INTEROPERABILITY IN
STRATEGIC COMBINED JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS

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Abstract:

Throughout the history of warfare, different countries have used special operations in their effort to achieve key strategic objectives. The objectives of these special operations ranged from hostage rescue to foreign government overthrow. As a consequence of the international terrorism threat within the context of globalization, there is an increased likelihood for Strategic Combined Joint Special Operations to be used in the future as an efficient method for solving potential international crises.

This paper purpose is to explore the interoperability's domain, as one of the key factors for the success of Strategic Combined Joint Special Operations.

Key words: combined, joint, special operations, strategic, interoperability

1. Introduction

"It is not enough to be joint, when conducting future operations. We must find the most effective methods for integrating and improving interoperability with allied and coalition partners. Although our Armed Forces will maintain decisive unilateral strength, we expect to work in concert with allied and coalition forces in nearly all of our future operations, and increasingly, our procedures, programs, and planning must recognize this reality" [1].

Interoperability seems to be a relatively simple concept to explain and implement. In general terms, interoperability: is a measure of the degree to which various organizations or individuals are able to operate together to achieve a common goal. From this top-level perspective, interoperability is a good thing, with overtones of standardization, integration, cooperation, and even synergy [2].

The specific types and degrees of interoperability are in most cases defined, implemented, and measured in terms of the concrete situations within which they are addressed. This is mainly because the needs of interoperability are fewer and more easily identifiable for a specific situation than for a general one. Moreover, many of the interoperability needs not identified during the planning phase of the operation emerge and become clearer during the execution phase of the operation [3].

As a Rand Corporation study on interoperability stated, in political-military situations, such as Strategic Combined Joint Special Operations "... interoperability often comes at a price. These costs may be difficult to define and estimate insofar as they consist of military expenditures to enhance interoperability as well as the economic and political costs incurred. The issue, of course, is what sorts of inter-operability are worth what sorts of costs." [4]

Therefore, often the first step towards operating "in synergy in the execution of assigned tasks" [5] consists in conducting a comparative analysis between the benefits and the costs of the interoperability needs for a given situation.

2. The importance of interoperability

Conducting strategic military operations implies various levels of military command and multiple dimensions of the political spectrum. In this context, from the perspective of Strategic Combined Joint Special Operations, the analysis of the interoperability issue is better to made using the broadest available definition: "The ability of systems, units, or forces to provide services to and accept services from other systems, units, or forces, and to use the services so exchanged to enable them to operate effectively together." [6]

Analyzing the above definition, we can conclude that interoperability is important for military operations due to its triple role of catalyst, communicator, and decrypter.

Thus, it can be asserted that interoperability:
- becomes the binder that enables different forces and units to work together;
- creates the channels through which these forces and units offer and accept each other's services;
- ensures the fact that all the implied forces and units are capable of using and understanding the exchanged services and information.

The importance of interoperability mainly consists in supporting national security and national military strategies. Moreover, interoperability may reduce the costs of participating in a coalition and may offer a base for future coalition operations [7].

3. Interoperability in strategic combined joint special operations

Referring to command, control, communications, and computer systems support of SOF, JP 3-05 states the following [8]:

- Command, control, communications, and computer (C4) support to SOF must be global, secure, and jointly interoperable. SOF C4 support consists of multiple and varied groups of systems, procedures, personnel, and equipment that operate in diverse manners and at different echelons, from the national to the tactical levels.

- SOF missions are normally controlled at the lowest operational level that can accomplish the needed coordination, although political considerations may require control at the national level.

- SOF C4 systems must be interoperable at the appropriate security level with the C4 systems deployed by US conventional forces, joint commands, allied units and US commercial networks to facilitate the seamless transport of critical information and common services.

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These statements confirm the strategic and politico-military distinctiveness of Combined Joint Special Operations. Moreover, the efforts to achieve interoperability may be guided by transforming the above statements into the following question:
- Who is required to achieve interoperability?
- For what capabilities and services is interoperability required?
- What type of interoperability is needed and at what level is interoperability required? [9]

In the following paragraphs, this paper seeks to answer these questions on which the achievement of interoperability depends.

