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WORKING PAPER

Planning Diplomacy and Development *Force Planning Applications for the State Department and USAID*

By Brian M. Burton



Center for a
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Security

Acknowledgments

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Cover Image

A part of USAID-relief efforts for Iraq - USAID provided the necessary medical supplies to assist with the medical needs of the Iraqi people.

(USAID)

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About the Author

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Secretary of State Hillary Clinton launched the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) with the intention of revitalizing and strengthening the influence of the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The two civilian agencies are widely perceived to have lost substantial policymaking influence to the Defense Department (DOD), particularly since the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. While the shift of bureaucratic power to the Pentagon in wartime is predictable, many observers believe that State and USAID have lost influence because of inadequate resources as well as their inflexible organizational structures and practices. As one report argued, “Today, significant portions of the nation’s foreign affairs business simply are not accomplished. The work migrates by default to the military that does have the necessary people and funding

but neither sufficient experience nor knowledge.”¹ The State Department, meanwhile, struggles to adequately staff some of its most critical posts and to secure sufficient resources to support its operations.² Ameliorating the imbalance in both influence and resources between DOD and civilian agencies requires “strengthening and elevating diplomacy and development cooperation as key pillars” of U.S. foreign policy on par with defense.³

This will require more than just additional funding and people.⁴ A comprehensive reexamination of State and USAID strategy, operations and capabilities is needed to enhance the ability of those organizations to effectively advance broader national security and foreign policy objectives. The QDDR process also provides an opportunity to apply a top-down strategic planning effort to align resources and regional strategies with national priorities, and to effectively communicate State and USAID requirements to the policy and legislative communities. The current practice, by contrast, is driven from the bottom up by over 100 plans provided by bureaus and country teams that are largely disconnected from one another and from broader national strategy.

While State and USAID clearly differ from DOD in function, structure and organizational culture, the concept of force planning offers a possible mechanism to address the planning needs of State and USAID. A central component of DOD’s

Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) that the QDDR may attempt to emulate is the development of a force planning construct, an outline of the size and mix of capabilities the U.S. military requires based on an assessment of existing and possible demands on the force in the years ahead. Force planning methods inject analytical rigor into the planning process by attempting to link decisions about force development and investments to strategic priorities. While they do not replace the need for policy planning and other forms of strategy-making, the State Department and USAID could benefit from a rigorous linkage of strategy and resources by developing a planning and requirements construct for their own “force.”⁵ This working paper outlines key steps the State Department and USAID could initiate in pursuit of a planning process modeled on DOD force planning.

Why Force Planning? What It is and is Not

Force planning provides a means to establish capability requirements; define the objectives that personnel, money and programs would serve; and identify ways to assess how well those objectives are being met. The DOD process is imperfect, but it offers an intriguing and well-developed method for deriving defined mission sets from national-level strategic guidance and using them to shape force structure for current and future challenges. The end result is a force planning construct that outlines how the department should size and shape its force structure and procurement according to current priorities and future challenges.

The highly technical aspects of the QDR and DOD analytic process might not seem particularly well suited for application to State and USAID. The tradeoffs involved in the long-term development of force structure and weapons capabilities are more easily subject to quantification than the capabilities of diplomats and aid experts. However, there are broader lessons about the employment of strategic planning, including the use of scenario exercises

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and assessments, that could help future QDDRs lay the foundations for a more effective process for maximizing investments in critical capability areas.

When applying force planning methods, it is crucial for policymakers to understand what they cannot do. A central misperception is that force planning is a purely mechanistic process, that one can simply feed inputs into a figurative machine and receive ready-to-implement force structure requirements. In fact, the process is always open to interpretation and adjustments to prevailing assumptions. It also needs to be weighed against shifting strategic priorities, the irresolvable uncertainties of the future and limited budgets.

