JOINT INTERAGENCY COORDINATION GROUPS (JIACGS),
A TEMPORARY SOLUTION TO A LONG TERM REQUIREMENT

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This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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**Joint Interagency Coordination Groups (JIACGs), A Temporary Solution to a Long Term Requirement**

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**Availability Statement:**
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

**Security Classification:**
- Report: Unclassified
- Abstract: Unclassified
- This Page: Unclassified

**Abstract:**
See attached file.
ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: LTC Terry R. Sopher, Jr.

TITLE: Joint Interagency Coordination Groups (JIACGs), A Temporary Solution to a Long Term Requirement

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 19 March 2004  PAGES: 22  CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

The value of JIACGs at the Combatant Commands has been proven to the Department of Defense, the Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Central Intelligence Agency, U.S. Customs Service, and Department of State. The authority and understandings that established JIACGs are sufficient. What remains problematic, and has been the single largest contributor to periods of less than optimal interagency coordination, are the missing means - people. The type of personnel required in the JIACGs cannot be grown overnight; however, they can be groomed and trained. They must be assigned for a period of not less than two years, and they require some education in the interagency process. To task the agencies and departments to provide this out of hide assures non-compliance. To provide the departments and agencies with a specific means/incentive to man/participate in the JIACGs would go a long way in ensuring interagency coordination at the Combatant Commands in support of national security interests.
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JOINT INTERAGENCY COORDINATION GROUPS (JIACGS), A TEMPORARY SOLUTION TO A LONG TERM REQUIREMENT

Joint Interagency Coordination Groups (JIACGs) operating within the Department of Defense (DoD) at the Combatant Commands following September 11, 2001, have demonstrated that unprecedented success can be achieved when the elements of national power are coordinated and integrated together towards national strategic objectives. While JIACGs were born out of necessity to fight the Global War on Terror, they are inherently a temporary solution to a long-term requirement. Much like the changes made in the military out of necessity by the Goldwater-Nichols Act, the DoD and the other government agencies and departments must transform how they coordinate their resources, authorities and efforts in support of national strategic objectives. JIACGs may achieve an enduring future if they can evolve beyond the temporary institutional, bureaucratic and funding policies with which they were originally constrained. This paper will review the background that led to the creation of JIACGs, and will use a case study of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM to examine US Government agencies’ reaction to the JIACG concept, alternatives proposed to the JIACG and the experiences of USCENTCOM in implementing the JIACG. The conclusions drawn from the case study will be further explored in an effort to discern practical recommendations that may ensure an enduring, effective interagency process for complex contingencies and plans.

BACKGROUND

The United States Government uses the four elements of national power—diplomatic, informational, military and economic to address issues and threats to national security from state and non-state actors. Theoretically, these elements of national power may be employed individually, sequentially, in combinations or simultaneously by the government in proportioned response to a given situation. The United States Government employs these elements of national power via government agencies that are assigned specific responsibilities, authorities and capabilities.

Many of these agencies have overlapping responsibilities when it comes to application of elements of national power. While the Department of State is principally responsible for the diplomatic element, other agencies and departments like the Department of Commerce may play a supporting role in pursuit of diplomatic objectives. The informational element of national power is not controlled by any one agency but may be carried out by a multitude of agencies depending on the message the United States Government wants to communicate and the audience it wishes to reach. The DoD is primarily responsible for the military instrument of
national power, but other agencies support or assist the DoD’s military efforts. Finally, the Department of Treasury, Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, and Department of Justice and others all have the ability to effect aspects of the economic element of national power.

The challenge for our government lies not only in determining which element(s) of power to apply to a given national security issue, but also in how best to integrate and coordinate the numerous individual agencies’ efforts synergistically towards accomplishing the broad United States strategic objectives.

The requirement for agencies and departments of the United States Government to coordinate their policies and activities in support of United States strategic objectives is not new. It really began with the National Security Act of 1947, which created the National Security Council (NSC) to “Advise the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to the national security so as to enable the military services and other departments and agencies of the Government to cooperate more effectively in matters involving national security.”

