

Perspectives

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Foreign Affairs for the 21st Century

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The Past is Prologue

A little more than 60 years ago foresighted American leaders devised a national security structure for the post-World War II 20th Century. In the 1980s, another group of foresighted American leaders devised a way to create a more efficient and effective defense structure for our national security. Additional changes to create a Department of Homeland Security and to coordinate the intelligence community came after 9-11. Now the time has come for the current generation of foresighted American leaders to match these efforts in the realm of foreign affairs.

With the passage of the National Security Act in 1947, the United States positioned itself for the post-WWII world on a new and innovative structure. That structure created many of the institutions that still serve us today: The Department of Defense (DoD) merging the War and Navy Departments, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the National Security Council (NSC) and the NSC process of inter-agency consultation and cooperation. By the 1980s it was clear that the service rivalries and bureaucratic infighting in the Defense Department was reducing military effectiveness and wasting enormous sums of money through redundancies and inefficiencies. The solution—the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act—was a masterstroke that over time created “joint-ness”, a “purple” or integrated military without destroying the individual services that have served the nation so well over two centuries. While no one would deny that there remain huge inefficiencies and waste in this enormous bureaucracy, it is generally considered that DoD is infinitely better positioned for the 21st century than the civilian side of the United States Government.

In the aftermath of the tragedy of 9-11, American leaders searched for the cause of the failure to stop a terrorist attack on American soil and found it in the turf-wars and bureaucratic ossification among our intelligence and law enforcement agencies and many of those entities became today’s Department of Homeland Security. The intelligence community too was reorganized and the Director of Central Intelligence function was split from the CIA Directorship with the creation of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. It is too soon to tell if these were masterstrokes or merely stages in the evolution of these functions.

A Growing Problem

The only significant part of the national security structure of the U.S. Government that has not changed in

any serious way is that of foreign affairs. With the ill-served consolidation of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency into the Department of State and the weakening of the Agency for International Development (USAID) as a viable voice in foreign policy debate, the Department of State emerged from the 20th century a weaker, less relevant and more ambiguous partner of the Department of Defense and other agencies of national security. This led to the gradual but inexorable accumulation of civilian duties to the military—public diplomacy, foreign assistance and nation building in particular.

While the Departments of State and Defense were able to keep within their lanes with a relatively clear demarcation of responsibilities during the period of the Cold War, in the post-Cold War era this delineation has become

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blurred. Even more problematic has been the large and growing imbalance in funding dedicated to military vs. civilian international responsibilities and national security. In large measure the drift of public diplomacy (strategic communication), foreign assistance (civil-military affairs) from the civilian world of the State Department and USAID to the military world of the uniformed services and various DoD contractors is the result of this funding imbalance.

This situation has become untenable and thus it is time for a reappraisal and reassessment of the whole structure of foreign affairs just as Goldwater-Nichols served for the whole structure of national defense.

The Department of Foreign Affairs

Currently composed of the Department of State, the Agency for International Development, the Foreign and Commercial Service (FCS) of the Department of Commerce, The Department of the Treasury’s Office of International Affairs and Office of Terrorism and Financial

Intelligence, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) of the U. S. Department of Agriculture and numerous other bureaus, commissions, agencies and offices scattered through a dozen cabinet departments, America's foreign affairs lacks cohesion and cohesiveness. The State Department which considers itself the coordinator and premier inter pares in foreign affairs is often only a junior partner or an after-thought in the process. Indeed with so many actors in foreign affairs today, it is likely that on any given issue another agency from Treasury to the EPA to Transportation will consider itself as having the lead. Traditional diplomacy, the hallmark of State is only one of many instruments of national power and sometimes the one least appropriate or least considered.

To re-right the balance in America's national security structure, the Department of State must be broadened into a true Department of Foreign Affairs (the original name by the way) and like the Department of Defense should be restructured to accommodate the many roles it must play. Within the Department of Foreign Affairs there could be semi-independent sub-departments, similar to the departments of the individual services in the Defense Department, to deal with traditional diplomacy (i.e. state-to-state relations), public diplomacy (similar to the former USIA), foreign assistance (USAID), foreign trade (USTR, FCS, FAS etc.), stabilization and reconstruction (in league with DoD). These Departments within the Department of Foreign Affairs could function as the Department of Diplomacy, the Department of Public Diplomacy, the Department of International Development, the Department of International Trade, etc.

This Goldwater-Nichols scale reform for the civilian side of national security is long overdue. And while the parallels between the original Defense Department reorganization and the new design for a Department of Foreign Affairs can be overdrawn, the effect could be even more significant and beneficial for the future of United States foreign relations. Although State is now charged with coordinating all civilian activity abroad, it cannot manage this responsibility with current budgeting and authorities. It is recognized widely that State needs a broader mandate and authority beyond the traditional diplomatic and consular functions to encompass wide-ranging end-to-end coordination and management of foreign affairs from public diplomacy to development to trade. Already elements of this design can be seen in the September 2009 Project on National Security Reform's Report to the President Turning Ideas Into Action (see Chapter II, pp. 105-107 entitled "Next Generation State Department").

Further Reforms

The time is right for a new National Security Act to update the 1947 version, to re-define the roles and responsibilities and realign mission and the budget priorities assigned to each of the partners in national security. The Congress too should take a close look at how the national security functions are budgeted and funded through the relevant House and Senate committees for the Departments of Defense and a newly expanded role for a Department of Foreign Affairs. Realignment of agency missions and the committee structure and funding mechanisms are woefully in need of reform and the large-scale restructuring of the foreign affairs component of national security would provide a most convenient vehicle for this realignment.

- (1) For more details on the Act see: http://www.intelligence.gov/0-natsecact_1947.shtml
- (2) An overview of Goldwater-Nichols may be found at: <http://www.agaus.org/Documents/GoldwaterNichols.pdf>
- (3) <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/rewrite/budget/fy2004/homeland.html>
- (4) http://www.dni.gov/faq_about.htm



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