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9/11, COUNTERTERRORISM AND THE SENIOR INTERAGENCY STRATEGY TEAM

INTERAGENCY SMALL GROUP PERFORMANCE IN STRATEGY FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

by

Christopher Lamb and Erin Staine-Pyne



COSC Foundation's
Arthur D. Simons Center
for Interagency Cooperation



President Barack Obama meets with NCTC Director Michael Leiter (center right) at the National Counterterrorism Center in McLean, Va., Oct. 6, 2009.

White House photo by Samantha Appleton

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Interagency Strategy Team**

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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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Abstract

The belief that better information-sharing among national security departments and agencies could have prevented 9/11 motivated the President and Congress to create new institutions to safeguard the nation against catastrophic terrorist attacks. The National Counterterrorism Center in particular was designed to improve interagency coordination for the counterterrorism mission. Inside the Center, a small interagency group called the “Senior Interagency Strategy Team” (SIST) was established to serve as the primary organizational mechanism for interagency collaboration. Initially, the high-level group was successful. Buoyed by the national counterterrorism consensus following 9/11, the group produced the first National Implementation Plan for the War on Terror. However, the plan was poorly received, and the SIST’s prominent role and productivity fell precipitously thereafter, so much so that all subsequent leaders of the group questioned the value of its existence.

The rise and fall of the SIST is a fascinating case study of interagency collaboration. The SIST was assigned a key role in what is arguably the national security system’s most important mission area—countering terrorists and particularly terrorists trying to strike the U.S. with weapons of mass destruction. Yet it failed. This case study explains how and why it failed. Contrary to what the 9/11 Commission Report suggested, this study argues that good people cannot always overcome bad organizational structure. The SIST’s creators hoped that having its members faithfully represent their parent agencies’ positions would yield cooperation and strategic solutions. However in the current system, faithfully representing department and agency concerns made it impossible for SIST members to make the necessary tradeoffs in organizational equities that might have yielded a real strategy for counterterrorism. The SIST lives on, absorbing scarce and expensive counterterrorism expertise—too disappointing to revitalize but too evocative of hopes for better interagency collaboration to kill outright.

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Introduction

“For about a minute I stared at the pictures and the report, not quite believing what I had in my hands. We had asked the CIA repeatedly during the USS Cole investigation if they knew anything about why Khallad had been in Malaysia.... Each time we had asked—in November 2000, April 2001, and July 2001—they had said that they knew nothing. But here in the file was a very different answer: they had in fact known.... I walked out of the room, sprinted down the corridor to the bathroom, and fell to the floor next to a stall. There I threw up.... The same thought kept looping back: If they had all this information since January 2000, why the hell didn’t they pass it on?”

An FBI agent’s reaction after 9/11 on discovering the CIA possessed information relevant to the investigation of al-Qa’ida¹

The national calamity on 9/11 brought the issue of interagency collaboration into sharp focus. Government officials were queried on what they knew, when they knew it, and whether they sufficiently shared the information. Even though the CIA maintained it told the FBI at appropriately high levels what it knew,² accounts like the one cited above convinced many that the 9/11 terror attacks might have been prevented if departments and agencies had shared more information. This belief stimulated organizational reforms to improve interagency collaboration. Much as Pearl Harbor galvanized a previous generation to create the National Security Council (NSC) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to prevent surprise attacks from other countries, 9/11 motivated the President and Congress to create new institutions to safeguard the nation against catastrophic terrorist attacks.

The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (also known as the 9/11 Commission) made a compelling case for organizational reform. The Commission noted the greatest impediment to strategic warning of terrorist attacks was “human or systemic resistance to sharing information.” It tied this shortcoming to the organizational structure of the national security system, which not only prevented any one authority from integrating information from all sources, but also prevented anyone from assigning responsibilities across agencies, tracking progress, and removing impediments to success. The Commission summed up the problem with a metaphor: “The agencies are like a set of specialists in a hospital, each ordering tests, looking for symptoms, and prescribing medications. What is missing is the attending physician who makes sure they work as a team.”³ The Commission recommended the creation of a National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) to fill this gap.

The NCTC was given two missions: It would produce all-source intelligence analysis on terrorism enabled by good information-sharing among government departments and agencies, and it would provide national-level guidance to integrate all department and agency counterterrorism efforts.⁴ Its Directorate of Intelligence is responsible for the first mission,⁵ and its Directorate of Strategic Operational Planning (DSOP) is responsible for the second mission. As the Center’s planning and implementation arm, DSOP was designed to perform the role of the 9/11 Commission’s “attending physician” by ensuring the departments and agencies work together as a team to integrate all elements of national power in the fight against terrorists.

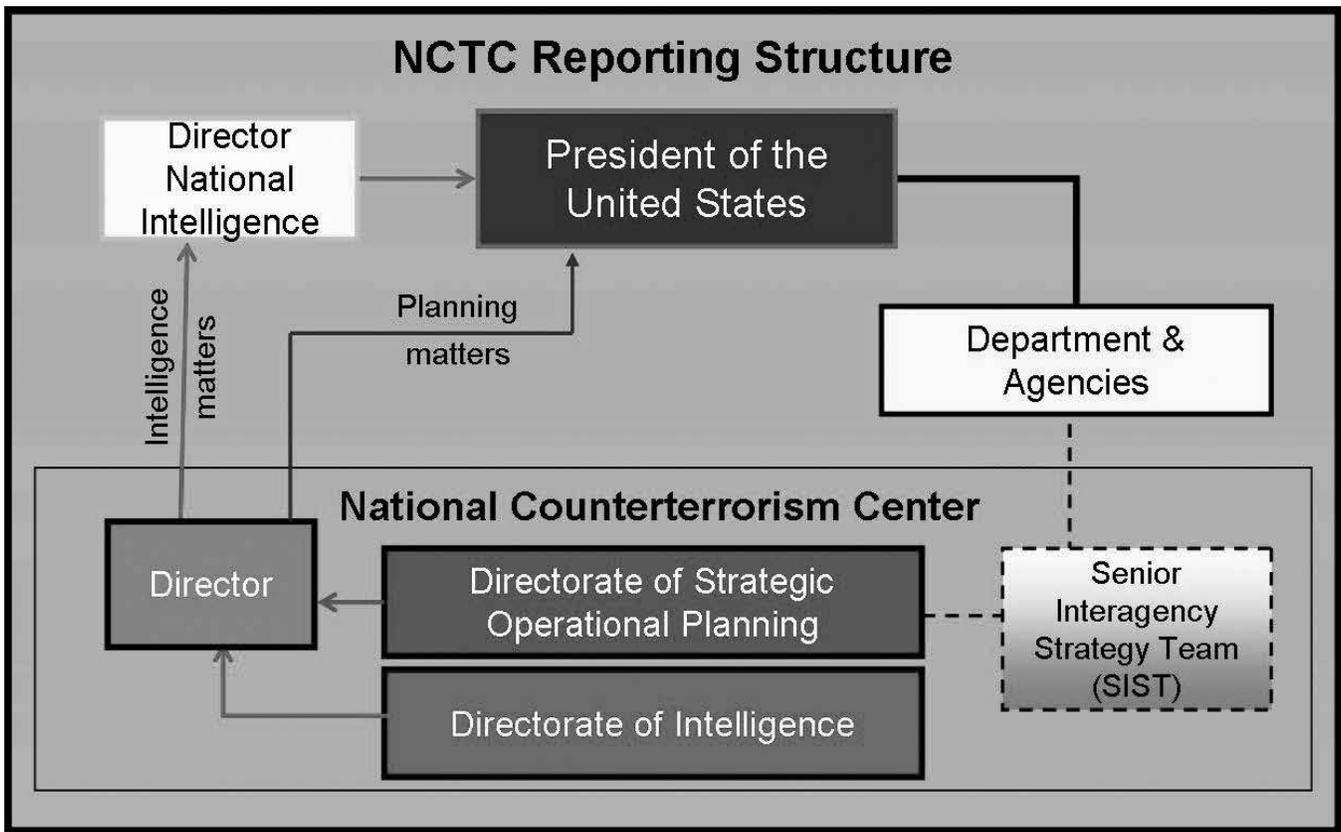


Figure 1: NCTC Reporting Structure

The Directorate of Intelligence evolved from the existing Terrorist Threat Integration Center, so its transition and standup was relatively simple. By contrast, getting DSOP up and running was complicated. The Bush Administration created a small interagency group to work out a plan for how DSOP would function. In a little more than two months, this transition team drafted a sophisticated operating concept that included a leading role for a small interagency team called the Senior Interagency Strategy Team (SIST). The SIST was designed to connect DSOP to the departments and agencies and ensure that counterterrorism planning was fully integrated across the government.

The SIST was created in early 2005, and members soon discovered they were overseeing a “mini train wreck.”⁶ They found themselves in the middle of an unpopular organization with limited resources and many reluctant participants.⁷ The SIST overcame these impediments and, in little more than a year, successfully produced the first National Implementation Plan for the War on Terror (NIP).⁸ After that, however, the SIST’s prominent

role and productivity fell precipitously, so much so that all subsequent leaders of the group have questioned the value of its existence.

The NCTC’s Directorate of Intelligence⁹ was created to identify terrorists’ whereabouts and warn of pending attacks. Both notable successes, such as the killing of al-Qa’ida leader Osama Bin Laden and glaring failures, such as the Christmas Day bombing attempt on Northwest flight 253 are largely attributed to the Directorate of Intelligence. Comparatively little attention has been paid to the Center’s second mission of coordinating the national security system’s response to terrorism, which was the *raison d’être* for DSOP and the SIST. Although DSOP has been seriously studied before,¹⁰ the SIST has not.

The relative lack of interest in these organizations is unfortunate. They were assigned key roles in what is arguably the national security system’s most important mission area—countering terrorists and particularly terrorists trying to strike the U.S. with weapons of mass destruction. The SIST was intended to be the key enabler that would allow

DSOP to fulfill the role of “attending physician” for the national security system’s counterterrorism mission. Without this key enabler, the 9/11 Commission’s “attending physician” remains absent. In fact, expert witnesses have admitted as much to Congress, saying that in its planning role the NCTC remains “a negotiator and mediator of sorts rather than director of action,” and that “arguably the government as a whole still lacks a truly interactive process for addressing terrorism.”¹¹

Without an “attending physician” to ensure the departments and agencies work as a team,

America’s response to terrorism is necessarily disjointed and less effective. If the U.S. is ever to have the organizational equivalent of an attending physician, it needs to understand why the SIST was not able to succeed. Providing an explanation for the SIST’s performance is the purpose of this study. First, however, we need to review the history of how the SIST developed and performed over the past decade to establish the group’s activities, track its performance trends, and identify the major factors affecting its output.

History of the Senior Interagency Strategy Team

The NCTC, and particularly the DSOP and the SIST, was unprecedented: “Never before has the U.S. government created a dedicated entity, sitting outside of the Executive Office of the President, to translate policy and strategy developed within the NSC system into integrated ‘strategic operational plans’ carried out by the departments and agencies.”¹² Summarizing the status quo prior to the 9/11 attacks illustrates how novel the organizational response was and puts the SIST’s creation and subsequent performance over the ensuing decade in proper perspective.

U.S. COUNTERTERRORISM POSTURE PRIOR TO 9/11

“Some of the saddest aspects of the 9/11 story are the outstanding efforts of so many individual officials straining, often without success, against the boundaries of the possible. Good people can overcome bad structures. They should not have to.”

—9/11 Commission Report

Terrorism has a long history, but most experts link the American experience with modern terrorism to aircraft hijackings by Palestinian terror organizations between 1968 and 1969,¹³ followed closely by the adoption of “counterterrorism” policies and the establishment of “counterterrorism” organizations following the 1972 Palestinian

Liberation Organization murder of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympic Games. Since then, different presidential administrations have assigned varying degrees of priority to fighting terrorism. For example, countering terrorism was a high priority in the Reagan administration, which believed it was sponsored, in part, by the Soviet Union and thus part of the Nation’s geopolitical struggle against communism. Counterterrorism was a lesser priority after the Cold War, until February 26, 1993, when the World Trade Center was attacked. After that event, the Clinton administration cited terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as the two most important threats facing the U.S.¹⁴

The attack on the World Trade Center and other terrorist attacks, such as the 1995 Sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway, suggested some terrorists were willing to execute mass casualty events, so the U.S. focused its attention on keeping weapons of mass destruction out of their hands. In that regard, the willingness to combat terrorism with clandestine operations while reinforcing international legal regimes and cultural norms against terrorism took on a higher priority. The al-Qa’ida terrorist organization, in particular, was perceived as a major threat. Its near simultaneous attacks on the U.S. embassies in East Africa in 1998 demonstrated that al-Qa’ida’s operational capability extended well beyond the Persian Gulf.

As the priority placed on counterterrorism rose and fell, different presidential administrations also

made adjustments to counterterrorism policy and strategy. The White House and State Department first provided policy direction for the counterterrorism mission in 1973, directing that “no concessions” be given to terrorists. Over the ensuing three decades, the U.S. typically asserted that terrorism was illegal and a law enforcement problem and was not a topic for negotiation or concessions of any kind. The U.S. continued to fight terrorism publicly with international law enforcement measures and behind the scenes with clandestine operations. The government’s first comprehensive counterterrorism policy was formed in 1986 under the Reagan Administration,¹⁵ but subsequent administrations revealed elements of their counterterrorism policy and strategy in the annual, congressionally-mandated National Security Strategy document. For example, the Clinton administration’s National Security Strategy stated the U.S. government’s long-standing, major counterterrorism tenets: “Our policy...is to make no concessions to terrorists, continue to pressure state sponsors of terrorism, fully exploit all available legal mechanisms to punish international terrorists, and help other governments improve their capabilities to combat terrorism.”¹⁶

Beyond the broad public policy tenets, the U.S. government’s actual approach to counterterrorism between 1972 and the late 1990s was a more complex and evolving mix of nine different elements that were applied with varying amounts of emphasis depending on circumstances and the administration in place:¹⁷

- International legal conventions.
- Defensive measures.
- Addressing the causes of terrorism.
- Policy of no concession given to terrorist.
- Judicial response through extradition, rendition, arrest, and prosecution.
- Economic sanctions against state sponsors.
- Use of force.
- Preemptive action.
- Disruption.

There was greater continuity with respect to how administrations organized the national security counterterrorism policy apparatus. As early as the Carter administration it was clear that counterterrorism required coordinating a wide range of department and agency activities. By 1979, twenty-nine different agencies played a role in the counterterrorism mission, making it an intrinsically interagency affair.¹⁸ The leadership, membership, and rank of the group providing oversight for the mission varied across administrations, but the basic construct remained the same—a small group of senior officials from diverse departments and agencies providing periodic oversight of the counterterrorism mission, typically at the Deputy Assistant Secretary or Assistant Secretary level (see chart below). Ever since the first Bush Administration, the group would generally report to the Deputies Committee, the NSC staff meeting attended by the second highest officials from major departments and agencies. The Deputies Committee, in turn, reports to the Principals Committee, a group made up of the head of each department or agency. It is also common for the primary interagency oversight group to create a set of subsidiary working groups to tackle specific counterterrorism issues.¹⁹

Typically, the Department of State (State) and/or an NSC staff official chaired the group. The Clinton administration introduced one organizational innovation of sorts. It established the Office of the National Coordinator for Security, Infrastructure Protection, and Counterterrorism within the NSC staff. In effect, the Clinton administration was elevating the status of the NSC official managing the interagency oversight group, so that he came to be called a “terrorism czar.” The individual holding the position, Richard Clarke, had a higher profile and access to Principal Committee meetings, but otherwise had no more authority than his predecessors charged with managing counterterrorism.²⁰

Pre-9/11 Interagency Oversight Groups Working Counterterrorism (CT) on an Ongoing Basis²¹			
President	Primary CT Oversight Group	Chair	Level
Nixon	NSC Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism working group	State	Deputy Assistant Secretary
Ford: no change.			
Carter	Executive Committee on Combating Terrorism	NSC, then State	Assistant Secretary
	Working Group on Terrorism	State	Deputy Assistant Secretary
Reagan	Operational Sub-Group (later, Coordination Sub-Group) ²²	NSC	Assistant Secretary
	Interdepartmental Group on Terrorism (policy and planning support)	State	Assistant Secretary
	Terrorism Incident Working Group (operational support)	NSC, then State ²³	
Bush	Interdepartmental Group/Terrorism	State	Assistant Secretary
Clinton	Coordinating Sub-Group becomes Counterterrorism Security Group (CSG)	NSC	Under Secretary or Assistant Secretary level
Bush	NSC Principals Committee on Counterterrorism and National Preparedness	NSC	Under Secretary or Assistant Secretary level

Table 1: Interagency Oversight Groups

Thus, on the eve of 9/11, the priority accorded to counterterrorism had grown substantially. However, U.S. policy, strategy, and organization for counterterrorism had not changed much over that same period despite a great deal of superficial and rhetorical variations. In particular, neither Congress nor presidential administrations had found an organizational innovation capable of overcoming the “cast-iron bureaucratic stovepipes” later lamented by the 9/11 Commission, which thwarted attempts to effectively integrate the work of the diverse executive branch departments and agencies. Foreshadowing the findings of the 9/11 Commission, the Commission on National Security in the 21st Century (also known as the Hart-Rudman Commission) warned in January 2001 that, “our nation has no coherent or integrated governmental structures” to respond to terrorist threats.²⁴ Thus the U.S. did not have a decisive, integrated decision-making structure for counterterrorism when the first aircraft hit the World Trade Center on 9/11.

A NEW COUNTERTERRORISM ORGANIZATION: 2001 TO 2004

The tragedy of 9/11 immediately changed U.S. policy and strategy for combating terrorism and soon changed the way the national security system was organized to oversee counterterrorism. In a meeting on the afternoon of 9/11, President Bush stated that combating terror was the administration’s new priority, and it would pursue four corollary objectives: secure the country; reassure the American people; destroy the terrorist networks, and give their state sponsors the choice to be with us or against us; and finally, to prepare for war against al-Qa’ida in a meaningful way.²⁵ In the President’s speech to Congress on September 20, 2001, al-Qa’ida was named as the enemy, Afghanistan was accused of harboring terrorists, and Americans were told that the war on terror would be long, invisible, and open-ended.²⁶ Fighting such a war would require some new organizational constructs, but as has been noted in a different context, the administration had to go to war with the bureaucracy it had, not the

one it wanted.²⁷

Validating the Hart-Rudman Commission's early warnings, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice would later note that, "The President's clarity stood in stark contrast to the chaotic decision-making structures supporting him." Since government institutions adequate for dealing with the newly-perceived terrorism threat did not exist, "in the first days and months ad hoc arrangements had to fill the void."²⁸ Soon, however, the White House attempted to reorganize for the fight against terrorism with new NSC staff positions and offices. President Bush established the Office of Homeland Security and hired General Wayne Downing as Deputy National Security Advisor for Counterterrorism.²⁹ Downing served less than a year in the job, "apparently dissatisfied by a series of losing bureaucratic struggles."³⁰ The Office of Homeland Security had fifty professionals working to lead, coordinate, and conduct oversight of the numerous federal programs involved with security and disasters. Former governor Tom Ridge was selected as its head. Ridge expected to have real authority, but found that everything had to be cleared by the White House Chief of Staff.³¹ Other than these notable efforts, the administration proceeded with the national security system it had inherited.

Congress was unsatisfied with executive changes to the counterterrorism apparatus and wanted major organizational changes. Led by Senator Joe Lieberman, Congress mounted an effort to establish a new department for homeland security. By combining the many different agencies with a role to play in protecting the U.S. from attacks on its territory into one cabinet-level department, the importance of homeland security would be elevated, and one official would be responsible for integrating these agencies' work. The idea was begrudgingly accepted by the Bush Administration,³² and legislation consolidating 22 separate federal agencies into the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was signed in November 2002.³³

While these national-level changes were being debated, some individual departments and agencies initiated their own strategies and planning processes to better chart the demands of what was becoming

known as "the war on terrorism." Days after the attack, the Department of Defense (DoD) stood up a Strategic Planning Cell for the War on Terror led by then Brigadier General Jeffrey Schloesser, which was tasked to develop a strategy to defeat al-Qa'ida. This is where the Bush Administration's first counterterrorism strategy of "kill or capture" began to take shape. It took a while for this approach to yield results. It was not until March 2002 that the U.S. obtained its first key al-Qa'ida planner, Abu Zubaydah, who was caught by Pakistani authorities and turned over to the CIA. Many other al-Qa'ida leaders would eventually follow.

Senior military officers responsible for developing plans to defeat al-Qa'ida began to complain about the lack of a long-term, coordinated strategy and expressed concern that "kill or capture" would not be enough to keep the terrorism ideology from spreading.³⁴ The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard B. Myers, presented President Bush with a series of initiatives designed to move beyond "kill or capture," but in 2002, the President was not yet ready to broaden the campaign beyond the defeat of al-Qa'ida.³⁵ The Pentagon did not desist from questioning the adequacy of "kill or capture," however. Later, in the fall of 2003, after the invasion of Iraq had succeeded, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld sent a memorandum to his senior policymakers and commanders asking if the U.S. was really winning the war on terrorism, and how we could know if more terrorists were being killed or captured than were being recruited into the ranks?³⁶ To answer these questions, the DoD began work on a new military strategy that intensified the debate and highlighted the lack of a comprehensive strategic approach to guide the war on terrorism.

Meanwhile, after U.S. attempts to diplomatically isolate al-Qa'ida from the Taliban failed, the U.S. committed to removing the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, as well as destroying al-Qa'ida.³⁷ Soon thereafter, the focus in the White House shifted from destroying the Taliban to toppling Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. The National Security Strategy released in September 2002 continued to emphasize the Bush Administration's focus on disrupting and destroying terrorist organizations

by attacking them. However, it also postulated that traditional deterrence would not work against terrorists and declared the U.S.'s right to conduct preemptive action.³⁸

As planning for military intervention in Iraq was taking place in the executive branch, public pressure was building for an investigation into the events on 9/11. The families of the 9/11 victims were particularly relentless in lobbying Congress,³⁹ and their efforts succeeded when Congress created the 9/11 Commission. The administration argued sensitive intelligence might be compromised, but others charged the administration with wanting to shift blame to the intelligence community. Bush finally relented a year after the terrorist attacks and agreed to the creation of the independent commission. Soon thereafter Congress released the findings of its joint inquiry into the intelligence community's actions leading up to 9/11. The joint inquiry cited a breakdown in communication among intelligence agencies and between intelligence agencies and law enforcement and recommended creating a government-wide strategy for combating terrorism that included an all-source fusion center within the new DHS, the strengthening of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) counterterrorism programs, and a Director of National Intelligence.⁴⁰ Many of these findings and recommendations were later adopted by the 9/11 Commission.

Before the Commission could release its findings, the administration took additional steps to reorganize. In response to Congressional criticism of the intelligence community's performance prior to 9/11, President Bush announced the creation of a Terrorist Threat Integration Center during his January 2003 State of the Union address.⁴¹ President Bush directed the FBI, CIA, DHS, and DoD to support the new center with the objective of merging and analyzing all terrorist threat information at a single location.⁴² The head of the center was to report directly to the Director of Central Intelligence. When the ten 9/11 commissioners released their unanimously approved report to the public in July 2004, their recommendations went well beyond merely creating the Terrorist Threat Integration Center.

The report contained a remarkable amount of

organizational analysis. The Commission argued that al-Qa'ida's "new brand of terrorism presented challenges to U.S. governmental institutions that they were not well-designed to meet."⁴³ Along with a set of organizational reforms, the Commission proposed a three-pronged approach to protecting the country against further terrorist attacks: attack terrorists and their organizations; prevent the continued growth of Islamist terrorism; and protect against and prepare for terrorist attacks. President Bush committed to using the 9/11 Commission's recommendations "as a guide" to improve ongoing efforts to protect America.⁴⁴ The Senate, with the support of the White House, responded favorably to the 9/11 Commission's report by producing a bill that closely mirrored the 9/11 Commission's recommendations. It passed quickly with a resounding 96-2 margin.⁴⁵

The House of Representatives, on the other hand, moved much slower, in part because the bureaucracy expressed stern disapproval of the most controversial recommendation—establishing a Director of National Intelligence. DHS Chief Tom Ridge and acting CIA Director John McLaughlin opposed a Cabinet-level Director of National Intelligence. They argued that improving the current structure would be a better alternative.⁴⁶ Because it would end the Director of Central Intelligence's 57-year reign as the Nation's chief intelligence officer, the new position of Director of National Intelligence was particularly unpopular at the CIA. However, Pentagon leaders also disapproved.⁴⁷ They worried that the new position might compromise their control over tactical battlefield support provided by intelligence collection agencies, including the National Security Agency, National Reconnaissance Office, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, and the Defense Intelligence Agency. Pentagon officials wanted the House of Representatives to ensure that DoD maintained authority over these programs.⁴⁸

When pressure from the 9/11 Commission members, the 9/11 families, and the press forced the House of Representatives to take action, its draft legislation reflected the recommendations of the Commission, but it still gave far less budget authority to the new Director of National Intelligence, in

keeping with the DoD's preference. The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act passed by Congress in December 2004 circumscribed the new Director of National Intelligence's budget power. Any attempt by the Director of National Intelligence to transfer funds within the intelligence community had to be approved by the Office of Management and Budget, be less than \$150 million, and be less than 5 percent of the amounts available to the affected agency.⁴⁹ The Pentagon may have rejoiced over this legislative victory, but not the CIA. The creation of the Director of National Intelligence was viewed by many in that organization as "punishment" for the perceived intelligence failures of 9/11.⁵⁰

The 9/11 Commission's recommendation to create the NCTC was less controversial, especially because President Bush had already created the Terrorist Threat Integration Center in early 2003. Four weeks after the 9/11 Commission released its report, the President established the NCTC through Executive Order 13354. The order required the Center to take over the Terrorist Threat Integration Center's duties for analyzing and integrating all intelligence pertaining to terrorism and counterterrorism (except purely domestic counterterrorism information). It also gave NCTC a new mission to conduct "strategic operational planning" for counterterrorism activities, integrating all instruments of national power, including diplomatic, financial, military, intelligence, homeland security, and law enforcement activities. The executive order placed NCTC under the supervision of the Director of Central Intelligence, as had been the case for the Terrorist Threat Integration Center.⁵¹

Congress also tasked DSOP with "strategic operational planning" in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, specifying that such planning, "shall include the mission, objectives to be achieved, tasks to be performed, interagency coordination of operational activities, and the assignment of roles and responsibilities." Like the President's executive order, the legislation empowered DSOP "to conduct strategic operational planning for counterterrorism activities, integrating all instruments of national power, including diplomatic, financial, military, intelligence,

homeland security, and law enforcement activities within and among agencies."⁵² However, Congress preferred a different reporting structure than the President. The legislation specified a dual reporting chain for the NCTC. The law required that on intelligence matters, the NCTC director report to the newly created Director of National Intelligence, who replaced the Director of the Central Intelligence, and on strategic operational planning matters, the director report to the President.

The NCTC was less controversial than the Office of Director of National Intelligence, but standing up the organization was still difficult. Its Directorate of Intelligence was established quickly since it subsumed the existing Terrorist Threat Integration Center,⁵³ which had already battled within the intelligence community to obtain a staff of over 350 people.⁵⁴ Establishing the DSOP was a much bigger challenge. To begin with, many powerful departments and agencies were leery of the new organization or at least of some of its assigned duties and authorities.

