



U.S. Army soldiers help the crew of a U.S. Navy MH-53E Sea Dragon helicopter from the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson unload food and supplies at the airport in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

# Establishing a Conceptual Framework for Interagency Coordination at U.S. Southern Command

BY JOANNA GUTIERREZ WINTERS

Given the U.S. government's current resource constraints U.S. government agencies are examining ways to reduce costs and leverage current resources. Agencies focusing on expanding interagency initiatives must seek ways to become more cost efficient. Interagency coordination is a challenging task complicated by diverse agencies' different and sometimes competing cultures, priorities, strategies, goals, plans and incentives. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) has followed the progress of interagency coordination between the Department of Defense (DOD), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), U.S. State Department and other agencies. In several studies, GAO identifies four key areas that could improve interagency coordination: (1) developing and implementing overarching strategies; (2) creating collaborative organizations; (3) developing a well-trained workforce; and (4) sharing/integrating national security information.

U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), one of DOD's six regional Combatant Commands,<sup>1</sup> is taking an active role in interagency coordination.<sup>2</sup> The threats in SOUTHCOM's area of responsibility for the most part do not require a military response<sup>3</sup>, SOUTHCOM has leveraged the interagency community to accomplish its mission, especially in the areas of humanitarian assistance and counter-narcotics. Considering defense budget cuts, synergizing interagency capabilities at the military operational level, at the Combatant Commands for example, helps reduce duplication of effort among agencies and maximizes use of limited U.S. government resources. SOUTHCOM is thus well-positioned to further the interagency process and create a more solid foundation for establishing an interagency coordination framework.

*Joanna Gutierrez Winters is a consultant for the Joint Special Operations University, United States Special Operations Command.*

This article examines SOUTHCOM's mission, examines how the organization addresses interagency coordination in the four GAO described areas, and provides recommendations for further enhancing interagency coordination. Humanitarian assistance and counter-narcotics serve to highlight specific strengths and weaknesses in SOUTHCOM's overall interagency process and progress. The article is composed of four sections with the body following GAO's key areas for consideration in improving an organization's overall interagency coordination.

SOUTHCOM's mission is, "to conduct joint and combined full-spectrum military operations within the Area of Responsibility, in order to support U.S. national security objectives and interagency efforts that promote regional security."<sup>4</sup> Two of SOUTHCOM's focus areas are countering transnational organized crime, and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief. Because most of the challenges in SOUTHCOM's area of responsibility are related to issues such as gangs, drugs, natural disasters, poverty and inequality, SOUTHCOM is incorporating a whole-of-government approach working with other U.S. government agencies and the private sector in conducting its mission.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, a decrease in the overall U.S. defense budget, affecting all Combatant Commands, requires that all Commands look for ways to leverage interagency resources. SOUTHCOM, with a smaller budget than other commands, has greater incentives to work with other agencies toward this goal.

### Developing Overarching Strategies

Interagency coordination is more easily accomplished when there is a clearly articulated mission/goal, and when leaderships of

Combatant Commands and relevant agencies are committed to achieving a specific outcome. Creating an overarching interagency strategy could provide a catalyst for interagency engagement thereby driving different organizations to work together to create a sense of collaboration that permeates the agencies involved. Studies on leadership point out the importance of defining a mission as a catalyst for creating a successful organization. Successfully defining team direction contributes significantly to a team's effectiveness and success.<sup>6</sup>

According to GAO, "strategic direction is required as the basis for collaboration toward national security goals. Defining organizational goals and responsibilities and mechanisms for coordination can help agencies clarify who will lead or participate in which activities, organize their joint activities and individual efforts, facilitate decision-making, and address how conflicts would be resolved, thereby facilitating interagency collaboration."<sup>7</sup>

Overarching strategies are critical in providing different agencies with clear direction in accomplishing common national security objectives. This is the first step in organizing a group of people/agencies to move in the same direction. However, a strategy should not be so broad that implementation is ambiguous and/or confusing. Establishing roles and responsibilities as well as coordination mechanisms to facilitate decision-making is critical in building effective teams.

"Although some agencies have developed or updated overarching strategies on national security-related issues, GAO's work has identified cases where U.S. efforts have been hindered by the lack of information on roles and

responsibilities of organizations involved or coordination mechanisms.”<sup>8</sup>

SOUTHCOM’s overarching strategic document is the Command Strategy. The Command Strategy encompasses the Commander’s vision for the entire Combatant Command including SOUTHCOM’s sub-elements. It takes into account national level documents such as the National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, U.S. Military Strategy, and the Global Employment of the Forces (GEF) laying out the strategy for the organization within the context of its geographic area of responsibility.

The Theater Campaign Plan (TCP) is derived from the Command Strategy. This plan takes the Commander’s vision and converts it into a plan of action for the entire Command. Parallel to execution of the TCP, Component Commands<sup>9</sup> and Security Cooperation Offices<sup>10</sup> develop their own plans – the Component Support Plans and the Country Campaign Plans respectively – which support the TCP and the Command Strategy. Because U.S. military representatives at embassies create the Country Campaign Plan, this must be synchronized with the embassy’s overall Mission Strategic Plan at the country level.

