U.S. Army (Chris Shin)

Afghan Parliament representative cuts ribbon dedicating Teachers Training College in Panjshir, Afghanistan

National Security Reform

A Prerequisite for Successful Complex Operations

BY JAMES R. LOCHER III

In Kandahar, Afghanistan, the Teacher Training College has 184 students, including a 19-year-old woman named Shogota. "Here, we need teachers, education," she says. Shogota believes that if people like her can become teachers, engineers, and businesspeople—community leaders—they will play a crucial role in creating a more modern and secure Afghanistan.[1]

But right now, Shogota and her peers do not have the resources they need. There are not enough trainers at the college. There are not enough engineers to rebuild vital infrastructure. There are not enough advisors to help local businesses grow. As a result, poor Afghans turn to

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the Taliban for employment, adventure, and a sense of belonging.[2] Despite the best efforts of Americans on the ground, and for all the hopes of a young woman such as Shogota, hers is the story of a national security failure for the United States. The most important part of

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Shogota's story takes place not in Afghanistan, but in Washington. For years, experts and leaders from across government have been arguing that Afghanistan needs to be treated as a complex operation, with agricultural experts, teachers, lawyers, and engineers working alongside the military. But while strategists were thinking about the mission as a whole, it was being funded in a piecemeal fashion, agency by agency. The Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have small budgets compared to that of the Department of Defense (DOD), and as a result, the civilian effort never received needed support. There is no way to train civilian teachers, lawyers, engineers, or agricultural experts for combat-zone assignments. This, in turn, makes our well-funded military's job more difficult, forced as it is to become the face of the American presence in Afghanistan. In the words of Michèle Flournoy, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, the United States has been reduced to taking "stopgap measures"—using soldiers to do civilian work.[3]

Looking at the big picture, the reason Shogota is having trouble becoming a teacher is not because any one part of the national security system failed. Rather, failure in the contemporary security climate is *built into the system itself*.

If we do not change the way we think about national security, this failure will be repeated time and time again. America will fail to seize important opportunities to win friends and build partnerships around the world and will fail to respond to a growing range of increasingly diverse, complex threats from abroad.

Complexity is now the norm. Operations in the 21st century involve the Departments of Justice, Treasury, Agriculture, Homeland Security, and Energy, among others.[4] They require some of the most highly trained personnel in the world—people who can police unstable areas, train fledgling forces, think strategically, and advise other nations on issues as diverse as capacity-building, local governance, and economic development.[5]

But the success or failure of these operations will not depend solely on what takes place on the ground. As we see from the example above, the outcome is determined in government offices across Washington and the Nation and is written, to a great extent, into the very structure of the national security system itself. We must reconsider all the elements in this system to assess their effectiveness and to suggest ways in which they can be improved.

For, indeed, they *must be improved*. If complex operations are to succeed—if America is to remain secure in the face of new and ever-changing threats—the Nation must reorient and reform its entire national security system.

Past Lessons

The national security system has never been static; it is in a constant state of evolution. As threats have changed shape, policymakers—in the executive branch, Congress, and Armed Forces—have changed aspects of the system by

adding capacity, shifting or increasing resources, refining strategy, and so forth.

But this evolution has tended to be ad hoc, inconsistent, and incomplete. In general, it has been reactive rather than proactive, lagging behind the challenges that it exists to address. Despite all this, the remarkable men and women who safeguard our nation's security have achieved some stunning successes—winning battles large and small, tracking and neutralizing enemies, and defending our borders against myriad threats. But the system that should enable them has too often held them back.

During World War II, our ability to wage conventional war was hampered by a lack of communication within the military. The Army and Navy had their own air forces and intelligence agencies, and information-sharing was almost nonexistent. This was addressed after the war by the National Security Act (NSA) of 1947, which created, among other things, the organizations that would become the National Security Council (NSC), Central Intelligence Agency, and DOD. The NSA, however, was a compromise bill and integrated the Services to a much lesser degree than President Harry Truman wanted.[6] In the 1970s, our national security failures began to grow more apparent. They were exposed by the Vietnam War, the intelligence abuses investigated by the Church Commission, and the Iran hostage crisis.

