Interagency Command and Control at the Operational Level:
A CHALLENGE IN STABILITY OPERATIONS

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PHOTO: A member of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Disaster Assistance Response Team looks on as humanitarian relief supplies from Puerto Rico arrive in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 26 January 2010, as part of Operation Unified Response. (U.S. Navy, Mass Communication Specialist 2d Class Chris Lussie)

L AND POWER SUCCESS in stability operations will require interagency command structures at the operational level and the concurrent development of a more effective interagency "culture" for these missions. The future probability of military engagement in stability operations is high. Land power, broadly speaking, bears the brunt of the planning and execution of such missions.

Stability operations are military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment and provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure, reconstruction, and humanitarian relief.[1] Land power plays a leading role in stability operations, which concentrate on population control, security, and development activities. Military forces drawn heavily from the U.S. Army engage in stability operations to establish, safeguard, or restore basic civil services. They act directly and in support of government agencies. Stability operations often involve both coercive and cooperative actions. They lead to an environment in which the other instruments of national power can predominate.

The very definition of stability operations raises the problem of how to command and control endeavors that are by nature Joint, interagency, and often multinational. Since the U.S. government will continue to conduct stability operations, the U. S. defense establishment must develop a comprehensive view to integrate military land power with its interagency partners for these deployments. Although stability operations are an interagency and intergovernmental effort, challenges and shortcomings in coordinating and resourcing efforts across executive branch departments often result in the U.S. Army carrying a disproportionate burden in conducting these operations.[2] While the Army will play a critical role in executing stability operations, and bear significant responsibility for planning in the pre-execution phase of stability operations, it will not be alone.[3] During the planning and execution cycle, the Army is directly participating with organizations throughout the government to define the most appropriate and essential roles for the military and civilian agencies in stability operations.[4]

Land power for stability operations is a holistic mix of capabilities drawn from the U.S. Army and a host of other federal agencies. A partial listing of these agencies includes the Department of State (DOS), the U.S. Agency for International Aid (USAID), the Department of Justice (DOJ),

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the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the Department of Agriculture. Critical challenges are establishing unity of effort and command over such diverse institutions and structuring appropriate command organizations at the operational level for maximum effectiveness.

Strategic Context

A U.S. Joint Forces Command study on the future of warfare lends credence to the view that the future holds a high potential for instability due to demographic, energy, and climate trends. This *Joint Operating Environment 2008* report stated, "The next quarter century will challenge U.S. joint forces with threats and opportunities ranging from regular and irregular wars in remote lands, to relief and reconstruction in crisis zones, to sustained engagement in the global commons." The analysis implies that U.S. military forces will engage in persistent conflict over the next quarter century.[5]

In this era of persistent conflict, rapidly evolving terrorist structures, transnational crime, and ethnic violence complicate international relations and create belts of state fragility and instability that present a grave threat to national security. Drivers of conflict (sources of instability that push parties toward open conflict) include religious fanaticism, global competition for resources, climate change, residual territorial claims, ideology, and the desire for power. While journeying into this uncertain future, leaders will increasingly call on stability operations to reduce the drivers of conflict and instability and to build local institutional capacity to forge sustainable peace, security, and economic growth.[6]

Stability operations are a core U.S. military mission. The Department of Defense (DOD) must be prepared to conduct and support them across all activities including doctrine, organizations, training, education, exercises, materiel, leadership, personnel, facilities, and planning.[7] This mandate implies the need for substantial ground forces that can successfully execute the resulting contingency operations produced by such an unstable and volatile world. These land power forces must contain an integrated mix of civilian and military capabilities to address the core sources of instability and conflict.

Unity of Command and Unity of Effort

While the functions of command are eternal, the nature of command must evolve in scale and scope, given developments in technology and the mission. If the United States remains involved in stability operations, the Armed Forces, together with their civilian partners, must apply doctrinal principles that are applicable to these missions. Chief among these are *unity of command* and its interrelated concept of *unity of effort*.[8]

Unity of command is simple—for every objective, ensure unity of effort under one responsible commander. Unity of command means that a single commander directs and coordinates the actions of all forces toward a common objective. Cooperation may produce coordination, but giving a single commander the required authority is the most effective way to achieve unity of effort. The Joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational nature of unified action creates situations where the commander does not directly control all organizations in the operational area. In the absence of command authority, commanders must cooperate, negotiate, and build consensus to achieve unity of effort.[9]

