

Jeffrey Thomas

Professor Mark Wegge

Module 4: Joint Capabilities

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Summative Assessment #6

Question: North Africa Vignette

Using the North Africa scenario and background found in Session 4.15, Student Requirements (Naval War College. Joint Military Operations Department. Service Capabilities Vignette for North Africa: Scenario and Background Information) and background information found throughout Blocks 3 & 4, the student will recommend (and justify):

1. What capabilities each Service could provide that would be particularly effective in this crisis? (Why select one capability over others? What are the pluses and minuses of each capability?)
2. What impact does the availability of strategic lift have on the capabilities recommended and the sequencing/flow into the Joint Operations Area? Do strategic lift requirements alter the capabilities selection their availability? If so, how?
3. What command and control structure would be best suited as the U.S. integrates with host nation and possible coalition partners?

In answering the above questions, one should consider the following:

- What implications do the scenario timelines and location(s) have on the capabilities recommended?
- What limitations are there on employing the recommendations?
- Are there complementary capabilities between Services that contribute to greater overall effectiveness? For the capabilities each Service offers, what do they need from other Services to make them fully effective, or more effective?
- If more than one Service offers similar capabilities, are there reasons to prefer one rather than the other in this scenario?
- How does the maturity of the theater affect the choice of capabilities? How will they get there, and how will they be sustained? Where can they be based, if needed?
- What risk does the recommendation carry?
- Are there redundant capabilities in the recommendations? If so, what are the implications?
- What are the limitations of what can be accomplished in the crisis?
- Does the choice of capabilities affect the ability to "disengage" if national policy so dictates?
- Would the recommendation(s) change if the U.S. is expected to maintain a permanent presence in the local area? How would they change?
- Are there potential coalition partners who might offer capabilities that enhance the recommendations?

Note: Do not address these points individually as the questions are answered. Use them to analyze the situation and potential capability requirements and to justify/support selected capabilities.

Response

The North Africa vignette opens with a fast-moving crisis in which Algeria can launch a major offensive against Morocco with little warning, backed by chemical-capable Scud-B missiles dispersed to hidden firing positions, Kilo-class submarines moving through Gibraltar, and dispersed air forces poised to exploit hesitation (U.S. Naval War College [NWC], 2020, pp. 4-5). Strategically, the United States seeks to protect national interests, prevent chemical escalation, and preserve regional stability in North Africa as a matter of credibility and security. At the theater strategic level, the aim is to deter Algerian aggression, assure Morocco, and preserve freedom of navigation and operational access in the Western Mediterranean approaches so United States and coalition leaders retain viable options under political constraint. Operationally, the objective is narrower and decisive. Deny Algeria the ability to coerce or seize decisive terrain in Morocco through a mechanized thrust enabled by dispersed air forces, Kilo-class submarines, and chemical-capable Scud-B missiles dispersed to hidden firing positions. The answer requires a disciplined set of joint contributions, drawn from every Service and Special Operations Forces (SOF), but limited to what the scenario demands.

The United States Space Force (USSF) deserves early attention because the crisis is built around time-sensitive uncertainty. Algeria's dispersed chemical-capable Scud-B missiles and short warning window create an operational premium on warning, targeting confidence, and rapid dissemination across a wide battlespace. Spacepower doctrine provides the precise capability the combined joint task force (CJTF) must emphasize: "Information Mobility provides timely, rapid and reliable collection and transportation of data across the range of military operations in support of tactical, operational, and strategic decision making" (United States Space Force [USSF], 2020, p. 34). That capability supports missile warning, assured data transport, and

resilient positioning, navigation, and timing (PNT) for air defense and strike. The benefit is reach without dependence on nearby land infrastructure. The risk sits in the terrestrial segment and reliance on protected gateways. A prudent commander treats this as a vulnerability to manage, not an assumption to lean on.

Naval forces are central because access is constrained and sustainment must move across contested water. The vignette places Algerian Kilo submarines through the Strait of Gibraltar, a direct threat to movement and to the credibility of follow-on reinforcement. It also signals that Spain fears terrorist retaliation and is reluctant to provide basing, which increases the value of sea-based options and offshore posture. The most relevant naval capability is sea control focused on anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and protection of sea lines of communication (SLOC).

