Changing Interagency Culture

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The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrated America's resolve to use "whole of government," or "interagency," approaches to problem solving. Unfortunately, the degree of initial success at such endeavors has simultaneously highlighted shortcomings and the need for improvement. For ten years, the US military wrestled to fulfill every counterinsurgency (COIN) role from killing insurgents to building schools, and finding Saddam Hussein to securing voting polls. Headlines captured the essence of how difficult the challenges were and how, at various times, the military struggled to not only adapt, but to adapt effectively. Recognizing the need to bring to bear more capabilities and options to solve the challenges, the USG sought to combine the capabilities of the DOD with those of OGAs. Attempts to integrate the DOD with those entities included Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and embedded PRTs (ePRTs), in addition to Joint Interagency Task Forces (JIATF), and Joint Interagency Coordination Groups (JIACG), already in existence.

These "top-down" steps are appropriate but incomplete attempts to ultimately change the *culture* of interagency cooperation. In a better world, a more representative population—in both the DOD and OGA work forces—would develop a deeper understanding of the other's capabilities and culture, action officers would better understand each other's jargon, and the resulting corporate trust

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would propel interagency operations from "forming" to "performing" much more efficiently and effectively than recent efforts have demonstrated. In order to develop a *lasting* culture of cooperative US government interagency effectiveness, the DOD must not only continue its top-down direction but also lead a bottom-up effort to grow understanding at a grassroots level by revamping Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) Phase I and increasing interagency exchange opportunities.

What is *Interagency?*

Before framing the problem, it is important to define a few terms. Joint Publication (JP) 3-08 defines *interagency* coordination as that which "occurs between elements of DOD and engaged US government (USG) agencies for the purpose of achieving an objective."[1] Although JP 3-08 differentiates slightly between *interagency* and *whole of government*, this paper will treat them synonymously. According to JP-1, *joint* activities are those in which elements of two or more military departments participate.[2] Finally, the perspective of this analysis is *not* that the DOD has *the* correct approach and other agencies must align. The perspective is that the DOD has the need to improve interagency effectiveness and, more than any OGA, has the resources to attempt large-scale improvements. Whether the improvements recommended in this paper occur on a DOD campus or off, they intend to improve DOD understanding of others as much as the other way around.

The Fundamental Assumption

Before the analysis, it is important to address a fundamental question in this paper: is interagency cooperation worthwhile and enduring, not just convenient and en vogue thanks to the nature of our decade-long COIN operations? Before answering, consider this parallel question: are joint operations necessarily better than single service operations? In its opening chapter, JP-1 stresses that joint warfare is team warfare and the "synergy that results from the operations of joint forces maximizes the capability of the force."[3] To the generation of American service members who grew up in the post-Goldwater-Nichols-Act era, the notion of *not* performing joint operations may seem foreign; there exists an expectation that operations should be more successful with joint cooperation than without it. However, along the road to joint operations, the military has learned difficult lessons during joint efforts such as Operation EAGLE CLAW (the failed Iran hostage rescue) and Operation ANACONDA (2002 Shahi-Kot Valley, Afghanistan, where Army-Air Force coordination seriously lapsed). Through the lessons applied from these and other operations, and education and daily training, the military has refined its processes, changed its doctrine, and continued closer to a notional ideal level of "jointness" desired by the DOD.

One of the most important lessons from the parallel joint question, which applies well to interagency operations, is that joint is not *always* better. Specifically, trying to force participation in an operation merely to allow a "joint label," or shared credit, does not meet the intent of the concept. A prime example of this error comes from Operation EAGLE CLAW, where training, capabilities, equipment, integration and personnel decisions were, to some degree, driven by a need for each service to play a part instead of relying *solely* on what made sense for mission success.[4] The result was lives lost, operational failure, strategic embarrassment and a complete revamping of DOD joint training and operations (i.e. the Goldwater-Nichols Act). Just like joint operations, labeling an operation as "interagency" is no panacea but *should* provide greater flexibility to the operational commander. The key is for operational planners to determine the *needed* capabilities to meet mission success. When and where it makes sense to use an interagency approach, the participants owe it to the country (or coalition) to be proficient and ready to execute. When a problem is better solved outside the DOD, or only within the DOD, planners must be empowered to use only the necessary resources while being

protected from other pressures. In his article "Joint Interagency Cooperation: The First Step," Colonel Bogdanos summarized this sentiment well when he stated, "mission accomplishment, not pride of ownership, had to be the benchmark for any initiative."[5]