DoD was concerned that the Director would report directly to the President on planning matters,⁵⁵ and also worried that DSOP's role would conflict with its Title 10 statutory responsibilities for planning.⁵⁶ The CIA was overtly hostile to the NCTC's Directorate of Intelligence,⁵⁷ but some CIA officials saw limited value in an interagency strategic planning group. More commonly, the CIA was wary of the harm the new organization might do to CIA equities,⁵⁸ particularly by interfering with operations. One observer expressed the CIA attitude as, "you are treading on us; you are just a bureaucracy that is going to slow us down, and we have a job to do."⁵⁹ The FBI was concerned about NCTC intelligence officials stepping over into law enforcement activities.⁶⁰ The DHS supported the NCTC but was concerned about supporting a counterterrorism organization that might be dominated by the DoD and the CIA.⁶¹ Other departments, such as Justice and Treasury, saw an opportunity to increase their influence.⁶² The Treasury Department, in particular, had created a very effective interagency team to handle terrorism finance and money laundering, earning the only "A" grade in the 9/11 Commission report. It supported

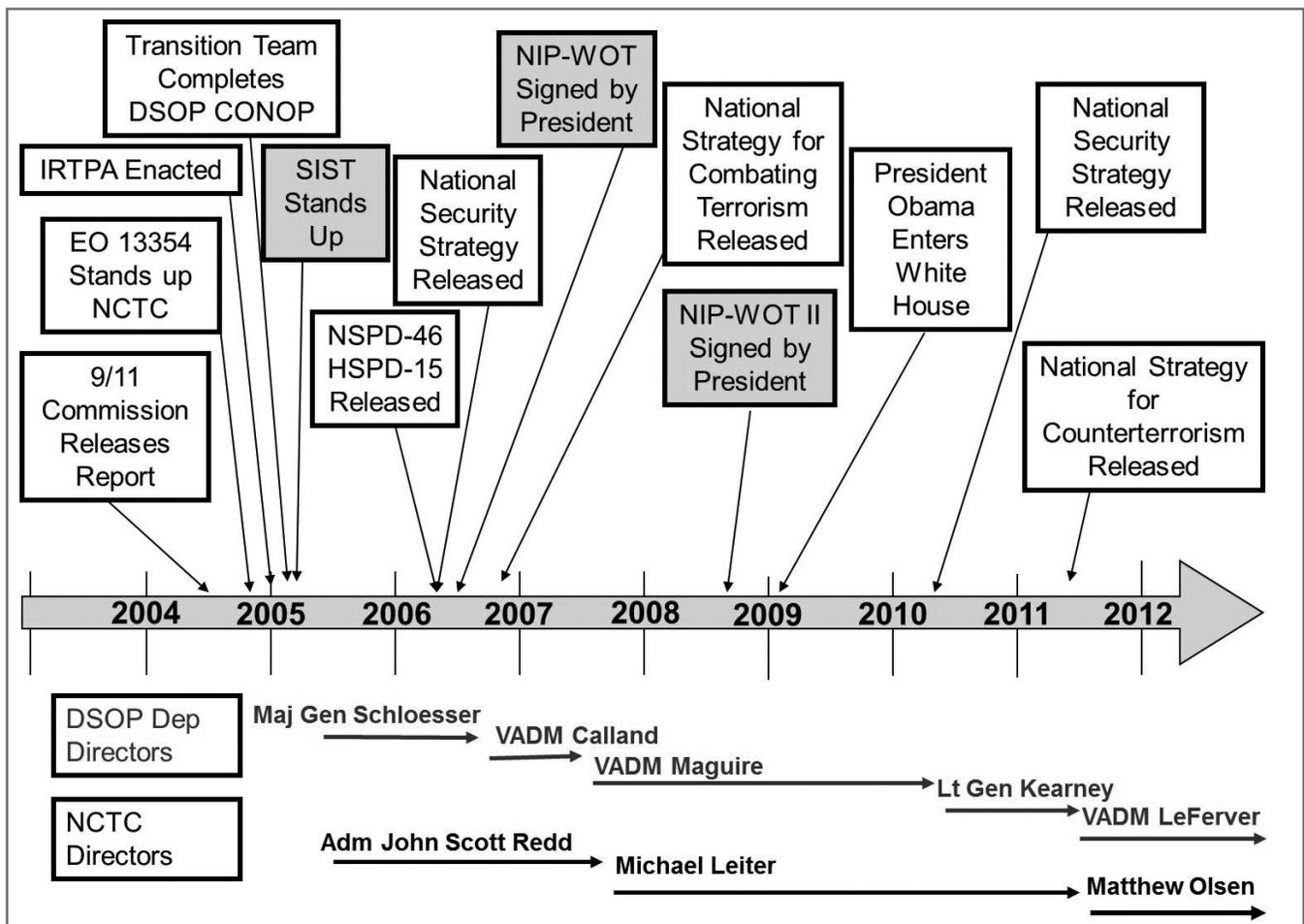


Figure 2: NIP Timeline

greater interagency collaboration,⁶³ saw itself as the “go to” agency for terrorism finance issues, and was pleased to advertise its work in the new organization.⁶⁴ Still, there was enough bureaucratic opposition that all concerned knew standing up the NCTC was going to be a major challenge. The Bush Administration decided to tackle the problem head on.

THE SIST CONCEPT TAKES SHAPE: LATE 2004 TO EARLY 2005

In early November 2004, the NCTC’s interim director John Brennan sent letters to the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of Homeland Security, Director of the CIA, and Director of the FBI requesting support for an effort to determine how DSOP should be configured. He asked each of these national security leaders to assign at least one of their senior-level officials full time for a period of no less than 60 days to work on a plan for how

DSOP would function and what resources would be required to make it a success. Brennan also believed that ideally some members of this working group should stay on to carry out the plan. Brennan placed his deputy Arthur Cummings in charge of this interagency steering group, which came to be known informally as “the transition team.” He let the group know that he intended to take the recommendations to the NSC at the end of January 2005.

Brennan received a representative from the CIA, three from DHS, three from DoD (one from the Secretary of Defense’s staff and two from the Joint Staff), two from State, one from the FBI, one from Treasury, and one from the NSC staff (who seldom showed up). The NCTC front office also placed a representative on the transition team and supported it with expertise from the consulting firm that had experience in building organizations.⁶⁵ The transition team members were essentially

“locked in a room for two months” working full-time. The team was provided a conference room, but no phones, computers, Blackberries, or other electronics. (One member of the team recalls that the austere working environment underscored the need for the SIST’s creation—to have sufficient logistical support in order to be effective.)⁶⁶

The team knew the organization had to be capable of producing a national counterterrorism implementation plan, and they had sixty days to produce a concept for how it would do so. Otherwise they received little guidance. Brennan simply told Cummings to “go figure it out.” For the first few weeks Cummings worked full-time with the transition team, but then confident the team was on track, attended to his many other duties, including attending Deputies meetings. He reviewed the team’s products regularly, and would only intervene occasionally to provide small bits of additional guidance.⁶⁷ A consultant facilitated discussions and required the group to produce a PowerPoint slide summary at the end of each day that captured its progress, which was passed on to Cummings. The consultants helped identify the issues the team would have to resolve and took the materials the group produced and organized them into the draft concept of operations.⁶⁸ Occasionally, the group broke down into smaller elements to take on specific issues, and the consultants often supported these deliberations as well.⁶⁹

The atmosphere was a bit apprehensive. There was a lot of concern that the new organization might try to tell the departments and agencies how to do things. Yet the departments and agencies were in favor of voluntary cooperation, particularly in counterterrorism, given the circumstances surrounding 9/11. For the most part, the agencies and departments sent senior representatives they trusted to do a good job.⁷⁰ Later, there would be more attention to “turf protection,” but most transition team members were not locked in on any position and simply wanted to figure out the best way forward. There were a couple of representatives on the transition team—notably from CIA and State—who had more field experience than time in Washington. They were dubious that any good could come from a Washington bureaucratic

construct and were even viewed as favoring the weakest possible organization.⁷¹ They did not attend the transition team meetings as regularly as others. One main duty Cummings performed was keeping agency representatives engaged. He let them know they were viewed as speaking for their agencies and departments.⁷² The other members largely discounted their skepticism. One of the two eventually was replaced, and the other was not perceived to be representative of his organization’s support for the effort.⁷³

Other than these two members, the rest of the group was Washington savvy. They had a lot of experience in interagency groups of one kind or another, including NSC staff experience. They knew that while the Deputies Committee has enough clout to make decisions with authority, its members did not have the time to stay abreast of specific issues. They understood that ongoing management of any major issue area had to occur at the assistant secretary level for the most part. They also understood the complexity and potential confusion involved in standing up a new interagency organization that was not in the NSC staff’s normal hierarchy of interagency committees.⁷⁴ The concept they finally agreed upon would painstakingly address the relationships among the major parties at the NCTC, including the Director, the Deputy Director of DSOP, the SIST, and the NSC staff’s pertinent interagency committees.

The transition team spent a great deal of time trying to figure out what strategic operational planning meant. The law specified that DSOP could not make policy or conduct operations, and it provided a brief description of what strategic operational planning covered. Nevertheless the concept was highly contentious.⁷⁵ Lack of precedence for the meaning of the term left the door open to varying interpretations.⁷⁶ In general, there were two schools of thought on the subject. The 9/11 Commission clearly believed the NCTC should have a robust role in operational coordination. The 9/11 Commission actually proposed “a civilian-led joint command for counterterrorism” saying, “it should combine strategic intelligence and joint operational planning.” The Commission’s report even offers a hypothetical case where a suspected

terrorist is discovered traveling from Bangkok, and the NCTC, based on joint intelligence, manages the case by assigning tasks to different agencies and tracking the progress of the interagency operation.⁷⁷

The second school of thought took a more restrictive view, arguing that the NCTC should coordinate rather than direct. It noted that President Bush's Executive Order 13354 declined to use the well-understood military term, "joint operational planning" and instead coined the phrase, "strategic operational planning."⁷⁸ The implication was that the White House wanted the Center to facilitate rather than direct. Departments and agencies that did not want to take orders from NCTC naturally favored this view. They maintained that DSOP should be "light operational and heavy planning; little power to direct, but good coordination."⁷⁹

Cummings and others met personally with Senators Joe Lieberman (I-Connecticut) and Susan Collins (R-Maine), and later with congressional staffers to better understand the intent of the law.⁸⁰ The meetings did not shed a lot of light on the meaning of the term. As Senator Collins later acknowledged, she readily conceded that strategic operational planning was a compromise term that sounded contradictory.⁸¹ The executive branch had coined the term, and Congress was content to let it define the concept more specifically.⁸² It attempted to do so. A series of Deputies meetings were held for this purpose. The Deputies considered congressional intent and initially concluded that strategic operational planning meant to "coordinate, integrate, and synchronize the national counterterrorism effort." There was immediate resistance to this interpretation because "synchronize" implied the ability to direct department and agency activities, which it was argued, would be contrary to the law's prohibition against conducting operations. Besides, the legislation did not repeal the authorities of other organizations to plan for counterterrorism, so the departments and agencies could and did argue they still had a role in planning. It was decided that DSOP orchestration of the counterterrorism effort would be limited to the national level, with execution and department-specific planning being conducted by the individual departments and agencies.⁸³ Where to draw the line precisely between the two levels

would remain an ongoing issue,⁸⁴ but at least for the time being, the Deputies had provided their ruling and resolved the issue in theory.

In keeping with the Deputies guidance, the transition team's concept made DSOP responsible for national as opposed to department or agency plans. It explicitly noted that DSOP had authority to coordinate plans but not to manage or direct operations. The concept assumed that DSOP plans were approved by the Deputies Committee or higher authority. After such approval, actions are executed by individual agencies in support of the plan. The transition team did argue that someone at the NCTC had to have visibility over ongoing counterterrorism operations and their outcomes, including highly classified ones, to ensure that planning efforts reflected developments in the security environment and accounted for all U.S. operations. It also envisioned some assessment and evaluation duties for the new organizations. Otherwise, the concept for DSOP and SIST was that their activities would focus on national counterterrorism strategy and plan development.

Concerning the boundary between policy and strategy, the transition team's concept noted that DSOP's work had to be informed by and consistent with the national counterterrorism "strategy" put out by the White House. However, they also put DSOP and the SIST in charge of a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy process that assessed national courses of action and obtained commitments from departments and agencies for those courses of action. The transition team seemed to agree with the many critics who have argued that strategies promulgated by the White House are more policy guidance than actual strategy. Thus they envisioned the need for more distinct strategic courses of action to counter terrorism and assigned DSOP and the SIST that responsibility.

Having worked out the scope of DSOP's activities, the transition team had to tackle a host of other issues. Perhaps the most important question was how the organization would relate to the long-standing NSC hierarchy of interagency committees, from the principals, to the deputies, and particularly the Counterterrorism Security Group. One option considered was dual-hatting the Assistant to the

President for Counterterrorism on the NSC staff as the head of DSOP.⁸⁵ Instead, the concept ended up saying the head of DSOP should regularly meet that NSC official as well as others working on counterterrorism. Other than indicating lots of cooperation, the transition team said little about the internal authority relationships between DSOP leaders and the SIST. The SIST was envisioned as a free-floating entity of sorts. However, since the document charged DSOP's director with convening and chairing regular meetings of senior leaders from departments and agencies working on counterterrorism, it made sense for him to also chair the meetings of the SIST, which is what happened.

When the transition team completed its work in late January, it presented the Deputies Committee with a remarkable document. The transition team's "National Counterterrorism Center, Strategic Operational Planning Concept of Operations," was a concise but elaborate, twenty-four page explanation for how DSOP and the SIST should function. It defined the mission, organizational relationships and structure, and staffing requirements for both DSOP and the SIST. It laid out a three-phase plan for standing up the organizations that included a leading role for the SIST. The SIST was intended to serve as a board of advisors overseeing interagency strategic operational planning for the U.S. government's counterterrorism mission. Few interagency groups have ever been initiated with more attention to their purpose, their mandate, and their relationship to other key elements of the larger national security organization.

THE SIST STANDS UP IN 2005

The concept of operations circulated among departments and agencies and was briefed to the Deputies Committee, which resolved several contentious issues not sufficiently clear in the draft document. The Deputies Committee clarified that DSOP would conduct coordination, integration, and synchronization of counterterrorism efforts at the national level via the development of strategic objectives and implementation plans.⁸⁶ Thus the Deputies came down on the side of longer-term planning, which presumably left crisis or near-term plans to the NSC staff and, in particular, its

Counterterrorism Security Group. However, the Deputies kept the door ajar for DSOP exerting some operational influence by allowing it to delve into the means for implementation of national plans, an important concession.

In February 2005, the Deputies Committee approved DSOP's organizational chart, which authorized the SIST and the level and status of its interagency representatives.⁸⁷ These meetings were contentious, with the CIA in particular, which was concerned that the new bureaucracy would impede its execution of operational responsibilities. Cummings argued emphatically that neither the SIST nor DSOP would seek approval authority over or attempt to manage operations conducted by the departments and agencies. He also insisted the SIST members had to be more than mere liaisons. The Deputies ultimately sided with Cummings, mandating that SIST members should be Senior Executive Service members who were assigned full-time to SIST work.⁸⁸

The Deputies Committee approved the DSOP and SIST concept of operations, but none of its members or anyone on the NSC staff knew precisely how the new organizations created expressly to improve interagency collaboration would work. The transition team faced an ongoing barrage of hypothetical questions about what would happen in various circumstances. Cummings and other transition team members felt there was a limit to how much detail could be provided and that at some point "we've just got to start doing it."⁸⁹ They would have to feel their way forward as they tried to build the organization mandated in legislation and envisioned by the transition team or, at least, those who would be staying on for that purpose. After the concept was approved by the Deputies, the transition team stood down from mid-February until approximately mid-March, waiting to see if parent organizations would assign transition team members to the SIST. A few transition team members went on to serve as original SIST members. Most, however, returned to their parent organizations where their immediate task was to identify their replacements and get them assigned to the NCTC.

By design, the SIST's original membership included two DoD representatives (one from the

Standing Up Interagency Organizations

The national security system allocates resources through departments and agencies that often view interagency efforts skeptically. Thus new interagency organizations, including top White House initiatives such as the NCTC “typically start slow and pick up momentum slowly” because the national security system is reluctant to provide “human capital, logistics, and administrative support.”¹⁰³ This proved true for the NCTC and its precursor, the Terrorist Threat Integration Center. In the 2003 State of the Union address, President George W. Bush instructed the leaders of the FBI, the CIA, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Defense “to develop a Terrorist Threat Integration Center to merge and analyze all threat information in a single location.”¹⁰⁴ Several months later the Terrorist Threat Integration Center began operations, but the new entity was dogged by bureaucratic resistance that, even after its transition to the NCTC, “never dissipated.”¹⁰⁵

The Center was to be populated by a diverse group of personnel representing all the relevant intelligence organizations.¹⁰⁶ In the first few months “a mere 30 analysts, mostly novices” were found who could meet the President’s priority effort.¹⁰⁷ The departments and agencies worried that the new Center would be dominated by CIA interests, since it was housed on the fourth floor of CIA’s headquarters.¹⁰⁸ By July, six months after the President’s speech, the affected departments and agencies had managed to provide about 100 analysts and liaison officials.¹⁰⁹ The Center encountered other mundane problems besides staffing. For example, the newly arriving personnel were blocked from entering CIA headquarters because guards did not recognize the Center’s newly-minted badges and official logo.¹¹⁰ The Center was supposed to move to a separate facility, Liberty Crossing One, by May 2004,¹¹¹ but that was delayed until September.¹¹²

Even after moving into Liberty Crossing One in the beginning of 2005, DSOP accommodations were ad hoc and temporary. NCTC’s Directorate of Intelligence expanded comfortably into this location, but no one had thought about DSOP until the executive order made strategic operational planning a requirement. So DSOP personnel arrived to find that all available space had been taken by the Directorate of Intelligence personnel. DSOP set up offices in conference rooms “squeezing 23 people into the space.”¹¹³ DSOP would not find permanent housing until the adjacent Liberty Crossing Two building for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence was completed in 2008.¹¹⁴

Meanwhile the organization endured a slew of administrative problems despite its new location. The DSOP “didn’t even know how to communicate with varying agencies and used WASHFAX to communicate from executive secretary to executive secretary.”¹¹⁵ Integrating computer systems to enable communication was one of the “biggest agonies of standing up the NCTC.”¹¹⁶ There were only 15 to 16 people in DSOP at the time, mostly contractors and detailed personnel. No one was conducting the mission of strategic operational planning because the few on duty were consumed by administrative tasks. Getting more personnel was a “conundrum,” and administrative and computer support was equally vexing.¹¹⁷ Analysts “had to get through eight different systems of computers,”¹¹⁸ operating at different levels of classification. The “mainframe [for computer networking] was under CIA auspices.”¹¹⁹ Given the CIA’s skepticism, it was slow to facilitate information sharing. It initially re-classified information and denied access to NCTC members,¹²⁰ including DSOP’s personnel. DSOP members had to get “read in” by CIA authorities to access individual documents.¹²¹

Communications were also complicated by broader representation and outreach. Organizations such as the Department of Education were beyond the normal counterterrorism structure and unequipped to handle classified information at any level. The Department of Commerce’s representative to the Senior Interagency Strategy Team did not have access to the single computer in Commerce with classified networking capabilities. A major limitation in producing the National Implementation Plan (NIP) for the War on Terror was not having the “right people involved because they did not have the right computer access.” The “top secret” implementation plan had to be re-classified “secret” so it could be shared between the different computer systems, and that took time.¹²²

Office of the Secretary of Defense and the other from the Joint Staff) and one member each from Treasury, State, Justice, Homeland Security, CIA, and FBI. The SIST could expand to include Department of Commerce, Department of Health and Human Services, or others as required.⁹⁰ The two representatives for the DoD caused early contention, but Defense fought hard to ensure both the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were represented. Defense argued that by law the Chairman is the senior military advisory to the President, and thus a representative from his staff had to participate on the SIST as well as a representative from the Office of the Secretary of Defense.⁹¹

The Deputies Committee directed that SIST members be from the Senior Executive Service, Senior Intelligence Service, or if in uniform, general officers.⁹² The senior rank was meant to ensure that SIST members knew and had access to senior leaders in their parent organizations. This access would allow SIST members to represent the views of their parent organizations authoritatively or get quick clarification on critical issues.⁹³ Such people were in short supply, particularly ones with the right security clearances. So some departments and agencies sent lower ranking people (GS-14s and GS-15s) to fill SIST positions.⁹⁴ Some also disregarded the Deputies Committee decision that SIST members be assigned full-time. The concept of operations acknowledged that SIST members would spend as much as 30 percent of their time coordinating positions with their parent organizations, but department and agencies nonetheless were asked to assign “full time” representatives to the SIST. In reality, some were assigned “part-time” and never relieved from their regular parent agency.⁹⁵ So from the beginning, some SIST members were not available for day-to-day work and instead just attended weekly SIST meetings. The DHS, for example, sent a part-time representative until assigning a full-time member in late 2005.⁹⁶ Similarly, the FBI did not send a representative at all until late in 2005, arguing that the deputy of NCTC, an FBI agent, could act as the senior representative on behalf of the Bureau.⁹⁷

DSOP initially had few personnel and no

planning capability, nor even its own office space. It shared space with the Directorate of Intelligence in Liberty Crossing One.⁹⁸ DSOP personnel and SIST members had to get computers,⁹⁹ pass polygraph exams, obtain Top Secret clearances,¹⁰⁰ and gain access to multiple computer systems and compartmentalized information.¹⁰¹ To the disappointment of some SIST members, their first months were spent mostly working management and administration issues. Job number one was helping secure personnel from their parent organizations to get DSOP up and running.¹⁰²

Substantively, the SIST’s immediate task was to create a NIP for the War on Terror. The SIST members did spend some time trying to work on the product, but did so without a leader or any guidance. The first Deputy Director of DSOP had not yet arrived, and the SIST’s new members revisited some of the baseline issues addressed by the transition group, including how DSOP should organize and operate and what strategic operational planning was and was not.¹²³ Members had major disagreements on how to define terms like “instruments of national power,” which some SIST members wanted to link to particular departments and agencies.¹²⁴ The group also debated what was meant by deliberate and dynamic planning.¹²⁵ Without leadership in place, the SIST process began to falter. The group agreed on an initial framework and methodology, but differed on how the plan should be written. There seemed little point in going down one road if an incoming leader might insist on another direction.¹²⁶ The NCTC front office asked them to delay activities until the DSOP Deputy Director arrived. Thus it became apparent early on that it would be difficult for the SIST to resolve contentious issues itself, or for its work to proceed independently without active engagement from the Deputy Director of DSOP.

NEW LEADERSHIP CHARTS A COURSE FOR THE SIST: 2005 TO 2006

In mid-2005, Vice Admiral John Scott Redd, the first NCTC Director, and Major General Jeffrey Schloesser, the first DSOP Deputy Director arrived. Their arrival precipitated a major cultural change for the SIST. Previously the transition team and later

the SIST had been involved in everything. They were the de facto authority on all issues affecting DSOP, from identifying the work to be done, to the number of people required for each task and with what level of experience. The arrival of the new titular leaders, though anticipated, was nonetheless jarring, particularly for those who had served on the transition team that created the concept for DSOP and the SIST. The SIST members went from being responsible for the entire DSOP organization to being responsible to their new leaders.¹²⁷ Moreover, the new leaders soon made it clear that they expected DSOP to pursue its planning duties in a particular way, one well known to military personnel but not to those from other departments and agencies.

Schloesser, the first in a succession of DSOP Deputy Directors with operational experience in special operations forces, arrived at Liberty Crossing in July 2005. He was arguably the military's most experienced strategic planner on counterterrorism. He had stood up DOD's Strategic Planning Cell for the War on Terror just days after 9/11¹²⁸ and also directed the first National Military Strategic Plan—War on Terror.¹²⁹ Schloesser was an Army special operations helicopter pilot, spoke Arabic, and earned his Master's degree from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. He had served as an embassy liaison and was familiar with State culture and overseas operations.¹³⁰ Newly appointed Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte and the interim NCTC Director John Brennan interviewed Schloesser and during the interview, both men made it clear they were interested in how Schloesser had developed the military's strategic plan for the War on Terror. All three men seemed to agree that DSOP needed to conduct similar planning, only for the entire government

As Schloesser arrived at DSOP, Redd, was preparing for his confirmation hearing before the Select Committee on Intelligence. Like Schloesser, Redd was well prepared for his responsibilities. He was a retired naval officer, a graduate of the Naval Academy and a Fulbright and Burke Scholar. He had served as commander of Fifth Fleet and Director of Strategic Plans and Policy for the Joint Staff.¹³¹ After retiring from the Navy, he had worked as the Deputy

Administrator and Chief Operating Officer of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad, where he became even more familiar with interagency issues in a complex contingency. He then served as the Executive Director for the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction (also known as the WMD Commission), which gave him an opportunity to carefully consider not only terrorist threats to use weapons of mass destruction but how well the U.S. government was organized to prevent such an occurrence.

During his confirmation hearing, most Senators asked Redd about the intelligence mission. Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) asked Redd the only question about the planning mission. The Senator seemed skeptical that the new organization would improve things: "Every time there's been a problem...it's let's have another center—a center today, a center tomorrow, a center here, a center there. And we seem to be losing our center of gravity sometimes because of it." The Senator wondered how Redd would resolve the ambiguities among the many planning authorities of the different departments and agencies. Redd replied that the Center's function was "the next level down" from the National Security Council's policy process, and he assured the Senator that strategic-operational planning was a straightforward enterprise:

It is a very comfortable model to me in the sense that I've done it. That's the way you do planning. You start with a strategy and you say, okay, what are the goals, what are the missions, what are the tasks, who is best suited to take these tasks on, assign them out. Then the agencies come back and they bring it together and you say, okay, let's make sure we're coordinating. And here is the key part. Then we look at some metrics. How are we doing?¹³²

Redd and other DoD representatives were quite familiar with this approach to planning (see *The Pentagon Planning Model*, pg. 16). In fact, DoD already had counterterrorism plans that fit this model. Replicating the model at the national level was a natural next step to them.¹³³

The Pentagon Planning Model

There is no brief and widely accepted definition of the Defense planning model,¹³⁴ but several characteristics pervade its stages and components. In general, the Office of the Secretary of Defense and Joint Staff planning follows a logical, detailed, and deductive method, with the intention of linking defense strategy and policy to plans, requirements, capabilities, and budgets through a variety of inter-related processes that cover near-term, intermediate, and long-term exigencies. The fundamental purpose of the planning is to systematically translate the demands of the security environment into concrete requirements that can be met with programs and budgets via the Pentagon's overarching Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution system. Since the security environment and its attendant risks change over time and some capabilities are extant, en train, or envisioned, planning takes place concurrently for different timeframes:

Near-term planning: Centered on time horizons ranging from the present to roughly three years out, near-term planning consists of force management planning and contingency planning. Force management planning concerns the command and control of forces in the near future. Contingency planning includes immediate crisis response plans and plausible near-term scenarios U.S. forces must be well-prepared to handle.

Intermediate-term planning: Centered on time horizons ranging from three to six years from the present, intermediate-term planning includes force generation and sustainment planning, which coordinates and facilitates the recruitment, training, and equipping of the armed services. It also includes force posture planning, which concerns the geographical deployment of defense assets and their levels of readiness.

Longer-term planning: Centered on time horizons beyond six years from the present and that lie outside the range of current budgetary projections, longer-term planning generally consists of designing future forces. Force design planning is perhaps the most complex defense planning effort. Planners must envision the force structure and capabilities needed to counter potential threats to long-term U.S. security interests.

Undergirding these planning processes are doctrine, concepts of operation, and mission-essential task lists that define how U.S. forces train together and execute their missions. The mission-essential tasks are derived from plans and their concepts of operation. The process is more complicated than this and includes identification of assumptions, risks, etc.—but the rigorous, deductive nature of the planning model is evident. The temporal and functional categories of planning are interdependent in theory but often are managed separately because of the organizational divisions associated with their execution. In recent years, the Pentagon has emphasized the need to better integrate its diverse planning activities, and to partner better with allies and other agencies, including State and United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The SIST (and prior to the SIST, the transition team) had long debated whether the DoD planning model was appropriate at the national level for the counterterrorism mission. Initially, even the DoD members on the transition team agreed that the Defense planning model was excessively detailed for the high levels of integration envisioned for DSOP and the SIST and required too much manpower.¹³⁵ Later, however, Defense representatives to the SIST expressed greater appreciation for the rigorous DoD approach to planning. Representatives from other organizations continued to warn that DSOP and other agencies did not have the staff, support, or inclination to conduct DoD-style planning.

They believed more flexibility was required and that an iterative, pragmatic approach would serve the counterterrorism community better. One SIST member proposed that the best way to tackle an interagency plan was to “bite off little pieces...and get those little pieces accepted.”¹³⁶

Proponents of this point of view valued national-level planning but believed the best way forward was to keep the effort focused on issues of major importance, proceed iteratively, and from small victories, build a larger base of cooperation. They knew that the common prejudice in non-defense organizations was that politics and the evolving situation in the field were too fluid to benefit from

detailed national-level planning.¹³⁷ They believed the value of the planning enterprise had to be demonstrated. They wanted to avoid imposing anything, and instead woo and engage the agencies as the planning and circumstances evolved. “Even then, the task would have been difficult because the organizations were fighting a war and executing their missions while the planning process was trying to catch up.”¹³⁸ This was the CIA view, and in the early months of the SIST’s existence, CIA culture was prominent in the leadership, personnel, information systems, and general ambiance at Liberty Crossing.

The arrival of Redd and Schloesser effectively ended the dispute on planning approaches. Schloesser did not buy into a lot of the work the SIST had done prior to his arrival. It “wasn’t a plan... it was a way ahead that described how [strategic operational planning] was going to operate.”¹³⁹ Schloesser, well-versed in Defense-style planning, believed that if you could not tie a plan’s objectives to specific actions, and those actions to resources identified through specific budget lines, then it was worthless. In his view, agreement on broad concepts with no specific supporting actions and nothing to hold anyone accountable for resourcing those actions would not work.¹⁴⁰ This view, backed up by Redd, prevailed.

