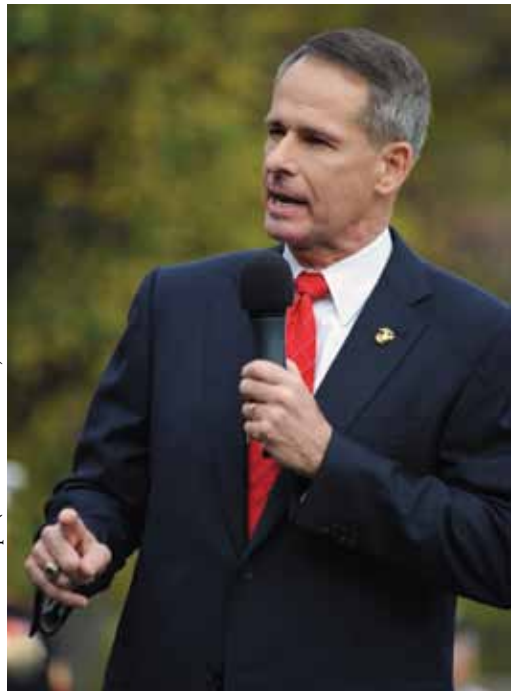
An Interview with Peter Pace



U.S. Marine Corps (Charles M. Groff)

The whole-of-government concept, so popular only a few years ago, seems to have lagged a bit. The sense of urgency for national security reform seems to have dissipated, perhaps particularly on Capitol Hill. Do you believe there should be more urgency about national security reform?

PP: There's a lot on everyone's plate, and it takes leaders of stature to help focus people with limited energy on which problem to solve. If we think about the interagency process, here is how it works in my opinion, and this is not about any administration; this is about how our government functions, not any particular flavor of government.

If the Nation has a problem that it is facing, the National Security Council [NSC] comes together. For lack of the right terminology, the one-star level gets together, then the two-star, the three-star, and the four-star. Finally, we have an NSC meeting with the President and with all the heads of the agencies. In the process of going through the dialogue and the discussion of what the problem is and the various courses of action are, the cooperation in the room is excellent. Everybody is sharing ideas; everybody is trying to find the right courses that will be successful—great Americans working together trying to do the right thing.

Either during that meeting or some subsequent meeting, the President makes a decision, and that's where the system starts to malfunction. Why? Because the Secretary of Defense takes his piece, the Secretary of State takes her piece, the Secretary of the Treasury takes his. These Cabinet secretaries take their respective pieces of what's supposed to be done and go back to their respective agencies, and they start working on it. The problem is that there is nobody below the President with "Choke Con" over this system. So if a problem starts between DOD [Department of Defense] and

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State—unless it is so significant that the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense want to bring it to the President—it just does not get solved. People try to work around it and it just bubbles along. There are great people trying to do the right thing, but nobody is tagged with the responsibility of keeping all of this tied together. The bottom line is if any agency says no, unless it goes to the President, there is no way to move that "no" off center.

Let's consider Goldwater-Nichols [Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986]. I believe you can take every piece of the Goldwater-Nichols legislation and apply it to the interagency [community]. Maybe not right away, but we should certainly look at it. First, how would it function? Before 1986, we had the best Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps in the world, but they didn't share their toys with one another. Along comes Congress and they say that's not good enough. None of the Service chiefs wanted Goldwater-Nichols legislation to pass because they did not want to give up authority. As it turned out, once they were forced into it, what they gave up as Service chiefs they picked up in spades as *joint* chiefs. Now each of them had a chance to discuss the other Services' issues in the tank. Most importantly, there was a *single* person in charge. It took almost 20 years to get where we had worked with each other enough, understood each other enough, gone through enough problems together, all of which builds trust—and we stumbled over everything possible to get to the point where we understood each other. The only way to get there was to go through it.

So if you take a look at the interagency, my belief is that a way forward might be to have somebody in charge immediately below the President, so it would work something like this: the President makes a decision and says the Secretary of State is in charge. Or Treasury is in charge. Or DOD is in charge. Bottom line: the President both *makes* a decision and *decides* which department is going to lead.

In DC, all follow-on meetings are run by State if they are the lead. In the regions, the combatant commanders have the facilities, so you meet at the combatant commanders' table, but whoever is the designated lead runs the meeting using the facilities of DOD. In the country, the Embassy is a great facility. You have the meeting in the Embassy, but whoever in DC has been designated as the lead runs the meeting. Now is it going to go smoothly the first couple of times? Of course not. If there is a problem and the State Department person in any of those locations says something that the military guy does not feel comfortable with, you take it to the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Defense takes it to the NSC and they discuss it. It will take years to work through all those problems, but if we don't get started, if it's a 10-year process, it's 10 years from when we start. If we wait 2 more, it's 12. Initiating this change requires a Secretary of Defense or Secretary of State to really push this process because they are the ones who, in my opinion, have to start giving up the most. If we do not have individuals who are willing to give up some authority to improve the interagency, it is not going to happen.

