOR or developing a formal relationship with a GCC. If not formal alignment, the JTF HQ might establish a habitual relationship that will increase its chances of being selected. To this end, the JTF HQ capability might consider prioritizing engagement with a particular combatant command or combatant commands over others.

Conclusion: Scoping the Mission and Affiliating with a GCC

While past trends are not predictive, understanding the factors that have historically governed JTF HQ selection can help the USAF make informed decisions about its JTF HQ readiness requirements. As such, the empirical analysis provided here suggests that the USAF may want to consider the following findings as it builds a JTF HQ capability.

First, the USAF has been underrepresented in its leadership of JTF HQs relative to the other services between 1990 and 2017. Because of the small number of USAF-led JTF HQs to date, 9 AF had limited examples to draw on, which means that 9 AF had very few lessons learned. But this also implies that the USAF's new JTF HQ capability can set a new precedent in not only how the USAF leads in joint operations but in how the USAF can contribute to joint operations.

Second, while HR/NEOs are unpredictable in their timing, they are likely to continue to occur with relative frequency in the future. As the USAF's JTF HQ capability continues to

plan for a specific set of missions, HR/NEO opportunities will consistently be a potential option. The USAF's JTF HQ capability may wish to make manning and training decisions on likely HR/NEO missions to increase its chances of selection.

Finally, the USAF should consider prioritizing a relationship between the JTF HQ capability and a GCC. As was discussed in Chapter 5, joint doctrine and precedent suggest that JTF HQs are most often aligned with GCCs, and the empirical evidence presented here bears this out. Conversely, there is scant data to support the idea that the worldwide-deployable JTF HQ, built around the GRF or some similar construct, would be frequently selected. If the USAF wants to increase its chances of leading a JTF, then developing a geographic alignment appears more likely to create auspicious conditions. Furthermore, by understanding the operating environment in a particular AOR, the USAF's JTF HQ capability will be able to bias and scope decisions about organizing, training, and equipping forces toward both the geographic realities of that AOR and the most likely mission requirements.

7. Historical Case Studies: Implications of Recent JTF HQ Formation and Selection Processes for 9 AF

The qualitative analysis of doctrine and precedent in Chapter 5, combined with the empirical analysis of JT HQ selection and formation in Chapter 6, provide insight into how JTFs are formed, why they are used, and what types of units tend to be selected for different missions. In this chapter we supplement that analysis with a deeper historical analysis of individual JTF HQs; specifically, we analyze three cases from recent history to draw key insights regarding the factors that influence JTF HQ formation, selection, and performance. (A more detailed discussion of the case history and context is provided in Appendix D.) While the three cases examined here represent only a small sample, when combined with other insights in this report they may help to inform USAF decisionmaking more broadly as it continues to make choices that will shape the way the service as a whole presents forces to joint commanders.

An Approach to Case Study Analysis

To conduct this analysis, we selected three cases of military operations occurring in the last decade (2011–2020), described how the JTF HQ was formed and employed in each case, and derived general insights from this narrative. We connected these insights to themes that have emerged in our research engagements and discussed their implications for USAF stakeholders building a JTF HQ capability.

We specifically looked at the implications of these case studies for building a USAF JTF HQ along two dimensions: “getting ready” and “answering the call.” “Getting ready” refers to building capability within a unit, or units, to effectively lead a JTF. This encompasses C-NAF efforts (formerly in 9 AF, and now in 15 AF) to train for the JTF HQ mission and the USAF’s efforts to organize, train, and equip units that can meet the requirements of JTF leadership. “Answering the call” refers to the selection of USAF commanders and staffs to lead and influence JTF HQs. To answer the call, the USAF and its JTF-capable units must be postured in a way that strikes a balance between providing a USAF-unique warfighting capability and also accommodating existing joint norms and constructs.

The three cases examined here are Operation Odyssey Dawn, Operation United Assistance, and Operation Inherent Resolve; they were chosen based on three criteria:

1. **JTF structure:** Each operation involved forming a joint HQ around a preexisting core unit, as opposed to the IA construct.
2. **Recency:** Each operation occurred during the last ten years.
3. **9 AF Joint Training Guidance:** Each operation is a JTF mission to which 9 AF aligned its training efforts—enforcement of an exclusionary zone, HA/DR, and joint targeting and interdiction.

We chose these criteria because they reflect some of the key features of the 9 AF JTF HQ capability, which was built around a core unit, was relatively nascent in its development, and was targeted at particular training missions. The decision to focus on preexisting core units reflects both the fact that 9 AF itself was a cohesive, core unit and that the majority of JTF HQs formed between 1990 and 2017 were built on core units, as was discussed in Chapter 6. Recency was a consideration to ensure that the cases reflected current practice; of course, because each JTF HQ is so unique and the people making JTF HQ selection decisions change frequently, these practices are subject to change frequently. Finally, as was discussed in Chapter 3, 9 AF maintained a mandate for worldwide deployability but scoped its training focus on a particular mission set; the cases here aim to highlight those mission sets.

The goal of the case studies is to explore whether, in light of these relevant characteristics, the USAF may be able to provide a JTF HQ capability with unique advantages over other service capabilities. Because JTF HQs are so unique and are selected and formed based on a wide variety of factors that change over time, we made no attempt to control for certain variables or to isolate the impact of particular factors on mission effectiveness. Rather, the analysis seeks to identify common themes across the cases that might point to lessons learned for the USAF as it seeks to optimize a JTF HQ for these particular mission areas.

The first case study focuses on the air exclusionary zone mission, offering an analysis of JTF HQ selection and formation during Operation Odyssey Dawn, the 2011 no-fly zone mission over Libya led by a GCC-aligned unit (NAVEUR, under the auspices of AFRICOM). In the second case, the HR/NEO mission is discussed through the lens of the Army's response to the Ebola crisis in Africa in 2013, which initially involved a GCC-aligned unit (USARAF) under the auspices of AFRICOM that was later replaced by a service-retained unit (101 AD). Finally, the third case examines Operation Inherent Resolve (2014–present), in which airpower plays a major role in joint targeting and interdiction, supporting broader counterterrorism and capacity-building efforts. This operation was initially led by ARCENT, and is currently led by III Corps and XVIII Airborne Corps on a rotational basis.

Operation Odyssey Dawn (2011)

Background

In 2011 Libya became one of the many nations in the Middle East and northern Africa swept into the rising tide of the Arab Spring, a movement promoting individual freedoms and democratic governance. Former Libyan leader Mu'ammar Gaddhafi signaled the intent to crack down on the population with overwhelming force. In response, U.S. and allied

government leaders began to call for a military intervention on humanitarian grounds to protect Libyan civilians.¹

U.S. leaders opted for a limited military intervention; it began as a noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO), transitioned into a broader humanitarian relief effort, and finally culminated in targeted strikes designed to protect civilians and enable rebel forces through the enforcement of an air exclusionary zone. This was implemented and maintained with air and maritime fires. JTF-OD was designed to quickly transition to a CJTF as soon as practical and was replaced by the NATO-led CJTF-UP after about two weeks.

Joint Task Force Formation and Employment

In early 2011, General William “Kip” Ward, the Army commander of AFRICOM, already understood that a military response to the Libyan crisis would most likely be required and began planning for military options across the spectrum of conflict with the engagement of his relief, General Carter Ham, who was preparing to assume command.²

JTF-OD was formally established on March 3, 2011.³ AFRICOM and USEUCOM leadership selected NAVEUR to serve as the core of the JTF, with Admiral Samuel Locklear of the Navy commanding. NAVEUR was selected as the HQ for several reasons. Given the geography of Libya on the Mediterranean Sea, the 6th Fleet would likely play a major role in the NEO. When the operation eventually transitioned to a kinetic one, maritime assets would constitute the preponderance of forces and launch the initial strikes into Libya.⁴ Additionally, NAVEUR had a large, mature staff. The dual-hatted nature of NAVEUR, which served as a Navy service component for both AFRICOM and USEUCOM, gave the latter access to an HQ with a large JMD and processes oriented to conventional problem sets in the European theater. Political considerations were also at play. While the international community considered how to respond, the Navy could lead the operation from aboard the amphibious command ship USS *Mount Whitney*, which was outfitted with the requisite technical systems and spaces for a JTF HQ and a fleet command center/JFMCC staff. While the United States wanted to build a coalition and eventually transition to NATO leadership, until this happened, it was not possible to lead the military effort from NATO facilities in Italy.⁵

¹ Christopher S. Chivvis, “Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention,” in Karl P. Mueller, ed., *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-676-AF, 2015, pp. 11–23; Jeremiah Gertler, *Operation Odyssey Dawn: Background and Issues for Congress*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, Report R41725, March 30, 2011.

² Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, August 2019.

³ Jason Greenleaf, “The Air War in Libya,” *Air and Space Power Journal*, March–April 2013, p. 30.

⁴ James Foggo and Michael Beer, “The New Operational Paradigm: Operation Odyssey Dawn and the Maritime Operations Center,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, No. 70, 3rd quarter, 2013, pp. 91–93.

⁵ Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, August 2019.

The dual-hatting of the maritime component between AFRICOM and USEUCOM was not the only complex command relationship developed for JTF-OD. Most notably, AFRICOM's 617th AOC, which was smaller and had less operational experience than the USEUCOM's 603rd AOC, needed more support to serve in a JFACC role, which would be critical in an air exclusionary zone campaign. AFRICOM's 17th Air Force (17 AF) and 617th AOC staff, commanded by Major General Margaret Woodward, were commingled with the 603rd staff at the USEUCOM Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) facility in Ramstein, Germany.⁶ Maj Gen Woodward then served as the JFACC for JTF-OD.

Despite the dual-hatting, however, the composition of JTF-OD was largely in keeping with recognized "best practices." By relying on structures already in place, changes to the chain of command were minimized.⁷ Meanwhile, GEN Ham, the USEUCOM commander, intended to keep the JTF HQ staff engaged fully at the operational level, empowering ADM Locklear, the NAVEUR commander, to take the lead in operational planning as GEN Ham focused on the strategic picture by engaging with senior military leaders and political decisionmakers.⁸

A relatively short-duration JTF HQ, Operation Odyssey Dawn transitioned to Operation Unified Protector under NATO authority on March 31, 2011.⁹ The air campaign is generally considered an operational success—an air exclusionary zone was rapidly implemented and enforced, preventing the mass killing of civilians and helping to bring about the collapse of the Libyan government and military. However, almost a decade since the campaign's conclusion, Operation Odyssey Dawn is now viewed in context as a strategic failure in that Libya remains in turmoil.¹⁰

Insights for Leadership at the Operational Level of War

Operational Staff Gaps

JTF-OD was largely successful in translating strategic intent into tactical effects—which is to say, it functioned as an effective operational-level HQ. While the political and strategic approach to the Libyan Civil War is still hotly debated, the NAVEUR staff appears to have served AFRICOM's purpose in that the fluctuating strategic guidance was converted into military action with concrete effects. The dual status of NAVEUR as a service component for

⁶ Deborah Kidwell, "U.S. Experience: Operational," in Karl P. Mueller, ed., *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-676-AF, 2015, pp. 110–117.

⁷ Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, *Forming a Joint Headquarters: Insights and Best Practices Focus Paper*, Suffolk, Va.: Joint Staff J7, 2015a, p. 1.

⁸ Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, August 2019.

⁹ Joe Quartararo, Sr., Michael Rovenolt, and Randy White, "Libya's Operation Odyssey Dawn: Command and Control," *Prism*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2012, p. 145.

¹⁰ Greenleaf, 2013, pp. 40–48.

both AFRICOM and USEUCOM facilitated the sharing of assets across these theaters and the maintenance of unity of command.

Beyond this, however, is the reality that AFRICOM itself was originally postured for stability operations, not large-scale conventional operations. GEN Ham and the AFRICOM staff overcame this, but as one service journal article suggested, JTF-OD served as an “operational wake-up call.” For example, 17 AF did not have any permanently assigned forces.¹¹ The 617th AOC was undermanned; and the staff was focused on the air mobility and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance mission because of the larger AFRICOM focus on stability operations. The commingling of the 603rd and 617th staffs helped overcome this, which allowed Maj Gen Woodward to conduct what was later viewed as an exemplary air campaign.¹² Still, despite the centrality of airpower to the mission, the USAF component of AFRICOM was not organized, trained, or equipped to serve as a JTF HQ. The USAF had to rely on its higher HQs and AOC in the European theater to successfully carry out its component responsibilities.

AFRICOM is still postured primarily for stability operations, sharing service component HQs with USEUCOM (NAVEUR, USAFE). Given the current challenges in the USEUCOM AOR—mainly, near-peer competition, the vast geographic expanse of Africa, and the diversity of challenges that exist in the theater—this analysis suggests that there may be a deficit in operational staff capability in AFRICOM. This is one problem an on-call JTF may be able to mitigate for the USAF and the Joint Force, especially if it establishes an AOR-specific focus and a relationship with the GCC. By having a staff organized, trained, and equipped for the JTF HQ mission, the USAF could deploy this staff and commingle with in-theater units and resources. When missions such as joint targeting, the enforcement of an exclusionary zone, or air mobility are needed on the African continent, the USAF JTF HQ capability could position itself to fill the gap.

Partner Coordination

Operation Odyssey Dawn was conducted simultaneously with the British Operation Ellamy and the French Operation Harmattan.¹³ Coordination with international forces that were outside the direct JTF-OD chain of command was essential to the success of the overall campaign. Additionally, JTF-OD set conditions for a transition to CJTF-UP. This occurred successfully but was hindered by the lack of interoperability between communication systems and the lack of processes for effective information sharing.¹⁴

¹¹ Greenleaf, 2013, p. 40.

¹² Kidwell, 2015, pp. 110–111.

¹³ Claire Taylor and Ben Smith, “*Military Operations in Libya*, London: British House of Commons International Affairs and Defense Section, April 1, 2011, pp. 11–15.

¹⁴ Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, August 2019.

Communications are always a challenge in military operations, especially given that individual services often operate on separate networks. This challenge is greatly exacerbated in a coalition environment, where national staffs and forces need to communicate and share information on common networks while still safeguarding their country-specific information. This creates a tension between the need to communicate quickly and share information widely and the need to protect networks and secure sensitive information. In JTF-OD, this challenge was especially pronounced because international forces were operating in separate chains of command. This made it difficult to coordinate the fight, and perhaps more so to transition to an Alliance operation in a combined formation.

The transition to a NATO operation was relatively smooth in terms of relationships. The staffs serving in the AFRICOM and USEUCOM AORs were familiar with one another's processes and often had strong personal ties, especially between commanders who routinely worked together. But the transition was less smooth in terms of technical systems. Different nations used different networks, and the JTF HQ was not well prepared to transition easily to NATO networks.¹⁵

The USAF's JTF HQ capability can position itself for this reality by investing in the technical networks and informational architectures that will allow for interoperability in specific theaters and with certain partner nations. This is easiest if the JTF HQ is oriented toward a certain geographic area or problem set. If AORs or mission sets have not been prioritized, the unit could invest in widely used systems, such as the Battlefield Information Collection and Exploitation System. Prior to deployment, this could include investing in software-packaged, preimaging computers; creating log-on credentials for staff; and training on the systems during exercises.

Exclusionary Zones and Joint Targeting

Operation Odyssey Dawn was shaped by strategic and political considerations. The goal was to influence the situation in Libya by defending civilian populations; it was not to occupy the country or cause unnecessary damage. Additionally, a reliance on joint fires allowed political leadership to minimize the exposure of U.S. troops to direct combat.¹⁶

The USAF is well postured to lead such operations because joint targeting is a known competency of airmen serving at the operational level of war, and it is probable that the USAF will have the preponderance of forces in a future operation that relies on maintaining a no-fly zone.

However, at the lead of a JTF HQ, airmen may need to do more than manage no-fly zones; they will need to inform an overall strategy with an understanding of the strategic and operational

¹⁵ Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, August 2019.

¹⁶ Foggo and Beer, 2013, p. 93.

alternatives that airpower provides, and the pros and cons of those approaches. As we saw in this case study, the operational success of JTF-OD once again did not transition to strategic success. This calls into question the wisdom of limited interventions—the temptation of political leaders to overestimate the strategic utility of airpower. When, where, and how the United States military leverages airpower should be context dependent. Airmen therefore have a responsibility to provide sound advice to civilian leadership, linking targets to operational effects and clearly articulating how strategic context shapes operational design.

Implications for “Getting Ready” and “Answering the Call”

- **Developing Relationships with Component Staffs.** JTF-OD demonstrated gaps in operational staff capacity in the AFRICOM theater. An on-call JTF HQ could help the USAF fill this gap for the Joint Force. The air component was not well positioned to provide an HQ at the component level, let alone at the JTF level. A light staff that is well trained and that can deploy on short notice could commingle with another NAF staff in theater to provide leadership for air-centric missions.
- **Investing in Specialized Information Architecture for Interoperability.** A service-retained JTF HQ can mitigate the friction that exists in international coordination by investing in the hardware and software to share information with partner nations. If the JTF HQ is aligned to an AOR, this becomes far easier. In the event that the unit is not aligned to a specific AOR, it can at least maintain a robust software suite and invest in commonly used intelligence-sharing systems, such as Battlefield Information Collection and Exploitation System, the Combined Enterprise Regional Information Exchange System, or Stone Ghost.¹⁷
- **Training for Exclusionary Zones and Joint Targeting.** The mission sets that 9 AF trained for may very well provide value for the Joint Force, as they did in JTF-OD. Then again, the long view of Operation Odyssey Dawn reveals the shortcomings of confusing operational and strategic success. How national policymakers view airpower and leverage it for national defense is beyond the JTF HQ level. What USAF service schools and training centers can do is train and educate planners to understand how strategy shapes operations. Targets are eliminated, and no-fly zones are enforced within a broader context; understanding how best to shape strategy into operational objectives at least sets conditions for subordinate components to maximize the effects that airpower achieves.

