

Summary Report: U.S.-UK Integration in Helmand

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JS Schroden'.

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Glossary

ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
CFACC	Combined Force Air Component Commander
CIS	Computer Information System
CTC	Coalition Targeting Cell
DFID	Department for International Development
FCO	Foreign & Commonwealth Office
FECC	Fires and Effects Coordination Cell
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISR	Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance
JAG	Joint Aviation Group
JFSp(A)	Joint Force Support-Afghanistan
JIEDDO	Joint IED Defeat Organization
MAG	Marine Aircraft Group
MARCENT	Marine Corps Forces Central Command
MAW	Marine Aircraft Wing
PJHQ	Permanent Joint Force Headquarters
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
RC(SW)	Regional Command Southwest
ROE	Rules of Engagement
RP	Regional Platform
SFA	Security Force Assistance
SOF	Special Operating Forces
UN	United Nations

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Introduction

Study background

The Commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command (COMUSMARCENT) asked CNA, working in partnership with the UK's Permanent Joint Force Headquarters (PJHQ), to capture insights from U.S.-UK staff integration in Afghanistan. A combined U.S.-UK study team was created, consisting of three CNA analysts from the United States, two UK military officers from PJHQ, and a scientist from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory. The study team used a hybrid analytic approach involving interviews of U.S. and UK military officers and other subject matter experts, combined with analysis of previous studies and references pertaining to U.S. and UK military operations and integration of forces.

The U.S.-UK study team twice traveled to Afghanistan to conduct field research, completing about 60 interviews with personnel at RC(SW), TF Helmand, and the UK's Joint Force Support-Afghanistan (JFSp(A)). In addition, the study team met with previous senior leaders and personnel to better understand the evolution of operations and U.S.-UK interactions over time. While the study report was written by CNA analysts, the UK team contributed important thoughts and discussion in the spirit of a joint study. Also, the report authors benefitted from CNA's considerable body of work regarding Afghanistan operations; U.S. joint lessons-learned reports on Iraq and Afghanistan; and the UK's Herrick Campaign Study, a comprehensive examination of UK operations in Helmand province that identifies lessons for the UK to pursue. This occasional paper presents an unclassified overview of the complete (and classified) CNA report from this study, titled *(U) U.S.-UK Integration in Helmand*.¹

¹ Larry Lewis, Catherine Norman and Jerry Meyerle. *(U) U.S.-UK Integration in Helmand*. Secret/REL FVEY. CNA Corporation. DRM-2015-C-010285-1Rev. 2015.

A special relationship

For over a century the United States and United Kingdom have maintained a close and generally harmonious relationship—particularly during and since World War II. Statesmen on both sides of the Atlantic have remarked on this “special relationship”: “The Anglo-American relationship has done more for the defense and future of freedom than any other alliance in the world,” according to former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher;² “The relationship between the U.S. and UK has often been described as special or essential and it has been described thus simply because it is” in the words of Secretary of State John Kerry.³

One attribute of this special relationship is close cooperation and partnership between the U.S. and UK militaries.⁴ This was clearly seen during World War II, when American and British forces worked together in an integrated command structure.⁵ Likewise, since World War II, the relationship between the two militaries has been marked by extensive intelligence sharing, robust exchange programs, and intentional efforts to make equipment and training compatible. The relationship has also included combined involvement in military operations: British forces have contributed to all U.S.-led major combat operations since World War II (except Vietnam), including Korea, Operation Desert Storm (1991), Operation Enduring Freedom (2001), and Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003).

² Eugene Robinson, “Clinton’s Remarks Cause Upper Lips to Twitch,” *Washington Post*, 19 October 1993.

³ Benjamin Russell, “Special relationship is safe... ‘US has no better partner than UK’, says John Kerry,” *The Express* (London), 9 September 2013.

⁴ After World War II, Churchill pointed to the direction this special relationship would take, emphasizing the military component of the U.S.-UK partnership: “Neither the sure prevention of war, nor the continuous rise of world organization will be gained without what I have called the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples ... a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States. Fraternal association requires not only the growing friendship and mutual understanding between our two vast but kindred systems of society, but the continuance of the intimate relationship between our military advisers, leading to common study of potential dangers, the similarity of weapons and manuals of instructions, and to the interchange of officers and cadets at technical colleges.” (Winston Churchill, speech in Fulton, Missouri, 5 March 1946.)

