

Interdisciplinarity and the Whole of Government: Theory and Praxis

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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to deal with the multidimensional, complex realities of contemporary armed conflict, and post-conflict reconstruction, the international community has begun to consider and in some instances, practice a more integrated approach to decision-making and implementation. Sometimes referred to as 3-D, whole of government, integrated decision-making, interagency coordination/coordination, or joined up government, it is an evolution of defense, diplomacy and development as the primary players in supporting more creative and flexible responses to the spectrum of conflict. Whether its roots lie in interdisciplinary theory or its offspring, or simply is the most current attempt at dealing with the changed international environment, it represents the realization that new practices are required for managing the dynamic and fluid international conflict environment. This paper, written from a praxis orientation, seeks to examine the progression of the concept and comment on the future of whole of government.

INTRODUCTION

There is little if any doubt that the context of international conflict and post-conflict reconstruction has changed significantly. The rise of non-State actors, the dialogue of human security versus State security, the introduction of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and the consequent debates on the role of sovereignty in a globalised world has resulted in governments accepting their need to respond more adroitly to the complexity of the international environment. The costs of conflict in terms of the loss of human life, economic viability, environmental degradation, as well as the long-term requirements of constructing or re-constructing a post-conflict environment are sobering. The impact of instantly available information, as well as the reality that insecurity in one geographic area has impact on the national interests of a distant State has resulted in an awareness within governments and international institutions such as the UN that the management of conflict must exhibit and practice a global and integrated processes. Stove piped decision-making within the framework of clearly erected barriers is no longer accepted as viable.

The emergence of 3-D, also known by the following titles “whole of government,” “joined up government,” or “interagency co-ordination/cooperation” is an interesting evolution within the international community and is not reserved to the domain of States. International organizations such as the United Nations (UN) are engaged in reviewing organizational processes and procedures, doctrine, and missions with the understanding that it also must factor into planning processes, as well as the organizational structure of the mission itself, the array of players ranging from the Troop Contributing Countries, regional organizations, the national governments, or what remains of it, local civil society institutions, the various groups to conflict, as well as the raft of external agencies who are involved in post-conflict reconstruction. The development of integrated missions, and the accompanying Integrated Mission Planning Process is an indication of the depth of investment the UN has made in the linking the various stakeholders, including national actors in the design, development and implementation of a UN mission.¹

Whether it is a government, an international organization, or any of the other players in the scene, all are confronted with the myriad of cultures unique to each groups’ philosophical mandate, operational imperatives, understanding of their roles, political will, regional factors, national interests, and how to work in a complex environment. Coming to terms with each other in the field, as well as in the policy decision-making processes requires that this evolution be carefully addressed and understood not as an end in and of itself, but rather as a dynamic process that will continue to evolve as the spectrum of conflict itself continues to evolve.

This paper attempts to briefly examine (1) theoretical framework of the integrated approach to decision-making; (2) review the evolution of the concept as governments have made modifications to their structures; and (3) to conclude with recommendations for the future.

A THEORETICAL HOME

Determining a theoretical home for the “whole of government,” or 3-D processes is challenging. Notions of interdisciplinarity and/or complexity are generally more commonplace in the academic environment and considerable debate remains about whether International Relations is itself a separate discipline from Political Science, or as C.A.W. Manning noted that it is an “integrative neodiscipline.” Governments, international agencies, and NGOs typically do not debate the merits of interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinary theory or what the emerging trends are in philosophical constructs of cross-disciplinary eschatology. This is not to infer that somehow grappling with these thorny issues makes one more or less understanding of the international environment. However, it can be argued that identifying a theoretical framework does provide a hook upon which to hang debates about the evolution of theory to praxis and back again.

For purposes of this paper, the theoretical constructs of interdisciplinarity and complexity are the foundations for discussing the emergence of “3-D,” “whole of government,” “joined

¹ Early documentation on the value of integrated approaches in decision making can be found in the Agenda for Peace (1992) and the Brahimi Report (2000); for details about the integrated mission, consult the UNDKPO website, as well as The Report on Integrated Missions.

up government,” or “interagency coordination/cooperation.”² In our work, we are increasingly aware that the concepts of interdisciplinarity and complexity are intertwined in the discourse of conflict, conflict management, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction (safety, security, transformation, reconstruction). This paper does not intend to debate the intricacies of interdisciplinarity, its role in international relations theory, or its evolution, leaving that to other scholars.³ It simply asserts that the theoretical constructs of interdisciplinarity and complexity may provide parameters for examining how integrative processes impact on governmental policy making, and the consequent implementation in the field.

