

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 16 May 2006			2. REPORT TYPE FINAL		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Deconstructing the Tower of Babel : conflict and opportunities In the Interagency Process"					5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
					5b. GRANT NUMBER	
					5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) LtCol Stephen P. Corcoran USMC Paper Advisor (if Any): N/A					5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
					5e. TASK NUMBER	
					5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Joint Military Operations Department Naval War College 686 Cushing Road Newport, RI 02841-1207					8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)					10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
					11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.						
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the JMO Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.						
14. ABSTRACT The interagency process as it currently exists today requires a new approach to enable the United States to bring all the elements of national power to bear on strategic objectives. The current construct of the National Security Council performs adequately at identifying American interests and developing coordinated policy across the expanse of government. However, past experiences (9/11, Afghanistan, Iraq and Hurricane Katrina) has illustrated that there is a disconnect in transitioning sound policy to the point of coordinated execution at the operational level. There are numerous dynamics that interplay when coordination is attempted across such a large entity as the United States government. When taken from within the context of the American political system, the interactions of the numerous dynamics create a challenging environment in which to achieve strategic objectives. The failure of coordination in past complex contingencies does not have to be prologue or the script for future contingencies. Additionally, there are approaches to preserve the American form of government and attain successful execution at the operational level.						
15. SUBJECT TERMS Interagency Process						
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Chairman, JMO Dept	
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) 401-841-3556	

**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.**

**DECONSTRUCTING THE TOWER OF BABEL: CONFLICT AND OPPORTUNITY
IN THE INTERAGENCY PROCESS**

By

Stephen P. Corcoran

Lieutenant Colonel USMC

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

16 May 2006

Abstract

The interagency process as it currently exists today requires a new approach to enable the United States to bring all the elements of national power to bear on strategic objectives. The current construct of the National Security Council performs adequately at identifying American interests and developing coordinated policy across the expanse of government. However, past experiences (9/11, Afghanistan, Iraq and Hurricane Katrina) has illustrated that there is a disconnect in transitioning sound policy to the point of coordinated execution at the operational level.

There are numerous dynamics that interplay when coordination is attempted across such a large entity as the United States government. When taken from within the context of the American political system, the interactions of the numerous dynamics create a challenging environment in which to achieve strategic objectives. The failure of coordination in past complex contingencies does not have to be prologue or the script for future contingencies. Additionally, there are approaches to preserve the American form of government and attain successful execution at the operational level.

When the dynamics with their attendant limitations are understood, new approaches can be explored to remain within the operational design of the government and improve the interagency process. By combining more effective coordination at the strategic level and implementing a control construct at the operational level, the interagency process can maximize the interplay of institutional dynamics with the end result of achieving strategic objectives with reduced friction and increased effectiveness.

Complex U.S. contingency operations over the past decade, from Somalia to Iraq, have demonstrated the necessity for a unity of effort not only from the armed forces but from across the U. S. government and the international coalition. In most cases, however, such unity of effort has proved elusive, sometimes with disastrous results. Clark A. Murdoch

INTRODUCTION

To effectively harness and synchronize all the elements of national power to satisfy strategic objectives, changes to the interagency process need to be implemented. Four major complex contingencies; 9/11, Afghanistan, Iraq and Hurricane Katrina have illustrated shortfalls in interagency planning and execution. Functional at the strategic level through the auspices of the National Security Council (NSC), there is a disconnect between the national strategy promulgated and what is executed at the operational level. Prior to 9/11, the NSC performed adequately in identifying known and suspected threats and developing corresponding strategies. With a tectonic shift in global attitudes and the international environment as a result of 9/11 and other complex contingencies, the interagency process has not evolved to meet the daunting challenges of a radically changed landscape. Post 9/11 and recent experiences in Iraq, at the strategic level, minor strides have been made to achieve unity of effort along functional lines. The establishment of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), establishment of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the establishment of the National Intelligence Directorate (NID) have increased the effectiveness of some functions to a small degree. However, better clarity and improved effectiveness at the strategic level have not resulted in gains in planning and execution at the operational level.

