

Concepts and Systems for *States in Crisis*

by Nicholas Riegg

United States government agencies are grappling with what they need to do to successfully meet the challenges of post-conflict contingencies and failed states that require assistance in developing more effective political, economic, and societal institutions.

The military's relatively new "full spectrum" approach to warfare emphasizes that the military and other U.S. interagency partners must address the full gamut of needs of nations defeated in war or in need of humanitarian assistance due to natural or manmade catastrophes. To date, U.S. interagency partners discuss which organizations are going to focus on what needs, but give little attention to defining the attributes of well-functioning political, economic, informational, and cultural institutions. Military manuals and civilian agency policies say little about what options or types of political institutions or processes can achieve sustainable peace, justice, and progress; which types should ordinarily be avoided; or what economic mechanisms can efficiently and acceptably meet economic ends. There is very little in standing policy that defines what sorts of operational or tactical measures agencies and officers on the ground should take to assure that U.S. national strategic objectives are met. The purpose of this article is to stimulate a dialogue on such matters.

In this article the term "interagency" refers strictly to the various departments, agencies, and other instrumentalities of the executive branch of the U.S. government. While an agency may interact with or utilize the talent and resources of non-governmental organizations, multinational corporations, international organizations, state and local governments, or coalition partners and allies, this paper only addresses issues concerning the executive agencies themselves.

Why in 2010 is the nation focusing so much on interagency cooperation and coordination? The answer lies largely in the persistence of international terrorism and uneven progress in the post-conflict stabilization of Iraq and Afghanistan. There is broad consensus that terrorism is something that must be countered by all instrumentalities of the nation, not just the military. In the case of

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Iraq and Afghanistan, there is some feeling that had interagency coordination been better and had interagency objectives been better chosen, those two countries would be more secure, socially stable, democratic, and economically dynamic than they are today.

Another reason for the interest in interagency coordination is the growing awareness throughout government and society that various failing or dysfunctional states around the world could fall into anarchy, become breeding grounds for terrorists, upset regional stability, threaten the smooth functioning of global markets, or exacerbate international ideological conflicts. A whole-of-government or comprehensive effort will be needed to bring those nations into a more stable and productive condition.

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Concepts

If the U.S. is to help struggling nations, any interagency group must be expert in the history of what types of political, economic and other social institutions have and have not worked well in various, relevant situations. This expertise cannot be overemphasized. If an interagency team works in a well-integrated and efficient manner, but tries to impose or acquiesces in the formation of inappropriate or weak institutions, laws, and procedures, all of its outstanding teamwork will be for naught.

As shown in several of the Federalist Papers, the founding fathers knew well the history of

numerous failed republics from classical times, as well as the mechanisms by which stable, but less-than-democratic states assured their endurance. Such knowledge led the founders to adopt institutions—including adequately representative, adequately decisive, and adequately balanced ones—that had been shown by history to be effective. Similarly they avoided those that had too often led to failure — including overly broad representation, indecisive electoral systems, and unchecked powers.

The wisdom of the founding fathers is not very evident in the political advice the U.S. has given Iraq. The acquiescence of the U. S. in Iraq’s adoption of its current form of electoral system strongly suggests that advisors were ignorant of the problems that typically accompany such proportional representation (PR) systems. As was predictable, the adopted electoral system has contributed powerfully to the creation of numerous small, divisive factions and parties; legislators more dependent on and accountable to their party bosses than to their constituents; coalition governments dependent on the whims of the smallest of parties; parliamentary gridlock on critical economic and political issues; widespread corruption; and an unnecessarily weak executive. In 2010, it has been more than eight months since elections and a government has yet to be formed.

The point is not that Iraq would have a virtuous political situation except for proportional representation; rather it is that PR fans the flames of political vice, which naturally exists in every society. PR typically brings the sorts of political instability that has been seen since the end of WWII in Italy, Greece and Brazil. In contrast, countries such as Britain and the U.S., which have avoided PR and instead instituted single member constituencies, tend to have more stable, less corruptible systems. Countries such as France that have moved from PR to single member constituencies also have moved from the ranks of the unstable to those of the more stable.

