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Meeting Complex Challenges Through National Security Reform

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Goldwater-Nichols forced major changes in organizational structure and officer career planning for DoD. What are corresponding implications for the Department of Defense and the Intelligence community based on the proposed reforms?

In 2004, my organization was asked to collect and analyze lessons from the Global War on Terrorism, giving particular attention to how components of the national security establishment worked together and what role DoD could play in making that process more efficient and effective. We conducted concurrent investigations in Washington and at the combatant commands. In Washington, we interviewed the leadership and selected staff members of the Departments of Defense, State, Justice, Treasury, and Energy, the CIA, and the National Security Council Staff. Concurrently, we sent officers to work in Combatant Command operations centers to see how interagency collaboration manifested itself at the other end of the chain. We then sent a team across Africa for two years, visiting Joint Task Force Horn of Africa and embassies across the continent to learn how the interagency process worked in an area of the world in which there were almost no US forces, no alliances with the US, and little military infrastructure. This past year we carried that effort across the South Atlantic to the Americas.

I want to share some lessons from that experience that have relevance to our proceedings today.

- **Lesson 1.** Abroad, Americans from every agency work hard to overcome hurdles born of bureaucratic inertia in Washington. In wrestling with their home offices, they routinely lose precious time and momentum, allowing our less encumbered opponents to gain or maintain the initiative. Even if the field representatives of every agency of the US government at a particular embassy agree on what needs to be done, there is no assurance that their independent chains of command will agree in Washington or will coordinate with each other here to make the requisite resources available. In Washington, decisions are made in an environment of constant insufficiency—more tasks than resources—, causing people to make resource allocation choices that are as often motivated by bureaucratic, as national imperatives and interests.
- **Lesson 2.** Equally compelling is the prospect that the implementation of US security policy might differ on two sides of an international border. A country team at one embassy, seeing a situation through the prism of the country in which they are assigned, may interpret and implement guidance from Washington differently than at a neighboring embassy. The country team approach pioneered by the Kennedy Administration nearly half a century ago is no longer sufficient in an era of globalization. Today, nearly every issue of vital US concern transcends national borders. But we lack regional coordination mechanisms that can find common

ground on priorities, who should lead, and what resources should be made available. Those issues are the drivers of what needs to change.

- **Lesson 3.** Even if we establish regional coordinating bodies to unify US foreign policy implementation, we will still need a facilitation process in Washington that is more responsive to the needs of federal agencies abroad. While the National and Homeland Security Councils exist for such a role, they do not perform the function. If powerful, strong-willed people like Donald Rumsfeld, George Tenet, and Colin Powell disagreed on something, their disagreements were left on the table, with no authority below the President able to adjudicate. Since Presidents may prefer to remain above the fray or their staffs may insulate them from internal tussles, the “800 lb. gorilla” syndrome carries the day. That 800 lb gorilla is the Defense Department, whose resources and planning capabilities dwarf those of all other Departments. Although foreign and security policy are intertwined, having the Defense Department driving foreign policy is not necessarily good for the country. Every problem looks like a nail if the only tool considered is a hammer. While there are many reasons for our current condition, the realities are unsettling. Our military is over-extended, our treasury is weakened, our alliances are frayed, and our relationships around the globe are strained.
- **Lesson 4.** The behavioral cultures of Departments of government differ so much that a bridging mechanism is needed to bring them into a common frame of reference, particularly with respect to planning. Someone who spends a career in the Department of Justice has a different planning horizon than a counterpart in State, the CIA, or Defense. At Justice nearly everything is about building a case and sensitivity to chain of custody and rules of evidence. The planning horizon is however long it takes. At State, the planning horizon is driven by daily cable traffic, an endless stream of insight and perspective on matters ranging from consular affairs to trade relations. At the CIA, the planning horizon can be very short in the Directorate of Operations and more cyclical in the Directorate of Intelligence, the latter driven by a production schedule of Presidential briefings, Congressional testimony, and NIEs. At Defense, the planning horizon is driven mainly by logistics—the volumes of people and materiel that can be marshaled, moved, and supported in a given period. Within the Department of Defense, it has long been accepted that all the disparate pieces can function as one because of military schools and exercises. For the interagency, there is no common career development path, no common schooling system for people to learn how each other’s organizations work or what they can do, and no common exercise program that brings disparate elements together for practice to learn where the bugs are and what needs to be done to fix them before the team goes into the world series. Unfortunately, that is as true inside the various non-DoD communities as it is across the whole. We cannot afford to place blood, treasure and prestige at

risk because we are uncoordinated, because our problem-solving processes are inefficient, and because our ability to execute even the best policy is beset with delay and disconnects.

