Conducting Stability Operations: Utility of the Whole of Government Approach

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Introduction

Growing Currency:

- Developments in security environment generate growing emphasis on Whole of Government (WoG) approaches to security operations.
- Response to challenges posed by fragile & conflict affected states & problems they confront (since applied to address other security concerns).
- Approach increasingly adopted by Canada & allies (e.g. US, UK, other NATO nations, Australia & UN).
Definition

**Approach:**

Based on idea that given increasing complexity of security challenges posed in today’s world - lasting solutions require a multifaceted response involving a range of civilian & military resources operating in a focused & integrated fashion.
Key Features

Approach would feature:

- Proactive engagement between actors.
- Outcome-based thinking (always looking to end state).
- Shared understanding between parties.
- Culture of collaborative working
Potential Benefits

Benefits claimed:

• Enhanced information sharing (higher information flows & SA).
• Greater awareness of the roles of other actors.
• Better coordination & integration with other actors (reduce transaction costs associated with activities).
• Strengthened norms of collaboration.
• More effective prioritization, nurturing & maintenance of links with others.
Potential Benefits

• Improved strategic framing & campaign planning.

• More awareness of 2nd & 3rd order effects of decisions/ actions.

• Increased legitimacy for decisions & actions taken.

• Increase of synergies between organizations.
**Potential Benefits**

*In short, WoG promises:*

- More efficient & effective responses to security challenges
- & a means of attaining greater strategic effect at less cost.
- Relevant considerations in *any* period - but *especially* important in times of increasing austerity.
Potential Benefits

Problem:

• Such claims generally assumed vice demonstrated.

• Clearly establishing cost-effectiveness can be difficult.
Assessing Performance

Key Considerations:

• On surface seems relatively straightforward for military. Less “boots on ground” required for less time = less cost to military (in time, resources, effort).

• In reality – calculus more complex (how is cost effectiveness determined? Not just question of money & time, also quality of decisions, quality or impact of outcomes-- both short & long term, issues relating to substitution effects & questions of the legitimacy of decisions & actions taken).
Assessing Performance

• Most important - military element does not function in vacuum – WoG inherently multi-agency – Costs to others matter (time, resources).

• Must be considered along with military costs (issue of cost-effectiveness cannot be neatly parcelled out – false metric that risks creating a false impression).

• To focus on military alone – reflects same siloed thinking that WOG approaches aim to surmount.
Assessing Performance

Unfortunately – little analysis of cost effectiveness of WoG approach -- either for military alone or OGD’s:

• Systematic assessments of WoG performance in operations few in number. (Little comparative study).

• Issue of WoG capacity to lessen costs of stability ops to military (or in fact any department) – completely unaddressed.
Practice

• Anecdotal evidence from past practice offers clues, but nothing definitive.

• On plus side – AAR’s from Canada’s WoG efforts in operations such as Haiti, & Afghanistan indicate some benefits in terms of quality of decision-making & effectiveness of response (relevant to cost-effectiveness).
Practice

Here, cases suggest WoG provides:

• Enhanced trust between departmental representatives, improved communication, greater access to information & thus better SA.

• Better understanding of cultures & priorities of governmental players (clearer understanding of operational & strategic requirements).

• Improved opportunities to interact with indigenous populations (WoG players work to increase possibilities for establishment of networks with local authorities & populations).
Practice

But benefits counterbalanced by costs:

- WoG startup not always smooth, civilian component under-resourced in capability & capacity – especially in early going. Reduces input, influence & contributions.

- Existence of differing organizational cultures impedes understanding, cooperation – takes time & effort to surmount – even partially (differing goals, mindsets, biases, programming vs. planning cultures).
Practice

• Practical issues (security issues in information sharing, issues of organizational credibility/integrity flowing from linkages with others, collaboration may compromise ability of some to conduct missions, continuity issues given rotation of staff, issues of terminology, vocabulary, etc.).

• Development of effective mechanisms, bodies, processes & procedures to achieve effective interaction and collaboration a gradual process (revisions, trail and error). Involves costs (education, training, etc.) slows progress on ground.
Assessment

*In short – balance of benefits & costs - not entirely clear.*

• In terms of immediate benefits, net outcome may have been neutral at best and at worst a burden to departments involved.
Assessment

Still, longer term benefits may be better:

- WoG responses generally improve with time (evolutionary process).

- Practices, networks & institutions developed for past operations can offer means of reducing some of the costs that accompany operations in future.

- Experience may offer best teacher – ensuring past obstacles avoided & successes emulated.
Suggestions

Past experience indicates need for:

• Sustained leadership at the top, need more coherent policy framework.

• Macro “capstone” strategic security policy that sits above & directs all government departments & agencies (At present, no unifying strategic vision – need an overarching narrative that binds departments together – a road map. In absence, bureaucracies tend to go their own way – slows coordination, planning, etc.).
Suggestions

• More incentives & opportunities for practice of WoG approaches (more ops. for cross-departmental liaison, secondment & staff exchange, i.e. WoG PD).

• Greater investment by departments in cross governmental education & training to develop personnel to lead & implement WoG approach (e.g. pre-deployment training opportunities, etc.).

• More effort in analyzing past WoG practice (ID lessons, measures of performance – to better assess cost effectiveness).
Conclusion

*At present though:*

- Cost effectiveness of WoG approach -- both for military and other departments -- unclear.
- What is available from past practice suggests mixed record.
- Approach may pay greater dividends in future – especially if interest sustained & past lessons extracted carefully, implemented wisely (i.e. if general practices & procedures institutionalized – WoG a learning process, a socialization process).
Conclusion

• Prognosis especially promising at tactical level – less so at operational & strategic (some gains – institution of CCOA, experiences of interdepartmental coord. committees – possible mechanisms for emulation - but stovepipes will be hard to overcome).

• Still, demand for approach unlikely to die given nature of conflicts & crises likely to arise in future (in fact calls for WoG may grow – esp. given resource constraints both in Canada & among allies).

• Consequently, if WoG is likely to be necessary – why not try to improve it?
Questions?