The Command Strategy is *not* an interagency strategy. It is not created as an interagency document with strategic inputs from other agencies; it is a SOUTHCOM document that directs the command to work with interagency partners in achieving SOUTHCOM objectives.<sup>11</sup> As a result of this direction, creation of the TCP does include interagency participation. In 2009 and 2010, SOUTHCOM conducted its first interagency planning meetings. The Command produced the TCP and presented the plan to over ten U.S. government departments and offices for inputs and comments. According to some SOUTHCOM

officials, interagency representatives believed the TCP was already too far in the planning process. They felt it was too late for them to make any substantive inputs. USAID representatives commented that SOUTHCOM leadership, prior to holding the TCP interagency meeting, had already approved most elements of the plan, and they were not expecting their inputs to be reflected in it.<sup>12</sup> However the meetings provided a venue for understanding diverse agency missions and served as a basis for seeking areas to align future activities and resources.<sup>13</sup>

*SOUTHCOM is taking initiatives to involve the interagency community in its plans by suggesting roles and responsibilities via its TCP.*

---

These initial interagency meetings were an attempt to create a coordination mechanism that more specifically delineates roles and responsibilities laid out in the TCP in support of the Command Strategy, but because the TCP was nearly complete when the meetings took place, it was considered a SOUTHCOM plan, not an interagency plan. The plan also contained elements for which other U.S. government agencies besides DOD were leads in overseeing specific activities and tasks. SOUTHCOM was attempting to encourage the agencies to take a more active role in activities laid out in the TCP.

While the Command Strategy is not an interagency strategy, SOUTHCOM is taking initiatives to involve the interagency community in its plans by suggesting roles and responsibilities via its TCP. SOUTHCOM planners are advised to be cautious and not appear to be dictating actions to agencies.

Furthermore, since an overarching interagency strategy does not exist instructing the interagency organizations to work together, the TCP could continue to be viewed as a SOUTHCOM plan rather than an interagency one.

### Overarching Strategies: Humanitarian Assistance, DOD and USAID

The current SOUTHCOM Command Strategy highlights humanitarian assistance/disaster relief as one of SOUTHCOM's focus areas and recognizes the importance of working with other U.S. government agencies and the international community in this area.<sup>14</sup> USAID is the lead agency overseeing foreign humanitarian assistance efforts for the U.S. government. In an effort to better synchronize USAID and DOD humanitarian assistance, in November 2009, USAID issued, Policy Guidance for DOD's Overseas Humanitarian Assistance

Program. This document lays out specific procedures for how USAID should work with DOD on DOD's humanitarian assistance projects. The document also contains specific DOD instructions for implementation of these projects. According to DOD guidance, "the humanitarian assistance program should complement, but not duplicate or replace, the work of other U.S. government agencies that provide foreign assistance."<sup>15</sup>

While this is a useful overarching interagency document, it only focuses on USAID and DOD engagement. During the 2009 Continuing Promise mission, a SOUTHCOM humanitarian assistance initiative, U.S. public health officers from the Department of Health and Human Services filled 49 medical, engineering and environmental health positions.<sup>16</sup> The Policy Guidance issued by USAID provides a structured framework for the delineation of



U.S. Navy photo by Seaman Ernest Scott

U.S. and Canadian service members, along with USAID and World Food Program representatives gather in Haiti to discuss hurricane relief efforts.

roles and responsibilities on humanitarian assistance efforts between DOD and USAID, but it does not encompass activities of other U.S. government agencies.

### **Overarching Strategies: Counter-Narcotics**

The SOUTHCOM Command Strategy identifies counter illicit trafficking as another focus area in its area of responsibility. Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S), a component of SOUTHCOM, is tasked with leading counter-narcotics efforts for SOUTHCOM. JIATF-S is unique in that its role as a counter-narcotics task force has allowed the organization to be very specific in its focus and mission. Additionally, the counter-narcotics mission has received national attention for several decades. Because of this, JIATF-S has evolved into a more mature interagency organization with a strategy that touches the activities of numerous U.S. government agencies:

*JIATF-South's directive authority is a mix of top-down congressional and executive branch mandates and negotiated outcomes. After experimenting with various lead agency approaches in the 1980s proved ineffective, Congress and the executive branch decided fighting drugs was a national priority that demanded a national response. Declaring drugs a national security problem brought DOD support to the table and led to the creation of the national task forces, with implied authority to coordinate across departments and agencies. More important, the National Interdiction Command and Control Plan makes JIATF-South the sole agent that can perform detection and monitoring within its 42-million-square-mile operating area. This singular responsibility makes the task*

*force the natural focal point for intelligence fusion and reduces the problem of multiple agencies with competing jurisdictions.*<sup>17</sup>

This unique role, along with a national focus on counter-narcotics, has provided JIATF-S with the national support it needs to conduct its mission. The overarching strategy is set by national directive and as such, is supported by several agencies that make up the organization. The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) created the National Interdiction Command and Control Plan (NICCP) as a result of the National Drug Control Strategy. Signed by DOD, the Coast Guard and U.S. Customs service,<sup>18</sup> the NICCP further enhances interagency coordination on counter-narcotics at the strategic level, thus creating a framework for conducting interagency coordination operationally and tactically. JIATF-S took this overarching interagency strategy and more specifically laid out the roles and responsibilities of the agencies involved at the operational and tactical level: "When JIATF-South adopted an end-to-end understanding of its mission, the entire interagency team could support it. The mission is discrete and well understood and helps the agencies achieve their organizational goals."<sup>19</sup>

