

Sailors inspect catapult before launching F/A-18F Super Hornet from *Nimitz*-class aircraft carrier *USS Carl Vinson*, deployed supporting maritime security operations and theater security cooperation efforts in U.S. 5th Fleet area of responsibility (U.S. Navy/Travis K. Mendoza)



Implementing Joint Operational Access

From Concept to Joint Force Development

By Jon T. Thomas

Strategic guidance issued to the U.S. military over the past 5 years explicitly cites the emerging challenge to what has been a significant advantage for American and partner forces for decades: the unfettered ability to project military force into an operational area with sufficient freedom of action to accomplish a designated mission.¹ In some instances this ability includes access to sovereign territory,

but in all cases it requires access to the global commons.² Potential enemies are developing antiaccess/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities³ that could threaten access and jeopardize missions. Concept development, as the bridging mechanism from strategic guidance to operational capabilities, has played a key role in the past few years to guide joint and Service force development activities in this area. The Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC) and the recently signed Joint Concept for Entry Operations⁴ are examples of where strategic guidance to overcome A2/AD challenges is translated into operational

concepts intended to guide how the U.S. military is organized, trained, equipped, and employed.

Less visible perhaps but equally important are the processes whereby the ideas embodied in these concepts are transitioned into specific force development activities arrayed across the entire spectrum of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy (DOTMLPF-P). These activities, actioned by Service, Joint Staff, and Defense agency sponsors and accomplished in a timeframe that accounts for the complexity of the task and the

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scope of the work required, are what institutionalize the change demanded by strategic guidance documents. In other words, concepts without accompanying implementation plans typically end up as nothing more than “books on a shelf.” Moreover, these force development activities always occur within a resource-constrained environment, which implies a need to prioritize efforts necessary to implement the concept.

Over the past year, the Joint Staff in conjunction with the Services, combatant commands (CCMDs), and key stakeholders in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) developed an implementation plan for Joint Operational Access (JOA) that prioritizes efforts and identifies specific actions to institutionalize the ideas in the JOAC. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff signed the plan on August 29, 2014.

Why a JOA Implementation Plan?

The JOAC is the principal concept guiding U.S. military efforts to counter opponent A2/AD strategies. It describes how joint forces will achieve operational access in the face of armed opposition by potential enemies and under a variety of conditions as part of a broader national approach. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey signed the JOAC on January 17, 2012. Less than 2 weeks prior in the Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG) issued by then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, specific direction was provided to “implement the Joint Operational Access Concept.”⁵ Thus, development of a plan to implement the JOAC is simply following orders.

The need for a JOA Implementation Plan (JIP), however, runs deeper than simply the direction provided in the DSG. As mentioned, multiple strategic guidance documents explicitly identify the need to prepare for and overcome opponent A2/AD strategies, and the joint force started taking action immediately. In some cases, these actions are part of a large-scale effort (the multi-Service Air-Sea Battle [ASB] Concept and its associated implementation activities are

a good example), while in other cases Services, CCMDs, and agencies are focusing efforts on specific aspects of the A2/AD challenge. Missing from the overall effort is a mechanism to bring all of these actions together to foster coherence among all the ongoing activities across the joint force. First and foremost, enhancing coherence among operational access efforts is the practical outcome of developing an overarching JIP.

Notably, some valuable second-order effects are derived from conducting an effort to produce coherence. First, the visibility generated by documenting all operational access efforts within one overarching plan generates opportunities for synergy among ongoing (or planned) actions across the joint force. Interrelated activities can be accelerated or decelerated, or content added or subtracted, based on this added visibility. Second, having an overarching plan provides an opportunity to prioritize efforts and maximize the return on resources committed to the effort. Such a prioritization must be carefully supported with analysis and vetted with key stakeholders, but once produced can be a powerful tool to inform multiple DOTMLPF-P governance processes across the Department of Defense (DOD). Finally, pulling all of the various activities together related to JOA may result in new discovery that informs the way ahead.

Such new discovery could take three forms. First, in an organization as large as DOD, it is possible for *all* actors to assume that an activity, already recognized as necessary, is being accomplished by someone else, when in reality these assumptions have led to no single organization actually initiating the activity. Collectively, a key activity has somehow been overlooked and a new effort must be initiated to accomplish the necessary action. Second, after reviewing the volume of efforts within a given required capability area, a conclusion may be reached that the collective effort has missed something and a new effort should be initiated to address the newly discovered need. Third, documenting all activities related to a JOAC required capability may reveal that one or more stakeholders is performing similar actions

that could potentially be combined, or one activity curtailed, so as to facilitate economy of effort. In the development of the 2014 JIP, the first two examples of new discovery (recognized but overlooked necessary activities or specific missed actions) manifested themselves, but the third example (duplication) is likely to manifest in future updates to the plan.

