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Command and control

Michael Crane

Command and control, or C2, is an issue of keen interest to both students and practitioners of the military art because the C2 arrangements go a long way to establishing the tenor of any operation. As General David Petraeus used to say when I worked for him at US Central Command (CENTCOM), if you get the C2 right the rest will follow. At the other end of the spectrum, poor command and control arrangements create ambiguities and frictions that distract the attention and energy of commanders. After all, C2 structures are about power relationships: who gets to give orders and who has to take them. An examination of command and control arrangements is therefore very important to understanding Australia's recent operations in the Middle East.

I present here a personal perspective, and my observations should be seen in that light. I served twice as Commander Joint Task Force 633, so my assessments are developed primarily through the lens of national command. But in the period under consideration I also served as Chief of Staff at Headquarters Joint Operations Command (HQJOC), Head Military Strategic Commitments (HMSC) and Deputy Director Operations at CENTCOM, so what follows also reflects some flavour of those appointments.

I do not propose to dwell at any length on why national command is so sensitive to Australians; our experience in two world wars is widely known and understood. Neither will I trace the detailed development of

higher ADF command structures from Federation; such an exposition is not necessary for this discussion, and in any case others have done that very elegantly elsewhere.¹

Instead, I want to focus on the Australian command and control arrangements that I experienced in the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) in 2006 and 2012. I begin by describing the original structures and how they evolved over time to the points at which I found them. I then canvass some of the critiques of the model and offer my perspectives. Finally, I turn briefly to select other issues that I grappled with on a day-to-day basis during my tenure in command.

Australian Middle East Area of Operations command and control, 2001–14, in outline

As we have seen in earlier chapters, Australia's most substantial recent involvement in the Middle East had its origins in the terrorist attacks in the United States in September 2001. In response to those attacks, the ADF deployed ships to support the Maritime Interception Force (MIF) in the Persian Gulf, a special operations task group to Afghanistan, and aircraft to different locations in the region. Operation SLIPPER, as it was known, was commanded by Commander Australian Theatre (COMAST), Rear Admiral Chris Ritchie. 'Australian Theatre', or AST, is the precursor title of HQJOC. Ritchie's concept for the operation was endorsed by the Chief of Defence Force and the Strategic Command Group, and he was then left to run it.

We did not deploy a Joint Task Force (JTF) headquarters for Operation SLIPPER in 2001, but we did deploy an Australian national commander, Brigadier Ken Gillespie. He was based in Kuwait, where he was co-located with the US Land Component Commander and handy to the other US component commanders. Gillespie reported to COMAST, but did not himself exercise much control over the deployed Australian forces. Instead, on national matters, the commanders of the tactical elements reported directly to their respective Australian Theatre component

1 See in particular D. Horner, 'The higher command structure for joint ADF operations', in *History as Policy: Framing the Debate on the Future of Australia's Defence Policy*, ed. R. Huisken and M. Thatcher, ANU E Press, Canberra, 2007, pp. 143–61. Much of my description of the early years in the Middle East Area of Operations is drawn from this rich source.

commanders—that is, to the maritime, special forces and air component commanders. Gillespie was kept informed so that he could veto Australian participation if required, but on operational matters, the tactical commanders worked under the operational control of their respective US component commanders.

The command arrangements for the 2003 Iraq War, Operation FALCONER, had some similarities. The Australian national commander, Brigadier Maurie McNarn, was co-located in Qatar with the US commander General Tommy Franks. As in Operation SLIPPER, McNarn reported to COMAST, who by then was Rear Admiral Mark Bonser. As before, the several deployed task group commanders were placed under operational control of the coalition component commanders. But this time they reported through McNarn on operational matters and to COMAST on technical and administrative matters. The big differences, though, were at the strategic level. First, for reasons of secrecy, Operation FALCONER was planned in Canberra by Strategic Operations Division in Defence Headquarters, and Bonser was brought in only later. And second, in addition to reporting to Bonser, McNarn also reported directly to the Chief of Defence Force, General Peter Cosgrove, who wanted a more direct connection with his commander in the field because of the rapid pace of operations.