Unity of effort is coordination and cooperation toward common objectives, even if the participants are not necessarily part of the same command or organization—the product of successful unified action.[10] Uniting all of the diverse capabilities necessary to achieve success in stability operations requires collaborative and cooperative paradigms that focus those capabilities toward a common goal. Where military operations typically demand unity of command, the challenge for military and civilian leaders is to forge unity of effort among the diverse array of actors involved in a stability operation. This is the essence of *unified action*: the synchronization, coordination, and/or integration of the activities of governmental and nongovernmental entities with military operations to achieve unity of effort.[11]

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To this end, military forces have to operate with the other instruments of national power to forge at a minimum unity of effort through a whole-of-government approach.[12] Regrettably, lack of true unity of command leads to inefficiencies, opportunity costs, and a less-than-holistic approach to a global counterinsurgency and other post-conflict missions. The correct command structure for stability operations is crucial. Unfortunately, political or agency considerations too often determine specific command structures. History abounds with command arrangements powered by these attributes.[13]

The problems with the current American interagency process are complex. Most of today's troubles arise from a gap created by a lack of either capacity or integration, or both, below the national level.[14] So while the strategic policy level may have its integrative mechanisms, the operational and execution level are where the deficits lie. This operational level links the use of tactical forces, which include civilian agencies, to achieving the strategic end state.[15] Major operations are not solely the purview of combat forces. They typically go forward with the other instruments of national power. Major operations often bring together the capabilities of other agencies, nations, and organizations.[16] Unfortunately, current command arrangements are imprecise or cobbled together and do not fully address the situation at hand.[17] Integrating the efforts of military and nonmilitary organizations in the interagency process to achieve unity of effort has proved elusive, allowing for unclear lines of authority and communication and leading to confusion during the execution of the operation.[18] Given the challenges and complexities inherent in stability operations, *military and civilian agencies must evolve to a more concrete unity of command approach that avoids the inefficiencies of consensus building and compromise found in a unity of effort model*.

Organizational Mismatches

Typically, execution at the regional or local levels is fraught with problems, because the agencies representing the instruments of power organize themselves differently and there is no directive authority for implementation at the regional level. The DOD and the DOS, as the core players in stability operations, are representative of these problems. The former has six geographic combatant commands responsible for the various regions, but the latter's regional organization is different. The State Department has six regional bureaus, but their boundaries do not match those of DOD. As an example, the U.S. Central Command commander must coordinate efforts with three regional State bureaus: African Affairs, Near Eastern Affairs, and South and Central Asian Affairs, plus 27 country teams.[19] Because most emergencies transcend national boundaries, the absence of a compatible operational framework between officials of the DOS and the geographic combatant commanders is a problem. Complications thus arise between the DOS (with its country teams) and the DOD (with its regional commands).[20]

In addition, the resourcing and readiness of personnel are vastly different between the two organizations. As House Foreign Affairs Committee Acting Chairman Howard L. Berman pointed out, "There are only 6,600 professional Foreign Service officers today in the State Department. According to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, this is less than the personnel of one carrier battle group and, allegedly, less than the number of active duty military band members."[21] Similarly, USAID today has less than 3,000 people essentially doing the contract management that outsources their entire development mission.[22]

The Interagency Historical Record

In this light, an effective strategy to resolving a regional crisis depends on integrating all elements of power through the interagency process at the operational level to achieve unity of command and effort with clear lines of authority and lines of communication. The difficulty integrating military and nonmilitary actions at the operational level is a recurring theme. In a number of contingency operations undertaken over the past two decades, this lack of amalgamation has produced enough obstacles to meeting political-military objectives that military and interagency participants attempted a series of internal reforms, often to no avail.[23] The following vignettes provide a sampling of the difficulties.

Somalia. In Operation Restore Hope (1992-1993), the human resource element came to the fore. A critical shortfall was that most civilian organizations did not maintain large staffs and were not

equipped to conduct expeditionary operations. In Somalia, neither the DOS nor USAID had sufficient personnel in the region. For example, while Ambassador Robert Oakley and his staff remained fully engaged working with the military in Somalia, there were not enough civilian personnel to negotiate with the various factions or to assist local village elders in establishing councils and security forces. Army civil affairs teams had to assume those responsibilities to the detriment of other tasks.[24]

Haiti. For Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti (1994-1997), military planning began in October 1993 when the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed U.S. Atlantic Command, now U.S. Joint Forces Command, to focus on a forcible-entry option.[25] Working in self-prescribed isolation, the military planners did not have the ability to coordinate with other agencies. Already, other branches of government– the DOS, Treasury, Transportation, Commerce, Justice, Agriculture, and the CIA–were engaged in working some facet of the Haiti problem.[26] The compartmentalization of planning prevented the interagency process from producing coordination and consensus, the two most necessary ingredients for unity of effort.

