

Implementing the QDDR

by Edward Marks and Christopher Lamb

The 2010 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) was an attempt to do for the Department of State what the Quadrennial Defense Review was supposed to do for the Department of Defense (DoD): provide a comprehensive plan to “improve the efficiency and effectiveness of State and USAID [United States Agency for International Development] in delivering results for the American taxpayer, by modernizing their capabilities and aligning their efforts as core pillars of America’s civilian power.” The phrase “aligning their efforts as core pillars of America’s civilian power” is particularly important because the QDDR begins with the flat statement that to advance American interests and values in the twenty-first century, “we must lead through civilian power.”

Although clearly a strategic policy document, the QDDR includes significant content related to organizational questions that have important implications for operational matters and specifically for inter-agency cooperation. As the report emphasizes, the international environment in the twenty-first century requires that “diplomacy and development must be mutually reinforcing,” since responding to global challenges requires, among other things, “embracing the contributions of all U.S. agencies operating overseas and coordinating their efforts in-country.” Although not mentioned specifically, the clear implication is that the DoD and military programs are included in this overall, strategic vision.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton launched the QDDR in mid-2010, and it covers reforms already underway at State as well as new recommendations. Implementation will obviously take time, and the QDDR is viewed as an ongoing commitment to “review, right-size and institutionalize

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reform.” In other words, it will be a quadrennial exercise at State and USAID. The current atmosphere in Washington and in the country appears unreceptive to reform—at least reform that requires any increased expenditures. As American Foreign Service Association President Susan Johnson noted in a recent report: “Prospects for growth, either in personnel or pay, are virtually nil, retarding implementation of Diplomacy 3.0 and the QDDR.” The current mood in Congress probably precludes, at least for the moment, organizational changes that require legislative action as well, even if additional resources are not required.

Still, the reorganization proposed in the QDDR is not massive and appears to be designed to create minimal disruptions. Surely some of the changes can be implemented without making changes to statutory organizations and positions. The new organization chart in the QDDR, for instance, shows no changes to the formal relationship between State and USAID. Several organizations have been renamed and some reshuffling has occurred. The recently re-empowered Under Secretary (U/S) of Global Affairs is renamed the U/S for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights and regains oversight of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement. In addition the U/S gains oversight of the Office of the Coordinator for Stabilization and Reconstruction (S/CRS). This move may represent a demotion in the reporting chain; the Coordinator has never really had the advantages of an “S” or Secretary-level office designation, so this could provide greater integration with the Department through more consistent oversight at the U/S level. S/CRS was designed to address interagency collaboration issues on behalf of the Secretary; however, unlike other coordination offices (e.g., counterterrorism), it is now buried where its mandate will not be as clear.

Therefore, despite the unwelcome environment into which the QDDR was delivered, some implementation is possible

and the doable is being pursued. The Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources and the USAID Administrator were specifically directed to oversee implementation and were provided with additional staff to do so. They see reform and reorganization as ongoing processes. Some reforms are already

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complete and others are underway. The QDDR specifically notes the long-term character of reform and states that the Department will ask Congress to mandate a review every four years, as it has done for the Department of Defense.

Of the proposed reforms, we were most interested in those touching on the role of the Chief of Mission (COM). Our recently published study on the same subject, “Chief of Mission Authority as a Model for National Security Integration”¹ is unconstrained by the need for consensus, is more free-wheeling, and offers more radical recommendations than those in the QDDR. Nevertheless, we believe the research may be useful now for implementing some elements of the QDDR and for providing thoughts on future reforms when the environment is more favorable.

The QDDR notes the need to “empower and hold accountable Chiefs of Mission as Chief Executive Officers of interagency missions.” This item is interesting in that it does not really propose anything new either in organization or authority. After all, since the days of President Truman, COMs have always been empowered to serve as Chief Executive Officers (CEOs)

of American diplomatic missions. We need only refer to the existing COM authority as outlined in Presidential letters going back to President Eisenhower and in 22 USC 3927 (Title 22, Chapter 52, Subchapter II, Section 3927). The legislation states: “Under the direction of the President, the chief of

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mission to a foreign country shall have full responsibility for the direction, coordination, and supervision of all Government executive branch employees in that country (except for Voice of America correspondents on official assignment and employees under the command of a United States area military commander).” The President’s representative, the COM, commonly an ambassador, is supposed to direct and supervise all activities in country and coordinate the resources and programs of the U.S. government through the country team, with the exception of employees under the command of a United States area military commander and other exceptions consistent with existing statutes and authorities.

Another way of putting it is that, under this authority, an ambassador is supposed to perform the role of the CEO of a multi-agency mission. As the QDDR points out, “the best ambassadors play that role effectively.” However, it is no secret that the executive authority of ambassadors as COMs has often been challenged and restricted in the interplay of bureaucratic competition and policy debate; hence the perceived need to recommend in the QDDR and elsewhere that COMs should

be “empowered”. The clear objective of the QDDR reforms in this area, therefore, is to turn sometime effectiveness into something more robust and persistent. Too often reorganization in bureaucracies is dismissed as mere relabeling and rearranging organizational boxes. In this case, given the central role of ambassadors and embassies in the conduct of foreign affairs, a better analogy might be strengthening the lines of authority between the boxes.