After the successful invasion of Iraq, Operation FALCONER came to an end and a new operation, CATALYST, began. While several units returned to Australia, the remaining force still contained a variety of naval, land and air elements, and at this point a joint task force was established: Joint Task Force 633 (JTF 633). The first Commander JTF 633, Air Commodore Graham Bentley, was given operational control of all Australian elements, which he in turn delegated to coalition commanders. He reported to COMAST but retained a direct link to the Chief of Defence Force.

In the period following the establishment of JTF 633, there were some seismic changes in arrangements at the strategic and operational levels.

- In 2004, Headquarters AST became HQJOC; COMAST (a two-star appointment) became the Deputy Chief of Joint Operations (DCJOPS); and the three-star appointment, Vice Chief of the Defence Force (VCDF), was double-hatted as Chief of Joint Operations (CJOPS).

- At the same time, Strategic Operations Division was disestablished, and a smaller Military Strategic Commitments (MSC) Branch was established at one-star (brigadier or equivalent) level to support the Chief of Defence Force (four-star ranked appointment) and VCDF in their operational roles.
- In 2007, the roles of CJOPS and VCDF were separated, so that for the first time we had a three-star officer (lieutenant general or equivalent) focused entirely on commanding operations on behalf of the Chief of Defence Force.
- At the same time, HQJOC (the rebadged Headquarters Australian Theatre) expanded considerably as it moved from Potts Point in Sydney to Bungendore in rural New South Wales, not far from Canberra, and absorbed the component headquarters.
- Finally, the MSC Branch was expanded to a small division, headed by a two-star officer (major general or equivalent) as Head MSC (HMSC).

At the JTF 633 level, though, the basic command and control construct remained remarkably stable for more than a decade. Commander JTF 633 exercised operational control over a number of task groups dispersed across the MEAO, most of which were then delegated under the operational control of coalition commanders. Commander JTF 633 also commanded a significant national logistic element, which was designed to reduce our impost on US resources.

There were, of course, a number of changes in the JTF over time.

- In 2006, in response to our renewed and growing commitment in Afghanistan, a deputy national commander was established in Kabul, Colonel Dick Stanhope being the first incumbent.
- In 2007, the rank of the Commander of JTF 633 was upgraded from one-star to two-star level, and the rank of the deputy in Afghanistan was later upgraded from O6 (colonel or equivalent) to one star.
- Having moved to Baghdad in 2003 soon after the end of the Iraq War, in late 2008 the JTF headquarters moved to the United Arab Emirates. A move was necessary because the UN mandate in Iraq was coming to an end, but it also reflected the realisation that the weight of Australian operations was by then in Afghanistan.

- At about the same time, the various air elements of the JTF were assigned to an Air Task Group under a group captain, rather than reporting directly to the commander of the JTF as they had done previously.
- And in 2011, the new CJOPS, Lieutenant General Ash Power, assigned units under operational command of Commander JTF 633 rather than operational control. By so doing, the Commander JTF 633 could exercise the further delegation of authority, rather than that function being mandated directly from HQJOC.

By the time I arrived in the United Arab Emirates to assume command in September 2012, the JTF command and control arrangements were largely well settled, although, as Figure 3 illustrates, it was somewhat complex. The blue lines show the basic national command arrangements. CJOPS exercised theatre command,² with national command³ and operational command⁴ being delegated to me as Commander JTF 633. In turn, I exercised national command of those units based in Afghanistan through my deputy in Kabul, Brigadier Peter Short, while those outside Afghanistan worked directly to me. Also in the national space were multiple chains of technical control, shown in Figure 3 in green, running from a range of agencies in Australia to units based in the Middle East. These chains dealt with matters ranging from airworthiness and special forces operations to finance and other administration. In fact, some detachments were not strictly even working for me at all—for example, the Diggerworks team at Tarin Kowt was an army unit focused entirely on learning lessons about our land materiel, and I had no responsibility for it other than to provide it with protection and logistic support.