One of the more critical scholars of interdisciplinarity, Julie Thompson Klein writes that “...the underlying concepts of interdisciplinarity—breadth and general knowledge, integration, and synthesis—are ancient.”⁴ She notes, however, that rather than dying as an ancient art might, the impact of the explosion of knowledge and the tectonic shifts that impacted multiple disciplines gave rise to the emergence of interdisciplinary fields of study. The disciplines of biology and philosophy increasingly identified complex problems requiring newer models and different approaches in problem solving. Issues of social, political, economic, and technical development married with elemental values and shifting cultural norms required an interdisciplinary approach to deal with complex systems. The 1970s-1990s were particularly rich in the discourse of interdisciplinarity with acknowledgement that the era/environment required approaches that could support decision-making in response to the “complex and dynamically changing situations” we remember.⁵ Subjects such as planning, systems theory, organizational theory and development became commonplace within universities, and there was encouragement to take a holistic approach in research and analysis. If we accept Klein and Newell’s definition that interdisciplinarity is “... a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession”, we may have a place for situating 3-D, whole of government approaches to decision-making and the subsequent operationalisation in the field. Putting this multifaceted and complex approach into this space may provide assistance in determining how the horizontal and vertical relationships and interrelationships might work.⁶

In the discourse of conflict, and post-conflict reconstruction, the complexity of the environment is clearly articulated by acknowledging the variety of placers, and situations that

² The author is aware that these terms have multiple meanings, and that the terminology is in a state of evolution; preference will be given to 3-D and whole of government with the acknowledgment that interagency coordination is quickly become more commonplace to define the interdisciplinary approach.

³ For those interested, suggestions for further study include but are not limited to the following; Barry Buzan, 2001, “The English School: An Underexploited Resource in IR” in *Review of International Studies*, 27, p. 3; Alan James, 2000, “C.A.W.Manning, ms entry for *The New Dictionary of National Biography*; David Long, 2002, “Interdisciplinarity and the English School of International Relations”, paper delivered to the International Studies Association Annual Convention, New Orleans; C.A.W. Manning, 1962a, *The Nature of International Study*, Bell; Hidemi Suganami, 2001, “C.A.W. Manning and the Study of International Relations” in *Review of International Studies*, 27, p. 1.

⁴ Klein, Julie Thompson (2004). “Interdisciplinarity and complexity: An evolving relationship” in *E:CO Special Double Issue*, Vol 6 Nos 1-2, p. 2.

⁵ Jantsch, E. (1972). “Towards interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity in education and innovation” in *Interdisciplinarity: Problems of teaching and research in universities, Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development*, pp. 97-121.

⁶ Klein, J.T. and Newell, W. (1997) “Advancing interdisciplinary studies” in J. Gaff and J. Ratcliff (eds.), *Handbook of the undergraduate curriculum? A comprehensive guide to purposes, structures, practices and changes*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p. 394.

have to be managed. Simply factoring in the speed with which information is passed on the Internet, how a cell phone camera makes everyone a journalist, the power of cultural diversity, shifting power dynamics of States, and the growing economic gap between *have's* and *have not's* provide the impetus to approach policy and praxis in an interdisciplinary manner.

EMERGENCE OF INTEGRATIVE OR INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

The emergence of a “3-D,” “whole of government” approach to decision-making resulted from the complex and dynamic situations in peace operations emerging largely from the end of the Cold War. While the UN intervention in Congo (1960-64) was the first time that civilians were significantly involved in a mission, one can trace the evolution of “whole of government” from Cyprus to Bosnia. The intervention in Cyprus is generally acknowledged to have been established in a permissive environment where the task of each actor was largely defined in parallel lines. The military managed the security environment, and the non-military group, including the non-governmental groups (NGOs), alongside the UN, managed issues of governance such as the rule of law, dialogue amongst the parties, and supporting the capacity building of local civil society institutions. Coordination was the operational framework and the mission has been largely successful in maintaining a relatively calm and peaceful environment. However, the parallel lines of operation have been generally maintained. On the other hand, the events in Bosnia, too complicated to engage in this paper, required that the international community find a way to marry the insecure environment, called ‘less permissive,’ with the concomitant needs of managing cultural diversity of those operating in the mission, as well as the local cultures. The non-military actors on the ground in Bosnia found their operating environment challenging. The outcome of the Bosnia experience was an understanding that for a mission like that to be successful, there needed to be a re-examination of assumptions about the military-civilian relationship on a horizontal plane, as well as the vertical relationships on the ground among the various groups in Bosnia, the external actors who were flooding the environment, as well as the regional actors, juxtaposed against policy cycles, development cycles, reconciliation, and post-conflict reconstruction.

