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CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20318-9999

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16 August 2004

MEMORANDUM FOR Chief of Staff, US Army
Chief of Naval Operations
Chief of Staff, US Air Force
Commandant of the Marine Corps
Commander, US Central Command
Commander, US European Command
Commander, US Joint Forces Command
Commander, US Northern Command
Commander, US Pacific Command
Commander, US Southern Command
Commander, US Special Operations Command
Commander, US Strategic Command
Commander, US Transportation Command

Subject: Operation IRAQI FREEDOM Strategic Lessons Learned Report

1. The enclosed subject report provides details on the planning for and conduct of major combat operations in Iraq from the Joint Staff perspective. A version of this document was forwarded to Congress on 29 June 2004.
2. Without enclosure, this memorandum is UNCLASSIFIED.

RICHARD B. MYERS
Chairman
of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Enclosure

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Operation IRAQI FREEDOM Strategic Lessons Learned

31 March 2004

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DIRECTOR, JOINT STAFF**

**REASON: 1.4(a)(b)(c) and (d)
DECLASSIFY ON: 31 December 2014**

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(U) Foreword

(U) The United States and its coalition partners initiated major combat operations, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF), on 19 March 2003 as a result of Saddam Hussein's continued violation of multiple UN Security Council Resolutions following the conclusion of Operation DESERT STORM, Hussein's failure to comply with UN inspection requirements and US intelligence information linking the Iraqi regime to the global terrorist network. From the onset of planning for combat operations, the United States and its coalition partners had three primary interests:

- a. (U) To overthrow the Iraqi Regime, ending years of oppression, torture and unrest for the Iraqi people and the region.
- b. (U) To dismantle the weapons of mass destruction capabilities and eliminate the regime's threat to the Iraqi people, the region, the United States and its partners.
- c. (U) To rapidly establish a stable post-conflict environment.

(U) All three goals had to be accomplished while still sustaining the campaign against al Qaida, deterring opportunistic aggression, defending the US homeland and supporting efforts to establish and maintain a global environment free from terrorist actions. The following report, forwarded in response to congressional requirements, provides considerable detail on the planning for and conduct of major combat operations in Iraq. The US and coalition military forces that took part in OIF performed magnificently. With professionalism, dedication and great personal courage and bravery, the men and women of our military excelled in a fast and difficult military campaign against a lethal enemy in a noncontiguous environment. Still, the war is not over--and there is still dangerous work to do--but our Armed Forces stand ready to meet that challenge.


RICHARD B. MYERS
Chairman
of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

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Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (U)
Strategic Lessons Learned (U)

(U) Introduction

(U) This document presents the Joint Staff-led effort to collect and analyze the strategic lessons learned during planning and executing Phases I-III of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF). In addition, this report incorporates strategic lessons from Phase IV planning for the transition to post-conflict operations.

(U) Terrorist events worldwide against US personnel have increased since the 1960's culminating in the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US homeland. This initiated the US Global War on Terrorism, Operations ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) and now OIF. The left side of Figure 1 reflects increasing terrorist actions since 1960 and major military actions undertaken since 1990. The right side depicts key actions leading up to OIF.

