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## “WE’RE ALL SMARTER THAN ANY ONE OF US”: THE ROLE OF INTER-AGENCY INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATIONS IN COMBATING ARMED GROUPS

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Non-state armed groups present a direct threat to U.S. national security at home and abroad. Their decentralized structures, informal and formal logistics networks, and ability to merge with and hide among the world’s civilian populations make them extremely difficult targets for threatened states and their intelligence and security organizations to address. Joint inter-agency and international intelligence and security efforts are arguably necessary to respond to such threats; however, despite the obvious advantages of intelligence collaboration at all levels of a conflict, obstacles to inter-agency and international cooperation remain. These obstacles arise from lack of capability, a lack of will, or a combination thereof. This paper discusses three lack-of-will challenges related to collective action and two capability problems using as case studies tactical-operational joint-agency task forces in Bosnia and Northern Iraq. Based on lessons learned from these cases, I recommend that Joint-Inter-Agency Task Forces (JIATFs) become integrated into U.S. joint doctrine, that lead agencies or personnel for these organizations be established at their inception, that JIATFs at the strategic level focus more on the importance of networking and cooperation than operations, and the incentive mechanisms

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for participants be restructured to promote teamwork over individual accomplishment. These recommendations address a variety of problems with inter-agency collaboration; other problems—personalities paramount among them—require a more long-term approach.

## INTRODUCTION

Armed groups present a direct threat to U.S. national security at home and abroad. Their decentralized structures, informal and formal logistics networks, and ability to merge with and hide among the world's civilian populations make them extremely difficult targets for threatened states and their intelligence and security organizations to address. In addition, those same security and intelligence organizations frequently lack an indigenous capability to collect and fuse actionable intelligence, develop a priority targeting list, and generate and adaptively implement the best mechanisms by which to attend to those targets. Joint inter-agency and international intelligence and security efforts are a necessary response to an adversary that has often proved both more cunning and more versatile than the efforts employed to counter it.

Since the 9/11 Al Qaida attacks on U.S. soil, multiple intelligence organizations operating at different echelons of operation emerged to combat armed groups. The United States government made a concerted effort to organize its intelligence and security forces into a single body, the Office of the Directorate of National Intelligence (DNI). Ostensibly, its purpose was to promote intelligence sharing between U.S. agencies and the Department of Defense (DoD) and, to a lesser extent, with other countries from within a single body. At the tactical-operational level of the Long War, U.S. military personnel, in conjunction with other U.S. intelligence agencies, members of coalition partner intelligence and security agencies, and, in some cases, host-nation security agencies, have developed formal and ad-hoc organizations called Joint Inter-Agency Task Forces (JIATFs) with more specific—but more focused—missions to counter armed groups. Similar, more formal, organizations emerged at the theater level of war, and the National Counter-Terrorism Center (NCTC) and its counterparts materialized as strategic-level JIATFs (Millett and Murray 1988, 1-26).

JIATF formation is based on the concept that no one type of intelligence is capable of providing the most accurate picture of armed group activity on its own. With the exception of some unusually well-placed or well-timed single-source intelligence reporting, it is an all-source in-

telligence package that produces the most accurate assessments. While different agencies have expertise in different intelligence types, no one agency has a premium on all-source intelligence, making collaboration and de-confliction (to avoid circular reporting and duplicate use of the same source by two or more agencies) crucial for developing accurate, actionable intelligence. Furthermore, intelligence-sharing by itself is insufficient to counter armed group activity. The most effective JIATFs will, therefore, have multiple purposes and components including: 1) intelligence sharing across agencies, 2) deconfliction of intelligence collection efforts against armed groups, 3) the conduct of meetings or other forums for discussion to fuse analyses and assessments to develop actionable intelligence, 4) the development of joint priority targeting lists, and 5) the ability to direct an agency or other mechanism to operationalize the intelligence (*The 9/11 Commission Report*, 2004, 403-404).

Despite the obvious advantages of intelligence collaboration at all levels of a conflict, obstacles to inter-agency and international cooperation remain. These obstacles arise from lack of capability or lack of will, or a combination thereof. Some of the capacity-related impediments include laws that prevent intelligence sharing or, at a minimum, disclosure of intelligence sources and means; technical problems like firewalls between different agency databases; problems with secure communications; and lack of sufficiently trained personnel. In addition, some JIATFs may lack representatives from organizations that can provide the capabilities necessary to fulfill the various missions described above. Although it will take some time, these challenges can be overcome with improved resources and legislation. The problems associated with the lack of will to cooperate, however, appear more intractable. Theoretically, the lack of will arises from agencies and representatives making a conscious decision not to form, join, or substantively contribute to a collaborative intelligence-sharing organization.

A logical beginning for overcoming such challenges is to focus on those areas where expeditious change seems most feasible. My experience working on operational-level JIATFs in Bosnia and Iraq and with personnel in theater-level JIATFs in the latter suggest the following lessons:

- The more immediate the physical threat posed by armed groups, the more likely JIATFs or related collaborative entities are to form without coercive mechanisms.
- Smaller, lower-level JIATFs are more productive in collaborating to develop actionable intelligence than larger, higher-level JIATFs.

- The greater the physical or emotional distance between agency headquarters and its representative on the JIATF, the greater the propensity for the representative to provide substantive contributions to the JIATF.
- JIATFs function best when one agency or group is designated as the "leader." This leader can emerge by virtue of the size or amount of assets he or she brings to the table, by tacit acknowledgement of other members of the JIATF, or via a formalized designation.
- JIATFs with an operational arm—a capability to act on the intelligence—involve better cooperation than those that do not.