The month of September 1994 demonstrated that insufficient planning in the interagency process affected the strategic, operational, and tactical level of war. The "close hold" on information retarded mutual understanding of the operation by different agencies and even within individual agencies themselves.[27] U.S. Atlantic Command went to the National Security Council to meet with the Haiti Interagency Working Group. During the meeting, one Army officer in attendance noted, "Many members of the working group stared in disbelief; not even their own people, who had known about the plan for over a year, had let the secret out."[28] As further evidence of insufficient coordination, during the meeting, Major General Byron, head of the U.S. Atlantic Command J-5 Plans Cell, asked the DOJ representative to explain how the DOJ

The "close hold" on information retarded mutual understanding of the operation by different agencies and even within individual agencies themselves.

was going to train the new Haitian police force, an earlier agreement in the Pol-Mil plan, only for the department to say it could not handle the mission.[29]

Similarly, at the execution level, the ad hoc nature of interagency arrangements also revealed themselves. In Cap Haitien, for example, representatives from the 10th Mountain Division and the Coast Guard collaborated closely, but as one observer noted, "We had our tents pitched next to each other, but the USAID tent was missing... There was no one to answer our questions about civilian assistance capabilities for 30 days into the operation."[30]

Afghanistan. In Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan (2001-present), interagency command and coordination improved, but many deficiencies remained. On the positive side, to facilitate coordination between the two organizations during
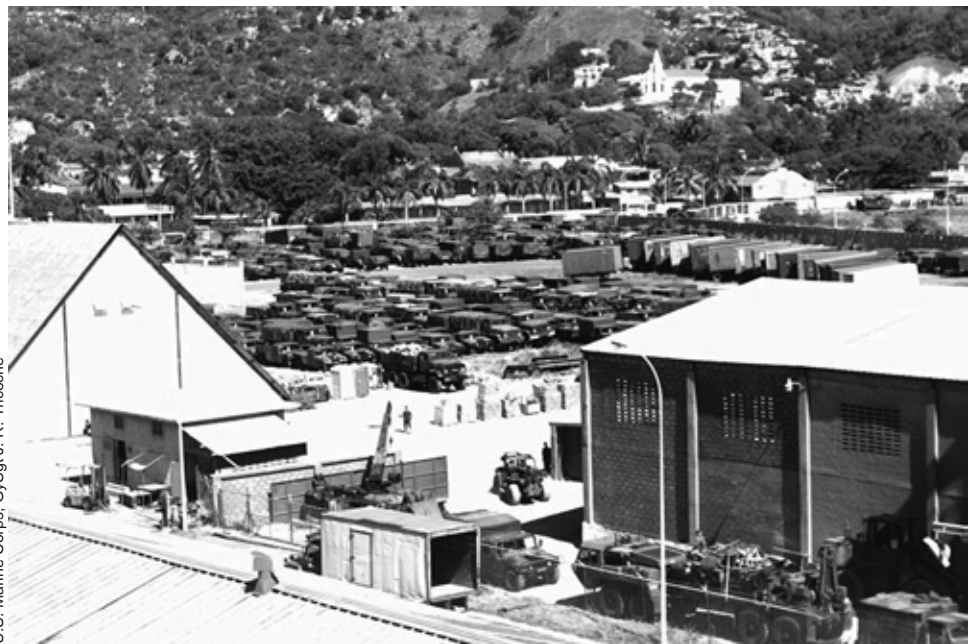
U.S. Marine Corps, GySgt J. R. Tricoche

An overview of the port of Cap Haitien during Operation Uphold Democracy. The port was used as a logistics center and command post for the special purpose Marine air ground task force CARIB. The U.S. Army 10th Mountain Division and the U.S. Navy also used the port as an off-load center for logistical support.

