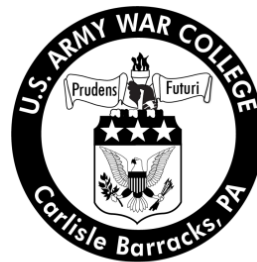


Preparing for Coalition Warfare in the Age of Austerity

by

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United States Army War College
Class of 2012

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PREPARING FOR COALITION WARFARE IN THE AGE OF AUSTERITY

Coalitions are demanding, difficult, sometimes divisive, yet increasingly indispensable.

—Dennis Showalter and William Astor¹

Coalitions have been a norm in warfare since the dawn of history. From the Greek city-states banding together to fight the Persians, and then each other, to the recent intervention in Libya, like-minded nations have grouped together for the common good, and frequently as well, to pursue their own narrower interests. Collective defense has always been a strong motivator for the formation of coalitions and alliances. However, in the post Cold War era of discretionary interventions by like-minded states, the impetus for coalition building is, even ahead of burden sharing, the quest for international legitimacy.²

Regardless of how history scores the eventual outcomes of the wars of the last decade, the West's collective proficiency in coalition warfare has greatly advanced. The old adage, "war is the mother of necessity," has been the driver that has pushed coalition interoperability to new levels. This prolonged and intense shared operational experience has made coalition operations second nature for a generation of multinational leadership. Better mutual understanding and robust international personal contacts have allowed coalition commanders and staffs to work through such thorny problems as command and control, intelligence sharing, and national caveats to find far from perfect yet workable solutions. Indeed, despite those who bemoan the pitfalls and painfulness of coalition operations, there is a strong argument that military coalitions are both stronger and increasingly more important than they have been in recent times.

As we approach the so-called 'post-war' period when operations in two major coalition undertakings, Afghanistan and Iraq, are expected to wind down, the natural inclination will be to revert to the ante bellum state of coalition affairs. Austerity measures and attendant bureaucratic infighting for limited resources will drive many to circle the wagons and look inwards, and coalition engagement will be low hanging fruit in the quest for sacrificial cuts. History would tell us that this is unwise as we are entering not a 'post-war' period, but an 'inter-war' period, when military coalitions will shortly again be required for discretionary interventions around the world. Effective coalitions are transitory in nature, and the collective skills that go along in maintaining them are perishable. They require nurturing to be successful.

So, in the context of 'post-war' re-deployment and 'strategic contraction,' how does the West maintain its hard-earned proficiency in coalition warfare? Like-minded Western nations must internalize the coalition warfare lessons of the past decade, understand the form coalition warfare will take for future discretionary interventions, and with that understanding wisely invest scarce resources into those capabilities that will facilitate integration with coalition partners. As the militaries of these like-minded nations become smaller and more resource constrained, they must counter-intuitively reach out and become closer to each other. As part of developing coalition integrators, this means expanding and maintaining the robust cross-national personal relationships that are the lubricant to the inherent and significant friction of coalition warfare. This also entails leveraging existing alliances and partnerships, such as NATO, not so much as increasingly difficult instruments for collective action, but as forums for maintaining interoperability in modular coalitions of like-minded willing partners and regional actors.

The Last Decade – Coalition Warfare’s Ongoing Maturation

At the turn of the century, many experts were predicting the demise of coalition warfare. The world’s sole superpower, the United States, was fielding such technologically advanced and expensive capabilities that there was significant concern that the ‘interoperability gap’ would make coalition warfare all but impossible.³ Moreover, the onerous decision making process - ‘war by committee’ - that shackled the conduct of the Kosovo Campaign left a bad taste in many mouths, the U.S. in particular. This reluctance to being unduly constrained by a coalition structure impacted the initial U.S. approach in Afghanistan, which, according to a 2002 study, “left the U.S. military relatively unfettered by coalition considerations but at a political cost with traditional allies.”⁴ This unilateral approach was somewhat repeated in Iraq, where the formation of a ‘coalition of the willing’ proved extremely challenging, and highlighted the difficulties in gaining international consensus when the justification for intervention is tenuous. In a study on recent U.S. experiences with coalition warfare, Cornell University Professor Sarah Krepps discusses the appreciation of the need for wider consensus, with the upshot being that “multilateralism emerged as one of the few winners of the Iraq War.”⁵ The emergence of a widespread coalition centered on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Afghanistan embodied this rejuvenated multinational approach, seemingly disproving the forecast that that coalition warfare was passé.