2 Theatre Command is the authority given by CDF to CJOPS to command assigned forces to prepare for and conduct operations (campaigns, operations, combined and joint exercises) and other activities as directed.

3 National Command is a command that is organised by and functions under the authority of a specific nation.

4 Operational Command is the authority granted to a commander to specify missions or tasks to subordinate commanders, to deploy units, to reassign forces and to retain or delegate OPCON, TACOMD (Tactical Command) and/or TACON as may be deemed necessary. It does not of itself include responsibility for administration or logistics.

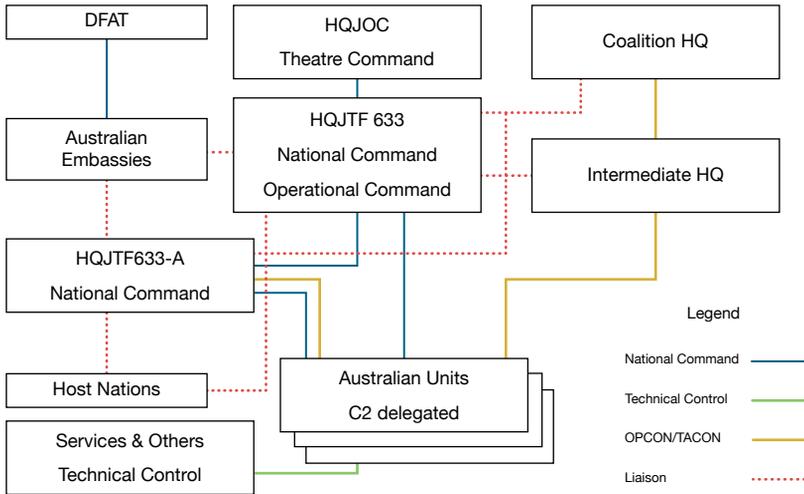


Figure 3: Middle Eastern Area of Operations command and control arrangements.

Source: Courtesy of Major General Michael Crane.

Authority to employ Australian units for the conduct of operations was delegated to coalition commanders (the linkages are illustrated in Figure 3 in brown). Australian units were generally allotted under Operational Control (OPCON)⁵ or Tactical Control (TACON)⁶ of the supported coalition headquarters, depending on the requirement. The picture is greatly simplified, of course, because there were multiple coalition headquarters, and some of them had multiple linkages to Australian units. For example, our ship in the MEAO worked for Combined Task Force (CTF) 150 on maritime security, CTF 151 on counter-piracy and CTF 152 on Gulf security, with the command and control arrangements switching at any given moment to suit the immediate requirement.

It is interesting to note that Peter Short exercised more than just national command on my behalf. When the Dutch left Uruzgan in 2010, Australia began holding and interrogating detainees in its own right for the first time.

5 Operational Control is the authority delegated to a commander to direct forces assigned so that the commander may accomplish specific missions or tasks that are usually limited by function, time or location; deploy units concerned; and retain or delegate TACON of those units. It does not include authority to allocate separate employment of components of the units concerned. Neither does it, of itself, include administrative or logistic control.

6 Tactical Control is the detailed and, usually, local direction and control of movements or manoeuvres necessary to accomplish missions or tasks assigned.

Given the obvious sensitivities, the deputy commander in Afghanistan was made responsible for oversight of detention and interrogation operations, and the respective units were allotted OPCON to him.

Finally, another critical element of the C2 architecture was the liaison network that Peter Short and I operated, shown in Figure 4 in red. Peter worked all his contacts in Afghanistan assiduously and did a great job on my behalf in keeping his finger on the pulse from day to day. That meant I did not have to visit Afghanistan as frequently as I might have done otherwise, and it freed me to focus on relationships in the Gulf.

