Current doctrine regarding Joint Military and Interagency cooperation is inadequate for effective and consistent results by the Regional Combatant Commanders. Vague or non-existent Joint and U.S. Government (USG) agency doctrine regarding planning and command and control structures has left seams and gaps in our ability to effectively carry out national policy.

Steps that can be taken today for improvement at the operational level are the expansion, improvement and standardization of procedures and structure beyond the current JIACG construct. This useful organization needs to be fully leveraged with the proper staffing, resources and authority to significantly impact US National Interests.

The US Military is the only governmental organization with the resources and command and control architecture to significantly effect National Policy. As the executers of the military portion of this arm of nation power, the Regional Combatant Commands must accept the role they are in. They require all the tools and skills of USG specialties and cannot afford to wait for significant USG interagency reforms.
Joint Interagency at the Combatant Commands: Making it Real; Making it Work

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A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: ________________________

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Abstract

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Introduction

The major institutions of American national security were designed in a different era to meet different requirements. All of them must be transformed.¹

The recent success of the U.S. military operations in the joint arena since the passing of Goldwater-Nichols have showcased the increasing ability of the joint military force to be successful in completing a myriad of missions while confronted with a shrinking resource base. These missions are increasingly becoming further from what the military has viewed as its traditional core competencies and tasks. As the executers of these national policies and interests, the Regional Combatant Commanders are increasingly expected to provide solutions to missions that traditionally were the purview of other U.S. Government (USG) agencies.

The Regional Combatant Commanders (RCC) are expected to grasp the essential elements of the national strategy, how they are to be applied in their particular geographic region, and what instruments of national power are best suited to achieve these policies. Through the application of operational art the RCCs are able to bring the significant resources of the joint military force to bear in the pursuit of achieving national policy goals. Clausewitz states, “The assertion that a major military development, or the plan for one should be a matter for purely military opinion is unacceptable and can be damaging.”² Interagency participation in the planning and execution of the full range of military operations (ROMO) is essential. Increasingly military leadership at the operational level is required for success in all aspects of national policy implementation, due to the level of resources required for planning and execution.

While a “Goldwater-Nichols” for the interagency process, or possibly an update to the National Security Act, may be the long term answer to the current problem, speculation
for that legislation is beyond the scope of this paper. However, tackling DOD’s interagency coordination at the critical operational level can be improved and must be synchronized effectively, not just coordinated.

The RCCs have become the de facto executers of more than just military operations. They are the primary executers of US foreign policy. While tasked by Joint Pub 3-08 to integrate USG agencies into planning, the RCCs have no set mechanism for this interaction to occur.\(^3\) The current level of interagency input into the RCC planning and execution process is inadequate. This paper will address the issue that the process is conducted in either an ad hoc fashion or where it is a standardized process, it is aimed at a specific mission or joint task force. This must change. The RCC must have an integrated, staffed and funded structure with which to conduct planning and operations throughout all phases of peacetime engagement, war, and stability operations.

**Interagency Coordination: What is the problem?**

Interagency coordination is not a new concept. There have been small, yet effective methods attempted during the past several years that have resulted in significant increases in coordination. However, joint military doctrine addresses the issue in vague terms that do not address command and control (C2) relationships, resources or integrated planning. These successful efforts merely demonstrate the potential that a real, formalized and concerted interagency effort could achieve at the operation level. “The trend and importance of DOD involvement in the interagency process at the operational level is on the rise. A broad range of government and nongovernmental organizations, both domestic and foreign, have major responsibilities and competencies which may enhance achievement of US national policy objectives.”\(^4\) The difficulties of coordinating these various elements of national power:
diplomatic, informational, military, and economic (DIME) are formidable, and are compounded by a lack of organizational structure to deconflict and ensure accountability. Yet, the Component Commander and his representative Joint Force Commanders (JFC’s) must understand and utilize all elements of national power to achieve these vital national policy goals.

The end of the Cold War increased the role of the Armed Forces in peace keeping, drug enforcement and humanitarian missions that overlapped with several USG agencies. The numbers of these missions increased along with the military’s requirement to maintain its core proficiencies. Many USG agencies are stretched to maintain their day to day activities due to inadequate resources. Due to its significant resources and culture of planning, the Department of Defense (DOD) is unique and has become the de facto agency of choice for the executive branch to carry out national policy and strategy.

Michele Flournoy says that outside the Defense Department few agencies devote significant resources to long term planning. And even fewer have the operational resources to act on those plans… “It is a simple fact today, U.S. operational capability rests almost entirely in the Department of Defense.”

