

Achieving Unity of Effort in Interagency Operations
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In the last two decades, the United States has experienced some truly stellar military victories: rolling back Saddam Hussein's aggression against Kuwait in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, establishing a secure environment for the implementation of peace accords in the Balkans, driving the Taliban from power in Afghanistan in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and toppling Saddam Hussein's brutal regime in a matter of weeks.

During the same period, however, the United States has also experienced some profound operational failures: from the unsuccessful effort to stabilize and rebuild war-torn Somalia to the failure to quell the insurgency and jump-start reconstruction early on in post-conflict Iraq. In such cases, the United States, and the international community more broadly, has had great difficulty translating military successes into the achievement of broader strategic objectives. Winning the peace has proven to be much more difficult than winning wars.¹

While some of these operational failures may have stemmed from misguided policy or mistaken judgment, others have resulted from poor policy execution. In numerous operations, the United States has been unable to bring to bear all of its instruments of national power—political, economic, military, and informational—in a coherent and effective campaign. In some cases, inadequate vertical integration meant that policy decisions made in Washington did not translate into intended actions on the ground. In others, poor horizontal integration meant that the various agencies involved in execution operated independently of one another rather than as a team, yielding an uncoordinated and ineffective campaign. Sometimes, unresponsive oversight meant that decision-makers in Washington were not providing policy direction in a sufficiently timely fashion to meet the needs of those who were executing policy in the field. And in all of these

¹ Many of the ideas presented here were initially developed as part of the *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols* study, which I co-lead while at CSIS. I have continued this work on interagency reform as President of the Center for a New American Security.

cases, the U.S. government simply lacked the unity of effort necessary to achieve its strategic goals and objectives.

These problems have several sources. First, unlike the U.S. military, which has doctrine and a standard approach to planning its operations, the U.S. government as a whole lacks established procedures for planning and conducting interagency operations. Each new administration tends to reinvent this wheel, either issuing new Presidential guidance—which too often overlooks the lessons learned and best practices of its predecessors—or ignoring the issue entirely until it faces an actual crisis. This *ad hoc* approach has kept the United States from learning from its mistakes and improving its performance in complex contingencies over time. It is no wonder that U.S. personnel who have served in multiple operations over the last 10-15 years lament feeling a bit like Sisyphus.

In addition, the U.S. government lacks the mechanisms necessary to coordinate and integrate the actions of its various agencies at all levels—in Washington, within regions, and in the field. For example, the NSC does not currently have adequate staff dedicated to coordinating the development of integrated interagency plans for complex operations and providing effective policy oversight of operations under way. Nor are there established mechanisms to enable the various U.S. government actors who will be involved in a given operation to develop a truly integrated, interagency campaign plan. And when the United States actually conducts an operation, there is no standard approach to fully integrating the activities of military forces and civilian agencies on the ground. To the contrary, an examination of the coordination mechanisms used in operations ranging from Haiti and Bosnia during the Clinton administration to Afghanistan and Iraq during the Bush administration suggests that U.S. civilian and military leaders tend to develop new approaches in each operation. These *ad hoc*, often personality-driven approaches too often ignore the experience gleaned from previous operations.

Finally, the civilian agencies of the United States government simply lack the capacity to rapidly deploy personnel to conduct operations on the ground. In practical terms, this lack of operational capacity in the agencies other than DoD has had two profound effects on the U.S. military in operation after operation. First, it has expanded the military's mission substantially, as men and women in uniform have been forced to take on tasks (such as economic reconstruction and judicial reform) that might be more appropriately or better performed by civilian experts. Second, it has extended the duration and costs of the military's mission, as milestones central to its exit strategy, such as the reconstitution of local police forces or the holding of elections, are delayed.

At the end of the day, unity of effort across the U.S. government is not just about being more efficient or even more effective in operations. It can determine whether the United States succeeds or fails in a given intervention. It can also determine whether the ultimate costs of success—both dollars spent and lives lost or forever changed—are as low as possible or higher than necessary. In this sense, unity of effort is not just something that is nice to have; it is imperative.