⁵ Anthony J. Rice, “Command and Control: The Essence of Coalition Warfare,” *Parameters* (Spring 1997).

Three disparities in U.S.-UK operations

The relationship between the U.S. and UK is not only special; it is also asymmetric. This asymmetry is due to three disparities that affect combined U.S.-UK operations: resources, interests, and areas of national focus.

Disparate resources

The first disparity is in national capabilities. While both the U.S. and UK have considerable national resources and capable military forces, there are significant differences in scale. While both are professional and capable forces, historically the U.S. has spent more on defense than the next 10 highest spending countries combined (including the UK).⁶ This spending disparity enables the U.S. to have a significantly larger military force, more advanced technology, and unique warfighting capabilities. As a result, while the U.S. prefers allies in military operations for the purpose of legitimacy, it does not necessarily require them.

The lack of dependence of the U.S. on coalition partners was exemplified in the initial invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. The U.S. received a number of offers of assistance after the attacks of September 11, but the United Kingdom was the only nation whose offer of assistance was accepted in initial combat operations—and even then, the U.S. accepted only limited contributions from the UK, and contributing UK forces had no national caveats during this time period.^{7,8} Overall, the United States' initial success against the Taliban did not depend on partner contributions.⁹

⁶ However, 2014 marks the first year this statement is not true—with budget cuts, U.S. expenditures on the military are only equal to that of the next nine countries combined. Guy Eastman and Fenella McGerty, “Analysis: U.S. No Longer Spends More on Defense than Next 10 Biggest Countries Combined,” *IHS Janes 360*, 25 June 2014. <http://www.janes.com/article/40083/analysis-us-no-longer-spends-more-on-defense-than-next-10-biggest-countries-combined>.

⁷ National caveats are the restrictions that NATO members place on their participation in a deployment. These are discussed in more detail in the section “Friction Points.”

⁸ Sarah Kreps, “When Does the Mission Determine the Coalition? The Logic of Multinational Intervention and the Case of Afghanistan,” *Security Studies* 17, issue 3 (2008). Note that Australia, with its contribution of special forces, was the second nation to join the U.S. and UK, one month after the initial invasion in October.

⁹ One newspaper reported that “in military terms the capitulation of the Taliban was a U.S. victory. British troops played only a peripheral part.” See “The Limits of Intervention,” *The Independent* (London), 23 December 2001, 16.

Different interests

Another disparity is a difference in national interests. The U.S. has a broader set of interests, allies, and investments around the world that it must consider, as well as a wider array of potential threats. This means that there will be inherent differences in national interests between the two nations. For example, the UK's decision not to contribute to operations in Vietnam shows a difference between U.S. and UK national interests in that conflict.

Focused national contributions

The third disparity is the ability of the UK to focus significant national strategic capabilities while supporting a smaller force and smaller operating area. This asymmetry was evident in Helmand Province. A variety of UK forces operated in Helmand, receiving considerable dedicated support from national intelligence agencies to UK tactical operations. Also, the UK enjoyed its own national support for reconstruction and governance efforts through the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). This situation contrasted with that of the United States—it also had support from the intelligence community, Special Operating Forces (SOF), and the U.S. interagency, but this support was spread over much of Afghanistan and often centralized in Kabul. Because the UK was responsible for just one geographic area and yet received national strategic-level support, it could exert a concentrated level of national capabilities in a single province.¹⁰

¹⁰ However, this was not always the case. For example, the UK and U.S. suffered similar challenges in integrating reconstruction and security efforts, as discussed in the “Civil-Military Integration” section of this report.