Operation United Assistance (2014–2015)

Background

In 2014, cases of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) began to spread across the African nations of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, signaling the start of an epidemic. By September, President Barack Obama announced that the United States would build a treatment center for

¹⁷ Representative of 9 AF, email to the authors, July 20, 2020.

medical workers—the Monrovia Medical Unit—outside Liberia’s capital. The training of medical professionals to assist patients without spreading the disease was viewed as critical to arresting its spread. The president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, responded by requesting more support.¹⁸ President Obama addressed the military response to the Ebola crisis on September 12, calling for a broader whole-of-government effort by providing C2, logistics, and engineering capabilities. It was announced that the United States would deploy up to 3,000 troops to West Africa to support the interagency in accomplishing these goals.¹⁹

Joint Task Force Formation and Employment

As the danger of the Ebola crisis became imminent, AFRICOM put USARAF, the GCC’s land component, on alert about the potential to form a JTF HQ to support the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). On September 12, 2014, the U.S. Department of State formally requested assistance from the U.S. military, prompting USARAF commander, Major General Darryl Williams, to travel to Liberia with a 13-person cell.²⁰

USARAF initially provided the core planning staff to maintain unity of command during the buildup of forces; however, given the size of the effort, it quickly became clear that a new command architecture would be needed as more troops and resources flowed into the region. To manage the operational JTF, the SECDEF designated 101 AD, which was preparing to deploy to CENTCOM for counterinsurgency operations, to provide the HQ for what would become known as Operation United Assistance.²¹

The USAF offered to lead the joint operation. As was discussed in Chapter 2, then-Lt Gen Goldfein had noted the relevance of USAF capabilities to support a disaster relief effort in western Africa—particularly, USAF expertise in opening and operating airfields in an austere environment and providing air mobility/logistics support. Indeed, the USAF contributed significantly in these areas during the operation. However, a perception among USAF stakeholders is that the readiness and availability of 101 AD were the primary factors in it being selected over a USAF capability.²²

¹⁸ Alix Boucher, *Supporting Non-Standard Mission Role: U.S. Operations in Liberia, 2014–2015, That Enabled the U.S. and UN Response to the EVD Outbreak*, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, January 2018, p. 4.

¹⁹ “Fact Sheet: The U.S. Response to the Ebola Epidemic in West Africa,” press release, White House, September 14, 2014.

²⁰ Boucher, 2018, pp. 16, 17.

²¹ Center for Army Lessons Learned, *101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) Operation United Assistance: Lessons Learned and Best Practices*, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Center for Army Lessons Learned, Initial Impressions Report No. 16-05, November 2015b, p. 3.

²² Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020; retired 9 AF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 9, 2020.

USAF officials recognized that, in contrast to 101 AD, the USAF would need additional time to identify a commander, develop a JMD for the HQ, and source it with qualified individuals throughout the USAF. The 101st AD had a robust HQ element that was already in training to deploy as a cohesive unit. While USAF staffs and leaders would have been familiar with the capabilities needed for Operation United Assistance at both the tactical and operational level, there was no such USAF HQ unit available to deploy. The 101st AD, however, could get there the fastest, with the most capability.

A 101 AD–led Joint Force command HQ was stood up in Monrovia, with the command group tied closely to the U.S. embassy.²³ The JFC structure was illustrative of the fact that JTFs often deviate from the traditional alignment of domain-focused component HQ under a JFC. A JTF can take the form needed for a specific mission, and the JFC construct grew out of a need to adapt to an HA/DR environment, where the main function of the HQ was to coordinate focused military support to a civilian agency. An HQ support battalion, engineer brigade, combat support hospital, sustainment brigade, area mobile laboratory, aviation battalion, contracting battalion, and military police company reported to the Joint Force Headquarters.²⁴ During the operation, a special-purpose MAGTF deployed with around 100 Marines with aviation assets. USAF and Navy personnel joined their Army and interagency counterparts to provide niche scientific and medical skills, and U.S. Navy Seabees bolstered the engineering capabilities in theater.²⁵

Insights for Leadership at the Operational Level of War

Filling a Void in C2 Capability

Reflecting on AFRICOM’s decision to select Army units over the USAF for Unified Assistance, current and former USAF officials familiar with the process came away with the impression that the key decision factor was the Army’s ability to offer a dedicated, on-call JTF HQ capability.²⁶ Yet it was also that the Army had not been able to offer an ideal solution; indeed, the retasking of 101 AD left a gap that needed to be filled elsewhere. The unit had been slated to relieve troops in the CENTCOM AOR and fight an ongoing war. The lack of an available HQ had follow-on effects for the readiness of the Joint Force. As a result, a major takeaway from this experience for the USAF was that a trained and ready on-call joint

²³ Ross Lightsey, “Fighting Ebola: An Interagency Collaboration Paradigm,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, No. 81, 2nd quarter, 2016, p. 65; Boucher, 2018, p. 24.

²⁴ Lightsey, 2016, p. 64.

²⁵ Boucher, 2018, pp. 28–30; Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2015b, p. 8.

²⁶ Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020; retired 9 AF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 9, 2020.

HQ could have offered a better C2 solution to OSD and the Joint Staff as they sought to quickly stand up a U.S.-led response to the Ebola outbreak.

Building a C2 Capability to Meet the Unique Requirements of HA/DR

The 101st Airborne Division was prepared to conduct counterinsurgency operations in CENTCOM.²⁷ Instead, the unit was tasked to provide support to a whole-of-government disaster response. In other words, the staff was optimized for one mission set and forced to adapt to another. This was accomplished by last-minute changes to the unit's predeployment training. Instead of the preplanned exercise at the Army's Mission Command Training Program, the division staff participated in two days of academics on western Africa, the nation of Liberia, the EVD, and interagency perspectives on HA/DR operations.²⁸ While this was cited as valuable to the command's ultimate success, adapting to a new context based on two days of training was not optimal.

Ideally, the majority of a unit tasked to serve as a JTF HQ in support of a civilian agency would have received relevant training. In this case, this would have included courses in HA/DR, previous experience working with USAID, and exercises focused on disaster relief. Additionally, the manning and organization of this unit should be geared toward the types of missions it will perform. While some level of flexibility is a must, for the unit to provide a viable option for HA/DR operations it may consider manning with some of the key capabilities an HA/DR JTF may require and organizing around some of the key functions it may be asked to perform. Examples of this may include additional civil engineers, public affairs officers, contracting specialists, logisticians, or medical planners. Having more of these personnel permanently assigned, and knowing where they fit into the organization (rehearsed during unit training and larger exercises), makes a unit more viable for this type of operation. However, this will create difficult trade-offs for a worldwide-deployable JTF HQ: Niche billets for HA/DR, such as contracting specialists or civil engineers, must be balanced against niche billets for joint targeting, such as targeteers and cyber specialists.

Command Through Coordination: Adapting to a New Mindset

Operating in support of an interagency partner demands a different perspective and set of processes from an HQ staff. JFC-UA functioned as a filter, a clearinghouse, and connective tissue between multiple commands and agencies. Such an operation demands a nonlinear perspective. Rather than driving the planning cycle, the staff is filtering and sharing large amounts of information while collaboratively developing creative solutions to shared problems. A staff that is accustomed to controlling events may prove unresponsive to the

²⁷ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2015b, pp. 1–20.

²⁸ Lightsey, 2016, pp. 63–65.

perspectives and needs of another organization, while one that is forward leaning with a “can-do” culture could end up misapplying DoD resources to the detriment of all involved. An effective staff understands the various roles and responsibilities in an HA/DR operation and can maintain a dialogue across organizations while filtering out misguided requests and tasking in support of the commander’s objectives.

For example, nations requiring assistance with disaster response are most likely lacking in infrastructure. Most military units are accustomed to robust supporting infrastructure, such as runways, roads, and secure bases. This might not be available in the AOR, and an HQ will be required to function on a light footprint with its own sustainment. At the same time, where DoD capabilities are lacking, staffs need to understand that it may be more appropriate to tap into the capabilities of a nongovernmental organization, multinational corporation, or host nation. One example provided to the RAND research team by a USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance military liaison specialist was that of the World Food Program’s air mobility capabilities. The organization maintains a significant fleet of aircraft and often has access to locations where DoD does not. Rather than defaulting to providing an interagency partner with military aircraft, an informed staff might act as a conduit to link interagency partners with nongovernmental organizations who share common cause and may be better prepared to assist.²⁹ A specific example from Operation United Assistance was the use of land provided by the Firestone Corporation in Liberia. The company, which did extensive business in western Africa, was able to assist the overall effort with the space and access it needed.³⁰

Implications for “Getting Ready” and “Answering the Call”

- **Developing Relationships with GCC and GCC Component Staffs.** As was the case with JTF-OD, the potential benefits of aligning a JTF HQ capability with a GCC again emerged in the case of JFC-UA. While 101 AD was in the “right place at the right time,” the service-retained unit’s training and operational experience were geared toward combat, not HA/DR. A JTF HQ capability that was not only readily available but that also offered unique expertise in humanitarian assistance might have been able to spin up the response even more quickly. If the USAF’s JTF HQ capability were to affiliate with a GCC, it could align readiness and availability with GCC needs and offer relevant expertise, targeting its training, manning, and interagency relationship building to focus on the mission sets most relevant to the GCC given its geopolitical challenges. In the case of AFRICOM, for example, a training focus on HA/DR requirements might give the USAF’s JTF HQ capability a considerable edge, given significant humanitarian aid needs in the theater.

²⁹ USAID-OFDA military liaison, personal communication with the authors, July 2019.

³⁰ Lightsey, 2016, p. 67.

- **Training for HA/DR.** The 9th Air Force positioned itself to provide value to the Joint Force by developing a baseline knowledge of HA/DR among its staff through the JHOC and by training collectively for this mission in exercises planned with AFSOUTH.³¹ Some level of focus on this likely mission set (given the frequency of HA/DR and DSCA JTFs in the past 30 years; see Chapter 6) will pay dividends by putting leaders in place who understand the relevant authorities and processes at the outset of a disaster response. The USAF should continue to invest in JHOC training as a requirement for JTF HQ staff and continue to seek out HA/DR exercise opportunities.
- **Manning for Disaster Response.** HA/DR, like DSCA, often requires niche capabilities. A JTF HQ that is manned with HA/DR and/or DSCA operations in mind can add value by providing an understanding of those capabilities likely to be requested by interagency partners and by setting conditions for subordinate units to provide those capabilities most effectively and efficiently. For an NAF HQ, this may mean additional emphasis on engineering, logistics, public affairs, search and rescue, or medical planners. While the intent of the USAF has been for the JTF HQ to remain relevant across all mission sets, resource constraints may incentivize prioritizing some capabilities over others. Given the frequency of JTF employment in disaster response and the challenges highlighted in this Operation United Assistance case study, some degree of specialization in these mission sets may add value.
- **Interagency Engagement.** Understanding interagency processes before an emergency can set the stage for an effective response. Collaboration between the USAF's JTF HQ capability and interagency subject matter experts (SMEs) at both the leadership and action-officer levels may create in-house training opportunities. At the command level and up to the service level, organizational engagement may help message USAF capabilities to potential interagency partners, demonstrating service willingness to participate in major exercises and the ability to provide support in the event of a crisis. The USAF should coordinate its initiative to lead at the operational level of war with organizations such as the Department of State, FEMA, and USAID, working together to define requirements and share resources such as training time. The USAF's JTF HQ capability should regularly engage SMEs from the interagency, and incorporate their perspectives into unit-level training.

Operation Inherent Resolve (2014–Present)

Background

Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), the U.S.-led multinational effort to disrupt, degrade, and defeat ISIS,³² primarily involved operations to enable ISF and regional groups to roll back

³¹ 9th Air Force Joint Task Force, 2019.

³² ISIS is also referred to as ISIL (the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) or, as the coalition prefers, Daesh—a label stemming from the group's early days that the coalition finds pejorative and that supports the coalition narrative that ISIS is neither Islamic nor a legitimate state.

the caliphate and liberate ISIS-held territory.³³ U.S. and coalition airpower was a critical enabler of these efforts and was also used to target ISIS leadership and infrastructure directly while minimizing the exposure of U.S. troops to direct combat.³⁴

Joint Task Force Formation and Employment

CJTF-OIR provided the command structure for coordinating military efforts against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, which were led by the United States and included contributions of varying degrees from approximately 60 allies and partners.³⁵ This command structure went through several organizational changes as it evolved into the CJTF HQ that was still operational as of the spring of 2020.

CJTF-OIR began on June 24, 2014, when the national command authority directed Army commander of CENTCOM, General Lloyd Austin, to commence military operations against ISIS. GEN Austin responded by designating ARCENT as the Joint Force Land Component Commander (JFLCC) for operations in Iraq, expanding the unit's role to Combined Force Land Component Command in September 2014 as international forces integrated into the command structure. Then, in October 2014, the SECDEF designated ARCENT as HQ of CJTF-OIR, acknowledging that the Army component of CENTCOM was now commanding and controlling multiple subordinate HQs with their own AORs, made up of different military services.³⁶

The structure of CJTF-OIR was unique from a doctrinal perspective. Rather than consisting of land, air, maritime, and special operations components subordinate to ARCENT as the CJTF HQ, it consisted of a robust land component HQ (the CJFLCC for Iraq) and a Special Operations Joint Task Force Headquarters, subordinate to the CJTF and parallel to the CJFLCC, which would have its own joint operating area and subordinate units.

CJTF-OIR also did not have a dedicated CFACC. Instead, a supporting relationship was established between the three-star CENTCOM CFACC (dual-hatted as the commander of AFCENT) and the three-star CJTF commander.³⁷ This was because of the important role of

³³ Center for Army Lessons Learned, *News From the Front: Insights from LTG Paul E Funk II, Commanding General, III Corps and CJTF-OIR*, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Center for Army Lessons Learned, March 2018, January 27, 2018a, p. 6; Federal News Service, "Canadian Armed Forces Brigadier General D. J. Anderson, Director of Partner Force Development and the Ministerial Liaison Team for Combined Joint Task Force, Operation Inherent Resolve, Holds a Briefing," July 6, 2017, pp. 1–6.

³⁴ Federal News Service, "Air Force Maj Gen Peter Gersten, Deputy Commander for Operations and Intelligence, Combined Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve, Holds a Pentagon Briefing Live from Baghdad, Iraq," April 26, 2016a, pp. 2–7.

³⁵ Federal News Service, "Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend, Commander, Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve, Interviewed on CSPAN's *Washington Journal*," November 28, 2016b, p. 1.

³⁶ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2016a, p. 1.

³⁷ Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, *JTF C2 and Organization: Insights and Best Practices Focus Paper*, Suffolk, Va.: Joint Staff J7, 2017, p. 5.

airpower in the operation, but it was also shaped by the unique geography and situation: the AFCENT staff and the CENTCOM AOC were robust and already participating in operations ranging from Afghanistan to steady-state activity in the Persian Gulf. The reality of multiple conflicts in the AOR, a mature AOC, and the need to share assets across the region made it practical to keep to management of air assets under the theater CFACC.³⁸ This model became known as the “theater JFACC model” of a JTF.³⁹

As was discussed in Chapter 2, the USAF did eventually succeed in capturing several senior billets within the CJTF-OIR staff but was not able to make a convincing case for CJTF-OIR leadership. ARCENT remained in command of CJTF-OIR for about one year, replaced in September 2015 by III Corps, known as America’s Contingency Corps for its JTF HQ mission.⁴⁰ III Corps, in turn, was relieved in place by XVIII Airborne Corps, which has historically been associated with the JTF mission through the GFMAP. XVIII Airborne continues to rotate with III Corps as the core of the HQ staff on an annual basis.⁴¹

Insights for JTF Leadership: Ground War or Air War? Balancing the Close and Deep Fights

Our research team investigated the common criticism (based on the opinions of some military leaders and defense analysts) that OIR did not make effective use of airpower.⁴² A full investigation of this issue is beyond the scope of this study,⁴³ but the qualitative assessments of senior leaders involved in OIR did reveal that there was in fact a tension between the view of OIR as a ground versus an air operation and that the use of airpower to wage a more holistic campaign that balanced the close fight (supporting partner ground forces as they advanced to take territory) and the deep fight (striking at enemy centers of gravity for operational effect across time and space) evolved as the operation progressed.

Early in the campaign, when ARCENT transitioned from the CJFLCC to the CJTF, OIR was conceptualized as a ground campaign. While the CFACC and the CJTF established mechanisms to coordinate effectively with each other, there was little USAF leadership within the CJTF itself, and airpower was viewed as an essential enabler of ground forces: It gave the ISF overmatch against their enemy and restricted the enemy’s freedom of maneuver. In the

³⁸ USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, December 2019.

³⁹ Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, 2017, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2016a, p. 2.

⁴¹ Center for Army Lessons Learned, *News from the Front: Lessons in HQs Evolution for Commanders and Staff: Reorganizing a CJTF-OIR HQ*, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2019, p. 4.