### **Developing Overarching Strategies: Summary**

Overarching interagency strategies create a basic framework for initial engagement by agencies involved in achieving a common goal. Going beyond an overarching strategy and focusing on a specific mission facilitates the interagency process in that roles and responsibilities of relevant agencies are more easily identified – as in the cases of humanitarian assistance and counter-narcotics. For

humanitarian assistance, USAID is the lead U.S. government agency tasked with overseeing this initiative outside of the U.S. While overall policy guidance exists in how DOD and USAID should work together on humanitarian assistance issues, other U.S. government agencies are not taken into account. An overarching interagency strategy that encompasses all applicable government agencies would create a stronger incentive for agencies to work together in this area. In the case of counter-narcotics, there are numerous agencies that have roles including DOD, Homeland Security, Justice Department, and the U.S. Intelligence Community.<sup>20</sup> The existence of national level guidance facilitates the coordination necessary to effectively carry out the national counter-narcotics mission. In other words, the

evolution of the overarching national guidance on counterdrug policy has successfully served to shape JIATF-S into what it is today.

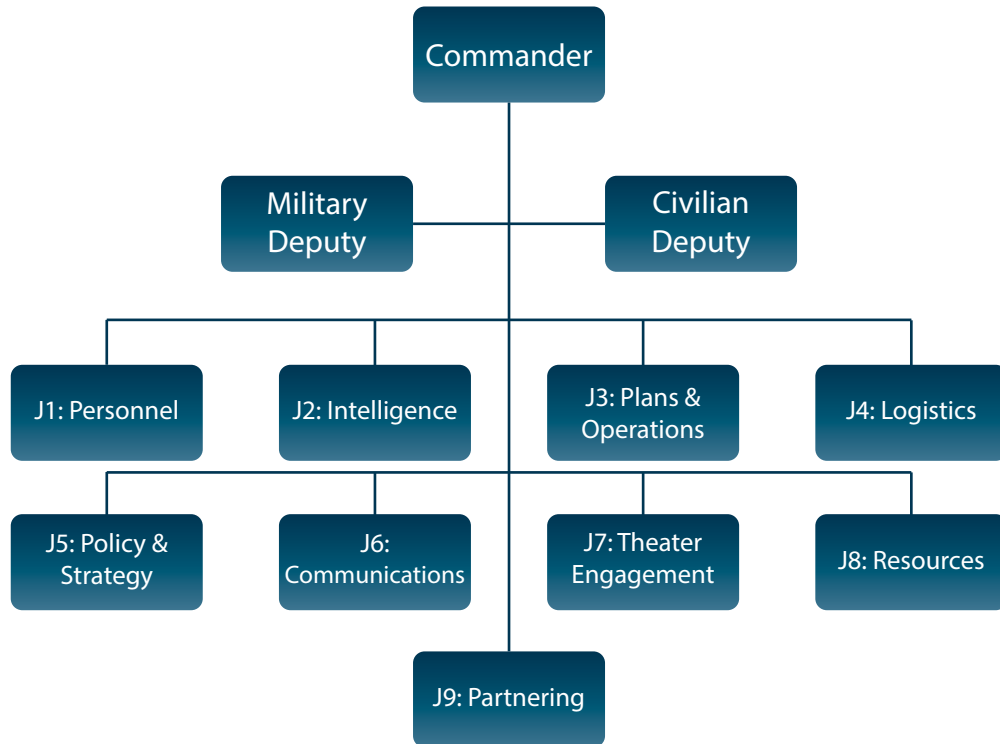
In both the humanitarian assistance and counter-narcotics cases, a narrow mission facilitates coordination as roles and responsibilities are more easily identified. An overarching strategy written and endorsed by SOUTHCOM's key interagency partners could lay the framework for a holistic approach to interagency coordination. Furthermore, clearly documenting an overarching interagency strategy could more formally establish the framework for creating collaborative organizations so initiatives that are put in place are less easily altered with changes in leadership within any of the agencies involved.



PFC Shaquille Stokes

Vice Admiral Joseph D. Kernan, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command and U.S. 4<sup>th</sup> Fleet, looks at pallets of drugs seized by the U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard.

Figure 2: USSOUTHCOM Organizational Chart



### Creating Collaborative Organizations

One of the main challenges to effective inter-agency coordination is differences in organizational culture among the numerous agencies. GAO reports, “Organizational differences – including differences in agencies’ structures, planning processes, and funding sources – can hinder interagency collaboration. Agencies lack adequate coordination mechanisms to facilitate collaboration during planning and execution of programs and activities.”<sup>21</sup>

In 2002, The Office of the Secretary of Defense tasked Joint Forces Command<sup>22</sup> to support each of the Combatant Commands in developing a Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG) for the purpose of creating a more collaborative interagency environment

at each Command. At SOUTHCOM, inter-agency coordinators were hired to work within the J7 – Experimentation Directorate.<sup>23</sup> From its inception, success of this group depended heavily on personal interactions with inter-agency representatives mostly focused on information exchange with external agencies. The coordinators reached out to the inter-agency community attempting to find areas of potential collaboration between SOUTHCOM and their respective organizations. In 2008, under the direction of SOUTHCOM Commander Admiral James Stavridis, the group evolved into the Partnering Directorate or J9—a separate directorate within SOUTHCOM.

