



Special Forces fast-rope through center opening of helicopter at Hurlburt Field, Florida, April 23, 2013, during annual 2-week joint/combined tactical exercise Emerald Warrior 2013, designed to leverage lessons learned from Operations *Iraqi Freedom* and *Enduring Freedom* (U.S. Air Force/Colville McFee)

The Importance of Lessons Learned in Joint Force Development

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The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) actively promotes the importance of innovation, experimentation, and learning. He made this explicitly clear in his address to the 2016 graduating class of the National Defense University:

Those of you graduating today have to lead that change or we're going to find

ourselves—and I don't mean in the distant future, I mean the not-too-distant future—we're going to find ourselves at a competitive disadvantage. That will be the cost of not recognizing what needs to change, and not affecting change in your organizations.¹

Former CJCS General Martin E. Dempsey also addressed the need for learning:

Our profession is a calling requiring unique expertise to fulfill our collective responsibility to the American people, “provide for the common defense and secure the blessings of liberty.”

As professionals, we are defined by our strength of character, life-long commitment to core values, and maintaining our professional abilities through continuous improvement, individually and institutionally.

This endeavor [advancing the profession of arms] requires all Joint Warfighters to engage in a serious dialogue to chart the way ahead to strengthen our profession as we develop Joint Force 2020. We must ensure we remain responsive and resilient; the American people deserve nothing less.²

Both generals actively promote the need for a profession of arms to maintain and expand its unique body of knowledge and expertise. The military invests significant resources to achieve this aspect of being a profession, including establishing a directorate within the office of the Chairman devoted to Joint Force Development (DJ7). This article delves into the benefits of joint lessons learned and how they enable and enhance our profession to maintain and expand our unique body of knowledge and expertise.

U.S. Code, Title 10, Section 53, defines the responsibilities of the CJCS. These include developing doctrine; formulating policies for joint training, military education, concept development and experimentation; advising the Secretary of Defense on development of joint command, control, communications, and cyber capability; and formulating policies for gathering, developing, and disseminating joint lessons learned.

The importance of gathering, developing, and disseminating joint lessons learned cannot be overemphasized. Today, we need real-world lessons learned by the deployed young officer who is experiencing what works, what does not, and what could—if certain changes were made. This is mission of the Joint Staff Joint Force Development Directorate’s Joint Lessons Learned Division (JLLD).

The JLLD executes the Chairman’s Joint Lessons Learned Program by

collecting, aggregating, analyzing, and integrating lessons and best practices from joint, interagency, and coalition operations in order to shape and advance joint force development. The division’s desired endstate is that lessons are effectively applied through force development functions, promoting learning across the joint force to improve readiness, operational effectiveness, and leader development.

The division actively collects Department of Defense (DOD)-wide lessons learned through the employment of composite study teams and passively through analysis of field observations and reports entered into the Joint Lessons Learned Information System (JLLIS). JLLIS is the DOD system of record and enterprise solution supporting the Chairman’s Joint Lessons Learned Program. A complement to the overall JLLD mission, it facilitates the collection, tracking, management, sharing, collaborative resolution, and dissemination of lessons, which enable the five phases of the Joint Lesson Learned Program: discovery, validation, resolution, evaluation, and dissemination. It also provides automated workflow processes to elevate observations from operations, exercises, training, experiments, and real-world events and facilitates the discovery, validation, issue resolution, evaluation, and dissemination of critical lessons.

The JLLIS construct allows approved users across the Services, combatant commands, Joint Staff, and interagency community both to input information (for example, observations, best practices, after action reports, internal staff assessments) and to provide an important reference for the planning process. Key users and stakeholders include the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), Joint Staff, combatant commands, Services, National Guard Bureau, combat support agencies, as well as other joint, U.S. Government, and coalition partners. The JLLD additionally identifies and aggregates key findings and themes within a Joint Capability Area framework on a quarterly and rolling fourth quarter basis. The resulting observation report informs the internal active study process and provides an important reference point for

focused research to the lessons learned community at large.