While Schloesser was working out the specifics on how strategic operational planning would be conducted by the SIST, the NSC was conducting a policy review on counterterrorism. The policy review focused on moving out of the post 9/11 phase of counterterrorism, which was primarily concerned with destroying al-Qa’ida and building up U.S. homeland defenses, and moving toward a strategy that focused on advancing a democratic agenda as a long-term approach to counter violent extremism.¹⁴¹ There was concern about the “ripple effect” that years of targeting terrorist leaders might have in creating a new generation of terrorists in places like Iraq. The White House wanted a new presidential directive and an update to its 2003 National Strategy for Combating Terrorism.¹⁴²

The timing of the policy review reinforced the inclination to have DSOP and the SIST focus on a detailed, supporting implementation plan. The

NSC staff saw DSOP as a planning arm that would provide implementation momentum for its new policy direction. Initially there was some tension between DSOP, the SIST, and the NSC staff. The SIST, operating independently at that time and struggling to get DSOP established, resisted being “tasked” by the NSC staff. By June 2005, however, when Juan Zarate occupied the position of Deputy Assistant to the President for Counterterrorism, the relationship was smoother. Zarate considered DSOP “clay waiting to be formed.”¹⁴³ He used it and the SIST as a “J-5” (strategy and plans) organization, allowing them to take the initiative, identify problems, and push solutions up to the NSC staff. Zarate would visit the NCTC to rehearse or think through issues that could not be fully addressed by the White House staff.¹⁴⁴

Thus the natural tension felt as DSOP tried to carve out its new authorities and responsibilities apart from the NSC staff activities faded,¹⁴⁵ and both sides came to view their efforts as complementary. The White House would tackle broad policy objectives, and DSOP would produce a supporting interagency implementation plan.¹⁴⁶ Under Redd and Schloesser, the form of the plan took shape. Just as the DoD had buttressed the nation’s post-9/11 counterterrorism policy with its own national strategic military plan, DSOP and the SIST would now produce the nation’s first strategic plan for the emerging counterterrorism policy, the NIP for the War on Terror. This plan would account for the government’s entire counterterrorism effort, assessing capability gaps and assigning lead roles, missions, and tasks to departments and agencies.¹⁴⁷ By late summer 2005, the SIST’s preoccupation with management and administrative duties had given way to full-time attention to producing the NIP for the War on Terror.¹⁴⁸

The implementation plan was broken into four key pillars identified in NSC policy and strategy: Protect and Defend, Attacking Terrorist Capacity, Countering Violent Extremism, and Preventing Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism. In addition, the plan had three cross-cutting pillars: Institution Building, Information Sharing, and Building Partner Capacity.¹⁴⁹

Countering violent extremism, in particular,

was a new emphasis. The extent to which terrorists' propaganda was having an impact on recruitment and employment for al-Qa'ida became painfully clear, and the importance of countering the terrorists' strategic communications was reflected in policy. The plan also emphasized denying access to weapons of mass destruction.¹⁵⁰ Denying access to weapons of mass destruction was a long-standing objective, but accomplishing it required linking the counterterrorism and counter-proliferation communities. The White House was keen to see this happen, and the NIP pursued the issue vigorously in its planning details.¹⁵¹ The initiative was given added impetus by real world events. An incident involving contraband material moving through U.S. ports by container ship put the importance of the issue in high relief,¹⁵² and planning with the counter-proliferation experts was facilitated by collocation in the same building.¹⁵³

With the substantive workload mounting quickly, Schloesser agreed to set aside the Deputies directive that SIST members be assigned full-time. He accepted part-time members on the SIST to keep it going,¹⁵⁴ but worked to obtain full-time SIST representatives. He did not always succeed, but by the end of 2006, all but a couple of SIST members worked predominantly on site at NCTC. Schloesser also worked hard to build up DSOP's planning expertise. DSOP established interagency writing teams to work on each pillar of the NIP but had trouble finding experienced planners. Few departments or agencies conducted strategic or operational planning and those that did utilized different models.¹⁵⁵ To help launch the planning effort, agencies with well-established roles in counterterrorism loaned DSOP three planners (or analysts) and DoD, provided six.¹⁵⁶

Still by the end of 2005, DSOP had just 25 permanent members. Contractors were hired to fill planning positions and other administrative functions.¹⁵⁷ The resultant DSOP planning teams were understaffed, and those serving on the teams were mostly junior and inexperienced in counterterrorism. Some of the contractors had never worked in government in any capacity.¹⁵⁸ DSOP leaders recognized the need for senior mentorship and training for the inexperienced planners.¹⁵⁹

SIST members filled this role. They were assigned to specific pillars that best reflected the members' personal and organizational experience. For example, the DoD and CIA SIST members were assigned to mentor the writing team working on the "Attacking Terrorist Capacity" pillar. DSOP also began training programs to teach the planners the DoD's planning approach with its focus on tight linkage from strategy to tasks and metrics.¹⁶⁰

SIST members served as managers, mentors, and administrators. They worked to get the NIP products reduced to the Secret level so they could be shared among computer systems (which finally happened in mid-2006). They also mentored members on the intricacies of multi-level planning (described as "an agony" by one versed in the subject.)¹⁶¹ The SIST was meeting formally two to three times a week during the fall of 2005,¹⁶² but informally the full-time members were meeting constantly and working through long planning days.¹⁶³ The pace could be especially grueling for smaller departments with less staff in the counterterrorism field. The State representative once worked more than 35 hours straight to meet a drafting deadline.¹⁶⁴

The SIST members also began to feel the pressure of representing their agencies. They were charged with speaking for their senior leadership and working to ensure their equities were protected,¹⁶⁵ but they also began to feel the challenge of "delivering their department or agency."¹⁶⁶ Sometimes they could find a way to resolve outstanding issues to the satisfaction of multiple departments and agencies, in which case, as one former SIST member noted, "you serve your nation as well as your agency."¹⁶⁷ For those who did not have access to their organizations' senior leadership, securing positive approval was difficult. On occasion their lack of access was revealed when the CSG or Deputies Committee reached conclusions opposite from the ones the SIST recommended.¹⁶⁸ Schloesser and Redd made office calls to the department and agency's leadership to ensure they knew who their SIST member was, what the SIST's role was, and how important it was for the SIST members to have access to their senior leaders.

In response to the lobbying and as it became clear

that DSOP's planning efforts were going to result in the assignment of operational responsibilities, the departments and agencies paid more attention to the people assigned to DSOP and the SIST.¹⁶⁹ During the fall of 2005, State and DoD replaced their GS-14 and GS-15 members, respectively, with members of the Senior Executive Service.¹⁷⁰ As the rank of SIST's members increased, its substantive work became more detailed. As the working groups began to identify objectives and sub-objectives under each pillar, the SIST added another level of detail, determining that the NIP should also contain specified and implied tasks (or actions) for each sub-objective. The SIST also required that the departments or agencies responsible for accomplishing each task be identified.¹⁷¹

There were two conspicuous advantages to this level of detail. Many of the agencies and departments could not easily answer the question, "What are you doing on counterterrorism?"¹⁷² Identifying each organization's activities in great detail would effectively educate DSOP and SIST members and all those concerned with the counterterrorism mission throughout the bureaucracy. In addition, building a detailed set of actions for sub-objectives would allow the NCTC to later draw attention to tasks that were not getting enough focus or resources.¹⁷³ State, in particular, ended up with a large number of objectives that it could not pursue for lack of resources.¹⁷⁴ These tasks and the missing capabilities to execute them could become opportunities to secure additional resources.¹⁷⁵ This was the impetus to get the Office of Management and Budget involved in the SIST meetings, and from then on that office assisted with resource allocation based on prioritization of NIP-directed activities.¹⁷⁶ SIST members were quite concerned about how their planning activities would affect their parent agencies' budgets.¹⁷⁷ They realized, in the words of one agency representative, that an NCTC priority that might have been number 99 on the parent organization's priority list could potentially trump its number 1 priority after the top priorities had been vetted on an interagency basis.¹⁷⁸ The issue was not just resources, however. In the past, the departments and agencies occasionally ignored tasks directed by the Deputies Committee,

often for lack of resources—but sometimes even after being specifically provided funding to complete the task.¹⁷⁹ They simply did not agree with, value, or believe the assigned task was their responsibility. A transparent, authoritative, and detailed implementation plan with clearly assigned actions would at least highlight this problem.

Contentious issues among DSOP planning teams would often be brought to the SIST for resolution.¹⁸⁰ Frequently the issues boiled down to disputes between DoD and State on overseas activities; between the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the CIA over intelligence activities; and between the FBI and DHS over domestic efforts to counter terrorism. For example, the "Protect and Defend" pillar was controversial because it often covered new initiatives and relationships rather than well-established programs.¹⁸¹ DHS was assigned most of the tasks associated with this pillar, but it had strong competition from the Department of Justice and FBI. DHS was also struggling to get organized and resolve internal coordination issues among its 22 formerly separate agencies.¹⁸² The "Attacking Terrorist Capacity" pillar was also controversial, even though the bureaucratic battle lines were well known to all parties. The CIA and DoD were the major protagonists in this area, with expanding special operations being the issue of the day. Brennan, who left government in late 2005, told the press:

The Department of Defense is very eager to step up its involvement in counterterrorism activities, and it has set its sights on traditional CIA operational responsibilities and authorities....Quite unfortunately, the CIA's important lead role in many of these areas is being steadily eroded, and the current militarization of many of the nation's intelligence functions and responsibilities will be viewed as a major mistake in the very near future.¹⁸³

Brennan thought that if the special operations were "closely coordinated with host countries and American ambassadors, 'U.S. interests could be very well served.'" But he warned that "if the planned SOCOM [United States Special Operations

Command] presence in U.S. embassies abroad is an effort to pave the way for unilateral U.S. military operations or to enable defense elements to engage in covert action activities separate from the CIA, [U.S.] problems abroad will be certain to increase significantly.”¹⁸⁴

State agreed on this point, but also thought it applied to CIA operations. In SIST deliberations State maintained its long-standing insistence that other departments and agencies could do nothing overseas without the permission of the ambassador.¹⁸⁵ State did not want to direct operations of other agencies overseas, but it did want to have veto authority over proposals for operations in other nations that were not at war with the U.S. “State wanted to make sure that there were no permanent shifts of authority or structural changes made to embassies as the result of NCTC’s counterterrorism plans.”¹⁸⁶ DoD, CIA, and even USAID have always maintained that there are exceptions to the general rule that the ambassador has approval authority over all activities in country. According to one report, this issue came to a head in January 2006, when Secretary of State Rice argued that letting the Pentagon operate outside the U.S. ambassador’s control would militarize U.S. foreign policy. Her point was later hammered home by State’s coordinator for counterterrorism, Henry A. Crumpton, in testimony to Congress: “Our best means of countering the multilayered terrorist threat is to engage coordinated networks of interagency Country Teams operating under the ambassador in an intimately connected whole-of-government approach. We are not there yet, but we have made progress.”¹⁸⁷

While the State Department saw its insistence on the ambassador’s overseas authority as a principled stand for better interagency coordination, SIST members from other agencies resented the categorical position. Ultimately, the issue had to be elevated to the Deputies Committee.¹⁸⁸

There was also a clash between the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the CIA. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence insisted that it be listed as the lead agency for various intelligence tasks since CIA was subordinate. This insistence generated many off-line discussions between the organizations’

representatives. Eventually, representatives handled their dispute outside the SIST. They recognized their disagreements were preventing the SIST from making progress elsewhere. Because the Office of the Director of National Intelligence controls resources, it ultimately prevailed and was listed as the tasked agency. The unintended consequence of this bureaucratic controversy was even greater detachment from the CIA. The CIA, upon reflection, decided it was just as well not to have NIP duties. It adopted the attitude that DSOP and SIST activities were not consequential, and it was better if others attended to that time-consuming bureaucratic endeavor. Not incidentally, DSOP found itself shut out from knowledge of CIA operations, which were then taken up in a separate, highly-classified review process for the paramilitary counterterrorism portfolio.¹⁸⁹

SIST reviews of DSOP work were also frustrating, at least for members of the DSOP planning staff. Typically the group chief or planning team lead would present a semi-developed plan, and SIST members would evaluate the product, often quite critically in a process referred to as a “murder board.”¹⁹⁰ From the planners’ point of view, the value in the SIST critique was difficult to see. SIST members’ experiences and insights varied dramatically, and to planners it often appeared they had been sent over by the parent agencies to “inject sand in the gears.”¹⁹¹ SIST members, on the other hand, did not consider themselves “nay-sayers,” but rather, “truth tellers.” They were just identifying the pragmatic and political parameters within which any plan would have to operate, including the need to respect other agencies’ equities.¹⁹²

Each SIST member had a different method for plugging into his/her home department or agency. For example, the DoD representatives began a weekly meeting at the Pentagon with the Joint Staff, Office of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Special Operations Command, defense agencies, and other interested parties from across DoD.¹⁹³ In addition, the Pentagon held quarterly senior-level, in-progress reviews co-chaired by the Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Policy and the Director of the Joint Staff.¹⁹⁴ Other departments had a much less formal process but were “always going back

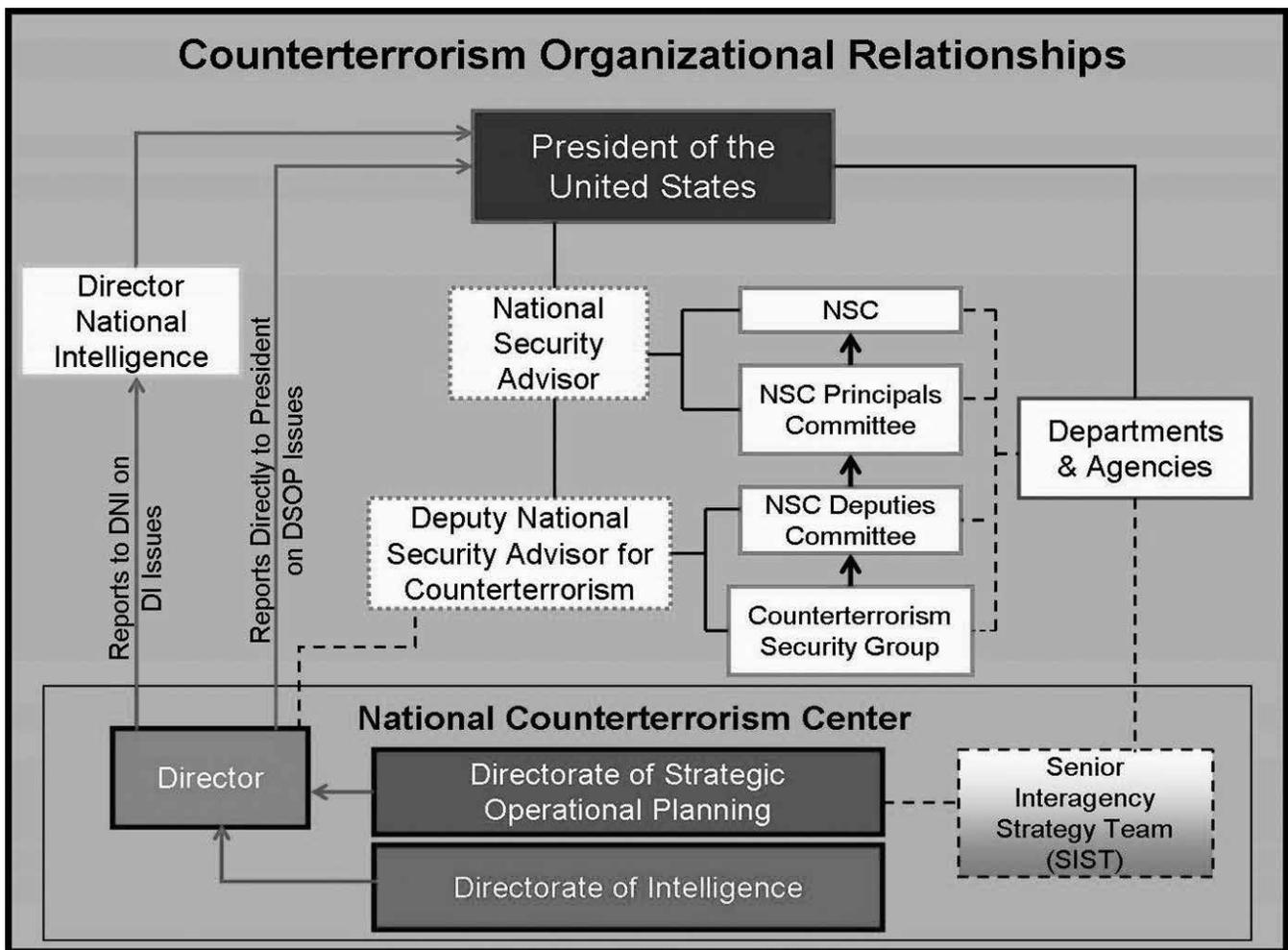


Figure 3: Counterterrorism Organizational Relationships

and forth...office to office to pull different threads together.”¹⁹⁵

As the SIST’s work stretched into 2006, it developed a “do no harm” philosophy—SIST products should not conflict with or infringe upon a department or agency’s legal authorities, diminish its ability to do its mandated job, or disrupt internal departmental planning and budgeting priorities.¹⁹⁶ Avoiding these kinds of controversial areas decreased the likelihood that SIST members would get out of step with their home agencies in a way that later on might embarrassingly be revealed in a CSG or Deputies meeting (see Figure 3). The SIST sought the “proverbial 80 percent solution” as it grappled with a wide range of complex interagency disputes, including legal reviews, budget realities,¹⁹⁷ competing equities, and unintended consequences, such as the CIA distancing itself from the SIST’s planning activities.¹⁹⁸

The decision to avoid the more controversial areas was reinforced by higher authorities who kept politically-charged and some technically-complex topics beyond the purview of the SIST. The Countering Terrorist Use of Internet plan required cyber and legal expertise with clearances for highly classified programs. For this issue area DSOP set up a separate planning team that reported to the NCTC Director and worked outside the organization’s standard planning methodology. Political issues, such as detainee policy, were also off-limits to the SIST. Shunting difficult issues to a special venue so they would not unduly impede progress on the larger effort was not unusual. As an example, even after eighteen months of intense turf battles precipitated by accommodating the newly-constituted DHS,¹⁹⁹ Presidential Directive 46 still left the most contentious bureaucratic issues to be resolved in annexes that would be negotiated by the

disputing agencies. In this respect delimiting the range of difficult problems the SIST had to manage helped the SIST maintain a good rate of progress.

By April 2006, just as the NIP on the War on Terror was coming to fruition, Redd was called to testify in front of the House Armed Services Committee. Some Congressmen were concerned about public and private reports of insufficient interagency coordination in the war on terrorism. Congressman Skelton cited a recent comment by General Downing, for example, who asserted that “over the years, the interagency system has become so lethargic and dysfunctional that it materially inhibits the ability to apply the vast power of the U.S. government on problems.”²⁰⁰ Downing’s critique carried weight, particularly since he was a former commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command and after 9/11, President Bush’s Deputy National Security Advisor for Counterterrorism. Congressman Skelton asked Redd to comment. Redd disagreed with Downing. He thought the interagency system still needed improvement, but believed it had, in fact, gotten better: “As a government, we have come together in ways that I have never seen during my four decades of government service. We at NCTC are honored to be a part of that interagency team effort.”²⁰¹ “We are making progress but challenges remain,” is a standard refrain for executive branch officials reporting to Congress on almost any topic, but it was an accurate assessment of interagency cooperation on counterterrorism planning at the time. Producing the NIP within a year’s time was an enormous feat. Yet even at this relatively early juncture, it was clear that many in DSOP questioned the SIST’s role and utility,²⁰² and sometimes tried to sidestep the SIST. For example, besides the NIP, DSOP issued several other plans in 2006 that were not carefully coordinated with the SIST. DSOP’s National Strategy to Combat Terrorist Travel is a case in point.²⁰³ DSOP staff did not show the completed plan to the SIST until the week before it was to be coordinated through agencies and submitted to the NSC.

The SIST quickly identified areas where the draft plan failed to take note of existing policies, the limits of federal authority in states and

municipalities, or the sovereignty of other nations.²⁰⁴ SIST members also noted where the plan should be reworked and re-coordinated.²⁰⁵ Many of the plan’s tasks fell to State, and the SIST State representative knew the Department would never agree to the tasks as articulated. DSOP authors argued the effort was too far advanced to be significantly rewritten. They also claimed personnel from State had been involved in the effort from its inception. State personnel perceived their task as “brainstorming” without limits or caveats, and although they had contributed, they had by no means indicated State’s formal concurrence with their efforts. They had, in fact, been urged not to limit their thinking to established departmental positions. In the end, after senior NCTC and NSC intervention, the plan was completely restructured and rewritten with SIST involvement. For some, this turn of events underscored the need for the SIST to be involved early in plan development and, in effect, “set the tone and role of the SIST” during the larger NIP planning exercise.²⁰⁶

With the publication of the NIP and other plans, DSOP and the SIST demonstrated productivity to the counterterrorism community.²⁰⁷ The SIST, in particular, seemed to have demonstrated its value as “a built-in sanity check.”²⁰⁸ As a result, other departments and agencies moved to support the organization. In May 2006, the Department of Energy decided that it needed representation on the SIST because of its technical knowledge of weapons of mass destruction. It sent a full-time senior executive to join the team.²⁰⁹ The Department of Justice also filled its empty position with a full-time member.²¹⁰ Both new members were impressed by the work the SIST was doing and with the SIST’s leadership.²¹¹ Some agencies remained skeptical, however, both of the SIST and its association with the counterterrorism mission. USAID, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Education did not want to be identified with the counterterrorism effort, even though they had a role to play.²¹²

The NIP on War on Terror was signed by President Bush in June, 2006.²¹³ The classified plan was nearly 200 pages and assigned more than 500 different tasks related to counterterrorism.²¹⁴

The only department or agency that was not involved was the Department of Housing and Urban Development.²¹⁵ Some of the details in the plan were considered unlikely to come to fruition. Nevertheless, the senior leaders at the agencies and departments with a counterterrorism mission had good reason to read the document. It assigned lead responsibilities to agencies that potentially could affect their budgets. The SIST thought that the plan would serve as a great “forcing function,” for allocating resources and immediately began working on the execution of its many detailed tasks.²¹⁶ Among SIST and NCTC leaders, there was widespread satisfaction with the NIP as a milestone achievement.

In retrospect, producing the NIP was the SIST’s most notable achievement. Yet, even before the plan was approved, there were warning signs that it would be the high water mark for the SIST. Many of the more contentious political and technical issues had been pulled from the SIST’s purview, and still it struggled to resolve those that remained. Moreover, there was a bureaucratic backlash brewing over the effort required by the NIP. Inside the executive branch many were saying that the NIP was just a catalogue of ongoing tasks.²¹⁷ Congress began to voice the same concerns. The Bush Administration did not share the NIP with Congress,²¹⁸ but departments and agencies were advising Congress of their concerns through back channels, and members of Congress began to express an interest in the NIP and its practical utility.²¹⁹ For example, during a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing in June, Senator Barack Obama (D-IL) pressed administration witnesses for reassurance that all overseas counterterrorism activities were well coordinated. He wanted to know “what kind of operational structure are we putting in place to make sure that everybody is rowing in the same direction?” Redd responded by touting the NIP:

What we have done is take that strategy and policy and break it down to strategic objectives, sub-objectives, and then discrete tasks.... I think it is an indication of how seriously people understand the need for interagency coordination...not only do we

have this task, but who is in charge, and who are the partners.²²⁰ [turf battles] are resolved...at a much lower level and make things a lot more responsive.

Senator Obama’s response revealed skepticism: “This group is empowered by its constituent parts? You are not just generating several hundred tasks that then are ignored...?” To which Redd responded:

Two hundred people from around the interagency come together, fight it out, sharp elbows, and this is the plan. Then we take it to the NSC Deputies’ level, Principals’ level, and then we take it to the President for approval.... And trust me, it is not a rubber stamp sort of thing. This is really unusual in the history of our Government, but it is an interagency effort where everyone has come together, again, a recognition that this is a different kind of war.²²¹

Congress remained concerned. Six ranking minority members of the House of Representatives sent a letter to the administration several months later expressing concerns that the NIP was “superficial” and “a document that merely compiles what federal agencies are already doing,” rather than “a true plan that ranks terrorism threats, prioritizes responses, coordinates spending, and measures results.” The letter also criticized the administration for its refusal to provide the plan to Congress.²²²

DSOP and the SIST were immediately under pressure to implement the plan and prove its utility to skeptics in Congress, multiple departments and agencies, and as it later turned out, their own senior leaders. In September 2006, Schloesser was selected to command the 101st Airborne Division. He handed over DSOP and the SIST to Vice Admiral Bert Calland.²²³ Calland was a Navy SEAL, commander of Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) during 9/11, and currently the Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.²²⁴ He was also on the short list to be promoted and take command of Special Operations Command (SOCOM),²²⁵ and candidly told his staff he would only serve for six to eight

months and would retire if he was not selected for the SOCOM post.²²⁶ He was also notably skeptical about the value of the NIP.

IMPLEMENTING THE NATIONAL PLAN FOR COUNTERTERRORISM: 2006 TO 2007

Implementing the NIP was an enormous challenge. DSOP's goal was to conduct "interagency coordination of operational activities," but it had not yet determined how the coordination, integration, and synchronization would work in practice.²²⁷ It tasked the departments and agencies to develop supporting implementation plans incrementally, with the goal of eventually prioritizing the diverse tasks in the implementation plans.²²⁸ Department and agency initial draft plans that identified the highest priorities and key actions were due 30 days after Presidential approval. In some cases, SIST members would write their parent organizations' initial draft implementation plans.²²⁹

From the initial implementation plans, DSOP quickly compiled a list of the highest priority tasks from each department and agency, some of which identified other agencies as the leads for a given task. Departments and agencies then prepared a second draft that covered all the priority tasks for which they were identified as the lead agency. The third and final iteration addressed and grouped remaining tasks that had not been prioritized and delineated tasks that should be eliminated.²³⁰ Although some agencies lagged in meeting the final deadline, all SIST members were conscientiously involved in the effort, often engaging the highest levels of their departments or agencies.²³¹

Early in 2007, some SIST representatives began working together to address areas of interagency conflict identified in the implementation plans. Most SIST representatives, however, were focused on the next phase, which was creating "roadmaps" for how they would accomplish the priority tasks. The roadmaps were intended to "refine approaches to ongoing activities and provide the basis for a more usable NIP II,"²³² including easier process monitoring. DSOP would use a new method of data collection called CODEX, approved by Schloesser before his departure.²³³ The departments and agencies were to register their progress on

supporting implementation plans in the CODEX database. The system would allow each agency or department to see what others were doing with respect to missions and tasks. For example, the lead agency tasked with developing a biometrics system would be able to see what progress supporting agencies were making.

The new CODEX database and supporting process provided a level of transparency that was completely consistent with the SIST's prime directive. At the same time it was a significant change from the path laid out in the NIP, especially since DSOP wanted it done for all 515 tasks, and not just the top priorities. SIST representatives immediately recognized the burden of gathering and entering extraordinarily detailed data for 515 tasks and recommended against the system's use. Some members of the SIST urged that the group be allowed to proceed along the implementation path outlined in the NIP, particularly the development of roadmaps. This recommendation was not taken.²³⁴

The CODEX database became an "administrative monster" that was too onerous to be useful. SIST members received an overwhelming number of complaints from the departments and agencies about CODEX. Some departments and agencies did not have the requisite manpower to keep the CODEX database current. Even organizations with planners available for the effort submitted plans that were either "thin gruel or fantasy."²³⁵ Only the Department of Justice created its roadmaps and entered data into CODEX on time, submitting hundreds of pages as lead agency for over 80 tasks.²³⁶ Most departments and agencies, including the DoD, ignored CODEX. Instead they developed communities of interest on topics of mutual interest and discussed them via email.²³⁷ In effect, they were bypassing DSOP and CODEX.

With such a poor overall response, DSOP postponed the June 2007 deadline for submission of the remaining CODEX data and never raised the issue again. More importantly, DSOP also abandoned the systematic implementation efforts prescribed in NIP. The unintended consequence of the mid-stream shift to CODEX was two-fold. The implementation process of prioritizing tasks and developing roadmaps came to a halt, and in

addition, the relationships that SIST representatives had forged with their departments and agencies in the development of the implementation plans were damaged.²³⁸ The CODEX failure led to a serious “process versus progress” debate within the SIST.²³⁹ Some felt the process had to be pursued to its natural conclusion to yield benefits, while others felt the focus on process was obscuring the lack of actual progress on coordinating instruments of national power.

During this debate, Calland was largely absent. He had inherited a fragile organization with a future that was anything but certain. If not for the support provided by the National Security staff, some felt that DSOP would not have gotten off the ground. Calland also understood the depth of the CIA’s disdain for the NCTC. Particularly in the early days when the organization was struggling to stand up, the CIA would work to produce a product and then watch the NCTC “put its stamp on it and call it their own.” For this and other reasons, the CIA was “putting out lots of anti-bodies,” and Calland “was questioning whether it would survive.”²⁴⁰ The organization was also experiencing significant turnover. In addition to Schloesser’s departure, his Deputy ended her rotation, a third of the SIST representatives swapped out, and DSOP was facing its first major planner rotation (planners were on a one-year rotation from the departments and agencies). Even though an effort had been made to set up classes to instruct some of the interagency partners on how to do DoD-style planning, the large turnover naturally eroded this knowledge base.²⁴¹

Moreover, Calland was not impressed with the planning mission. He believed that intelligence fusion was NCTC’s primary value. He considered the NIP a “remarkable achievement” given the difficult process of securing interagency buy-in—but a bureaucratic rather than substantive one. Like SIST members who worried that progress had been overtaken by a fixation on process, Calland considered the NIP a “self-licking ice cream cone... managing a process without getting to issues that needed to be addressed.” He thought it was too big, and that it had to be reduced to, at best, one hundred key tasks. Given its breadth and detail, it was simply too difficult to monitor and assess implementation,

particularly given the level of resistance to DSOP’s “grading” department and agency progress. Despite the fact that the President signed it, the NIP was considered just one of a number of priorities the departments and agencies had to take into account.²⁴²

In effect, the SIST had hit the wall on the limits of interagency cooperation, particularly given the retreat from CODEX. SIST members were aware that their parent organizations were beginning to ignore the NIP, considering it “planning for planning’s sake.”²⁴³ Their own leader, Calland, was skeptical of its value, as were some newly-arriving SIST members. One new representative in particular, who arrived just as the NIP was being completed, began pushing to have it rewritten so that it was more strategic and less focused on “busy work.” She believed it should be less of an architecture document and more of a strategic plan to focus attention on priorities and outcomes.²⁴⁴ Additional evidence surfaced suggesting there was not enough “buy-in” to get the NIP implemented. In order for departments and agencies to accomplish tasks as directed by the NIP, they had to be assigned to specific offices or individuals, often in the field. It soon became clear that these subordinate elements were unaware that they had been tasked to execute specific actions.²⁴⁵ Without CODEX, DSOP had no way of knowing the ongoing status of any given task.²⁴⁶ In the end, it appeared implementation was stalled. Taskings and assessments were not being distributed outside of Washington, and agencies were just providing bureaucratic responses to NCTC inquiries rather than vigorously pursuing implementation.²⁴⁷

By early 2007, SIST members were pretty much convinced that the educative value of the detailed tasks enumerated in the NIP had run its course. They realized that the NIP was dying under its own weight.²⁴⁸ They began discussing the need to rewrite the document and limit it to 100 tasks in order to make implementation and monitoring more manageable for the lead agencies.²⁴⁹ They debated the proposition but came to no agreement. The SIST continued to hold well-organized meetings with agendas, notes, and minutes, but Calland was not able to attend them. He was consumed by the demands of the White House, the interagency

process, and the competition for quality personnel from the department and agencies—always a contentious issue but particularly so during a time of war. He tasked his deputy to take over the SIST meetings, and they quickly became less frequent and less meaningful.²⁵⁰ As SIST meetings became less frequent, the members held “SIST only” meetings to try to add value.²⁵¹ Some SIST members began looking for other jobs²⁵² while other members started paying more attention to their other responsibilities.²⁵³ Some members felt the SIST just fell apart during this period, and that DSOP also struggled to be productive and relevant.