pre-war planning sessions, the CENTCOM staff included a senior CIA officer that served as special advisor to the Commander.[31] Also, the DOS and the military's combatant commander for the region worked closely from the onset to secure basing and over-flight rights. Nevertheless, other agencies focused on reconstruction in a post-war Afghanistan played catch up, and many elements of the U.S. government were largely absent.[32] For example, only a small handful of personnel from the U.S. Department of Agriculture deployed to Afghanistan, a country with both a critical demand for agricultural development and a significant capacity for such development—including the need to develop alternatives to the production of poppies, doubly corrosive because it both funds the Taliban and spreads drugs to other countries. And the United States has perhaps the best-organized and most successful agricultural extension service in the world! As this example shows, the Departments of Defense and State and USAID have been "at war," but almost all the rest of the U.S. government has not been so engaged.[33]

Iraq. Finally, Operation Iraqi Freedom (2002 to present) provides a host of pre- and post-conflict interagency command issues. As in Afghanistan, fears of widespread famine motivated civilian planners to pre-position relief supplies in Kuwait. Despite close coordination between USAID and the military in the month leading up to the war, the head of USAID, Andrew Natsios, could get neither the Pentagon's permission to pre-position supplies thought necessary nor get release of funds for rebuilding Iraq.[34] In the post-conflict phase, the friction and interagency fighting between the military's Combined Joint Task Force-7 and the Coalition Provisional Authority reached extraordinary and costly levels.[35]

The Proposals

Unity of command should not threaten any government agency's independence; only a dedicated portion of each agency in direct support of stability operations should ever come under the authority of a unified commander. Under these circumstances, an enforcement mechanism would probably be necessary to compel agencies to attach competent people to centralized commanders or directors. While *National Security Policy Directive-44* recognizes the need for interagency integration, it does not enforce unity of command. The executive branch should follow-up NSPD-44 with a presidential-level document requiring unity of command in areas undergoing stability operations. In doing so, it should dictate the various government agencies' roles and responsibilities as well as the conditions under which any particular agency should assume overall direction.[36] Such a step then needs pragmatic solutions that establish appropriate organizational models for interagency command, while augmenting liaison capabilities and developing professional education to foster a true "interagency culture" for stability operations.

Current Models for Interagency Command

As noted, in many respects, interagency efforts at the theater or field level are even more important than at higher levels of government. Interaction between military and nonmilitary activities needs to be seamless. As requirements for assistance with governance (including human rights), reconstruction, stabilization, and development increase, the requirement also increases for cooperation across institutional boundaries.[37] Given the nonmilitary nature of most activities in stability operations, civilian command primacy would be the pragmatic goal to strive for. Several precursor institutional models already exist that partially reflect this precept and could evolve into true and institutionalized interagency command arrangements. These three precursor models are the classical embassy country team, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), and provincial reconstruction teams. Such institutionalization would avoid tendencies to adopt ad-hoc approaches in operations short of war, including post-conflict transition.[38]

Country teams. Until now, combatant commands on the strategic and operational level have had an institutional means, albeit incomplete, of

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synchronizing interagency actions ongoing in theater—the embassy country teams.[39] Headed by the ambassador and composed of representatives of various agencies, it can provide specific recommendations on peacetime engagement or contingency responses. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual 3113.01A, *Theater Engagement Planning,* refers to the role of the teams in contingencies.[40] While providing an interagency perspective, country teams have inherent disadvantages. By definition, their focus is limited; commands may not have adequate staff to interpret competing priorities advocated by various teams in any region. Secondly, as senior government liaisons, DOS political advisors to military commanders represent only one of the many agencies on the country team, so the potential exists for biased priorities and misunderstanding. Lastly, because USAID does not maintain staff in every diplomatic mission, country teams do not offer an accurate representation of all ongoing or funded efforts.[41]

This template would improve with the creation of a more robust team. In-theater U.S. country teams would need to be all-inclusive (including specialized agencies and organizations such as the CIA and U.S. Special Operations Command) to be able to share information and intelligence, have common communications protocols and systems, and put a premium on building and sustaining mutual confidence and respect.[42] They should also continue to be headed by a senior diplomat.