These unique skill sets and capabilities have led to growing acceptance in military circles, as stated in joint doctrine, that these missions will increasingly involve the US military as the principle if not lead agency. While interagency conflicts and cultures have resulted in friction in the process of implementing coherent national policy objectives, the RCCs are now, regardless of other agencies tasking, the primary executers of US foreign policy. They are, “the modern-day equivalent of the Roman Empire’s proconsuls.” While the military is effectively executing this new role, extra resources are needed for successful national policy implementation. Tapping into the interagency well of skill sets and experience would enable the military to be more effective in its new role. The full spectrum
of warfare from Phase 0 through Phase 4 that the RCCs are expected to execute requires the
involvement of both military and civilian interagency expertise.

The flaws in the interagency coordination process were recognized long before the
recent flurry of writing and activity began. While the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols legislation
forced DOD to conduct joint operations between the services, the interagency cooperation
issue received executive level attention in 1997 by President Clinton through the Presidential
Decision Directive (PDD) 56.\(^7\) Regarding contingency operations, the directive states,
“While agencies of government have developed independent capacities to respond to
complex emergencies, military and civilian agencies should operate in a synchronized
manner through effective interagency management.”\(^8\) This directive broke down stovepipes
at the strategic level within the National Security Counsel. The establishment of the
Executive Committee resulted in improved interagency coordination at the strategic level and
increased accountability to the President. However, the attempt failed to address the inherent
problems regarding authority and resources at the operational and tactical levels. Tasking
and accountability are addressed in the annexes; however, the terminology is vague.
Additionally various USG agencies neither have the planning culture nor internal procedures
of accountability needed to be effective. While PDD 56 is no longer in effect, it provides a
valid starting point from which to address interagency coordination.

\textit{A Recipe for Conflict.} The current mechanisms inherent in the RCC’s present day
structure do allow for minimal interagency crosstalk. As part of the RCC’s planning process
the Theater Security Cooperation Plan (TSCP), is the most direct link through which the
RCCs are able to influence US foreign policy short of a military operation. However, this
TSCP process needs to be further integrated into the RCC’s Command Theater Strategy.
each country in the RCC’s area of responsibility (AOR), has an Ambassador and Country
team that is intimately familiar with local customs and the current political and military
situation. However, the RCC’s staff’s ability to tap into this is primarily reactionary. The
RCC’s J-5/7 are not sufficiently plugged into the interagency piece while planning. Joint
document addressing successful interagency operations tasks the RCC to “Establish an
authoritative interagency hierarchy,”9 while acknowledging that the military may not be the
lead agency. “There may be resistance to the establishment of such an interagency
hierarchy… Nonetheless, commanders should attempt to insert discipline, responsibility,
and rigor into the process in order to function effectively.”10 This guidance is given to
the RCCs without the actual authority to command the other USG agencies at the operational
level. Joint doctrine addresses the relationship between the RCC, his Political Advisor
(POLAD) and the Ambassador under the Crisis Response section of chapter III. It stresses a
continuous working relationship at the interagency level, “long before crisis action planning
is required,”11 without a structure for the staff to work with USG interagency players. The
RCC or POLAD is expected to communicate with the Ambassador and Country Team when,
“crisis action planning becomes necessary.”12 However, when crisis strikes these individuals
are dealing with the demands of crisis management reducing their ability to plan effectively.
The planning experts are then constructing the Operation Plans (OPLAN) or Operational
Orders (OPORD) without input from the Ambassador and Country T, which is necessary for
the coordination part of the planning, Annex V. The RCC’s staff has already developed
planning for possible contingencies, without the benefit of this in depth knowledge, and
without significant input from the senior US diplomat in the region.
Lack of Interagency Synchronization: Recent History

