
Chapter 8

**Strengthening the Interagency
and Maximizing its Effort in
Combating Terrorism**

Bert Tussing

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A host of concerns currently surrounds the interagency process and its ability to effectively and efficiently address the complex contingencies that surround the current War on Terrorism. A recurring charge against that process is that it lacks focus; that while there is a recognition of the need and importance of addressing the conditions which continue to provide a fertile feeding ground for terrorists to exploit, our country's efforts towards those ends are stove-piped among diverse components of the federal government. More-than-noteworthy efforts of organizations like USAID's Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation, the State Department's new Office of Reconstruction and Stabilization, and the combatant commanders' Joint Interagency Coordination Groups (JIACGs) are attempting to address the problem. But there is a concern in that these efforts are not being coordinated through the interagency, allowing little to no chance for synergy, and leaving wide open the inability to bring a necessary prioritization to a pool of never-ending need. An accompanying concern is that personnel who actually populate and "work" the interagency are frequently laden with institutional obstacles which do nothing to ameliorate these conditions.

There will be no quick solutions to these "shortfalls," whether real or perceived. But before the ultimate answers can be derived, the correct questions have to be asked. The remainder of this chapter attempts to discern some of those questions; to provide observations surrounding the environment which raises the questions; and suggested solutions to the questions discerned.

¹ The questions, observations and recommendations in this chapter were obtained from a workshop examining the efficacy of the current interagency process in addressing terrorism, its roots and its effects. The workshop was a part of the U.S. Army War College's symposium, Addressing the Underlying Conditions that Foster Terrorism, which took place at the U. S. Army War College's Center for Strategic Leadership from 8-10 June 2005.

Who Should Lead in the Coordination of the Interagency Process in Combating Terrorism?

This elemental question must serve as a starting point for any viable discussion. For whatever benefit, there is of course an elemental the answer: the President. But that answer, while perhaps correct, is in and of itself, far from satisfactory. Without meaning to overstate the obvious, the President is ultimately responsible for everything that does or does not occur in government during his administration. Accordingly, the Executive Branch is designed to assist in that administration, the Congress is designed to oversee that administration. Still, the question of how much of a direct role the Chief Executive plays in the day-to-day oversight of any issue is one that is finding frequent resonance in a number of authoritative circles.

For our purposes, it may be best to focus on the day-to-day aspect of the White House involvement in the War on Terrorism. Some have suggested that the President (as well as the Congress) has too frequently become victimized by the “tyranny of the in-box.” That in trying to remain responsive to immediate concerns and actions, President Bush is robbed of an ability to step back and take a more *strategic focus* on issues of great complexity, such as combating transnational terrorism. They further suggest that the Administration must, in fact, discipline itself to provide direction, to establish a reasonable infrastructure to respond to that direction, and then to allow the direction to take place.

This requirement, has occasionally been found wanting in the first term of the present administration. Many authorities have held that the logical entity to have *strategic oversight* of the interagency efforts in the War on Terrorism is the National Security Council (NSC). However, a pervading opinion is that the NSC had not been provided the direction to properly provide for the balance of issues that need to be addressed in combating terrorism, nor empowered to coordinate those issues across the Executive Branch. Accordingly, cooperation between powerful entities like the Department of State and the Department of Defense, is as likely a function of personality as process. The character and influence of the NSC and its

function has always been a reflection of the President's personality. The importance and complexity of the issues of dealing with transnational terrorism deserve more than the "ad hoc" response than that provided by the structure of the NSC during President Bush's first term.

In fairness, the evolving direction of the NSC in the Administration's second term may address some of these concerns. The reorganization, which includes a dedicated "Deputy National Security Advisor for Combating Terrorism" placed notably along side deputies for "International Economics" and "Strategic Communications and Global Outreach," portends a more directed focus and steadier application of the elements of national power against terrorism, its power base, and the conditions which sustain it. But there are still what some hold to be blatant obstacles within the NSC structure that will serve to obfuscate and divert attentions which desperately need focus. Frequently cited among these is the continued existence of the Homeland Security Council (HSC). The Council, which was established in response to a greater terrorist threat, unnecessarily divides the government's concentration on a transnational issue into domestic, as opposed to international concerns, invariably fostering competitive attitudes while the potential for synergy lies dormant. The wisdom of husbanding issues of domestic security under the new and distinct banner of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in an era that brings the threat against our populace to and through our doors is well founded. But an accompanying decentralization of thought within the Executive Office of the President is considered by many to be particularly ill-conceived.

