



SMALL WARS JOURNAL

Twelve Lessons from Sixteen Months: Reflections of a CJTF-HOA Commander

By [Wayne W. Grigsby Jr.](#), [Cheryl Sim](#) and [Matt Dabkowski](#)

Journal Article | May 22 2015 - 4:38am

Twelve Lessons from Sixteen Months: Reflections of a CJTF-HOA Commander

Wayne W. Grigsby Jr., Cheryl Sim, and Matt Dabkowski

Introduction

Established at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti (CLDJ) in late 2002 as part of OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) is a unit at the seams. Operationally, it is the United States' (US') only permanent presence on the African continent, and it sits on the border of the US Africa and Central Commands (AFRICOM and CENTCOM). Geographically, it is located just 80 miles from Yemen at the northern extent of the East African Rift Valley, overlooking the southern end of the Bab-el-Mandeb strait. Culturally, it rests at the junction of Christianity and Islam within a diverse mosaic of peoples. Not surprisingly, life along these seams is dynamic and complex, and nothing is more valuable – and challenging – than developing a shared understanding of the environment and building trust.

With this in mind, roughly a year-and-a-half ago, I was told I would assume command of CJTF-HOA less than three weeks before I had to be in Djibouti. Admittedly, at the time, I would have been hard pressed to identify Djibouti on a map, let alone appreciate the scope and challenge of my assignment. Specifically, with approximately 4,200 personnel to cover an area of roughly half the size of the continental US, the mismatch between CJTF-HOA's resources and its responsibilities is substantial. Nonetheless, in some ways, my ignorance may have been an advantage, as it forced me to listen more and ask questions first. Following several weeks of reading, receiving staff briefs, traveling throughout East Africa, and talking with teammates, Rear Admiral Alex Krongard (my former deputy) and I jointly developed our mission statement. It reads:

Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, in partnership with our joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational teammates, conducts theater security cooperation activities, enables regional actors to neutralize violent extremist organizations, and enables regional access and freedom of movement within East Africa in order to protect and defend United States interests and support aligned regional efforts, as feasible. On order, execute crisis response within East Africa to protect and defend United States military, diplomatic, and civilian personnel, facilities, and interests.

Over the last 16 months, we have, to the best of our ability, executed this mission; our penchant has been

for action. As General Patton stated, “A good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan next week” (Patton 1966, 354). In particular, we leveraged small teams to work behind, beside, and below our partners to achieve outsized impacts, and we adjusted our staff structure to better match our operational environment. Of course, we learned a lot along the way, and we offer the 12 lessons below to other individuals and organizations that may operate in similar environments in the future.

1. Interagency processes in Africa are led by our ambassadors.

Under the direction of the President, the Chief of Mission (COM – Ambassador or Chargé d’Affaires) to a foreign country has the full responsibility for the US Government’s (USG’s) bilateral relationship and activities with the country of assignment, including military assistance. In countries without a permanent US presence, Somalia for example, it is understood that the Special Representative for Somalia performs the COM function.

COMs are charged with directing, coordinating, and supervising all USG Executive Branch employees in their countries of assignment with two exceptions, one being employees under the command of a US geographic combatant commander (CCDR) (DOS 2014, 3). CJTF-HOA has personnel located in several embassies who encumber positions established under National Security Directive Decision 38. Due to this, generally, those positions fall under COM authority. Additionally, it is long-established that defense attachés, security cooperation officers, and US Marine Corps security guards all fall under COM authority. All USG agencies in country must keep the COM fully informed at all times of their current and planned activities and comply fully with all COM directives (Ibid.).

Separately, any USG Executive Branch employee who travels to a specific country for engagement with embassy staff or host country nationals must obtain a country clearance; this includes combatant command (COCOM) personnel. Visitors or those on other temporary duty are also required to keep the COM or his/her designate informed of their activities.