Force planning is also not a substitute for policy planning or developing coherent national security strategies. Though policy and strategy should always be informed by available capabilities, the goal of a force planning process is to properly size the force and identify the key skill sets and capacities needed to support the pursuit of strategic objectives and mitigate the most critical potential threats at an acceptable level of risk.⁶ It is best understood as decision support, rather than decision-making.

Decision-making rightly belongs to senior leaders, such as the president, the secretary of state and the administrator of USAID, who can accept or reject the findings of any planning or analysis group. However, with a rigorous analytic process that weighs alternative force structure and options for allocating resources, force planners hope to assist top leaders to make better-informed decisions that align resources with strategic objectives and priorities.

Requirements for a State/USAID Force Planning Process:

1. ENGAGE SENIOR LEADERSHIP TO SHAPE AND SUPPORT A PLANNING PROCESS.

Planning begins at the top. The first and foremost requirement for effective strategic and resource planning in State and USAID is for the organizations' top leadership to both push for and participate in the process. The secretary of state, administrator of USAID and their top deputies (both political appointees and career executives) must set expectations for what type of information or options they seek from planning. This "demand signal" will help shape both the process and the specific issues it focuses on. To infuse the process with both meaning and urgency, they must intend to use that analysis in setting plans to accomplish national strategic objectives more effectively. This principle of "active management" was first adopted in DOD by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. According to RAND Corporation analysts Alain Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, previous secretaries of defense had subscribed to a "traditionalist" view of the position that called for the minimum necessary civilian oversight while "keep[ing] away from such military matters as strategy and force requirements," which were left to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Services.⁷ However, this basically ensured that the elected national leadership had little to no say over defense priorities and capabilities development, factors that have a significant impact on the nation's entire national security policy. McNamara's view was

that these decisions should not be left solely to the armed forces, given their wider effects on the United States' political, diplomatic, and economic position. As the President's appointed leader of the Defense Department, he saw his role as ensuring that the defense program was shaped in accordance with holistic "national interests" and the President's priorities, rather than driven by service bureaucracies.⁸

The leaders of the State Department and USAID face a similar decision today. All too often, the current State Department strategic planning process limits the ability of senior leaders to do more than adjudicate the plans provided by regional bureaus and country teams when these leaders need to play an active role in setting the agenda, shaping the capabilities and, bluntly, *leading* the department. The history of attempts by previous secretaries to institute new planning practices in State and USAID suggest the difficulty of overcoming prevailing bureaucratic interests and organizational cultures. Only leaders truly committed to active management and willing to invest in a process that can challenge existing resource allocations have a chance to alter the present state of affairs in which existing bureaucratic equities often trump strategic priorities. To demonstrate this commitment, any revamped planning process must be owned and led by senior political appointees in the department; for State, that leader would be the Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources.

2. TRANSLATE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES INTO CLEAR MISSIONS AND CONCEPTS OF OPERATION.

Clear strategic objectives are necessary to assess whether existing plans and programs are having a beneficial impact. One overarching foreign policy goal — maintaining an international system in which America's democracy, market economy and open society can continue to thrive — has formed the core of American grand strategy since the Cold War. Objectives that support that overarching goal include containing hostile actors, such as North

Korea and Iran; preventing and stabilizing conflicts in critical regions; developing and maintaining strong alliances and partnerships with other states and with international organizations; and fostering international cooperation on key global issues such as nuclear nonproliferation and climate change. Appropriately, these objectives mirror many of those identified in the Obama administration's 2010 National Security Strategy.⁹

Whatever the President determines to be that national objectives should be utilized by the leadership of the executive departments to define department- or agency-specific goals. Ideally, the mission sets for the State Department and USAID, as with DOD, should be validated and derived from the national-level objectives set by the White House and laid out in the National Security Strategy. While the National Security Strategy is considered less a planning document than a summation of presidential vision, departments and agencies do look to it for guidance on priority missions.