The AFRICOM model. As an expert on African affairs in the United States, Dr. Dan Henk from the Air War College noted, the U.S. engagement with Africa has often reflected rather different approaches and intensities among DOS, USAID, and DOD. This often resulted in confusion about U.S. interests, objectives, and motives.[43] To address this bewilderment, the DOD activated AFRICOM as one of its six regional military headquarters on 1 October 2008. Africa Command has administrative responsibility for U.S. military support to U.S. government policy in Africa, including military-to-military relationships with 53 African nations.[44]

The command started with a greatly different organizational approach to its area of responsibility. The designers of U.S. Africa Command understood the relationships between security, development, diplomacy, and prosperity in Africa. As a result,

AFRICOM reflects a much more integrated staff structure that includes significant management and staff representation by the DOS, USAID, and other U.S. government agencies involved in Africa.[45] U.S. Africa Command also departed from the Pentagon's traditional "J-code" organizational structure, a method of organizing a command for warfighting developed in the Napoleonic age. Furthermore, AFRICOM's commander, uniquely, has a civilian deputy from the Department of State to coordinate the nonmilitary functions of the U.S. government in Africa.[46]

Thus, AFRICOM, with its envisioned interagency character, should positively influence U.S. policy coordination in Africa and move toward greater interagency integration.[47] Yet for several reformers, AFRICOM did not go far enough in establishing a true interagency structure.[48] As Robert Munson suggested in his article on AFRICOM in *Strategic Studies Quarterly*:

> My first proposal is for AFRICOM to be established from the beginning not as a military command with a few nonmilitary trappings but as a *true interagency command*. This command would have three equal main components: the military, a political element, and a section devoted to development. Despite the military title of "command" and the current focus of the Secretary of Defense on creating AFRICOM, we must refocus the effort to include all-important elements of foreign policy equally. If there were a better word to replace "command" in AFRICOM, it should emphasize the nonmilitary missions and deemphasize the military aspects. Perhaps one should begin with the organizational model of an embassy rather than a military organization![49]

Interestingly, he promotes a more country-team model on an enlarged scale. With this perspective in mind, the current AFRICOM can only provide an evolutionary step to greater interagency command and control structures under civilian agency leadership.

The provincial reconstruction team model. During the summer of 2002, U.S. officials developed the concept of provincial reconstruction teams to spread the " ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] effect," without expanding ISAF

itself. First established in early 2003, provincial reconstruction teams consisted of 60 to 100 soldiers plus, eventually, Afghan advisors and representatives from civilian agencies like the State Department, USAID, and the Department of Agriculture. These teams have the potential to become a model for future stabilization and reconstruction operations.[50] Since their inception, they have proven effective in supporting the spread of governance and development in Afghanistan. Since then, 25 additional teams (11 U.S.-led and 14 non-U.S.) have deployed throughout the country, mostly small forward-operating bases in provincial capitals. The U.S.-led teams combine civilian and military personnel who focus on governance, development, and security. These civil-military teams work with the Afghan government, civil society, Afghan and coalition security forces, and the international community.[51]

U.S. Army, SGT Terry Wade

Jim Dehart, left, an advisor from the U.S. Department of State, Jim Hoffman, right, an agricultural adviser from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and members of the Panjshir Provincial Reconstruction Team meet with Afghan locals on a hill top in the Anaba District of Panjshir Province, Afghanistan on 2 January 2010. PRT members were surveying a possible location for a water reservoir.

The provincial reconstruction team leverages all the instruments of national power—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic—to improve stability. However, the team's efforts alone will not stabilize an area; combined military and civil efforts are necessary to reduce conflict and develop local institutions to take the lead in national governance, provide basic services, foster economic development, and enforce the rule of law.[52] The team's structure is modular in nature with a core framework tailored to the respective operational area. A typical team contains six Department of State personnel, three senior military officers and staff, 20 Army civil affairs advisors, one Department of Agriculture representative, one Department of Justice representative, three international contractors; two USAID representatives; and a military or contract security force (size depends on local conditions). The size and composition of the team varies based on operational area maturity, local circumstances, and U.S. agency capacity.[53] Eleven of the 12 U.S. teams are military-led and have a handful of civilian officers—one each from State, USAID, and the Department

of Agriculture. The civilians are equal members of the integrated command team and provide crucial skill sets that the military lacks—political reporting, cultural awareness, an understanding of civilian governmental structures, and a background in development. The military commander has final authority on all security matters, but the civilians take the lead on governance and development.[54]

Nevertheless, the teams are only a tactical-level interim measure. They need a national or regional level interagency command framework. Yet, these provincial reconstruction teams provide a good starting point to develop the tools necessary to achieve political and military success in future missions, whether they involve counterinsurgency, peace enforcement, or even ungoverned spaces.[55]

> *…provincial reconstruction teams provide a good starting point to develop the tools necessary to achieve political and military success in future missions…*