The first three observations address lack of will-related challenges, while the last two speak to capacity-related structural obstacles.

In the next section I discuss some possible reasons why the first three occur and briefly outline why the proposed structural adjustments are needed. Subsequently, I review the formation and operations of two "functional" JIATFs— one in Bosnia in 2001 and the other in Mosul, Iraq in 2003— to illustrate how JIATFs can successfully form and produce actionable intelligence for a specified period of time. I then discuss the theater-level JIATF in Baghdad in 2004 and the strategic-level JIATF in the United States, the NCTC, to illustrate where and how difficulties with cooperation might emerge. The paper concludes with some general observations and recommendations on how to overcome intelligence collaboration dilemmas.

## **LACK OF WILL TO COOPERATE: JIATFs AS A COLLECTIVE ACTION PROBLEM, A PRISONER'S DILEMMA, AND A PRINCIPAL-AGENT PROBLEM**

Developing a JIATF and encouraging compliance with the JIATF's directives is a two-staged process: overcoming a collective action problem to form the JIATF, and mitigating the effects of a prisoner's dilemma situation and a principal-agent problem to encourage continued participation by each agency involved.

### **Forming a Functional JIATF—A Collective Action Problem**

Mancur Olson's classic collective action problem for the production of nonmarket goods occurs when multiple groups have a shared common interest in solving a problem and no one group has the ability to ad-

equately resolve the issue alone. Although cooperation would be fruitful for all concerned, each organization tends to pursue individual interests that may be detrimental or run counter to a collaborative effort to resolve the problem (Olson 1971, 6-8). In addition, there are prospective costs associated with group teamwork that discourage cooperation. Absent some overriding factors that create benefits outweighing those costs or some form of outside intervention to coerce cooperation, cooperation is unlikely. A collective action problem, then, can preclude teamwork that would be beneficial to solving the problem.

Collective action problems can, however, be overcome. As previously discussed, an outside agency or other force can coerce cooperation where it would otherwise not occur. Another way to obtain cooperation—without the inducement of coercion—is to establish an agreement or institution with rules that govern cooperation and supervise production of the “good.” Groups are likely to commit to such agreements if they assess that the potential benefits of participation outweigh the costs associated with both setting up the organization and sharing resources and information with others (Olson 1971, 27, 31).

Olson also contends that the size of the organization is instrumental in determining whether it will produce the collective good. Specifically, he argues that smaller groups are more likely to operate efficiently than large groups—the larger the group, the greater the challenges associated with achieving consensus, which reduces efficiency (Olson 1971, 45-46). In addition, Olson asserts that “certain small groups can provide themselves with collective goods without relying on coercion or any positive inducements apart from the collective good itself.” There are also circumstances in which smaller groups could choose to cooperate “simply because of the attraction of the collective good to individual members” (Olson 1971, 33, 36). Therefore, we would expect that smaller groups would be more likely to overcome collective action problems than larger ones.

JlATF formation is essentially an implied or explicit agreement or institutional arrangement designed to solve a collective action problem. The problem is the presence of armed groups that threaten the security of the citizens in the JlATF’s area of responsibility (be it tactical, operational, theater, or strategic), and the collective good they attempt to produce is security. The group produces security by developing actionable intelligence and recommendations for addressing the threat posed by the armed groups. The individual members of JlATFs are the different U.S. civilian and military agencies working for some overall agency-in-charge and may also include intelligence, security, and governmental representatives of the host

nation or partner nations. Different agencies produce different types of intelligence, and some maintain the capability to produce all-source intelligence products. In most cases, however, no one agency or organization can produce sufficient actionable intelligence for armed groups on its own. Therefore, it is in the interests of the agencies to pool their intelligence collection and analysis efforts to jointly develop actionable intelligence related to the armed groups in their area of control.

The factors that threaten JIATF formation and membership parallel some of the challenges associated with overcoming collective action problems. The benefits are, of course, the production of jointly-actionable intelligence that more accurately reflects the true assessment of ongoing enemy activity, and a collaborative decision-making process that determines what qualifies as actionable intelligence and designates agencies to take action. An additional benefit of collaborative intelligence work is more efficient use and dispersal of multiple intelligence assets collecting against targets on a group-directed priority targeting list; the JIATF allows agencies to deconflict existing collection and targeting efforts. The potential "costs" for agencies participating in a JIATF include 1) reduced autonomy in decision making concerning actionable intelligence, 2) the potential for compromising source information, 3) loss of a monopoly on specific types of intelligence reporting, and 4) the loss of credit for any positive actions taken in response to that reporting. Thus, individual agencies that believe they have the ability to produce sufficient actionable intelligence on their own are reluctant to collaborate.

The immediacy of the threat posed by armed groups is itself a form of coercion; the nearer or greater the presence of danger, the greater the necessity for addressing its source promptly. Since the threat is most pressing for the tactical or operational units addressing it directly, at this level—irrespective of size or composition—JIATFs are more likely to form and flourish. These JIATFs have more incentives on a more regular basis to collaborate to produce a safe and secure environment than strategic JIATFs (those located at a theater command center or in a domestic capital city). The latter may not experience the immediacy of the threat on so frequent a basis, which would explain why outside coercion—like theater Commander or Executive intervention—would be necessary to encourage collaboration.