As mentioned, JLLD actively collects lessons through experienced study teams that deploy to theater, collect data through interviews and observations, and conduct timely analysis of operational issues. This provides immediate feedback to the joint warfighter and input for transformational change to joint doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy (DOTMLPF-P). JLLD studies are normally conducted at the request of combatant commands, joint task forces, or other military organizations conducting real-world operations. They are focused on identifying unique challenges and the DOD response. Study products are typically vetted with the requesting organization, which is free to use the study as an internal product for improvement or to approve it for release. In many cases, it is difficult to measure the impact of specific study efforts because the learning benefits accrue over time. Whenever possible, JLLD studies are posted to one or more appropriate networks, including unclassified or classified Intel Share, JLLIS, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Battlefield Information Combat Exploitation System. This process enhances the visibility and sharing of lessons and best practices across the force, including interagency and coalition partners.

JLLD studies continue to cover a wide spectrum of joint, interagency, and coalition operations. Below are summaries from several recent JLLD study efforts that exemplify the range of these operations and the organizations conducting these operations.

Decade of War Study

This study was the JLLD response to the 2011 CJCS call for learning the lessons of the past decade’s U.S. military operations.³ In the decade following 9/11, the United States employed its military in a wide range of operations to address real and perceived threats from both nation-states and terrorist groups, strengthen partner-nations’ militaries, conduct

humanitarian assistance operations, and provide defense support of civil authorities in catastrophic incidents such as Hurricane Katrina. This wide range of operations aimed to promote and protect national interests in the changing global environment.

In general, operations during the first half of the decade were often marked by numerous missteps and challenges as the U.S. Government and military applied a strategy and force designed for a different threat and environment. In the second half of the decade, the joint force adapted to the operational environment and became more effective. From its study of these operations, JLLD identified overarching and enduring lessons that presented opportunities to learn and improve—best practices that the United States can sustain and emerging risk factors that it should address. These lessons were derived from 46 studies consolidated into the report.⁴

The *Decade of War* study discusses the 11 strategic themes that arose from the study of the enduring lessons and challenges of the last decade:

- Understand the environment: A failure to recognize, acknowledge, and accurately define the operational environment led to a mismatch among forces, capabilities, missions, and goals.
- Conventional warfare paradigm: Conventional approaches often were ineffective when applied to operations other than major combat, forcing leaders to realign the ways and means of achieving effects.
- Battle for the narrative: The United States was slow to recognize the importance of information and the battle for the narrative in achieving objectives at all levels; it was often ineffective in applying and aligning the narrative to goals and desired endstates.
- Transitions: Failure to adequately plan and resource strategic and operational transitions endangered the overall mission.
- Adaptation: DOD policies, doctrine, training, and equipment were often

poorly suited to operations other than major combat, forcing wide-spread and costly adaptation.

- Special operations forces (SOF)—general purpose forces (GPF) integration: Multiple, simultaneous, large-scale operations executed in dynamic environments required the integration of SOF and GPF, creating a force-multiplying effect for both.
- Interagency coordination: Synchronization was uneven due to inconsistent participation in planning, training, and operations; policy gaps; resources; and differences in organizational cultures.
- Coalition operations: Establishing and sustaining coalition unity of effort was a challenge due to competing national interests, cultures, resources, and policies.
- Host-nation partnering: Partnering was a key enabler and force multiplier and aided in host-nation capacity-building. However, it was not always approached effectively or adequately prioritized and resourced.
- State use of surrogates and proxies: States sponsored and exploited surrogates and proxies to generate asymmetric challenges.
- Super-empowered threats: Individuals and small groups exploited technology and information to expand influence and approach state-like disruptive capacity.