The US involvement in Panama (Operation Just Cause) in 1989 was one of the recent indicators that US policy execution to ignore the interagency requirements for success in a major military operation. While the failures in the military’s own joint command and control are evident, the failure of the military and the other USG agencies to coordinate at basic levels is perhaps of greater import. The lack of a concrete, established coordination led to mistaken assumptions by the military, again the lead planning agency. This resulted in the lack of ability to plan for stability and reconstruction efforts. “Because planners lacked contextual knowledge, they misunderstood critical issues and failed to anticipate the kinds of disruptions that occurred following the defeat of the PDF [Panamanian Defense Force].”13 Friction between the military and Department of State was acute. Ambassador Hinton’s relationship with the JTF Commander was virtually non-existent and lead to the removal of US military forces conducting vital reconstruction needs. Of particular note was the need for Panamanian law enforcement after hostilities ceased. A review of policy by Congress was the result of the training and restructuring of the Panamanian police by US military forces conducted in conflict with the wishes of the State Department and possibly with US law. “However, even before the legislation was passed, the State Department in Washington and Ambassador Hinton in Panama sought to end the military involvement with the police.”14 An open discussion by the Country Teams during the initial planning by Southern Command could have avoided this conflict and legal wrangling. With the appropriate information being passed to the JTF Commander, execution could have sufficiently involved the interagency assets necessary for mission accomplishment. This essential, yet lacking communication would have led to a realization that without further USG agency involvement and resources,
these missions would need to be entirely military in execution. “Either the military would do it [in Panama] or it would not get done.” Missions that arguably could be better performed by US civilian law enforcement, or at least with their input, could release pressure on the military allowing it to concentrate on other tasking or reconstruction projects.

An analysis of Operation Iraqi Freedom and the planning (or lack of) in the interagency arena is again an issue too large for this discourse. However, a quick look at the C2 structures involved again reveal the need for a more robust planning coordination body at the RCC level. Anthony Cordesman from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, argues that:

In retrospect, the United States – the leader of the Coalition and the only power with the necessary resources to act – failed to effectively terminate the conflict for three principal sets of reasons: problems in international coordination; failures in U.S. policymaking and leadership; and failures at the field and tactical levels. Two of these issues need to be better addressed at the RCC level and integrated into the OPLAN process. RCC relationships with the Ambassadors and local Country Teams in the AOR must lead to international coordination if not international agreement with the stated US policy goals. By substituting the joint term operational for field, the blame falls partly on the RCC’s lack of operational planning and inadequate execution. While the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was to lead the Stability and Reconstruction (SASO) efforts, there still remains confusion as to what specifically it was, how this organization was formed and to whom it reported. This confusion is evident in the CRS Report for Congress. “While it is clear that ultimately, the CPA Administrator answered to the President, it is also clear that the Administrator reported to the Secretary of Defense as well. Administratively, Ambassador Bremmer and the authority fell under the Department of the Army.” While
puzzling, the obvious reasons behind the DOD links are the resource requirements for the reconstruction efforts, and the CPA’s ability to work through the ongoing combat operations taking place in Iraq. The CPA’s lack of results, and its associated disconnects with the military were due to an organizational problem in its interagency authority and C2 structure. The following figure displays the inherent conflicts in the relationship between the military leaders in Iraq and the CPA.\(^{18}\)

**Figure 1**

**Coalition Provisional Authority**

A robust interagency planning structure that insisted on the importance and focus of Annex V in the OPLAN and OPORD would have been able to alert the RCC to the inherent flaws in the interagency coordination piece and the acute lack of resources available. Instead of another ad hoc interagency reconstruction or coordination team the US must leverage its existing planning and coordination capabilities along with the military’s inherent resource advantages in order to execute a coherent national strategy.

This “missing” interagency coordination body has been addressed at the RCC level with the Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG) concept. JIACG is being further
refined as a prototype at JFCOM and has been successful in Pacific Command (PACOM), Central Command (CENTCOM). Additionally, the Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF) has been effective in Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) in regards to the Counter Drug mission. However, these organizations have been created primarily for specific missions or tasking and are limited in scope, resources and duration. A more permanent solution is needed. The JIACG has begun the process through which the RCC can integrate with USG agencies at the operational level to affect a coherent US Policy in their specific AOR. This construct is the basis for successful interagency coordination in the foreseeable future, accepting the military as the primary tool through which planning and C2 is accomplished. Whether acting as the supporting or supported agency, the military is the primary agency resourced to plan and execute many of these missions. Issues regarding the staffing, funding and resources of the JIACG are sticking points that need to be addressed. Increasing the staff size and loading to an already robust structure at the RCC level is a challenge even for DOD. Convincing other USG agencies that are currently man power and resource constrained to send the senior experience members of their own organizations to work for DOD will be challenging. This will require DOD to “sell” the value of the JIACG in its ability to significantly enhance the capabilities and involvement of the other agencies.

Command and control issues plague the JIACG and interagency process. While the US military has the undisputed preponderance of resources and planning capability, it neither possesses the necessary skill sets nor does it have authority over other USG agencies by its size alone. A clear statement of who the supported and supporting agencies are is necessary for efficient C2.
Operational command and control is perhaps the most critical and at the same time all-encompassing of all operational functions. It is the principal means by which the operational commander sequences and synchronizes the actions and activities of both military and non-military sources of national power in a given theater.\(^{19}\)

Whether a military led operation or not, the RCC and his staff are in a unique position to plan, coordinate and synchronize the interagency effort with a level of common knowledge not present in any other USG body. The immense resources of DOD, and the operational capability of the RCC’s should be a major part, if not the center of, any interagency planning regardless of which USG agency is the lead.