The size of a JIATF also impacts its effectiveness. Olson's arguments suggest that smaller JIATFs should operate more efficiently and produce more actionable intelligence than large JIATFs because 1) overcoming consensus requirements is easier for smaller groups, 2) larger JIATFs would

assume the properties of Olson's large groups in that individual members lack sufficient incentive to act and 3) the attraction of producing security is greater for smaller than larger groups. Since tactical-operational level JIATFs tend to be smaller in size than at other levels of war, they would, in theory, be most likely to encourage cooperation. And, recalling that smaller groups are more likely to produce the good without outside coercion and that larger organizations require outside coercion for collaboration, we would expect operational-level and some theater-level JIATFs to form and efficiently produce security, while the larger, strategic-level JIATFs would not do so in the absence of some coercive mechanism.

### **Maintaining JIATF Membership—A Prisoner's Dilemma and a Principal Agent Problem**

Olson's collective action problem for nonmarket goods outlines the conditions under which JIATFs are more likely to form without coercion and efficiently produce security. However, his model fails to explain the circumstances under which individual agencies choose to participate or abstain from the JIATF. Participating agencies and their representatives face two key quandaries in this decision: a prisoner's dilemma and a principal-agent problem.

Agencies participating in JIATFs typically confront a prisoner's dilemma when deciding whether or not to participate in a JIATF and, after joining, whether or not to contribute. That is, agencies weigh the benefits and risks of cooperating or defecting, and choose the option that provides the greatest benefit with the lowest amount of risk. As discussed in the previous section, defection from JIATFs yields a higher individual payoff than cooperation for some participating organizations. This is particularly true when an agency participating in the JIATF garners the intelligence, analysis, and recommendations from JIATF meetings and subsequently conducts its own operations against an armed group or its affiliates. That agency can then claim full credit for all aspects of the operation and its outcome. Although in such cases the necessary operation did, in fact, occur, collaboration with other agencies in a JIATF setting might have resulted in a more optimal production of security, even if the organization—rather than individual groups—gets credit for the operation. Furthermore, the agency that acted independently faces only reputational costs within the JIATF itself, not with its own agency or in the community as a whole. Arguably, the JIATF could refuse to admit that agency in the future, but reducing membership would likely be counterproductive to both the JIATF and the agency in question.

The prisoner's dilemma illustrates why physical distance between agency and JIATF is important. In cases where obtaining credit for operations may directly enhance an agency's budget or other key resource allocations, the prisoner's dilemma is particularly prevalent. Because budget and key resource distribution occurs most frequently at the strategic level—theater and strategic-level JIATFs tend to be less visible to more important senior agency and political leadership—the lure of defection from JIATFs tends to be greater at higher echelons of conflict. Therefore, we would expect the attractions of collaboration to be greater (and the prospective benefits derived from defection to be minimal) at the tactical-operational and theater levels than at the strategic level. Furthermore, more immediate threats tend to influence individual agency cost-benefit analyses such that the balance between providing collective security and obtaining credit for individual achievements shifts in favor of the former. The immediacy of the threat is, once again, an important factor in determining whether each individual agency's prisoner's dilemma situation results in defection or cooperation.

Finally, JIATF participation is also a function of a principal-agent problem (Lane). In JIATFs, each agency participating is represented by an individual or individuals whose degree of autonomy depends on their agency and the mission of their assigned JIATF. Principals (the intelligence and security agencies) direct their agents (individual representatives on JIATFs) on how to conduct themselves in a joint working environment, and in this case, discourage agents from reciprocating fully with members of other organization. Therefore, agencies that delegate a substantial amount of authority to their representatives will produce agents more likely to collaborate in JIATFs because they have the leeway to do so—these representatives are also more subject to local rather than agency-loyalty pressures. The less authority the agent has from the principal, the less likely that agent is to make substantive contributions in a JIATF environment; these agents will feel more pressured to conform with the agency's interests than to act in the JIATF's interests.

Incentives and disincentives for collaborating are different for each member of the JIATF, as are the sources of pressure. For the military and government agencies, the pay scales of most employees are fixed, so strict monetary incentives and disincentives may not be available to the principals for use. Instead, the agency can provide non-monetary rewards such as promotions and agency-specific awards as incentives for employees to serve agency interests. Potential disincentives include job stagnation, verbal or written reprimands, and, in extreme cases, cutting off the employee from



the agency's materials and influence.

The existence of the principal-agent problem illustrates another reason why physical or emotional distance between agency and its representative on a JIATF matters. Because the pressure to conform with agency requirements is greater the closer one is to that agency, agents are more likely to succumb to that pressure. At lower-level JIATFs, however, the agency does not have the oversight or physical control over the agent that it might at more visible levels of war.

## TWO STRUCTURAL CAPACITY REQUIREMENTS

The collective action problem, prisoner's dilemma, and principal-agent models demonstrate some causes of lack-of-will related challenges to JIATFs. Overcoming these problems, however, is not sufficient. Even if different agencies have the will to form and participate in JIATFs, structural problems can still inhibit JIATF operations. Specifically, functional JIATFs require an overall agency-in-charge and a capability to turn the intelligence into successful operations to counter armed groups.

To function properly, JIATFs require a lead personality or agency. Leaders or agencies-in-charge are necessary to maintain the focus and direction of JIATF efforts and to resolve any data collection conflicts or analytical or operational disputes. Such leaders may emerge naturally among members by virtue of resources or capabilities or via government-directed efforts depending on the size, mission, and visibility of the JIATF. When that authority is absent, the ability to organize meetings and collection efforts, assign responsibilities for collection, analysis, and action, and to act as a clearinghouse for all decisions deteriorates, and JIATF operations can stagnate and render the entire effort ineffective (The 9/11 Commission Report 2004, 400). Such negative results may also occur if competition for leadership arises. In such cases, agencies may fall back on their own resources and withdraw from collaborative efforts in an endeavor to emerge as the preeminent agency.

