THE INTERAGENCY ABROAD:
The New Paradigm's Progress

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WHILE IT HAS BECOME COMMON to invoke the term "interagency" to express a requirement for diverse capabilities in engagements abroad, applying the concept requires precise definition to avoid bureaucratic problems in the theater of operations. A wide variety of expertise is necessary to generate success in any conflict, but the need for many skills does not mean that we should diversify chains of authority. Unfortunately, the interagency process in its present form lacks cohesive leadership in the area of military operations. Federal agencies are not accustomed to permitting other agencies to direct their personnel and resources. Accordingly, planners would do well to consider the consequences of incorporating the term "interagency" into military doctrines and practices, and define precisely what resources are needed.

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PHOTO: U.S. Marines with 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade eat dinner with Marines from 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment and members of the provincial reconstruction team from the Helmand province at the former site of Patrol Base Jaker in Nawa district, Helmand province, Afghanistan, 31 October 2009. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by SGT Freddy G. Cantu)

The Interagency

The term "interagency" implies a highly diverse group of actors operating independently in a theater of conflict. The idea that the interagency process needs to be part of U.S. military engagements abroad came about through a series of reports, investigations, and committees which examined responses to terrorism and American foreign endeavors in the last decade. They concluded that information sharing, diverse expertise, and variety in constructive capabilities are prerequisites for success in foreign engagements.[1] These skills are not found in any single government entity, but rather in many, and thus an interagency approach has become essential in foreign endeavors, especially those involving complex contingencies.

Conceptually, the necessity for an interagency process appears in documents as diverse as the U.S. Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025 ("The Corps leads Joint and Multinational Operations and enables interagency activities"),[2] and the *National Defense Strategy 2008* ("We must consider further realigning department structures and interagency planning and response efforts…").[3] The "comprehensive approach" terminology in

the broader context of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, for example, likewise carries with it the impression that multiple organizations (such as the various entities of the U.S. government's executive branch) will be needed in NATO missions throughout the world.[4] The UK Delegation to NATO notes, "Experience from NATO operations has demonstrated to Allies that coordination between a wide spectrum of actors from the international community, both military and civilian, is essential to achieving key objectives of lasting stability and security."[5]

The formal distinction between those bureaucracies that have a role in conflicts and those that do not is evident in Title 50, U.S. Code, "War and the National Defense."[6] Yet, the interagency approach applies to all manner of non-Title 50 organizations which have been pressed into service during war and other conflicts. However, U.S. domestic bureaucracies, are generally designed, funded, and staffed to handle domestic issues in the United States. The expertise of their personnel may resemble that which is necessary in an overseas situation, but their detailed knowledge is tangential at best. For instance, the Department of Homeland Security sent several Customs and Border Protection agents to Iraq in 2005. While they were undoubtedly technically proficient, they had never encountered anything like the violent and parlous insurgents who operated along the more than 3,650 kilometers of land borders over which other Middle Eastern states supplied weapons, financing, and fanatical fighters and suicide bombers.[7]

Consider what it would take for U.S. federal law enforcement agencies to fight the Taliban in Afghanistan, a group engaged in killing, drug smuggling, weapons smuggling and transfers, trans-border illegal activities, and intimidation of senior Afghan leadership. Without the multi-billion-dollar behemoth of the intelligence community, these issues would require the respective expertise of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the Drug Enforcement Agency; Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms; Customs and Border Protection; the Transportation Security Agency; the Secret Service; and U.S. Marshalls. Although some of these agencies are in Afghanistan, responding to their own priorities and chains of command, they are not designed to act in international affairs as do the Department of State, the Central Intelligence Agency, or Department of Defense, because they are meant to enforce U.S. domestic federal law.

It is one thing for bureaucracies to work independently and quite another to assume that outsiders will understand their operations and be able to collaborate with them or even approach these issues in the same manner as U.S. federal agencies do. The problem of competing organizations with converging priorities is not unique to federal law enforcement; it is a sign of bureaucratic organizations locked in a Hobbesian state of conflict where organizational imperatives counter integration. The idea is the same across government. Why should Afghan nationals, or for that matter other government agencies and non-governmental organizations, have to sort through confusing bureaucratic rules designed for use in Washington? The need to apply all elements of national power to a given conflict or armed confrontation does not mean that the U.S. should export all its agencies.

Principles of Armed Conflict

Conflict spans a spectrum from major conventional operations to security and structure-building under threat of violence. Without the threat of violence, there is no need for a military operation unless for the sake of pure massed logistics; and in that case, the operation no longer has to do with conflict per se. Arguably, the farther away on the conflict spectrum a confrontation or operation is from major conventional operations, the more likely it is to require diverse expertise to provide civil responses to various problems and to build civil structures. However, this does not negate the principles of armed conflict nor mean that they somehow cease to apply; they apply to terrorism, insurgency, or even counter-piracy, as well as conventional clashes.