The creation of J9 was met with internal organizational resistance, primarily because it



was manned with personnel taken from other directorates; but J9 proved a successful facilitator of interagency collaboration, including establishing coordination mechanisms critical to the collaborative environment described by GAO. The Partnering Directorate's mission statement is:

*The Partnering Directorate fosters "whole-of-government" solutions for 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges by integrating the U.S. Government, private sector, and public-private organizations into the shared mission of ensuring security, enhancing stability, and enabling prosperity.*<sup>24</sup>

***SOUTHCOM currently has over 30 interagency representatives from 15 different agencies serving in part-time or full-time roles supporting the Command.***

Interagency coordination does not occur solely within J9. The directorate is a catalyst providing other directorates with interagency connections and advice. J9 facilitated the placement of interagency personnel throughout the Command. It serves as the Command's interagency arm; its main focus is to provide the Command with essential interagency contacts and recommendations for interagency inclusion in Command day-to-day functions. SOUTHCOM currently has over 30 interagency representatives from 15 different agencies serving in part-time or full-time roles supporting the Command.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, SOUTHCOM has representatives located at other agencies including the headquarters of USAID and the Department of Homeland Security. The creation of J9 and its focus on providing

interagency engagement opportunities while creating mechanisms for coordination is a significant step in moving towards the collaborative organization described by GAO.

#### **Creating Collaborative Organizations: Humanitarian Assistance**

In the case of humanitarian assistance, USAID has three full time representatives working at SOUTHCOM. The Senior Development Advisor, detailed to J9, serves as the Command's Senior Advisor on development issues. USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) has two representatives detailed to J7. They are responsible for working on disaster relief efforts. OFDA representatives proved extremely helpful to the Commander during the January 2010 Haiti earthquake crisis providing daily updates on USAID activities thus allowing the Commander to make better informed decisions and more effectively support USAID disaster relief initiatives.

#### **Creating Collaborative Organizations: Counter-Narcotics**

J1ATF-S provides an exemplary example of interagency coordination at operational and tactical levels on counter-narcotics issues. Not only does the physical co-location of interagency personnel at the task force headquarters facilitate coordination, the organization has also implemented effective coordination mechanisms, including periodic coordination meetings and a 600 page standard operating procedures manual that lays out guidelines on how to work with interagency and international partners. The manual addresses differences in culture, language and practices. Different agencies, for example, have different meanings for the same words and phrases; in

the manual, the phrase *tactical control* has one definition and it applies to everyone.<sup>26</sup> Understanding what assets each agency brings to bear on an operation is also important in coordinating successful activities. The manual provides this information allowing agencies to holistically plan their activities.

Additionally, interagency representatives serve in leadership positions and have authority to make decisions on behalf of their respective agencies.<sup>27</sup> “For task force participants to feel connected to results, they must be part of the command. Within the JIATF-S organizational structure representatives from DOD, Homeland Security and the Justice Department, along with U.S. Intelligence Community liaisons and international partners, work as one team.”<sup>28</sup>

Not only does JIATF-S have an overarching national and interagency strategy, it has created clear mechanisms such as recurring planning meetings for coordination, which continue to foster an environment conducive to a collaborative organization:

*To facilitate the asset allocation process, JIATF-South hosts a semiannual planning conference that brings together all its counterdrug partners. The interagency and international partners review their efforts from the past three months, plan for new initiatives and combined operations, and decide what assets they want to give the task force for the next 6 - 9 months usually by calculating the number of airplane hours and ship days.*<sup>29</sup>

### **Creating Collaborative Organizations: Summary**

GAO describes the creation of adequate coordination mechanisms as necessary for

collaborative organizations. At the SOUTHCOM headquarters level, establishing J9 was an important catalyst in creating a collaborative organization; it focuses on bringing interagency participation to all command activities including the Command’s structure and planning processes. Embedding interagency personnel within the Command facilitates a collaborative environment and an appreciation of different agencies’ cultures. In the cases of humanitarian assistance and counter-narcotics, the existence of higher-level strategic guidance provides a framework for establishment of effective coordination mechanisms and has led to collaboration among agencies in these mission specific areas.

*JIATF-S has created clear mechanisms such as recurring planning meetings for coordination, which continue to foster an environment conducive to a collaborative organization.*

Research conducted by GAO shows that agencies’ concerns about maintaining jurisdiction over their missions and related resources can be a significant impediment to collaborating with other agencies.<sup>30</sup> These barriers can be overcome by building trust among interagency partners and developing a willingness to work together.

