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Challenges and Considerations for Multinational Stability, Security, Transition and Reconstruction Operations

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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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24 April 2008

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ABSTRACT

The United States has invested tremendous effort to improve its method for conducting security, stability, transition, and reconstruction (SSTR) operations. However, it is clear that several shortfalls still exist—particularly in coalition actions. Current operations have proven that this is especially the case when the overall command structure resides in a multinational governing body, such as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This paper describes how the United States arrived at its current strategy with respect to SSTR operations within a multinational construct, followed by a discussion of current theater-strategic and operational level initiatives, including programs resident in the geographic combatant commands. Next, the analysis will describe the evolution and current application of NATO’s “comprehensive approach” to operations, with a focus on notable limitations in Afghanistan and an assessment of the potential way ahead. Finally, this paper will offer recommendations to improve future operations in a multinational setting and suggest how to influence multinational operations not led by the United States, specifically the NATO-led operation in Afghanistan.

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Many of the problems we face—from the threat of pandemic disease, to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to terrorism, to human trafficking, to natural disasters—reach across borders. Effective multinational efforts are essential to solve these problems.

—2006 National Security Strategy

The United States has invested a great deal of effort into maturing its methods for conducting global stability, security, transition, and reconstruction (SSTR) operations; however, it is clear that several shortfalls still exist--particularly in coalition actions. Current operations have proven that this is especially the case when the overall command structure resides in a multinational governing body, such as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The current focus within the United States Government on SSTR operations is a reaction to disjointed interagency coordination in Afghanistan and Iraq and in recognition that current policy will direct additional SSTR operations in the future. National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD)-44 appointed the Department of State lead agency for coordinating all foreign stability and security decisions and created the position of Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization.¹ Additionally, Department of Defense Directive (DODD) 3000.05 designated stability operations as a “core U.S. military mission...that will be given priority comparable to combat operations and be explicitly addressed and integrated across all DOD activities including doctrine, organizations, training, education, exercises, materiel, leadership, personnel, facilities, and planning.”² In order to apply the guidance resident within DODD 3000.05, many joint and service doctrine manuals have been rewritten, every geographic combatant command and service component has implemented or is exploring new ways to support SSTR operations, and,

perhaps most importantly, operational plans and the joint planning process have been modified to place increased emphasis on stability operations.³

Concurrently, other nations and international security organizations are also exploring a “whole of government” or “comprehensive approach” to operations.⁴ The intent is to synchronize the diplomatic, informational, military and economic sources of power with the skills resident in intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. Specifically, NATO is considering a framework to expand its defense-only charter and to formalize ties with intergovernmental organizations with which it most frequently interacts, namely the United Nations and the European Union.⁵ As of this writing, however, due to many political factors, the “comprehensive approach” is still merely a concept of operations and not official NATO policy.

Therefore, more robust operational level integration of these initiatives must be accomplished for both current and future operations in order to fully realize the desired level of cooperation. Specifically, there is limited and inconsistent multinational interagency interaction with combatant command planning staffs and standing joint task force headquarters.⁶ Additionally, when joint task forces are formed, they often rely on multinational augmentation due to inadequate multinational staffing at service component operational headquarters—the organizations that form a joint task force.

As such, this paper will first briefly describe how the United States arrived at its current strategy with respect to SSTR operations within a multinational construct, followed by a discussion of current theater-strategic and operational level initiatives, including programs resident in the geographic combatant commands. Next, the analysis will describe the evolution and current application of NATO’s “comprehensive

approach” to operations, with a focus on notable limitations in Afghanistan and an assessment of the potential way ahead. Finally, this paper will offer recommendations to improve future operations in a multinational setting and suggest how to influence multinational operations not led by the United States, specifically the NATO-led operation in Afghanistan.