Doctrine defines sea control operations as “the employment of naval forces, supported by land and air forces as appropriate, in order to achieve military objectives in vital sea areas”

(Department of the Navy, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations [OPNAV], 2010, p. 1-5). In this scenario, sea control is the condition that makes reinforcement and sustainment credible. The upside is endurance and political flexibility. The downside is that Algeria can contest the maritime domain, which drives serious ASW, integrated air defense, and disciplined routing.

Air Force contributions matter because speed and reach are the only way to move key enablers while access remains uncertain. The vignette’s short warning window demands rapid movement of command nodes, air defense elements, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), and specialized personnel, while simultaneously contesting Algeria’s dispersed air forces and supporting defense against missile coercion. Air Force doctrine captures the relevant capability language: “Global Reach is the ability to project military capability responsively-with unsurpassed velocity and precision-anywhere, and provide mobility to rapidly supply, position,

or reposition joint forces” (Department of the Air Force [DAF], 2021, p. 3). In this vignette, the useful subset is strategic airlift, air refueling, and counterair functions that protect the force and preserve options. The advantage is responsiveness. The limitation is capacity and reliance on airfields, fuel, and protection, which ties directly to strategic lift constraints and the need to defend reception nodes.

The Marine Corps offers a crisis-response capability aligned to political and geographic friction. Amphibious doctrine defines the construct: “An amphibious operation is a military operation launched from the sea by an amphibious force (AF) to conduct landing force (LF) operations within the littorals” (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff [CJCS], 2019a, p. I-1). NWC 3153T reinforces the practical utility of an embarked Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) as a forward-deployed package designed for rapid employment with organic aviation and logistics (NWC, 2023, p. 62). In the North Africa vignette, the Marine Corps contribution should remain tightly framed around expeditionary crisis response, limited-objective operations, and reinforcement of key nodes under constrained basing. The strength is a self-contained, sea-based combined-arms tool that offers credible options without a large early footprint. The limitation is scale. A MEU is not a substitute for sustained defense against mechanized formations.

The Army is indispensable because the operational objective (OPO) involves denial of terrain seizure and defense against mechanized penetration. The vignette’s order of battle (OOB) indicates Algeria fields three mechanized divisions, and the ground threat is a central driver of the crisis. Army doctrine captures the enduring logic of landpower: “The ultimate determinant in war is a man on the scene with a gun” (Department of the Army [DA], 2019, p. 1-2). For this scenario, the Army capability focus should be disciplined. The most relevant subset is integrated

air and missile defense (IAMD) to blunt Scud coercion and protect critical nodes, paired with brigade combat power appropriate to defeat mechanized forces once reception, sustainment, and positioning are viable. The advantage is staying power and the ability to hold terrain. The constraint is strategic mobility and sustainment demand.

Special Operations Forces (SOF) should be treated as a precision enabler that reduces uncertainty and expands options, not as a stand-alone solution. Joint doctrine states, “SR entails reconnaissance and surveillance actions normally conducted to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance” (CJCS, 2020, p. II-5). In this vignette, special reconnaissance (SR) supports the OPO by reducing uncertainty around mobile missile forces, key movement corridors, and high-value nodes, especially when dispersal and deception degrade other collection. The advantage is access and discrimination with a small footprint. The limitation is limited organic sustainment and the requirement for close integration with joint ISR, fires, and maneuver.

The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) should be explicitly considered, even if its most visible maritime missions are not central to the vignette’s main threats. The forces and capabilities handbook describes Coast Guard employment of “Law Enforcement Detachments (LEDETs), Port Security Units (PSUs), and other specialized assets” in support of national security tasks (NWC, 2023, pp. 137-138). In this scenario, Coast Guard relevance is situational and enabling. PSUs can support port security and force protection tied to reception and sustainment. LEDETs can support maritime security and interdiction functions as required by policy and authorities. The operational limitation is scale and the fact that mechanized penetration, submarines, and missiles dominate the crisis. The Coast Guard should be considered, then employed selectively where its authorities and capabilities materially reduce operational risk.