Benefits of Coalition Operations

Governments of both the U.S. and UK consistently state their intent to conduct future military operations as part of a larger coalition. Why is this? A driving factor is legitimacy. In decisions regarding the use of force, multilateral decisions—either under the authority of the United Nations or as part of a coalition of willing nations—are generally regarded as more legitimate than unilateral ones. And yet coalitions have some downsides. They are complex. They involve different nations participating together in operations when their national objectives may differ, they may not have an equal will to act, their military capabilities may not match, and they may have mixed abilities in terms of operating with one another. Coalitions can lead to frustration and reduced mission effectiveness, as was observed in Kosovo; these concerns can also drive nations to curtail coalition involvement in operations, as was the case for the initial U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.¹¹

But coalition operations can work well. For example, in air operations, the U.S. regularly integrates with coalition partners under the overall command of a combined force air component commander (CFACC) such that air capabilities are delivered in a near-seamless way. Unlike air operations, ground operations had not realized the full set of benefits that a coalition can bring until the recent operations in Afghanistan. Over the past five years, U.S. and UK forces in Helmand province worked closely together in a way that had not been seen previously in an operation outside of the air domain.

Indeed, coalition operations are expected to continue in the future because there are clear benefits of operating with partner nations. Some of these benefits result directly from the presence of a coalition partner and do not depend significantly on the specific form of the partnership. As noted above, a key benefit is greater legitimacy regarding an operation, since such legitimacy connotes the right to wage war.¹² While international law provides justification for individual nations to conduct combat operations under certain conditions, in practice such actions can appear

¹¹ The initial invasion included only small force contributions from the UK and Australia, despite many offers of assistance from other nations.

¹² Legitimacy has been defined as “[that] which is lawful, legal, recognized by law, or in accordance with the law,” *The Guide to American Law*, December 1983.

more legitimate if they have a mandate by an international body such as the United Nations (UN), or, alternatively, if operations are conducted by a group of nations acting together (i.e., a “coalition of the willing”). This legitimacy can be pivotal to the decision to go forward with an operation.¹³

Another such benefit is a greater mass in terms of forces available compared to each nation’s individual contribution. Even smaller partners, when combined, can make a significant contribution—a larger number of troops for ground operations or ships/aircraft for operations in other domains—which is especially valuable for an enduring operation.¹⁴

Coalition operations can offer other benefits, depending on how respective national partners interact with one another during a mission. They can take one of several approaches:

- **Deconfliction.** In this approach, each military force is treated as relatively autonomous. Forces are relegated to geographically separate operating areas and are responsible for their own enabling support. Forces largely maintain autonomy and seek to reduce the risk of one force harming another (e.g., friendly fire, aircraft collisions).
- **Coordination.** In this approach, each military force retains some autonomy, but they coordinate some efforts and approaches in order to bring about a harmonious or efficient relationship. Some autonomy is subordinated on a case-by-case basis in support of this coordination process.
- **Integration.** In this approach, military forces combine their collective activities in order to achieve unity of effort, operating as a whole and gaining efficiencies and synergies.¹⁵

¹³ For example, Army Field Manual 3-16 states, “Another reason the U.S. conducts such [multinational] operations is that rarely can one nation go it alone.... This blending of capabilities and political legitimacy makes certain operations possible that the U.S. could not or would not conduct unilaterally.” *The Army in Multinational Operations*, FM 3-16, May 2010. This effect was also seen in the proposal for the use of force against the Syrian regime in summer 2013; when the U.S. did not have coalition partners such as the UK willing to join, the decision was made to forgo that proposal.

¹⁴ In October 2014, there were 45 nations contributing troops to NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). While the U.S. contributed most of the total forces (~25,000 personnel), the other contributing nations together provided about 10,000 additional forces. Though the U.S. had the capacity to field the total number, because of coalition contributions it did not need to.

¹⁵ These definitions are adapted from U.S. Joint Staff, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02, (8 November 2010, as amended through 15 August 2014).

While all coalition operations potentially offer increased effectiveness and efficiency, such benefits will be seen most clearly during integrated operations, where complementary capabilities are leveraged to the greatest extent.

CNA's complete classified report from this study presents analyses of specific case studies pertaining to U.S. and UK operations in Helmand province, Afghanistan, in order to offer steps for promoting integration in future operations. These case studies were chosen to represent different areas in the spectrum with regard to U.S.-UK integration. Here, we present a brief description of the five case studies at the unclassified level. We then discuss the observed friction points in coalition integration, as well as best practices for coalition integration as seen in Helmand province. We conclude with recommendations for promoting coalition integration in future operations.

