

Paratroopers from 82nd Airborne Division prepare to load C-130Js from 317th Airlift Group as part of Joint Access Operation Exercise, Pope Field, NC, June 2013



U.S. Air Force (Damon Kasberg)

Assured Access Building a Joint and Multinational Airborne Forcible Entry Capability

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As we end today's wars and reshape our Armed Forces, we will ensure that our military is agile, flexible, and ready for the full range of contingencies. In particular we will continue to invest in the capabilities critical to future success, including intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; counter terrorism; countering weapons of mass destruction; operating in anti-access environments; and prevailing in all domains, including cyber.

—President Barack Obama

Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense

The Nation and its allies face a strategic turning point that necessitates the optimization of joint and multinational airborne joint forcible entry (JFE) capabilities to meet future security challenges. The security environment has been shaped more by surprise than inevitability, and the future presents “a complex and uncertain security landscape in which the pace of change continues to accelerate”¹—thus the ability for the United States and its multinational partners to respond quickly with assured access to introduce the capabilities required to secure its interests.

After more than a decade of ground combat with its tremendous investment of national blood and treasure, many policymakers are unable to envision a future

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requiring the commitment of ground forces. However, the contrary is more likely, with scenarios that could arise from traditional state-based military threats, “disorder” from intrastate conflict and failing governments, transnational threats, violent extremist organizations, disasters, and hybrid combinations. Clearly, most of these circumstances, particularly those involving the loss of control of weapons of mass destruction or the protection of threatened American lives or interests, will require the rapid introduction of ground forces, employed in uncertain to nonpermissive conditions as part of a suite of interdependent joint force capabilities.

Fiscal constraints increasingly limit overseas basing options and access to volatile regions. As a result, our adversaries will employ asymmetric capabilities and antiaccess/area-denial (A2/AD) strategies in the global commons and possible operating areas to limit, delay, or degrade the employment of joint and coalition forces. Consequently, ground forces employed in crisis response scenarios must be agile, responsive, and capable of JFE, operational maneuver from strategic distance, fighting immediately on arrival to seize lodgments, and exploiting the initiative gained when our air and naval partners defeat the in-depth A2/AD efforts of our adversaries.

To ensure a robust and credible crisis response capability, the Department of Defense (DOD) directed the establishment of a joint Global Response Force (GRF), and the Army’s contributions are centered on the unique capabilities of the 82nd Airborne Division—rapidly deployable, forcible entry capable, tailorable in composition, scalable in size, adaptable to multiple missions, and always at a high state of readiness. Throughout its history, the 82nd Airborne Division has answered the Nation’s “911 call.”

With troop deployments to Afghanistan waning, the 82nd regains focus on its core mission of airborne JFE. It does so in full recognition that this is an inherently joint mission requiring the regeneration of core competencies to guarantee the capabilities necessary to conduct airborne JFE. Additionally, the last decade of war has certainly reinforced the importance of interoperability with our allies, who we cannot afford to meet for the first time in combat. As a result, we must continue to foster relationships and train with the airborne forces of our multinational partners, who are typically the rapid

response forces of their respective nations, in full recognition of the likelihood of operating side-by-side should our countries choose to act in concert against future threats. Thus, as one peers into the future, it is clear that the United States must maintain a diverse GRF that is rapidly deployable to the source of a crisis, highly trained and ready, able to assure access in any environment, and fully interoperable with potential partners and allies.

Prevailing in Defense

Since its inception, the employment or threat of employment of airborne units as the spearhead of an operation has repeatedly proved its strategic value by demonstrating compelling political resolve. This reinforces the old military adage that in order to deter an adversary, a nation must have the ability to defeat that adversary, and airborne forces are one of the most effective tools for doing so. Airborne JFE operations achieve tactical or operational surprise by making any spot in the world accessible and forcing an adversary to defend in all directions. During the last four decades, airborne JFE has proved itself as a credible option to demonstrate U.S. resolve by introducing significant combat power into both contested and uncontested operational environments. It remains the fastest way to introduce large numbers of ground forces—4,500 paratroopers in 30 minutes. As part of the GRF, the U.S. joint force has maintained the ability to deploy a brigade-size airborne force anywhere in the world within 96 hours of notification and, if needed, conduct forcible entry parachute assault to secure key objectives and execute follow-on combat operations ranging from deterring or defeating adversaries, protecting American and allied citizens and interests, securing key infrastructure, maintaining peace, or conducting stability operations or humanitarian assistance.