These two models have been the dominant forms of coalitions for the past decade: ‘coalitions of the willing’ – like-minded nations grouping together for a common cause, as was the case in Iraq; and an alliance-centric model, where NATO became the core for a larger coalition effort, similar to that used earlier in Bosnia and Kosovo, and employed later in Afghanistan and in Libya. Both models were similar, with the U.S.

providing a dominant or essential supporting role, and employing interoperability measures painstakingly developed through NATO. They also had similar challenges, traditional in most coalitions, ranging from employment limitations and national caveats, command and control friction, culture and language barriers, and technical and procedural interoperability.

These challenges at many times were seemingly insurmountable, but war can be considered the supreme forcing function.⁶ Faced with rather few options, national military headquarters, coalition commanders and staff, and contingents on the ground found methods and workarounds to continue with the mission. With a new maturity in mutual understanding, patience, and cultural and political savvy - all born of intense experience and need - a sense of cooperation and compromise came to characterize coalition interaction. General Raymond Odierno, one of the most experienced coalition commanders of his generation, freely acknowledged that, “our warfare experience since 9/11 has expanded our understanding and appreciation for the importance of coalition operations.”⁷

The poignant acknowledgement that national caveats are a fact of life for coalition operations reflects this maturity. For coalition partners, these employment caveats “represent a logical manifestation of their sovereignty,”⁸ and are a reflection of domestic laws, policies, and politics to which national contingents are rightfully beholden. Every country has them, even the U.S., as noted by former U.S. Ambassador to NATO, Kurt Volker: “In Libya, the U.S. itself has become a caveat country.”⁹ Despite the challenges of these limitations, coalition commanders, working closely with national contingents, have generally been able to find meaningful roles and tasks commensurate

with their mandate and abilities. Through mapping out this understanding in 'caveat matrices' that portray employment and use of force differences amongst contingents, or discussions revealing unwritten and unofficial caveats, this appreciation has become much more widespread, allowing for improved staff planning and minimized friction.¹⁰ While the national veto exists, its use is very limited, as according to British Lieutenant General John Kiszely, "processes have evolved that avoid its direct and open use."¹¹

Intimately linked to caveats, experience has tempered expectations regarding the degree of command over coalition forces from other nations. Unity of command was a significant preoccupation for many of those who studied coalition warfare in the pre-9/11 period, although a transition in thought was emerging: "The ability to integrate rests largely on one principle. Unity of command is the most fundamental principle of warfare, the single most difficult principle to gain in combined warfare."¹² No democratic country will completely surrender command of its military forces to another – the political risks are just too great. Dual chains of command – national and coalition - with coalition commanders often having only limited powers, are the norm. A recent RAND study on coalition warfare concludes: "Complete unity of command is rarely achievable; it must instead be measured in degree rather than as an absolute."¹³

Coalition commanders now wisely strive for unity of effort. They expend considerable and well placed energy to ensure commonality of objectives with their coalition partners and satisfy their national agendas to the degree practicable. This includes the hosting of visiting national dignitaries, calls to national military leadership to achieve commonality of understanding, and even personally visiting national capitals. Commanders gain unity of effort through patience; developing personal relationships,

mutual respect, and rapport; attaining an in-depth understanding of each member's national goals, objectives, capabilities, and limitations; engaging in collaborative planning; and assigning tasks commensurate with capabilities and mandate.¹⁴

Technical interoperability was another previous preoccupation for coalition warfare's naysayers. Their great fear was that the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs was going to make the U.S. military so technologically far ahead of potential coalition partners that they would not be able to operate together on the battlefield.¹⁵ While technical interoperability remains very important and challenges persist, what has proven to be of greater essence is non-technical interoperability, or 'cooperability',¹⁶ which is the "interoperability of people, process, and organization so that combined military capability can be achieved."¹⁷ Western states are now devoting much more research and attention to this essential aspect of interoperability, while, more importantly, the fact that a wide variety of coalition forces with differing technologies have been able to find solutions to circumvent gaps and be able to operate together exemplifies this 'cooperability' in practice.

