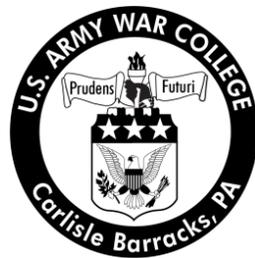


Strategy Research Project

Improving U.S. Foreign Policy Development and Implementation

by

Lieutenant Colonel Todd M. Fox
United States Army



United States Army War College
Class of 2014

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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Abstract

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Adopting an APEX-like approach at the NSC level would be a significant step to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of American foreign policy. State, USAID, and Defense all face significant obstacles “to ensure that their individual plans are based on shared assessments of conditions and appropriately aligned to account for each other’s priorities and plans.” Although each organization shares a common interest to promote US national security, distinct cultures, processes, language, timelines, and personalities lead to very different approaches and priorities. Establishing a common planning process that is based on the APEX system but modified to account for organizational differences is the next step in improving synchronization of all of the elements of national power. A National Security Council integrated and a UCP-like plan approved by the President would better align national ways and means to achieve national end states and reduce the confusion or mixed messages sent to our allies, adversaries, and partners throughout the world.

Improving U.S. Foreign Policy Development and Implementation

The simple truth is that the world for which the [U.S.] national security system was designed in 1947 no longer exists. Today's challenges require better integration of expertise and capabilities from across the government....Instead, departments and agencies are often working against one another, the White House is unable to make timely and well-informed decisions, and there is an over-reliance on military force.

—President Barack Obama¹

Many today would argue that US foreign policy has become too dependent on the use of force. The Tobin Project out of Dartmouth College stated that “America’s current foreign policy relies too heavily on military force to promote U.S. interests.”² It is easy to understand this perspective after a long war in Iraq and more than a decade-long war in Afghanistan. Even the recent “rebalance to the Pacific” has had little to show from elements of national power other than the military’s deployment of a second Carrier Strike Group to the region. The diplomatic, informational, and economic aspects have not been appreciably shifted to support the Pacific rebalance.

Despite this perception by many throughout the world, recent American actions and statements could indicate a reluctance to use military force in the near future. Secretary Charles Hagel in his statement during the opening session of the 2013 Global Security Forum hosted by The Center for Strategic and International Studies cautioned against the increasing reluctance to engage the world. Secretary Hagel cautioned that “isolationism or inaction would be a mistake more grave than hubris.”³

Secretary Hagel’s comments are a warning against the rising sentiment that the use of force is too costly to be seen as an effective element of national power. He was not advocating the independent use of force to protect American interests. Rather, he

was arguing that an effective approach to international engagement requires the coordinated and synchronized efforts of all of the elements of national power.

The worsening situation in Syria serves as a striking example of uncoordinated, ad hoc foreign policy without integrated diplomatic, economic, and military efforts. It is a case study for the importance of credibility to a strategy of deterrence. Many economic and diplomatic efforts serve as indicators of escalation as a nation approaches the use of military force. If an adversary doesn't believe military deterrence is a credible threat, it weakens not just the military element of national power but all elements of national power.

This has derivative effects not only in Syria or the Middle East but throughout the world. If America appears to be moving to an isolationist-like posture, the nation will no longer have the credibility to deter potential adversaries or reassure our allies and partners. This effect is evident in Japan. In 2013 Japan increased defense spending for the first time in eleven years.⁴ Recent Japanese defense guidance articulated that “[p]riority shall be given to initiatives...to respond to cyber attacks, and ballistic missile attacks, and transport capacity, mobility, and air defense capability in relation to offshore island defense.”⁵ Japan clearly questions American willingness and capacity to fulfill its treaty obligations and has begun to develop an increased capacity to defend itself and its interests alone.

The central issue is a lack of coherence in American foreign policy and commitment. The fiscal reality of today leads many to assume America will do less. With a better synchronized and coordinated foreign policy, America could achieve more and do it more efficiently. The U.S. must develop a more thorough planning construct to

synchronize efforts across the whole of government. As it currently stands, the military has the most developed process for developing and communicating its strategy through the Geographic Combatant Commands. This further fuels the perception that US foreign policy is overly dependent on the military element of national power.

The Tobin Project clearly outlined the way in which American foreign policy should be developed and implemented to make our national security efforts more effective.