The Problem

US-led PRTs in Afghanistan represent one such recent initiative. First formed in 2002, PRTs comprised a military commander, sixty to ninety military personnel, and one representative each from the Department of State (DOS), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).[6] While the overarching goals of the Afghan PRTs were to assist with development, reconstruction, governance and security, a Government Accountability Organization report on the subject describes PRT attempts to assist Afghanistan across a broad spectrum of needs varying from improving maternal mortality rates, life expectancy and management skills to National Development Strategy assistance.[7] As one considers the specialized skills required to address these specific examples, compared to the generalized core competencies of the average military member serving on the ground in Afghanistan, it is clear to see the daunting tasks facing the Afghan PRTs. Hence, in Iraq, the PRTs took on a slightly different form.

Iraq PRTs officially formed in 2005, evolving out of DOS-led provincial support teams that had operated prior to that time.[8] Unlike in Afghanistan, a senior DOS member typically led Iraq PRTs assisted by a lieutenant colonel (typically Army) as a deputy. Although these PRTs were roughly the same size as those in Afghanistan, their makeup included broader agency representation (including Department of Justice, engineers, governance and cultural advisors, etc.) and had deeper civilian composition—including up to thirty locally employed Iraqis.[9] However, no "interagency –approved doctrine or concept of operations governed the first PRTs in Iraq. Nor are (sic) there agreed objectives, delineation of authority and responsibility between the civilian and military personnel plans, or job descriptions."[10] To some extent, ePRTs addressed the structural problems of the original PRTs, but the broader question remained: how effective were these interagency organizations?

Evidence abounds of the struggles and challenges faced by PRTs. In 2005, Christopher Shnaubelt identified "Iraq is a stunning example of how the failure to effectively plan and execute interagency operations turned what started out as a rapid victory into a long, hard slog."[11] Colonel Bogdanos noted that even though interagency task forces and working groups existed for years, they were "usually ad hoc, limited in authority, narrow in scope, and viewed with suspicion by most."[12] In 2009, Blake Stone reported from Iraq that his ePRT lacked guidance from the DOS lead and there was no coherent link between tactical or operational guidance and the desired strategic end state.[13] He concluded that the DOS lacked the planning knowledge and experience to be effective ePRT leaders and the military lacked a "fundamental understanding of what "the interagency" brought to the warfight (sic), how to harness its vast capabilities, and even more basic concepts such as who was in charge."[14]

One conclusion these examples point towards is that a disconnect exists between the known capabilities of each participant and the degree of synergy that the USG *expects* to achieve by merely merging those participants. Looking back to assess *why* the results did not match expectations is an important step towards understanding how to improve interagency effectiveness in the future. Perhaps a good starting point is to understand why the expectation—that interagency cooperation should result in a whole capability greater than the sum of its individual parts—exists at all. It is safe to conclude that at least since the 1989 Defense Authorization Act, the DOD codified the existence and purpose of the Joint Task Forces (JTF) that eventually gave birth to the Joint Interagency Task Forces (JIATF) of today.[15] These early efforts centered largely on counter-narcotics missions and accomplished great strides in

solving the challenges of jurisdiction and unity of effort when combining resources from agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the US Coast Guard, and more.[16] One of the best interagency success stories born out of the 1989 Defense Authorization Act is JIATF-South.

Within the US government, JIATF-South is the "crown jewel of interagency cooperation and intelligence fusion" as it establishes a precedent of what interagency coordination *can* accomplish.[17] In 2009, JIATF-South accounted for 40% of *global* cocaine interdiction, netting 220 tons of cocaine compared to the 40 tons interdicted by the rest of the entire US government. "Over the past 20 years, the same organization has arrested some 4,600 traffickers, captured nearly 1,100 vessels, and deprived drug cartels of $190 billion in profits."[18] Yet, despite its 7,000 to 10,000 visitors per year, an Institute for National and Strategic Studies report concludes that JIATF-South is "treated superficially in most of the literature on interagency collaboration, frequently identified as a model for whole-of-government problem-solving but with little attention paid to how it actually works."[19] The same report offers several lessons that could be applied to current and future interagency operations, but the preponderance of evidence in journals and articles regarding interagency effectiveness imply the lessons are ignored or unknown, especially at the outset of new interagency operations. Rather than analyzing a successful model, such as JIATF-South, the USG seems destined to re-forge interagency lessons in the field rather than in the classroom. The impression that interagency cooperation arrives at success or failure via an unstructured journey of discovery begs the question: have we ever gotten this right in the past?

