

Strategy Research Project

Unified Action in a Transregional Hybrid World

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Abstract

The United States is facing one of the most complex security environments in history, one that it is ill prepared for and poorly structured to address. Threats are increasingly transregional and hybrid, but US efforts remain regionally focused and departmentally aligned. Adversaries increasingly exploit this gap as an offset against overwhelming US might. Initiatives to increase the lethality of the military without better global interagency synchronization will result in a military that is both awesome and largely irrelevant. Cultural, bureaucratic, and societal factors have made progress elusive. Bureaucratic and cultural changes, made within the context of societal realities, are essential to achieve unified action against these threats. This paper is arranged into three parts. The first attempts to understand the nature of these threats, efforts to address them, and remaining gaps and challenges. The second addresses why security reform has been so elusive. The third offers recommendations based on the analysis from the first two parts.

Unified Action in a Transregional Hybrid World

We call on the American people to remember how we all felt on 9/11...
Unity of purpose and unity of effort are the way we will defeat this enemy
and make America safer for our children and grandchildren.

—The 9/11 Commission Report¹

The United States is facing one of the most complex security environments in history, one that it is ill prepared for and poorly structured to address. Threats are increasingly transregional and hybrid, but US efforts remain regionally focused and departmentally aligned. Adversaries increasingly exploit this gap as an offset against overwhelming US might. Initiatives to increase the lethality of the military without better global interagency synchronization will result in a military that is both awesome and largely irrelevant. Cultural, bureaucratic, and societal factors have made progress elusive, causing some security experts to view interagency efforts as “a bulldozer in a mangrove swamp”²—disruptive to their deeply rooted approaches. Bureaucratic and cultural changes, made within the context of societal realities, are essential to achieve unified action against these threats.

There has been no shortage of clamoring for better synchronization of the interagency, particularly after the attacks on 9/11. This has led to numerous commissions, studies, academic work, and recommendations loosely grouped under the title of “National Security Reform.”³ This paper borrows heavily from that body of work and builds on it by trying to determine what factors continue to stymie the best intentions to improve what many agree needs to be improved. This study uses the threat of transregional Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO) as a primary case study with the understanding that the principles and recommendations are applicable across any transregional hybrid threat.⁴ While no easy answers may be evident, a better

understanding of the root factors can inform recommended changes to address these challenges.

The paper is arranged into three parts. The first attempts to understand the character of these threats, efforts to address them, and remaining gaps. The second addresses why security reform has been so elusive. The third offers recommendations based on the analysis from the first two parts.

The Current Security Environment

Clausewitz observed that while the nature of war is immutable, the character changes, and the “most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish...the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.”⁵ Threats in the contemporary security environment commonly exhibit two characteristics: they are transregional and hybrid.⁶ It is this dual character which confounds efforts to address them. Were threats simply transregional, but largely military, a Department of Defense (DoD) solution would work, perhaps better enabling the Joint Staff to commit and move military capabilities more quickly. Conversely, if threats were hybrid, but constrained to a particular region, the current geographic centric approach could work, perhaps through the establishment of “interagency combatant commands.”⁷ In reality, because of complex interdependencies, efforts to address either characteristic in isolation are at best futile, and at worst counterproductive.

Transregional and Hybrid Threats

General Dunford, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), believes future conflicts will rapidly become Transregional, Multidomain and Multifunctional (TMM).⁸ DoD has a formal definition for “transnational”⁹ but not “transregional” so this

paper will use one from a RAND study published in 1997. That is, *transregional security problems are those problems that cut across established security theaters*.¹⁰ The same study asked if we had arrived at “...the end of geography.”¹¹ This study was before the advent of social media, the pervasive use of the internet, and the Global War on Terrorism—all factors which serve to further highlight and accelerate the globalization of security threats. Now, practically any threat has the potential to rapidly become transregional.

Threats in the current security environment are also increasingly characterized as “hybrid” by senior leaders,¹² but a definition of the term has not been formally adopted into doctrine. This paper will use the definition by Dr. Frank Hoffman, Distinguished Research Fellow at the National Defense University: “...a full range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder.”¹³ Hybrid warfare most frequently involves those activities conducted by adversaries short of the threshold that results in a large-scale military response by the US, commonly referred to as occurring in the “gray zone”.¹⁴

Transregional Synchronization

One of the major accomplishments of the Goldwater-Nichols Act (GNA) of 1986 was to strengthen the role of the Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC) and limit the role of the service chiefs and force providers.¹⁵ The intent of the legislation was to provide a joint approach to military operations by minimizing service parochialism. Although the GNA legislation largely accomplished its goals, it failed to provide for adequate synchronization among the GCCs.¹⁶ In solving the problem of lack of “jointness” it introduced the problem of regionalization.

In the years since the passage of the GNA legislation, the Cold War ended and the threat environment became increasingly complex, leading the DoD to develop two approaches to address this problem of regionalization. The military can assign the role of transregional synchronization to a combatant command, or it can synchronize from the Joint Staff.

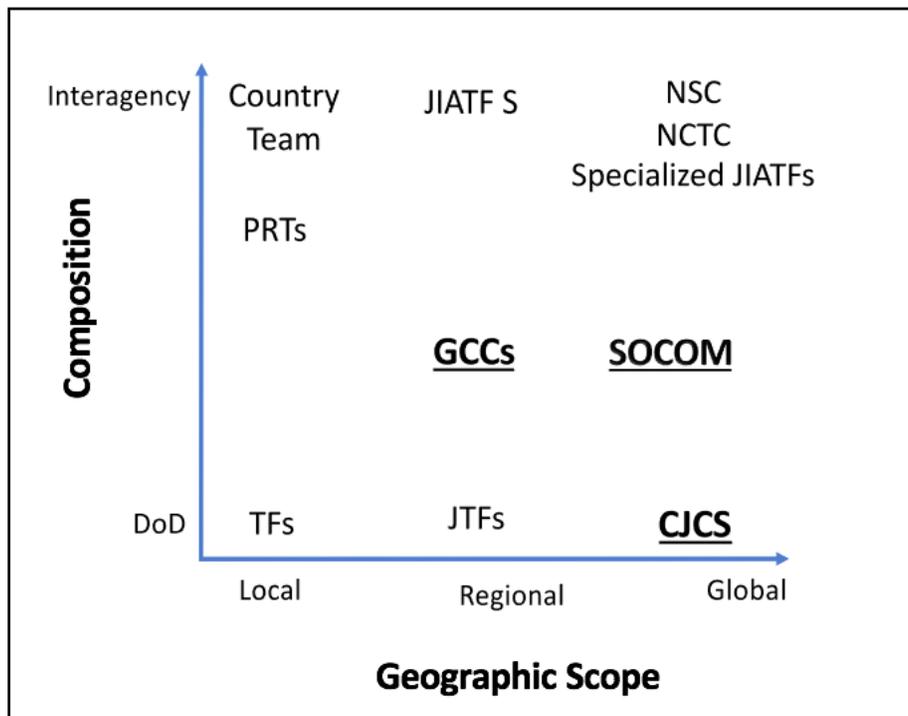


Figure 1. DoD Transregional Synchronization¹⁷

Combatant Commander

Joint doctrine provides for the Secretary of Defense (SecDef) to assign global synchronizer¹⁸ responsibility to a combatant commander. For threats with an obvious regional sponsor, such as Russia or Iran, the relevant geographic combatant commander (i.e. EUCOM or CENTCOM) can assume this role as the “supported commander.” For those inherently global functions or tasks, the SecDef can designate a functional combatant commander as synchronizer.

