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Rethinking Civil-Military Coordination for Humanitarian and Other Complex Operations

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Spanning "Bleeding" Boundaries: Humanitarianism, NGOs, and the Civilian-Military Nexus in the Post- Cold War Era

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Editors' Note: *Professor Cerami has written extensively on the military-civilian nexus. With permission from his publisher, we are e-reprinting (with references to Professor Roberts' article and Dr. Dorff's e-commentary when applicable) one of his earlier articles addressing this topic. While he does not engage in a point-counterpoint exchange with Nancy Roberts, his insights are valuable for advancing future research and practice in this important but seldom explored hybrid policy and administrative arena.*

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Introduction (and biases)

Management experts point out that the first stage of problem solving is to define the problem (see, for example, Whetten and Cameron 2007). For the sake of argument, some analysts contrast stark differences between effective organizations and effective people as if they were polar opposites or separate problems for a reform agenda in humanitarian operations. The argument here is simply that they are two sides of the same coin, and that no effective and efficient structures and policies will make up for poor staffs and operators. One of the priorities for the post-9/11 period, and especially in light of current events in Haiti, should be a heightened awareness of the need for large numbers of both effective civilian and military people and organizations engaged in humanitarian and other

complex operations. To state the obvious, effective practitioners at all levels—working internationally and domestically in multiple public, private, and nonprofit organizations—are all necessary to implement effectively the wide range of missions and tasks in humanitarian and other complex civil-military operations. I also contend, like Professor Roberts, that a robust, important, and timely research agenda awaits the public administration and public management communities.

My viewpoint, upfront, is that we should continuously improve the interorganizational coordination, training, and education of civilian (or nongovernmental) and governmental (including military) agencies. As Robin Dorff emphasizes in his e-commentary, in today's security environment of jihadists, terrorists, and criminals, the opportunities for creating a humanitarian space is highly unlikely in most regions of the world.¹ What follows, then, is a reinforcing of the thoughts offered by Roberts in her article (and by Dorff in his e-commentary), as well as additional thoughts on extending the opportunities for rethinking the civil-military challenges ahead.

Let me address these issues by suggesting the nature of the problems, programs, performance, and professionalism necessary to improve the state of civil-military coordination for humanitarian and other complex operations. In the process, I will argue that various literatures in public administration and management that are not addressed in detail by Roberts in her article are also applicable to managing the nongovernmental organization (NGO)-military nexus. These literatures have been largely ignored in theory and practice related to the NGO-military nexus. Moreover, they offer a robust set of hypotheses for testing, refining, and elaborating in this policy arena.

Problems

The U.S. government's military and civilian managers should continue to think more broadly (even beyond counterinsurgency warfare) about their domestic and international agency responsibilities for operational as well as educational reasons. In addition to humanitarian operations and disaster relief, what should be done about the current problems facing leaders in the new mix of public, private, and nonprofit organizations engaged in what the United Nations is addressing more broadly as development, governance, and state building?² The following is a summary of ideas and insights addressing both the structural and people problems that are especially pronounced in complex operations of all types in the post-9/11 world.

As Roberts argues and summarizes, the historical record reflects varying degrees of agency roles and missions in humanitarian as well as post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction. For instance, there is no evidence that once military "hot wars" ended there was an automatic and immediate transition to civilian leadership and control of post-conflict support, recovery, reconstruction, or institution building. In post-World War II Japan, the military ran operations for seven years in a hierarchical structure headed by General Douglas MacArthur. Some thinking about a transition to civilian control was discarded after early successes became institutionalized. In other cases, the guidelines on roles and missions were not clear. At times, a desire to be adaptable and flexible became a way to avoid addressing the difficult questions related to interagency and organizational responsibilities, accountability, and oversight.

Programs

As both Roberts and Dorff argue, aligning and integrating organizations—and attuning³ the people engaged in international efforts in

support of governmental and NGO efforts—are indispensable to the creative design and effective execution of complex humanitarian and contingency operations. Interorganizational and intercultural processes are obviously necessary for planning and coordinating the efforts of governmental organizations and NGOs. In fact, as Roberts and Dorff note in greater detail, the Department of Defense has taken the lead within the U.S. government to develop a "community of practice" of experts in the 3Ds of defense-diplomacy-development by forming a Center for Complex Operations.⁴ This center is focused primarily, but not exclusively, on U.S. government efforts. More must be done for continuing the development of communities of practice that integrate the efforts of NGOs and international institutions as well. And there is a role for public administration and public management research—especially on networked governance—that can inform and help shape future research.