- **Lesson 5.** There is a growing and increasingly dangerous network of relationships of convenience in this hemisphere among criminal enterprises, trans-national radical movements, and regimes hostile to the US. Those relationships are transient but feed on each other in ways largely unseen here at home. While we are in this meeting, Iranian operatives from the IRGC-Quds Force are interacting with Hezbollah-aligned Lebanese money launderers in the Tri-Border region of South America to convert promissory notes from a recent opium shipment from Afghanistan into cash. They will use it to finance the training of Latin look-alikes for infiltration, espionage, surveillance, intimidation, and terrorism, at a facility Iran leases from the Chavez government in Venezuela. The opium shipment and the agent trainees arrived aboard Iranian national airlines that recently doubled the number of flights they make to Latin America. At the same time, al Qaeda operatives are using the same banks to translate the proceeds from trans-South Atlantic diamond smuggling operations that they control into cash. With the cash, they will buy passage for the pre-teen sons of poor farmers in Guinea-Bissau to madrassas in remote areas of the Western Sahara. Their promise is to give these sons of the destitute the foundations for a better life but the boys will never return. They will reach adulthood in remote training camps for a future campaign of terrorism. Our opponents are waging a form of warfare that blurs traditional lines of responsibility of US intelligence, law enforcement, and military arms. Laws that are intended to protect civil liberties at home become brakes on these agencies abroad. At organizations like Joint Task Force South in Key West, all agencies manage to find ways to work together because they all have a shared stake in prosecuting the counter-drug effort and have the national consensus and bi-partisan support for prosecuting it vigorously. For the shadow wars we face in Africa and South America, there is less clarity and therefore less priority but our enemies are learning something new every day about how to infiltrate and undermine us and are preparing their proxies to put these lessons into practice. They share those lessons by word of mouth while what we know ends up in obscure reports that line shelves with little notice. We do not see the future well because we pay so little attention to its precursors and are therefore pretty good at checkers but abysmal at chess, the game our opponents play.

How do we ensure that the process that took a decade to implement within the Department can be done quickly and efficiently in the new round of reforms?

- There are no silver bullets and every new step takes time to socialize, sell, fund, and implement, but there are some things we can and should do as expeditiously as our processes will allow.
1. Comb through our federal bureaucracies to streamline their decision-making processes and create the depth of manning that it takes to send people to school, participate in exercises, and participate in joint planning. There won't be more money to do this, we'll have to fund it by becoming more efficient and sharing facilities and tools.
 2. Establish a national security university, fed by a common process of basic and intermediate professional development schooling. Make the President of NSU a respected career diplomat with experience in dealing with other branches of government. Why? Because the Department of State is charged with the formulation and implementation of US foreign policy. Alternatively, rotate the position among the Departments of State, Defense, CIA, and the FBI and make the Vice President a representative of a different agency than the President.
 3. Establish an interagency exercise program that brings all elements of national power into a common practice session at least once a year. Establish a small interagency team to design and plan the exercises and another to collect lessons from them and devise ways to bridge identified capability gaps. The teams report to the National Security Advisor.
 4. Establish an interagency lessons collection and analysis team jointly accredited by State, Defense, Justice, and CIA to identify strategic opportunities. The team should be a mix of seasoned experts and young "apprentices" from each agency who serve a three-year tour and go back to their home agency. There are abundant searches for challenges but almost no effort to identify opportunities that are the foundations of a pro-active strategy.
 5. Establish an interagency team of the best and brightest thinkers from State, Defense, CIA, Justice, Energy, and Treasury to craft a national security strategy. They would do so under the leadership of one of their own, selected from within the group by the National Security Advisor. They would report to a senior review panel composed of senior members of their own agencies and the NSC Staff.
 6. Propose legislation that requires all agencies of the national security establishment to take stock of their progress on interagency collaborative efforts and to provide a candid, classified assessment of how effectively the current national security strategy is being implemented and where there are gaps and unmet challenges.

7. Propose legislation that requires all elements of the national security establishment to jointly report back to Congress on their plans to establish and implement common experiential and educational tiers and “last step” gates for promotion to their senior ranks.
8. Establish regional coordination panels headed by the NSC staff. They would be standing bodies, statutorily limited in size and chartered to develop cross-agency recommendations for strategy implementation and resource allocation in each region of major national security interest or concern. They would report to the Cabinet, chaired by the National Security Advisor.

The nature of each of these proposed efforts is collaborative. We may be unable to quickly change the structure of our government to address new realities but we can and should improve its collaborative processes, providing the glue necessary to bind disparate efforts together to common purpose and streamline its decision-making.