



# Globally Integrated Operations in the Horn of Africa through the Principles of Mission Command

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**I**n the *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations: Joint Force 2020*, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff focuses on the future security environment and how it will affect the manner in which U.S. forces operate. Of concern, he notes that while the world is “trending toward greater stability overall,” our enemies are becoming “potentially more dangerous” as many gain access to deadly weapons and destructive devices.<sup>1</sup> To prepare the joint force, the chairman discusses a concept called *globally integrated operations*, in which

U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Alex Krongard, the Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa deputy commander, and Col. Youssouf Idjihadi, chief of staff of the Comoran National Army of Development, sign an acquisition and cross-servicing agreement 6 July 2014 at the Armée nationale de développement in Kandani, Union of Comoros.

(Photo courtesy of CJTF-HOA PAO)

“Joint Force elements, globally postured, combine quickly with each other and mission partners to integrate capabilities fluidly across domains, echelons, geographic boundaries, and organizational affiliations.”<sup>2</sup>

In many ways, the Combined Joint Task Force—Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), which is part of the only permanent U.S. military presence on the African continent, is realizing this vision today. Based out of Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti, on the Gulf of Aden, CJTF-HOA conducts theater security cooperation (TSC) activities that enable African regional entities to neutralize violent extremist organizations. CJTF-HOA facilitates regional access and freedom of movement for U.S. forces and, on order, executes crisis response.<sup>3</sup> Set against the backdrop of East Africa—a mosaic of diverse nations and peoples with vast resources yet

tremendous needs—the solutions here are not off-the-shelf. To meet its mandate, between January 2014 and April 2015, CJTF-HOA fundamentally changed its manner of operating and its structure.

This discussion covers the adjustments made, more or less in the order of their development, and highlights some U.S. policy changes needed. The exposition is specific to CJTF-HOA's operational area: Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, and Uganda. The principles of innovation and organization could be applicable to other combined joint forces operating with limited resources, over extended distances, alongside many types of unified action partners, and in complex environments. However, the intent is not to establish a reusable template for organizing complex partnerships. Instead, this article describes how one commander used judgment to apply mission command principles so he could create unique solutions for unique problems.

## Building a Network within the Unified Action Team and with Supporting Organizations

The CJTF-HOA's U.S. staff includes members from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines Corps. After fourteen years of persistent conflict, most of its service members have served multiple operational tours, including previous assignments in the Horn of Africa. To be sure, their collective experience in counterinsurgency operations and nation building is invaluable. Additionally, more than half of CJTF-HOA's U.S. staff is from the Reserve Component, enhancing the command's military expertise with years of civilian experience in areas such as business, construction, consulting, education, law, and politics.<sup>4</sup>

Beyond its assigned personnel, CJTF-HOA has worked hard to augment its joint network (U.S. Department of Defense partners) by developing informal relationships with special operations forces within its operational area. The resulting relationships are symbiotic. In particular, while tactical special operations forces have special authorities and capabilities, CJTF-HOA has excellent access to high-level liaisons and decision makers. This allows all parties to execute their individual missions more effectively.

Nonetheless, East Africa's complex and dynamic environment demands more than a unilateral effort,

and more than a collection of bilateral efforts, a reality echoed by President Barack Obama during his 2014 commencement address at the U.S. Military Academy. First, the president reminded the audience that the United States is the one “the world looks to for help” during disaster relief (e.g., the typhoon in the Philippines) or terrorist attacks (e.g., the Boko Haram kidnappings in Nigeria).<sup>5</sup> He then went on to express the need for the United States to have a long-term strategy to counter these kinds of threats—a strategy that includes U.S. leadership functioning through partnerships as the means to engage and defeat violent extremists:

We have to develop a strategy that matches this diffuse threat—one that expands our reach without sending forces that stretch our military too thin, or stirs up local resentments. We need partners to fight terrorists alongside us.<sup>6</sup>

The United States cannot fight terrorism alone; no nation can. Nations need to cooperate as teams through *unified action*, defined as “the synchronization, coordination, and/or integration of the activities of governmental and nongovernmental entities with military operations to achieve unity of effort.”<sup>7</sup>

With approximately two thousand U.S. service members serving in an operational area nearly half the size of the continental United States, CJTF-HOA is a case in point not only with respect to numbers but also with respect to authorities. The U.S. Department of State has the lead in U.S. operations in East Africa, with the Department of Defense serving in a supporting role. As noted in the U.S. Department of State's *Post Management Organization Handbook*, the chief of mission (COM) “has authority over every executive branch employee in the host country, except those under the command of a U.S. area military commander,”<sup>8</sup> and “all executive branch agencies with employees in the host country must keep the COM fully informed at all times of their current and planned activities.”<sup>9</sup> Put another way, while CJTF-HOA does not directly work for the ambassadors and *chargés d'affaires* in its operational area, those U.S. civil authorities ultimately control the task force's ability to perform TSC missions, and it must defer to them.