While there is still no clearly accepted definition of “whole of government”, “3-D,” “joined up government,” or “interagency cooperation/coordination,” there is general acceptance that it means an international policy that encompasses in an integrative manner the diplomatic, defence, and development initiatives for building peace, however broadly defined, in a post-conflict environment. The focus of “whole of government” is not restricted to post-conflict environments, and includes attention to conflict prevention as well. It requires a greater understanding of the linkages of operationally implementing a policy, and the need for coherence on the ground from all players, including the local actors, and the beneficiaries of the external action. Fundamentally, it means that at the policy-making level, key actors from all engaged groups are responding to a stronger recognition that security issues, and conflicts across the spectrum are multidimensional and feature military, political, and development realities that cannot be successfully or efficiently addressed independently from each other. As the problems facing the international community grow in complexity, demanding a synergistic response, those who are divining a response must be equally committed to the concepts of interdisciplinarity and complexity. The time required to achieve the stated ends, as well as the impact of all the external players on the ground against the

issues of national ownership are also factors to be considered at both the strategic policy making strata and the operationalisation in the field. At no time can or should any of the players in the whole of government process forget that the political will required to implement an integrative strategy is dependent on national interests which will trump any and all other considerations.

In national arenas, the construction of government structures and mechanisms that can respond to the issues already noted requires a mind shift as well. Fundamentally, an interdisciplinary approach based on process requires that power be shared both horizontally and vertically. It does not serve the interests of interdisciplinarity to approach it half-hearted, simply because the very act of creating new institutions or frameworks to manage the complexity means that well entrenched systems will be challenged. Complicating the development of government structures is the impact of administrative support, human resources and financial resource limitations. Proving that the creation of more bureaucracy is a good use of public funds is often a hindrance to the development of new infrastructure to manage the processes of whole of government or 3-D. The rotation of staffs common in departments of international affairs and trade fractures institutional memory. As each new person comes into the redefined department, there is generally a loss of lessons learned and best practices, resulting in “re-inventing the wheel” which ultimately takes time and energy away from the real task of creating those integrative institutional mechanisms that will respond to the complexity of international affairs. Cultural differences within the governmental landscape are a complicating factor in the development of national structures, just as is the cultural diversity found in the field environment. Both are manifested by differing philosophical approaches to synergistic opportunities, as well as the differing definitions of peacekeeping, peacebuilding and stabilization. For example, development tends to take a longer-term outlook compared with the military perspectives that focus on achieving a secure environment as the measure of their success. Humanitarian assistance experts focus on the immediate alleviation of human suffering, while development NGOs anticipate engaging in the field for long periods of time, and in continuing the work already underway by their respective groups, often having been in the region for decades.

National governments have taken a variety of approaches to meet the needs of the whole of government approach; however, systematic research on the horizontal and vertical relationships of an interdisciplinary approach is scarce. For example, Canada has developed mechanisms within each of the primary pillars to attempt a more integrative response. The 2005 International Policy Statement (IPS) promulgated by the former government outlined new initiatives such as Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START), the Global Peace and Security Fund, and support for UN reform. Aid was to be doubled, and diplomacy would create new partnerships and put more personnel in the field. The defence component of the whole of government approach has benefited as well and the new resources available to the Canadian Forces (CF) include equipment and a substantial increase in funds allocated to improve the military capacity to respond to conflict. The United Kingdom responded with the creation of a Global Conflict Prevention Pool designed to “...integrate UK policy-making so that the three departments can develop shared strategies for dealing with conflict and make the practical programmes they fund as effective as possible”.⁷ In the United States, increased attention was placed on the links between the Department of National Defense, the

⁷ Department for International Development, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and Ministry of Defence (2003). *The Global Conflict Prevention Pool: A joint UK Government approach to reducing conflict*, London: 2003, p. 6.

