# Insights & Best Practices
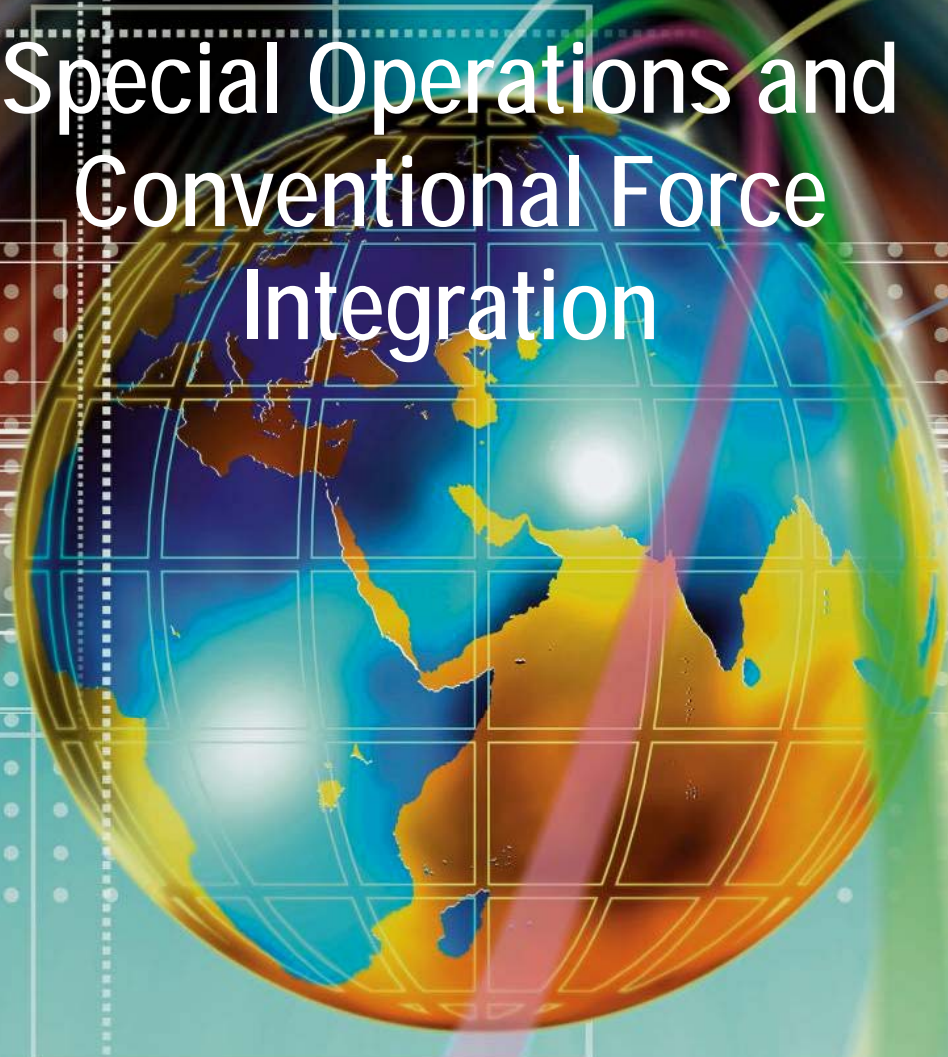
# Special Operations and Conventional Force Integration

## Focus Paper #5
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### Joint Warfighting Center
### United States Joint Forces Command

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## Preface

This paper addresses insights and best practices in achieving synergy between conventional forces and Special Operations Forces (SOF) co-located on the irregular warfare battlefield. We focus integration considerations in those cases where a Joint Task Force (JTF) is formed and SOF is working within the JTF's Joint Operations Area (JOA). We discuss insights at the theater strategic, operational, and tactical level, and provide education and training recommendations. We do not address insights on integration in the more traditional (conventional) warfare environment because we have not been able to gather sufficient data. However, we believe many of our insights can apply to that environment.

We don't discuss coalition SOF in detail due to the limited scope of this paper. These important members of the team provide unique capabilities based on their mission sets and national direction. JTF commanders can't simply "outsource" these forces to the JSOTF commander. Instead the joint force commander must build the same levels of trust, confidence, and integration with these highly skilled operators as with the other joint forces.

The paper builds on insights in the July 2008 JWFC publication "Insights and Best Practices on Joint Operations."[1] It is also consistent with the USSOCOM Pub 3-33 Handbook on Conventional and SOF Integration and Interoperability dated September, 2006.[2] We strongly recommend use of the USSOCOM Handbook for additional information and tactical level checklists.

The Joint Warfighting Center's Joint Training Division (JTD) and the USJFCOM Special Operations Command (SOCJFCOM) are afforded the unique opportunity to visit and support joint headquarters worldwide as they prepare for, plan, and conduct operations, and draw out and refine what we term "best practices" to share with others and help inform and shape joint doctrine. Other papers are on Commanders Critical Information Requirements (CCIR), Information Management, Interagency Coordination, and JTF Command and Control (C2).

**We want to get your thoughts on this subject.** Please pass on your comments, insights, and best practices so that we may share them. Contact the JTD POC for insights and best practices, Mike Findlay at (757) 203-5939 or email at Michael.Findlay.ctr@jfcom.mil. The paper can also be viewed at http://jko.cmil.org/.

> Major General Jason K. Kamiya
> Commander, Joint Warfighting Center

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[1] A JWFC product. This and the focus papers can be downloaded at http://jko.cmil.org/ under lessons learned.
[2] A USSOCOM FOUO product. Excellent product on detailed TTP best practices. Can be obtained at https://www.us.army.mil. Search for "CF and SOF Integration and Interoperability Handbook V2."

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## 1. Executive Summary

Conventional and Special Operations Forces have achieved a degree of synergy and harmony never before thought possible. This is a result of the warfighters building mutual trust and confidence over the past seven years of conducting full spectrum operations – knowing that they are one team in one fight. We have seen the complementary capabilities of conventional forces and SOF come together as one team in one fight to better achieve objectives.

Warfighters continue to emphasize the importance of personal relationships and trust that enable a decentralized, synergistic approach to operations – these personal relationships transcend command relationships, doctrine, and all else.  The most successful warfighters are those who work together in an atmosphere of a shared appreciation for the other's capabilities and missions along with a shared sense of responsibility for each other's success.