For example, I called on the US naval, land and air component commanders several times during my tour to get their assessment of their operations, to check whether there were any issues for Australia and, of course, to touch base with the Australians working in their respective headquarters. Working also with the Australian ambassadors in the region, I routinely called on representatives of the host governments on whose support we relied so heavily.

The critiques

Despite their longevity, the command and control arrangements described above have been critiqued routinely. Most of the main concerns are summarised in a scoping study for a review of strategic C2 lessons, conducted by Noetic Solutions in July 2013.⁷ The study claims that there are ‘very few JTF 633 “fans” in the ADF’, and found ‘near-uniform questioning of [the JTF’s] role, size, location and function’. JTF 633 was generally perceived, the study said, to be ‘at best marginally contributory to the work people did, and was described variously as “a self-licking ice-cream”, overly controlling, risk averse, disruptive and interfering’.

The study found that those consulted had several concerns. First, they felt that the appointment of a discrete national commander, rather than the role being assigned to a senior embedded officer, confused senior coalition officers and other coalition members. Second, they felt that this separation of functions rendered the Australian national commander just another

7 Noetic Solutions, ‘Strategic Command and Control Lessons—Scoping Study’, Noetic Solutions, Canberra, 2013, www.defence.gov.au/FOI/Docs/Disclosures/343_10_11_Document.pdf (retrieved 31 March 2020).

visitor to the headquarters who merely added to the staff workload. They felt that any perception of special influence or access was probably largely illusory. Finally, they felt that the connection between the various activities being conducted did not support the need for a JTF—in other words, that the various task groups were essentially conducting discrete tasks through different coalition chains of command. They argued that, with the introduction of the various environmental directors general, HQJOC had evolved beyond an integrated model. Under these changed circumstances, the task groups could have been commanded directly through these ‘components’, with the logistic and force support elements being made direct command units—presumably through the Chief Staff Officer for Joint Logistics (or J4) at HQJOC.

At the other end of the spectrum, another former JTF 633 commander, Major General Craig Orme, makes a quite different criticism.⁸ Orme assesses that the command and control arrangements were not sufficiently strategic and that JTF 633 could have had an even wider role. He argues that we only ever had a tactical vision for each operation, and came to understand the need for an MEAO theatre architecture only after some 15 years of operations. He makes the point that, had we had such an architecture to tie the theatre together from the outset, the transition to new operations as conditions changed would have been much smoother. He also argues that such an architecture could have included the minor operations, including in South Sudan, the Sinai and Palestine.

Finally, Brigadier Anthony Rawlins in Chapter 6 of this book raises another critique based on his experience as commanding officer of Overwatch Battle Group (West)-2 (OBG(W)-2) in Iraq’s Al Muthanna Province in 2006–07. If I understand it correctly, it is that the national chain of command failed to articulate a clear intent for OBG(W) operations, then leave the commanding officer to get on with implementing that intent in accordance with the principles of mission command.⁹

8 Major General C.A. Orme, DSC, AM (Retd), private communication, April 2017.

9 ADF doctrine does not define mission command, but describes its effects. Perhaps the most precise description (in a somewhat unsatisfactory section of the doctrine) is ‘Under Mission Command ... the superior commander directs WHAT is to be achieved but leaves the subordinate commander free to decide HOW to achieve assigned tasks’. See ADDP 0.01, *Command and Control*, pp. 2–8.

Now, the data for the Noetic study was developed via an email questionnaire sent to just 14 senior ADF and Department of Defence officers. The authors are quick to point out that their study makes no claim to being comprehensive. Accordingly, we should take care in deciding what weight to give expressions such as ‘few fans in the ADF’ and ‘near-uniform questioning’.

That said, the people canvassed represent an impressive body of experience. The group included two former JTF 633 commanders and two others who would go on to command it. It also included former senior embedded officers, a former CJOPS and a former Commander Special Operations, as well as senior Defence headquarters and staff from HQJOC. Further, Craig Orme’s and Anthony Rawlins’s experiences speak for themselves.