Not surprisingly, the answer is yes and, ironically, the trail leads back to America's last major counterinsurgency: Vietnam. During the Vietnam War, the US made several attempts to create a whole-of-government approach to solve the difficulties it faced. Arguably, the most effective solution was the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support program, or CORDS. In 1966, General Westmoreland wrote that it "is abundantly clear that all political, military, economic, and security (police) programs must be completely integrated in order to attain any kind of success."[20] Although he stated this in 1966, it was not until May, 1967 that, with President Johnson's direct guidance, CORDS began in earnest. Neither CORDS nor its successors started off as models for how to conduct interagency business in the future. CORDS adapted and ultimately enjoyed many successes due to what should be axiomatic: "unity of effort is imperative . . . The pacification program in Vietnam did not make any headway until the different agencies involved were brought together under a single manager within the military (command and control) architecture."[21]

The preceding structural problems and demonstrated initial fumbles by PRTs, EPRTs and even CORDS are symptoms of the root cause of interagency shortfalls: the USG has a propensity to start, *almost* from scratch, when it comes to assembling a coherent interagency organization to execute national strategy at the operational level. Despite the historic Vietnam example, the 1989 Defense Authorization Act, and the laudable JIATF-South example, our most recent experience shows a continued reliance on personality driven, ad hoc structures punctuated with misaligned guidance, mistrust, and even counterproductive efforts. With so many top-down attempts to codify structures and cooperation, why does the evidence show a generic lack of enduring interagency effectiveness?

To a large extent, the answer is that the DOD and OGAs have yet to fully embrace the importance and necessity of interagency cooperation at the *cultural* level. If the cultures among the organizations did embrace this inevitability, it is very likely that the friction and counter-productivity demonstrated in Afghanistan and Iraq would have been reduced. Policies and direction from the top indicate the upper echelons of both DOD and OGA leadership clearly value the *potential* of whole of government solutions, but at the grassroots level, how many in the DOD truly understand the

capabilities, strengths and weaknesses of the DOS, or USAID? What does a DOS Foreign Service Officer know about military planning? How will an officer assigned to a JIACG respond to, "I'm from the State Department and I don't do PowerPoint?"[22] The *people* who are the backbone of the interagency processes must understand each other's' cultures better if the USG is to maintain effective whole-of-government competency rather than rediscover it, in the field, during future operations. The important question is, how do such massive bureaucracies change their cultures?

The Solution

Change management theories abound, but business strategists Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne capture the essence of the problem in that it is difficult, requires deliberate, aligned strategy, and takes time. They cite four specific hurdles that must be overcome to successfully change organizational culture: 1. Cognitive: people must have some understanding of why the change in strategy or in culture is needed. 2. Limited resources: changing an organization will require shifting resources away from some areas and towards others. 3. Motivation: workers have to want to make the change. 4. Institutional politics. They quote one manager who complains: "In our organization, you get shot down before you stand up."[23] To simplify, there must be clear top-down guidance and there must be buy-in at the grassroots level.

The good news is that top-down guidance does exist. In his 2005 Vision for Joint Officer Development, General Peter Pace identified that the "definition of joint matters must evolve…" to the "…*integrated employment of US and multinational armed forces and interagency capabilities*."[24] Even JP-1 states that joint matters "relate to the integrated employment of military forces in joint operations, including matters relating to…unified action with the US *interagency and intergovernmental communities* (emphasis added)."[25] These two statements identify a clearly stated top-down vision of a desired end state: effective interagency integration. The mere existence of PRTs, JIACGs, JIATFs reinforces the top-down efforts to achieve the desired end state. However, this is only a partial solution.

