Validating
a Whole-of-Government Approach and
Redefining
the Civil-Military Operations Cell

by Matthew K. Wilder

> *A whole-of-government approach is an approach that integrates the collaborative efforts of the departments and agencies of the United States Government to achieve unity of effort toward a shared goal.*
>
> *Field Manual 3-07, Stability Operations*

> *The integration of civilian and military efforts is crucial to successful COIN operations. All efforts focus on supporting the local populace and host nation government. Political, social, and economic programs are usually more valuable than conventional military operations in addressing the root causes of conflict and undermining an insurgency. COIN participants come from many backgrounds. They may include military personnel, diplomats, police, politicians, humanitarian aid workers, contractors, and local leaders. All must make decisions and solve problems in a complex and extremely challenging environment.*
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> *Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency*

The validity of the whole-of-government approach in dealing with the full range of homeland and national security threats at the operational and tactical levels would seem to be obvious given the complexities of today's threats. By allowing division of labor and maximum use of subject matter expertise, leveraging this approach allows all agencies involved in homeland and national security planning to address crises from a position of strength. The federal government has embraced the advantages offered by the whole-of-government approach and has taken broad steps to build it into the national and strategic framework. Regardless of the precedent and policies in place to mandate leveraging the whole-of-government approach, challenges and criticisms still abound, especially the difficulty in integrating diverse agencies to achieve unity of effort and the

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resulting bureaucracies. Despite the challenges, the validity of the whole-of-government approach is apparent and can be profound in stabilizing failing states that pose a threat to the U.S. However, the U.S. government should fully exploit the positive effects of a whole-of-government approach by refining training and making the Civil-Military Operations Center (CMOC) a tactical entity. These changes may also have the corollary effect of minimizing some of the detracting factors of implementing the whole-of-government approach in homeland and national security situations.

Strategic Level National Policy

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "valid" as: 1) having legal efficacy or force; 2) well-grounded or justifiable; 3) logically correct; and 4) appropriate to the end in view. Given these definitions and the descriptions of the whole-of-government approach in Field Manual (FM) 3-07, *Stability Operations*, and FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, the Department of Defense (DoD) certainly considers the whole-of-government approach to be valid. This view is echoed in the Strengthening National Capacity section of the 2010 National Security Strategy where the whole-of-government approach and national defense are mentioned as complementary ways to achieve the end state of national security. The Obama Administration's organizational changes, such as combining the staffs of the National Security and the Homeland Security Councils, also demonstrate the importance of the whole-of-government approach to homeland defence and national security. The Defense Strategic Guidance for 2012 also specifically mentions the importance of a whole-of-government approach to counter the spread of weapons of mass destruction and the nation-states that seek to acquire such weapons.

The advantages of a whole-of-government approach are also prominently addressed outside the DoD. The 2009 National Intelligence Strategy reiterates the intelligence community's commitment to the whole-of-government approach in counterterrorism operations. The State Department's 2007–2012 Strategic Plan not only advocates for, but is dependent upon, the whole-of-government approach with regard to the successful conduct of stability and reconstruction operations.[1] Considering the emphasis placed on the whole-of-government approach and interagency collaboration by the national and strategic level documents, the

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validity of the approach has been established with regard to national and homeland security. At the national and strategic levels, the whole-of-government approach is validated by strategic documents that direct the government with legal force, using justifiable and logical reasons appropriate to achieve the end state of national and homeland security.

Validating Whole-of-Government at the Operational and Tactical Levels

Early in 2006, DoD recognized the deficiencies in interagency cooperation at the combatant command level where the majority of interagency coordination and operational planning and execution takes place. The Under Secretary of Defense for Policy tasked the Commander of U.S. Joint Forces Command to present a plan of action to the Secretary of Defense to improve interagency planning within combatant commands.[2] This

followed a Government Accountability Office report that revealed major failures and fiscal mismanagement at the operational and tactical levels in Iraq and Afghanistan. What resulted

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at the operational level was the creation of the Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG), designed to facilitate coordination between the geographic combatant command staff and the staffs of the respective interagency members.[3] Joint doctrine for DoD formalizes the concept of the JIACGs assigned to the headquarters of each combatant command. Joint Publication 3-08, *Interorganizational Coordination during Joint Operations*, defines the JIACG as:

> An interagency staff group that establishes regular, timely, and collaborative working relationships between civilian and military operational planners. Composed of U.S. government civilian and military experts accredited to the combatant commander and tailored to meet the requirements of a supported combatant commander, the JIACG provides the combatant commander with the capability to collaborate at the operational level with other U.S. government civilian agencies and departments. JIACGs complement the interagency coordination that takes place at the strategic level through the NSCS [National Security Council Staff].[4]

Although the JIACG at each individual combatant command is structured differently and has experienced varied degrees of success in implementing the whole-of-government approach, it was also the first important step in building unity of effort at all levels. In a 2005 *Joint Force Quarterly* article, Colonel Matthew F. Bogdanos describes how the JIACG should be structured. He states that an effective JIACG should be formalized within the military command structure and organized to achieve both unity of effort and unity of command. He proposed that each JIACG should report directly to the Chief of Staff or Deputy Commander to ensure equal representation among other combatant command staff elements, as well as to provide a nucleus of active duty officers with augmentees from the interagency as the situation dictates. Bogdanos further asserted that the JIACG should be adequately resourced at the national level by mandating funding and participation by the interagency in the JIACG and gaining approval to implement a streamlined information-sharing process. He also called for the National Security Council to approve a joint interagency career designation similar to the joint service designation that is currently an important component to career advancement for both the military and the interagencies.[5]

In addition to the interagency and whole-of-government coordination provided by the JIACG, the 2009 U.S. Civil-Military Campaign Plan for Support to Afghanistan was drafted with the goal of providing unity of effort to the diverse agencies operating within the Afghan region. The plan dictated specific interagency objectives for military and interagency involvement and prioritized efforts at the national, provincial, and local levels.[6] At the tactical level, the whole-of-government approach has assumed the form of provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) that interact with U.S. forces at the brigade and battalion level, as do nongovernmental and other governmental organizations. The use of PRTs throughout

Afghanistan demonstrated the necessity for interagency cooperation and the effective use of the whole-of-government approach. PRTs were established in late 2002 to improve security, assist the Afghan government in administering tribal areas, and facilitate reconstruction. Each PRT was comprised of members from DoD tasked with protecting the team and conducting military matters; the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which led reconstruction efforts; and the Department of State, responsible for political advisory and reporting.[7] While the effectiveness of the PRTs as an integral part of the whole-of-government approach has been debated, it has also been one of the few organizational teams that has proved flexible enough to adapt to a fluid, tactical situation with some success. At the operational and tactical levels, the whole-of-government approach proves valid by definition, albeit with some challenges regarding optimum performance. Much the same can be said of the whole-of-government approach to diplomacy.

Whole-of-Government in Diplomacy

Many of the details of the whole-of-government approach with regard to diplomacy were outlined by National Security Presidential Directive 44, which tasked the Secretary of State and the Department of State Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) to:

1. Develop strategies for reconstruction and stabilization (R&S) activities; provide U.S. decision makers with detailed options for R&S operations; ensure program and policy coordination among U.S. departments and agencies; lead coordination of R&S activities and preventative strategies with bilateral partners, international and regional organizations, and nongovernmental and private sector entities.

2. Coordinate interagency processes to identify states at risk of instability, lead interagency planning to prevent or mitigate conflict, develop detailed contingency plans for integrated U.S. R&S, and provide U.S. decision makers with detailed options for an integrated U.S. response.

3. Lead U.S. development of a strong civilian response capability; analyze, formulate and recommend authorities, mechanisms and resources for civilian responses in coordination with key interagency implementers such as aid; coordinate R&S budgets among departments and agencies; identify lessons learned and integrate them into operational planning by responsible agencies.[8]

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Although the S/CRS was subsumed by the State Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stability Operations (CSO), many of the key missions remain the same. The CSO was established as a result of the first Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, which called for the new bureau to serve as the institutional locus for policy and operational solutions for crisis, conflict, and instability.[9] At the operational and tactical levels, employees of this bureau are expected to represent the whole-of-government in a myriad of situations, to include representation within JIAGCs and numerous other interagency teams. These same actors are also concerned with the whole-of-government approach with respect to fragile states.

