

The Need for Interagency Reform:

Congressional Perspective and Efforts

by Geoffrey C. Davis and John F. Tierney

The dynamic and unpredictable nature of national security in the twenty-first century involves a broad array of challenges that defy traditional tactics.

An overhaul of our interagency operations is critical for our country's national security. Interagency operations are operations conducted by two or more federal departments or agencies in support of our nation's national security mission.

To improve interagency coordination and eliminate barriers that impede improved operations, we introduced the Interagency Personnel Rotation Act of 2011.

Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Joe Lieberman (I-CT), Ranking Member Susan Collins (R-ME), and Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management Daniel Akaka (D-HI) introduced a companion bill in the Senate.

The State of Interagency Operations Today

The reality is that our country's national security interagency process is hamstrung and broken. There are regulatory, budgetary, legislative, bureaucratic, and cultural impediments to effective interagency operations.

These problems are independent of personalities, party affiliation, and presidential administrations. Our contemporary interagency system was devised over sixty years ago for a different era when national security was primarily a function of military capabilities wielded by the Department of Defense in overseas missions. At the time, major combat operations and nuclear deterrence were the principal areas of focus of U.S. national security strategy. This approach

Geoffrey D. Davis is the U.S. Representative for Kentucky's 4th congressional district where he serves as a Republican on the Ways and Means Committee. He graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, NY and served as an assault helicopter flight commander in the 82nd Airborne Division.

John F. Tierney is the U.S. Representative for Massachusetts' 6th congressional district where he serves as a Democrat on the Oversight and Government Reform Committee and Ranking Member of the National Security Oversight Subcommittee. While Chairman of that Subcommittee, he undertook a variety of investigations that led to improvements at Walter Reed and oversight reforms at the Department of Defense.

enshrined the belief that national security was almost exclusively a function of the Departments of Defense and State and the intelligence community.

The historical development of our approach to executing our national security objectives has created a mismatch of authorities, capabilities, and focus. These challenges have impeded a synchronized, whole-of-government effort in dealing with the full range of contemporary, national security problems.

The historical development of our approach to executing our national security objectives has created a mismatch of authorities, capabilities, and focus.

A specific example of these interrelated problems occurred during the early days of U.S. military operations in Iraq. The fact that U.S. military forces in Iraq learned of the unilateral disbandment of the Iraqi Army—the cornerstone of all U.S. security planning—through a cable news report is indicative of the disconnect between the Coalitional Provisional Authority (CPA) and the U.S. military command. The contentious relationship between the senior civilian official (Paul Bremer) and the senior U.S. military commander (Lieutenant General Sanchez) added to the lack of unity.

Also contributing to the problem is the dearth of widespread, effective training and education programs that would enable government personnel (civilian and military) to break out of agency stovepipes and seek better coordinated and more cost-effective interagency solutions.

Agency Collaboration and Soft

Power to Address New Challenges

Since the end of the Cold War, national security challenges have included global interdependence, weakened Cold War alliances, influential sub-state and non-state actors, increasing resistance to diplomatic pressure, and new biological and cyber threats.

Addressing the expanded scope of constantly evolving national security issues requires a correspondingly wider range of highly integrated and carefully calibrated operations that not one individual agency can provide. Doing so effectively requires the application of non-military or “soft” power.

Executive departments, such as Agriculture, Commerce, Education, and Transportation, have not been viewed as necessary contributors to national security or interagency operations in the past. Non-security agencies themselves may not be conscious of or prepared to act in their national security roles, and the cultures of these organizations provide little incentives for staff to participate in national security missions. Further, even if they have the desire to assist, they can be prevented from doing so by a lack of resources or education and training. For example, when departments and agencies were reluctant to contribute personnel to the CPA, the CPA was forced to operate throughout its tenure with approximately two-thirds of its required personnel.

In order for our country to confront the wide array of complex national security threats and issues, agencies and departments must act in a more highly-synchronized and collaborative manner at all stages from initial planning through implementation and ongoing operations.

Executing our national security strategy can be dangerous and produce erratic outcomes when agencies and departments fail to collaborate. For example, the head of the CPA in Iraq Paul Bremer did not want to be

slowed by the interagency process. CPA staff was instructed not to respond to requests for information from other departments or agencies. State Department employees detailed to the CPA had to operate via Hotmail e-mail accounts to receive backchannel communications, and National Security Advisor senior deputies learned of Bremer's orders via the CPA website.