Achieving Greater Unity of Effort

The demand for the United States and the international community to conduct complex contingency operations of one sort or another is likely to remain quite high. Whether aimed at denying terrorists safe haven, spreading free-market democracy, stopping genocide, restoring stability, or keeping weapons of mass destruction out of hostile hands, complex contingency operations will be a defining feature of the early 21st century. Because these operations are fundamentally interagency in character—requiring contributions from multiple agencies—achieving unity of effort in their execution will be critical to reducing both the risks of failure and the costs of success.

Over the last decade, several efforts have been made to improve U.S. effectiveness in complex operations. In 1997, the Clinton administration's PDD 56² articulated a standard approach to managing complex contingency operations based on lessons learned from Somalia and Haiti. Throughout the 1990s, a number of "pol-mil plans" were written and rehearsed at the strategic level, adding greater coherence to USG preparations for international interventions ranging from Bosnia to Sierra Leone. During the same period, interagency gaming and simulations explored the requirements of complex operations and identified both process and capability shortfalls.

More recently, Combatant Commanders have formed Joint Interagency Coordination Groups to bring interagency perspectives into their planning and operations. In the field, Civil-Military Operations Centers, Civilian-Military Centers, Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Centers and, more recently, Provincial Reconstruction Teams have been used in various interventions to coordinate civil-military operations on the ground. These innovations have had varying degrees of success. But fundamentally, they have all been piecemeal approaches, and none has solved the larger integration problem.

² Presidential Decision Directive 56, "Managing Complex Contingency Operations," (Washington, DC: The White House/National Security Council, May 1997). <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd56.htm>

The Vision: Integrated Planning and Execution of Complex Operations

Strengthening integration requires thinking through how the USG is likely to approach different types of operations long before planning for a specific operation begins. The next President should task his or her NSC staff to work with agency counterparts to develop interagency “concepts of operation” for critical mission areas, from combating terrorism and homeland security to stability operations and combating WMD. Interagency concepts of operation would articulate the United States’ overarching objectives in a given mission area, identify critical tasks that need to be undertaken, lay out an overall approach to how these tasks would be performed, and assign responsibility for specific areas to specific agencies.

These concepts of operation would provide the basis for codifying an interagency division of labor in various mission areas and for better aligning agency authorities and resources with their operational responsibilities. They would also provide a basis for assessing agency capabilities to execute their assigned tasks, and developing action plans to remedy critical shortfalls. If fully implemented, this approach would significantly enhance the USG’s preparedness to deal with specific interagency operations when they arise.

The process of interagency planning for a specific complex contingency operation would begin with a decision by the President or by the Principals or Deputies Committee of the National Security Council. Following that decision, the Deputy National Security Adviser would be charged with guiding the development of planning guidance for the operation, overseeing interagency planning and rehearsals for the operation, and ensuring the President remains fully briefed on plans for the operation as they evolve and events on the ground as the operation unfolds. The Deputies Committee would be designated as the primary interagency decision-making body responsible for overseeing the planning and conduct of complex contingency operations.³

Each operation would be overseen on a day to day basis by an Executive Committee composed of senior Presidential appointees (Undersecretaries or Assistant Secretaries) from the relevant regional and functional offices of all agencies participating in the operation. It would be chaired by the NSC Senior Director for the relevant region or a senior civilian appointed by the President for this purpose, and supported by a new NSC office for Complex Contingency Planning, which would provide functional expertise on the interagency planning process. A governing principle of this group should be the accountability of its members as Presidential appointees.

³ This approach draws on elements of both the Clinton administration’s PDD-56 and the Bush Administration’s draft NSPD-“XX”. (The NSPD was given the designation “XX” because it was not signed.)

The Executive Committee's first task would be assisting its chair in drafting the planning guidance for the operation. This guidance would define the mission, its overall objectives, the desired end state, the roles and responsibilities of various agencies, and the mechanisms to be used to achieve unity of effort across USG operations. The Deputies Committee would review the Guidance before its implementation.

