

Colloquium Brief: Conflict Management: A Tool for U.S. National Security Strategy

July 6, 2011 | [Ms. Mackenzie Duelge, Esq., Dr. Volker Franke](#)

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A Partnership Between the U.S. Army War College, and Kennesaw State University

Key Insights:

- *Security and development go hand-in-hand. Especially in fragile and failing states, the military is increasingly involved in peace- and nation-building efforts. However, military involvement is reaching unsustainable levels. Often, civilians cannot or will not deploy to dangerous places and the military's increasing focus on completing nontraditional security functions may lead to role confusion.*
- *Despite growing attempts by the U.S. Government to integrate international interventions into a whole-of-government (WOG) approach, the agencies involved often collectively fail to foster the skill sets necessary for a truly effective integrative approach, thereby rendering WOG largely impractical.*
- *The nation-building efforts in fragile or failing states to date have been plagued by poor communication and poor planning, making effective interagency coordination difficult. Moreover, cooperative efforts rarely receive independent funding, and loyalties remain largely with home agencies.*
- *Different operational contexts may require different approaches, and the intricacies of diverse and complex cultural contexts make the transfer of specific skills and lessons-learned difficult, if not impossible. The specialized skill sets and response mechanisms developed over time by the various agencies may make coordinating efforts more effective than integrating them.*
- *In the final analysis, while WOG has distinct advantages, it is not an effective one-size-fits-all approach to structuring U.S. engagement in nation building and conflict management. The effectiveness of nation-building and conflict management efforts can be increased by:*
 1. *providing independent funding for cooperative approaches, thereby increasing loyalty to the collaborative team;*
 2. *designing and administering targeted training in joint planning, civil-military cooperation, and intercultural competencies; and,*
 3. *engaging local populations and civil society more actively in peace-building and development activities.*

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Introduction.

On February 25, 2011, Kennesaw State University and the Strategic Studies Institute hosted the Symposium “Conflict Management: A Tool for U.S. National Security Strategy.” The three panels conducted over the course of the day covered the following topics: “Responding to New Foreign Policy and National Security Threats,” “WOG Prospects and Challenges,” and “WOG Lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan.” The Symposium discussions ranged from the conceptual to the practical with a focus on the challenges and desirability of interagency cooperation in international interventions.

■ The panelists shared their experiences and expertise on the question of WOG and the impact of fragile and failing states on national security concerns. The panelists engaged the audience in a discussion that included viewpoints from academia, the military, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations. Despite the broad range of viewpoints, a number of overarching themes and tentative agreements emerged.

Panel 1: Responding to New Foreign Policy and National Security Threats.

The first panel linked emerging national security concerns to an overall question about the necessity and efficacy of WOG approaches for responding to a range of emerging threats and explored the need for new response mechanisms. ■

Dr. Robert Kennedy, Professor of International Affairs at the [Sam Nunn School of International Affairs](#), Georgia Institute of Technology, argued that many contemporary threats come from the fragile and failing states around the world that serve as breeding grounds for a number of emerging threats, ranging from terrorism to totalitarianism. Dr. Kennedy identified the guiding question of the panel: How should the U.S. respond to these kinds of international challenges? He observed that it is easy to declare that agencies should cooperate with one another and with their foreign counterparts, but such cooperation has not always been embraced or successfully implemented. Questioning the ability of U.S. agencies to integrate into a cooperative approach, Dr. Kennedy concluded that the U.S. Government has embraced WOG approaches thus far, but he detailed a range of issues that must be addressed before effective integrated approaches to dealing with emerging threats, challenges, and opportunities will become the norm.

Dr. Mary Habeck, Associate Professor of Strategic Studies at the [Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies](#), Johns Hopkins University, examined planning and strategy in international interventions. Dr. Habeck argued that Phase 4 planning in Iraq failed as a result of poor interagency understanding of what constitutes planning. For the military, planning includes everything from the setting of grand goals to the mundane details of day-to-day operations and personnel movement. For the nonmilitary agencies involved, planning consisted primarily of grand strategy and incorporated no deadlines or concrete steps. Dr. Habeck argued that the military has taken a lead role in peacebuilding and peacekeeping because it is the only agency that truly considers the critical importance of strategic planning and the operationalization of goals.