JIATFs also require operational arms to maintain their relevance as organizations. A JIATF that only collects, reviews, and analyzes intelligence is little more than a glorified analytical cell; if the analysis does not translate to action or, at a minimum, is not integrated into the decision-making process addressing the armed group challenges, it quickly becomes expendable. Furthermore, if agencies and their representatives believe the JIATF is having little or no impact on operations, their support for the organization will dwindle and, once again, agencies will revert to independent operations (Wilson, 2007).

## COMBATING ARMED GROUPS IN JIATF-BOSNIA AND JIATF-MOSUL IN MOSUL, IRAQ

Although Bosnia and Iraq were and are very different conflicts, both involved countering armed groups that demanded a collaborative effort to address. My personal experiences on the theater-level Bosnia JIATF from 2001 to 2002 and in the operational-level JIATF in Mosul, Iraq, illustrated successful collaborative intelligence efforts to counter armed groups. A general account of those experiences follows.

### **Bosnia Post-9/11 (2001-2002)**

Bosnia had few religious extremists prior to 1992. During the Bosnian War, many foreign Islamic fighters or *mujahedin* answered the pleas of the Bosniac community for assistance in combating the Serb nationalists who sought to eradicate them. At the conclusion of the conflict, some of these mujahedin- decided to settle permanently in Bosnia, and many married local women and integrated with various local communities. Other mujahedin and the armed groups and charitable organizations that sponsored their travel and arms had a different idea in mind. Even before 9/11, U.S. military and civilian agencies—along with their coalition partners—recognized that Bosnia was probably being used as a transit point for members of Islamic extremist armed groups transiting to and from the Middle East and Europe as part of planned operations and related logistical activities. The immediacy of this threat, however, did not become apparent until after 9/11, when U.S. intelligence and security agencies decided to take action.

At the time of the 9/11 attacks, U.S. intelligence agencies and some U.S. and coalition forces were already involved in a collaborative intelligence and targeting effort; however, the mission of that organization had nothing to do with Islamic extremists. In response to the perceived, more immediate threat posed by terrorism, Lieutenant General (LTG) John Sylvester, commander of the Stabilization Forces (SFOR) in Bosnia at that time, and his deputy for operations, then-Brigadier General David Petraeus, decided to build a new organization out of this entity to develop actionable intelligence on Islamic extremists and their associated organizations in Bosnia. The outcome was the establishment of Bosnia's first Joint Inter-Agency Task Force for Combating Terrorism (JIATF-CT).

In addition to the agencies already working collaboratively, LTG Sylvester coordinated with the U.S. Ambassador in Sarajevo and other key personnel at the U.S. Embassy to encourage agencies there to join the effort. The first JIATF-CT meeting was held at the U.S. National Intelligence

Cell at Camp Butmir in Sarajevo in late September 2001. Although LTG Sylvester was nominally in charge of these meetings, there was substantial participation from key U.S. intelligence agencies, U.S. military intelligence analysts, and U.S. special operations personnel. Other players included representatives from the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the National Security Agency, and the SFOR Document Exploitation team. Although multi-national representatives did not attend the JIATF meetings due to classification issues, U.S. members of the JIATF-CT coordinated with operational elements organic to SFOR to support JIATF intelligence collection requirements and conduct operations based on JIATF-produced actionable intelligence. Multi-national participants included SFOR partner law enforcement, intelligence, and operational representatives from four different countries.

As the organization evolved and began to take action on some of the collaborative intelligence materials and analysis, it expanded to include additional capabilities and agencies interested in the Bosnian problem-set. During the meetings, each intelligence agency provided its own, unique collection capabilities and reporting and, as gaps in collection or operational abilities emerged, new agencies were recruited to join the effort. After the debacle in which six Bosnian citizens of Middle Eastern descent were sent to the detention center at Guantanamo Bay, the JIATF gained an information operations representative whose job was to work with the U.S. Embassy in managing prospective negative fallout from JIATF operations. Other additions included members of the SFOR legal team, two personnel from the U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control, a U.S. Interpol liaison, and members of the Department of Homeland Security's Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (BICE). The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) identified a link between material that JIATF-Bosnia was unearthing in its operations and related post-9/11 investigations against suspected armed group members and charitable organizations in the United States. They, too, sent representatives to work with members of the JIATF.

Like its composition, the scope and capabilities of JIATF-Bosnia developed in response to situational needs. Initially, the threat was perceived to be great enough such that meetings were held on a daily or as-needed basis. Over time as SFOR and its partners began to address the armed group threat, the number of meetings per week dropped to two and, eventually, one. Although meetings were held only weekly, formal and informal coordination between all agencies remained throughout the time the JIATF functioned.

JIATF-Bosnia may have been one of the first successful JIATFs to counter armed groups post-9/11. Between September 2001 and August 2002, JIATF-Bosnia produced actionable intelligence on individual foreign *mujahedin* in Bosnia suspected of links to various Middle East Islamic Extremist armed groups and three Islamic charities that had proven links to extremist or terrorist activities including the Saudi-based World Association of Muslim Youth, Al Harymain nongovernmental organizations and the Benevolence International Foundation (BIF). The BIF operation was one of the more important successes as the Bosnian branch provided key evidence linking the U.S.-based branch and the organization's founder, En'nam Arnout, directly to Osama Bin Ladin. In addition to these operations, JIATF-Bosnia personnel developed a functioning watch-list and borders watch system to check suspects moving in and out of the country at various points of entry. These operations and others effectively made Bosnia a much less permissive environment for Islamic extremists and charities to either operate in the country or move easily through it. By August 2002, intelligence and open-source reporting indicated that some armed groups were looking to avoid Bosnia rather than use it.

