

Fostering a Whole-of-Government Approach to National Security from the Bottom Up

Interagency Training at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center

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In the twenty-first century, the United States faces an increasingly complex and dynamic strategic environment. Contested international borders, emerging powers, economic inequality, political instability, societal upheaval, sectarian conflict, ecological changes, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction will all affect U.S. national security. In contrast to the Cold War era, most of these challenges can not be addressed through economic and security alliances, with the military providing nuclear and conventional deterrence. As the 2015 *National Security Strategy* notes, “The challenges we face require ... the pursuit of a comprehensive agenda that draws on all elements of our national strength.”¹

While the need is clear, efforts to implement a “whole-of government” approach to national security have been episodic and ultimately unsuccessful. Although there has been much discussion, frustration, and angst about the lack of cooperation and coordination between and among U.S. government agencies and departments, there has been very little progress in establishing mechanisms to coordinate disparate and diverse organizations, each with their own leadership, culture, and authorities. The result is a disjointed and often ineffective foreign policy. While it will take national leadership to change this at the strategic level, there are measures that can be taken to mitigate challenges at the operational and tactical levels.

Although a whole-of-government approach may seem a daunting task, one of the most effective ways to encourage coordination and collaboration is to bring representatives from interagency entities together for realistic training with their military counterparts *before* they are forced to work together in a crisis. Recognizing the importance of “training as you fight,” the Army’s Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) in Hohenfels, Germany, integrates interagency personnel into its exercises. They include mission rehearsal exercises, noncombatant evacuation operations, and brigade readiness exercises with NATO allies and multinational partners. This experience provides soldiers and other interagency participants the opportunity to work with, and learn from, the other entities they may encounter during a deployment. Integrated training also helps build the relationships and develop the trust required to effectively implement national security policy.

The Need for Development of Interagency Lines of Effort

In 2002, the first post-9/11 *National Security Strategy* dramatically changed the focus of how national security policy was implemented.² For the first time, international development was included as an essential component. Since then, every national security strategy

has noted the importance of a “Three D” (defense, diplomacy, and development), whole-of-government approach to national security. The Department of Defense (DOD), Department of State (DOS), and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) are tasked to work together to foster peace and long-term stability. While there are numerous challenges that have limited the implementation of this guidance, two stand out: the lack of stability and civil-military operations education and integrated, interagency training.

As part of its effort to fulfill this new national security emphasis, USAID established a small cadre of foreign service officers specialized in crisis, stabilization, and governance in 2003. Known as Backstop 76ers, these officers are charged with planning and implementing humanitarian, transitional, and governance activities in unstable or politically volatile areas. However, they have had limited impact where interagency coordination and joint planning and implementation are crucial for success. This is the result of a number of factors including little or no interagency education, very low-risk tolerance, the predilection of promotion boards to favor traditionally developed officers over those with experience in conflict zones, and a siloed approach to programming in unstable areas.

In 2004, the DOS established a similar capability when it created the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization.³ It managed to recruit over 130 direct-hire deployable specialists under the Crisis Response Corps. However, this initiative ended in 2011 when funding cuts caused the Crisis Response Corps to disband. It is worth noting that neither entity included stability or civil-military operations education as a regular requirement in their programs. The growth of violent extremism, increased frequency of humanitarian disasters, global health crises (e.g., Ebola), and increased migration mean that U.S. government officials will continue to operate in unstable environments across the globe. While the DOD has the capability and capacity to respond to crises anywhere, it often lacks the subject-matter expertise to identify and mitigate nonmilitary challenges that directly affect political end states. In contrast, joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational entities have the subject-matter experts but often lack the capability and capacity to quickly deploy them. Therefore, it is imperative that these

entities understand and leverage each other’s capabilities and capacities.

Mission success requires military and civilian personnel to work seamlessly with each other as well as with allies and partners, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); each with overlapping mandates and often divergent objectives. Even though the DOD, DOS, USAID, and other agencies are colocated in our embassies, they are not adequately trained in crisis response, often causing unnecessary delays and potential mission failure as interagency personnel have to learn “on the job” about one another’s roles, resources, and expertise.

To foster effective collaboration and deconfliction of activities, these entities must be educated in stability and civil-military operations and train together *before* a crisis. These are significant challenges, as there is no interagency stability or civil-military operations education or training, nor is there policy guidance mandating it.