So each of these critiques deserves to be examined in detail, and no doubt, as historians mull over the evidence in years to come, a clearer picture will emerge. Let me offer a few observations that the historians might include in their considerations.

First, I agree that the idea of a discrete national commander did bemuse some coalition officers, but I never thought they were confused, and I never found it an insurmountable issue. Actually, some senior Americans rather liked our system, because it was quite clear which officers were doing national tasking and which ones were engaged in coalition work.

For my own part, I have always thought there were good reasons not to have an embedded officer as the senior national representative. Underlining that distinction between dedication to national tasks and coalition effort is one. Another is that, presumably, an embedded officer’s embed duties are sufficient to fill his or her days in their own right without loading national responsibilities on top. I certainly found that was the case when I was an embedded officer at CENTCOM. If it is not, somebody should probably be reviewing whether that embed position is really necessary. Finally, I am not sure that embedded officers can bring a sufficiently hard-headed national focus to the national command role. My experience throughout more than a decade suggests that embedded officers are quickly institutionally captured by their coalition headquarters. And that is as it should be—we want them to be the best coalition staff officer they can be because it is in Australia’s interest for them to be seen to be a loyal team member. But that does make it difficult for them to judge priority between coalition and national interests.

I also agree that my visits to coalition headquarters did make some work for coalition staffs, but it was minimal. I was being reminded of the sensitivity to my visits, particularly by our embeds and national staff in Afghanistan. I do not know how my predecessors or successors did it, but I tried to time my visits appropriately, and I always made them low key. I was not interested in getting detailed briefs from the coalition staff. I was focused on engaging the commanders themselves, and those who were worth their salt were always willing to give me their time. Of course, I also wanted to hear the views of our embedded staff on how the operation was going and whether their individual roles were useful, and to talk to them about how they were going personally. If that took up some of their time, I make no apology for that.

As to whether we received any special access or influence by virtue of having a discrete national commander, I am not sure we ever made that claim. I believe that such special access and influence as we had has come from the US experience of Australia as an ally and partner: we came to the party when they asked us; we then tried not to ask too much of them in terms of support; and we always said which part of the job we would do, then did it.

A more interesting question is whether we had it right in having our national support infrastructure, including our headquarters and commander, based in the United Arab Emirates from 2008 rather than, say, in Kabul. To me, the argument for the United Arab Emirates was reasonably compelling. From a security point of view, it was far superior to anywhere in Afghanistan, and not having it in Afghanistan reduced the load on the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Also, having been based in Baghdad in my first tour, I found the United Arab Emirates much more convenient for visiting the dispersed elements of the JTF and our coalition and host nation partners.

Perhaps another variation would have been to appoint Peter Short as national commander in Afghanistan, working either to me as the regional national commander or directly for the CJOPS. I think Short would argue that he could have done that and that, in many ways, it was the de facto situation anyway. I will simply say that I think it is easier to make the case for that kind of arrangement than it is for double-hatting an embed, which would be my least preferred option.



A member of Mobility Support fires a 84mm Carl Gustaf Rocket Launcher at the heavy weapons range in Tarin Kowt, Afghanistan, 2012.

Source: Courtesy of the Department of Defence.

The ‘no need for a JTF’ critique is also interesting: could we have done away with Headquarters JTF 633 altogether and run the entire operation through the HQJOC components and Joint staff? Well, of course anything is possible, and in fact we do run some minor operations that way—Operation SOLANIA in the Pacific, for example.

But I believe it would have been difficult to do it through HQJOC and the components of the headquarters in the early days in the MEAO because of the limited capacity of HQJOC before the 2007 expansion. Perhaps the components could have run the operational task groups, but the J4 at HQJOC certainly could not have run the national support side with the staffing levels it then had. And of course, the doctrine we were moving towards at the time was the creation of an integrated HQJOC with no components, so such an approach would have swum against the prevailing philosophical tide.