⁴² See, for example, Lara Seligman, “Fighting ISIS: Is Pentagon Using Airpower’s Fullest Potential?” *Defense News*, October 11, 2015.

⁴³ For more context on this issue, see Becca Wasser, Stacie L. Pettyjohn, Jeffrey Martini, Alexandra T. Evans, Karl P. Mueller, Nathaniel Edenfield, Gabrielle Tarini, Ryan Haberman, and Jalen Zeman, *The Air War Against the Islamic State: The Role of Airpower in Operation Inherent Resolve*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-A388-1, 2021.

overall campaign design, however, several USAF representatives voiced the view that airpower was not viewed as a means to achieve operational effects on its own.⁴⁴

In other words, there was a linear view of the battle space. As one USAF leader described it, there was not a “functional approach” to targeting.⁴⁵ Such an approach would have been based on an in-depth assessment of ISIS centers of gravity and the identification of key vulnerabilities. Airpower, as well as direct action and nonkinetic capabilities (information operations, cyber, intelligence, civil affairs), could have been used against those vulnerabilities to more rapidly disaggregate ISIS as an organization. At the same time, the prioritization of air assets would have to be balanced to ensure the critical support to the ISF’s ground units.

In this view, USAF leadership may have effected a more nonlinear view of the battle space. Airpower could have been employed earlier across the whole theater to go after ISIS leadership and after financial and economic targets. At the same time, the SOJTF HQ may have taken on a larger role earlier, conducting multiple unconventional warfare efforts across the theater supported by coalition air forces. In this way the campaign could have looked more like the early days of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, with the USAF empowering indigenous forces to achieve their objectives rather than creating operational effects on its own. A USAF senior leader noted, however, that there was merit and utility to the Army’s conceptualization of OIR as a ground problem set. Overall, the approach taken was successful in destroying the caliphate and liberating Iraqi territory.⁴⁶

Integrating Nonkinetic Capabilities: Preparing for Partnership

Viewing the history of CJTF-OIR simply through the lens of “air war versus ground war” misses a larger point with greater implications for leadership at the operational level of war. CJTF-OIR was unique in that it integrated a large-scale effort to build partner capacity with conventional forces and a “by, with, and through” approach to both conventional and irregular forces, with a limited military intervention designed to directly strike the enemy while enabling partners.⁴⁷

At the operational level of war, an effective HQ is one that can balance these kinetic and nonkinetic efforts. Because the CJTF HQ role is to enable detailed operational planning by components, an effective CJTF needs to be structured to set the conditions for components to direct subordinate elements in nonkinetic operations that work synergistically to support the

⁴⁴ USAF senior leader, December 2019, Arlington, VA; discussion with USAF Field Grade Leader, August, 2019, Sumter, S.C.

⁴⁵ USAF senior leader, December 2019.

⁴⁶ USAF Senior Leader, personal communication with the authors, December 2019.

⁴⁷ Federal News Service, “Brigadier General James F. Glynn (USMC) Deputy Commanding General, Special Operations Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve, Holds a Defense Department News Briefing via Teleconference,” January 16, 2018; “General D. J. Anderson Briefing,” 2017.

greater campaign. This means that a service-retained JTF HQ that is ready for a mission like OIR may be trained and organized differently than ARCENT's initial CJTF HQ was at the operation's outset, maintaining niche specialties that may not be present in even a robust Army corps, such as III Corps and XVIII Airborne Corps, which made great strides with regard to partnered operations as they progressed.

Army records noted that at the outset of OIR, there was little integration between the LoEs for which the CJTF was responsible and those LoEs for which interagency partners were responsible. In the ideal campaign design, the kinetic and nonkinetic elements of a campaign should work together, with organizations directly responsible for one LoE finding places to support those responsible for other LoEs. In the opinion of those serving in the CJTF HQ, there were missed opportunities to integrate the various parts of the campaign.⁴⁸ Furthermore, at the start of the mission, the HQ was not properly organized or manned to plan and conduct partnered operations. In some cases, personnel that planned key leader engagements were also serving as desk officers and operational planners.⁴⁹ Given the outsize importance of engaging coalition partners and host nation authorities, the CJTF was constrained in its ability to perform important operational functions.

Coordinating LoEs that include supporting a partner advance, striking enemy deep targets, and building capacity in a partner's military force requires a great deal of coordination. Political and economic LoEs must be integrated with military LoEs, regardless of whether an organization is chiefly responsible for providing the relevant capabilities in that area. This takes constant engagement by senior leaders with their peers in the interagency, foreign militaries, and host nation leadership. It also takes staff-level integration with interagency partners organizations and the host nation. This type of work requires exceptional skill, ranging from operational planning, to program management, to regional expertise, to interpersonal abilities. Even on a large staff, it is difficult to find the right personnel to advise senior leaders prior to key leader engagements, plan engagements to complement kinetic operations, and integrate with host nation staffs and defense ministries.

The lesson here is that a JTF HQ should expose its personnel to the reality that the CJTF's mission is often focused "up and out," working across organizations to enable operational planning by components.⁵⁰ It should also be manned with enough personnel to provide regional expertise to operational planning teams and prepare critical engagements with host nations. These engagements set conditions for partnership operations that will be planned well below the CJTF level.

⁴⁸ Center for Army Lessons Learned, "The CJTF OIR Command Structure Lacked Unity of Effort," Lesson ID: 134590, Center for Army Lessons Learned. Joint Lessons Learned Information System, March 24, 2016a, p. 6.

⁴⁹ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2016a, pp. 2, 5–8.

⁵⁰ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2018a.

Implications for “Getting Ready” and “Answering the Call”

- **Engagement as a Headquarters Function.** In the case of CJTF-OIR, an HQ organized and trained for the essential engagement functions at the operational level of war would have provided a valuable advantage. Such an organization may have been better able to support continuous engagement with allies and partners, full-time embedding in host nation ministries, and off-site liaisons with the interagency and still have enough experts to support ongoing operational planning teams and a 24/7 JOC. Prior to deployment, organizing specialists for engagement functions would provide the Joint Force with a capability that is lacking in traditional JTF structures—even robust units such as Army corps HQs. In keeping with the other case studies, this also speaks to the potential value in aligning JTF HQ operational test and evaluation decisions to a particular AOR or problem set, as staffing a light unit with sufficient functional and region-specific expertise becomes more manageable.
- **Joint Targeting, Nonlinearity, and the Importance of Operational Art.** OIR indicates that the Joint Force may have a conceptual gap in the ability to think holistically and in a nonlinear way about the battle space. While a full assessment of USAF command culture and planning perspectives was beyond the scope of this study, multiple SMEs have commented that the USAF approach to operations adds value by taking functional approaches to targeting adversaries and better integrating effects across domains. A CJTF is responsible for translating military strategy into the language of operations, thus enabling a coherent operational design. At CJTF-OIR, the HQ evolved over time to do this more effectively. An USAF JTF HQ can offer the Joint Force a unit that is prepared to do this on day 1, but *only* if its staff is practiced in joint targeting processes. The key is to ensure that airpower’s unique contributions can be incorporated into a broader operational picture by a USAF JTF HQ practiced in operational art and the JPPs widely understood and used across the services.
- **Light and Lean Only Goes So Far.** A right-size HQ can improve the quality, rapidity, and control of a commander’s decision cycle. The HQ for OIR is perhaps larger than it should be, making a leaner option an attractive one. Still, the amount of incoming information from subordinate components and the COCOM—as well as the need to integrate more fully with the interagency, partners, allies, and host nation forces—demand a significant amount of depth to manage a myriad of functions and avoid becoming overwhelmed by volume of information. The current size of an NAF HQ is not optimal for a large-scale mission like OIR. The USAF must either increase NAF capacity or have a plan in place (such as resource sharing with theater staffs or rapid joint augmentation) to quickly increase the size of its staff if it intends to provide an on-call option for missions such as OIR.

Conclusion: Applying History’s Lessons

The case studies analyzed herein involving the command of joint efforts for Operation Odyssey Dawn, Unified Assistance, and Inherent Resolve suggest that there are both challenges and opportunities for USAF leadership at the operational level of war. Each operation reveals areas where USAF commanders and staffs can provide value to the Joint Force: enforcement of an exclusionary zone, humanitarian assistance, and joint targeting. At

the same time, the USAF did not provide a JTF HQ for any of these operations because the service was not optimized to do so. In each case, the key decisionmakers (the CCDR, the Joint Staff, and/or the SECDEF) grounded their decisions on some combination of preexisting command relationships or on the readiness and availability of a unit for the JTF mission.

A USAF JTF HQ may offer an alternative solution, but it must be designed in a way that provides a unique warfighting advantage to the Joint Force. The findings in these case studies, which reflect themes that emerged in earlier chapters, indicate that an effective USAF JTF HQ would likely benefit from adopting several specific features. First, as indicated in Chapters 5 and 6 and in all three case studies, the USAF's JTF HQ capability would likely benefit from the development of habitual relationship(s) with COCOMs/operational components; the advantage here is that aligning with a particular GCC would naturally lead to a focus on specific niche skills to fill a capability gap, as well as the ability to plan for a rapid deployment and integration into a particular AOR. Second, and on a related note, the discussion of Operation Unified Assistance further reinforces the Chapter 6 finding that HA/DR mission might be a particularly rich area for the USAF's JTF HQ capability to focus on given the frequency with which these missions occur and the clear gaps in current HA/DR C2 capabilities. These two findings are mutually reinforcing, because GCC alignment would make it easier for the USAF's JTF HQ capability to scope its efforts to organize, train, and equip to meet the readiness requirements and deployment timelines required to provide C2 for HA/DRs in a particular AOR.

Third, all three of these case studies reflect the central theme of Chapter 4, which is that mastery of operational art is a prerequisite for successful joint leadership. Leadership at the JTF level requires stepping away from detailed operational planning to set conditions to enable its subordinate units to do so. Clear examples include the role of JTF-UA as a clearinghouse for interagency requirements, the centrality of partner engagement in day-to-day OIR staff operations, and the ability of JTF-OD to coordinate with partners and enable a transition to a new command architecture.

The 9th Air Force took steps to excel in operational art, including courses like the JTF Staff Basic Course, the JECC Planner's course, and JHOC. The 9 AF planned exercise program, to the extent 15 AF chooses to carry it out in the post-COVID-19 context, will expose the staff to likely mission sets while messaging USAF capabilities to operational components, CCDRs, and interagency partners.

To be successful, however, 15 AF must have the resourcing to continue training its personnel and engaging in large operational-level-of-war exercises. The staff must be appropriately manned for the missions at hand (as seen in our case studies) with enough capacity in those skill areas to function on a rapid battle rhythm and engage across organizations. While a light-and-lean HQ model may provide certain advantages, if it is too lean, it may leave gaps in critical functions. Aligning with a GCC might lead to a natural scoping of training, manpower, and equipment requirements, but these case studies and the discussion of 9 AF's budget constraints suggest that adequate resourcing will be essential for standing up an effective JTF HQ capability with the requisite staff size and expertise.

8. Findings and Recommendations

Overview

In this chapter we discuss key findings and recommendations. Many of the recommendations are targeted at senior USAF leaders in ACC and HAF who have the authority to make funding and policy decisions. However, the chapter indicates, whenever possible, potential changes that could be made at the C-NAF level to improve ongoing efforts to stand up a JTF HQ capability. While 9 AF has been deactivated, its experience in building a JTF HQ capability can highlight some critical lessons learned for 15 AF as the latter pursues the same goal.

The findings and recommendations are divided into three parts. The first part identifies critical and unresolved issues related to 9 AF's mission scope. Clearly scoping the JTF HQ mission will make it easier to communicate 15 AF's strengths as a JTF HQ capability both inside and outside the USAF and also provide the necessary context required to make a range of other critical decisions about the JTF HQ capability moving forward.

The second part focuses on the force presentation issues that fall out of the mission scope discussion; if the USAF continues to prefer a worldwide-deployable JTF HQ, it likely needs a bigger staff than what might be required for a JTF focused on a narrow set of missions. And regardless of the force sizing construct, the USAF needs to develop a JTF HQ force presentation model that allows for planned periods of reconstitution and deployment to ensure adequate deploy-to-dwell ratios, judicious use of ANG and Reserve forces, and alignment with USAF and Joint Force presentation needs.

In the third part, we discuss findings and recommendations related to the JTF HQ's needs to build credibility as a force practiced in operational art and trained to work closely with joint and interagency partners. We also discuss broader institutional-level issues related to USAF-wide culture and budget. Advocates for a USAF JTF HQ capability must build a strong case—through the careful and deliberate scoping of its mission set, force presentation, and training agenda—to convince stakeholders both inside and outside the USAF of its relative value. At the same time, the USAF as an institution must decide whether this focus on strengthening joint leaders and teams is a top priority and then resource it accordingly.

Scoping the JTF HQ Mission Set

As 15 AF continues to train to form and employ a JTF HQ, the USAF should revisit the CSAF's initial guidance to 9 AF and its implications for the JTF's command relationships, mission scope, and deployment model. In particular, Gen Goldfein tasked ACC to design,

train, and certify a core JTF HQ to be placed on the former GRF and be made “available for tasking by the SECDEF and the CJCS to meet global contingencies.”¹ While the GRF was replaced with the IRF—a similar construct that also centers on the use of forces made available on a rotational basis for worldwide deployments on short notice—the spirit of Gen Goldfein’s guidance continued to drive 9 AF efforts. As a result, 9 AF pursued a service-retained JTF HQ with no GCC affiliation, an expansive mission set, and a still-evolving force generation model.

RAND research indicates that the USAF’s JTF HQ capability may benefit from a narrower focus on a discrete set of missions, with a particular focus on HR/NEO missions. We also found that affiliating with a GCC may be beneficial given that COCOMs have historically shown a preference for selecting units with habitual or formal command relationships to serve as JTF HQs. Given these findings, a goal of worldwide deployability patterned on the former GRF or the new IRF concept may not be appropriate for the JTF HQ. Herein we provide more detailed findings and recommendations related to these issues.

Finding: The JTF HQ Mission Scope Is Not Well Defined

To date, there has been considerable debate within the USAF about the scope of the JTF HQ mission set. Gen Goldfein called for a GRF-aligned unit, implying a worldwide-deployable JTF capable of meeting a broad swath of missions across the conflict spectrum. Yet conversations with USAF officials involved in 9 AF efforts suggested that because worldwide-deployable capabilities are already available and the USAF’s JTF HQ capability has limited resources, a more modest mission set that leverages the USAF’s unique capabilities might increase the viability of a USAF JTF HQ. The tension between broad and narrow missions for the JTF HQ capability was reflected in 9 AF training guidance, which on the one hand called for 9 AF to train for the GRF but on the other hand called for a focus on training for a small subset of airpower-oriented missions: Integrated Air and Missile Defense, targeting/interdiction, recovery operations, enforcement of an exclusionary zone, and HA/DR and/or DSCA operations.²

Recommendation: Reduce the range of missions for which a USAF JTF HQ prepares. The USAF should give serious thought to prioritizing a narrower range of mission sets so that JTF HQ staff can train to provide a niche capability not currently offered by other units and scope resource requests to meet those requirements. This does not necessarily preclude deploying for a different mission, but it does offer a specific solution to a Joint Force problem rather than a lighter version of a C2 capability that is already provided by other units. Additional scoping and specialization would enable further prioritization of training time and

¹ DAF, 2018b, pp. 12–13.

² Discussion during 9 AF Working Groups regarding JTF training, Shaw AFB, S.C., December 18, 2019.

informed staffing decisions that would provide a targeted capability to the Joint Force rather than another all-purpose core unit capable of JTF HQ formation.

Recommendation: Come to formal agreement with senior USAF leaders on the JTF HQ function. The Air Staff and 15 AF should come to agreement on the exact role that the USAF's JTF HQ capability should play, whether that involves providing a JTF HQ capability globally, affiliating with specific COCOMs, or providing a training and certification capability to GCC air components. As was discussed above, we argue that affiliating with a COCOM might be particularly beneficial—whether it serves in a JTF HQ “doer” or “trainer” role—because it would allow for some narrowing of the JTF HQ mission set. In any case, whatever agreement USAF stakeholders reach should be clearly documented in CSAF guidance. Clearly defining the JTF HQ function and mission set will make it easier to communicate the strengths of the JTF HQ capability both inside and outside the USAF and also provide the necessary context to make a range of critical resourcing decisions to organize, train, and equip a JTF HQ going forward.

Finding: The Plurality of USAF JTFs Between 1990 and 2017 Involved HR/NEO Missions, Which Often Require JTF HQs and Draw on USAF Strengths

Another key finding, which is reflected in our quantitative analysis of JTF HQs in Chapter 6, is that HR/NEO missions may be a particularly promising focus area for the USAF's JTF HQ capability because they have occurred frequently and play to the USAF's strengths. As was discussed in Chapter 6, HR/NEOs tend to be short-duration missions, lasting less than five years. Our count of HR/NEOs includes HA/DR, foreign humanitarian assistance, DSCA, and NEO missions. These missions are alike in that military units serve in a supporting role to a civilian entity and place a premium on military capabilities traditionally seen as “enablers” to combat operations, such as logistics, search and rescue, and public affairs. There are differences in these mission sets, predominantly in the realm of legal authorities, and the capabilities required will differ based on the situation at hand. Still, in terms of how an HQ serves in a supporting role—matching military capabilities to interagency requirements—these mission sets are alike.