With respect to this interest in enhancing this leadership and management function in the State Department, we see three “levels” of reform that offer promise:

1. Reinvigorating the existing authority of COMs.
2. Exporting the COM authority in the crisis management area.
3. Exporting the COM authority into the headquarters operations of the State Department itself.

The first reform option is not mentioned specifically in the QDDR but is implied:

To build an effective partnership with their host country and advance America’s interests and values, these U.S. civilians on the ground will often have to work as a seamless team, bringing their unique strengths to bear and adapting together to fast-changing circumstances on the ground....We can work smarter and better by setting clear priorities, managing for results, holding ourselves accountable, and unifying our efforts....That is only possible if the Chief of Mission is empowered to direct and supervise these efforts.

While the statutory authority for COMs would appear to be clear, practice has shown that it is not. Empowering COMs in the way called for in the QDDR will require expanded

support from the National Security Council and other agencies to ensure that U.S. government personnel understand and internalize their accountability to the COM and clarify the reporting structures for all U.S. civilians in-country. Numerous studies of American embassies, such as Ambassador Robert Oakley's classic study,² discuss these and other largely management initiatives that would strengthen an ambassador's effective managerial authority.

The QDDR also calls for COMs to engage directly in high-level policymaking in Washington, DC. This is a bit more "radical"; although, it reflects what has always been the mark of successful ambassadors in the past. The QDDR's discussion of this subject is worth repeating:

In order for our Chiefs of Mission to direct and coordinate the interagency in the field, they must not only drive the Country Team on the ground, but also be more effectively engaged in interagency decision-making in Washington. By participating in this process, Chiefs of Mission can more effectively understand, support, and balance the goals and objectives of all agencies represented at post. Moreover, our Chiefs of Mission in the field have an invaluable wealth of information and deep understanding of their countries that can inform and assist interagency decision-making in Washington. To give Chiefs of Mission the voice they need in Washington and to draw on their knowledge and perspective, Chiefs of Mission will be invited to participate via secure telecommunications in Deputies Committee Meetings in Washington at the discretion of the National Security Staff.

This proposal in the QDDR not only describes an expanded role for ambassadors, but discusses some of the necessary technical communication improvements needed to achieve the objective.

While admirable, this proposed change

could be even more dramatic in response to the contemporary world. Serving ambassadors are generally the most senior U.S. government

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officials occupied full-time on the portfolio of problems and programs associated with their country of assignment. They are the only U. S. government officials with standing interagency executive authority (albeit limited to in-country personnel and operations), based on statute as well as specific Presidential designation.

Utilizing modern communication technology, the QDDR is already proposing an expanded role for ambassadors in the Washington arena. Modern technology can diminish, if not eliminate, the organizational and geographic distinctions between headquarters and the field. Why not go all the way and eliminate the organizational distinction between headquarters and the field and allow ambassadors/COMs to serve as their own "country directors?" Ambassadors/COMs who also serve as country directors could then participate directly in Washington decision-making. In an unofficial and informal manner, this approach has often been practiced in the past and, no doubt, is being practiced by some ambassadors today. However, we wonder whether this occasional practice should not be made the standard operational mode of the new State Department.³

The second category of reform is more ambitious and may require legislative action.

Involving COMs more directly in Washington decision-making, as just proposed, should strengthen interagency cooperation on a day-to-day bilateral basis. However, the regional character of a particular contingency or the introduction of large numbers of military personnel and resources from the regional combatant command presents challenges that sometime exceed the management capability of the resident ambassador. According to a Center for Strategic & International Studies report on smart power, there is a need to reorganize and re-equip the Executive Branch to implement

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multi-faceted tasks, such as economic development, contingency planning, and post-conflict reconstruction as the civilian agencies, as currently constituted, lack the resources and expertise to undertake these tasks. As a result, the recourse is to turn to the military services by default, if not by Presidential decision.⁴ Therefore, the State Department should give some thought to filling this authority/management gap.

One possible remedy would be to extend the authority to permit mission-specific, COM appointments. These appointments might include emergency situations where the problem involves more than one country, a country with no assigned COM, or a resident COM who just does not have the special skills or credentials

required to respond to the situation. In some cases, this mission-specific COM might or could work under the existing country COM (e.g., response to Japanese earthquake and nuclear crisis). The augmenting COM would handle the special circumstances under the supervision of the existing COM, but with authority for integrating interagency efforts for that particular emergency. In other cases, particularly where problems transcend one country's boundaries, the augmenting COM would report directly to the State Department (e.g., matters involving piracy in the Arabian Sea). In all such cases, the key would be to carefully define the scope of the mission and reporting chain.