### **JIATF-Mosul in Mosul, Iraq, 2003-2004**

Few of the U.S and coalition force units that invaded Iraq in 2003 spent the bulk of their time completing the missions for which they originally planned and prepared. Much to its surprise, the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division found itself based in Mosul, Iraq, in April 2003, responsible for Iraq's four northernmost provinces: Ninawah, Dahuk, Sulaymaniyah, and Irbil. While working to learn about a region unfamiliar to them, the 101<sup>st</sup> welcomed personnel from different U.S military and civilian organizations who arrived to provide additional support. In addition, local Iraqi Kurdish and Arab political parties offered the support of their intelligence and security services (militias in some cases) to help ensure stability and security for Northern Iraq's citizens.

The post-invasion "honeymoon" period was short-lived. Although it was apparent to many of the 101<sup>st</sup> and civilian intelligence personnel that some form of underground resistance was emerging, the type, nature, and capabilities of the different organization associated with it were initially unclear. In addition, U.S. military and the U.S. and Iraqi intelligence and security organizations operating in the region were running independent operations and independent analyses, resulting in overlapping reporting as well as substantial collection and operational gaps. Furthermore, despite the fact that U.S. special operations forces and other "special" elements

operating in the area did their best to coordinate with ground forces, the leaders of the different elements were nevertheless concerned about the potential for incidents of fratricide. At that time, barriers to intelligence collaboration—aside from institutional culture—included communications difficulties, lack of joint databases or alternate technical abilities for different systems to “speak” to one and other, physical distance between the headquarters of different organizations, and a gradually worsening security situation that inhibited movement of U.S. elements located outside of the 101<sup>st</sup> Division compounds. Despite these barriers, some informal and relatively effective intelligence sharing and operational collaboration was taking place informally, resulting in joint operations to erode the Al Rifah armed group and the mission to capture or kill Saddam Hussein’s sons in July 2003.

As the security situation deteriorated, the absence of a more formal coordination mechanism became more clearly apparent. Using JIATF-Bosnia as a model, the Division Commander, then Major General Petraeus, directed his staff to develop a JIATF-like body in conjunction with the other intelligence and security services operating in the area in early September 2003. According to an unclassified briefing, the purpose of the JIATF was to:

...develop a mechanism to focus [the] intelligence effort, coordinate / deconflict 101<sup>st</sup> Division and U.S. national assets, fuse intelligence, and coordinate coalition operations in order to facilitate joint targeting and, in so doing, create an environment inhospitable to terrorists (JIATF-Mosul briefing 2003).

The structure of JIATF-Mosul differed somewhat from JIATF-Bosnia for several reasons. First, as the preeminent presence in the region, the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division had the greatest amount of resources on the ground, placing it in a position of automatic leader for any JIATF-like body. Secondly, with two exceptions, the bulk of the U.S. agencies operating in Mosul and the northern region had a very small number of personnel based at the Division headquarters, substantially improving communication between those agencies and the U.S. military. Thirdly, the bulk of the national collection assets were focused on areas other than Mosul because the environment in Mosul was considered “stable” compared to the more dangerous areas of Iraq like Al Anbar and Baghdad; therefore, national-level assets did not play nearly as great a role in collection efforts. Lastly, unlike the Bosnian Ministry of Interior, which was somewhat unified in the face of a perceived common enemy, the local Iraqi intelligence and security

services and militias were diverse and loyal to a specific ethno-religious and political group, making their reporting as well as their viability as operational elements questionable.

Notwithstanding these differences and the new challenges associated with them, JIATF-Mosul achieved some successes. The first official JIATF-Mosul meeting occurred at the end of September 2003 with personnel from all agencies operating in Mosul attending. Subsequent meetings occurred on a weekly or as-needed basis. From October 2003 until the 101<sup>st</sup> relief-in-place with Task Force Olympia in late January 2004, JIATF-North activities resulted in at least thirteen major joint operations to address individual key targets and some armed groups including former Ba'athists, Ansar al Islam, and local criminal organizations. Like the Bosnia JIATF, JIATF-Mosul also served as a mechanism through which intelligence agencies could coordinate directly and informally with the Brigade Combat Team (BCT) commanders, which led to some additional successes, including one operation that addressed twenty-three targets simultaneously. Although there were some coordination challenges with these latter missions, the results were positive. By February 2004, JIATF-Mosul had not only conducted successful operations, but had developed a positive forum for intelligence coordination as successive units and agencies rotated in and out of theater.

### **A Summary of Successes**

Despite the fact that they evolved at different levels of war, JIATF-Bosnia and JIATF-Mosul exhibited the characteristics of successful JIATFs. Both JIATFs were formed in response to a recognized, immediate threat and challenges associated with it. Both were comparatively small organizations with no more than a handful of representatives from each participating agency, and both had sufficient physical and emotional distance between principal and agent to prevent agency interests from superseding those of the JIAFT. Finally, both organizations had clear leaders that emerged informally as the situation developed, and multiple operational arms by which to act on intelligence. In addition to these features, both JIATFs proved very flexible in response to agencies' desire to participate as well as the emerging needs of the situation. These traits led to both operational and theater-level successes against armed group in increasingly complex environments.