HR/NEO JTF HQs are formed in response to unforeseen events, and their missions are typically well bounded in scope. These realities seem to make them the best candidate for creating a new command structure, an assertion that our data support. Forming a JTF HQ allows the COCOM or DoD to respond to an emerging requirement (such as a natural disaster) without necessarily reorienting the entire command away from its previous focus (such as priorities related to strategic competition). Preparing specifically for this mission may increase the likelihood of a unit being selected to serve as a JTF. The limited scope and duration of many natural disasters may also lend itself to the size of an NAF, which is smaller than most JTF-capable units.

Multiple SMEs claim that USAF capabilities are particularly relevant to HR/NEO missions, such as airlift, expeditionary airfield operations, and search and rescue.³ The importance of a service's niche capabilities to a given mission set is closely related to the likelihood that a service will have the preponderance of forces involved in an operation. According to this logic, the USAF would be more likely to lead a JTF for an HR/NEO mission than for other operations. This is supported by our data, which indicate that the USAF was selected for the majority of JTF HQs between 1990 and 2017 for HR/NEO missions (seven out of 12).

Recommendation: Focus on HR/NEO Mission Sets Before Considering Mission Set Expansion. Given the frequency of JTF HQ formation for HA/DR and DSCA operations, the USAF might consider focusing JTF HQ staffing and training decisions on these mission sets. As the case study of Operation Unified Assistance in Chapter 7 indicates, these operations require a unique staff culture focused on playing an enabling role.⁴ Further, they require niche expertise, such as medical, public affairs, and engineering planners.⁵ The 9th Air Force had already begun preparing for DSCA exercises supporting FEMA and HA/DR operations in support of USAID.⁶ The unit also provided C2 to TF-SE, which supported civil authorities' COVID-19 response in FEMA regions III and IV. While the USAF's JTF HQ capability should not ignore the possibility of deploying for joint targeting, exclusionary zone enforcement, or Integrated Air and Missile Defense missions—all areas in which the USAF has extensive experience—these may be missions to consider once the JTF HQ's credibility in the HR/NEO mission set is well established. Recent history suggests that disaster response operations are the most likely case for JTF formation. Furthermore, the USAF has already started to build credibility in this missions set through past JTF HQ experience. If the USAF's JTF HQ capability is prepared to provide some specialized capabilities in this area, it will likely be better prepared to solve operational problems for the Joint Force.

Finding: Units Selected to Serve as a Joint Task Force Core Are Most Often Aligned with a Combatant Command

In addition to considering a functional focus on a particular mission set, such as HA/DR, the USAF may also want to consider aligning the JTF HQ capability with a COCOM. The USAF's view that senior defense leaders are more likely to select a service-retained, globally deployable unit to serve as a JTF HQ is rooted in a misguided belief that the now-defunct

³ USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 2020; USAF field grade leader, personal communication with the authors, August 2019.

⁴ USAID-OFDA military liaison, personal communication with the authors, July 2019; Center for Army Lessons Learned, *Joint Force Command Operation United Assistance Case Study: Lessons and Best Practices*, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Center for Army Lessons Learned, Handbook No. 16-22, July 2016c, p. 88.

⁵ Lightsey, 2016, p. 64.

⁶ Discussion during 9 AF Working Groups regarding JTF training, Shaw AFB, S.C., December 18, 2019.

GRF was a frequent source of JTF HQs. In reality, the GRF has provided about three JTF HQs to the Joint Force between 1990 and 2017.⁷

The GRF has historically been one avenue of JTF selection, and it is true that the high state of readiness of these units makes them able to deploy rapidly and provide an HQ capability.⁸ However, as the empirical data in Chapter 6 indicates, COCOMs have tended to select units aligned to their command structure when forming JTFs. By *aligned*, we mean that these units were either the service component to a GCC or that the unit had an established relationship with the GCC command structure. An example of a GCC service component serving as the JTF HQ is the CENTCOM land component, which served as the JTF HQ in the opening days of CJTF-OIR. Examples of units that are habitually associated with GCCs include 3rd Air Force, II Marine Expeditionary Force, or Sixth Fleet, which operate in the USEUCOM AOR; and I Corps, 7th Fleet, and III Marine Expeditionary Force, which operate in the Indo-Pacific Command AOR. These units are accustomed to the command structure, problem sets, and geography within that region.

As was discussed in Chapter 5, it is considered best practice for commanders to work within established C2 relationships versus creating new ones.⁹ Discussions with SMEs indicated that this was perhaps the primary reason that GCC-aligned units are selected to lead JTFs more frequently than non-GCC-aligned units.¹⁰ Beyond the principles of simplicity and maintaining unity of command, these units are trained to operate within the theater command relationships and are typically certified by the COCOM for the JTF mission.¹¹ This most often involves in-theater joint exercises, for which the training objectives are established by the COCOM. A GCC-aligned unit benefits from prior AOR-specific training and an established relationship with the theater commander and other forces operating in theater. It is also more likely that these staffs will be operating within the AOR when challenges arise, thus saving precious time by removing the need for additional deployment and joint reception, staging, onward movement, and integration.

Recommendation: Affiliate the USAF's JTF HQ capability with a GCC. The 9th Air Force did not have any formal or habitual C2 relationships with GCCs or GCC components. However, an informal affiliation has at least two major benefits. First, it would allow for a natural narrowing of mission scope, because the JTF HQ would be able to focus on a mission related to the needs of a particular geographic region. Second, affiliation with a GCC might increase the odds that the USAF's JTF HQ capability would be selected to serve as an

⁷ GAO, 2017, p. 1.

⁸ Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, Washington, D.C., September 2019.

⁹ Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, 2015b, p. 1.

¹⁰ Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, August 2019.

¹¹ Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, 2015b, p. 1.

operational JTF HQ. As was discussed in Chapter 6, past trends in JTF HQ formation suggest that the plurality of JTF HQs are aligned with a GCC. The USAF may want to consider if 15 AF should be affiliated with a GCC, or if it should apply resources to optimizing its C-NAFs to serve as JTF HQs within their assigned theaters.

The 9th Air Force had already begun the process of building GCC relationships; its Joint Training Guidance called for exercises in the NORTHCOM, Southern Command, and USEUCOM AORs.¹² Leaders in 9 AF stated on multiple occasions that GCC relationship building is viewed as a critical element of preparing for the JTF mission.¹³ However, more concerted and explicit efforts to affiliate with particular GCCs may increase the opportunity for JTF HQ selection.

Recommendation: Reconsider if worldwide deployability is an appropriate goal.

Given that the GRF no longer exists and that it never was much of a vehicle for JTF HQ selection, the USAF may want to reconsider whether worldwide deployability is an appropriate goal. The GRF has since been replaced by the IRF, but the USAF's plans for aligning its forces with the IRF construct were still evolving as of mid-2020 and it is not yet clear that there is any correlation between IRF alignment and JTF HQ selection. While worldwide deployability may not increase the JTF HQ capability's odds of selection, empirical data *does* suggest that there could be a benefit from both COCOM alignment (formal or habitual) and a focus on HR/NEO missions; however, neither the former GRF nor the IRF incorporate these priorities, suggesting they may be poor force presentation models for a USAF JTF HQ capability.

Finding: Joint Integration and Collaboration Are Critical to JTF HQ Success

Building relationships with interagency and joint partners is critical to the success of a JTF HQ. For example, Operation Inherent Resolve, discussed in Chapter 7, shows the need for the synchronization of kinetic and nonkinetic LoEs and the importance of military HQs nesting themselves within a whole-of-government approach.¹⁴ Operation United Assistance indicates the need for DoD and interagency organizations to understand one another's capabilities and for military staffs to adapt to a supporting rather than a lead role.¹⁵

Recommendation: Increase training opportunities in collaboration with military and civilian partners. The 9 AF training guidance included two exercises with interagency partners—FEMA and USAID.¹⁶ And, as was discussed in Chapter 3, 9 AF had the opportunity

¹² 9th Air Force Joint Task Force, 2019.

¹³ USAF field grade leader, personal communication with the authors, January 22, 2020.

¹⁴ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2016a.

¹⁵ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2015b, pp. 3–9.

¹⁶ 9th Air Force Joint Task Force, 2019.

to provide support to FEMA in a real-world operation as part of the U.S. military's response to COVID-10. Staff at 9 AF were aware of the value of such engagements, and multiple 9 AF leaders have stressed a need for continued collaboration with military and civilian partners.¹⁷ Continuing to exercise with interagency partners is a good investment of USAF JTF HQ capability resources, because it will condition the staff to perform a role that military staffs are often challenged by. The USAF's JTF HQ capability should also include interagency experts in garrison training events. Participation by SMEs in STAFFEXs or in academic seminars can expose 9 AF planners to civilian capabilities and organizational culture.

Joint and interagency integration in garrison training would benefit the USAF's JTF HQ capability in terms of understanding how to leverage the capabilities of other services and how COCOMs are likely to frame a given problem. While the Northern Viking problem set, on which 9 AF based three STAFFEXs, brought joint capabilities to the force, there was, as of mid-2020, little engagement with Army, Marine Corps, and Navy commands. The USAF's JTF HQ capability would benefit from both formal and informal relationships with joint commands and other services, including Guard and Reserve units that can provide manpower to staff training or even augment day-to-day operations. Furthermore, U.S. Army Central is colocated at Shaw AFB, and might be able to work in concert with the 15 AF on JTF HQ training. This type of engagement could include everything from capability briefings to full participation in staff training by members of outside commands that could bring joint expertise and perspectives to simulated operational planning teams.

Choosing a Force Presentation Model Aligned with a JTF HQ Mission Set

Finding: There Is a Tension Between JTF HQ Organization and the USAF's Emerging Force Presentation Model

As was discussed in Chapter 3, the 9 AF JMD called for 110 billets—likely too few if the USAF plans to provide the requisite bench of specialists needed to deploy as an effective JTF HQ. This is true whether the JTF HQ capability focuses on a specialized mission set, such as HA/DR, or a broader scope of missions. As of mid-2020, 9 AF was building the JTF HQ without the full complement of its UMD or its JMD; in the run-up to the now-canceled Northern Viking joint exercise, only 68 of the 110 JMD billets were filled by a combination of RegAF and active-duty ANG members. RegAF airmen stationed at Shaw AFB were dual-hatted, exercising administrative control over eight USAF wings and two direct-reporting units, in

¹⁷ Discussion during 9 AF Working Groups regarding JTF training, Shaw AFB, S.C., December 18, 2019.

addition to sharing the responsibility for building the JTF HQ capability USAF with some augmentation from ANG members.¹⁸

The staff size seems even more dubious when one considers how staff responsibilities may expand further under the new 15 AF. As was discussed in Chapter 2, the USAF gave 15 AF staff administrative control over 13 wings, potentially further stretching the ability of that staff to perform JTF HQ functions. And second, as of mid-2020, there was discussion underway to require 15 AF to take on an additional C2 role beyond the JTF HQ capability, deploying forward as a tactical C2 node attached to USAF wings as part of an expeditionary air task force.

These additional responsibilities presented at least three layers of challenges for the JTF HQ capability in the eyes of 9 AF staff. First, at a minimum, with a JMD of 110 that was less than 75 percent staffed, 9 AF was struggling to meet its legacy administrative control responsibilities to 9 AF wings. Second, 9 AF staff worried that this tension would increase when additional wings fell under 9 AF in the transition to 15 AF. And third, 9 AF staff noted the organization might face even more critical staffing challenges if it was required to deploy as a tactical C2 capability. Furthermore, different skills, organizational constructs, and equipment might be required to provide tactical C2 to a deployed task force as opposed to forming an on-call JTF HQ optimized to lead a staff at the operational level.¹⁹

Recommendation: Acknowledge and reconcile the JTF HQ's relative C2 priorities. Given that 9 AF staff was probably too small to accomplish its core JTF HQ mission—let alone additional roles and responsibilities—USAF leadership should consider the relative priority of these additional roles and the extent to which they overlap in terms of organization, training, and equipment. An explicit discussion of priorities would help the USAF to establish manning requirements that adequately reflect the scope and character of what the USAF's JTF HQ capability is being asked to do.

Recommendation: Increase the JTF HQ staff. At a minimum, 15 AF may need a bigger staff than 9 AF had to accommodate the variety of specialties and skills required for deploying as a JTF HQ. But given the considerable expansion of responsibilities for day-to-day and contingency operations under the USAF's new force presentation model, 15 AF may need even more augmentation. Assigning more staff to 15 AF would require additional resources and would require adjustment to a range of assignment patterns and other USAF processes. Other possibilities include establishing sharing arrangements with other COCOMs when 15 AF deploys or reducing the responsibilities of 15 AF to take into account current manning constraints.

¹⁸ There are some additional ANG and Reserve members who support the administrative control role under military personnel appropriation days—short-term, active-duty tours—but they are not on the JMD; representative of 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, August 6, 2020.

¹⁹ USAF staff officer, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020.

Recommendation: Choose a transparent force generation cycle that balances 15 AF's limitations with the needs of Joint Force. As was discussed in Chapter 2, CSAF guidance called for 9 AF to be "GRF-aligned," but the implications of that mandate for 9 AF's force generation cycle were unclear.²⁰ Should the USAF's JTF HQ capability pursue an "always on call" construct, or plan to build readiness over time in anticipation of deploying as a whole unit during a window of vulnerability? Of course, no force can be 100 percent ready and available all the time; force generation cycles must be carefully managed to allow for windows of both reconstitution and deployment. However, the USAF and 15 AF still have a choice to make about how often 15 AF needs to be ready and available, and how those readiness requirements will be sourced through a combination of ANG and Reserve units. The 15th Air Force should coordinate with USAF leadership to deliberately identify a force generation cycle that can be clearly communicated to internal and external stakeholders. This approach would allow for deliberate and long-term funding, planning, and training, and strategic integration of ANG and Reserve forces, as discussed further below.

Recommendation: Clarify ANG and Reserve funding and authorities to meet the JTF HQ mission. If the 15 AF JMD continues the 9 AF practice of a heavy reliance on the ANG and Reserve to support half of its billets, it will be important to gain a full understanding of the costs associated with organizing, training, and equipping these forces. To fill a rotational requirement for 55 manpower billets every third year, the ANG and Reserve will require many more than 55 airmen. For example, in the Air Force Reserve, it takes two people to be continually ready to fill one billet. This means one qualified individual ready to deploy and one qualified individual in dwell time (unavailable for deployment). And in the ANG, it takes three qualified individuals to continuously man one billet—one ready to deploy, one deployed, and one in dwell (unable to deploy). Understanding the various authorities that govern ANG and Reserve funding and mobilization orders are also a major consideration. How the mobilization of ARC members will be paid for and what authorities they are activated under will depend on the force presentation model that 15 AF selects.²¹

Recommendation: Engage in long-range planning to align ANG and Reserve mobilization with JTF HQ force presentation needs. Regardless of the force generation cycle that the USAF chooses for the JTF HQ capability, funding for ANG and Reserve mobilizations will have to be planned for ahead of time. The 15th Air Force needs to request allocations from the Air Staff and ACC for ANG and Reserve mobilization in out-years. This is true whether 15 AF adopts an "always on call" model under which different components of 15 AF staff (regular or ANG and Reserve) are available for shorter deployment windows on varying timelines, or it adopts a model that calls for a focus on the entire capability (regular, *plus* ANG and Reserve) preparing for a single deployment window.

²⁰ Representative of the 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, June 4, 2020.

²¹ Operations Working Group, Shaw AFB, S.C., December 18, 2019.

Addressing Broader Institutional-Level Issues Related to USAF-Wide Culture and Budget

Once the USAF and 15 AF have deliberately scoped the JTF HQ mission, settled on a force presentation model, and built a complementary plan to train and integrate with other forces, they will need to build a convincing case to institutionalize the effort to ensure that it continues despite changes in senior leadership. Institutionalization will require highly visible, leadership-driven efforts to promote the importance of strengthening joint teams in USAF culture, consistent and robust advocacy, and a dedicated funding stream.

Finding: USAF Contributions to Joint Leadership Are Not Limited to Leading and Influencing JTF HQs

Based on our quantitative analysis in Chapter 6, we found that the USAF did not lead the majority of JTF HQs over nearly three decades. Of the 88 JTF HQs from 1990 to 2017, the Army led 44, compared with the Marine Corps, which led 16; the USAF, which led 13; and the Navy, which led 12. Three JTF HQs were led by something other than the four services. However, even when the USAF is not leading a joint operation, it still may play a significant role in terms of providing an AOC to C2 air operations, a Joint Air Component Coordination Element to liaise to other component HQs, or fielded forces.

Recommendation: Make a unique contribution to joint command. The AOC, in particular, has been hailed as a step forward in C2. While this is laudable, the question for the USAF is whether it should be satisfied to focus on air operations or if should raise its sights to play a leading role in the joint force. JTF leadership is one prominent way to do this. Needless to say, the USAF has faced questions before about whether its focus should be on flying aircraft or taking on broader issues of winning wars.²² One might argue that the very purpose of having a separate service for the air implies that the domain requires particular perspectives and expertise, and that airpower plays a key role in achieving operational objectives. If this is so, why should the USAF not seek to go beyond a supporting role, when it is appropriate to do so, to lead joint military operations?