While the guidance was under development, members of the Executive Committee would also help identify personnel from their respective agencies to serve on an Interagency Crisis Planning Team (ICPT) that would work intensively with military campaign planners from the relevant Combatant Command. Chaired by the NSC Senior Adviser for Complex Contingency Planning or his or her designee, the ICPT would comprise regional and functional experts from all of the agencies with responsibilities in the operation.⁴ The ICPT would also have extensive reach back capabilities, such as secure means of communications like video teleconferencing and collaborative web-based tools, to enable its members to engage experts in regional and functional offices of their home agencies in developing specific aspects of the plan. The ICPT's purpose would be to develop a truly integrated interagency campaign plan for all aspects of the operation, to be approved by the Deputies Committee and ultimately the President. Based on the planning guidance, the ICPT would integrate the development of various plans to implement that guidance, de-conflicting component planning and seeking to create synergies wherever possible.

Ideally, interagency planning would be organized not according to the traditional phases of conflict but by parallel streams of activity. An ICPT preparing for a post-conflict reconstruction operation might, for example, include multiple interagency planning teams, each of which would plan for a given area of activity, such as security, governance, justice/rule of law, or social and economic well-being. This would enable interagency integration at a much lower level while ensuring that planning for winning the peace also received priority and attention from the start. The ICPT should also plan "backwards" from the desired end state to the point of intervention in order to ensure that the United States' ultimate objectives in the operation drive how the intervention is conducted rather than vice versa.

4 The proposed ICPT model builds on a similar model proposed by State S/CRS, but with two important differences. First, it would be chaired by NSC rather than State, empowering the chair with a direct line to the National Security Adviser and enabling him or her to play more of an "honest broker" role in resolving agency disputes. Second, it would ultimately work for the President, not the combatant commander, making the latter a supporting rather than the supported player in the planning process. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization Fact Sheet, (Washington, DC: Department of State, 11 March 2005), <http://www.state.gov/s/crs/rls/43327.htm>

Much of the value of this exercise would lie not in the plans themselves, but in the planning process, as underlying assumptions are brought to light, information is shared across agency stovepipes, different interpretations of the planning guidance are aired and addressed, and critical working relationships are forged. Were the interagency planning team unable to resolve a dispute between agencies, they could seek further guidance from the Executive Committee, which would either resolve the issue and clarify the guidance or refer the issue to the Deputies Committee for decision. In this sense, the normal NSC process would remain the “court of appeals” for resolving issues that arise in the course of the planning process.

Prior to formal approval, the Deputy National Security Adviser would host a rehearsal of the interagency campaign plan for the Deputies. This rehearsal would review the interagency planning guidance, the interagency campaign plan, and supporting plans developed by agencies or teams. The primary aim of this table top exercise would be to ensure that the plans reflect the guidance as intended, to reveal any disconnects between agency plans, identify issues or possible events that plans have not adequately addressed, and identify ways in which U.S. efforts could be made more effective. Conducting this rehearsal before the first U.S. boot hits the ground offers an invaluable opportunity to further integrate U.S. efforts before lives are on the line.

At some point in this planning process, the President would appoint a senior civilian to serve as his Special Representative, responsible for achieving the intervention’s strategic objectives and accountable for the success of the overall campaign.⁵ Together, the Special Representative and the Commander, Joint Task Force, who is responsible for all military operations in the campaign, would lead an Interagency Task Force charged with integrating U.S. interagency operations in the field. The principal purpose of the IATF would be to enhance the unity of effort among all the U.S. government actors involved—civilian and military—and, ultimately, improve the chances of success on the ground.⁶ The Special Representative and the CJTF would be supported by a fully integrated civil-military staff, organized along functional lines (e.g. with staffs for intelligence, planning, operations, logistics, administrative matters, etc.).⁷ Both civilian and military

5 This could be the U.S. Ambassador to a given country or another senior civilian of comparable stature. It should be noted that in many cases the United States may not have an Ambassador in the affected country at the time of the intervention.

