

## An Interview with

# General Lance L. Smith,



## USAF, Commander, U.S. Joint Forces Command

**General Lance L. Smith, USAF, is Commander, U.S. Joint Forces Command, and Supreme Allied Commander for Transformation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.**

**JFQ:** All leaders seem to bring a fresh or renewed emphasis to a command. What is your top agenda item or priority emphasis?

**General Smith:** One of the areas that we are focused on right now comes largely from my experience as the deputy commander at CENTCOM [U.S. Central Command] for General [John] Abizaid. We are evaluating the balance between supporting current operations and future operations. I want to make sure that we are doing everything possible to help the combatant commanders as they fight this very difficult war. We are specifically looking at any technologies, concepts, or capabilities to see if we can shorten development and implementation timelines; otherwise, these could take years to develop. I think that has resonated well with the folks at JFCOM [U.S. Joint Forces Command]; they like the idea that we are having an impact on the battlefield today. We are going to be at this effort for a while, so we do not want to spend too much of our time looking at the higher end of warfare when we have a very dangerous irregular threat facing us right now. We are focusing on the kind of war that we expect to fight for the next 5 to 10 years.

**On September 13, 2006, Col David H. Gurney, USMC (Ret.), and Lisa M. Yambrick of Joint Force Quarterly interviewed General Lance L. Smith, USAF, in his office at U.S. Joint Forces Command in Norfolk, Virginia.**

**JFQ:** General Pace, just as General Myers before him, speaks frequently about more effective partnering with other Federal agencies, allies, and industry. How does your command promote the coherent integration of U.S. military capabilities with other elements of U.S. and allied power?

**General Smith:** We focus on bringing other elements of national power into the fight at the operational and strategic level of war—planning, execution, and stabilization and reconstruction. The absence or lateness of such an effort has had an effect in both Afghanistan and Iraq, so we try to bring all of these communities together in a number of ways. We are experimenting with a variety of innovative organizations that show promise, and we invite them to participate in exercises together on their turf and ours. We do this with the State Department, with Homeland Security, and other organizations that conduct exercises. We have pursued the effects-based approach to thinking on most things we do, which, at the operational and strategic levels, is all about harnessing the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic elements of national power into a common purpose. Sometimes we end up with this great debate over acronyms such as EBO [effects-based operations] and EBAO [effects-based approach to operations], and I hate to attach letters to concepts, but it really is a common sense approach. We know we are not going

to win by military power alone. We have to achieve effects on the battlefield, in the battlespace, that involve a whole lot more than just the military.

**JFQ:** It seems that we are incessantly accused of fighting the last war. The mission of USJFCOM can be fairly interpreted as a mandate to prevent this from happening. The threat seems to have changed dramatically, but our force structure and equipment appear very much the same. Are we keeping pace with the threat, or is this a false metric?

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**General Smith:** First of all, I take some exception to your assumption. The war we are fighting and the tools we are using to fight the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are considerably different than the personnel, equipment, and materials that we started with when I arrived there 3 years ago. The force structure has changed to accommodate the irregular war we are fighting; the training has changed; the tactics, techniques, and procedures have changed; and they continue to evolve to meet this current threat. Beyond that, we continue to look to the future. We are conducting an experiment right now called Urban Resolve 2015 that involves over 1,400 people across the Services, as well as representatives from the interagency community and coalition partners who are looking at how we might fight urban warfare 9 years from now. We are experimenting with technologies and tactics that could be put into the field in an urban arena in 2007, as well as into 2015 and beyond.

We are very well partnered with TRADOC [U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command] and the other Services on all of

this. So I don't believe we are stagnant or trying to fight the last war. Anyway, I don't know what the last war was—*Desert Storm* and Operation *Iraqi Freedom* and Operation *Enduring Freedom* were all different in their own way. We fight the war that we have, and we train to fight the war we think we might have. We are spending a lot of time studying the “fourth-generation warrior” right now, whatever that happens to be. And so as we try to sort out who he is and what he looks like, we try to make sure we stay ahead of the fight and adjust as the enemy changes and adapts.