One example was the assignment to United States Special Operations Command (SOCOM) the role of synchronizing the Global War On Terror in the 2004 Unified Command Plan (UCP). “SOCOM accordingly became ‘the lead combatant commander for planning, synchronizing, and as directed, executing global operations against terrorist networks in coordination with other combatant commanders.’”¹⁹ In reality, SOCOM commanders have found it difficult to synchronize among peer combatant commanders due to “unclear definition of authorities.”²⁰

This difficulty has led to a recent shift in approach. The current means of synchronizing transregional CT efforts is the National Military Strategic Plan to Counter Transregional Terrorist Organizations, drafted by SOCOM but signed by the CJCS and endorsed by the SecDef. In this plan, SOCOM is the coordinating authority²¹, but not the global synchronizer.²² This shift is a recognition that the Chairman is uniquely positioned to arbitrate among the combatant commanders.²³

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Goldwater-Nichols in many ways strengthened the position of Chairman, particularly vis-à-vis the service chiefs. It reinforced the Chairman’s primary role as providing best military advice to the President, SecDef, and when required, Congress.²⁴ It did not, however, place the Chairman in the chain of command. This decision reflects a historic reticence about making the Chairman too powerful, due to concerns that it would weaken the sacrosanct American principle of civilian control over the military.²⁵ This decision also highlights an apparent paradox: protection of a democracy against transregional hybrid threats may require greater centralization of military authority, which is counter to traditionally held practices of a democracy.

Instead of placing the Chairman in the chain-of-command, the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act assigned him the responsibility of “Global Military Integration.”²⁶ Only time will tell if this change in responsibility comes with enough authority to enable transregional synchronization. What does seem apparent to General Dunford, though, is that the Joint Staff does not have the organization nor expertise to synchronize against these transregional threats.²⁷ Goldwater-Nichols took the first steps to improve the Joint Staff, the next important step in this process has been the creation of the Transregional Threats Coordination Cell (T2C2) currently headed by Brigadier General Jamie Jarrard within the Joint Staff J5. This cell is designed to inform the Chairman’s best military advice, enable combatant commanders to counter transregional threats, coordinate military efforts with a wide variety of interagency and international partners, and develop plans to counter transregional threats.²⁸

The efforts by General Dunford and others to transform DoD to address transregional threats are promising, but there is still much work to be done. Even if successful, these changes are exclusive to DoD and their impact limited to the application of military force. Most agencies and departments of the US security establishment are geographically oriented and will need to undertake similar efforts to move to an approach that is transregional. If taken in isolation, the cumulative effect of these efforts may better prepare the various agencies and departments to address transregional challenges separately, but do little to address hybrid threats which require a unified interagency approach.

Interagency Synchronization

Countering hybrid threats requires capabilities and authorities that DoD does not have, and most often in locations which the DoD does not have the lead. Success

requires all the tools of the interagency working together seamlessly to achieve unified action. Interagency synchronization is the key to addressing hybrid threats. Part 2 of the paper discusses factors that make interagency synchronization difficult, but there are some useful examples of interagency efforts that have been successful, highlighted below. Each have their own inherent weakness, but serve as useful case studies to draw from.

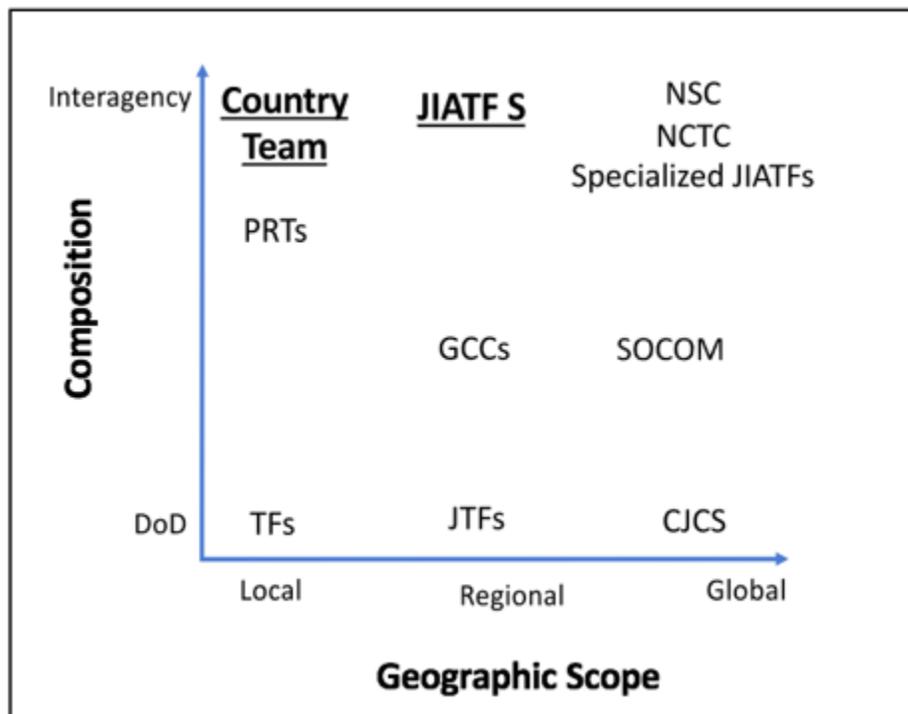


Figure 2. Interagency Synchronization²⁹

Country Teams

Perhaps the most effective interagency synchronization occurs at the country team level, where the Ambassador serves as Chief of Mission (COM).³⁰ “Pursuant to the President’s letter of instruction, the COM has authority over every executive branch employee in the host country, except those under the command of a U.S. area military commander, or those on the staff of an international organization.”³¹ In this capacity, the

COM considers the objectives and requirements of each of the US government departments and agencies and ensures they are synchronized into an overall Mission Plan. In practice, this system typically works well, and most consider it to be fair and effective.³²

The effectiveness of the country team comes with one inherent limitation. The COM's mandate, by definition, extends only to his or her country of assignment. Country teams, in focusing on their countries of assignment, may find it difficult to maintain even a regional perspective, much less a transregional perspective. While each member of the country team has a higher authority that they answer to, and most are aligned regionally, none have the mandate nor authority to synchronize efforts across the interagency.