The 1983 intervention in Grenada during Operation *Urgent Fury* and the 1989 invasion of Panama in Operation *Just Cause* are notable airborne JFE operations that resulted in the restoration of legitimate governments.² When diplomatic efforts failed to achieve policy objectives, our joint force quickly achieved air superiority and rapidly projected land power for the decisive effect of removing hostile regimes. The success of these operations undoubtedly deterred future aggressors across the globe.

Airborne JFE is such a powerful instrument of national power that the threat of its employment can be as compelling as the reality. The multinational military intervention in Haiti clearly demonstrated this strategic deterrent value. In September 1994, President Bill Clinton approved Operation *Uphold Democracy* to forcibly remove the military regime installed by the 1991 coup d’état that overthrew Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the elected president. The plan centered on an airborne JFE operation—distributing nearly 4,000 paratroopers from 82nd Airborne Division over two drop zones to achieve 40 tactical objectives.³ With 82nd Airborne Division en route in an air armada of over 60 planes, former President Jimmy Carter and General Colin Powell had the strategic leverage to force the capitulation of an illegitimate regime and avert a U.S. invasion of Haiti.⁴ A close synchronization of diplomatic efforts with a ready, responsive, and imposing airborne JFE capability provided the U.S. administration with a powerful deterrence tool to decisively confront and defeat aggression without firing a single round.

Airborne JFE is most effective because its associated forces are always in a high state of readiness, operationally adaptable, and ready for immediate employment. However, they are not limited to parachute assaults and lethal operations. They are agile forces prepared to meet myriad potential crises thanks to a training regimen for the full spectrum of operations against hybrid enemy threats.

The following three operations clearly demonstrate the broad utility of 82nd Airborne Division and its rapid response capability. In 1988, when the Sandinista government of Nicaragua threatened the borders of Honduras, President Ronald Reagan launched Operation *Golden Pheasant* to counter Nicaraguan military incursions into the border areas of Honduras. Airborne JFE forces departed home on a short-notice deployment exercise consisting of an airborne assault and air-land operations followed by combined patrols along the Honduran-Nicaraguan border. The deployment was publicly described as a joint maneuver exercise, but the show of force, covered by international media, caused the Sandinistas to rapidly withdraw across their border, effectively deescalating the situation.

Six days after his invasion of Kuwait, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein massed

his armored forces on the Saudi Arabian border, threatening the Kingdom's sovereignty. President George H.W. Bush ordered air and ground forces to deploy to Saudi Arabia in response to a request from King Fahd. Within 48 hours of notification, lead elements of the Division Readiness Brigade (DRB) were on their way to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, becoming the initial American presence on the ground and drawing "the line in the sand."⁵ The 82nd Airborne Division

understanding, fell in on mature infrastructures, and enjoyed unchallenged access to the theaters. Units generally knew when they would deploy and when they would return, and were able to transition with their predecessors for weeks. We refined our conduct of counterinsurgency in this manner for all of the right reasons: to give Servicemembers every advantage possible, but we should not delude ourselves that this will be the nature of future conflicts.

in the weapons, technologies, and methods necessary to fulfill their A2/AD strategies. Our adversaries now have access to more lethal and disruptive technologies including precision-strike cyber warfare instruments and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. As a result, both state and non-state actors have the capability to perpetrate violence and disruption on a grand scale.⁷ Our adversaries have also captured "lessons learned" from coalition operations during the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. Inexpensive investments in A2/AD will provide increased protection and standoff capabilities limiting freedom of action in the global commons and the terrain where we operate.

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bought the joint force time to deploy and set the conditions for follow-on coalition forces to expel the Iraqi army from Kuwait.