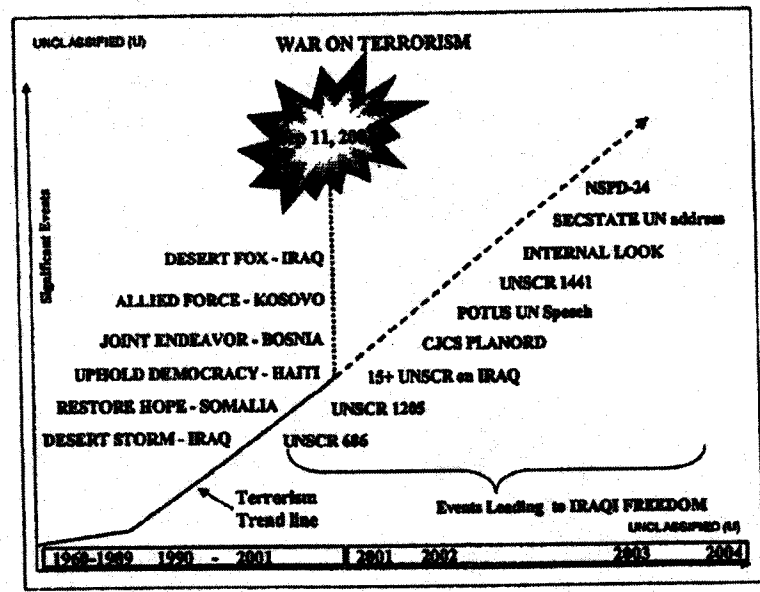


Figure 1. (U) War on Terrorism Timeline

(U) As our Nation began focusing on impending confrontation with Iraq, we incorporated OEF lessons learned to improve operations during OIF. This cemented the value to senior leaders for a robust, active and candid joint lessons-learned collection, analysis and dissemination process for OIF. The greatest benefits of this type of process are saving lives of American personnel and prosecuting more effective military operations. The lessons-learned program continues to gather critical information funneled through and collected from the tactical, operational and strategic levels as illustrated in Figure 2.

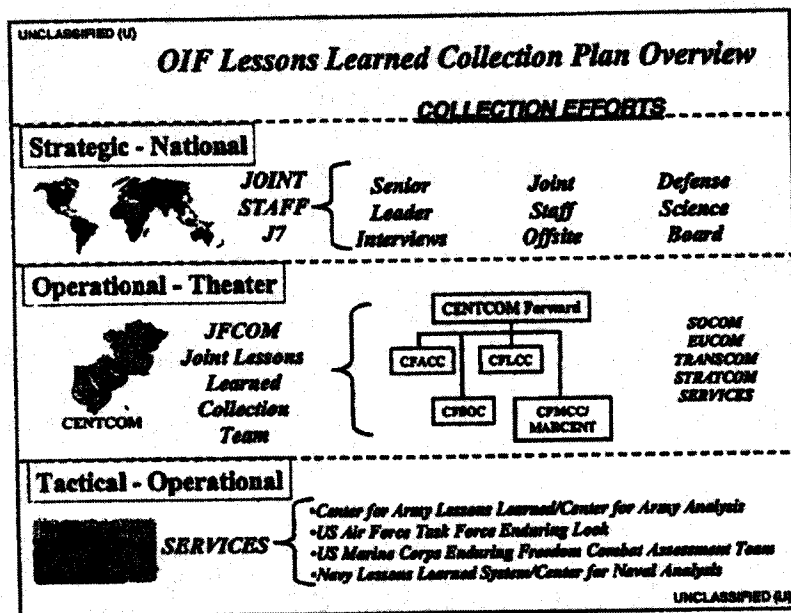


Figure 2. (U) OIF Lessons-Learned Collection Plan Overview

(U) The Chairman's intent was to candidly identify and thoroughly analyze, from a DOD perspective, strategic lessons from planning and executing Phases I-III of OIF and to incorporate the results into action plans to improve our country's joint warfighting capability.

(U) Within this context, the strategic lessons learned are categorized as high performance capabilities requiring sustainment, effective capabilities requiring enhancements, and capabilities falling short of expectations or needs (Figure 3).

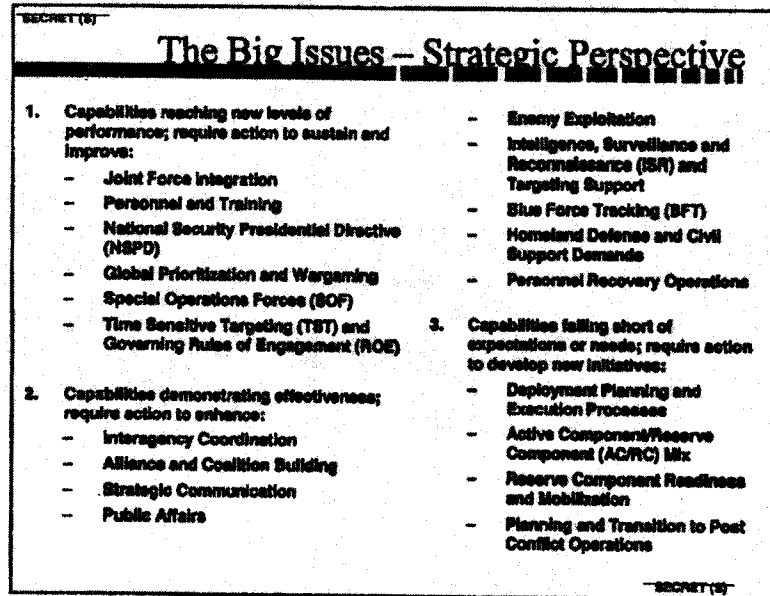


Figure 3. (U) The Big Issues – Strategic Perspective

(U) In each case, the lesson is of strategic importance and requires some level of support to sustain or improve our joint warfighting capability. Each strategic lesson finding is followed by one or more recommendations.

