

Executive Summary

Improving the Whole of Government Approach toward Operational Planning and Execution for Stabilization

Introduction:

The United States has a compelling national security interest to promote stability in select fragile and conflict-affected states. The operating environment is complex and requires a whole-of-U.S. government (USG) response, coupled with non-governmental and international partners, and supported by the affected nation in order to achieve their own national goals. Since 1947, the national security system has struggled to handle effectively the range and complexity of the existing global threats and opportunities.

As the operating environment has changed rapidly since 1947, the response to that environment has also evolved, but not fast enough. Over the past thirty plus years numerous academic institutions, think tanks and governmental agencies have all identified and catalogued the problems and challenges. From the Eberstadt report to Congress in October 1945 through the Defense Science Board Summer study of 2016, stacks of studies and reports have been produced calling for a whole-of-government approach to achieve national security, while also improving the national security system. These studies, and numerous others, call for improving the ability for the USG to assess, decide, plan, deliver, and adjust stabilization plans and activities. However, as the Congressional Research Service in 2012 concluded, there is no consensus among USG agencies on how to fix the perceived problems. Numerous reforms occurred and the need for a holistic approach is understood, but the basic system remains one of stovepipes and not of integrated, horizontal, systemic approaches.

Since the 1990s, the USG strove to absorb strategic lessons from Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Liberia, Libya, and Syria. These experiences underscored the benefits of applying all instruments of national power to complex problems. As numerous reports reveal, gaps persist in several critical areas: civilian capacity; interagency education, training and exercises; effective planning, coordination, and collaboration; cross-organizational understanding; an interagency framework establishing proper roles and responsibilities; unified assessments and shared understanding; adequate statutory authorities and funding mechanisms; and sufficient information sharing. A paper for the incoming Administration's transition team prepared in November 2016 by the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Department of Defense summarized the issues as follows:

The US Government is lacking a number of critical mechanisms to formulate and execute stabilization efforts, and does not systematically empower and integrate important capability into existing processes. Stabilization has not been treated as a priority. The Fragility Study Group of the National Security Council attributes these performance shortfalls to "... bureaucratic politics; the pursuit of maximalist objectives on unrealistic timelines; the failure to balance short-term imperatives with long-term goals; the habit of lurching from one crisis to the next; and missed opportunities to act preventively." While intellectually sound, the earlier, more ambitious

initiatives often fell short. Smaller projects demonstrate that executive branch and legislative-branch cooperation is possible, but such projects are often cumbersome or address only a niche. It is possible to do better without infringing on the prerogatives of individual agencies. ¹

Key Findings:

- A whole-of-Government approach is necessary to achieve US national security goals.
- The USG has institutional challenges at all levels in achieving required collaboration. There are many facets to consider, such as Processes, Organization/Structures, Culture, Education and Training, Human Capital, Resources, Authorities
- The frictions to whole-of-government collaboration include:
 - Essential nature of U.S. governing process, specifically Authorities and Funding
 - Nature of various agencies cultures
 - Information sharing among the players
 - Differing processes, such as Tools and Timelines
 - Lack of overarching “doctrine”
 - No overarching education and training
 - Resources and capabilities mismatch among various stakeholders
- Research has uncovered best practices that, under key circumstance, have provided an acceptable level of collaboration to translate policy into execution.
 - The operation had a clear, achievable purpose and vision that was shared by all stakeholders.
 - The operational scope was small, focused, discreet.
 - Collaboration was empowered by the appropriate resources and authorities.
 - Support emanated from the highest levels and was reflected throughout the Government. The relevant Embassy, host nation and multi-national partners are essential to ensure an integrated and agreed upon approach and implementation.
 - Structure followed function and included the appropriate human capital; the right people from the appropriate agencies were on the team.
 - The participants were well prepared through education, training, and experience.
 - There were clear lines of authority and objectives.
 - All key players agreed on processes and tools and rules of the road.
 - Information sharing agreements were paramount for a common understanding of the environment.
 - Learning and adaptation was embraced; these were learning teams
 - Agencies and individuals were rewarded for their participation

Full Report with Recommendations:

If you are interested in getting a copy of the full report contact Scott Braderman, Chief of Research, james.s.braderman.civ@mail.mil.

¹ “Sustainable Stability”: A Feasible Future for U.S. Stabilization Efforts” (Washington DC: November 2016) p1.