A key aspect of this cooperability has been the growing acknowledgement of the significance of cross-cultural understanding. Cultural education has gained much importance, not just prior to operations, but as part of general professional development in many Western militaries. Gal Luft, in a recent book on the importance of culture in coalition operations, notes with optimism that, "The role and the importance of culture are slowly gaining their well-deserved recognition both in academic and military circles."¹⁸ This, especially for U.S. forces in their frequent coalition leadership role, has been very beneficial. "Consequently, the U.S. military has been able to improve coalition

relations with partners around the world and to carry out one successful coalition endeavor after another. The same is true for other militaries.”¹⁹ This improved cross cultural savvy has reduced the incidence and severity of mission-detracting cultural blunders and friction, while at the same time expanding the appreciation that diverse heterogeneous groups tend to make more creative and higher quality decisions.²⁰

The free flowing globalization of information has been a strong factor in better preparing national forces for coalition operations. While NATO has long endeavored to improve interoperability amongst its members, standards are necessarily subject to various levels of approval through its Committee for Standardization and subsidiary bodies.²¹ This all takes time. In today’s operational environment of rapidly evolving threats and concepts, forces need to be informed on the latest developments. Fortunately, rapid and robust information flows have now resulted in strengthened and highly integrated lessons learned feedback loops. “There is no shortage of learning material: producing a ‘lessons learned’ report is now standard practice in coalition operations.”²² Emerging operational concepts are rapidly propagated amongst coalition partners. Recent examples include the counter-insurgency approach of ‘clear, hold, build,’ the importance of ‘influence activities,’ building indigenous security force capacity, and the ‘comprehensive’ or ‘whole of government’ approach. Indeed, forces preparing for deployment to Afghanistan have had the benefit of training with Commander ISAF’s Tactical Directives within days of their publication. Coalition partners rapidly share tactics, techniques, and procedures for evolving in-theater challenges, such as the application of joint fires, counter-improvised explosive device methods, and multinational medical matters. With this know-how incorporated into their

pre-deployment preparations, national contingents arrive in a theater of operations much better prepared to integrate into the coalition and commence operations.²³

While technology has facilitated information sharing, it has not proven to be a panacea. Excessive restrictions on the sharing of classified material, including intelligence, have often been recognized as an impediment to coalition effectiveness.²⁴ Over classification, cumbersome bureaucratic regulations, and lack of trust all militated against sharing. Again with experience, the 'need to know' culture has, out of wartime necessity, been better balanced with one based on 'share to win,' even in the face of the WikiLeaks scandal.²⁵ Although arguably still in need of streamlining, writing for release, tear lines, and reasonable levels of classification have become more commonplace. The greatest facilitator of intelligence sharing has been trust, painstakingly built through personal relationships and shared operational necessity. A Dutch study on coalition information sharing determined that: "Trust is considered of critical importance to the development of information exchange relationships, and it evolves through mutually satisfying exchange interactions."²⁶ That trust, born out of fruitful coalition experience, has generated much needed improvements on the ground, and indeed some policy change. Russell Glenn from RAND recently noted that, "encouragingly, one of the most dramatic U.S. policy adaptations in recent years has reportedly been a willingness to share intelligence more widely with coalition members."²⁷

With war again as a forcing function, perhaps one of the greatest coalition information sharing tools to come out of the last decade is the Afghan Mission Network (AMN). The AMN successfully fuses a plethora of national systems to allow for sharing

of data, commander's intent, and situational awareness across the battlefield and indeed back to home countries, greatly facilitating force preparation, collaboration and C4ISR.²⁸ Based on mutual trust amongst coalition partners as discussed above, numerous senior coalition commanders describe it as an operational 'game changer,' a declaration echoed by former ISAF Commander General David Petraeus: "The network is the most important enabling capability I have as a commander."²⁹ With its ability to accept a wide variety of partners and applicability to other coalition operations, the editor of Jane's Defence Weekly forecasts, "The AMN is essentially the new model for command and control in coalition warfare."³⁰