Implementing this type of broad, cross-agency executive authority might require new Congressional authority. However, staying strictly within the bureaucratic boundaries of the State Department and USAID outlined in the QDDR, it might be feasible to invoke the COM concept and implement it in missions conducted within those boundaries. Even military personnel and resources could conceivably be included under this "mission-specific COM" arrangement if those resources were assigned – or "chopped" in military speech – to the mission in much the same way as defense attaches and military assistance personnel are assigned.

The third category of reform is much more radical and moves way out beyond the boundaries of the QDDR. Still, it involves a concept and perspective that follows the logic of the QDDR and might be usefully mentioned, if only for future consideration. This approach would be to "export" the COM authority back into the headquarters organization of the Department of State and specifically grant it to the key management levels: the secretary and the regional assistant secretaries. With this authority, the State Department could provide for integrated management and direction of all U.S. government civilian and political-military international operations. Thus empowered,

regional assistant secretaries would provide a middle level to the chain of command to ensure that policy and resources are integrated and coordinated at the policy level and then flow down to country teams, rather than going directly through discrete bureaucratic and authority stovepipes. This arrangement would alleviate, if not eliminate, the current organizational competition at the country level.⁵

A regional assistant secretary's COM authority would not extend to combatant commanders or their assigned forces in combat operations or other Title 10 missions assigned by the National Command Authority, the same limitation that ambassadors/COM have with respect to their country of assignment. However, while the combatant commands would continue to prepare and review war plans through the existing military chain of command, the regional assistant secretaries would assist the combatant commanders in developing the pre- and post-conflict phases (Phase 0 and Phase IV) of their war plans and theater security cooperation plans. Thus, the regional assistant secretaries would fulfill the long expressed desire of the DoD for an effective counterpart to their geographic commanders. Having a close relationship between the relevant combatant commander and the regional assistant secretaries would ensure a strong relationship between peacetime engagement and the deterrence and preservation of a stable, steady-state situation in the regions.

An operational chain of command to manage field operations would therefore extend from the secretary, through regional assistant secretaries, to COMs. This clear chain of command—President, secretary, and regional assistant secretaries—would replicate at each level the authority and role that Chiefs of Mission are responsible for exercising in their country teams. During crisis responses to countries where no U.S. mission presence exists, the head of the deployed U.S. government team (whether civilian or military) will be equipped with COM

authority and would therefore be able to operate as a single “mission manager,” unlike the Coalition Provisional Authority for Iraq which was deployed only under DoD authority.

The regional under/assistant secretaries (actual level of title to be determined as part of the restructuring) would have primary responsibility for integrating all federal operations and implementation within their areas of responsibility, with the exception of military forces engaged in active operations. As the designated head of a designated interagency team of responsible department and agency officials—a Washington-based, virtual interagency team—they would be responsible for producing integrated regional strategies and review and approve all department and agency plans that drive activity and resource allocations. Country team plans (strategic mission plans), DoD security cooperation plans, and foreign assistance plans would be prepared and submitted to these regional “COMs” and the virtual regional team for approval and integration. This would provide a clear line of communications and command during crisis response as well as normal, steady-state operations, from the top field commanders (military and civilian) up through the operational and strategic levels in Washington.

In sum, the whole Department of State would be organized as a “national team” where in addition to informal coordination at all levels, policy and resource integration would take place at three formally-designated levels: secretarial or cabinet level; regional assistant secretary level; and country team level (also, for emergencies, in special mission teams).

Obviously not all of these proposed reforms can be implemented rapidly, even if there were the requisite political and congressional interest and approval. However, they do constitute a spectrum of possible reform, with each point on the spectrum worthwhile on its own account, while at the same time opening the way to

further reform in the future. If the QDDR is to avoid the usual fate of blue-ribbon organizational reviews—filed away for the interest of historians—then some movement is required. As the QDDR states: “Ultimately, however the reforms and recommendations presented in the QDDR are only as good as their implementation.” **IAJ**

Notes

- 1 Christopher J. Lamb and Edward Marks, “Chief of Mission Authority as a Model for National Security Integration,” *Institute for National Strategic Studies Strategic Perspectives, No. 2*, National Defense University, Washington, DC, December 2010.
- 2 Robert B. Oakley and Michael Casey, Jr., “The Country Team: Restructuring America’s First Line of Engagement,” *Strategic Forum No. 227*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University Press, Washington, DC, September 2007.
- 3 Kishan S. Rana, *21st Century Diplomacy: A Practitioner’s Guide*, DiploFoundation, The Continuum International Publishing Group, New York, NY, 2011.
- 4 Report of the Center for Strategic & International Studies Commission on Smart Power, Center for Strategic & International Studies, The CSIS Press, Washington, DC, November 6, 2007.
- 5 Edward Marks, “The Next-Generation Department of State Project,” *Foreign Service Journal*, May 2010.