**JFQ:** *Your Web site states that U.S. Joint Forces Command developed the risk assessment process for national leaders. Can you speak about the system that provides leaders with a worldwide perspective on force sourcing solutions?*

**General Smith:** I don't know if we developed it or not, but let me give you an example of how we do it. First of all, when we began the current fight, we had an operational plan. We gathered the resources to support the plan, fought the war, and then sent the troops home. Now, through a process where the combatant commander requests specific forces he needs, we get to the business of being the primary joint force provider. Once the request is validated by the Joint Staff, we go out to our components (representing the Services)—and, in some cases, the other combatant commanders—and determine what forces are available to support the commander's request—General Abizaid, in this case—for Iraq, or Afghanistan, or the Horn of Africa. Every time we do that, it impacts the forces that are available to another combatant command. So the affected combatant commander has the opportunity, as we take these packages forward (they all have to

be approved by the Secretary of Defense), to assess the risk to his command, based on his war plans and his mission. That assessment is in the package that goes to the Secretary of Defense, and he determines how much risk he is willing to take. So risk assessment occurs on an as-needed basis, or maybe an *as-affected basis* would be a better way to say it. It is part of the routine.

Every 3 months, we have a Joint Quarterly Readiness Review, where we, in concert with the Joint Staff, go in and look at the readiness of our forces. We compare them to a given OPLAN [operations plan] and see how current operations or plans affect the capabilities of the combatant commanders to perform their

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missions, and then risk is assessed against that OPLAN. For instance, if we recommended troops from the Army's III Corps for Iraq, we see how that impacts the plans for, say, Korea, and then a risk assessment is made. We are able to look at how we might mitigate the risk, so we look at it from our perspective and say, “We can't give you the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, but you may get the Army's 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division.”

After we've done that, the combatant commander also looks at it and says that course of action is either low, moderate, significant, or high risk to him. This way the Secretary can make an informed decision with the advice of the Chairman.

Once a year, the Chairman, who is responsible for advising the Secretary and the President on military forces, is required to go to the President through the Secretary of Defense and assess the Total Force in order to tell him how we are doing. So there are a lot of ways to assess risk, and it is pretty complex. The Department is currently developing new systems, such as DRRS [Defense Readiness Reporting System], to understand readiness better and gain visibility down to lower levels within the force.

**JFQ:** *Your command is focused upon the precise choreography of ground, sea, air, and space-based assets. This requires a very complex command and control architecture. How vulnerable are we to disruptions?*

**General Smith:** The question is whether the disruption is from inside or outside the organization, because the complexity of the command and control system itself is an issue. Because we have to be able to operate in an environment where we have allies and multiple Services, the key element in trying to make the command and control system less complex or more robust is to make sure we have a good data strategy. We do not have a great one right now, and we are working on that to try and make sure systems can talk to one another. So we have internal issues with the complexity of the command and control system that operates okay now, but *could* operate much better. We particularly need to improve our ability to work in a multinational environment.

From a vulnerability perspective, we pay an awful lot of attention to information



JFQ (David H. Gurney)



assurance. That is an area where U.S. Strategic Command has the lead, and we are working closely with them to make sure we are in step. As we develop new command and control systems, information assurance is integral to how the system is built. Then, of course, the system is continuously monitored to determine if anybody is trying to hack into it. Action can then be taken to strengthen our protections or go after the source of the problem. We also build redundancies into the system; it is not just the bad guys that can affect us—it is the lightning strike and other environmental factors that affect computers and communications that we are all familiar with. So because of our increased reliance on computers and related technologies, we must have parallel efforts to ensure that important data is protected—and we do.

Industry is moving out with new ideas on how to build redundancy into the system: blade technology, for instance, where you have a number of computer banks that back each other up; if one fails, the computer does not dump any more. Since the information is shared across multiple hard drives, you do not lose the data and should not even know there was a problem. That helps protect you in a lot of ways: from yourself, from the environment, and from the enemy.