JIATFs

A construct to synchronize efforts across the interagency that can extend beyond national boundaries is the Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF). While the purposes for forming JIATFs vary, they typically address a specific issue requiring the contributions of multiple agencies and departments. One of the best examples is JIATF South, focused on illicit trafficking in the Western Hemisphere.³³ JIATF South has been in existence since 1989 and the current director is a Coast Guard Rear Admiral with vice directors from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Customs and Border Protection. While difficult to measure the impact on the drug problem, many consider JIATF South as the model for synchronized interagency efforts.³⁴ In contrast to the country team, JIATF-South's mandate spans regionally, but is focused on a narrow mission set. It provides a valuable model of interagency synchronization on a scale larger than the country team, but not fully transregional.

These two examples are effective in their own right but also have common characteristics. Most notably, they are able to forge a common sense of purpose that transcends parochialism while at the same time remaining loyal to their respective agencies or departments. A commonly held truism is that the closeness of an interagency relationship is inversely proportional to proximity to Washington DC. This observation cannot be objectively proven and is admittedly cynical, but reflects the importance of mission focus over agency affiliation. Interagency synchronization requires loyalty to mission that transcends loyalty to individual agency.

Transregional IA Synchronization

The previous sections identified efforts by DoD to address threats that are transregional and efforts by the interagency to address threats that are hybrid. Each of these examples have limitations that make them ineffective, at least by themselves, against threats that are both transregional and hybrid. This section explores those efforts that attempt to address transregional hybrid threats.

The following examples are distinguished by the level in which they operate. Modern military theory generally considers three levels of warfare: strategic, operational, and tactical. Hybrid threats present a unique problem with this taxonomy in that they often do not manifest as warfare in the traditional sense and interagency actors may not recognize the same levels within their own efforts.³⁵ This paper adopts a rather liberal interpretation of the levels of warfare, more analogy than purely doctrine. The strategic is that level at which a nation determines national and multinational security objectives and guidance and develops and uses national resources to accomplish them.³⁶ The tactical level, for the purposes of this paper, are those discrete actions often conducted by individuals or small teams from the interagency. In an

interagency context, this could be a law enforcement investigation, an intelligence operation, or any one of the myriad of diplomatic efforts conducted by foreign service officers. The operational level links the tactical actions to the strategic objectives.

The need to distinguish among levels of warfare introduces another dimension to the dual character of transregional and hybrid threats. The graphic below superimposes the previous graph on this third axis. Highlighted are those synchronization efforts further explored below.

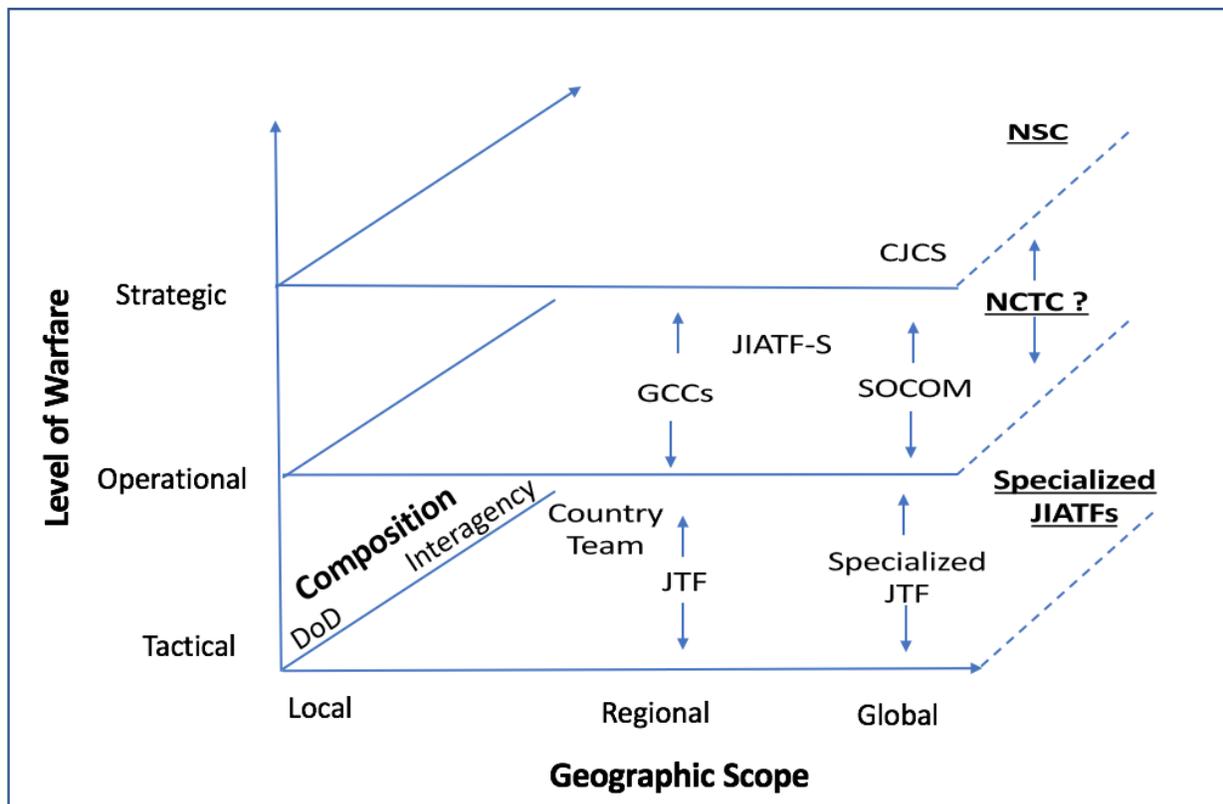


Figure 3. Transregional Interagency Synchronization³⁷

National Security Council (NSC)

The NSC has transregional responsibilities and serves to synchronize the interagency at the policy and strategy level but no lower for two reasons. First, if the NSC becomes consumed with synchronizing the detailed execution of policy, their role

in policy formulation will suffer. Second, the tendency to go deeper than the policy or strategy level, to attempt to control execution at the operational and even tactical levels, leads to the micromanagement so feared by the departments.

