



# Force Management and Organizational Capability in Joint Base Religious Support

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*“Humans are more important than hardware.”*

– SOF Truth #1

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When the 11th Airborne Division re-activated on June 6, 2022, at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER), it became the Army’s only division headquarters without an Army-led garrison for support. Having experienced ten Soldier suicides on JBER alone between 2020-2021 and wrestled for twenty-five years with organizational identity and mission, the decision to resurrect the 11th Airborne Division was a strategy to inject unit cohesion and purpose into the U.S. Army in Alaska.<sup>1</sup> Tragically, members of the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps assigned to the garrison on JBER responsible for addressing identity and purpose through spiritual readiness remain isolated from their fellow Soldiers due to joint base command relationships (COMREL). These Army Chaplains and Religious Affairs Specialists bear an Air Force identity and mission, constraining them from providing religious support and spiritual readiness aligned with the Army Senior Command. The COMREL dichotomy between the operating and generating force on joint bases creates misalignment with the Senior Commander’s intent and impairs spiritual readiness task and purpose. The Army Chaplain Corps must align its garrison assets under the Army Senior Commander on joint bases to achieve religious support unity of effort and strengthen spiritual readiness.

## Background

Unlike Geographic Combatant Commands (GCCs), the creation of joint bases has a fiscal, rather than operational, purpose.<sup>2</sup> Neither joint base doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, or policy (DOTMLPF-P) originate or integrate with the Department of Defense’s (DOD’s) Joint Strategic Planning System (JSPS) construct.<sup>3</sup> Aimed primarily at reducing cost and eliminating redundancy, Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) affected not only real property and funding but also personnel and mission. With the transfer of installation support functions (ISF) on joint bases to the lead service, the Army religious support ISF aligned its priorities and procedures with Air Force operating instructions (OIs) rather than Army regulations (ARs) wherever it was the supported component. Although Joint Publication 3-83, *Religious Affairs in Joint Operations*, describes interoperability authorities and procedures, it does not address joint bases which operate according to Department of Defense Operating Instruction Support Agreements, local Memorandums of Agreement (MOAs) and lead-service doctrine.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, joint basing categorizes Installation

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Management Command (IMCOM) Soldiers as Joint Base Integrated (JBI) or Joint Base Supported Component Force Structure (JBSCF) personnel. Local MOAs capture these changes and are co-signed by the Vice Chiefs of Staff of each service component.<sup>5</sup>

In its strategic overview, the BRAC report admits, “No institution will remain successful without adapting to its constantly changing environment. Our armed forces must adapt to changing threats, evolving technology, reconfigured organizational structures, and new strategies.”<sup>6</sup> Since the implementation of joint basing in 2009, the U.S. Army in Alaska has undergone significant organizational change in response to an extremely dynamic and challenging operational environment.<sup>7</sup> This level of transformation requires a correlating sustainment response from its power projection platform.

According to the 2022 Joint Base Operating Guidance, a 2012 policy memorandum requiring the Joint Base Partnership Council to review each MOA every three years remains in effect.<sup>8</sup> This process, known as the Joint Management Oversight Structure (JMOS), is a four-tiered accountability architecture to ensure fairness between the services, provide compliance oversight, dispute resolution, and MOA change approval.<sup>9</sup> In the fourteen years since the implementation of joint basing, each of the three Air Force-led joint bases conducted this review only once: Joint Base Langley-Eustis (JBLE)<sup>10</sup> and Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA) between 2011-2012<sup>11</sup> and Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) between 2022-2023.<sup>12</sup> While joint base procedures such as periodic MOA revision can serve as useful tools in resolving force management and organizational

capability issues, they can only do so if executed on prescribed timelines and elevated to the appropriate JMOS tier.

## Problem

In an information paper from 2020, U.S. Army Alaska (USARAK) made the following observations:

Joint bases are not truly Joint bases; rather, they are installations where one service is the supporting command (lead) and other organizations are supported commands. JBER administratively functions under Air Force regulations that are not aligned with Army requirements, timelines, [and] priorities...These differences result in gaps and seams that impede Army unit readiness.<sup>13</sup>

The DOTmLPF-P domains described in Army Regulation 71-9, *Warfighting Capabilities Determination*,<sup>14</sup> Army Regulation 71-32, *Force Development and Documentation Consolidated Policies*,<sup>15</sup> and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3150.25H, *Joint Lessons Learned Program*, provide the best framework for understanding and addressing these “gaps and seams.”<sup>16</sup>

## DOCTRINE AND ORGANIZATION

Although JBER recently conducted a comprehensive MOA revision in response to these concerns, it failed to address the affiliation and task organization of JBI Chaplain Corps personnel. Chaplains and Religious Affairs Specialists comprise roughly half of Soldiers assigned to a garrison headquarters.<sup>17</sup> AR 165-1, *Army Chaplain Corps Activities*, defines the roles and responsibilities of Religious Support Offices (RSOs) and their

relationship to the Senior Command Chaplain on the installation.<sup>18</sup> This position, created in April 2020, is now codified in the new AR 165-1 and, as of July 2022, includes the 11th Airborne Division on JBER (although the O6 chaplain in Alaska will now be an IMCOM billet).<sup>19</sup>

In addition to meeting regulatory requirements, the formalized relationship between the RSO and Army Senior Command achieves greater unity of effort, improved leader development, and ensures senior rater equity between the operating and generating force.<sup>20</sup> Without shared identity and organizational alignment however, generating force assets are unable to represent the Army Senior Command, advocate for religious support equities, or provide dedicated spiritual readiness to their fellow Soldiers and Families. Can the Senior Command Chaplain carry this burden alone? If the value of organizational alignment, service culture, and identity for Soldiers were irrelevant, the 11th Airborne Division would not be re-activated today. The point of friction with joint basing in this area is its COMREL.