The *Decade of War* study briefly summarized each of these strategic themes and provided recommendations to the joint force. The Army used this study as the framework for a complete strategic-to-tactical crosswalk of its organization, training, and equipping. The study also became part of the professional military education (PME) curriculum. This study led U.S. Southern Command to request support in understanding the protection of civilians in its area of responsibility. Lessons from this study influenced how the United Nations (UN) approaches the protection of civilians in UN peace-keeping operations. Additionally, JLLD

integrated the lessons from this study, in conjunction with the Continuum of eLearning, and produced a series of short videos, one for each of the strategic themes. These videos can provide a basic overview or help a senior officer determine if the entire report should be accessed.

European Perspectives Project: Security in the Baltic Region

The European Perspectives Project (EPP) is a series of studies conducted with partner nations. The combined perspectives provide a strategic view about Russia's behavior. The purpose of the series is to gain a common understanding and inform U.S., allied, and partner leaders about perceived challenges and potential solutions. *Security in the Baltic Region* is the first study in the series to be published.⁵

The Baltic Sea Region (BSR) includes Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (three former Soviet states) as well as Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Poland, and Sweden. The United States and Great Britain are critical external BSR actors. The BSR is important to Russia for many reasons including:

- Sixty percent of Russian maritime commercial trade transits the Baltic Sea
- Forty-three percent of Russian oil exports transit the Oresund straits (traditionally places of great economic and political importance connecting Scandinavia with Central Europe)
- The Oresund straits are the world's third most strategic oil chokepoint.

Russian rhetoric indicates that it is concerned about maintaining influence in this region.

JLLD partnered with Finland, Great Britain, and Sweden to conduct a study of security in the BSR. The findings provided a shared understanding of the Russian challenge and its implications to the United States, Europe, and NATO, resulting in a common framework for potential countermeasures. The study



Swedish sailors assigned to HSwMS *Karlsand* climb aboard USS *Oscar Austin*, which supports theater security cooperation and forward naval presence in U.S. 6th Fleet area of operations, Baltic Sea, September 26, 2017 (U.S. Navy/Ryan Utah Kledzik)

sponsors included the Joint Staff J5, J7, and the U.S. European Command J5.

This study found that the BSR has been a source of innate tension between Russia and the West. Geography, location, economic dependence, demography, media penetration, politics, and lack of a unified approach make the BSR vulnerable to Russian influence. Russia increased nonmilitary and military pressure in the BSR in a long-term effort intended to enhance Russian security, assert great power influence, and confront the West below the threshold of war. BSR countries strengthened their defense postures and increased cooperation, but a collective approach to countering, deterring, and de-escalating Russian aggression proved problematic. Future efforts must be founded on unity, defense capabilities, resilience, and deterrence. The impacts of this work are still developing; however, it is clear that a result of the

study is closer alignment among the participating countries as well as conceptual frameworks for how future cooperation might be enhanced to better mitigate Russian threats.

In addition to the real-time strategic planning insights that this study has provided, many segments of the EPP effort are expected to provide timely and relevant material for professional development. In this case, JLLD produced an “EPP: Baltic Region” study video to provide background content for joint PME classes to engage in seminar-type discussions.

JLLD is beginning the next phase of the project—working with Great Britain and countries in Central Eastern Europe (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) to better understand their perspectives and evaluate how these perspectives might shape future efforts.

Global Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance

Early in 2017, the CJCS directed Joint Staff J7 to conduct a study on the optimization of global intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) in support of the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM). JLLD began a 90-day study focused on recommendations to enhance the combat effectiveness and efficiency of ongoing DOD combat ISR and complementary processing, exploitation, and dissemination operations. The key question JLLD addressed was whether current practices for prioritization, allocation, and employment of available ISR resources are optimized for combatant commands and joint task forces to achieve their military objectives. The research team (composed of analysts from the Joint Staff J7, J2, and J3) identified 4 findings with 11 actionable recom-



B-1B Lancer, 28th Bomb Wing, participates in Baltic Operations Exercise over Baltic Sea, June 9, 2017 (U.S. Air Force/Jonathan Snyder)

mentations as well as several important overarching themes that were outside the study's original scope.

