

# Swords and Plowshares:

## *DoD and USAID* on the Battlefield

**by Quy H. Nguyen**

***The challenge facing our institutions is to adapt to new realities while preserving those core competencies and institutional traits that have made them so successful in the past.<sup>1</sup>***

***Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense***

### **Introduction**

**B**ecause winning the Nation's wars is as much political as it is military, it is a matter of national security and priority that the Nation's leaders do everything they can to ensure lasting interagency cooperation and unity of effort. Failing in this, the hard lessons learned from the sacrifices of DoD personnel and personnel of other U.S. government agencies will atrophy and have to be learned again at a terrible cost. Since September 11, 2001, the Department of Defense (DoD) and its complementary soft-power interagency partner, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), have been asked to take on more diverse roles across a full spectrum of operations that include reconstructing bridges and schools, stabilizing governments, and creating economic development. While these missions and tasks are not necessarily new, lessons learned from recent operations in Afghanistan and Iraq should be applied vigorously so the DoD and USAID will not need to relearn them in the future.

### **Proposed and Current Measures to Improve Interagency Cooperation**

The National Defense Authorization Act of 1997 established the National Defense Panel, which called for the "establishment of an interagency cadre based on long-term, multi-faceted career development" that includes military and civilians to fill key billets in the national security structures. By February 2001, the United States Commission on National Security/21st Century recommended

**Lieutenant Colonel Quy Nguyen is the Commander, 56th Comptroller Squadron, 56th Fighter Wing at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona and a 2009 graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.**

forming a civil service interagency cadre called the National Security Service Corps, which would allow individuals to obtain “rotational assignments and professional education” to “hold certain positions or to be promoted . . .”<sup>2</sup> In July 2005, the Center for Strategic and International Studies also proposed a “national security career path that would give career professionals incentives to seek out interagency experience, education, and training.” It further recommended that Congress provide civilian agencies an additional 10 percent float in manpower billets in order for the program to work.<sup>3</sup>

A July 2008 Congressional Research Service report for Congress calls for an institutional approach to building a permanent “interagency cadre of national security professionals . . . aimed to adjust the organizational cultures of all agencies with national security responsibilities, in order to make interagency collaboration and integration second nature.” In doing so, it attempts to create a National Security Professional Development Program that would entail education, training, and exchange tours to gain “a better understanding of the mandates, capabilities, and cultures of other agencies.”<sup>4</sup> However, taking such action requires Congressional funding and support, which has been difficult to come by in light of the recent economic difficulties facing the nation. There currently is still a gap to be filled.

In their November 2008 report “Forging a New Shield,” the Project on National Security Reform characterized the interagency system as being “grossly imbalanced . . . [and] supporting strong departmental capabilities at the expense of integrating mechanisms.” Thus, it also put forth a number of recommendations for interagency reform by calling for a new concept of national security and began work on a draft for a new National Security Act.

Despite these “high level” recommendations, there has not been much progress or funding

support to properly implement them. Given the current gap, the agencies have had to once again defer to ad hoc efforts in the pursuit of unity of effort. One example is an initiative by the Army National Training Center to employ former USAID personnel with Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) experience to assist in pre-deployment PRT training. Fort Bragg,

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NC, has also implemented a program to train PRT commanders for up to six months prior to deployment, including training opportunities with interagency partners. In 2009, USAID began offering a three-day USAID familiarization course for military personnel and the Foreign Service Institute offered several reconstruction and stabilization training courses for civilians and military.<sup>5</sup> While these and similar training opportunities represent progress toward improved cooperation, they are born of pressing necessities for immediate integration prior to deployments to Afghanistan or Iraq.

From the strategic perspective, the State Department’s creation of the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) did bring about a Washington-based, interagency, decision-making body supported by a full interagency secretariat that performs planning and operations functions. S/CRS, however, has been resource constrained and has not evolved as designed; thus, it continues to lack a comprehensive capability to fully

integrate interagency efforts. Although DoD Instruction 3000.05 is clear in its guidance on the relationship between stability operations and combat operations, as well as broad language for supporting the agencies, it does not explicitly address interagency cooperation with USAID. What is missing is a “joint-interagency” policy memorandum between the DoD and USAID to solidify the commitment for improved interagency cooperation. From the operational perspective, the Office of Provincial Affairs and Multi-National Corps-Iraq published a

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unified common plan (UCP) in April 16, 2009, with the aim to usurp independent stove-piped efforts that were at times counterproductive and duplicative. The UCP brought together a formalized interagency planning and execution framework to “build civil capacity at the regional, provincial, and local level in Iraq.” And while the sum of recent measures indicates a degree of commitment, initiative, and leadership in the right direction, these measures are, by themselves, ad hoc efforts once again at risk of atrophy similar to what took place after successful interagency cooperation efforts post-WWII in Japan and successful CORDS operations in Vietnam.