We find that a <u>decentralized, "one team, one fight" approach to conducting operations</u> is the key to effective integration of SOF and conventional forces. This approach breeds resilience, speed and agility in the command and control system by emphasizing tactical level initiative and horizontal linkages between forces at the lowest levels. These horizontal linkages allow for synergy of operations at the "speed of war" in contrast to legacy "stovepiped" SOF and conventional force C2 thinking that unnecessarily centralize decision-making and slow execution.

At the <u>theater strategic</u> (Combatant Command) level, we see strong trust between commanders. However, we find a continuing need to better incorporate special operations expertise and perspectives in GCC planning and clearly define command relationships between the Theater Special Operations Commands (SOCs) and established JTFs to best achieve unified action.

At the <u>operational</u> (JTF and Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF)) level, we see excellent integration of SOF and conventional forces. These commanders operate and live together in the same JOA and share the "one team, one fight" view of operations. They develop strong personal relationships, trust each other implicitly, extensively exchange liaison elements, and seamlessly share information recognizing the need for mutual transparency to ensure harmony of operations.

At the lower <u>tactical level</u> (regiment, brigade, battalion, and detachment), we find much better integration than ever before. We see most integration challenges occurring early in the deployments before personal relationships and trust are fully established. We note that good commanders rapidly build trust and confidence with their counterparts through an inclusive command climate that doesn't allow for the biases, stereotyping, and ego challenges that could otherwise develop due to differences in the various Service and SOF cultures. We still see the high tempo of tactical level operations and limited numbers of liaison personnel available at the tactical unit level challenge integration in planning and execution, but tactical commanders are working through these challenges on the ground. We find the <u>right command climate</u> at the lowest level, emphasized by higher commanders, helps foster a "one team, one fight" mindset. USSOCOM Pub 3-33 additionally provides an excellent discussion on detailed FOUO-level tactics, techniques, and procedures to increase interoperability and integration.

**Insights:**

– Commanders set the climate for effective integration. Foster the "one team, one fight" mindset. Build trust and confidence upfront. Recognize and respect the different "cultures" of SOF and the various Services. Demand synergy of operations in your intent, planning guidance, and orders. Ensure commanders talk to commanders, and staffs talk to staffs.

– Incorporate special operations expertise and perspectives early on during GCC and JTF planning. Do not wait until execution to harmonize special operations capabilities. This requires dedicated, possibly organic, special operations staff support at GCC and JTF headquarters.

– Fully share capabilities and limitations to gain greater transparency into each others' potential contributions to reduce risk and enhance mission success.

– Ensure clear command relationships exist between the forces at all levels – theater strategic, operational, and tactical that ensures access to each other's capabilities to best accomplish the mission. A must!

– Decentralize to gain agility and resilience in operations. Craft and take advantage of decentralized mission approval levels to empower tactical level initiative within higher commander's intent and increase speed of execution.

– Develop horizontal linkages at all levels down to brigade and even battalion, to ensure tactical level integration of decentralized operations. Direct the exchange of liaison elements – both ways. Be transparent in planning and operations.

**Recommendations:**

– **Education**. Emphasize the "one team, one fight" mindset that fosters camaraderie and breeds success. Delve into the agility and increased resilience rationale behind the concept of decentralization of operations. Share the capabilities and limitations, together with recognition and acceptance of the different "cultures" of the forces. Teach fundamentals of building and maintaining trust to mitigate "culture" clashes and ensure synergy of operations.

– **Joint Training**. Train together like we fight together. Replicate the complex environment with the stakeholders operating in the same battlespace. Focus on building relationships and trust prior to and during initial employment of forces to minimize the initial "90 day" lag in effective operations after TOA.[3] While recognizing deployment and scheduling demands, ensure that commanders participate in these exercises to jumpstart building of these relationships. Exercise command relationships, emphasizing integrated planning and decentralized operations with clearly defined mission approval levels and necessary coordination with battlespace owners.

– **Service Training**. Inculcate a realistic joint context into service training replicating the numerous stakeholders and the horizontal coordination to ensure synergy of operations. Learn about each others' cultures, capabilities and limitations.

– **Learning**. Learn during operations and conduct post-deployment seminars to institutionalize lessons learned and further build trust and relationships.

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[3] TOA: Transfer of Authority between outgoing and incoming commanders associated with force rotations.

## 2. The Value of Decentralization and Importance of Trust

Our commanders have made great strides in instilling a decentralized mindset to operations to gain speed in execution and resilience in command and control. Inherent in this move toward decentralization is the development of trust and clear understanding of the balance between risk and opportunity.

Decentralization increases speed of execution. Warfighters recognize the higher the approval level, the longer it takes for mission approval. Fleeting targets of opportunity may be lost. Decentralization coupled with commander's intent, appreciation of risk, and a common appreciation of the situation empowers subordinates to thrive in today's complex environment and operate within the adversaries' decision cycle (their OODA loop[4]).

Decentralization also builds resilience in command and control. It allows the more simple horizontal coordination directly with one's warfighting partners rather than the complex vertical "up, over, and down" information flow through higher headquarters. This "up, over, and down" process is time consuming and requires more robust communications capability and staff processing to facilitate mission approval. Continually requesting mission approval from higher HQ takes both time and effort, and pulls commanders and staffs away from the operations at hand.