This is a change in mindset for many of the service members who have participated in operations led by Department of Defense forces in other parts of the world, notably Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, most of





(U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Carlin Leslie)

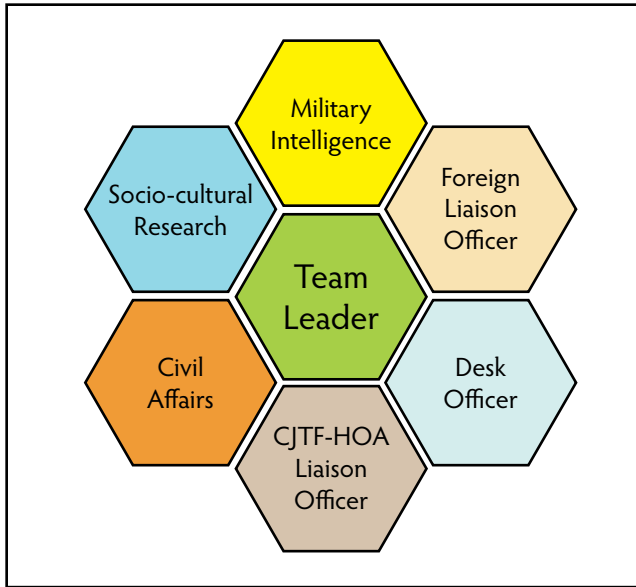
Cadets attend a briefing by Maj. Gen. Wayne W. Grigsby Jr., commander, Combined Joint Task Force—Horn of Africa, 27 December 2014 at the Joint Military Academy, Arta, Djibouti. Grigsby discussed the six principles of mission command and provided the CJTF-HOA perspective on the importance of building a better leader and promoting joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational teammates.

CJTF-HOA's service members have never been inside a U.S. embassy let alone become acquainted with the functions of an embassy's myriad sections. With this in mind, CJTF-HOA has worked closely with the COMs in its operational area to establish and to staff liaison officer positions inside the embassies. With military liaisons in Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Seychelles, and the Somalia Unit—located in Nairobi (Kenya), Uganda, and the U.S. diplomatic mission to the African Union (AU) in Addis Ababa—CJTF-HOA has increased its institutional knowledge and has become more responsive to the concerns and needs of the U.S. country teams.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, from a multinational perspective, CJTF-HOA is privileged to have a strong contingent of embedded staff and foreign liaison officers from partner-nation militaries assigned to its headquarters at Camp Lemonnier. Established through memoranda of understanding between the African nations' militaries and U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM), these officers provide a level of understanding that would be impossible to achieve otherwise. With representation from

Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, France, Italy, Japan, Kenya, South Korea, Spain, Uganda, the United Kingdom, and Yemen, the embedded staff and foreign liaison officers' unique perspectives and contacts help to ensure that military-to-military training is meeting legitimate needs in a manner appropriate for its intended audience. With its network built, CJTF-HOA can leverage small elements, reinforced by members of the unified action team, to achieve outsized results, especially in support of the AU mission in Somalia.<sup>11</sup>

CJTF-HOA often finds itself operating in situations where defense, diplomacy, and development are merged. Traditionally, these functions are relegated to the Department of Defense, Department of State, and U.S. Agency for International Development respectively. However, at the tactical level, these roles are often blurred as our partners typically interface with a single U.S. official or organization that, in effect, represents all three. In these circumstances, having an awareness of partner capabilities and the personal relationships to access them is invaluable. In an era of constrained



**Figure 1. Fusion Action Cell Structure**

resources, building a network and operating by, with, and through the unified action team is no longer an interesting idea—it is an imperative.