The National Security Act of 1947 established the NSC to “...advise the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to the national security so as to enable the military services and the other departments and agencies of the Government to cooperate more effectively in matters involving the national security.”³⁸ Thus, it establishes two related but distinct functions. It is a policy advisory body to the President and a coordination mechanism among the interagency. While complementary, the balance between these functions is something that each administration from Truman on has struggled with.

President Trump recently issued an executive order establishing the President’s intent for the organization and function of the NSC. However, it is too early to determine how the new NSC will function in practice. Instead, it may be helpful to examine the previous administration’s NSC to provide an example with a track record. President Obama’s first Presidential Policy Directive (PPD 1) outlined the envisioned organization and function of the NSC and staff. It established the following committees in descending order of authority, but increasing frequency of convening: Principals Committee, Deputies Committee, and the NSC Interagency Policy Committees (NSC/IPC). It designated the NSC/IPC as “...the main day-to-day fora for interagency coordination of national security policy.” It further provided guidance that the “NSC/IPC shall convene on a regular basis to review and *coordinate the implementation* of Presidential decisions in their policy areas (emphasis added).”³⁹

There is little debate surrounding the role of the NSC and staff in policy formulation, but some controversy surrounding its role in implementation of policy. The centralization of authority at the NSC staff under the Obama administration led to micromanagement according to many observers, including previous Secretaries of Defense Panetta⁴⁰ and Gates⁴¹. Brent Scowcroft, former National Security Advisor, also warns against an NSC involved in day-to-day operations. “You have to step back from operations. The government is bad at stepping back and thinking. The NSC is the only outfit that can do that.”⁴² While the NSC and staff have a role to play in synchronization of efforts at the policy and strategy levels against transregional hybrid threats, it is neither appropriate nor effective in synchronizing at the operational level.

National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC)

A possible solution to synchronizing operational implementation across the interagency is to create a separate body focused on one particular transregional hybrid threat. With regard to counter terrorism, the NCTC is the closest example of such a body, which may lead some to assume that it is fulfilling the operational synchronization role. In reality, as shown below, it operates primarily in the strategic planning realm, not in operational synchronization. It fulfills a critical role in coordinating a common approach, but does not fulfil the role of tying tactical action to strategic goals.

The 9/11 Commission Report proposed the creation of NCTC, recommending “...this NCTC should be a center for joint operational planning and joint intelligence, staffed by personnel from the various agencies.”⁴³ In envisioning the intended purpose of NCTC, the report provided the analogy of a military staff with a “J2” (Intelligence) role, and a “J3” (Operations) role.⁴⁴ Its creation was codified by the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 which defined the intelligence⁴⁵ and operations⁴⁶ roles.

After some initial growing pains,⁴⁷ NCTC is “now a recognized center of excellence on terrorism” according to senior intelligence officials.⁴⁸ NCTC is known and respected for providing the common intelligence picture about terrorist groups and threats, in data basing and sharing information, and enabling watch listing. It appears to have largely achieved the original vision of its intelligence role.⁴⁹

In contrast, the operational role is less well known.⁵⁰ The entity within NCTC responsible for this role is the Directorate of Strategic Operational Plans (DSOP). The role of DSOP from inception has been ambiguous, as was the legislation creating it. Its title appears somewhat oxymoronic to those accustomed to the terms “strategic” and “operational” as terms of art. In practice, DSOP leadership views its role as firmly in the strategic vice operational level and in drafting plans, contributing to strategy development, and assessing the progress of that strategy.⁵¹ This role is more analogous to a “J5” Plans role than the “J3” Operations role envisioned in the 9/11 Commission Report. This role is further reinforced by restriction in legislation prohibiting NCTC from “directing the execution of any resulting operations”.⁵² In practice, DSOP leadership views the restriction as both necessary to ensure interagency support and appropriate given a strategic planning vice operational synchronization role.⁵³

As a model for synchronization of the interagency, NCTC represents progress, but also highlights some systemic issues.⁵⁴ There is little doubt that NCTC has contributed significantly to US counter terrorism efforts, and fills a vital role, but a gap remains in synchronization at the operational level. Filling this gap by NCTC, or another entity, would require a clear and unambiguous charter, accompanying authorities, and an enhanced staff.

Specialized JIATFs

There are efforts initiated and led by various departments or agencies to synchronize efforts, particularly information sharing within the community on very specific topic areas. General Thomas addressed one such effort in his Senate confirmation hearing as SOCOM Commander.

The Constitutional and legal differences in departmental and agency authorities, that lead to some logical and necessary tensions between actionable intelligence and prosecutable evidence, will remain a challenge to the nation's global multi-dimensional counterterrorist campaign. Yet we are finding ways to minimize limitations through interagency and coalition mechanisms that attack these problems, such as Operation Gallant Phoenix.⁵⁵

Anecdotally, the participants from various agencies have viewed their participation in this effort as both unique and valuable, observing that organizational rivalries disappeared among individuals with a shared mission focus and experience. This notwithstanding, a common shared concern was the absence of a corresponding synchronization effort at a higher level.⁵⁶

Remaining Gaps

Research for this paper attempted to identify mechanisms to synchronize efforts at each level of warfare against transregional hybrid threats. Efforts at the policy and strategy level by the NSC and NCTC are mature or maturing, and efforts at the tactical level are promising. The critical gap remains at the operational level, a gap which remains largely due to enduring challenges which will be explored further in the following section.

Challenges in Transforming National Security

The previous section highlighted attempts to address transregional and hybrid threats, but also highlighted remaining gaps, particularly at the operational level. This

section looks at the cultural, bureaucratic, and societal factors that have made transforming to fill these gaps so difficult.

One of the best case studies of meaningful reform within the US security establishment was the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986. Former congressional staffer James Locher provides a first-hand account of the immense challenges passing this legislation in his book “Victory on the Potomac: The Goldwater-Nichols Act Unifies the Pentagon.” While an incomplete analogy because it doesn’t extend to the interagency, it provides insight into the challenges of reforming a complex governmental organization.

Cultural Challenges

Locher highlighted how differing service cultures, particularly that of the Navy, were major impediments to creating a joint approach to warfighting.⁵⁷ As different as the services are, the differences among the various agencies and departments are even greater.⁵⁸ These organizational cultural differences explain why dedicated professionals who, largely selfless individually, can be so parochial.