Another example of how ineffective agency collaboration can slow or even detrimentally impact our national security operations is illustrated in the early days of our military operations in Iraq. Ensuring that the Iraqi Army had the required number of personnel for combat operations was a high priority for U.S. forces advising and assisting the Iraqis. Unfortunately, because there was no modern banking system in Iraq, Iraqi soldiers could only be paid in cash, which required them to spend days away from their units while taking money home to their families.

During this period, the Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Treasury indicated that, if given the go-ahead, he was prepared to help Iraq establish a modern banking system which would have, among other things, enabled Iraqi soldiers to send pay home without having to leave their units and on-going combat operations. The Deputy Secretary's proposal was not implemented because the Department of the Treasury was not tapped to conduct overseas national security operations with other agencies of the federal government. Over the years, this problem has been largely solved. However, if the Department of the Treasury had been properly involved early-on, the problem could have been solved sooner, thereby contributing to increased Iraqi combat power and lightening the burden on U.S. forces during one of the most difficult periods of our military presence in Iraq.

The State Department's Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) released in 2010 recognized the potential contributions of many different agencies to meet

foreign policy objectives but observed that their efforts "can be more unified, more focused, and more efficient." While it is important that agencies acknowledge this need, Congress must also act to ensure departments and agencies take needed steps much like it did in 1986 with the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act.

The Interagency Personnel Rotation Act of 2011 takes needed steps to satisfy some of GAO's important recommendations and to reform our stove-piped interagency operations.

The Interagency Personnel Rotation Act

In 2009, the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a comprehensive report on the actions required to enhance interagency collaboration for national security activities. The GAO report included the following key recommendations: the development and implementation of overarching strategies; the creation of collaborative organizations; the development of a well-trained workforce; and the sharing and integrating of national security information across agencies.

The Interagency Personnel Rotation Act of 2011 (the "Rotation Act") (H.R. 2314 in the House and S. 1268 in the Senate) takes needed steps to satisfy some of GAO's important recommendations and to reform our stove-piped interagency operations. This legislation would accomplish three primary objectives to facilitate greater collaboration and professional development of federal agency personnel

involved in national security.

First, the Rotation Act establishes a rotational program for federal agency employees with roles in national security. The bill provides for the creation of a framework of “interagency communities of interest” (ICIs). The ICIs span multiple agencies within which the Executive Branch should operate on a more integrated basis. By establishing a rotational program that includes “soft power” agencies with more traditional national security agencies, the Rotations Act takes the important first steps necessary to remove the cultural barriers to successful interagency operations.

To facilitate the establishment of this rotation program, the bill creates a Committee on National Security Personnel (the “Committee”) within the Executive Office of the President. The Committee is under the chairmanship of the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, includes the National Security Advisor and the Director of the Office

...the Rotation Act is designed to address the lack of incentives available to national security personnel to participate in interagency operations.

of Personnel Management and is supported by a board including senior-level officials from participating agencies. The Committee will issue directives and set standards for implementation of the interagency rotation system.

The Committee would also designate the substantive ICI categories—functional or regional— while individual agencies would determine which of their positions belongs to each ICI. The use of communities as distinct subsets of a broader program derives from

a Quadrennial Homeland Security Review recommendation. By narrowing the scope into these subsets, we seek to ensure relevant personnel rotate to like positions. For example, positions relating to information technology and engineering may be included, such as within an ICI covering cybersecurity.

Second, the Rotation Act also requires employees serving in ICI positions to participate in training and education in an effort to further break down the cultural hurdles interagency operations face. The training and education component will allow individuals in ICI positions to further develop an understanding of national security and homeland security strategy; the importance of interagency integration for accomplishing national security and homeland security objectives; the roles, functions, authorities, cultures, and resources of agencies involved in the applicable ICI; and practical skills and strategies for ensuring maximum interagency cohesion.

Lastly, the Rotation Act is designed to address the lack of incentives available to national security personnel to participate in interagency operations. The Rotation Act mandates that when hiring Senior Executive Service or equivalent positions with national security responsibilities agencies give strong preference to personnel who have completed interagency rotations. Additionally, the legislation requires agencies to identify additional incentives for participants.

Implementation of the Rotation Act would provide the opportunity for all agency employees with a role in executing our national security strategy the incentives, education and training, and ability to participate in an effective rotation program. Through this legislation, these personnel will be able to more effectively participate in the planning and execution of national security interagency operations when the need arises.

Conclusion

A successfully integrated interagency process will empower the U.S. to more effectively deploy our non-military instruments of power abroad. This ability will allow the U.S. to more successfully fulfill its interests while reserving the use of lethal military force as a last resort.

The Rotation Act is an important first step, but, it is only a first step. Further action by Congress and the Administration is needed to achieve effective interagency operations and develop a comprehensive cadre of national security professionals. **IAJ**