While CJTF-HOA and other elements based at CLDJ clearly fall under CCDR authority, it is critical that CJTF-HOA personnel coordinate and cooperate with the COMs and the embassy country teams on engagements and programs, including the integration of country-level strategic plans. The Foreign Assistance Act (1961), as amended, directs the COM to ensure that all military assistance in the country to which she or he is assigned is coordinated with political and economic considerations. COMs and COCOM personnel are expected to maintain cooperative relationships, and the general expectation is CCDRs will keep the COMs fully informed about their activities, employees, and operations in the country. In the event that disputes arise that cannot be worked out in the field, those issues will be taken up by appropriate Department of State and Defense officials in Washington, DC.

2. Being forward in Africa, we are ahead of the policy process.

Presence on the ground and consistent engagement with key African interlocutors on their home turf provides access to information (factual or otherwise), enhanced perspective, and improved analyses. Given the multiple layers of bureaucracy between the operational front lines and the diplomatic rear area, this means those who work “in the field” are often six to nine months ahead of key Washington, DC policy-makers in terms of understanding what is transpiring on the ground. Moreover, once the information makes it to the appropriate authorities, the policy process is cumbersome. It often lacks the nimbleness, nuance, and agility to respond to emerging developments or shifts in emphasis. As a result, policy decisions are often based on information that is no longer current or respond to issues that have been overcome by events. This is a habitual problem that ultimately degrades effectiveness.

3. Traditional security sector assistance needs to evolve to include regional approaches.

As mentioned previously, the core legislation that defines how the USG handles security assistance is the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended. For the most part, the USG continues to provide security assistance and manage programs based on processes that largely evolved during the Cold War. This means that COMs and their country teams develop requests for bilateral assistance two to three years out with the intent of meeting the USG's bilateral goals and objectives for the country in question.

The advent of the African Union's participation and lead in peacekeeping operations (PKO) has shown that new authorities are needed to allow the USG to provide assistance outside of this traditional architecture (e.g., providing assistance directly to a PKO force headquarters rather than to an individual troop contributing country). Such an approach is not just an interesting idea; it is presidentially directed. As Presidential Policy Directive 23 states, "Security sector assistance programs should be complemented by and linked to a broader regional approach, including cross-border program coordination, support for regional organizations, and facilitation of linkages among partner countries, where appropriate" (White House 2013).

4. The optimum way ahead integrates bilateral, counterterrorism, and regional equities.

Currently, bilateral, counterterrorism (CT), and regional initiatives (and the fiscal authorizations and mechanisms used to fund them) are not adequately coordinated. Consequently, they collectively fall short of their potential, because there are only limited efforts to integrate programs for their overall regional impact. As the only permanent US military presence in Africa, CJTF-HOA is uniquely positioned to identify opportunities, marshal sponsors, and synchronize initiatives such that bilateral efforts can yield regional benefits and regional initiatives can reinforce bilateral relationships. CJTF-HOA's recent East Africa Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) Conference was a first, tangible step in this direction. Specifically, by identifying the common goals, relative strengths, and capability gaps of individual countries, resilient and interoperable capabilities can be deliberately built and aligned regionally. In the same vein, AFRICOM should require Defense Attachés (DATTs) and Office of Security Cooperation (OSC) Chiefs to coordinate their Country Cooperation Plans to ensure that there is a common understanding of the programs being proposed throughout East Africa along with their potential cross-border impacts.

5. Benghazi and Bastion continue to shape actions.

Within a 96-hour period in September 2012, Islamic militants attacked the US diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya and Camp Bastion in Afghanistan's Helmand province, killing two diplomats (including U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens) and two US Marines, as well as destroying eight AV-8B Harrier IIs. In Benghazi, warning signs may have been ignored, causing significant, public criticism of Department of State leaders. As the Benghazi Accountability Review Board concluded, "Systemic failures and leadership and management deficiencies at senior levels within two bureaus of the State Department (the "Department") resulted in a Special Mission security posture that was inadequate for Benghazi and grossly inadequate to deal with the attack that took place" (DOS 2012, 4). In Bastion, base perimeter forces were determined to be inadequate, eventually leading to the forced retirement of two US Marine Corps generals (Amos 2013).