At worst, these differences can lead to mistrust and cross-purposes, but at best, they can provide unique perspectives which are both valid and valuable. Assume the interagency comes into information about extremists that spans multiple countries. The DoD, with a bias for action and a transregional view, advocates for wide dissemination of the information to enable action against the extremists. CIA station chiefs, viewing information as primarily transactional, prefer to tightly control dissemination, ensuring reciprocity. Law enforcement personnel are concerned with preserving the evidentiary value of the information and inclined to use the information to create an enterprise case rather than seeking individual detentions. The State Department is most concerned with

the potential for human rights violations by those nations that receive the information. Approached correctly, there is the potential to achieve all objectives and increase the total value of the information by optimizing the strengths and experiences of each agency. This synergy is most often achieved at the “tactical level” through collective approaches applying a JIATF or similar model, where shared sense of purpose transcends rigid adherence to those organizational norms. This synergy becomes more difficult at the “operational level”. This is typically the domain of more senior members of the respective departments and agencies who are more steeped in their organizational norms and more inclined to parochialism.

Bureaucratic Challenges

Another challenge highlighted by Locher is a product of the bureaucracy itself. It is a rare element in a bureaucracy who will willingly cede power, authority, or resources to another even in the interest of effectiveness. Ironically, US departments and agencies, who are led and manned by selfless individuals, can be tremendously selfish as institutions. In the case of Goldwater-Nichols it took an external authority, Congress, to impose change. Meaningful change in the national security community is counter to the very nature of a bureaucracy and will need to be imposed by an outside authority.

While the Goldwater-Nichols Act was limited to the military, there may be an opportunity for new legislation to drive change in the national security establishment. Senator John McCain, the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has recently spoken about the need for a “new Goldwater-Nichols.”⁵⁹ While this may be necessary for DoD, the kind of changes necessary to ensure interagency synchronization against hybrid threats will transcend multiple congressional committees. A better analogy is the National Security Act of 1947, which transformed the very

structure of the national security establishment.⁶⁰ This kind of legislation has been so elusive, at least in part, because the Congressional committee structure is divided generally along departmental lines (Armed Services Committees, Foreign Relations Committees, Intelligence Committees). There is little indication these committees coordinate any better than the various departments and agencies of the executive branch. According to a staff member who previously worked on the House Armed Services Committee, there is no formal process for committee leadership to meet regularly with other committees. There is a process called “sequential referral” to seek approval to take up legislation with components that fall under the jurisdiction of another committee, but this is an exception typically used with very large and complex bills such as the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).⁶¹ Ironically, Congress is often critical of the interagency for not working together, while facing similar fault lines internally.

A related challenge is legislation, particularly fiscal law. DoD’s budget dwarfs that of every other department and agency, and has a corresponding infrastructure of bases, aircraft and logistics. While it is reasonable that the various departments and agencies pay their fair share in collective efforts where possible, it is often impractical for the smaller agencies. For example, hosting law enforcement agents on an overseas base funded by DoD requires recoument of funds from those agencies, although the actual additional expense absorbed by the DoD is marginal. At the same time, the impact of an unforecasted expense can be prohibitive for that agency.

The Economy Act⁶² serves as a transfer mechanism among agencies, the Antideficiency Act⁶³ serves as an enforcement mechanism, but the Purpose Statute⁶⁴

creates the issue. It states that “appropriations shall be applied only to the objects for which the appropriations were made except as otherwise provided by law.” Fiscal law is an area which requires positive authority. The absence of prohibition is insufficient, specific authorization is necessary to spend or transfer money. Strict interpretation⁶⁵ can create a barrier to interagency collaboration in areas of mutual responsibility, particularly those that are unforecasted.⁶⁶

Societal Challenges

Two nations appear to be particularly adept at waging transregional hybrid warfare...Iran and Russia. They also have strong centralized authority and a low regard for democratic principles, at least as practiced by western democracies. Russia, in particular, has been adept at this form of warfare, and has constructed a massive defense facility (Figure 4) to synchronize its various ministries. Russia has also reportedly vested significant authority in its Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, best known for the Gerasimov Doctrine which describes hybrid warfare in detail.⁶⁷



Figure 4. Russia's National Defense Control Center⁶⁸

Similarly, Iran has reportedly vested significant power in Major General Qassim Solemani, nominally the commander of the IRGC-Quds Force, but reportedly holding far reaching authority to shape foreign policy. A very visible figure in the Middle East, the Iranian efforts in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen are attributed largely to him.⁶⁹

These examples highlight the value that two potential adversaries place in hybrid warfare and the efficiency that can be brought about with centralization of interdepartmental authority. Even more important, though, is what these examples do not mean. It does not necessarily follow that the US approach must be similarly configured. A state's security apparatus should reflect the values of that state, not dictate them. There is an inherent tension between the core US societal value of democracy and centralization of authority, particularly under the military. This does not imply that a democratic society cannot effectively wage hybrid warfare, nor does it necessarily eliminate any particular change from consideration. It does mean that as bureaucratic and cultural changes are made in the interagency, they must be made in consideration of societal factors. Any recommended changes need to be balanced

against the need to maintain the trust of the American people that the agencies and departments serve. The next section provides recommendations intended to change interagency bureaucracy and culture while preserving the trust so important to a democratic society.

Recommendations

The 9-11 commission report highlighted the failures of the interagency in working together and made a number of recommendations. Although some recommendations have been adopted, many have not. The urgency felt at the time has since dissipated and the US is still ill-prepared and poorly structured to face the transregional hybrid threats that are becoming the norm. Leaders cannot mandate cultural change, but can impact organizational culture through changes to the bureaucracy. Attempting to change the culture without changing the bureaucracy is naïve and changes to the bureaucracy that do not result in a corresponding change in the culture will be short-lived. Change can be either revolutionary or evolutionary. The importance, and urgency, of better synchronizing US efforts against transregional hybrid threats warrants revolutionary change to overcome bureaucratic inertia. Just as the National Security Act of 1947 structured the government to address the Cold War, the US needs a new Act to address the contemporary environment. Realistically, however, evolutionary change is far more likely barring another catastrophic event. Following are recommended elements of that change.

Congress

Goldwater-Nichols demonstrated that the surest way to achieve change in an entrenched bureaucracy is strong and unambiguous legislation. This is unlikely in the interagency until the various committees in Congress develop a method of working

together on a regular basis.⁷⁰ Congress should develop processes to regularly coordinate across committees on national security matters. Only then will they be able to draft legislation that cuts across all necessary agencies and departments.

As addressed earlier, interagency unity of effort is difficult if the resources that fuel these efforts cannot flow just as seamlessly. Congress should establish a fund for national security efforts separate from the base budgets of the individual agencies and departments, under the joint oversight of the relevant committees. If this is not feasible, restrictions on co-use of resources should be loosened to allow for interagency efforts while preserving separate authorities.

Policy/Strategy Synchronization

The NSC will remain responsible for recommending policy for approval by the President and development of strategy to achieve it. It is the only entity that has the ability to do this and to synchronize efforts at the Secretary or Director level. To do this effectively, and to ensure they are able to have the “long view”, the NSC should remain at the policy and strategy levels.