These ongoing interorganizational efforts also reinforce the importance of a framework highlighting the significance of public leadership and management in terms of setting strategic direction; aligning, integrating, and attuning the efforts of various domestic and international stakeholders; and emphasizing performance measures for scholarly research, policymaking, operations, and education. Moreover, these may vary across the cells of the 2x2 table offered by Roberts, but we simply do not know how at this point.

A common view is that training and education programs for civilian and military practitioners are needed prior to deploying organizations and people to conduct humanitarian operations. The nature of crisis action becomes an understandable excuse for a lack of preparedness; however, in my view, the short-term nature of crises demands a long-term, progressive system for educational and

training processes to prepare and certify leaders and teams for complex contingency operations. The history of U.S. government efforts in eliminating stovepipe obstacles and integrating interagency education and training is still being written in educational and training programs centered on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Let me make the argument that what is needed is a transformation to create civilian-military agency training and educational cultures for those organizations and people that will be operating humanitarian and other complex operations. Similar to the argument made by Dorff in his e-commentary, there is simply no substitute for a progressive system of education, training, assignments, and promotions that provide opportunities for civilians, military personnel, and government officials to interact in diverse agency and international contexts. Public administration and public management scholars know much about the obstacles and levers to changing organization cultures in public and nonprofit organizations that could be applied and tested in the NGO-military nexus (for a summary of this literature, see Khademian 2002; also see Fernandez and Rainey 2006).

In addition, there is a need for more formal interorganizational and civil-military knowledge management processes. The architecture for an interagency knowledge or learning system should include several components such as: databases, online learning courses and simulation networks, predeployment training and certification systems, individual leadership development and planning instruments, subject matter expert networks, and an interactive center for lessons learned. As noted in Dorff's e-commentary, the Center for Complex Operations has initiated efforts in many of these areas. Organizational training and education must complement and reinforce individual development and

career progression. These are all topics in which public administration and public management scholars have done extensive research and that should be tested and incorporated where applicable in future research and practice on this topic (e.g., Agranoff 2007; Agranoff and McGuire 2003; O'Leary and Bingham 2009).

Performance

The ties among executive leadership, policy effectiveness, and government and NGO performance are the subject of continuing research in the public management literature. For instance, Ingraham, Joyce, and Donahue (2003) offer a performance framework and find "big lessons" such as "management matters" and "effective leadership is vital." Their studies highlight performance management at the U.S. federal, state, and local levels. Their public management research stresses the vital role of strategic leadership and management for coordinating complex administrative systems across agencies and within government—which they find "is clear" from their studies of U.S. government organizations (20-21). It is reasonable to expect that the scope of public administration research and education should extend to emphasize interorganizational, intercultural, and international leadership and performance management (see Moynihan 2008; Radin 2006).

Under ambiguous and dynamic circumstances, it is usual for the military, because of its organizational and resource capability, to fill the void. Especially in crisis situations, there is a tendency for foundational, early routines and relationships to become increasingly hard to change over time, regardless of prescribed agency roles and missions. For instance, in the early case history of Afghanistan provisional reconstruction teams, there were individual agency guidelines. Yet, because of the ad hoc nature of initial team

recruiting, lack of interagency training and education, and short-term deployments and operations, individual agency representatives were often unaware of their agency guidelines, responsibilities, and authority. At times, because of ongoing military conflict, civilian aid agencies were overwhelmed by the better organized and resourced military components. Modifying the performance expectations of roles and missions under ambiguous, crisis conditions and in times of transition became especially difficult.

Again, as Dorff points out in his e-commentary, historical research does not suggest the normal occurrence of planned transitions or orderly phasing from conflict to post-conflict to reconstruction activities. Nevertheless, specific ways of providing incentives for aligning, integrating, and attuning agency roles and missions may be profitably coupled with performance management techniques. For instance, in the founding of the provisional reconstruction teams, there were no apparent measures of success. In most cases, successful interagency operations resulted from the efforts of experienced leaders, such as military officers with Balkan peacekeeping service. Setting reasonable expectations for the scope and pace of work by diverse governmental agencies and NGOs would benefit from established performance standards, along with systematic accountability, reporting, and oversight processes.

Professionalism

The military services stress their professional ethos, as does the American Society for Public Administration, for instance, in its Code of Ethics. Can we define and develop a notion of civil-military, humanitarian professionalism that transcends real but sometimes harmful agency loyalties? Can we invent a new civil-military professional structure to systematically train, reward, certify,

and promote these individuals? Can we extend the scope and reach of those individuals who can improve the effectiveness and value of their agencies in performing the wide variety of planning and operational missions and tasks?

These times call for humanitarian leadership that can be developed over time with thoughtful developmental approaches based on extensive research and knowledge. Shifting from adhocery, crisis management, and firefighting to a trained and ready professional humanitarian cadre should not be beyond the imagination of governments and international institutions involved in humanitarian operations and disaster relief along with governance, state building, and development efforts.