In short, Benghazi and Bastion increased the emphasis on force protection and reduced the appetite for risk. Accordingly, the Department of State will likely move slowly on relocating staff to Mogadishu on a permanent basis due to the security environment. The perception remains, enhanced by the recent Christmas Day attack at Mogadishu International Airport (AMISOM 2014b) and other high profile bombings (BBC 2015; Yusuf 2015), that USG personnel are at great risk in Mogadishu.

6. Mission Command is a commander's responsibility.

Similar to the African continent itself, CJTF-HOA's combined/joint area of operations (CJOA) suffers from the tyranny of distance. Accordingly, communicating with outlying stations is often difficult, and personal interaction is unavoidably restricted. Moreover, with limited resources and authorities to address myriad, nontraditional issues, solutions to problems within the CJTF-HOA's CJOA are rarely "*two up and one back*." In such an environment, disciplined initiative and independent action are necessary, and this requires subordinates to thoroughly understand and aggressively act within the commander's intent.

As Joint Publication 3-31: Command and Control for Joint Land Operations states: "As joint land operations tend to become decentralized, mission command becomes the preferred method of C2 . . . It empowers individuals to exercise judgment in how they carry out their assigned tasks and it exploits the human element in joint operations emphasizing trust, force of will, initiative, judgment, and creativity" (2014, IV-8–IV-9). This statement rings true within CJTF-HOA, but it requires a significant, energetic, and personal commitment by the commander to work.

7. CJTF-HOA is a case study for developing the DOTMLPF solutions of tomorrow.

In October 2014, the Army published the latest version of its operating concept (AOC) – *Win in a Complex World*. In part, the central idea of the AOC is that the "Army, as part of joint, interorganizational, and multinational teams, protects the homeland and engages regionally to prevent conflict, shape security environments, and create multiple options for responding to and resolving crises" (TRADOC 2014, 17). Spanning the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war, the AOC is largely conceptual, and it acknowledges that all elements of national power (political, economic, informational, or military) are necessary for strategic wins. Moreover, as a novel approach, it recognizes that "[o]nly through focused investment and continuous analysis and assessment will the ideas proposed in the AOC manifest as doctrine, organizations, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities (DOTMLPF) solutions" (Ibid., 24). Recalling our earlier mission statement, in many respects CJTF-HOA is executing the AOC's central idea today, making it an excellent case study for building the DOTMLPF solutions of tomorrow.

8. Special operations / general purpose forces (SOF/GPF) interdependence is key.

Despite more than a decade of continuous conflict, special operations/general purpose forces operating in the same battlespace often remain disconnected and unsynchronized (Sacolick and Grigsby 2012). While the theoretical, long-term fix for this is doctrinal, a practical, short-term fix is developing a mutual awareness of and respect for the capabilities and objectives of each other, together with identifying concrete ways in which each force can support the other. This requires nurturing personal relationships through periodic conferences, weekly meetings, and daily correspondence. Over time, SOF's perceived shroud of intrigue is lifted, and GPF's perceived penchant for control is removed. The result is a symbiotic relationship that improves the overall effectiveness of the team.

9. When it comes to security sector assistance, "headware" is often more valuable than "hardware."

By and large, the majority of the security sector assistance we provide to partners is sophisticated materiel such as helicopters, remotely piloted aircraft, armored vehicles, and night vision devices. Although this is what they want, it is often not what they need. Put another way, when our partners have difficulty navigating in a simple convoy from point A to point B, they do not need the latest robotic gizmo or flying gadget; they need a compass, a map, and land navigation training. To this end, DATTs and OSC Chiefs need to honestly assess their host militaries' capabilities and the effectiveness of their existing TSC and CT initiatives. Focusing on leadership and basic skills training may not be sexy, but they are likely more valuable. In short, when it comes to security sector assistance, "headware" is often more appropriate than "hardware."