Category I: (U) High Performance Capabilities Requiring Sustainment

(U) Six strategic lessons were observed that fall into this category: joint force integration; personnel and training; the National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD); global prioritization and wargaming; Special Operations Forces (SOF); and time sensitive targeting (TST) and the governing rules of engagement (ROE).

1.1. (U) Joint Force Integration

-(S) Finding. The evolution of joint warfighting skills through operations and exercises in the 1990s led to increased joint force effectiveness. This joint warfighting culture led to a high degree of trust and confidence among senior leaders, combatant commanders and Services in preparing for and executing OIF. OIF demonstrated new levels of joint warfighting effectiveness through the integration of the Services, interagencies, special operations and

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coalition forces. The United States, interagency and coalition partners integrated its capabilities to gain the desired effects through shared planning, intelligence, battlespace awareness and objectives. OIF operationalized the vision of the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act. However, our ability to operate jointly, from strategic to operational to tactical levels, is progressing faster than our doctrine, education, training and organizations.

~~(S)~~ The recommendations are to update joint doctrine in the key areas of information operations, homeland defense, interagency coordination, post-conflict operations and intelligence support among others; address these same areas in joint education initiatives; and expand the interagency and coalition partner participation in enhanced joint training and exercises. Additionally, we need to enhance the Service interoperability training at Service capstone training events and combat training centers. Lastly, DOD needs to complete the training transformation initiatives to establish a capability to provide commanders, staffs and units with an integrated live, virtual and constructive training environment within the appropriate joint context, and allow global training and mission rehearsals, with objective assessments, in support of specific operational needs.

1.2. (U) Personnel and Training

(U) Finding. America's Armed Forces are manned by outstanding people committed to their country and leadership. Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coastguardsmen, both Active and Reserve Components, operated as they were trained and were able to adapt their individual and collective capabilities to the conditions around them and the threats they faced. These Service men and women were able to make the difficult transition from high-intensity conflict operations to stability operations and back during OIF as a result of superior personnel, leadership and the individual and collective training conducted by the Services. Once called upon, the Reserve Component forces exhibited the same expertise and focus on mission accomplishment as the Active Component forces, proving the value the Reserve Component brings to the Total Force. The all-volunteer force is working.

(U) The recommendations are to continue to recruit the highly skilled, all-volunteer Active and Reserve Component force; to provide appropriate incentives for highly skilled individuals to volunteer and remain in service to the Nation. Moreover, the Services need to maintain the current levels of individual and collective training and to nurture the relationships

with the business community that has so willingly supported the Reserve Component deployments.

I.3. (U) National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD)

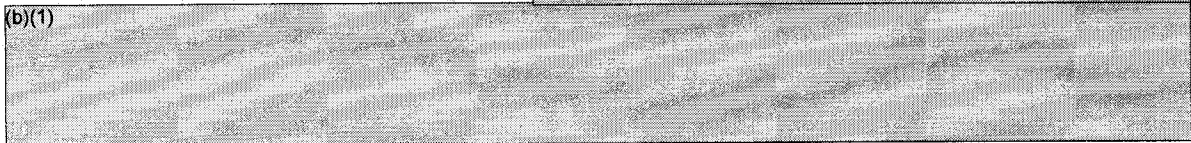
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I.4. (U) Global Prioritization and Wargaming

(S) Finding. The Prominent Hammer and Elaborate Crossbow strategic wargame series conducted by the Joint Staff, Services and combatant commanders, and the insights from operational availability analysis were critical to understanding and addressing global priorities and risks. These wargames analyzed how the US Armed Forces supported OIF while maintaining global responsibilities. Additionally, these wargames identified resources available to other combatant commands resulting in the validation of existing defense strategies through careful risk identification and mitigation. (b)(1)

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~~(S)~~ The recommendations are to execute similar strategic wargames to review global-asset allocations in order to continuously assess risks and execute a force management process. These wargames should include the transition and post-conflict operational requirements to support future prioritizations for troop-to-task determinations. Where applicable, the interagency functions should be included in selected wargames.

1.5. (U) Special Operations Forces (SOF)

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(U) The recommendations are to institutionalize this successful integration in joint doctrine, education and training; expand the SOF-conventional force exercise opportunities for both US and coalition SOF; and to analyze and determine long-term SOF missions and force structure requirements.