Although military force is sometimes necessary, U.S. policy should be balanced and rely more on America's other tools of foreign policy—e.g., our unrivaled economy, and the global appeal of our values. Through a balanced foreign policy, the United States can achieve its important foreign policy goals, while reestablishing our country as a beacon of freedom and human rights, at a fraction of the costs of the current policy.⁶

Dr. Daniel A. Gilewitch from the US Army Command and General Staff College highlights a key shortcoming in the development of national security policy implementation associated with how each agency and department receives and interprets national security guidance.

For those unfamiliar with the world of security cooperation, there exists a dizzying array of national security and joint strategy documents that guide security cooperation planning and execution...[T]heir purpose and the relationship between them can be difficult to understand, in part because the linkages between them are not well publicized...[and] because their purpose occasionally shifts over time...[I]t is imperative that security cooperation practitioners understand the flow of strategic guidance through the operational level in order to effectively execute their jobs, and to better understand to what ends their efforts serve the Nation.⁷

The current system for implementing the National Security Strategy is for each department to develop its own plans with limited interagency or interdepartmental coordination. There is no codified process to integrate all elements of national power. The process relies much too heavily on Combatant Commands and interagency

partners such as the State Department's Regional Bureaus attempting to find consensus through an informal, ad hoc system to align efforts. This process often leads to an American foreign policy that is disjointed, sending mixed or confusing messages to our allies, partners, and adversaries.

Organizational differences—including differences in agencies' structures, planning processes, and funding sources—can hinder interagency collaboration. Agencies lack adequate coordination mechanisms to facilitate this collaboration during planning and execution of programs and activities. U.S. government agencies, such as the Department of State, USAID, and DOD, among others, spend billions of dollars annually on various diplomatic, development, and defense missions in support of national security. Achieving meaningful results in many national security-related interagency efforts requires coordinated efforts among various actors across federal agencies; foreign, state, and local governments; nongovernment organizations; and the private sector. Given the number of agencies involved in U.S. government national security efforts, it is important that there be mechanisms to coordinate across agencies. Without such mechanisms, the results can be a patchwork of activities that waste scarce funds and limit the overall effectiveness of federal efforts.⁸

The biggest structural impediment to implementing a coherent strategy is insufficient coordination at the national level. As our doctrine currently exists, a Theater Campaign Plan (TCP) is developed by a combatant command and “is accomplished by collaboration, synchronization, and coordination in the use of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic instruments of national power.”⁹ This briefs well but is not routinely executed very well. The sheer number of the sources of strategic guidance that a combatant commander must analyze to determine his priority efforts can easily lead to multiple interpretations of relative importance. Additionally, the primary sources of a combatant commander's guidance are Department of Defense specific products such as the Guidance for the Employment of Force (GEF) and the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP).

While these products are invaluable to synchronizing Department of Defense efforts and provide information to other US government departments and agencies, they are not the primary sources of guidance to the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development.

Department of Defense doctrine attempts to deconflict these potentially different interpretations by coordinating and sharing combatant commanders' plans both with the Department of State regional bureaus and through their country desks to the country teams in each affected country. Despite this effort, a requirement to coordinate and attempt to satisfy the needs and perspectives of dozens of separate offices across multiple countries and bureaus for each combatant commander still exists. The lack of a codified process can be worked through to achieve a unified US approach to a region, but it is extremely time intensive and personality dependent. This ad hoc approach can often lead to a plan that is not responsive or flexible enough to coordinate all of the elements of national power to seize opportunities or mitigate risk. The result is often differing levels of commitment to a combatant commander's approach which at best leads to lost opportunities, and at worst, to efforts that work to contradict each other. The potential complications can serve to send mixed messages to actors in the region, render the national approach inconsistent, and waste resources.

In an attempt to improve national-level planning for the implementation of the National Security Strategy, the Department of State, the United States Agency for International Development, and the Department of Defense established the 3D Planning Group. The 3Ds of Diplomacy, Development, and Defense "are the three pillars that provide the foundation for promoting and protecting US national security interests

abroad.”¹⁰ Although State, USAID, and Defense all derive their basic guidance from the National Security Strategy, “their planning perspectives and approaches are derived from their distinct missions, roles, legal authorities, and congressional interests...as a result, each of them has created distinct frameworks, processes, terminology, and planning cultures.”¹¹

It has become vogue to talk in terms of unity of effort within a “whole of government” approach. While the concept of unity of effort is an improvement from three separate and distinct efforts working toward different ends, it still lacks the structure to effectively align efforts and designate supported and supporting relationships within our approach. Unless there is a clear national approach to solving national security problems bureaucratic interests creep in and overlapping authorities make effective collaboration and coordination difficult across the various departments and agencies.

