# Silver Bullet or Time Suck?

## Revisiting the Role of Interagency Coordination in Complex Operations

BY ANDREA BARBARA BAUMANN

American-led interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan are drawing to an end and the political climate inside the Beltway has turned decidedly hostile toward large deployments of U.S. troops and civilians overseas. Consequently, stability operations have dropped off the radar for many analysts and commentators. The policy community that once feverishly tackled questions over how to stabilize foreign countries through the extended deployment of military and civilian capabilities under various labels (most prominently state- or nation-building and/or population-centric counterinsurgency) is shifting its gaze elsewhere. With growing hindsight, the entire endeavor is often declared as flawed from the start.[1] In addition to this sense of strategic failure, a drop in political attention now heightens the risk of losing hard-earned insights from these operations. This is therefore a crucial time to evaluate the institutional developments that operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have spurred.

This article takes a step back from debates over the strategic validity of stability operations in order to focus on a particular aspect related to their conduct: the coordination of civilian and military organizations within an integrated, or whole-of-government, approach. It does so in full recognition of the fact that whole-of-government terminology nowadays mostly elicits exasperated sighs from governmental officials. The Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns brought the civilian-military nexus into the spotlight within the U.S. interagency community. However, effective cooperation between the Departments of Defense and State (including the U.S. Agency for International Development

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[USAID]) remains a bureaucratic struggle and a cultural challenge. Government agencies may well take the demise of large-scale operations as an excuse to retreat into their respective comfort zones. Additionally, impending budget cuts come with hard choices over reductions in capabilities and programs that are likely to affect collaborative efforts.

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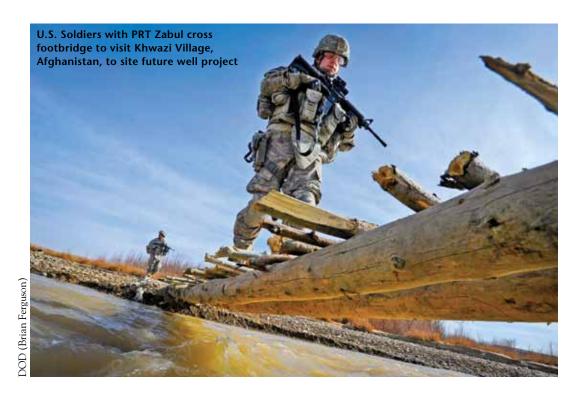
These changes in the budgetary and political climate will require forms of collaboration within the U.S. Government that differ from those witnessed in the past. Some of the processes and structures that have emerged throughout the last decade are worth conserving while others will have to be discarded or adapted in the face of changing expectations over the nature of future operations. Careful assessment is needed to make these distinctions including considering mechanisms that have been introduced in order to facilitate whole-of-government efforts in the realm of stability operations. Low appetite for stability operations in decisionmaking circles should not be used as an excuse for failure to engage with the lessons they hold for coordination within the U.S. Government. This article aims to contribute to this process by looking at experiences from the recent past and outlining options for the future.

### In Case of Emergency, Dial Coordination?

Comprehensive or integrated approaches have come to be considered best practice by a variety of multilateral organizations and governments in the context of complex peace and stability operations.[2] These policy frameworks invariably emphasize the necessity of advancing coordination among participating organizations and agencies. Their focus has often been exclusively on the *feasibility*—rather than the *desirability*—of greater integration between defense, diplomacy, and development. The scramble for policy recommendations on how to deepen coordination has often preempted the basic question of how much is enough. The policy debate surrounding whole-of-government and related coordination initiatives could appear rather dogmatic at times. Vague concepts such as smart power have turned into veritable mantras and raised high expectations regarding the implementation of an integrated civilian-military approach to stabilization.[3]

These policy slogans, while attractive, have failed to convey an adequate sense of how difficult it is in practice to design effective institutional frameworks for the concerted action of military, diplomatic, and developmental organizations. The vision outlined in official statements and documents of a seamless, unified civilian-military approach stands in contrast to the experience of many practitioners, who struggle to reap its proclaimed benefits in their assignments. In a recent survey conducted among 268 officials, all of whom occupied management positions within State (including USAID) and Defense, the percentage of those who felt that "collaboration" between agencies had "a beneficial effect on overall mission success" had dropped by 21 percent within just 1 year (from 2010).[4] Over the same period, the percentage of those who felt that collaboration made their overall mission "less successful" had increased from 3 percent to 14 percent.[5]