6 In order to develop such an approach, I examined a range of models that the United States has used in recent operations, including the Civil Military Operations Center (as used in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia), the Joint Interagency Task Force (used in counter-drug operations), coordination between the U.S. Embassy and the Commander, Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Afghanistan, and coordination between the Coalition Provisional Authority and the CJTF in Iraq.

7 The majority of the IATF staff would be military personnel under the command of the CJTF and civilian personnel detailed from their home agencies to work for the senior civilian. In those cases in which a U.S. embassy exists, this

representatives of coalition partners could also be integrated into the task force as appropriate.

Ideally, for each complex contingency operation undertaken, the United States would establish a core IATF staff early on, outside the area of operations, to participate in the interagency planning and preparation for the operation. The IATF would deploy to the field with the CJTF, relying primarily on the U.S. military to provide the security, communications, logistics, and other support it would need to function.

Admittedly, the IATF would require some profound changes in the way that various U.S. agencies are used to doing business. Agency representatives would have to share intelligence and information more readily with their counterparts from other agencies. They would also have to develop new ways of operating alongside each other—as members of an integrated team rather than in their agency stovepipes. They would also have to develop a deeper understanding of (and perhaps appreciation for) the capabilities each agency can—and cannot—bring to an operation. This may sound like a tall order, but it is not so different from what the nation has asked of members of the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps over the last two decades in developing the capacity to conduct truly joint military operations.

The bottom line is this: Interagency operations are the next frontier of jointness and one that the United States cannot afford to neglect.

Actionable Recommendations

A number of specific recommendations arise from this vision of a truly integrated approach to the planning and conduct of interagency operations. They would reshape how the U.S. government operates and is organized at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels and also create the necessary capacity for operations on the civilian side.

At the Strategic Level:

The NSC needs to move beyond its traditional and well-accepted role of preparing decisions for the President and take a more active oversight role to ensure that Presidential intent (as reflected in those decisions) is realized through USG actions.

integrated staff should incorporate and expand on the existing country team. Private contractors and NGOs might also be included. While providing the expertise and perspectives of their home agencies, the civilian USG personnel would be expected to take direction from the President's Special Representative and the CJTF.

A stronger NSC role in providing policy oversight during planning and execution, however, does not mean that the NSC staff should be involved in the conduct of operations. NSC staff is neither equipped for an operational role, nor is it subject to the same level of Congressional accountability as the national security agencies. In particular, no NSC staffer should have directive authority; in those cases in which an NSC staffer may believe that Presidential guidance is being ignored, he or she can use the NSC process to raise the issue to higher levels for resolution.

Establish a new NSC Senior Director and office dedicated to integrating interagency planning for complex contingency operations.

The next President should appoint a new Senior Director for Complex Contingency Planning with a dedicated staff of civilian and military professionals with extensive planning expertise. This office would be responsible for chairing the Interagency Crisis Planning Teams described below and providing planning expertise to the Executive Committee for a specific operation. It would also be responsible for developing standard operating procedures for interagency planning. This office should be given the staff and resources necessary to support at least three simultaneous planning efforts. Ideally, a core staff of civilian and military planners would remain in place as administrations change to provide continuity.

Establish planning capacity for complex contingency operations in civilian agencies.

Effective interagency planning for operations will require agencies other than DoD to increase their capacity to participate in and contribute to the planning process. The establishment of the Office of the Coordinator for Stabilization and Reconstruction in the State Department is a first step in this direction. Other agencies that regularly participate in complex contingency operations, such as USAID, Treasury, Justice, and Commerce, should create staffs with operational planning expertise as well. This will be no small challenge in organizations that lack a planning culture, expertise, and resources. Congress should provide the necessary authorities and resources for the personnel required. Given its planning culture and expertise, DoD should offer to detail some of its planners to help jump-start and support new planning offices in other agencies.

Establish a standard, NSC-led approach to interagency planning at the strategic level for complex contingency operations, as described above.

This approach should be codified in a national security directive signed by the President and should build to the greatest extent possible on the best practices of the current and previous

administrations, such as the Clinton administration's PDD-56 on Managing Complex Contingency Operations, the Bush administration's NSPD-"XX", and the State S/CRS essential task list planning template.