10. Building trust in the joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) environment requires constant communication at a level of classification cleared for all partners.

Trust is a delicate thing. It is difficult to build, harder to keep, and, once lost, almost impossible to regain. Formally defined as the “assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something” (Merriam-Webster 2015), trust emerges as one’s expectations are consistently met over time. It is the consequence of keeping promises, and it does not appear overnight.

Notwithstanding this reality and its importance in establishing and maintaining unity of effort in the JIIM environment, trust is often glossed over as an easily gained attribute. Put another way, trust is assumed versus earned – a convenience that overlooks the central challenge of effectively conducting JIIM operations. In particular, our processes and regulations limit our ability to share information, and this undermines trust between partners. With this in mind, trust must be built through continuous communication at a level of classification cleared for all partners. In East Africa, this implies communicating on unclassified networks and understanding that there is often an underlying trust deficiency between regional partners.

11. Coordinating actions in time, space, and purpose is tough, but it is tougher when the command and control (C2) structure is misaligned.

On any given day, the assets of four combatant commands (AFRICOM, CENTCOM, Special Operations Command (SOCOM), and Transportation Command (TRANSCOM)) are present on CLDJ. By proximity alone, CJTF-HOA is responsible for their conduct and care, yet CJTF-HOA has no tasking or legal authority over entities outside of its task force. Moreover, even though CJTF-HOA is the battlespace owner and supported command for AFRICOM within East Africa, the DATTs and OSC Chiefs across the CJOA neither report to nor are rated by the CJTF-HOA Commander.

Simply put, the current C2 structure does not engender unity of command, and, consequently, coordinating actions in time, space, and purpose across East Africa is difficult at best. In order to deal with this challenge, CJTF-HOA routinely organizes conferences that gather interested parties to synchronize efforts across its CJOA. Recent examples of this include the CLDJ Mission and Manning Conference and the East Africa TSC Conference.

12. Roughly 200 years since Clausewitz conceived it, the “trinity” still holds.

Generally speaking, the African Union Mission in Somalia’s (AMISOM’s) recent campaigns have been an operational success. Key areas of Southern Somalia have been wrested from al-Shabaab’s (AS) control (AMISOM 2014a); many key AS operatives and leaders have been terminated (Sheikh 2015); and initiative rests with AMISOM. Despite this progress, the situation in Somalia remains strategically tenuous, and this paradox is largely due to the lack of a cohesive Federal Government of Somalia, the limited development of Somalia’s National Army and Police Force, and the resulting inability to provide liberated Somalis with legitimate governance and services (IASC TTPR 2014, 9). As Clausewitz penned roughly 200 years ago, the military, the government, and the people represent a trinity (Jablonsky 1994), and maintaining a balance between these three elements is necessary for strategic success. Moving forward too quickly in one area without simultaneously accounting for the other areas may ultimately do more harm than good.

Conclusion

The 12 lessons above are my principal takeaways as the commander of CJTF-HOA, a unit at the seams operating in a dynamic, complex environment where issues are many and resources are few. They are not

all inclusive, and, for many readers, they may not be new. Nonetheless, as General Perkins, the Commander of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command, rightly states: To win in a complex world “[o]ur Army must continuously learn, adapt, and innovate” (TRADOC 2014, v). This places a special responsibility on units in the field to share their observations with the larger community. In the end, if these lessons enhance the understanding of a single Soldier or advance the dialogue on a single issue, then capturing them here will have been time well spent.

This paper 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.

References

African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). October 29, 2014. Joint security update on Operation Indian Ocean by Somali Government and AMISOM. <http://amisom-au.org/2014/10/joint-security-update-on-operation-indian-ocean-by-somali-government-and-amisom/> (accessed February 23, 2015).