Accordingly, the lead in coordination of the nation's *strategic* approach to addressing the total spectrum of terrorism should reside in a reconstituted National Security Council, folding the HSC back into that body. However, while this new leadership may provide for overarching authority, the operational and tactical implementation of policy coordinated by the NSC will also require sanctioned authority. In that light, an evolving position is that the new National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) may serve as the most appropriate conduit for *operational* implementation of national policy. Through the mechanism of the center's Strategic Operations Planning Department,

the NCTC appears postured to “integrate, coordinate and synchronize” interdepartmental efforts to apply the instruments of national power in combating terrorism.² These instruments will include diplomatic, financial, military, intelligence, and law enforcement activities, applied at home and abroad in the various regions of strategic concern to our nation and its interests.

The domestic application of these activities will occur *tactically* through the established mechanisms of federal, state and local governments. There is not, however, a universally recognized *regional* mechanism for this same coordination across the international front. Many acknowledge USAID as the most appropriate medium for *localized* implementation of the developmental portion of a national “Defense- Diplomacy-Development” construct for addressing terrorism. But this still leaves open a required function to coordinate the three elements of that construct, and to prioritize them throughout a given region. Whether that coordination function should continue to take place through the Combatant Commanders, especially through an agency like the JIACG; or through a de-militarized entity under the Department of State that captures a regional focus to address transnational threats, is a question whose time has come.³

An Interagency Process Devoted to Combating Terrorism and its Causes, Which Authorities Are Necessary to Successfully Lead?

Simply establishing an agency, or a function within an agency, and assigning responsibilities thereto does not equate to empowering that agency. Particularly given the demands of coordinating the diverse efforts associated with these concerns, even the restructuring of the NSC will not guarantee it the wherewithal to orchestrate the functions of the interagency toward these ends. Current concerns along these lines are highlighted against the backdrop of the real and perceived dominance of DOD in determining the direction of the country’s response to the terrorist threat. Real or not, the concerns were reinforced in the minds of many players within the interagency following

² From “An Overview of the National Counterterrorism Center,” a presentation delivered at the symposium by Mr. Art Cummings, Interim Principal Deputy Director of the NCTC.

³ Dennis Murphy and John Traylor provide a more detailed discussion of the regional dimension of combating terrorism in Ch 9.

the introduction of DoD's *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism*. While thoughtful and well-construed, the document was not vetted through any interagency process, but is nevertheless being portrayed in many circles as superseding the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*. Whichever strategy stands, the mechanics of this development drove home the notion that coordinating the actions of the Departments of Defense, State, Homeland Security, the Treasury, et al., will require specific empowerment or the NSC will find itself cast as a peripheral player.

The only guaranteed means toward such empowerment throughout the President's cabinet will be through a National Security Presidential Directive. This directive will have to take up an early initiative of this President to supersede Presidential Decision Directive 56 of the Clinton Administration (*Managing Complex Contingency Operations*), but will have to move beyond that directive to focus more explicitly on combating terrorism, its causes and its effects. It must assign specific responsibilities to Executive Branch departments in fulfilling their agencies' functions in battling the terrorist threat, and specifically empower the NSC (presumably through the Deputy National Security Advisor for Combating Terrorism) with the integration and coordination of departmental efforts. In short, it must make clear that the NSC carries the President's mandate.

In addition to this mandate, however, some insist that resourcing and budgetary authority will be an essential component to executing a coherent strategy. Irrespective of which agency would exercise "lead" authority over the issues, some mechanism is necessary to ensure that "follower" agencies would, first, *have* sufficient resources to address the issues, and then *use* those resources towards those ends. In these regards, it is important to note current restrictions in the control of funding for developmental programs, such as those in the Economy Act and the Foreign Assistance Act, restrictions that will only be overcome by Congress which imposed them. A call has gone out for a "replenishable counterterrorism funding line," disbursed by direction of the President with "notwithstanding authority" and "no year" dollar expenditures to handle close in requirements to assist partner countries with urgent needs. Some have cited a need for a strategic approach to budgetary

considerations addressing the soft side of the War on Terrorism, but note that genuine long-term planning of the sort envisioned in these discussions is rare outside of DOD. Accordingly, a long-term planning process may be called for, but with it a long-term budgeting *authority*, rather than the supplemental authorities most often associated with these expenditures. Among other benefits, this shift from iterative supplemental funding to long-term budgeting may provide a more productive means of supporting the developmental line-of-action contained within the interagency terrorism programs.

From a cross-Cabinet perspective, the integration of issues in combating terrorism at its sources will cross many budget lines in multiple departments. As such, some authorities are calling for a partnership in coordinating and integrating anti-terrorism functions between the NSC, which would oversee policy considerations, and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which would assist in budgetary oversight. This oversight could take form not only in deliberate annual budget planning, but likewise in providing for requirements which challenge anticipation, such as disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, and other potential pools for terrorist exploitation.⁴

How Do We Expand the Interagency Focus to Address Complex Contingencies in General, and the Challenge of Terrorism in Particular?