However, even in the absence of top-level guidance, State and USAID need to do a better job of defining their mission sets. The State Department's 2009 Agency Financial Report featured the most recent overarching mission statement encompassing both State and USAID, which reads:

Advance freedom for the benefit of the American people and the international community by helping to build and sustain a more democratic, secure and prosperous world composed of well-governed states that respond to the needs of their people, reduce widespread poverty and act responsibly within the international system.¹⁰

This statement provides overarching objectives, but it is not actionable. The report lists high-level strategic goals such as "Achieving Peace and Security," "Promoting Economic Growth and Prosperity" and "Promoting International Understanding."¹¹ Yet these are more aspirations than guides to well-

defined mission sets. Additionally, State does not often receive formal or definitive guidance from leadership on specific priority roles and missions. State Department staff often shape policies and programs based on action memos or the secretary's speeches —unfiltered by any sense of long-term strategy with defined priorities.

The Department, along with USAID, would benefit greatly from an effort initiated by the secretary to review and define its most critical mission sets based on statute and administration priorities, a function that DOD performs with periodic reviews of roles and missions.¹² This effort would be a back-to-basics exercise not aimed at crafting an elaborate mission statement emphasizing the advancement of freedom and alleviation of global poverty, desirable though those ends certainly are. At its core, the State Department is the arm of the federal government charged with managing U.S. foreign relations with states and international organizations. Its basic missions include, but are not limited to, diplomatically representing the United States abroad, administering international travel through passport and visa programs, and coordinating and overseeing a range of foreign affairs operations from security assistance to foreign development aid.

Such a review should also perform two critical tasks. First, it should deconflict the responsibilities and mission sets of State and USAID. One of the persistent problems faced by the first QDDR is the lack of clarity on this issue created by a concurrent QDDR process and an NSC-led development strategy review, with the outcome of each in doubt pending the other. Provided the current organizational arrangement of State and USAID is maintained, the secretary and the USAID administrator should oversee an internal hashing-out of key questions, such as which organization has ultimate responsibility for foreign assistance and what role each plays in stabilization or disaster relief operations. Second, the study should specifically delineate steady-state mission demands as

Figure 1: Examples of State Department Missions

Steady-State Missions

Represent the United States abroad

- Maintain a diplomatic presence in key countries and regions of sufficient capacity to effectively represent U.S. interests and influence international actors.

Coordinate regional and in-country initiatives

- Oversee and coordinate good governance and democracy promotion, security assistance, foreign aid and educational exchange initiatives.

Perform consular services

- Efficiently and securely manage passport and visa services.

Surge/Emergency Missions

Oversee and conduct post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization operations

- Provide a rapid diplomatic representation and management response in overseas crisis situations.
- Provide personnel and resource support to the development of host-nation governance capacity.

well as missions that require the development of a “surge” capability for emergencies, such as unforeseen post-conflict reconstruction or a rapid ramping up of diplomatic staff to address a specific crisis.

This level of fidelity on missions is necessary because it is used to develop operational guidance within the different bureaus and offices of the department. This guidance outlines how to execute those missions: that is, how many and which types of personnel are involved and the subsidiary tasks they will perform in the process. In DOD parlance, this guidance comes in the form of “concepts of operation.” Concepts of operation should delineate the number and type of personnel or other resources required to perform the series of discrete tasks required to execute a mission, usually based on standard procedures and updated with the lessons learned from previous operational experience. For example, if the U.S. Navy is tasked with the mission of setting a blockade in a given area, it has both a clear definition of what a blockade is and an extensive body of theoretical literature and practical experience

and training that tell it how to conduct that mission, right down to how many and what type of ships it would need to do it. The closest the State Department currently comes to establishing concepts of operation is the work of the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS), which produced the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Essential Tasks Matrix laying out comprehensive courses of action for conducting stabilization missions.¹³ Even this document is not specific enough, failing to offer insight into how many people and what specific skills are required in such missions. However, while S/CRS’ concept-development model might not be ideal for other offices to replicate, it does offer a possible start for parts of the department to reach clear operational concepts.