These numbers are more usefully interpreted as indicators of growing awareness among officials of the costs associated with interagency

**U.S. Soldiers with PRT Zabul cross footbridge to visit Khwazi Village, Afghanistan, to site future well project**

DOD (Brian Ferguson)

cooperation rather than as a slamming verdict on its utility. The advantages of comprehensive or integrated approaches over parallel, independent action by individual agencies have been repeated countless times. Coordinated approaches are generally viewed as leading to better results in the key areas of coherence, cost-effectiveness, and complementarity.[6] Coherence among participating agencies is sought internally (in pursuit of unity of effort in the absence of unified command) as well as to ensure consistency toward external audiences (including local stakeholders, host nation officials, and the media). Cost-effectiveness is one of the primary motivations behind efforts to consolidate processes for resource allocation, planning, delivery, and evaluation. Complementarity, finally, is a function of the inherent complexity of stability operations. It is widely recognized that these operations require the application of a wide range of professional expertise to deal simultaneously with crosscutting and interdependent problems in the areas of security, governance, and socioeconomic development.

Beneath the general consensus that coordination is beneficial, however, there is little clarity on the precise form or intensity of "working together" that any of these objectives imply. Terms such as *coordination*, *collaboration*, *integration*, and *cooperation* are often used interchangeably in policy and scholarly papers, and this article is no exception. How can one argue, then, that coordination is either sufficient or insufficient, or that coordination efforts are succeeding or failing?[7] What sort of benchmarks determine whether a lack of coordination is indeed to blame for suboptimal outcomes— or that increased levels of coordination have led to concrete gains? Persistent lack of agreement over the small print of a unified whole-of-government approach is reflected in the fact that proposals for organizational reform in the area of national security have failed to gain traction over the past decade

in spite of sophisticated thinking on the subject.[8] Limited, process-oriented changes have been more effective, for instance, in the areas of joint planning and cross-departmental project management. Hence, in the absence of agreement on organization, agreement on process has become the alternative path toward cross-governmental cooperation.[9] Procedural adjustments have helped to reduce transaction costs, facilitate communication among departments, and pool expertise and resources from different corners of the government architecture. Yet in the absence of further institutionalization, many processes and practices have remained heavily dependent on the commitment and leadership of people during their stay in office.

> PRTs took on a leading role in the coordination of civilian and military efforts both in Iraq and in Afghanistan

The future demand for interagency coordination will vary from one mission to another. Sometimes it may be enough to maintain basic consultation processes among departments, but past experience has demonstrated that the demand curve can be steep if a mission or field of activity develops where close coordination is an imperative. The dynamic nature of the demand for coordination has implications for organizational structures and resources. While coordination tools can be introduced or built up on short notice (granted the availability of resources), they often require longer timeframes to produce actual results. For example, technical facilities to share information among different agencies, including compatible systems and shared protocols, neither automatically guarantee that officials at either end of the channel have a shared understanding of the

information that is transmitted, nor do they enable agencies to jointly act on the information. Institutional structures that promote the integration of effort (and understanding) among practitioners from different agency backgrounds are therefore likely to require resources that are better placed within standing agency budgets than operational contingency funds.

A key question that arises from these observations is "How does one design institutional mechanisms that provide governmental agencies the flexibility to respond to variations in the depth and form of interagency coordination between missions or issue areas?" The following section engages with this question by evaluating the performance of two organizational structures that were introduced over the past decade to coordinate civilian and military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

## Coordination Structures within the Bureaucracy and in the Field

On the ground, Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) were initially introduced in Afghanistan to facilitate outreach to a variety of stakeholders at the provincial level outside Kabul in the early days of the campaign.[10] Over time, they took on a leading role in the coordination of civilian and military efforts both in Iraq and in Afghanistan that is well documented in the academic and policy literature.[11] The coordination mechanism established within State on the basis of a Presidential directive, the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS), has not achieved quite the same notoriety but has equally become the subject of debate and analysis, including in this journal.[12]

*PRTs: Civil-Military Melting Pots with an Expiry Date.* The use of PRTs as joint platforms for civilian and military agencies in the

theater of operations undoubtedly provided a number of advantages. Shared structures allowed for the pooling of funding streams from different budgets. The combination of small, rapidly available funds with larger sums (often governed by more complex regulations) offered practitioners on the ground a flexible solution to bridge the gap between immediate needs and long-term projects.[13] Civilian agencies benefited from the transport and security arrangements provided by the military through the PRT structure and from improved access to military decisionmaking and planning at the tactical level. By acting as focal points for shared logistics and joint project management, PRTs thus offered tangible benefits for interagency coordination.