Beyond matters of capacity, there is also the question of whether we should have run the operations in the MEAO directly through HQJOC, even if we could have. Perhaps one could make the case that this would have eliminated overlap and shortened lines of command and control, but in my view these are marginal benefits. HQJOC is, after all, designed

to run all operations worldwide at the operational level, and running task groups directly would inevitably draw it down into the tactical to the detriment of its higher command functions. So, for me, the answer to this question is no.

Craig Orme's concern that we did not take JTF 633 far enough has greater merit. I was in Baghdad in late 2008 trying to negotiate a new Status of Forces Agreement with Iraq, so I saw firsthand the disruption to Headquarters JTF 633 as it moved down the Gulf to the United Arab Emirates. I have heard service chiefs lament the way we walked away from some Gulf countries when we no longer needed them after the successful invasion of Iraq, only to have to rebuild our bridges when we needed them again. So there is definite appeal in the idea of a solid foot on the ground with an enduring remit to manage Australia's military footprint in the MEAO on behalf of HQJOC.

I believe, however, that such an idea quickly founders on the rocks of reality. Wish it otherwise as we may, all our operational commitments in the Middle East from 2001 to 2014 were developed incrementally and were therefore tactical in their focus. There was no sense of being engaged in a campaign, at least not in the early years. Winning resources was difficult, as successive governments prescribed numbers for task elements almost to the individual soldier level. In such an environment, winning support for a JTF headquarters with a more expansive mandate would simply not have been possible. That said, we should certainly note the potential of this idea for future operations, even when they start small and tactical.

As to Anthony Rawlins's concerns, let me just say that, in my view, the OBG(W) task and the constraints around it were clear. We were, at that stage, in our province, past any free-flowing manoeuvre warfare, with its inherent ambiguity, where there is a need for subordinate commanders to have freedom of action and room for them to express themselves with flair and élan. The task the Australian Government had taken on just had to be ground out, and there was not anything pretty about it. That OBG(W) soldiers did not like the task, or that there might have been more professionally interesting jobs elsewhere, is of little account.

As an aside, when Ken Gillespie was VCDF and dual-hatted as CJOPS, I accompanied him on a call on the British two-star commander of Multi-National Division – South East (MND-SE), who made a strong

play for OBG(W) to be allowed to reinforce in what was by then a difficult situation in Basra. Gillespie had little patience for this request. He reminded our host that the difficult situation was of British making. He pointed out that we had a long history of being asked by the British to do things that were not in our interests, and said we would not be so easily drawn again. He noted that we had already undertaken to do the job in Al Muthanna, and declared his intention that we would see it through. Perhaps we failed to communicate this intent adequately to OBG(W), but there was certainly no doubt in our commander's mind about what he wanted to do—and what he did not.

Where I could agree with Rawlins is that perhaps Australia missed an opportunity to leave Al Muthanna when the Japanese did, which would have saved our soldiers from what was apparently an unpopular mission. Of course, that would have meant that somebody else had to do it. In any case, for its own reasons the government decided that we would not leave with the Japanese, so the job just had to be done, like it or not.

Selected other issues

I want to leave the critiques there and touch briefly on some other issues. There are many we could consider, but I will focus here on just a few.

First, let me touch on national caveats and the so-called red card. In any coalition, national caveats are a sensitive issue. They are a significant factor for the coalition commander because they constrain the employment of his force. General John Allen used to track them personally when he was Commander of ISAF in Afghanistan, and I recall that during one of my visits to Kabul he produced a matrix that showed the various caveats—and it was a very complicated chart indeed.

But from a contributing country's point of view, national caveats are critical to sustaining national will for the contribution. They are usually finely calculated, balancing the need to make the force useful with a clear assessment of national appetite for risk.

Australia's history is replete with examples in which those we have fought alongside have asked us to do things that were not necessarily in our interests, and since we first invoked the idea of a national commander, standing up for those interests has been a key part of the role.