3. SET PRIORITIES FOR KEY MISSION SETS

Priorities guide how organizations allocate limited resources. As with DOD’s roles and missions review, it is important that State Department leaders identify the top few mission sets that are currently under-supported and take steps to better delineate them for the bureaus and offices

responsible.¹⁴ A wide discussion on missing or lagging priorities might be a regular feature for force planners within State and USAID to conduct on a periodic basis, perhaps as a preliminary part of a regular roles and missions review.

While operational flexibility and innovation are crucial to the implementation of successful policies and strategies, a lack of explicit direction on priorities equates to a lack of real and enduring strategy. Without prioritization, policy will be driven from below by each bureau, maximizing its own interests without sufficient consideration of possible opportunity costs of or alternatives to existing plans and programs. This was the challenge faced early on in the development of the DOD Planning, Programming and Budgeting System (PPBS) in the 1960s: Each of the military services developed strategies and programs with little reference to one another or changing strategic priorities. As a result, the secretary “had no adequate way of relating individual service priorities to the overall national strategy and force structure.”¹⁵ A central identification of the priority threats and strategies to counter them was required to rationalize this state of affairs.

Clarity and specificity in defining both missions and priorities are critical to an effective planning process. A central danger of reviews like the QDDR is that they adopt as core objectives vague generalities such as “building a more peaceful world,” “engaging bilateral and multilateral partners” or “promoting human dignity.” While certainly laudable, such aspirations provide little guidance to personnel who must make decisions and tradeoffs with potentially far-reaching implications. Therefore, future QDDRs should emphasize what specific challenges and regions are most crucial for the Department in the years ahead. For example, the 2001 QDR specified “forward deterrence” in Europe, Northeast Asia, the East Asian littoral and the Middle East as a priority.¹⁶ The State Department and USAID might emphasize capacity building, conflict prevention and crisis response in South and Central Asia

(including India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan) and the Middle East (including the Persian Gulf and the Levant) as priority objectives. Such guidance makes clear the Department and USAID’s focus over the four-year period covered by the review.

4. DEVELOP SCENARIO AND ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGIES TO TEST EXISTING PLANS AND REQUIREMENTS.

The process of developing force sizing requirements must involve a careful assessment of the desired mix of capabilities and skill sets required to execute State and USAID’s missions in specific scenarios. Questions to guide force sizing might include:

- How do State and USAID priorities translate into operational objectives (that is, the specific achievable outcomes sought) to be achieved in given regions and countries?
- What level of influence or presence in a given region or country is required to meet operational objectives? What personnel, facilities and programs produce the types of influence and presence necessary to achieve them?
- What types and distributions of skill sets and specific knowledge are required to meet these objectives?
- Is the identified demand a new steady-state or a surge requirement? How sustainable are these demands in light of budget constraints and competing global priorities?

These questions require both qualitative and quantitative answers. Many of the qualitative answers currently exist among bureaus and other centers of expertise and experience across the State Department and USAID. In order to provide useful quantitative answers for force sizing, the organizations would have to employ some type of contingency or scenario planning, which has been utilized in the QDDR mainly to identify crisis prevention and response capabilities.¹⁷ A team of policymakers can develop recommended requirements, but these must then be tested under

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a range of different conditions to expose potential capability gaps under different likely or extreme scenarios. Without reference to case studies or specific examples, gaining an accurate force-sizing picture of what is required today and what is likely to be required a few years into the future will be much more difficult. A DOD-like set of plans with agreed-upon and objectively assessed estimates of personnel and resource demands from State and USAID would enhance their ability to develop the capacity to more effectively respond to crises.

Though it may not be possible to develop contingency plans for diplomacy and development with as much rigor as for military forces, it is possible to imagine a range of scenarios that would test State and USAID's preparedness to execute their missions effectively and identify gaps in capabilities and skill sets. The Policy Planning Staff (S/P),

as the secretary's independent office for analysis, could organize and prepare scenarios at the direction of the secretary, deputy secretaries or director of policy planning. The role of S/P, or perhaps a similarly-placed Office for Strategic Planning and Requirements, would be critical in managing scenarios and assessments because S/P answers directly to the secretary. This would help ensure that scenarios emphasize the secretary's priorities and are rigorous enough to challenge the preexisting assumptions and programs of the bureaus and country teams.