“SOUTHCOM’s leadership has focused on building relationships of trust, open dialogue, and transparency with partners. According to interagency partners we spoke with, leadership at SOUTHCOM has been important in building relationships among agencies. While SOUTHCOM has encountered some resistance to its collaboration efforts, it has overcome much of this resistance by building

relationships, providing information on the Command's activities, and discussing the overall benefits of the interactions for the region."<sup>31</sup>

### Developing A Well-Trained Workforce

GAO reports that, "Agencies do not always have the right people with the right skills in the right jobs at the right time to meet the challenges they face—including having a workforce that is able to quickly address crises. Moreover, agency performance management systems often do not recognize or reward interagency collaboration, and training is needed to understand other agencies' processes or culture."<sup>32</sup>

*In many cases interagency coordination is personality driven and informal, making interagency progress vulnerable when an organization experiences a high turnover rate.*

This is potentially one of the greatest challenges in institutionalizing an interagency process for a combatant command or any other military organization. The high turnover in military personnel is an impediment to establishing sustainable cultural change. Military personnel, especially higher-ranking officials, who come to the Command with no prior knowledge of or experience in interagency engagement, could potentially be an obstruction to the organization's interagency initiatives and progress. If the incoming leadership, including the directors and their immediate staff, do not see the benefits of interagency collaboration, the process could experience significant setbacks. Command leadership should ensure new personnel are provided with appropriate tools to maintain Command interagency focus. Strong leadership among civilian

personnel, who tend to remain in their positions for longer periods of time, is critical in order to provide a level of continuity required for ensuring a sustained shift towards an interagency culture in an organization that experiences large turnover. In many cases interagency coordination is personality driven and informal, making interagency progress vulnerable when an organization experiences a high turnover rate. "Without formalizing and institutionalizing the interagency planning structure, we (GAO) concluded efforts to coordinate may not continue when personnel move on to their next assignments."<sup>33</sup>

This is also the case at SOUTHCOM. "While GAO's work on SOUTHCOM did not focus on training, personnel from the Command also expressed the need for more opportunities to improve their understanding of working in an interagency environment."<sup>34</sup>

### Developing a Well-Trained Workforce: Humanitarian Assistance

Every year, SOUTHCOM conducts a number of humanitarian assistance exercises that serve as training platforms for U.S. military personnel. Exercises include construction of schools, wells, and clinics; others focus on medical readiness – U.S. personnel providing health-care to host nation citizens. Other exercises focus on disaster response efforts. Some of these involve interagency personnel and partner nations. For example, in the Continuing Promise Mission (a humanitarian assistance operation involving medical personnel and civil engineers) U.S. Public Health Service Officers from Health and Human Services filled approximately 49 medical, engineering and environmental health positions.<sup>35</sup> Such opportunities for interagency personnel to

train with the U.S. military creates a better interagency trained workforce.

### Developing a Well-Trained Workforce: Counter-Narcotics

JIATF-S does not have a formal structure to train incoming personnel on interagency engagement, and it takes a long time to train new personnel to the point where they are fully productive and understand the JIATF-S culture. Evan Musing and Christopher Lamb, in a comprehensive study on JIATF-S, provide this perspective from several interviews conducted with JIATF-S personnel:

*It takes time, however, to develop a positive team culture. Members must overcome their parochial Service, agency, or personal worldviews, appreciate diverse perspectives, and be committed to fulfilling the team purpose by working as an integrated unit. But newcomers to JIATF-South usually experience culture shock, feeling "dazed and confused and scared." Some confess that the complexity of the operations leaves them feeling they are moving too slowly or are overreacting when they do take action. Newcomers often have had little experience working with people outside their own Service or agency. After arriving, they are acutely aware that they have entered a different culture, surrounded by a bewildering array of unfamiliar uniforms and languages, or as the familiar quip goes, "the Star Wars bar scene."<sup>36</sup>*

A big part of this initial confusion has to do with the differences in agency culture. JIATF-S is a military organization that has successfully embedded interagency personnel who bring their own agency cultures and biases to the organization. A newcomer must

face an array of differing cultures while trying to adapt to the organization's collaborative, open environment. Law enforcement agencies, for example, are more prone to withhold information until they have built a strong enough case for prosecution, whereas agencies involved in monitoring and detecting more openly share information to complete an operation.

*J9 could serve the Command well by institutionalizing a training program to teach newcomers SOUTHCOM's interagency process.*

---

### Developing a Well-Trained Workforce: Summary

A well-trained interagency workforce is critical in developing an interagency culture. Personnel who are knowledgeable on different agencies' cultures and understand the benefits of interagency engagement more easily and quickly overcome the initial barriers associated with working in an interagency environment. Creating a well-trained workforce should facilitate quicker development of formal coordination mechanisms where informal coordination currently exists. GAO finds that, "by using informal coordination mechanisms, agencies could end up relying on the personalities of officials involved to ensure effective collaboration."<sup>37</sup> Adequately trained personnel, who understand the benefits of interagency collaboration, work more effectively and create more effective mechanisms leading to collaborative organizations.

J9 could serve the Command well by institutionalizing a training program to teach newcomers SOUTHCOM's interagency process. Currently, J9 provides a general presentation

on SOUTHCOM's role in interagency coordination; a more detailed training program including how the directorates engage with interagency partners would provide a better overview. This training could also provide newcomers with knowledge on how interagency coordination efforts affect their positions within the Command. An overview of national level guidance instructing agencies to work together would also highlight the importance of interagency collaboration for SOUTHCOM and national security. Additionally, the opportunity to provide Command personnel with an interagency exchange program would increase SOUTHCOM knowledge of other agencies' roles and missions. This would allow Command personnel to become more sensitive to other agencies' cultures and more aware of interagency collaboration possibilities.<sup>38</sup>

*The Overseas Humanitarian Assistance Shared Information System (OHASIS) is the information database used by DOD to compile information related to Humanitarian Assistance.*