Discussion over the cross-cutting, budgetary planning process that will be required to properly address the interagency effort against terrorism and its causes is indicative of a larger concern that exists over the structure of the interagency and its ability to adapt to a new threat in a new era. The current interagency process has been characterized as a relic of the Cold War era, ill-configured to handle the complex contingencies which are already

⁴ For a description of how this sort of policy-fiscal partnership could be constructed, see Chapter 6 of this volume, authored by Craig A. Murdock and Michele Fournoy, reprinted by permission, *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: Phase 2 Report*, CSIS, Washington, DC, July 2005, Chapter 2.

characterizing the 21st century. There is an increasing need to integrate all elements of national power to address issues such as terrorism, peacekeeping and stabilization, transnational organized crime, post-conflict reconstruction, humanitarian assistance, disaster response and other challenges. But the interagency process largely remains a collection of “stove-piped” functions, often pursuing separate but related agendas, with no real impetus towards pursuing or achieving synergy. The vision of the NSC as an “orchestration mechanism” for this diversity marks a proper beginning, but its success will be limited until institutional, (or perhaps better described as “cultural”) obstacles within the interagency are overcome.

To be sure, these obstacles aren’t intentional; in many cases they are born of ignorance. Simply put, far too few members of the interagency know what the rest of the interagency does. Without an understanding of how the separate components fit into a combined interagency effort (recognizing the capabilities, limitations and necessary constraints in each) it will be hard to develop and maintain a long-term strategic focus for addressing complex contingencies. From multiple sectors, a clear requirement seems to be emerging for a working familiarity between the components of the interagency. Some have suggested that, in the short term, this could begin with a sort of exchange program between the Departments, assigning personnel outside of their parent agencies for a period of time, automatically infusing a degree of shared awareness between the “detailees” and the agencies to which they are joined. It is perhaps interesting to note that the Strategic Operational Planning Department of the new National Counterterrorism Center is largely composed of this kind of detailee structure, a condition they intend to make permanent. Mr. Art Cummings, Interim Principle Deputy Director of the Center, extolled the virtues of this approach: “The strength of the NCTC is the fact that we have all those different cultures and people working at the same table, on the same mission.... We don’t approach problems the same way, and we don’t think the same way. That’s the good news.”⁵

⁵ Cummings, *op. cit.*

While this proposed exchange program may be viewed as beneficial, in the minds of many it fails to adequately — or perhaps more to the point, *permanently*—address the problem of interagency coordination. Observers contend that, in order to synergize the strength of the interagency process in addressing terrorism and the other complex issues of the 21st century, the federal departments will have to undergo a “Goldwater-Nichols-like” conversion in systems designed for education, planning, and coordination.

Outside DOD, there is an appreciable lack of educational opportunities and requirements surrounding national security functions in the interagency. Exchange opportunities like the ones cited above are certainly educational, but the relative potential gains in insight and understanding gathered on the job (as opposed to in a dedicated learning environment) would be limited. Studies have recommended the introduction of sequenced educational opportunities over the course of an interagency career, preparing “national security professionals” for increased responsibilities while traversing their individual agencies’ career paths. The apex of this type of education would come in syllabi designed for “strategic-level leadership” close akin to the type of joint, strategic curricula offered at DOD’s top level schools.

Taking these recommendations a step further may call for planned assignments across interagency lines during the course of a career. Drawing again from examples within DoD, ascension to senior positions in government would be contingent upon having served outside of one’s “host agency,” perhaps on multiple occasions. Proponents of this institutionalized exchange program are convinced that neither a full appreciation of the combined strength of the interagency community, nor a sufficient awareness of its weakness can be gained without this kind of hands-on experience.

In order to accommodate this “cross-pollenization,” significant adjustments may have to be made in the government personnel system (or systems), for the purpose of establishing a common foundation for interagency assignments. People with experience in the arena have contended that a genuine interagency process will require a genuine interagency personnel system. An immediate requirement in the minds of many is the

development of a universal Federal Security Clearance system, allowing common access to items of common concern in problems demanding interagency solutions.

In addition to these recommendations, a call has gone out across the interagency for several “institutional enhancements” to strengthen the interagency process in combating terrorism. One of these is devoted to establishing a long-term, deliberate planning process incorporating representative stakeholders from across the governmental departments. The process would be devoted to identifying and addressing a desired “comprehensive end-state” for a country or region’s response to terrorism, its causes, and that which sustains it. The planners would attempt to frame this end-state, and the ways and means to reach it, from a national, regional, and global perspective. And the plan would place a high premium on building “partner” capacity to achieve the desired end in its own right, whether that partner is a nation, a region, or a transnational entity.