Department of State, and USAID. The newly created Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilisation (S/CRS) clearly indicates the focus on complex environments and the required interdisciplinary analysis needed to create responses that can promote the strategic objectives of the United States. Joint task force meetings began to include small numbers of civilians and NGOs and currently there is a focus on the creation of a community of practice to share information about managing the challenges of the international environment.⁸

Benefits of the interdisciplinary approach could support a more systematic planning process in terms of resource allocation, hopefully preceded by changes to the mandates of particular agencies to allow them more discretionary and effective use of resources, both financial and human. If the mechanisms of an interdisciplinary approach were structured within the government, the outcome could be a single policy resulting from the vision that would emerge by having all the key players involved in the strategic conversations and planning cycles. The institutionalization of the process could withstand changes of governments thereby having a national policy that would supercede particular political ideology. Including independent think tanks, and other government bodies such as Justice, Trade, Public Safety in the dialogue would only add a richer dimension to the policy outcomes. Engaging those actors who function at the micro-level in the dialogue would add the field dimension so often missing in strategic policy formulation.

However, in a recent meeting on the subject, participants noted that despite the good intentions of building institutional structures to enable a coordinated, or synergistic response to conflict and post-conflict environments, the reality is quite different.⁹ Overall, within the bureaucratic structures, they noted a continued need to reinforce coordination mechanisms, both across departments, and within departments. There was an identified requirement to continue to build knowledge about how to work within the parameters of an interdisciplinary approach, as well as to support creative initiatives for problem solving. The participants acknowledged that turf struggles are not new phenomena, but if allowed to continue in any one of the systems critical to success, the wholeness of the approach is compromised. Concern of the loss of identity is and continues to be a factor in the discussions of interdisciplinarity. We should acknowledge that a whole of government approach or interdisciplinarity does not signify a loss of identity or uniqueness into an indefinable mass, but rather anticipates that the comparative advantages of the various disciplines will be focused on the common strategy identified by the policy makers. It must be unequivocally stated that each of the specific disciplines, or departments involved in an interdisciplinary process retain their individuality; for example, development will continue to function outside a 3-D, or whole of government context, but when engaged in an integrated response, will function as a member of a synergistic and interdisciplinary system. A comment heard from time to time that indicates the level of frustration about the slowness of working in an interdisciplinary manner is that the only way to have this approach is to legislate it.

⁸ For further information see: Andrew S. Thompson, "Canada in Haiti: considering the 3-D approach" Conference Report, Waterloo, Ontario, 3-4 November 2005; Dr Andrew F. Cooper, "Adding 3Ns to the 3Ds: Lessons from the 1996 Zaire Mission for Humanitarian Interventions", The Centre for International Governance Innovation, Working Paper No. 4, December 2005, available at www.cigionline.org; Julian Wright, IRPP, Canada in Afghanistan: Assessing the 3-D Approach, Conference Report, Waterloo, Ontario, 12-14 May 2005; Dr A M Fitz-Gerald and Col F A Walthall, "An Integrated Approach to Complex Emergencies: The Kosovo Experience" in *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, available at <http://www.jha.ac/articles/a071.htm>.

⁹ Defence, Development, and Diplomacy: The Canadian and US Military Perspectives, 21-23 June 2006, Kingston Ontario.

Overall, the whole of government or 3-D can either be a metaphor to explain a policy framework that responds to the reality of the international community, or it can become the window dressing panacea that in truth does nothing substantive. The key in interdisciplinarity, or whole of government approaches is to ensure that the policy being presented for debate and discussion has examined all aspects of the issue. Problems should be clearly articulated, outcomes should be proposed, and above all, the precise objective of the policy should be open to “strategic conversations” among the multiple lines that will be involved in development of the policy and its implementation. More than answers emerge from discussion and debate; quite often, so do the questions.

To support the definition posited earlier, and to examine the challenges presented by an interdisciplinarity, critical analysis and research of this approach should be undertaken. Clearly absent in the overall whole of government or 3-D approach is any benchmarking for success. Developing means of measuring performance of this process is critical if we are to fully appreciate whether the operational manifestations of the integrative policy are successful. In the process of defining benchmarks, the same challenges that confront the development of institutional structures will be a factor in benchmarking and measuring success. The issue of shared power will emerge to confound the development of measures of success and benchmarks. At a recent high-level seminar on MINUSTAH (Haiti), there was lively debate on the relationship between the host government and the international actors as to who determined the criteria for success. Questions that emerged in plenary and small group discussions included some of the following: Which groups should be included in the benchmark deliberations; what is the role of the host government? What is the role of national sovereignty over the external agent in determining what success is? What is the role of cultural norms in determining concepts of justice? What is the function of local civil society groups in determining measures of success/effectiveness? Answers were not expected at this meeting, but clearly, the opportunity to ask the questions and begin a longer dialogue was critical given the multiple issues that Haiti must resolve.