The JMRC Training Environment

Most exercises the interagency participates in are command-post exercises, with only command, staff, and communication personnel in a headquarters environment. While this provides a forum for interagency understanding, command-post exercises do not include preexercise stability operations or civil-military training; a detailed, dynamic, reactive operating environment; hundreds of role players; a realistic physical infrastructure (e.g., consulates, police stations, mosques, nongovernmental organization offices); or training objectives tailored for non-DOD organizations. Consequently, participants in command-post exercises do not experience the conditions and personal “frictions” they would encounter using real-world deployments.

To facilitate interagency integration, the JMRC has created a unique training environment. It starts with the premise

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Carl Siebentritt from the Department of State (*right*) mentors civil affairs soldiers during an exercise in 2016. (Photo by Spc. Aven Santiago, Joint Multinational Readiness Center Public Affairs)

that in order to prepare for real-world operations, exercises must include a range of civilian and military actors that could be encountered. This includes host country, U.S. government, allies, multinational partners, and international and nongovernmental organizations—each with their own organizational mandates, interests, capabilities, and cultures. Their inclusion is essential for the execution of a comprehensive whole-of-government approach.

Based on this premise, the JMRC creates unique scenarios embedded within a complex, dynamic operational environment that is integrated into a physical infrastructure encompassing numerous training venues within a two hundred square kilometer training area. Prior to the start of an exercise, and based on the scenario they will shortly be immersed in, the JMRC provides integrated stability and civil-military operations education for both civilian and military participants. The goal is to help both understand how to foster civil-military integration in support of their respective missions. As the exercise unfolds, the JMRC's dynamic operating environment responds to the actions or inactions of the training audience. These interactions are displayed in real-time via radio, television, and social media.

At the end of exercises, a combined civil-military after-action review helps identify whether mission goals and training objectives for civilian and military actors were met. More importantly, the after-action reviews

also identify ways to mitigate civil-military challenges encountered during the exercise.

Significantly, the JMRC scenario and training environment challenge combat units to take into account the humanitarian and long-term consequences of military operations. For example, the DOS political advisors advise the rotational unit commander and his or her staff to ensure long-term political objectives inform operations. The USAID personnel, including first responders from the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, advise the commander about the economic and social characteristics of the operating environment, potential humanitarian concerns, and long-term stability concerns. These entities also work with civil affairs, public affairs, psychological operations, and other staff sections to recommend courses of action and assist with key leader engagements in support of U.S. goals. Periodically stepping outside their roles, interagency personnel have unique opportunities to mentor their DOD counterparts on how to effectively work with other U.S. government entities and help them understand how their actions affect broader national security goals.

The Benefits of the Civil-Military Approach to Training at JMRC

There are numerous benefits for joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational actors participating in JMRC exercises. They include stability and civilian-military operations education and training, learning how other interagency entities operate, and practicing a whole-of-government approach to operations. Taken together, they give interagency personnel the opportunity to “train as they would fight.”

Stability and civil-military operations education. In contrast to other training venues, the JMRC provides stability and civil-military operations education and training at the tactical level. The two-day program of instruction includes the following modules: Understanding the Human Dimension of the Operational Environment, Identifying and Targeting Sources of Instability, Civil-Military Integration, and

Informing and Influencing. After the classroom portion of the courses, students are placed in a situational training exercise with interagency colleagues to practice the concepts they just learned and prepare them to collaboratively achieve mission goals. To facilitate interagency integration, training units are required to have nonlethal training objectives, such as supporting governance, assisting dislocated civilians, restoring public safety and order, etc. The JMRC exercises also include end states that can't be accomplished by military means alone, e.g. fostering host-country government legitimacy.

Organizational insight. Training together provides unique insight into how other interagency and international entities operate. For example, a new or mid-level DOS or USAID foreign service officer without military experience taking part in an exercise gains an understanding of military culture, staff structures, planning, operations, and crucially, how to inform and influence military decisions. Interagency personnel take those lessons back to their organizations, allowing them to more quickly and effectively interact with military personnel in real-world operations. The participation of non-DOD interagency entities in exercises is also important for military personnel. DOS political advisors, regional security officers, consular officers, and USAID development officers and disaster specialists provide valuable political and humanitarian context for operations and validate training for specific mission sets such as noncombatant evacuation operations. In summary, exercise participants at the JMRC get direct exposure to, and are forced to interact with, their interagency and international counterparts to respond to conflicts or complex emergencies. Crucially, the training goes both ways.