In order to instill long-term buy-in and lasting improvement in interagency cooperation (and operations), bottom-up efforts must breed understanding across the associated organizations. The most effective means to accomplish that effort is by a combination of education and hands-on experience gained prior to real-world operations. The following sections cover an ideal solution and the advantages it offers, followed by more practical solutions that, while not as encompassing, would still improve on what exists today. Ideally, the DOD should create (or improve upon) a single Government Professional Development (GPD) school in the Washington, D.C. area. Whether GPD could use the facilities at the National Defense University or the Joint and Combined Warfighting School is beyond the scope of this paper, but the intent is similar. However, the target audience for GPD is officers in the ten-to-fourteen year point in their careers (O-4s) rather than the eighteen-to-twenty year point (O-6s). This would effectively educate the action-officers rather than the commanders and leaders.

GPD offers several advantages in drawing OGA participation as compared to the current service colleges (Leavenworth, Maxwell, Newport, and Quantico). First, its location is central to the preponderance of other agency headquarters, think tanks, multiple top-notch universities and the seat of the USG. In short, GPD would leverage greater potential to draw in the desired interagency student mix, qualified faculty, political and governmental leaders from the Senior Executive Service to provide lectures and question and answer sessions, allow for future growth in adjuncts and exchanges, and, most importantly, allow more students to attend via commute rather than a one-year move.

One of the greatest strains on OGA student attendance at the current service colleges is the time cost of sending members away for ten months. Given the manning constraints across the USG to fill *needs*, it is that much more difficult to release a member to fill *wants,* such as developmental education. After all, a seat filled at a school for ten months equates to an empty seat at the home office for the participating agency. Therefore, GPD would restructure its curriculum to decrease time demands and increase throughput potential. GPD would have a trimester structure similar to the Naval War College but, rather than only teach the JPME Phase I (renamed Joint-Interagency Professional Education, JIPE) at once to the entire student body, it would be taught all three trimesters to one third of the student body (see figure 1). To fulfill military education requirements, DOD students would attend GPD full time. OGA students would have a full-time option or could attend just JIPE, allowing them to choose from one of three part-time opportunities to attend.

Naval War College Trimester Structure		
TSDM	S&W	JPME

GPD Trimester Structure		
JIPE	M3	M2
M2	JIPE	M3
M3	M2	JIPE
Extra Seats	for OGA	JIPE

TSDM: Theater Security Decision-Making
S&W: Strategy and War
JPME: Joint Professional Military Education

JIPE: Joint-Interagency Professional Education
M2: Module 2 (To Be Determined)
M3: Module 3 (To Be Determined)

Figure 1

The intent behind allowing JIPE-only students at GPD is twofold. First, it allows another cost and time savings for resource-constrained agencies. Costs reduce not only in terms of potential commutes instead of moves, but also in terms of position vacancies in the OGA offices lasting three-to-four months instead of ten. Second, DOD and OGA capabilities are taught and exercised among the students during JIPE. Equally as important as the objective learning outcomes for JIPE will be the networking and socializing among the students. The value of student interaction and the application of personal experiences to the classroom environment is immeasurable compared to book learning on its own.

Regardless of where it is taught, for how long, or what it is called, the JPME Phase I curriculum must be changed for two reasons. The first need is to increase the amount of interagency training and education provided to any given class. As a data point, in its 2012 syllabus, the U.S. Naval War College JPME Phase I syllabus dedicated only one out of seventy-five lessons to instructing intergovernmental organizations/other governmental agencies.[26] The second reason is to provide ownership to OGAs, thereby increasing their JPME buy-in. The best way to increase buy-in for the participating OGAs is to provide them with ownership of a representative number of syllabus lessons. For example, the DOS may own more syllabus lessons than the Department of Energy (DOE) based on the likely greater DOD-DOS operational interaction (compared to DOD-DOE). By owning the syllabus lessons, each agency would control what it feels is most important for students to understand, whether that is capabilities, resources, expectations, organization or leadership and decision making.

GPD should, in essence, create what Bernoulli would call a venturi effect: with the reduced time requirements for JIPE-only students and increased organizational buy-in via syllabus ownership, GPD should draw in more OGA members on an annual basis than current in-residence IDE programs. Theoretically, throughput could increase threefold because three JIPE-only students could attend (from a given agency) in the time allotted a current full-time student. GPD provides a conduit through which DOD-OGA interaction would increase compared to current levels and, therefore, spread cultural understanding throughout the USG agencies at a much faster rate.

