Seams: Challenges in Interagency and Multilateral Collaboration

Kurt E. Müller

In major combat operations, in which two forces oppose each other on a "linear" battlefield, the intelligence section of each organization attempts to determine the identity of the opposing forces and where the boundaries between neighboring battalions, brigades, or divisions lie. These boundaries are inherently weak spots that require close coordination to ensure neighboring organizations pursue their tasks in tandem. Consequently, a tactical commander often seeks to weight an offensive operation to penetrate a defensive line at the boundary between two defending organizations. At the operational level (theater, front, field army, defined differently by various nations), intelligence informs the commander about movements of major forces and their ability to pose a threat or an opportunity to exploit. A salient example of the successful exploitation of such a seam was the 1914 victory of the German Eighth Army over the Russian First *and* Second Armies at the Battle of Tannenberg.

A comment attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte is that he preferred fighting against allies to campaigning with allies (Silkett, 1993).[1] The observation holds whether one considers the inherent weakness of the seam between allied fighting formations or the political goals that hold them in an alliance. Both the tactical and the political dimensions of such observations, not to underestimate an inherent cost-effectiveness, have led some NATO allies to establish multinational formations to refute this perception and enhance their effectiveness together. The political-military dimensions of both conflict and foreign relations lead us to consider the seams in the organization of diplomacy, as well. Finally, as I shall show, seams are also evident in complex operations that cross agencies outside the domain of national-security interests. First, let's look briefly at the diplomatic realm.

An ambassador is the personal representative of one head of state to another. As such, ambassadors and their country teams facilitate bilateral relations, but not necessarily in close coordination with policies toward neighboring states. At the geostrategic level, major governments may organize their foreign-affairs ministries to aggregate these bilateral relations across a region. A European nation may consider North America as one region, Central and South America as another, and so on. For the U.S., the State Department organizes six regional bureaus: Africa; East Asia and the Pacific; Europe and Eurasia; the Near East; South and Central Asia; and the Western Hemisphere. In addition to bilateral assignments, ambassadors are also appointed to various intergovernmental organizations. Thus, we have "permanent representatives" (though any permanence applies to the mission rather than the individual) to the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the World Trade Organization, and others.

In the pursuit of foreign policy goals, it should be obvious that an approach to regional issues that coordinates relations with multiple regional states is at least helpful, if not essential. The mitigation of suffering in Darfur requires collaboration among several neighboring states, for

[1] Silkett, W. A. (1993). Alliance and coalition warfare. *Parameters: U.S. Army War College Quarterly*, *23*, 74–85.

example. Similarly, if insurgents in Afghanistan come from Pakistan and build a support base there, then Pakistan's collaboration can help remove the threat to Afghanistan's security. Those who remember Vietnam will relate this issue to the Vietnamese use of Laos for sanctuary and supply lines during both the French-Indochinese war and the American involvement in Vietnam. On the other hand, failure to assess accurately the interests of regional powers led Germany to disregard the British interest in guaranteeing Belgium's neutrality and integrity in World War I, bringing the British into the war.[2] Similarly, MacArthur's pursuit of North Korean troops beyond a simple restoration of the integrity of South Korea led China to enter the Korean War.

In countering terrorist activity, numerous states share an interest in apprehending those who would unleash an attack on the normal routines of their citizens. Disparate groups with unrelated goals may share information, logistics, training, and financing because they employ similar tactics in attempting to force targeted governments to meet their demands. They may share facilities in an undergoverned territory—a remote location in which the "host nation" has little control over the local populace—to exchange expertise and to evade military or law-enforcement agencies that would pursue them.

In the pursuit of international criminals and their supporters, collaboration is essential in tracking the movement of individuals, their finances, weapons, communications, and so forth. But who are the partners in this effort? First, though often left out of consideration until later, is the sovereign nation in whose territory the target is operating. Not only should coordination with this host government be a priority; in most instances, this regime should get a large share of the credit for apprehending the terrorist, breaking the narcotics network, or whatever the goal is. There should be few instances of ignoring state sovereignty when there is no intent to treat the state as a belligerent, such as in the fruitless 1916–1917 pursuit of Pancho Villa.

A variety of agencies may have mutually supportive capabilities in achieving a goal. If the mission is to restore a post-conflict or post-disaster society, likely partners in an operation conducted by the U.S. government would include the military, the Department of State's Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, its Agency for International Development, or its Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, and perhaps programs within the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Health and Human Services, Justice, Transportation, or Treasury. A multilateral operation would include intergovernmental organizations in addition to, not in lieu of, these national executive agencies. Of course the participating nations are likely to add their own agencies parallel to those cited. Representing development or disaster-assistance agencies, for example, may be the Canadian International Development Agency, Britain's Department for International Development, and Germany's Technisches Hilfswerk. For political-diplomatic issues, a contact group or a high representative's office may be established, and entities, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union, the Organization of American States, the Economic Community of West

[2] In stark contrast, under the skillful leadership of Bismarck, Prussia had used the same British interest to its advantage in the Franco-Prussian War to cause France to fear that if it invaded Belgium, Britain would side with the German states.