---. AMISOM Condemns Attack on its Halane Base Camp in Mogadishu. December 25, 2014. <http://amisom-au.org/2014/12/amisom-condemns-attack-on-its-halane-base-camp-in-mogadishu/> (accessed on February 24, 2015).

Amos, James F., Commandant of the Marine Corps. “Accountability determination of U.S. Commanders for the 14-15 September 2014 attack on Camp Bastion, Leatherneck, and Shorabak (BLS) Complex, Helmand Province, Afghanistan.” Memorandum for Record. Washington, DC, January 30, 2013.

<http://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Docs/CMC%20Memo%20for%20the%20Record%20in%20Bastion%20Investigation.PDF> (accessed on February 24, 2015).

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). January 4, 2015. “Somalia violence: Deadly car bomb near Mogadishu airport.” <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30672660> (accessed on February 24, 2015).

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS). February 24, 2014. Command and Control for Joint Land Operations (Joint Publication 3-31). Washington, DC: GPO. www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_31.pdf (accessed February 23, 2015).

Foreign Assistance Act of 1961. Public Law 87-195. U.S. Statutes at Large 75 (1961): 424. Codified at U.S. Code 22 § 2151. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-75/pdf/STATUTE-75-Pg424-2.pdf> (accessed February 23, 2015).

Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team on Preparedness and Resilience (IASC TTPR). December 4, 2014. Early Warning Early Action Report for December 2014 – May 2015. <http://humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/downloaddoc.aspx?docID=6969&type=any> (accessed February 23, 2015).

Jablonsky, David. 1994. US Military Doctrine and the Revolution in Military Affairs. *Parameters* 24, no. 3 (Autumn): 18-36.

Merriam-Webster. 2015. “trust.” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trust> (accessed on February 25, 2015).

Patton, George S. *War as I Knew It*. Edited by Beatrice Patton. New York: Pyramid

Books/Houghton Mifflin, 1966.

Sacolick, Bennet S. and Wayne W. Grigsby Jr. "Special Operations/Conventional Forces Interdependence: A Critical Role in 'Prevent, Shape, Win.'" *Army: The Magazine of the Association of the United States Army* (June 2012): 39-42.

https://www.ausa.org/publications/armymagazine/archive/2012/06/Documents/Sacolick_0612.pdf (accessed on February 24, 2015).

Sheikh, Abdi. February 4, 2015. U.S. strike kills senior Shabaab leader in Somalia.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/04/us-usa-somalia-shabaab-idUSKBN0L81QJ20150204> (accessed February 23, 2015).

United States Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). October 31, 2014. *The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World* (TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1). Washington, DC: GPO. <http://www.tradoc.army.mil/tpubs/pams/tp525-3-1.pdf> (accessed February 23, 2015).

United States Department of State (DOS). December 18, 2012. Report of the Accountability Review Board on the September 11-12, 2012 Attacks on the Special Mission Compound in Benghazi. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/202446.pdf> (accessed on February 24, 2015).

---. July 18, 2014. *U.S. Department of State Foreign Affairs Manual Volume 2 Handbook 2: Post Management Organization*. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/89604.pdf> (accessed on February 25, 2015).

White House, Office of the Press Secretary (White House). April 5, 2013. Fact Sheet: U.S. Security Sector Assistance Policy. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/04/05/fact-sheet-us-security-sector-assistance-policy> (accessed on February 24, 2015).

Yusuf, Mohammed. February 20, 2015. "Somali President Condemns Al-Shabab Attack." <http://www.voanews.com/content/militants-attack-mogadishu-hotel-casualties-feared/2651534.html> (accessed on February 24, 2015).

About the Authors



Wayne W. Grigsby Jr.