1.6. (U) Time Sensitive Targeting (TST) and the Governing Rules of Engagement (ROE)

~~(S)~~ Finding. Building upon OIF lessons learned, TST reached new levels of effectiveness. The associated ROE were developed in close coordination with policy makers, targeteers and operators. This integrated policy coupled with improved intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), command and control, and precision munitions enabled the rapid acquisition, decision and execution of emerging targets.

~~(S)~~ The recommendations are to develop recommended TST ROE during the deliberate

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should include collateral damage assessment responsibilities for all munitions regardless of the method of delivery.

Category II: (U) Effective Capabilities Requiring Enhancements

~~(S)~~ Nine strategic lessons, which show great promise and should be given emphasis to elevate the performance to higher levels, were observed in this category. The lessons in this category include: interagency coordination; alliance and coalition building; strategic communication; public affairs; enemy exploitation; ISR and targeting support; Blue Force Tracking (BFT); homeland defense and civil support demands; and personnel recovery operations.

II.1. (U) Interagency Coordination

~~(S)~~ Finding. The IPMC Executive Steering Group (ESG) was a key enabler for the interagency plan development and coordination of policy. After September 11, 2001, the SECDEF directed the department to establish planning cells in (b)(1)

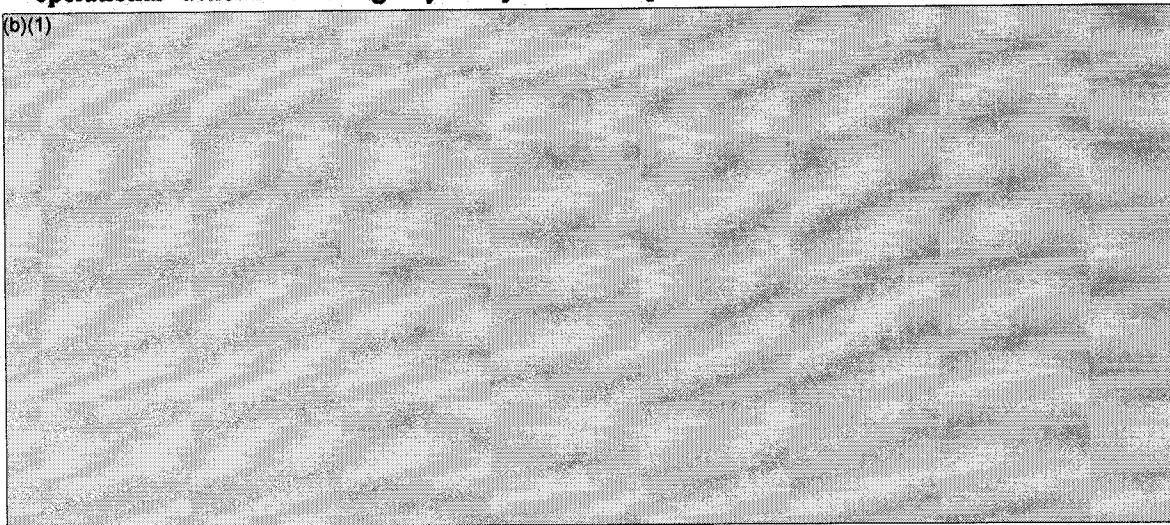
(b)(1) Subsequent decisions directed the Joint Staff to create the IPMC (b)(1) planning cell to integrate interagency planning. The National Security Council (NSC) staff led the ESG and elevated the work of the IPMC for the deputies and principals. Based on lessons on planning and execution of OEF, there was significant improvement in the process. This system was an improvised mechanism to work the complex interagency coordination on the full range of war planning issues from pre- through post-conflict phases. The system was effective, but needed further improvement. Interagency work group participants are staff members of a larger ad hoc organization that must be treated and managed as an organization. Staffs must be linked

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~~(S)~~ The recommendations are to institute formal procedures and directive authorities within the NSC to assist in translating interagency decisions into integrated strategic and