If an airpower perspective can contribute new ways of leading military operations, it is incumbent upon the USAF and 15 AF to show how this is the case. Airmen talk of the flexibility and range inherent in air operations and of the usefulness of the tenet of “centralized command and decentralized control.” If there are unique and desirable advantages associated with USAF leadership of joint operations, airmen at 15 AF and throughout the USAF should seek to find ways to embody and demonstrate them. It is up

²² Carl Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

to USAF leaders, however, to ultimately decide whether leading air operations is sufficient, or whether unique contributions to joint command need to be in the JTF HQ commander role or other joint roles.

Recommendation: If leading JTF HQs is critical, promote it in USAF culture. If USAF leaders determine that the leading and influencing JTF HQs is important enough to pursue despite the apparent lack of broader support, then the USAF will need to take steps to shift organizational culture, defined as group norms of shared behavior and underlying shared values that reinforce those norms.²³ To do this, the USAF first needs to demonstrate and communicate that new behaviors lead to stronger organizational performance. Recent 9 AF participation in TF-SE, providing C2 support to U.S. Army North's COVID-19 response, is an example of new USAF behavior. Second, USAF leaders need to shape promotion criteria and succession planning in a way that promotes the new cultural norms to ensure the change becomes lasting.²⁴ Continuing to fund USAF participation in joint efforts and shifting force development to favor joint career development and education over a service-centric approach—at least for some segment of the officer population—may not be popular and will entail some costs. Yet such risks are required to institutionalize a shift in USAF culture toward leading and influencing joint teams.

Recommendation: Ensure 15 AF is an attractive assignment. One of the main ways to promote a culture that values joint teams is to shift USAF force development efforts. The USAF could reimagine 15 AF as an attractive training pipeline for the USAF's top joint leaders. USAF leaders could take several steps to signal the importance of 15 AF staff assignments. One way would be for USAF leaders to consider serving on 15 AF staff as equivalent to other internal USAF leadership positions, such as group or squadron command and equivalent staff positions, and to reflect that decision in formal promotion board guidance. Another option would be for USAF leaders to advocate for 15 AF staff to receive Joint Duty Assignment credit based on the premise that the staff organize, train, and equip on a full-time basis to lead joint operations.

Finding: USAF Resourcing Decisions Constrain JTF HQ Initiative

As was discussed in Chapter 3, several officials in ACC and HAF argue that the initiative to stand up a USAF JTF HQ capability will generally be viewed as a low priority given the USAF's limited resources and competing initiatives. Joint C2 is often perceived of as less important than competing requirements, such as acquisition programs and the readiness of

²³ John Kotter, "The Key to Changing Organizational Culture," *Forbes*, September 27, 2012b. For a similar definition in the context of a discussion of military organizations, see Theo Farrell, *The Norms of War: Cultural Beliefs and Modern Conflict*, Boulder, Colo.: Lynn Rienner Publishers Inc., 2005, p. 1.

²⁴ John Kotter, *Leading Change*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012a.

tactical units.²⁵ While the USAF as a service will have to determine the relative value of competing requirements, the competition for scarce resources has created challenges for the USAF's JTF HQ capability in terms of manning, training, and acquiring the right hardware.

With regard to manpower, 9 AF planned to source a 110-billet JMD—55 RegAF billets and 55 ANG- and Reserve-funded billets (27 from the ANG and 28 from the Reserve). Military literature speaks to the value of “light and lean” staffs, and this smaller option, coupled with an emphasis on the empowerment of subordinate components and decentralization, may indeed prove beneficial to joint operations.²⁶ However, units historically chosen to lead JTFs tend to be larger than the planned size of the 9 AF staff. Even with the benefits of a lean staff, the JTF HQ capability has to be robust enough to perform niche functions by having enough of the right skill sets in the right places. The case studies in Chapter 7 and the academic literature both suggest that a JTF HQ must be sufficiently manned to balance future planning with managing current operations. In each of the cases we consider, niche capabilities were needed to support multiple cells and sometimes simultaneous working groups/operational planning teams.

The individual and collective training needed to become JTF capable also requires a significant amount of resources. This includes unit-level training, such as sending individuals to required schools and training courses (such as the JECC Planner's Course, JTF Staff Basic, and JHOC, all of which 9 AF benefited from) and in-garrison training supported by contracted instructors. Getting people to the right courses and providing quality instruction through contracted support requires unit and USAF investment.

Funding for communications technology has also proven a challenge. The 9th Air Force initially struggled to obtain funding for communications systems because funding was included in separate program elements rather than under a single program of record. Its staff were eventually able to secure funding for equipment, but faced delays because the requirements were lost in broader program elements.

Recommendation: Prioritize funding for the JTF HQ effort. If the USAF chooses to build a culture that promotes the importance of leading and influencing joint teams, then funding for the JTF HQ capability will become a clear priority. Still, it will be up to senior USAF leaders to provide clear and direct guidance to Air Staff and ACC representatives facing tough choices in a highly constrained budget environment.

One obvious way to send this signal is for senior USAF leadership to reaffirm the CSAF's guidance to consolidate JTF HQ capability funding into a single program of record, as discussed further below.

²⁵ USAF civilian, personal communication with the authors, July 25, 2019; USAF action officer, personal communication with the authors, July 15, 2019.

²⁶ Stofft, 1994, pp. 193–194; Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, 2015b, p. 3.

Recommendation: Follow CSAF guidance to establish a program of record for the JTF HQ. Advocacy for 9 AF funding was complicated by dividing funding into separate program elements—one for manpower and another for C2. The decision to spread funding for the JTF HQ capability across funding streams was contrary to CSAF guidance, which called for the JTF HQ to be a program of record, meaning that it would be consolidated under a single account for budget planning purposes. The significance of a program of record is that it indicates the USAF intends to fund the program across the Future Years Defense Program through the POM. Typically, the decision to establish a program of record occurs once the program achieves formal initiation, which typically occurs after Milestone B determination is made, when DoD has determined the effort is technologically feasible.²⁷ Taking this step would be similar to the AOC becoming a program of record in 2013 after former Undersecretary of Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, Frank Kendall, determined that the AOC was technologically feasible, thereby achieving Milestone B.²⁸

Recommendation: Enhance advocacy for JTF HQ funding. The 9th Air Force’s latitude to address its own funding challenges was obviously limited. But there may be opportunities to improve strategic messaging across the USAF to make it easier for stakeholders to understand how a JTF HQ capability might add value. Liaisons charged with relaying 15 AF’s message to ACC and HAF could engage in a campaign to move the conversation beyond budget numbers to explain the JTF HQ initiatives underway and how these initiatives may mesh with broader USAF initiatives. Making these connections clearer may make it easier when it is time to discuss key policy or funding decisions related to the JTF HQ effort.

While Gen Goldfein and other senior USAF leaders stated that JTF leadership is a priority for the service, officers at the working level report that “everything is a priority” and ask which existing initiatives should be downgraded to make room for new initiatives like the JTF effort. It is good to have top-level support, but to move the USAF as an institution, JTF advocates need to engage a broad range of officers and other officials. For staff at the ACC and HAF, there was a view that other competing requirements were, in fact, more urgent funding priorities. Given this disconnect, it may be helpful to have more regular and forceful engagement between senior USAF leaders and budget leads within ACC, HAF, and 15 AF to communicate the priority of the JTF HQ effort relative to other requirements.

²⁷ Defense Acquisition University. “Program of Record,” Defense Acquisition University Glossary, undated.

²⁸ Phillip R. Pratzner, Jr., *The Combined Air Operations Center: Getting the Organization Right for Future Coalition Air Operations*, Quantico, Va.: School of Advanced Warfighting, Marine Corps University, 2002; Gideon Grudo, “Rebooting the AOC Upgrade,” *Air Force Magazine*, August 29, 2017.

Appendix A. Data Set Sources

The sources listed in this appendix correspond to all the collected research for the empirical analysis in Chapter 6. Our research includes sources from government reports, academic papers, news articles, and webpages of corresponding service websites. These sources are also listed in our larger References section, where web URLs are given for many of them.

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Appendix B. List of Joint Task Forces Activated from 1990 to 2017

Table B.1 includes the list of 88 JTFs activated between 1990 and 2017 that we identified and used in our database in conducting the quantitative analyses in Chapter 6. They are listed in chronological order.

Table B.1. A List of 88 JTFs from 1990 to 2017

Joint Task Force	Years Operational
Joint Task Force Sharp Edge	1990–1991
Joint Task Force Proven Force	1990–1991
Joint Task Force Patriot Defender	1991
Joint Task Force Fiery Vigil	1991
Joint Task Force Quick Lift	1991
Joint Task Force Guantanamo	1991–1993
Joint Task Force Provide Comfort	1991
Joint Task Force Sea Angel	1991
Joint Task Force Provide Hope	1992–1997
Joint Task Force Provide Transition	1992
Joint Task Force Los Angeles	1992
Joint Task Force Southwest Asia	1992
Joint Task Force Andrew	1992
Joint Task Force Marianas	1992
Joint Task Force Hawaii	1992
Joint Task Force Restore Hope	1992–1993
Joint Task Force Provide Relief	1992–1993
Joint Task Force Provide Promise	1993
Joint Task Force Provide Refuge	1993
JIATF-South	1999–present
Joint Task Force Deny Flight/Decisive Edge	1993–1995
Joint Task Force Haiti/Joint Task Force 120	1992–1993
Joint Task Force 160	1994–1996
Joint Task Force Assured Response	1996
Joint Task Force Pacific Haven	1996–1997
Combined Task Force Northern Watch	1997–2003
Joint Task Force Assured Lift	1997
Joint Task Force Guardian Retrieval	1997
Joint Task Force Noble Obelisk	1997
Joint Task Force Noble Anvil	1999

Joint Task Force	Years Operational
Joint Task Force Shining Hope	1999
Joint Task Force Skilled Anvil	1999
Joint Task Force Civil Support	1999–present
Joint Task Force Falcon	1999
Joint Task Force Atlas Response/Silent Promise	2000
JTF-O/JTF-509	2001–2002
International Security Assistance Force–Afghanistan	2001–2014
Combined Joint Task Force 180/76/82/101	2001–2009
Joint Task Force 510	2002
Joint Task Force Guantanamo	2002–present
Joint Task Force Autumn Return	2002
CJTF-HOA	2002–present
Office Of Military Cooperation–Afghanistan/Office of Security Cooperation–Afghanistan	2005–2006
Joint Task Force 4	2003
Joint Task Force Liberia	2003
Joint Task Force 58	2003
Joint Task Force Aztec Silence	2003–?
Combined Joint Task Force 7	2003–2004
Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Arabian Peninsula	2004–2010
Multi-National Corps–Iraq	2004–2009
Multi-National Force–Iraq	2004–2005
Combined Joint Task Force Haiti	2004–2005
Multi-National Security Transition Command–Iraq	2004–2011
Joint Task Force 134	2005–2009
Combined Joint Task Force 536	2004–2005
JTF-Gulf Region Division (GRD)	2005
Joint Task Force Paladin	2005
Special Operations Coordination Element–Horn of Africa/JSOTF–Trans-Sahel	2005–present
Joint Task Force–Joint Area Support Group Iraq	2005
Joint Contracting Command (Iraq/Afghanistan)	2005
Iraq Assistance Group	2005
Combined Joint Task Force Troy	2005–2011
Joint Task Force Katrina	2005
Joint Task Force–Port Opening	2005
Joint Task Force Lebanon	2006
Joint Task Force Balikpapan	2006
CSTC-A	2006–present
NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan	2009–2015
Joint Task Force Caring Response	2008
Joint Task Force Pelican	2008
Joint Task Force 435	2009–2010
Combined Joint Interagency Task Force 435	2010–2014

Joint Task Force	Years Operational
Joint Task Force Haiti	2010
Joint Task Force–Office of Defense Representative to Pakistan	2010
Joint Task Force Homeland Defense	2006–2013
Joint Task Force 519	2011
Joint Task Force 505	2011
JTF-OD	2011
Joint Task Force Odyssey Guard	2011–2012
CJTF-UP	2011
Joint Task Force National Capital Region	2012–present
Joint Task Force Sandy	2012
Joint Task Force 505	2013
JFC-UA	2014
CJTF-OIR	2014–present
Joint Task Force 505	2015
Joint Task Force Ares	2016–present
Joint Task Force Leeward Islands	2017

Appendix C. Understanding the Operational Level of War

By preparing for the JTF HQ mission, the USAF is improving its capacity to lead at the operational level of war. The U.S. military generally understands this as the level of a commander and staff that bridges the gap between strategy and tactics.¹ This simplified definition works in this study in most cases. However, military historians and theorists would argue that reality is a bit more complicated. For decades the U.S. military has debated the best way to conceptualize the idea of an operational level war, or if such a “place” even exists at all.

This appendix briefly reviews the operational level of war from a historical perspective, acknowledging that there is some debate about its value but ultimately also acknowledging that it provides a helpful mental aid for thinking about the tasks of JTF HQs and other entities that must knit together strategic and tactical requirements.

Between Strategy and Tactics

Some argue that a distinct “level” of warfare focused chiefly on operations—or on how a series of engagements and the application of different combinations of tactics resulted in an effective campaign—has existed almost as long as warfare.² Many historians generally see the operational level of war as becoming truly distinct with the advent of modern warfare; some trace that to the Napoleonic Wars, while others trace that to the U.S. Civil War. Either way, most theorists see that changes in the role of commanders and staffs took place as warfare evolved to include larger, more mobile formations.³ Following the French Revolution and increasing throughout industrialization and into the information age, the movements of military forces became more dispersed in both time and space, creating a need for new types of thinking about how the actions of disparate groups with different capabilities could produce collective effects and achieve the overall strategy.⁴

In the modern era, the timing and tempo of military actions became critical, creating a need for commanders to think about how their forces maneuvered in relation to one another and in relation to the enemy. The span of a commander’s control increased, leading to a change

¹ Hans-Henning von Sandart, “Operational Art in a Continental Theater,” in Clayton R. Newell and Michael D. Krause, eds., *On Operational Art*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1994, p. 118; Joint Staff, *Operations*, Washington, D.C.: Joint Staff, Joint Publication 3-0, 2017b, p. I-13.

² Luttwak, 1980, p. 61; Richard M. Swain, “Reading About Operational Art,” in Clayton R. Newell and Michael D. Krause, eds., *On Operational Art*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1994, p. 200.

³ Wilson Blythe, “A History of Operational Art,” *Military Review*, November–December 2018, p. 39.

⁴ David Jablonsky, “Strategy and the Operational Level of War: Part I,” *Parameters*, Spring 1987, p. 70.

in the nature, composition, and importance of a military staff. A staff could no longer be just a group of assistants or advisers; rather, SMEs were needed to both advise the commander and to manage the essential functions of a large-scale military campaign. Functions such as logistics, intelligence, and communications continued to increase in their importance throughout the modern age. As such, modern military staffs have evolved to be both advisers and managers. As advisers, they work within their area of expertise to provide their commander with information he or she needs to make decisions that support his or her intent for the campaign. As managers, they solve problems within the commander's guidance, thus ensuring that other staff sections, subordinate commanders, and other organizations have the information they need to make decisions.⁵ In short, an effective staff at the operational level of war supports the commander's decision cycle. They manage problems, giving the commander the right information at the right time to make decisions, and leverage their subject-matter expertise to develop the complex plans needed for a successful campaign. These plans translate into orders; on behalf of the commander, staffs generate clear, concise orders that allow subordinate units to make decisions that remain in line with the broader operational scheme and military strategy.

The increasing scope of warfare not only demanded an increased span of control and the leveraging of more information but also changed how militaries thought about conflict. The objectives of campaigns began to change in the modern era and continue to change. As such, commanders increasingly have had to think beyond the attrition of the enemy army or the capture of territory. The rapid annihilation of a fielded force by maneuvering it into an unfavorable situation might be as significant as the actual attrition of enemy forces and supplies. And while the capture of key territory might be a means to an end, it might matter more in the ability to cut a fielded army's supply lines or influence the will of the populace in a certain area. To design a campaign that would support a broader strategy, a commander has had to think more holistically and critically about the factors at work in his or her environment, including political, economic, and social dynamics. The type of thinking a commander needs has continued to evolve throughout history; a commander leading multiple subordinate formations has to understand what is important and how his or her actions relate to the broader goals to be achieved.⁶

This reality suggests that a "level" of war emerged throughout the modern era. Commanders and staffs working at echelons where they must integrate the capabilities of disparate formations to create a broader campaign could be said to be working at the operational level of war. To the U.S. military, commanders and staffs at these echelons serve as a bridge between strategy and tactics.⁷ If strategy concerns national objectives and the allocation of

⁵ Hittle, 1961, pp. 3–9, 55, 144; Stofft, 1994, pp. 193–194.

⁶ Luttwak, 1980, pp. 61–70.

⁷ Joint Staff, 2017b, p. I-13.

resources to support them and tactics are concrete military activities, operations are then the broader schemes by which strategy is translated into tactics to achieve it.⁸ At the operational level, we move from the conceptual (strategy) to the concrete (tactics).

A “Level” of War?

