

# UNITED WE STAND, DIVIDED ...? ACHIEVING INTELLIGENCE INTERAGENCY SYNERGY IN COMPLEX WARFARE

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***Adaptive work consists of the learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face***

— Ron Heifetz<sup>1</sup>

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As 9/11, the current Israeli/Hizbollah conflict and the foiled terrorist plot to bring down aircraft departing London taught us, we must efficiently and effectively integrate national and international efforts in order to engage an assortment of new adversaries or find ourselves weakened by the seams we either inadvertently create or tolerate. The Cold War effort, and in particular our intelligence focus, became so narrowly focused on fostering the collapse of the Soviet Union that we lost our ability to fully integrate and leverage all elements of national interagency effectiveness across a range of new and developing adversarial contingencies. The process of adapting our industrial age organizations to today's new reality is not something we have collectively done well.

Today and for the foreseeable future, we will need to assess and effectively deal with a range of threats that are primarily ideologically driven, global and networked. Military effects alone will not get us there – nor will any other single form of national power for that matter. What is required is a concentrated and integrated mobilization of all national efforts, be they academic, intelligence, economic, political, legal or cultural – especially since the great majority of the US

is non-federal government. In short, we must transform our agencies into high speed, responsive, adaptive and integrated organizations capable of managing “interagency relations” (IAR) to the highest level of synergy as possible.

One of the greatest gifts that each interagency player has is their differences from one another. It is those differences that add color and context to both perception and action. How one's agency relates to others, how well one learns to address conflicts in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face will determine just how successful IAR will be.

One must begin with the notion that leadership in effective IAR situations is not about having all the answers, but is really about having a number of diverse diagnostic tools and perspectives that can “influence the community to face its problems.”<sup>1</sup> Effectiveness means making the problem statement the leader, thereby getting the agency's decision makers egos out of it.

The leader's adaptive challenge is to *shape a shared meaning* – of a potentially very diverse group as opposed to trying to force a pre-conceived position from their own group. The goal is interagency clarity absent a “stovepiped” bias inherent in a single agency's approach to problem resolution. DIA does not have all the answers and neither does NSA, DEA, the National Security Council nor the FBI. The purpose of creating these agencies in the first place was to get concentrated focus on the problem from a particular point of

view – that focus is both each agency's greatest strength and their greatest weakness. The weakness is minimized only when its views and conclusions are thrown up against conflicting points of view that challenge its processes and outcomes. It is the mix of ingredients that gives the cake texture and flavor.

As we “map the terrain” of IAR we believe, as would a geographer who creates various maps for many purposes, that multiple perspectives are much better than unitary views. “IAR” means *crossing the boundaries of governmental and non-governmental organizations in order to benefit from the shared accomplishments of otherwise autonomous agency operating goals*.<sup>2</sup> We found it fitting and in concert with our argument to draw from several bodies of knowledge on how agencies relate with one another. We scrutinized open systems theory (borrowed from biology), exchange theory (an economic view), acculturation theory (a symbolic-interpretive view), political decision-making theory (a competing values view), and a theory of legislated control (a legal-rational view). Below we map the territory of interagency relations using these multiple venues. We hope our approach gives the reader an introductory idea about achieving effective IAR from a range of perspectives.

### The “Open Systems” View of IAR

Open systems remain adaptive by taking inputs from the external environment, transforming some of them, and sending them back into the environment as outputs. For example, the liver cleanses the blood that the heart pumps. Animals breathe out carbon dioxide, which trees transform into oxygen.

In *Organizations in Action*, James D. Thompson describes three types of interdependence (listed here from the least to the most complicated).

- **Pooled Interdependence.** In this type of interdependence, separate organizations, which perform adequately on their own, might fail if one or more of them fail when they all operate in a broad context. We saw this vividly on 9/11 when information captured by the FBI was not shared with the CIA or the FAA and vice versa. One organization's failure threatens all, but perhaps not all at once. The traditional practice of relatively independent national-based intelligence structures is a good example of pooled interdependence. “National intelligence” activities can occur, but only with institutional-oriented, relatively autonomous decisions to share information.

Pooled interdependence may be the most preferred form of interdependence because it is the least difficult way to coordinate. The highly structured internally focused coordination one typically finds with this type of interdependence uses established **standards and rules** (laws, doctrine, habitual routines, official memorandums, set processes, regulations, and standing operating procedures) and is found in the bureaucratic workings of today's intelligence agencies

- **Sequential Interdependence.** This type of interdependence is linear, like an assembly line—one unit in the sequence produces something necessary for the next unit and so on. Passing intelligence “up and down the line” is a good example of how sequential interdependence works. For example, CIA passes information to DOD, which in turn passes it down to through the “chain of command.”

Here, agencies typically coordinate by adding to standards and rules via developing **schedules and plans** to synchronize a series of decisions yet to be made. This form of coordination is more appropriate in more *nonroutine* situations, such as before interventions when tasks are forecasted in the midst of possible situational changes. Formulating a national intelligence estimate focused on a particular emergent situation is an example.

- **Reciprocal interdependence.** Here, the output of one organization becomes the input for others and vice versa. Agency boundaries become less distinguishable, and the combined performance of the agencies requires more complex forms of coordination, information sharing, and collaboration. This form of interdependence is still somewhat rare, even though new intelligence initiatives flowing from the creation of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) is calling for more and more shared and integrated assessments. We are discovering daily that attempts to close the seams among the range of agencies that make up the U.S. (and coalition) intelligence community are slow in coming, largely because of the underappreciated need for the highly adaptive nature of reciprocal interdependence.

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