At the Operational Level:

Create rapidly deployable Interagency Crisis Planning Teams for interagency campaign planning.

Chaired by the NSC Senior Director for Complex Contingency Planning, the ICPT for a given operation would be responsible for developing a truly integrated interagency campaign plan, based on the President's planning guidance for the operation, to be approved by the Deputies Committee and ultimately the President. Each ICPT would be composed of regional and functional experts from all of the agencies involved, and should have "reachback" capabilities to draw on the broader expertise resident in these agencies.

For any operation involving security, stability, transition and reconstruction operations, the COCOM and his CJTF should fully integrate these elements into their campaign plan. The COCOM should designate a subordinate commander to lead the military's participation in the interagency planning process.

This commander would participate in all aspects of military planning as well as the interagency planning process described above. Working with the ICPT, this commander would ensure that military planning is responsive to interagency planning guidance, seek to identify and resolve conflicts or disconnects between DoD planning and that of other agencies, increase synergy, and clarify what DoD needs from and can offer to other agencies during the operation.

At the Field Level:

For each complex contingency operation, establish an Interagency Task Force in the field to integrate the day to day efforts of all USG agencies and achieve greater unity of effort on the ground.

Each IATF would be led by a senior civilian appointed by the President⁸ and the commander of the military's joint task force for the operation. The President's Special Representative would be

⁸ The Special Representative could be the U.S. Ambassador to the country, if one was in place, or another senior civilian named by the President. In the former case, the IATF staff would build on and significantly expand the existing country team.

responsible for achieving the intervention's strategic objectives and accountable for the success of the overall campaign, and the Commander, Joint Task Force, would be responsible for all military operations in the campaign. Together, they would be supported by a fully integrated staff of civilian and military professionals organized along functional lines. The IATF structure should be flexible enough to include representatives of coalition partners and be adapted to operational circumstances.

Establish a standing IATF headquarters core element that is ready to deploy to an operation on short notice.

This standing headquarters core element (and its associated logistics and command and control backbone) would be the foundation for building the rest of an IATF once an operation was anticipated. Creating such a standing capacity is critical to reducing the response time to crises and to enabling the development of standard operating procedures, the training of personnel, and the forging of interagency relationships that will be put to the test in real-world operations. This core IATF staff would participate in interagency planning for the operation, increasing the likelihood that operations on the ground would reflect the President's intent and guidance, and would deploy to the theater to begin operations as soon as possible. The ideal initial home for this core element would be Joint Forces Command, where the construct could be fleshed out and refined through experimentation and exercises. If this organization proves its value in future operations, Congress should provide the additional resources necessary to establish a standing IATF headquarters core element for each region of the world.

Creating the Necessary Capacity

Create a new Training Center for Interagency and Coalition Operations.

An Interagency Training Center would provide rigorous training in integrated planning for complex contingency operations for NSC and agency personnel; pre-deployment training for those tapped for specific operations; and new employee (contractors and direct hires) training for those about to assume responsibilities for operational planning, oversight, and coordination. The Center could also train a cadre of senior leaders who could be rapidly inserted into the Interagency Crisis Planning Teams and Interagency Task Forces described above. A reserve of civilian team leaders who have spent months or years training and operating with their military counterparts would be an invaluable asset at the outset of an operation when coordinating civilian and military efforts is particularly critical.

The Center could also provide training in cooperation with U.S. allies and partners and develop standard operating procedures with these countries for the planning and conduct of stability operations. Finally, the Center staff could focus on the collection, analysis and dissemination of lessons learned and best practices.