Against the backdrop of frequent rotations and changes in staff, the shared physical space provided by the PRTs helped mold a variety of professional profiles and backgrounds into a common approach at the tactical level. However, close proximity in the absence of uniform regulations and standards (for example, for accommodation, dispute resolution, leave, and security) could equally provoke resentment and deepen prejudices and stereotypes among personnel from different agency backgrounds. Moreover, the dynamics that led to increased cooperation on the ground are not necessarily a function of the PRT structure alone. Coordination between different agency representatives was arguably facilitated by a common desire among practitioners to contribute to tangible, immediate improvements of local conditions. Shared disdain for petty bureaucracy within their home institutions and the desire to escape micromanagement and to get on with the job could create a sense of commonality that bridged cultural gaps between civilian and military professionals.[14] These features raise doubts over the possibility of replicating the sense of common purpose that emerged alongside the PRT model in a different context, where objectives are less immediate and less localized.

Moreover, PRTs provided only limited support to stabilization professionals—whether from a military or civilian background—in the development and professionalization of their expertise beyond the limited duration of a tour or assignment. While they generated numerous lessons on how to combine security, governance, and development programs at the provincial and district levels, the personality-dependent and temporary character of arrangements within most PRTs meant they were ill-suited to consolidate and institutionalize best practice. Personalities were widely perceived to determine the quality of interagency relationships within the PRTs irrespective of formal hierarchies or structures. As a civilian expert returning from a deployment in Afghanistan noted, if "civ-mil" was simply formalized as "yet another box to tick" on the military's checklists, it hardly led to genuine collaboration.[15]

Finally, PRTs were conditioned—and limited in their coordinating role—by the massive military presence that characterized stability operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The PRT model was geared toward mitigating the logic of numbers that shaped civilian-military relationships on the ground, but ultimately proved unable to alter it.[16] As a development expert noted, "Two [USAID] people in a PRT are going where the military wants them to go. . . . If you send thousands of troops you cannot expect a civilian solution. Once you are there you conceded the strategy."[17] In this context, the PRTs primarily added value by serving as vehicles for the projection of a mix of civilian and military expertise and the resources required for its delivery at the province and district levels. However, they ultimately

contributed little to the coherent development of stabilization expertise and offered only limited institutional support for professionals who came to accumulate and embody this expertise. In the absence of complementary efforts at the home institutional level, the contribution of the PRT model to the coordination of civilian and military efforts is likely to remain both process-oriented and localized.
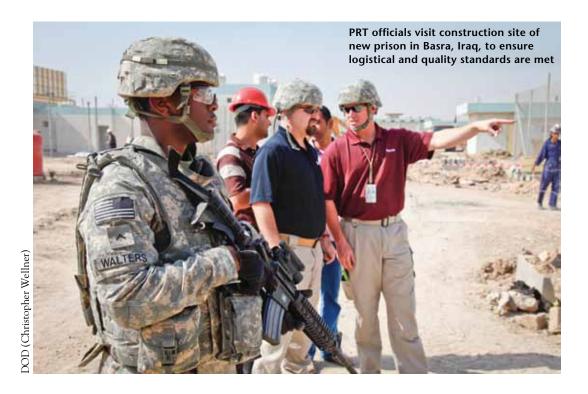
> far from a technocratic tool, S/CRS was itself a bureaucratic creature faced with securing resources and finding a voice in the marketplace of ideas and influence