African States, or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, may have a significant presence. Just about every type of operation will see the participation of nongovernmental organizations, both NGOs within the country affected and others from the sending countries.

Geographic Seams

Similar coordination applies across a range of interventions in one country by another or a group of others: from peacekeeping to disaster assistance to internal development to war. Returning to the earlier remarks concerning the interests of neighboring nations, it is also notable that unless their opposition has already been expressed or there is other reason to discount their policy objectives, these neighbors should be consulted if they are not participants, or they should be welcomed to contribute staff to the multilateral task force if they are. Discounting the interests of non-belligerents entails significant risk. Thus, the Iraq Study Group recommended the U.S. overcome its reluctance to engage Iran and Syria in developing a regional solution to the challenge of political relations in Iraq (Baker & Hamilton, 2006).[3] This attention to states with which the U.S. has testy relations paints the picture of multilateral diplomacy in *chiaroscuro*. Security challenges and diplomatic relations are not just highlights and shadows; they require attention to subtleties of color as well. The case of Iraq requires closer coordination with neighbors with whom the U.S. has friendly relations, such as Turkey,[4] whose interests in Iraq's stability are vital to Turkish security.

How are these consultations undertaken? Recognizing that most diplomatic relations are conducted bilaterally, we expect embassy staff to work with appropriate agencies in the country to which they are accredited. But what about ensuring that our interests in each country are working in tandem with those in the neighboring state or at least that competing policy interests are coordinated and prioritized? Ambassador Michael Lemmon recalls first encountering an effort at such coordination and prioritization while posted in Islamabad—with periodic consultations among the U.S. embassies to Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—gathering staff in one of the region's capitals for 2 to 3 days of discussions (both structured and informal) to consider an agenda of mutual interest. As ambassador to Armenia, he and his colleagues replicated this approach during annual conferences among the missions to the South Caucasus region, with invitations extended to the embassies in Ankara and Moscow and to DOS personnel in Washington, as well. Discussions were also extended to senior host-nation officials. Such gatherings can be contentious, but ultimately productive, and Lemmon advocates them to facilitate discussion and coordination across the seams: between Washington and the field, between the staffs in different nations, and across agencies on a country team within each mission.[5] Moreover, representation from the geographic military commands may be included productively.

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[3] Baker, J. A., & Hamilton, L. H. (2006). *The Iraq study group report*. New York: Vintage-Random House.

[4] Terril, A. (2007). *The evolution of U.S.-Turkish relations in a transatlantic context* (Colloquium Brief). Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute.

[5] E-mail, Lemmon to Müller, 13 November 2007.

The Department of Defense organizes its interests both geographically and functionally.[6] Differing from the regional delineations the Department of State uses, DoD's regional commands—Central, European, Northern, Pacific, and Southern—have just been joined by an African Command, with a senior foreign service officer as deputy commander. This innovation recognizes the primarily political nature of challenges to U.S. interests in Africa.

DoD's regional commands have significant influence over the activities of Defense personnel in specific countries and routinely engage in developing regional assessments. Consequently, a defense interest that develops across borders is easily tracked, but the very success of regional assessments leads to concerns for the seams between regions. If Defense is charged with tracking a terrorist organization, members of that organization should be expected to cross those regional boundaries in the hope that our agencies lose them. Because the commands treat regions according to priorities, a challenge can easily arise when an issue is not accorded the same priority across regional boundaries.

Agency Seams

Attention to coordination within a country team addresses one of the bigger challenges in government: harnessing the capabilities of disparate agencies to apply a "whole-of-government" approach to a national goal. The desire for grand strategy drives occasional calls for a "Goldwater-Nichols II." This reference to the most significant defense legislation since the National Security Act of 1947, passed to overcome service parochialism within the Defense Department, attempts to induce Congress to undertake a similar effort to coordinate disparate interests across the federal bureaucracy.[7]

Efforts to facilitate interagency coordination are appropriate at multiple levels. As the authority for executive organization and keeper of the purse, Congress contributed to the bureaucracy and can demolish the walls between agencies. Executive agencies can look to national imperatives first, rather than to institutional priorities, and point out to Congress the constraints precluding collaboration with other agencies. Congress erected some walls to ensure insulation of activities where it saw a need to redress deficiencies or correct excesses by some agents of government. Thus, as indicated elsewhere in this volume, Congress banned the training of foreign police in reaction to the use of such training in Latin America to repress dissent. Similarly, bans on intelligence agents' consorting with nefarious characters were seen as correctives to guilt by association. The isolation of foreign intelligence from domestic law enforcement—once seen as necessary—contributed to the intelligence failure preceding the 9/11 attacks. Consequently, the pendulum is swinging in the opposite direction, but the legacy of bureaucratic constraints is one of several influences insulating agencies from each other. Expertise resident in some agencies that could help achieve stability

[6] The Department of State also has functional bureaus, e.g., the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration.