As a general statement, our caveats in the MEAO in 2006–07 and 2012–13 were reasonably modest. The Australian forces assigned for tasking in Al Muthanna in Iraq and Uruzgan in Afghanistan were not to operate outside those areas without explicit national approval; the ship could work with some task forces but not others; and things of that ilk. Of course, Anthony Rawlins has drawn to our attention his concerns about the constraints around OBG(W) operations (see Chapter 6), but even those caveats were modest compared to those imposed by some other nations.

I only ever really came close to pulling the national ‘red card’ once. It was right at the beginning of my second tour, in early October 2012, and, oddly enough, it arose out of an ISAF requirement, not an Australian one. It was not long after we had suffered the tragedy of losing three soldiers to an attack by the treacherous Afghan, Sergeant Hekmatullah. That attack precipitated a significant review of ISAF force protection protocols. One of the outcomes was a requirement that 11 specified criteria had to be satisfied before a combined ISAF–Afghan National Army patrol could be sent outside the wire, although an ISAF Forward Operating Base commander could give a waiver on up to three of those criteria if he was satisfied that the risk had been adequately mitigated. At that point, the Americans were still leading in Uruzgan, and two nights in a row the evening report from our deputy, Colonel (now Brigadier) Ben James, advised that the US commander proposed to send out a combined Australian–Afghan patrol the following day, on the basis that he had waived three of the 11 criteria.

On the first night, I called James and asked which of the criteria had been waived and on what basis the Combined Team – Uruzgan commander felt that the associated risks had been adequately mitigated. An explanation followed, and I thanked James and let it go, but when the same thing happened the following night—again initially without explanation—I called James again to express my concern. I do not recall exactly what I said, but it was to the effect that as the Australian national commander, I was becoming uneasy about what appeared to be a routine acceptance of additional risk for Australian soldiers that seemed to circumvent Commander ISAF’s intent.

James accepted my concerns, and from then on a thorough justification accompanied advice of planned combined patrols. As things turned out, it was not long before ISAF set aside the requirement to satisfy those

criteria explicitly and the risk was managed in different ways. But from a perception point of view, the damage had been done. When I went to visit Uruzgan a few weeks later, there was still an undercurrent of concern about my ‘meddling’ in operational matters, and Commander Regional Command (South) made an oblique reference to the issue during a later visit by the CJOPS.

This incident serves to illustrate just how important but also how sensitive the role of a national commander can be. These were not even Australian rules—they were ISAF’s—yet what I thought were quite reasonable questions provoked a minor storm. But I cannot agree with Anthony Rawlins that mission command says I should have just stepped back. We must never forget what has been done to us by others in their own interest, and national commanders must continue to advocate for Australian interests when they see them threatened.

It is worth mentioning briefly that the command and control arrangements concerning embedded officers is not straightforward. Certainly, controlling them is not easy, principally because most of them work deep within a coalition chain, there is rarely direct Australian supervision, and they are, after all, Australians—they are outcome focused and they have a ‘can-do’ attitude. So, for example, when the one-star Australian director of the Combined Air Operations Centre in Qatar boarded a US aircraft and went on a bombing mission over Afghanistan one day in 2007, it caused me some concerns. To this day, I do not know whether he was within his personal directive and rules of engagement to do so, but the point I made to him was that I would have minded less if he had told me about it before he went on the mission rather than after. That way I could have at least been prepared to manage the fallout if anything went wrong.

Graham Bentley first began the task of crafting directives to embeds in 2003, and they have grown like Topsy since. The early ones were a bit light, and if anything, the current versions are probably too prescriptive. But it is important that embeds do have clear guidance because *laissez-faire* is simply not a workable approach to managing them.

Another interesting dimension of our command and control arrangements in the MEAO was the relationship between the JTF and Australia’s diplomatic missions in the region. Our ambassadors in the various countries up and down the Gulf were, of course, important in

helping to assure ongoing support for our basing presence. But the two key diplomats, to my eyes at least, were the ambassadors in Baghdad and Kabul, and of those I met and worked with, two merit mention here.