America’s Coalition Operations and the Current Strategic Guidance

American experience conducting military operations within the framework of a coalition dates back to the American Revolutionary War when French forces and a Prussian military advisor contributed greatly to our goal of achieving independence from England.⁷ However, while the United States has frequently relied on contributions from other nations to conduct operations, the relationship has not always been fully open and transparent. For instance, during NATO operations over Kosovo in 1999, the United States conducted a portion of the air operations using a U.S.-only air tasking order (ATO). As later described by the Combined Forces Air Component Commander, this decision surprised and caused justifiable consternation with military leaders of other allied nations of the then fifty-year old alliance.⁸

More recently, in the midst of Operation Enduring Freedom and during the build up to Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2002, the Secretary of Defense seemed to minimize coalition contributions and further polarize potential coalition partners when he remarked, “the mission must determine the coalition, and the coalition must not determine the mission. If it does, the mission will be dumbed down to the lowest common denominator, and we can’t afford that.”⁹

Since then, the Defense Department has clarified its engagement strategy and reinvigorated attempts to achieve increased cooperation with other nations. Most recently, the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review articulated this new focus:

Today's environment demands that all agencies of government become adept at integrating their efforts into a unified strategy. This requires much more than mere coordination: the Department must work hand in glove with other agencies to execute the National Security Strategy. Interagency and international combined operations truly are the new Joint operations. Supporting and enabling other agencies, working toward common objectives, and building the capacity of partners are indispensable elements of the Department's new missions.¹⁰

The Quadrennial Defense Review expounded to specifically address SSTR operations within NATO stating, "the Department will continue to strengthen traditional allied operations, with increased emphasis on collective capabilities to plan and conduct stabilization, security, transition and reconstruction operations."¹¹

Based, then, on the guidance within the Quadrennial Defense Review, each geographic combatant command introduced and refined a number of programs to improve coordination with the interagency and with partner nations. For example, U.S. Pacific Command's Multinational Planning Augmentation Team (MPAT) is an informal forum designed to foster collaboration and improve interoperability among multinational mission planning experts, as well as interested intergovernmental and non-governmental agencies. Originally formed in 2000 and later validated during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, MPAT provides a corps of professional operational-level mission planners capable of augmenting a multinational task force headquarters.¹² Elsewhere, U.S. Southern Command recently restructured its staff to incorporate an interagency component recognizing the low probability of major combat operations in the area of responsibility but a high probability of multinational and interagency stability and

security operations. Additionally, U.S. Africa Command will be the first truly integrated interagency combatant command when it becomes fully operational capable in September 2008.¹³ All told, these initiatives offer significant promise to future multinational force commanders and have the potential to ensure improved cooperation and synchronization with partner nations during a U.S.-led SSTR operation.

The inherent desire of these and other operational-level initiatives is to achieve what is described as “unity of effort” and “unified action” toward a common goal or objective. As defined in joint publications, “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.”¹⁴ “Unified action” is defined as “the synchronization, coordination, and/or integration of the activities of governmental and nongovernmental entities with military operations to achieve unity of effort.”¹⁵ These terms synthesize several operational principles, including objective, unity of effort, simplicity, and, to a certain degree, unity of command. However, it is crucial to note that through unified action and unity of effort, the military in SSTR operations should normally maintain *supporting* role to the Department of State.¹⁶ The military can be used to establish a secure environment in which other organizations can reconstruct a weak nation’s critical infrastructure, build host nation capacity, and create conditions for the host nation to govern autonomously and provide for its own security. What the military can also provide, and the United States military in particular, is planning capacity and experience, manpower, equipment, logistical support, and intelligence/information support. The continuing challenge is to incorporate this overwhelming capability without being detrimental to the other agencies’

scheme. As will be discussed, the same challenge exists within the framework of a coalition, as well.