More recently, 82nd Airborne Division rapidly deployed to meet urgent humanitarian needs due to the effects of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and a catastrophic earthquake in Haiti. In both instances, 82nd deployed on short notice, adapted to unique circumstances on the ground, and significantly contributed to assuaging human suffering. Though neither deployment involved an airborne operation, a parachute assault was considered for Haiti because of unknown runway conditions at Port au Prince International Airport and a compelling need to get assistance on the ground rapidly.

Combining high standards of individual and unit readiness with a global force projection capability that can mass land power on any piece of ground in the world has provided policymakers with an undeniably critical instrument of national power. Since World War II, there have been 16 instances of airborne JFE forces achieving critical national objectives. In the future, our country's leaders will undoubtedly want and require this capability as a means to achieve U.S. interests.

Strategic Atmospheric

Our nation's longest war has understandably become somewhat predictable and formulaic in its conduct. International coalitions of up to 50 nations fought counterinsurgency in 2 countries against opponents who, although cunning and lethal, possessed a limited set of capabilities. Our forces enjoyed high levels of situational

The history of warfare tells us that future conflicts will occur unexpectedly and be characterized by uncertainty, friction, and dynamic political conditions. We must be prepared to conduct the full range of military operations against opponents who will possess some high-end niche capabilities (air defense, surface-to-surface missiles, chemical/biological weapons, and so forth), which may afford them some asymmetric advantage. In the initial stages, we will not possess all of the situational understanding that we desire and will have to fight for access to the theater against opponents' antiaccess capabilities. Our support infrastructures will be immature and expeditionary. Fortunately, we have the most combat-experienced leadership at all levels in our history, which is learning and leading units through this transition to be trained and ready for the nature of future conflicts.

Unlike the drawdown in the 1990s, the joint force today is decisively engaged in over 70 countries. Simultaneously, the Services confront equipment modernization requirements despite a decade of soaring budgets. More important, the United States faces a security environment that continues to become more uncertain, complex, and dangerous.⁶ As Washington responsibly draws down forces in Afghanistan, the joint force prepares for a different future—one involving "come as you are" conflicts with both powerful nation-state and elusive nonstate opponents that are capable, well organized, and lethally equipped.

A global view of the future operating environment makes clear that our adversaries have made considerable gains

The joint force must maintain the ability to credibly dissuade, deter, and defeat adversaries as they present themselves. At the low end of the threat spectrum, we will encounter guerrilla-type opponents armed with limited A2 capabilities but vast experience with the employment of low-tech AD as they blend into the population.⁸ Like the Afghan Taliban, they will choose the time and place for contact with the joint force. In the middle of the spectrum we can expect to see Hizballah-like forces that employ hybrid tactics and techniques that combine irregular and guerrilla competencies with modern weapons.⁹ Though this type of threat is not new, their employment of A2/AD strategies, likely under no formalized or centralized command and control, would be less vulnerable to the comprehensive pressure of organized U.S. diplomatic efforts and military power.¹⁰ At the high end of the spectrum are the conventional forces of state actors, against whom we have historically built our grand strategy and force structure. We expect them to employ robust A2/AD capabilities.

As the United States looks globally and develops ways to counter our adversaries' A2/AD capabilities, it must consider resource constraints. Over the last decade, policymakers deliberately accepted risks associated with threat advances in A2/AD strategies and capabilities in order to mitigate operational and strategic risk associated with Iraq and Afghanistan.¹¹ As DOD reshapes its strategy to face future challenges, it is almost universally agreed that this method can no longer continue and that failure to adapt to the nature of future warfare may equate to unacceptable risk to U.S. interests abroad.