*S/CRS: Mandate Impossible?* The Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization was established within the State Department in July 2004. National Security Presidential Directive 44 formally authorized the Secretary of State to task the coordinator with a range of functions and called on other executive departments and agencies to collaborate.[18] "It seemed like you had this wonderful, clear authority for the whole operation," recalled a senior State Department official, "but in the real world, these declarations had only limited impact."[19] Far from a technocratic tool, S/CRS was itself a bureaucratic creature faced with the imperative of securing resources and finding a voice in the marketplace of ideas and influence within government. Bureaucratic politics—rather than operational requirements or strategic considerations—threatened to shape its mandate. While the military welcomed the opportunity to liaise with the civilian side of government through a single point of contact, established constituencies within State and USAID saw the new unit as a potential rival that would either draw scarce resources away

or waste them by duplicating existing capacity. In this context, the rhetoric employed by the initial leadership, which envisaged an ambitious coordinating role for the unit, was described by a former S/CRS official as "powerfully crippling—it made nobody want to work with us."[20]

The shift toward a more modest and selective agenda, adopted after 2006 under Ambassador John Herbst, provided a more realistic baseline for the fledgling unit to engage in a fight for institutional recognition and survival. One strategy to mitigate the crippling effect that the skepticism and hostility of established players within the bureaucracy had on its development was for S/CRS to profile itself as a convener and facilitator instead of pushing for an authoritative role. The office would add value by assisting other elements of the government in synchronizing different policies within a unified package rather than seeking to impose a vision of its own. Yet the strategy of conquering and defending institutional space within the bureaucracy by responding to external requests for assistance threatened to curtail the office's ownership and control over the development of a coherent mandate. In trying to satisfy a variety of demands placed on it, the new office risked satisfying none in the end. As a former official contended, "It would have been better to pick a model and say 'this is who we are.'"[21]

In a similar vein, the focus on developing deployable capability turned out to be a poisoned chalice. It bought S/CRS goodwill within the foreign affairs establishment, which hardly objected to the creation of additional capacity to fill hardship posts overseas, but at the same time risked turning the office into a mere "body shop" for other agencies. Where its customers primarily saw additional human resources and equipment, S/CRS was keen to use the deployment of experts to project specialist expertise to embassies and field headquarters. This included,

**PRT officials visit construction site of new prison in Basra, Iraq, to ensure logistical and quality standards are met**

DOD (Christopher Wellner)

for instance, planning tools that were neither widely used nor readily accepted within the rest of the State Department. As a senior official explained, "If all we do is create more people who can move faster, *without the other functions*, we will be increasingly less 'ad hoc'—but that's about it."[22]

S/CRS nevertheless managed to offer a number of advantages in terms of interagency coordination within the U.S. Government. First, the office shouldered a number of transaction costs that arose from the demand for close civilian-military cooperation in Iraq and Afghanistan. It deployed experts overseas to facilitate joint civilian-military planning on the ground and developed recruitment criteria and training curricula for the establishment of a Civilian Response Corps. However, many of these functions are arguably closer to the mandate of developing specialist expertise in order to fill skill gaps within the government than elements of a proper *coordinating* role. Second, S/CRS can be said to have provided a home to a hybrid, civilian-military professional community that emerged in the area of stabilization and reconstruction. Consistent with the brevity of its existence and its specialist focus, S/CRS promoted attachment to the "cause" or mission rather than to career ladders or deep-seated agency traditions.[23] Nevertheless, it did not have the institutional clout to support these professionals in the development of their expertise and careers. Those who chose to stay with the unit often acted out of personal dedication and interest in the mission pursued by S/CRS, sometimes at the risk of jeopardizing career prospects within their home institutions.

In sum, the S/CRS mandate often resembled a delicate balancing act: it was expected to coordinate without assuming authority, facilitate joint planning and implementation with few resources of its own, and generate expertise without interfering with the business of State's powerful regional bureaus.

Its experience illustrates a dilemma related to the institutionalization of coordination functions in the form of a separate unit or organization. If the unit's mandate implies challenging entrenched practices and promoting new and possibly uncomfortable ways of doing business within the bureaucracy, then it has to retain a somewhat renegade character. Leslie Schear and James Curtin have argued, for instance, that S/CRS was "cast in the role of a 'constructive irritant' acting to promote new patterns of collaboration and change."[24] The

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likely price for this is that the office remains at the margins of the institutional playing field and that its mandate becomes diluted by the struggle for survival. Even if supported by a formal mandate, the office would be compelled to compete for recognition within the bureaucracy for the better part of its existence if it is not adequately resourced from the start—much to the detriment of its original functions. Consolidation and greater resources, on the other hand, risk weakening some of the original S/CRS advantages (its agility and perhaps also its appetite for pushing against entrenched traditions) by adding layers of bureaucracy. In that regard, the transformation of the office into a functional bureau within the State Department provides an opportunity to enhance its independence and authority over the strategic development of civilian crisis and conflict management doctrine and capability. There is a risk, however, that the new bureau will turn its back on the uncomfortable task of fostering interagency consensus and become more insular and one-dimensional in its approach.