The first finding revealed that joint policies, instructions, and doctrine have not kept pace with the evolution of ISR employment, resulting in ad hoc implementation and disparate organize-train-equip approaches. ISR growth has outpaced ISR policies and enterprise management. There is a stark difference between the information outlined in component doctrine versus joint doctrine. Each Service conducts collection management differently, including use of ISR assets. Recommendations for this finding include providing guidance on roles and responsibilities within the ISR enterprise that will enforce overarching directives and instructions and establish a reporting requirement for better visibility of ISR assets.

The second finding identified the undisciplined processes for enterprise design, architecture, and establishing data standards, resulting in non-interoperable sets of systems and tools that introduced numerous inefficiencies into the ISR enterprise. The recommendation stemming from this finding is that OSD should enforce the provisions of DOD Directive 5143.01, which require the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence (USD[I]) to serve as the focal point for intelligence information systems' interoperability and governance processes.

The third finding described the deficiencies in joint force training and joint certification standards necessary for the required skills, knowledge, and abilities at all levels within the ISR enterprise. In short, the joint force needs to professionalize ISR enterprise managers in order to fully optimize assets. The

recommendations associated with this finding included enforcing the requirements for joint certification standards for Service college managers and expanding planners' and leaders' knowledge of how to employ ISR. The latter portion may include developing a curriculum for Services to use in their PME pipelines.

The final finding revealed that joint force organization and manning have not kept pace with the exponential growth of the ISR enterprise. Newly collected ISR data cannot be incorporated if there is an imbalance in the number of personnel assigned to collection; processing, exploitation, and dissemination; and analysis. Recommendations included ensuring that future platform acquisitions are accompanied with commensurate joint force organization, technology, and training; conducting a manpower study to determine the appropriate manning

capacity to support PED and all-source analysis; and minimizing the amount of unprocessed data by implementing the necessary PED manning and technology.

The USD(I), ISR Operations, is leading an executive steering group (ESG) consisting of the Joint Staff J32, Joint Staff Vice Director J2, along with other senior representation from the Intelligence Community (IC) to direct the implementation of the CJCS-approved recommendations and way ahead. The ESG will involve the IC in working groups that will focus on the recommendations, which should provide improvements for optimizing ISR resources. They will not, however, close the widening gap between ISR supply and demand. The current ISR enterprise evolved through an enduring fight against violent extremist organizations (VEOs). Only through an enterprise ISR strategy with associated design/architecture discipline can system integration, interoperability, data analysis, and sharing occur. Governed by a USD(I) defined structure and architecture, the Services, agencies, and partners will be able to provide an ISR force that is flexible, adaptable, organized, trained, and equipped to advance beyond the counter-VEO fight and prepare for a near-peer competitor.

The DOD Response to Ebola in West Africa

This study analyzed *United Assistance*, the DOD support operation for the U.S. Government's response to the Ebola crisis in Liberia in 2014–2015.⁶ The operation was the first U.S. military operation to support a disease-driven foreign humanitarian-assistance mission. Initially, the Ebola outbreak seemed to follow its normal pattern, but as infected people traveled to cities to get medical care, the disease spread farther and quicker. Nongovernmental aid agencies normally do not work with the military, but the disease reached a level that could no longer be managed without military logistics.

The unique aspects of the mission, evolving DOD roles, lack of understanding of the operational environment, and force projection shortfalls presented

an array of challenges in establishing an expeditionary base in an austere environment. Although limited in capability, the use of a Service component headquarters, coupled with key enablers, opened the theater, supported immediate operations, and provided time to prepare for a tailored follow-on headquarters and response force. The 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) executed a disciplined operation that supported the lead Federal agency (the United States Agency for International Development), avoided mission creep, and enabled a timely and orderly redeployment that included a 21-day controlled monitoring regimen.