Calland left DSOP in July 2007 without a replacement and without DSOP having yet completed an assessment of the NIP.²⁵⁴ Calland's departure coincided with a major increase in imminent terrorist threat indicators.²⁵⁵ The July 2007 National Intelligence Estimate declared that the U.S. homeland would face a persistent terrorist threat over the next three years.²⁵⁶ In the hallways of the intelligence agencies, however, there was a real, palpable angst about the possibility of an imminent attack during the summer of 2007. Al-Qa'ida's apparent interest in summertime strikes and increased al-Qa'ida training in the Afghan-Pakistani border region were major indications that something would happen soon. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff told the editorial board of *The Chicago Tribune* that he had a “gut feeling” about a new period of increased risk.²⁵⁷

Based on the intelligence, Michael Leiter, acting as NCTC's Deputy Director, pushed the NSC to give his organization the responsibility to construct a plan to respond to the pending terrorist threat.²⁵⁸ At the time there was still little confidence in NCTC as an organization. Some, like the CIA, thought there was no need for the Center at all; others, including some of its own leaders, saw little value in the DSOP planning role; and still others, including NCTC and NSC staff leaders, saw no value in the SIST.²⁵⁹ The NSC considered giving the responsibility to the FBI but finally decided to assign the role to NCTC.²⁶⁰ As it turned out, DSOP was well prepared to accept this momentous responsibility because of the SIST's foresight.

Earlier, DoD representatives on the SIST had

pressed for the creation of a Counter Options Group (COG) within DSOP.²⁶¹ The group would be responsible for developing and coordinating “options” for senior policymakers to consider in event of a major terrorist attack. It would do both scenario-based and target-based planning to prevent “a cold start” at the inception of a crisis.²⁶² The plans could help reveal the second- and third-order effects from crises and not just the demands of the immediate response. This type of planning is quite normal for the DoD and the military but alien to most other agencies. The other SIST members had no idea what the Defense representatives were talking about and saw very little added value from the process, especially given the already high workload in DSOP. State, in particular, was dead set against the idea because it did not have the planning capacity for such undertakings and thought there was no logical way to delimit hypothetical planning scenarios.²⁶³ State also had a long-standing concern that Defense-style planning might limit State's options in a complex crisis situation. State typically viewed DoD planning exercises as attempts to secure an agreement in principle to an advance course of action without actually understanding the specific circumstances.²⁶⁴ Despite such misgivings, the Defense representative eventually convinced his SIST colleagues, and counter options planning became a required part of the NIP.²⁶⁵

From this foundation, DSOP quickly constructed a plan to address the increased risk of a terrorist attack in summer 2007, and it successfully coordinated with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to obtain resources for those departments and agencies that were tasked to respond.²⁶⁶ The initiative was such a success that the COG was institutionalized as the Interagency Task Force (ITF) (which later became the Joint Counterterrorism Awareness Group) that prepared for another possible terrorist attack before the 2008 elections. The entire effort was considered a major success by senior leaders, up to and including the President. Although these task forces stood up under the Counterterrorism Security Group's auspices, they came to the SIST for help in getting their efforts organized.²⁶⁷

The effort also sparked the concept of pursuit

teams,²⁶⁸ which attempted to prevent intelligence from slipping through the cracks by chasing down leads. The NCTC instituted pursuit teams after the unsuccessful attempt to blow up Northwest Flight 253 in December, 2009.²⁶⁹ Together, the pursuit teams and the ITF created by NCTC moved the organization in the direction of the “joint operational” mission the 9/11 Commission envisioned it performing.²⁷⁰ From these kinds of activities, DSOP was able to achieve some major successes even while the value of its strategic operational planning function was being seriously questioned. The SIST received even less credit for its contributions than DSOP, however.

DSOP ECLIPSES THE SIST: 2007 TO 2009

In July 2007, Admiral Joseph Maguire became the third head of DSOP in just over two years. Maguire was a Harvard graduate and like his predecessor, a Navy SEAL. He had commanded a Naval Special Warfare Group and served as the deputy commander of Special Operations Command Pacific and commander of Naval Special Warfare Command.²⁷¹ When he arrived, DSOP was considered by some to be a “dysfunctional organization,” and he agreed it needed remedial action. Inside NCTC, the relationship between DSOP and the Directorate of Intelligence was broken and the relationship with the White House had deteriorated, as last-minute taskings from the NSC were poorly handled. Positions across DSOP were going unfilled, and senior personnel lacked the ability to lead.²⁷²

Maguire set out to fix the organization. He first went to the Joint Staff in the Department of Defense to address DSOP’s personnel shortages, but he also tapped into the special operations community, which coughed up five experienced planners. He dismissed his deputy and the chief of staff.²⁷³ He converted numerous contractors to government employees and hired all the Group Chiefs in DSOP.²⁷⁴ During his tenure, the organization went from 75 people and 1 senior executive to 140 people and 5 senior executives (not including the members of the SIST).²⁷⁵

Maguire also worked to improve relations

with the White House staff. The NSC has long had a reputation for frantic working of short-term demands driven by proximity to the President. The pace was such that DSOP would be tasked on a Monday to provide the NSC with a decision briefing on Thursday,²⁷⁶ which did not give DSOP an opportunity to pre-brief any decision makers, build consensus, or take input from the agencies and departments.²⁷⁷ When the SIST met on Friday, Maguire would relate how the White House meeting had gone the previous day, but the SIST had no opportunity to provide input. In fact, the SIST would not be aware of the briefing topic until after it occurred. The short turnaround times did not serve any good purpose. When Maguire briefed the relevant NSC committee (Counterterrorism Security Group, Deputies, or Principals) they would often stall in order to get more information on their organizations’ perspective. There was no penalty for “not getting anything done.” After four months, Maguire was batting zero and asked for a change in the battle rhythm. The NSC obliged, switching to a two-week process that allowed DSOP to get the interagency involved and resolve conflict prior to NSC meetings,²⁷⁸ which made a tremendous difference in the quality and success of the work.

As for the SIST, it did not make a good initial impression on Maguire. His first SIST meeting highlighted some of the existing organizational tensions. He noticed that DSOP planners and SIST members were chary about attending the gathering and believed the meeting itself was conducted in an unprofessional manner. The SIST members did not treat the DSOP planning staff or Maguire’s deputy with respect. Finally, Maguire excused everyone except the SIST members and said, “I don’t know what just happened here, but that will never happen again.”²⁷⁹ The SIST’s role had been evolving from a mentoring group to an advisory body as DSOP planners built up their expertise. Some of the longer-serving, mid-level staff (e.g., group chiefs) resented the level of SIST involvement in the planning process, believing they infringed on DSOP prerogatives.²⁸⁰ This event constituted a decisive breakpoint in DSOP-SIST relations. The newer planners would still visit the SIST members for information and insights on occasion, but from this

point on the SIST did not routinely sit in judgment of DSOP planning efforts.

Maguire concluded the SIST was the most dysfunctional part of DSOP.²⁸¹ He thought the group might make sense if populated with the right people, but agency representation was quite uneven.²⁸² He made a point of meeting with each SIST member individually to get to know him or her better, but he missed a lot of meetings because he was tied up with other responsibilities and trying to build up DSOP's organizational capacity.²⁸³ He considered the issue of whether the SIST could make a contribution an open question, but his doubts were growing. When the SIST was tasked to respond or provide feedback on proposals or briefings prepared by the DSOP staff, only a few members typically responded. There was a growing perception that the SIST was only good at "carping at presentations during meetings."²⁸⁴ In addition, Maguire was not a fan of the first iteration of the NIP, and he was aware that many others shared his reservations.

Even though Redd continued to extol the virtues of the NIP in Congressional testimony,²⁸⁵ it was widely known that it was running into major roadblocks. The Director of National Intelligence and other senior leaders recommended getting rid of the plan because of its poor reputation. Maguire agreed. He thought the plan made no sense, and that it had no impact on the actual fight with al-Qa'ida. It had no buy-in from other agencies and was too highly classified. He wanted to change it as fast as possible, and he obtained the blessing of the National Security Advisor to do so.²⁸⁶ The NIP was to be an annual plan so revising it was not altogether unexpected.²⁸⁷ What was surprising was Maguire's approach. He went to the departments' and agencies' deputy secretaries and asked them to help write the plan, bringing them into NCTC to work. The goal was to get buy-in and resolve friction. Maguire believed the members of the SIST were not senior enough to resolve interagency conflicts²⁸⁸ and others agreed, especially for dealing with "cutting edge" ideas.²⁸⁹ If conflict had to be solved, the deputy secretaries had the seniority to work out issues and get approval from their secretaries. The SIST played a role in developing the second NIP (NIP II), but less directly and with

a lower profile.²⁹⁰ The SIST provided oversight on ideas and verbiage,²⁹¹ ensured the right people from their department or agency were part of the writing process, and tackled budget issues.²⁹²

During Maguire's tenure, the scope of DSOP's strategic operational planning role was reexamined. Redd's September 2007 testimony to Congress defended the value of the NIP and also planted a seed with Congress. He said that the 9/11 Commission had a much more "aggressive or directive view" of strategic operational planning than Congress and the Executive branch had actually implemented. Perhaps inspired by the successful role DSOP played in preparing the government for the imminent terrorist threat during the summer of 2007, he suggested that in a few years Congress might want to revisit the issue of DSOP's role.²⁹³ Shortly after this testimony, Redd retired and handed the reins to his deputy, Michael Leiter.

Leiter had served as a U.S. Navy pilot, clerked for the Supreme Court, and was an experienced federal prosecutor.²⁹⁴ He had also served on the Director of National Intelligence's staff prior to becoming the Principal Deputy Director at the NCTC.²⁹⁵ Most importantly, he served as the acting director from November 2007 until his confirmation in June 2008 and shared time and insights with Redd before his retirement. During his confirmation hearings, Leiter indicated a desire to institutionalize government-wide strategic planning in DSOP.²⁹⁶ Like Redd, he saw value in the NIP, a long-term, deliberate roadmap that described the responsibilities of each of the departments and agencies. The NIP had been the first counterterrorism plan to include options for countering violent extremism or the ideological roots of terrorism,²⁹⁷ and under Leiter it became DSOP's number one planning priority.²⁹⁸ Also like Redd, he saw the need for a short-term dynamic planning capability based on new events or a crisis. In addition, Leiter began to push DSOP to make the planning process less Defense-centric and more relevant to the entire interagency, thereby addressing a common complaint from other departments and agencies.²⁹⁹

As DSOP and the SIST worked on NIP II, the Bush Administration began to work on formalizing the government's counterterrorism structure.

Senior leaders were concerned that the national security system had not planned and postured itself to pursue a long war against terrorism; for example, it had not planned for counterterrorism region by region.³⁰⁰ Initially, the idea had been that the war on terrorism was a global structure that knew no regional boundaries, but experience suggested counterterrorism had to be pursued differently in different regions and with different allies. The Deputies Committee approved a new counterterrorism structure that formalized four functional working groups and one regional working group, all reporting to the Counterterrorism Security Group. The functional working groups corresponded to the four counterterrorism pillars identified in the NIP. The chair of each group was the pillar lead in DSOP.³⁰¹ The regional working group was chaired by the Department of State and deputy-chaired by DSOP. The regional working group was supposed to bring a regional focus to NIP II that would prioritize actions and develop synergies, particularly between the disjointed efforts to build partner capacity within a country or a region. By some accounts, the group did not perform well because State refused to conduct shared decision making and instead just asked other organizations to report their activities.³⁰²

The new, formal counterterrorism architecture helped solidify the increasingly strong links among DSOP, the NSC, and other counterterrorism offices formed when departments and agencies began bypassing the SIST in response to the CODEX database.³⁰³ As these relationships matured, there was a corresponding increase in discontent among SIST members. New members to the group had a tough time determining the group's purpose,³⁰⁴ and longer-serving members were disillusioned about the SIST's reduced role. Some members began to suggest that the group should be a decision-making body. Others countered that decisions made by the SIST were not binding on the agencies or departments and that DSOP had the entire NSC bureaucracy to navigate before decisions were made final.³⁰⁵ Attendance at SIST meetings began to wane, and some members sent their junior personnel to "listen and report back."³⁰⁶

Theoretically, the SIST could help DSOP with

evaluation. The original concept of operations produced by the transition team indicated that DSOP should develop metrics for success and perform frequent assessments of how well agencies were executing strategy and planning. The departments and agencies were especially sensitive about having their efforts "graded," so under Schloesser this sensitive activity was handled discretely by Nick Rasmussen, who initially reported directly to the NCTC's front office and acted as a liaison with the White House.³⁰⁷ In mid-2006, he became DSOP's Chief of Strategic Assessments before departing for the NSC staff in 2007,³⁰⁸ where he would continue to try to assess progress in the war on terrorism for Juan Zarate. However, departments and agencies resisted being assessed even when the effort was managed from the NSC staff.³⁰⁹

DSOP's "Strategic Assessments Group" (see Figure 4) endured a lot of false starts that were not well coordinated either within DSOP or with other agencies. For example, early on, members of DSOP's staff visited the DoD's venerable dean of strategic assessments, Andy Marshall. DSOP tried to implement a process similar to Marshall's, but was bureaucratically blocked.³¹⁰ The strategic assessment conducted in support of the first NIP was a highly classified document seen by only a small number of people. DSOP leaders were aware of effective measurement tools but unable to develop any consensus among the departments and agencies on metrics with tangible criteria.³¹¹ The exercise was educational in that it revealed substantive challenges to measuring progress in the complex counterterrorism mission. Otherwise it had little impact because its results were not authoritative, and it was produced and circulated among such a small group of decision makers.

By the time NIP II was being produced during Maguire's tenure, the SIST was playing a greater role in the assessment process. The SIST helped DSOP "socialize" its second major strategic assessment, which attempted to measure the impact of government activities on the adversary and corresponded with the production of NIP II. The assessment process was significantly more transparent the second time around, with departments and agencies iteratively reviewing

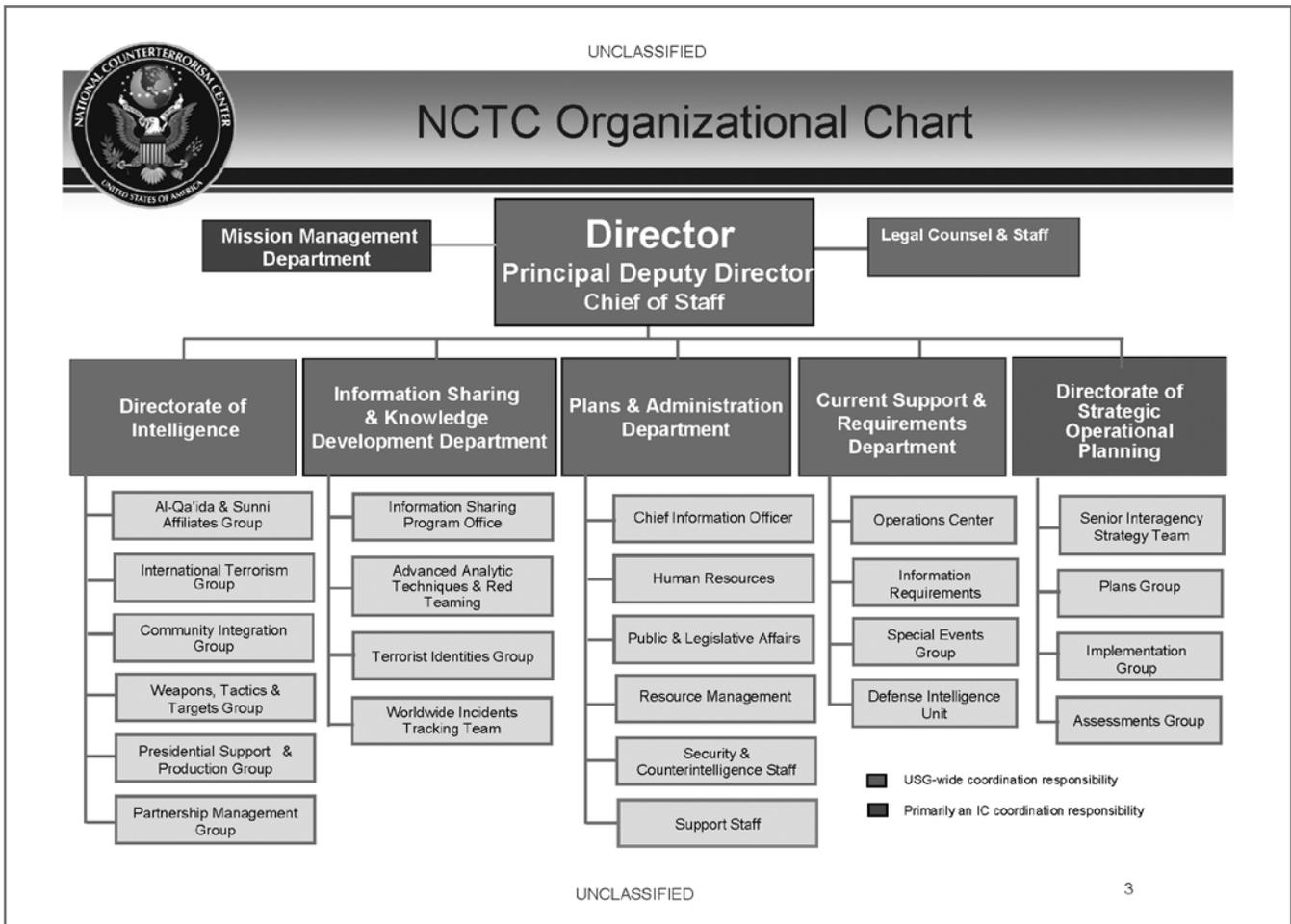


Figure 4: Directorate of Strategic Operational Planning Organizational Chart³¹²

and providing input to the analysis.³¹³ Here too, however, the departments and agencies pushed back and in particular resisted measurements of success. They did not want to be “assessed” by DSOP and questioned DSOP’s authority to do so.³¹⁴ Thus, the assessment stayed away from definitive judgments and recommendations and instead concentrated on identifying trends:

The assessment identified select positive, negative, and neutral observations, organized by the four pillars of the NIP, in the categories of U.S. government (blue), partner (green), and adversary (red) actions. From here... judgments helped key decision-makers better understand the complexity of the materials presented in the report. In many cases the judgments described the relationship between “blue,” “green,” and “red” trends, but direct correlations (i.e.,

impacts) between outputs and outcomes were typically not established.³¹⁵

The assessment was anything but hard hitting, and the process deteriorated to the point of least resistance, wherein departments and agencies were just asked to report what they were doing (or intended to do) with regard to tasks or objectives. Most within the interagency counterterrorism community saw the assessments process as an opportunity to gain more resources. Meanwhile, Zarate also saw the need to measure progress. He developed twelve “markers of success” for the CSG to indicate how the counterterrorism effort was going during the last two years of the Bush Administration.³¹⁶

NIP II was signed by the President in September 2008. It had been written by a more robust DSOP staff and with senior leaders from the departments and agencies,³¹⁷ which left SIST members feeling their role had diminished. Even so, Maguire’s

assessment of the SIST's value had improved. He felt the SIST played a useful role in shaping NIP II.³¹⁸ Morale on the SIST improved, and members felt they were getting more attention from Maguire.³¹⁹ Maguire promoted NIP II in an effort to solidify support for its implementation. He traveled to brief the senior official in each department and agency on the revised plan, accompanied by the relevant department or agency's second ranking official (typically its deputy secretary).³²⁰ NIP II emphasized national level objectives.³²¹ It also consolidated redundant tasks and was about half the size of the first plan.³²² Unlike NIP, NIP II did not call for supporting plans but instead tasked the agencies and departments to identify impediments to implementation. The SIST was tasked to lead the mission to identify implementation impediments and track the process, which improved the attendance at SIST meetings for a while.³²³ In late 2008, DSOP held a NIP Implementation Conference to bring the community together to identify and solve strategy implementation problems.³²⁴

Overall, NIP II was deemed an improvement.³²⁵ Director Leiter described the process of strategic operational planning as a journey of discovery:

I think we've made a lot of progress over the past two years in integrating the U.S. government's effort. We started in kind of a classic military model in strategic operational planning: write a big plan, everyone will follow the plan, and the budgets will be addressed. For a variety of reasons, that was a useful start, but it wasn't altogether satisfying, nor was it altogether effective. We didn't stop that, but what we added on to it in terms of strategic planning is more targeted and more immediate planning efforts.³²⁶

All the hard work had been useful, but Leiter still believed it needed to evolve more in the direction of dynamic planning. The transition team for DSOP had debated this very issue. The actual concept of operations for DSOP had said DSOP would do both "standing" and "dynamic" plans, but recognized the priority for the former when it tasked the SIST to provide advice and guidance on standing plans and

only address dynamic plans as time permitted. The Deputies had resolved the debate largely in favor of longer-term planning. Now, several years later, the NCTC director was acknowledging the need for more emphasis on dynamic planning. The National Security Council staff thought "dynamic planning" would replicate what the CSG did and resisted this development.³²⁷ From the SIST's point of view, dynamic planning was a major challenge, and its ability to play a major role in dynamic planning was questionable. Since its members had to return to their parent agencies to secure approval for their positions, the SIST would be hard put to keep pace with dynamic planning. Thus, absent some major intervention, the SIST's role, in decline since the first NIP, seemed likely to continue its decline.

COUNTERTERRORISM DECISION MAKING SWINGS BACK TO THE WHITE HOUSE: 2009-2010

President Obama's administration took office in February 2009. Initially the change in administration meant less work for DSOP and the SIST,³²⁸ but before long the White House's demand for documents and information skyrocketed. The requests often were detailed; for example, the administration wanted to know how many people a department or agency had in a particular country and what they were doing.³²⁹ After fact finding, the administration began to act on new policy guidance, which renamed the war on terrorism and in general reduced the influence of the counterterrorism community. John Brennan, the Deputy National Security Advisor and Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, was experienced in counterterrorism and had helped set up DSOP. He knew what he wanted to do, and he chose to centralize decision making in the White House staff. The new administration eliminated the position of Deputy Assistant to the President for Counterterrorism, previously filled by Juan Zarate, which had been DSOP's link to the NSC. Brennan took on some of the position's responsibilities and others were pushed down to the NSC's Senior Director for Counterterrorism, including management of the Counterterrorism Security Group that previously had been run by Zarate.³³⁰

The new administration also created a sub-group for the CSG (commonly called the sub-CSG) with senior subject-matter members at the same level as the SIST.³³¹

Under Brennan's leadership both DSOP and the SIST saw their workloads plummet. Brennan had overseen the work of the transition team that developed the concept of operations for the DSOP and SIST, but under the Obama Administration he moved to strengthened White House control over all aspects of counterterrorism planning. DSOP continued to work on implementation and assessment of the NIP and also branched out to conduct preparedness exercises,³³² but their lack of connection to the NSC staff made the value of these efforts questionable. With Brennan's focus on dynamic planning, some of DSOP's longer-term planning efforts naturally moved to the back burner.³³³ SIST members were also increasingly frustrated. The flow of information to and from the White House deteriorated. When the SIST pushed ideas to the White House, such as developing policy for the detention of high value targets in foreign countries, they were ignored by NSC staff busy with other issues.³³⁴ In turn, little information came from the NSC staff. DSOP sometimes looked to public policy speeches for guidance.³³⁵ To SIST members it seemed like Brennan was "a one man show."³³⁶ It was as if NCTC's license to identify problems and solutions for NSC consideration had been revoked.³³⁷

It also is true that by the time Brennan assumed his position as the President's key advisor on counterterrorism the SIST had the reputation of being able to "poison" initiatives.³³⁸ It was acting to protect department and agency equities, and nothing unified the SIST as effectively as issues that elicited united resistance from all the departments and agencies. Within DSOP the SIST became somewhat notorious for blocking the work of the DSOP middle managers. SIST members had begun exercising their oversight roles in Interagency Coordination Group (GS-14 subject-matter expert level) meetings led by DSOP group chiefs. The group chiefs noticed their meetings began to resemble SIST meetings. The SIST members, who were senior to the other participants, dominated the

conversation, and the lower-ranking experts stopped sharing their insights.³³⁹ From the SIST members' point of view, they were providing a healthy reality check on work in progress; from the DSOP point of view, SIST members (some more than others) came across as "turf monitors" who threw up roadblocks³⁴⁰ and, in effect, sabotaged the process. Early on, the DSOP had been forced to rely on the SIST, but by this point, they wanted to bypass such friction. The group chiefs had their own robust set of contacts and no longer needed the SIST members to make connections with the departments and agencies.³⁴¹

In this environment, SIST membership declined further. State pulled back its permanent representative to the SIST in December 2008, only sending a representative to weekly meetings.³⁴² State's representative from this period argues that "there is no need for DSOP," and underscores the point by raising the long-debated question: "What is strategic operational planning?"³⁴³ State said its pullback was a manpower issue, and no one challenged the decision.³⁴⁴ DHS's representative became part-time, and DoD consolidated its two representatives into one. There were exceptions to the general decline in interest; the Department of Energy considered pulling its SIST member back but ended up sending a new full-time member.³⁴⁵

Even in this environment, some SIST members found ways to be useful. In mid-2009, NCTC hosted an exercise testing the federal response to a "Mumbai-style" attack in an urban environment. Three members of the SIST representing DoD, FBI, and Justice attended. SIST members raised numerous cross-cutting issues the state and local authorities had not considered. The result was a more realistic scenario with well-developed lessons learned and also the creation of a Memorandum of Understanding between the DoD and the FBI for movement of counterterrorism response teams.³⁴⁶

The end of 2009 brought a dramatic change in mood to NCTC. On Christmas Day, Umar Farouk Abdulmudallad, an al-Qa'ida operative, boarded a Detroit-bound Northwest Airlines plane and tried to detonate an explosive device strapped to his leg.³⁴⁷ The attempted bombing triggered alarm bells in Congress, which suddenly wanted a full accounting for how the system had failed

Congressional Interest in NCTC's Strategic Operational Planning

Congress occasionally holds hearings to examine how the NCTC is performing.³⁴⁹ Members of Congress focus on NCTC's intelligence integration and analysis role rather than its counterterrorism strategic planning (see Figure 5 below). In part this is because the NCTC's strategic planning function falls between two committees and neither has asserted authority. Therefore, testimony from the NCTC director mostly pertains to the substance of terrorist threat rather than the effectiveness of interagency counterterrorism cooperation.³⁵⁰

When Congress considered Redd's nomination to NCTC director in July 2005 only seventeen questions were asked and only one addressed NCTC's planning mission.³⁵¹ The following year the House Armed Services Committee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee each held a hearing on NCTC. About 10 percent of the questions posed by members of Congress related to DSOP's mission and how it was coordinating tasks across the interagency. Members seemed satisfied with Redd's statement that, "We are just beginning this phase of strategic operational planning but have already made significant contributions in certain compartmented areas."³⁵²

However in 2007 a Government Accountability Office report sparked Congressional interest in the NCTC's planning performance by noting, "NCTC officials would not discuss the [NIP II] plan, its contents, or any issues raised in this report." Congress wanted access to the plan, which was widely viewed on Capitol Hill as a misstep.³⁵³ The harshest criticism came from House Democrats, like Loretta Sanchez who lamented the lack of information about the plan. She noted that reports from DHS indicated "we are still struggling to coordinate our Nation's counterterrorism work," which she said, "quite frankly...is unacceptable."³⁵⁴

A year after expressing interest in interagency counterterrorism planning, Congressional hearings virtually ignored DSOP's planning mission in favor of probing issues involving civil liberties, domestic radicalization, and information-sharing on terrorist threats. During this same period Leiter was confirmed, which offered another opportunity for Congress to express concern about the planning mission. Senator Russ Feingold and others wanted to know whether Leiter felt he needed additional statutory authority to do his job. Leiter sidestepped the question but told Congress "NCTC must further institutionalize...government-wide strategic operational planning," and said he was, "more convinced than ever that success against terrorism [requires] coordinated and synchronized efforts, to include...diplomatic, financial, military, intelligence, homeland security, and law enforcement activities."³⁵⁵

Leiter was called to testify once in 2009 during hearings Congress periodically scheduled to evaluate terrorist threats after 9/11. Only one question related to NCTC's planning mission was raised: "Are you engaged in strategic operational planning?" Leiter responded: "We are not nearly as advanced as we are in the intelligence sharing...." Leiter was again asked whether he needed additional statutory authority or resources and responded he did not.³⁵⁶ He was also asked whether NCTC's authorities overlapped with State. Later, that year Congress sought to cut NCTC's budget by 20 percent, but lobbying by the Director of National Intelligence halted the effort.³⁵⁷