The inevitability of operational security (OPSEC) concerns and planning in an interagency context further reinforces the need for an expanded and permanent JIACG. With the members of JIACG incorporated as an integral part of the RCC staff, therefore taking ownership of the interagency planning, security concerns can be mitigated. By vetting ideas early within the staff planning process, potential pitfalls can be avoided. Confining sensitive material to cleared JIACG members onsite and integral to the staff, would address OPSEC concerns. Instead of reaching outside the RCC structure during initial planning, resources and subject matter experts are available onsite. This same body has the ability to “reach back” when necessary, to its parent organization for further resources and planning aids.

**Recommendations: Beyond today’s JIACG**

While the JIACG is an excellent addition to the RCC’s ability to work and plan interagency issues, the scope has been too focused. Both the PACOM and CENTCOM JIACGs were formed for the counter-terrorism (CT) mission. Already highly successful, the model presented by the JIACGs is promising on a wider scale. Engaging the interagency players at the operational level of both planning and execution across the entire RCC’s
mission spectrum would exercise the potential of the JIACG. While each of the Component Commanders, both Regional and Global, have some form of JIACG functioning or are in the developmental stage, they are all structured, funded and focused differently. Current efforts by JFCOM to increase the size, capability and involvement of the JIACG are leading in the right direction but need further expansion.

The next step required is a fully funded, standardized structure, with agreed upon memorandums of understanding with the various USG agencies for the staffing and authorities contained within. This expanded body needs to go beyond the current JIACG concept, becoming fully synchronized into the planning process. More than a group, this Interagency Executive Committee (IEC) would have direct access to the Component Commander (Figure 2), while integrating horizontally with the J Codes (Figure 3) to ensure interagency synchronization into RCC deliberate and crisis action planning.
The IEC would be chaired by a senior Executive Service (SES) member and staffed by experienced interagency members from the various USG Agencies and the POLAD. The body would work, not specifically crisis issues, but continually with country teams and the represented USG agencies to ensure that OPLANS and OPORDS are not static documents; missing vital and up-to-date information. This level of coordination would be vital in enabling the synchronization of the TSCP with the RCCs planning, incorporating the Country Teams unique perspectives to ensure a coherent execution of national policy.

The senior level of the SES would ensure the IEC’s ability to remain relevant and informed of the planning and operational requirements throughout the organization, allowing early input into the planning process. While a structured and funded body, the ability of the Component Commanders to add additional interagency staffing is essential to tailoring the IEC to the specific needs of the AOR. This standing body (Figure 4), funded and staffed for day to day operations by the RCC, could be increased in size and capability by careful augmentation from reserve forces who are selected from civilian backgrounds that increase capability.

**Figure 4**

**IEC Structure**
Challenges exist, yet by including the interagency piece more fully in training exercises the RCC can ensure a sufficient staff capability. “It is not enough to practice joint operations. Interagency scenarios are more probable and difficult. Realistic multiagency exercises encourage combined civil-military courses of action and provide shared experiences which can develop trust and understanding.”23

While current policy from DOD includes funding for the JIACG, follow through and resources remain scarce. “In December 2003, DOD requested, and for the first time agreed to pay for, individuals experienced in staff work… Unfortunately, this decision overlooked the possible effect on the nonreimbursed agencies, each of which predictably became less inclined to continue providing representatives for JIACG.”24 As the lead agency in planning, DOD must follow through with its commitment to fully fund, staff and resource the IEC if it wishes to generate sufficient interagency buy-in.25 Success from interagency operations must be promoted to generate interest and ownership from other USG agencies. Senior, experienced member from USG agencies assigned to the IECs will assist in effective reach back ability to their parent agencies for assistance, resources and integration in interagency exercises.