Complex threats such as the Iran hostage crisis required greater cooperation among the Services. In 1986, as a professional staff member on the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), I helped draft the Goldwater-Nichols DOD Reorganization Act of 1986, which empowered the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Staff, and combatant commands, and brought us out of "The Age of Services" and into "The Age of Jointness."

Although these reforms greatly strengthened our national defense, it is also true that threats have not stopped evolving. Indeed, they are changing at an accelerating rate, spreading in an increasing number of directions, taking new and at first unrecognizable shapes. For example, in recent years we have witnessed the steady rise of transnational actors—militia groups, terrorist networks, narcotraffickers, pirates, and other criminal enterprises—whose strength and agility may far exceed the capability of weak governments to police their own territories.[7] Other threats to our security are not manmade: natural disasters, climate change, and AIDS, among others.

The national security environment is more likely to be characterized by complex operations today than it was during World War II. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, one of the most influential advocates for national security reform, has observed:

> *Over the last 15 years, the U.S. Government has tried to meet post–Cold War challenges and pursue 21st-century objectives with processes and organizations designed in the wake of the Second World War. Operating within this outdated bureaucratic superstructure, the U.S. Government has sought to improve interagency planning and cooperation through a variety of means: new legislation, directives, offices, coordinators, "tsars," authorities, and initiatives with varying degrees of success. . . . I'm encouraged that a consensus appears to be building that we need to rethink the fundamental structure and processes of our national security system.*[8]

Gates recognizes the increasing need for effective interagency processes, whole-of-government solutions, and the increased use of soft

power. Indeed, one analysis predicted that the Obama administration would face six critical challenges in the field of complex operations: "improving integration and program coherence, enlarging the capacity for stabilization and reconstruction, strengthening conflict prevention, promoting economic growth, strengthening institution-building, and leveraging U.S. programs internationally."[9]

In the face of complex threats, a new age must begin. Our patchwork approach to national security must end. In the 21st century, we need a new whole-of-government approach—an "Interagency Age" in which our system is as adaptable as the threats we face.

Growing Consensus for an Interagency Age

Support for this idea has been building for more than a decade. Experts have been pushing for greater cooperation among agencies and a more strategic, coordinated approach to national security policy.

In 1994, Vice President Al Gore's National Performance Review argued that the U.S. Agency for International Development, U.S. Information Agency, and Arms Control and Disarmament Agency should be incorporated into the State Department. In 1995, the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces found a need for a "quadrennial strategy review," an interagency project to be led by the National Security Council and conducted at the beginning of each administration. In 1996, the Aspin-Brown Commission on Roles and Capabilities of the U.S. Intelligence Community issued its final report, and that same year, the staff of the House Intelligence Committee conducted the Intelligence Community in the 21st Century study. Both reports proposed major restructuring and realignment of authorities.[10] In December 1997, the National Defense Panel published a report stating that "the entire U.S. national security structure must become more integrated, coherent, and proactive."[11] A report released by the Hart-Rudman Commission in 2001 argued that the United States must "redesign not just individual departments and agencies but its national security apparatus as a whole. Serious deficiencies exist that cannot be solved by a piecemeal approach."[12]

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After the 9/11 attacks—the most catastrophic national security failure since Vietnam—the calls for reform grew louder and more urgent. The 9/11 Commission Report declared, "Americans should not settle for incremental, ad hoc adjustments to a system designed generations ago for a world that no longer exists."[13] In the fall of 2006, the Princeton Project on National Security issued recommendations for a new, more flexible national security strategy.[14] The Center for Strategic and International Studies launched "Beyond Goldwater-Nichols," a four-phase study on ways to reorganize the national security system to meet 21st-century challenges.[15] Project Horizon, an internal government program, began in 2005 in order to identify "capabilities to prepare for the unforeseen threats and opportunities that will face the nation over the next 20 years" through increased interagency cooperation.[16]

U.S. Air Force (Cherie A. Thurlby)

