OPERATIONAL-LEVEL NATIONAL SECURITY ORGANIZATION:
AN ALTERNATIVE TO "CINC-RONIZATION"

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

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.

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OPERATIONAL-LEVEL NATIONAL SECURITY ORGANIZATION: 
AN ALTERNATIVE TO "CINC-RONIZATION"

Our future security environment offers many interesting challenges. Information technology is causing increased globalization, and therefore increased interdependence, of our political, economic and information systems. With the complexities of today’s environment, and the increasing relevance of the economic and informational elements of national power, effective development and coordination of national security policy requires the continuous coordination of agencies representing the entire spectrum of national power. In the aftermath of World War II it may have been adequate to include only the Secretaries of State and Defense in the National Security Council (NSC); however, changes in the security environment make broad-based input desirable at all levels of our national security structure. At the same time, the failure to coordinate all elements of national power when we address national security issues could be disastrous in terms of wasted resources and national credibility.

The purpose of this paper is to address the question of reorganizing our operational-level national security apparatus. Regional security issues should be planned and implemented by an organization that provides balanced representation, responsibility, and authority among all elements of national power, rather than a regional system dominated by the military element. Currently there are fundamental differences between the strategic and operational-level organizations that plan and implement national security policy, and these differences may cause inappropriate responses and inefficient resource allocation to address problems. Neither organizational level currently embodies the more balanced role that should be shared among all elements of national power. While the strategic level is dominated by the President as the decision-maker and relative co-equality among his advisers
and cabinet officers, operational-level organization has the military in a dominant beauracratic position.

Following a brief overview of the current national security apparatus at the strategic and operational levels, two reorganization models will be introduced: a "regional security council" and an "interagency operations center." These proposed organizations will then be analyzed in terms of the following three objectives for changing our current system:

1. meeting globalization and regionalization challenges in the security environment
2. reducing the "national security equals defense equals military" mindset when solving national security problems
3. integrating all elements of national power during policy formulation and long-term planning as well as crisis management

Conclusions drawn from the evaluation of the two models will then form the basis for a recommended regional national security organization.

The predominant source of information for this paper comes from recently published articles and books. Reference is made to joint doctrinal publications and some older research works that have enduring value. Note that the terms "regional" and "operational-level" are often used interchangeably, and "national security" is considered one term (e.g., regional national security issues, vice regional security issues). Strategic-level national security organizations are addressed for discussion and comparative purposes, but they are not the intended focus.

**Current Organization**

The National Security Act of 1947 established the National Security Council (NSC), which has the President, Vice President, Secretary of State, and Secretary of Defense as
statutory members. Beyond this statutory minimum, the President is free to designate other officials as standing members, temporary members, advisors, or observers, as he deems necessary and appropriate. Commonly included members include the National Security Adviser, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the Director of the Council of Economic Advisers. The Director of Central Intelligence and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff serve in statutory advisory roles. This body normally is convened to deal with crisis management situations, rather than dealing with advanced planning for potential problems. Long-term planning is addressed by Interagency Working Groups (IWGs), although the use of these groups has fluctuated through the years. In a 1995 article, the Joint Force Quarterly characterized standing interagency working groups as "... less commonly used than they were four years ago, [but] they should not be. Working in isolation until the proverbial balloon goes up does not improve the process." There are indications that IWGs are being standardized, particularly the standing Contingency Planning IWG formed by the National Security Adviser in December 1999.

At the operational level, the military commander in chief (CINC) "owns" his area of responsibility. He has staff members that provide advice on diplomatic, economic, and informational issues, but they are purely advisory roles. The CINC is vested with "combatant command authority" over assigned forces. Military personnel are not subject to the authority of the State Department's chiefs of mission. The President charges chiefs of mission to "... exercise full responsibility for the direction, coordination, and supervision of all executive branch offices and personnel... except for personnel under the command of a U.S. area military commander, another chief of mission, ... or on the staff of an international organization." Therefore, within each country there are two individuals – the
CINC and the ambassador -- who may see themselves with the leading role on issues that overlap between diplomatic and military considerations. There are normally no regional equivalents to the CINC within the organizations governing the other elements of national power, although there are regional experts serving in diplomatic and economic agencies.