3.1 Who is required to achieve interoperability?

Given the multinational and political-military nature of the Strategic Combined Joint Operations, the first area in which interoperability must be achieved is the political sphere. Furthermore, the existence of political interoperability is the main factor that determines the feasibility of Strategic Combined Joint Operations as effective tools to solve difficult international challenges. In this respect, Annette Heuser argued, ". . . political interoperability must be based on the definition of common challenges, instruments, and objectives." [10]

For a coalition, the common challenges are threats to the security and common interests of two or more states, and the common objective is represented by the agreement between involved countries on the desired end state in solving the inflamed situation. In terms of common instruments, this concept refers to the common vision of the involved states on ways to eliminate the threats and on the tools that those states agree to utilize in solving such difficult international circumstances [11].

One efficient tool that a coalition may use is represented by the Strategic Combined Joint Special Operations. In this light, the concept of political interoperability proposed by Heuser may lead us to the following conclusion: in order to design, plan, and execute successful Strategic Combined Joint Special Operations, interoperability must be achieved among countries' governments, departments of defense, military services, and military branches.

3.2 For what capabilities and services is interoperability required?

The number of elements between which interoperability is required during the Combined Joint Special Operations depends on CJSOTF's structure and its relations with other governmental or non-governmental agencies. JP 3-05 defines the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force as: "A task force composed of special operations units from one or more foreign countries and more than one US Military Department formed to carry out a specific special operation or prosecute special operations in support of a theater campaign or other operations. The combined joint special operations task force may have conventional nonspecial operations units assigned or attached to support the conduct of specific missions." [12]

According to the above definition, two main models for a Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force may be identified:
- Different SOF services from different countries;
- Different SOF services and Conventional Force branches from different countries.

However, in performing their missions, sometime CJSOTF elements may need the support of other governmental agencies, such as intelligence agencies. Best and Feickert

illustrate this situation as follow: "In practice, military personnel may be temporarily assigned to the CIA and CIA personnel may temporarily serve directly under a military commander" [13].

All the above lead to the conclusion that for Strategic Combined Joint Special Operations, interoperability must be achieved between the elements of special forces, conventional forces, and governmental agencies

3.3 What types and at what levels is interoperability required?

Bares believes that the interoperability mechanism should have the following characteristics:

- Openness ability: the quality of a system previously connected with others, to share a common understanding with them relative to some matters of a coalition.

- Inter-cooperability ability: the capability of a system to share its knowledge (and know-how) with its neighboring systems in an optimal way, according to the comprehension it can get of the evolving situation.

- Ability to conduct actions: the competence of a system to do the required job in the coalition and, consequently, to completely interoperate and furthermore inter-cooperate on all actions assigned to it [14].

Applying Hura's model to Strategic Combined Joint Special Operations, we can conclude that the interoperability requirements according to levels of war are as follows:

- Openness ability — at the strategic level;
- Inter-cooperability ability — at the operational level;
- Ability to conduct actions — at the tactical level [15].

3. Conclusion

Interoperability is important for military operations due to its triple role of catalyst, communicator, and decrypter. Due to the political-military particularities of SCJSPECOPS, interoperability must be achieved among countries' governments, departments of defense, military services, and military branches and between the elements of special forces, conventional forces, and governmental agencies as well.

Procedures alignment represents the final aim of acquiring interoperability within SCJSPECOPS. This goal is achieved by two convergent approaches. The first approach consists of acquiring organizational interoperability by harmonizing political objectives, as well as strategy and doctrine in order to align coalition operations. The second approach resides in obtaining technical interoperability by acquiring physical and protocol interoperability as the necessary prerequisite for operational interoperability.

Procedures alignment ensures that CJSOTOF elements will efficiently work together. This alignment creates the channels through which CJSOTOF elements offer and accept each other's services. Moreover, it makes them capable of using and understanding the exchanged services and information.

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