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## PROSPECTIVE CHALLENGES WITH U.S. THEATER AND STRATEGIC-LEVEL JIATFs

There are circumstances in which JIATFs will lose relevance or fail outright. At higher levels of war, the number of players in JIATFs increases and the distance between principal and agent is reduced. In addition, the threat often does not seem as severe, and intelligence can often become politicized depending on the nature and mission of the JIATF in question. These factors contribute to the breakdown of collaboration and, in some cases, lead to the dissolution of collaborative efforts. While I did not personally participate in the Baghdad-based Multinational Force Iraq JIATF (MNF-I JIATF) or the NCTC at the national level, my colleagues serving on the former provided some insights on why that JIATF was problematic. I use those lessons and observations from my experiences on functional JIATFs to make some preliminary suggestions about the problems likely to arise for the NCTC.

### **MNF-I JIATF, 2004-2005**

Iraq's first theater-level JIATF may be doomed to fail. The element that eventually became MNF-I JIATF was an extension of the USNIC in Baghdad in conjunction with Coalition Joint Task Force (CJTF) intelligence elements. After General George Casey assumed command of MNF-I in June of 2004, he and his Intelligence Officer, Major General Barbara Fast, coordinated with the U.S. intelligence agencies in Iraq to develop the MNF-I JIATF. Participating agencies included the Office of Regional Affairs, FBI, BICE the Defense HUMINT service, and members of some foreign intelligence and security services, among others.

From the beginning this JIATF was fraught with lack-of-will challenges. Although the number of representatives on the JIATF was small, the large number of agencies participating made it difficult to organize and achieve consensus on various analyses. In addition, at the time the JIATF was formed, participants were largely confined to their base camp at Baghdad International Airport; rarely did the analysts have the opportunity to experience first hand the threat presented by armed groups. Perhaps the greatest impediment to cooperation, however, was the short distance between agency and representative. Although the JIATF was technically a separate entity, military analysts working on or with the JIATF were closely tied to members of the MNF-I or Corps-level intelligence cells. The JIATF, as an organization not entirely composed of military personnel, was frowned upon by some of the members of the military

intelligence community. Moreover, because of the visibility of the Iraq War in the United States, U.S. national intelligence agencies developed large, often politically-charged presences in Baghdad. Despite having different missions, each agency was struggling to make itself germane, and did not consider JIATF participation to be a primary objective. For their part, the military and civilian agents working on the JIATF struggled to make substantive contributions to the group amid resistance and pressure from their respective agencies.

The MNF-I JIATF also lacked the structural elements necessary to maintain its relevance.

Although it was formed and operated by U.S. military personnel, there was no "official" leadership to proctor JIATF meetings and to enforce collaboration. Furthermore, the JIATF was not directly linked to operations. While JIATF products were supposed to lead to operations, there was no guarantee that they would actually do so, and the personnel serving on the JIATF often wondered about the true purpose of the organization and their work on it.

### **The National Counter-Terrorism Center (CTC) 2004-2005.**

In August of 2004, the President established the National Counter-Terrorism Center (NCTC). Congress codified the NCTC in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act in December 2004, and they placed the NCTC under the office of the Director of National Intelligence. According to its website, the official purpose of the NCTC was to "serve as the primary organization...for integrating and analyzing all intelligence pertaining to terrorism and counterterrorism ... and to conduct strategic operational planning by integrating all instruments of national power." With this mission, the NCTC became the preeminent U.S. organization for collecting, fusing, and operationalizing actionable intelligence against armed groups that threatened U.S. citizens and interests.

As a strategic-level JIATF, the NCTC likely suffers from the same lack-of-will challenges as the MNF-I JIATF, though at a much higher level with potentially more dire consequences. The number of agencies involved at the national level likely makes consensus on intelligence analysis and operations extremely difficult to achieve. In addition, the distance between agent and principal is almost non-existent, and organizational politics and pressure could easily overcome efforts to collaborate by promoting a reluctance to share information in the interest of preserving agency premiums on specific types of intelligence. Lastly, as noted by a former member of the DNI, "politicization of intelligence [at the national level] is a large part of the



problem” (Hutchings 2005). Even if the NCTC produced focused, collaborative analysis, there is always the risk that the analysis would become used for purposes other than to guarantee the security of the nation.

The NCTC also has some structural problems. As noted by the 9/11 Commission report authors, “while joint and inter-agency work has increased substantially in the National Intelligence Community since 9/11, there seems to be no one at the head of the effort” (*The 9/11 Commission Report 2004*, 400–401). Although the DNI is the individual who is overall in charge, there is no one body of individuals vested with decision-making power such that their dictates override individual agency actions. Agencies are still required to run their own day-to-day operations, and there is no clear delineation between individual agency national missions and NCTC missions. And, although the mission of the NCTC is supposed to be operational in nature, national-level intelligence analysis is often so broad that developing actionable intelligence for specific operations is very difficult.

## CONCLUSION—OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These cases indicate that JIATF success—-as measured by its ability to conduct of operations and reduce threats--at any level is dependent on several key factors. Those include—but are not limited to—the presence of an immediate threat or a sense of urgency about the threat, a small number of members sitting on a JIATF, physical and emotional distance between agency headquarters and the JIATF, a clear leader or source of authority for JIATF meetings and related activity, and the existence of an operational arm. Some other JIATF successes or beneficial side-effects—such as improved coordination between agencies, establishment of better and more lasting working relationships, and productive brainstorming sessions—are often not so obvious and can be obscured by operational failures.