To identify and achieve strategic objectives with the maximum amount of effectiveness and the least amount of bureaucratic inertia, the focus of the interagency process needs to be placed on developing a new command and control construct. The

new command and control construct needs to accept fundamental tenets of the United States government (separation of power/civilian control) while effectively enabling the operational level with improved tools to accomplish assigned missions and tasks. This paper proposes focusing on the operational level as the nexus to achieving strategic objectives through an improved joint interagency process.

BACKGROUND

The interagency process is the purview of the National Security Council. Established in the National Security Act of 1947, the NSC is the President's principle advisors and implementers of domestic, international and military policy. One of the many functions of the NSC is to effectively coordinate across the elements of national power. ¹ At the national strategic level:

The NSC process involves chairing and directing the work of interagency groups and applying procedures through which inputs (defined as events or circumstances requiring response or presenting opportunities) are converted into outputs. The three basic elements of this process include: 1) understanding the circumstances, intelligence and other information underlying a given issue; 2) precisely defining US interests and selecting desired goals and outcomes; and 3) evaluating and selecting from among alternative means and risks the most effective path to achieve the desired outcomes (i.e. strategy). ²

At the highest level, the process is relatively sound and a vital element in the successful attainment of US strategic objectives. Pre 9/11 provides the best illustration of good policy and strategy that was not effectively coordinated and executed at the operational level. Though the NSC dodged a large degree of criticism in the 9/11 Report, it never the less did a fair job in outlining U.S. interests and priorities in regards to counter-terrorism based upon known intelligence and patterns of past behavior. As the attacks against US

¹ Derived from the mission statement on The National Security Council Website www.nsc.gov

² Michael Donely, "Rethinking the Interagency System" (Washington D.C.: Hicks and Associates INC Occasional Paper # 05-02 May 2005), 2

interests increased in number and severity in the 80's and 90's, the NSC coordinated effective policies across the departments and agencies within the United States government. As far back as the 1980's, the United States began to understand the seriousness of the terrorist threat as U.S. interests came under attack internationally. The Reagan Administration issued National Security Decision Directive 30 (NSDD 30) designating policy and for "managing terrorist incidents both domestically and internationally."³ In the 1990's the U.S. began to feel the effects of terrorist acts domestically with the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993.

Following the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, President Clinton ordered the NSC to coordinate the response. In rapid fashion the attackers and the planners were identified and tried in Federal Court. The successful execution of the response never generated legislative or media interest due to the results achieved.

In 1995 President Clinton issued Presidential Decision Directive 39 which was a classified directive that reaffirmed "the United States should deter, defeat and respond vigorously to all terrorist attacks on our territory and against our citizens."⁴ President Clinton's second administration made terrorism and counter terrorism a high priority and issued Presidential Decision Directives 62 and 63 further defining terrorism as a national security issue and assigning primary responsibility.

Though not the majority view, the NSC adequately discharged its duties prior to 9/11. The litmus test for strategic emphasis is proved or disproved by the funds allocated to a particular issue. "Between 1994 and 2000 the U.S. doubled its annual expenditures on terrorism bringing the total to more than \$10 billion with \$11.3 billion proposed for

³ Reagan , Ronald , National Security Decision Directive 30 (Washington D.C: 10 April 1982) , 3

⁴ Various, " The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States" (New York : W.W. Norton & Company, 2004) , 81

2001.”⁵ Based upon the known threat and the priorities established by the President and the NSC, it was an adequate prioritization and apportionment of assets based upon the known threat. Prior to 9/11, the NSC had a degree of understanding of the threat and was able to effectively manage emerging crises.

Where the NSC was successful in outlining priorities and developing policy, as a collective body, they were equally unsuccessful at coordinating interagency execution or maintaining the ability to translate policy to the operational level. Post 9/11 illustrated a drastic change to the international environment and fatal flaws in coordination at the operational level. At the highest level of U.S. policy and strategy formulation, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Peter Pace remarked that the “ NSC does a great job of teeing up the issues of the day for the President but once the President decides to do something, then our government goes back into stovepipes for execution.”⁶ Absent a crystal ball, the White House and the NSC had an understanding of the problem and solid policy. The policy coordination mechanisms within the NSC performed to task. The break down of 9/11 and subsequent complex contingencies was at the ill defined, guided and resourced operational level.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

In the aftermath of 9/11, the commission charged with investigating the failure of the United States to prevent the attacks and the disjointed response succinctly summed up the problem confronting the interagency process:

However the specific problems are labeled, we believe they are symptoms of the

⁵ Laura K Donohue, “In the Name of National Security: US Counterterrorism Measures 1960 – 2000” (Washington D.C. : Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs August 2001) ,11

⁶ Michael Donely, “Rethinking the Interagency System” (Washington D.C.: Hicks and Associates INC Occasional Paper # 05-01March 2005) , 9

Government's broader inability to adapt to how it manages problems to the new challenges of the twenty-first century. The agencies are like a set of specialists in a hospital, each ordering tests, looking for symptoms, and prescribing medications. What is missing is the attending physician who makes sure they work as a team.⁷

The NSC, successful at the strategic level nevertheless abrogated their collective responsibility to coordinate across the U.S. government. Each agency prior to 9/11 exercised due diligence but within a narrow context that failed to see the entirety of the issue or the interaction between intelligence and the synchronization of effort. The NSC as the "attending physician" did not translate strategy into operational planning, execution and oversight. In the aftermath of the stalled progress and at times regression of strategic objectives in Iraq, the NSC proved incapable of managing the operational aspects specifically, the harnessing of all the elements of national power across the span of government. The NSC has demonstrated in several complex crises "weakness in interagency planning and coordination at the operational level.....this is among the core problems below the president's level."⁸ Similarly, other reports have gone on to note that effective strategy at the highest levels does not equate to successful implementation at the operational level.

The NSC as the owner of the interagency process is not staffed and more importantly, should not be responsible for planning and execution at the operational level. Implementation at the operational level is key to successfully attaining goals and objectives. The NSC can not adequately implement its own policy any better than the Pentagon can implement a strategy or policy with a regional focus. The operational level

⁷Various, "The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States" (New York : W.W. Norton & Company, 2004) , 101

⁸ Various, "Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era PHASE I REPORT" (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies March 2004) , 22

of the interagency process is ill defined, devoid of authority and relies on a spirit of cooperation to synchronize efforts. The current system relies on coordination as the centerpiece to harness all the elements of national power. But, this system fails to recognize that at the operational level, coordination does not empower or enable lead agencies to task, organize and manage assigned functional missions that are relevant to two or more agencies. Further, there are no tools for compulsion in regards to achieving synchronization when tasks or missions run counter to agency or department interests. The end result is a retreat into agency stove pipes. The 9/11 Commission identified two key reasons why past attempts at cohesive interagency coordination have failed:

1. When interagency coordination is attempted or ‘homed’ in on a single agency, and representatives or liaison officers are brought in from other agencies to participate, a gap between information sharing and coordination of an operational response is often left unaddressed because a single agency lacks authority to direct the activities of the government as a whole.
2. When operational planning and direction is attempted at the NSC staff level, the staff becomes overwhelmed and too focused on day to day issues at the expense of advising the President on larger policy issues.⁹

When the problem of interagency coordination was analyzed for the difficulties experienced in Iraq, a report reinforced the same themes from the 9/11 Commission report. The report identified six major areas of contention:

1. Lack of government-wide procedures for developing integrated strategies and plans.
2. Lack of a ‘planning culture’ outside of DOD.
3. Limited NSC staff capacity dedicated to integrating agency strategies and plans.
4. Lack of deployable experts in civilian agencies.
5. The inability of designated lead agencies to speak for the President.

⁹ Various, “ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States” (New York : W.W. Norton & Company, 2004) , 130

6. The absence of standardized mechanisms for coordinating the planning and conduct of complex operations among coalition partners.¹⁰

Two separate complex crises yielded similar deficiencies. The NSC as the owner of the interagency process does not have the capability to implement and execute at the operational level. When the tasks or objectives are delegated for execution, lead agencies do not have the skill or the authority to direct other agencies in support. A lack of operational experience and a culture of planning are directly attributable to this deficiency.

In the absence of a clearly defined command and control structure, agencies responsible for implementing national strategic policy have to rely on coordination between entities. This is further exacerbated by the lack of a cohesive command and control process or support system that allows the flow of information amongst agencies. This is compounded additionally by “each agency interpreting and /or executing presidential policy largely on its own terms...(that) has been directly associated with interagency failures in counterintelligence, homeland security, and other areas.”¹¹ Policy often becomes an empty vessel for agencies and departments to pour in bias and self interest.