**Reorganization Proposals**

**Regional Security Council (RSC).** The first reorganization option is a Regional Security Council (RSC) that would be formed on a National Security Council model, including a regional security adviser, regional undersecretary of defense, and a regional undersecretary of state/ambassador. Regional economic and informational representatives, preferably undersecretaries from two new cabinet departments formed at the national level, would be statutory co-equal members of the council. The CINC and a regional director of intelligence would serve as advisers to the RSC, much the same as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) and the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) currently advise the NSC (see figure 1 below). The regional security adviser is envisioned as a sub-cabinet level position, filled by a senior (possibly retired) official with some combination of military, DoD, State Department, and other government agency experience.

**Figure 1**

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  Regional Security Adviser (RSA)  -Regional CINC
                                 -Regional Director of Intelligence

                                      Regional Undersecretary of Defense
                                      Regional Undersecretary of State/Ambassador
                                      Regional Undersecretary of the Economy
                                      Regional Undersecretary of Information

  Regional Security Council
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Interagency Operations Center (IOC). The second model being considered is an “Interagency Operations Center,” outlined in a 1998/1999 article authored by three military officers, one each from the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The following is a summary of their proposal:

... [A] full interagency team within the headquarters of each US regional commander-in-chief. The teams eventually could be empowered to have primary responsibility for planning, coordinating, prosecuting, and sustaining US interagency responses in their regions. The goal would be to improve reaction time to such requirements and to reduce, if not eliminate, the effects of communication stovepipes that exist between civilian agencies in Washington and their members abroad. This is more than an exercise in communication technologies, however, for it could involve devolution of a measure of authority from Washington to the representatives of federal agencies assigned to the headquarters of the regional commanders-in-chief. It suggests a permanent cultural change within the Washington bureaucracy. 6

The IOC is seen as a permanent organization within the CINC’s staff, tasked training interagency participants as well as providing a nucleus coordinating staff during crises.

Why Reorganize?

The three objectives introduced earlier in the paper provide the reasons why we are considering reorganization. First, we want an organization that better fits our current and projected security environment, moving away from the ‘legacy system’ inherited from the Cold War period. Our current organization does not fit the way we say we want to do business (i.e., synchronized effort among all government agencies on a continuing basis). Second, we want to move away from the mindset that “national security equals defense equals military.” How we organize our national security apparatus can influence when and how we use the different elements of national power. Military dominance at the operational level may influence decision-makers toward inappropriate military involvement. Third, we want an organization that facilitates integrated planning on a continuing basis and not simply
during crisis management. While the military routinely analyzes and plans for both military contingencies and peacetime engagement activities, this planning emphasis and capability is not uniform among the elements of national power.

**Meeting the Challenges of Our National Security Environment**

**Discussion.** One objective of changing our regional security structure is to best meet the current and projected challenges of the security environment. These challenges include increased importance of regional issues and the impact of economic and information system globalization.

Globalization argues in favor of co-equal representation from the economic and informational elements of national power in forums that are responsible for meeting our national security objectives. The importance of these two areas when dealing with both foreign and domestic issues increases as globalization increases. Our vulnerability to “attack” from less-than-friendly elements using these two potent forms of national, or in some cases trans-national, power is also increased as we engage in a more interdependent world. “The Soviet Union’s collapse coincided with another great revolution. Dramatic changes in information technology and the growth of ‘knowledge-based’ industries altered the very basis of economic dynamism, accelerating already noticeable trends in economic interaction that often circumvented and ignored state boundaries. . . . As the prototype of this ‘new economy,’ the United States has seen its economic influence grow, and with it, its diplomatic influence.” This quote not only shows the changing nature of the economy, but it also illustrates one relationship between the economy and diplomacy. Other examples of the economic and informational globalization include:

- World market fluctuations that immediately followed the precipitous drop in the New York Stock Exchange on 14 April 2000. The market reaction was a
demonstration of global economic interdependence and the real-time impact caused by information technology.