For lasting improvement in interagency cooperation and the achievement of unity of effort, there must be institutional and structural changes in how the agencies operate. Sometimes such institutional changes must be

forced, as seen by the Goldwater-Nichols Act, which forced joint coordination and cross-pollination by the military services. However, as effective as the U.S. military has been in combat, it does not adequately address current national security needs that require interagency cooperation and the application of soft power, which in some situations can be as potent as the application of hard power. Absent a similar act for the agencies to force cooperation, it is still possible to improve interagency cooperation if given Presidential commitment and adequate Congressional funding support. The following recommendations are meant to improve unity of effort between the DoD and USAID as part of the whole-of-government approach. While senior DoD leaders such as Admiral Mullen have admitted “we are a good decade away from creating a capability in our other departments,” the time to act is now.<sup>6</sup>

### **Recommendations**

Presidential commitment and Congressional funding support are requisite ingredients to provide the foundation for lasting unity of effort by U.S. government departments and agencies. Therefore, the President must reiterate his commitment to strengthening the nation’s soft-power capabilities and interagency cooperation with a cover letter to accompany an “Interagency Civilian-Military Cooperation Policy” between the DoD and the Department of State. This interagency policy with signatures from DoD, State, and USAID is necessary to put the weight and flexibility of the military and the policy direction of the State Department behind interagency cooperation with USAID. The signature requirements will also strengthen the State Department and USAID’s cooperation commitment toward the DoD. Although current DoD Instruction 3000.05 and USAID’s Civilian-Military Cooperation Policy call for increased cooperation, this interagency policy with specific implementation guidance, to include

a formal interagency exchange program, is the next critical step to merge and integrate each agency's policy intents. Details of the proposed formal interagency exchange program are as follows.

### ***Proposed DoD and USAID Interagency Exchange Program Guidance***

To advance achieving unity of effort, the DoD and USAID should work in partnership and with S/CRS to further develop and implement a formal Interagency Exchange Program for DoD and USAID personnel to enhance the employment of soft-power effects required by national imperatives. Just as joint assignments have served the DoD extremely well by integrating combined arms for maximum lethal effects, cross-flow assignments between the DoD and USAID will create the opportunity for both military and civilian professionals to better leverage each other's core competencies through shared information and expertise. Interagency assignments will be considered important by the participating agencies, and officers selected to participate will be duly chosen and developed for advancement.

The exchange program should be designed to immediately leverage limited resources and expertise to close the current soft-power capabilities gap created by the national security landscape and internal policy directives. At the same time, it should have the foresight to develop longer-term capabilities. While current operations allow ample opportunities for DoD and USAID personnel to work side by side at the PRT level in Afghanistan and Iraq, they must sustain and safeguard current gains for the future to prevent atrophy. Thus, the interagency exchange program between the DoD and USAID represents an important step in this direction.

An interagency cadre including representation from the State Department, USAID, and all services within the DoD should

manage the program. The interagency cadre's charter would provide leadership, management, and program development. The agencies should

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take the initiative by calling for an initial cadre of volunteers interested in developing soft-power skills to further support and develop the proposed exchange program. The cadre should conduct a cost estimate to determine program funding requirements to cover additional billets, education and training programs, and other operational funding needs. Once finished, the cadre would work to submit the total funding requirement as part of the President's annual budget request to Congress.

### ***Proposed Exchange Program Manpower Staffing***

The program should be designed with additional interagency manpower billets and given staffing priority. Officers selected for the program should be designated with a skill identifier to enable effective management for career and long-term development. A sustainable, functional, and learning organization must have a proper mix of experienced personnel and novices in the pipeline willing to serve. For long-term viability, the program must put a premium on developing not just senior officers and professionals, but those at the junior to mid-grade levels as well.