**Decentralization and Mission Approval**. The adjacent figure portrays the challenges of centralized mission approval processes together with alternative methods that allow one to operate inside the adversary's decision cycle. The vertical axis addresses the mission approval level – depicting the various levels of command culminating with the President at the top. The horizontal axis is time – the time to request and gain mission approval. We see that the higher one goes along the vertical axis (i.e. more centralized / higher approval level), the longer it takes to gain mission approval and the more likely that you may miss targets of opportunity.
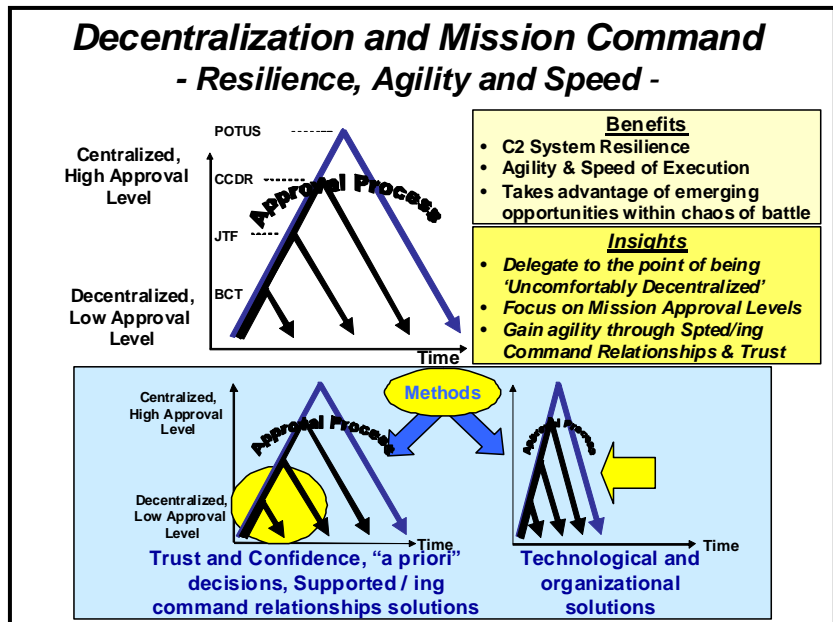


At the bottom of the figure we depict two methods used in operational headquarters to gain speed in execution. The left option focuses on decentralizing mission approval levels – pushing them down into the lower left quadrant. Here we see the value of mission type orders, trust and confidence, and "a priori" decisions. The right

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[4] OODA loop: Observe, Orient, Decide, Act loop developed by John Boyd

side addresses streamlining the processes where mission approval can not be delegated through technology and organizational solutions.

The Services address the importance of decentralization. For example, Army FM 3-0 emphasizes decentralized execution. It promotes disciplined initiative at the lowest level, acting aggressively to accomplish the mission within the commander's intent. FM 3-0 addresses delegation to subordinates to minimize detailed higher level control and empower subordinates' initiative.[5]

**Trust**. Trust is a prerequisite to decentralization, delegation of authority, and speed. Stephen Covey in The Speed of Trust talks to trust as the "hidden variable" in the formula for organizational success.[6] Trust always affects speed and cost (see figure). When trust goes down, speed goes down and cost goes up. Likewise, when one has high degree of trust, speed increases and cost decreases. Decentralization, trust, and transparency in both planning and action are all necessary contributors to



**Trust and Confidence**
*- The Speed of Trust -*

**Considerations**
• Building and Maintaining Trust
• Possibly your Most Important Action
• A Deliberate and Continuous Effort
• Built Through Words And Actions

Trust → Speed Cost
Trust → Speed Cost

Good reference: The Speed of Trust, Stephen Covey, 2006.

Centralized, High Approval Level
Approval Process
Decentralized, Low Approval Level
Time
Trust and Confidence, "a priori" decisions, Supported / ing command relationships solutions

**Insights**
• Mission Type Orders
• Command Climate Of Inclusion and Crosstalk
• Transparency
• CCIR And Other Reporting Implications

speed of execution. We find that one can not talk decentralizing and empowerment while at the same time unnecessarily retaining decisions (e.g. CCIR and CONOP[7] approvals) at higher levels. Nor can one restrict cross talk and transparency while expecting initiative and speed of action.

Biases, stereotypes, and ego can cause friction between the various Service and SOF "cultures" and get in the way of building trust. Each of the Services and SOF has their own distinct cultures, developed over the years based on their different missions, expectations, and traditions. At the risk of oversimplification, the SOF professional development process instills the value of individual resourcefulness and initiative based on the likelihood of isolated operations with little external support. Marines learn the value of esprit and mission first. Soldiers value discipline and team work. We also see vestiges of Service cultures still ascribing to the notion that you have to own everything in your battlespace, i.e. you must have OPCON of it, not recognizing the power of trust and the Supported/ing command relationship.[8]

It is human nature to question others' cultures, their potential contributions and reliability, especially in combat when you are faced with trusting that other force with your life. We've seen countless examples of this initial "culture clash" impeding

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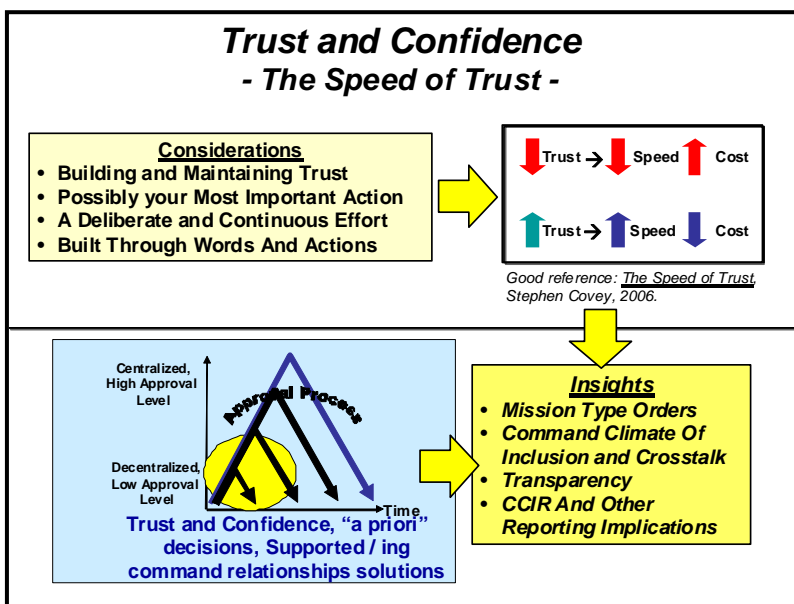
[5] FM 3-0 (Operations), Feb 2008, pg 3-6
[6] Suggest reading The Speed of Trust by Dr Stephen Covey.
[7] CONOP: Concept of Operations
[8] We'll discuss this much more in the succeeding sections.

development of trust and obstructing a "one team, one fight" mindset, resulting in less mission effectiveness.

The best teams recognize and aggressively mitigate these "culture" differences, and focus on building trust and teamwork to gain every possible advantage to accomplish the mission and minimize casualties. We must shed old baggage!

**Risk**. The concept of risk is directly related to the issues of decentralization, mission approval levels, and trust. Risk is inherent in all military operations. Thoughtful balancing of risk and opportunity empowers subordinate initiative in achieving results. We view risk in terms of risk to the force (e.g. in terms of casualties, etc.) and risk to the mission (e.g. in terms of attaining overall objectives). Commanders assess and mitigate these risks continuously during planning and execution.