NATO in Afghanistan and the Path to a “Comprehensive Approach”

In recognition of the need for international support for security and reconstruction after the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the United Nations created the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) through a Security Council Resolution.¹⁷ NATO expanded its role in Afghanistan SSTR operations in late 2003 when it assumed leadership of ISAF. NATO designated a Senior Civilian Representative who was charged to work “in close co-operation with the ISAF Commander and the United Nations as well as with the Afghan authorities and other representatives of the international community present in the country, such as the European Union.”¹⁸ On 5 October 2006, NATO assumed full responsibility for SSTR operations in Afghanistan from the United States-led Coalition Forces Command-Afghanistan, the sole United States operational level command organization in Afghanistan.¹⁹

Thus, NATO’s participation in ISAF represents the first time NATO has conducted a major operation outside its traditional area, but it is not the first time NATO has been involved in an SSTR operation. NATO enforced United Nations Security Council Resolutions twice in the Balkans: in Bosnia, beginning in 1995 and in Kosovo, beginning in 1999 and continuing to this day. Likewise, discussions within NATO concerning a “comprehensive approach” have circulated for some time, as well. First introduced by the Danish government in 2004, the Concerted Planning and Action (CPA) initiative called for improved and more continuous coordination with other

intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations.²⁰ Influenced by NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, Transformation, this concept was expanded and renamed an "effects-based approach to operations" in 2005. Finally, NATO adopted the "comprehensive approach" concept at a summit in Riga, Latvia shortly after assuming all SSTR operations in Afghanistan.²¹ The "comprehensive approach" for conducting operations in Afghanistan recognized the need to "improve coherent application of NATO's own crisis management instruments as well as practical cooperation at all levels with partners, the UN and other relevant international organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations and local actors in the planning and conduct of ongoing and future operations wherever appropriate."²² The governing body established a timeline of one year to formulate the plan for implementation.

Two years later, in April 2008, NATO met once again in Bucharest, Romania and reaffirmed its commitment to a "comprehensive approach," but thus far, has failed to agree on an implementation strategy. The lack of a plan is having real consequences in Afghanistan. As General Egon Ramms, the current NATO operational level joint force commander recently noted, "I have no economic planning staff in my headquarters, no one capable of training lawyers and judges, no banking experts, no agronomists, no urban planners. There is no way around these limitations."²³ In turn, a report released in January 2008 by the Atlantic Council for the United States issued a terse warning: "Currently, the Afghan government is not winning the crucial battle in the civil sector to create the judicial, legal and police reforms essential to governance and is losing the fight in curtailing corruption and drug production and creating job opportunities."²⁴ In 2006, General James Jones, former Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, forecast the current

situation, stating “the challenge is: How do you do that, who does it, how do you get everything from NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] to 37 governments focusing, for example, on judicial reform? There are a thousand prosecutors in Afghanistan. They live on \$65 a month. They cannot exist on \$65 a month in Kabul. An interpreter for the United Nations makes about \$630 a month. There’s something backwards there, and somebody needs to fix that.”²⁵

In addition to the complexity associated with codifying a more comprehensive approach within NATO, there are additional barriers to true unified action intrinsic in the nature of multinational operations. One such barrier NATO, in particular, has struggled with is garnering support of nations without “caveats” associated with how their military members will be used. On 2 April 2008, NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer reiterated the frustration stating, “For the foreseeable future, ISAF will remain indispensable. Nor does it change the need for allies to do more. For example, we can and will do better to lift the remaining national caveats and fill the shortfalls so that ISAF can operate at maximum effectiveness.”²⁶ These national caveats have restricted the commander’s operational design and limited the available force to “self defense only” missions. Thus, the forces are essentially in theater to protect themselves. Doctrinally, however, “no offer of national support should be declined outright.”²⁷ In fact, experience demonstrates accepting coalition partners’ contributions regardless of perceived value added is the glue that binds a multinational operation. As United States Air Force Lieutenant General Michael Short, Combined Forces Air Component Commander for Operation ALLIED FORCE remarked, “you’ve got to understand that even if they just contributed four airplanes and sixty people, that was an enormous decision and step for

them to take, and you have to understand how frail coalition governments are, just as your fighting coalition may be frail, and understand what they are going through.”²⁸

Thus, while the host nation government is the overall friendly center of gravity in SSTR and counterinsurgency operations, coalition support is another and its fragility will often have a dramatic impact on the conduct and even the success or failure of operations.