Significant complications remain unresolved, from combined strategy formulation, to full technical compatibility for a plethora of systems, to burden sharing disagreements. These all require work. Yet faced with incredibly complex challenges on the ground, coalition forces have done an admirable job in breaking down national stovepipes in order to better integrate their operations, achieve better unity of effort, and focus on the mission at hand. Much of this success is attributable to the extended benefits of personal relationships developed amongst coalition commanders and staffs against the backdrop of war. These leaders realized through experience that open and cooperative relationships are much more productive than ones based upon suspicion and ignorance. The challenge now is to maintain this hard-won proficiency.

The Future of the Coalition Construct

The trends over the last decade can give us some clue as to what to expect in the next, while at the same time the increasingly stressed fiscal environment will necessitate modifications in the strategic approach of like-minded nations looking to conduct discretionary intervention operations. For Western democracies, domestic

political realities will continue to drive coalition participation, regardless of alliance membership. Given these factors, the inclusion of regional forces partnered with an expeditionary but smaller coalition 'core of cohesion' will become the ever more important.

In a volatile operating environment, crises, ranging from natural disasters to mass atrocities, will persist and stimulate world response. While collective defense for a traditional ally will garner a more effusive reaction from alliance members, international interventions for such lofty goals as 'Responsibility to Protect' and humanitarian assistance will continue to be the purview of like-minded coalitions of the willing, even if under the guise of an international mandate. Libya is a prominent recent example. In an era of 'strategic contraction', with traditional allies universally suffering budget cuts, all will be increasingly hard pressed in terms of capacity to conduct these operations single-handedly, even the U.S.. Moreover, the desire to have international (and indeed domestic) legitimacy will drive the desire for multilateralism. The international community often views with suspicion actions taken by a single nation alone.³¹ Finally, history shows that coalitions greatly increase the chances of mission success, despite their inherent difficulties.³² For these reasons, coalitions will continue to be the structure of choice.

As with the recent past, membership in an alliance, NATO being the primary example, will not necessitate participation in future coalition operations, even if sanctioned by the alliance membership at large. Libya showed this trend clearly, as U.S. Secretary of Defense Gates lamented: "While every alliance member voted for the Libya mission, less than half have participated at all, and fewer than a third have been

willing to participate in the strike mission.”³³ This lack of unified burden sharing, along with the almost unilateral disarmament of some of its members, has caused many to question the continuing relevance of the Alliance.³⁴

This question has arisen because NATO has tried to expand beyond the intent behind its initial creation – collective defense. In general, the political motivation to come to the defense of an alliance partner is arguably much stronger than participating in a discretionary ‘out of area’ intervention. Realizing this, Georgetown University’s Charles Kupchan has argued that NATO members will be unable to reach a clear strategic consensus on global interventions, and efforts to turn NATO into a global alliance risk stretching it past the breaking point. Instead, in order to remain relevant, NATO should refocus on its roots – collective defense – while concurrently acting as a political vehicle of cohesion to address a global agenda.³⁵

So, while ‘like-minded’ nations have come together for a seat at the table in NATO, all will not be consistently ‘like-minded enough’ for discretionary interventions, especially for ones with more limited national interests. To address this, Seyom Brown has proposed the concept of ‘modular coalitions,’ which are based on sub-sets of alliance members who have been able to garner sufficient political will to participate, and who draw on the interoperability mechanisms developed by the Alliance. “The polyarchic characteristics of world politics make it very unlikely that NATO, any more than the UN, will be able to conduct actual military operations effectively other than on a modular basis—that is, with small subsets of its membership.”³⁶ Indeed, this elective participation has been the recent practice for interventions, showing, “that the NATO

Alliance is increasingly a mechanism for addressing defence matters on an opt-in basis, rather than a genuinely collective effort.”³⁷