Regardless of the feasibility to establish GPD in accordance with the recommendations above, there are more incremental steps the DOD can take to strive for the same desired end state. First, and still within the construct of education, the DOD can broaden the scope of its distance learning JPME programs. Using the Navy's College of Distance Education as a model, such distance learning should require frequent seminar (i.e. in-person) participation among the students. These seminars can meet at installations all over the world, whether at military bases, college campuses or even other agency facilities.

Second, the DOD could increase exchange programs with other agencies. Rather than confine exposure to small fields of highly selected officers, such as Regional Affairs Strategists and Foreign Area Officers, the DOD should establish a broader network of work exchange programs. As the DOD gradually decreases its deployed footprint in the Middle East, it could better afford to, for example, send "individual augmentees" on three- to four-month "deployments" to work in a DOS or USAID field office. Notably, these exchanges should *not* hinge on a quid-pro-quo arrangement. The DOD would send a very strong message of how it values the experience for its young officers by its willingness to invest time, talent and treasure to achieve the desired ends. The net result would be greater exposure of OGAs to DOD members, accelerated spread of cultural understanding in both directions and increased trust. One of the "finesse" challenges to this recommendation, however, is the need to "incentivize" participation in the exchanges. Specifically, if the DOD values interagency effectiveness then it must not treat such exchange opportunities as a meaningless branch in a member's career. Although the scoring system for joint tour credit is not necessarily an ideal template for such an incentive, its intent demonstrates the point.

Counter-Argument

The language used above is soft because there are many aspects of managing cultural change that are outside the control of the DOD. In general terms, the best the DOD can do is set the conditions for increased OGA participation at GPD, distance learning and exchanges. Ultimately, however, it is still up to the OGAs to send more students and participate. Despite DOD efforts to make attendance more affordable (in terms of time and money), convenient, and relevant, OGAs may choose not to participate. To draw back on the work of Kim and Mauborgne, the OGAs would also need to take action—independent of DOD initiatives—to create cultural change within their own organizations. That is a difficult task. When it comes down to decreasing budgets and limited bodies to fill positions, OGAs will continue to have a difficult time shifting their stretched resources to participate in DOD-led JPME if the organizations do not see JPME as a priority. In order for OGAs to motivate their people and change institutional politics, they would also need to make JPME a top-down priority and provide bottom-up incentives for their people to participate. Those incentives would most likely be linked to job promotion and pay, both of which lie very distinctly outside the realm of any DOD influence.

However, none of these counterpoints mean the DOD should not do what it can to increase interagency effectiveness and set the conditions for improvement. Given the fundamental assumption

that recognizes the value of effective interagency operations, the DOD should not hesitate to take the lead and do what it can. Regardless of OGA participation, DOD could still change its residence- and distance-learning syllabi to incorporate OGA-written syllabus lessons. It is also doubtful OGAs would deny exchange opportunities, especially if the arrangement did not require a one-for-one personnel swap. The results within the DOD would still be improved cultural understanding among its members (at a younger age), and results outside the DOD would be the demonstrated resolve to address the need seriously. Perhaps, in time, DOD's unofficial influence would increase the degree of OGA participation. The bottom line remains, however, that the changes within DOD are still worthwhile.

Conclusion

The current requirement for the DOD to cooperate closely with OGAs is not a passing fad. On the contrary, the last fifty years of U.S. history show repeated times and circumstances that have called on combining the capabilities, skills, and resources of an interagency, or whole-of-government, solution. Recent top-down guidance has established structural entities designed to enable and support such efforts. However, the start-up difficulties, clashes of interests and competition for resources that continued to plague interagency cooperation efforts in the most recent decade point towards a fundamental problem of cultural misunderstanding and ignorance. The best way to grow a lasting interagency culture of cooperation is to educate a broader base of USG officers and members at a central school, with a streamlined syllabus taught and owned by the organizational experts. Even without a centralized school, the DOD should adjust its JPME curriculum to cover a broader range of interagency capabilities and seek exchange opportunities for its younger officers. Through time, as with joint operations, the DOD and OGA *people* will bring the agencies closer together and raise the level of synergy closer to what every American expects it should be.

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