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United States Joint and service doctrines present the American principles of warfare. The nature of warfare has not changed, nor has the need for unity of command, simplicity, economy of force, leadership, speed and flexibility of decision, and a cohesive approach.[8] While the need for rapid decision making may be greater as the conflict intensifies, the principles hold. Even the much-lauded counterinsurgency manual notes, "Warfare in the 21st century retains many of the characteristics it has exhibited since ancient times. Warfare remains a violent clash of interests between organized groups characterized by the use of force."[9] However much a hybrid of high- and low-intensity action a conflict may be, the fundamental nature of armed conflict remains unchanged.[10] The attendant principles that determine how to apply a national effort to that conflict have also remained constant.

Using the interagency process in its current form in an operational theater ignores these principles. Neither the team leader in the immediate firefight nor his commanding general control nonmilitary governmental agency personnel sharing the area of operations. Technically, the chain of responsibility for other than non-Department of Defense agencies converges with that of the military only at the office of the president. Indeed, many agencies and organizations of the U.S. government operating in conflict zones will avoid direct contact with the military for their own reasons. Most of the world, on the other hand, will view these other agencies, their personnel, and their actions in a conflict zone as those of the U.S. armed forces, probably attributing the military for both the good and the harm done.

Failures in such areas as information or resource sharing in the face of a threat or crisis reflect not only the lack of common engagement, but also bureaucratic posturing to preserve the status quo. These self-seeking efforts show a propensity to act in accordance with bureaucratic imperatives, or as Secretary of Defense Gates put it, "a reluctance to change preferred ways of functioning, the attempt to run a war with peacetime management structure and peacetime practices, a belief that the current set of problems either was an aberration or would

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soon be over."[11] To conclude that sending the same agencies to the next conflict will somehow alter their behavior as they compete for resources, talent, and credit is not reasonable.

Defining an Approach

In a conflict zone, we must carefully determine how the interagency process is applied to avoid creating more problems than we solve with government agency participation. Any conflict may include military forces from other nations, multinational organizations like NATO, international organizations like the United Nations, nongovernmental organizations, contractors, and transnational actors. Because of this complexity, a nation's contribution in a conflict zone should be, at least in principle, as simple and cohesive as possible. During military operations, where lives are certain to be wagered on the success of the mission, even if that mission is to rebuild infrastructures in a hostile environment, the agency most competent by training, experience, and mandate must be given the designated lead and authority over other government agencies if we are to generate unity of effort and a common cause.

Designated lead. There are examples of success for this model of ceding resources to the qualified lead agent. Provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan, despite the evolution of the conflict there, have shown tactical success.[12] In Iraq, the convergence of General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker's personalities and the desperate outlook in 2007 during the surge produced unity of effort. Agencies send their members to a conflict zone for a constructive purpose. Once they find common goals, they can unify their efforts, even if only by the force of key leaders' personalities and the good will of participants on the ground. The leadership should deliberately integrate the operational chain of command in the theater of conflict, rather than permit each disparate federal or contracted entity to act on its own.

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Ambassador Ryan Crocker; Marine GEN Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and U.S. Army GEN David Petraeus meet in Iraq, 16 July 2007.

Recent experience suggests that, to enable coordination and focus efforts, it is best to consolidate interagency personnel in an area of operations within or adjunct to military bases, and in some cases under the direct authority of the State Department and its ambassador, rather than in individual groups. In any conflict, the main effort is inevitably conducted by the military command, both by circumstance and by public perception. We should devise a system whereby (at least during Title 50-type conflicts) contributing U.S. government organizations must actually cede resources to those organizations accustomed to, and hopefully resourced for, conducting large-scale operations (often the military command present).

Specialized forces. The need for diverse expertise should cause the military to review its organizational design. The lethality of large-scale conventional conflict has driven the U.S. military to create and maintain pools of specialized forces for highly specific tasks. The threat drives conventional forces to construct qualifications and standards for a task-driven, specialized force across the board. It is like a military assembly line: each unit has its specified tasks that each unit member must perform to standard.

Using this mind-set, in order to construct a bridge, for example, one requires a unit of specialized engineers who build bridges. However, this provokes the question: in order to build a bridge, do we need a unit of bridge builders, or do we need a single bridge builder and a unit? The fact is that to construct a

bridge, one does not need a unit of engineers. One only needs a single competent engineer and a unit that can execute whatever task it is given. The Romans did not cross the Rhine or the Ebro with legions of engineers; they crossed these rivers by the creativity and dedication of their regular legionnaires, following the instructions of a single competent engineer. Perhaps the best option would be a unit of engineers, but it is not the only option.