Whole-of-Government Approaches to Fragile States

The USAID defines "fragile states" as those lacking the capacity and legitimacy to deliver public goods in the political, economic, security, and social spheres. Although fragile states have long been identified as threats to national security because of their attractiveness as bases of support to enemies of the U.S., only USAID has a comprehensive whole-of-government strategy with respect to these states.[10] Within

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the State Department, the CSO has the primary responsibility to address and coordinate the whole-of-government approach, but it has been negatively impacted by the profound differences between the civilian and military planning and coordination processes. Studies conducted by the U.S. Institute of Peace conclude:

A central lesson of Iraq and Afghanistan is that civilian agencies must also develop new ways of planning, as well as integrated mechanisms for joint civil-military planning. Today, most "planning" in the State Department is ad hoc and conceptual, intended to develop a common understanding of the objective itself rather than to provide a roadmap detailing operations. The same tends to be true of USAID, although the latter does have experience in supervising the implementation of actual programs and projects. By contrast, a culture of operational planning permeates the U.S. military, focusing on how to "get the job

done" by melding overall strategy, doctrine, resources, and logistics into a coherent effort. Achieving greater policy coherence requires bridging these two planning cultures, so that the strategic determination of overall objectives, informed by a sophisticated understanding of local political and cultural environments, is accompanied by a more rigorous operational planning ethos along military lines, including regular testing, honing, and correction of plans through gaming, training, and exercises. In addition, the U.S. government needs to embrace joint civilian-military planning whenever U.S. forces may be used. Given the ramifications of military decisions on post-conflict operations, a truly joint approach would integrate civilian agency input into *all* phases of military involvement, rather than being tacked onto the post-conflict phase. In an initial effort to address this challenge, S/CRS has been working with Joint Forces Command to develop a common doctrine for stabilization and reconstruction operations that can facilitate detailed civil-military planning, as well as procedures for the deployment of civilian agency representatives to each Regional Combatant Command.[11]

These reports indicate that a series of challenges exist to the whole-of-government approach, and that a comprehensive solution is required to address these challenges.

Challenges and Criticisms of the Whole-of-Government Approach

Despite the clear advantages of leveraging the whole-of-government approach, there are obvious challenges and criticisms regarding the efficiency of the approach. Many of these originate with issues surrounding the difficulty of achieving unity of effort or unity of command. "Unity of effort" is defined by the military in FM 3-07 as the coordination and cooperation toward common objectives,

even if the participants are not necessarily part of the same command or organization. This is not to be confused with "unity of command," which refers to differing participants serving under the authority and responsibility of one command or responsible agency. From the interagency perspective, unity of command is relatively easy to achieve for interagency teams led by a member of the military because the rank structure is more rigid and transparent. However, true unity of effort when expressed as horizontal (inclusive of all team members and agencies) instead of vertical (along stove-piped chains of command) integration has proven much more elusive regardless of the composition of the interagency team.[12]

Todd Moss from the Center for Global Development describes some of these common challenges at the strategic level. He draws a parallel between how other nations successfully use the whole-of-government approach and can leverage multiple entities toward a common purpose (unity of effort) because in comparison they have smaller budgets and governments and fewer issues to address. Moss believes a whole-of-government approach requires making decisions collectively, which often leads to deadlock because each party involved in a particular decision has its own agenda. He advocates for a clear line of authority in situations utilizing the whole-of-government approach and one responsible individual or agency that will resolve conflicts and ultimately make decisions.[13] In effect, Moss is addressing the principle of unity of command.

