WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT: Building U.S. Stability Operations Capability
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The Joint Force Development Process (JFDP) of the U.S. military consists of translating strategic guidance from senior policymakers into the doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel, and facilities that compose the U.S. armed forces. Over the past 20 years, the JFDP has produced two significant evolutions: Rapid Decisive Operations in 1997 and Modularity in 2004. Performance since those progressions demonstrates that the JFDP has engineered a joint force with unmatched capabilities to achieve termination of conflict by rapid, decisive defeat of enemies in conventional force-on-force combat – the mission for which it is optimized.

However, this is a mission for which the U.S. military is seldom used. Although conventional warfighting is a critical capability especially in terms of deterrence, a review of U.S. military operations since 1991 shows that conventional force-on-force warfare is rare (Iraq I, former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq II, and Libya). In contrast, stability operations, which include capacity-building, disaster response, and counterinsurgency, have played a much greater role, principally in the aftermath of regime-changing decisive victories the military was designed to achieve. In 2007, 75% of deployed U.S. troops were tasked with stability and support operations, even though 90% were trained primarily as warfighters (Riholtz 2009). Looking to the future, of the ten primary missions delineated in the *2012 Defense Strategic Guidance*, only three include conventional force-on-force scenarios while five are stabilization-oriented.

Despite clearly higher demand, no major organizational change that prioritizes stability operations capability has been introduced in the JFDP.

U.S. military leadership is highly averse to conducting stability missions with their concomitant hazy objectives and obscure success markers. The cultural disdain has almost certainly led to stability operations not attracting appropriate attention.

However, the arguments for building greater stability operations capacity in the U.S. military are compelling. First, policymakers have continually tasked – and will continue to task – U.S. armed forces with stability missions requiring an institutional response to build the appropriate competencies. Second, the international system imposes constraints on conventional military options that can be attenuated by stability operations capability. Third, as the lone superpower, the U.S. has an overwhelming interest in using all levers of power available (Smith 2005) including stability operations to create and support stakeholders that will uphold the rules and norms of the current international system. Despite reluctance on the part of military leaders and policymakers, the threats and challenges of the international security environment require an effective U.S. stability operations capability.

The past decade of U.S. military experience in Iraq and Afghanistan has exposed the woefully ill-prepared state of U.S. armed forces to fulfill the most complex stability missions assigned to them by policymakers. In these two major theatres and throughout the world, expanding

mission requirements (known as "mission creep") now include humanitarian relief, security sector reform, infrastructure rehabilitation, counterinsurgency, government advisement, evacuation, disarmament, natural disaster response, counterterrorism, economic development, law enforcement, community outreach, counterproliferation, intelligence gathering, and diplomacy. The military continues to be the organization of choice for policymakers due to the security component that typically accompanies these functions. Consequently, the Department of Defense projects that stability operations will be conducted with greater frequency than any other type of mission in the future.

The competency required to effectively execute such tasks, however, is attained through significant education, training, and professional experience. A thorough and evolving body of literature exists for each of these functions as well as a panoply of experts willing to teach them. Two-day and two-week modules are no substitute for the structures needed to capture, cultivate, and institutionalize such competencies. The practices employed by most development operations in order to ensure proper capability are not currently duplicated in the U.S. military.

Nevertheless, soldiers trained primarily in conventional force-on-force warfighting are regularly called upon to organize elections, develop civil society, or manage an insurgent demobilization and reintegration campaign. Proper training and experience will undoubtedly translate to greater mission success.

An approach that neglects clear demand while ignoring established methods and dismissing available expertise invites failure, squanders valuable resources, and places U.S. troops needlessly in danger.

It is also becoming apparent that the exigencies of the current international system and contours of modern warfare constrain U.S. military options. The experiences of both Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrate that calibrating U.S. armed forces for rapid termination of conflict by decisive defeat without a properly planned, resourced, and executed stability operation is highly ineffective. The Bush administration and military leadership abhorred Clinton-era ideals of "nation-building" and, therefore, pursued a minimalist post-combat strategy after both invasions. Instead of investing adequate troops and resources in a coordinated stabilization effort, the operational objective was to transfer duties and authorities to local and international organizations as quickly as possible.