What the 2014 JIP Does

At this point, it is worth explaining why the term *Joint Operational Access* is used rather than *Joint Operational Access Concept* implementation plan. While the 2014 plan focuses on the required capabilities in the JOAC⁶ as the organizing construct, future updates in 2015 and beyond are intended to incorporate additional required capabilities from supporting approved joint concepts.⁷ By orienting the implementation plan to the broader subject of JOA, there is room left for inclusion of other capabilities as joint concepts further mature.

The central elements of the 2014 JIP are a prioritization of the 30 required capabilities described in the JOAC and then a matrix of specific force development actions that, if completed, would significantly contribute to achieving the associated required capability. Because this prioritization is intended to inform multiple DOTMLPF-P governance processes across DOD, the 2014 JIP carefully describes the analytic process used to derive the prioritization of the JOAC required capabilities. This process leveraged multiple existing mechanisms such as the Comprehensive Joint Assessment (CJA); Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Service chief, and combatant commander posture statements and congressional testimony; combatant command Integrated Priority Lists (IPLs); and the Capability Gap Assessment (CGA). Due to its central role in the overall DOD requirements process, the Joint Capabilities Board reviewed this portion of the 2014 JIP, and the prioritization of required capabilities was endorsed via a JROC memorandum.

With respect to specific force development actions, the 2014 JIP includes activities related only to the 10 highest



USS *Abraham Lincoln*, *Ticonderoga*-class guided-missile cruiser USS *Cape St. George*, and Military Sealift Command fleet replenishment oiler USNS *Guadalupe* conduct replenishment at sea (U.S. Navy/Travis K. Mendoza)

priority JOAC required capabilities due to the scope and magnitude of the task at hand in relation to the time available to develop the first iteration of the plan. The decision to address only those actions associated with these top 10 priorities should not be construed to mean that no efforts are currently under way or planned to address the remaining 20 JOAC required capabilities. Future updates in 2015 and beyond are planned to include a broader set of force development actions as additional required capabilities are addressed.

The 2014 JIP identifies 165 discrete DOTMLPF-P force development actions⁸ to be accomplished by specific sponsors within the Services, CCMs, Joint Staff, combat support agencies, or OSD. This execution matrix describes the action to be taken, the output of that action, the sponsor (referred to as the office of primary responsibility [OPR]), other stakeholders with which the action must be coordinated, and the timeframe in which the action is to be completed

(an estimated completion date [ECD]). While some actions are to be completed within 1 year, many of these force development actions will not be completed for several years due to the magnitude of the effort. This level of detail within the execution matrix permits a key additional step—assessment of progress.

The assessment plan included in the 2014 JIP simply seeks to determine what progress was made in completing the actions described in the plan. Primarily consisting of self-reporting of progress by OPRs, the individual results of this annual assessment will be compiled and then used to inform the subsequent update to the JIP. In most cases, actions will be completed on schedule or remain on track when the ECD extends beyond the current year. In some cases, circumstances during execution may delay completion by the ECD. The assessment process will seek to determine the cause of the delay and how to respond to it. In either case, the 2014 assessment will inform adjustments to priorities and actions in the 2015 JIP.

Finally, the 2014 JIP includes a description of the process for communicating to audiences both internal and external to DOD as to why and how the plan was developed, how actions will be implemented, and how progress will be assessed. The purpose of this communication is to encourage collaboration among all stakeholders through improved understanding of joint force development activities related to operational access. While the JOAC itself is an unclassified and publicly available document, the 2014 JIP is classified due to the detailed manner in which it addresses capability shortfalls. As a result, distribution of the 2014 JIP will be limited consistent with established classification procedures.

Some unclassified metrics, however, can shed light on the content in the 2014 JIP execution matrix. First, of the 165 actions in the matrix, a majority (64 percent) consist of ongoing activities within DOD. This is understandable given that strategic guidance related to A2/AD challenges has been in place

for years, and the joint force has already begun many efforts to address the issue. Second, 84 percent of the 165 actions listed in the execution matrix are related to non-materiel activities. That is, the vast majority of actions in the 2014 JIP are not focused on building new things, but instead are focused on finding ways to better employ the materiel capabilities currently planned for the joint force, an approach consistent with the ideas in General Dempsey's assessment of the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review.⁹ Third, the force development actions identified in the 2014 JIP are spread across the entire range of possible OPRs: approximately 50 percent across the military Services, about 25 percent for the Joint Staff, and the remaining 25 percent allocated across the CCMDs, OSD, and support agencies. So in addition to the volume of actions (165) associated with just 10 of the 30 JOAC required capabilities, this spread of OPRs is a clear indication of the significant scope of the force development effort required to address the A2/AD challenge to operational access. Together, these metrics highlight the broad, inclusive nature of the 2014 JIP, a pattern that can be expected to remain as the plan is updated in future annual cycles.

