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Stabilization and Reconstruction Staffing

Developing U.S. Civilian Personnel Capabilities

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Summary

Recent U.S. experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq have shown that engaging in Security, Stability, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR)[1] operations is a difficult and potentially lengthy process that requires appropriate resources. Most of all, in order to have a chance of being successful, a SSTR operation requires a realistic understanding of the capabilities needed for such an operation. This monograph examines one capability required for successful SSTR operations: the provision of competent civilian staffs that can manage and conduct the tasks needed for success.

The data gathered to support this research come from the rapidly growing body of literature dealing with SSTR missions and with how to increase the quality and quantity of civilian participation in recent SSTR operations; interviews with U.S. and British civilian personnel deployed to Iraq and personal correspondence with personnel having direct experience in SSTR operations or special visibility into the problems of civilian participation in SSTR operations; and the authors' own experiences in Iraq as U.S. civilians involved with the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). We used particularly the experiences of the CPA and its predecessor and successor organizations in Iraq, focusing on the ability of the United States to deploy such staffs to SSTR

[1] Since mid-2006, the Defense Department has used the term *Security, Stability, Transition, and Reconstruction* (SSTR) operations to refer to civilian-directed interagency efforts to stabilize a country that is undergoing some level of internal strife or lack of governance. We use the term for purposes of standardization.

operations and making recommendations to improve future SSTR operations.

This focus is motivated by the experiences of the CPA, which demonstrated that the United States failed, from several perspectives, to field a complete, competent civilian staff—an "A-Team." The staff could be characterized as short-term (few were there for longer than six months), and they were generally not what would be considered well-qualified. Almost none were experts on Iraq or the Middle East. Many worked in positions outside their professional expertise and well above the level of their previous experience. The failure to field an A-Team staff is not a criticism of the character or capabilities of any individual, nor of a lack of effort or competency on the part of those in leadership positions. Rather, it is an indictment of the lack of institutional capability.

The paradox of using civilians in SSTR efforts is that civilians usually move out of rather than into areas of political instability. A complete playbook for identifying, obtaining, and organizing human resources into an unstable area simply does not exist. However, there are statutes, rules, and policies that could facilitate future SSTR operations and provide a basis for identifying and recruiting candidates, assessing qualifications, appointing and compensating employees, and training and developing the workforce.

National-level policy and strategic direction should guide those charged with SSTR planning and operations, which include the creation of institutional pieces needed to implement policy. Planners should then use the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's (OPM's) Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework (HCAAF) and standards, developed as part of the President's Management Agenda,[2] to consider issues related to the creation and fielding of large

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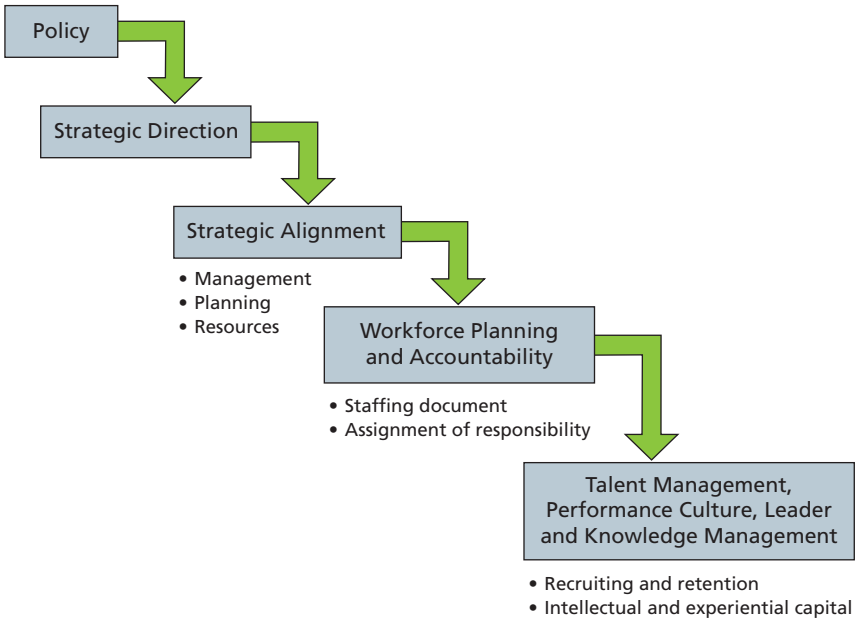
[2] "The President's Management Agenda (PMA) is a management initiative instituted by President George W. Bush in April 2001 to improve management practices across the Federal Government and transform government into results-oriented, efficient and citizen-centered enterprise" (U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Performance Budgeting and Strategic Planning, "About the President's Management Agenda." See Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget, *The President's Management Agenda, Fiscal Year 2002*, Washington, D.C., no date.

civilian staffs. The Framework advocates strategic alignment, workforce planning and development, leadership and knowledge management, results-oriented performance culture, talent management, and accountability. See Figure S.1.

Policy and Strategic Direction

With regard to policy and strategic direction, policymakers should include human resources and resource managers when planning SSTR operations, to ensure that plans and policies are executable and that human resources and other organizations, especially budget and finance, actively support policy implementation.