Coordination continues to be the driver of the current interagency process even in light of a pressing need to effectively synchronize disparate agencies into a single operational focus. Regardless of the scope and magnitude of the issue (counter-terrorism/homeland security/reconstruction/disaster response), the current organization of

¹⁰ Various, “ Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era PHASE I REPORT” (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies March 2004) , 22

¹¹ Micheal Donely, “Rethinking the Interagency System” (Washington D.C.: Hicks and Associates INC Occasional Paper # 05-01March 2005) , 5

the U.S. Government precludes one agency from subsuming another for functional tasks regardless of importance or unity of effort achieved. Coordination becomes both an enabler and disabler simultaneously. As an enabler, it allows diverse tasks of government to proceed within logical boundaries. The U.S. Department of Agriculture maintains cognizant authority for far ranging and diverse federal programs and requires a degree of autonomy to remain effective. Being subsumed by a larger agency for a joint functional task would potentially negate its charter and primary missions necessary for the safe and effective functioning of the U.S. food distribution system. On a larger interagency scale, the NSC under the current Bush Administration has coordinated and issued policy on 46 major national security issues. Coordination at the national strategic level enabled effective identification of issues and corresponding policy. In looking at the whole, the national strategic level does an adequate job at coordinating complicated issues and policies and for the most part, contributes directly to the high American standard of living.

Coordination becomes a major dysfunctional piece of the interagency process when diverse organizations are brought together to achieve a functional goal. Where the policy appears clear, the manner and method of execution is anything but clear. Organizational dynamics and preservation of agency and department power rise to the forefront and manifests as severe impediments to execution. There are numerous dynamics and barriers to coordination that effect the interagency process at all levels. In a recent report eight key barriers were identified:

1. Organizational sovereignty
2. Missions are complex with great uncertainty as to the correct course of action
3. Large disparity in power and resources between agencies

4. Agencies have different mandates, programming approaches, timeframes and concept of end state.
5. Agencies have different cultures, languages, and systems of communication
6. Barriers in communication between headquarters and the field
7. Politics of coordination
8. Not everything can or should be coordinated.¹²

The barriers become overwhelming when unity of effort is tantamount to the successful attainment of strategic objectives. Almost five years after 9/11, numerous commissions and the stark reality that the nation faces a determined enemy, the United States is still struggling through an interagency process that has failed to transition a cohesive policy and strategy and set operational responsibility and parameters to defend the homeland and prosecute the enemy abroad.

The recently issued National Security Presidential Directive 46 which is a classified document that outlines the counter terrorism and the homeland security strategic direction for the United States has failed to materialize as an operational architecture or plan due to the ineffectiveness of the interagency coordination process at the operational level. “A series of internal battles that have been kept more secret than the classified document itself has delayed final agreement on who has the authority to carry out its most demanding responsibilities.”¹³ It is important to debate issues with significant impact and to assign responsibility within the most capable entities, however, when there are no mandated control mechanisms or means of compulsion, the eight barriers to coordination become insurmountable hurdles regardless of the importance and

¹² Susanna Campbell & Michael Hartnett, “A Framework for Improved Coordination: Lessons Learned from the International Development, Peacekeeping, Peacebuilding, Humanitarian and Conflict Resolution Communities”(Washington D.C.: The Interagency Transformation, Education and After Action Review Program, 2005) , 9

¹³ Jim Hoagland, ‘Terror Turf Wars: Bush’s Secret Blueprint, Stalled By Infighting’ (Washington D.C. The Washington Post 16 April 2006)

severity of the issue. To wit; the inability to finalize the operational piece of the national counter-terrorism plans.

To state that the interagency process is broken would be too simplistic. The nation functions daily even with bureaucratic boundaries, Byzantine procedures and complicated laws. For the most part, when compared with other political systems and processes, the American Bureaucratic Model serves the majority of the nation. However, it is primarily a peace time construct that is not fine tuned for the requirement at hand or a new environment. The premise identified by the 9/11 Commission Report that agencies fail to see the major change in the operational environment is a catalyst to begin to examine the problems of the interagency process at the operational level. 9/11, Afghanistan, Hurricane Katrina and Iraq have provided enough material and objective data to begin the process of beginning to look at different ways to improve the effectiveness of the interagency process. That process is by nature a complicated one that does not avail itself to a single solution or methodology to begin to solve the inefficiencies and fractured focus. In order to increase effectiveness and preserve the unique form of government within the United States, a balanced approach to the interagency process should be explored.