The 3D Planning Group is an attempt to improve the coordination and synchronization across the three key players in US security and foreign policy implementation. The 3D Planning Group developed and published the 3D Planning Guide in an attempt to improve each organization’s understanding of the others’ planning process. The guide is a reference that describes the different plans and planning processes of State, USAID, and Defense and an attempt to improve collaboration and sharing. The intent is to improve understanding between the three organizations of each other’s planning constructs to “support collaboration between State, USAID, and Defense for more informed and effective planning coordination.”¹² Unfortunately, the 3D Planning Group is simply another attempt to improve the ad hoc

nature of interagency planning with no authority or ability to codify interaction and collaboration among State, USAID, and Defense.

Following is a description of the distinct planning processes used by the Department of State, Department of Defense, and the US Agency for International Development to illustrate the challenges that exist in formulating and executing national security strategy in pursuit of national objectives. This paper will attempt to highlight the aspects of each department's unique planning process and organizational culture that hinder efforts to collaborate, align, and integrate national efforts during US foreign policy development and implementation. After discussing each organization separately, the paper will describe an alternative to the system as it currently exists to better align national efforts through implementation of a common planning process that is centered on early integration through the application of design. A recommendation is provided to formally implement elements of design in the National Security Council and establish an APEX-like system of in progress reviews to align efforts and improve the implementation of national foreign policy.

Department of State Planning Process

The 2010 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) outlined a series of recommendations to improve strategic planning at the Department of State. Their intent was to “ensure budgets support strategic priorities; improve monitoring and evaluation systems; and streamline and rationalize planning, budgeting, and performance management processes.”¹³ This resulted in an approach that starts with multi-year (3 year) State/USAID regional strategies informing multi-year interagency country strategies. The resulting annual country team budget requests will then inform yearly bureau-level budget requests.¹⁴