### Improve Information Sharing

Information sharing is the basis of all initial coordination. Establishing a formal mechanism for continuous information sharing is critical in interagency coordination; this leads to agencies making decisions from a common operating picture. GAO reports, "U.S. government agencies do not share relevant information with their national security partners due to a lack of clear guidelines for sharing

information and security clearance issues. Additionally, incorporating information drawn from multiple sources poses challenges to managing and integrating that information."<sup>39</sup>

Information sharing can occur on many different levels. It starts with informal initial exchanges and can lead to more formal mechanisms including the establishment of databases and more elaborate information sharing networks. Interagency information sharing occurs throughout SOUTHCOM for many purposes. J2 focuses information sharing on intelligence priorities, issues and threats. J3's operational role leads it to focus information sharing on current operations and plans. J5, whose focus is on developing strategies and policies for SOUTHCOM, focuses information sharing at a strategic level. J9, given its unique role at SOUTHCOM, conducts information sharing at all levels with numerous agencies.

Physical presence of interagency personnel at SOUTHCOM facilitates information sharing, mostly on an informal basis. J9 has established monthly interagency meetings, but these meetings lack a formal agenda and do not focus on specific outcomes.

In terms of formal mechanisms, several databases exist at SOUTHCOM serving as repositories of information and a foundation for information sharing. SOUTHCOM, by implementing the TCP, instituted a more aggressive campaign to populate the Theater Security Cooperation Management Information System (TSCMIS). TSCMIS is an internet-based program, which provides a map of activities carried out throughout the area of responsibility. SOUTHCOM provided U.S. government agencies access to TSCMIS to compile DOD and interagency activities in the region.

### Improve Information Sharing: Humanitarian Assistance

SOUTHCOM has several tools to facilitate information sharing. USAID and State Department officials embedded at SOUTHCOM assist in coordination of humanitarian assistance efforts. As mentioned previously, two USAID representatives assigned to SOUTHCOM provide information on humanitarian assistance activities throughout the AOR. The Overseas Humanitarian Assistance Shared Information System (OHASIS) is the information database used by DOD to compile information related to Humanitarian Assistance. It is used to report humanitarian assistance activities to Congress. Exercises serve as another tool for information sharing. These exercises bring together U.S. government agencies with roles in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Despite specific DOD-USAID guidance instructing all humanitarian assistance projects be entered into OHASIS,<sup>40</sup> in a recent report analyzing humanitarian assistance projects and information sharing, GAO found OHASIS was not being effectively used by SOUTHCOM and other Combatant Commands. The report cited only six projects marked complete for SOUTHCOM from fiscal year 2007 through 2009 in the database, while DOD's report to Congress listed at least 81 completed projects for each fiscal year for each of the Combatant Commands.<sup>41</sup> The report indicates not all Humanitarian Assistance projects were being reported.

### Improve Information Sharing: Counter-Narcotics

JIATF-S information sharing has evolved over the years. The organization has overcome issues of trust, issues of interoperability among agencies, and issues related to classification. JIATF-S has reached a point where agencies that work at the task force see the benefits of sharing information for the attainment of a common goal. The sharing of information in many cases is seamless, especially when conducting operations. Each agency understands the uniqueness of each other's roles contributing to the overall counter-narcotics mission. DOD

*Fully utilizing established tools for information sharing is key to establishing a common operating picture for effective interagency coordination.*

focuses on detection and monitoring, while law enforcement agencies focus on interception and arrests. Whereas, agencies were initially hesitant about sharing information because of different goals and cultures, JIATF-S has overcome barriers by maintaining a clear focus on its counter-narcotics mission. For example, DEA was wary of releasing intelligence to DOD because law enforcement is sensitive about sharing intelligence due to its longer-term role in prosecuting suspects, while DOD wants to terminate its involvement soon after detection.<sup>42</sup> Not only has JIATF-S been able to overcome differences in agency cultures to improve information sharing with its interagency partners, it has also demonstrated success in information sharing

with partner nations.

*JIATF-S is unique in having established effective procedures for routinely and quickly converting classified intelligence and sensitive law enforcement information into a form that can be shared at an unclassified level under bilateral agreements with partner nations capable of taking responsive actions.*<sup>43</sup>

### Improve Information Sharing: Summary

Information sharing is critical to interagency coordination. Fully utilizing established tools for information sharing, such as existing databases and exercises, is key to establishing a common operating picture for effective interagency coordination. Formal mechanisms play an important role, but creating an environment of trust and a clear understanding of mutual benefits derived from information sharing enhance interagency coordination efforts. SOUTHCOM has worked to establish trust with and among its interagency partners. This is the basis for a collaborative environment that enhances information-sharing efforts.

### Recommended Next Steps For Interagency Coordination: SOUTHCOM

SOUTHCOM is recognized as achieving a relatively successful level of interagency coordination compared to other Combatant Commands, partly because of its many years of interagency coordination experience in humanitarian assistance/disaster relief and counter-narcotics initiatives.<sup>44</sup> Change takes time and becoming an interagency focused command has been an evolutionary process for SOUTHCOM.