Teacher talks during interview at reopening of school in Abu Ghraib, Iraq

In 2006, the Iraq Study Group issued a sweeping recommendation on national security policy that went well beyond the subject of the Iraq War:

> *For the longer term, the United States government needs to improve how its constituent agencies—Defense, State,* [U.S.] *Agency for International Development, Treasury, Justice, the intelligence community, and others—respond to a complex stability operation like that represented by this decade's Iraq and Afghanistan wars and the previous decades' operations in the Balkans.*[17]

Today, there is agreement that our national security system must become more coordinated and adaptable. The U.S. Government is currently unequipped to integrate the various departments or harness their skills to carry out complex operations. As Senator John Warner wrote to the White House in 2006, the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan "have revealed that our government is not adequately organized to conduct interagency operations."[18] It is consequently unprepared to meet threats requiring complex operations.

Despite this consensus, however, the Interagency Age will not emerge of its own accord. It will take a concerted and sustained push by both the executive and legislative branches. It will take considerable foresight. And it will require that officials take a holistic view of what the national security system is intended to accomplish.

Identifying Problems

That effort must begin with a careful analysis of the flaws in the current system. At first glance, this seems a nearly impossible task: the U.S. national security system is a maze of institutions. During the first year of the George W. Bush administration, for example, there were 9 unified commands, 16 agencies in the Intelligence Community, 17 agencies in DOD, 17 committees in the NSC, 22 agencies folded into the Department of Homeland Security, and 305 Embassies, consulates, and diplomatic missions around the globe.[19] In all, our national security system at the Federal level relies on approximately 4 million people.[20]

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The system is complicated. But for all its complexity, it has three central elements: Congress, the White House, and the departments and agencies themselves. We can ask the same question of each element: Is its priority successful mission outcomes? Right now, the answer for all three is *no*. Each has conflicting priorities. Each is distracted from the mission at hand. As a result, each is unprepared to support complex operations.

Congress. Congress is responsible for authorizing and funding the national security system. But the structure of Congress itself virtually guarantees that its oversight of the system will be fragmented and ad hoc.

Although many congressional committees have jurisdiction over a part of the national security system, no single committee oversees the system as a whole. According to a 2008 congressional report:

> *Congressional oversight of national security programs is divided among many different committees, including the Armed Services Committees, the Select Committees on Intelligence, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, and the Committee on Homeland Security, among others.*[21]

This means that no committee can focus on a mission outcome. It has only part of the entire mission and often engages in fights over jurisdiction as well. One result is an alphabet soup of uncoordinated agencies.

Finally, the rules governing congressional funding practices are inconsistent and overcomplicated. As the HELP Commission[22] put it, "At

present, the interpretation, management and operation of these procedures is at best unwieldy and at times unworkable. . . . Within the legislative branch itself, the authorizers and appropriators follow different procedures, and the House and Senate obey their own distinct processes."[23]

Complex operations in the field, such as an Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Team, are not likely to be successful in the absence of wise congressional action in Washington.

White House. The Commander in Chief is responsible for managing the 4-million-person national security system and setting its long-term strategy. Right now—although it would be politically impossible for any White House to admit—the President constantly risks being overwhelmed by these responsibilities and lacks the resources to fulfill them effectively.

The root of this problem lies with the overburdened NSC. The Ashridge Centre, a strategy research group, collected data in the 1990s that suggest a hypothetical corporation with 4 million employees would have more than 3,200 staff members in its corporate headquarters.[24] The NSC, which ought to be the headquarters for the national security system, is approximately one-fifteenth that size, with 71 funded employee slots and 155 detailees. With the NSC asked to do so much with so little, there is an insufficient national security "brain"—no center to effectively coordinate between agencies and missions.

This means the Oval Office is overburdened as well. Since true management is impossible, the President is forced to hope for an individual foreign policy guru—Henry Kissinger is the most frequently used example—to provide direction. This arrangement is, at best, inconsistent. As a result, all Presidents are forced to micromanage, dealing with short-term threats rather than grand strategy. We elect our Presidents based on their vision and foresight, but once they are in office, we require them to spend their time dealing with the crisis of the day.