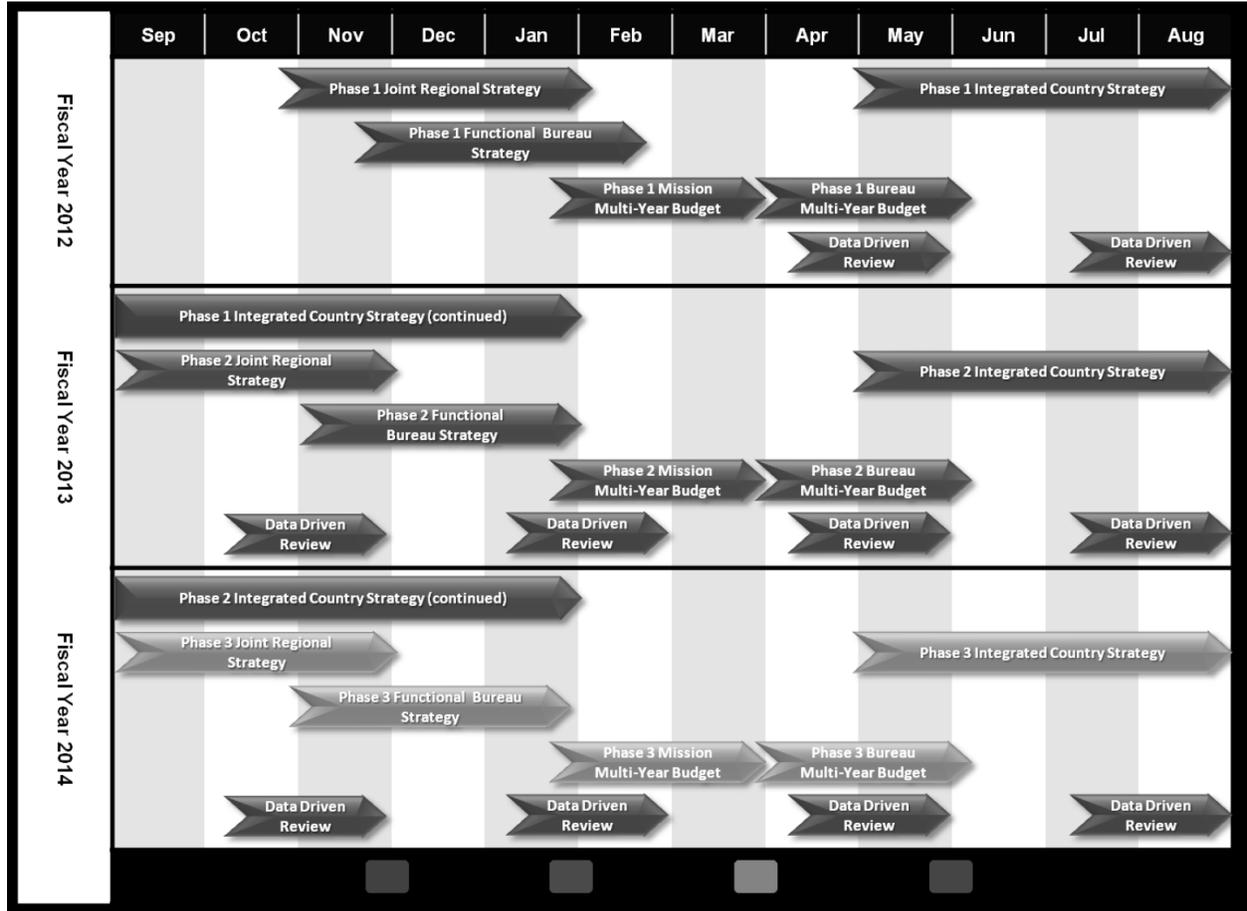


Figure 1: The Department of State's New Strategic Planning Process¹⁵

The Department of State and USAID produce a Joint Strategic Plan that serves as the highest-level strategic framework for State and USAID and guides all planning and budgeting throughout both organizations.¹⁶ The Joint Strategic Plan is developed based upon guidance from the National Security Strategy and the Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development. The key components of the Joint Strategic Plan include the mission statement, the pillars of foreign policy, and the joint strategic goals.¹⁷ In essence the Joint Strategic Plan outlines the desired ends and ways that the Department of State and USAID intend to implement in support of US foreign policy.

The Joint Strategic Plan is similar to the National Defense Strategy published by the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

Based upon guidance from the Joint Strategic Plan, the regional bureaus develop their Joint Regional Strategy. The Joint Regional Strategy is a three-year regional strategy developed by the Department of State and USAID for a particular region. The Joint Regional Strategy “provides a forward-looking flexible framework within which bureaus and missions prioritize desired end states, supporting resources, and respond to unanticipated events.”¹⁸ The Joint Regional Strategy provides the ends and means to the country teams to enable their detailed planning for execution of individual integrated country strategies in the larger regional context.

The integrated country strategies are developed by individual country teams to articulate US priorities in a given country. The strategy sets mission goals and objectives through a coordinated and collaborative planning effort among State, USAID, and other government agencies to include the specific geographic combatant command with responsibility for that country. A key aspect of the integrated country strategy is where the decision authority lies. Although the Chief of Mission shares the integrated country strategy with the regional bureau as a form of “bottom-up” refinement, the final approval authority for the strategy lies with each individual Chief of Mission.¹⁹

The figure below represents the Department of State Strategic Planning Cycle. Although the figure recognizes the opportunities for collaboration and information sharing in steps 2 and 3, it is evidence of current shortcomings that the same opportunities are not conveyed during step 1-Agency Strategic Planning.



Figure 2: Department of State Strategic Planning Cycle²⁰

USAID Planning Process

USAID is the principal US agency to “extend assistance to developing nations and those countries recovering from disaster, trying to escape poverty, and engaging in democratic reforms.”²¹ USAID promotes US foreign policy objectives through economic growth, agriculture, and trade, supporting global health initiatives, promotion of democracy, conflict prevention, and humanitarian assistance.²²

While many of their planning processes are embedded in Department of State planning process, there are aspects of the agency that make its planning process unique. First, USAID regions do not align with the Department of State regional bureaus. USAID’s strength lies within its field offices around the world, and USAID “is highly dependent on its country-level Missions and forward-deployed American and

local staff for assessment, planning, and implementation of the majority of its programs.”²³

USAID Missions are empowered to develop strategic plans known as Country Development Cooperation Strategies. Although State and Defense coordinate with allies and partners in the development of strategic objectives and plan, USAID is much more dependent on host nation agendas to develop and align US, host nation, international, and bilateral donor programs within a specific country.²⁴ The Country Development Cooperation Strategy is a five-year strategy that focuses on USAID-implemented assistance, including non-emergency humanitarian and transition assistance, and related US government non-assistance tools.²⁵ Approval authority for a Country Development Cooperation Strategy lies with the Assistant Administrator of the USAID regional bureau. Once approved, the strategy is submitted to USAID staff and interagency partners and posted to the USAID website.²⁶

The following figure illustrates USAID’s development assistance planning requirements and shows how it is nested with State Department planning.