Lessons learned from the initial JIACG must not be lost only to be relearned during execution. Several aspects of success in the PACOM JIACG that should be duplicated in the IECs are:

- A combination of varied skills among the staff
- Tasking authority across the J codes and Components
- DIRLAUTH “asking” authority with other government agencies in the interagency community26
In addition, the DIRLAUTH “asking” authority needs to be specifically applied to working with the Embassies and their Country Teams in the AOR. This would assist the POLAD and the IEC in ensuring a constant assessment and reassessment of the AOR with timely and up-to-date information for the planning process. The capacity of the IEC to liaison with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and International Organizations (IOs), through reach back ability to parent agencies, enhanced by DIRAUTH interaction in the AOR, will be essential to maximizing the ability of these organizations and the US government during disaster assistance. “Some 350 organizations are registered with USAID. While they represent a common modus operandi in today’s world, literature on the interagency process is scant”27 Recognizing both the culture gap between military and NGO/IO members and the reactive nature of these organizations, any enhancement in communication and coordination will be a major advancement over current ad hoc operations.

The Interagency Executive Committee concept presented here builds upon many of the JIACG and JIATF successes and recommendations for further improvement. In order to ensure consistent US foreign policy implementation the DOD must fully resource this body, and prove its worth to the interagency process. The potential rewards of an effective IEC could address many of the shortfalls identified in the interagency process, including those noted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies “Beyond Goldwater-Nichols Phase 1” Report.

The report concluded that recent experience reflects “a consistent US inability to effectively integrate political, military economic, humanitarian and other dimensions of complex contingency operations.” This problem was attributed to several factors, including:

- The lack of government-wide procedures for developing integrated strategies and plans
- Lack of a “planning culture” outside DOD…
- Lack of deployable experts and capabilities in civilian agencies28
The proper use of this body, fully integrated into RCC staffs, will address many of these issues. This would be a major step toward integrating strategies and plans at the critical operational level, while avoiding confusion and delay at the tactical level. Integrating the correct interagency players into DOD planning will spread the planning culture. Conversely, this will educate all members of the IEC and military staff regarding the capabilities and cultures of each of the USG agencies involved. As the IEC refines its roles and establishes standard operating procedures, experienced staffers and alumni, the number of deployable experts grows, along with the education and training of the military component.

**Conclusion**

*Interagency forums established early at the operational level will enable close and constructive dialog between the engaged agencies.*

The time for interagency coordination with the military has already passed. Operations repeatedly fail in regard to the integration of a complete interagency effort, leading to embarrassing failures of US foreign policy. While success in the joint arena has been promising, success in the interagency arena has been lacking. These numerous failures and small successes are blatant signals that the process needs to be improved and that DOD has the tools to achieve it. The operations of the last 15 years have proven that DOD and the RCCs will be called upon to achieve major portions of US foreign policy. By accepting the role of lead agency in the interagency planning process, DOD can ensure these foreign policy goals are achieved, as well as smoother crisis action planning and response.

Current joint doctrine regarding interagency involvement does not adequately leverage interagency capabilities prior to crisis action planning. Vague and ineffective current doctrine results in a lack of knowledge of the capabilities of USG agencies and leads
to further marginalizing of the interagency role in planning. When required by the JTF to execute the operation, these assets and personnel are not available. The associated agencies are forced further into a reactionary mode, perpetuating the lack of planning culture inherent in USG agencies outside DOD.

Each RCC’s current status in their AOR is recognized by foreign leaders, international bodies, and the executive branch as being essential to the implementation of US foreign policy through more than just military means. The entire spectrum of DIME is utilized by the RCCs in their daily interactions with foreign nations and USG agencies working abroad. Denying the influence and capability that these Component Commands bring to bear on the execution of US policy weakens the US position abroad. The proven ability of the RCCs to plan and execute operations using all aspects of DIME is enhanced through integrating our civilian interagency strengths.

The stakes are too high to allow the status quo of ad hoc interagency responses to continue. The tacit acknowledgement by the executive branch that the military is the only agency that can execute major operations leads to the conclusion that any interagency coordination will have to involve major joint military planning. The unique ability to properly plan and execute these operations places a responsibility on DOD to create conditions that will lead to the successful execution of US foreign policy. “Any time we lose lives, any time we have miscalculated, any time we have to go back to the American people and ask for more treasure, more sacrifice, and it was not calculated and it should have been, then somebody should be held responsible.”30 This responsibility is continually being borne by DOD, regardless of mission tasking and lead. Innovative and executable solutions must be put into practice and exercised to ensure further failures do not occur.
Notes


8 Presidential Decision Directive 56

9 Pub 3-08, Vol. I, III-2

10 Pub 3-08, Vol. I, III-2

11 Pub 3-08, Vol. I, III-6

12 Pub 3-08, Vol. I, III-6


14 Shultz, In the Aftermath of War: U.S. Support for Reconstruction and Nation-Building in Panama Following Just Cause, 47.

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