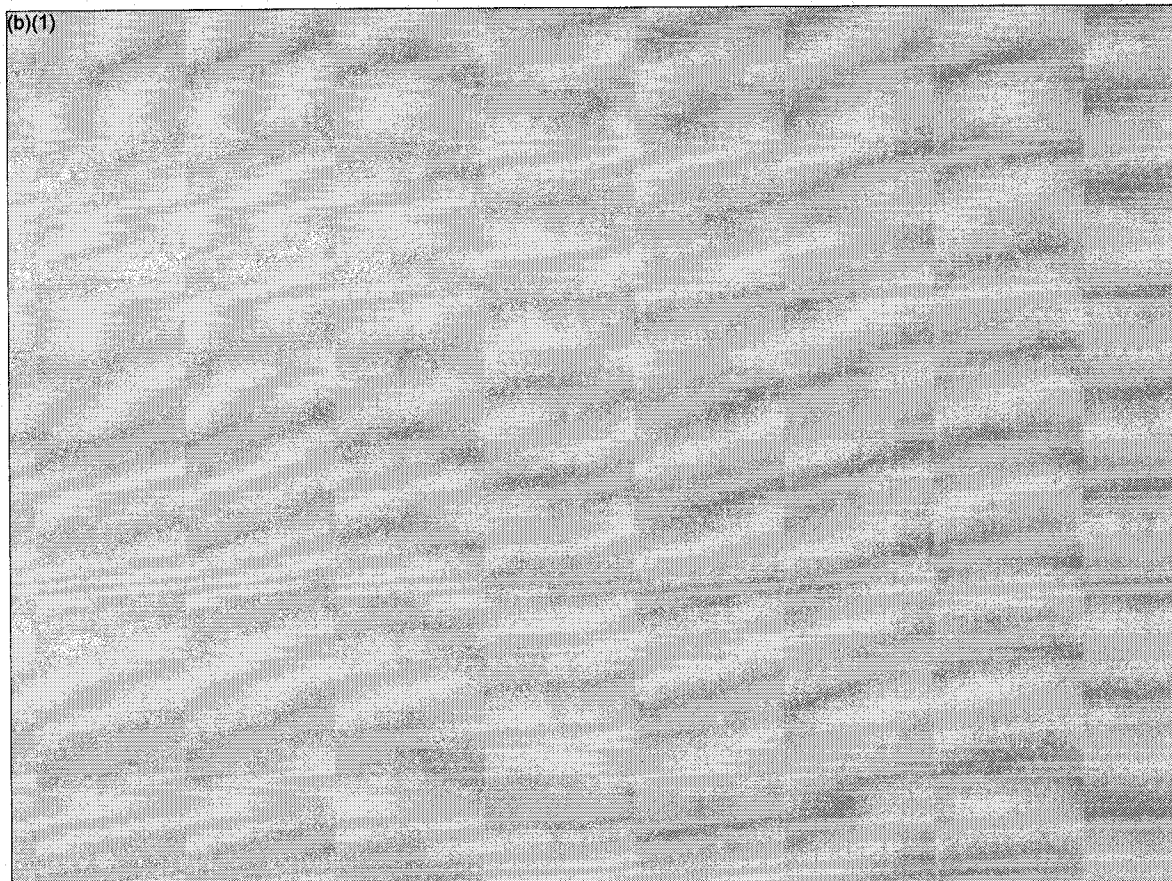
operational actions. Interagency unity is an important strategic asset and national and

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II.2. (U) Alliance and Coalition Building

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II.3. (U) Strategic Communication

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II.4. (U) Public Affairs

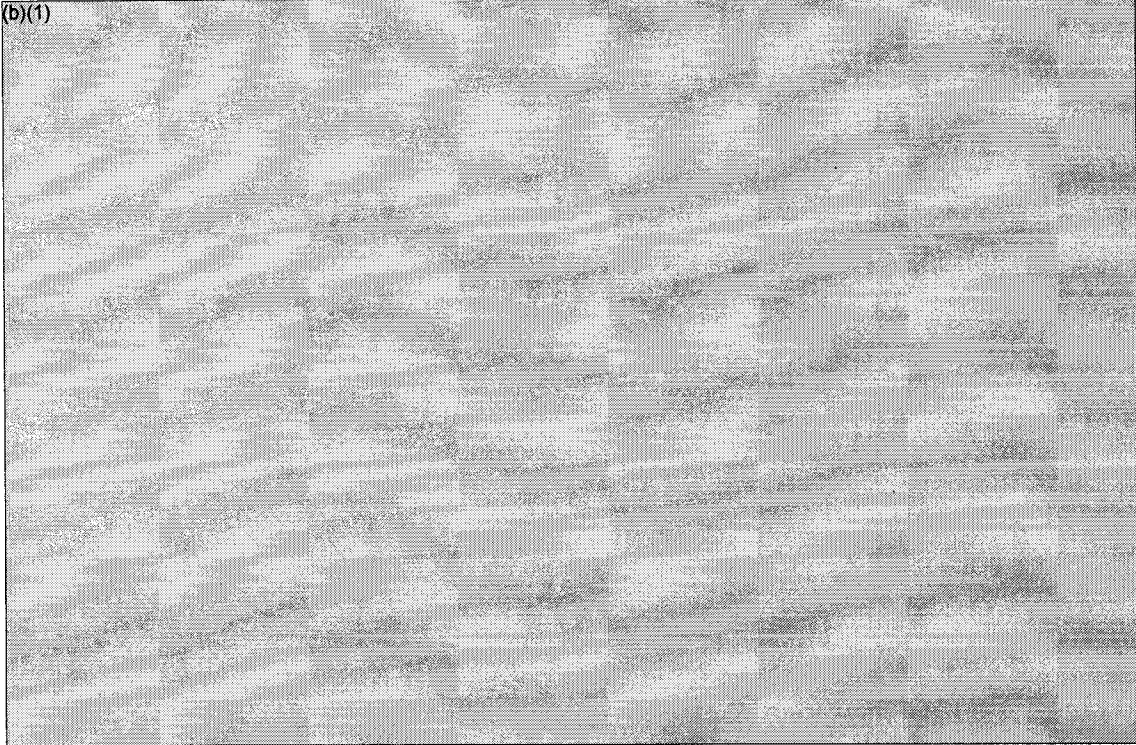
(U) Finding. While public affairs was focused on the US audience, there was a requirement for better coordination with international information programs and the international 24/7 news cycle. The embedded media was a great success but DOD must be prepared to fill the information communications void when embedded media leave the units.