## POLICY

Joint base dysfunction exists outside of Alaska. In its 2021 audit of joint bases across DOD, the Office of the Inspector General confirmed the following:

Lead Components at JB Lewis-McChord, JB Anacostia-Bolling, and JB Elmendorf-Richardson did not always meet minimum performance standards or other terms specified in the MOA...Joint base personnel often identified Service-based decisions, operational differences, and a DOD-wide lack of joint base knowledge and operational guidance

as reasons why MOA terms were not met...These factors can also hamper relations on the installation and potentially marginalize the input, needs, and mission of the supported Components.<sup>21</sup>

Despite not operating jointly, the supporting (lead) component still operationally controls (OPCON) JBI or JBSCF personnel from their sister service. Joint bases have no joint manning document, retain the culture of the supporting component, and typically prioritize the mission of the lead service unless the stakeholders use the JMOS process effectively to enforce accountability measures. With only one MOA revision per joint base in fourteen years, little has been done to address this. The relationship between operational units and installation religious support works most effectively when aligned within a service-specific organization and culture. It is only when both services maintain their distinctive identities that equity exists and joint operations can occur.

## PERSONNEL

For the past four years, the Army's number one priority was "People First."<sup>22</sup> The focus on warfighting and readiness today still relies on strengthening the Army profession and building cohesive teams.<sup>23</sup> The 11th Airborne Division operationalizes this:

Arctic capability and mission readiness ultimately depend on our greatest resource, our Soldiers. People have been and remain our top priority, with a focus on taking care of Soldiers, Families, and our Army community through leadership and connections. On 6 June 2022, the 11th Airborne Division activation

properly aligned *identity, purpose, and mission* for our soldiers, and the chief of staff of the Army charged us with reestablishing the proud reputation of this storied division. This was a huge missing piece of the puzzle. We improved soldiers' and family members' quality of life by clearing away the previous "*Frankenstein-like*" creation that was cobbled together with various patches and units. The best quality of life program in the Army remains tough, challenging, training as *part of a cohesive unit*—and that must remain foundational [emphasis mine].<sup>24</sup>

Likewise, Army Field Manual 7-22, *Army Holistic Health and Fitness*, describes spiritual readiness in terms of purpose, meaning, and identity.<sup>25</sup> Soldier readiness is directly proportional to the level of connection within a community that shares a common purpose and identity. In the Army, these values are both organizational and spiritual. The Army Chaplain Corps lives at the intersection of both.

While tangible assets such as materiel and facility transfer usually receive the most attention, the center of gravity in joint base religious support is not chapels or funding but identity and mission. Although local MOAs tacitly acknowledge the Army identity of JBI and JBSCF Soldiers as the supported component, Army Chaplain Corps personnel OPCON to a sister service negates this description. Additionally, and in contrast to JBSCF Airmen on Army-led Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) who retain their organic unit patch, JBI and JBSCF Soldiers on JBLE, JBSA, and JBER wear an Air Force shoulder sleeve insignia. In the case of the Army Support Element on JBER, this happened just prior to the

MOA revision of 2022. My personal communication with JBSCF Religious Affairs Airmen at JBLM on this topic indicate they do not want to operate under the same conditions as the ASE Soldiers on JBER.<sup>26</sup>

JBI and JBSCF Soldiers do not appear on an Air Force manning document and do not count against their numbers but exist on an Army Table of Distribution and Allowances (TDA) with an Army Unit Identification Code (UIC).<sup>27</sup> Neither local MOA nor joint doctrine requires this cross-service identification. For Army Chaplains and Religious Affairs Specialists on Air Force-led joint bases, however, the status quo is assimilation and prioritization rather than partnership and equality.<sup>28</sup>

## LEADERSHIP, EDUCATION, AND TRAINING

Impediments to joint operations also exist outside of local MOAs and OIs. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld described the BRAC process as an opportunity to promote jointness in 2005 but the official report from the BRAC commission found the opposite to be true stating, "very few of the hundreds of proposals increased jointness, and some actually decreased or removed joint and cross-service connections...collocation is not synonymous with integration, and transformation is not synonymous with jointness."<sup>29</sup> This is ironic considering BRAC initially prioritized "current and future mission capabilities and the impact on operational readiness of the total force of the Department of Defense, including the impact on joint warfighting, training, and readiness" as the first of eight statutory selection criteria.<sup>30</sup>

According to Major General Brian Eifler, Commanding General of the 11th

Airborne Division, interoperability with joint partners is essential to building capability in the unforgiving environment of the Arctic.<sup>31</sup> Army Senior Commanders have a responsibility to drive the strategic vision for everything from Soldier readiness to power projection.<sup>32</sup> Army Command Policy defines the roles of senior commanders as caring for Soldiers, Families, and Army Career Professionals to enable readiness across the force.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, the COMREL between Army Senior Commanders and Army Chaplain Corps personnel in JBI or JBSCF positions on joint bases constrains this.