The degree to which interagency coordination has been conducted and the effectiveness of it has varied considerably over the last 50 years. Presidential Decision Directive 56 (PDD 56) was an effort to increase the effectiveness of interagency coordination by addressing the need for decisive authority (who is in charge), a balance between institutional cultures, and approaches and requirements for planning. Specifically Presidential Decision Directive 56 seeks to reduce clashes between civilian and military methods, incorporate into the interagency process proven planning processes and implementation mechanisms, and address the lack of training and expertise in interagency work across the government. The intent of Presidential Decision Directive 56 is to establish management practices to achieve unity of effort among United States Government agencies and international organizations engaged in complex contingency operations. To ensure unity of effort in interagency coordination, Presidential Decision Directive 56 requires all agencies to review their legislative and budget authorities for supporting complex contingency operations and where such authorities are inadequate to fund an agency’s mission and operations in complex contingencies, propose legislative and budgetary solutions.

After PDD 56, the DoD’s participation in this interagency process included routine participation in the interagency process at the Principles, Deputies, and Policy Coordinating Committees (PCC) levels. Normally, the Joint Staff Director of Plans and Policy’s (J-5) staff facilitated interagency coordination issues for the Combatant Commanders’ strategic and
operational plans and operations. This was often a long, grueling and incomplete process resulting in less than fully coordinated US government efforts and plans. Agencies often decided not to participate or to non-concur with a given plan as a means of blocking a policy or issue that was not supported by their organization.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the US Government response directed by the President necessitated a significantly less centralized and less bureaucratic interagency process to ensure the rapid combined application of all the elements of national power against Al Qaida and other terrorist groups with global reach. In February of 2001, President Bush issued National Security Presidential Directive 1 (NSPD1). It assigned oversight of ongoing working groups to provide coordination for ongoing operations. The DoD was keenly aware of the need to integrate and synchronize its military strategy with the resources and capabilities extant in the other government agencies, especially in light of the events of 11 September, the prior efforts at interagency coordination, and the policy end-state of defeating terrorism. The question at the time was how best to accomplish this.

CASE STUDY – OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

The DoD, as the lead federal agency, is responsible for translating the national strategy for the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) into a military strategy, and then to effect interagency coordination and integration of the strategy with the other elements of national power. To accomplish this responsibility, the DoD tasks the Combatant Commands to develop campaign plans for their Areas of Responsibility. United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) as the responsible Combatant Command for Afghanistan did the actual campaign planning and had to figure out how to integrate the capabilities, resources, authorities and expertise of other government agencies into the campaign plan on an extremely short timeline.

To assist, the Secretary of Defense directed and authorized the establishment of JIACGs or Task Forces by the Combatant Commands in October 2001. The purpose of these organizations was to coordinate, facilitate, plan, and integrate operations, activities, and information sharing between other government agencies and the military in support of the Global War on Terrorism at a level below that of the Principles, Deputies and Policy Coordinating Committees. This still left the question of how to effect interagency coordination below the PCC level such that it could cut through the red tape and stovepipes of the bureaucracies, cultures, and limitations of multiple agencies in a rapid, effective manner.
In concept, a Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG) is composed of military and civilian experts from various governmental agencies that have information, resources, and authorities as specified by United States law, which when combined produce results exceeding the sum of the parts. These experts bring with them knowledge of the unique capabilities, programs, and methodologies in their agencies which would otherwise not be known by the military planners. Ensuring that these other government agencies’ capabilities and authorities, or lack thereof, are incorporated early in the planning process is essential. This allows the planners to appropriately assign tasks to military and other government agencies commensurate with their abilities, authorities and unique organizational missions. The members of the JIACG use enhanced situational awareness in order to effectively leverage and seamlessly integrate other government agencies’ capabilities into DoD and Combatant Command level efforts.6

The concepts of “if you build it they will come” or “hope as a method” seem to best define the strategy for effecting the interagency participation in DoD JIACGs. Establishment of JIACGs requires more than DoD resources; it also requires resources from other government agencies. Funding to support the JIACGs was provided in the form of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM contingency funds from the DoD.

