



Air traffic controller with 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit communicates with pilot of CH-46E Sea Knight helicopter with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 262 (Reinforced), 31st MEU, during multilateral NEO exercise, February 12, 2011 (DOD)

The Need for a Joint Support Element in Noncombatant Evacuation Operations

By George K. Dixon

The U.S. Government's first duty is to protect and defend the citizens of the Nation. Loss of confidence in the government's ability and willingness to safeguard citizens can shift the public narrative and may

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even compel policymakers to alter strategic direction. Noncombatant evacuation operations (NEOs) from threatened areas overseas are therefore an important strategic matter, particularly in today's world of viral videos and globalized travel. The military elements tasked on short notice to plan and execute NEOs may not always fully appreciate these strategic implications.

A quintessential image from the Vietnam era is of U.S. helicopters plucking people off rooftops amid the fall of Saigon while panicked throngs of Vietnamese plea to get onboard. Another is the spectacle of evacuation helicopters being pushed off the decks of U.S. warships and into the sea. For many around the world, these images symbolize the failure and abandonment of U.S. strategy in Southeast Asia.

Another low point for the United States were the images of blindfolded Embassy staff being held hostage by Iranian revolutionaries and of burned U.S. rescue aircraft in the desert. The Iran hostage drama punctuated a crisis of confidence in political and military leadership during the 1970s. The failed rescue attempt in April 1980 reinforced doubts about U.S. military capability and led to a complete reorganization of U.S. Special Operations. This contributed to perceptions of strategic drift and malaise leading into the 1980 Presidential campaign.

President Ronald Reagan's fundamental theme was renewing confidence in America. He ordered the invasion of Grenada, vowing not to "wait for the Iran crisis to repeat itself, only this time, in our own neighborhood—the Caribbean."¹ Operation *Urgent Fury* evacuated 800 American medical students and toppled a communist-aligned regime. Grenada advanced Reagan's strategic objective to reverse the "Vietnam Syndrome"² and rebuild the credibility of U.S. power. But Grenada also uncovered serious gaps in the military's ability to operate jointly, leading directly to the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986.

Military-assisted NEOs occur infrequently, but they carry enormous diplomatic, military, and national strategic consequences. Images of noncombatants in danger are powerful, and the audience is unforgiving. Doing NEOs successfully is even more imperative in a fully globalized, cellphone-enabled, viral-video world where cameras are everywhere and images spread instantaneously.

To maximize the success of such important missions, the Department of Defense (DOD) should create a new Joint Planning Support Element specifically for NEOs. Geographic combatant commanders (GCCs) could use this entity to augment their staffs during a NEO event. This Joint NEO Support Element would coordinate the strategic and operational aspects of NEOs and provide subject matter experts. GCCs should still designate a NEO joint force commander to retain overall military control, and they

would still provide the bulk of forces, lift, and planning within their areas of responsibility (AORs).

Policy, Doctrine, and Practice

Diplomatic evacuation events occur quite often. From 1988 through October 2007, the Department of State conducted 271 authorized and ordered departures from overseas posts,³ an average of nearly one every 3 weeks. Embassy or State Department personnel carried out the vast majority of these without military assistance. However, a mass evacuation or a hostile security environment can overwhelm Embassy and State Department capabilities, leading them to call for military assistance.

Withdrawing American citizens and diplomats from a foreign location has weighty strategic and political repercussions. An ordered evacuation signals an official U.S. Government determination that the host government can no longer guarantee the safety of foreign nationals and that staying in place is no longer worth the risk. It could further undermine the host region's economy, stability, and legitimacy and may forfeit the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic assets an American presence maintained.

The Department of State is always the lead Federal agency for "protection or evacuation of United States citizens and nationals abroad,"⁴ including the "evacuation and repatriation of United States citizens in threatened areas overseas."⁵ The senior U.S. diplomat in a country is a Chief of Mission or Ambassador and is the personal representative of the President of the United States with extraordinary decision authority over all U.S. Government operations in their assigned country. The Chief of Mission controls all U.S. Government personnel in that country except those assigned to a GCC. Military personnel at the Defense Attaché Office (DAO), Security Assistance Office, and Marine Corps Security Guard detachment are under the authority of the Chief of Mission, not the GCC.