I first met His Excellency Marc Innes-Brown in Baghdad in late 2006, when my predecessor, Brigadier Mick Moon, took me for an introductory call during our handover. Innes-Brown had been ambassador since August that year. I do not recall what we talked about in that introduction, but I do remember that he had red hair and a reputation of being pretty fiery to go with it.

Just a couple of weeks later, my senior operations officer walked into my office to advise that His Excellency had requested that we send over some staff to brief him on current operations. That seemed a little odd—after all, he had an attaché resident in the embassy. I asked whether we had given such briefs before and found we had not. Then I consulted our operations order and my directive from the CJOPS, and, as I recall, I found that both were silent on any formal command and control relationship between the JTF and the embassy beyond a requirement for us to provide force protection and some enabling logistic support.

Yet clearly it was imperative that there be a relationship that ran deeper than just force protection and logistics. While I was not required to consult or report through the ambassador on operational matters, the JTF was a big focus for him in its own right and, beyond that, our activities obviously had the potential to affect his broader work. Reciprocally, he had access to a range of information that lent context to what I saw happening in the coalition, and he could work to shape things in the diplomatic arena if I felt I needed such help.

In the end, I declined to provide staff to give Innes-Brown his brief—I felt that our headquarters was busy enough doing its core tasks without adding jobs that we were not resourced to do. But I did offer to go across to the embassy to give him a personal update, and he accepted with alacrity. That approach seemed to work well in terms of both meeting his information need and deepening our personal relationship. So I made the journey across to the Red Zone every fortnight or so for the remainder of my tour, combining the brief to the ambassador with visits to our embedded staff and calls on senior coalition officers.



Major General Michael Crane, Commander Joint Task Force 633, with Afghan National Army artillerymen, Camp Alamo, Kabul, 2013.

Source: Department of Defence.

In 2012, my relationship with the ambassador to Afghanistan began differently. In May that year, I attended the force preparation course in Sydney, only to find that the then ambassador-designate, Jon Philp, was also enrolled. This extraordinary step on Philp's part had two important outcomes: it gave him some insight into the way the ADF perceived Afghanistan and its operations there, and, perhaps more importantly, it allowed us to begin to develop our personal relationship before becoming immersed in our respective responsibilities. Over dinner one night that week we agreed that, while we would likely have different perspectives on many issues, nothing would be important enough to allow it to disrupt our personal relationship. We settled on a protocol under which, if we could not agree, we would refer a matter to our superiors and each abide by their decision. This approach served us well, and I am delighted to say that we never needed to ask for adjudication from Canberra.

Successful as our personal relationship was, I should close by observing that the formal arrangements between the JTF and the embassy in Kabul (or lack thereof) were broadly similar to those I had experienced in Baghdad in 2007—although in Kabul there was not yet a resident attaché. We probably need to give that some more thought.

Conclusion

As I have said, there are many other issues relating to command and control I could have discussed. Should we revisit the idea of a standing deployable JTF headquarters? How did Headquarters JTF 633 perform technically, and should we rethink our individual trickle flow reinforcement system? Why did Australia come to have its own campaign plan for Afghanistan and how was that managed? How did we get to be leading in Uruzgan Province when we had fought for so long not to be in charge there? At the strategic level, how far have the services really come in ceding control of assigned forces to the CJOPS? And so on.

There is obviously still a lot of work to be done by historians in sorting through these issues. One factor that will complicate their task is that everybody's experience is different. If you are Major General Paul Symon, who commanded in the early days, your concern is whether we should have had a properly organised standing national headquarters to get us started. If you are Major General John Cantwell in 2010, you are worried about HQJOC reaching past you into Afghanistan, and the extent to which you yourself have to lean into Afghanistan to feed the Canberra beast. If you are Major General Craig Orme in 2014, you are concerned about how you ramp up again in Iraq when Australia has only just removed the last remnants of its military presence there. And, of course, Anthony Rawlins has set out his concerns earlier. So, where you stand on our command and control arrangements very much depends upon where (and when) you sit.

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