- Violent protests against meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. Such fervor in the streets used to be reserved for registering dissatisfaction with military issues rather than economic policy.

A second characteristic of the security environment is the increased regionalization of many issues affecting national security. Stating that the forces of globalization and regionalization working at the same time may seem contradictory; however, there may be a logical cause and effect. The economic and information globalization tends to diminish the need or desire for nations to look beyond their regional boundaries to pursue political or military aims. For instance, one historical reason for extra-regional activity was to gain resources and thereby improve one’s economy. Economic improvements are based increasingly on intellectual capital and electronic transactions, while diminishing the need for territorial and natural resource aggrandizement. Another example of this globalization-regionalization dichotomy is found in the phenomena that “businesses are becoming more global in scope, and capital is flowing globally, but trade is becoming more regionalized. The formation of such economic entities as the European Union and the AsiaPacific Economic Cooperation Organization is an example. This regionalization of trade is prompting a focus on regional security.”

A third example of greater emphasis on regionalization is the strength of regional defense agreements. Much of the military focus is shifted to regional issues in the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union’s monolithic threat, and only the United States retains a credible extra-regional power projection capability.

Analysis. This combination of globalization and regionalization calls for several changes. Our national security apparatus must have not only expert representation in the emerging national power elements of economics and information, but bureaucratically viable
representation as well. Both the RSC and IOC proposals would be better able to address these two emerging national security environment phenomena. There would be greater institutionalization of the roles of the economic and informational regional representatives, providing viewpoints that are more balanced during policy formulation and crisis management.

**The “National Security Equals Defense Equals Military” Mindset**

**Discussion.** Our look at how we tend to equate the military with national security, to the exclusion of other forms of national power, is divided into three subsections. Consideration is given to the following: (1) how the military took on a dominating role in foreign affairs from an historical perspective; (2) opinions on why the military is not suited to solve every national security problem; and (3) how even the names chosen for certain organizations and activities send the message that equates the military with national security.

**The Military and Foreign Policy – Historical Perspective.** Our current national security institutions, both at the strategic and operational levels, are holdovers from World War II and Cold War era considerations. One must look back to World War II to see how we arrived at a militarily dominant regional security and foreign policy apparatus. Up to that time, the State Department was dominant in foreign affairs, with post-World War I isolationism still a major influence in defense matters. This situation changed when “a landmark shift in the foreign policy center of gravity came with WW II and its aftermath... World War II caused a major shift of influence from [the department of] state to the military, or at least military themes.” The National Security Act of 1947, as amended in 1949, provided the statutory “nail in the coffin” of State Department dominance in foreign affairs.
Perhaps the most significant effect of the Act, reflected in the NSC’s composition, has been to *elevate further the military aspect of foreign policy* at the expense of traditional diplomacy [emphasis added].

This shift in foreign policy emphasis was maintained throughout the years of the tightly focused containment strategy followed by the United States throughout the Cold War.

At the operational level, regional CINCs were retained as part of the post-war national security structure to cover geographical areas of responsibility. Although the United States reduced forces drastically, the armed forces that remained were much larger than ever before in the nation’s history. Therefore, the military had the continuing mission, robust planning staffs, and overseas infrastructure that established and continues to maintain military dominance in national security matters on a regional level.

"Not Every Problem is a Nail". The military should not always be the "instrument of choice" to deal with our national security problems. The current administration, citing a need to improve the government’s management of what they refer to as "complex contingency operations" (e.g., peace accord implementation operation in Bosnia, humanitarian intervention in northern Iraq; and foreign humanitarian assistance operations) published Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 56. This PDD, which describes complex contingencies as "multi-dimensional operations composed of such components as political/diplomatic, humanitarian, intelligence, economic development, and security," goes on to state that:

In many complex emergencies the appropriate U.S. Government response will incur the *involvement of only non-military assets*. . . . We have also learned that many aspects of complex emergencies *may not be best addressed through military measures*. . . . Military and civilian agencies should operate in a synchronized manner. . . . Integrated planning and effective management of agency operations early on in an operation can avoid delays, reduce pressure on the military to *expand involvement in unplanned ways*, and create unity of effort within an operation . . . . [emphasis added]
The Chairman of the Joint Chief Staff, speaking to the Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce in the fall of 1999, offered the following thoughts concerning use of the military instrument:

The overriding lesson from our extensive experiences in contingency operations in this decade is that we must bring all our resources to bear — economic, political, diplomatic, and military — if we expect to be fully effective in solving non-military problems that are rooted in religious, cultural or ethnic strife. . . . We cannot afford to separate diplomacy and force so rigidly. . . . The military is a very powerful hammer. But not every problem we face as a Nation is a nail.¹²

Although the concerns cited above pertain to the strategic level, they have application at the regional level. In fact, the concern deepens because of the bureaucratic imbalance favoring the military representative within geographic areas. As stated in U.S. joint doctrine, “. . . there are very few operational-level counterparts to the combatant commander within other agencies . . . “¹³ Because of this lack of regional counterparts, the CINC takes on overall responsibility overall national security issues at the operational level. Joint doctrine provides the following guidance to CINCs / Joint Force Commanders when working issues in an interagency setting:

Establish an authoritative interagency hierarchy, considering the lead agency identified at the national level, and determine the agency of primary responsibility. As previously identified, there may be missions in which the Armed Forces of the United States are in a supporting role. There may be resistance to the establishment of such an interagency hierarchy, as interagency players may view themselves as “one among equals” at all levels, Nonetheless, commanders should attempt to insert discipline, responsibility, and rigor into the process in order to function effectively.¹⁴

The tone of this passage clearly puts the burden for crisis response organization squarely on the shoulders of the CINC, regardless of military involvement. There is also an inference
that the CINC will have to “babysit” the non-military members of the interagency process, as if the military were the only institution capable of “discipline, responsibility, and rigor.”

What’s in a Name? Even the way we name our national security organizations invites bias toward Department of Defense (DoD) participation. When the DoD was created in 1947, the intent was to form an organization that was dedicated to the defense of our nation. As the Chairman of the Joints Chief of Staff said recently, “The fundamental purpose of America’s Armed Forces is to fight and win the Nation’s wars. Plain and simple. To fight and win the Nation’s wars.”15 Without getting into a discussion of the merits of our current national strategy, it is clearly embodied in the term “engagement.”16 This strategy has evolved throughout the 1990s, resulting in the 1998 National Security Strategy reference to “the imperative of engagement [emphasis added].”17 Even a cursory look at our National Security Strategy shows that little space is devoted to discussing “defense” compared to the number of pages devoted to “engagement.” The military certainly has a vital role in an engagement strategy, but there are also greater opportunities for the other instruments of national power to contribute to achieving our national objectives. One author challenges the term “Revolution in Military Affairs” by suggesting that we broaden our outlook to include what he terms a “Revolution in Security Affairs” that encompasses political, economic, social, and cultural changes.18 A related issues was surfaced by the 1994 Commission on Roles and Missions, which recommended an NSC-directed Quarterly Strategy Review (QSR), intended as a comprehensive strategy and force review in contrast to a more narrowly-focused Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR).19 A QSR would be more appropriate than the QDR in light of our complex security environment. The inference from this terminology is that responsibility for the national strategy belongs to the Defense
Department, leading to military strategy dominating the security strategy. The intent of these examples is to show that national security issues are not simply the purview of the Defense Department, but are appropriately the shared responsibilities of all agencies wielding national power.