### ***Proposed Education and Training Program***

The U.S. government must decisively act to reverse years of imbalance in education and

training programs for soft power. Interagency education program levels should mirror current military professional education levels. Opportunities to receive interagency training and development should be available at the appropriate time and years of service. The program should include current interagency opportunities, such as the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, but also expand to include other on-the-job and operational cross-flow assignments. These opportunities will translate into faster integration at all levels and will help achieve unity of effort in future operations.

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For both DoD and USAID officers identified to participate in the interagency exchange program, the recommendation for education and training to close the knowledge, skills, and abilities gap should include a certification program. This certification program should be designed to maintain foreign language fluency, area and cultural knowledge, leadership and management ability, negotiating skills, public diplomacy know-how, and job-specific functional expertise spelled out in DoD Instruction 3000.05. This program would include the skills required to rebuild indigenous institutions, judicial systems, private sectors, economic sectors, necessary infrastructures, and representative governmental institutions. The interagency exchange training program would work directly with the State Department's Foreign Service Institute and the Army's

National Training Center to ensure the current deployment training programs endure.

### ***Proposed Interagency Exchange Activities***

In addition to training and education, activities related to interagency exchange positions should have a strong operational focus with the aim of improving unity of effort in the context of civil military operations and its associated soft-power effects. These activities would be designed to further improve operational integration as follow on to time spent in education and training environments. For instance, a program already exists to send civil service personnel on overseas excursion tours when there are no foreign service volunteers. There is also a program that allows civil service personnel to convert permanently to the foreign service. These programs could also be temporarily supplemented with military personnel with the right mix of skill sets, experience, and additional foreign service training provided by USAID. Finally, a capstone operational assignment for an O-5 DoD officer could be a position as a PRT commander followed by an assignment to a higher headquarters, where operational experience gained at the PRT level can be reintegrated to further improve policies or plans.

An operational assignment exchange for USAID would be a position at a geographic combatant command's Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG) or its equivalent to assist with regional- and country-specific planning. USAID Disaster Assistant Response Teams who provide specialists trained in a variety of relief skills to assist U.S. embassies and USAID manage the U.S. government response to international disasters could be integrated into JIACGs. These experts understand the needs of the embassy and USAID mission and have access to other government and non-governmental organization networks that understand the cultural norms

and practices of the affected country. They can offer valuable advice to commanders during planning. Combatant command planning for reconstruction and stabilization should also take into account the balance of security, governance, economic development, and societal or cultural norms, a notion that requires the involvement of both military and civilian expertise. This USAID expertise added to the combatant command staff would assist with cultural planning and should eliminate some of the initial obstacles and counterproductive effects seen by those first on the ground in recent conflicts.

The interagency cadre should also work with exchange program participants to develop an Interagency Universal Joint Task List (IUJTL) specific to reconstruction and stability operations in order to have a common language for task planning, training, and prioritization. Currently S/CRS has an essential task matrix that provides a framework for contingency reconstruction planning.<sup>7</sup> This task matrix should be converted into an IUJTL for interagency use. This set of tasks would facilitate a common understanding of tasks and terms and will help the DoD and USAID team members integrate quickly into a training environment, as well as when deployed.

Further, the interagency exchange program participants should be given the responsibility to capture lessons learned and best practices from the operational environments. For example, a similar version of the Office of Provincial Affairs and Multi-National Corps-Iraq UCP could also be implemented in Afghanistan. Lest the U.S. government interagency system repeats the mistakes made in the earlier days of PRT implementation, lessons learned should be captured, institutionalized, and archived.

Development of and participation in training and exercises will create a common set of standing operating procedures to improve on the fragile successes achieved in the neighborhoods of Iraq and provinces of

Afghanistan. The agencies must “practice like they play.” Although each operation may be inherently different and will come with unique challenges, it will be helpful to establish and codify in doctrine and applicable training

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manuals a notional PRT task organization that DoD personnel and foreign service officers can learn and train on. One of the strengths of the DoD’s organizational structure is its use of command relationships compared to the USAID practice of a formal coordinating relationship. The DoD’s command structure offers an unambiguous chain of responsibility resulting in clearly defined relationships and levels of authority. To this end, interagency exchange cadre would support the development of two PRT-like command structures—one with a military lead and one with a civilian lead. Whether one is preferred over another would depend on the level of security in the area of operation. This structure further ensures unity of effort by assigning interagency personnel under one chain of command, similar to the CORDS structure used during the Vietnam War. As a note of emphasis and in keeping with the views of the Secretary of Defense to guard against the perception of “creeping militarization” of U.S. foreign policy, an exercise with a notional PRT structure should have the military in a lead role to start. As the exercise progresses, it is critical to practice transferring authority to a civilian counterpart as the environment becomes more benign. The rationale for this is to help the military overcome the friction and reluctance of being subordinate to a civilian leader in an active war zone, as was seen in both Afghanistan and Iraq PRTs.