Different perspectives in assessing risk can present a challenge to decentralization and establishing mission approval levels. Risk to the force may be viewed differently based on differing expertise and experience in employment of specific unit capabilities. Risk to the mission can also be viewed differently. For example: A SOF unit may assess risk to the mission in terms of continued combat advisor success or taking down a terrorist network, while the JTF commander may view risk in terms of impact on continued legitimacy of the mission and coalition cohesion.

A JTF commander could unknowingly impede "speed of "execution" by centralizing mission approval at his level to guard against any inadvertent risk to the JTF mission. However, the warfighters have learned how to retain this "speed of execution." They focus on fully inclusive planning at all levels which enables a common appreciation of the environment and risk. They have also developed well thought-out concept approval processes which empower subordinate initiative while flagging high risk operations for rapid decision at the appropriate level.

**Insights:**

- Delegate authorities to the point of being "uncomfortably decentralized" in order to get inside the adversary's decision cycle. We must accept the "discomfort" of losing "personal" control as we empower subordinates and underwrite their actions to speed execution and gain resilience in C2.

- Develop and review CONOP approval levels and CCIR to ensure they are not unnecessarily restricting subordinate initiative and slowing speed of execution.

- Foster the "one team, one fight" mindset that promotes camaraderie and breeds success. Share a common appreciation of the situation to enable prudent and balanced assessment of risk to the both the force and the mission.

- Build trust and relationships early – before deployment. Mitigate the "culture" differences, and focus on building trust and teamwork to accomplish the mission and minimize casualties. Nurture these relationships through both commander and staff crosstalk and follow through. Match promises with action.

- Recognize the perishable nature of trust in combat and guard it. You get one chance to lose trust; it takes a long time to rebuild trust once it's lost.

- Gain agility and flexibility through horizontal collaboration in which subordinates work directly with their warfighting partners at the tactical level. Aggressively demand subordinates to work with each other and seamlessly share information. Assist horizontal crosstalk through resourcing of liaison elements.

### 3. Command Relationships

Properly crafted command relationships can directly support decentralization and nurture trust to gain <u>synergy</u> and <u>harmonization.</u> These command relationships can change the mindset from a 'vertical' focus on receiving and unilaterally accomplishing tasks from the higher commander to that of working much more closely - harmoniously - with



our *horizontal* warfighting partners as depicted by the oval in the adjacent figure. Command relationships can help reinforce the recognition that we fight as one team of joint, interagency, and multinational partners – and depend on access to each other's capabilities to succeed.
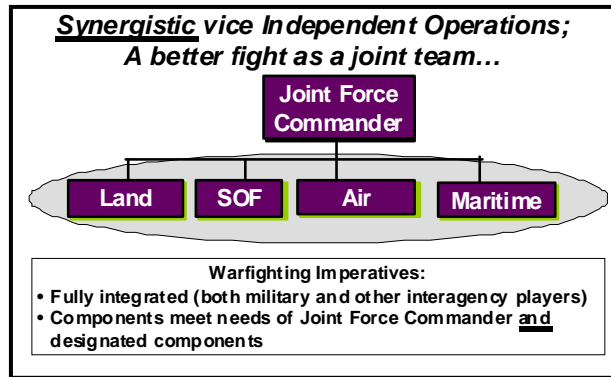
We've seen that getting the command relationships correct up front is absolutely critical to success. We find one key decision is whether to transfer "ownership" of forces to another commander or empower him with access to their capabilities. Operational Control (OPCON) and Tactical Control (TACON) provide authority to "own" and directly control the necessary forces to take on the fight alone, while Support Command relationships focus on providing access to the capabilities of other forces that can bring more to the fight and help in mission accomplishment.

<u>OPCON</u> provides for "ownership" of the forces. It authorizes the commander to task both "what to do" and "how to employ." It requires expertise in planning and employment. It remains the preferred command relationship over forces that the commander will continuously own and employ, and for which he and his staff have the <u>expertise</u> and <u>capability</u> to command and control.

<u>TACON</u>, a subset of OPCON, also provides for "ownership" of forces. TACON authorizes the gaining commander "local direction and control" for accomplishment of a specific mission. While normally thought as a temporary arrangement, it can be an enduring command relationship as in the case with SOF in Iraq and Afghanistan.

These "TACON" forces can either be attached or provided to the gaining commander. We often see supporting commanders providing forces and delegating TACON to a supported commander such as in the case of air sorties provided by the Navy or Marines TACON to the Joint Forces Air Component Command (JFACC). We also see higher commanders (such as a Combatant Commander) opting to attach forces and delegate TACON to a subordinate commander such as the case of the JSOTFs being subordinated under the TACON of JTFs in Iraq and Afghanistan. This attachment and delegation of TACON is often the case in longer duration missions where long term habitual relationships are required.

As noted above, a supporting commander can "provide" forces and delegate TACON directly to a supported commander as part of his support command responsibility to aid or assist that force. This providing of forces TACON can apply to SOF or ground forces equally as well as the case of air sorties noted above. We see this occurring informally with SOF and ground forces at the tactical level for specific
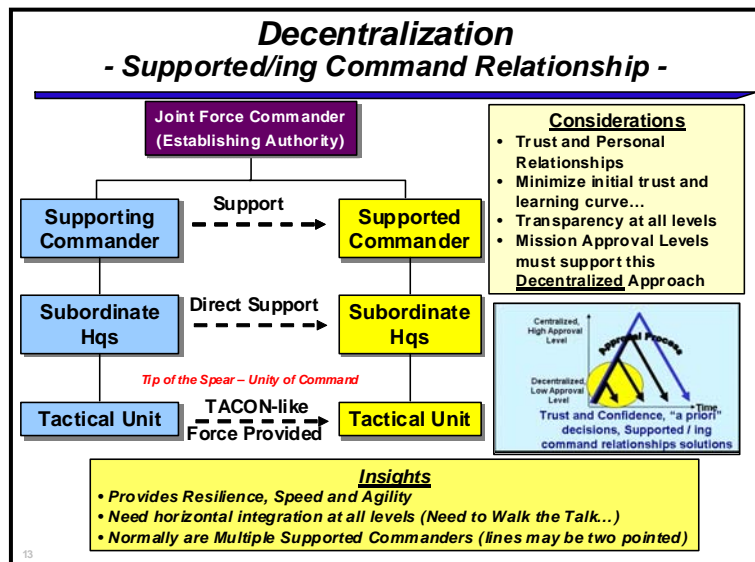
operations and specific time durations. It enables unity of command at the very tip of the spear – during actual combat operations at the tactical level.