Often, the strength of the coalition is directly proportional to the operational leadership of the multinational task force (MNTF) commander. It is the MNTF commander who must articulate the overall objective for multinational participants based on his understanding of the operational environment, the desired end state, and coalition strategic political goals. NATO’s operational commander, General Egon Ramms, understands the demanding situation in Afghanistan, succinctly stating, “Furthermore, the complexity of Afghanistan is best reflected in the continuous interplay of many factors: a weak central government disconnected from local, district and provincial developments, fragile institutions, illiteracy, narcotics, corruption, insurgents, bad infrastructure, tribalism, warlordism, criminality and the challenges that go with the geopolitical situation of Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries.”²⁹ In addition to understanding the operational environment and providing guidance through commander’s intent, “the operational level commander must be aware of the specific constraints and capabilities of the forces of participating nations...MNTF commanders (similar to joint task force commanders) at all levels may be required to spend considerable time consulting and negotiating with diplomats, host nation officials, local leaders, and others; their role as diplomats should not be underestimated. MNTF commanders will routinely work directly with political authorities in the region.”³⁰ One could argue in a complex contingency

operation, such as the one currently being conducted in Afghanistan, it is not only the multinational task force commander who is engaged as a diplomat, but in today's information age, so, too, are the military members of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams—the “strategic corporals” as the Marine Corps describes them.

Other barriers to multinational operations include language, cultural, equipment interoperability issues, frequent personnel turnover, and, of course, competing interests due to overlapping command organizations. ISAF, which is currently 40 nations, is commanded by an American four-star general, who reports to the Joint Force Headquarters in Mons, Belgium, which reports to NATO Headquarters.³¹ Concurrently, other U.S. military forces operating in Afghanistan may either be under operational control of U.S. Special Operations Command or U.S. Central Command. Additionally, guidance can originate from U.S. State Department channels, NATO's Senior Civilian Representative, the recently-appointed Special Representative to the United Nations Secretary General, or the Afghan government itself. Also, each coalition partner maintains a national chain of command and national interests overrule coalition interests. Added to this environment, some 2,600 independent organizations are supporting reconstruction, often working directly with individual Afghan ministries.³² As stated earlier, while the military plays a critical role in SSTR operations, it is nonetheless a supporting role to a primarily political process.

U.S. Joint Forces Command and the Supreme Allied Command, Transformation

As the Defense Department's lead concept developer and as NATO's Supreme Allied Command, Transformation, U.S. Joint Forces Command is ideally situated to influence both U.S. and NATO future operational level programs. Two programs

currently under development concerning multinational SSTR operations are the Joint Operating Concept for Military Support to Stabilization, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction and the Multinational Interagency Working Group. Published in 2006, the Joint Operating Concept codifies a joint vision for future SSTR operations in the 2014-2026 timeframe, describes the possible scenarios in which the military may be called upon to conduct SSTR operations, and provides a framework to conduct operations along six lines of operation or “major mission elements.” These major mission elements include 1) establish and maintain a safe and secure environment, 2) deliver humanitarian assistance, 3) reconstruct critical infrastructure and restore essential services, 4) support economic development, 5) establish representative, effective governance and the rule of law, and 6) conduct strategic communications.³³ According to the Joint Operating Concept, the current situations in Iraq and Afghanistan can be characterized as “High end” SSTR operations.³⁴ With respect to the multinational or coalition component of planning and executing SSTR operations, the Joint Operating Concept discusses in detail how theater security cooperation can be shaped to build partner capacity for SSTR operations and how partner nation forces could be integrated into an operation.³⁵ However, while there is substantial discussion regarding *interagency* coordination during the planning phase, the document fails to fully address *partner nation* participation or contribution to the planning effort.