NEW INITIATIVES

There is broad consensus that fundamental changes in the U.S. Government need to be made to facilitate the successful prosecution of any endeavor. There have been numerous studies reiterating the common theme that “United States has been unable to bring to bear all of its instruments of national power – political, economic, military, and

informational – in a coherent and effective campaign.”¹⁴ The status quos of the pre 9/11 strategic and operational environment created a government institution that was resistant to change and when placed in a simple context, it led one author to conclude that the U.S. government creates a culture where “candle makers do not invent electricity.” With the situation studied and analyzed by highly talented and credentialed individuals, the beginnings of significant in roads to progress have been made at various levels.

At the operational level, the formation of the Joint Interagency Coordination Groups (JIACG) has helped bring the full resources of the U.S. government to regional issues. United States Central Command has had limited success with the interagency group as well as with the Provisional Reconstruction Teams (PRT) in Afghanistan. However, this is an improvement for the Department of Defense not the entirety of the interagency process. The National Defense University has made great strides in education and the development of policy and procedures with the implementation of the Interagency Transformation Education and After Action Review Program. The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) established by Executive Order 13354 of August 2004 is a step in the right direction in integrating diverse functional areas to achieve strategic objectives. However, the center is not empowered to achieve unity of effort through established control mechanisms. The center remains predominantly an operational planning and coordination center. The initiatives and studies point to progress but fail to build a cohesive approach to begin to improve interagency operations.

It would once again be too simplistic to advocate a lock step hierarchal approach to the interagency system. The United States form of government however inefficient,

¹⁴ Various, “ Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era PHASE II REPORT” (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies May 2005) , 55

demands a degree of autonomy and we are collectively reticent to have “super agencies” subsume others in the name of unity of effort. The CSIS report “Beyond Goldwater Nichols” astutely placed a constraint on its investigation by placing the nature of the political system off limits as it is an enduring American strength. The report further went on to state that “while undeniably strong over the span of centuries, the basic nature of our divided system of government – with checks and balances constraining the power of all institutions, including the President – creates enormous friction and wasted energy in daily operations. Decentralized government structures create complex, duplicative, excessively bureaucratic processes that can choke initiative and cause unneeded inertia.”¹⁵ The solution does not lie in reinventing government. Contrary, the bid for success should be in preserving the American system which was deliberately designed with the decentralized distribution of power and instead, seeking inroads at different levels to improve the process. There is room to remain within the spirit and intent of the political system by focusing the majority of effort on reform at the operational level in order to begin to reduce friction and achieve greater effectiveness.

Two themes ring the loudest when increased effectiveness in the interagency process is explored. The first theme is in what General James Jones termed a “Goldwater Nichols” like event to reform the interagency process. This theme is popular in many circles due to the interagency process is at a similar crossroad as the Department of Defense was in the early 1980’s. The Department of Defense was stove piped and dug in along service lines, was incapable of cohesively planning and executing along functional lines and faced a major external negative event that pointed towards reform.

¹⁵ Ibid; 7

The interagency system shares many similarities but vastly different characteristics. Unlike the Department of Defense, the interagency process does not have a single point of control, influence or direct Presidential authority. The Military Services all reside in a single department under the command of the President of the United States. There are no command relationships between the President and the other agencies and departments. The unique form of American government carefully precludes the amalgamation of power by any one branch of government.

There are reforms from the “Goldwater Nichols” camp that can be adopted to achieve a strategic and operational effect without disrupting the political design of the government. The center for Strategic and International Studies report “Beyond Goldwater-Nichols” outlined several initiatives that can be enacted with Executive Authority and Legislative Authority:

1. Establish planning capacity for complex contingency operations in civilian agencies.
2. Develop common concepts of operation for each interagency mission area, using NSC-led interagency working group.
3. For each complex contingency operation, establish an Interagency Task Force in the field to integrate the day to day efforts of all U.S. government agencies and achieve greater unity of effort on the ground.
4. Create a new Training Center for Interagency and coalition Operations.¹⁶

There are parallels between reforms for the interagency process and Goldwater-Nichols. The fundamental impact of the Defense Reform act was a shift in authority from the Service Chiefs to the Combatant Commanders for regional issues. Similarly, the establishment of Interagency Task Forces would shift power from Washington into the field. Though a step in the right direction, the reforms still do not address the requirement

¹⁶ *ibid*; 131- 135

to move beyond coordination at the operational level and establish formal control mechanisms.