There's much discussion on the parent command's (the losing unit) authorities over forces that have been provided or attached under the TACON of another commander (the gaining unit). We often hear the losing unit describe their residual authority in terms like "OPCON less TACON." We find that this view often places the TACON force commander in the position of having two bosses, his "OPCON less TACON" boss and his "TACON" boss. This can be confusing, detract from unity of command, restrict initiative, and reduce synergy of the force.

We find as **best practices** in the use of TACON:
- For the respective commanders to jointly determine the required tasks and organize the provided or attached TACON force for those identified tasks. This is a continuing dialogue as the situation and requirements change. Major changes of mission focus normally require organizational changes, are not within the parameters of "TACON" and require coordination with the parent organization.
- Clearly articulate the scope of the TACON authorities delegated to the gaining commander (normally a JTF).
- Provide the gaining commander of the TACON force the requisite expertise to effectively plan and exercise TACON of the force. We sometimes find conventional forces requesting TACON or even OPCON of SOF without also asking for the requisite command and staff expertise in employment.
- Designate the losing commander (normally the SOC) as a supporting commander (see description below) to the JTF.
- Minimize direction or control of the TACON force by the losing commander to strengthen the JTF's unity of command and responsibility for employment of the TACON force.
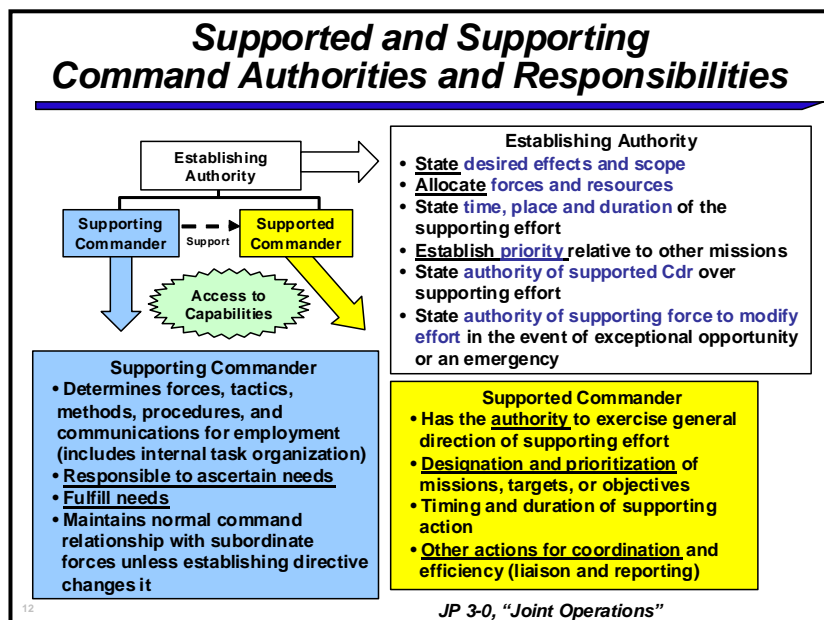
Support. We have learned in OEF and OIF that the support command relationship is probably the most powerful command relationship in terms of gaining access to additional capabilities. It requires the supporting commander to aid or assist another (supported) commander. This support relationship in essence makes the supporting commanders responsible for the success of the supported commander. They can not simply provide some forces and ignore the supported commander's subsequent requirements and challenges. Rather, the support command relationship requires supporting commanders to stay involved with the supported commander and continue to assist him during the conduct of operations – it creates harmony.



**Decentralization**
*- Supported/ing Command Relationship -*

Joint Force Commander (Establishing Authority)

Supporting Commander → Support → Supported Commander

Subordinate Hqs — Direct Support — Subordinate Hqs

*Tip of the Spear – Unity of Command*

Tactical Unit — TACON-like Force Provided — Tactical Unit

**Considerations**
• Trust and Personal Relationships
• Minimize initial trust and learning curve...
• Transparency at all levels
• Mission Approval Levels must support this Decentralized Approach

**Insights**
• Provides Resilience, Speed and Agility
• Need horizontal integration at all levels (Need to Walk the Talk...)
• Normally are Multiple Supported Commanders (lines may be two pointed)

This support relationship allows for the horizontal integration discussed earlier. The support command authority provides a supported commander access to capabilities that he doesn't own. Its flexibility is one of its greatest advantages. The supported commander simply needs to request support within the higher commander's intent. Supporting commanders are responsible to ascertain the supported commander's needs and help him. This relationship supports decentralized execution within mission type orders and commander's intent. There will normally be multiple, concurrent supported and supporting commanders – often the commanders will be in mutual support - thus there is a need for clear priorities being established by the establishing (higher) authority.

<u>**Authorities and Responsibilities**</u> within the Supported/ing Command Relationship:

- The <u>establishing authority</u> is the common higher commander – may be a Combatant Commander, a JTF commander, or even at the SecDef level in the case of certain GWOT or USSTRATCOM activities.[9] This higher commander defines the support command relationships among his subordinates in terms of who is supported and supporting, the respective degree of authority, and overall priorities – especially where there are limited resources supporting numerous operations. SOF and Air are good examples of some limited resources. He is also the "referee," the tie-breaker / adjudicator, when subordinates cannot work out the necessary balance of access to capabilities.