A 1988 memorandum of agreement describes how DOD will support State

during an evacuation.⁶ It establishes three policy objectives:

- protect U.S. citizens and designated other persons, to include their evacuation to relatively safe areas when necessary and feasible
- minimize the number of U.S. nationals subject to risk of death and/or seizure as hostages
- reduce to a minimum the number of designated noncombatants in probable or actual combat areas so that combat effectiveness of U.S. and allied forces is not impaired.

DOD Directive 3025.14, "Evacuation of U.S. Citizens and Designated Aliens from Threatened Areas Abroad," provides further guidance on supporting State overseas evacuations. It reiterates that the primary responsibility for NEOs is with State and the diplomatic Chief of Mission. But DOD and all combatant commands must plan and prepare contingency plans to support NEOs.

Military-assisted NEOs are exceptional in that the U.S. Ambassador, not the military commander, has responsibility for the overall operation. Embassy or State Department personnel coordinate overflight and landing clearances and designate marshalling areas and safe havens. But the military commander has responsibility for execution once military forces and equipment commence operations.⁷ A NEO is always a unity of effort situation with overlapping responsibilities requiring intense coordination.

Military-assisted NEOs generally also involve multiple Services and sometimes coalition forces. The NEO joint force typically will insert a ground security element to control evacuation sites and marshalling areas; move evacuees by land, water, or air to a temporary safe haven; provide sustainment, administrative processing, communications, and safety to the evacuees at the temporary safe haven or follow-on destinations; and then either repatriate American citizens to U.S. territory or return them to the affected area once the crisis is over. Embassy or State officials maintain overall responsibility throughout all phases of NEOs, but the military must be prepared to step in at



Airmen from 86th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron and Critical Care Air Transport team from Landstuhl Regional Medical Center load wounded Libyan fighter onto civilian aircraft for transport to local German hospital, October 29, 2011, Ramstein Air Base, Germany (U.S. Air Force/Chenzira Mallory)

any point to maintain operations start to finish.

Joint Publication 3-68, *Noncombatant Evacuation Operations*, is the current joint doctrine for NEO operations. The main thrust of the publication is the tactical aspects of NEOs, but it also includes discussion of interagency coordination, strategic communication, military deception, defense support to public diplomacy, information-sharing, geospatial intelligence, and use of psychological operations.

The Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) is routinely trained and certified for conducting NEOs in uncertain or hostile environments.⁸ An MEU, if available, is the optimum tactical force. However, military-assisted NEOs often occur at times and places where an MEU is not nearby or available. Half of all military-assisted NEOs over a recent 20-year period were executed without an MEU.⁹

General purpose forces from any of the military Services may be tasked to execute NEOs, typically on short notice with no prior preparation.

An MEU also lacks the staff depth to handle operational- and strategic-level coordination during a NEO event. These planning and coordination duties therefore default to the joint force commander, GCC, or Service component staff. This is a problem because NEOs require rapid response and focus, often while other operations are under way elsewhere in the AOR. Assembling a new joint force headquarters (JFHQ) or diverting GCC or Service component staff during a crisis may hinder operations elsewhere or sidetrack the NEO.

By its very nature, a NEO requires bilateral coordination with the host nation. It frequently also becomes a multilateral, allied, or coalition operation. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO),¹⁰

United Kingdom,¹¹ Australia,¹² France,¹³ and Canada¹⁴ each has its own established NEO doctrine. The United States has mutual agreements with a number of countries to evacuate each other's designated persons in times of crisis. The Joint NEO Support Element should build and promote interoperability with the NEO doctrines, terminologies, and rules of engagement of potential mutual support partners. Combatant commands are unlikely to maintain the same familiarity with all potential NEO doctrines, especially from countries outside their AOR, leading to potential friction if multiple nations attempt evacuations concurrently.

Case Studies

Vietnam: Operation Frequent Wind, April 1975. The United States maintained a large diplomatic presence following troop withdrawals from Vietnam in 1973. The American Embassy and

DAO in Saigon were the largest of any foreign post. Tens of thousands of American citizens, U.S. Government employees, contractors, business people, and family members remained in Vietnam.