Adaption was required to have the definitions specifically address the issue of coalition operations.

Case Studies

An integrated U.S.-UK operational headquarters, RC(SW)

Regional Command Southwest, or RC(SW), was an integrated, multinational headquarters led by the U.S., with senior UK officers in key positions and UK field grade officers spread throughout various staff sections. UK personnel made up approximately a quarter of the headquarters staff. U.S. personnel, along with a small number of Estonian and Danish officers, constituted the remaining three quarters. Staffing considerations aside, a coalition headquarters calls for more complex command and staffing processes. Thus, a coalition headquarters held both advantages and challenges.

A key advantage of a coalition staff was being able to leverage partner nation expertise in areas of strength and gain different perspectives. For example, the UK held both the C-9 (Governance and Development) and C-10 (ANSF Development) staff positions for several rotations, consistent with its experience and deep knowledge of these areas. However, given the complexities of command, coalition partners introduced additional factors that had the potential to degrade unity of effort, including: different views regarding command roles and responsibilities within the headquarters; doctrinal and cultural differences; issues regarding force generation and pre-deployment training; and incompatibility of computer information systems for information sharing.

The following are some key observations concerning integration in the context of the RC(SW) headquarters.

- Equity in leadership positions within the RC(SW) staff was important to the UK as a coalition partner.
- Positions were sometimes reshuffled over time. These moves often reflected changing mission priorities as well as opportunities to better align experiences and strengths with responsibilities.

- The UK contribution was not assembled in a timely way. As a result, combined pre-deployment training was limited, degrading the ability to work together effectively.
- Incoming staffs were unprepared for coalition friction points that limited integration.

Aviation

Aviation was an essential element of the International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF's) operations in Helmand. Mobility in Helmand province was extremely challenging, due to difficult terrain (both mountains in the north and desert in the south and west), the lack of significant road infrastructure, and increasing security concerns due to IED attacks. Initially, the U.S. and UK commanded and operated their own aviation platforms primarily in support of their own operations. For example, in Regional Command South (RC(S)), the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands each had national aviation task forces. In June 2010, in preparation for the establishment of RC(SW), the U.S. and UK integrated their national aviation efforts. Specifically, the UK's Commander, Joint Aviation Group (COMJAG) moved to Camp Leatherneck and collocated with the U.S. Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW), bringing along a number of UK personnel to form an integrated staff. Integrating the tasking and operations cells for aviation brought the combined aviation resources of the U.S. and UK together and promoted both effectiveness and efficiency as they supported the combined set of missions.

While many UK and U.S. aviation platforms were similar, both countries brought some complementary capabilities. For the UK, the AH-64 Apache attack helicopter gave additional combat power options, including the use of its 30mm gun, which gave an engagement option to forces even in close proximity to friendly forces, and proved to be a deterrent to enemy forces. Likewise, the UK saw USMC aviation support capabilities as a big advantage in expeditionary air operations. The 2014 COMJAG described USMC aviation as a "proper expeditionary capability that takes everything you need for the full spectrum of conflict."

However, rather than integrating fully, the U.S. and UK deliberately weighed the costs and benefits of integration for aviation operations in Afghanistan. They discussed whether they should integrate aviation completely by making the tasking process blind to which nation was supporting each task. In the end, however, another approach was taken: aviation tasking kept assets with the respective nation by default unless there was a clear advantage of assigning them to the other nation. This economical approach to integration minimized the potential negative impact of training and capability limitations.

The following are key observations concerning integration in the context of aviation.

- U.S.-UK integration yielded efficiencies: fewer national resources were needed from both nations.
- Aviation took the approach of selective integration, where U.S.-UK integration was pursued only for areas or operations where there was clear benefit.
- Integration produced unity of effort without unity of command.
- Aviation leveraged complementary capabilities for the U.S. and UK across multiple mission sets, including attack, reconnaissance, and medical evacuation.
- Friendly fire and combat ID challenges, while rare, persisted as a cross-national challenge.