Strategic lift affects the recommended capability set by shaping feasibility, readiness, and operational risk. The Forces/Capabilities Handbook notes that sustainment and deployment requirements are met through sealift, airlift, and pre-positioning (afloat and ashore), known as the strategic mobility triad (NWC, 2023, p. 177). Lift constraints make some capabilities functionally unavailable early, especially heavy land combat power and large sustainment nodes that depend on ports, staging space, and protected sea lines of communication. Airlift is expensive and capacity-limited, yet it delivers speed for high-value enablers with disproportionate operational impact, including command nodes, ISR elements, SOF packages, and air defense components (DAF, 2021, p. 3). Sealift is slower, yet it delivers the mass that makes sustained land defense and long-duration operations credible, while pre-positioning reduces delay when access and reception capacity exist. Where services offer overlapping effects, the commander should prefer capabilities that arrive fast and operate with minimal host-nation dependence, because redundant heavy formations consume lift and throughput without increasing early deterrence proportionally. In an immature theater with constrained access, the CJTF can rapidly improve warning, protection, and deterrence, but it cannot instantly generate the reception, sustainment, and mass required for a prolonged campaign without secure ports, airfields, and protected sea lines.

A lead-nation (LN) CJTF structure fits this scenario because it provides unity of effort and speed of decision while respecting national sovereignty. Joint doctrine defines the construct: “An LN structure exists when all member nations place their forces under the control of one nation” (CJCS, 2019b, p. II-6). The operational command and control (C2) recommendation is a multinational force commander or combined joint task force (MNFC/CJTF) under United States LN authority, supported by functional components: Combined Force Air Component

Commander (CFACC), Combined Force Maritime Component Commander (CFMCC), Combined Force Land Component Commander (CFLCC), and Combined Force Special Operations Component Commander (CFSOCC). The CJTF should incorporate a Coalition Coordination Center (CCC) and a Host Nation Coordination Element (HNCE) at the CJTF level to manage intelligence release, rules of engagement alignment, sustainment prioritization, and political constraints. A space coordination element should be integrated within the CJTF staff to translate information mobility, missile warning, and PNT support into operational priorities and targeting decisions (USSF, 2020, p. 34). This construct also gives the commander a clean way to plug in coalition high-demand enablers, such as maritime patrol, air refueling, ISR, and medical or logistics support, without diluting unity of command.