Another criticism of the whole-of-government approach is the potential for a lack of both unity of command and unity of effort at the operational and tactical levels. This often leads to challenges in communication, security, and prioritizing resources.[14] JIACG faced a number of these challenges. A number of studies indicate that the JIACG failed to reach its full potential at the combatant-command level

because commanders often limited its access to key decision makers. The studies also found that the nonstandard organization and culture of the JIACG led to a lack of acceptance in the overall organization, which limited its level of effective collaboration.[15] In 2009, the Office of the Secretary of Defense conducted a multi-layer assessment to evaluate collaboration among agencies in support of the counterterrorism and counter-weapons of mass destruction effort. Assessment participants identified six key imperatives that must be present to increase collaboration: perception of mission criticality, mutual benefit among agencies, mutual trust, access and agility in intelligence, incentives, and common understanding.[16]

Virginia Egli concluded that collaboration within the intelligence community is a factor of organizational culture. Egli examined collaboration between the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) using noted psychologist Edgar Schein's organizational culture model and concluded that collaboration

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could be increased by rewarding collaborative behavior.[17] Organizational culture is defined as "the specific collection of values and norms that are shared by people and groups in an organization."[18] Egli identified several shortfalls in the organizational culture of both the DHS and the FBI. Specifically, DHS was not yet sufficiently mature to develop an organizational culture separate

from its composite agencies, and the FBI was opposed to intelligence collaboration because of outdated legislation and attitudes.[19] The FBI was also hindered by a lack of common training programs for intelligence analysts. Perhaps most interesting is how Egli links an effective organizational culture with a stable membership in the culture and shared history. She states:

> The primary organizational culture difference between the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Homeland Security is stable membership and shared history. Stability in organizational culture means that its members are firmly established. Shared history in organizational culture means that its members have gone through the social learning and/or socialization process while overcoming challenging events.[20]

In summary, Egli's research clearly links collaborative behavior with an effective collaborative culture that is established with a common training program, a rigid sense of membership, and socialization to cultural norms through shared hardship.

A Harvard Business School case study used the collaboration challenges resident within the interagency to propose ways to overcome collaborative issues. The Harvard research indicates that barriers to collaboration are primarily a result of interpersonal and organizational bias and territoriality.[21] Likewise, a recent Congressional Research Service report indicates that the U.S. Congress and national security leaders have long realized that collaboration was a more complicated issue than many believe, and one that may be addressed through reforms and mandates concerning the education, training, and experience for national security officers. The report's analysis of recent Congressional actions with regard to the National Security Professional Development System advocate for sweeping changes in the way collaboration is encouraged, as well as the changes to human resources, funding, and incentives necessary to sustain change.[22]

Potential Solutions: Common Training and a Tactical CMOC

A common excuse for the lack of success in the whole-of-government approach is the lack of interagency understanding, culture, and planning processes. One possible solution is a training course for those likely to be involved in key areas of interagency coordination and operations where a successful whole-of-government approach will significantly contribute to mission success. This course would need to be of sufficient duration and substance to inculcate participants with the need for collaboration, appropriate collaborative behavior, and a shared whole-of-government culture to complement their own existing organizational cultures. In conjunction, changes to the organizational level in which the CMOC is found will also advance the whole-of-government approach, especially with regard to unity of effort and unity of command.

The CMOC is designed to facilitate the whole-of-government approach and encourage interagency coordination at all levels, which includes participation from intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and other governmental organizations. By doctrine, the establishment of a CMOC is a standing capability for military civil affairs units at all levels.[23] However, since this capability is often found at the operational and strategic levels, there is little current capacity for a CMOC-like capability at the tactical level. Although changes to the CMOC do not represent the ultimate solution to some of the difficulties concerning the whole-of-government approach, it may help to resolve some of the most common contemporary issues at the lowest tactical level.

A standing CMOC maintained at the brigade and division levels of military forces that are likely to be involved in operations requiring a whole-of-government approach would be a step forward. This concept offers the advantages of a standing nucleus of personnel that are trained to integrate and collaborate with interagency teams, who would also be available to train others, develop enduring relationships with counterparts in the interagency, and offer a framework that is scalable to fit the needs of the organization and operational environment. This concept would involve a civil affairs (or complementary career branch) major (or equivalent) as the CMOC chief, with a captain and senior noncommissioned officer as the standing CMOC cell. Despite the initial strain this construct may present to military staffing, the cost-benefit analysis would undoubtedly be favorable given a more efficient whole-of-government approach in any operation.

Conclusion

The whole-of-government approach has proven valid by definition and by practice at the national/strategic, operational, and tactical levels, as well as through the advantages it can offer to diplomacy and fragile states. With some changes, it can continue to add value to future operations. *IAJ*

Notes

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