The multinational interagency working group (MNIG) concept was created out of the joint interagency coordination group (JIACG) concept. In October 2001, the Commander, U.S. Central Command, requested and received approval from the Secretary of Defense to create a Joint Interagency Counterterrorism Task Force (JIATF-CT). This

organization fused the capabilities of the various intelligence and counter-terrorism communities to provide the joint force commander a more robust, accurate estimate of the operational environment.³⁶ The concept evolved into the JIACG, which is now common to all geographic combatant commands. In turn, the MNIG conceptually establishes operational connections between a coalition military staff and the civilian departments and agencies of the coalition partners, as well as with appropriate international organizations and non-governmental organizations. The MNIG concept was developed for and tested during Multinational Experiment 4, an SSTR exercise based on an Afghanistan scenario.³⁷ The concept is currently being further developed through Multinational Experiment 5, running through 2010, which focuses on a North Africa multinational SSTR scenario and is informed by current operational experience.³⁸

Recommendations: Build Trust through Persistence and the Human Network

In developing recommendations, it is important to maintain the perspective that, without question, the Department of Defense is the most skilled, the most lethal, and the most expensive defense organization the world has ever known. With that in mind, one needs to determine what the best method is to bring these vast planning and organizational resources to bear without stifling constructive input from the variety of nations. Additionally, how does a joint force commander build a coalition based purely on a support role without acting like or appearing to be the “bull in the china shop?” Based on these questions, the fact that a number of challenges still exist in ongoing multinational SSTR operations, and the almost certainty there will be a requirement to conduct efficient, effective multinational SSTR operations in the future, the following recommendations are proposed. Overall, the recommendations focus on increased

personal interaction with multinational/interagency personnel. Some may argue technology affords the opportunity for a network-centric approach to improving cooperation. While technologically-driven information networks are useful with coalition partners capable of matching our technology, the vast majority of future partner nations can not and/or will not be able to. Thus, only the human network, with persistent face-to-face interaction will achieve the desired level of trust and cultural awareness to invigorate robust cooperation and planning.

Therefore, geographic combatant commanders should consider incorporating interagency and multinational planning experts within each of their standing joint task force headquarters. Additionally, U.S. Pacific Command's Multinational Planning Augmentation Team is an excellent concept that should be applied within the other geographic combatant commands. Also, within the limits of operations security, geographic combatant commands should consider establishing a mechanism to increase partner nation and interagency participation in the *plan development* process. Future SSTR operations may be conducted within the framework of an alliance or coalition, whether those operations are prior to, during, or at the conclusion of the "dominate" phase of a major operation or campaign. As such, there is greater opportunity for synergy and unified action and a higher probability of more rapidly and efficiently reaching the desired end state if potential partner nations have a direct impact on *planning* the SSTR operations from their inception and well *before* the crisis erupts.

Additionally, in light of the Quadrennial Defense Review's mandate to "transform designated existing Service operational headquarters to fully functional and scalable Joint Command and Control Joint Task Force-capable Headquarters,"³⁹ consideration should

be given to expand the capacity for service operational headquarters to include additional exposure to multinational and interagency elements. For example, III Marine Expeditionary Force based in Okinawa is a service operational headquarters that can serve as a joint task force and, in fact, served as the joint task force headquarters in response to the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami.⁴⁰ By increasing exposure to multinational and interagency components, each service operational headquarters would be better prepared to immediately begin planning using a comprehensive approach, rather than requiring a core of experts from the combatant command staff or U.S. Joint Forces Command to augment their staff. To mitigate the fact that there are a large number of potential joint task force headquarters and scenarios requiring a joint task force, coupled with the scarce availability of multinational and interagency personnel, combatant commanders should designate specific service operational headquarters “SSTR capable” and strive to infuse the scarce interagency, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organization manpower within these operational headquarters.