Additional skills are also important to identify, define, and develop. Of course, communications skills are especially important for enhancing effectiveness at all levels. Real concerns about overcoming turf and stovepipe pathologies cannot be erased by achieving false consensus among diverse agencies for the purposes of group cohesion and conflict avoidance. Time must be allocated for agencies to insure that interagency communications do not water down or camouflage clear core competencies, capabilities, and possibilities. Education and training is needed across government and civilian organizations to develop the deeper understanding of the intent and meaning of written and oral communications.

Beyond education, mentoring skills are essential to support nontraditional career paths that extend opportunities for individuals in interagency and international work. As previous national studies of U.S. government performance have stressed, in an age of globalization, there is an urgent need to break away from stovepiped agency education and promotion systems. What forms of mentor-

ing systems can use social networks to cross agency boundaries and extend the range of senior expertise available for a new cadre of emerging humanitarian leaders? Our understanding at this point is rudimentary in the NGO-military nexus. Still, research conducted in the domestic policy arena by scholars in the Center for Technology and Governance at the Rockefeller School, State University of New York-Albany, offers lessons regarding the levers and obstacles to doing public sector knowledge networks (Dawes, Cresswell, and Pardo 2009).

Developing a reservoir of interorganizational talent will have to focus on individual as well as team development. Creative solutions, such as the aforementioned use of online educational technology, should provide educational support for team training and development. New and distributed educational networks that assist in meeting individual, team, and organizational training and educational development needs may be practical substitutes or supplements to full-time, long-term, traditional schooling. Regardless, in a period of increasing demands and decreasing personnel, there is a need for more focused and efficient civil-military humanitarian skill development programs.

Concluding Thoughts

Much work is being done currently (in the government, private, and nonprofit sectors) for improving U.S. governmental agency and interagency structures, as well as educating and training a core of interagency civilian and military professionals. Aligning and integrating the efforts of agencies and people—from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors—in effective policy processes and operations, especially for humanitarian operations, remain key tasks in the years ahead. Baselines, guidelines, and standard procedures can be perceived as barriers to creativity and innovation.

Of course, there is a need for flexibility and adaptability in dynamic situations. Without serious efforts to synchronize efforts, however, there is the open-ended possibility for endless reinvention and inefficiencies. These problems are especially pronounced in situations of high personnel and organizational turnover. Thus, the possibilities for false creativity and wasted efforts are very real. Therefore, educated, experienced, and high-performing individuals, teams, and organizations are a necessary condition for improving effectiveness.

The ad hoc and personality-driven natures of many civil-military operations have been fairly common responses by the U.S. government. This is especially true in the crisis atmosphere of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is noteworthy that the successful case of postwar Japan included more than two years of predeployment preparation, study, policy development, and capacity building among several U.S. agencies.

Clearly, however, nontraditional measures of effectiveness are needed for nontraditional missions and tasks, such as those required for successful international and intercultural support, stability, and reconstruction activities. What does it mean to conduct successful interorganizational operations over time? What standards are needed to measure effectiveness? The amount of information available due to modern information technologies is staggering for any organization. Blending theory and practice is required to strengthen and refine the ongoing efforts for focused research, training, and education needed to improve the civil-military effectiveness in humanitarian and other complex operations. Public administration and public management have insights to incorporate into this policy arena, and it offers scholars in these areas a rich target for future research.

Notes

1. Given the insecurity of the post-9/11 world, I cannot imagine the opportunities to establish safe forms of "humanitarian space" that existed in previous eras. The idea of "security first" as addressed in Amitai Etzioni's (2007) important book should apply to individuals as well as communities and nation-states.
2. See <http://www.un.org/esa/progareas/governance.html>. Accessed January 7, 2010.
3. The notion of attunement involves "alignment with the kind of resonance that moves people emotionally as well as intellectually" (Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee 2002, 208).
4. The center's web page (<http://ccoportal.org/>) notes that its aim is in "Enhancing the U.S. Government's Ability to Prepare for Complex Operations. The CCO will link U.S. Government education and training institutions, including related centers of excellence, lessons learned programs, and academia, to foster unity of effort in stability operations, counterinsurgency, and irregular warfare—collectively called 'complex operations.' The Department of Defense, with support from the State Department and USAID, established the Center for Complex Operations (CCO) as an innovative interagency partnership. Recognizing that unity of effort across disparate government agencies, and across DoD components, requires shared intellectual and decision-making frameworks, the CCO will connect education and training programs across the government to foster a 'whole of government' understanding, assessment and approach to complex operations." Accessed January 7, 2010.

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