Despite the directive from the Secretary of Defense to establish JIACGs, and the personal guidance of the Combatant Commanders, getting military personnel with the right experience and skills to staff the joint billets in the JIACGs proved difficult. Those military personnel who had qualifications applicable to the interagency process also had skill sets that made them highly sought after within their own military directorates and commands.

AGENCY REACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Achieving interagency buy-in to the JIACG organizations proved the most difficult task when it came to assignment of civilian personnel from the other government agencies. Despite PDD56 and the unprecedented level of focus and cooperation amongst the interagency, it took several months work at the Deputies level to resolve the issue of assignment of civilian personnel to the JIACGs on a temporary trial basis.

In an effort to effect the mandated and mutually desired interagency coordination, as well as to prevent any perceived erosion of individual agency authority or autonomy, almost all agencies including elements within the DoD immediately proposed alternatives to the JIACG to the Joint staff. To participate in the JIACGs as called for, each government agency would have to provide an experienced middle to high-grade (Government Service 13 to 15 equivalents) individual to each of the six Combatant Commands. The continuing Homeland Security and
GWOT efforts were fully consuming the resources of all government agencies and the type of personnel required in the JIACGs were critical to each government agency’s efforts for their own core functions. In addition to protection of individual agency equities, the basis of the following alternative proposals was primarily an attempt to mitigate the personnel resource requirement inherent in the JIACG concept.

The perceived “loss” of several individuals from each agency on a full-time basis was viewed as too costly and difficult. The return on investment was theoretical, and unproven. The preferred solution was to send an interagency representative to the JIACG only when required; this was deemed both feasible and supportable. Therefore, the first alternative was to return to a modification of the “pre-September 11” mode of interagency coordination. These were same type of cobbled together interagency task forces that had been used to coordinate civil military operations in Vietnam, the War on Drugs, Operation JUST CAUSE, and the Balkans. To do this required the agencies and departments to provide liaisons to DoD JIACGs on a temporary basis when called for a specific event or plan. The problem with these task oriented interagency task forces was that these individuals brought with them an insular vision of their organization, a lack of continuity on the issue to which they were being asked to contribute, and often a lack of authority or accountability in committing an agency to a particular course of action. This option satisfied the agencies’ requirement to participate in the interagency process for planning and operations as well as providing some relief on personnel requirements. However, it did not adequately address the end-state of seamlessly integrating all the elements of United States national power, nor did it address the long-term requirements articulated for interagency coordination for the Global War on Terror.

The second proposed alternative was to change the JIACG from a special staff responsible to the Combatant Commander into a traditional joint military staff placed under the Director of Plans and Policy (J-5) or the Director of Operations (J-3). This was proposed to resolve the military staff’s desire to make the interagency coordination function more results oriented and in line with the military ethos. The desire then was to compel the other government agencies to provide input. If the other agencies and departments failed to provide input within the Combatant Command’s time constraints, the DoD considered that the agencies and departments had been included by virtue of the agency and department representatives in the JIACG. This option satisfied DoD and the Combatant Command’s desire for more control over the process, but it failed to address the end-state of seamless integration of all elements of national power. It assumed that the only agency or department that knew how to conduct plans and operations was the DoD via the Combatant Commands, and if the DoD needed something
from another agency, it would ask for it. The Hobson’s choice that this alternative placed upon the JIACG and its non-DoD agency and department representatives would quickly ensure the demise of interagency coordination.

The final proposed alternative was to obtain some level of compromise between the DoD, the Combatant Commands and the other government agencies and departments on which agencies required representation in the JIACG, whether representation would be full or part-time, and what JIACG’s relationship would be to the Combatant Command joint staff. This alternative would allow the other government agencies flexibility in staffing the JIACG, with the understanding that representation could be adjusted based upon demonstrated and perceived return on the investment by both DoD and the participating agencies and departments. Placing the JIACG under the umbrella of a Combatant Command staff principle (the J-3 in the case of USCENTCOM), that was dual-hatted as the director of the JIACG, legitimized the JIACG within the military culture and therefore increased the effectiveness of interagency coordination. The other Combatant Commands placed the JIACG under the J-5 or working directly for the Combatant Commander.