### Empowering the Staff: Army Mission Command Principles

While building a robust network among unified action partners is necessary, it is not sufficient. In particular, with widely dispersed small groups of personnel operating throughout the operational area, maintaining unity of effort and purpose is challenging. Accordingly, CJTF-HOA focuses on mission command principles to empower its members and to drive toward the mission's end state. The CJTF-HOA applies the Army's principles of mission command to guide operations, striving to "build cohesive teams through mutual trust, create shared understanding, provide a clear commander's intent, exercise disciplined initiative, use mission orders, [and] accept prudent risk."<sup>12</sup> By encouraging the use of this doctrine throughout the staff, all levels of the organization can achieve tactical agility, which allows CJTF-HOA to move faster than its adversaries do.

For many service members assigned to CJTF-HOA, Army mission command principles are new. Using these principles has energized the task force staff to conduct TSC activities effectively and efficiently and to enable their partners. On any given day in CJTF-HOA,

it is common to see operational planning teams with members from several different countries collaborating and sharing cultural insights, social norms, and customs. This partnered, decentralized execution not only builds depth across the staff but also efficiently improves understanding among all partners, allowing the commander to make informed decisions on myriad issues across the operational area.

### Reorganizing to Match the Environment: Fusion Action Cells

CJTF-HOA's use of mission command is consistent with the key elements of globally integrated operations, which include flexibility in establishing and employing joint forces.<sup>13</sup> As the *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations: Joint Force 2020* states,

In the years to come, security challenges are less likely to correspond with, or even approximate, existing geographic or functional divisions. Future Joint Forces might therefore be increasingly organized around specific security challenges themselves.<sup>14</sup>

In this regard, the future is now at CJTF-HOA.

Prior to November 2014, a single desk officer managed each country within CJTF-HOA's operational area. Each desk officer interacted with staff directorates, liaison officers, USAFRICOM and its components, and U.S. embassy personnel. Although this structure built tremendous depth of knowledge in individual officers, it was vulnerable to personnel transitions and had limited capacity. Therefore, the CJTF-HOA commander, Maj. Gen. Wayne W. Grigsby Jr., U.S. Army, created a cross-functional team structure based on his experience in the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. The innovative structure flattened the staff organization (reduced hierarchical layers) and allowed for increased information sharing, open communication, and timely and precise staffing vertically and horizontally.<sup>15</sup>

This reorganization formed six country-focused teams (Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Uganda) known as fusion action cells (FACs). A lieutenant colonel or a major (or service equivalent) led each team of six functional specialists, which included, notably, a foreign liaison officer representing that team's country (see figure 1). Instead of a single desk officer for each country, a seven-person team worked toward common goals, building a shared understanding of the country.

Looking to capitalize on its foreign liaison officers, CJTF-HOA took this initiative to the next level by moving the majority of the TSC planning activities into an unclassified environment known as the Hive (see figure 2), which placed the FACs into a large, open room without walls or cubicles. Within the Hive, foreign liaison officers sit side-by-side with service members from the United States and African partners to gain a greater understanding of East African issues, plan TSC activities, and build trust. Each FAC can perform long-term planning and coordination of TSC activities (e.g. counter-improvised explosive device training in Burundi or developing and analyzing lessons learned in Uganda) that will identify and mitigate gaps across the region rather than solely concentrating on administrative duties (e.g., submitting Aircraft and Personnel Automated Clearance Systems requests).

Within the Hive, cohesive teams interact daily—*not just as needed*—with their East African foreign liaison officers, with one another, and, in effect, with the regional coalitions to which their African nations belong. The foreign liaison officers help CJTF-HOA understand the cultures and customs of the nations with which U.S. forces partner while also providing insight into the security threats and concerns of the countries from an African perspective.

### Pushing for Transparency: Unclassified Environments

Introducing the foreign liaison officers as permanent members of the Hive brought to light the need to operate in an unclassified environment as much as possible. This is a fundamental shift in culture for many service members, who are comfortable working in classified environments in

other theaters. The move has led CJTF-HOA’s staff members to learn how to share information with partner nations and the regional coalitions to which they belong, bringing new perspectives and sources of information into the planning and execution of TSC activities. Moreover, the unclassified environment has helped simplify communications with partners, allowing CJTF-HOA to be more responsive to their needs. By sharing the purpose of activities, the desired end state of events, and the resources available to accomplish missions, CJTF-HOA maintains transparency and strengthens relationships.