Documents	Purpose	Frequency and Period Covered
State-USAID Joint Strategic Plan (Joint State-USAID)	Defines the primary aims of U.S. foreign policy and development assistance as well as our strategic priorities within each of those goals.	Every 4 years Period Covered: not less than 4 years
USAID Policy Framework: 2011-2015	Provide core development priorities, operational principles.	Every 5 years Period Covered: 5 years
Agency Policies and Strategies (USAID) / Joint Regional Strategies (State/USAID, as applicable) Terminology: Strategic goals, priorities, themes, regional approaches.	Presents corporate approaches and priorities for USAID's regional bureaus and technical focus areas (e.g., education, violent extremism and insurgency, health, and more).	As needed Period Covered: Generally 5 years (3 years for Joint Regional Strategy)
Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCS) Terminology: Development Objectives, Results Framework, Intermediate Results, Performance Management Plan	Sets longer term country-specific development assistance priorities and expected results. Developed by the field; final approval in Washington.	Every 4-6 years Period Covered: 4-6 years
Operational Plan (Joint USG) Terminology: Functional Objectives, Program Areas, Elements, Sub-Elements	Proposes 1) budget allocation below the Program Area level and 2) means of implementation. Budget, higher level narratives and key issue funding reviewed/approved in Washington.	Annual Period Covered: 1 year for budget and performance; 2 out-years for performance targets

Figure 3: USAID's Development Assistance Planning²⁷

Department of Defense Planning Process

The Department of Defense has institutionalized complex processes and support mechanisms that enable it to prepare, plan for, and conduct military operations in support of the National Security Strategy. Primary responsibility for detailed planning and implementation resides in the geographic combatant commands. The geographic combatant commanders receive their guidance from five primary sources: the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy, the National Military Strategy, the Guidance for the Employment of the Force, and the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan.

With this guidance, the geographic combatant commanders work to develop their Theater Campaign Plans. Unfortunately, the guidance given to a combatant commander to formulate their theater strategy “comes from a variety of sources, none of them adequately definitive and comprehensive.”²⁸ Often national policy and guidance is vague and open to individual interpretation. This requires the combatant commander to “interpret, analyze, and synthesize the many forms from which national intent comes, and then communicate this synthesis back to the national policy makers to ensure he is in sync with their vision.”²⁹

It is critical that a combatant commander coordinate across US government departments and agencies, international partners and allies, and non-governmental and private organizations to ensure compatibility of objectives and alignment of efforts. This is extremely time intensive and often personality dependent, but it is critical to the success of national efforts.

The resulting theater campaign plan will provide a description of key factors of the environment that provide context for the strategy and the combatant commander’s desired strategic ends, the strategic approach to apply military power with other elements of national power to achieve these ends (ways), and the resources necessary to source the operational approach (means).³⁰ A key aspect of the theater campaign plan is the combatant commander’s framing of the environment. Effective framing of the environment is critical to establishing a common understanding of the region’s tendencies, potential opportunities for engagement, and identification of the risks associated with the proposed strategy.

The most significant difference in the three planning processes is where the authority lies to approve developed plans. The Department of Defense has recently adopted the Adaptive Planning and Execution System (APEX) to “monitor, plan, and execute mobilization, deployment, employment, sustainment, redeployment, and demobilization activities associated with joint operations.”³¹ All theater campaign plans are approved by the Secretary of Defense and require detailed coordination between all members of the Joint Planning and Execution Community. “APEX activities span many organizational levels, but the focus is on the interaction between the [Secretary of Defense] and [combatant commanders], which ultimately helps the President and [Secretary of Defense] decide when, where, and how to commit US military forces.”³²

The APEX system is an attempt to clarify strategic guidance and improve coordination within the Department of Defense through frequent interaction of senior leaders, combatant commanders, and associated stake holders. The APEX system formally integrates planning activities within the Department of Defense through incorporating planning detail, frequent In Progress Reviews (IPRs), continuous assessment, and collaborative technology to provide increased opportunities for consultation and guidance during the planning process.³³ The IPRs serve to align all stake holders at multiple points throughout the planning process to ensure all share a common understanding of the environment and problem to be addressed, the desired ends and associated operational approaches to achieve those ends, the required support and resources to execute the strategy, and the risks associated with it.