Mr. Michael Miklaucic, Research Director and USAID Liaison for the [Center for Complex Operations, National Defense University](#), identified many of the dangers of failed and failing states and explored reasons why such states pose a national security threat to the United States. Illicit networks, both criminal and terrorist, have emerged in states where government control of state stability is limited or non-existent. Technology has been encouraging the development of these networks, and the new national security threats are a “Gordian mess” defined by nonexistent boundaries and nonsusceptibility to a single strategy. U.S. Government agencies lack the skills to address these complex problems. Mr. Miklaucic concluded that the threats to the United States are no

longer monolithic, long-term dangers. Instead, threats can come from anywhere, at any time, and we are not prepared to face this high level of uncertainty.

Dr. Michael Ashkenazi, Senior Researcher at the [Bonn International Center for Conversion](#), connected many of the preceding viewpoints in his argument that development threatens to destroy the undeveloped culture it replaces. The destruction of past cultural practices means that when the U.S. intervenes in fragile states, there is a natural resistance to the implementation of new ways of doing things. The WOG approach does not always take into account the impact of intervention on the native culture, and it fails to acknowledge the benefits of power dispersed across a number of smaller, specialized agencies with high levels of internal trust.

In the end, Panel 1 posed a number of important questions and highlighted some of the major challenges to any WOG approach adopted in international interventions:

- How have national security threats changed?
- How can the U.S. Government respond most effectively to these new threats?
- Is a WOG approach practical and effective in addressing these threats?
- Why do specialized agencies exist?

The panelists generally agreed that agencies often collectively fail to foster all of the skill sets necessary for a truly integrated cooperative approach to international problems, and that WOG approaches are probably impractical.

Panel 2: WOG Prospects and Challenges.

▣ Panel 2 addressed some of the practical challenges of implementing WOG approaches in U.S. intervention efforts in fragile states. The panelists generally agreed that there are key structural problems with the WOG approach.

Dr. Lisa Schirch, Director of the [3D \(Development, Defense, Diplomacy\) Security Initiative at Eastern Mennonite University](#), opened the panel with a development-focused discussion, arguing that one of the failings of WOG approaches is its lack of integration with organizations that help build and maintain the necessary structures of a civil society. Dr. Schirch suggested that the weakness of governments in fragile and failing states is the result of a lack of strong civil society. Local groups have some of the knowledge and legitimacy that can help in the construction of a civil society. Without civil society, development cannot really be achieved. Dr. Schirch concluded that the skills of the people on the ground are not always the skills needed to help weak states develop, and that communication is a key problem in coordinating the efforts of various agencies and organizations.

Dr. Melanie Alamir, Program Manager for Networked Security for the German defense contractor [IABG](#), addressed the end results of a WOG approach. Dr. Alamir argued that the purpose of changing methods is to change outcomes, and that WOG approaches should be evaluated not on how good they sound, but on the outcomes they produce. When considering outcomes, WOG approaches have limited utility, because the nature of these interventions depends on the types of parties involved. Interagency cooperation in recipient states is difficult to coordinate due to the relative weakness of recipient governments and the overall lack of political structure. Cooperation in donor states only affects efficiency and planning, and does not necessarily improve the outcomes of an intervention. Dr. Alamir concluded that WOG approaches may be a good start or a good way to organize, but their utility may be overrated.

Major General (Ret.) Charles Dunlap of [Duke University Law School](#) addressed the difficult question of whether or not a WOG approach is generally weakening agencies' ability to pursue their primary goals. General Dunlap focused mainly on the military's role in nation and peacebuilding, highlighting some of the development issues that can arise if a recipient state sees the military pursuing essentially civilian goals. Recipient states may come to believe that the military is the only

agency that can actually get things done. Perhaps more importantly is the fact that it is not necessarily an effective use of the military to train soldiers in competing skill sets. General Dunlap concluded that maintaining divisions in government may be more effective than a WOG approach because it keeps differing objectives separate and in the hands of those most likely to achieve them.

Mr. James Stephenson, Senior Advisor for Stabilization and Reconstruction at [Creative Associates International](#), built on General Dunlap's argument and suggested that the U.S. presence in recipient states has increased to unsustainable levels as a result of attempts to embrace WOG approaches. The sheer number of Americans in many places has caused hostility and suspicion on the part of natives, and is costing the U.S. enormous amounts of money. A successful WOG approach should have representatives of various agencies teaming up to serve the overall mission rather than their individual agencies. This is not happening, and the inability to build teams that enable development and security in recipient states has instead led to an excess of actors trying to enforce development. Mr. Stephenson concluded that this is at cross-purposes with sustained development and stability, and that if the WOG approach cannot be implemented properly, it may need to be abandoned.