The situation across Southeast Asia deteriorated rapidly throughout early 1975. The U.S. Air Force and Marines evacuated the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on April 12, 1975, in Operation *Eagle Pull* 5 days before that city fell to the Khmer Rouge. Meanwhile, North Vietnamese army units invaded the South and by mid-April were closing on Saigon.

During April 1975, the United States evacuated over 130,000 people by air and sea in the largest NEO in history.¹⁵ U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin, hoping to negotiate a truce and reluctant to admit failure or to cause panic, delayed final Embassy evacuation as long as possible. By the time he did request evacuation, 16 North Vietnamese army divisions surrounded Saigon, the airport was closed by ground fire, and mobs of panicked civilians and communist “home guards” filled the streets, making movement almost impossible.¹⁶

Helicopter extraction was the only remaining option. During April 29–30, 1975, Marine helicopters lifted 1,373 American citizens and 5,595 Vietnamese and third-country nationals from the U.S. Embassy compound in central Saigon and the DAO compound at Tan Son Nhut airport. U.S. casualties included two Marines killed by indirect fire and two aircrew lost at sea. As the official after action report noted: “Trying more attractive options may result in execution decision being delayed until a worse case situation has developed.”¹⁷

Mogadishu, Somalia: Operation Eastern Exit, January 5–6, 1991.

Operation *Eastern Exit* took place during Operation *Desert Shield* and just 2 weeks before the launch of *Desert Storm*. This created some complications. Military forces in theater were concentrated in the Persian Gulf and focused on preparing for major combat operations.

Most Westerners fled Somalia by late December 1990 due to the violent

anarchy caused by civil war. Ambassador James Bishop and a minimal Embassy staff remained into January hoping for an Italian-brokered ceasefire.¹⁸ As the situation worsened, however, the Ambassador requested immediate evacuation.

Confusion and ongoing miscommunications between DOD, Ambassador Bishop, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), and the NEO task force caused problems throughout the operation. U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) was tasked to execute the NEO but was not monitoring events in Somalia. They got their first warning order on January 1 and received the execute order the next day. NAVCENT was unenthusiastic about committing significant forces, having watched an earlier operation in Liberia morph from a NEO into a protracted military reinforcement of the Embassy.

NAVCENT assigned just two amphibious warfare ships to the operation. They departed Oman, some 1,500 nautical miles from Mogadishu, on January 2. At one point the amphibious group commander even ordered these ships to slow down to conserve fuel. Marines and Sailors onboard were instructed not to unwrap ammunition so it could be returned to contingency stocks later.¹⁹

The Embassy’s emergency action plan was to evacuate from Mogadishu airport. But by January 2, roving bands of gunmen and runway damage closed the airport. Fixed-wing evacuation attempts by the Italians, French, and Soviets all failed. By then, ground movement to the harbor was dangerous, and security near the Embassy was rapidly deteriorating. Diplomats from several nearby foreign embassies began sheltering at the U.S. compound.

Early on December 5, while still 500 nautical miles away, the task force launched an initial flight of two CH-53 helicopters carrying a ground security team. The ground team was hastily reorganized and cut to 60 men to save space and weight.²⁰ The inbound flight required two air-to-air-flight refuelings to reach Mogadishu.

Communications between the task force and Embassy were highly

problematic. The Embassy had no secure link to the task force other than by diplomatic cable to Washington and then relayed down through USCENTCOM. All radio traffic between the task force and Embassy went “in the clear.”

The flight crews had maps of Mogadishu from 1969 that did not show the location of the Embassy compound, which relocated during the 1980s. They had to circle the city for 20 minutes searching for the objective marked only by a retired Marine waving a bedsheet.²¹

The lead helicopters reached the Embassy just as gangs of looters were about to breach the walls. It took perhaps as long as 10 minutes to clear the landing zone and deploy into the compound. Evacuation took place under sporadic gunfire as follow-on helicopters arrived. The evacuation control cell team was cut from the mission, and the ground security team failed to fully search or distribute the evacuees properly, resulting in one foreign diplomat almost getting onboard with a loaded weapon. The mission safely evacuated some 281 people from 30 nations, including 8 ambassadors and 39 Soviet embassy staff.