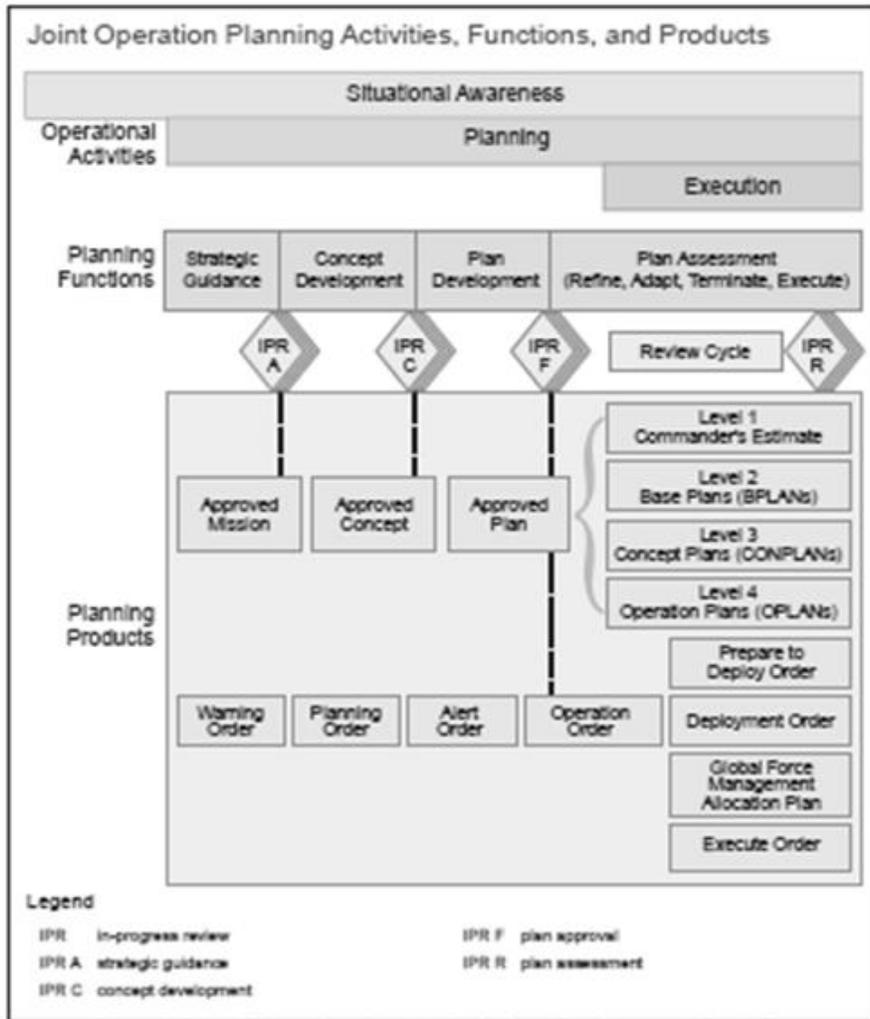


Figure 4: Joint Operation Planning Activities, Functions, and Products³⁴

APEX will do much to improve the quality of joint planning to ensure alignment of Department of Defense efforts in support of national objectives. Unfortunately, the APEX system is still in its infancy and many of the policies, processes, and tools have not yet been fully developed. Currently, Theater Campaign Plans are a Department of Defense product with some less than optimal sharing and coordination across the whole of government. As the system currently exists, “[c]ommanders and planners must identify the desired contribution of other agencies and organizations and communicate

needs to [the Office of the Secretary of Defense]³⁵ for further coordination and integration. “Though close coordination with interagency and coalition partners is encouraged, the formal procedures of joint strategic planning are limited to the [Joint Planning and Execution Community].”³⁶ APEX synchronizes across joint efforts, but it is less effective as a means to improve planning and prioritizing with the interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational actors.

An APEX-Like System for the National Security Council

The 3D Planning Group has done an exemplary job to highlight areas where State, USAID, and Defense can collaborate to better synchronize and align national efforts. Unfortunately, the efforts don’t go far enough to solve the many problems associated with development and implementation of US foreign policy. The two primary shortcomings are that collaboration occurs too late in the planning process and approval authorities reside at multiple different levels depending on the element of national power being utilized. The development and approval process is disjointed and doesn’t serve to codify how each of the elements of national power are used to achieve national interests.

Although sharing the highest-level strategic guidance document – the National Security Strategy (NSS) – State, USAID, and DoD face significant hurdles to ensure their plans are based on shared assessments of conditions, are appropriately aligned, and account for each other’s priorities and plans.³⁷The National Security Strategy effectively serves the purpose of providing the initial top-down guidance to begin the planning and development process at the departmental and regional levels, but that is where it stops. Although there are a number of personnel from other agencies embedded with a combatant commander’s staff such as the Political Advisor and

liaisons through the individual country teams, there isn't sufficient coordination with interagency partners that have the appropriate authorities.