Even if it does not provide a full collective approach to intervention operations, NATO’s interoperability framework has been and will continue to be the default for coalition integration. According to Admiral James Stavridis, NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander, “NATO’s investment in interoperability decades ago continues to be beneficial in both old and new partnership enterprises.”³⁸ Having this standardization is increasingly more important as more non-NATO forces partake in Western led coalitions, and as multi-nationality occurs at progressively lower and lower levels. In discussing the Alliance’s uncertain future, Julian Lindley-French implores, “if nothing else survives of NATO into the twenty-first century, at least preserve the all-important force planning and interoperability standards vital to the efficient force generation of coalitions.”³⁹

The recent past has also demonstrated that U.S. participation, if not overt leadership, has been and will continue to be critical for any future coalition intervention operation. Continuing U.S. global interests, in most cases more pronounced than those of traditional partners, will impel it to lead interventions. In actual fact, lacking the ability to do so themselves, it will often be in these partners’ best interests to, in the words of the head of the British Army, “advocate lead nation status from the United States and do everything that we can to reinforce the coherence and momentum that this generates.”⁴⁰ In any case, even with its anticipated cuts to force structure, among Western nations only the U.S. has the panoply of expeditionary and theater level capabilities necessary to prosecute modern interventions. Indeed, U.S. theater enablers, such as medical

evacuation, combat search and rescue, and command and control architecture are crucial in maintaining a coalition.⁴¹ While the purely military benefits of coalitions may be of declining importance to the U.S., given its predominant military capabilities compared to those of any potential coalition partners, the political advantages of coalitions are, on the other hand, greatly increasing.⁴² Even with vastly different levels of capability, the U.S. has developed what Sarah Kreps terms ‘accommodation strategies’ in order to intervene multilaterally with less capable allies. “Coalition operations do present some challenges, but these are challenges to which the U.S. military has adapted.”⁴³

While a U.S.-led sub-alliance modular coalition of like-minded Western nations will be the probable structure, in some interventions the challenge will be to provide the numbers of troops that the situation demands. Not only are budget cuts eroding the size of many Western militaries, but their national demographics, with an ever shrinking recruiting base, militate against having large armed forces. Despite the technological and tactical superiority often offered by Western forces, mass in the form of troop density will still be important in some interventions. One needs only look at recent counter-insurgency operations for examples. “There are some circumstances – particularly against adversaries with large numbers of military-age troops – in which American military power is simply insufficient.”⁴⁴ So, how are ‘hollow’ interventions – ones with the will but not the force – to be avoided?

One answer lies in the formation of a multilayered coalition that couples traditional like-minded nations with a looser coalition of partner regional states, who may lack inherent expeditionary capabilities themselves, but have sufficient strength to put a credible number of ‘boots on the ground.’ In this case, a sub-alliance modular coalition

with global projection abilities forms the 'core of cohesion' and is joined in theatre with less capable but more numerous 'like-minded enough' regional forces. The core forces extend their well-developed interoperability practices, through robust liaison and perhaps security force assistance elements, to work alongside and integrate the regional forces. High-end capabilities from the core are complemented by the additional 'mass' of regional forces. This concept is not new, as a 2002 study on recent operations noted: "Coalitions have not replaced our traditional alliances but instead they draw heavily on the capabilities of our alliance partners, in combination with regional actors from the crisis area."⁴⁵ Recent initiatives, under the umbrella concept of 'building partner capacity,' are steps in the right direction as they portend to develop relationships with regional partners and introduce wider interoperability mechanisms, easing the formation of these looser, multi-layered coalitions.