Lebanon: Israeli Invasion, July 2006. On July 12, 2006, Israel invaded Lebanon in response to Hizballah kidnapping two of its soldiers. The Israeli military bombed roads, bridges, and airports, blockaded seaports, cut power, and jammed cellular service, all of which created a mood of panic. This unanticipated event triggered one of the largest multinational NEO events in recent history. The scale, scope, and abruptness of the crisis overwhelmed the Embassy’s ability to manage the evacuation.

The State Department requested DOD assistance on July 14. Evacuations began with a limited helicopter extraction on July 16 and continued through August 2.²² The United States evacuated 15,000 Americans from Lebanon. Other nations also evacuated thousands of their citizens: Canada (15,000), France (14,000), Sweden (8,400), Germany (6,300), Australia (5,000), Denmark (5,800), United Kingdom (4,600), and Brazil (2,950).²³ The massive numbers of evacuees and the breadth of countries



Mock NEO participants aboard USS *Germantown*, with embarked elements of 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, Sattahip, Kingdom of Thailand, February 12, 2012 (U.S. Navy/Johnie Hickmon)

involved reflect globalization, with ever-increasing population mobility and dual nationalities.

Initially there were no U.S. Navy ships in the eastern Mediterranean and the closest MEU was in the Red Sea, 6 days away by ship. Airlift was in heavy demand for ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) used its contracting channels to procure a commercial passenger ship to transport evacuees from Beirut to Cypress. The vast majority of Americans evacuated by sea between July 19–25 using contracted commercial ships and then U.S. Navy and Marine Corps vessels.

Israel had blockaded the coastline, and all ground movement and port operations had to be cleared with the Israeli military. Evacuation also had to be coordinated with Lebanon and either

Cypress or Turkey. Lebanon is within the USCENTCOM AOR, but Israel, Cypress, and Turkey all fall under U.S. European Command (USEUCOM). This required continuous coordination between combatant commands.

The U.S. Embassy and the State Department in Washington had even bigger coordination challenges. State planners kept attempting to reserve commercial aircraft and ships, at times in direct competition with USTRANSCOM and allied countries.²⁴ State headquarters in Washington restricted the Beirut embassy from talking directly with the media. Meanwhile, the department did not communicate effectively with evacuees, family members, or the media. This created delays and miscommunications that worsened the panic and confusion.

Cypress was used as a temporary safe haven by several other Western countries. This was the height of tourist season. All

hotels, catering, and ground transportation were soon overbooked. DOD had to construct an emergency tent city and bring in additional forces and logistics for life support. U.S. evacuees flowed into Cypress faster than State could charter flights for them back to the United States, which forced DOD to also manage repatriations.²⁵

Japan Earthquake: Operation Pacific Passage, March 2011. Following the massive earthquake in Japan on March 11, 2011, DOD authorized a voluntary return of military family members and DOD civilians to the United States. U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) led the repatriation effort, which flew more than 7,800 DOD noncombatants and their pets out of Japan. Since this was a DOD-only evacuation, it was a rare instance of civilian evacuation and repatriation conducted

entirely by the military without State Department participation.

Although *Pacific Passage* was completed successfully, it uncovered issues that could have been problematic under different circumstances. DOD's computer database used to track non-combatant evacuations (NEO Tracking System, or NTS) did not interface with the passenger manifesting system used by Air Mobility Command.²⁶ Nor did NTS include all fields required for U.S. customs clearance. *Pacific Passage* was the first real-world test of NTS. Operators were able to work around the problem by using manual processes and rekeying data into multiple systems. However, these flaws increased workload and delay. In a larger emergency, these glitches could have resulted in passengers not being tracked or appropriately screened or being misrouted. DOD has programs under way to correct these issues.

USNORTHCOM's estimates and plans only encompassed repatriation and onward movement to the continental United States. However, many evacuees went to destinations in the U.S. Pacific Command AOR. The units running the Joint Reception Coordination Center had never trained in NEO or NTS and had to learn on the job. Because *Pacific Passage* was a completely DOD-run event, it bypassed normal state and Federal agencies that ordinarily handle repatriation and reception of evacuees.

The Arab Spring Uprisings and Their Aftermath: Libya (2011, 2012), Yemen (2015). The Arab Spring movement that began in December 2010 demonstrated a controversial shift in U.S. policy. In Libya and Yemen, the United States decided not to attempt evacuation or did so only after allied NEOs were already under way.