To be sure, the shift to an unclassified environment has not been easy, and it has engendered some suspicion among U.S. service members. Nonetheless, by accepting the prudent risks of operating in an unclassified, collaborative environment, CJTF-HOA is opening lines of communication with countries in the region, increasing commitment to the sharing of best practices between countries, creating camaraderie, and



Figure 2. Hive Structure





(U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Nesha Humes)

Col. Dan Taylor, security force assistance director for Combined Joint Task Force—Horn of Africa, speaks to the “Hive” 17 July 2015 at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti. The Hive is a unique staff organization comprised of U.S., East African, and European service members, who are separated into country fusion action cells that work together to plan military-to-military projects and support security initiatives in partner countries throughout the Horn of Africa.

establishing mutual respect and trust among all partners. Given that globally integrated operations require partnering, flexibility, and agility, CJTF-HOA’s shift to an unclassified environment seems on target.

## Synchronizing Activities: East Africa Theater Security Cooperation Planning Conference

Conducting staff operations in an open environment without physical boundaries encouraged cross-talk and idea sharing between the FACs. As these discussions continued, the Hive’s leadership recognized a need to understand and align activities, exercises, and conferences across the Horn of Africa to form an overall TSC common operating picture (COP). Each FAC created a country-specific COP based on CJTF-HOA TSC activities and key leader engagements, but the country COPs captured only a small subset of the defense, diplomacy, and development activities taking place across East Africa. These COPs were bilateral due to the nature of interactions between U.S. team members and each East African country. Therefore, the overall TSC landscape was not being captured, which created the potential for missed opportunities or overlapping efforts.

To remedy this problem, CJTF-HOA hosted the East Africa TSC Planning Conference in January 2015, bringing together representatives from USAFRICOM

and its components, Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, and academia.<sup>16</sup> This collaborative forum aligned complementary U.S. government activities across East Africa through a combination of structured presentations and open dialogue. The event advanced TSC planning for all involved. It enhanced regional security by providing an understanding of diplomacy while identifying and mitigating partner capability gaps in defense and development from a regional perspective. Feedback from participants showed that the conference was a success. It culminated with a distinguished visitor day, when U.S. ambassadors, *chefs d'affaires*, and deputy chiefs of mission from across the region came together to discuss issues and solutions for a secure East Africa.

## Exploiting Shared Interests: Regional Synchronization Branch

While preparing for the East Africa TSC Planning Conference, CJTF-HOA began to appreciate the value of understanding regional coalitions to which various African nations belong. For example, all of the countries in CJTF-HOA’s operational area belong to the AU, a coalition that supervises the employment of Burundian, Djiboutian, Ethiopian, Kenyan, and Ugandan peacekeepers in Somalia. As a regional entity, the AU exerts substantial influence, and it binds its members together through initiatives and agreements.

Similarly, Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda constitute the East African Community, an organization that “aims at widening and deepening cooperation among the partner states in, among others, political, economic and social fields.”<sup>17</sup>

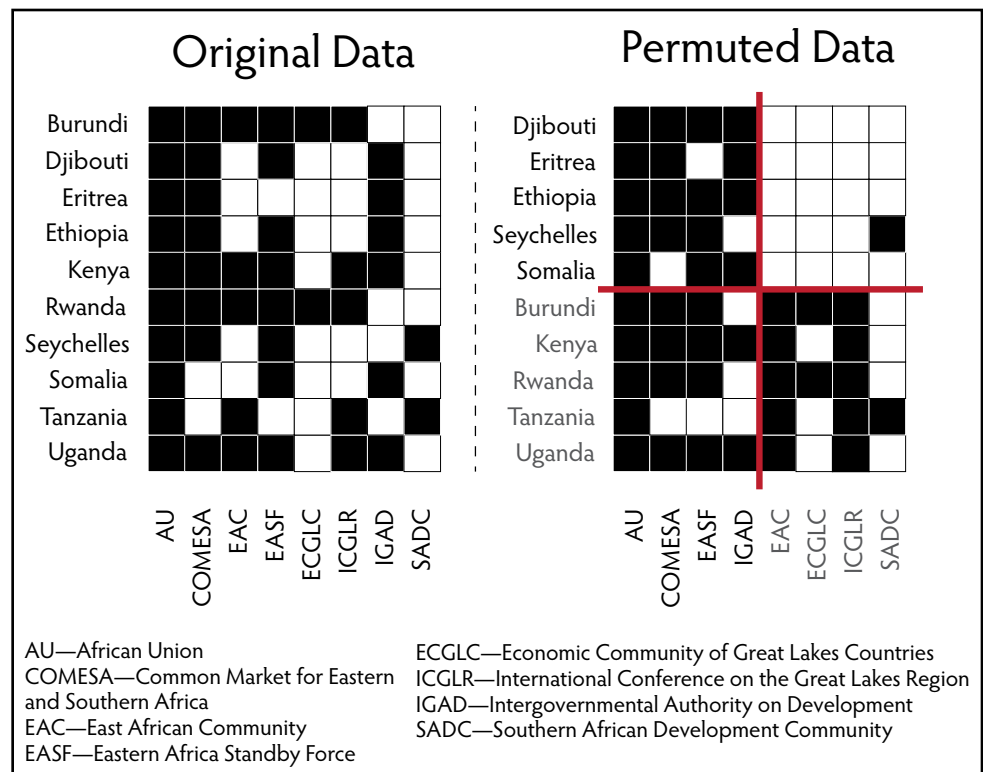
As a regional entity, the East African Community advances the shared interests of its member nations; understanding its mandate provides valuable insight into the region. Given these regional linkages, CJTF-HOA’s leadership began to think that a collection of bilateral relationships between the United States and each nation was not sufficient, or efficient, for supporting its African military partners because each military was not working independently on security issues that crossed borders.