Fortunately, a review of the national defence and security strategies of most like-minded Western nations indicates a common emphasis on the need for continuing international military cooperation and interoperability, especially with the U.S.⁴⁶ Likewise, U.S. policies stress the importance of international military partnerships, whether they are through formal alliance or ad hoc coalitions,⁴⁷ an imperative stressed by senior military leadership:

Relationships matter more than ever. Coalitions and partnerships add capability, capacity and credibility to what we see as shared security responsibilities. Therefore, we are committed, even in the face of some of the budget pressures that have been described, to expanding the envelope of cooperation at home and abroad.⁴⁸

Regardless of the participating countries, future coalitions will still face certain unalienable realities. They will continue to be subject to the vagaries of domestic democratic politics, particularly for discretionary interventions. "It is an oxymoron to

speak of political interference and coalition operations.”⁴⁹ These underpinnings will mean that unity of effort will continue to trump unity of command, as nations retain full command. Concomitantly, national caveats, capabilities, and proficiency will drive a contingent’s roles and tasks. Technology differences will result in continued technical interoperability challenges. Furthermore, two newer realities are emerging. Firstly, in our volatile operating environment, the acceleration of events and response may drive a much more rapid coalition formation than has been the practice in the past. Again Libya is an example. Secondly, much the same as combined arms warfare, there has been a downward proliferation of multinational groupings – junior leaders at progressively lower levels must be proficient in coalition operations.⁵⁰ In the face of all of this, coalition forces must be able to work together. The lessons of the last decade will without doubt retain their applicability, but must now be applied in an increasingly resource constrained environment.

Investing in Coalition Integrators

In the face of budget reduction stress, concerns are common that unconstrained service interests may trump joint integration especially as force structure is cut, putting ‘force integrator’ capabilities at risk.⁵¹ This worry may be extended to multinational integration, where fiscal austerity may drive the same fate for ‘coalition integrators.’ But what are these ‘coalition integrators’? For the most part, they are those capabilities, practices, and expertise that facilitate coalition interoperability. They range from capabilities such as compatible command and control systems and liaison officers, to common procedures and doctrine, to such intangibles as mutual understanding and personal relationships. The good news is that like-minded nations are doing many of the right things now, such as compiling recent coalition lessons learned, developing

combined doctrine, incorporating cultural education into professional development, multinational training and exchanges, and swapping liaison and exchange officers. But these all come with increasing costs.

When it comes to investments, Western nations and their militaries are being forced to make some hard decisions. Some are touting niche and/or shared capabilities as the way forward, but with uncertain politics driving coalition participation the inherent risk is that all will be not available when needed, especially for more contentious interventions. Regardless, outreach activities that develop coalition integrators, such as those above, must be counter-intuitively privileged over many other capabilities and, when necessary, force structure. In balancing future force development, these coalition integrators must continue to be funded, as their long term operational and strategic benefits far outweigh their relatively minimal costs.

Collectively identifying and advocating coalition integrators continues to be an important first step. Like-minded militaries must strive for commonality in their systems and procedures. While NATO has provided this role for decades, more exclusive organizations have also pursued tighter interoperability for the 'core of cohesion.' Initially formed in 1954, the American, British, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Armies' (ABCA) Program, aimed at optimizing coalition land forces interoperability, is putting significant effort into garnering coalition lessons from recent operations.⁵² Likewise, the Multinational Interoperability Council (MIC), formed in 1996 and based on a slightly larger group of like-minded nations, has been conducting very relevant studies.⁵³ These efforts, for modest investments, produce very useful products and need continued support.

As these organizations identify and describe fundamental principles and procedures that need to guide coalition efforts, national doctrine must follow suit. A common (or common enough) doctrine and lexicon amongst likely coalition partners will continue to be at the forefront in importance for coalition integrators. Starting with a shared view of emerging threats, commonly understood operational concepts and vocabulary will greatly facilitate future coalition integration. This has been well understood for some time:

There can be little doubt that the ability of coalitions to overcome [their ad hoc nature] is directly proportional to the commitment that potential coalition partners give to developing general doctrinal principles to guide their operations, and to training. No other factors hold as much potential for successful mission execution.⁵⁴