Security force assistance

International forces conducted a wide range of security force assistance (SFA) activities in Afghanistan, including training, partnering with, mentoring, and advising Afghan army and police forces.¹⁶ Despite this seemingly linear framework—from training, to partnering, to mentoring, and finally to advising—the SFA effort in Helmand was not always a straightforward progression. First, the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) recruited thousands of new personnel over the period of 2009-2014, so the training centers continued to provide initial training throughout this period. The transition from tactical hands-on training at the checkpoint level to mentoring at the company, battalion, or district police headquarters levels was also not linear. Some ANA and ANP units had stable leadership and grew in capacity and capability over time. Other units experienced periodic setbacks, which required coalition force advisors to return from a mentoring or advising role to a more hands-on, partnering relationship. In sum, the coalition SFA mission had to modulate its efforts based on the ANSF's capabilities and capacity to receive assistance.

¹⁶ These four activities are outlined in U.S. doctrine, including *Advising: Multi-service tactics, techniques, and procedures for advising foreign forces* [U.S. Army] Field Manual FM 3-07.10; [U.S.] Marine Corps Reference Publication MCRP 3-33.8A; [U.S.] Navy Tactics Techniques and Procedures NTTP 3-07.5; and [U.S.] Air Force Tactics Techniques and Procedures AFTTP 3-2.76. September 2009.

The U.S. and UK SFA efforts in Helmand had two primary differences: the two nations formed their advisor teams differently, and they had different command relationships for the advisor teams. This led to, among other things, differences in command and control structures. U.S. and UK forces thus experienced two main friction points with regard to SFA in Helmand, which were linked to problems with command and control and communications across U.S.-UK and civil-military lines.

Coordination of U.S. and UK advisor teams

RC(SW) had limited ability to coordinate the efforts of the U.S. and UK advisor teams, and there was no unity of command within the advisor teams. While this did not preclude unity of effort, features observed in such unity for other warfighting functions were largely absent for SFA.¹⁷

Coordination of U.S.-UK and civil-military efforts for police advising and training

The command and control picture was even more complex on the ANP side, because it involved not only two military advisor teams from the U.S. and UK, but also civilian actors. This was particularly notable at the provincial level. The complexity of U.S.-UK and civilian-military relations also extended to training of the ANP: the UK took a civilian-led approach to police training, while the USMC took a military-led approach.

The following are key observations concerning integration in the context of security force assistance.

- The two nations had different approaches to SFA, including:
 - how they conducted security force assistance,
 - what echelon SFA efforts were supporting,
 - how advisor teams were assembled, and
 - how command and control was exercised.
- Coalition SFA efforts were not integrated—and at times were not even deconflicted. This lack of unity of effort led to cases of “advisor fratricide,”

¹⁷ Such features observed in aviation included headquarters in close proximity, strong personal relationships, leadership emphasis on coalition integration, and deliberate leveraging of complementary capabilities.

where multiple advisory efforts stressed different and sometimes conflicting priorities and outcomes.

Civil-military integration

In order to make stability and security sustainable in Afghanistan, ISAF, in conjunction with the international community, also sought to bring development, reconstruction, and good governance to Afghanistan.¹⁸ These efforts were conducted both by ISAF and by civilian agencies of nations making donations on behalf of Afghanistan. Civil-military relations were thus a natural consequence of the need for development, governance, and reconstruction combined with the two sets of actors that worked towards this goal in different ways. These civil-military relations were often marked by friction, and Helmand was no exception.

One friction point was a lack of unity of command. The development, governance, and reconstruction effort in Helmand was structured differently than elsewhere in Afghanistan. A two-star-equivalent UK civilian commanded the HPRT, which spearheaded the civilian effort, while a two-star U.S. general led the overall military effort. The HPRT adhered to the idea of civilian primacy over military operations. But in reality, the HPRT had no authority over the military RC(SW) command, which reported to ISAF and had more capability to influence affairs within its AOR. This issue of primacy was a source of tension: the civilian leaders in the development and reconstruction effort believed they should be in the lead, but, in practice, the campaign and its priorities were driven largely by the military.