An important issue to address is identifying the drivers of the move to “3-D” or “whole of government” approaches to policy development. Is it a reaction to current international crises, a response to the 9/11 event, or a substantive interest in the complexity of international conflict which now is driven by factors other than a bi-polar world more easily controlled by hegemonic structures. If the drivers are Afghanistan, Haiti and Sudan specifically, then one might question the sustained interest of an interdisciplinary policy structures. If, however, the motivation comes from the realization that the environment has inexorably changed, and is likely to be ever more fluid, then there is considerable room for researching the ways to bring interdisciplinarity to theoretical discourse, to praxis in the field, learn the lessons and then re-assess the theory.

WHAT LIES AHEAD? OR WHAT ARE THE “DO’S” AND “DON’TS”?

Regardless of the discomfort that may be involved in developing policy strategies, frameworks and mechanisms that respond to the interdependent world, there is little likelihood of reverting to earlier patterns of conflict, conflict management, and post-conflict reconstruction. We are apt to become even more interdependent as the environment continues to change, energy resources are shared among an increasingly demanding human population,

and particularly as power structures change. The rise of China and India as significant actors, economically and strategically on the world stage, cannot be ignored. Nor can we neglect the fact that three countries that contribute most personnel to peace operations, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India (in order of contributions), bring with them their specific philosophies and perspectives on subjects such as human rights, rule of law, and post-conflict reconstruction. The recent elevation of Japan's Department of Foreign Affairs to Ministry Status, and its current debate on modifying the constitution to enable Japan's military to be active in peacekeeping represents more significant changes to the international status quo.

If insurgencies continue to claim more attention, and the whole of government approach is largely military in both policy and praxis, then the relationship among the other actors will by definition be different. The intersection of military and humanitarians in the "humanitarian space" impacted by the emergence of the Three Block War metaphor, and the debates about the militarization of humanitarian aid and space will not abate any time soon. If the environment is not secure for the humanitarian and development officials to do their work, then what happens to the whole of government approach? Afghanistan and Haiti may become more the norm and Provincial Reconstruction Teams may be the whole of government approach to conflict, and post-conflict reconstruction. If this is the case, then the dialogue amongst the various stakeholders in an interdisciplinary dialogue will be likely be focused at the micro-level and be less efficient in assisting the macro level of an interdisciplinary policy structure.

Making recommendations is an occupation fraught with hazard; however, three recommendations about building a more coherent approach to an interdisciplinary approach may be useful. First, if a government has determined to build its national and international policies on the 3-D, or whole of government approach, then it must have the structures and mechanisms in place to support that decision. It must do whatever is required to ensure that the members of the strategic policy-making and the implementers of the policy are "singing on the same song sheet" and that the turf wars are minimized. If this requires a legislative process, then a government should be willing to open the dialogue to its citizens, and its governmental bodies. Second, educating and training all the players critical in an interdisciplinary approach to the process would be beneficial if in no other way than defusing assumptions and presumptions about each culture. For example, preparing the members of an integrated mission, or of a Provincial Reconstruction Team, at the micro level prior to their deployment can only enhance the probability of success of the mission simply due to a raised awareness of how each branch interacts with the others.

This in no way suggests that each of the groups have their specific education and training pre-empted, but rather that the interdisciplinary approach would assist in enhancing knowledge of "the other" in a non-threatening environment to underscore the comparative advantages of working together. Third, there must be a clear understanding of the environment in which the international community now functions. The range of issues includes clash of cultures; the divide between East and West; the economic gaps; the rising concerns about the 'youth bulge'; the role of fundamentalism in religion and politics; the fundamental problem of fragile infrastructures that cannot provide fragile States the time to develop the institutions of government/governance; the relationship between national ownership of aid, and the mandates of the international community; the impact of environmental degradation and climate change; and sovereignty and the responsibility to protect. There is also the underlying message that western ideological constructs may not be applicable, or useful in the increasingly non-western environment.

While there is no guarantee that an interdisciplinary approach will stay any of the issues facing international society in the near future, it does at the very least offer an option for addressing the myriad issues in a manner that acknowledges how the process of determining a response will be better if made in the context of shared power.