While SOUTHCOM's Command Strategy instructs the organization to work with interagency partners in accomplishing objectives, an overarching interagency strategy signed by the Commander and his/her peers from different U.S. government agencies could further solidify SOUTHCOM's interagency collaboration commitment. This would create a shared mission and vision among agencies and could enhance interagency coordination throughout all levels of agencies involved – similar to JIATF-S's accomplishment where all agencies come together focused on one shared mission. This could, however, be more challenging (but not impossible) at the Combatant Command level where missions tend to be broader than they are at the task force level.

Adequate coordination mechanisms create collaborative organizations according to numerous GAO reports cited in this study. SOUTHCOM's J9 serves as a catalyst in creating coordination mechanisms for the entire Command. However, implementing two examples from JIATF-S, would further improve coordination mechanisms. Firstly, JIATF-S's focused interagency meetings where representatives come together to review past efforts, plan new initiatives and discuss allocation of resources represents coordination at a more profound level. Secondly, JIATF-S's manual of standard operating procedures for interagency coordination is another good example of a successful coordination mechanism. SOUTHCOM has a basic interagency plan that is broad in nature and does not have the level of detail that the JIATF-S plan has. This plan, Annex V, is part of SOUTHCOM's TCP. A more detailed plan that is supportive of an overarching interagency strategy would more clearly delineate roles and responsibilities of the

interagency partners under the framework of a unified interagency strategy.

A well-trained workforce is critical in establishing a culture of interagency collaboration. SOUTHCOM would facilitate greater interagency coordination by providing appropriate training and incentives to work with other agencies. J9's role should be expanded to provide this type of education throughout the Command. As previously noted, the TCP, Component Support Plans and Country Campaign plans are the planning documents that support Command Strategy. These plans are the driving force for SOUTHCOM in executing all its activities in its area of responsibility. These documents are created by all the different elements of SOUTHCOM. By educating the workforce, SOUTHCOM will be closer to ensuring interagency collaboration is detailed in these plans.

Concerning improved information sharing, SOUTHCOM's embedded interagency staff have provided the Command immediate interagency access. The Command should update existing formal mechanisms for information sharing such as its humanitarian assistance database to improve interagency collaboration. On a broader scale, J9 should take an active role in identifying other agencies that may have a part in SOUTHCOM activities by analyzing their strategies, programs, plans and objectives. In this area, J9 has an important role in linking SOUTHCOM's priorities to potential interagency resources including personnel and funding that could be leveraged.

The second sentence of this study states that, "Interagency coordination is a challenging task complicated by diverse agencies' different and sometimes competing cultures, priorities, strategies, goals, plans and incentives." It is also an evolving phenomenon that must

be pursued with patience and a steadfast vision focused on the benefits of working in a collaborative interagency environment. Taking some of the recommendations cited in this study and continuing to deepen interagency engagement by focusing on the four main areas described by GAO could serve as a template assisting SOUTHCOM in achieving its vision and mission. While each Combatant Command has unique roles, taking these four elements into consideration as well as understanding the SOUTHCOM interagency experience offers insight for enhanced interagency coordination across DOD at the Combatant Command level. **PRISM**

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> A regional Combatant Command is an organization of the Department of Defense that conducts military engagements in a designated geographic area of responsibility.

<sup>2</sup> GAO-10-801: *U.S. Southern Command Demonstrates Interagency Collaboration, but Its Haiti Disaster Response Revealed Challenges Conducting a Large Military Operation*; July 2010; Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

<sup>3</sup> House Armed Services Committee, Posture Statement of General Douglas M. Fraser, US Southern Command, before the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, March 6, 2012



<sup>4</sup> <http://www.southcom.mil/ourmissions/Pages/Our-Missions.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> House Armed Services Committee, Posture Statement of General Douglas M. Fraser, US Southern Command, before the 112th Congress, March 6, 2012

<sup>6</sup> S.J. Zaccaro, A.L. Rittman, and M.S. Marks, "Team Leadership", *Leadership Quarterly* 12 (2001), 451-483

<sup>7</sup> GAO-10-822T: *National Security, Key Challenges and Solutions to Strengthen Interagency Collaboration*; June 9, 2010; Statement of John H. Pendleton, Director, Defense Capabilities and Management; Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> The Component Commands are elements of the different military services (air force, marines, army, navy and special operations) that report to the Combatant Command. In addition to these, there are functional Component Commands or Joint Task Forces that have specific missions. SOUTHCOM has three: Joint Task Force Bravo, Joint Task Force Guantanamo and Joint Interagency Task Force South.

<sup>10</sup> The Security Cooperation Office is the military organization at US Embassy's around the world that represent the regional Combatant Command

<sup>11</sup> "United States Southern Command, Command Strategy 2020: Partnership for the Americas," US Southern Command, [http://justf.org/files/primarydocs/Command\\_Strategy\\_2020.pdf](http://justf.org/files/primarydocs/Command_Strategy_2020.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> During this period, the author was the J9 Branch Chief of Non-Traditional Security Initiatives and observed first hand the internal and external reactions to new SOUTHCOM interagency initiatives.