**Analysis.** Realizing the full benefits of economic and information power at the operational level will not occur until the credibility and viability of these instruments is established. During the Cold War there were reasons for military dominance at the operational level – the security environment was dominated by the Soviet monolith or some surrogate thereof. The challenges today are different, and much can be gained by moving away from a military-dominated approach to national security. While the RSC builds on the NSC model instituted in the late 1940s, it updates the membership by recognizing the co-equality of the economic and informational elements of national power, consistent with changes in their national security role. The CINC assumes an advisory role that has precedent in the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff role in the NSC; however, unlike the Chairman, the CINC would retain combatant command authority. Reality is that the CINC will normally run military operations through subordinate joint force commanders, lending greater similarity to the relationship among the Secretary of Defense, Chairman, and CINC. Benefit should result from having similar organizations at the strategic and operational levels, providing counterparts that possess similar authority at their particular level. The IOC retains the current role of the CINC, and in fact reinforces his pre-eminence in national security affairs within his assigned region. The intent is to empower the IOC to handle regional affairs with devolution of power from Washington, but that power really devolves to the CINC. The regional representatives of the diplomatic, economic and informational
communities would have greater input than at present, but their influence would remain subject to the limitations of serving as subordinate staff officers.

**Continuous Integration**

**Discussion.** The third and final objective of changing our regional / operational-level organization is to improve regional policy formulation while enhancing our crisis management capabilities. Much of the emphasis on interagency issues centers on crisis management, at the expense of daily operations and more routine issues of national security. The key to minimizing the need for interagency crisis groups is “preventive maintenance” -- to develop and implement coherent regional strategies on a continuing basis. What is needed to improve our efforts in executing government policy is to get away from reliance on ad hoc working groups that often have no enduring participation or dedicated constituency.

Comparison of current national security institutions shows a disjointed organizational system considering that the two levels are expected to coordinate continuously. At the strategic level, it remains up to the President to determine what representation on the NSC, if any, is appropriate from the economic and informational elements of national power. The NSC staff, headed by the National Security Adviser, supports the President as he executes his national security responsibilities. However, this is far from an overarching coordinating authority at the national level, and the staff remains most comfortable in its traditional role as crisis manager vice strategic planner.

At the operational level, there is no statutory body charged with integrating or coordinating either national security planning or implementation. As has already been touched on, the regional CINCs are vested with extraordinary responsibility and authority that often goes beyond military matters. The CINC has representatives from the other
elements of national power who are members of his staff and provide advice and expertise (e.g., the political adviser, or POLAD). However, the key point here is that these individuals work for the CINC as members of his staff. While they have direct communication channels back to their parent organizations, they have no regional coordination authority or responsibility.

A closer look at the regional diplomatic organization illustrates the potential for discontinuity at the operational level. The political adviser to the regional CINC has no authority over the ambassadors in the CINC's area of responsibility. The political adviser reports to the political-military section at Foggy Bottom, while the CINC has a direct line to the Secretary of Defense – a significant difference in bureaucratic clout.20 “The US Ambassador, synonymous with chief of mission, represents the President but takes policy guidance from the SECSTATE through regional bureaus [emphasis added].”21 This “chain of command” for diplomatic matters does not include the political adviser on the CINC's staff. A recent article by a former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff offers the following recommendations on this matter:

... Encourage additional related reorganization of the Executive Branch to bring the national security structure of the United States into effective coordination, including reforms of the intelligence community and State Department structures. One pressing need is to modernize the antiquated (nineteenth-century) structure of regional assistant secretaries of state presiding over individual embassies throughout a geographic area, creating a modern design where perhaps a “super-ambassador” who would live in the region could be given overall diplomatic responsibility and authority for the region, mirroring the Pentagon's delegation of authority to a regional commander in chief.22
The current regional assistant secretaries of state would serve on the RSC (with a name change to undersecretary), but they would have authority over the chiefs of mission in the geographic area (a regional ambassador).

**Analysis.** Our national security organizations at both the strategic and operational level need to serve two basic purposes: policy formulation and implementation, and crisis response. Both of these purposes are best achieved when the organization has clear lines of communication and authority. Both proposed models would create permanent organizations that would address both these purposes on a continuing basis, thus eliminating the current reliance on committees and working groups to deal with national security issues. As standing bodies, both the RSC and IOC would more coherently address national security issues particular to that region, with more effective accounting for cultural, religious, social, and ethnic dynamics. The regional reorganization would have a secondary effect of reducing the burden on the NSC staff to coordinate non-military elements of national power for regional issues, allowing greater concentration on inter-regional integration and coordination as well as its more traditional crisis management role. The greatest difference between the two proposals in meeting this objective is the role of the military. The IOC capitalizes on the proven capability of the military to conduct deliberate planning, prepare plans and orders, and utilize established processes for organizing, analyzing, and disseminating information and directives. The RSC creates additional civilian bureaucracy that would need additional education to assume greater responsibilities for planning as we know it today.