The Challenges of Implementing Interagency Training and Education

While the benefits of interagency training are clear, there are two significant implementation challenges. The first is the lack of opportunities for interagency entities to learn about their counterparts. For example, many military personnel are unaware that USAID—through its Office of Foreign

Disaster Assistance—is responsible for leading and coordinating U.S. government disaster assistance and humanitarian relief activities.⁴ This includes prepositioning relief supplies around the globe and deploying disaster assistance response teams. These multidiscipline teams can quickly deploy to remote locations, perform needs assessments, and coordinate with host government and local NGOs as well as international organizations such as the UN, the World Bank, the Red Cross, and others. USAID also houses offices which coordinate emergency food relief (Office of Food for Peace), conflict mitigation (Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation), and economic and political transitions (Office of Transition Initiatives).⁵ To mitigate this challenge, the JMRC



United Nations High Commission for Refugees representatives meet with Italian civil-military cooperation officers during Exercise Allied Spirit 5 in 2016. (Photo by Spc. Aven Santiago, Joint Multinational Readiness Center Public Affairs)

provides an overview of civilian entities taking part in an exercise to the senior leaders of rotational units during the Leadership Training Program that takes place approximately ninety days before an exercise. In addition, immediately before the start of an exercise, the JMRC provides opportunities for interagency entities to give “capability briefs” to their DOD peers. However, too often the rotational units’ staffs are too busy preparing for the exercise to take advantage of these briefs.

Although information sharing can occur anywhere, a more significant challenge is applying it in an austere,



A U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) disaster assistance response team (DART), which includes members of the Los Angeles County Fire Department, assists with the rescue of a fifteen-year-old boy from rubble 30 April 2015 in Nepal, five days after a devastating earthquake. The coordinated effort to provide search and rescue, food, and shelter spanned governments, the United Nations, and nongovernmental organizations. The author of this article emphasizes that established relationships and procedures across U.S. government entities helps maintain readiness for operations that require large-scale coordination. (Photo courtesy of USAID DART)

complex, and dynamic field environment. The JMRC scenarios force interagency actors to work together to solve challenges ranging from a humanitarian disaster to responding to military aggression. This strengthens a whole-of-government approach by allowing military units to see their actions in a broader, long-term political context, helping them avoid “winning the war” with tactics that “lose the peace.” Military units also gain an appreciation for the authorities, resources, responsibilities, and constraints of civilian personnel (e.g., working under the guidance of a U.S. ambassador while evacuating U.S. citizens during a noncombatant evacuation operation). Military units also learn that interagency personnel are natural liaisons to organizations they will encounter during operations, including local government officials, the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and NGOs. Noteworthy, rotational units would be much more effective fulfilling their training objectives and facilitating national security if civil-military education was included in

professional military education such as the Captains’ Course and the Command and General Staff Course.

Summary

According to a 2012 Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis report, one of the enduring lessons from the past fifteen years of operations was the “uneven interagency coordination due to inconsistent participation in planning training and operations.”⁶ This is the result of numerous differences between civilian and military organizations. The only way to mitigate these differences is for civilian and military entities to learn and train together. Uniquely, the JMRC provides these opportunities in a realistic operating environment. ■

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Notes

1. The White House, *The National Security Strategy* [NSS] (Washington, DC: The White House, February 2015), ii, accessed 18 January 2018, <http://nssarchive.us/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/2015.pdf>. Although not as clearly elaborated as in the 2015 NSS, the 2017 NSS notes, the importance of “improving the integration of authorities and procedures across the U.S. Government...” The White House, *The National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, December 2017), 32, accessed 9 February 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf>

2. The White House, *The National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, September 2002), accessed 18 January 2018, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/>.

3. For more information on the now-defunct Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, visit <https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/crs/>.

4. See “Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster,” U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) website, last updated 18 July 2017, accessed 18 January 2018, <https://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/organization/bureaus/bureau-democracy-conflict-and-humanitarian-assistance/office-us>.

5. For more information on the various offices and bureaus housed by USAID, visit <https://www.usaid.gov/>.

6. Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis, *Decade of War, Volume 1: Enduring Lessons from the Past Decade of Operations* (Suffolk, VA: Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis, 2012).