Theories of military operations that influence how modern thinkers conceptualize operational art and the operational level of war took root in the Soviet Union during the interwar period. The chaos of the Russian Revolution, which had deposed the old order, allowed for a surge in new thinking within the military, while World War I demonstrated a clear need for military innovation. Soviet leaders such as Mikhail Tukhachevsky began to examine how the culmination of successive operations produced a successful campaign, while others expanded this to think nonlinearly about how operations could be both consecutive and simultaneous, leading to the idea of deep campaigns waged from land, sea, and air.⁹

The U.S. military began to incorporate the idea of an operational level of war into doctrine in the 1980s; a significant catalyst for this was the adoption of AirLand Battle—an operating concept that considered using land and air forces across a multidimensional battle space.¹⁰ The term *multidimensional* refers to the relationship between time and space, carrying out efforts in different areas, at different times, for different (but related) effects. To fight on a high-end battlefield, commanders had to be as concerned with concrete effects (destroying enemy formations) as with intangible ones (such as deceiving the enemy commander, influencing the morale and cohesion of enemy forces, and shaping the viewpoints of allies and the domestic populations).¹¹ A distinction between a “close fight” (engaging fielded forces and supporting other tactical engagements) and a “deep fight” (striking targets well beyond the horizon, such as C2 nodes, or trying to create psychological effects on the adversary population in information operations) emerged. For example, air interdiction could serve to strike logistics hubs behind enemy lines, thus delaying the flow of forces to theater, just as it could be used to strike those forces as they moved to engage friendly ground troops.¹²

In 1984 the U.S. Army referred to “operational art” as a level of warfare where strategic concepts were matched to actions to achieve them, where commanders applied critical thinking to understand what was to be done and why.¹³ For many this definition worked.

⁸ Luttwak, 1980, p. 61; Otis, 1994, pp. 33–34.

⁹ Blythe, 2018, pp. 40–42.

¹⁰ Blythe, 2018, pp. 44–46.

¹¹ Blythe, 2018, pp. 46–47.

¹² John Warden, “The Air Campaign,” in Clayton R. Newell and Michael D. Krause, eds., *On Operational Art*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1994, pp. 86–87, 100–109.

¹³ Jablonsky, 1987, p. 65.

These theorists claimed that this “level” of warfare has always existed in one form or another but that it has become more apparent throughout time as the scale and scope of warfare increased.¹⁴ For other theorists, however, the Army was conflating two distinct ideas: *operational art* (the cognitive process that exists between strategy development and tactical execution) and *the operational level of war* (an unnecessary distinction that referred to this process happening at certain echelons of command).¹⁵ Some critics argued at the time (and do to this day) that a distinct operational level is not helpful. In their view, there is only strategy (national goals and the allocation of resources) and tactics (military actions conducted to execute the strategy).¹⁶

Two strands of reasoning emerged. The first strand focused on operational art as a cognitive process. According to this point of view, the U.S. Army mistranslated the Russian language and Soviet idea of operational art and conflated a process and a type of thinking with echelons of command, where these processes and thinking were perceived to take place.¹⁷ The second—related—strand of thought saw the three “levels of war” as problematic because they were artificial. As strategy, operations, and tactics are intertwined, there are no solid boundaries between “levels” of war; there is no echelon that deals exclusively in one kind of thinking or one kind of activity.¹⁸

There is value to both critiques. Operational art does indeed take place at different levels of command. A CCDR, for example, must consider what operational approach is likely to support national strategic goals and must weigh in on national policy decisions based on the operational realities of his or her theater. On the other end of the spectrum, an Army company commander has a very specific set of tasks to complete and deals in tactical concerns, such as how to employ his or her platoons. Still, there is a similar mental process at work. As the squads encounter resistance, platoon commanders will adapt their approaches, creating a feedback loop between the commander’s intent and the tactical actions. The company commander will give guidance to ensure that the changing situation remains in line with his or her intent as much as possible. At the same time, there is a linkage (albeit through multiple echelons of command) between the company commander’s tactical objective and strategy. The more

¹⁴ Newell, 1994, p. 3; Sandrart, 1994, p. 120.

¹⁵ Huba Wass de Czege, “Thinking and Acting Like an Early Explorer: Operational Art Is Not a level of War,” *Small Wars Journal*, March 14, 2011, pp. 1–4; Dale Eikmeier, “Operational Art and the Operational Level of War, Are They Synonymous? Well It Depends,” *Small Wars Journal*, September 9, 2015.

¹⁶ Harold W. Nelson, “Foreword,” in Clayton R. Newell and Michael D. Krause, eds., *On Operational Art*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1994, p. iii; Lawrence Doane, “It’s Just Tactics: Why the Operational Level of War Is an Unhelpful Fiction and Impedes the Operational Art,” *Small Wars Journal*, September 24, 2015, pp. 1–3.

¹⁷ Wass de Czege, 2011, p. 4.

¹⁸ Doane, 2015, pp. 1–3.

aware the junior officer is of this strategy, the better he or she can adapt the tactical approach to support it as conditions change. For example, which piece of terrain is more important if you cannot hold both? What is the relationship to the civilian population on the ground, and how might interacting with them change the perception of U.S. forces operating in the country? The company commander, like the CCDR, is applying operational art.¹⁹

Operational Art: Understanding Its Role Across Echelons of Command

If the operational level is, in fact, distinct from strategy and tactics, these levels must be treated as mental aids only, with the conceptual boundaries between them being permeable. A CCDR, for example, could lead assigned forces through the combatant command's functional construct, using his or her own staff as the only echelon above the component commands responsible for developing their campaign plans. Most of the campaign planning will be left to the components, which will certainly be dealing in the realm of operations—identifying enemy centers of gravity, LoEs, operational objectives, and key tactical tasks.

The JFACC in this scenario will most likely be the service component commander, if this role is not delegated to his/her deputy or a C-NAF commander. He or she will develop a plan to employ airpower to support the CCDR's intent. The CCDR's intent will be formed based on national strategy but must be informed by some degree of operational thinking to create synergy across the components. The JFACC will worry about the refinement of operational objectives and how to use airpower to accomplish those objectives, deciding which targets are most important to the air component, how airpower should be allocated across the theater in support of objectives, and how sorties should be apportioned. This results in a Joint Air Operations Plan (JAOP). For the AOC staff, the main product is an air tasking order that is generated on a 72-hour cycle. This air tasking order is the product of strategic thinking (the commander's intent, the ongoing dialogue about the JAOP), operational thinking (employing airpower according the JAOP), and tactical thinking (understanding the capabilities of different technical systems and platforms and adjusting force packages as conditions change).²⁰ Throughout this notional scenario, the CCDR and his or her staff will shape the development of the JAOP and oversee operations to make sure the air campaign aligns with maritime and land campaigns as they are executed. While the combatant command staff will work predominantly at the strategic level, they remain concerned with operations. The JFACC is working firmly at the operational level, but without strategic and tactical understanding, his or her campaign planning will not achieve tactical effects or align to the broader strategy to be accomplished. Thus, to say that strategy, operations, and tactics are divided along hard and fast boundaries at different levels of command would be inaccurate. It also would be inaccurate to

¹⁹ Example inspired by Wass de Czege, 2011.

²⁰ Joint Staff, *Joint Air Operations*, Washington, D.C.: Joint Staff, Joint Publication 3-30, 2019, pp. III-1–III-30.

say that commanders at the operational level, such as the JFACC in this scenario, can only think about forces in his or her functional domain. Component commanders can offer alternatives for the JTF HQ commander's consideration that might involve forces from other components. This theoretical debate shaped the way U.S. military doctrine evolved in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Today, Joint Publication 3-0 draws a distinction between operational art, defined as follows:

The cognitive approach by commanders and staff supported by their skill, knowledge, and experience, to plan and execute (when required) strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military capabilities by integrating ends, ways, and available means.

The operational level of war is defined as linking “the tactical employment of forces to national strategic objectives. The focus at this level is on the planning and execution of operations using operational art.”²¹

The Joint Force understands that operational art is applied at every level of command and also that the conceptual boundaries between levels of war are permeable. Echelons may span the boundaries between strategic, operational, and tactical depending on conditions.²² For this study, we accept these definitions of operational art and operational level of war, while being aware that there is a healthy debate within and among the military services about their utility, meaning, and application. Given these assumptions, a significant question for the USAF to consider is how to refine training, education, and career development efforts to prepare commanders and staffs to frame problems, operationally design campaigns, and direct forces from all domains to meet desired objectives.

²¹ Joint Staff, 2017b, p. I-13.

²² Joint Staff, 2017b, p. I-13.

Appendix D. Case Study Details

The purpose of this appendix is to provide more details on the geopolitical factors that led to the need for the three operations highlighted in Chapter 6—Operation Odyssey Dawn, Operation Unified Assistance, and Operation Inherent Resolve—and to more deeply explore the complex webs of decisions made during the formation of a joint command in each case.

Operation Odyssey Dawn (2011)

Background

The call for democratic governance across the Middle East and Northern Africa was hailed by Western onlookers as the Arab Spring—a seeming tide of Arab populations rising up and demanding reforms that would promote individual liberty and participation in government. This period was marked by protests, both peaceful demonstrations and violent riots, across the region, and brutal crackdowns by security forces. In some places, calls for peaceful transition were driven by competing interests, sectarianism, and ideological extremism into bloody conflicts.¹

The nation of Libya was one place where the call for change had taken hold. Under the rule of Mu’ammar Gaddafi since 1969, the Libyan government had clashed with the United States and the West, including the making of military threats and the sponsorship of international terrorism. The United States had used military force against Libya before, in Operation El Dorado Canyon, in retaliation for terrorist attacks.

In more recent years, there had been hope for improvement, evidenced in part by Libya’s willingness to end its weapons-of-mass-destruction program in 2003.² Rebel forces in Libya had organized themselves to resist government oppression. These forces were not monolithic and ran a broad political and ideological spectrum from secular moderates calling for democracy, to militias accountable to local strongmen, to Islamist extremists.³ The Libyan military mobilized to stop the uprising, turning an attempted revolution into a civil war. Antigovernment forces did not appear to be capable of defeating the Libyan military, a relatively modern force by regional standards.

¹ Seth Jones, “The Mirage of the Arab Spring,” *RAND Blog*, January 3, 2013.

² Judy G. Endicott, “Raid on Libya, Operation El Dorado Canyon,” in A. Timothy Warnock, ed., *Short of War: Major USAF Contingency Operations 1947–1997*, Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, 2000, pp. 145–157; Målfrid Braut-Hegghammer, “Giving Up on the Bomb: Revisiting Libya’s Decision to Dismantle Its Nuclear Program,” *Wilson Center Blog*, October 23, 2017.

³ Jason Pack, “The Two Faces of Libya’s Rebels,” *Foreign Policy*, April 5, 2011.

The Libyan government responded with overwhelming force, particularly against resistance-held cities like Benghazi. With Libyan formations approaching population centers, it appeared as though the revolution would be short-lived and that many civilians would be killed as collateral damage, if not outright massacred in deliberate retaliation.

JTF Formation and Employment Details

In late February 2011, the Joint Staff issued planning orders to establish an operating environment and initiate crisis action planning at AFRICOM and USEUCOM,⁴ which share some component commands. The naval component commander for USEUCOM (Commander, NAVEUR) is also the component commander for AFRICOM (Commander, Naval Forces Africa). Similarly, the air component commander for USEUCOM (the commander of USAFE) is dual-hatted as the air component commander for AFRICOM (Commander, U.S. Air Forces Africa). The JFACC for AFRICOM was the Commander of 17 AF (which was affiliated with AFRICOM and has since stood down) and the 617th AOC (which was aligned with AFRICOM at the time, but has since merged with USEUCOM's 603rd AOC).⁵

Depending on one's point of view, such command relationships could have allowed for unity of command and sharing of assets across two adjacent theaters (maritime and air assets would operate out of the Mediterranean and Continental Europe) or could have led to convoluted lines of authority. The major challenge was that AFRICOM, a new COCOM established in 2007, had never before planned and conducted a large-scale kinetic operation.⁶ The 17th Air Force, for example, had no permanently assigned forces. The 617th AOC was not heavily manned like the AOCs in other theaters of operation; and the JFACC staff was organized and trained for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, as well as air mobility—the two main air mission sets that enabled AFRICOM's primary mission of engagement.⁷

The “hollow” nature of 17 AF led to a creative solution devised by General Martin Welch of USAFE, Lieutenant General Frank Gorenc (of 3rd AF/603rd AOC), and Maj Gen Margaret Woodward (of 17 AF/617th AOC). Maj Gen Woodward, who had proactively initiated planning for no-fly zone options in mid-February 2011, determined she would commingle her 17 AF and 617th AOC staff with the 603rd staff at the USEUCOM CAOC facility in Ramstein, Germany.⁸ With her staff's preparation and the heavy influx of resources from a

⁴ Kidwell, 2015, p. 117.

⁵ Quartararo, Rovenolt, and White, 2012, pp. 146–149; Kidwell, 2015, pp. 109–114.

⁶ Quartararo, Rovenolt, and White, 2012, p. 151.

⁷ Kidwell, 2015, pp. 109–110.

⁸ Kidwell, 2015, pp. 110–117.

much larger staff that was postured for conventional operations, Maj Gen Woodward would be ready to serve as a JFACC for the JTF that had begun to take shape.

GEN William “Kip” Ward, Army commander of AFRICOM, understood that a military response to the Libyan crisis would most likely be required based on the escalation to civil war and the statements of policymakers.⁹ The exact shape that such a response would take was still ambiguous, with some calling for a kinetic military intervention and others insisting that promoting democracy through force was not in the best interests of the United States.¹⁰ GEN Ward began planning for military options across the spectrum of conflict with the engagement of his relief, U.S. Army GEN Carter Ham, who was preparing to assume command.¹¹

JTF-OD was originally established to conduct a NEO in support of the Department of State and prepared to conduct follow-on humanitarian operations. The initial NEO entailed the evacuation and repatriation of Egyptian nationals from Tunisia.¹² U.S. military leaders understood, however, that the implementation of a no-fly zone in Libya was still a possibility. On February 26, the Joint Chiefs of Staff formally directed 17 AF to plan for a no-fly zone.¹³ In considering the operational requirements, Maj Gen Woodward concluded that the enforcement of an exclusionary zone in Libya would require air and maritime strikes against ground targets, especially Libya’s Integrated Air Defense System. USAF and Navy assets would have to strike against radars, missile launchers, runways, and aircraft. This was not initially grasped at the political level, where decisionmakers continued to debate if and how the United States should get involved. She worked to convey this reality while developing both kinetic and nonkinetic courses of action.¹⁴

JTF-OD was formally established on March 3, 2011.¹⁵ NAVEUR was selected to serve as the core of the JTF, with ADM Samuel Locklear commanding. NAVEUR was selected as the HQ for several reasons. Given the geography of Libya on the Mediterranean, the 6th Fleet would likely play a major role in the NEO. When the operation eventually transitioned to a kinetic one, maritime assets would constitute the preponderance of forces and launch the initial strikes into Libya.¹⁶ Additionally, NAVEUR was a large, mature staff. The dual-hatted nature of NAVEUR gave AFRICOM access to an HQ with a large JMD and processes

⁹ Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, August 2019.

¹⁰ Quartararo, Rovenolt, and White, 2012, p. 150.

¹¹ Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, August 2019.

¹² Quartararo, Rovenolt, and White, 2012, p. 146.

¹³ Kidwell, 2015, p. 117.

¹⁴ Kidwell, 2015, p. 117; Greenleaf, 2013, p. 31.

¹⁵ Greenleaf, 2013, p. 30.

¹⁶ Foggo and Beer, 2013, pp. 91–93.

oriented toward conventional problem sets in the European theater. Political considerations were also at play. While the international community considered how to respond, the Navy could lead the operation from aboard the amphibious command ship USS *Mount Whitney*, which was outfitted with the requisite technical systems and spaces for a JTF HQ and a fleet command center/JFMCC staff. While the United States wanted to build a coalition and eventually transition to NATO leadership, until this happened, it was not possible to lead the military effort from NATO facilities in Italy.¹⁷

The maritime operations center was commingled with the JTF HQ. The fleet command center and joint operations center (JOC) shared space aboard the *Mount Whitney*, with some officers dual-hatted, having positions on both the JFMCC and JTF HQ staffs. This was intended to maximize unity of effort between the 6th Fleet maritime operations center (the maritime component staff) and the JTF HQ (the NAVEUR staff). ADM Locklear designated the 6th Fleet Commander, Vice Admiral Harry Harris, as JFMCC.¹⁸

Maj Gen Woodward was selected to lead the air campaign as JFACC. She did so from Ramstein AFB, with her staff now an amalgamation of the 617th and 603rd AOC staffs. Brigadier General Christopher Haas, AFRICOM's special operations component commander, served as the Joint Force Special Operations Component Commander. There was no JFLCC in JTF-OD, because the initial mission was a NEO with the likelihood of a transition to the enforcement of an exclusionary zone; as such, no courses of action signaled a need for a land component HQ. When GEN Ham relieved GEN Ward as AFRICOM commander, he became the theater commander for Operation Odyssey Dawn. He fought the war from Germany, frequently engaging with political leadership in Washington, D.C., to develop and maintain a coherent strategic approach.¹⁹

The composition of JTF-OD was in keeping with recognized "best practices": by relying on structures already in place, changes to the chain of command were minimized.²⁰ While some of the command relationships may have appeared convoluted, AFRICOM's posture for stability operations was mitigated by the sharing of staffs across COCOM lines. This leveraged the dual-hatting of some of the service components of both commands. GEN Ham, the USEUCOM commander, intended to keep the JTF HQ staff engaged fully at the operational level, empowering ADM Locklear, the NAVEUR commander, to take the lead in operational planning as he focused on the strategic picture by engaging with senior military leaders and political decisionmakers.²¹

¹⁷ Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, August 2019.