Operational Synchronization

As shown, the biggest gap in synchronization for transregional hybrid threats is at the operational level. This is the level in which the greatest emphasis needs to be placed because it is the level at which the greatest parochialism is likely to reside. For that reason, any entity with the responsibility of synchronizing interagency efforts needs to have the ability to compel action among participants. For transregional hybrid threats that are enduring in nature, an entity should be identified or created, given a clear mandate, and appropriate authority to synchronize efforts at the operational level. This entity needs to be a true interagency body. In some cases it may be appropriate for the

military to assume the lead role, but in most cases the lead should be should be civilian, particularly if there is potential for the threat to cross domestic boundaries. To do otherwise would risk the support of the American public concerned about the appropriate role of the military in a democracy.

Tactical Synchronization

For specific aspects of transregional hybrid threats, the specialized JIATF (or similar) construct represents a best practice. In addition to the direct benefits of the JIATF synchronizing tactical level action against hybrid threats, it has the indirect benefit of creating a culture of security professionals who view efforts from an interagency approach.

Interagency Culture

One effective component of the Goldwater-Nichols legislation was the deliberate preparation of officers to serve in a joint capacity and the requirement of joint experience for promotion.⁷¹ In mandating and incentivizing joint experience, the DoD has achieved “jointness”, but the interagency remains divided. The agencies and departments of the national security establishment should incentivize interagency experiences within the careers of their personnel. As shown by Goldwater-Nichols, this requirement won’t be fully embraced until it is legislated and incentivized. The DoD can better implement this requirement by balancing current “joint” requirements with interagency requirements instead of adding them to an already very crowded career timeline.

The current joint military doctrine of Unified Operations (JP 3-0, JP 5-0) represents progress in addressing transregional hybrid threats. It acknowledges the necessity of integrating the elements of national power, coordinating with the

interagency, and provides examples of mechanisms to facilitate this coordination. Nonetheless, it is focused predominantly on the military element of power. Interagency doctrine, jointly developed and approved by the relevant agencies, would be far more valuable. While this concept may seem far-fetched, joint doctrine probably seemed just as unlikely 30 years ago.⁷² The interagency should develop doctrine as part of an inclusive process, ultimately approved at an NSC Deputies Committee. This is an area where DoD, with its penchant for planning and doctrine development, can take a lead role in organizing, but the product should be truly interagency.

Department of Defense

DoD should accelerate efforts currently underway designed to enable the CJCS, with the help of the Joint Staff, to serve as a global synchronizer. These efforts include the issuance of a Joint Strategic Campaign Plan in lieu of a Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan and modification of Joint Staff procedures and organization. If the Chairman is not able to fulfill his newly designated responsibility in global integration, Congress should give careful consideration to placing the Chairman in the chain of command. Over two centuries of apolitical service to the Constitution should have earned enough trust with the American public to mitigate concern over too much centralization of military authority.

To fill the gap in synchronization efforts at the operational level against transregional threats, DoD should establish JTFs, under the concurrent Operational Control (OPCON) of all affected GCCs. Those combatant commands that have global responsibilities can serve as force providers for the JTFs, but alignment under GCCs maintains the key elements of the Unified Command Plan. When guidance from two or more GCCs conflict, and cannot be worked out between them, the issue can be

elevated to the Chairman. This approach would be complementary to the new role of the Chairman as “global integrator”. Even in the absence of true synchronization authority, close and enduring coordination between these JTFs and interagency partners can produce a measure of unity of effort. Ideally, these JTFs can then evolve into JIATFs to fully synchronize operations. When another agency or department has the ability to lead these efforts, DoD needs to be prepared to cede lead and, in some cases, authority. This represents an evolutionary approach to the previous recommendation to create an entity dedicated to this task, but also represents the highest likelihood of success barring an event that drives revolutionary change.

Conclusion

Overwhelming combat power has virtually guaranteed that adversaries will choose to not go “toe-to-toe” with the US military in a conventional fight. Their advantage—their “offset”—is the ability to achieve their objectives through a combination of tools applied more quickly and seamlessly than the US can. Success will no longer be determined primarily by synchronization of combat arms or joint operations but by the synchronization of all elements of national power at every level. Ultimately, our difficulty in dealing with transregional hybrid threats, is not with the threats themselves, the problem is with “us”. Until “we” recognize that the world has shifted, and are willing to adjust our approach, we will continue to struggle to address these threats.⁷³

The intent of this study has been to examine efforts to address threats that are both transregional and hybrid, identify remaining gaps and challenges, and to provide recommended changes to processes and structures intended to impact organizational culture and approach. While these recommendations are both simple and audacious, they are critical if the US hopes to address the growing transregional and hybrid threats

that have become the norm. The character of the current and future operating environments demands audacious changes. While these changes, within the legislative branch as well as the executive, are necessary and important, even more important is the willingness to change...to do whatever is necessary to avoid re-learning the lessons of the 9-11 Commission.

Endnotes

¹ Thomas H. Kean et al., *Executive Summary of The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (Washington, DC: National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 2004), 27.

² Comment, observed by the author, made by an interagency colleague to his leadership over concerns about the information sharing occurring during an interagency effort.

³ Following the attacks on 9/11, concerns about the lack of interagency coordination led to the establishment of the bipartisan Project on National Security Reform in 2006. The Project ceased operations in 2011, but related efforts continue under this broad label. *Project on National Security Reform Home Page*, <http://www.pnsr.org> (accessed March 8, 2017).

⁴ This paper is scoped only on the US interagency, fully recognizing that addressing transregional hybrid threats requires strong international partnerships, adding additional complexity to synchronization.

⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, eds. and trans., Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 88.

⁶ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2015* (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, June, 2015), 4.

⁷ Every department and agency in the US national security community is configured in some way along geographic lines. The State Department is divided into regional bureaus, the Central Intelligence Agency is divided into area divisions, and the Department of Defense into geographic combatant commands. Christopher Naler advocated for an increased interagency participation in the geographic combatant commands as a means for better addressing regional threats. Christopher Naler, "Are we Ready for an Interagency Combatant Command?" *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 41 (2nd Quarter 2006): 26-31.

⁸ General Joseph F. Dunford, "General Dunford's Remarks and Q&A," public speech, Center for a New American Security—Next Defense Forum, Washington, DC, December 16, 2015, <http://www.jcs.mil/Media/Speeches/Article/636952/gen-dunfords-remarks-and-ga-at-the-center-for-a-new-american-security-next-defe/> (accessed February 10, 2017).

⁹ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02 (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 15, 2016), 246.