Departments and Agencies. Government departments and agencies are the direct link between managers in Washington and operations in the field. However, the cultures and designs of these agencies make it harder for our forces on the ground to execute missions.

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The greatest problem within the agencies is that they provide no incentives for a bureaucrat to adopt an interagency mentality. In fact, they encourage the opposite. It is no wonder that interagency committees, where they exist, have largely been ineffective—for work on those committees will not break a person's career, but loyalty to one's own agency will *make* that career. This parochial mentality is reinforced by the way operations are funded—agency-by-agency rather than operation-by-operation. The natural consequence is that an agency has two missions for every one it is assigned. In addition to achieving a successful outcome, there is an internal mission: demand the most money and take the most credit.

Even when agencies *do* want to cooperate, they face unnecessary obstacles. For example, each agency uses idiosyncratic rules to govern information-sharing, making it harder for them to communicate with one another. As a result, an unofficial network of back channels, bypasses, workarounds, and ad hoc solutions has taken the place of real, transparent cooperation.

These jerry-rigged systems show that staffs from different agencies want to work together but lack the necessary tools or authorization.

Because the current national security system is grossly imbalanced toward agency capabilities and away from interagency missions, complex operations are likely ineffective, information-impoverished, frustrating, and held together by out-of-the-box organizational inventions.

We need a national security system focused on outcomes. Congress should authorize this system, the White House should manage it, and the agencies should give those in the field the support they need to execute it. At the moment, however, competing interests are getting in the way. Without fundamental change, it will be impossible for the United States to focus solely on the successful outcomes of the missions at hand.

Solution: A New National Security Act

Like the Age of Services, which was ushered in by the 1947 National Security Act, and the Age of Jointness, which was ushered in by Goldwater-Nichols, the Interagency Age will become possible only when Congress reorganizes the national security system by statute. In order for any such legislation to be effective, it will need to address the three problem areas already identified:

Congress. The legislative branch must begin by changing its own rules to reflect a view of national security that is broader and more complex. It should start by establishing a Select Committee on National Security in each chamber to oversee the entire national security system. It should also strengthen the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and House Foreign Affairs Committee by adopting new rules to empower them to formulate and enact annual authorization bills.

The NSC. The NSC should seek legislation to formalize the merger between the staffs of the Homeland Security Council and the NSC, and begin to expand the new National Security Staff. It should strengthen the position of Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs so whoever holds it can be an effective manager for the entire national security system.

In addition, the NSC staff should be freed to deal with long-term strategy. Instead of having to carry out damage control, the Executive would be freed to focus on U.S. long-term interests. Furthermore, the NSC should delegate medium-term responsibility to interagency teams. These teams would be divided by region, country, and province. Finally, the NSC should use interagency crisis task forces to respond to extremely sudden, short-term threats.

Departments and Agencies. The NSC staff should seek legislation that would mandate a whole-of-government quadrennial national security review (QNSR). National security legislation could reduce the need for back channels and ad hoc solutions by building a coherent framework and normative process for strategy formation, management, and implementation. To reduce interagency friction, it should direct each national security agency to prepare a 6-year budget projection influenced by the QNSR, the annual national security strategy document, and new annual national security planning and resource guidance documents.

Conclusion

Complex operations in Afghanistan and throughout the world, at home and abroad, will not be successful in the absence of full-scale national security reform in Washington. The war in Afghanistan cannot end without successes in numerous Provincial

Reconstruction Teams, but the U.S. national security system is not currently able to generate these interagency successes. Shogata's frustration at the lack of teachers for her Teacher Training College in Kandahar symbolizes this inability and the repeated failure of the U.S. national security system to successfully conduct complex operations.

After every national security failure, people start looking for someone to blame. Can we blame the President? Can we blame Congress? Can we blame bureaucrats in Washington or "bad apples" in the field? It takes far more calm—and far more courage—to acknowledge that our problems run deeper than any one person. But it is true. We need to stop looking for the failure within the national security system. The failure *is* the system. **PRISM**

Notes

[1] Dene Moore, "Canada Helps Rebuild Afghan Schools amid Threats from Militants," *Canadian Press*, July 23, 2009. On U.S. contributions to Teacher Training Colleges, see U.S. Agency for International Development, "Repairing Teacher Training Colleges," June 1, 2003, available at <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/Article.6.aspx>.