Developing plans, however, should not be viewed as an end in itself: *exercising* the plans (or plans deliberately similar to those plans) will also be a vital component of strengthening the interagency process. Such exercises (ranging perhaps from tabletop to command-posts and beyond, in deference to what is being assessed) reinforces the types of “familiarity” sought after in some of the previous recommendations, but also provides a practical mechanism to play out policy, demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of our doctrine, and identify gaps in our preparations. Familiar territory for DOD and DHS, the lessons learned from these types of exercises, especially viewed from the multiple perspectives that characterize interagency efforts, could prove invaluable in *solving* problems before they happen.

Additional Consideration: the Role of Strategic Communication

Concurrent with the interagency question is the role Strategic Communication will play in the United States’ efforts to address terrorism and the underlying conditions which sustain it. Viewed simplistically as how we convey our message in these efforts, and how that message is received,

a significant number of critics hold that the country is suffering losses at home and abroad in “the war of ideas.”

One point of origin for our weakness in this arena is attributed to be the government’s failure to provide sustained leadership. Once again, the answer to the question of “Who should be in charge?” has proven to be elusive across the Executive Branch. Over time the nominal responsibility for carrying out the strategic communications campaign in the War on Terrorism has drifted from the NSC’s Directorate for Strategic Communications and Information, to the NSC’s World Muslim Outreach, to its new Strategic Communications and Global Outreach. New indications are that coordinating the overseas component of the Nation’s strategic communications effort will fall under the new Under Secretariat for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs in the Department of State. Wherever the responsibilities will ultimately reside, the presiding officials of the responsible organizations will have significant challenges to face, domestically, internationally, and within both the public and the private sectors.

The domestic side of our strategic communications efforts in addressing terrorism’s “underlying conditions” will have to deal with adverse perceptions surrounding resources and expenditures towards these ends. Frequently it has been noted that the American public and some members of Congress look upon efforts toward overseas development as “give-away programs”—nice to do, but easy to assign a lower priority viewed against constrained resources. It has been suggested that an education campaign is needed, particularly within the halls of Congress, to show a cost-benefit analysis behind empowering nations and peoples to stand alone, ending the cycle of deprivation and frustration that terrorist organizations have found so easy to exploit. Once again, building the capacities of our partners (nationally, sub-nationally, and supra-nationally) may well be the surest path to success; but unless Congress can be convinced, it will likely be the path not taken.

On the international front, the challenge for strategic communication will be in enlisting both governmental and non-governmental support. From

a governmental perspective, many would suggest that Washington can seldom expect a message emblazoned with “Made in the U.S.A.” stenciled across it to be warmly received by nations trying to establish/maintain credibility with their own people. In some cases, in fact, a government’s “moderate message” against fundamentalist extremism is either lost outright or obscured by charges that the purveyor of the message is a “puppet” of the Americans. It is the message and its moderating influence that should be important to us, not whether or not we receive credit for it.

If this is true of governments, it is all the more so with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It is no secret that these organizations often enjoy greater access to the populace of a country or region than our diplomats could hope to obtain; but history has taught these organizations that openly associate with governmental entities could immediately result in doors closing. In some areas of the world this is particularly true of association with the government of the United States. Unfortunately, recent history would indicate that our country has occasionally made bad matters worse in rhetoric surrounding its developmental efforts. Many NGOs are quick to note that, no matter what the economic, educational, medicinal or other altruistic intent, trying to enlist their organizations in any effort labeled “The War on Terrorism” is predisposed to failure. Interestingly enough, the same type of obstacles could be expected in enlisting another non-governmental sector, international business. This sector could provide a significant venue for access, but its reticence to being associated with a poorly conceived global message would be equal to, or even surpass that of the NGOs.

Conclusion

The direction the Administration is taking in the NSC, through the NCTC, the State Department’s Under Secretariat for Public Diplomacy and other initiatives leaves an opening for new optimism surrounding the interagency process for addressing terrorism; but optimism is not enough. No effort by any organization will succeed without a clear mandate from the White House in the form of a National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD). That directive must empower a partnership between the NSC

overseeing policy and OMB overseeing the resourcing of that policy. The policy must lay out a clear delineation of agency responsibilities, including delineation of tiered leadership along a strategic, operational, and tactical focus. The importance of Strategic Communication must be sustained at each level, consistently presenting our nation's message in "the war of ideas" under the orchestration of a single agency charged with framing that message for both a domestic and international audience.

Even on the strength of an NSPD, the NSC will remain foremost a coordination and synchronization entity between the Departments of the Executive Branch. In order for it to perform its function most efficiently, those departments will have to approach their integrated efforts with a common understanding of the strengths and limitations of these essential stakeholders behind our national elements of power. This understanding will only come about through a new direction in education and exchange among those charged with our Nation's security. The bi-polar threat that fashioned the national security structure of the last generation has given way to an asymmetric threat that defies even national identity. And, the threat is evolving. Our new national security structure must be able to move as freely—across agencies and across institutional cultural boundaries.

Professor Bert Tussing is Director of the Homeland Security/Homeland Defense Group, Center for Strategic Leadership, United States Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.