## Interagency Coordination 2.0: What Toolkit after Iraq and Afghanistan?

What lessons can be drawn from past experience to design smart coordination tools for the future? The two types of institutional mechanisms evaluated above—both of which emerged over the past decade in response to calls for the integration of defense, diplomacy, and development—have certain features in common. First, they turned out to be relatively resource-intensive means to foster coordination in terms of funding and manpower (which also meant that they were underfunded most of the time). Second, their form and outlook were shaped by the reality of large-scale U.S. military deployments overseas and the demand for more civilians in these theaters of operation. Finally, they had a strong operational focus that arguably came at the detriment of other considerations related to their existence, like, for example, implications of their institutionalization in the mid to long term, as well as conceptual and doctrinal developments. These examples illustrate the limitations of a whole-of-government approach that relies on agreed procedure in the absence of agreed organization. The following recommendations address alternative ways of dealing with this dilemma by examining institutional capacity and then considering conceptual underpinnings. Together, they advocate for a more selective approach to coordination.

### Tackling the Institutional Dilemma

Past proposals for a single integrated national security department and other calls for large-scale bureaucratic reorganization have been stymied by political and resource-related constraints.[25] Yet rather than having budget trends dictate the form and depth of coordination, interagency reform should follow from a

careful assessment of its desirability in light of past experience and on the basis of educated guesses about future demand. Selective investments and changes at the margins may stand a better chance of providing a sustainable basis for effective coordination than the (largely elusive) quest for a unified bureaucratic structure.

The aim of a selective approach to coordination is to turn governmental agencies into smart customers of other agencies' services and expertise—not to streamline and standardize the different approaches that they bring to the table within a single unified outfit. Institutionally, this entails a shift from integrated organizational structures at home and in the field toward flexible, networked forms of interaction. In contrast to the mechanisms discussed above, the tools of a selective approach would operate as shared platforms among existing organizations instead of proliferating into new offices and units. Over the past few years, innovative ways of information-sharing among different organizations have emerged in the form of virtual networks and communities of practice dedicated to identifying best practice and learning lessons.[26] These structures should be expanded to encourage a frank exchange among agencies, and, more importantly, they should be empowered to address and manage conflicts of interest that inevitably arise in the process. Acting as clearinghouses rather than as "coordinators," they would leave the development of core expertise, doctrine/policy, and training curricula to standing departments and agencies instead of pushing for integration in these areas.

A selective approach to coordination, moreover, relies on the ability of agency officials to move and work effectively—and with authority—between standing departments and agencies. Rather than entrusting separate units with the task of transforming the working habits and cultures of organizations, the government should revitalize existing proposals for interagency reform, which aim at softening the seams between organizations in order to make them more permeable for interagency-savvy staff. These require renewed debate on the optimal size and staff profile of a select cadre of so-called national security professionals, as well as on legislation to attract outstanding individuals and provide them with viable career paths.[27] While joint training modules for practitioners have attracted considerable attention over recent years, their ability to attract both funding and highly skilled individuals in the absence of concrete operational demands is uncertain. In this regard, it is more important to socialize governmental agencies into supporting interagency-focused staff to work flexibly on crosscutting issues than to train "interagency specialists" in a given domain. Hence, a reputable selection process for national security professionals that is regarded as such throughout the government bureaucracy is a more sustainable investment than the proliferation of specialized training modules. The latter may be added at relatively short notice and tailored to operational requirements as they arise—but only if a sufficient institutional basis for cross-government working exists in the first place.

The cadre would differ from early S/CRS aspirations for a coordinating role as well as from its subsequent focus on rotating subject matter experts in and out of hardship assignments. Its main focus would be to ensure continuity in interagency consultations and provide a basis for expansion in times of increased demand for joint action. In other words, it would exert a steady "pulse function" within the bureaucracy through a network of officials who nevertheless remain part of the normal fabric of their parent organizations. Such crosscutting functional concerns as gender equality and human rights have

become increasingly mainstreamed throughout the U.S. policymaking apparatus but still require a dedicated constituency that continues to remind departments of their commitments to these issues and advocates for their inclusion into policy instruments.[28] The same applies to interagency or, more specifically, civilian-military coordination. Nearly a generation of governmental officials who have spent their formative years dealing with the

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complex challenges of Iraq and Afghanistan now instinctively adopts an inclusive perspective and considers coordination a fact of life rather than a chore. This legacy is at risk, however, if these officials do not see their behavior rewarded and supported by their home institutions through smart and sustainable incentive structures.