Ultimately, a compromise was achieved which met: the National Security Council’s desire for improved interagency coordination, the intent of Secretary of Defense’s directive to establish JIACGs, the Combatant Commanders’ strategic and operational interagency coordination requirements, and the requirements of other government agencies. Despite this compromise agreement, only a few interagency representatives actually were assigned to a Combatant Commander (USCENTCOM) in 2001.

USCENTCOM JIACG

The experiences and successes of the USCENTCOM JIACG (where I served as the first J-3 and later as the Deputy Director), provide a sound model from which to draw insights and understanding of the requirements for successful interagency coordination and it is the model that will be examined in this paper (see Figure 1 below).
The DoD, Department of State (DOS), United States Customs Service, Department of Justice (DOJ), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Department of Energy, Department of Commerce, and Treasury Department agreed to contribute personnel to the USCENTCOM JIACG. These personnel were to serve as agency subject matter experts imbued with the authority to make decisions or given access to those who could authorize decisions.

At USCENTCOM, necessity and strong leadership finally overcame the lack of human resources and a select and extremely well qualified group of military and civilian personnel was established to form the first Combatant Command JIACG and immediately coordinate interagency efforts to assist Task Force DAGGER and other forces operating in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. Because of their qualifications, all these individuals were assigned to the JIACG in a temporary duty status of anywhere from 30 to 90 days. Some of the agency representatives participated as part-time members, while others served on an as required basis. While the USCENTCOM JIACG was extremely effective, a significant portion of the JIACG’s efforts for the first twelve months centered around extending or replacing personnel on a constant basis.

The joining of these personnel from the various agencies into one unified military organization with clearly defined objectives was an exercise in communication, education, compromise and leadership. The USCENTCOM JIACG developed cohesion quickly and learned by immersion each agency’s core functions and competencies. This led to a further understanding of where the competing non-negotiable differences were and where there were
gaps in capabilities that needed to be filled. The members of the JIACG used this broad understanding to identify methods to overcome or circumvent a given agency’s objection or reluctance to pursue a specific course of action when it was recognized by the JIACG that this was essential to accomplishment of strategic objectives of the campaign plan. Like any military organization that develops strong bonds, the JIACG developed strong interpersonal and organizational bonds that superseded, to a degree, their individual identification with their parent organizations’ culture and party line. The strength of these bonds was also a source of friction between the JIACG and the parent agencies of the JIACG members. A great deal of finesse on the part of the leadership and the individual members was required to ensure that the friction did not diminish the credibility of the JIACG and its effectiveness in eliminating stove pipes and cutting red tape. The USCENTCOM JIACG was consistently effective in resolution of near-term crisis action and contingency planning and operations for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM.

In the case of the USCENTCOM JIACG, the unparalleled classified strategic and operational successes of the JIACG in Tampa, Florida and elements forward in Afghanistan led General Myers, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to state in a press interview in January 2002 “interagency coordination is the way we need to conduct all operations from now on.” Additionally, the Director of the FBI reaffirmed his support for continued participation in JIACGs in a March of 2002 video teleconference and again in June of 2002 in a conversation with General Franks.

CONCLUSIONS

There was full support from all the government agencies in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11 for conducting the GWOT (ends). There was also broad support for the concept of conducting the interagency coordination below the PCC level for ongoing operations (ways). However, when it came to process and actual assignment of personnel (means) from other agencies to the DoD and vice versa, the support was mostly rhetorical. This imbalance in ends, ways and means imparted a sense of impermanence to the JIACG and subsequently prevented true systemic interagency coordination that was required over the long timeframe that the President articulated for the conduct of the GWOT. The risks associated with this imbalance consist of a diluted focus of effort on strategic objectives due to efforts expended on acquisition of resources (personnel), loss of credibility of the JIACG due to rotation of qualified personnel, and the always-present possibility that the transitory and provisional nature of the JIACG would translate into its dissolution. Finally, the ability of the JIACG to effect
interagency coordination was always perceived to be in competition with other Combatant Command Directorates, DoD entities, as well as other agencies in terms of roles and missions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The value of JIACGs at the Combatant Commands has been proven to the DoD, DOJ, FBI, CIA, United States Customs Service, and DoS. In February of 2003, the National Security Council Deputies Committee formally approved JIACGs to provide Combatant Commands the counsel and expertise of civilian agencies on a broad range of issues that require civil-military cooperation. With the National Security Council's approval of the JIACGs, it would seem that the authority and understandings that established the JIACGs in the DoD are sufficient. What remains problematic, and has been the single largest contributor to periods of less than optimal interagency coordination, are the missing means – personnel, training, doctrine and finally perhaps the requirement for a government wide forcing function that compels the agencies to do what they have not been able to make themselves do.