By adopting proportional representation, Iraq has moved itself from one extreme to another,

from Saddam Hussein's decisive but tyrannical authoritarianism, to a weak, indecisive, more corrupt form of government. When a voter in the city of Baghdad has to select 52 representatives out of a field of several hundred candidates representing dozens of parties, he or she is overwhelmed. All that can be done is to vote for a party and allow the party's non-transparent, non-accountable processes to run the political system.

The prognosis for Iraq's future under proportional representation certainly does not suggest the operation of a model democracy or the development of a vibrant economy, which were among the stated objectives of the U.S. when it invaded the country in 2003. To avoid helping to create another weak or failing political system in the next country the U.S. seeks to assist, future interagency efforts must be better informed by history, practice, and competent political theory.

In addition to getting political institutions right, knowing what types of economic concepts, mechanisms, and systems have and have not worked in various situations will be important if agencies are to assist failing nations in achieving sustained economic development. One cannot expect knowledge-intensive and capital-intensive economic systems, such as those that operate in the U.S. and other highly developed nations, to be appropriate or workable in nations with very low per capita income or education. There may be some similarity in basic principles, but successful institutional forms will necessarily be very different. One can learn much that is relevant for post-conflict and lesser-developed economies from the historical development of the U.S. and other advanced economies as well as from the more recent history of successfully emerging economies.

What sorts of specific concepts should optimally guide interagency coordination in full spectrum warfare or, especially, in the stabilization and rejuvenation of chaotic, dysfunctional, or failing states? While there are many ways to approach that question, focusing

on factors that states generally need in order to be politically stable and economically dynamic is a start. These factors may be sorted into three groups: perceptions of the population; institutions and principles for political stability; and economic principles.

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Perceptions of the population

The following perceptions contribute to political stability:

- A general sense of justice among the population.
- A sense that oneself or one's group has adequate representation in governance.
- A sense that the government is strong, cannot be easily changed, and can enforce decisions.
- A sense that the government is both decisive and reflects the ethos of the population.
- A sense that the political situation will not significantly interfere with daily life.
- A sense that economic conditions will not worsen and may improve.
- A sense of national identity and pride that competes with (or trumps) more local or other separating identities.

If a large majority of people in a country have the above perceptions, the country is likely to be relatively stable; albeit, if a significant minority does not share those perceptions and is willing to fight, peace may break down. Most societies

develop some type of policy-setting, policy-enforcing, and juridical institutions to help assure that people generally share those stabilizing perceptions; to make the perceptions reflect reality; to limit disruptions from malcontents; and to develop competent, effective, and efficient governance. To build identity and pride, nations may also create or preserve various cultural institutions and sites, including (but not limited to) memorials, statues, temples, centers for the performing arts, museums, zoos, libraries and even sports arenas. In a post-conflict situation, an occupying force will want to assure that such cultural sites are protected as well as assuring that those important perceptions are maintained.

But political perceptions and political institutions alone cannot guarantee a stable, much less a culturally and economically dynamic society.

Institutions and principles for political stability

For political institutions to assure national political stability, they must generally have all, or a large majority of the following characteristics:

- Adequately fair and effective judicial systems.
- Adequate policing and enforcement of justice.
- Security forces to keep the peace and protect the nation.
- A forum or council (usually a legislature), in which the divergent views of the society's key poles of power may be expressed, debated, negotiated and resolved in order to avoid disorder and (hopefully) achieve social progress.

- Representation in government that includes at least those major poles of social power that can mobilize people and resources sufficient to disrupt the operations of the state. If disagreements cannot be negotiated in the forum, conflict and possibly civil war are more likely.
- Widespread suffrage and democratic representation. (While desirable, these two principles may not be critical, popular, or practical in all situations, as Aristotle and Plato long ago recognized.)
- Executive leadership and societal mechanisms that will pressure the poles of power, forums, parliaments, and councils to reach consensus in a timely manner.
- An executive that is decisive and has adequate independence and power to firmly lead the nation.
- Adequate checks and balances, not just among the national branches of government, but also among the national, local, and/or regional levels of government.
- An adequate number of counterbalancing poles of power in the society itself, outside of the formal government, to assure that no single group can achieve a monopoly on political power.