[7] The National Security Act of 1947 created the Department of Defense. The Goldwater-Nichols National Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, PL 99-433, increased the power of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and that of the unified combatant commanders and reduced the role of the services. As a result, joint military operations became the norm.

in Iraq may be housed in bureaus that by statute are precluded from deploying personnel abroad. On other issues, collaboration between agencies is easier among personnel serving together on a joint task force or country team than it is between their respective departments in Washington.

Because one agency has an institutional culture and values that differ from those in the next agency, and because each government entity must abide by constraints on their authority to support various activities (sometimes referred to as "the color of money"), institutional perspectives sometimes inhibit reaching consensus on the means to accomplish a common goal, or even to agree that a given agency has a role to play in solving a problem. Recently, Congress has been more supportive of military expenditures than it has been of other agencies with a role in achieving national security goals. Defense has often taken positions in favor of expanding particular programs in other departments because they contribute as well to national security. But support for expanding these agencies may not play well with constituents at home. The topic of foreign aid, for example, can easily influence a Congressional election. Support for expanding the State Department falls into this category (see Adams, 2007).[8] But if it is supposed to lead Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan and Iraq, DOS will need more funding. The Department of State has asked Defense to detail personnel to fill many of these billets. When Defense succeeds in doing so, institutional State interests may decry the "militarization of foreign policy."[9] If State fills many of the remaining billets with contractors rather than its own continuing employees, the degree to which DOS culture permeates the work product in these PRTs will be questionable as well.

This interaction between Defense and State is of long standing. The close interaction between diplomatic and military elements of national power has been articulated best by two classic strategists, Sun Tzu (544–496 BC) and Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831), but even before their appreciation by the U.S. national security establishment, our patterns of senior leadership already evidenced the interaction. Six individuals have served as both Secretary of State and Secretary of War/Defense. More recently, two senior commanders became Secretary of State, and seven presidents had earlier served as Secretaries of State prior to their election (one, James Monroe, also as Secretary of War). With the creation of the intelligence bureaucracy and the office of the National Security Advisor in the mid-20th century, the interaction of these offices with Defense and State have been added to the mix and have shown a similar fluidity in diplomatic and military leadership.

[8] Adams, G. (2007). The politics of national security budgets (Policy Analysis Brief). Muscatine, IA: Stanley Foundation. Retrieved from http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/publications/pab/pab07natsecbudget.pdf.

[9] For examples of antagonism to the growing influence of the War Department during World War II, see "Special Staff, U.S. Army, "History of Training—Military Government," (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, n.d.), vol. 1, 1939–1944 (typescript); Harry L. Coles and Albert K. Weinberg, *Civil Affairs: Soldiers Become Governors* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1964, rpt. 1986), United States Army in World War II, Special Studies, esp. pp. 25–29; or for a summary, chapter 3 of Kurt E. Müller, *Language Competence: Implications for National Security* (New York: Praeger/CSIS, 1986).

Seams Within Missions

We have indicated the challenge of communicating across agencies dealing with a common issue. A variation on this theme is coordination among agencies on a country team. Here the team-building challenge begins with the Chief of Mission, who will want to facilitate the teamwork of each agency represented in the embassy. But, like the concept of commander's intent in the military, ambassadorial priorities may not always be clear to those whose work should reflect this ranking or its more subtle nuances. This teamwork becomes more complicated when agency priorities in Washington collide with embassy priorities. Every agency with a presence on the country team expects rightly to use that entrée as the means to facilitate its members' work in the country. As with the pejorative example of militarizing diplomacy, any agency pursuing an agenda that may collide with the ambassador's wishes runs the risk of being perceived as overstepping its bounds. Ambassadorial wishes may range across a broad set of domains affecting the deployment of executive-branch personnel: which agencies are represented, whether personnel are armed or uniformed, access to the embassy compound or restriction to/from various facilities, access constraints to specific host-nation ministries, and the like. From the agency's institutional perspective, these wishes may strike deploying personnel as the ambassador's meddling in their business. Correcting that opinion requires a process the military knows from its post-Goldwater-Nichols experience: deconfliction. Most advocates of joint operations would probably say the military has moved from deconfliction of missions across the services to joint development and execution of these missions. Similarly, the process of planning and deploying a task force, whether military or interagency, may require deconfliction with embassy priorities by exploring among country-team members the scope and extent of missions and the impact of proposed constraints on the goals to be achieved.

Transition: From Deconfliction to Multi-Agency Operations

Forecasts concerning future concepts of command and control in the Defense Department currently identify a shift from an understanding of linear military missions to a perception of the complexity of the national-security environment that foresees networked interagency contributors addressing a complex network of factors and reacting to the complexity of adversarial responses, as well. Projecting the interagency ripples of actions taken to achieve a desired end-state will be an inherent task in these operations. Whether the focus of a campaign is economic development to replace a narcotics industry, pursuit of criminals, stabilization of a post-conflict society, or inhibiting the proliferation or transfer of weapons of mass effect, the complexity of achieving the desired effect will require whole-of-coalition dedication to the mutual goals agreed by the participating nations. Identifying the seams that present inherent vulnerabilities is the first step in projecting the responses to future challenges.