**Supported and Supporting Command Authorities and Responsibilities**

**Establishing Authority**
- <u>State</u> desired effects and scope
- <u>Allocate</u> forces and resources
- State time, place and duration of the supporting effort
- <u>Establish priority</u> relative to other missions
- State authority of supported Cdr over supporting effort
- State authority of supporting force to modify effort in the event of exceptional opportunity or an emergency

**Supporting Commander**
- Determines forces, tactics, methods, procedures, and communications for employment (includes internal task organization)
- <u>Responsible to ascertain needs</u>
- <u>Fulfill needs</u>
- Maintains normal command relationship with subordinate forces unless establishing directive changes it

**Supported Commander**
- Has the <u>authority</u> to exercise general direction of supporting effort
- <u>Designation and prioritization</u> of missions, targets, or objectives
- Timing and duration of supporting action
- <u>Other actions for coordination</u> and efficiency (liaison and reporting)

*JP 3-0, "Joint Operations"*

**Best practices:**
- Give clear direction to subordinates in terms of priorities, acceptable risk, and intent to allow subordinates to work horizontally with each other in accomplishing tasks. This is critical and requires continuous, hands-on involvement in today's environment of multiple ongoing missions with limited resources.
- Set conditions for and demand crosstalk amongst supported and supporting commanders to build and reinforce the necessary horizontal personal relationships, and trust and confidence.
- Challenge your subordinates to "self-regulate" their apportionment of capabilities to one another through horizontal crosstalk. This crosstalk amongst your

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[9] GWOT: Global War on Terror. STRATCOM: U.S. Strategic Command

components will allow them to arrive at the optimal apportionment of capabilities to accomplish both their assigned tasks and support the supported commanders.
- Staying involved when necessary to arbitrate / resolving conflicting understanding of priorities.

- <u>Supported Commander</u>. The supported commander is given access to supporting capabilities and has the authority to provide general direction, designate and prioritize missions, targets, or objectives, and other actions for coordination and efficiency (to include requesting liaison and directing of reporting requirements).

**<u>Best practices</u>**:

- Identify needs to supporting commanders as a continuous, not one time, activity.
- Request liaison from supporting commanders to help coherently integrate supporting capabilities in the operation.
- Bring lack of support issues first to supporting commanders, and if necessary to establishing authority for resolution.
- Recognize your accountability in developing your concept of operations and supported requirements taking into account potential risk and hardship to supporting commander forces.

- <u>Supporting Commander</u>. The supporting commander is responsible to both ascertain and satisfy the needs of the supported commander within the priorities directed by the establishing authority.

**<u>Best practices</u>:**

- Recognize your role in ensuring the success of the supported commander. We see that those believing and following through on the 'one team, one fight' mindset set the conditions for success. Share your assessment on potential risks, both to the mission and to your forces, with the supported commanders to assist in best accomplishing the mission with the minimum risk.
- Understand and respect the authority of supported commander. Recognize that your support to another supported commander may have a higher priority than even a mission your unit has been assigned.
- Take time in ascertaining the supported commander's requirements and understanding the overall priorities in apportioning your forces to accomplish both your assigned tasks and those of other supported commanders.
- Send liaisons to supported commanders to assist them in planning and in ascertaining your requirements.
- Establish appropriate command relationships to your subordinates to ensure you fulfill your supporting responsibilities. Ensure the support command relationship is delineated to the very lowest level by empowering your subordinates to work directly with their 'supported' counterparts.
- Forces or capabilities can be provided in a Direct Support or even TACON relationship to a respective supported commander to ensure his success. We need to educate our leaders that this is okay and often preferred.

## 4. Combatant Command Level - Integration Insights

Effective integration of conventional forces and SOF begins at the Geographic Combatant Command (GCC) level. The GCC sets conditions for integration through guidance and intent, crafting of the theater task organization, command relationships, and tasks to subordinates.

The global nature of challenges and responses coupled with high demand and low density forces have increased the need for agility at the GCC level across their Area of Responsibility (AOR). This has led to an increased use of theater level Functional Components (e.g. the JFACC and theater SOC[10]) with delineated supported and supporting command relationships with established JTFs.

This <u>increased use of functional components has changed the paradigm at the GCC</u> level. In the past, most forces were provided to the JTFs with little reliance on theater-level functional components. We now find that the GCCs are tasking their functional components with AOR-wide missions while also directing that they support established JTFs. As a result, <u>GCCs must provide much more direction, resourcing, and prioritization</u> for the interaction of their functional components with these JTFs.

National SOF may also support a GCC. These forces are often organized as a task force separate from Theater SOF and normally remain directly subordinate to the GCC with some form of support command relationship with established JTFs. Integration insights regarding these forces at the operational and tactical level remain similar to Theater SOF and are discussed in subsequent sections.

We find that the GCC has two important responsibilities regarding integration of SOF and conventional forces:



**Global Command Relationships**

- Coordination with USSOCOM. As the supported commander in its AOR, the GCC exercises unity of command over forces in the AOR. In this role the GCC, in full coordination with the SOC, articulates SOF requirements that USSOCOM supports in its force provider role. The GCC normally transfers them under the OPCON of the SOC; the combatant commander also has the option of attaching them to a JTF in an OPCON or TACON relationship. The GCC (and SOC) also identifies and provides the required non SOF-unique enablers from in-theater or through the standard conventional force provider process with USJFCOM.

  The GCC is also a supporting commander to USSOCOM in accordance with SOCOM's responsibilities in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). However, we find that this does not normally change command relationships for SOF in the GCC's AOR.

- The <u>other significant GCC responsibility</u> is that of crafting strategy and plans, determining the Theater organization, and the associated command relationships for operations within the AOR. This entails establishment of subordinate joint forces, assignment of tasks to Service Components, Functional Components,

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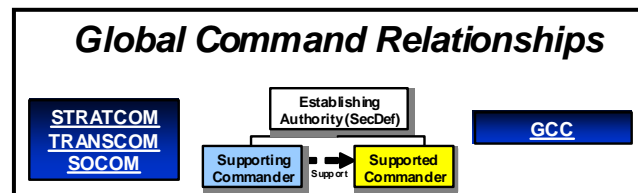
[10] The SOC is a Subunified Command but has many of the "Functional Component" attributes.

and the SOC, and command relationships. The GCC decides whether to directly empower subordinate joint task force commanders with control (e.g. OPCON or TACON) over SOF (normally a JSOTF), provide those joint force commanders access to SOF capabilities through a supported/ing command relationship with the theater SOC, or a combination of both. We focus the remainder of discussion in this section on this responsibility.

We observe a continuing challenge at the GCC level to define the relationships between the Theater SOCs and established JTFs. The GCC is faced with optimizing SOF for AOR-wide flexibility while also attempting to provide JTF commanders unity of command over those forces operating in their JOAs. The high demand and low density nature of SOF, together with the need for detailed expertise in SOF employment, further complicates this challenge.