Many forms of progressive, stable government have developed over the centuries, including some forms of liberal monarchy and many types of parliamentary democracy, including the U.S. system. Some forms are stronger in certain dimensions than others, and some are very weak in many of the above characteristics. In a post conflict situation or in giving assistance to a dysfunctional state, the U.S. and its partners need to take great care as to what type of political system exists or is adopted. But political perceptions and political institutions alone cannot guarantee a stable, much less a culturally and economically dynamic society.

Arts, letters, sciences, philosophy (or religion), education, economics, health, communication, and particular social values must also develop.

Economic principles

The following institutions and principles contribute to dynamic economic stability*:

- Functioning product and service markets that allow freedom of entry to new buyers and sellers.
- Functioning factor (land, labor, capital) markets with pricing that reflects supply and demand.
- A stable monetary unit (currency) and adequate banking facilities.
- Good commercial law and arbitration/adjudication processes.
- Fair and economically efficient tax systems that fully fund legitimate governmental functions.
- Social, cultural, and fiscal incentives and mechanisms for saving and the accumulation of capital.
- Export industries to generate foreign exchange inflows for domestic investment needs.
- Low tariffs on industrial inputs and capital needed by the export sector.
- Full cost pricing of public goods.
- Development of industries (e.g., manufacturing) that can absorb large amounts of labor, particularly as medical advances spur population growth and agricultural mechanization reduces the need for farm labor.

* *The term “dynamic economic stability” refers to an economy that is growing and growing in a manner that can generally be sustained over many decades; although, there may be significant variations in the rate of growth, with periodic bouts of slow growth, excessive growth, recession, inflation, and depression.*

- Physical and legal protection of legitimate, private, financial, and intellectual property, as well as real property, whether the property is for personal or commercial purposes.
- Allowance for corporate, limited liability companies as well as private or partnership forms of business.
- Public understanding that governments cannot create money or wealth and that adequate taxes are a requisite for maintaining effective, useful government.
- Mechanisms which allow enlightened self interest to operate, particularly in the provision of public goods that have large externalities and improve the skills and capabilities of the society (e.g., education, public health, industrial and other standards, and some regulatory regimes).

If the U.S. or other nations wish to bring stability to either a post-war or failing state situation, they—through their various implementing agencies or interagency processes—will need policies and practices that seek to establish at least the perceptions, institutions, and economic principles noted above. If they are not focused on these concepts and if their operations and tactics are not aimed, in particular, at designing and achieving well functioning institutions, they are unlikely to produce the substantive conditions needed to realize either sustained political or economic stability.

Systems

A system is the set of relations, means, and mechanisms a group of individuals or entities use to coordinate actions toward some end or set of ends. A system can be thought of as a collection of nodes (actors) and links (relations or connections). A system can be centrally controlled, or it may be decentralized, so that each actor determines his own method of contributing to the desired end state. Military organizations, some corporations,

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American football and command economies typically use relatively centralized, directed systems. In contrast, free market economies, academic institutions, the international web and soccer teams typically use more decentralized approaches to meet their ends.

Interagency cooperation and coordination in the U. S. has typically been decentralized. Each agency has largely determined for itself how it will contribute to meeting national policy goals. There are always consultations, but the nature of the system of checks and balances has historically provided independence in these matters to each department and specialized agency. While others argue for more centralized direction of interagency efforts, this article assumes the decentralized approach will largely persist. Accordingly, the question arises as to how the decentralized system can be adjusted to achieve better coordination than it has in the past, particularly in situations of the sort faced in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This article proposes that the interagency system can be improved by strengthening the concepts and incentives as well as the links among the nodes (agencies) of the system. An interagency system that is trying to assist foreign nations emerging from conflict or otherwise struggling to escape from impoverished, dysfunctional, chaotic, economically stagnant, or a deteriorating situation should have clear concepts based on expertise about what is needed and what the options are for meeting those needs. Each agency should also understand the capabilities and requirements of other agencies and develop better, deeper, and broader modes of consultation and reciprocal support. Given the

divergence in size, personnel, and budget among the agencies, better coordination will also require some upgrade in the capacities of various nodes.