The type of personnel required in the JIACGs cannot be grown overnight; however, they can be identified, groomed and trained. To ensure continuity, effectiveness and long-term seamless interagency coordination these personnel must be assigned to the JIACG for a period of not less than two years, and will require some education in both the interagency process and the organization of all participating agencies and departments.

The participation in the JIACG by agencies and departments of the United States Government is an additive requirement imposed without sufficient resources in a time of unprecedented expansion of responsibilities and requirements to ensure both homeland security and national interests. To expect that agencies and departments will continue to participate “out of hide,” even with the DoD footing the bill, assures varying degrees of non-participation. This does nothing to advance the JIACG from an evanescent organization which fineses the irreconcilable differences between the departments into an entity that ultimately changes the mechanism for how interagency coordination is effected.

On the surface, it would seem that a reasonable recommendation would be the creation of a specific interagency manpower account to pay for the various agencies and departments' participation in DoD JIACGs.

However, simply increasing the end strength in the various agencies with the understanding that additional personnel would be on long-term loan to the DoD will not work, as agencies and departments will resist this kind of micro management and external agency intrusion into their programs and policies. Likewise, giving the DoD additional resources to buy
the personnel and services costs associated with cobbling together JIACGs at the Combatant Command level will likely fail for similar reasons.

Additional, formal education based upon interagency coordination doctrine (born out of recent interagency and JIACG specific experiences) would provide a baseline of common understanding of the processes and core functions of each agency and would thereby enhance the ability of military and civilian personnel assigned to JIACGs to effect comprehensive, informed interagency coordination. A model for this type of education already exists. Personnel from Joint Forces Command teach the Emergency Preparedness Liaison Officer (EPLO) course at a Federal Emergency Management Agency facility. The EPLO course is open to military and civilians and covers roles, missions and applicable laws, and provides an understanding of the complex nature of military support to civil authorities in a domestic emergency (interagency coordination). This mobile course would seem to lend itself to modification applicable to JIACGs and would fill a void in JIACG concept and practice. Adding the use of an interagency simulation exercise to the curriculum would pull the issues covered together into a practical learning application.14

The NSC’s Contingency Planning Interagency Working Group designated the National Defense University (NDU) as the Executive Agent for training, education, and after action review for United States Government response to Complex Contingency Operations. This action at the end of fiscal year 2002 was in response to identified interagency training requirements in the National Capital region and at the Combatant Commands. This initiative evolved parallel with the establishment of the Combatant Command JIACGs. It eventually was morphed into the Interagency Training, Education, and After Action Review (ITEA) program. In 2003, NDU and ITEA recognized that training was too limiting a moniker for the program, since training usually implies that a given response is applied to a given set of circumstances. Interagency coordination is too complex, variable, and fluid against which to apply set techniques. The program’s name was changed to Interagency Transformation, Education and After Action Review (ITEA), more accurately reflecting the evolving mission of promoting fundamental change in the way that executive agencies interact with each other. This name change reflected the United States Government’s realization that it must transform itself to meet the challenges posed by the emerging security environment post September 11. ITEA developed curriculum that addresses the environment of complex contingency operations; United States governmental and non-governmental organizations; international organizations; and the processes of interagency coordination. In addition to this broad interagency curriculum, ITEA has also developed a JIACG-specific exportable program that allows JIACG personnel to
immediately integrate and begin coordination absent the steep learning curve experienced over the past two years.15