**JFQ:** *In conversations with military personnel from all Services, it is striking how much better midcareer officers understand innovative constructs such as EBAO and the Standing Joint Force Headquarters than their more senior leaders. How do you keep busy, post-war college leaders up to snuff?*

**General Smith:** In a lot of ways. First of all, I like your premise. It is exactly right. There are a lot of things our younger troops understand, do differently, perceive differently, and act out differently than I might just because of how they grew up and how they think. There is an entirely different culture with regard to the learning process. For instance, I learn by reading the instruction manual. I would never think of operating a new toy without first sitting down and reading the instruction manual; we do that with complex airplanes, too. With most young people today, it does not occur to them to spend weeks studying the instruction manual. The mind learns better graphically than it does by rote memory. So what they do, because they have grown up this

General Smith, as NATO Supreme Allied Commander for Transformation, signs memorandum of understanding for creation of Combined Joint Operations from the Sea Center of Excellence



way with computers and videogames and a multitude of other technologies, is just turn on the switch, press a button, and see what happens—it locks into their mind. Where we might grasp 30 percent of what we've read in the manual, they grasp 60 to 70 percent of what they see. We are trying to figure out just exactly how young people learn today, so we can take advantage of that and adjust our training methods accordingly.

Regarding concepts such as the effects-based approach to operations, they get it, because most of them have been to Iraq or Afghanistan or someplace else where the concept is simply part of how they perform on a daily basis. They clearly understand that there's a lot more to our business than just breaking things. They must always think about what effect their actions are going to have before they act. Destroying a minaret in a mosque versus shooting the sniper or just going around it altogether are options they must consider. So the effects-based approach to them is natural. When I get into conversations, especially with KEYSTONE [for senior enlisted] and CAPSTONE [for new general officers] and PINNACLE [for 2- and 3-star officers who are going on to be joint task force commanders] students, there is not a great deal of debate about this—good discussion, sure, but clear agreement that this is the way we have to do business.

It is clear to all of them that the battlespace has changed; you have to understand who all the players are and how they are linked, just as we talked about earlier:

Where are the centers of power focused? Are we fighting criminals, warlords, drug kingpins, or religious extremists? Where and how is the money moving into and out of the theater? Who is most effectively influencing the people, what are the problems in the city, what is the status of law enforcement? All these things that were not always part of the tactical fight in previous wars are things our troops clearly understand today because they've been there, done that, and have the T-shirt. We try to capitalize on this through the lessons learned process conducted by our Joint Center for Operational Analysis by ensuring that all these experiences are captured and included in professional military education, exercises and experiments, and Service and joint training programs.

Additionally, Joint Forces Command conducts mission rehearsals with the headquarters and component staffs prior to any of them going over to the desert or the Horn of Africa. We take the most current knowledge available and share it with these officers and senior leaders and try to give them scenarios to exercise with that they can expect in theater. So the ability to keep the young officers and enlisted folks up to speed on these concepts is really part of the whole exercise and training program.

**JFQ:** *We have been heavily engaged in the Long War for 5 years now. How does USJFCOM improve the ability of the United States and its allies to prevail?*

**General Smith:** The command was set up in a very efficient way to deliver and develop the capabilities that troops in the field need. Those who had the vision for JFCOM were pretty smart because many of the engines of transformation and change reside in this command. For instance, we have joint concept development and experimentation, integration and interoperability, joint training, plus primary responsibility for providing forces. This is very powerful.

Since the Joint Center for Operational Analysis is also part of JFCOM, we are able to inform all of our processes with the most current lessons learned out of Iraq and Afghanistan and the various exercises we participate in. We conduct two major exercises with each of the combatant commands every year, plus we participate in most others. So we have many of the pieces needed to take lessons observed and ensure that they become lessons learned. We also have the ability to include lessons learned in our innovation and experimentation program, so we can experiment with alternate ways to conduct operations, mitigate risk, or whatever issue is prominent at the time.