Then, in the final months of 2009, the shootings at Ft. Hood and the attempted Christmas bombing on Flight 253 vaulted NCTC leaders back into Congressional hearings. The Senate held a series of four hearings from January through March 2010 to examine the system's ability to anticipate, detect, thwart, and respond to terrorist attacks. The sharpest scrutiny was directed at the intelligence side, but issues regarding DSOP's strategic planning authorities also arose. Congress asked Leiter again whether he had sufficient authority, and this time he candidly commented: "I do not think the legislation gave clear authority—in fact, it did not give us clear authority to direct action, so we have become a negotiator and mediator of sorts rather than director of action."³⁵⁸ Testimony during one of the subsequent hearings from a former DSOP planner, Richard Nelson, reinforced Leiter's point: "DSOP has a limited ability to compel interagency participation and thus remains a relatively powerless organization...."³⁵⁹

Finally, Congress had a different answer regarding authorities, but it took no action. In recent years Congressional interest in DSOP has remained low, particularly with respect to DSOP's strategic operational planning. During the confirmation hearing for NCTC's current director, Senators continued to demonstrate more interest in DSOP's ability to integrate intelligence on the terrorist threat.³⁶⁰ However, Senator Collins, one of the NCTC original supporters, did note the organization was not living up to its intent: "I cannot help but think that we have a lot of good people, a lot of good agencies, a lot of activity, but there still does not seem to be an overall strategy, nor accountability built in, nor a means of assessing success."³⁶¹

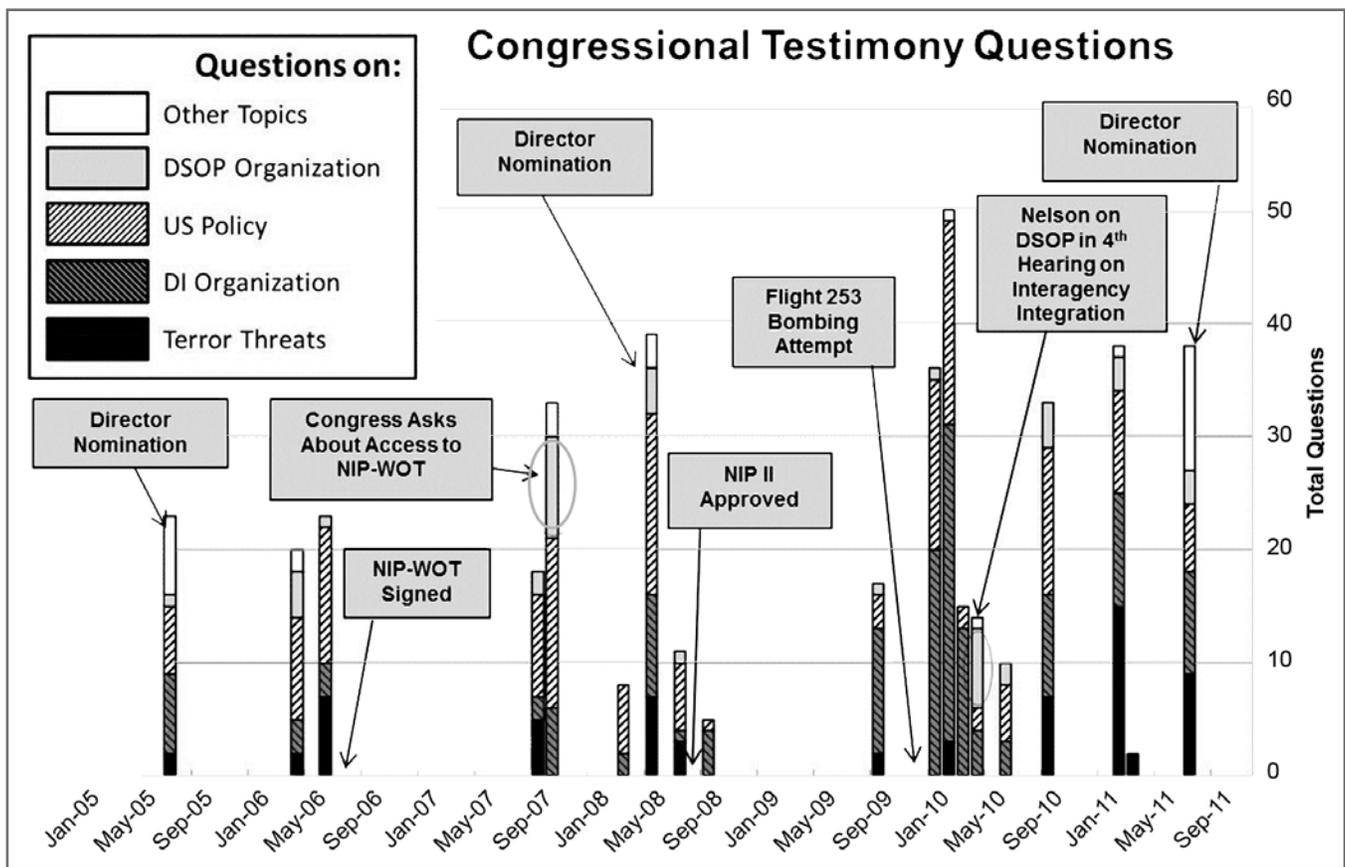


Figure 5: Congressional Testimony Questions

to detect Abdulmudallad and his plans. Congress held hearings, called witnesses, and considered whether the reforms in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorist Prevention Act had been adequate.³⁴⁸ (See *Congressional Interest in NCTC's Strategic Operational Planning*, pg. 33.)

Those testifying told Congress plainly that DSOP should be strengthened in mission, authority, and personnel.³⁶² The testimony came on the heels of a Project on National Security Reform study that analyzed NCTC's ability to integrate whole-of-government counterterrorism capabilities into strategic plans. The report found major systematic impediments to DSOP's success, including DSOP's tenuous relationship with the National Security Staff, overlapping planning authorities within the interagency, lack of a formal and flexible process to align resources with strategic plans, and the lack of strategic planning competencies within the civilian personnel structure. In addition, the study evaluated the SIST and found that the group had "...a wide range of experience, substantive knowledge of the mission, and outreach to a broad

network of practitioners and policymakers within the counterterrorism community," but that "...the SIST had yet to realize its full potential."³⁶³ The study recommended four actions to reconstitute the SIST:

- Identify its role in a counterterrorism architecture executive order.
- Include a SIST charter as part of implementing guidance issued from the Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism.
- Provide the director of NCTC with authority to concur with department and agency nominations to the SIST.
- Encourage the active participation of the associate deputy director of DSOP in regular deliberations of the SIST.³⁶⁴

These recommendations fell on deaf ears. Brennan was content with his approach to managing counterterrorism. The Obama administration

weathered the Christmas bombing controversy and ignored the recommendations to better integrate DSOP and NSC staff efforts.

In this environment, the SIST's perceived utility continued to decline. Although it made contributions, the SIST had not been able to carve out a definitive role in any DSOP activity after its management of the first NIP, including dynamic plans and assessments. The Obama Administration's centralized approach to counterterrorism diminished prospects for the SIST even further. An increasing number of SIST members began to question whether the SIST had a viable part to play in the nation's counterterrorism community, including its next several leaders.

ATROPHY AND DECLINE: 2010-PRESENT

DSOP's rank and file has long believed that "the SIST is essentially dead weight," and that "it could be disbanded without any impact to national security."³⁶⁵ Over the past several years, DSOP leaders came to share this view in large part. In July 2010, Lieutenant General Frank Kearney replaced Maguire. Kearney, a West Point graduate, came from the Deputy Commander position at U.S. Special Operations Command. He also commanded Special Operations Command Central. When Kearney arrived, DSOP was again changing. It was trying to shift focus from primarily long-range, strategic planning as embodied in NIP II to a greater emphasis on shorter-term dynamic planning and coordination of interagency activities. It was not going well. DSOP played a minor, low profile role in developing the Obama Administration's June, 2011 National Strategy for Counterterrorism,³⁶⁶ which officially superseded the 2008 NIP II,³⁶⁷ and it was meeting resistance from the NSC staff and the CSG on addressing dynamic planning.³⁶⁸

In these circumstances, Kearney and DSOP began focusing on strategic implementation plans, taking direction from the Principals Committee and Deputies Committee meetings and focusing on protection of the Homeland.³⁶⁹ One such plan released in December 2011 was to empower local partners to prevent violent extremism in the U.S.³⁷⁰ DSOP also sustained its assessment activities, playing the role of both disciplinarian and advocate in interagency deliberations. Assessment reports

delivered to the White House kept pressure on the interagency to engage in the planning process but were also a tool to lobby for more funding on behalf of the departments and agencies.³⁷¹

As Kearney worked to keep DSOP relevant, he also explored the purpose of the SIST. By the time he arrived attendance had declined and meetings were purely information-sharing exercises. The DoD representative was noticeably engaged, but few others were, and it seemed to Kearney that most attendees were getting very little out of the meetings.³⁷² Kearney met with the SIST members and asked openly how the SIST could be useful. He asked "what do we want this to be" and even whether the SIST should be disbanded.³⁷³ There were mixed responses, but a few strongly advocated for the SIST, so he did not abandon the group. Instead, Kearney decreased the meetings to every two weeks or as needed. Toward the end of his tenure he also changed the SIST meeting format.³⁷⁴ Rather than having the DSOP staff brief the SIST, he wanted SIST members to bring issues to the table that DSOP should address on a case-by-case basis.³⁷⁵ He then assigned each member a "special project" to bring a topic of his or her choice forward.³⁷⁶ Instead of DoD-style briefings, there were "read-aheads" to facilitate discuss³⁷⁷

Kearney tried his best to make the SIST more strategic.³⁷⁸ He even called and tried to cajole the State representative to return to the meetings when her attendance lapsed. Some SIST members considered the Kearney assignments as "homework" and were not enthusiastic about responding. However, they usually managed to come up with a worthwhile issue to vet.³⁷⁹ Changing the approach improved DSOP group leaders' opinion of the SIST in as much as they found some issues raised by the SIST helpful. For example, in managing Iraqi refugee entries to the U.S., the SIST pointed out that departments and agencies were using different criteria for approving entry, which in effect allowed undesirable elements access.³⁸⁰ The SIST also looked at ways to engage terrorists operating in East Africa, coming up with a decision matrix and even an innovative strategic communications plan. These efforts were considered useful, even though the Principals overruled the strategic communications

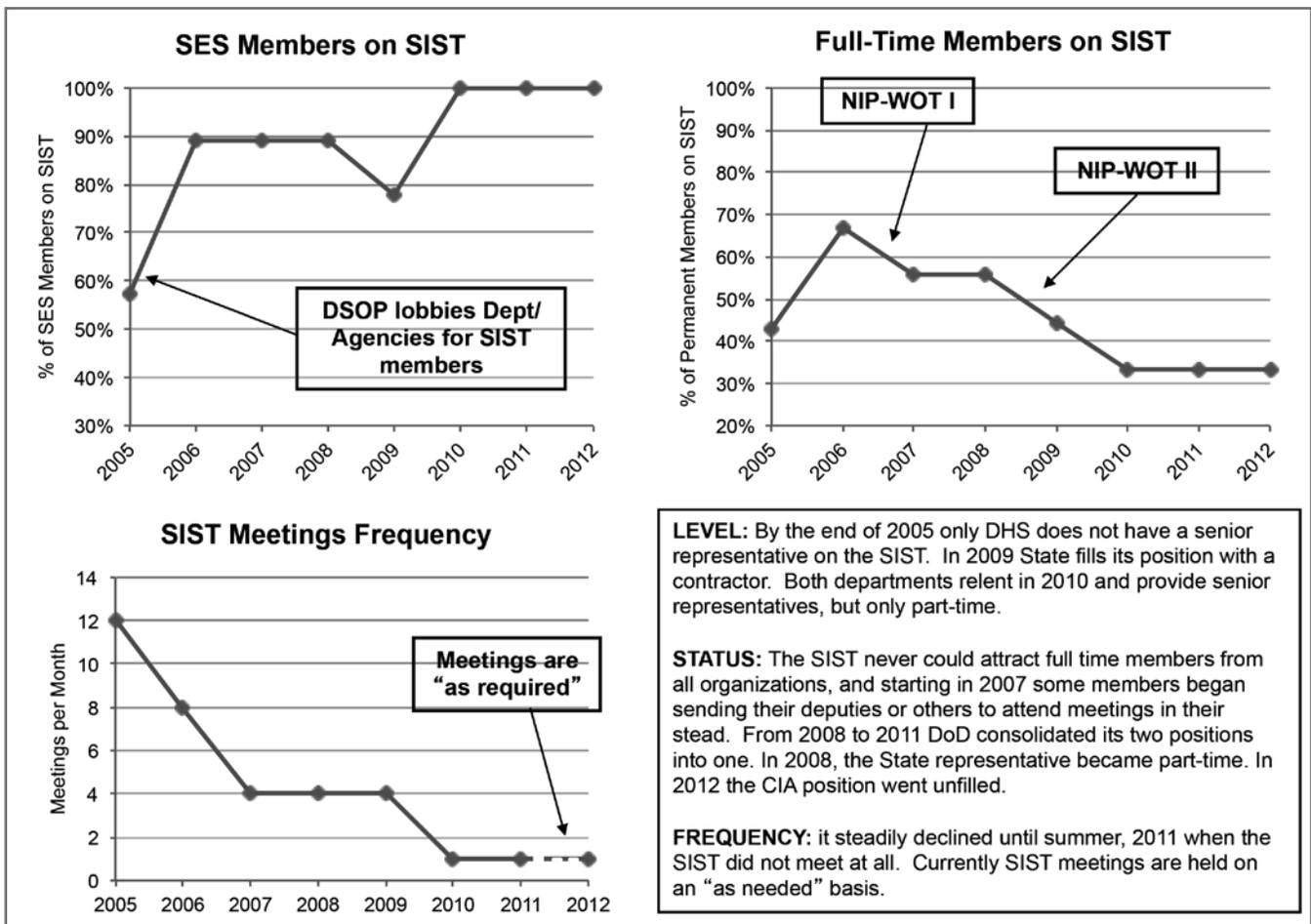


Figure 6: Charting SIST Participation

plan in favor of the standard practice of minimizing U.S. commentary on lethal strikes;³⁸¹ however, the general DSOP view was that the SIST was a drag on its productivity.³⁸² Many in DSOP believed they had “outgrown the SIST.”³⁸³ Judging by their attendance, SIST members shared the view that the group’s utility was limited. By the end of 2010, only three representatives were still full-time members of the SIST and only three quarters of the members would show up to meetings.³⁸⁴(See Figure 6.)

During the summer of 2011, DSOP received its fourth leader in six years, Vice Admiral Michael A. LeFever. During the transition period, the SIST did not meet for almost four months.³⁸⁵ Like Kearney, LeFever could not immediately identify a reason for the SIST to continue. He also met with the group and explored ways it might be useful and indicated he would continue to work with the SIST.³⁸⁶ As Kearney discovered, some members felt strongly that the group served a valuable function, others

less so, and still others were openly in favor of the group’s demise. In the year following LeFever’s arrival there were only three meetings of the SIST. Some believed the reduced schedule might facilitate better attendance because members would calculate that they were only being convened in response to some important crisis that had to be addressed.³⁸⁷

In summary, although the SIST’s initial work resulted in what Redd considered revolutionary improvements in interagency coordination,³⁸⁸ after several more years of toil, its productivity was considered so suspect that succeeding DSOP directors openly considered terminating the group, and an increasing number of members saw little reason to meet. At issue is why the SIST’s decline took place, which we discuss in the following sections.

Analysis of Variables Explaining Performance of the Senior Interagency Strategy Team

To better assess the SIST's performance, we use the ten variables drawn from organizational and management literature on cross-functional teams, explained at length elsewhere.³⁸⁹ In the following sections we provide a brief explanation of each variable and assess its importance in explaining the performance of the Senior Interagency Strategy Team. We focus on understanding the team's performance during 2006–2007 when Schloesser led the group. This was the most productive period for the group, a time when its membership was most consistent and group cohesion was high. Also, with one notable exception³⁹⁰ all the SIST members who served under Schloesser were available and agreed to be interviewed. We compare and contrast the working group's experience under Schloesser to the group's experience in later periods when doing so is necessary to explain variables that changed over time in ways that significantly affected group performance.

ORGANIZATIONAL-LEVEL VARIABLES

Interagency small groups, like many cross-functional teams, are products of the larger organization or system within which they operate. The SIST is no exception in this regard; its success was inextricably tied to the post-9/11 national security system. Generally, when a small interagency (or cross-functional) group is formed, some higher authority defines the group's purpose. Often at the same time, there will be some guidance about who the group answers to, what authorities the group has, and what sort of resources—human, material, and informational—it will control. Depending on the broader organization's attributes, there will also be varying levels of support provided for the team. These organizational-level variables—which we summarize as *purpose*, *empowerment*, and *support*—are typically the most basic and earliest determinants of a small group's performance.

Team purpose can evolve from the founding of the team, through the emergence of a strategic consensus, and ultimately, into a well-defined strategic concept. Research on teams often

concludes that there is an advantage to allowing teams to identify their own specific objectives over time, but some initial guidance on the team's purpose and what it is supposed to accomplish is necessary.³⁹¹ In the case of the SIST, its sense of purpose was complicated by several factors that prevented the organization from ever obtaining a strategic consensus on what it should be doing.

The SIST's purpose was linked to DSOP's, and DSOP's purpose was confused by the inexact definition of strategic operational planning. The 9/11 Commission clearly intended for DSOP to act as the “attending physician” that would integrate the elements of national power to the benefit of the counterterrorism mission. DSOP was to develop strategic objectives and more detailed supporting plans based on national policy and strategy guidance, then monitor the execution of the plans and identify areas for improvement, including needed capabilities. Defining the exact scope and character of these activities was contentious and had to be worked out over time. Initially, there was more agreement on what DSOP's purpose excluded—policy and operations—than what it included.

The big debate about how to define strategic operational planning revolved around the balance between near- and longer-term planning. Many, including the 9/11 Commission and the DoD, wanted an interagency organization that focused on near-term operational plans to win the fight against terrorists, while others thought DSOP should focus on longer-term strategic planning to win the long war. This debate was carried on at the highest levels of government, where opinions varied³⁹² and changed over time. Some who initially supported a focus on longer-term planning came to appreciate the need for dynamic planning as time went by. A consensus on the precise boundaries of strategic operational planning never emerged. Throughout the SIST's existence, members would lament that “no one understood the purpose of the SIST” because there was no agreement on the boundaries of the mission.³⁹³ Thus the SIST's purpose was largely defined by the tasks it undertook.

In this regard, the SIST's sense of purpose came from two sources: the transition team and NCTC's first leaders. The transition team's concept of operations clearly imparted a critical role for the SIST that it performed in two parts. The first assigned task was to build DSOP's organization and develop its processes. Initially, this meant SIST members serving as their organizations' senior representatives for a host of management and administrative issues required to establish DSOP. The second assigned task was to ensure full transparency among DSOP and those involved with counterterrorism in the departments and agencies. SIST members were DSOP's primary link to the interagency and their parent organizations' primary links to DSOP.

Beyond those organizational tasks, the SIST was assigned a third substantive task, which was to begin a long-term planning effort.³⁹⁴ The President mandated the creation of the NIP, and Schloesser successfully invested the SIST in producing it. During this early period it "became the primary tasking for the SIST"³⁹⁵ and rallied the team to action. If the NIP was more descriptive than prescriptive, this was not seen as a major liability by SIST members. They reasoned that they "needed to figure out where we were before we could know where we were going."³⁹⁶ Similarly, it was not considered a major liability that each SIST member was compelled to represent the equities and interests of his or her department or agency while also trying to get "buy-ins" from the agency or department.³⁹⁷ As one SIST participant explained, "it is good to have a group that has good connections to the mothership and can step back and formulate a plan to put on the table for everyone to shoot at."³⁹⁸

The focus on the NIP was so strong that after it was completed and Schloesser departed, SIST members continued to work on their parent organizations' implementation plans and felt, many said, a "great sense of purpose."³⁹⁹ When support for the document collapsed among NSC leaders, departments, agencies, and even NCTC leaders, SIST members were still pursuing the follow-on implementation plans. Only slowly and reluctantly did members of the group come to realize the detailed, top-down planning they were engaged

in was unsustainable. When the broader system rejected the value of a largely consensus product that the SIST had worked so hard to produce, a crisis of purpose emerged. In essence, the inherent organizational tension in the SIST's founding charter was laid bare.

The SIST's primary assigned purpose—ensuring transparency by accurately representing their departments and agencies—both advanced and retarded efforts to integrate the elements of national power for more effective counterterrorism. Under the right conditions, transparency could help resolve conflicts among departments and agencies as information was shared, positions explained, and acceptable compromises promoted. However, representing their parent organizations accurately also often meant resisting courses of action they found unpalatable, which reinforced conflicts. In short, the mandate to accurately represent their parent agencies views (and thus their interests) meant some problems might be resolved by consensus, but others would be reinforced.

This dual effect was evident from the beginning, symbolically represented in two contradictory interpretations of the SIST's purpose by those attending the NSC Deputies Committee meetings on the SIST in February 2005. One attendee thought the SIST was supposed to be a team able to "overcome parochialism within the bureaucracy" and "prevent entrenched staff positions" from driving the process.⁴⁰⁰ Other senior leaders had similar hopes. One member of the NSC hoped the SIST would "create a definable community of interest that sees itself as part of broader strategy and stays together over time."⁴⁰¹ Yet another SIST leader agreed "it would be a shame if the SIST became a checking function where interagency turf battles occurred."⁴⁰² But a lower-ranking official who attended those early Deputies Committee meetings argued the opposite: that the intent was to permit the agencies and departments to protect their equities in case of unhelpful intrusions by DSOP. He thought the SIST members should protect their department or agencies equities at a time when the interagency was "quibbling over counterterrorism roles and missions." He emphasized DSOP's direct reporting relationship with the President, and noted

that all the departments and agencies were unhappy about the prospect of DSOP using that relationship as an opportunity to “grade their homework in front of the president.”⁴⁰³

The SIST was able to overcome some parochialism, but over time it devolved more toward protecting bureaucratic equities, and probably inevitably so because the SIST’s ability to stymie or constrain was far greater than its ability to create. It was easier to block something than to get everyone else on board with one agency’s preferred approach. This was true whether the SIST was trying to help with plans, assessments, or ad hoc problem solving. Increasingly, DSOP and others came to see the SIST “sanity checks” as bureaucratic foot-dragging intended to protect parent organizational equities more than to ensure pursuing wise courses of action. The SIST’s accurate depiction of parent organizational positions, which was a key purpose laid down for the SIST in its founding charter, ultimately earned it a poor reputation as an organization that needed to be worked around by those more dedicated to the mission than to protecting the equities of functional organizations. After the NIP, both DSOP leaders and SIST members struggled to pinpoint how the SIST could be useful. Original members of the group began to look for other work ⁴⁰⁴ while new members of the group found it difficult to determine the group’s purpose and ultimate goal.⁴⁰⁵

The Senior Interagency Strategy Team was approved by and received guidance from the Deputies Committee, but was not authorized to direct activities or control resources. The SIST derived its authority from DSOP, which derived its authority from the NCTC director’s direct reporting line to the President. In practice, however, directors were not willing to challenge the NSC staff and its hierarchy of committees by taking an issue directly to the President.⁴⁰⁶ Either they never had an issue they felt could not be resolved through NSC staff channels, or they understood that the President preferred to operate the national security system primarily through NSC staff mechanisms. Even the DSOP and SIST concepts of operations asserted that contentious issues should be taken to the Deputies or Principals committees and not directly to the

President. So the day-to-day reporting relationship went from Schloesser, to the Deputy National Security Advisor for Combating Terrorism, Zarate; so much so that it seemed Schloesser “worked for Zarate.”⁴⁰⁷

The relationship with the NSC staff thus became a critical source of authority for DSOP. Zarate often reminded the CSG that DSOP was a planning arm for the NSC, and such assertions reinforced the legitimacy of DSOP and its work.⁴⁰⁸ It also meant that the NSC staff strongly influenced, if not effectively controlled, DSOP’s activity set. Sometimes DSOP was given the authority to counter an emerging threat, such as developing a plan to combat foreign fighters in Iraq, while other times, for political or other reasons, authority was kept at the NSC or given to another group, department, or agency. The fact that the initial NIP was presidentially-directed is one major reason it provided such a sense of purpose for DSOP and the SIST.⁴⁰⁹ After it collapsed, DSOP and the SIST had to operate at the behest of the NSC staff. When the presidential administration changed and the NSC staff lost interest, the value of DSOP and SIST activities plummeted. Given the size of the organization and the sheer breadth of the counterterrorism community and mission,⁴¹⁰ the SIST and DSOP could always find planning and process issues to work.⁴¹¹ However, these activities seemed a matter of “form over substance.”⁴¹²

Thus, as Leiter and independent studies have argued, DSOP and the SIST lacked real authority to direct activities. By design, the SIST’s authority was also limited in terms of how it made decisions. SIST members were not empowered to make decisions on behalf of their parent organizations as they saw fit. Ironically, most of the representatives sent to the transition team were given just such latitude by their departments and agencies. They were told to simply do what they thought best, while keeping their parent organization informed. However, the transition team, looking at how the system works, thought it was imperative for SIST members to faithfully represent the views of their departments and agencies. The concept specified that the DSOP director would check with the Counterterrorism Security Group to determine if the SIST members faithfully represented the views of their agencies.

The assumption was that the SIST and DSOP would be doing something not otherwise done—strategic operational planning—so the problem would not be redundant guidance, but rather guidance that was inconsistent with policy formulated in the CSG or at odds with what parent organizations were actually willing to do. If the SIST members were senior enough and working the issue diligently (i.e., full-time), presumably they would be well-informed and commit their parent organizations to activities they actually intended to undertake.

Unfortunately, some of the original representatives sent to the SIST did not have the seniority to represent their parent organizations effectively.⁴¹³ They were just sent over as “note takers” and did not have access to their departments’ or agencies’ senior leaders.⁴¹⁴ They could not state their agencies’ positions and constantly said they would have to check on it; they were viewed as “not empowered.”⁴¹⁵ Empowerment was “radically different” for different SIST members.⁴¹⁶ This caused “incredible grief” when the SIST worked for consensus on the NIP.⁴¹⁷ If SIST members ventured to represent their organizations’ positions without verifying them, that organization’s representative to the CSG would contradict the SIST position.⁴¹⁸ This problem was so acute that Redd and Schloesser visited the Principals and Deputies to convey how important it was for the SIST member to have direct communication with them and be able to speak for each agency or department.⁴¹⁹

The lack of empowerment and potential for embarrassing exposure inclined SIST members to stick closely to their mandate to ensure transparency by faithfully representing their departments and agencies. The SIST members seemed to have the interests of the greater good at heart, but they also knew their role was to represent the equities of their agency or department.⁴²⁰ This was seen as a virtue in as much as national-level decision making has broad and enduring implications. It paid off to have each department and agency reviewing the decision to make sure no missteps were taken, since the “... unintended consequences could go super wide.”⁴²¹ The ultimate manifestation of this perspective was the SIST members’ “do no harm” rule, which meant not asking one another to sacrifice the priorities or

budgetary interests of any department or agency.⁴²²

These limits on empowerment ensured the SIST would not charge ahead into counterterrorism mission management but rather move at the speed of a consensus process. This was especially true because the SIST had no independent source of mission-specific resources. In theory, the SIST needed only information, not control over material resources. If the SIST identified shortfalls through its planning process and could prioritize the activities that were most important to the success of counterterrorism strategy, arguably it had done its job. In practice, however, the willingness of departments and agencies to support the strategy and planning process depended on their assessment of the SIST’s influence. The lack of directive authority combined with the lack of influence over resource allocation was crippling. The SIST could not direct limited resources to highest priorities, nor could it (or DSOP for that matter) grease the consensus process with resource incentives, in effect offering to pay departments and agencies for activities. Over time the SIST might have increased its influence with the OMB and obtained resources for capabilities identified as critically important by its planning process, but it had to tread carefully. Such initiatives were carefully scrutinized by those responsible for oversight of each department and agency budget. Schloesser’s planning approach was detailed enough to link objectives to actions, and actions to capabilities and to identify capabilities that were not properly resourced, but this took time. The NIP produced in June 2006 only “briefly influenced” the 2008 budget. The first complete reflection of NIP priorities in departmental budgets did not appear until fiscal year 2009.⁴²³ Even then, the SIST was careful to enhance rather than undermine department and agency budgets. It was uncomfortable to be “...tip toeing in the agency and department’s budget backyard,”⁴²⁴ since anything that threatened an organization’s budget received immediate attention and quick escalation if not solved satisfactorily.