Cuts to force structure and the realignment of forces to a more continental U.S.-based posture will undoubtedly shape the perceptions of allies, future partners, and adversaries regarding our ability to meet current obligations and address emerging threats and crises. Historically, the presence of forward-stationed forces clearly demonstrated a commitment to protecting the global commons and a willingness to enter into conflict to achieve strategic stability and secure U.S. interests.¹² As the Army repositions forward forces stateside, the ability to maintain treaty obligations and conduct military engagement will rest on the shoulders of expeditionary forces. Observant adversaries will take notice of the decline in presence and implement strategies that threaten the ability of joint forces to traverse the global commons and project land power to gain and maintain access at a time and location of their choosing.¹³

Our allies have also been grappling with shrinking defense budgets, causing them to reexamine national priorities and the strategic policies that drive their force structure and capability decisions. Though each nation approaches the problem differently, the ability to provide responsive forces to deter and defeat threats as well as respond to unforeseen contingencies remains a common priority. The British are dividing their land forces into a Reaction Force and an Adaptable Force. Three Armored Infantry Brigades organized for expeditionary operations and a single Air Assault Brigade “trained and equipped to undertake the full spectrum of intervention tasks” comprise the Reaction Force available for short-notice contingencies.¹⁴ The French continue to embrace the concept of expeditionary forces as critical to maintaining national interests. According to their White Book, currently under revision, France will maintain “an intervention capability that is flexible and reactive, capable of conducting the entire spectrum of operations, often with the same men.”¹⁵ Their recent success with airborne JFE in Mali during Operation *Serval* reinforces their importance to crisis response capabilities and may indicate that little will change regarding how the French defense establishment will prioritize its resources. For many of our North Atlantic Treaty Organization partners, increasing budgetary pressures place them in a situation where they will optimize force structure and resource decisions so if they are

not able to fight alone, they are able to fight within a coalition and maintain maximum autonomy.¹⁶

The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review, the 2011 National Military Strategy, and the President’s 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for a 21st Century Defense*, each emphasize that the United States will face future access challenges to the global commons and critical regions of the world. Thus a critical core capability for the United States is the ability to “rapidly and globally project power in all domains.”¹⁷ The United States must overcome the illusion of unopposed strategic and operational access to locations deemed integral to securing core national interests. To prevail over the most complex national security challenges, our leadership must determine how it might breach sophisticated A2/AD capabilities, conduct opposed forcible entry, and maintain access and freedom of action in each contested domain despite persistent area-denial threats.¹⁸

Shaping an Airborne JFE

As previously discussed, all of our country’s strategic policy documents highlight our adversaries’ pursuit of A2/AD capabilities. In response, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Michael Mullen described the following core military competencies neces-

sary to defeat aggression: “complementary, multi-domain power projection; joint forcible entry; and the ability to maintain joint assured access to the global commons and cyberspace should they become contested.”¹⁹ In recognition of emerging adversarial capabilities and changes in U.S. force posture, Admiral Mullen subsequently directed the development of the Joint Operational Access Concept, which is intended to guide how the joint force overcomes access challenges to achieve strategic goals. The concept defines general principles that describe how the joint force would approach opposed access and requisite capabilities for a cross-domain and in-depth execution.²⁰ These factors should largely determine the size, structure, and resources necessary to shape the core joint force capabilities and capacities required by

the GRF. In order to respond to global contingencies, the GRF—as a microcosm of what DOD offers as a whole—provides a menu of rapidly deployable forces to give national leaders and combatant commanders options for dealing with unforeseen challenges. As contributors to the GRF, the Services must organize, train, equip, and maintain their GRF contributions to ensure strategic flexibility, strategic depth, and strategic reach.

Strategic Flexibility. The GRF provides our leadership with strategic flexibility by delivering tailorable and scalable formations via multiple methods, which requires our adversaries to defend in all directions. In order to deliver these formations over great distances, the Army is dependent on the capabilities and future modernization plans of the Air Force and Navy. To achieve cross-domain effectiveness against A2/AD strategies arrayed in depth and time, each Service must collaborate on multidomain requirements using airborne, amphibious, and air assault JFE elements. This collaboration would drive the capabilities and resources necessary to achieve opposed entry, maintain freedom of action, and defeat adversaries who continue to employ AD strategies.²¹

Initial in-depth efforts to breach A2/AD threats would rely heavily on the Navy and Air Force. However, once enemy air defenses are neutralized and a lane is estab-