Joint Task Force *Odyssey Dawn* (JTF-ODD) included a multinational evacuation from Libya and Tunisia in March 2011. By then, however, most Americans had already left. Several NATO countries conducted NEOs in February that evacuated Americans.²⁷ These included the United Kingdom (Operation *Deference*), Canada (Operation *Mobile*), Germany (Operation

Pegasus), and France. Operation *Deference* also included multinational contributions by Romania, Kuwait, Ireland, Spain, and Austria.

The newly created U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) led JTF-ODD and then transitioned it to NATO control. USAFRICOM's intended mission was regional stability and engagement, not warfighting or JFHQ operations. Their headquarters staff was 50 percent civilian and lacked the depth to sustain a 24-hour tempo.²⁸ Although Libya is within USAFRICOM's AOR, the forces involved and staging bases were from USEUCOM or USCENCOM. USAFRICOM relied heavily on USEUCOM, NATO, and Arab League coalition partners for support.

The decision not to attempt a military rescue of U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens from Benghazi, Libya, on September 11, 2012, remains a topic of ongoing partisan arguments and accusations. Four Americans, including Ambassador Stevens, died in an attack on the Benghazi compound. Controversy continues over whether military assistance would have been possible and over who made that determination.

Another controversial decision was not to evacuate private U.S. citizens from Yemen. The U.S. Embassy evacuated in February 2015. An undetermined number of U.S. citizens were left to remain or find their own way out.²⁹ Several other nations, including India, China, Pakistan, and Somalia, did evacuate their citizens.

Lessons Learned

Military-assisted NEOs will always be a unique and complex tactical, operational, and strategic mission. Despite this, a NEO is something most headquarters and units historically have just "muddled through." Every NEO has its share of unique problems, and so far the United States has avoided a repeat of the 1970s experiences. But it only takes one disaster to rewrite the strategic narrative.

We should expect a few recurring challenges in any future NEOs:

- Ambassadors and the State Department will defer requesting military assistance as long as possible. By the time they do, the range of options will be narrow.
- GCCs may struggle to devote resources to NEO, particularly if they are already committed on other operations.
- Communications, shared situational awareness, and trust between the Embassy and the NEO force will be untested or absent.
- Mission scope often expands into longer duration repatriation operations or resettlement duties and spills across combatant command boundaries.
- Globalization and modern technology put more Americans in more places with more connectivity than ever before.
- Public attention is notoriously short, but if an incident resonates emotionally, it can sway policy, politics, and perceptions dramatically.

The Need for a Standing Joint Capability for NEO

A Joint Support Element specifically organized for NEOs could provide immediate capability and a foundation of expertise to support or augment GCC staffs during a NEO contingency. I propose that DOD create a Joint NEO Support Element (JNSE) to provide a rapidly deployable joint planning team specifically focused on NEOs. Marine Expeditionary Units remain an ideal tactical force to execute NEOs when available. Geographic combatant commands should retain ownership for NEO contingency plans in their AOR. What a proposed JNSE could provide is specialized NEO planning and coordination expertise that is deployable worldwide and has reachback to Washington.

The ideal structure for such a JNSE is under USTRANSCOM as part of Joint Enabling Capabilities Command (JECC), which was formed in 2008 as a result of past lessons learned from contingency operations and the Millennium Challenge



Marines and Sailors with Special-Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Crisis Response help U.S. citizens into Marine Corps KC-130J Hercules airplane in Juba, South Sudan, during evacuation of personnel from U.S. Embassy, January 3, 2014 (U.S. Marine Corps/Robert L. Fisher III)

2002 wargame. There was often a troublesome lag at the outset of a crisis before a JFHQ could assemble and ramp to full operating capability.

The existing JECC provides fast-deploying joint headquarters staff elements to provide a nucleus for a contingency JFHQ.³⁰ Currently, there are three subordinate commands under the JECC: the Joint Planning Support Element (JPSE), Joint Public Affairs Support Element, and Joint Communications Support Element (JCSE). The JNSE would become a fourth element of JECC.