## ***Exchange Program Funding***

To achieve long-term unity of effort, executive branch departments and agencies must have the support of the President and funding from Congress. A redirection of monetary support to programs aimed at improving interagency cooperation should come from the President, Congress, and the agencies, including DoD and USAID. Without a commitment to long-term funding, the interagency exchange program will fail before it even begins. This cannot and must not be allowed if the nation is to begin strengthening its soft-power capabilities. To be clear, the U.S. military was fully funded, organized, trained, and equipped with the latest technical means to employ lethal effects on the eve of September 11, 2001; however, the destruction witnessed that morning offers a humbling reminder that no matter how well the nation's conventional forces were funded for lethal effects, it did not ensure the protection of its citizens from acts of terror by those non-state actors who were willing to commit them.

**Of the utmost priority is funding to bolster both S/CRS and USAID manpower shortfalls.**

Of the utmost priority is funding to bolster both S/CRS and USAID manpower shortfalls. These organizations need to immediately hire the personnel required to begin the long rebuilding process to fill the U.S. government's gap in capabilities for the application of soft power. Next, Congress must provide funding for the additional interagency billets required to support the proposed exchange program, including funding for initial cadre, exchange program education, and operational activities. Without the required funding to support a

formalized and sustained interagency exchange program, it will be next to impossible for the agencies, including DoD and USAID, to close the current soft-power, capability gaps, and it will prevent lasting progress toward interagency cooperation between these agencies.

## **Additional Research**

For future research, the U.S. government should explore specific USAID, DoD, or service-specific billets and skills most suitable for the interagency exchange program and conduct an analysis to include other State Department billets in the exchange program. In addition, as monetary constraints have often impeded interagency cooperation, U.S. government should conduct additional research on the current fiscal funding process with the goal of improving flexibility and efficiencies. As it stands, current fiscal law is fairly restrictive and cumbersome to execute. It is not conducive to the flexible sharing of resources across appropriations within a single agency, much less the sharing of resources between agencies. Moreover, the Special Inspector General for Iraqi Reconstruction website has a number of comprehensive audit reports pointing to even more potential areas for research, including reports on PRT performance and issues related to reconstruction efforts in Iraq.

Finally, for further comparative analysis on the whole-of-government's role in conducting stability operations in a counterinsurgency fight, U.S. government planners could further analyze counterinsurgency from the perception of the local population. Most discussions involving counterinsurgency operations take a U.S.-centric view. However, to win a counterinsurgency fight, the U.S. government must not look at nation building from its own view, but the view of the local population. In this type of protracted struggle, the center of gravity is the will of the people to either support the host government or the insurgency. The will

of the people, attained through their hearts and minds, is grounded in culture and history and is not likely to change overnight or even over the course of a few years. This counterinsurgency center of gravity is supported by three elements: an effective military that can provide security; an effective civil capacity to provide governance and well-being; and long-term capital resources to sustain the effort. Instability in any one of these elements will result in an unstable peace.

## Summary

The paramount importance of achieving unity of effort can be summed up in the words of an anonymous PRT member, “We need to do everything we can to ensure the PRTs can do their work. When we succeed, the Iraqis can run the country themselves and we can go home. We are, in a sense, the exit strategy.”<sup>8</sup> Interagency cooperation must start months, if not years, before the first boots hit the ground, in order to win the battle for the hearts and minds of the local population in a far away land. Improved unity of effort between the DoD and USAID can be achieved with a continued shift in interagency coordination and collaboration, not only in thinking but also in practice, and supported by adequate resources. The implementation of a joint-interagency policy followed by the proposed formal interagency exchange program between the DoD and USAID would represent a serious commitment on the part of the nation’s leaders to generate lasting soft-power capabilities to complement its unrivaled hard-power capabilities. The promise for interagency cooperation during peace might in fact be proven to be a powerful institutional lever to achieve unity of effort during a contingency or during times of war. **IAJ**

## Notes

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