**Conclusions and Recommendation**

In the preceding discussions the following points were argued: our security environment is changing in a manner that requires more attention to the economic and
informational elements of national power; the military instrument of national power has a dominant bureaucratic position at the operational (regional) level; and benefit will be gained from continuous integration of all elements of national power during deliberate planning and well as crisis management. Both proposed reorganization models would address and improve our current capabilities in each of these three respects.

The fundamental question then is whether we want to abandon the current emphasis on the regional CINC in favor of a civilian-oriented RSC, or retain the CINC in his current role. Adding an IOC to the CINC’s staff improves his ability to work interagency issues; however, these issues remain mere adjuncts to military planning and operations. The need for changes in the role played by the CINC is not emergent or overwhelming. Generally the job gets done in a satisfactory manner, but we may never know the economies available within the DoD if the role of the military could be reduced in favor of increased use of other instruments of national power. Likewise, the potential of the other instruments may never be fully realized unless they are given the opportunity to serve as full-fledged members of the national security team on the operational level. We will not get beyond the point when interagency affairs are merely an annex to a military operation plan as they are now. The goal should be the highest degree of integration and synchronization in national security affairs attainable -- when the military operation plan becomes one of four annexes to a regional operation plan, the other three major annexes being the diplomatic, economic, and informational. The fundamental change needed is similar to that made within our armed forces by the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986. The impact of this single piece of legislation was to shift the military from “interservice cooperation” to “jointness” as the way of doing business. A reorganization of both the strategic and operational national security apparatus
should take us from “interagency cooperation” to “national security jointness.” In 1960 (times of relative simplicity in our national security environment), Paul Nitze provided the following commentary on national security organization during congressional testimony:

I am somewhat skeptical of the idea of representatives of the Joint Chiefs of Staff or of the State Department going to this, or that, or the other group. The point is not to have somebody representing the bureaucratic position of the State Department vis-à-vis the Joint Chiefs, or representing the bureaucratic position of the Joint Chiefs vis-à-vis the Policy Planning Staff [State Department] . . . Everybody has to work together as an entity. . . . What is required here is not cross-representation. What is required here is joint development of ideas in a field which affects policy as a whole. What we are talking about here are political-military problems and not just military problems or purely diplomatic problems. So here you have to work on these things together [emphasis added].

Although Nitze’s comments are in terms of strategic-level organization, his thoughts on representatives going to groups to represent bureaucratic viewpoints and the need for joint development of ideas are germane at the operational level as well.

The mere fact that our government refers to issues in terms of “civil-military” and “political-military” issues – rather than in terms of “national security” issues -- indicates how far away we are from truly integrated procedures and processes. It has taken years in the wake of Goldwater-Nichols to institutionalize cooperation and integration that transcends bureaucratic considerations in the military, but progress has been made and continues. The same concerted effort is needed in the executive branch to achieve effective integration of our elements of national power in support of our national security objectives. The Regional Security Council model can take us away from the military-dominated operational level integration process (“CINC-ronization”) and set us on the path to gain the most from all instruments of national power as we tackle our future security problems.
NOTES


4 President Clinton’s letter to the Ambassador of the Republic of Sierra Leone, dated 16 September 1994.

5 The proposed RSC could serve as a model for improvements to our NSC. Such issues as the consolidation of economic and financial matters in our Executive Branch (e.g., a Secretary of the Economy, with Undersecretaries of Treasury, Commerce, Agriculture, etc.) and a Secretary of Information would offer benefits in achieving more closely integrated government policy in both national security, international, and domestic issues. A more detailed discussion of national level organization; however, is beyond the intended scope of this paper.


7 Condoleezza Rice, “Promoting the National Interest,” Foreign Affairs, Jan/Feb 2000, 45-46.


10 Ibid, 124.


Bibliography