## Reframing the Conceptual Basis

In addition to institutional arrangements, concepts and ideas that have shaped expectations about "the interagency" in the past should be reconsidered. Based on experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, interagency cooperation has become epitomized for many by the model of "four guys in a Humvee"—a military officer, State official, one from USAID, and perhaps an intelligence analyst. At the same time, there is a sense among practitioners that this is unlikely to be the standard for future operations. Concerns over the perceived legitimacy of foreign interventions have encouraged the combination of civilian and military elements of power and the participation of a wide and diverse range of actors (civilian, military, governmental, and nongovernmental) in the past,

and will again. It is reasonable to assume that future operations will involve multiple actors who bring along intermittent disharmony, recurring conflicts of interest, and near-permanent friction. A truly comprehensive approach therefore implies the cultivation of a certain degree of constructive friction among agencies. Different organizations are called upon to unite behind a common mission precisely because their staffs bring *distinct* skills and expertise to the table. A combination of different professional perspectives—rather than a single lens—is deemed necessary to understand and respond to complex security challenges in contemporary interventions. Unity and harmony can neither be the precondition for nor the automatic outcome of a comprehensive civilian-military or "smart power" approach. While often perceived as an indicator of failure, confrontation and friction among organizations may well be signs that a genuinely *comprehensive* approach is at work. Consequently, they deserve greater attention.

Many of the policy debates on complex operations have revolved around the notions of sequencing (of different actions or lines of operation) and transitioning (between different actors). While these are inevitable byproducts of a multiagency operation, they should be accompanied by a more explicit and central recognition of *tradeoffs* that individual agencies are confronted with in the process. The tendency to call for joint processes by default should give way to more careful analysis of *when* and *where* integrated structures are indeed superior to (and more cost-effective than) agency-led processes. The main advantages to be gained from integration are a sense of shared ownership and greater levels of buy-in from participating agencies. The resulting products or processes, however, may lose some of their utility for individual agencies. Tradeoffs are most readily identified

when they have a direct impact on resources. For instance, the integration of planning and reporting systems requires civilian agencies to dispatch (reasonably senior) personnel to subnational headquarters and command centers in order to match the military command structure. This confronts short-staffed civilian agencies with difficult decisions over how to best allocate scarce human resources. Less evident but possibly more significant tradeoffs have arisen in the past from differences in organizational cultures that relate to modes of decisionmaking, human resources, and knowledge management. Illustrations of these types of tradeoffs are found in the areas of joint doctrine and training, which have been key components of a whole-of-government approach to stability operations.

In the realm of doctrine, past efforts to draft an interagency "counterinsurgency [COIN] guide" under the auspices of the State Department turned into a lengthy process, which ultimately produced an abstract document that received little attention or buy-in within the wider bureaucracy. In an earlier issue of this journal, Raphael Cohen argues that "The very fact that the [COIN] guide was an interagency product may have decreased its value" and that the guide reflected "a brokered consensus rather than a singularly distinct point of view."[29] Interestingly, Cohen suggests that military doctrine may be of greatest use to the interagency community when serving as "a window into understanding the military as the dominant institution [in a COIN setting]."[30] While inclusive in its consultative phase, the doctrinal process that led to the military's widely acclaimed counterinsurgency field manual (FM 3-24) remained under the authority of a small team of authors with strong organizational leadership and control.[31] The State Department's inaugural Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development

Review, in December 2010, which promoted an explicitly *civilian* perspective on conflict and crisis response, was a similarly inclusive but agency-driven process, which ultimately received greater recognition within government (and beyond) than the previous interagency-focused initiative. In sum, interagency buy-in does not exclusively or automatically follow interagency authorship; and coherent agency-specific products may ultimately capture a wider audience than interagency doctrine reduced to the lowest common denominator.