The lack of independent authority and resources was a particular problem for dynamic planning or dealing with emergent threats. Even when the threat seemed clear to DSOP, it had no authority

to direct quick action by other organizations. From the affected organization's point of view, it had resource limits that hindered compliance even if it were inclined to be helpful. For example, under Kearney's leadership, DSOP developed a plan to counter an impending threat. Agencies such as the Transportation Security Administration resisted pursuing the required activities, noting, "We didn't budget to bring on extra [personnel] to check for x, y, or z."⁴²⁵ And agencies are not always willing to take on an activity even when they are provided resources for doing so. As more than one SIST member noted, departments and agencies sometimes disagree with a course of action regardless of its resource implications: "Even when something is in the NIP or National Counterterrorism Strategy you still can't make the department and agencies follow through. It is not just a resourcing issue."⁴²⁶

The SIST did not even have a budget to facilitate its own activities. There was early discussion about the desirability of conducting studies and exercises, but there were no funds for doing so unless SIST members could find some in their parent organizations' budgets.⁴²⁷ The SIST did, however, have good access to information and facilities, which were important resources given the SIST mission. In the post-9/11 environment, when information sharing among the departments and agencies was emphasized, the SIST had the necessary information. The representatives "never pulled any punches," and told each other the things they could tell without deliberate shading. The SIST representatives would also "open doors" for each other in order to gain information.⁴²⁸ As for SIST facilities and logistical support, they improved over time as DSOP moved out of the cramped conference rooms it initially inhabited and into its own building.⁴²⁹ Eventually, Schloesser succeeded in getting senior representatives for the SIST as well.

Another form of empowerment experienced on small, cross-functional organizations like the SIST is psychological and comes from a growing confidence that the team is on the right track and making progress. Although NCTC was an unpopular organization at the time, most members of the SIST under Schloesser's leadership remember feeling a

great deal of psychological empowerment. Partially, the motivation and sense of accomplishment came from being involved in a counterterrorism organization in the post-9/11 environment. Plus, under Schloesser there was "freedom of action to identify problem sets and push them up."⁴³⁰ One member recalls that "sometimes we'd brief something on Wednesday and the president would get it on Friday."⁴³¹ The sense that the SIST's work mattered and could go all the way to the top of the government motivated members early on. The fact the NIP was mandated by the President and Schloesser trusted the SIST to produce it was also highly motivational. Even representatives from organizations that were notably skeptical about the value of the SIST worked incredibly hard on developing the NIP and felt good about putting their counterterrorism experience to work in that way.⁴³²

A common and recurring cause of small team failure is lack of support from the broader organization (or in this case, the national security system). It is difficult for teams to operate successfully in an organizational environment that undermines the autonomy of the team process and does not reward experience on the team.⁴³³ When teams are formed, typically they are given a sense of their roles within the larger organization and understand both the formal relationship and informal coordination requirements. If not, they must soon explore and establish those relationships. In some large organizations, teams are viewed as experiments and largely left alone to see if they can fend for themselves. Typically, this is not a formula for success. In others, they are housed in a standing functional bureaucracy that will provide minimum forms of support: a place to meet, basic operating funds, some administrative support, etc. Then again, some organizations make a conscious decision to be team-oriented (so-called "team based organizations"), and they provide extensive support as a matter of policy and design.

The Senior Interagency Strategy Team was not a typical interagency small group. Most interagency teams are placed within a "lead" department or agency where they receive minimal support but are largely ignored and left to fend for themselves. Some are often subject to overbearing attempts by the lead

department to control team output. The SIST was different in that it was created at the same time as its parent organization, DSOP, and there was no model for either DSOP or the SIST to follow. Moreover, those savvy in Washington politics understood that even though the organization was codified in law, it was not going to be immediately effective or even a permanent feature.⁴³⁴ Instead, both the SIST and DSOP had to develop relationships and forge coordinating mechanisms to carve out a role in the national security system.

The most important organizational relationship the SIST has is with DSOP. Since the same person leads DSOP and chairs the SIST, the relationship between the two is largely “a creature of the chair” and controlled by that individual.⁴³⁵ Schloesser valued the SIST as a “consensus building organization,” since he knew he did not have the authority to tell the agencies and departments what to do. He also believed it could “become a very powerful change agent.”⁴³⁶ Schloesser met with the group formally at least once a week for one to two hours, but informally he met with them constantly.⁴³⁷ “Schloesser clearly had the best relationship with the [SIST] team”⁴³⁸ in part because he valued it and in part because the first NIP was a SIST-controlled activity. After Schloesser, no other leader would have as close a relationship with the SIST, in part because the value of its consensus output—the NIP—was deemed low, and in part because DSOP middle-managers came to resent SIST interventions in their work.

In the beginning, the SIST had “full authority” to go to any part of DSOP.⁴³⁹ Under Schloesser, the SIST met weekly with the DSOP staff, which had mixed feelings about the SIST. They disliked briefing the group, often because their plans would be pulled apart⁴⁴⁰ and from their point of view, often for bureaucratic rather than substantive reasons.⁴⁴¹ On the other hand, early on when DSOP staff members were inexperienced, they would ask SIST members for planning advice and for assistance getting the right people from the agencies and departments into DSOP planning meetings. As the DSOP developed its own permanent staff and own communities of interest, the relationship between DSOP staff and the SIST deteriorated.

The SIST relationship with the rest of the NCTC was less prominent, but also problematic. Some members of the SIST were agency or department senior representative to NCTC and therefore responsible to the director for any issues or challenges.⁴⁴² Often this meant that a SIST member was saddled with trying to get personnel moved from his or her department or agency to either the intelligence or planning staff at NCTC.⁴⁴³ Early on, this led to some confusion over how NCTC’s rotational personnel were managed. Some SIST members thought it was their responsibility to manage their parent organization’s personnel at NCTC, while others thought the rotational personnel worked for NCTC and left them alone.⁴⁴⁴ In addition, the relationship between the Directorate of Intelligence and the Directorate of Strategic Operational Planning became “acrimonious”⁴⁴⁵ over disputes about the adequacy of intelligence support to planning. Strategic operational planning arguably is one third of NCTC’s mission (the other parts being intelligence analysis and information sharing) but accounts for only 10 percent of its personnel.⁴⁴⁶ DSOP thought the Directorate of Intelligence should assist its planning by conducting Red Team assessments, but its leaders disagreed.⁴⁴⁷

The most important SIST relationships were with superiors in home departments and agencies. SIST members informally received guidance from their parent organizations or intuitively adopted their organizations’ attitudes. In either case, SIST representatives had to discover and represent the prevailing opinions in parent agencies, which was not always easy given the diverse views within departments and agencies. For example, within State, the Counselor to the Secretary, Philip Zelikow, who “had been deeply involved in establishing the NCTC and [was] invested in making it work,” was “a prime supporter of the SIST.” On the other hand, the new Coordinator for Counterterrorism in State, Ambassador Hank Crumpton, newly arrived from the CIA where he ran the organization’s National Resources Division, “thought NCTC, and DSOP and the NIP-WOT in particular, were unnecessary.”⁴⁴⁸ State’s leadership was supportive⁴⁴⁹ but initially ambivalent about developing strategic plans.⁴⁵⁰ At the lower levels

there was a balance between offices that would and would not help,⁴⁵¹ with some flatly stating “all we do is counterterrorism; we don’t need DSOP.”⁴⁵² Yet, as one State representative said, “The Department nevertheless was united in its expectation that its SIST member would prevent any other agency from encroaching on State prerogatives, regardless.”⁴⁵³

As for the CIA, it did not see a need for a strategic framework,⁴⁵⁴ and it wanted to make sure the SIST “didn’t get outside of the lane of what the DSOP is supposed to do.”⁴⁵⁵ Moreover, the agency was extremely defensive once it lost the battle over the Director of National Intelligence and hypersensitive about other agencies meddling in its operations.⁴⁵⁶ In fact, there was a perception that the CIA representatives were given instructions to intentionally block progress.⁴⁵⁷ DHS was concerned that its authorities and responsibilities for domestic security would be encroached upon if the NCTC was dominated by mature organizations, such as DoD and the CIA, and it needed a place to engage the interagency to establish its role in homeland security. Since DHS had to coordinate the 22 different departments and agencies under its new leadership, it wanted to use the SIST to ensure its prerogatives and resources were safeguarded.⁴⁵⁸ Treasury’s leadership was supportive. The DoD was perceived as quite supportive given the agenda was one it had long promoted, but it was also intent on trying to take over the process as its representatives argued for DSOP to emulate Pentagon practices.⁴⁵⁹

The methods SIST members used to “deliver their department” and reach agreement on various positions were quite different. DoD representatives, trying to manage a large bureaucracy, set up weekly meetings to air issues and test the water on attitudes. The representatives would feed information to the assembly and in return they would get the Pentagon’s position. DoD generally supported the SIST as a vehicle for identifying interagency issues and solving simple problems quickly.⁴⁶⁰ The State representative, on the other hand, would constantly travel back and forth between DSOP and the State Department Counterterrorism office to stay plugged in. The entry point at State was often the Counselor, who would sometimes use his personal weight to get decisions made.⁴⁶¹ The CIA member would go

back to the agency when necessary, but the CIA was “actually fighting the war and they didn’t want to deal with strategic planning and processes,” which was “why they sent a representative.”⁴⁶² Once CIA lost the lead for intelligence issues to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, it largely remained aloof from the SIST.

Relations with other agencies were even more problematic. They did not send the “right people,” and they provided no method to get information out of the agency or department. DHS was a major challenge in this regard, and it became apparent that the department had a tremendous challenge trying to speak for the 22 different organizations underneath it.⁴⁶³ It was also important for SIST members to cultivate close ties to their department’s representative on the NSC’s CSG, but often the two individuals were not in synch.⁴⁶⁴ Over time department and agency support for the SIST declined further. Many pulled their full-time representatives. The Joint Staff, which early on had insisted on having its own representative, pulled its person back and allowed the representative from the Office of the Secretary of Defense to represent the entire Department. Later the Joint Staff decided to send a representative, but not full-time or from the special operations or counterterrorism community.⁴⁶⁵

The SIST might have obtained more support and stature if it had been able to cultivate a close relationship with the CSG or NSC staff leader on counterterrorism, but those relationships were largely managed by the deputy director of DSOP. After the Deputies tried to set the SIST up for success by ensuring it had “the right people,” it largely left the nascent organization alone. From the NSC’s point of view, it was “never quite clear the role it [the SIST] was playing and where it fit into the decision process.”⁴⁶⁶ Zarate did interact with the SIST on occasion,⁴⁶⁷ but the SIST had to rely on Schloesser to interface with the NSC.⁴⁶⁸ In this respect, the SIST’s relationship with the NSC could not be better than DSOP’s. Later, as DSOP matured and leadership at the NSC changed, the relationship between DSOP and the NSC staff was more contentious. DSOP thought its role was to “challenge the assumptions” made by policymakers because “if your assumptions are wrong, the policy

and planning will fail.”⁴⁶⁹ Such interventions often prompted a “who are you at NCTC to comment on national policy?” remark from NSC staff members. When DSOP interventions stopped receiving any response from the NSC staff, frustration mounted. Either the DSOP planning proposals were not good enough,⁴⁷⁰ or the NSC staff was too busy or disinclined to pay them any attention. Either way, the news was bad for DSOP. DSOP could not abandon the relationship because “...otherwise we continue to build plans and strategies that no one will use.”⁴⁷¹

TEAM-LEVEL VARIABLES

In contrast to organizational-level variables, team-level performance variables are typically controlled by the team. Variables such as team *structure, decision making, culture, and learning* can have a major impact on how the team operates, and they are often the most salient team characteristics to the casual observer because they regulate day-to-day team operations.

Team structure refers to the “mechanics” of teams—design, collocation, and networks—that affect productivity. Research shows that effective teams are designed to tackle specific tasks, are small (typically fewer than 10 people and no more than 20), collocated, and have a strong internal and external communications network. In the case of the SIST, the team’s central task—producing a comprehensive national counterterrorism plan—affected and reinforced other structural attributes such as size, collocation, and tenure. Even before NIP attributes were clear SIST members were expected to be collocated and serving full-time.⁴⁷² Once it became clear that the NIP would involve detailed lists of specified and implied tasks assigned to lead and supporting organizations, SIST leadership believed having collocated, full-time, senior membership was all the more important.

The decision to follow the Defense-planning model reinforced the need for full-time, collocated SIST members. The NCTC facilitated this objective by providing administrative and contract support, as well as office space, which the full-time members shared. Members felt that “proximity was important because it let us work out issues very

easily.”⁴⁷³ Proximity also was important because the group was working in a classified environment on classified computer systems, which some agencies and departments did not have access to in their home buildings.⁴⁷⁴

The scope and detail of the NIP task generated lots of work and drove the pace of SIST meetings. At its peak, the SIST would meet formally three times a week, either with Schloesser or his deputy.⁴⁷⁵ During this period, meeting attendance was high and even part-time SIST members would often come over early before a meeting or stay late to have off-line discussions.⁴⁷⁶ The complexity of the NIP task also expanded part-time membership. Departments and agencies not usually associated with counterterrorism, such as the Departments of Education and Commerce, had responsibilities in the NIP and had to be present to represent their organizations.⁴⁷⁷ Depending on the topic, the SIST could increase from its core six members to as many as seventeen agency and department representatives.⁴⁷⁸ The SIST grew from six members in early 2005 (State, Defense, FBI, CIA, Treasury, and DHS)⁴⁷⁹ to include Justice and Energy, plus temporary representatives from other organizations depending on the portion of the plan being discussed.

Despite the need for senior, collocated, full-time SIST membership, this ideal was never fully realized. Even the temporary transition team that was a precursor to the SIST was bifurcated. There were full-time members from organizations that viewed the SIST as important, and part-time members from organizations that viewed the SIST with more skepticism. During the work on the first NIP, these two substructures narrowed as most core organizations provided full-time support, and those that did not still came to the frequent meetings and invested substantial effort. Following Schloesser’s departure and the rejection of the NIP, the differences between the full-time and part-time representatives grew. Some SIST members came to the conclusion that there was not enough work to justify full-time membership and tried to get back to their departments and agencies.⁴⁸⁰ Full-time supporters resisted this trend, arguing “you’ve got to be there...if we are there and have the right

experience...then we can make it work better.”⁴⁸¹ A fissure developed between the two groups that persisted and grew, so that when this research was conducted the few remaining full-time members were noticeably more supportive of the SIST than the part-time representatives, who treat it as a collateral duty and frequently said bluntly that the group should be disbanded.

During the production of the NIP, the SIST’s approach to its task of strategic operational planning almost rose to the level of a “shared mental model.” It was the DoD’s preferred planning model, but it was a model with well-known attributes that could be communicated and taught. Yet this model collapsed for lack of support, and the SIST never regained a consensus on its approach to solving planning problems. After that, the SIST struggled to provide value and ended up taking an eclectic, opportunistic approach. The SIST looked over DSOP’s shoulder as it shifted from “long-term” toward “short-term” planning interests, dabbled in net assessments, and did ad hoc problem solving that often involved two or three members of the SIST working outside the context of formal SIST meetings.

Another important aspect of team structure is the team relationships with outside groups. A high performing team often succeeds at “boundary spanning,” or forging productive relationships with diverse outside groups that can help it accomplish its mission. In the case of the SIST, with so many organizational performance variables working against it, members and leaders had to work hard at liaison activity from the beginning just to keep the organization alive and relevant. Most of the SIST members already had effective networks within their own agencies, and Schloesser worked with Department and Deputy Secretaries to ensure they had access to higher levels as well. These relationships facilitated efforts to faithfully represent parent organizations’ views, and initially they provided value to DSOP. As DSOP became better established, however, the relationships with parent organizations were viewed as less important and sometimes even as impediments to progress.

Decision-making processes are employed to make sense of and solve a variety of complex problems faced by the team. Experts on team

decision making emphasize the importance of diverse viewpoints (i.e., heterogeneous worldviews), well-managed team conflict, and improvisational and tenacious decision implementation.⁴⁸² When properly managed, conflict between heterogeneous worldviews can produce better and more informed decision making and help to avoid “groupthink.” Eventually, conflict must be reduced to ensure effective action is taken. The challenge in team decision making is allowing disagreement to improve decisions, but not so much that the team is unable to implement them.

In the case of the Senior Interagency Strategy Team, the key decisions to be made revolved around one momentous issue—how best to integrate the elements of national power to defeat terrorism or at least prevent another catastrophic terror attack on the country. To make such decisions, the SIST needed to be informed and able to reconcile competing views on strategy and planning. It had to know the White House’s key policy objectives and parameters, what agencies and departments were currently doing to combat terrorism, and what capabilities the U.S. government needed to execute alternative strategic courses of action. It also needed to decide who would develop those capabilities and who would employ them. SIST decision making never met all of these requirements.

In general, the substantive scope and quality of SIST decision making constricted over time—from strategic to tactical issues and from problem identification to information sharing. Why becomes clear when we examine the origins of competing SIST viewpoints, the way they were reconciled to produce decisions, and how those decisions were implemented. The SIST naturally benefited from heterogeneous worldviews based on diverse agency and department mandates, cultures, and positions. As one SIST member wryly noted, “Few plans survive contact with the enemy, or friends either for that matter.”⁴⁸³ The fact that the different departments and agencies approached problems differently and had different legal authorities for doing so could actually be a source of strength if the competing views could be reconciled. It also could be a source of persistent tension and conflict. The DoD and CIA have a long-standing history of

cooperation and competition over their respective overseas combating terrorism roles, just as the DHS and Justice are now juggling their division of labor for combating terrorism within U.S. borders. On the SIST, departments and agencies were willing to share information about their perspectives, authorities, and activities, but could not cede control over those activities that are typically codified and constrained by law. So while pursuing areas of potential conflict and cooperation, the general attitude was “show your wares but don’t give up the goods.”

Thus, the key requirement for productive SIST decision making was resolving conflict productively. This was hard because the way the SIST resolved conflict was by consensus. Consensus decision making was complicated by tight timelines and lack of incentives for compromise. The SIST struggled to meet tight deadlines, which could be extended or truncated by political considerations, a special authority about to terminate, the budget process, or a research and development cycle.⁴⁸⁴ The larger impediment to consensus decision making was the reality that no one had any particular interest in making concessions. It was “collaboration with the intent to strong arm,”⁴⁸⁵ but there was no authority and little leverage for anyone to strong arm the others. If an organization had the clear lead for an issue area it could simply let it be known that it would not cooperate with a different way of doing business.

To resolve conflict, the SIST had to work toward consensus gingerly. When differences of opinion led to organizations entrenching in their positions,⁴⁸⁶ the first course of action was to determine if there was any “wiggle room” in the department’s or agency’s position. If so, the member would take the issue back to the department or agency to see if it would budge in the interest of compromise. There was a fair amount of accommodation on small issues during the development of the NIP. Members would also work outside of SIST meetings to build coalitions.⁴⁸⁷ Indeed, “most of the effective work happened outside of the SIST meetings...either by calling or visiting or talking after hours.”⁴⁸⁸

If issues were really contentious they were taken out of the SIST altogether and left to more senior decision makers.⁴⁸⁹ The SIST simply did

not have the decision-making authority to resolve a contentious issue. Its members had to faithfully represent parent organization positions. The only way to resolve tough issues was to elevate them. First, Schloesser would try to work them out with the relevant departments and agencies. If that did not work, the issue was elevated to the Deputies or Principals for a decision.⁴⁹⁰ This was tedious and could be a political liability. Frequently passing along issues for resolution irritated senior leaders.

The advantage of laborious and time-consuming consensus decision making should have been quick decision implementation. In other words, one would expect that if departments and agencies acceded to inclusion of an objective or a task in the NIP, they would execute it. Not so. Even with a Presidential signature and the OMB assisting with obtaining resources for the department and agencies, “it didn’t mean that it [the agency or department] would follow through.”⁴⁹¹ Nor could DSOP or the SIST coerce or shame the departments and agencies into executing their “assigned” responsibilities even though the document was signed by the President. The idea was that departments and agencies would be bound to the NIP through the development of their implementation plans, but most abandoned the implementation plans when they became too onerous. In the end, DSOP was not able to force implementation of decisions made during the planning process.⁴⁹²

Organizational culture is typically described as shared values, norms, and beliefs. On teams, strong shared values, norms, and beliefs typically translate into higher levels of cohesion and trust among team members, which in turn contributes to greater team commitment and higher team performance.⁴⁹³ In the case of the SIST, individual members brought their department or agency cultural norms to the team. Everything the SIST did—presentations, meetings, memos, and data collection—was examined through the lenses of different organizational cultures.⁴⁹⁴

The SIST was able to overcome the disparate organizational cultures and forge a sense of cohesion and trust among its members during the Schloesser period when the team was working on the NIP. The stronger sense of purpose, reinforced by the Presidential directive to produce the NIP

and Schloesser's sustained attention to the group helped greatly. The members of the SIST were senior personnel who were expected to complete their tasks.⁴⁹⁵ Cohesion increased as members delivered on their promises to do something. SIST cohesion also increased once the members were collocated, began to spend more time together, and interacted as 'human beings outside of the formal meetings.'⁴⁹⁶ Some had worked together previously in counterterrorism circles, and this also helped.⁴⁹⁷ Information sharing reduced suspicion and bridged organizational cultures.⁴⁹⁸ For example, once the CIA representative showed a willingness to be candid about CIA operations, the team as a whole became more transparent and sharing.⁴⁹⁹ The team also participated in some common social activities; for example, attending a sports event in order to get to know each other better.⁵⁰⁰ Eventually, the full-time SIST members working on the NIP developed a team rapport. One team member called the others "SISTers" and bought them pins and tee-shirts with the Greek sorority letters signifying "SIST," which she joked "was the world's most exclusive and expensive sorority."⁵⁰¹

Over time this strong sense of trust and team cohesion deteriorated for multiple reasons. The one norm that was understood by the entire team was that each SIST member represented and protected his or her department or agency.⁵⁰² Thus, team trust was based, in part, on the agreement that members of the team would "do no harm" to each other's organizational interests.⁵⁰³ In the short term, this facilitated the cooperative atmosphere, opened communication, and increased commitment to find compromises that did not come at the expense of anyone's organizational equities. Over time, however, this undermined the value of the group and its products in the eyes of external audiences. Eventually the group was left without a common task to cohere around. With no widely accepted task to perform, departments and agencies reevaluated their level of commitment to the group. The level of cohesion significantly dropped once parent organizations began to replace their representatives with part-timers, which hindered, then retarded, and ultimately reversed the growing trust on the team.⁵⁰⁴ New members without the NIP experience

"had no institutional interest in making this group successful because it provided no value." Some who saw the team as "worthless" recommended that it be disbanded.⁵⁰⁵

Team learning is an ongoing process of reflection and action, through which teams acquire, share, combine, and apply knowledge.⁵⁰⁶ When newly acquired knowledge is translated into lessons and practice, it can improve both task performance and the quality of intra-team relations. The Senior Interagency Strategy Team needed a learning process to level the playing field. High-performing teams exploit their team experience, learn from it, and alter their behavior. They also experiment with different approaches to see what works best. Eventually, they may get to the point where they can invest in knowledge for its own sake, exploring high-risk learning opportunities in hopes of longer-term payoffs.

Perhaps the most notable example of SIST learning was the effort to help the team absorb the DoD approach to planning. There was no model for "strategic operational planning" per se, so the SIST either had to import or create a planning model. Once NCTC leadership decided that DSOP would import the Defense approach to planning, the team had to learn what this meant. Only "20 percent of the members knew what a plan was and how it addressed a strategy," as the DoD defined such things. Schloesser brought in planners he trusted to exchange knowledge and teach the senior group.⁵⁰⁷ Some members of the SIST also desired more formal training or education for the SIST. They advocated a Capstone-type course focused on counterterrorism (i.e., a short course designed to bring newly-minted flag officers up to speed on strategic issues).⁵⁰⁸ This never happened.

A more mundane, but important aspect of team learning was getting everyone up to speed on each organization's capabilities, limitations, and operating issues.⁵⁰⁹ Some members saw the SIST as "an interagency tool to tell their departments' story" and showcase their capabilities."⁵¹⁰ There is also ample evidence that the group boosted individual member expertise on counterterrorism. For one thing, some SIST members, and to an even greater extent DSOP personnel, were tapped

by NSC leadership to serve as counterterrorism experts on the NSC staff.⁵¹¹ Yet the value of this type of information sharing naturally declined over time. New members were more likely to see the group as just an “information exchange body” and to think “it was rare that we learned anything new.” Newer members were less likely to think the SIST “provided the group information that they couldn’t get elsewhere.”⁵¹²

Finally, the SIST should also be credited with some experimentation as its leaders and members struggled to find a viable role for the team. The group explored red-teaming, dynamic planning, and assessment efforts. It never came up with a defining role for itself after the demise of the NIP, but it was not for lack of trying. Not everyone thinks this persistence was a laudable example of experimental learning, however. One SIST member notably skeptical about the group’s relevance argued the SIST “did no learning,” and that the group “became less relevant as it tried to assert itself even more, which only made them more annoying.”⁵¹³

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL VARIABLES

Small groups are made up of individual members whose backgrounds, talents, and skills can impinge upon or facilitate group performance. Organizations need their teams to perform well irrespective of particular members, and they often recruit, train, and reward personnel so that they can perform at satisfactory levels in all circumstances. Nonetheless, the nature of the task and other circumstances sometimes make small groups critically dependent upon member capabilities for high performance. Schloesser believed this was true in the case of the Senior Interagency Strategy Team. He sought “good people” with the right expertise and worked to keep them as full-time members. In the three variables considered below—*team composition*, *rewards*, and *leadership*—we examine the extent to which the SIST performance was affected by individual member attributes.

Team composition refers to the characteristics of individuals chosen for the team, which can be a function of intentional team design or happenstance. Often cross-functional teams are constructed to ensure diversity, including specific competencies.

Over time, the team can impart personality characteristics to its individual members that enhance individual skill sets and their integration. In the case of the Senior Interagency Strategy Team, the composition of the group was deemed important enough to be discussed and decided upon by the NSC Deputies Committee. Getting the right people was seen as a “key to success” by the transition team, SIST leaders, and later by some departments and agencies.⁵¹⁴ Initially though, the departments and agencies ignored the requirement approved by the Deputies Committee to provide senior-level, full-time, knowledgeable, counterterrorism professionals who could speak for their departments or agencies.⁵¹⁵ But during Schloesser’s tenure the number, rank, and availability of SIST members for duty increased.

After arriving at DSOP, Schloesser concluded he needed more senior members for the SIST. Some departments and agencies ignored the Deputies Committee decision to provide senior members to work on the SIST full-time. Schloesser and Redd did not appeal to the President for enforcement; instead, they appealed directly to the departments’ and agencies’ senior leaders. They also compromised. Schloesser considered rank more important than full-time collocation. He believed it was important to get someone with sufficient rank to speak for his or her organization, and he was willing to accept senior executives even if they could not be present and devoted to the SIST full-time.⁵¹⁶ Despite frank conversations among DSOP leaders about the quality of SIST representatives, they were careful about pushing too hard to have anyone replaced. They did not want to prompt the departments and agencies to pull back their representatives permanently.⁵¹⁷ As became evident later, this was a realistic concern.

DSOP leaders had a different definition of quality personnel than did the departments and agencies. The SIST needed individuals who fully understood their organizations’ counterterrorism capabilities, could quickly resolve issues at the highest levels of their organization, and make commitments. Anything less slowed or even blocked the work of the SIST on the NIP.⁵¹⁸ From the agency’s or department’s perspective, the definition of quality

Core NCTC/DSOP/SIST Members' Tenures

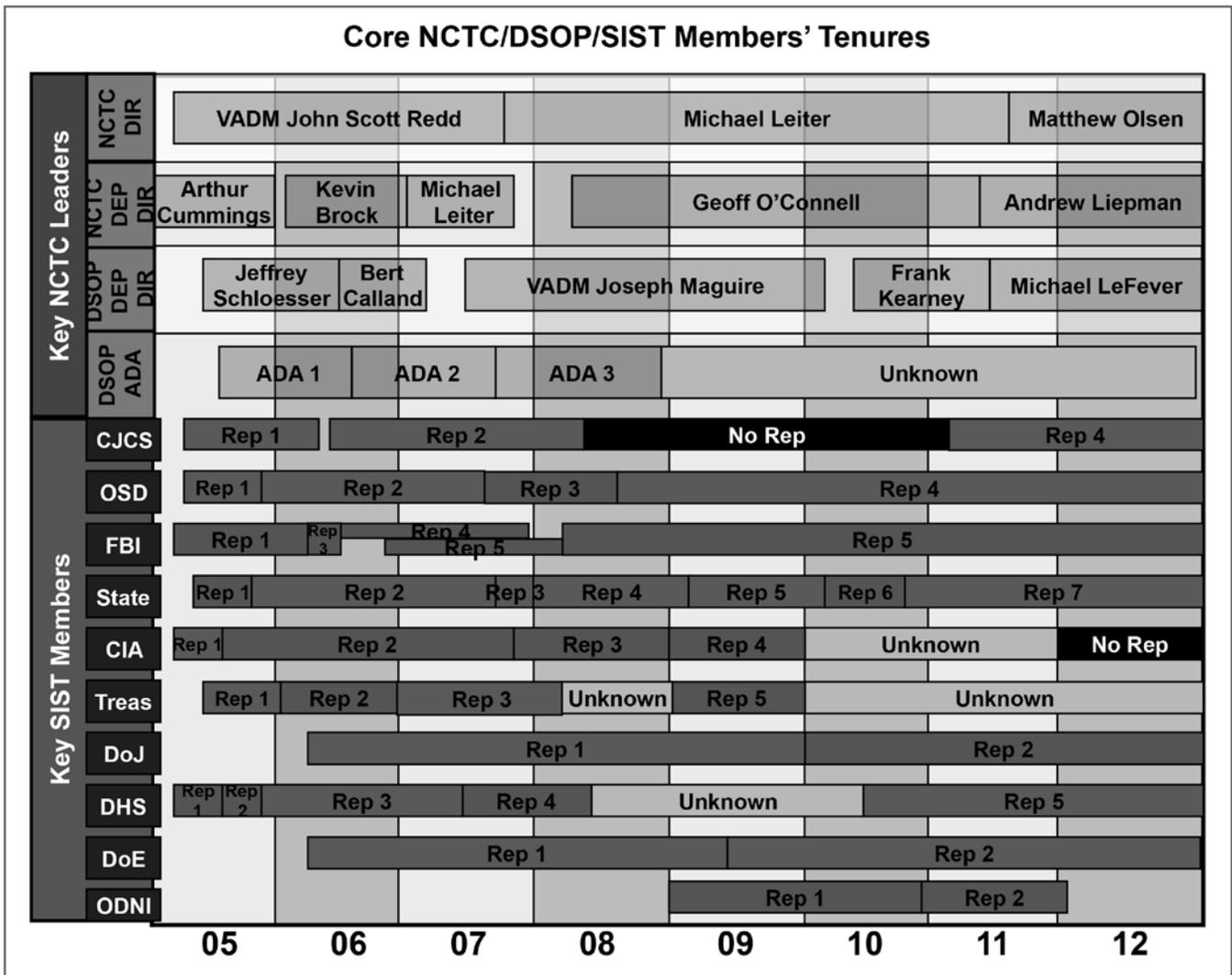


Figure 7: Member Tenure

personnel varied with the organization’s general intent. If the organization wanted to keep tabs on the NCTC, it only needed to send a “note taker.” If the organization wanted to share information, it needed to send a knowledgeable individual who had the information or knew how to get it quickly. If they intended to engage and protect their organizational equities at the same time, it paid to send a senior representative, but not necessarily full-time.