Another friction point stemmed from the different goals and approaches (both between the U.S. and the UK and between the civilian and the military sides). U.S. and UK civil-military efforts emphasized different areas. The HPRT considered relations with the provincial government to be its top priority. But the Regional Platform was designed to coordinate U.S. civilian and military activities and to provide political advice to the regional command—hence, it was located at the RC(SW) headquarters. With regard to the civil-military divide, despite improvements over time in civil-military integration, there remained fundamental disagreements between the military and many civilian personnel in regard to the overall aim of development, governance, and reconstruction efforts.

The following are key observations concerning integration in the context of civil-military operations.

¹⁸ ISAF's Mission in Afghanistan, 13 October 2014, <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_69366.htm>.

- Unity of command was not feasible, because the U.S. and UK had separate national chains of command, and because there was substantial interagency involvement.
- Lack of unity of effort developed in the areas of governance, development, and reconstruction because different actors had substantially different goals and because of their geographical separation.
- Planning was stovepiped, and execution used different sets of funds, complicating deconfliction and coordination. Changes to the RC(SW) organization helped promote better unity of effort.

Lessons from the Case Studies

Common friction points

The U.S. and UK militaries, while similar in culture and approach, have many differences. While these differences can be inconsequential when the two nations are following a deconfliction or coordination approach, they can become significant friction points as U.S. and UK forces move toward integration of efforts (as they did in Helmand). The case studies were used to identify factors that hindered integration in those specific cases (referred to here as friction points). These include friction points *associated with institutional military forces*—such as differences in force generation, interoperability, military culture, and computer information systems—as well as those relating to *national policy*, such as differing Rules of Engagement, detainee policies, and other national caveats.

Institutional friction points

Observers from RC(SW) and elsewhere universally noted that the U.S. and UK militaries were as similar and compatible as any two nations' forces could be expected to be. Yet there were still a number of significant differences between the two institutions that complicated U.S.-UK integration. Areas with such differences included:

- **Force generation for an integrated headquarters.** Prior to 2014, the RC(SW) headquarters was built around a Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) staff with coalition augmentees, primarily from the UK.¹⁹ While the U.S. had the advantage of deploying a headquarters assembled around a staff that had trained together for several months, the UK assembled its contributions to the RC(SW) command from individual augmentees. The UK was challenged in its ability to find experienced personnel for the complete set of posts, and in an

¹⁹ This is similar to the way that RC(S) and RC(E) were built around Army divisional staffs with US and coalition augmentees.

adequate timeframe to support their involvement in U.S. pre-deployment training.²⁰

- **Pre-deployment training.** UK headquarters personnel had limited participation with U.S. counterparts in pre-deployment training due to late identification and assembly of the UK team and a lack of timely separation from previous post commitments.
- **Military culture.** While the USMC and UK militaries had much in common, there were some cultural differences that hindered coalition integration. This was seen, for instance, in different understandings of roles for staff positions.
- **National functions.** Even though the U.S. and UK increasingly integrated their headquarters and some areas of operations over time, several areas remained national functions throughout, including personnel functions (“1” shop), logistics (“4” shop), and finance (“8” shop).
- **National approaches.** The U.S. and UK had different national approaches and philosophies on several topics, including security force assistance and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) teams.

National policy friction points

In addition to friction points arising from differences in U.S. and UK military institutions, there were also national policy decisions that introduced friction and made it more difficult to form a cohesive coalition. As a coalition is a collection of nations with different philosophies, histories, and national interests, it is inevitable that partners will have some differences in national policies. At the same time, these differences can chafe against the cohesion of a coalition. These differences are commonly referred to as *national caveats*. The U.S., as the lead ISAF nation, effectively minimized its national caveats within ISAF because it aligned ISAF policies with its NATO-declared national caveats.²¹ This had the effect of making U.S. national policy decisions consistent with ISAF. For other nations, including the UK, national policy decisions appeared as national caveats that differ from ISAF policies. The UK

²⁰ Interview with RC(SW) COS, Afghanistan, 7 April 2014.