Clear strategic guidance and frequent interaction between senior leaders and planners promote an early, shared understanding of the complex operational problem presented, strategic and military end states, objectives, mission, planning assumptions, considerations, risks, and other key guidance factors.³⁸

When the three planning processes are compared, it is easy to see that most of the formal coordination happens later in the process. Most of the codified coordination comes later during the phases of planning where different staffs are considering the specific ways each intends to implement their adopted approach.

“The NSC system is the principal forum for interagency deliberation of national security policy issues.”³⁹ A process that required interagency collaboration through an APEX-like process at the NSC level during the early phases of planning would benefit each agency. Although each agency uses the National Security Strategy as the principal source of guidance for planning, there are multiple sources of guidance and often each agency will interpret that guidance differently based on their organizational cultures and priorities. “Even though the NSS is an annual requirement, it typically is not updated for several years at a time and may be superseded by other strategic documents and policy statements.”⁴⁰

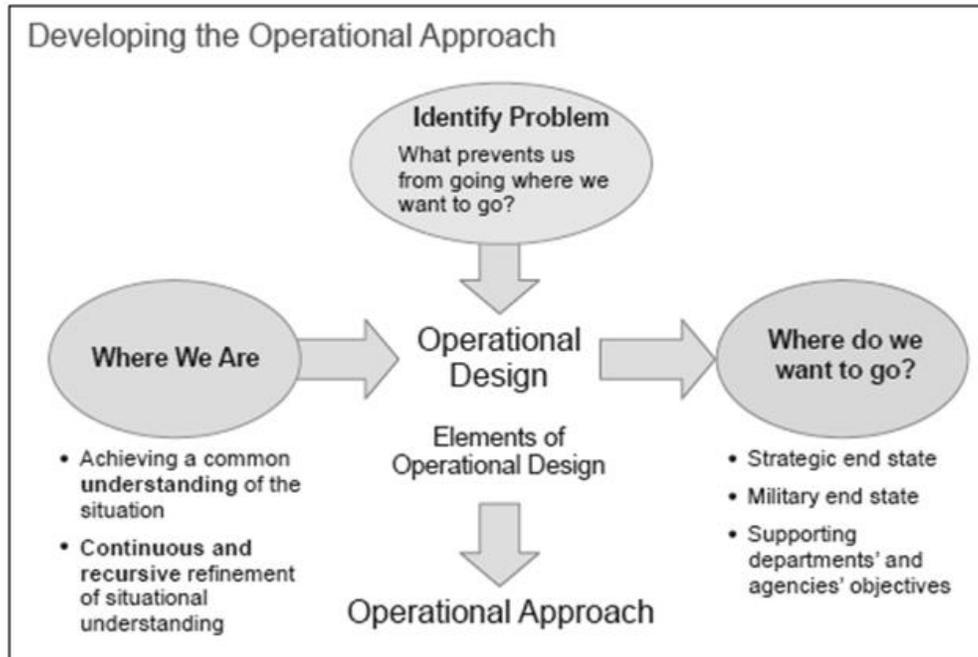


Figure 5: Using Design Methodology to Develop an Operational Approach⁴¹

Earlier coordination and collaboration would help to align how each agency evaluates the environment, defines the problem at hand, and develop a national-level approach to solve that problem. This would have a significant impact to streamline later planning to synchronize national ways and prioritize national means based upon a mutual understanding of the environment and NSC-level approved national approach. An APEX-like system would adopt a design methodology that serves to clarify guidance from the National Security Strategy. This methodology would also help to develop a common, national-level understanding of the environment, definition of the problem to be addressed, and a mutually understood approach to achieve national objectives.

A process that further requires periodic updates and confirmation of national priorities would serve to ensure that the national understanding of the problem and the approved approach are current and making progress toward our desired national ends.

A system that requires US Departments and Agencies to develop and submit their subordinate plans back to the National Security Council for integration, synchronization, deconfliction, resourcing, and ultimately approval would better align our efforts.

The new APEX system is a great step to better align Department of Defense efforts in support of a combatant commander's theater campaign plan and contingency plans. Unfortunately, it is unique to the Department of Defense. "Achieving national strategic objectives requires effective unified action resulting in unity of effort."⁴² Elevating approval for regional approaches to national security interests through the adoption an APEX-like system in the National Security Council would serve to better align and synchronize national efforts.