- ***Create a deployable cadre of civilian personnel with the requisite skills in the planning and conduct of complex operations.***

In the near term, the focus should be on making S/CRS successful in fulfilling its ambitious mandate and on strengthening the more operational parts of USAID. In the longer term, however, Congress may want to consider consolidating S/CRS and parts of USAID into a new field operating agency. Establishing a new independent agency would facilitate the creation of the operations-oriented culture so critical to the success of any civilian rapid response capability—a culture that is largely absent from mainstream State Department and mainstream USAID. It would also create an institutional home and a more viable set of career paths for civilian professionals who want to become true experts in planning and conducting various aspects of interagency operations. Currently, such activities are generally seen as a diversion from the types of experience one needs to be promoted within either the Foreign Service or the Civil Service in the State Department. In short, the current structure of incentives and disincentives within the State Department actually tends to discourage civilian professionals from gaining exactly the type of experience and expertise that is urgently needed to improve U.S. performance in interagency operations. Creating a new agency with its own culture, career paths, and incentive structures would likely create a more hospitable environment for growing the civilian operational capabilities the United States needs than trying to do so within the prevailing cultures of the State Department and USAID.

- ***Congress should authorize and fund a “personnel float” within the civilian agencies involved in national security to enable professional education and development.***

If we want to be able to expect the same level of professionalism from career civilians as we have come to expect from our military personnel, we must allocate the resources necessary to enable them to undertake a comparable and sustained program of professional development. Congress regularly allows the Military Services 10-15 percent additional endstrength to create a personnel “float” that is used to enable training, education and joint rotations as military professionals come up the ranks. The same should be provided to civilian professionals in the national security domain.

- ***Congress and the Office of Personnel Management should establish new promotion requirements for civilian professionals in the national security agencies: appointment to the career Senior Executive Service in any such agency would require a year of interagency education and a 2-3 year interagency rotation.***

One of the most profound changes made in the landmark Goldwater-Nichols legislation was the creation of the Joint Service Officer designation and the associated incentives for officers in the U.S. military to seek joint service as a way of advancing their careers. Once joint service became a virtual requirement for promotion to Flag or General Officer, the best and brightest in each of the Services began to actively seek joint assignments. This cross-fertilization across the Military Services created the human and cultural foundation on which increasingly integrated joint military operations have been built over the last 18 years. Jointness began as a change of experience that begat a change of mindset and behavior.

But there is no comparable system of incentives and requirements to encourage interagency rotations among civilian professionals across the national security agencies. Quite the contrary: rotations out of one's home agency are often viewed as the kiss of death for one's upward mobility. In an era of interagency operations, we need to plant the seed of jointness in the interagency context by creating incentives that reward interagency experience.

Building on the success of the Joint Service Officer program established by the original Goldwater-Nichols legislation, Congress should work with OPM to establish a similar incentive structure to encourage civil servants in agencies that play a key role in national security—Defense, State, AID, Treasury, Commerce, Justice, Energy, CIA, and Homeland Security—to gain interagency expertise and experience. Better integrating the plans, policies and operations of these agencies requires a human resources approach that would expand opportunities to gain interagency experience and would reward those who seek broad-based, integrative approaches to problem solving.

Making promotion to SES (or equivalent) as a career professional contingent upon spending a 2-3 year rotation in another agency would likely turn the prevailing attitude toward interagency rotations on its head: Rather than being seen as a distraction from, if not a detriment to, advancement in one's home agency, it would be seen as the most important ticket to punch for promotion. This requirement would be administered by OPM in partnership with the individual Departments, which would maintain control over the selection, assignment and promotion of their own personnel. Over time, this might provide the basis for developing something akin to a National Security Professionals Corps, which would seek to create a cadre of civilian professionals expert in national security and interagency management.

Conclusion

Unity of effort must start at the top with clear guidance from the President on what the U.S. is seeking to achieve and how these objectives should be met in a given complex operation. But it cannot stop there. Improving U.S. performance in complex operations requires creating a robust and interconnected set of integration mechanisms at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of the U.S. government. It also requires developing a more sophisticated and standardized approach to interagency planning, management and oversight of these operations as well as investing in the necessary capacities in the civilian agencies.

Although this will require many in the U.S. government to change old ways of doing business, the potential payoffs cannot be overstated: greater success in achieving U.S. objectives, faster, at less cost, and with fewer lives lost. Given the high likelihood of U.S. involvement in complex contingency operations for the foreseeable future, achieving greater jointness and success in interagency operations must be one of our highest national security priorities.



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