By the way, the process of change does not evolve strictly from lessons learned; it also comes from the good ideas of Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines—anybody who wants to make an input into our process has the opportunity to do so.

**JFQ:** As NATO's Supreme Allied Commander for Transformation, can you speak to NATO's efforts to address the challenges it faces in the Long War?

**General Smith:** First of all, NATO does not necessarily look at what is going on in the world today the same way the United States does, so it is worth noting that the issues for NATO will be somewhat different than the issues for America—or any other individual nation within NATO for that matter. We are all engaged in the global war on terror to varying degrees and with different senses of urgency or concern about the terrorist threat. But as an organization, as an Alliance, NATO understands that there is an enemy out there who wants to harm the West and that we as an Alliance have to work together to defeat them. That is why NATO's number one operational priority

today is Afghanistan, and that is why we, as an Alliance, are in Afghanistan.

At the summit in 2002, NATO committed to change, based primarily on the 1999 Kosovo experience where we found ourselves unable to effectively operate together in several areas. We all found it difficult to deploy even that short distance because we expected to operate from static, robust bases in Europe. The ability to sustain forces outside the immediate area was another issue, as was the ability to talk securely among each other.

We have come an enormous way from there to supporting the operation in Afghanistan and to having a NATO Response Force that is capable of rapid deployment to far reaches of the world. This is significant because I am relatively certain that we could not have gone to Afghanistan 10 to 15 years ago without huge difficulty. So NATO has transformed a great deal; we have had 10 countries join the 16 that made up the Alliance in the early 1990s, and those nations are all transforming, trying

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to move in many cases from former Warsaw Pact, large force militaries to more flexible, more agile, deployable, interoperable forces. They are all going in the right direction, and this will continue.

**JFQ:** Can you also comment on any efforts to mitigate the reported negative trends in interoperability with the United States and speak to your prognosis for the future?

**General Smith:** I wouldn't say that this is necessarily a trend. It usually arises in the area of command and control. When nations such as ours develop their own secure systems to meet sovereign needs, and then they are introduced into the battlespace, we too often find that they are not compatible. We are working this mostly by going to Web-based systems, and once you get it Web-based, then interoperability becomes much easier, especially if you have a basic data strategy to ensure that you can ultimately connect the two.

Releasability will continue to be a problem. Most nations want to protect their sources in some form or another, but we have made headway. We have an intelligence

fusion center now that brings together NATO information in a single place, but we still have national intelligence centers in large numbers in places such as Kosovo and Afghanistan that cannot or do not talk to each other. But there is progress. In fact, if we look at the situation right now, the U.S. future command and control system, the Network-Enabled Command and Control [NECC] system, and the NATO equivalent [NATO Network-Enabled Command, or NNEC] are both under development simultaneously, and we are trying to structure it so that they can link together. That is one of the real advantages, by the way, of my wearing both a national and NATO hat.

U.S. Joint Forces Command and Allied Command Transformation are working together, trying to ensure that we build all future systems to share data—everything from situational awareness tools like full motion video, to communications, to computer software. These have to be able to interact and interoperate together with minimal effort, but it's not easy. Our job is to try and keep everyone informed sufficiently so that it makes sense to build a Friendly Force Tracker, for instance, that can be seen by all nations, not just one.

**JFQ:** It seems that each geographic combatant command has organized its Standing Joint Force Headquarters differently. Is this a good thing, or should they be more standardized?