The GCC often opts to focus the Theater SOC on AOR-wide threats that may cut across JTF JOAs within the AOR while attaching requisite SOF capabilities in the form of JSOTFs under the OPCON or TACON of established JTFs. The
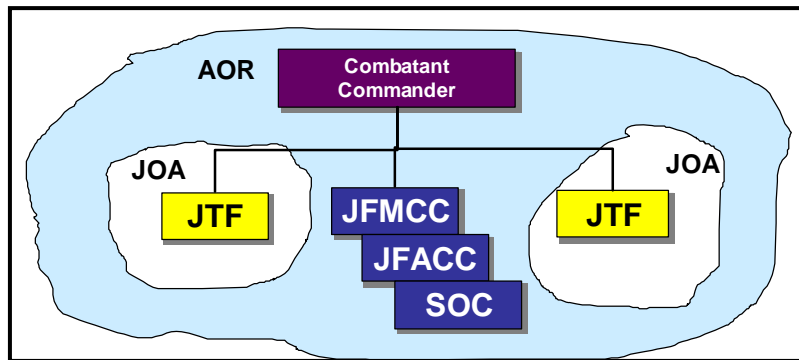


Theater SOC is normally tasked with AOR-wide missions and is designated as the supported command for those missions. The GCC also designates the SOC as a supporting command to JTFs (whom are designated as supported commanders) and often further directs the attachment of JSOTF to JTFs in an OPCON or TACON role for unity of command. We have seen the Theater SOC in the supporting commander role often deploy a robust liaison element to the supported JTF to both provide SOF planning expertise to the JTF commander and to better ascertain future SOF requirements. This is an excellent practice, but is often viewed as ad hoc and greeted with varying degrees of acceptance by the supported JTF.

The GCCs face the integration challenge of ensuring unity of command within a JTF's JOA while best achieving theater-strategic objectives in the AOR. At times, we see tension between a JTF commander's view of his authority and desired employment of SOF in the JOA with that of the SOC Commander's view. This will continue; it's natural due to their different perspectives - the SOC looking at it from an AOR perspective faced with limited SOF resources, and the JTF looking at it from a JOA mission focus. However, this can be exacerbated when the GCC tasks both the SOC and JTF with similar objectives or tasks within the JTF's JOA. The GCC can, and should, help alleviate this friction by clearly delineating the JTF and SOC's specific authorities and responsibilities, and ensuring both share a common understanding of their individual responsibilities and authorities.

Another SOF and conventional area of integration is with Maritime and Air component commanders. SOF aviation and naval warfare assets operate in the air and sea domain (and are welcomed and embraced). We find good coordination and clear delineation of responsibilities between the SOC and those components.

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The GCC should use the special operations expertise organic to the theater SOC in both a staff advisory role for the GCC HQ in addition to its better known role as a subunified, functionally-oriented headquarters (i.e. the subunified command for special operations). In the mid 1990s the GCC J3-SO staff elements were transferred into the SOC and the SOC was charged with this dual-hatted role. Thus, the SOC commander is now dual-hatted as both the commander of the SOC and as the <u>GCC's special operations staff advisor</u>. In his advisor role, he provides a special operations staff element at the GCC that provides staff support to the commander and staff principals. It is through this staff advisory role that the GCC receives SOF-specific recommendations on task organization, risk, tasks, and command relationships to ensure effective special operations integration.

We have seen cases in which this staff support role is either not emphasized and resourced by the SOC, or not accepted by the GCC staff. Some GCCs view the SOC as primarily that of a component and not a "staff element," and unfortunately use organic staff or individual augmentees for special operations input in their staff processes. <u>The SOC's staff support and advisor role is arguably its more important role in setting conditions for SOF integration and GCC mission success.</u>

### <u>Insights at GCC level</u>:

- Instill an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence to gain synergy and mitigate the risks associated with interdependence of National and Theater SOF and established JTFs. Gain synergy through intent, planning guidance, and orders.

- Incorporate SOC-provided special operations staff support at the GCC level to ensure special operations perspectives and capabilities are an upfront, inherent part of the planning versus an add-on at the end during execution.

- Ensure a common understanding of the GCC's concept of operation and specific tasks of both the Theater SOC and established JTFs. Avoid assigning both the same task. Clear delineation and common understanding of tasks and responsibilities will reduce confusion.

- Clarify command relationships vis-à-vis the SOC and established JTFs in the form of orders to reduce ambiguity. Determine whether the fundamental relationship will be that of supported and supporting, or if designated SOF will be attached under the direct control (i.e. OPCON or TACON) of established JTFs, or <u>some combination of the above</u>. This important decision affects unity of command, expertise in employment, and theater-wide availability of SOF.
  - Clearly specify the Supported/ing Command Relationships between the SOC, JTF(s), and other Functional Component Commands.
  - Provide clear priorities, acceptable risk, and scope of SOC support to the JTF relative to other missions throughout the AOR.
  - Provide requisite expertise and oversight in SOF employment to JTFs.
  - Clearly state the authorities of the JTF vis-à-vis the SOC for provided or attached SOF (e.g. a JSOTF). While seemingly obvious, these aspects can be overlooked, decreasing responsiveness and agility in support of the JTFs and causing employment disagreements.

- Clarify specific Administrative Control (ADCON) authorities and responsibilities of the SOC vis-à-vis the Theater Service Components.

## 5. Operational Level – Integration Insights

At the operational (JTF and JSOTF) level, we see excellent integration of SOF and conventional forces. These commanders operate and live together in the same JOA and share a "one team-one fight" mindset of operations. They develop strong personal relationships and trust, exchange liaison elements, and seamlessly share information recognizing the absolute need for transparency to ensure harmony of operations. We find that the commanders of these JSOTFs, while recognizing the broad authority and responsibilities of the SOC, receive their tasks and direction from the JTF commanders.