When CJTF-HOA’s leadership realized the significance of the relationships within various African coalitions and organizations, it began to study them. These regional organizations are visually depicted in the left matrix of figure 3, where the shading of a square in a specific row and a given column indicates the country in the specific row is a member of the organization in the given column. For example, moving across the first row (Burundi) of the matrix, all the columns are shaded except the last two (IGAD and SADC), indicating Burundi is only a member of the first six regional organizations.

While shared membership in a single organization is interesting, shared membership in numerous organizations is more compelling as this may imply closer alignment between given countries. To illustrate this, the right matrix in figure 3 shows the original data permuted (or reordered) based on the results of blockmodeling—an analytical method from computational sociology designed to identify hidden structure in

networks.<sup>18</sup> Although the details of this analysis are beyond the scope of this work, a key result is worth mentioning. Specifically, all countries in CJTF-HOA’s operational area are broadly linked through the AU, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the East African Community, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. The southwestern states (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda) share additional memberships that indicate the presence of a subregional block. Treating the operational area as a whole would ignore this nuance. As CJTF-HOA’s planners look to design multilateral TSC activities to produce regional effects, understanding this underlying sub-regional alignment is important.

Accordingly, CJTF-HOA created the Regional Synchronization Branch (RSB) to work alongside the country FACs and use relationships already in place across the region. To promote additional engagement with its European partners, CJTF-HOA’s leadership assigned a British officer to lead the RSB, with support from the foreign liaison officers and other members of the headquarters staff. The RSB strives to understand and engage regional organizations



**Figure 3. Regional Organizations and Member Countries**



within the operational area, and it helps to shape bilateral TSC activities to achieve regional effects. Countries develop subject matter experts to train their own soldiers (train-the-trainer) as well as soldiers from neighboring countries at the same time. The RSB encourages coalition partners operating in the region (e.g., the British Peace Support Team—East Africa) to use similar programs of instruction when training the militaries of individual countries. Continued work to strengthen existing regional organizations formed by countries in East Africa is essential for security and stability, and CJTF-HOA is committed to this effort.

## Making the Problem Bigger: A Multilateral Approach

The country EACs and the RSB understand the need to work across borders multilaterally to accomplish CJTF-HOA's mission and enable the long-term security strategy of the United States. However, the current U.S. legal and fiscal authorities that govern TSC activities in East Africa are bilateral, which limits CJTF-HOA's ability to establish interoperable capabilities across the region. Nation-to-nation interactions are only a piece of the larger efforts needed to continue to advance defense, diplomacy, and development across East Africa.

Accordingly, the United States needs to develop a complementary regional approach to diplomacy and security cooperation, with legal and fiscal authorities, that would permit the direct allocation of TSC resources to multinational organizations and cross-nation peacekeeping training and capacity building. This assertion is echoed by President Obama in Presidential Policy Directive 23, which urges “cross-border program coordination [and] support for regional organizations.”<sup>19</sup> More recently, the need for the United States to establish regional authorities was front and center during the 9 December 2014 staff talks between the AU and USAFRICOM in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where Grigsby recounted the difficulties of signing over mine-resistant ambush protected vehicles to Ugandan soldiers:

Since the first Ugandan and Burundian peacekeepers arrived in Mogadishu, there has been a pressing need for armored vehicles. The U.S. government identified “Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected” vehicles, or MRAPs, that were no longer being used in