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lished, airborne forces allow the joint force to maintain the momentum by rapidly seizing key terrain and infrastructure to enable further penetration or follow-on operations. Once a foothold is seized and a lodgment established, follow-on forces would arrive; the joint force would then transition from reacting to A2/AD threats to dislocating and defeating the enemy at their origin. In recognition that a one-size-fits-all capability will likely fall short of unanticipated demands, the GRF must provide a mission-tailored force, in both size and capability, that is prepared to gain access and operate and sustain itself against the range of threats across a distributed battlefield under the harshest conditions.²² To meet those requirements, airborne JFE forces are ready to provide more than 4,500 paratroopers and mission-

essential equipment, arrive anywhere in the world within 96-hours plus flight time and parachute into multiple drop zones in a matter of minutes. This immediately provides a full set of mission-tailored joint, DOD, and partner capabilities seizing the initiative from our adversaries and expanding a tactical airborne capability to achieve operational effects.

Strategic Depth. Inherently, joint and combined action forms the foundation for strategic depth. While the United States has always retained the right to act alone in pursuit of its national interests, the preference is to cooperate with allies, building political legitimacy with a multinational alliance, to achieve common objectives. U.S. interests are rarely isolated from other nations, and this creates opportunities to cooperatively deepen security ties, address common security challenges, and develop combined strategies to deter and defeat acts of aggression.²³ More than a decade of coalition operations has taught us how to approach problems as a partner, enhance interoperability in planning and command and control, and leverage nation-specific competencies to achieve collective goals that would otherwise be unattainable.

This is true with airborne JFE, where fiscal realities have driven likely partner nations to make choices that limit their rapid reaction forces' abilities to execute unilateral operations. These partners, however, still possess complementary capabilities and niche competencies that can advance combined efforts to achieve common goals. The French intervention to aid the Malian army against al Qaeda affiliates near Timbuktu, Mali, in January and February 2013, is an example. During Operation *Serval*, the French 11th parachute brigade and special operations forces conducted three opposed airborne operations to decisively defeat the threat where it was based.²⁴ Though uniquely enabled by the presence of French support structures in neighboring countries, the French military lacked the strategic airlift to gain and maintain access. Ten countries provided strategic airlift, refueling, and other specialized capabilities to cover the shortfalls. French air force officials remarked that "international partners, including the United States for the first time, were comfortable working under French operational command because of years of joint training and increased command and control (C2)

interoperability."²⁵ Operation *Serval* demonstrated how our partners embrace a new paradigm—where collaboration and the combination of limited capabilities create the ability to mass joint forces to decisively defeat aggression in remote areas of the world that would otherwise remain inaccessible.

We have entered an era when mission requirements no longer allow individual Services and, in some cases, individual nations to act alone. To this end, the 82nd cooperates with airborne forces from 15 nations in a multinational airborne community of purpose to ensure interoperability and rapid response capability development. An underlying outcome of airborne JFE is that it serves as the mechanism to facilitate the introduction and employment of other DOD and partner capabilities, purposefully conveying tactical action into operational effect. Hence, strategic depth requires pervasive interoperability within the joint force and between the United States and its allies. If this is not addressed, we may find our vital national interests under attack and just beyond our reach.

Strategic Reach. Providing a responsive airborne JFE capability that projects land power anywhere on the globe is possible only through inter-Service collaboration that defines mission requirements and requisite capabilities and then allocates sufficient resources and training. The joint force has become increasingly interdependent, but Service-centric budget planning, programming, and execution complicate the ability to develop and maintain critical multidomain capabilities. Currently, Services and partner nations struggle to balance mission demands, personnel management, and modernization requirements, while trying to reduce expenditures. Under such conditions, prioritizing resources against unanticipated future challenges becomes problematic.