This approach, however, broke a golden rule of stabilization by failing to seize upon the "pause" (Watson 2005) after regime change in order to impose new rules and institutions. Consequently, local stakeholders converged within the power vacuum to compete for influence and resources, causing disorder and mayhem. It was not until years later that the administration realized the international security implications of withdrawal from both states in their chaotic conditions and decided that failure was "not an option." The result has been two protracted insurgencies costing thousands of lives and trillions of dollars that could certainly have been mitigated had a proper stability force and plan been developed and implemented.

These experiences show that military force is constrained and has decreased utility without effective stability operations in the current international environment. Globalization has made ungoverned spaces, failed states, and rogue states a security threat to the entire international community. Although a particular regime may be a nuisance or threat, the alternatives may be even worse.

Without effective post-combat stabilization, the risk of unleashing transnational crime and terrorism, sectarian conflict, or humanitarian crises outweighs the benefits of removing a threatening government.

The fiascos of Iraq and Afghanistan have consequently reduced U.S. and international support for conventional military solutions due to fears of being drawn into an intractable post-combat stability operation. Currently, one of the most powerful arguments for non-intervention in Syria is the challenge of managing sectarian strife after the conventional regime-changing invasion. As hesitancy over follow-on stabilization campaigns erodes the credibility of conventional military solutions, their deterrent utility also decreases. Furthermore, less credible threats increase the danger of miscalculation and misperception, which could lead to unwanted or unnecessary conflicts (Jervis 1988). If proper capability were developed to address post-combat contingencies, however, conventional military options would be more credible, applicable, and feasible.

Finally, as the primary economic, diplomatic, and security beneficiary in the international system, the U.S. has a core interest in preserving it. The institutions implemented after WWII were explicitly created to develop stakeholders through security arrangements and economic interdependence to ensure a stable system. The system optimizes as participants willingly adhere to established rules as opposed to a coercive framework dependent upon military force. Therefore, whether a mission builds the capacity of other stakeholders, confronts adversaries directly, or provides immediate relief to disaster victims, a primary annex is to win hearts and minds. So when U.S. troops are deployed to Haiti after a devastating earthquake, the objective is not only to employ force to provide security and to protect relief workers and supply chains, but also to demonstrate to the global community that the current U.S.-sponsored international system is worthwhile.

The extensive list of stability missions assigned to the U.S. military illustrates the efforts exerted by U.S. policymakers to create stronger and more invested stakeholders. Challenges to the international system will continue to require stability operations to answer immediate threats, build capacity amongst stakeholders, and maintain commitment. Developing the appropriate stabilization capability underwrites the entire international system and ensures accrual of the many benefits currently realized by the United States.

Therefore, it is imperative for U.S. and international security that U.S. armed forces be trained, equipped, and structured to become the most effective stability operations organization in the world. The present focus on conventional warfighting reflects a Cold-War-era force that fails to optimize for the current international security environment. Although some effort has been

made to integrate stability operations training and doctrine into the various branches, these attempts fall short of the institutional restructuring needed to produce the required capabilities and to dispel the cultural aversion to conducting these vital tasks.

U.S. armed forces are in need of a new unified stability operations command dedicated to the development of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel, and facilities to fulfill stability missions. Although many stability-related operations would continue to be fulfilled through regional commands, STABCOM is envisioned to be the institutional center of gravity for the most challenging and complex stability operations.

As a new functional command, STABCOM would draw upon existing specialists and equipment from all service branches as well as coordinate with other government agencies to build the required competencies. Resources and personnel would be retasked to focus on those missions most demanded of the U.S. military. Regional, cultural, and language expertise would be developed in order to better understand the context of operations. Professionals in conflict resolution, economic development, construction, civil society, and government would be recruited to build capacity in host nations. Partnerships with foreign governments and militaries, non-governmental organizations, academia, and the private sector would be cultivated in order to coordinate efforts and capitalize on outside expertise. Most importantly, all these capabilities would be integrated and implemented under one command structure to eliminate redundancies, conflicts, and inefficiencies that are typical of multi-dimensional, multi-agency operations.

Of course, in a period of military drawdown and economic contraction, the fiscal viability of such a plan is sure to be called into question. However, a unified command would exploit efficiencies that are squandered due to the current half-hearted, disaggregated approach to stability operations. Additionally, STABCOM leadership would draw upon their specialized experience to advise policymakers in order to avoid costly miscalculations and errors. Furthermore, a new command would ensure institutional memory to avoid repeating mistakes in future operations. In the long term, it will be more financially viable to properly structure the U.S. military and properly advise U.S. policymakers than to engage unprepared in ill-conceived operations and bear the resulting costs.

Works Cited

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