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The experience of the past decade has further shown that extensive training modules, as traditionally employed by military organizations, are not easily transferred to a whole-of-government context. This is partly due to the discrepancy in staff numbers between military and civilian agencies, which makes it difficult for civilian officials to leave their desks unattended to participate in joint exercises. Yet given the different nature of their expertise and interactions with stakeholders, diplomats and development experts also do not attribute the same value to large-scale standardized and repetitive exercising within their own organizations. For the military, teambuilding, leadership development, and the consolidation of skills and routines go largely hand in hand. Civilian stabilization experts who participate in joint exercises, however, may derive certain teambuilding benefits (if training schedules are synchronized with deployments) but not

necessarily any of the other benefits mentioned. Interagency training is thus not just a matter of how many people an agency can send to a joint exercise. It requires careful consideration of differences in approach to the development of human resources and the cultivation of expertise within each partner organization.

While these examples require further discussion, they point to the conclusion that "joint" is not a quality seal per se. If joint programs and structures are not based on an explicit discussion of tradeoffs, they risk consuming considerable resources while producing little more than a shallow "feel good" effect in the interagency community.

## Conclusion

The drawdown of American military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan has led to a reduction in the immediate demand for operational civilian-military coordination within the U.S. Government. The precise form that future operations will take is hard to predict. That they are likely to straddle the 20th-century boundaries between defense, diplomacy, and development is certain. The resulting challenge is to design a flexible institutional framework that allows agencies to cooperate effectively *if* and *where* needed, while at the same time allowing them to prioritize scarce resources in accordance with distinctly different core mandates and working methods.

This article has outlined the shortcomings of a whole-of-government approach that relies on agreed procedure in the absence of agreed organization. It has provided an assessment of the contribution to interagency coordination in stability operations made by two recent coordination mechanisms—Provincial Reconstruction Teams and the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization. Two sets of recommendations have argued for a more

selective approach to coordination, which allows for adaptation to variations in the demand for civilian-military coordination. Institutionally, this approach leads away from the integration of operational capability toward ensuring that the 3Ds are sufficiently connected to allow for coordination to be intensified when (and where) needed. Conceptually, these recommendations shift the focus away from an implicit quest for harmony toward more explicit recognition of the inevitability—and inherent desirability—of continued friction among agencies within a comprehensive approach. Correspondingly, they emphasize the need to part with the assumption that joint processes are inevitably superior to agency-led processes.

The desire to identify, capture, and institutionalize lessons from past and ongoing operations is a constant feature of policymaking. Yet none of the insights accumulated by organizations or individual practitioners over the years is an objective lesson that simply waits to be detected and distilled into best practice. The lessons our institutions ultimately retain depend on the assumptions that guide our analysis of what has happened. It is therefore crucial to examine the legacy of the past decade with a critical and open mind that is willing to question the conventional wisdom, however widespread. In that regard, it is not bad news that the focus on the operational integration of civilian and military efforts that has characterized stability operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is now giving way to other concerns. This opens space for considerations that have not yet received sufficient attention. These include the need to cooperate more effectively with international organizations and other governments, the importance of taking local interlocutors seriously and building effective partnerships, and a shift in expertise from postconflict

reconstruction to conflict prevention. The past decade has clearly shown that interagency coordination comes at a price. Yet the investment may pay off if it helps agencies to become smart customers of each other's strengths and tolerant toward each other's requirements to do things *differently*. The answer lies—as usual—somewhere in the middle. PRISM

## Notes

[1] Arguing against this widespread view is, for instance, Paul D. Miller, "The Case for Nation-building: Why and How to Fix Failed States," *PRISM* 3, no. 1 (December 2011), 63–74.

[2] For an overview of national approaches, see Stewart Patrick and Kaysie Brown, *Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts? Assessing "Whole of Government" Approaches to Fragile States* (New York: International Peace Academy, 2007). On the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), see Philipp Rotmann, *Built on Shaky Ground: The Comprehensive Approach in Practice*, Research Paper 63 (Rome, Italy: NATO Defense College, 2010).

[3] See Hillary Clinton, Nomination Hearing for the Post of Secretary of State before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC, January 13, 2009; The White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, May 2010); Department of State, *Leading Through Civilian Power: The First Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review* (Washington, DC: Department of State, December 2010).