¹⁰ Ian O. Lesser, *NATO Looks South: New Challenges and New Strategies in the Mediterranean* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2000), 15.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2015*, 1.

¹³ “Hybrid threats incorporate a full range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder. Hybrid Wars can be conducted by both states and a variety of nonstate actors. These multi-modal activities can be conducted by separate units, or even by the same unit, but are generally operationally and tactically directed and coordinated within the main battlespace to achieve synergistic effects in the physical and psychological dimensions of conflict. The effects can be gained at all levels of war.” Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Washington, DC: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, December 2007), 8.

¹⁴ Nathan P. Freier et al., *Outplayed: Regaining Strategic Initiative in the Gray Zone*, Integrated Research Project (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, June 2016).

¹⁵ *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986*, Public Law 99-433, 99th Cong., 2nd sess. (October 1, 1986), 1041.

¹⁶ “It (Goldwater-Nichols) solidified the chain of command from the President to the Secretary of Defense to the Combatant Commanders. It affirmed civilian control of the military by codifying in law that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs is outside the chain of command, in order for him to be able to provide vital, objective, independent military advice to the Defense Secretary and the President. At the same time, it also strengthened the Chairman’s role, created the position of Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and centralized the role and voice of the Combatant Commands. And it reinforced the concept of jointness, especially with respect to the careers of senior officers, by requiring them to gain professional experience outside of their service in order to advance further in their careers.” Ash Carter, “Remarks on ‘Goldwater-Nichols at 30: An Agenda for Updating’,” public speech, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, April 5, 2016, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech-View/Article/713736/remarks-on-goldwater-nichols-at-30-an-agenda-for-updating-center-for-strategic> (accessed March 21, 2017).

¹⁷ This chart depicts potential synchronization mechanisms. The x axis depicts the geographic scope, ranging from those that are designed to be local at the left to those that can extend globally to the right. The y axis depicts the degree of interagency involvement ranging from a single agency or department, such as DoD, at the bottom to those that are fully interagency at the top. The mechanisms specifically addressed in the following paragraph are highlighted in bold and underlined.

¹⁸ “A global synchronizer is the CCDR responsible for the alignment of specified planning and related activities of other CCMDs, Services, DoD agencies and activities, and as directed, appropriate USG departments and agencies within an established, common framework to facilitate coordinated and decentralized execution across geographic and other boundaries.” U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, Joint Publication 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, March 25, 2013), xvi.

¹⁹ Edward J. Drea et al., *History of the Unified Command Plan 1946–2012* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, June 2013), 92.

²⁰ Richard Lardner and Anne Flaherty, “Admiral: Bureaucracy Hampers Terror War,” *Washington Post Online*, June 13, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/12/AR2007061201412.html> (accessed February 27, 2017).

²¹ “Coordinating Authority” by doctrine does not include the ability to compel action, while “Synchronizing Authority” does not have a doctrinal definition, but is generally considered to be a stronger term.

²² Brigadier General James Jarrard, e-mail message to author, February 27, 2017.

²³ Jim Garamone, “Carter Describes Security Networks’ Role in Confronting Threats,” *Defense Media Activity*, June 20, 2016, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/805201/carter-describes-security-networks-role-in-confronting-threats> (accessed March 22, 2017).

²⁴ *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986*, para 153.

²⁵ Dr. John Hamre, “Reflections: Keep America’s Top Military Officer Out of the Chain of Command,” *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, March 21, 2016, <https://defense360.csis.org/reflections-keep-americas-top-military-officer-chain-command/> (accessed March 8, 2017).

²⁶ *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017*, 114th Cong., 2nd sess. (January 4, 2017), 353.

²⁷ “I do believe that there needs to be a staff that has a perspective of all the combatant commanders, that can actually provide the Secretary of Defense with a common operational picture, that can actually frame decisions for the Secretary of Defense that do involve multiple regions simultaneously, and can do that in a timely manner. And of course, that’s not – as you well know, that’s not currently what the Joint Staff is designed to do.” General Joseph F. Dunford, “General Dunford’s Remarks and Q&A.”

²⁸ The full mission of T2C2 is: “As a standing cross-functional team, T2C2 will inform and advance the Chairman’s best military advice; Enable Combatant Commanders to counter transregional threats; Coordinate, synchronize, and collaborate military efforts with the National Security Council staff, Office of Secretary of Defense, Combatant Commands, the U.S. Government interagency, and international partners; and Formulate, coordinate, and enable national security strategies, plans, and policies addressing transregional networks that threaten U.S. interests, allies, and objectives.” Jarrard, e-mail message to author, February 27, 2017.

²⁹ Figure 2 is the same graph as Figure 1 but highlights two examples of Interagency synchronization: Country Teams and JIATF South.

³⁰ Christopher J. Lamb and Edward Marks, “Chief of Mission Authority as a Model for National Security Integration,” *National Defense University Press*, December 2010.

³¹ U.S. Department of State, *Chief of Mission Authority and Overseas Staffing*, 2 Foreign Affairs Handbook H-110 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, August 13, 2015).

³² Lamb and Marks, “Chief of Mission Authority as a Model for National Security Integration.”

³³ “JIATF South as a designated national task force, executes detection and monitoring of illicit trafficking across all domains, and facilitates international and interagency interdiction to enable the disruption and dismantlement of illicit and converging threat networks in support of national and hemispheric security.” *Joint Interagency Task Force South Home Page*, <http://www.jiatfs.southcom.mil> (accessed January 16, 2017).

³⁴ Evan Munsing and Christopher J. Lamb, “Joint Interagency Task Force–South: The Best Known, Least Understood Interagency Success,” *National Defense University Press*, June 2011.

³⁵ The applicability of the levels of warfare to hybrid threats is a topic worthy of further study, but is beyond the scope of this paper.

³⁶ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations*, Joint Publication 3-0 (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, January 17, 2017), I-13.

³⁷ This graph takes the graph previously used as Figure 1 and Figure 2 and places in on a third axis, the level of warfare.

³⁸ *National Security Act of 1947*, Public Law 80-253, 80th Cong., 1st sess. (January 3, 1947), 2.

³⁹ Barack H. Obama, *Organization of the National Security Council System*, Presidential Policy Directive—1 (Washington, DC: The White House, February 13, 2009).

⁴⁰ Leon Panetta, *Worthy Fights* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 375.

⁴¹ Robert Gates, *Duty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 587.

⁴² David J. Rothkopf, *National Insecurity* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014), 358.

⁴³ Thomas H. Kean et al., *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (Washington, DC: National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 2004), 403-404.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 403.