[2] Vanni Cappelli, "The Alienated Frontier: Why the United States Can't Get Osama bin Laden," *Orbis* 49, no. 4 (Fall 2005), 713–729.

[3] Quoted in Thom Shanker, "G.I.s to Fill Civilian Gap to Rebuild Afghanistan," *The New York Times*, April 22, 2009.

[4] Bernard Carreau, "Domestic Agencies, Civilian Reserves, and the Intelligence Community," in *Civilian Surge: Key to Complex Operations*, ed. Hans Binnendijk and Patrick M. Cronin (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2009), 135–163.

[5] Bernard Carreau, "Outsourcing Civilian Capabilities and Capacity," in Binnendijk and Cronin, 165–194.

[6] Amy B. Zegart, *Flawed by Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), chapter 2.

[7] James A. Schear and Leslie B. Curtin, "Complex Operations: Recalibrating the State Department's Role," in Binnendijk and Cronin, 93.

[8] Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, April 15, 2008.

[9] Patrick M. Cronin and R. Stephen Brent, "Strengthening Development and Reconstruction Assistance," in Binnendijk and Cronin, 120.

[10] Richard A. Best, *Proposal for Intelligence Reorganization, 1949–2004* (Washington, DC: Congressional Information Service, Library of Congress, 2004), 29.

[11] National Defense Panel, *Transforming Defense: National Security in the 21st Century: Report of the National Defense Panel* (Arlington, VA: National Defense Panel, 1997).

[12] United States Commission on National Security/21st Century, *Road Map for National Security Imperatives for Change: The Phase III Report of the U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century* (Washington, DC: U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century, 2001), 30.

[13] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York: Norton, 2004), 399.

[14] G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, "Forging a World of Liberty Under Law: U.S. National Security in the 21st Century," final report of the Princeton Project on National Security, September 27, 2007, available at <www.princeton.edu/~ppns/>.

[15] Clark A. Murdock, Michèle Flournoy, and Mac Bollman, *Beyond Goldwater-Nichols: U.S. Government and Defense Reform for a New Strategic Era, Phase 2 Report* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005), 6.

[16] Project Horizon Progress Report, Summer 2006.

[17] The Iraq Study Group Report, Recommendation 75, available at <www.usip.org/isg/iraq_study_group_report/report/1206/iraq_study_group_report.pdf>.

[18] John Warner, letter to White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card, March 15, 2006.

[19] Project on National Security Reform (PNSR), "Forging a New Shield," Center for the Study of the Presidency, PNSR, 2008, 21.

[20] Approximately 1.4 million Active-duty uniformed military personnel, another 1.4 million military Reserves, and the civilian and uniformed staff of other agencies, such as the Coast Guard, Central Intelligence Agency, and National Security Agency. See Edward F. Bruner, "Military Forces: What Is the Appropriate Size for the United States?" (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, January 2006), available at <www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/crs/rs21754.pdf>.

[21] U.S. House of Representatives, House Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, "Agency Stovepipes vs. Strategic Agility: Lessons We Need to Learn from Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq and Afghanistan," April 2008.

[22] According to the Brookings Institution Web site, "Congress established the Helping to Enhance the Livelihood of People around the Globe (HELP) Commission to study U.S. development and humanitarian assistance programs and to propose bold reform recommendations for relevant structures, mechanisms, and incentives."

[23] Quoted in PNSR, *Ensuring Security in an Unpredictable World: The Urgent Need for National Security Reform (Preliminary Findings July 2008)* (Washington, DC: PNSR, 2008), available at <www.pnsr.org/data/images/pnsr%20preliminary%20findings%20july%202008.pdf>.

[24] J. David Young, "Benchmarking Corporate Headquarters," *Long-range Planning* 31, no. 6 (December 2008), 933–936.