The Department of State, in particular, should at least double the size of the Foreign Service to develop a corps of specialists who can actively advise and provide educational input to struggling nations in both political organization and economic development. It is no longer sufficient for diplomats to interact only or even mainly with members of existing governments. In countries with some form of democracy or a relatively large economic, academic, media, or other societal powerful sectors, diplomats should hear views from and share ideas with those who may be in future governments or have substantial influence on government policies.

While different types of decentralized systems exist in the corporate and other worlds, many elements of the centralized system the military uses can be usefully adapted by other federal agencies and, somewhat counterintuitively, by the overall decentralized interagency process. Those elements include the following:

- Developing manuals, publications, and other material that cover substantive principles, policies, and concepts (not simply rules and administrative procedures), which are widely distributed to guide officials. Such material provides a common reference point from which officers from different organizational units can coordinate their operations.
- Developing critical types of information about countries and regions in which the U.S. may have to operate to protect American interests or assist a nation in distress. This information should go beyond what is needed for successful war fighting, and focus on what is needed to transform countries and regions into positive contributors to the global community.
- Planning well ahead of time for contingencies in various regions, including plans that will

help to stabilize states and regions and, where possible, minimize or avoid the need to use military force.

- Reviewing and clarifying U.S. interests, ends, ways, and means in approaching or handling a contingency.
- Distinguishing among plans, resources, and organizational requirements needed for meeting strategic, operational, and tactical objectives.
- Setting priorities and estimating the conditions, likelihood, or timeframe in which a contingency may occur.
- Applying cost-benefit analysis, program budgeting, marginal analysis, system stabilization, and other types of analytic tools to plans, interagency relations, and unit responsibilities.
- Maintaining substantive and regular communications among interagency actors from the strategic to the tactical level, both to keep information and plans up to date and to coordinate activities when implementing plans.
- Conducting regular educational or refresher courses (every three to five years) to keep officers from the various agencies current with new, relevant information and to bring officers from various agencies together to learn and work to build stronger bonds among agencies.
- Developing comparable groups (cones, branches, specialties) within each agency of officers who are well versed in the types of operations needed to stabilize nations in distress.
- Conducting a regular program of practical exercises or role playing scenarios in which interagency officers rehearse stabilization operations.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list

of systemic tools and principles, only to hit some of the high points. As executive agencies move ahead in this new field, more of what they need to adapt from the military and corporate America will become evident.

Is it surprising that a retired, force-averse diplomat is advocating adapting force-focused military systems? It should not be. The military is the largest element of government by many orders of magnitude. It has developed good systems to handle its many components. Adapting what it has already done makes far more sense than reinventing the proverbial wheel or trying to draw much from the limited systems of other agencies.

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Conclusion

Interagency coordination requires a better development and explication of a common set of concepts that should guide executive agencies in all types of national security planning. A common set of concepts is particularly important in those cases where agencies expect to bring stability to nations that have suffered from war, mismanagement, or natural catastrophe and have not had a history of effective democracy or widespread economic prosperity. A common set of concepts can lead to a better unity of effort in what will probably always be a fairly decentralized mode of interagency interaction. Beyond concepts and substantive principles, better interagency coordination will surely require better systems and mechanisms. The military has developed several types that could be usefully adapted and adopted by other agencies in a collaborative fashion.

In addition to developing better concepts and systems to guide interagency efforts in struggling nations, there are a number of practical considerations. A future paper will address such considerations in more detail; however, one practical consideration is the fact that civilian agencies must be greatly expanded in size if they are to be able to contribute adequately to nation-rescuing operations. Appropriate specializations and training within each agency and jointly among agencies are also requisite. In addition, the military must update its principles (doctrinal manuals) and educational objectives, including those concerning political matters and economics, to better utilize interagency strengths and meet the needs of struggling nations.

Executive agencies have a lot to do to make interagency cooperation a more meaningful term and to assure that what they do in an interagency setting achieves the articulated end state. Making the effort will minimize long term threats to national interests that currently abide in states rising from the ashes of war or suffering from dysfunctional social, political, and economic policies. **IAJ**