Departments and agencies sent people who fit all these descriptions over time. It depended on lobbying by NCTC leaders, the importance organizations attached to the work of the SIST, and their estimate of how their equities might be affected. For the purpose of seeing the first NIP to completion, all but one organization agreed to send a senior representative, but some not on a

full-time basis. This core group was committed to the NIP and largely stayed together until the end of 2007, although a few swapped out toward the end of 2006. By 2008, the group was unraveling and remaining full-time members had to “introduce themselves to new members constantly.” “The new members had no idea what they were participating in”⁵¹⁹ and needed a lot of help getting up to speed. The seniority of SIST members also declined, and their knowledge of counterterrorism was more varied. In some cases, departments and agencies would send personnel who were experienced but had little knowledge of counterterrorism and were near retirement.⁵²⁰ Over time and as the perceived value of the SIST’s work declined, organizations reduced their representation to part-time and some pulled them back completely (see Figure 7).

Another unresolved, recurring composition issue was the type of expertise the SIST needed. Like many interagency groups, the SIST's membership was a mix of generalists and functional specialists, policymakers, and program experts. Most were chosen because they held the appropriate clearances, were the appropriate rank, or had counterterrorism expertise; whether they had a policy, operational, or program background was deemed to be of lesser import. Ideally, an individual would have a combination of these attributes, but in reality, the SIST had to settle for less than the ideal. Initially, the degree of counterterrorism expertise among the SIST members varied dramatically,⁵²¹ but as the agencies and departments saw that DSOP was going to build detailed plans, they agreed to send more senior and experienced people, some of whom had planning skills.⁵²² The core group that developed by mid-2006 was made up of a Navy SEAL, a CIA operator, a former Army Special Forces officer, an FBI special agent, a State Department coordinator for counterterrorism, a senior prosecutor who had previously headed the Department of Justice's counterterrorism component, a Coast Guard Reserve Captain, a Weapons of Mass Destruction counterterrorism expert, and a terrorism financing lawyer from Treasury. This group represented a wealth of counterterrorism knowledge and possessed a wide variety of policy, planning, and programming experience. The team also represented a mix of practical field experience and Washington policy and political savvy. SIST leaders considered this mix of "different expertise"⁵²³ a healthy one in light of the widely-held view that "we can't kill our way out of a war with terrorists."⁵²⁴ By 2009, the group had changed, and while most people had some sort of counterterrorism knowledge, it would be a stretch to say the team was any longer composed of counterterrorism experts.⁵²⁵

Rewards are often used to attract, motivate, and retain members on teams. In the case of the SIST, rewards played almost no role in attracting members. One early member thought "that this might be a good thing for promotion,"⁵²⁶ but otherwise the many SIST members we interviewed believed that working on the SIST would do little or nothing to advance a career.⁵²⁷ The record indicates

they were partially right. Three of the original eight members of the SIST who worked on the NIP did receive significant promotions following their SIST experience, and Schloesser, moved on to the coveted command position of the 101st Airborne Division. Considering the three cases suggests their advancement most likely reflected the original willingness of their parent organizations to send their best, up-and-coming leaders to the SIST more than the judgment that their performance on the SIST merited advancement.

There were few "active incentives" to encourage performance while members served on the SIST. In government, these types of incentives—particularly monetary awards—are not a prominent feature, and those that exist are generally controlled by the parent departments and agencies. The DSOP leader could encourage hard work with his sustained attention to the SIST and with verbal support, and did so. DSOP received a Unit Citation Award after the NIP was completed, but almost none of the SIST members remember it. However, SIST members did receive "affective rewards," or the good feelings associated with a sense of mission and accomplishment. Being part of a team engaged in an important undertaking was energizing, and morale was high during the hard, year-long production of the first NIP. Members felt they were making a contribution to protecting the U.S. from terrorists, which was satisfying.⁵²⁸ Even people informally associated with the SIST's work at this time were caught up in the effort and developed a deep commitment to its success. For example, the person from the OMB who helped the SIST with resource issues was so taken with the collective effort that he wanted to join the NCTC staff permanently. When they completed the NIP, SIST members were elated. It was a major milestone in DSOP's short history and for the nation.⁵²⁹

Traditional, directive leadership is the norm in government, especially among military officers, but most people charged with leading an interagency team understand they do not have the same direct supervisory authority over the members of the team that they would have over subordinates in their home agencies. Consequently they are open to alternative leadership styles. Interagency small group leadership is also challenging because in

most cases, the group's leader is asked to lead the team as a collateral duty. Certainly this was true in the case of the SIST, which was run by the NCTC's deputy director for DSOP. Thus the SIST leader could not give the group his undivided attention. Instead, the SIST leaders had to balance the SIST and its activities with the need to make a success out of DSOP, which also was a new but much larger and more prominent organization. The leadership challenge was even more difficult considering the SIST was made up of senior personnel who came and went. Given the fact that the SIST's formal leader was a part-timer also responsible for running DSOP, and that the SIST members were senior, experienced leaders in their own right, it is not surprising that early on a competition of sorts emerged for informal leadership on the SIST.⁵³⁰ Eventually it became clear that no one member by force of personality, competence, or popularity would be able to direct the others. Instead, each member would exert informal leadership depending on the subject under discussion.⁵³¹

SIST leadership styles varied, but generally were a mix of traditional and coaching leadership.⁵³² Until LeFever took command of DSOP in 2011, all of the DSOP leaders were from the military special operations community. Yet, most had a lot of experience with other departments and agencies, and they knew they would have to practice an alternative to traditional top-down leadership style in order to be successful within the interagency. For example, Schloesser had worked at State and served on two country teams. He understood that despite his position, he was not empowered to force the department and agencies to act, and he adjusted his leadership style accordingly. He treated the SIST members as colleagues, tried not to act overly directive,⁵³³ and instead worked on collaboration.⁵³⁴ Schloesser coached the team through the use of Defense-planning methods and strategy implementation. He also coached the team through conflict resolution and reached out to the departments or agencies with "back channel communication" to build consensus or gain information.⁵³⁵ However, Schloesser did make decisions when he thought it was necessary to move the team forward,⁵³⁶ sometimes without even

consulting the SIST.⁵³⁷ Despite his best efforts to appear non-military, in this predominantly civilian group he was still perceived by some members as directive with a "top-down...direct hands-on approach."⁵³⁸

Later leaders also used a combination of traditional top-down and coaching styles, but their priority commitment to DSOP was more evident. After Schloesser, it was clear that the Deputy Directors were more focused on running DSOP than working with the SIST. Perhaps the watershed event signaling this change in attitude was Maguire's reaction to his first SIST meeting, after which he told the SIST he would never again permit that kind of criticism of DSOP work. In fact, as the Deputy Directors concentrated on running DSOP and became less convinced of the SIST's value, the leadership style shifted to a "shared leadership" approach. Kearney and LeFever both approached the SIST and asked how its members thought it could be used to best effect. They were genuinely open to exploring any alternatives that made sense to the SIST, and shared the decision-making process on the SIST's future with the SIST members.

In summary, SIST leaders used a combination of leadership styles as circumstances seemed to demand. When the SIST's purpose or, at least, its primary tasking seemed clear, the SIST leader used a combination of traditional and coaching leadership styles and successfully led the team to high performance. As the SIST's purpose and activities became less clear, the leadership style became less directive and more shared. Without a well-defined task to focus the attention of the SIST, performance and leadership style were less of an issue. SIST members seemed to understand there was no easy solution to their predicament, at least not one that could be solved by a change in leadership style alone.

All the SIST leaders were talented, accomplished leaders willing to adjust their leadership style to the interagency environment. However, it is true that they made different judgments on the SIST's potential, and those who engaged the group most actively got the most out of the group. Even so, the SIST's productivity declined regardless of leader

involvement after the NIP, and not surprisingly, faster as the group was ignored by the NSC and other counterterrorism leaders and groups. The level of senior leader attention to the SIST, which did vary,

was not the critical factor in SIST's performance. Other performance variables reviewed here limited SIST performance in ways that ultimately made leadership style a moot issue.

Evaluating the SIST and Interagency Strategic Planning

Before evaluating the SIST it is necessary to establish criteria for fairly assessing its performance. The first difficulty in establishing appropriate expectations for the SIST is distinguishing its performance from the performance of DSOP. The two are hard to separate. Indeed, DSOP and the SIST were designed to work together to generate the requisite strategy and planning output. The minimum expectation for the SIST was that it would ensure transparency for DSOP and its activities as well as those of the departments and agencies involved in counterterrorism. Some even argue the SIST was only supposed to play this role until DSOP became better established and its legal authorities were clarified, at which point it would take a lower profile and serve merely as an advisory body to DSOP.⁵³⁹ Thus some argue the SIST should be evaluated by whether it ensured accurate and sufficient information sharing between DSOP and the rest of the departments and agencies represented on the SIST, and by its contribution to helping establish DSOP.

However, the SIST also was supposed to evaluate parent agency plans, ensure their integration with national plans, provide advice and guidance on DSOP plans, and in cooperation with DSOP, develop standard planning guidance and templates for departments and agencies to use. In these ways the SIST was to contribute to the quality of DSOP's strategy and planning efforts. Throughout the past decade, the SIST struggled to make just such contributions, and each succeeding leader of DSOP sought ways to use the SIST in these capacities. To make judgments about the SIST on this broader basis, we must determine the SIST's contribution to DSOP but also render a judgment on the quality of DSOP strategy and planning output.

It would not be appropriate, however, to judge

either SIST or DSOP performance by how well the counterterrorism mission was performed (i.e., how safe the U.S. is from terrorism). NCTC—and by extension, DSOP and the SIST—does not have responsibility for or the authority to conduct the entire counterterrorism mission for the U.S. government. The 9/11 Commission warned against the NCTC making policy or directing operations,⁵⁴⁰ and these limitations were accepted by both the President and Congress.⁵⁴¹ By design, the Center's authority is bound by two very distinct limits. On one side the NSC retains the authority to create counterterrorism policy and provide broad strategic direction, and on the other hand, departments and agencies hold the authority and means to ensure operational execution of counterterrorism plans. NCTC cannot force the departments or agencies to implement plans or take associated actions. DSOP and the SIST had to ensure their strategic operational planning was consistent with the broad policy boundaries established by the NSC but also less detailed and directive than individual department and agency guidance for operations.

Specifying what NCTC was prohibited from doing—policy and operations—helps delimit DSOP's appropriate area of responsibility. This is particularly true if we accept the popular depiction of national security mission responsibilities in an “end-to-end” management process that begins with assessment of the situation, moves to policy, then strategy, planning, implementation of the plan, and finally, evaluation of progress, which begins the cycle anew. All of these phases can be taking place at the same time, but this artificial sequence for how national security missions are managed delimits DSOP's area of responsibility between policy and operational implementation of plans (i.e., somewhere in the strategy and planning realm).

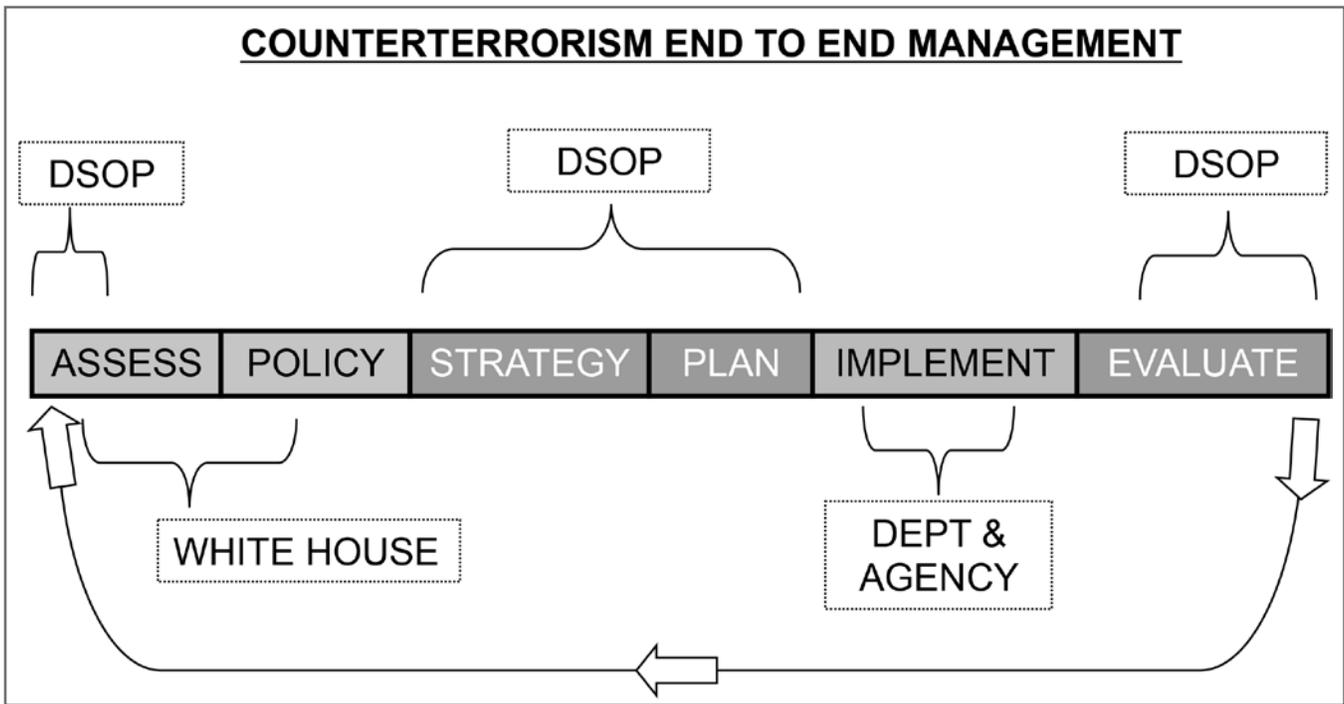


Figure 8: Counterterrorism End-to-End Management

In practice, strategic operational planning was defined as a combination of strategy and plans, with strategy understood to be discrete courses of action that are more specific than public policy positions, and national planning understood to be less detailed than individual agency plans. DSOP and the SIST were also allowed a role in evaluation and assessment, but they were only directly responsible for—at best—the strategy and planning portion of an “end-to-end” depiction of a management process for the counterterrorism mission (see Figure 8).⁵⁴² Thus, for the purposes of this study, the performance of the SIST, broadly construed, must be based on its contribution to DSOP’s strategy and planning output. Accordingly, we need some criteria for evaluating good strategy and good planning.

Organizational theorist Richard Rumelt offers some basic strategy quality criteria. He argues good strategy must have three elements: a diagnosis, a guiding approach, and a set of coherent actions.⁵⁴³ Rumelt calls these three elements “the kernel” of strategy. He also argues that the development of good strategy cannot be static, but instead must be able to react quickly and thoughtfully to new information.⁵⁴⁴ Rumelt notes this flexibility is particularly necessary when the problem being

solved is not static, a condition that certainly applies to terrorism. Using Rumelt’s principles we can establish four basic criteria for evaluating the quality of SIST-facilitated strategic-operational plans. Do they: (1) address the root cause or merely the symptoms of the problem; (2) make a clear, conscious choice for the best solution to the problem; (3) identify logical, feasible, coordinated actions to implement the solution; and (4) provide for an iterative feedback loop that allows adjustments to the solution (see Table 2, pg. 54).

We acknowledge that these tests are minimum criteria for discerning “good” from “bad” strategy, and thus evaluating whether the SIST helped produce good strategic plans. Strategy experts identify many other ingredients that contribute to good strategy. For example, some strategists emphasize the need for anticipation, or the ability to accurately predict the behavior of rivals. Our inability to anticipate the rise of an insurgency after the 2003 invasion in Iraq is an example of poor anticipation. Other strategists tout “dynamics” as another important strategy factor. Strategists evaluate dynamic trends to “exploit a wave of change” from technology, politics, or some other force. These and other factors are important, but not as much as the fundamentals.

Strategy Litmus Test	
Diagnosis	Does the strategy clearly identify a root cause of the problem or challenge to be overcome?
Approach	Does the strategy select the preferred approach, directing and constraining action to overcome the problem based on an advantage or asymmetry?
Action	Does the strategy include prioritized actions that are clear and feasible given scarce resources?
Process	Does the strategy process allow for feedback or new information to be introduced and acted upon?

Table 2: Strategy Test

As Rumelt argues, “a good strategy may consist of more than the kernel, but if the kernel is absent or misshapen, then there is a serious problem.”⁵⁴⁵

The dividing line between strategy and planning is graduated rather than sharp, a question of detail rather than absolute distinctions. Rumelt argues that the level of detail for the actions required to implement a strategy solution is not great. The solution choice “channels action in a certain direction without defining exactly what shall be done,” and it should “define a method of grappling with the situation and rule out a vast array of possible actions.” Adding more anticipatory details to the strategic course of action chosen is generally understood to be “planning.” The level of detailed planning required depends on circumstances. According to Rumelt, strategy encompasses the difficult decisions about priority and sequence of actions for strategy implementation: “It is the hard craft of strategy to decide which priority shall take precedence. Only then can action be taken.”⁵⁴⁶

Thus we consider broadly defined actions and their prioritization and sequencing to be strategy choices, and identification of more detailed means to implement those actions to be planning. To determine the quality of the DSOP/SIST planning, we borrowed criteria from the Joint Staff to evaluate planning in the DoD.⁵⁴⁷ These basic criteria can also be expressed as four questions: (1) Are the plans consistent with national level policy and strategy for counterterrorism? (2) Are the plans adequate in scope and content to satisfy all taskings and

accomplish the mission? (3) Are the plans feasible based on resources available within the timeframe contemplated by the plan? (4) Is the risk acceptable based on anticipated losses in political capital, personnel, resources and time to accomplish objectives?

If DSOP’s written strategy and plans (“strategic operational planning”) or informal contributions to strategy and plans meet these basic criteria for good strategy and planning, and if the SIST played a productive role in helping DSOP create the valued output, we believe it would be appropriate to conclude that the SIST performed well and did all that reasonably could be expected given the injunctions against NCTC involvement in policy or operations. With these criteria for evaluating SIST performance established, we now can offer a net assessment for SIST performance.

Performance Assessment

By all accounts the Senior Interagency Strategy Team was at its height of performance when working on the first NIP during Schloesser's tenure. The team had good participation, developed a mode of operation, conducted detailed planning, and met its mandate to maintain transparency between DSOP and the agencies and departments. With the SIST's assistance, oversight, and mentorship, DSOP stood up and produced four action plans and the NIP by the end of 2006. The SIST members made essential contributions to developing, drafting, and staffing these plans. Even though the SIST was envisioned as an advisory rather than a production body,⁵⁴⁸ given the level of planning expertise in DSOP at the time, it would not have been possible to produce anything approximating the quality and level of detail in these plans without the SIST's contributions.

The NIP provided leaders at all levels with a complete picture of the counterterrorism effort, something not previously available.⁵⁴⁹ The planning process itself helped educate officials across the government, providing "ah-ha" moments like discovering what the Department of Treasury and the Department of Education were doing about terrorism.⁵⁵⁰ The NIP identified—even if it did not resolve—capability gaps⁵⁵¹ and emphasized programs that were not receiving enough attention.⁵⁵² It drew attention to methods to counter violent extremism and ways to keep weapons of mass destruction away from terrorist organizations by integrating counter proliferation and counterterrorism efforts.⁵⁵³

The NIP also kept the departments and agencies involved with the mission and achieved some practical progress on interagency cooperation. The SIST prevented some bad ideas from going forward. In fact, one participant argued that, "the primary value of the SIST was often just restraining the occasionally overly enthusiastic and frenetic activity of the gifted, energetic, and tireless DSOP staff."⁵⁵⁴ The SIST also promoted interagency cooperation, solving some nagging problems informally or by developing Memorandums of Understanding between the affected departments and agencies. NIP planning led to the government's first effort to conduct

cross-functional counterterrorism budgeting. The NIP and its associated implementation plans allowed the SIST and DSOP to influence cross-agency counterterrorism budget decisions. This effort affected the OMB's resourcing decisions for counterterrorism programs in fiscal year 2009.⁵⁵⁵

It is almost axiomatic that "planning is most valuable for what is learned through the process, not for the plans themselves which must change when applied to an actual situation."⁵⁵⁶ Planning reveals otherwise obscure but important issues and develops trust networks among involved participants who struggle to resolve issues. These networks and knowledge bases are the most important output from planning. They pay off later when problems arise or when planners must make a change in course quickly. We argue that much of the NIP's value was transferred into DSOP and its staff, which became more knowledgeable under SIST tutelage. As one participant later noted, "the fact that all these agencies were sitting together for the first time to accomplish a long range, detailed counterterrorism coordination was remarkable" and "a major accomplishment" in its own right.⁵⁵⁷

In sum, the SIST shared information well and achieved important progress in counterterrorism cooperation. This was true in particular during the construction of the NIP, which educated the most senior leaders and engaged the departments and agencies in the planning process. Even so, NCTC and DSOP leaders were dissatisfied with the level of information and "buy-in" provided, and during NIP II, they attempted to coordinate directly with the deputies of the departments and agencies. In this respect that SIST was not perceived as useful enough by DSOP leaders to be allowed to continue on its existing performance path

Thus if we define the SIST's primary role narrowly as ensuring transparency between DSOP and the departments and agencies of the government involved in the counterterrorism mission, the record indicates it largely succeeded early on, but lost ground as DSOP developed its own interagency contacts and as the departments and agencies focused their attention on NSC staff-

run committees such as the CSG. Information sharing—and temporary information sharing at that—is a low standard of collaboration, but a number of those we interviewed believed this was the appropriate standard for judging SIST performance. Interestingly, this perspective was adopted by some SIST members trying to distance SIST performance from DSOP, and also by DSOP leaders trying to distance DSOP from the SIST’s performance. They agree that as DSOP became better established, the SIST was expected to abandon the muscular role it played in generating the first NIP and revert to an advisory body. They disagree on how the interagency planning process in DSOP went awry, however. Some early SIST members believe DSOP mistakenly moved away from the SIST’s collaborative process and tried to impose its planning authorities on the departments and agencies, which only succeeded in alienating them (the CODEX database debacle being the most notable example). DSOP members believe the SIST, by raising objections to their decisions, was a drag on DSOP productivity. DSOP members who believe the SIST was just reflecting department and agency concerns still argue that DSOP had no choice but to trust that political leadership would back DSOP efforts to vigorously implement the intent of the legislation that created NCTC.

Both interpretations accord with the facts, but reflect different assessments of how best to secure interagency collaboration. For reasons we will explain at greater length, the debate is academic. Even if DSOP had not alienated the departments and agencies by trying to secure their compliance with CODEX, DSOP leadership had lost confidence in the SIST by that point and was determined to chart a different course. Similarly, even if the SIST had been disbanded following the promulgation of the first NIP, DSOP’s strategy and planning output would not have been better and, arguably, would have been worse. We argue that with simple information sharing as the standard, good strategy and planning was not possible in any circumstance. Because Congress envisioned good strategy and planning as a NCTC output, and information sharing would not permit good strategy and planning; limiting the SIST’s role to information sharing doomed it to

failure.

The transition team that charted the way DSOP and the SIST would operate realized information sharing would not be sufficient. They knew DSOP would need help securing voluntary interagency cooperation, and the SIST was the chosen instrument for this purpose. By obtaining interagency cooperation, the SIST would help DSOP fulfill its role as the “guiding physician” orchestrating the government’s response to terrorism. Given the SIST’s envisioned partnership with DSOP, its key role in securing department and agency participation, and its evaluation, integration, and advisory duties, the SIST must be assessed more broadly for its contribution to the quality of DSOP’s strategy and planning efforts.

Making a judgment on the SIST’s performance thus requires an assessment of both the SIST’s contribution to DSOP’s work and the quality of the DSOP strategy and planning output. Taking the latter first, we must assert that neither NIP nor NIP II meet the following essential criteria for “good” strategy or planning:

- Identifying the root cause of the problem or challenge to be overcome.
- Selecting the best approach (directing and constraining action) to overcome the problem based on an advantage or asymmetry.
- Prioritizing actions that are clear and feasible given scarce resources.
- Allowing for feedback or new information to be introduced and acted upon.

Neither identified or postulated the root cause or causes of terrorism, something experts continue to debate.⁵⁵⁸ Neither plan promotes a singular course of action, constrained by asymmetric advantages and disadvantages. Instead both plans list all of the things the government was doing and could do to fight terrorism. There are no priorities identified in either plan, although the first NIP developed a future process by which priorities and a roadmap could be created. The plan did call for feedback, specifically directing a periodic review both for changes to the plan and for resourcing decisions.

If the NIP was not good “strategy,” theoretically

it could not be a good plan either. If the strategy does not chart a discrete course of action, attempting to maximize asymmetric strengths and compensate for relative weaknesses, then it is not possible to construct supporting plans with enough specificity and rigor to permit strategy execution. This becomes clear when the NIP is evaluated using the following four basic criteria for good plans:

- Consistency with national level policy and strategy.
- Adequacy in scope and concept to satisfy all taskings and accomplish the mission.
- Feasibility based on available resources within the plans timeframe.
- Acceptability based on the risk to political capital, personnel, equipment, and time.

The NIP was consistent with national level policy and strategy. In fact, it was written “hand in glove” with the White House’s counterterrorism policy and strategy, and the National Security staff was “heavily involved” in the process and regularly held discussions about it.⁵⁵⁹ Perhaps because of this, the NIP’s scope was also overly broad and failed to identify the specific course of action to receive priority attention. Because the strategy was too vague, the linkage between the plan’s concept and taskings for mission accomplishment were too weak.

The strategy directs both long-term and short-term actions to achieve the 2006 National Strategy for Combating Terrorism’s strategic vision of defeating violent extremism as a threat to our way of life and the creation of a global environment inhospitable to violent extremism. Over the long term, the U.S. government would advance effective democracies as the antidote to the ideology of terrorism; and over the short term it would:

- Prevent attacks by terrorist networks.
- Deny weapons of mass destruction to rogue states and terrorist.
- Deny terrorists the support and sanctuary of rogue states.
- Deny terrorists control of any nation they would use as a base.

- Build the institutions and structures to carry the fight forward against terror.⁵⁶⁰

The NIP broke down these long- and short-term goals into objectives, sub-objectives, and tasks under four main pillars and several cross cutting topics.⁵⁶¹

Under this rubric, the NIP catalogued every U.S. government activity being conducted to fight terrorism instead of determining which were most important and effective and, therefore, most necessary. The NIP could not establish priorities because it did not identify a discrete strategic course of action (and distinguish it from alternatives). With no strategic priorities, some supporting activities would receive too little attention, not be conducted in a timely fashion or with great enough effort, and perhaps even go unfunded. Although it may be true, as some argue, that massive spending in the decade following 9/11 thwarted major terrorist attacks and severely damaged the al-Qa’ida organization, this is beside the point for evaluating the SIST’s contributions.⁵⁶² High spending does not negate the need for priorities. There are always ways to spend more to accomplish more in a particular area. For example, either more resources could go into military operations or into building political support for change in the Islamic world. If one argues that every conceivable activity was well-funded, this is just an admission that we had no strategy depicting a particular course of action as preferable. Throwing unlimited resources at a problem is the negation of strategy.

With no conscious decision made about the acceptable level of resources for the counterterrorism mission and no prioritization within the NIP for activities, it is not possible to say whether the NIP was resource feasible. The U.S. does not have a single counterterrorism budget. Instead, counterterrorism programs exist in the individual budgets of the departments and agencies.⁵⁶³ Therefore the NIP was developed within the constraints of the department and agency budgets.⁵⁶⁴ The dilemma for SIST members when accepting a tasking in the NIP was whether to go back and see if they could meet the requirement through their home agency’s or department’s budgeting process or leave it as an unfunded mandate

and hope for funding from other sources, such as a Congressional supplemental appropriations or adjustment during the OMB's review process. The SIST had a committed representative from the OMB involved in the development of the NIP⁵⁶⁵ and there was a sense that the counterterrorism mission was not overly resource constrained.⁵⁶⁶ In fact, some of the departments and agencies tried to put tasks into the NIP that were only loosely related to terrorism in the hopes of receiving funding,⁵⁶⁷ which just exacerbated the lack of priorities by inflating the list of desired activities.