The Next Evolutionary Step

To have a true interagency command arrangement for stability operations, several elements are needed—an end to stovepiping, effective lines of authority, and civilian agency primacy. To the extent possible, stovepiping of different agencies must be eliminated, such as the current practice of requiring field-level missions to refer to higher levels in theater or to Washington for permission to take actions that either need to be decided upon rapidly or where local expertise should trump that at the parent level.[56] Second, clear lines of authority must exist in the theater and in the field. Setting parameters and business rules can help build mutual trust.[57] Third, civilian agency primacy would bring greater benefits when considering the nature of stability operations. The civilian Department of State and USAID have a long-term focus, train their personnel to work with foreign partners, and generally acquire better language skills than the military. Both agencies are comfortable in taking time to build personal relationships with other officials, and they tend to remain in the region longer, maintaining personal bonds and facilitating work between nations on a civilian basis.[58] In contrast to military officers who are frequently reassigned, USAID officers spend much longer developing their expertise, often living in country for four or more years.[59]

In order to support these multilateral stability operations, commands need to be truly an interagency construct rather than just a military organization with a few actors from other agencies included for effect.[60] I support the recommendation Jeffrey Buchanan, Maxie Y. Davis, and Lee T. Wight made in their *Joint Force Quarterly* article "Death of the Combatant Command: Toward a Joint Interagency Approach." They propose establishing standing, civilian-led interagency organizations that will have regional responsibility for all aspects of U.S. foreign policy.[61] These civilian-led interagency organizations would report directly to the President through the National Security Council, and their formal structure would include representatives from all major federal government agencies, including DOD, while dissolving the existing geographic combatant commands. Highly credentialed civilians, potentially with a four-star military deputy, would lead these institutions. Their charter would include true directive authority to all agencies below the National Security Council, with regard to activities in the assigned region—to include U.S. ambassadors and country teams.[62]

In the aforementioned AFRICOM example, the civilian commander of an advanced interagency AFRICOM would then be the U.S. ambassador to the African Union. Not only is this diplomat already representing the United States at the continental level, but he is also a civilian and would emphasize the American tradition of civilian control of the military. While the appointment of this diplomat to lead a partial military organization may call for congressional or presidential action and a change to U.S. laws, it is hardly a new concept since both the president and the secretary of defense, the two top leaders of the military, are civilians.[63]

Conclusions and a Precedent

The United States must make a quantum leap in establishing interagency command mechanisms if it wants to employ its land power effectively in future stability operations.[64] The key difference between the hard slog to "Jointness" versus interagency operations is that the armed forces had a clear chain of command, with the chairman of the joints chiefs at the top to push through reform. For many federal agencies, the first common point of authority is the president. Congress or the president should find a way to cause the various agencies of the executive branch to pull together at the operational level during war and post-conflict activities to achieve unity of command.[65]

Only civilian leadership, with significant interagency experience, can evolve existing models like the country team, AFRICOM, and provincial reconstruction teams into truly macro-interagency command organizations capable of harnessing and projecting America's "soft" power, arguably the most potent weapon in its arsenal, along with its military force.[66] In addition to the current three models mentioned, a precedent does exist in the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support" (CORDS) program in Vietnam. The CORDS program in Vietnam integrated civilian and military efforts on a larger scale, with soldiers serving directly under civilians, and vice versa, at all levels.[67] In fact the head of CORDS, Robert Komer, was deputy to the commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command ,Vietnam (MACV). He ranked third

at MACV, after General William C. Westmoreland's deputy, General Creighton Abrams. This status gave him direct authority over everyone in his organization and direct access to Westmoreland without having to go through the MACV Chief of Staff.[68] Komer did not have command authority over military forces, but he was the sole authority over the entire U.S. pacification effort, "for the first time bringing together its civilian and military aspects under unified management."[69] The interagency integration at all levels was a most impressive feature. In addition to the military, the State Department, CIA, USAID, the U.S. Information Agency, and even the White House staff were represented at all levels within CORDS. Throughout the hierarchy, civilian advisors had military deputies and vice versa. Civilians wrote performance reports on military subordinates, and military officers did the same for Foreign Service officers.[70]

The heritage of such an interagency "command" needs to permeate the current precursor models to create the next step—a true interagency command structure. Without this evolutionary process, the effective application of U.S. land power in future stability operations will remain haphazard—an outcome fraught with both risks and costs. **MR**

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6. See Joint Operating Environment 2008 (Norfolk, VA: U.S. Joint Forces Command, 2008).

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