Figure S.1
Fitting the Pieces Together



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Strategic Alignment

Findings

To ensure strategic alignment, which, according to OPM, is a system "that promotes alignment of human capital management strategies with agency mission, goals, and objectives through analysis, planning, investment, measurement and management of human capital programs," it is imperative to determine how the operation will be managed at all levels. Many different agencies are part of the federal government, and each has its own human-resources (HR) functions and management systems, although all are loosely related under the OPM umbrella. That separateness leads to one key problem: achieving unity of effort. In particular, a SSTR operation will require a unified staff working to achieve the goals of the U.S. government, but it will almost certainly be populated by individuals from several departments and agencies, as well as by contractor personnel. In view of the issues that surfaced during our interviews, as well as our direct experience with the CPA, we chose three basic criteria for evaluating options on how to achieve a unity of effort:

1. **Responsiveness to the Ambassador:** The SSTR operation is likely to have small staffs that provide assistance to deployed personnel. Having a single organizational point of contact for personnel issues across government will be critical to success. The distinguishing characteristic of this criterion is an operational focus.
2. **Capacity and capability:** No single agency will have the breadth of contacts and expertise to recruit the best personnel in every required field. The goal of this criterion is to maximize the use of recruiting capabilities across the U.S. government.
3. **Accountability:** Spreading the responsibility for personnel functions across all involved departments and agencies with no formal mechanism that ensures accountability will lead to shortcomings in finding and fielding high-quality personnel and to accounting for those personnel while in theater. Although clearly related, accountability differs from responsive-

ness, in that *responsiveness* has to do with the ease of coordination between the Ambassador's staff and the HR organization supporting that staff's needs, whereas *accountability* has to do with the ability of the HR organization to document and manage the HR functions needed to support the fielded staff, as well as to measure the results of the HR process.

We examined three models that could provide a solution to achieving all three criteria for unity of effort: (1) one agency having responsibility for the personnel-management effort for the entire operation, (2) one agency leading, supported by the other agencies supplying personnel to the effort, and (3) decentralized recruiting, with agencies validating and filling specific billets in their assigned areas of responsibility as needed, but without central direction or control. The second model came out best, although it has some shortcomings in accountability.

Recommendations

- The President should direct the National Security Council and the OPM to chair a SSTR panel to study, among other things, who should lead SSTR human-resources planning and operations support, and, after considering the panel's recommendations, designate a lead agency for HR efforts and coordination across government.
- The lead HR office should then determine and document how it will support SSTR operations, and develop anticipated personnel requirements and costs.
- The President should request, and Congress should authorize, standing authority to recruit SSTR personnel and pay related personnel costs. Use of such authority and funds then should be subject only to an appropriate declaration of need by the President. These funds should be available to the lead HR agency, thus eliminating additional financial burdens on departments and agencies seconding personnel to a SSTR effort.

Workforce Planning

Findings

Workforce planning is a key component of strategic alignment and forms the basis for deploying civilians. Such planning should engage operational and HR experts to fully document (i.e., make sure there are job descriptions), and work with the responsible agencies to *validate* (i.e., formally determine that the position is needed and properly defined), staff requirements.

Recommendations

The resulting plan should be detailed but flexible. The State Department's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) and the lead HR office should develop a notional workforce plan that planners could scale for larger operations or modify to meet unanticipated requirements. The plan should designate the agency responsible for each billet, time lines for filling positions, sources of candidates, and resource requirements and funding sources or responsibilities.

Talent Management, Performance Culture, Leader and Knowledge Management

Findings

The last three elements of HCAAF—talent management, performance culture, and leader and knowledge management—deal with who actually fills what position, as well as with HR and SSTR operational issues. Critical to these elements are recruiting and retaining staff, intellectual and experiential capital, and performance expectations and results. For example, under leadership and knowledge management, the Departments of State and Defense have each begun to address aggressively the types of leadership and continuity gaps that were articulated by many of our interviewees. For example, the State Department's Strategic Plan for 2007 indicates that the Department will increase the percentage of language-designated positions at overseas missions filled by people

who fully meet language requirements and will mandate leadership and management training for 100 percent of its targeted population.[3]

Recommendations

The lead HR agency, in coordination with responsible agencies and OPM, should

- determine what, if any, inducements are necessary to attract and retain needed personnel for SSTR operations.
- consider options such as signing bonuses, specialty pay, and retirement and promotion benefits, as well as specialty training.
- provide participants with information and intelligence on world hot spots as permitted by their need-to-know and security clearances.

Furthermore, S/CRS and OPM should conduct a gap analysis to compare existing authorities to staffing requirements to determine what, if any, additional authorities or legislation is needed to ensure that recruiting and retention efforts will result in a full, competent staff that is well prepared to execute the mission.

Conclusion

If the United States is to succeed in future SSTR efforts, the U.S. government must put human-resources considerations at the center of its planning efforts, include the human-resources community as a full and ongoing partner, and modernize legislative and policy considerations in order to field an A-Team. There is much at stake: If the United States ever again undertakes a SSTR operation requiring a large civilian staff and finds itself reinventing on the fly the systems by which such a staff will be created and populated, the likely result will be a significant waste of resources and possibly of lives.

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[3] U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development, "Strategic Goal Chapter 12: Management and Organizational Excellence," *FY 2007 Joint Performance Summary*, Washington, D.C., no date.