The doctrine available to assist JIACGs in understanding interagency coordination has been obscure and only generally applicable to JIACGs at the Combatant Commands. Recognizing the paucity of doctrinal material available to the JIACG and the Combatant Commanders, The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff has slowly developed and staffed, over the last two years, Joint Publication 3-08, Interagency Coordination during Joint Operations, (2nd Draft, 8 September 2003). Upon publication, it will provide authoritative guidance to the Armed Forces on the requirements for interagency coordination. While this seminal publication should be used as the basis for any interagency coordination curriculum, the curriculum should also incorporate interagency views to include commonly appreciated interagency doctrine or protocols to facilitate organizational appreciation, responsive information sharing, moderation of bureaucratic obstacles, timely decision-making and unified action.16

While I do not advocate that DoD is singularly the most qualified to teach interagency coordination, NDU was tasked to develop and conduct this training and has the highest likelihood of making such a program a near-term reality. Out of necessity, and for credibility, experts must present any such program from all agencies and departments. It needs to provide not only convergent views and success stories of interagency coordination, but also the differences and difficulties involved in the interagency process.

While this paper has primarily looked at JIACG development in USCENTCOM during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, it is important to note that the USCENTCOM JIACG did not achieve the same level of success in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. This was largely due to many of the factors previously discussed, but specifically leader turbulence and the resultant shifting of mission and focus, rotation of personnel, and lack of involvement in drafting the Interagency Annex (Annex V) to the Campaign Plan. What is more troubling is that the military reverted to “when required” interagency planning and coordination during the run-up and execution of phases I through III (Deter, Seize Initiative, Decisive Operations) of the campaign, and looked late to the interagency for assistance with phase IV (Transition) of the campaign. The alleged basis for the “when required” interagency coordination was due to the high level of secrecy surrounding the campaign plan, specifically the refusal of the DoD to authorize release of the campaign plan to the interagency citing operational security.

It is clearly in the best interest of the United States and the advancement of our National Security Policy to elevate interagency coordination from the middling results witnessed in the transition to post hostility operations (Phase IV) in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM back to the
consistent successes achieved by JIACGs in 2001 and 2002. The training and doctrine components of effective JIACG interagency coordination at the Combatant Commands are on the right path to transform how interagency coordination is accomplished in complex contingencies. The personnel component, while arguably working at an acceptable level, is indicative of the real and larger issue: agency and departmental rice bowls and the perceived or actual encroachment on agency and departmental roles, missions, and authorities by the DoD.

Now that the NSC has approved the JIACG concept, it will take some time to assess whether and to what degree the various agencies and departments will participate. Absent a more compelling mandate and the requisite accompanying means, it is likely that participation in JIACGs by agencies and departments will be selective. In all likelihood, participation will be based upon a cost benefit analysis of the perceived direct and immediate return to agencies’ or departments’ core functions rather than a grand strategic view of the benefits obtained for United States National Security.

With the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the GWOT, we are at a time in history when we are presented with a compelling reason for the US Government to transform how it cooperates at the executive branch level. Failing real renewed efforts by the agencies, departments and the NSC, the next step in the process of transforming United States Government interagency coordination may be taken by the Congress of the United States with legislation that mandates and defines an interagency cooperation solution. Our National Security demands no less than a coordinated interagency process at the strategic and operational level.
ENDNOTES


2 Ibid., 286.


4 Ibid.


8 Ibid., I-1.

9 Ibid.

10 The quote in this sentence is from Cable News Network (CNN) spot, viewed via satellite feed, at Bagram, Afghanistan less than 24 hours after I briefed the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff on Joint Task Force BOWIE’s interagency operations in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM.

11 The first reference in this paragraph is based on remarks made by the Director of the FBI to BG Gary Harrell in a video teleconference between Washington D.C. and Bagram Afghanistan in which I also participated, in March 2002. The second reference is based on comments I received from GEN Franks on his conversation (which I assisted in orchestrating) with the Director of the FBI.


18 Harry A. Tomlin, Case Study The Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG): The United States European Command Experience and the Way Ahead," (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 1 October 2003), 41.
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