¹⁸ Foggo and Beer, 2013, pp. 91–93.

¹⁹ Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, August 2019.

²⁰ Joint Staff J7, Deployable Training Division, 2015a, p. 1.

²¹ Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, August 2019.

In this way the JTF HQ provided the “connective tissue” between the strategic and operational realms. For Operation Odyssey Dawn, this was no easy task. As the operation evolved from a NEO to the enforcement of an exclusionary zone, the direction of operational planning took frequent, sharp turns. The large staff commingled with the maritime component helped absorb the multiple shocks of changes in strategic direction,²² while GEN Ham and the AFRICOM staff worked to mitigate the natural friction of translating policy to strategy.²³

On March 17, 2011, the United Nations adopted UN Security Council Resolution 1973, which authorized the use of force to defend civilians and enforce the arms embargo on Libya.²⁴ The next day, President Obama announced that an international coalition had agreed that a cease-fire must be implemented in Libya and that attacks on civilians must stop. This coalition initially included France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and various Arab states through an arrangement with the Arab League.²⁵ These nations coordinated their military responses but were not integrated into a combined military formation.

Kinetic strikes began on March 19 from three separate but coordinated efforts: the British Operation Ellamy, the French Operation Harmattan, and the U.S. Operation Odyssey Dawn. U.S. fast-attack submarines and guided missile destroyers launched Tomahawk land attack cruise missiles from the Mediterranean, chiefly targeting Libya’s air defenses.²⁶ French aircraft struck Libyan armor columns threatening population centers, while the British aircraft flew from the United Kingdom to deliver Storm Shadow cruise missiles against key targets. U.S. air assets flew from Germany and Italy and, in the case of B-2 Spirit bombers, from Whiteman AFB in the United States. The synchronized employment of bombers, strike aircraft, and maritime fires was successful in disrupting the Libyan Integrated Air Defense System and setting the stage for the enforcement of an air exclusionary zone. This was followed with aggressive combat air patrol to keep the Libyan Air Force grounded.²⁷ The air campaign was well designed for a no-fly zone and viewed as a resounding success, although some have argued that it was less appropriate for the follow-on air interdiction operations against Libyan ground units. One criticism referred to “tank plinking,” or inefficiently using airpower against piecemeal targets.²⁸

²² Foggo and Beer, 2013, p. 92.

²³ Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, August 2019.

²⁴ Taylor and Smith, 2011, p. 2.

²⁵ Quartararo, Rovenolt, and White, 2012, p. 145.

²⁶ Taylor and Smith, 2011, p. 11.

²⁷ Taylor and Smith, 2011, pp. 3–11; Kidwell, 2015, p. 119.

²⁸ Damon Matlock, Jonathan Gaustad, Jason Scott, and Daniel Bales, “Command and Control in Africa,” *Air and Space Power Journal*, July–August 2014, p. 121.

The intent of Operation Odyssey Dawn was to facilitate a transition from a U.S. operation coordinated with an international coalition to a multilateral military effort under NATO C2. A key task of JTF-OD was to set conditions for this transition, allowing for the movement of one C2 structure to another. On March 31 Operation Odyssey Dawn transitioned to Operation Unified Protector under NATO authority.²⁹ Lieutenant General Charles Bouchard of the Canadian Air Force was selected as commander of CJTF-UP. ADM Locklear served as theater commander from Allied Joint Command Naples, and the CFACC was Major General Ralph Jodice II of the USAF, commander of Allied Air Command Izmir Turkey. On March 9, in anticipation of a NATO operation, Maj Gen Jodice moved his CAOC staff to Poggio Renatico, Italy, from where he led the Unified Protector air campaign.³⁰ Combat operations continued until the end of October 2011. With the support of the international air campaign, Libyan rebels were successful in resisting the government armed forces. The Gaddhafi government fell, and the leader himself was captured and executed by rebels after his military convoy was interdicted by allied aircraft.³¹

Operation Odyssey Dawn is generally considered to have been an operational success. An exclusionary zone was rapidly implemented and enforced, which prevented the mass killing of civilians and helped bring about the collapse of the Libyan government and military. The insistence of the international community that civilians be protected was upheld through the application of air and naval power. Some airpower advocates saw Odyssey Dawn as proof that airpower could be decisive on its own, achieving operational effects without significant action in other domains. While many USAF leaders were concerned by the gaps in staff capacity, these had been successfully mitigated with the creative commingling of staffs and adept leadership.³² In the words of Maj Gen Woodward, Odyssey Dawn was viewed as a “singular success for airpower.”³³

However, almost a decade since the campaign’s conclusion, Operation Odyssey Dawn is now viewed in context as a strategic failure in that policy goals did not effectively translate into a military strategy to bring them about.³⁴ This case study notes the natural friction at the strategic and operational level that GEN Ham sought to mitigate for the JTF staff and the

²⁹ Quartararo, Rovenolt, and White, 2012, p. 145.

³⁰ Robert C. Owen, “The U.S. Experience: National Strategy and Campaign Support,” in Mueller, Karl P., ed., *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-676-AF, 2015, p. 84.

³¹ Chivvis, 2015, p. 40.

³² Greenleaf, 2013, pp. 29, 40–48.

³³ John Tirpak, “Lessons from Libya,” *Air Force Magazine*, December 2011, p. 35.

³⁴ Greenleaf, 2013, pp. 40–48.

agility with which the JTF staff adapted operational plans to strategic fluctuations.³⁵ The military approach to Operation Odyssey Dawn was grounded in U.S. foreign policy direction, which arguably did not translate to better outcomes in Libya, a country that today remains in turmoil. Some would see this as evidence of the shortcomings of limited military interventions—relying on airpower and standoff fires may translate into operational success, without necessarily creating conditions for strategic success. This point, of course, remains contested by both scholars and military professionals.

Operation United Assistance (2014–2015)

Background

In December 2013, hemorrhagic fever caused multiple deaths in Guinea. By March 2014, it appeared that the fever was being caused by the Ebola virus, a particularly dangerous pathogen that can have a death rate of up to 90 percent for those who contract it. Cases of EVD began to spread across the African nations of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. The disease continued to spread rapidly, signaling the beginning of an epidemic. Ebola is transmitted through human contact, particularly through linens, clothing, and medical tools. This put health care workers and family members of patients at greatest risk.³⁶ The limited health care infrastructure in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone fueled the disease's rise.³⁷ Additionally, some local mourning practices put family members in close contact with the corpses of the deceased, which caused further transmission.³⁸

Liberia is a nation with historical ties to the United States, having been founded by Black Americans emigrating to Africa during the era of slavery.³⁹ Among its neighbors, Liberia faced particularly acute economic and political challenges, lacking a well-developed health care industry and the public services that would be of use to confront a major emergency, such as a modern power grid and passable roads in many parts of the country.⁴⁰ The nation had faced internal conflict as well, enduring a civil war from 1999 to 2003, during which the United States and the international community provided support in the form of limited political, economic, and military assistance.⁴¹ Without additional assistance, EVD would

³⁵ Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, August 2019.

³⁶ Boucher, 2018, pp. 9, 11.

³⁷ Lightsey, 2016, pp. 61–63.

³⁸ Boucher, 2018, p. 11.

³⁹ “History of Liberia: A Time Line; 1820 to 1847: From Colony to Republic,” Library of Congress, webpage, undated.

⁴⁰ Boucher, 2018, p. 12.

⁴¹ Nicholas Cook, *Liberia's Post-War Development: Key Issues and U.S. Assistance*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, May 19, 2010.

cause mass suffering, killing many more in Liberia and the region. Given these governance and economic challenges, the second- and third-order effects of the disease could foment significant instability. Onlookers in the international community also realized that failing to contain the disease locally could risk its spread outside the affected countries and potentially worldwide.

In early August 2014 the World Health Organization declared a global health emergency. Later that same month, the presidents of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone wrote a joint letter to the United Nations Security Council formally requesting international assistance to confront the outbreak. Doctors without Borders opened several treatment centers, but these were quickly overwhelmed by the volume of patients in need of treatment. On September 8, 2014, President Barack Obama announced that the United States would build a treatment center for medical workers—the Monrovia Medical Unit—outside Liberia’s capital. The training of medical professionals to assist patients without spreading the disease was viewed as critical to arresting its spread. The president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, responded by requesting more support.⁴² It had become apparent to the Liberian government that one major facility would not be enough given the scope of the disaster.

JTF Formation and Employment Details

On August 4, 2014, prior to the World Health Organization’s declaration of a global health emergency, the U.S. ambassador to Liberia had declared a disaster. The U.S. Agency for International Development Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID-OFDA) activated a Disaster Assistance Response Team. The next day the SECDEF established an internal Ebola Task Force chaired by the assistant secretary of defense for special operations and low-intensity conflict. Within two weeks, AFRICOM put USARAF, the GCC’s land component, on alert about the potential to form a JTF in support of USAID. The USARAF G35 established an operational planning team to begin framing the problem at hand. At this point, no explicit guidance about a military response had been issued.⁴³

By late summer of 2014, the interagency and armed forces were anticipating and planning for a broader U.S. government response with a significant military component. This response began to take shape on September 12. The Department of State formally requested support for the disaster in Liberia.⁴⁴ The Joint Staff responded by issuing an EXORD for AFRICOM to provide the Ebola treatment facility previously announced by President Obama. The same day, AFRICOM dispatched a three-person planning team to Monrovia to support the Disaster Assistance Response Team that was already working on the USAID response and issued a

⁴² Boucher, 2018, p. 4.

⁴³ Boucher, 2018, p. 16.

⁴⁴ Boucher, 2018, pp. 13–16.

warning order to USARAF to begin detailed contingency planning. The initial EXORD issued by the Joint Staff was expanded three days later to include the construction of multiple Ebola Treatment Units, research lab support, and the deployment of ground troops.⁴⁵

The military response was formally announced the next day by President Obama, who directed that the military support a broader whole-of-government effort by providing C2, logistics, and engineering capabilities. As outlined in the president's announcement, the U.S. government's response to the Ebola outbreak was intended to

control the epidemic at its source, mitigate second-order impacts, including blunting the economic, social, and political tolls in the region, engaging and coordinating with a broader global audience, and fortifying global health security infrastructure in the region and beyond.

Military planners used the president's intent to develop their objectives: control the outbreak, address ripple effects on local economies and communities, coordinate a broader global response, and urgently build up a public health system in western Africa. It was announced that the United States would deploy up to 3,000 troops to western Africa to support the interagency in accomplishing these objectives.⁴⁶

On the day of President Obama's announcement, the USARAF commander, MG Darryl Williams, arrived in Liberia with a 13-person cell.⁴⁷ While it made sense for USARAF to provide the core planning staff to maintain unity of command during the buildup of forces, it was clear that as more troops and resources flowed into the region, a new command architecture would be needed. The SECDEF designated 101 AD, which was preparing to deploy to CENTCOM for counterinsurgency operations, to provide the HQ for what would become known as Operation United Assistance.⁴⁸

Multiple sources we spoke with explained that there had been a dialogue between the Joint Staff and OSD in selecting the best option for an HQ element. A perception among USAF stakeholders is that the readiness and availability of 101 AD were the primary factors in it being selected over a USAF capability.⁴⁹ Then-Lt Gen Goldfein had noted the relevance of USAF capabilities to support a disaster relief effort in western Africa, and particularly opening and operating air fields in an austere environment and providing air mobility/logistics support. Indeed, the USAF contributed significantly in these areas during the operation.

⁴⁵ Boucher, 2018, pp. 14, 16.

⁴⁶ "Fact Sheet," 2014.

⁴⁷ Boucher, 2018, p. 17.

⁴⁸ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2015b, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Representative of 9 AF, personal communication with the authors, March 2, 2020; retired 9 AF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 9, 2020.

At the time, however, senior leaders had realized it would take the USAF additional time to identify a commander, develop a JMD for the HQ, and source it with qualified individuals throughout the USAF. In contrast, 101 AD had a robust HQ element that was already in training to deploy as a cohesive unit. Given the immediacy of the disaster, it was decided that retasking 101 AD from its planned deployment in support of the Global War on Terror to a deployment to western Africa was the preferable course of action.⁵⁰

This account offered by multiple USAF officers is telling. During this study, senior military leaders in the USAF, Army, and Navy stressed that readiness, availability, and maturity of the HQ staff are major factors in selecting a joint HQ.⁵¹ While USAF staffs and leaders would have been familiar with the capabilities needed for Operation United Assistance at both the tactical and operational level, there was no such USAF HQ unit available to deploy. The 101 AD, however, could get there the fastest with the most capability. USAF stakeholders perceived that the unit's readiness and availability were the decisive factors in its selection.⁵²

Unable to immediately offer a dedicated, on-call JTF HQ, the USAF played an essential supporting role while the Army led the overall operation. With MG Williams commanding and the USARAF staff functioning as the HQ, military assets began to flow into theater. Critical logistical support was provided by Joint Task Force–Port Opening, an “off the shelf” USTRANSCOM capability that could be tailored to the mission at hand. In this case, the 123rd Contingency Response Group, made up of airmen from the Kentucky ANG, deployed to Senegal to set up a critical staging base from which Joint Task Force–Port Opening could support the nascent JTF for United Assistance.⁵³ The 101 AD commander, Major General Gary Volesky, arrived in Liberia on October 19, 2014. He was followed by the rest of the 101 AD HQ element, which began to arrive the next day. Within five days USARAF had been relieved by 101 AD as the HQ core, and Joint Forces Command–Liberia, or JFC-UA, was formally established to coordinate military support to USAID.⁵⁴

The JFC HQ was located in Monrovia, with the command group tied closely to the U.S. embassy.⁵⁵ The JFC structure was illustrative of the fact that JTFs often deviate from the traditional alignment of domain-focused component HQs under a JFC. A JTF can take the form needed for a specific mission, and the JFC construct grew out of a need to adapt to an HA/DR environment, where the main function of the HQ was to coordinate focused military support to a civilian agency. The command relationships were functionally aligned.

⁵⁰ USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 2020.

⁵¹ Army senior leader, personal communication with the authors, August 2019.

⁵² USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 2020.

⁵³ Boucher, 2018, p. 30.

⁵⁴ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2015b, p. iv.

⁵⁵ Lightsey, 2016, p. 65; Boucher, 2018, p. 24.

An HQ support battalion, engineer brigade, combat support hospital, sustainment brigade, area mobile laboratory, aviation battalion, contracting battalion, and military police company reported to the Joint Force HQ.⁵⁶ During the operation, a special-purpose MAGTF deployed with around 100 Marines and aviation assets. USAF and Navy personnel joined their Army and interagency counterparts to provide niche scientific and medical skills, and U.S. Navy Seabees bolstered the engineering capabilities in theater.⁵⁷

Main lines of effort for Operation United Assistance focused on building Ebola Treatment Units, training host nation health care workers to treat patients without spreading the disease, and testing Ebola samples to track the spread of the disease.⁵⁸ For military tasking and resourcing, the JFC would report to AFRICOM.⁵⁹ Support to the USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance was conducted by a unique process matching military capabilities to interagency gaps, as often occurs when the military is tasked with supporting a lead federal agency. DoD support to USAID is typically managed using mission tasking matrixes (MITAMs). A MITAM requests that a specific military capability be matched to a specific interagency requirement. This request for support is validated (sometimes at the JFC level, and sometimes as high up as between DoD and USAID, depending on the scope of support requested), and the relevant military unit is tasked with a mission.⁶⁰

Operating in such a supporting relationship often presents challenges for military units.⁶¹ A MITAM generally takes the form of a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, and the process can generate a great deal of friction that can only be mitigated through coordination among units, commands, and agencies. For instance, a federal agency will often make requests for capabilities too general (not being specific enough as to the requirement) or too specific (asking for an asset, instead of a capability).⁶² An effective operational HQ mitigates these challenges by maintaining constant lines of communication and an ongoing dialogue. Sometimes a military HQ needs to lean forward by offering creative solutions to interagency requirements; but, just as often, it must lean back to filter out requests that are best accomplished with interagency or even nongovernmental organization capabilities.⁶³ The 101 AD adapted to this reality by integrating with the U.S. embassy, with USAID-OFDA, and with the government of Liberia. They tasked liaison officers to their partner organizations and participated in the

⁵⁶ Lightsey, 2016, p. 64.

⁵⁷ Boucher, 2018, pp. 28–30; Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2015b, p. 8.

⁵⁸ Lightsey, 2016, p. 63.

⁵⁹ Boucher, 2018, p. 19.

⁶⁰ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2016c, pp. 85–89.

⁶¹ Department of State military liaison, personal communication with the authors, June 2019.

⁶² Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2016c, pp. 85–89.

⁶³ USAID-OFDA military liaison, personal communication with the authors, July 2019.