While collective doctrine should form the basis of training for and conduct of coalition operations, it must be coupled with education as a vital integrator. Armed with an appreciation for a coalition partner's history, culture, interests, and proclivities, one is much better prepared for working in a multinational venue. "Education can provide grounding in the problems that arise when working, commanding, or being commanded in multinational operations, as well as strategies for managing them."⁵⁵ The explosion of military cultural awareness studies aimed at better understanding indigenous populations has important collateral benefits for future coalition operations. The recent adoption of widespread language and cultural study programs at military academies is a prime example. Likewise, the expansion of the U.S. military's system of Foreign Area Officers provides specific expertise that greatly benefits coalition understanding.⁵⁶ Indeed, education regarding a particular culture has extended benefits to grasping the differences beyond the one studied. "The level of exposure of military organizations to other cultures in the pre-coalition stage determines their ability to minimize cross-

cultural tension with fellow coalition partners.”⁵⁷ Continued multicultural education, coupled with an increasing worldwide trend amongst the younger generation to display an increasingly international outlook, due to globalization, portends well for future coalition integration, something like-minded militaries must continue to foster.⁵⁸

Along with the educational pillar, experience in working together in peacetime or prior to deployment is another essential coalition integrator. Combined training imparts much needed mutual understanding and greatly increases interoperability. With the tyranny of geography, travel costs may be prohibitively expensive for many potential coalition members, and thus subject to obvious risk in tight financial times. Given that, combined training needs to be tightly focused to gain the most benefit. While it can be argued that the effects of field training are often transitory as it is most focused on the lower levels,⁵⁹ it should not be discounted because, as previously mentioned, coalition integration is happening at progressively lower levels. Command Post Exercises (CPXs), on the other hand, are especially useful tools to work through integration issues and develop mutual understanding. The recent trend of coalition mission rehearsal exercises, conducted in a classified domain using real-time intelligence, has, along with developing relationships early, greatly facilitated integration and allowed multinational formations to accelerate their readiness for operations once deployed.⁶⁰ A similar concept could be applied to peacetime CPXs, but using real-time scenarios, again in a classified domain, to achieve a greater degree of realistic mutual understanding. This undisputed added burden for exercise planners would be itself a forcing function for determining gaps in intelligence sharing, national policies, and potential caveats.

To reduce travel costs, the concept of digitally linked multinational CPXs offers promise. Operating from their home countries and using ever advancing technologies to facilitate interaction, participating forces exercise together virtually.⁶¹ This concept would test technical interoperability for a number of systems and the obvious shortcoming of reducing opportunities to develop face to face personal relationships could be mitigated to a small extent through video teleconferencing.

A step beyond combined exercises is personnel exchanges, both for professional development courses and into line positions. While this has been a longstanding practice to develop mutual familiarity, it is one that is often subject to cost cutting measures. Again, for a limited investment, the intangible benefits are immense. Along with developing an in-depth understanding of the host, including their doctrine and cultural outlook, exchange personnel form long-term personal relations and robust networks of contacts that provide exceptional starting points for future coalitions. What is missing is a method to systematically exploit these networks to ensure the right personnel can be reunited for specific coalition endeavors. Robust personnel record keeping and flexibility in assignments could reap important operational benefits in developing cohesion, especially for rapidly forming coalitions.⁶²

Liaison officers also provide an invaluable gateway into understanding coalition partners and overcoming inevitable interoperability challenges amongst them. Their selection however, unlike many practices, has to be more than an afterthought. Major General Robert Scales, in a 1998 Parameters article, argues that a new breed of highly educated, culturally savvy liaison officers is the key to bridge gaps between coalition partners. “The antidote to the fog and friction of coalition warfare is not technology; it

lies in trusted subordinates who can deal effectively with coalition counterparts.”⁶³ Early identification of and educational investment in the right personnel earmarked as liaison officers are ever more necessary with the increasing speed of coalition formation.

The importance of liaison officers increases with more pronounced technological asymmetries and cultural differences within a coalition, which are all the more likely with the inclusion of regional partners. Here liaison must be more robust, persistent, and may even be combined with Security Force Assistance (SFA) roles, where both liaison and professional development activities occur simultaneously. While beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the complexities of SFA, NATO’s Operational Mentor and Liaison Team program in Afghanistan is a prime example of this merged capability. As more regional forces may be required, as identified in the previous section, a greater investment in this liaison / SFA capability would be prudent. Again, potential benefits outweigh the modest investment.