Today, even the most sanctified of specialized missions has shown that when "special" becomes "normal," the only way to address many tasks is with large, conventional numbers. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the majority of U.S. military personnel engaged in training Iraqi and Afghan security forces to defend their own nation from internal threats are conventional. Training for foreign internal defense is, by definition, a core special operations task, and was once the most sacred of missions for special operations.[13] Even special operations must be flexible, however, when the particular operation in question becomes less special and much more commonplace. Field Marshall Viscount Sir William Slim, who commanded the longest continuous allied campaign of World War II and under whose command large-scale special operations began in earnest, expressed the paradox thusly: "Any well-trained infantry battalion should be able to do what a commando can do; in the 14th Army, they could and did. This cult of special forces is as sensible as to form a Royal Corps of Tree Climbers and say that no soldier, who does not wear its green hat with a bunch of oak leaves stuck in it, should be expected to climb a tree."[14]

The armed forces need to view their forces as military personnel first—personnel capable by virtue of their military culture of working efficiently together on a required task—and specialists second; or as the United States Marine Corps views itself: "Every Marine a rifleman." Diverse expertise may consequently only mean a single source of this expertise, for example, one FBI agent working with

an infantry unit, and a disciplined unit (that knows what it does not know and therefore knows what it needs) to be able to respond. The natural reluctance of governmental agencies to partner with military organizations is seen in domestic circumstances due to separation of powers, but this separation of power does not apply in the midst of a foreign conflict, and it is this environment that requires armed military personnel instead of domestic, federal police.

Likewise, the U.S. armed forces can look to historical examples for ideas on how to address today's issues. For example, at one time the armed forces operated a school of military government in conjunction with the University of Virginia.[15] This school provided the type of knowledge needed in June of 2003 in Iraq, where coalition forces were virtually the only capable, organized authorities extant and in contact with the populace. Conceptually, there are certainly a number of questions that imposing a military government on another nation rises as to modern interpretations of international law and the imposition of law. On the other hand, having a trained group of people who had studied in such a school might have helped an organization like the Coalition Provisional Authority in 2003.

Conclusions

Military planners must remain circumspect as to the application of the interagency process. If the Coalition Provisional Authority is the best recent conflict example, then the interagency process has a long evolution yet ahead of it to become useful. The dangers of using a relatively untested concept in conflicts are plain; the cost of mistakes is paid in lives. For this reason, U.S. Joint Forces Command eliminated the more overweening aspects of effects-based operations, in which certain proponents claimed both a change in the nature of warfare and the ability to predict collective human behavior through staff planning.[16] The doctrine has not been eradicated; rather, it has been redefined.[17] Likewise, the time has arrived to define more specifically how we intend to apply the interagency process in conflict.

Because of the nature of warfare, those agencies most competent to the task must have overall charge of the mission. In most conflicts, this is the military, but in some, the State Department is the obvious lead element and military forces are in support. The Navy-Marine Corps team by its expeditionary nature, and often the Special Forces, are both quite accustomed to responding directly to an ambassador. In principle, especially during a conflict, interagency expertise should be placed within a unified chain of command in theater. The military in particular must have a more flexible view of appropriate tasks to make the best use of this expertise using the creative labors of its ordinary Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines. Only in this form can the interagency process become an effective paradigm in the tools of the Nation. *MR*

NOTES

1. See, for example, the 9/11 Commission Report, the Intelligence Commission Report, and the Robb-Silberman Report to the President.

2. U.S. Marine Corps, *United States Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office [GPO], July 2008), 17.

3. Department of Defense, *The National Defense Strategy of the United States 2008,* (Washington, DC: GPO, June 2008), 18.

4. See the NATO website for definitions, < www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-2ACD72B2-2ACFADED/natolive/topics_51633.htm> (27 May 2009).

5. Great Britain, The UK Delegation to NATO, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Comprehensive Approach,* 2008-2009, <http://uknato.fco.gov.uk/en/uk-in-nato/comprehensive-approach> (13 May 2009).

6. Reference to Title 50 is Title 50 *U.S. Code*, "War and the National Defense, 193, Subtitle A, Chapter 8, Defense Agencies and Department of Defense Field Activities."

7. The Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Fact Book 2008*, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html#Geo> (9 March 2009).

8. Joint Publication (JP) 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, incorporating chg. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 20 March 2009), I-3.

9. U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington DC: GPO, December 2006), 1-1, para. 1-1.

10. Frank Hoffman, "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 52 (2009): 34.

11. Robert Gates, "A Balanced Strategy: Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age," *Foreign Affairs* (January-February 2009). The secretary was referring to an earlier work during the Vietnam conflict by Robert Komer entitled *Bureaucracy Does its Thing.*

12. See, for example, Tucker B. Mansager, "Interagency Lessons Learned in Afghanistan," *Joint Forces Quarterly* (1st Qtr 2006); or U.S. Agency for International Development, "USAID PRT-QIP" at <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/Activity.91.aspx> (27 May 2009).

13. JP 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 17 December 2003) para. 4.

14. William Slim, *Defeat into Victory: Battling Japan in Burma and India, 1942-1945* (New York, Cooper Square Press, 1956), 547.

15. See for example, Brent C. Bankus and James Kievit, "The Army and Marines and Military Government," *Small Wars Journal* online, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/bankuskievit.doc> (28 May 2009).

16. BG David A. Deptula, USAF, *Effects Based Operations: Change in the Nature of Warfare,* Aerospace Education Foundation, Defense and Airpower Series, Arlington, VA, 2001.

17. General James L. Mattis, USMC, "Commander's Guidance for Effects Based Operations," *Joint Forces Quarterly* (4th Quarter 2008), 105.