Incident Management System, which served as a clearinghouse for major meetings and decisions made at the intergovernmental National Ebola Command Center.⁶⁴

Such adaptation can be difficult for military forces not accustomed to operating in a supporting role, and it proved to be so for 101 AD. Prior to deploying, 101 AD had trained for an AOR where it could “own the battle space.” Now, it found itself supporting a lead federal agency in a sovereign nation. It had to now be responsive to tasking from USAID-OFDA and respect the laws and wishes of the government of Liberia. The Liberians were in the lead, with USAID in support. The role of 101 AD was not to take the lead as it had been prepared to do in CENTCOM, but instead to provide select capabilities to USAID. Even when military forces were critical to a mission, it remained a USAID mission in support of the government of Liberia, a narrative and image that had to be continually reinforced by the JFC to enable the host nation and bolster its capacity to respond to the disaster at hand.⁶⁵

Often in HA/DR scenarios, military staffs will attempt to lead the operation, which can lead to the misallocation of resources or cause harmful second-order effects (such as delegitimizing the host nation, undermining interagency partners, or missing a more relevant capability in a partner organization).⁶⁶ Civilian agencies can misunderstand or misuse military capabilities. This occurred during the Ebola response, when MITAMs were sometimes frivolous or inappropriate. For example, at times the JFC was asked to procure equipment or supplies rather than a particular military capability. These types of requests basically amounted to “passing a bill” to the better-resourced DoD.⁶⁷ A unit that is trained for HA/DR operations and has ongoing relationships with the interagency is more likely to be able to filter out such requests without slowing down the organization’s decision cycle or misallocating DoD resources. When acting in a supporting role, the operational HQ adds value when it is proactive and forward leaning but also when it can serve as a screen or a filter to maintain mission focus.

While not originally prepared for the HA/DR mission, 101 AD and the rest of Joint Force Command Liberia adapted well. The HQ was successful in facilitating the training of host nation health care workers, building Ebola Treatment Units, conducting sample testing in advanced lab facilities, and providing logistical support to the interagency. A strong inverse correlation between the presence of U.S. troops and the number of Ebola cases was noted in multiple assessments of Operation United Assistance. When the United States began providing military support, there was a rapid drop in the spread of the disease. However,

⁶⁴ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2016c, p. 3; Lightsey, 2016, p. 63.

⁶⁵ Center for Army Lessons Learned, *Operation United Assistance: Report for Follow-On Forces*, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2015a, p. 3.

⁶⁶ USAID-OFDA military liaison, personal communication with the authors, July 2019.

⁶⁷ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2016c, p. 88.

correlation does not necessarily denote causation. It is impossible to know the exact extent to which Operation United Assistance contributed to the decline in EVD, but logic would suggest that improved facilities and additional training for health care workers were positive influences in the disease's decline.⁶⁸

In February 2015, military forces began to draw down. In March, the 48th Chemical Brigade Headquarters, made up of 32 Army soldiers, replaced the 101 AD's division HQ as the core of JFC-UA.⁶⁹ In May the World Health Organization declared Liberia to be "Ebola free," and on June 30, Operation United Assistance came to an end.⁷⁰

Operation Inherent Resolve (2014–present)

Background

OIR was the name given to U.S.-led multinational efforts to disrupt, degrade, and defeat ISIS. This group, which has at various times operated as a terrorist network, an organized insurgency, and a functioning government, grew out of the remnants of al Qaeda in Iraq, using terrorist tactics to exploit sectarian strife within Iraq and the chaos of the Syrian Civil War.

Through its ideological fanaticism and extreme violence, the group rose to prominence in certain Iraqi communities and established itself as a cohesive force in the Syrian conflict. It proved capable of seizing territory and governing, declaring itself a new caliphate or Islamist nation governed according to its own extremist ideology.⁷¹ ISIS proved adept at leveraging modern communications, particularly social media, to spread propaganda and foment its ideology. It began to influence similar jihadist movements around the world in places like Africa and South Asia, where groups that were previously focused on local grievances became enmeshed in its broader movement.⁷² Through direct facilitation and indirect inspiration, the group began to cause and take credit for terrorist attacks in Europe and the United States.⁷³

⁶⁸ Lightsey, 2016, p. 68.

⁶⁹ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2015b, p. 30.

⁷⁰ Boucher, 2018, p. 3.

⁷¹ CJTF-OIR, undated.

⁷² Clayton Sharb and Danika Newlee, "Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K)," Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 9, 2018; Sarah Almukhtar, "How Boko Haram Courted and Joined the Islamic State," *New York Times*, June 10, 2015.

⁷³ Don Melvin, "At Least 95 Killed in Twin Bombings Near Train Station in Turkey's Capital," CNN, October 10, 2015; Eoghan Macguire, Alexander Smith, Jason Cummings, and Alex Johnson, "Manchester Arena Suicide Bombing: 22 Die at Ariana Grande Concert," NBC News, May 22, 2017; "Paris Attacks: What Happened on the Night," BBC News, December 9, 2015; Ashley Fantz, Faith Karimi, and Elliott C. McLaughlin, "Orlando Shooting: 49 Killed, Shooter Pledged ISIS Allegiance," CNN, June 13, 2016.

The spread of ISIS further destabilized the Middle East; large segments of Iraq were now controlled by a terrorist organization, and the forces working against Syrian president Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian Civil War were becoming ever more dominated by ideological extremists. The group was promoting terrorism worldwide—countering U.S. interests in places like Afghanistan, Nigeria, and the Philippines.⁷⁴ U.S. allies in Europe were the victims of its attacks, and the United States became keenly aware of the threat on its own soil from ISIS-inspired “lone wolves.”⁷⁵

The U.S. government responded militarily to this threat by conducting limited operations in Iraq and Syria. These operations were primarily focused on enabling the ISF and on working with local groups in the region to roll back the caliphate and liberate ISIS-held territory.⁷⁶ U.S. and coalition airpower was a critical enabler of these efforts and was also used to target ISIS leadership and infrastructure directly while minimizing the exposure of U.S. troops to direct combat.⁷⁷ After a long and unpopular war in Iraq, and amid a continuing effort in Afghanistan, the U.S. public was unlikely to support a large ground presence in Iraq, and political leadership exercised caution about getting entangled in the Syrian Civil War.⁷⁸ Additionally, airpower proved a decisive advantage in preventing the low-tech ISIS forces from holding territory and operating as a conventional military force, as it had been able to do for a significant amount of time.⁷⁹

JTF Formation and Employment Details

CJTF-OIR provided the command structure for coordinating military efforts against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, which were led by the United States and included contributions of varying degrees from approximately 60 allies and partners.⁸⁰ This command structure went through several organizational changes as it evolved into the CJTF HQ that is still operational as of spring 2020.

CJTF-OIR began on June 24, 2014, when the national command authority directed the commander of CENTCOM, GEN Lloyd Austin of the Army, to commence military operations against ISIS. GEN Austin responded by designating ARCENT as the JFLCC for operations in

⁷⁴ Sharb and Newlee, 2018; Almukhtar, 2015; Hannah Beech and Jason Gutierrez, “How ISIS Is Rising in the Philippines as It Dwindles in the Middle East,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2019.

⁷⁵ Daniel Byman, “How to Hunt a Lone Wolf: Countering Terrorists Who Act on Their Own,” Brookings Institution, February 14, 2017.

⁷⁶ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2018a, p. 6; Federal News Service, 2017, pp. 1–6.

⁷⁷ Federal News Service, 2016a, pp. 2–7.

⁷⁸ Kathy Gilsinan, “Cliché of the Moment: ‘Boots on the Ground’,” *Atlantic*, November 5, 2015.

⁷⁹ USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, December 2019.

⁸⁰ Federal News Service, 2016b, p. 1.

Iraq. By September 2014 the U.S. effort in support of the government of Iraq had expanded to include a significant international contribution, and ARCENT was redesignated as the Combined Force Land Component Command, acknowledging that international forces were now fully integrated into the command structure. On October 17, 2014, the SECDEF designated ARCENT as HQ of CJTF-OIR, acknowledging that the Army component of CENTCOM was now commanding and controlling multiple subordinate HQs with their own AORs, made up of different military services.⁸¹

The structure of CJTF-OIR was unique from a doctrinal perspective. Rather than consisting of land, air, maritime, and special operations components subordinate to ARCENT as the CJTF HQ, it consisted of a robust land component HQ (CJFLCC for Iraq) and a Special Operations Joint Task Force HQ, subordinate to the CJTF and parallel to the CJFLCC, which would have its own joint operating area and subordinate units. The CFACC was to be the current CENTCOM CFACC, who was dual-hatted as Commander, AFCENT.

A subordinate air component, a separate CFACC for OIR, was not created. Instead, a supporting relationship was established between the three-star CFACC and the three-star CJTF commander.⁸² This was because of the important role of airpower in the operation, but it was also shaped by the unique geography and situation: The AFCENT staff and the CENTCOM AOC were robust and already participating in operations ranging from Afghanistan to steady-state activity in the Persian Gulf. The reality of multiple conflicts in the AOR, a mature AOC, and the need to share assets across the region made it practical to keep to management of air assets under the theater CFACC.⁸³ This model became known as the “theater JFACC model” of a JTF.⁸⁴

One senior officer involved in OIR reported that this arrangement worked well because air assets could be tasked to support operations in multiple joint operating areas during a deployment and because it generally led to a fair and operationally sound distribution of resources. He cautioned, however, that the theater JFACC model may work better in some AORs than in others. Whether it is useful to create an air component subordinate to a CJTF depends on the nature of the mission and geography of the AOR.⁸⁵

Some other airpower advocates have stated that the theater JFACC model might lessen the influence of an airpower perspective on a campaign. Speaking of long-term efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, another USAF officer felt that airpower was not well-integrated into campaign planning because of the physical separation of the CFACC and the joint HQ’s executing

⁸¹ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2016a, p. 1.

⁸² Joint Staff J7, 2017, p. 5.

⁸³ USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, December 2019.

⁸⁴ Joint Staff J7, 2017, p. 5.

⁸⁵ USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, December 2019.

stability operations. In this view, consideration should be given to creating air components, air C2 mechanisms, and/or more senior USAF representation within JTFs. This opinion, taken with the experience of senior officers involved in OIR, reinforces the view that JTF command relationships should vary based on the nature of the operating environment.⁸⁶

ARCENT remained in command of CJTF-OIR for about one year, at which time it was decided that a new unit would deploy to form the core of the CJTF. In September 2015, III Corps, known as America's Contingency Corps for its JTF HQ mission, deployed to Camp Arafjan, Kuwait, to relieve ARCENT as core staff for the CJTF.⁸⁷ In turn, III Corps was relieved in place by XVIII Airborne Corps, which has historically been associated with the JTF mission through the GFMAP; XVIII Airborne continues to rotate with III Corps as the core of the HQ staff on an annual basis.⁸⁸

As was discussed in Chapter 2, USAF leadership of the JTF was considered multiple times because of the role of airpower in the campaign. One proposal, which was said to have CSAF support, included a transition to an IA/JMD model resourced with IAs from across the armed services and partner nations, similar to CJTF-HOA or CSTC-A. A USAF commander with a command group and cohesive USAF staff could be placed on top of this JMD. This proposal was ultimately rejected, according to the personal impressions of some military officers, because of resistance within the USAF and outside the USAF from the sister services to the idea of building an IA model from scratch.⁸⁹

Today CJTF-OIR continues to operate against ISIS in the region. The CJFLCC has been disestablished, leaving the CJTF HQ and the JSOTF, which reports through Special Operations Command Central and remains under the operational control of the CJTF HQ.⁹⁰ The CJTF HQ currently comprises around 1,200 personnel—military, civilian, and contractors. This large number counts the large Joint Intelligence Support Element and the many personnel that were absorbed into the HQ with the disestablishment of the CJFLCC HQ. Around 25 percent of these personnel are U.S. Army, most of which (about 250–300 people) deploy with the Army Corps HQ unit. Another 25 percent of the CJTF personnel come from other U.S. armed services, with the USAF leading this segment with around 130 airmen at any given time. These numbers are rounded out by 25 percent of HQ personnel being contractors or civilians, and another 25 percent being personnel from partner nations. Partner nation troops are mostly soldiers, with some representation from air services such as the UK Royal Air Force.⁹¹

⁸⁶ USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, June 2019.

⁸⁷ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2016a, p. 2.

⁸⁸ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2019, p. 4.

⁸⁹ USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, January 2020.

⁹⁰ USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, December 2019.

⁹¹ USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, December 2019.

The USAF maintains a significant role in the CJTF HQ because the Deputy Commander for Operations and Intelligence (DCOM-O&I) staff roles are filled by airmen—two-star and one-star USAF generals, respectively. The DCOM-O&I chairs the Joint Effects Board. This board is a key driver in the overall CJTF battle rhythm. This process sets conditions for the joint targeting cycle and operations at the component level by identifying and prioritizing desired effects, both kinetic and nonkinetic. This could include things like capability goals for the Iraqi armed forces or the degradation of ISIS C2. The DCOM-O&I is dual-hatted as commander of the 9th Air Expeditionary Task Force–Levant, which has operational control of the three air wings deployed for OIR. The CFACC retains tactical control of two of these wings, with one remaining under the tactical control of CJTF-OIR for advise-and-assist operations with the Iraqi Air Force. In the view of one senior leader, the deputy commander’s ownership of a key process in the CJTF battle rhythm and command relationship to the deployed wings helps bring an airman’s perspective to OIR.⁹²

One perspective shared with the RAND research team was that the USAF does in a sense provide a cohesive core for the CJTF HQ. With 130 airmen serving at the HQ as IAs, they are well inculcated into CJTF structures and processes. The Army corps deploys to the CJTF and integrates into existing relationships and an existing battle rhythm, while these airmen are replaced individually on different timetables (between four months and a year, depending on their orders). In the view of this specific individual, the narrative that the Army corps provides the core structure of the JTF and that the rest of the HQ falls in line with Army systems and processes is false. In reality, the Army corps is falling in on a CJTF with its own established systems and own unique unit culture. The significant and consistent representation of airmen within the command makes the USAF as much of a CJTF core as the Army.⁹³ This contrasts with the opinions of others engaged during this study, who felt that at many times during OIR, airpower was undervalued and the USAF did not have a significant voice in the conduct of operations.⁹⁴

OIR is generally viewed as an operational success. Since the fall of 2017, ISIS has ceased to exist as a state-like entity in Iraq and Syria.⁹⁵ The organization is no longer capable of holding territory or maneuvering in conventional formations. In public statements, CJTF-OIR leaders have noted great improvement in ISF capability and in the ability of other police and militia forces in the region to counter insurgency and terrorism.⁹⁶ The conventional power of the U.S. and coalition nations degraded ISIS force structure, as well as striking at their financial

⁹² USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, December 2019.

⁹³ USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, December 2019.

⁹⁴ USAF senior leader, personal communication with the authors, June 6, 2019.

⁹⁵ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2019.

⁹⁶ Federal News Service, 2016b; “Brigadier General DJ Anderson Briefing,” 2017.

and economic systems (makeshift banks and oil infrastructure).⁹⁷ The Obama administration, under which CJTF-OIR operations began, noted the degradation and disruption of ISIS and that the terrorist group was on its way to defeat.⁹⁸ Under President Donald Trump, DoD made an adjustment in military strategy, calling for a “campaign of annihilation” over one of “attrition” and focusing on bringing more combat power to bear on ISIS to end the ability of the group to exist cohesively rather than gradually wearing it down.⁹⁹

The chain of events between the CJTF establishment in late June 2014 and the disestablishment of the CJFLCC in November 2017 indicates that the operational approach throughout this time was largely a success. In December 2015, 10,000 host nation troops, including local militia, Iraqi police, and the Iraqi Army, liberated Ramadi with U.S. support. This was followed the next June with Iraqi forces retaking Fallujah. The next year the coalition provided fires and logistical support to the Iraqi Army in its hard fight to retake the key city of Mosul, which was liberated in July 2017.¹⁰⁰ By November 2017 it was acknowledged that ISIS had ceased functioning as a state-like entity. It was at this point that the CJFLCC for Iraq was disestablished. CJTF-OIR continues to function as an operational-level HQ for the fight against ISIS,¹⁰¹ which military leaders now view as a decentralized movement that can carry out terrorism operations locally, regionally, and worldwide and that has the intent of reconstituting locally to continue an insurgency in the Middle East.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Federal News Service, 2016a, pp. 4–7.

⁹⁸ Paul D. Shinkman, “Pentagon Chief Ash Carter Dismisses Donald Trump’s ISIS Plan,” *U.S. News and World Report*, November 14, 2016.

⁹⁹ Garamone, Jim. “Defeat-ISIS ‘Annihilation’ Campaign Accelerating, Mattis Says,” news release, U.S. Department of Defense, May 28, 2017.

¹⁰⁰ CJTF-OIR, undated.

¹⁰¹ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2019, p. 3.

¹⁰² “Brigadier General DJ Anderson Briefing,” 2017, p. 9.

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In 2016 Gen David Goldfein, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, called on the 9th Air Force (9 AF) to develop the capability to serve as a Joint Task Force Headquarters (JTF HQ), with the expectation that other numbered air forces would eventually develop similar capability. In August 2020, the 9 AF and 12th Air Force direct-reporting units and wings were integrated to form the 15th Air Force (15 AF), which now continues to carry out the mandate to develop a JTF HQ capability.

In this report, the authors examine the U.S. Air Force's (USAF's) efforts to develop a joint task force capability that maximizes airpower's contribution to joint warfighting—one that has the organization, training, and equipment required to effectively carry out a JTF HQ mission when called on to do so.

The authors conducted literature reviews, engaged in discussions with subject-matter experts, attended staff exercises, and generated case studies of operations. They also examined a data set of 88 JTF HQs activated between 1990 and 2017 to gain insight into the causes and conditions that typically result in JTF HQ formation and to understand the factors that shape JTF HQ mission sets, selection processes, and their duration.

The authors' findings and recommendations reflect research conducted prior to 9 AF's integration into the new 15 AF, but they remain relevant to 15 AF personnel and others interested in understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with USAF efforts to stand up a JTF HQ.

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