Relationship to Air-Sea Battle

While the JOAC is the principal concept guiding U.S. military efforts to counter opponent A2/AD strategies, the ASB Concept developed in May 2012 contributes to this effort as a multi-Service concept. ASB focuses on ensuring freedom of action in the global commons in order to enable concurrent or follow-on power projection operations.¹⁰ A complementary and supporting relationship exists between the ideas in ASB and those articulated in the JOAC. Because ASB represents a subset of the overall joint approach to ensuring operational access, the 2014 JIP includes many of the ongoing activities associated with implementation of ASB. As JOA implementation and ASB implementation processes mature, it is reasonable to expect further convergence of these efforts.

Way Ahead

The force development effort described in the 2014 JIP will take years to fully execute. This duration is a direct function of the scope and complexity of the overall joint force development effort. During 2014, execution of ongoing actions will continue and new activities will begin through the processes that govern DOTMLPF-P portfolios. Assessment of progress made on the actions documented in the 2014 JIP will occur and, combined with analysis derived from the fiscal year 2015 CJA, IPL, and CGA processes, will inform the development of the 2015 update. This method for annual updates to the JIP is intended to be responsive both to the amount of progress made in prior plans as well as to changes that inevitably occur in the evolving strategic environment. While the joint force may achieve a significant advance in operational access capability within a given year, it is more likely that major progress over the coming years will accrue as a result of sustained, focused effort guided by the JIP.

Summary

General Dempsey's approval of the 2014 Joint Operational Access Implementation Plan was a significant milestone in joint force development of required capabilities to maintain operational access in defense of the Nation and its partners. Developing a formal process to move the concept off the shelf and into formal action was new to the Joint Staff, Services, combatant commands, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. With the 2014 JIP, there now exists a documented process and an initial set of actions to generate coherence and synergy of prioritized efforts across the joint force. Annual updates to this plan will broaden the effort and are likely to result in new discovery that uncovers additional opportunities to overcome A2/AD challenges. With key stakeholder commitment to this process, progress will be made to the endstate of a joint force capable of achieving operational access in the face of armed opposition

by potential enemies under a variety of conditions as part of a broader national approach. JFQ

Notes

¹ *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, May 2010); *The National Military Strategy of the United States 2011: Redefining America's Military Leadership* (Washington, DC: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 2011); *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, January 2012).

² The term *global commons* is defined as "areas of air, sea, space and cyberspace that belong to no one state. Access to the global commons is vital to U.S. national interests, both as an end in itself and as a means of projecting military force into hostile territory." See Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC), annex A (Glossary), 42.

³ *Antiaccess* (A2) refers to those capabilities, usually long range, designed to prevent an advancing enemy from entering an operational area. *Area denial* (AD) refers to those capabilities, usually of shorter range, designed not to keep the enemy out but to limit his freedom of action within the operational area. See JOAC, annex A (Glossary), 40.

⁴ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin E. Dempsey signed the Joint Concept for Entry Operations (JCEO) on April 7, 2014.

⁵ *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership*, 5.

⁶ JOAC, 33–36.

⁷ JCEO is a prime example of where required capabilities from a subordinate concept will be addressed in the 2015 update.

⁸ In several instances, the 2014 Joint Operational Access Implementation Plan also identifies necessary "precursor actions" that are necessary to further refine and test ideas and approaches to force development before moving forward with actual adjustments in DOTMLPF-P elements. Examples of these precursor actions include additional concept development, wargaming, and technology demonstrations.

⁹ *Quadrennial Defense Review*, March 2014, 58–64.

¹⁰ "ASB [Air-Sea Battle] is a limited objective concept that describes what is necessary for the joint force to sufficiently shape A2/AD environments to enable concurrent or follow-on power projection operations. The ASB Concept seeks to ensure freedom of action in the global commons and is intended to assure allies and deter potential adversaries. ASB is a supporting concept to the Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC), and provides a detailed view of specific technological and operational aspects of the overall A2/AD challenge in the global commons." See *Air-Sea Battle: Service Collaboration to Address Anti-Access & Area Denial Challenges* (Washington, DC: Air-Sea Battle Office, May 2013), 4.