## Insights at the operational level:

- Focus on building trust and confidence at all levels. Make it a "one team, one fight." Ensure the O6 level JSOTF commanders get into the flag officer meetings.
- Incorporate SOF expertise and perspectives in JTF operational design, planning and decision forums. Make SOF a full member of the team – not a visitor!
- Demand transparency in both planning and operations. Ensure a common understanding of the situation and potential risks in operations. Direct the exchange of LNOs.  At JTF level, request liaison elements from National and Theater SOF headquarters (i.e. the Theater SOC), and from any provided or attached SOF (i.e. JSOTF) to better integrate their capabilities. Ensure these liaison elements have planning, current operations information sharing, and intelligence liaison capabilities. Provide JTF liaison elements to any National SOF headquarters operating in the JTF JOA to facilitate information exchange.
- Establish appropriate command relationships (typically mutual support) between SOF and the JTF's subordinate units. Develop horizontal linkages with SOF at all levels down to Brigade Combat Team (BCT) level to ensure decentralized, tactical level integration with SOF. This will likely entail liaison exchange and delineated mutual support relationships.
- Develop and enforce clear staffing processes for coordinating SOF operations with battlespace owners. Include site exploitation, casualty evacuation, fire support, intelligence exchange, ISR support, quick reaction force, and detainee handling staffing procedures. SOCOM Pub 3-33 has excellent checklists for this.
- Clarify public affairs release roles, responsibilities, and processes. We continue to see a challenge in proactive planning, coordination, and rapid release of public affairs information related to SOF operations. This requires command attention to ensure cross staff coordination and proactive public affairs release to stay ahead of potential adversary reactive propaganda in winning the information war.
- Develop clear mission approval levels for operations that promote decentralization and horizontal coordination between SOF and conventional tactical commanders. Articulate the level at which different types of operations must be approved, or at a minimum, coordinated. Direct mandatory coordination with Battlespace Owners (BSOs)and empower them with Coordinating Authority for operations in their AOs. They should have "non-concur" authority if they perceive a planned SOF operation in their AO may negatively affect their planned operations and objectives. Higher commanders resolve any non-concurrences.
- Be prepared to provide logistical and other enabler support to SOF.

## 6. Tactical Level – Integration Insights

It is at the tactical level that SOF and conventional integration really pays off. It is at this level where execution occurs and the two forces complement each other and work together to achieve JTF objectives. Integration in planning and execution at this level is the most challenging, particularly early in deployments, because of:
- The immediacy of "culture" differences and the associated biases, stereotyping, ego challenges, and friction which directly affect trust.
- Initially undeveloped relationships and trust.
- Force rotations and the resultant commanders' changing guidance and focus of operations.
- Task saturation of both SOF and conventional tactical level operators operating in the complex battlespace with each concentrating on their own operations.
- Limited amount of personnel actually available at the tactical unit level to plan and coordinate with other headquarters.
- The very human challenge of developing and maintaining trust at the lowest level in very stressful situations.

We have heard of past cases of command climates narrowly focused on only the OPCON chain of command 'stovepiped' viewpoints of the situation, primarily due to task saturation. These cases were often characterized by limited crosstalk between the respective tactical level headquarters, a lack of knowledge of each other's view of the situation and their mission, capabilities, and risk assessment, and an attitude that the other force wasn't 'value added' or didn't have a need to know. In some cases, the two forces did not initially understand the capabilities and different mission sets of one another and were hesitant to share information and collaborate to develop the best concepts of operations to accomplish their respective missions. We find that these challenges are being overcome by a command climate of inclusion, transparency, and the "one team, one fight" attitude, early development of personal relationships, recognition and acceptance of the different "cultures," and building of trust at the lowest level.

### Insights at the tactical level:

- Develop relationships and trust before or at a minimum very early in the deployment to mitigate the "culture" clash. This will likely include acceptance of open interface between SOF company grade and senior enlisted personnel with conventional field grade officers due to differences in force and rank structure. We find the best integration occurs when SOF tactical level commanders and LNOs have open access to division and brigade commanders and their S3's.
- Appreciate the broader "one team, one fight" approach to mission accomplishment and how your unit must plan and execute operations in synergy with others. Synergy and integration beforehand, not deconfliction after the fact, is the path to getting everything into the fight and accomplishing the mission. Leverage each others' different perspectives to enrich situational understanding and plans. SOF personnel (liaison, S3s, and even commanders) should regularly attend battlespace owner planning meetings as part of their battle rhythm.
- Continue employing clear staffing processes for coordinating and supporting SOF operations with battlespace owners in AOs.

## 7. Conclusion

The improvement in integration of Conventional and Special Operations Forces is a superb example of jointness at work. It has brought together many of the complementary capabilities of conventional forces and SOF and changed the way we think and operate. We recognize the hard work and ethos of the warriors who have personally made the sacrifices to make this synergy and harmony possible. We must now take advantage of their insights and lessons learned to permanently enlighten our Service and SOF cultures and institutions to the value of a decentralized "one team, one fight" mindset.

Commanders set the climate for effective integration. We believe that they are the key to this mentality. They must cultivate inclusiveness, transparency and synergy of operations through their actions, intent, planning guidance, and orders.

We must continue to decentralize to gain agility and resilience in operations. This will require a command philosophy of empowering tactical level commanders to exercise their initiative within higher commander's intent to increase speed of execution coupled with clear command relationships and responsibilities.

### We need to emphasize these insights in four areas:

– **Education**. Emphasize the "one team, one fight" mindset that fosters camaraderie and breeds success. Delve into the agility and increased resilience rationale behind the concept of decentralization of operations. Share the capabilities and limitations, together with recognition and acceptance of the different "cultures" of the forces. Teach fundamentals of building and maintaining trust to mitigate "culture" clashes and ensure synergy of operations. Show the value of transparency and seamless information sharing, together with the fallacy of behind the "green door" thinking.[11]

– **Joint Training**. Train together like we fight together. Replicate the complex environment with the stakeholders operating in the same battlespace. Focus on building relationships and trust prior to and during initial employment of forces to minimize the initial "90 day" lag in effective operations after TOA. While recognizing deployment and scheduling demands, ensure that commanders participate in these exercises to jumpstart building of these relationships. Exercise command relationships, emphasizing integrated planning and decentralized operations with clearly defined mission approval levels and necessary coordination with battlespace owners.

– **Service Training**. Inculcate a realistic joint context into service training replicating the numerous stakeholders and the horizontal coordination to ensure synergy of operations. Learn about each others' cultures, capabilities and limitations.

– **Learning**. Learn during operations and conduct post-deployment seminars to institutionalize lessons learned and further build trust and relationships.

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[11] The "Green door" refers to the past culture of not sharing information with warfighting partners. SOF operations would be planned 'behind the green door,' referring to a sensitive compartment intelligence facility (SCIF) door. Obviously, some operations require this degree of security – but with much more recognition of the need for information sharing.