**General Smith:** First of all, I would not presume to tell another combatant commander how to go about doing the job that the Secretary has given each of us. So the real issue is whether they have the capability to rapidly respond to a contingency and to establish a joint task force—if that is the chosen method to exercise command—quicker and with more efficiency, and with qualified people, in a better way than we used to be able to. When I was at CENTCOM, it took us a year or longer to fully establish Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan to the point where it had the right command and control systems on board and the right people in both numbers and quality. And then when we went to set up Multinational Force–Iraq, General [George] Casey had some ideas, and the Standing Joint Force Headquarters concept was one of them. It is worth remembering that he was





General Smith and General Bryan D. Brown, USA, Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, discuss needs and capabilities at Joint Warfighting Center

U.S. Air Force Atlantic (Bryan D. Axtell)

the JFCOM J-7 when that concept was being developed, so he had some experience and blueprints to go by. But even with that, it was not easy to build the organization or get the right people in place.

In this Long War, we do not believe you are going to have time to spend a year setting up a joint headquarters, so how the combatant commanders do that is important. Having said that, it seems reasonable to expect that we would be able to build deployable command and control packages similar in PACOM [U.S. Pacific Command], SOUTHCOM [U.S. Southern Command], EUCOM [U.S. European Command], and JFCOM. We would identify and train people ahead of time, so if they were in a joint task force, they could perform their mission anywhere they were assigned. That is where JFCOM has a major role to play: to make sure we support the combatant commanders so that they have the best equipment, the best trained operators, and the standards that allow people to develop common skill sets.

The Standing Joint Task Force Headquarters process works very well, by the way. We used ours in Hurricane Katrina, we used them in Pakistan for the earthquake, and we used them to help set up Task Force Paladin in Afghanistan. They are very effective, and their expertise is much appreciated by the combatant commands that have used them. NORTHCOM [U.S. Northern Command] also used theirs very effectively in Katrina, and other 2- and 3-star headquarters such as 2<sup>d</sup> Fleet are really moving out to provide this significant capability to the combatant commanders.

**JFQ:** *Can you explain how experimentation conducted by individual Services is*

*we would identify and train people ahead of time, so if they were in a joint task force, they could perform their missions anywhere*

*monitored, informed by, or coordinated with efforts conducted by USJFCOM?*

**General Smith:** One of the very positive aspects of our command is that our joint experimentation staff has natural links with the Services and other agencies inside and outside the Defense Department. Everybody is interested in experimenting with the programs they are working on, whether they are concepts or ideas or hardware or software. So the communities are close. Having the four Service components within JFCOM also helps us understand what the challenges are, what the issues are, and what the Services are experimenting with. Our J-9 has a direct relationship with each of the experimentation agencies throughout the Government. In addition, we have the Joint Technology Exploration Center, or JTEC, which is the vehicle that many of the Services and the combatant commanders use as a backbone for their experimentation efforts.

Each of the Services, when they experiment, also wants some joint element included in their program. If it is the Air Force, they want a joint force maritime commander and a joint force land commander. If it is the Army, they want a JFACC [joint force air component commander] and a JFMCC [joint force maritime component commander]. We get directly involved in

trying to provide those joint capabilities, so again we are able to help coordinate efforts across the Department and beyond. It is a very collaborative community.

**JFQ:** *We wish to give you an opportunity to tell the U.S. Joint Forces Command story in your own words.*

**General Smith:** Our primary goal is to do what we can to help win the war that we face today while balancing efforts for the future. There are still a lot of people who want to do the West harm and to expand their own ideologies, and there is going to be conflict on the edges for some time to come. We are doing everything we possibly can to help the combatant commanders and our friends and allies succeed.

All of this causes us to reflect very seriously on just exactly what we are doing throughout the command on a daily basis. We have many members of JFCOM with children in the Services and several with sons who have recently been wounded in battle. Our command sergeant major, Mark Ripka, has a son who was recently wounded in Iraq, and the son of our Joint Center for Operational Analysis commander, Brigadier General Jim Barclay, was injured in an IED [improvised explosive device] attack several weeks ago. And there have been a number of others. We feel strongly about doing everything we can to make sure that the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines are successful in mission execution and survive whatever they are doing. And we will take all the lessons we gather and make sure we help build a force that continues to improve, so we can be better prepared to engage in future conflicts as well. **JFQ**