You need people of stature to stand up and say, "This is something that needs to be done." You need people on both sides of the aisle in Congress and one or more Cabinet officials to become seized with the idea that we can have the same impact on interagency effectiveness and efficiency with a Goldwater-Nichols–like approach to the interagency process that was the result of the Goldwater-Nichols Act that forced the U.S. military to operate jointly.

How would you characterize the evolution of civilian-military collaboration over the last 10 years?

PP: This is just my own personal experience, so others may have a different view based on where they operated. When I was in the J3 as a lieutenant general around 1996–1997, when there was an NSC meeting at the White House, the Joint Staff put together its own position. We may or may not have coordinated it with DOD staff. If the meeting was at the White House, we would go sit next to each other but really not know what the other guy was going to say. The civilian representing the Secretary of Defense and I, if I were representing the Chairman, did not necessarily know what the other was going to say.

Fast forward to 2001 through 2007. Very purposefully, both on the civilian leadership side and the military side, all of the war planning meetings were run with the Secretary of Defense, Deputy Secretary of Defense, Chairman, and Vice Chairman all in the room together. We heard briefings from both civilian DOD and military Joint Staff. And VTCs [video teleconferences] were always in one room with all of us sitting in that room. When going to the White House for NSC meetings, typically the Chairman or Vice Chairman rode in the same vehicle with the Secretary, talking about what topics were going to be covered and who might say what when. So when we got to the White House, there was absolute clarity on what everybody's position was. If there were any problems, they had all been worked through before we even left the Pentagon. So from my limited experiences as a three-star and then as a four-star, there is a night-and-day difference as far as sharing information among civilian leaders and military leaders in preparation for meetings about the way forward.

Do you believe we face new and unprecedented threats?

PP: To the extent that any nation is dependent on computers, it is vulnerable. I am talking about cyber attack and cyber defense. There are 1.1 billion computers globally hooked into the Internet, and it's estimated that about 10 percent of these are zombie computers, co-opted by someone other than the owner. That means that there are over 100 million computers available to those who would want to use them for reasons other than what the owner intended.

Fundamentally, I believe that the dawn of cyber attacks and cyber defense is going to have the same impact on relations between nations that the dawn of nuclear weapons had. Nuclear weapons were used and—thank God—have been put on the shelf. Cyber weapons are being used literally thousands of times a day. Nation-to-nation, there is still some hope that the old nuclear philosophy of mutually assured destruction will help deter, but it is hard to determine where attacks come from.

The threat of cyber attack is very real and it is available not only to nations but to groups of individuals who may or may not be sanctioned by nations, and to criminals, and to terrorists. So the whole spectrum of possible people you need to defend yourself against has exploded.

All that the national government can do, in my opinion, is understand how to protect itself at the agency level and help set standards to let businesses protect themselves at their levels. Cyber attack and cyber defense are here to stay. We as a nation are ill prepared for it, as is every other nation. We, collectively, are going to have to figure out how to deal with this.

Do you think we need a new concept of war to respond successfully to cyber warfare?

And if so, how does a nation get to a new concept of war?

PP: I'm not prescient enough to know whether at the end of the process we end up with a new concept of war because the pieces that we have had to deal with for the last couple hundred years as a nation will still be fundamental to what the U.S. military will provide to the Nation. This is additive. Will the solution that we come up with on how to defeat this new threat be so significantly different that it requires a whole new concept of war, or is this another chapter in the current concept? Not perfectly clear to me. My gut tells me that we're adding a new, very important chapter alongside land, sea, air, and space. We've now added cyber. That to me makes sense, but I'd like to have time to work through the problem as a nation and then understand where we are.

In retrospect, do you believe our initial approach in Iraq was the right approach? Or was General [Eric] Shinseki right—we needed more people from the get-go and we have been catching up ever since?

PP: You've asked a question based on a faulty premise. Eric Shinseki was a member of the Joint Chiefs, he's a National War College classmate of mine, we played soccer together, and I consider him a friend. In the process of working up for the attack into Iraq, not once did he say that we needed more troops. What happened was that we had a plan that was wrong in a couple of aspects. And I'd rather point fingers at myself than anybody else. I was Vice Chairman then, and I will just simply tell you where I was wrong. First, based on intelligence and historical precedent, we believed that there were weapons of mass destruction—at least chemical weapons. We believed that so sincerely that we made sure all of our troops had chemical protective gear, and we fully expected that chemical weapons would be used against us when we got close to Baghdad. And the historical precedent for that belief was that Iraq had used them on their neighbors in Iran. Therefore, they still had them and therefore having used it before in war, they would use it again. Thank God that turned out to be wrong in the case of their using them.