[4] Government Business Council (GBC), *Joining Forces: Interagency Collaboration and "Smart Power," A Candid Survey of Federal Employees*, GBC Insight Report underwritten by Booz Allen Hamilton (Washington, DC: GBC, December 2011), 19.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Similar terminology is found in the "3C approach in situations of conflict and fragility," which has been promoted by a number of European nations in association with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee, NATO, World Bank, and United Nations, available at <www.3c-conference2009.ch>.

[7] Ted Strickler proposes the use of a matrix to measure the quality of interagency coordination in "Interagency Cooperation: Quo Vadis?" *InterAgency Journal* 1, no. 1 (2010), 6.

[8] See, for instance, Project on National Security Reform (PNSR), *Forging a New Shield* (Washington, DC: PNSR, 2008), available at <http://pnsr.org/data/files/pnsr_forging_a_new_shield_report.pdf>.

[9] I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of this article who suggested framing the issue in these terms.

[10] See Center for Humanitarian Cooperation, *Civil-military Cooperation Conference: Summary Report and Findings* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, January 16, 2003), 4.

[11] For an overview, see Christoff Luehrs, "Provincial Reconstruction Teams: A Literature Review," *PRISM* 1, no. 1 (December 2009), 95–102.

[12] See John E. Herbst, "Addressing the Problem of Failed States: A New Instrument," *PRISM* 1, no. 1 (December 2009), 21–26; Hans Binnendijk and Patrick M. Cronin, eds., *Civilian Surge: Key to Complex Operations* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2009), 98–109; Dane F. Smith, Jr., *U.S. Peacefare: Organizing American Peace-building Operations* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2010), 39–41; Renanah Miles, "The State Department, USAID, and the Flawed Mandate for Stabilization and Reconstruction," *PRISM* 3, no. 1 (December 2011), 37–47.

[13] For a breakdown of different sources of funding within U.S.-led Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), see U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Oversight and

Investigations, *Agency Stovepipes vs Strategic Agility: Lessons We Need to Learn from Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq and Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, April 2008), 23. See also Robert Perito, *The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Lessons Identified*, Special Report 152 (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, October 2005), 10.

[14] On this gap, see, for instance, Shawn Dorman, "Iraq PRTs: Pins on a Map," *Foreign Service Journal* 84, no. 3 (2007), 33; Perito, 5.

[15] U.S. civil servant, interview with author, November 24, 2010.

[16] See also Henry Nuzum, *Shades of CORDS in the Kush: The False Hope of "Unity of Effort" in American Counterinsurgency* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2010), 33.

[17] U.S. Agency for International Development officer, interview with author, October 28, 2010.

[18] National Security Presidential Directive 44, "Management of Interagency Efforts Concerning Reconstruction and Stabilization," The White House, December 7, 2005. This directive superseded Presidential Decision Directive 56, "Managing Complex Contingency Operations," The White House, May 20, 1997.

[19] Senior Foreign Service Officer, interview with author, October 21, 2010.

[20] Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) official, interview with author, December 10, 2010.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Senior Foreign Service Officer, interview, emphasis added.

[23] S/CRS official, interview.

[24] James A. Schear and Leslie B. Curtin, "Complex Operations: Recalibrating the State Department's Role," in *Civilian Surge: Key to Complex Operations*, ed. Hans Binnendijk and Patrick M. Cronin, 104 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2009).

[25] See, for instance, Clark A. Murdock, Michèle Flournoy, and Mac Bollman, *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: U.S. Government and Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era, Phase 2 Report* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005).

[26] For example, the Center for Complex Operations, authorized by Congress in the fiscal year 2009 National Defense Authorization Act. The International Stabilization and Peacebuilding Initiative follows a similar model but with broader international membership. See Civilian Capacity for Peace Operations, available at <www.civcap.info>.

[27] For an overview of existing initiatives, see Catherine Dale, *National Security Professionals and Interagency Reform: Proposals, Recent Experience, and Issues for Congress*, RL34565 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, September 26, 2011). See also PNSR, *The Power of People: Building an Integrated National Security Professional System for the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: PNSR, November 2010), available at <www.pnsr.org/data/images/pnsr_the_power_of_people_report.pdf>.

[28] The author is grateful to Cecily Brewer, Department of State, for these examples.

[29] Raphael S. Cohen, "A Tale of Two Manuals," *PRISM* 2, no. 1 (December 2010), 96.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, December 15, 2006).