<sup>13</sup> GAO-10-963T, *National Security, Interagency Collaboration Practices and Challenges at DOD's Southern and Africa Commands*; July 28, 2010; Statement of John H. Pendleton, Director Defense Capabilities and Management; Testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

<sup>14</sup> United States Southern Command, Command Strategy 2020: Partnership for the Americas; [http://justf.org/files/primarydocs/Command\\_Strategy\\_2020.pdf](http://justf.org/files/primarydocs/Command_Strategy_2020.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> USAID: Policy Guidance for DOD Overseas Humanitarian Assistance Program (HAP); [pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PCAAB986.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PCAAB986.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> GAO-10-801: *U.S. Southern Command Demonstrates Interagency Collaboration, but Its Haiti Disaster Response Revealed Challenges Conducting a Large Military Operation*; July 2010; Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

<sup>17</sup> Evan Musing and Christopher J. Lamb, Joint Interagency Task Force-South: The Best Known, Least Understood Interagency Success; Institute for National Strategic Studies, Strategic Perspectives, No. 5; National Defense University

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Yeatman, Richard M. *J1ATF-South Blueprint for Success*; Joint Forces Quarterly, Issue 42, 3rd Quarter 2006

<sup>21</sup> GAO-10-822T: *National Security, Key Challenges and Solutions to Strengthen Interagency Collaboration*; June 9, 2010; Statement of John H. Pendleton, Director, Defense Capabilities and Management; Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

<sup>22</sup> US Joint Forces Command was one of DOD's ten combatant commands. The Command's key role was to transform US military capabilities. As of August 31, 2011, US Joint Forces Command was disestablished.

<sup>23</sup> Most combatant commands are organized using a J-code structure where each J# represents a directorate within the organization (e.g. J1: Personnel, J2: Intelligence, J3: Operations, etc.); at the time of this initiative, the J7 was the directorate responsible for experimentation and simulations.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.southcom.mil/aboutus/Pages/J9.aspx>

<sup>25</sup> House Armed Services Committee, Posture Statement of General Douglas M. Fraser, US Southern Command, before the 112th Congress, March 6, 2012, p.2

<sup>26</sup> Evan Musing and Christopher J. Lamb, Joint Interagency Task Force-South: The Best Known, Least Understood Interagency Success; Institute for National Strategic Studies, Strategic Perspectives, No. 5; National Defense University, p. 47

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Yeatman, Richard M. *J1ATF-South Blueprint for Success*; Joint Forces Quarterly, Issue 42, 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2006

<sup>29</sup> Evan Musing and Christopher J. Lamb, Joint Interagency Task Force-South: The Best Known, Least Understood Interagency Success; Institute for

National Strategic Studies, Strategic Perspectives, No. 5; National Defense University

<sup>30</sup> GAO/GGS-00-106: *Managing for Results, Barriers to Interagency Coordination*; Report to the Honorable Fred Thompson, Chairman Committee on Governmental Affairs U.S. Senate; March 2000

<sup>31</sup> GAO-10-801: *U.S. Southern Command Demonstrates Interagency Collaboration, but Its Haiti Disaster Response Revealed Challenges Conducting a Large Military Operation*; July 2010; Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

<sup>32</sup> GAO-10-822T: *National Security, Key Challenges and Solutions to Strengthen Interagency Collaboration*; June 9, 2010; Statement of John H. Pendleton, Director, Defense Capabilities and Management; Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> GAO-10-963T, *National Security, Interagency Collaboration Practices and Challenges at DOD's Southern and Africa Commands*; July 28, 2010; Statement of John H. Pendleton, Director Defense Capabilities and Management; Testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

<sup>35</sup> GAO-10-801: *U.S. Southern Command Demonstrates Interagency Collaboration, but Its Haiti Disaster Response Revealed Challenges Conducting a Large Military Operation*; July 2010; Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> GAO-09-904SP: *Interagency Collaboration, Key Issues for Congressional Oversight of National Security Strategies, Organizations, Workforce, Information Sharing*; Report to Congressional Committees, September 2009

<sup>38</sup> In my role as a Division Chief in the Partnering Directorate, I detailed one of my subordinates to the Department of Energy (DOE) for six weeks. During his time there, he became knowledgeable of DOE's organizational culture and potential areas for engagement with SOUTHCOM and DOD in general. He was instrumental in moving along an MOU between SOUTHCOM and DOE that eventually led to the full time detail of a DOE representative to the Command.

<sup>39</sup> GAO-10-822T: *National Security, Key Challenges and Solutions to Strengthen Interagency Collaboration*; June 9, 2010; Statement of John H. Pendleton, Director, Defense Capabilities and Management; Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

<sup>40</sup> USAID: Policy Guidance for DOD Overseas Humanitarian Assistance Program (HAP); [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PCAAB986.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PCAAB986.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> GAO-12-359: *Humanitarian and Development Assistance, Project Evaluations and Better Information Sharing Needed to Manage the Military's Efforts*, February 2012, Report to Congressional Committees (p. 19)

<sup>42</sup> Evan Musing and Christopher J. Lamb, Joint Interagency Task Force South: The Best Known, Least Understood Agency Success; Institute for National Strategic Studies Strategic Perspectives #5; Washington DC National Defense University Press, June 2011

<sup>43</sup> National Research Council, *Maritime Security Partnerships* (Washington DC: National Academy of Sciences, 2008), 85

<sup>44</sup> GAO-09-904SP: *Interagency Collaboration, Key Issues for Congressional Oversight of National Security Strategies, Organizations, Workforce, Information Sharing*; Report to Congressional Committees, September 2009, p.26