We also believed, based on intelligence, that there were whole Iraqi divisions that, once we started to attack, would surrender en masse and become part of the liberating forces. Those divisions not only did not surrender en masse, they did not fight; they simply disintegrated and went home. So we got to Baghdad with about 150,000 troops, give or take—it was more than that, but I think that number is about right. It was not that we did not have a plan for securing Baghdad and for securing the country. It's that the plan was based on a false assumption, which was that the Iraqi army, all 400,000, would be intact. That it would serve as the Iraqi nation's army, and that we as liberating forces could turn over the responsibility of the security of their own nation to the new Iraqi government and the Iraqi armed forces. When they disintegrated, there were only U.S. and coalition troops and not enough to prevent the looting. So everyone understood—that is, the Joint Chiefs and General [Tommy] Franks understood—that U.S. troops alone were not sufficient. But the assumption was that Iraqi troops would be sufficient and therein was the problem. So again, I am not pointing a finger at General Shinseki because none of us believed that we needed more U.S. troops because of that assumption. In testimony, when asked, "How many troops more would it take?" General Shinseki gave

his answer. But the assumption that General Shinseki had been recommending more troops all along is incorrect.

In Afghanistan, do you think that the increase in troops is going to bring us at least a reduction in the violence and possibly victory? What does victory look like in Afghanistan at this point in time?

PP: Victory anywhere on the planet, with regard to terrorism, looks like average citizens getting to live their lives the way they want to. Here in Washington, DC, is there crime? Yes. But the police keep the crime below a level at which most citizens can live their lives as they see fit. Around the world, in Afghanistan, will there be terrorist attacks? Yes. But will we be able to collectively help the Afghan government keep those terrorist attacks below the level at which most Afghans can live their lives the way they want to? When you get to that point, then, that in my mind is the definition of victory. It is what has been happening over time in Iraq. It is what can happen over time in Afghanistan. We have to go back to fundamentals when we talk about Afghanistan and the addition of troops.

In March of 2003, when we went into Iraq, we knew that we did not have enough troops to occupy Iraq and pursue everything we wanted to do in Afghanistan. In military parlance, Iraq became the "primary theater" and Afghanistan became the "economy of force theater." *Economy of force* means you apply enough resources to win local battles, but you don't have enough resources to prevail. And you accept that based on the resources you have. So in World War II, for instance, Europe and Germany were the first objective and Japan and the Pacific were the economy of force missions until we won in Europe. So that was the intent. It took longer in Iraq than any of us would have wanted. But now that troops are available from Iraq, the question then becomes, "Now that we have the resources, should we *apply* the additional resources?"

I think it is absolutely right that the additional troops will provide additional stability and additional time for the Afghan government to build its own army. During the 2004 to 2007 timeframe, General [Abdul Rahim] Wardak, who is the Minister of Defense for Afghanistan, and President [Hamid] Karzai wanted to build an army that was significantly bigger than what the international community was building. They wanted to build an army/police force of about 400,000. There were two things that worked against that.

One, there's a European agreement, I believe it is called the London Compact, which establishes the proper size force we would want to build for the Afghan army—about 70,000. And there was certainly agreement inside our own government that we did not want to build an army bigger than Afghanistan could afford to sustain. About 70,000 troops for a country that had a GDP [gross domestic product] of between $6 and $8 billion—$2 billion of which was drug money—was about as much as we could see them being able to afford.

Over time, other math comes into play. For every 10,000 U.S. Servicemembers, just to have them on our rolls, costs $1 billion a year. To employ them overseas, it gets closer to $1 billion a month. So when you look at recommending 40,000 more troops, and you're looking at a ratio of 1 year over and 2 years back, to have 40,000 more troops, you're looking at where you're going to find another 120,000 more troops—which is billions and billions of dollars just to have them on the rolls and even more billions to employ them. When you look

at it that way, you say to yourself, okay, would it not be smarter to help the Afghan government build their army, and understanding that they cannot afford to maintain it, perhaps we as a nation would, as part of our support, provide them with $1 billion or $2 billion a year to sustain their army, inside their country, doing their work, allowing us to bring our troops home and saving all those other billions and billions of dollars that we're spending right now. So the math works pretty quickly in that regard.

It takes time. It will take years to help them build whatever size army it is, but if it's a six-figure army, a six-digit army with 200,000; 300,000; 400,000; whatever that number is, it's going to take years to build. Significantly, the Afghan government wants us there. The Afghan people want us there, which is different than Iraq. So to the extent that adding U.S. troops now buys for the international community, and especially for the Afghan people, time to build their own armed forces to take over their own work, I think that's a good investment.

That begs one final question: do we have the time? Do you think that we have the staying power to do what's necessary to fight a counterinsurgency, to build a nation, or even its army?

PP: We have the time and the resources to do whatever we think is important to our nation.
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