Major General Wayne W. Grigsby Jr., U.S. Army, is the former Commanding General of CJTF-HOA. His most recent assignments include Director for Army Training, Deputy Chief of Staff, G-3/5/7; Deputy Commanding General of Operations, 1st Armored Division; Director of the Mission Command Center of Excellence, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; and the Director of the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS). He graduated from Salisbury State University, and earned his Master's Degrees in Military Arts and Science from SAMS and in National Security Strategy from the National Defense University. He has been selected as the Commanding General of the 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kansas.



Cheryl Sim

Ms. Cheryl Sim a career member of the Department of State's Senior Foreign Service and the former political advisor to the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, Operation Enduring Freedom, Djibouti. She most recently served as Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire (2012-14). Prior to that, Ms. Sim was assigned as Deputy Special Representative for Somalia (Counselor for Somalia Affairs) in the Somalia Unit that is currently located at the U.S. Mission in Nairobi (2010-12). From 2007 to 2009, she was the DCM at the U.S. Embassy in Kigali, Rwanda. Ms. Sim joined the Foreign Service following graduate studies at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs where she focused on Southern Asia. She holds five Department of State Superior Honor Awards and five Meritorious Honor awards, and her foreign languages are French, Thai, and Hindi.



Matt Dabkowski

Lieutenant Colonel Matthew F. Dabkowski, U.S. Army, is an operations research analyst currently serving as the Military Assistant to the Commanding General of Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa, Operation Enduring Freedom, Djibouti. His previous assignments include Company Commander of HHC and A/5-20 IN during Operation Iraqi Freedom I/II and Chief of the TRADOC Analysis Center's Data Cell Forward, Kabul, Afghanistan. He holds a B.S. from the United States Military Academy in Operations Research and an M.S. in Systems Engineering from the University of Arizona. Dabkowski is the winner of the Military Operations Research Society's 2012 Rist Prize and the Army's 2009 Dr. Wilbur B. Payne Memorial Award. He has been selected as an Academy Professor in the United States Military Academy's Department of Systems Engineering.

Available online at : <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/twelve-lessons-from-sixteen-months-reflections-of-a-cjtf-hoa-commander>

Links:

- { 1 } <http://smallwarsjournal.com/author/wayne-w-grigsby-jr>
- { 2 } <http://smallwarsjournal.com/author/cheryl-sim>
- { 3 } <http://smallwarsjournal.com/author/matt-dabkowski>
- { 4 } <http://amisom-au.org/2014/10/joint-security-update-on-operation-indian-ocean-by-somali-government-and-amisom/>
- { 5 } <http://amisom-au.org/2014/12/amisom-condemns-attack-on-its-halane-base-camp-in-mogadishu/>
- { 6 } <http://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Docs/%20CMC%20Memo%20for%20the%20Record%20in%20Bastion%20Inve>
- { 7 } <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30672660>
- { 8 } http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_31.pdf
- { 9 } <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-75/pdf/STATUTE-75-Pg424-2.pdf>
- { 10 } <http://humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/downloaddoc.aspx?docID=6969&type=any>
- { 11 } <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trust>
- { 12 } https://www.ausa.org/publications/armymagazine/archive/2012/06/Documents/Sacolick_0612.pdf

- { 13 } <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/04/us-usa-somalia-shabaab-idUSKBN0L81QJ20150204>
- { 14 } <http://www.tradoc.army.mil/tpubs/pams/tp525-3-1.pdf>
- { 15 } <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/202446.pdf>
- { 16 } <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/89604.pdf>
- { 17 } <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/04/05/fact-sheet-us-security-sector-assistance-policy>
- { 18 } <http://www.voanews.com/content/militants-attack-mogadishu-hotel-casualties-feared/%202651534.html>
- { 19 } <http://smallwarsjournal.com/comment/reply/23564#comment-form>

Copyright © 2015, Small Wars Foundation.



Select uses allowed by Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 3.0 license per our [Terms of Use](#).
Please help us support the [Small Wars Community](#).