²¹ “National caveats are the restrictions NATO members place on their participation in a deployment. There is a national limitation, restriction or constraint of any national military forces or civilian elements under NATO command and control, or otherwise available, that does not permit NATO commanders to deploy or employ these assets fully in line with the approved OPLAN, including freedom of movement within the designated JOA and the approved ROE.” NATO guidance, MCM-0027-2005, dated 11 February 2009.

had a number of national caveats in Afghanistan, including ROE considerations, detainee operations, and limitations in its area of operations.²² These three areas of national policy differences were observed to have an impact on operations in Helmand. Their net effect was to highlight the dual chains of command—the coalition chain and the national chain—for the two national forces and degrade existing unity of command within the coalition.

Elements contributing to advancements in integration

Despite these friction points, the U.S. and UK made significant advancements in integrating collective efforts in Helmand province through 2014. Several elements contributed to this success: best practices for integrating the coalition headquarters, leveraging complementary capabilities, and institutionalizing unity of effort.

Specific best practices for an integrated headquarters

In their integrated headquarters, the two nations used a number of best practices in order to better manage and capitalize on contributions provided by each nation. These best practices include:

- **Leadership.** Senior leaders set the conditions for improved cohesion in a coalition environment. For example, MajGen Miller as former RC(SW) commander was observed to have built up strong relationships within the RC(SW) HQ, to the point that the issue of nationality was practically forgotten.²³
- **Equity.** The UK had a number of key leadership positions in RC(SW), including the deputy commander (DCOM), the C-5, the deputy C-3, and the DCOM's military assistant. The number of leadership positions was viewed by UK elements of the RC(SW) HQ as an important measure of equity, so it is worthwhile to be conscious of this measure in a coalition environment.

²² Similarly, the Danish battle group operating in Helmand had some caveats linked to the requirement for force protection elements to deploy with the tank platoon. In contrast, the Estonian company had no national caveats.

²³ Interview with DFECC, RC(SW), Afghanistan, 30 March 2014.

- **Collocation.** Having U.S. and UK personnel physically located together was an important element in integration. It was generally observed that it was easier to engage and discuss issues person to person. Doing so decreased misunderstandings and increased the overall tempo of decision-making.
- **Communication.** Specific measures intended to improve communication between U.S. and UK elements were also important in integration efforts. For example, some UK personnel were deliberately distributed at lower levels throughout the headquarters. This provided two benefits. First, “seeding” the staff with UK personnel helped avoid the formation of national enclaves within the staff.²⁴ Also, UK personnel noted that coordinating with UK personnel in other parts of the headquarters provided a quick way to make connections; they could then branch out to get to know others in the same section.²⁵
- **Leveraging existing staffs.** Between 2010 and 2013, the RC(SW) staff was built around augmentees from different commands, including MEF, MAW, Marines Logistics Group, and special operations units. Similarly, in 2014 it was assembled from augmentees drawn largely from a MEB. Starting with an existing staff holds several advantages: for instance, the force generation process was easier, giving the staff more time to work together prior to deployment. Personnel also had pre-established personal relationships, promoting trust and enabling the staff to better adjust for individual strengths and weaknesses.
- **Training together.** Pre-deployment preparation was critical for establishing organizations, responsibilities, and processes for managing coalition efforts in Helmand at the operational level. As described in the previous section, the force generation process in support of an integrated headquarters was marked by a number of challenges, and it affected the headquarters staff’s ability to collectively prepare for the deployment. That said, measures that were taken to allow U.S. and UK personnel to train together were seen as beneficial.

Leveraging complementary capabilities

The U.S. and UK are both highly professional military forces with similar training and doctrine. At the same time, the two nations also brought unique capabilities to

²⁴ Interview with C-2 and Deputy C-2, RC(SW), Afghanistan, 31 March 2014.

²⁵ Interview with DCOM, RC(SW), Afghanistan, 9 April 2014.

operations in Helmand. The USMC brought a basic but powerful capability: force size and the ability to mass effects.²⁶ While both nations have focused on quality forces and capabilities, the U.S. also has more capacity due to greater national resources and a larger proportion of those resources being apportioned to the military.²⁷ The U.S. also provided robust support capabilities. Additionally, UK personnel noted that the U.S. had the “ability to identify lessons and adapt quickly,”²⁸ an important skill in an operation where the environment could change dramatically from one season to the next. UK soft effects and key leader engagement capabilities were well thought of by the United States.²⁹ U.S. personnel stated that the UK has a better understanding of the larger goal of achieving “effects” versus kinetic fires.