A future portfolio for S/P or a new planning and requirements office would need to include specific responsibilities akin to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) Policy Office for Strategy, Plans and Forces — namely, overseeing the link between strategy, operational plans and capabilities and ensuring it remains strong. The staff of this office would have to expand, perhaps initially drawing the best planners from Bureau of Resource Management (RM) and the regional affairs offices of the regional bureaus while also bringing in outside expertise from federally-funded research and development centers like the RAND Corporation that have experience in developing assessment frameworks. This process would resemble the analytic offices within OSD established by McNamara to help provide the secretary of defense with a source of assessments independent from the uniformed services.¹⁸ Strengthening this independent staff provided the foundation and, eventually, the expertise and the process necessary to conduct more rigorous assessments of planning assumptions and force requirements. Ultimately, the State Department and USAID need to develop these capabilities as well if they are to improve their ability to plan strategically.

The scenarios utilized in this testing process must be well thought out and extremely detailed to credibly engage participants. They also must focus on current challenges and plausible future

developments that demand substantial commitment from the Department; examples might include organizing long-term diplomatic containment of a nuclear-armed Iran, diplomatic and development responses to a collapse of the Pakistani government or civilian support to international peace operations in Sudan. These scenarios offer compelling crises and enduring challenges that State and USAID may be called upon to either prevent or respond to in the near future. They would also help identify actions that could be taken to forestall the most dangerous aspects of these crises. This approach would link strategic planning processes more closely to current concerns and operations, while also producing action plans that could enhance the Department's ability to react to rapidly developing situations.

S/P or the new planning office should regularly reassess these plans, drawing on information and analysis from current State and USAID field operations. The largest repository of expertise on any region or functional issue resides in the field and within bureaus and country teams, just as in DOD the operational expertise lies in the combatant commands or units in the field. The key problem for State and USAID is that, unlike the military, "lessons learned" about success or failure in the field are not organized or disseminated in a way that enables strategic planners to access and take them into account.¹⁹ A centralized knowledge management capacity within the State Department is the most comprehensive way to solve this problem. This QDDR could begin by mandating that RM, the Foreign Service Institute and the Office of the Historian enhance their ability to compile and assess lessons learned in the field. These offices are the logical candidates for overseeing the retention of previous operational plans and experiences to help inform future planning. Additionally, there is no shortage of examples of various types of field operations carried out by allied countries and international organizations (including the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the World Bank) for building partner capacity, post-conflict

reconstruction or expanded embassy representation, all of which could be employed in developing plans for a wide range of contingencies. Together, these assessments would help develop a State/USAID analytic agenda that would facilitate qualitative and quantitative operations research to support long-term force development. This would be a powerful tool for State and USAID to identify correlations between desired policy outcomes and different shapes and sizes of diplomatic missions or aid models. While not solving every problem, a range of their current organizational issues, such as rationalizing force sizing and reexamining country and regional presence platforms, could be addressed more effectively through a rigorous analytic process based on field research and past case studies.

Conclusion

The first QDDR might not lay out a force planning construct, but it can enhance the State Department's and USAID's ability to think strategically about future requirements by adopting the principles identified here. An improved strategic planning capacity should foster the leadership and technical expertise that will advocate for and seize upon force planning methods as a useful planning tool. A force planning model is not a be-all-and-end-all answer to the State Department's strategy and resource issues, but it does offer an improved means of linking the two in a studied and rigorous fashion rooted in previous experience and rationalized across competing priorities. If carried out by State and USAID leadership, this approach should ultimately shape the diplomatic and development capabilities the United States needs to handle the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

ENDNOTES

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