



A National Security Act of 2009? A Short Recommendation for a Possible Revision of the National Security Act of 1947

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“The Interagency is broken” is a refrain heard daily inside the beltway and in conflict areas around the world. It is also quite popular to make the call for a Goldwater-Nichols type legislation to do for the Interagency what that legislation did for the US Military and Joint operations, assignments, and professional military education. Assuming that the Interagency needs to be repaired, the issue is how to reform the organizations, processes, and education and training in the Interagency so that the United States can achieve a “whole of government” approach to National Security challenges of the future and prevent situations such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan.

If someone were to give guidance to those whom would craft the legislation perhaps it would look like this:

1. Ensure that every cabinet agency in the Executive Branch has as a core mission protection of US National Security. Today, only the Department of Defense, along with the Intelligence Community, is viewed as the department with US National Security as a core mission. There are some in the Department of State and US Agency for International Development who believe their activities contribute to US National Security but this is not codified as a core mission. With all cabinet level departments having National Security as a core mission, they will have the justification to request the resources (funding and personnel) so that they can organize, train, educate, and provide the personnel with the requisite functional expertise from their department to support US National Security missions around the world, thus achieving a “whole of government” synergy that required for success.¹
2. Establish a Joint Common Planning process applicable to all Departments to ensure synchronization and orchestration of plans, operations, and activities across the Interagency from the Country Team’s Mission Strategic Plan to the Geographic Combatant Commander’s Theater Security Cooperation Plan and his War and Contingency Plans through the National Security Strategy of the United States. Plans must be nested and linked from the national to the tactical so resources, actions, and activities can be prioritized across all the departments. Attempts to

¹ Credit to Mr. Jim Locher who identified the problem that no agencies expect DOD has National Security as a core mission.

codify a process have been made (e.g., PDD 56 The Management of Complex Contingency Operations during the Clinton Administration) but the system has not been disciplined enough to ensure adoption and compliance. Too often there are military planners writing war and contingency plans that require the full range of the instruments of National Power (Diplomacy, Information, Military, and Economic) with no input from the Interagency. Just imagine if the campaign plans developed for Iraq and Afghanistan had full participation by experts from the Interagency.

3. Establish a National Security Management Structure with authority and resources to discipline the National Security planning and execution process. This should be built around the National Security Council and the National Security Advisor. However, the term advisor will have to be changed (but not to Czar!!) to coincide with the duties, responsibilities, resources, and authorities it will require to lead, manage, and discipline the National Security system.² A working title might be the “Director of National Security.” Consideration should be given to appointing this person to a term along the lines of the Federal Reserve Chairman or the Director of the FBI to allow service (and continuity) beyond administrations perhaps with a fixed 10-year term. In addition, a Grand Strategy planning process looking out decades should also be considered as an integral part of any National Security Management Structure.³

4. Establish core education and training requirements to ensure the development of a cadre of National Security professionals within each Department that will allow them to take their functional department expertise and apply it to support the US National Security mission. Additionally, within each department designated senior positions will require advanced National Security degrees for promotion and appointment to those positions. To effectively function as a National Security professional in today’s complex world the following attributes/skills must be developed by people within each department.

a. Ability to operate with broad guidance in complex situations. The military calls these “mission type” orders and operating within the commander’s intent. Situations are both complex and fluid and require agile, critically thinking professionals who solve problems without waiting for the development of complete and complex plans from higher levels.

b. Capable of executing a common problem solving processes. All departments should adopt the “design methodology” that the Army and Joint Staff are developing because it is a creative problem identification, visualization, and solving process that requires effective collaboration to properly identify problems, develop creative solutions, and then agilely execute plans, actions, and activities in ever changing situation.⁴

² Credit again to Mr. Jim Locher who is working hard to solve this problem.

³ Thanks to COL (RET) Joe Celeski for this suggestion.

⁴ Design is an approach to critical and creative thinking that enables a commander to understand unique situations, to visualize and describe how to shape positive change across the operational environment. By its very nature, design is a fundamentally iterative activity, evolving with the dynamics of the operational environment. Design assists the commander in leading innovative, adaptive work and guides planning, execution and assessment – it facilitates the ability of the commander to frame complex, ambiguous problems and develop solutions that are flexible and adaptive to dynamic conditions. Design leverages organizational intellectual power into decisive combat power that can be used to manage ambiguous situations over time. □ □

c. Capable of conducting distributed operations in austere environments. This is crucial at the tactical level as this will be the most prevalent condition in which operations occur. However, senior leaders must be well versed in this so that instead of micro-management and over control.

d. Tactical training must be built on outcome based training methodologies to provide experiential learning and support complex problem solving skills.

5. Simply, simplify, simplify. We have made a complex world more complex since 9-11. The proliferation of new terminology and concepts has caused confusion and difficulty in communicating among the Interagency. Calling Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism strategies is among the worst offenses. But as military and civilians alike struggle to name the conflict – from the Global War on Terror to the Long War to an Era of Persistent Conflict a tremendous amount of intellectual energy and capital is expended and does not contribute to problem solving. Furthermore for every problem, challenge, issue identified a new concept with an accompanying organization, task force, command, agency, or department is established which often diverts resources (funds and personnel) from existing organizations that might be better able to solve the problem is empowered to do so.

In addition, for an effective National Security System to be instituted Congress must revise the Security Assistance funding and authorities process to allow the national security apparatus to be responsive to the development of strategies and accompanying actions and activities to support those strategies.

Finally, the search for the “perfect solution” in terms of organization, training, education, lessons learned collection, concepts of employment and terminology hinders both effective operations and preparation for the future. There are two places where the Interagency process functions well – at the Country Team and on the ground in conflict areas. The men and women working overseas are getting it done despite a perceived unresponsive and inefficient National Security system. They have learned and adapted yet at the National and Strategic level there has been a lot of energy spent coming up with new ways to try to do old things and it has not helped the men and women on the ground. What is required is a national level system and processes that are simple, agile, and responsive to the challenges the US faces. Ideally, the system will defend against the 3 historical failures in conflicts around the world – the failure to learn, the failure to adapt, and the failure to anticipate.⁵

The above 5 steps may provide the foundation for guidance for a National Security Act of 2009 that could provide the US with a 21st Century National Security structure that would be able to effectively meet the National Security challenges in the era of persistent conflict.

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⁵ Eliot Cohen and John Gooch, Military Misfortune

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