Despite the success of the operation, shortfalls were revealed in planning, policies, and preparedness across DOD, which need to be addressed. Currently, epidemiologists are greatly concerned about future and more dangerous global infectious disease outbreaks. While this report was primarily written for the U.S. military, others, including U.S. departments and agencies, healthcare organizations, and nongovernmental organizations, may benefit from the discussion and recommendations documented.

This study provided key input directly to the White House Ebola Lessons Learned Summit and informed the Ebola report sent to President Barack Obama. More than 100 recommendations for strategic, operational, and tactical issues were produced, which were used to inform and improve joint doctrine, education, training, and concept development. In addition, the study provided key lessons and a framework for U.S. Africa Command senior leader after action review. JLLD additionally produced a Joint Knowledge Online instructional video and two case studies: *Rapid Deployment into an Undeveloped Theater*⁷ and *Employment in Support of Interagency Partners*.⁸

Operational Contract Support

The USCENTCOM Director for Logistics (J4) requested that the JLLD conduct a study to analyze and capture lessons and best practices to operationalize and institutionalize operational contract support (OCS) throughout the

command's area of responsibility. The study focused on OCS at its headquarters and forward headquarters, Combined Joint Task Force–Operation *Inherent Resolve*, U.S. Forces–Afghanistan, and subordinate Service components.

While the Armed Forces have routinely used contract support, the scope and scale of contractor use during Operation *Iraqi Freedom* and Operation *Enduring Freedom* were unprecedented. Significant contracting failures and reports of massive fraud, waste, and abuse during this period prompted Congress and the Secretary of the Army to create independent commissions to assess the extent of damage and to develop solutions to this crucial DOD and Service-wide problem. The OCS concept was developed and shaped as one of the solutions to this problem set. The reduction of force structure and manning, mission-specific force cap restrictions, and the continual introduction of high-tech equipment all point to the fact that the use of and diversity of contract support will continue to play a crucial role in military operations. Over the past decade, the Iraq and Afghanistan theaters combined have employed more contractors than military personnel.

The study team discussed OCS challenges in interviews with numerous senior leaders and subject matter experts representing USCENTCOM, OSD, Joint Staff, and the Services. These discussions made it clear that while the *DOD OCS Action Plan (FY2015–FY2018)*—developed by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Program Support), Joint Staff Logistics Directorate (J4), and the implementation approach taken by USCENTCOM J4 (CCJ4)—has been successfully guiding and enabling OCS advancement, significant challenges from institutional and operational perspectives still exist.⁹

The study developed 9 critical findings and over 40 recommendations; however, the most crucial challenges that will affect OCS progress are manning and training. Overcoming many of these challenges will require substantial support and endorsement at the highest levels of leadership. A few of the key findings/recommendations of the study include:

- A commander's establishment of and involvement in contract review processes were critical to contract oversight.
- Ill-defined manning requirements, combined with training and education shortfalls, complicated OCS implementation; however, ongoing efforts have reduced gaps and advanced OCS institutionalization.
- Resource constraints, method of manning, and personnel turnover all challenged Operational Contract Support Integration Cell (OCSIC) manning, with no identified institutional solution.
- Inadequate doctrine and policy complicated execution of OCS in theater.
- USCENTCOM's efforts to support the commander with OCSIC information management processes improved, but they remain immature.

While the study focused within the USCENTCOM area of responsibility, the recommendations included both operational (USCENTCOM-specific) and institutional (DOTMLPF-P) perspectives. This study was just recently approved for release to the DOD-wide community, so its full effect is not yet realized. However, JLLD has been working closely with Joint Staff J4 and OSD Program Support representatives, and the study findings and recommendations are being used to support a DOTMLPF-P Change Recommendation package currently being drafted within the Joint Staff and OSD.

Integration into Joint Force Development

Regardless of the source, the JLLD strives to integrate lessons-based knowledge across the joint force. Primarily, the division does this by maintaining relationships with organizations representing the activities of Joint Force Development: concepts, cyber, doctrine, education and leader development, and training.