The final criterion for good planning is determining whether the plan is risk acceptable based on estimated losses in personnel, resources, and time. Neither the NIP nor the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism addresses risk. President Bush considered the War on Terrorism a vital priority for the country that justified high expenditures. The commitment of significant American forces to both Afghanistan and Iraq and the large amount of resources the government committed to the fight after 9/11 suggests that the President considered all the actions outlined in the NIP as acceptable risks. Others might argue that the fiscal costs of these actions bore greater risk than the President recognized or than were necessary, but our assumption here is that the President consciously considered the inherent risks in war costs and judged them acceptable.

To summarize, the NIP did not meet the minimum criteria for good strategy and plans. It was more akin to what the Pentagon calls "mission essential task lists." Some might argue that the NIP process never had a chance to fully prove itself and might have evolved into good strategy and planning over time. For those SIST members who argued the U.S. had to determine where it was in the counterterrorism effort before determining where it should go, the NIP represented foundational progress. It was a comprehensive blueprint of the complex counterterrorism effort. If a change in strategic course was mandated, the NIP would help the counterterrorism community quickly assess the attendant level of effort and resource implications of such a decision. Over time the document might have evolved and helped DSOP "monitor budget

allocation" in order to ensure that the departments and agencies were doing what the NSC directed and that lead agencies or departments for various tasks were being supported by other organizations.⁵⁶⁸

These arguments make the case that the NIP and SIST could have been useful at some point if national leaders actually had a counterterrorism strategy; they do not make a compelling case that the SIST eventually would have been able to overcome its limitations and deliver such a strategy. In any case, before the SIST could evolve into a more useful organizational instrument the effort collapsed for lack of support. When criticism of the NIP⁵⁶⁹ shelved the planning effort, the SIST lost traction and went downhill in terms of its effectiveness. At issue is why this happened.

Some believe that DSOP's insistence on the CODEX process collapsed the cooperative process.⁵⁷⁰ It deflated department and agency support, which was always fragile, at a critical juncture. Others believe that CODEX simply revealed the limits of department and agency cooperation. From the beginning the departments and agencies were anxious about being "graded" by NCTC. They naturally were going to resist CODEX or any other effort to render transparent their capabilities and how well they completed tasks. In this vein, CODEX just provided a convenient excuse for the departments and agencies to ignore the laborious NIP-process. In our view, this latter argument is better substantiated. The reasons become clear when we compare and integrate the analysis of variables reviewed in the previous section to provide a net explanation for the SIST's performance.

It is clear that the organization-level variables—purpose, empowerment, and organizational support—are most important for explaining the demise of the SIST. To begin with, the broader substantive purpose of the SIST—strategic operational planning—was confusing and disputable. The decision in executive order and law to limit NCTC to just one portion of the "end to end" counterterrorism mission management chain was a crippling decision. No matter what the NIP-directed, departments and agencies could always later say "that was the plan," but "circumstances

changed and we had to adjust and execute operations differently.”

The SIST’s narrower organizational purpose—accurate depiction of parent organizational positions—also had a declining utility. SIST members had to accurately represent their parent agencies’ views, and in doing so, they represented their parent agencies’ interests as well. SIST members were supposed to guide DSOP planners and senior leaders, but they could not commit to any course of action without the consent of their department’s or agency’s senior leadership.⁵⁷¹ Even if departments and agencies agreed to something in principle, they might abandon their consent later if the agreement proved difficult to implement. Even the SIST’s strongest advocates agreed that “there was an inability to enforce a decision.”⁵⁷² One early SIST member points out succinctly why by identifying “the fundamental challenge” involved “only the president has authority over all these agencies, anything below that level of command has to have some element of voluntary cooperation involved.”⁵⁷³ In the case of the SIST, voluntary cooperation was its *raison d’être*. Not empowered to commit their departments and agencies, SIST members had to proceed on the basis of consensus, agreeing to “do no harm” to each other’s organizational equities. Over time, it became obvious that by faithfully representing their parent organizations, the SIST could more effectively block agreement than forge it. This was the case despite the fact that the toughest political and technical issues were removed from the SIST’s jurisdiction and handled elsewhere.

Beyond the confused and weak purpose, the SIST had little authority and few resources, and it was not well supported by the larger national security system. In fact, Congress has given the NCTC less authority, particularly in the area of budgets, than it affords the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.⁵⁷⁴ The SIST was not well supported by the larger national security system, which with some notable exceptions, generally shunned close working relationships with the group.

The muddled purpose of strategic operational planning, the SIST’s limited empowerment, and the

weak organizational support evident from the broader national security system all reflected the system’s tendency to defer to its powerful departments and agencies. They are so powerful that they do not have to follow through on national-level decisions. As the record shows, they do not even have to execute decisions made by the Deputies Committee or plans signed by the President. They can always plead lack of resources, say circumstances changed, or argue the decision interferes with the most efficient and effective running of their organizations. In short, the SIST was designed from the beginning by wise and knowledgeable practitioners to work within the limits of the current system, and those limits can be crippling when it comes to integrating the elements of national power.

The organizational-level variables even constrained the team’s performance in areas that are typically under the direct control of the team. Under Schloesser, the team did the best it could to develop a high-performing team structure, that is—a clear job design executed by senior, full-time, collocated, subject-matter experts from the necessary range of functional specialties. Ultimately, however, lack of support from the departments and agencies reduced attendance and led to a rift between the permanent members and the part-time members. Although the rift was not personal, it did reflect the different levels of commitment between the two groups. The full-time team members were advocates of SIST work, wanting to do more and become a decision-making body and be more involved in DSOP’s processes. The part-time representatives saw themselves simply as liaisons. Once it became apparent that no decisions would be made at the meetings and that no equities were at stake, SIST members began to send their junior counterparts, which further reduced the ability of the SIST to find consensus compromises since the “right people” were not in the room.⁵⁷⁵ Most tellingly, decisions made had to be agreeable to all members of the team. Tough issues where departments and agencies had fierce disagreement were taken outside of the group for resolution. The team was not empowered to resolve disagreements as a team.

With the organizational-level variables constraining performance on the team, the individual

members of the SIST and how they were rewarded and led, did not matter much. Ironically, SIST leaders assumed exactly the opposite. They believed that if they got the right people on the SIST it would be possible to resolve difficult and controversial issues and forge a national counterterrorism plan. Instead, the senior people who could speak for their parent organizations did so, thus faithfully importing organizational differences into the national planning process in a manner that trumped the need to make conscious tradeoffs between organizational equities in pursuit of a better overall national-level course of action.

In sum, the CODEX debacle might have been the proximate cause for the precipitous decline in department and agency support, but it was not the driving force. There was already considerable disenchantment with what was considered “planning for planning’s sake,” not

only among the departments and agencies, but among NCTC leaders like Calland and Maguire. More to the point, the departments and agencies saw where the process was leading and were bound to resist it, just as they later resisted assessments and measures of effectiveness that would enable assessments. SIST members might have hoped that given enough time and resources the system would embrace the Defense-planning model and gradually accede to the authority of the NCTC to develop, promulgate, monitor, and enforce its strategic operational planning. But given the weak organizational level support for the NCTC, this was an unlikely development. For reasons beyond its control, whatever strategy and planning output the SIST helped DSOP generate was not likely to have much downstream impact on those engaged in counterterrorism operations.

Conclusion

The efficacy of different counterterrorism approaches is often debated and sometimes studied, but terrorism studies tend to focus on the threat rather than counterterrorism responses. This is true, for example, of the most cited and read articles in the two most notable academic journals on terrorism. Currently 17 of *Terrorism and Political Violence’s* 20 most-cited articles examine terrorism and just three address counterterrorism. Likewise, 17 of its 20 most-read articles consider some aspect of the threat while only one looks at counterterrorism (two covered both subjects). The preponderance of articles in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* also focus on terrorism: 14 out of its 20 most-cited articles and 16 of its 20 most-read articles.⁵⁷⁶ At least 32 universities in the U.S. host research centers or foundations studying terrorism, and a quick survey suggests that they also tend to focus on the threat.⁵⁷⁷ Congress also demonstrates greater interest in the threat than our response as our study demonstrates.

Whatever the reasons for the imbalance, it seems clear that both the threat and our ability to respond to it deserve serious, sustained inquiry. After all, the two are interrelated. We cannot devise

an effective response to terrorism if we do not understand its origins, organizational strengths and weaknesses, and objectives. Similarly, if we do not understand our own political and organizational limitations, it will be hard to devise an effective counterterrorism strategy. It is frequently asserted that successfully countering terrorism requires multiple instruments of power and thus effective interagency coordination. This requirement for success is seldom seriously studied, however, a deficiency this report is intended to redress with an in-depth analysis of the SIST and its performance.

The SIST is a particularly interesting case for study because it was intended to be the mechanism that would permit DSOP to integrate all elements of national power for counterterrorism strategy and supporting plans. It was designed to enable DSOP to be the wise and authoritative attending physician that directs the emergency room functional specialists and saves the patient with a coordinated effort. It was never able to meet these expectations. The SIST, thoughtfully and painstakingly created from transplanted parts of other organizational bodies, remains glaringly representative of those

bodies. Not long after its creation, DSOP staffers were ready to light torches and grab pitchforks to participate in its demise. The SIST was less than the sum of its parts even at the peak of its vigor. It lives on, too disappointing to revitalize, but too evocative of hopes for better interagency collaboration to kill outright.

The SIST is a cautionary experience for those who oversee and manage the U.S. national security system, but not for the reasons often assumed. DSOP leaders consistently thought SIST performance was limited by the people who served on the body, but that was not true. On the contrary, the SIST was blessed with good leadership and experienced, hard-working professionals from the beginning but nonetheless failed. Even when hand-picked, higher ranking personnel were obtained, the SIST failed. Even when DSOP leadership coordinated the second NIP directly with deputy secretary-level leaders, the resultant product failed. It has been argued that “staffing issues” and inadequate “resourcing at the White House” are responsible for the poor performance,⁵⁷⁸ but in truth a prodigious amount of good staff work went into the NIP, and it was carefully reviewed by all parties concerned, including the White House. The nation received some value in return for the scarce human capital and rare counterterrorism expertise it invested in two versions of the national counterterrorism plans, but it did not receive good strategy and plans, much less the essential equivalent of an attending physician.

The SIST is a cautionary experience not because it illustrates the folly of poor staffing and inadequate resources, but because it demonstrates the inability of even exceptionally talented and experienced people to overcome typical system constraints. The SIST’s performance illustrates how the current national security system typically behaves when it comes to interagency coordination, and thus how poorly it can integrate diverse functional expertise to the benefit of even high-priority national missions. Unlike some other interagency constructs, the NCTC, DSOP, and the SIST were not given any special authorities via executive order or legislation to conduct their mission of strategic operational planning.⁵⁷⁹ Indeed, the SIST’s creators recognized this fact and designed the SIST to operate within the confines of the current system. They hoped that having SIST members faithfully represent their parent agencies would yield cooperation and strategic solutions. But as has long been observed, “coordination by committee” is “government at the lowest common denominator.”⁵⁸⁰ In such circumstances transparency has more liabilities than benefits. Faithfully representing department and agency concerns made it impossible for SIST members to make the necessary tradeoffs in organizational equities that might yield a real strategy and associated planning.

What the SIST experience illustrates, then, is that good people cannot always overcome bad organizational structure. In the case of the SIST, even many really good people over a long period of time could not overcome the system limitations imposed on their organization. With an uncertain purpose, no special empowerment, and limited organizational support from participating departments and agencies, even the best leadership and most talented members could not complete the SIST mission. That is what the SIST experience teaches. Despite its many lesser accomplishments, this lesson alone may be the most important contribution the SIST makes to the national security system. If those charged with leading and overseeing national security can understand why the SIST was unable to work as intended, they may one day undertake the reforms actually envisioned by the 9/11 Commission. For the moment the attending physician is still not on the job and the nation is at greater risk because of it. **IAS**

Endnotes

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- 2 Amy Zegart makes a persuasive case that the intelligence community failed to share information that could have prevented 9/11. However, the controversy about whether the intelligence community or political decision makers are more to blame continues. See Amy B. Zegart, *Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI and the Origins of 9/11*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2007 and Phil Shenon, *The Commission: The Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation*, Twelve, New York, 2008. For a detailed history on the rivalry between the CIA and FBI, see Mark Riebling, *Wedge: The Secret War between the FBI and CIA*, A.A. Knopf, New York, 1994.
- 3 *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, Norton, New York, 2004, pp. 353 and 416.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 403.
- 5 DSOP is in a Congressional “jurisdictional gap,” meaning that it falls between two committees, neither of which has asserted authority. Therefore, nearly all of the instances in which the director of NCTC has been called to testify before Congress have pertained to the substance of terrorist threat rather than the effectiveness of interagency counterterrorism effort. See “Toward Integrating Complex National Missions: Lessons from the National Counterterrorism Center Directorate of Strategic Planning,” Project on National Security Reform (PNSR), Arlington, 2010, p. 142.
- 6 Interview with Karen Aguilar, former Department of State Representative to the Senior Interagency Strategy Team, December 18, 2011.
- 7 Interview with David McCracken, former Department of Defense Representative to the Senior Interagency Strategy Team, November 22, 2012.
- 8 “Toward Integrating Complex National Missions: Lessons from the National Counterterrorism Center Directorate of Strategic Planning,” p. 55.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Richard “Ozzie” Nelson, “Intelligence Reform 2010: Lessons and Implications of the Christmas Day Attack: Intelligence Reform and Interagency Integration,” Statement to the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, March 17, 2010, Government Printing Office, Washington, 2011. Other sources are equally candid. Asked in 2010 whether “there is a coordinated plan among the federal agencies to combat violent extremism,” a worried senior Department of Defense official said he regularly “pray[s] for this kind of coordination,” but admitted “We’re a half step behind or more.” See also Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, *Counterstrike: The Untold Story of America’s Secret Campaign against Al Qaeda*, Times Books, New York, 2011.
- 12 “Toward Integrating Complex National Missions: Lessons from the National Counterterrorism Center Directorate of Strategic Planning,” p. 125.
- 13 James M. Smith and William C. Thomas, *The Terrorism Threat and U.S. Government Response: Operational and Organizational Factors*, University Press of the Pacific, Honolulu, 2005, p. 219.
- 14 Timothy Naftali, *Blind Spot: The Secret History of American Counterterrorism*, Basic Books, New York, 2006, p. 59.
- 15 David Tucker, *Skirmishes at the Edge of Empire: The United States and International Terrorism*, Praeger, Westport, CT, 1997, p. 37.
- 16 “A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement, 1995-1996,” Executive Office of the President, Washington, February 1995.
- 17 Tucker, p. 137.
- 18 Naftali, p. 177.

- 19 Tucker, p. 14.
- 20 Richard A. Clarke, *Your Government Failed You: Breaking the Cycle of National Security Disasters*, Harper, New York, 2008, p. 208. Richard Clarke previously chaired the Coordinating Sub Group and was appointed coordinator and began working on a plan to defeat al Qaeda. Dubbed the “terrorism czar” by the media, he pointed out the failings of his position saying he did not have “authority to hire, fire, move money, or order things to happen,” but rather he “persuaded, embarrassed, created consensus, or invoked higher authorities.”
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- 22 The group was renamed after the Iran-Contra scandal to emphasize a “coordinating” rather than “operational” role.
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- 24 The popular name for the commission came from its two co-chairs, former Senators Gary Hart and Warren Rudman. See, Shenon, p. 56.
- 25 Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington*, Crown, New York, 2011, pp. 75–76, <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>>.
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- 27 Christopher J. Lamb and Irving Lachow, “Reforming Pentagon Decisionmaking,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, Vol. 43, 2006, pp. 68–71.
- 28 Rice, pp. 79–80.
- 29 Charles B. Perrow, “The Disaster After 9/11: The Department of Homeland Security and the Intelligence Reorganization,” *Homeland Security Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2006.
- 30 Adam Bernstein, “Gen. Wayne Downing; Deputy National Security Adviser,” *The Washington Post*, July 19, 2007.
- 31 Perrow, p. 7.
- 32 George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, Crown Publishers, New York, 2010, p. 156. President Bush notes he was initially worried that a massive reorganization during war would be counterproductive, but later changed his mind because he thought the consolidation of the many organizations would result in “fewer gaps and less redundancy.”
- 33 Email from Paul Crissy, former Department of Homeland Security Representative to the Senior Interagency Strategy Team, May 29, 2012. The legislation was signed on November 25, 2002, but Secretary Ridge was not confirmed and the new department did not officially begin operations until January 24, 2003. Most of the department’s component agencies were not transferred into the new Department until March 1, and this seems to be the recognized birthday for the department.
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- 44 Mitchell.
- 45 Mary Curtius, "Senate Passes Major Overhaul of U.S. Intelligence," *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 2004.
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- 55 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.
- 56 Interview with David McCracken.
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- 415 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.
- 416 Interview with Karen Aguilar.
- 417 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.
- 418 Interview with David McCracken and interview with Karen Aguilar.
- 419 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.

- 420 Interview with Catherine Sheppard.
- 421 Interview with Thomas Kuster, November 16, 2011.
- 422 Interview with Paul Crissy.
- 423 “Homeland Security Beyond Our Borders: Examining the Status of Counterterrorism Coordination Overseas.”
- 424 Interview with LTG Frank Kearney.
- 425 Interview with Daniel Rosen. A similar point was made by in our interview with VADM Robert Harward.
- 426 Interview with David McCracken.
- 427 Interview with Paul Crissy.
- 428 Interview with Carol “Rollie” Flynn.
- 429 Interview with Thomas Kuster, November 16, 2011 and interview with a Federal Bureau of Investigations Representative to the Senior Interagency Strategy Team.
- 430 Interview with Karen Aguilar.
- 431 Interview with Paul Crissy.
- 432 Loren Gary, “Why Some Teams Succeed (and So Many Don’t),” in *Teams that Click*, Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, Boston, 2004, p. 44.
- 433 Interview with Vice Admiral Joseph Maguire.
- 434 Interview 15, February 14, 2012.
- 435 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.
- 436 Interview with Karen Aguilar.
- 437 Interview with BG Albert Riggle.
- 438 Interview with Paul Crissy, former Department of Homeland Security Representative to the Senior Interagency Strategy Team, February 23, 2012.]
- 439 Interview with David McCracken.
- 440 Interview with Thomas Kuster, November 16, 2011.
- 441 Interview with Rick “Ozzie” Nelson.
- 442 Interview with Thomas Kuster, November 16, 2011.
- 443 Interview with VADM Robert Harward.
- 444 Interview with Traci Klemm.
- 445 Interview with Vice Admiral Joseph Maguire.
- 446 Interview with William Millonig.
- 447 Interview with LTG Frank Kearney.
- 448 Email from Karen Aguilar, June 13, 2012.
- 449 Interview with Karen Aguilar.
- 450 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.

- 451 Interview with Karen Aguilar.
- 452 Interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.
- 453 Email from Karen Aguilar, May 30, 2012.
- 454 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.
- 455 Interview with Rudolph Rousseau.
- 456 Interview with Catherine Sheppard.
- 457 Interview with David McCracken; interview with BG Albert Riggle; and interview with Rick “Ozzie” Nelson.
- 458 Interview with Paul Crissy.
- 459 Interview with David McCracken.
- 460 Interview with Thomas Kuster, November 16, 2011.
- 461 Interview with Karen Aguilar.
- 462 Interview with Rudolph Rousseau.
- 463 Interview with Thomas Kuster, November 16, 2011; interview with Karen Aguilar; and interview with James Reynolds.
- 464 Interview with Rick “Ozzie” Nelson. The differences between a planning and operational focus often proved difficult to surmount. Email from Catherine Sheppard.
- 465 Interview with David McCracken.
- 466 Interview with Juan Zarate.
- 467 Interview with Thomas Kuster, March 22, 2012. During one tabletop exercise he commented that he appreciated the candor SIST members brought to the discussion.
- 468 Interview with Karen Aguilar.
- 469 Interview with LTG Frank Kearney.
- 470 Interview with Michael Leiter.
- 471 Interview with LTG Frank Kearney.
- 472 Interview with Thomas Kuster, November 16, 2011.
- 473 Ibid.
- 474 Interview with Thomas Kuster, March 22, 2012.
- 475 Interview with Karen Aguilar and interview with Carol “Rollie” Flynn.
- 476 Interview with Paul Crissy.
- 477 Interview with Raymond Hardwick.
- 478 Interview with Thomas Kuster, November 16, 2011.
- 479 Interview with David McCracken.
- 480 Interview with Paul Crissy and interview with Daniel Rosen.
- 481 Interview with Catherine Sheppard.

- 482 R. A. Guzzo, et al., (eds.), *Team Effectiveness and Decision Making in Organizations*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1995, pp. 204–261.
- 483 Interview with Thomas Kuster, November 16, 2011.
- 484 Interview with David McCracken.
- 485 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.
- 486 Interview with Thomas Kuster, November 16, 2011.
- 487 Interview with BG Albert Riggle.
- 488 Interview with Thomas Kuster, March 22, 2012 and interview with James Reynolds.
- 489 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.
- 490 Interview with VADM Robert Harward.
- 491 Email from Karen Aguilar, June 13, 2012.
- 492 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.
- 493 Glenn M Parker, *Cross-Functional Teams: Working with Allies, Enemies, and Other Strangers*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2003, p. 10.
- 494 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser. Much has been written about the different national security organizations, their cultures, and in particular their different approaches to planning. See, for example, Rickey L. Rife, *Defense is from Mars, States is from Venus: Improving Communications and Promoting National Security*, Defense Technical Information Center, Fort Belvoir, 1998.
- 495 Interview with Rudolph Rousseau.
- 496 Interview with Thomas Kuster, November 16, 2011.
- 497 Interview with Karen Aguilar.
- 498 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.
- 499 Interview with David McCracken. Later this changed as the CIA lost the battle over representation of the intelligence community equities to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.
- 500 Interview with David McCracken.
- 501 Interview with Thomas Kuster, November 16, 2011; interview with David McCracken; and interview with James Reynolds.
- 502 Interview with Paul Crissy.
- 503 There was a different relationship between the full and part -time members, as virtually everyone interviewed agreed. Interview with Paul Crissy.
- 504 Interview with Daniel Rosen.
- 505 L. Argote, D. Gruenfeld and C. Naquin, “Group Learning in Organizations,” in M. E. Turner (ed.), *Groups at Work: Advances in Theory and Research*, Lawrence Erlbaum, New York, 1999; see also “Multinational Organization Context: Implications for Team Learning and Performance,” *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 49, 2006, pp. 501–518.
- 506 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.

- 507 Interview with David McCracken. CAPSTONE is a course taught at National Defense University for General and Flag Officers. The course’s objective is to make these officers more effective in planning and employing U.S. forces in joint and combined operations. The CAPSTONE curriculum explores national security decision making, military strategy, joint/combined doctrine, interoperability, and key allied nation issues. For more information see <<http://www.ndu.edu/capstone/>>.
- 508 Interview with David McCracken.
- 509 Interview with a former Department of Treasury Representative to the Senior Interagency Strategy Team.
- 510 Email from Karen Aguilar, former Department of State Representative to the Senior Interagency Strategy Team, May 30, 2012; Interview with Thomas Kuster, Department of Defense Representative to the Senior Interagency Strategy Team, March 22, 2012.
- 511 Interview with Michael Leiter.
- 512 Interview with Ambassador Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley.
- 513 Interview with Daniel Rosen.
- 514 Interview with James Roberts.
- 515 Interview with Thomas Kuster, November 16, 2011.
- 516 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.
- 517 Interview with Rick “Ozzie” Nelson.
- 518 Interview with Thomas Kuster, November 16, 2011.
- 519 Interview with James Reynolds.
- 520 Interview with a former Department of Treasury Representative to the Senior Interagency Strategy Team.
- 521 Interview with Rick “Ozzie” Nelson.
- 522 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.
- 523 Interview with Paul Crissy.
- 524 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.
- 525 Interview with James Reynolds.
- 526 Interview with David McCracken.
- 527 Interview with Rudolph Rousseau; interview with Karen Aguilar; and interview with Paul Crissy.
- 528 Ibid.
- 529 Interview with James Reynolds.
- 530 Interview with Carol “Rollie” Flynn.
- 531 Interview with Paul Crissy and interview with James Reynolds.
- 532 Orton with Lamb, pp. 47–268. See the depiction of team leadership as traditional, coaching, and shared.
- 533 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.
- 534 Interview with James Reynolds.
- 535 Interview with Paul Crissy.
- 536 Interview with Karen Aguilar; interview with Paul Crissy; and interview with Carol “Rollie” Flynn.

- 537 Interview with Carol “Rollie” Flynn.
- 538 Interview with Karen Aguilar.
- 539 Interview with David McCracken.
- 540 “The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States.”
- 541 The President’s executive order on the NCTC and the Intelligence Reform and Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA) both expressly prohibit NCTC from directing the execution of counterterrorism operations. See, Executive Order 13354 and Public Law 108-458.
- 542 The end-to-end national security issue process depicted in the chart is borrowed from “Forging a New Shield,” pp. 175–181.
- 543 Richard P. Rumelt, *Good Strategy, Bad Strategy: The Difference and Why It Matters*, Crown Business, New York, 2011, p. 77.
- 544 Richard P. Rumelt, “The Many Faces of Honda,” *California Management Review*, Vol. 38, No. 4, 1996, pp. 103–111. When faced with two schools of thought which argue whether strategy occurs deliberately with long-term planning (design strategy) or whether strategy occurs based on a pattern of action that occurs over time void of goals and missions (emergent strategy), Rumelt states “the ‘process/emergent’ school is right about good process being non-linear. A great deal of business success depends on generating new knowledge and on having the capabilities to react quickly and intelligently to this new knowledge. Thus, peripheral vision and swift adaptation are critical. At the same time, I believe that the ‘design’ school is right about the reality of forces like scale economies, accumulated experience, and the cumulative development of core competencies over time. These are strong forces and are not simply countered.”
- 545 Richard P. Rumelt, *Good Strategy, Bad Strategy: The Difference and Why It Matters*, p. 77.
- 546 *Ibid.*, p. 88.
- 547 Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*, Glossary and pp. 5, 7, and 10.
- 548 Email from Karen Aguilar, June 13, 2012. We are indebted to Karen Aguilar for this quotation from Eisenhower, which is especially appreciated in the military and at National Defense University, from a speech to the National Defense Executive Reserve Conference in Washington, November 14, 1957, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1957, National Archives and Records Service, Government Printing Office, p. 818.
- 549 Interview with Michael Leiter.
- 550 Interview with Rick “Ozzie” Nelson.
- 551 Interview with Michael Leiter.
- 552 Interview with Thomas Kuster, November 16, 2011.
- 553 Interview with Juan Zarate.
- 554 Email from Karen Aguilar, May 30, 2012.
- 555 “Homeland Security Beyond Our Borders: Examining the Status of Counterterrorism Coordination Overseas,”
- 556 “Forging a New Shield,” p. 278.
- 557 Email from Karen Aguilar, May 30, 2012.
- 558 For an in depth discussion on the different paradigms by which to determine the root causes of terrorism see Max Abrahms, *What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy*, National Emergency Training Center, Emmitsburg, MD, 2008.
- 559 Interview with Juan Zarate.
- 560 “National Strategy for Combating Terrorism,” Executive Office of the President, Washington, 2006.

- 561 Interview with Thomas Kuster, November 16, 2011.
- 562 Peter L. Bergen, “After Bin Laden: Is the War on Terror Over?” Remarks at Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 5, 2012, <<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/after-bin-laden-is-the-war-on-terror-over>>, accessed on February 4, 2014
- 563 “Countering the Changing Threat of International Terrorism,” National Commission on Terrorism, Washington, 2000.
- 564 Interview with Paul Crissy.
- 565 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.
- 566 Interview with Juan Zarate.
- 567 Interview with Thomas Kuster, November 16, 2011.
- 568 Ibid.
- 569 The criticisms within government were identified in the historical review earlier in this report. For external criticisms, see: “Counterinsurgency in the 21st Century—Creating a National Framework,” U.S. Department of State, Washington, September 2006, <<http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/state/72027.htm>> and N. J. Torres, “Global War on Terrorism: Executing War Without Unity of Command,” Defense Technical Information Center, Fort Belvoir, VA, 2007; and “Forging a New Shield,” p. 57.
- 570 Interview with Neal Pollard.
- 571 Interview with a representative to the SOP Interagency Steering Group.
- 572 Telephone interview with Major General (Ret) Jeffrey Schloesser.
- 573 Email from Karen Aguilar, May 30, 2012.
- 574 See Christopher J. Lamb and Edward Marks, “Chief of Mission Authority as a Model for National Security Integration,” *Strategic Perspectives*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, December 2010.
- 575 Interview with Ambassador Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley.
- 576 Interview with a former Department of Treasury Representative to the Senior Interagency Strategy Team.
- 577 D.R. Bullis and R.D. Irving. “Journals Supporting Terrorism Research: Identification and Investigation into Their Impact on the Social Sciences,” *College and Research Libraries*, Vol. 74. No. 2, 2013, pp. 119–129. One of the best known centers is “The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism” located at the University of Maryland. All of its 16 research reports and 10 of its 16 research briefs focus on terrorism.
- 578 “Pragmatic Steps Towards a More Integrated Future.”
- 579 For example, the Office of Director of National Intelligence and the Office of National Drug Control Policy both have been given extraordinary budget authorities.
- 580 Patrick M. Morgan, *Theories and Approaches to International Politics: What Are We to Think?* Transaction Books, New Brunswick, N. J., 1977, p. 82.

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