A unifying theme running through many of the above coalition integrators is the importance of personal relationships. While not a panacea by themselves for the complexities and friction inherent in coalition warfare, “individual relationships will make or break a coalition.”⁶⁴ One of the strongest methods to facilitate harmonious integration and unity of effort is through a network of trusting personal relationships amongst the various contingents’ commanders and staffs. The mutual confidence inherent in strong personal relationships allows for open, honest dialogue in working through such thorny realities as requirements, capacity, and national will and caveats.⁶⁵ Gal Luft’s historical study of coalition operations determined that, “Personal relations between coalition commanders are perhaps the most important factor affecting fruitful cooperation.”⁶⁶

These relationships, many developed through the methods discussed above, are much easier to sustain in the context of globalized information environment and social networking. In the past, with longer lead times, coalition members could develop their relationships early in the operation. Again, with rapid coalition formation, the need for pre-established relationships is greater than ever.

However, even with significant effort, it is beyond practicality to be acquainted with all key coalition counterparts prior to deployment. Nevertheless, the associative credibility from mutual acquaintances or shared experiences, such as professional development courses, can be an accelerant in developing new relationships and collaborative habits. This point was made clear during a 2006 panel discussing coalition building: “Although the relationships may not have been personal, just because the other coalition members had previously worked or trained with American forces, they were able to operate together more easily in hostilities in Iraq.”⁶⁷ Common experiences and associates can be an early point of reference and readily hasten the sometimes slow process of relationship building.

Coalition warfare, given its inherent political nature, will continue to be difficult, time consuming, and frustrating. There are no silver bullets to magically remove its complexities, but coalition integrators can ease the pain and provide advantages far out of proportion to their costs. This is not only true for traditionally like-minded partners, but for newer regional partners as well. Prioritized investment in capturing recent lessons, developing common doctrine, providing relevant education, conducting combined training and exchanges, and maintaining robust liaison programs and capabilities are all critical in gaining and maintaining proficiency for future coalition operations. Likewise,

investments in developing personal relationships across national boundaries, as an antidote to the friction inherent in coalitions, will not be squandered. Coalition warfare, like warfare in general, is about people.

Conclusion

For a cynic, it is easy to look upon recent collective efforts in coalition warfare as a painful exercise in futility. For a pragmatic optimist, however, the last decade of determined, concentrated effort has pushed proficiency in coalition operations to new levels. Many more military leaders appreciate the strategic necessity of coalition formation and maintenance, are themselves comfortable in a coalition environment, and have the tact, patience, and cultural savoir-faire that enable them to work through the inevitable friction inherent in a multinational endeavor.

The like-minded nations of the West need to capitalize upon this experience, as the coalition construct will be the norm for discretionary Western interventions for some time to come. No nation, not even the U.S., can afford to go it alone – it is indeed an era of coalition interdependence. Consistent agreement will often be difficult, even amongst members of NATO, but the interoperability efforts of such organizations must be supported. Sub-alliance modular coalitions, with in all probability different players for different operations, but all with U.S. leadership or support, will be the norm. The inclusion of regional forces, partnering with this coalition core, will gain in importance as Western forces shrink.

In the forthcoming battle of the budgets, those activities, products, and capabilities that are essential for cohering individual national contingents into an effective coalition team must be protected. Along with retaining their capability to rapidly project their ever shrinking forces to the world's hot spots, like-minded Western

militaries need to protect and develop their coalition integrators. These integrators, and the trustful personal relationships that result from them, are the vital glue that bonds a coalition together and, in the face of adversity, keeps it together. Eisenhower, one of history's Great Captains of coalition warfare, asserted that "there is only one basic thing that will make allied commands work, and that is mutual confidence."⁶⁸ Hence, in this age of austerity, the militaries of like-minded nations must not take their limited means and withdraw inwards in self-absorption. They must, on the contrary, reach out to each other and create those bonds so necessary to be ready for the inevitability of their next coalition venture.

Endnotes

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