With respect to influencing the development of NATO’s “comprehensive approach,” the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, the Supreme Allied Commander, Transformation, and appropriate diplomatic representation should advocate in earnest for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to adopt and implement its “comprehensive approach.” As U.S. Joint Forces Command continues to experiment and develop concepts, it should help steer changes to NATO doctrine and create a framework which incorporates an interagency coordination process into NATO’s new standby joint task force package, the NATO Response Force. It is important to note, however, significant expansion to NATO’s charter is being met with resistance from some NATO member

states as well as other nations, such as Russia, who view increasing NATO's role as usurping other established organizations, such as the European Union and the United Nations.⁴¹ As Naval Postgraduate School professor and former NATO Defense College senior research fellow David Yost opined, "Major future improvements in cooperation are more likely to flow from compelling events than from earnest exhortations, judiciously framed strategies, and high-level diplomacy."⁴² Likewise, he concluded the threat leveling the current global security environment is not significant enough to individual NATO members and that major changes to NATO's structure are unlikely until member states are unanimously "convinced by harsh necessity that they have no choice but to adapt their policies to new security requirements."⁴³

With respect to Afghanistan, in addition to calling for more NATO personnel to provide security, to train the Afghan police, and to build the agricultural base while improving infrastructure, there is much the United States should do, but practically speaking, there is less the United States can do. In a letter to the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee recently recommended a separate U.S. operational level headquarters commanded by a three-star general to be collocated in Kabul with ISAF Headquarters and to oversee all U.S. combat and SSTR operations.⁴⁴ Currently, the senior American commander is the regional commander for Eastern Afghanistan and is subordinate to both the ISAF commander and Commander, U.S. Central Command. While a U.S. operational headquarters might provide better oversight and management of all United States Defense Department activities in Afghanistan, it is antithetical to the authority of ISAF. Perhaps a better recommendation is to advocate for and support the United States Ambassador to Afghanistan, NATO's Senior Civilian

Representative, and, most importantly, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General. With the new United Nations mandate, the Special Representative is given authority to coordinate all humanitarian assistance, improved governance, as well as outreach to neighboring countries.⁴⁵ Establishing security and conducting an effective counterinsurgency are crucial to the long-term stability of Afghanistan. But, as described in counterinsurgency doctrine, the most important aspect is not combat operations, but winning the support of the people while building up and legitimizing the host government. These actions will reinforce the notion that the United States recognizes the authority of the multinational organizations and the primacy of the political aspects of the counterinsurgency, rather than the military aspects. Conversely, re-establishing a U.S. operational headquarters would be a strategic error for it would effectively decrease coalition support for ISAF. In effect, instead of others believing the U.S. position is “coalition and interagency operations are the new joint operations,” they may interpret our actions as false proof the U.S., in actuality, thinks coalition operations “dumb down the mission to the lowest common denominator.” And we can’t afford that.

Conclusion

Everything in war is simple, but the simplest thing is difficult. The difficulties accumulate and end by producing a kind of friction that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war.

—Clausewitz, *On War*

In summary, conducting military operations in support of or in concert with other governmental, intergovernmental, and international organizations in a coalition setting during a complex contingency operation is an extremely challenging task. In Afghanistan, the task is even more acute due to weak elements of the indigenous

government agencies as well as a pervasive insurgent threat that currently enjoys a degree of territorial sanctuary and external support. Additionally, the future global operational environment without question will require the Department of Defense to support further stability, security, transition, and reconstruction operations. As such, it is imperative to continue to integrate and prepare to operate within a coalition and/or alliance and with the support or in support of interagency, intergovernmental, non-governmental and international organizations.

The United States and the Department of Defense must continue to lead in building habitual relationships through persistent engagement with all stakeholders in SSTR operations. As Department of State capacity for SSTR operations grows, the Department of Defense should assume less of a lead role and a more supportive role during day-to-day regional engagement. Until then, combatant commanders should consider such trust-building measures as offering increased input and insight into the joint operational planning process and consider providing “SSTR capable” service operational headquarters greater interaction with multinational and interagency partners. Additionally, through appropriate military and civilian leadership, the United States should continue to advocate and develop proposals to implement NATO’s “comprehensive approach” as soon as possible. U.S. Joint Forces Command is uniquely situated to capitalize on lessons from the Multinational Experiment series and the maturing multinational interagency group concept and should continue to influence the combatant commanders as well as NATO to ensure common doctrine, lexicon, and interoperability for future multinational SSTR operations.

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NOTES

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