The second resounding theme revolves around more effective coordination facilitated by minor reforms, education and increased understanding of the dynamics of coordination. This theme tends to be more politically palatable and requires the least amount of change. A small cottage industry in support of effective interagency coordination has sprung up in response to the various commissions, congressional hearings and independent studies. There is value in exploring the vast landscape of ideas in regards to better coordination techniques and practices. Even if a formal command and control construct is adopted at the operational level, there are still requirements for lead agencies or Interagency Task Forces to coordinate with international players and non-governmental organizations (NGO'S). The process of coordination at both the strategic and operational level will always remain. There is tremendous friction encountered when diverse organizations attempt to accomplish similar goals. The improved coordination school stands by the premise that “a hierarchical coordination structure, with one clear authority figure at the top, will not resolve the inherent tensions involved in trying to coordinate the efforts of different agencies.”¹⁷ In a sense, this is what retired Marine Colonel Kevin Kennedy termed the “herding cats approach to operations.” However unwieldy, it is an essential component to interagency operations at both the strategic and operational level when non U.S. government actors are integrated into the mission.

¹⁷ Susanna Campbell & Michael Hartnett, “A Framework for Improved Coordination: Lessons Learned from the International Development, Peacekeeping, Peacebuilding, Humanitarian and Conflict Resolution Communities”(Washington D.C.: The Interagency Transformation, Education and After Action Review Program, 2005) ,12

ACHIEVEING BALANCE; THE HYBRID APPROACH

Both approaches to long standing systemic problems in the interagency process hold potential to achieve a balance between the American Political System and operational necessity. At the strategic level, there is an advantage to retaining the existing power structure and the system of checks and balances. Policy is at times the result of bureaucratic infighting and a fight for resources and influence. Increased funding and influence flows to agencies that are more nimble and can operate within the context of political expediency and can best satisfy national objectives. Debate and consensus building based upon cooperation and coordination is helpful when divergent organizations look at similar tasks at the national strategic level.

The framers of the constitution consciously recognized that inefficiency would be a lesser evil to the centralization of power. “The decentralized nature of the American political system was consciously designed by the Founding Fathers after passionate debate on the tension between fragmented power structures on one hand, and governmental efficiency and effectiveness on the other.”¹⁸ Targeting increased education and implementing improved coordination methodologies within the interagency system would result in a more effective process. Reforms such as increasing the NSC staff to coordinate the transition of policy to strategy and then the transition to the level of execution would keep the NSC within its charter without usurping agency or department influence. Recent reports listed similar recommendations for slight reforms at the NSC level. The “Beyond Goldwater-Nichols” report recommended four reforms that would increase effectiveness:

¹⁸ Various, “ Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era PHASE II REPORT” (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies May 2005) , 30

1. Create an NSC Senior Director and office dedicated to strategic planning.
2. Establish a new NSC Senior Director and office dedicated to integrating interagency planning for complex contingency operations.
3. Develop common terminologies for each interagency mission area, using NSC –led interagency working groups.
4. Develop common concepts of operation for each interagency mission area, using NSC-led interagency working groups.¹⁹

Politically, maintaining the status quos at this level has multiple advantages; increased efficiencies while preserving a carefully designed system of government.

There is a disconnect when the methodology of coordination is applied at the operational level. The end result is the myriad of problems discussed previously but most importantly, the nation collectively loses its ability to cohesively bring all elements of national power to achieve strategic objectives. At the operational level it is important to re-look at the current structure and examine establishing a control relationship between lead agencies and supporting agencies. There is room within the American Political System to keep power decentralized and within the series of checks and balances that are firmly established. Additionally, there is also room to allow the political process and the bureaucratic process to proceed. A control relationship at the operational level is predicated on the “healthy” political and bureaucratic relationships at the strategic level.