The JLLD ensures that the lessons learned community is informed of ongoing and completed studies and reports

and also works to reformat and repackage lessons-based knowledge in formats that are suitable for other applications. For example, the division frequently creates case studies and educational vignettes that are quickly transitioned into the JPME II program at the Joint Forces Staff College. Regarding concept development, the division provides tailored inputs from lessons-based knowledge (whether studies-based, JLLIS-based, or from other sources) that can improve the development of joint concepts. The JLLD ensures that all joint doctrine under review (or development) benefits from the inclusion of lessons-based knowledge. To support joint training, the division provides tailored analysis summaries, which give combatant command and joint exercise planners resources and information to support their planning for and execution of operational-level exercises. Regarding cyber, the division, in partnership with the Joint Staff J7 Training Division, co-chairs a working group that builds awareness and provides support to the J7. Finally, in support of building the lessons learned community, the JLLD holds action officer and O6-level working groups, hosts an annual conference, and a General Officer's Steering Committee that maintain situational awareness across the community.

Maintaining the profession of arms requires many people working together. The Joint Lessons Learned Division plays a vital role in expanding the body of unique knowledge regarding our profession. This knowledge is gained by canvassing at the grassroots level through the collection of lessons learned. It is augmented by mining those lessons learned to identify key issues, concerns, and best practices to improve DOTMLPF-P and by identifying key themes to senior leaders. It also is augmented by robust and timely analysis of operational issues to provide immediate feedback to the joint warfighter. Many of the studies are shared through PME forums. All studies are posted on classified or unclassified Web sites. Often, sponsors of studies implement recommendations in real time even as the study is under way. In short, JLLD

promotes the profession of arms and ensures that the body of knowledge remains timely, relevant, and useful. Lastly, as the modern nature of warfare continues to rapidly change, the process of learning must keep pace or we will find ourselves at a competitive disadvantage with our adversaries. JFQ

Notes

¹ Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., speech delivered at the graduation exercises of the National Defense University, Washington, DC, June 9, 2016; video available at <http://original.livestream.com/ndustreampremium/video?clipId=pla_e501087a-a2fc-4ec1-9c6a-1dd18f43dc97&rt=3&ra=483661>.

² Martin E. Dempsey, *America's Military—A Profession of Arms* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, n.d.), available at <www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/aprofessionofarms.pdf>.

³ Martin E. Dempsey to George Flynn, "Chairman Direction to J7," official letter, October 6, 2011.

⁴ *Decade of War, Volume I: Enduring Lessons from the Past Decade of Operations* (Suffolk, VA: Joint Lessons Learned Division, 2012), available at <<https://intelshare.intelink.gov/sites/jcoa/default.aspx>>.

⁵ *Security in the Baltic Region* study available with Common Access Card and subscription at <<https://intelshare.intelink.gov/sites/jcoa/EPP/default.aspx>>.

⁶ *Operation United Assistance* study available with Common Access Card and subscription at <<https://intelshare.intelink.gov/sites/jcoa/Pages/ebola.aspx>>.

⁷ *Operation United Assistance: The DOD Response to Ebola in West Africa—Rapid Deployment into an Undeveloped Theater Case Study* (Suffolk, VA: Joint Lessons Learned Division, 2016), available at <https://intelshare.intelink.gov/sites/jcoa/Products/OUA_Case_Study_1_U.pdf>.

⁸ *Operation United Assistance: The DOD Response to Ebola in West Africa—Employment in Support of an Interagency Partner* (Suffolk, VA: Joint Lessons Learned Division, 2016), available at <https://intelshare.intelink.gov/sites/jcoa/Products/OUA_Case_Study_2_U.pdf>.

⁹ *Department of Defense Operational Contract Support Action Plan FY2012–FY2018* (Washington, DC: Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Program Support, 2015), available at <www.acq.osd.mil/log/PS/.ocs_action_plan.html/OCS_Action_Plan_FY15-18_Extract.pdf>.