To provide the joint force with flexible options, 82nd Airborne Division, the Army's largest contributor to the GRF, concentrates its focus on "winning the next war" by building competencies at every echelon in the following areas:

- GRF-directed mission training with a specific emphasis on deploying an airborne Infantry Battalion task force within 18 hours of notification to conduct airborne JFE and an airborne Brigade Combat Team within 96 hours of notification

- strategic deployment process and ensuring the ability to rapidly out-load personnel and equipment under short notice with joint partners

- mission command capability to conduct joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) crisis-action planning prior to deployment, continue planning and situational awareness during the deployment and while en route, and employ small footprint command nodes that use reach-back to 82nd Airborne Division's main command post and joint operations center at Fort Bragg

- aligned training exercises and objectives with emerging combatant commander requirements and JIIM partners.

However, 82nd Airborne Division must balance these efforts with the requirement to continue to provide forces to Afghanistan and remain postured to reinforce units already forward. As the Army's most ready force, 82nd Airborne Division must prepare for the future while maintaining a commitment to winning the current war.

The Air Force is the most critical enabler of airborne JFE. Not only does it supply the strategic lift to deploy airborne forces and enablers, but, depending on proximity to the littorals, it may have the sole responsibility for defeating enemy A2/AD through offensive and defensive counter-air and suppression and destruction of enemy air defenses. A global response capability thus requires setting priorities and posture decisions that ensure effective global enroute infrastructure and the maintenance of strategic lift assets.²⁶ Current fiscal goals force senior leaders in the Services to make tough choices that meet real-world mission demands first and then mitigate the effects on fleet maintenance, modernization, and training to meet future challenges. In a January memo, the Secretary and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force explained the rationale behind prioritization and curtailment of flying hours and operational and international training exercises. An 18 percent reduction in flying hours has led to a flying stand-down from spring to fall of fiscal year (FY) 2013, driving nearly all flying units not deploying to "unacceptable readiness levels," sacrificing preparedness for contingencies. To mitigate risk to the current mission, cuts were disproportionately applied across the force.²⁷ For Air Force Mobility Command, those reductions equated to a 40 percent

drop in flying hours and, by the end of FY13, will result in dramatically lower readiness levels that will require extensive time and funding to recover from.²⁸

Under these conditions, Army and Air Force individual and crew competencies and the ability to collectively train to airborne JFE are secondary objectives. As one senior Air Force leader stated, “It is easier to go to war with the 82nd than it is to train with you.” Army and Air Force leaders have embraced creativity and collaboration in order to optimize joint integration in every JFE training opportunity. For instance, the JFE Vulnerability exercise conducted by the Air Force Weapons School at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, combines Army and Air Force planners and GRF command posts from the division to the battalion levels to rehearse the joint planning and command and control required to defeat A2/AD strategies and create a lodgment. The Army’s most recent Joint Operational Access exercise integrated the predeployment certification of the 317th Airlift Group with airborne JFE by the 82nd Headquarters and a reinforced airborne Brigade Combat Team to seize two airfields simultaneously, evacuate U.S. and allied citizens, and secure chemical weapons and critical infrastructure. Collaboration of this scale occurs only through willing teamwork and cooperation among joint commanders who have the mandate to train and maintain an airborne JFE capability for the Nation’s future contingencies. Defeating known and anticipated A2/AD threats while gaining and maintaining opposed access requires national-level leaders to acknowledge the Service interdependencies necessary to achieve cross-domain dominance and coherently define requirements and allocate resources to enable airborne JFE.

Overcoming the Inertia of Circumstance

Historic examples of successful airborne JFE were due in no small part to the habitual relationships and practices developed during deliberate joint training. Strategic defense guidance established those relationships and prioritized resources to enable execution.²⁹ Today, Army and Air Force planners concede that the joint force could not reassemble the same package that restored Aristide two decades ago. Future crises will require the legitimacy of multinational coalitions that combine

trained and interoperable rapid response forces from many nations. This requires a commitment to resourcing an airborne JFE capability that produces a well-trained and capable team. Regardless of the language in the grand strategy of the United States, history demonstrates that success along the range of military options demands an airborne JFE capability. Failing to resource and train this capability creates excessive risk to the mission and troops and limits options the military can provide to the National Command Authority. **JFQ**

NOTES

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