(U) The recommendations are for the new strategic communication agency to develop procedures to improve our ability to rapidly counter disinformation and ensure a consistent message is delivered to multiple international and domestic, private and public audiences. The combatant commanders should plan and train to the demands of 24/7 news cycles, time zone delays and the command battle rhythms. Public affairs actions should be planned for all phases of combat operations including the transition to post-conflict activities.

II.5. (U) Enemy Exploitation

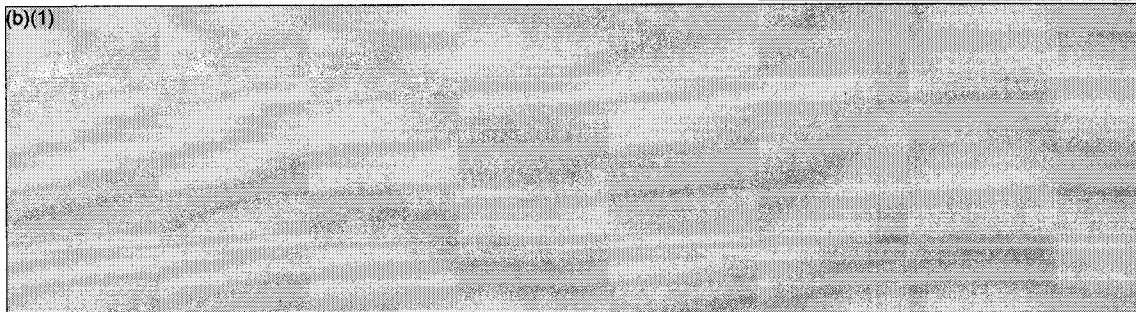
~~(S)~~ Finding. Exploitation of enemy assets and personnel on such a large scale was a new

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~~(S)~~ The recommendations are for the Contingency Planning Guidance to require combatant commanders to identify all exploitation requirements. (b)(1)

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II.6. (U) ISR and Targeting Support

~~(S)~~ Finding. The level of intelligence detail provided during OIF planning was noteworthy. (b)(1)

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II.7. (U) **BFI**

~~(S)~~ Finding. Blue Force Tracking increased the warfighters situational awareness and assisted in preventing fratricide incidents. The improved Common Operating Picture provided more effective command and control, and commanders were able to leverage the faster decision cycles to rapidly adjust their operations. (b)(1)

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~~(S)~~ The recommendations are to leverage the USCENTCOM OIF experience and US Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM) oversight for Joint Battle Management Command and Control to develop near real-time BFT within the joint battlespace, thus integrating intelligence, maneuver assets, targeting and joint fires. Additionally, USJFCOM should, in collaboration with the Services, develop and publish a joint standard BFT architecture and supporting investment strategy. Allies should be encouraged to participate in the development of a jointly integrated and interoperable BFT system. As the BFT technology approaches the individual tracking level of detail, the United States should consider developing a ubiquitous joint combat identification system.