## Solution

In his thesis at the United States Army War College examining the efficacy of garrison religious support in joint

operations, Chaplain (Colonel) Michael Brainerd recommends the RSO be task organized under the Army Senior Commander and supervised directly by the Army Senior Chaplain at that location.<sup>34</sup> Such a realignment, Brainerd argues, has the potential to increase chapel funding, solidify organizational identity, create shared purpose, promote common culture, and increase unity of effort. This course of action mirrors the motive and approach of the Army in the re-activation of the 11th Airborne Division.

Brainerd goes on to propose a joint application of this, offering examples of BRAC products such as joint basing and the (at that time) co-located Army, Air Force, and Navy chaplain schools at Fort Jackson, SC. However, in 2014 joint basing was only five years old and already experiencing fractures.<sup>35</sup> The Air Force and Navy chaplain schools

then moved back to their original locations in 2017 after it became evident that the training, doctrine, and culture of religious support between the services were not compatible even in a training environment.<sup>36</sup>

Unlike joint basing, the Army Chaplain Corps does participate in the JSPS and recently conducted a proponent-wide Capabilities Based Assessment (CBA) in 2022 as part of the Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System (JCIDS).<sup>37</sup> Although only a small part of the overall force development process, CBAs exist to identify capability gaps and then provide DOTMLPF-P recommendations to address them.<sup>38</sup> The CBA is phase one of a five phase force development process that potentially ends with changes to manning documents and task organization.<sup>39</sup> In preparation to



support MDO in the Army of 2030 and beyond, the Army Chaplain Corps' CBA examined religious support and spiritual readiness within each DOTMLPF-P domain at echelon across active duty and reserve components.<sup>40</sup> In its July 2023 report to Army Futures Command, the Chaplain Corps identified eight capability gaps with proposed solutions, including the Army Senior Chaplain's responsibilities to oversee garrison RSOs and force design updates (FDUs) to the Division Chaplain section.<sup>41</sup> These gaps and proposed solutions tie to an MDO statement which tasks the Army Senior Commander's chaplain with spiritual readiness responsibility during the competition phase on both Army garrisons and joint bases.<sup>42</sup> Although this same report recommends leveraging coordinating instructions as the means to accomplish this for units not organic to the command, a COMREL solution akin to Brainerd's 2014 proposal is more sustainable and enduring. The Chaplain Corps could accomplish this without any changes to MTOE or TDA manning documents by following a precedent already established by the Judge Advocate General (JAG).

The Army JAG Corps has aligned its generating force assets under the Army Senior Commander, even on joint bases, in its consolidated legal office using a doctrinal solution.<sup>43</sup> The Army Chaplain

Corps should follow suit and adopt this model. This force management strategy increases the organizational capability of both the Army Senior Command and the garrison RSO, aligns their identity and mission, and uses a systems approach to increase unity of effort. The alignment combines MTOE and TDA assets under the Army Senior Commander by changing task organization and not force structure, all without compromising the garrison or operational mission, but improving the effectiveness of both.<sup>44</sup> This course of action would not affect brigade or battalion UMTs and it empowers Army Chaplain Corps IMCOM personnel to represent Army requirements to the Joint Base Commander and serve on equal footing with their sister service counterparts. The Army Chaplain Corps should integrate operational and generating force COMREL alignment, modeled after the JAG Corps' consolidated legal office, into its DOTMLPF-P solutions as its CBA moves through the force development process. Although Functional Solution Analysis has already occurred, the Army Senior Leader Reference Handbook, *How the Army Runs*, states, "Every process may not always be required before organizational changes are made . . . and the process steps may occur out of sequence."<sup>45</sup> If the Chaplain Corp's CBA is the vehicle to achieve this, doctrine is the driver. This action, supported by strategic

endorsement from the Armed Forces Chaplain Board, will provide the joint staffing required for such a transformation and is no cost to the U.S. Army or the U.S. Air Force.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

Organizational capability issues require force management solutions. Joint basing is unable to provide senior commanders the dedicated and aligned religious support required to maintain spiritual readiness because it exists independently of the Joint Strategic Planning System. As a result of COMREL dichotomy, Army generating force assets assume a sister service identity in locations where they are the supported component which isolates them from the Army Senior Command, the Army Senior Chaplain, and their fellow Soldiers. This separation constrains the Army Senior Commander's ability to fulfill doctrinal requirements and disables Army garrison Chaplains and Religious Affairs Specialists from effectively representing, engaging, or advocating on the Army's behalf. In response, the Army Chaplain Corps must align its garrison assets under the Army Senior Commander on joint bases to achieve religious support unity of effort and strengthen spiritual readiness.

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