There is another important aspect of JIATFs that at times may trump—for better or worse—the factors that drive success or failure of JIATFs: the human element. Personalities are a crucial reason why JIATFs function or fail to do so. Technical collaboration efforts aside, the involvement of each agent in JIATFs in Bosnia and Iraq—and likely others as well—was and still is intensely personal. If personalities clash, participants may be unable to cooperate. Depending on the role of the person in the JIATF, positive or negative attitudes can buoy or sink the JIATF as a whole. This is especially true with ad-hoc JIATFs (those that are not formed via outside inducement), as the force of personalities initiates and fuses

JIATFs in those cases. Furthermore, "good personalities can overcome bad structures [but] they should not have to" (The 9/11 Commission Report 2004, 399). That is, strong committed personalities can make a JIATF work even in the absence of the structural requirements discussed earlier in the paper, though good personalities function best when they do not have other obstacles to overcome. Disruptive or ego-centric personalities can derail an entire JIATF effort depending on their position, agency, and timing. Unlike the other challenges discussed in this document, however, addressing personality-related issues requires a more long-term approach to how different agencies and the military develop their people (as discussed in the recommendations below); in the short-term, only good, strong personalities can prevail in the face of bad ones, and the presence of the former in JIATFs is almost entirely dependent on chance.

Addressing some of the will and structural problems is not as straightforward as identifying them. One reason is that absent constant, significant attacks or the threat of them—which would suggest the JIATF is not functioning well to begin with—it is difficult to maintain a sense of urgency during long lulls between attacks. This is a major concern given that lulls tend to signify that planning and preparations may be underway for a new attack. In addition, although smaller JIATFs appear to function better in some cases—especially at the strategic level—reducing the size of a JIATF may be impractical. The same is true for is reducing the physical and emotional distance between principal and agent at the national level as national agencies will almost always be in close proximity to any JIATF to which they send representatives. Nevertheless, there are some ways to ensure that intelligence collaboration at all levels of war has positive outcomes, even if those outcomes are not readily apparent or measurable.

***Recommendation 1: Make JIATFs at the operational and theater-levels part of U.S. operational doctrine.*** At present, there are limited circumstances under which ad-hoc JIATFs form at the operational and theater levels of war. By integrating JIATF formation into U.S. joint operational doctrine (the established procedures by which the U.S. conducts operations), the U.S. can guarantee that intelligence and security agencies on the ground 1) are ordered to work together, thus providing a source of outside coercion to encourage cooperation, and 2) advocate joint work in other spheres of military and civil-military operations.

***Recommendation 2: Prescribe leaders for JIATFs at all levels and ensure that they are linked directly to an operational arm or another purpose for***

*which there are tangible outcomes.* This recommendation addresses the two main structural challenges that can inhibit cooperation. Establishing leadership is absolutely critical for both coordination and collaboration purposes. Empowering a leader might present difficulties in a politically-charged environment, but, once the leadership (and penalties for ignoring it) are established, there will be a propensity towards acceptance in general. As previously discussed, a national-level operational arm in the tactical sense is neither feasible nor advisable. However, the “operational” component of the NCTC or other such entities could be the agent for setting national priorities for intelligence collection and developing contingency planning to either prevent or prepare for managing larger-scale threats to national security. Examples of this type of “operation” include preventing or developing a consequence management plan for weapons of mass destruction-related attacks, and addressing rogue state and non-state actors with the capability to conduct national-level attacks.

*Recommendation 3: Modify the mission of strategic-level JIATFs to encourage cooperation.* As discussed, it is impractical to expect that theater and national-levels JIATFs—depending on the circumstances—will remain as focused on operations and collaboration as tactical-operational JIATFs. In addition to modifying the mission of these JIATFs to be more guidance- and less operation-oriented, these organizations should also promote improved relationships between the different agencies and serve as a conduit for other collaborative endeavors by providing a medium for networking and cross-talk between individuals and agencies. The mission statements of these JIATFs should include statements that establish improved relationships as a key objective. Networking coupled with improved coordination could mitigate the effects of disruptive personalities while simultaneously removing any physical and some institutional barriers to collaborative work.

*Recommendation 4: Encourage a change in organizational culture by restructuring incentives for military and civilian intelligence agencies and their personnel.* The purpose of this recommendation is to produce personnel who will be good team players. Some personalities facilitate cooperation and promote a team-environment naturally. It is rare, however, that these personalities emerge without some previous positive team experiences or other visible incentives for teamwork. Non-cooperative personalities frequently emerge because there are greater incentives for

individual achievements than team achievements. This recommendation has two potential positive outcomes: 1) in the short term, JIATF players have more incentive to cooperate because the awards are for team—rather than individual—achievements, and 2) individuals who work on or around agencies that reward based on group accomplishments will evolve into personalities who are more inclined to be team players.

These recommendations are far from all-inclusive but provide a baseline for establishing an environment in the intelligence community that both promotes cooperation and recognizes what different entities at different levels of war can reasonably be expected to achieve. Impediments to cooperation may persist, but global threats demand that we take steps toward teamwork and national intelligence solidarity.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> I use the term “Long War” to refer to the “War on Terror.” Although the terminology is not yet mainstream, “Long War” is becoming more common a term for those who believe the conflict is much more than a war on terror. I personally make the distinction between terrorism as a tactic and the globalized insurgency we face in the Long War.
- <sup>2</sup> In no way does this work suggest that JIATFs are a “new” entity. Inter-agency task forces have been in existence in the U.S. and abroad, particularly in the area of counter-narcotics, for a number of years. What is unique about these particular JIATFs discussed here is that they emerged post-9/11.
- <sup>3</sup> I loosely used the authors’ definitions of operational, tactical, and strategic levels of war to describe the different levels of a conflict, a distinction that becomes more important as this paper continues. For purposes of this paper, the “tactical” level involves individual-on-individual encounters, the “operational” level refers to unit-on-unit encounters, the “theater” level refers to a theater of operations for a state and the “strategic” level refers to the national level. Also, for purposes of this paper, I refer only to JIATFs developed for the purpose of combating armed groups, although there are other missions for which a JIATF could be employed.
- <sup>4</sup> This refers specifically to intelligence-JIATFs (those formed by different intelligence agencies and entities) designed to combat armed groups, most often those associated with Islamic extremism both domestically and abroad.
- <sup>5</sup> All-source intelligence is essentially intelligence that comes from multiple sources; it combines different elements of human intelligence, signals intelligence, imagery intelligence, and open-source intelligence. The definition of all-source intelligence used here is that described in the “Intelligence” section of U.S. Army Field Manual 2.0.