II.8. (U) Homeland Defense and Civil Support Demands

~~(S)~~ Finding. Homeland defense is a global mission that affects planning by all combatant commanders and requires a coordinated strategy to maximize DOD's contribution to homeland security. OIF was fought as part of a multi-front war on terrorism. The requirements, in support of the National Homeland Security mission, competed for many of the same assets needed to accomplish the USCENTCOM mission. This has included forces committed to Operation NOBEL EAGLE, National Guard forces under state control engaged in airport security and critical infrastructure protection, and consequence management assets held to respond to potential threats to the US homeland.¹⁴ The Department of Defense created USNORTHCOM and a new Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense. The roles, responsibilities and relationships among these organizations and other traditional homeland security agencies continue to evolve.

~~(S)~~ The recommendations are to improve the information and intelligence-sharing capabilities and procedures among federal agencies, law enforcement officials, military staffs and Joint Task Force Civil Support by continuing to develop interagency procedures. In addition, the interagencies need to continue to refine their respective roles, responsibilities and relationships. The USNORTHCOM should be added to the coordination of deployment

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planning orders. Where necessary, USNORTHCOM should conduct analysis of force requirements, Reserve Component capabilities and readiness based on the demands of critical infrastructure protection for a variety of scenarios. The Department of Defense should develop joint homeland defense operating concepts and doctrine while continuing to develop standards for the training, exercise and conduct of consequence management missions. Further recommendations are to identify and allocate homeland security assets as applied to multi-tasked US Government chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear assets to include consequence management assets. The Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) need to work together in developing the US Government's position on the requirements necessary for military support for consequence management units until such time as DHS can develop its own capabilities to meet requirements.

II.9. (U) Personnel Recovery Operations

~~(S)~~ Finding. Significant USCENTCOM planning efforts resulted in dedicated resources and established organizations focused on personnel recovery. This detailed planning, training and integration of combat search and rescue assets resulted in no OIF personnel missing in action. However, USCENTCOM identified the need to improve training and reporting associated with personnel recovery operations because many incidents along with the location of personnel were not rapidly reported. The non-contiguous, non-linear operating environment means there are no secure areas. Every unit and individual, whether combat, combat support or combat service support must be prepared for combat. Captured personnel must have the requisite skills to mitigate enemy exploitation and reduce risks associated with captivity. The current levels of Code of Conduct training are no longer sufficient training standards.

~~(S)~~ The recommendations are to educate leaders on the planning efforts required to achieve success in personnel recovery operations. The Services must train and equip all individuals and units for combat operations in this non-contiguous, non-linear operating environment. Additionally, improvement is required in DOD's reporting process to include implementing a revised reporting process at the DOD level. There should be a review and update to the Code of Conduct training guidelines and requirements to include the integration of DOD civilians, contractors and interagency personnel.

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Category III: (U) Capability Shortfalls

~~(S)~~ The four strategic lessons in this category require extensive research and commitment at the national strategic level to become more effective capabilities for the future. The four lessons are: the deployment planning and execution processes; Active Component/Reserve Component mix; Reserve Component readiness and mobilization; and the planning and transition to post-conflict operations.

III.1. (U) Deployment Planning and Execution Processes

~~(S)~~ Finding. The deployment order process should have provided better deployment options, assumptions and alternatives for senior leaders. The force deployment process should have been able to better adjust to political decisions, diplomatic clearance issues and diplomatic initiatives. The current in-transit visibility system should have provided more easily accessible and comprehensive information on units and equipment required to track the build up of combat power. (b)(1)

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To aid in the development of these recommendations, strategic war games, exercises and experiments should include the deployment phase of the operation to assess our ability to operate with limited deployment assets, restricted access and reduced basing and overflight permissions to determine key deployment limitations.

III.2. (U) Active Component/Reserve Component Mix

~~(S)~~ Finding. Force structure decreases and cost-cutting measures in the 1990s increased the reliance on Reserve Component forces. These deliberate decisions to put critical combat

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support and combat service support force structure in the Reserve Components made it more difficult to rapidly access key capabilities. The current speed and intensity of warfare demand rapid access to capabilities that now reside in the Reserve Components. This requires early alert and mobilization orders to deploy these key capabilities or realignment of these capabilities into the Active Component. The current policies, laws and force mix limit strategic flexibility.

(S) The recommendations are to rebalance and restructure the Active and Reserve Component forces to eliminate the need for involuntary mobilization of Reserve Component forces within the first 30 days of a rapid response operation. The Services, in conjunction with the Joint Staff, should provide alternatives to realign the Active Component and Reserve Component mix of capabilities to better match Defense Strategy requirements. Additionally, the Services should develop more modular units through the creation of joint capabilities force packages. In the end, there must be a mobilization process that assures Reserve Component capabilities are available when and where required with Service investment strategies linked to readiness and war plans.