Colonel (Ret.) Jack LeCuyer, Minerva Chair at the [U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute](#), argued that it is unreasonable to expect successful WOG efforts at the "tip of the spear" or on the ground, if there is a lack of WOG at the strategic level of the national security system. The National Security Council (NSC) and the newly created National Security Staff (NSS) are the hubs of the U.S. national security system, and they have the unique opportunity to guide the development of a true WOG approach that begins at the top and cascades down to the field. The necessary coherence in policies, programs, and resource commitments is lacking because departments and agencies in Washington are typically more focused on their individual capabilities and programs than they are on a truly collaborative effort in which they work jointly to achieve national security goals and objectives. The NSC and NSS must become the strategic managers of the interagency space between the Executive Office of the President and the departments and agencies to ensure a true WOG approach. Absent this "forged" unity of effort and purpose in Washington, our efforts on the ground will continue to suffer from a lack of coherence and cohesion that define WOG efforts.

Panel 2 concluded that the practical and structural issues with successfully implementing a WOG approach to international interventions may be at cross-purposes with overall strategic goals.

Panel 3: WOG Lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Panel 3 examined the ability to learn and apply lessons from two major interventions — Iraq and Afghanistan — to potential future interventions and addressed the fact that cultural differences make the transfer of such lessons as well as skills difficult, if not impossible. 

In a Skype call from Liberia, **Colonel (Ret.) Christopher Holshek, Senior Associate with the [Project on National Security Reform](#)**, addressed cultural perceptions and argued that in some places, national and physical security take a back seat to governance and resource security. Yet, an understanding of this cultural phenomenon could help with future planning for regime transition and peacebuilding in places like Africa and Asia. Colonel Holshek emphasized the importance of cultural context to any peace-building mission, and reminded the audience that Iraq and Afghanistan are, in many ways, special cases. The U.S. has taken a leadership role in these interventions, but does not always take the lead in other places. In fact, Colonel Holshek argued, sometimes, the U.S. ought to take a backseat where other actors have greater influence and interest.

Mr. Doug Brooks, President of the [International Stability Operations Association](#), addressed the role of contractors in international interventions. Mr. Brooks argued that contractors often make visible the coordination problems that plague a WOG approach. Because independent contractors are hired solely as implementers and do not have a hand in the planning stages of an intervention, they are often less adaptable and less willing to change their approach. Furthermore, if different agencies hire different

contractors to complete objectives, the contractors may find themselves in conflict with one another. Worse yet, contractors hesitate to criticize a plan designed and implemented by the hand that feeds them and often end up carrying out a bad plan to the point of failure. Contractors often hire nationals who know the situation and can parlay what they learn working for the contractor into post-transition successes. Mr. Brooks argued that contractors should be given the flexibility to respond to local needs and take into account the advice of locals in peace-building missions.

Colonel (Ret.) William Flavin, Division Chief of Doctrine, Concept, Education and Training at the [Peacekeeping & Stability Operations Institute](#) at the U.S. Army War College, discussed the fiscal implausibility of WOG approaches. In order for interagency cooperation to work, collaborative teams should be funded independently. This would enhance loyalty to the team rather than just to the home agencies. This kind of independent funding almost never happens. Without strong leadership, planning, and funding, Colonel Flavin claimed, a WOG approach simply cannot succeed. The success of WOG approaches in some cases has been primarily the result of a good team and strong leadership. These successes have not identified any unifying process that can make WOG approaches better than other approaches that also have strong leadership and independent funding. In the end, Colonel Flavin argued that the elements for success are the same whether or not a WOG approach is used: “a plan, a man, and some money.”

Dr. Gregory Meyjes, Chair of the Department of Inclusive Education, Kennesaw State University and CEO of Solidaris Intercultural Services LLC, gave some cultural insights into the difficulties of international interventions. Dr. Meyjes outlined some of the successes of Human Terrain Teams that have been deployed to get a deep cultural understanding of a place prior to interventions. These teams have helped to limit conflict between groups that were natural allies, but culturally diverse. Intercultural competency is at the core of successful interventions, and the tendency to lump all of the people of a state together oversimplifies the situation to a dangerous degree in many places. WOG approaches do not improve intercultural competency per se and, by trying to centralize missions, may actually alienate foreign cultures. Dr. Meyjes argued that if we are to ask people to change their culture, we must have at least the legitimacy of cultural competency in making that request.

Overall, Panel 3 concluded that WOG approaches generally fail to address the important cultural difficulties of international interventions. The panelists agreed that it may be more important to focus on intercultural cooperation than on interagency cooperation per se.

The views expressed in this brief are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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