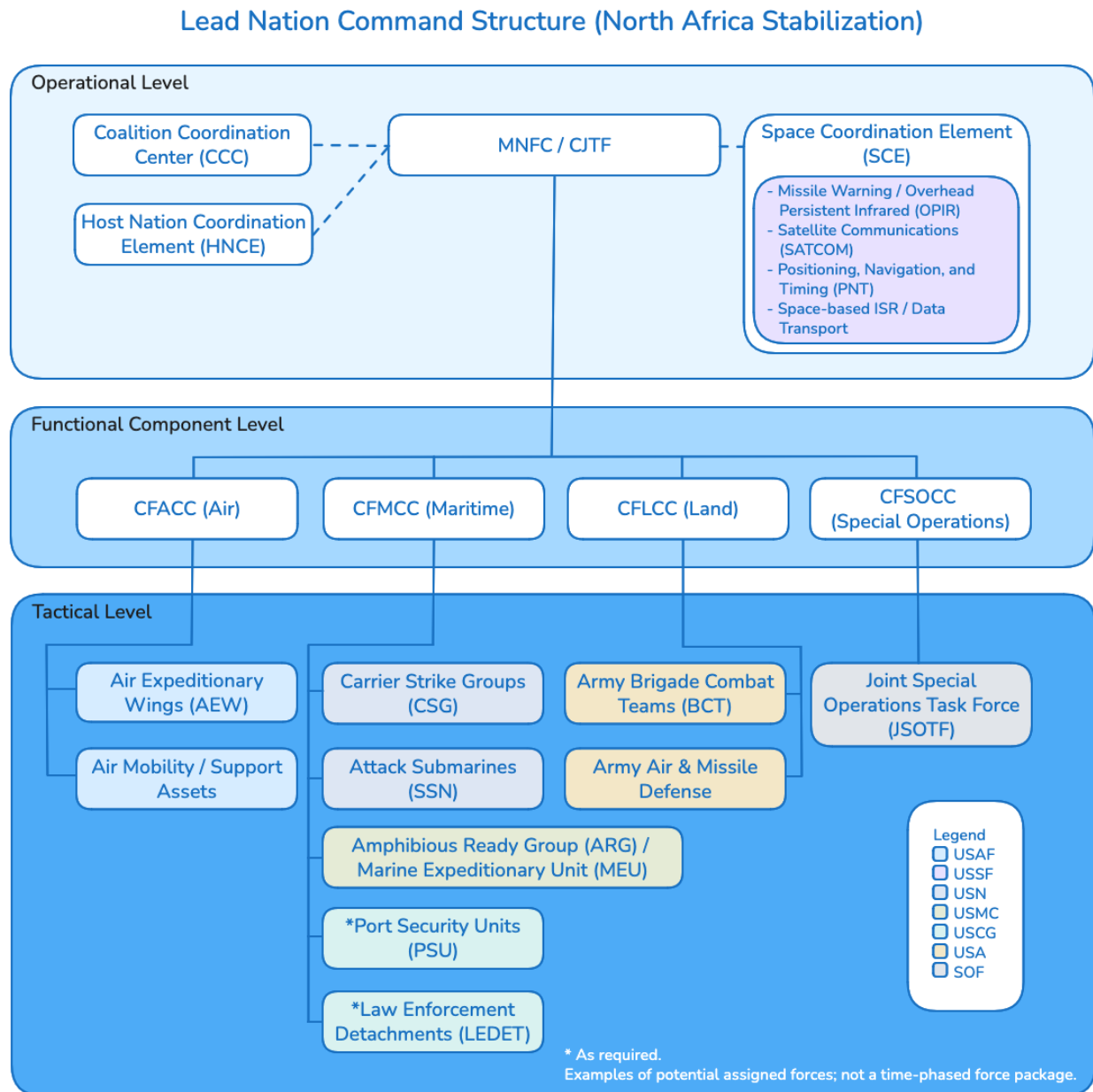


Figure 1: Lead Nation Command Structure (North Africa Stabilization)

A reasonable counterview argues for a single-domain emphasis. Landpower advocates will argue that the mechanized threat demands immediate concentration on ground combat power. Airpower advocates will argue that rapid strike and interdiction can coerce and dislocate the offensive. Maritime advocates will argue that sea control and offshore power projection provide flexibility without political exposure. Each argument contains truth, yet each becomes brittle when forced

to carry the whole operational burden. The vignette's threat design is multi-domain by intent, with submarines, dispersed air, and mobile missiles used to exploit seams and delay decision (NWC, 2020, pp. 4-5). The joint answer is selectivity. Choose the subset of capabilities from each Service and SOF that directly closes an operational vulnerability, then integrate them under a CJTF structure built for speed and unity of effort.

In summary, the nested objectives provide direction, but the main work is operational: deny Algeria the ability to coerce or seize Morocco through mechanized action supported by dispersed air forces, Kilo-class submarines, and chemical-capable Scud-B missiles (NWC, 2020, pp. 4-5, 12). Space Force information mobility compresses decision timelines and supports missile warning and targeting (USSF, 2020, p. 34). Navy sea control denies undersea leverage and protects maritime movement (OPNAV, 2010, p. 1-5). Air Force global reach delivers rapid mobility and sustains air operations under access friction (DAF, 2021, p. 3). Marine Corps expeditionary response provides a sea-based option aligned to constrained basing (CJCS, 2019a, p. I-1). Army landpower and integrated air and missile defense provide the capacity to hold terrain and blunt coercion (DA, 2019, p. 1-2). SOF special reconnaissance reduces uncertainty against dispersed threats (CJCS, 2020, p. II-5). The Coast Guard is considered and selectively employed where port and maritime security tasks support the operational problem (NWC, 2023, p. 138). Strategic lift shapes feasibility through the strategic mobility triad of airlift, sealift, and pre-positioning (NWC, 2023, p. 177). This capability set also preserves disengagement options by emphasizing sea-based and rapidly redeployable elements while limiting early reliance on large, fixed infrastructure ashore. A lead-nation CJTF with functional components and coalition and host-nation coordination nodes provides unity of effort and operational speed (CJCS, 2019b, p. II-6).

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