Afghanistan and brought them to Mogadishu to hand over to the Uganda People's Defence Force ... . However, prior to handing them over, they needed some repairs. How long do you think this should take? One month? Eight weeks? A year? How about another metric? One more dead or wounded soldier? Two? Twenty? Frankly, I can't tell you today when those MRAPs will be available because my government's programs are designed to work bilaterally, and sending this equipment directly to Mogadishu—where it is needed—is uncharted territory ... . The UPDF [Uganda People's Defence Force] leadership is so frustrated by this situation that they have now suggested that we transport the MRAPs 900 miles away from the front—to Uganda—where we have a long-established, bilateral security cooperation relationship in place that allows for the repairs.<sup>20</sup>

Due to the Herculean, ad hoc efforts of Department of State and Department of Defense personnel, in late January 2015, six months after their arrival in Mogadishu, the U.S. government signed the MRAPs over to the UPDF. Ultimately, the MRAPs were repaired on-site, avoiding a costly and time-consuming round-trip journey to Uganda. Today, these MRAPs are saving lives. Providing this kind of support should not be this hard.

Simply put, as U.S. military forces find themselves working more frequently by, with, and through regional multinational coalitions to which they do not belong, the lack of U.S. authorities configured to allow regional support represents a significant capability gap. Until the United States establishes regional authorities, CJTF-HOA will continue to work toward security and stability of the region using existing bilateral mechanisms to achieve regional effects.

## Conclusion

Between January 2014 and April 2015, CJTF-HOA adapted to its environment:

- ◆ Achieving security in East Africa depended on unified action among governments, militaries, and other entities, so CJTF-HOA built relationships.
- ◆ The variety of CJTF-HOA's partners and the tyranny of distance prevented the application of off-the-shelf solutions and real-time command and control so

CJTF-HOA applied Army mission command principles to conduct unified action.

- ◆ The security challenges did not lend themselves to functional directorates so CJTF-HOA established fusion action cells, arranged in a setting called the Hive.
- ◆ The integration of partners made planning difficult, so CJTF-HOA moved into an unclassified environment.
- ◆ Collaboration highlighted that activities are often unsynchronized, so CJTF-HOA brought interested parties together in a planning conference.
- ◆ A focus on regional actors reflected shared bilateral interests, so CJTF-HOA developed the regional synchronization branch.
- ◆ Although threats in East Africa are often regional and demand regional solutions, the authorities that govern TSC activities are bilateral and restrict U.S. support to multinational organizations, so CJTF-HOA supports the establishment of regional authorities.

These adjustments were not part of a carefully orchestrated plan. They were born on the fly, out of necessity, and from instinct and creativity as much as from analysis and doctrine. Nonetheless, given the nature of its operational environment and mission, CJTF-HOA's evolution demonstrates how

leaders can find innovative ways to conduct unified action effectively.

As the U.S. military continues to move from the chairman's *Joint Force 2020* to "subordinate concepts, force development guidance, and follow-on doctrine," the importance of flexibility and judgment in the application of mission command cannot be overstated.<sup>21</sup> In particular, when confronted with a complex problem, success is often less about applying the best existing template, taxonomy, or wiring diagram, and more about building a good solution tailored for the environment. *Joint Force 2020* affirms as much by stating, "standardization may lead to decreased diversity, flexibility, versatility and, ultimately, effectiveness."<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, overgeneralizing CJTF-HOA's adaptations carries risk. It is the process of adaptation, not the adaptations themselves, which bear careful consideration. In a future characterized by growing uncertainty and evolving threats, may we adapt well. ■

*This article presents the views of the authors and does not reflect the policy of U.S. Africa Command, the Department of Defense, the Department of State, or the United States Government.*

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## Notes

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**MR** We Recommend



## When Failure Thrives

**W**hen *Failure Thrives* suggests that the continued existence of large parachute-delivered combat formations is the result not of reasoned analysis but of political connections and nostalgia. University of St. Andrews scholar Marc Devore's provocative study, the inaugural publication of The Army Press, traces the development airborne organizations in the 20th century and argues that the idea of a successful forced-entry-through-parachute assault is a dangerous myth. Whether you agree or disagree, *When Failure Thrives* is an outstanding example of relevant scholarship designed to inspire professional discussions throughout the force. To download this work, go to <http://1.usa.gov/1KWuNnd>.