- <sup>6</sup> The 9/11 Commission Report recommends combining the intelligence and operational planning functions in a national, civilian-led operational JIATF. My experiences on JIATFs have been such that I have observed a need for all of these functions in addition to those recommended by the commission report (and I have also served on JIATF that fulfilled these functions).
- <sup>7</sup> I served as a fusion analyst in a theater-level JIATF in Bosnia from 2001-2002 and in Mosul, Iraq from 2003-2004. I also worked closely with colleagues and visited the MNF-I JIATF in Baghdad, Iraq, in 2004-2005. Although I have some sense of ownership for these observations, they are also independently shared in part or in whole by many of my superiors and colleagues who worked on or with these organizations.
- <sup>8</sup> Although Olson's work discusses the provision of public goods by collective action, on page 16 he notes that "there is no suggestion here that...other organizations provide only public or collective goods." It is not, therefore, necessary that the "good" produced from collaboration be a public good or one that is available to anyone remotely involved with the group.
- <sup>9</sup> In a discussion of the Cournot principal, Olson points out that groups attempting to produce nonmarket goods evaluate "whether the total benefit [they] would get from providing some amount of the collective good would exceed the total cost of [producing] that amount of the good."
- <sup>10</sup> In the basic principal-agent problem, the "principal"—usually the employer or government—delegates responsibility and authority to an "agent" (an employee or interest group). The principal assumes risk in delegating some of its authority to an agent, but cannot achieve overarching objectives sans that delegation. In order to ensure that his directives are carried out, the principal has to compensate the agent or provide incentives such that the agent believes the optimal outcome is to comply with the principal's wishes. If the agent assesses that acting in the common interest provides a more optimal outcome than acting in the principal's interests, they are more likely to choose in favor of the former.
- <sup>11</sup> Although not discussed in depth here, the rank or grade of the individual agent in question has a direct impact on the agent's leeway and ability to "play with others" – a member of former and current JIATFs suggested that the ranks of Captain and Major in the military or GS 13/14 in the U.S. Department of Defense have the most leeway because they are senior enough to get various tasks accomplished while remaining junior enough to avoid scrutiny.
- <sup>12</sup> This assessment is based on my own observations of operational and theater-level JIATFs in Bosnia and Iraq discussed in the next section.
- <sup>13</sup> The authors describe how national intelligence-sharing was ineffective because... "no one was firmly in charge of managing the case and able to draw relevant intelligence from anywhere in the government...assign responsibilities across

agencies (foreign or domestic), track progress, and quickly bring obstacles up to the level where they could be resolved. Responsibility and accountability were diffuse.”

- <sup>14</sup> In forward-deployed JIATFs, such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. military and DoD tend to act as the “preeminent” agency by virtue of their larger presence on the ground and, hence, more resources available on both the intelligence and operational side.
- <sup>15</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Wilson was on the 101st Division planning staff as the Chief Planner from 2003–2004, and he and I discussed these structural requirements both at the time and in reviewing the efforts of JIATF-Mosul. We concurred that these requirements are essential to making a functional, relevant, JIATF.
- <sup>16</sup> At the time I arrived in Bosnia in October 2001, the history contained in this paragraph was common knowledge to the members of SFOR working in the intelligence field. One of my colleagues advised that Evan Kohlman’s works on Bosnia cover this history in greater depth.
- <sup>17</sup> More information on BIF is available at [http://www.cooperativeresearch.org/entity.jsp?entity=benevolence\\_international\\_foundation](http://www.cooperativeresearch.org/entity.jsp?entity=benevolence_international_foundation).
- <sup>18</sup> The “Al Rifah” organization was comprised largely of former Ba’athists who formed an armed group that began operating in Mosul shortly after the fall of the Iraqi Regime. The operations against the Al Rifah organization and Uday and Qusay Hussein combined intelligence collection and fusion efforts from the 101st HUMINT collectors and fusion analysts, and operational support from various personnel.
- <sup>19</sup> This briefing was developed by 101st Division ACE personnel in conjunction with the Division Planning Staff in the Integrated Effects Working Group, September–October 2003, based on a similar briefing for JIATF-Bosnia developed by Colonel Michael Meese in Bosnia in 2001–2002.
- <sup>20</sup> This success was short-lived, but the dissolution of the JIATF was not a function of the players at that time or the agencies involved.
- <sup>21</sup> The material about the MNF-I JIATF was garnered from discussions with two JIATF members, Lieutenant Joseph Decie and Lieutenant Colonel Michael Kaffka, both of whom were military analysts and both veterans of the Bosnia-JIATF. The conversations took place from July –September 2004. I have no personal experiences on this JIATF.
- <sup>22</sup> It is rare that organizations are recognized for team achievement. While the U.S. military does have unit awards for unit achievement, JIATFs are not among recognized military units. This is particularly problematic for ad-hoc JIATFs. Intelligence agencies, too, tend to emphasize individual awards over team awards. It may be possible, for example, for the unit to which a JIATF answers to authorize awards to an entire JIATF that is successful, keeping in mind that

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each individual agency must also recognize the award for its participants once those JIATF members return to their agency.

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