The role of agencies would also be altered to a minor degree. The immenseness of the federal government and the myriad of tasks that are conducted on a daily basis are simply overwhelming. It is critical to keep agencies within their charters and enabled to conduct proprietary tasks. A shift in emphasis is required when two or more agencies are engaged in a functional task or an interagency group is established. When a functional

¹⁹ Various, “ Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era PHASE II REPORT” (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies May 2005) , 131- 135

task or mission is established and a lead agency chosen, identified elements or personnel from agencies and departments in support would be under the control of the lead agency at the operational level. Allocation of personnel and assets would be accomplished by coordination at the strategic level. Once decision is achieved, the interagency group would be responsible to the NSC through the lead agency or department. This is a point of departure from the recommendations outlined in the “Beyond Goldwater-Nichols” report. The report did not establish a control relationship rather it shifted the role of coordination from Washington to the field. Second, there are efforts that require the expertise and resources far greater than an Interagency Task Force operating in the field. Homeland security, counter terrorism and national intelligence require the resources of large agencies.

The viability of the hybrid option is predicated on establishing an adequate structure at the operational level. The operational level as previously discussed is ill defined and not resourced to operate semi autonomously. The reforms at the operational level previously outlined would be a movement in the right direction. Additionally, the hybrid solution would face several other obstacles. There would be a necessity to divert funds from individual agencies or departments for functional tasks that would create a large degree of bureaucratic friction. Agencies and departments currently struggle to accomplish assigned tasks within mandated boundaries and would find it difficult to source extra agency or department efforts. And last, the cultural impact on the current bureaucratic system cannot be minimized.

CONCLUSION

The interagency process as it currently exists today requires a new approach to enable the United States to bring all the elements of national power to bear on strategic objectives. The current construct of the National Security Council performs adequately at identifying American interests and developing coordinated policy across the expanse of government. However, past experiences (9/11, Afghanistan, Iraq and Hurricane Katrina) has illustrated that there is a disconnect in transitioning sound policy to the point of coordinated execution.

There are numerous dynamics that interplay when coordination is attempted across such a large entity as the United States government. When taken from within the context of the American political system, the interactions of the numerous dynamics create a challenging environment in which to achieve strategic objectives. The failure of coordination in past complex contingencies does not have to be prologue or the script for future contingencies. Additionally, there are approaches to preserve the American form of government and attain successful execution at the operational level.

When the dynamics with their attendant limitations are understood, new approaches can be explored to remain within the operational design of the government and improve the interagency process. By combining more effective coordination at the strategic level and implementing a control construct at the operational level, the interagency process can maximize the interplay of institutional dynamics with the end result of achieving strategic objectives with reduced friction and increased effectiveness.

Bibliography

- 99 TH Congress. *Goldwater – Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986*. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office 1986.
- Bardach, Eugene. *Getting Agencies to Work Together: The Practice of Managerial Craftsmanship*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute Press 1998.
- Campbell, Susanna & Michael Hartnett, *A Framework for Improved Coordination: Lessons Learned from the International Development, Peacekeeping, Peacebuilding, Humanitarian and Conflict Resolution Community*. Washington D.C.: The Interagency Transformation, Education and After Action Review Program 2005.
- Clark, Stephen. *Interagency Coordination: Strengthening the Link between Operational Art and Endstate*. Newport: R.I. Naval War College 1999.
- Donely, Michael. *Rethinking the Interagency System*. Washington D.C.: Hicks and Associates INC Occasional Paper # 05-01 2005
- Donohue, Laura. *In the Name of National Security: US Counterterrorism Measures 1960 – 2000*. Washington D.C.: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs 2001.
- Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Publication 3-08 *Interagency Coordination During Joint Operations*
- McCreedy, Kenneth. *Waging Peace: Operations Eclipse I and II: Some Implications for Future Strategy*. Carlisle Barracks: US Army War College 2004.
- Reagan, Ronald. *National Security Decision Directive 30* Washington D.C.: 1982.
- Straughan, Matt. *Information Operations and Unity of Effort: The Case for a Joint Interagency Information Operations Task Force*. Newport: Naval War College 1997.
- United States Congress. *A Failure of Initiative: Final Report of The select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for Hurricane Katrina*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office 2006
- Various. *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.
- Various. *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era PHASE I REPORT*. Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies 2004.
- Various. *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era PHASE II REPORT*. Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies 2005.