The role of the new JNSE would be similar to the existing Joint Planning Support Element. However, rather than expand the JPSE's mission set, a similarly structured but separately organized JNSE is needed. NEOs often arise concurrently with other crises that require their own joint planning support. Tasking JPSE to prepare for combat contingencies and

humanitarian assistance/disaster relief as well as NEOs would dilute their focus, training, and deployable manpower. History suggests commanders will prioritize other missions at the expense of NEOs. The JNSE could also be based closer to Washington, DC, where it could access State, other U.S. Government agencies, and foreign embassies. JPSE is located several hours away in Norfolk, Virginia.

The new JNSE could address the following concerns:

- It could increase GCC staff capabilities quickly. This would preserve a focus on the NEO even during situations where multiple simultaneous operations are unfolding in the AOR or the GCC staff is overloaded.
- JNSE staff could cultivate ongoing professional relationships and liaise with all the combatant commands, State Department, NATO, and allied

militaries that might be involved in a NEO. This could enhance interoperability, build trust, and provide reachback capability during a crisis.

- The JNSE could also liaise with other governmental agencies at Federal, state, and territory levels who share responsibility for repatriation and reception of Americans back to the homeland. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services and other entities with which most GCCs would not routinely interact.
- JNSE would serve as the subject matter expert on NEOs to refine and share doctrine, techniques, tactics, procedures, and situational awareness. They could develop exercises and training for military units, Embassies, the State Department, and allies.

Perhaps the most important strategic purpose for a JNSE will be to demonstrate a concrete U.S. commitment to prepare for evacuating American citizens anywhere, at any time, if necessary. This could be especially important in today's environment of globalization, instant communication, and extremist groups using ultraviolent propaganda footage. The strategic consequence of a disastrous evacuation or hostage situation could linger for decades. JFQ

Notes

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² Ronald W. Reagan, "Peace: Restoring the Margin of Safety," speech, Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention, Chicago, IL, August 18, 1980.

³ U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *State Department: Evacuation Planning and Preparations for Overseas Posts Can Be Improved*, GAO Report 08-023 (Washington, DC: GAO, October 19, 2007).

⁴ Executive Order 12656, 3 C.F.R., "Assignment of Emergency Preparedness Responsibilities," November 18, 1988.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Memorandum of Agreement Between the Departments of State and Defense on the Protection and Evacuation of U.S. Citizens and Nationals and Designated Other Persons from Threatened Areas Overseas, July 1998.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Joint Publication 3-68, *Noncombatant Evacuation Operations* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, November 18, 2015).

⁹ Army Technical Publication 3-05.68, *Special Operations Noncombatant Evacuation Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, September 30, 2014), table 6-1.

¹⁰ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Doctrine Standardization Document AJP-3.4.2, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations* (Brussels: NATO, March 2007).

¹¹ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-51, *Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations*, 2nd ed. (London: United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, February 2013).

¹² Australian Defence Force Publication 3.10, *Evacuation Operations* (Canberra: Australian Defence Headquarters, 2004).

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¹⁵ *Ibid.*

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¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁸ Adam B. Siegel, "Eastern Exit: The Non-combatant Evacuation (NEO) from Mogadishu, Somalia, in January 1991," CNA Research Memorandum 91-211 (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, October 1991).

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²¹ *Ibid.*

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²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁶ Jeff Corthell and Chris Faith, presentation slides from the *Pacific Passage* NEO Tracking System Conference, August 8–9, 2011, available at <www.jllis.mil>.

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²⁸ Joe Quartararo, Sr., Michael Rovenolt, and Randy White, "Libya's Operation Odyssey Dawn: Command and Control," *PRISM* 3, no. 2 (March 2012), 151.

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Cross-Functional Teams in Defense Reform: Help or Hindrance?

By Christopher J. Lamb



There is strong bipartisan support for Section 941 of the Senate's version of the National Defense

Authorization Act for 2017, which requires the Pentagon to use cross-functional teams (CFTs). CFTs are a popular organizational construct with a reputation for delivering better and faster solutions for complex and rapidly evolving problems. The Department of Defense reaction to the bill has been strongly negative. Senior officials argue that Section 941 would "undermine the authority of the Secretary, add bureaucracy, and confuse lines of responsibility." The Senate's and Pentagon's diametrically opposed positions on the value of CFTs can be partially reconciled with a better understanding of what CFTs are, how cross-functional groups have performed to date in the Pentagon, and their prerequisites for success. This paper argues there is strong evidence that CFTs could provide impressive benefits if the teams were conceived and employed correctly.



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