This approach would follow the APEX IPR system to coordinate and synchronize understanding, efforts, and efficiently allocate resources. The approach would provide unity of effort based upon a common understanding of the situation and environment, a common vision and goals for national objectives, coordination of efforts to ensure coherency, and integrated interagency decision making. This would further serve to ensure "whole of government" resources are applied along lines of effort to reduce redundancies and a more efficient use of national means.

The final product of an APEX-like approach at the National Security Council should resemble the Unified Command Plan currently published by the Department of Defense.

The UCP, signed by the President, sets forth basic guidance to all [Combatant Commanders] (CCDRs). The UCP establishes [Combatant Command] (CCMD) missions and responsibilities; addresses assignment of forces; delineates geographic AORs for geographic combatant commanders (GCCs); and specifies responsibilities for functional combatant commanders (FCCs).⁴³

The Unified Command Plan serves to prioritize objectives (ends), operational approaches (ways), and resources (means) within the Department of Defense. It also serves to delineate responsibilities for national efforts and identifies supported and supporting efforts and commands within that framework. A similar UCP-like document produced by the NSC could have the same effect within the whole of government. This would go beyond the statement of desired ends found in the NSS and provide the approved national ways and means to be implemented in pursuit of those ends. It would serve to align efforts and clearly set supporting and supported relationships within the whole of government.

This document would provide a better integrated and synchronized national approach to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of American efforts. Additionally, this document could accompany the President's budget request to Congress and serve as a clear means to justify resource requirements and assist Congress in their oversight responsibilities.

The Counterargument to a NSC led APEX-Like System

There would be significant organizational resistance to adopting an APEX-like approach at the NSC level. There will no doubt be resistance within the NSC itself and from the associated departments and agencies. This level of collaboration and possibly consensus would be extremely time intensive and have significant derivative effects within each associated department and agency. This would be an extensive undertaking in which departments and agencies concede some of their freedom of action. Adopting this approach would potentially restrict much of the latitude currently enjoyed by many of the various stake holders.

Opponents of developing an APEX-like system in the National Security Council to develop, synchronize, and resource national security efforts accurately argue that the NSC is not resourced or manned to execute this proposal. The NSC staff would have to be significantly increased to provide the manpower necessary to facilitate the coordination between different government departments and agencies. Additionally, the NSC would need a much larger staff of permanent planners to coalesce the proposed plans and strategies from multiple departments and agencies into a Unified Command Plan-type of document.

The APEX system has not yet been fully developed and implemented within the Department of Defense. Why would the NSC attempt to modify it and use it when it hasn't been fully implemented? Many of the systems required to make it work within the Department of Defense do not yet exist. Attempting to implement it across departments and agencies with different perspectives and cultures without these systems fully developed would significantly impact successful development of the system. Any initial failures or complications only serve to embolden those who oppose the system in the first place.

Additionally, many would argue that creating or adopting a common framework would actually serve to stifle much of what gives the interagency process value. If each organization was forced into a common planning process some of the unique organizational culture would be lost. The value of different organizational cultures and planning methodologies creates additional perspectives, approaches, and helps to eliminate blind spots or shortcomings that arise if the planning process is restrictive or overly prescriptive.

The intent of an APEX-like system is not to adopt a common planning process across the whole of government. Rather the intent is to align efforts through the adoption of an IPR process that requires collaboration early in the process. How each organization conducts the process of planning or the approach they take to problem solving would be only marginally impacted by requiring interagency sessions to conduct the basic elements of design. Each organization would arguably have a much better and more thorough understanding of the environment as a result of each others' contributions. A common understanding of the problem to be solved and the national approach to solving that problem would enable the more detailed planning process in each department or agency only now with a more coherent understanding of what to expect from and what to provide to partners across the whole of government.

Conclusion

Despite many of the potential complications associated with adopting an APEX-like approach at the NSC level, it would be a significant step to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of American foreign policy. The reality is that State, USAID, and Defense all face significant obstacles “to ensure that their individual plans are based on shared assessments of conditions and appropriately aligned to account for each other’s priorities and plans.”⁴⁴ Although each organization shares a common interest to promote US national security, distinct cultures, processes, language, timelines, and personalities lead to very different approaches and priorities. Establishing a common planning process that is based on the APEX system but modified to account for organizational differences is the next step in improving synchronization of all of the elements of national power. A National Security Council integrated and a UCP-like plan approved by the President would better align national ways and means to achieve

national end states and reduce the confusion or mixed messages sent to our allies, adversaries, and partners throughout the world.

Endnotes

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