III.3. (U) Reserve Component Readiness and Mobilization

(S) Finding. The declaration of a national emergency and resultant partial mobilization was designed for a large mobilization of forces and to condition the American people for an extended period of conflict. Most Reserve Component units are tasked to be ready to go to war in 180 to 270 days while war plans are now focused on seizing the initiative in 30 days or less. Many Reserve Component units are resourced at lower readiness levels than required for combat operations. Statutory requirements do not allow the military to activate Reserve Component personnel in order to increase their readiness level. Inadequate tools and the inability to track unit or personnel status across components and Services led to delayed mobilization decisions. This delay compressed deployment timelines and made force deployment flow and the subsequent build up of combat power more difficult.

(S) The recommendations are to improve force readiness based on anticipated, analyzed missions and tasks linked to war plans and crisis management; recognize that tiered readiness for Reserve Component forces is a way to economize the force; and develop flexibility for select Reserve Component units to have voluntary short-notice call up. This review should determine

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the need for additional Reserve Component and individual mobilization augmentee manning and facilitate those individuals who wish to voluntarily serve for extended periods of time. In addition, the Department of Defense needs to perform a comprehensive review of the Reserve Component alert notification process and statutory requirements to allow for less than a 30-day alert for mobilization.

III.4. (U) Planning and Transition to Post-Conflict Operations

-(S) Finding. Initial planning focused on the need to avoid the mistakes that were made in the Balkans and in Afghanistan and to clearly define the responsibilities for establishing unity of leadership. The Department of Defense was effective in implementing this unity of effort. However, interagency, OSD, Joint Staff and USCENTCOM planning should have been better integrated prior to hostilities. The coalition was slow to establish post-conflict organizations and procedures while conducting simultaneous combat and stability operations. Post-conflict plans lacked detail and would have benefited from closer coordination with the plans worked within the interagency process. The focus on refining the operational combat plans to defeat the Iraqi military limited the time available for identifying and preparing for post-conflict objectives and requirements.

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However, there were notable successes in planning and preparation for worst-case scenarios which anticipated, mitigated or averted potential crises. Among these were a humanitarian relief plan for avoiding mass refugee migration, a plan to protect natural resources and a plan to avoid an Iraqi currency crisis.

-(S) Recommendations. Warfighting combatant commands must prepare for post-conflict operations with the same intensity and attention to detail as they do for major combat operations,

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to include planning for the requisite resources for the successful execution of post-conflict operations. In this way, the post-conflict organizations and command relationships can be prepared, rehearsed and deployed forward to fully integrate with the joint headquarters. Consideration should be given to establishing a standing post-conflict capability to include a standing interagency planning capability to normalize the public perceptions of post-conflict planning as a logical extension of the ongoing war planning processes. Exchange programs between the Department of Defense and agencies with responsibilities for post-conflict planning and execution should be expanded, and post-conflict and stability operations should be incorporated into the Joint National Training Capability and joint exercises. Additionally, joint doctrine on the transition from combat to post-conflict operations should be updated. (U) Refer to the USJFCOM OIF Major Combat Operations Report for a detailed review of joint operational lessons learned.

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(U) Endnotes

¹ (U) High Payoff Target (HPT) – A high value target whose loss will contribute to the success of friendly operations. JP 1-02

² (U) High Value Target (HVT) – An asset that the threat commander requires for the successful completion of a specific course of action. JP 1-02

³ (U) Re-role Target (RRT) – Assigning a friendly asset to a higher priority target or different mission tasking than previously assigned by the Air Tasking Order (ATO). Occurs within the ATO cycle. USCENCOM

⁴ (U) Time Sensitive Target (TST) – A target identified within the ATO cycle of such importance to the Combined Forces Commander that it must be struck as soon as possible with any asset. JP 1-02

⁵ (U) Dynamic Target (DT) – A target identified within the ATO cycle of significant importance to all components that it should be struck during the ATO period given available assets. USCENCOM

⁶ (U) Joint Critical Target (JCT) – A target identified within the ATO cycle that does not meet TST or DT criteria, but is important enough to introduce for strike during the ATO in execution. USCENCOM

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(U) Examples of consequence management and exploitation capabilities are USMC CBIRF and the future US Army Guardian Brigade concept.

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