⁴⁵ “To serve as the primary organization in the United States Government for analyzing and integrating all intelligence possessed or acquired by the United States Government pertaining to terrorism and counterterrorism, excepting intelligence pertaining exclusively to domestic terrorists and domestic counterterrorism.” *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004*, Public Law 108-458, 108th Cong., 1st sess. (December 17, 2004).

⁴⁶ “To conduct strategic operational planning for counterterrorism activities, integrating all instruments of national power, including diplomatic, financial, military, intelligence, homeland security, and law enforcement activities within and among agencies. To assign roles and responsibilities as part of its strategic operational planning duties to lead Departments or agencies, as appropriate, for counterterrorism activities that are consistent with applicable law and that support counterterrorism strategic operational plans, but shall not direct the execution of any resulting operations.” *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee on Intelligence, *Attempted Terrorist Attack on Northwest Airlines Flight 253*, 111th Cong., 2nd sess., May 24, 2010.

⁴⁸ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “NCTC 10 Years later- A Decade of Service,” September 29, 2014, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/ic-in-the-news/206-ic-in-the-news-2014/1118-nctc-10-years-later-a-decade-of-service> (accessed February 26, 2017).

⁴⁹ Author’s personal observations based on interaction with counter terrorism professionals.

⁵⁰ “The extent of NCTC’s planning responsibilities are unclear. NCTC can prepare and obtain approval for counterterrorism plans, but it cannot ensure implementation.” Richard A. Best, Jr., *The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC)—Responsibilities and Potential Congressional Concerns* (Washington, DC: U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, December 19, 2011), 6.

⁵¹ Lieutenant General Michael Nagata, e-mail message to author, March 12, 2017.

⁵² *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004*.

⁵³ Nagata, e-mail message to author, March 12, 2017.

⁵⁴ This is perhaps best expressed in the summary of a report published by the Project on National Security Reform in 2010 “The Directorate of Strategic Operational Planning (DSOP) within the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) represents one of the most mature examples of a national-level interagency team and offers many valuable lessons for the broader U.S. government (USG) on its approach to complex national missions that cut across multiple departments and agencies. However, numerous obstacles persist, preventing DSOP from becoming a more efficient and effective interagency team.” Project on National Security Reform, *Toward Integrating Complex National Missions: Lessons from the National Counterterrorism Centers Directorate of Strategic Operational Planning* (Washington, DC: Project on National Security Reform, February 2010), 15.

⁵⁵ Lieutenant General Raymond A. Thomas, *Advance Policy Questions for Lieutenant General Raymond A. Thomas, USA Nominee for Commander, United States Special Operations Command* (Washington, DC: Senate, March 9, 2016), https://www.armedservices.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Thomas_03-09-16.pdf (Accessed March 29, 2017).

⁵⁶ These comments are representative of those received by the author, both directly and indirectly, while commanding Operation Gallant Phoenix from 2015-2106.

⁵⁷ James R. Locher, *Victory on the Potomac: The Goldwater-Nichols Act Unifies the Pentagon* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002).

⁵⁸ This is a topic that has been widely explored, particularly the differences between the Department of Defense and the Department of State. One of the most widely known works is Rife's paper "Defense is from Mars, State is from Venus" which focuses largely on the intrinsic personality differences of the professionals that comprise the two organizations and then extrapolates these to explain organizational differences. Ricky L. Rife, *Defense is From Mars, State is From Venus* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1998.) The critique by William Joseph Davis, Jr. and Christopher R. Papparone of Rife's paper challenges some of the conclusions of *Mars and Venus*. (William Joseph Davis, Jr. and Christopher R. Papparone, "Departments of State and Defense Relations: Are Perceptions Important?" *InterAgency Journal* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2012): <http://thesimonscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/IAJ-3-1-pg31-39.pdf> (accessed March 20, 2017)). Both works do a very good job of highlighting the differences between the two organizations and the relative strengths and weaknesses of each, while differing on the scale and on causality. Given that former military personnel make up about 20 percent of the State Department Foreign Service, it is difficult to attribute the organizational differences primarily to innate personality differences. While reasons for the differences are no doubt complex, it seems as if the organizational differences drive the individual actions and help form the personality rather than the converse. This effect is commonly known as "Where you stand depends on where you sit".

⁵⁹ Aaron Mehta and Joe Gould, "Carter Unveils Goldwater-Nichols Reform," *Defense News*, April 5, 2016, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/breaking-news/2016/04/05/carter-unveils-goldwater-nichols-reform/82657800/> (accessed March 29, 2016).

⁶⁰ *National Security Act of 1947*.

⁶¹ Unnamed House staff member, interview by author, January 20, 2017.

⁶² *Economy Act*, 31 U.S.C. § 1535 (June 30, 1932).

⁶³ *Anti-Deficiency Act*, 31 U.S.C. § 1341 (September 12, 1982).

⁶⁴ *Purpose Statute*, 31 U.S.C. § 1301 (March 3, 1809).

⁶⁵ Fiscal law is arcane, so it is difficult to determine if the difficulty is in the law, or the interpretation of it. In fact, if the desire or need to collaborate is intense enough, the interested parties will typically find a solution, but often the difficulty discourages the attempt.

⁶⁶ Colonel Robert Borcharding, U.S. Army JAG, e-mail communications with author, February 18, 2017.

⁶⁷ While some have interpreted Gerasimov's statements as Russian doctrine of hybrid warfare, pointing to operations in Crimea and Ukraine, others, such as Charles Bartles, argue that, in context, his statements are meant to be descriptive of the changing character of war, but not establishment of doctrine. Charles Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right," *Military Review*, January-February 2015,

http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20160228_art009.pdf (accessed February 19, 2017).

⁶⁸ Andrew Roth, "Vladimir Putin's Massive, Triple-decker War Room Revealed," *Washington Post Online*, November 21, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/11/21/vladimir-putins-massive-triple-decker-war-room-revealed/?utm_term=.d5c0c462be30 (accessed February 19, 2017).

⁶⁹ Dexter Filkins, "The Shadow Commander," *The New Yorker Online*, September 30, 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/09/30/the-shadow-commander> (accessed February 20, 2017).

⁷⁰ The 9-11 Commission Report made this observation, leading to the creation of the Homeland Security Committees. In retrospect, this simply led to another committee and did not necessarily lead to better coordination among the other national security related committees.

⁷¹ *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986*.

⁷² The Department of State first published the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) in 2010, modelled after the DoD Quadrennial Defense Review. That, and the development of the nested strategic plans from DoS regional bureaus to Missions, represents a maturation of DoS planning processes and a basis to build interagency doctrine.

⁷³ While this represents the author's opinion alone, elements are based on an email exchange with Lieutenant General Michael Nagata.