Both nations also had complementary capabilities in specific areas. For example, for security force assistance, the USMC was viewed to be particularly strong in tactical training, while UK SFA training and its Regional Corps Battle School were considered strengths in improving the institutional capability of host nation security forces.³⁰ These complementary capabilities brought several advantages. First, they introduced unique capabilities that benefitted the entire force in Helmand. Also, these capabilities offered an economy of scale—both the U.S. and UK could afford to deploy fewer forces and platforms because they could leverage coalition capabilities.

Institutionalizing unity of effort

Some observers have stressed the need to establish clear unity of command in a coalition environment. This is consistent with unity of command being one of the overarching principles of joint operations in U.S. doctrine.³¹ However, while unity of command simplifies the execution of command leadership, it is a goal that has not been met in practice in operations over the past decade that have included coalition and/or interagency partners. Pursuing unity of command is a reasonable aspiration;

²⁶ UK MOD documents have acknowledged inherent limitations because of smaller force size. For example: “Some adversaries may be able to procure adequate quality as well as afford greater quantity, whereas we will be unable to mass sufficient quality or quantity everywhere that it is needed.” UK MOD, Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, *Future Character of Conflict*, 3 February 2010.

²⁷ This asymmetry between the U.S. and UK is discussed in the introduction of this report.

²⁸ Interview with Commander, TF Helmand, Afghanistan, 2 April 2014.

²⁹ Interview with Commander, TF Helmand, Afghanistan, 2 April 2014.

³⁰ Interview with DFECC, RC(SW), Afghanistan, 30 March 2014.

³¹ For example, U.S. Army, *Unified Land Operations*, ADRP 3-0 (May 2012).

however, recent experiences suggest that full unity of command is not a likely outcome in future coalition operations.

Achieving unity of effort among the military, interagency, and non-governmental contributions is a more attainable goal. This approach to command requires a good understanding of individual national interests and equities and how orders and tasks can relate to them. There were examples of this type of coalition leadership in Afghanistan. In one example, a former RC(S) commander considered national priorities when tasking coalition partners and made sure to explicitly tie the mission objectives to that nation's national objectives. Achieving consent from national command authorities reinforced his command authority and promoted overall unity of effort.³² Unity of effort was also observed without unity of command with regard to SOF in Helmand.

It was also possible to improve unity of effort through organizational measures. In the aftermath of the Camp Bastion incident,³³ RC(SW) created a position—DCOM BLS (Bastion-Leatherneck-Shorabak Complex)—that had the purpose of coordinating and synchronizing force protection activities for the BLS Complex as well as advocating for force protection issues.

At times, promoting unity of effort was complicated by having officers of the same rank reporting to one another. This created ambiguity in roles that potentially complicated decision-making.³⁴ This was the situation in 2014 with the RC(SW) commander and deputy commander, the MAG and JAG commanders, the C-3 and C-3/5, and the FECC and DFECC.³⁵ The ability to promote unity of effort thus depended on having the right personalities in those positions as well as having relationships of trust. Such relationships were harder to achieve because of the difficulties in conducting combined pre-deployment training, which cultivates those trust relationships. Overall, this situation can add to the existing challenges in maintaining unity of effort in a coalition environment.

³² Interview with Chief of the General Staff, British Army, General Sir Nick Carter, 19 November 2014.

³³ On the night of 14 September, 2012, 19 Taliban fighters infiltrated Camp Bastion in Helmand Province, killing two USMC personnel and destroying or damaging eight Harrier aircraft.

³⁴ Interview with DFECC, RC(SW), Afghanistan, 30 March 2014.

³⁵ Interview with ACOS C-3/5, RC(SW), Afghanistan, 8 April 2014.

Conclusion: Are Coalitions Worth It?

A key question for future operations is, Are coalitions worth it? Based on experiences in Helmand, the answer seems to be “sometimes.” Coalition integration introduces real costs and risks, but also offers potential benefits. A key lesson from the U.S. and UK experience in Helmand is the approach of selective integration, where integration efforts are made on a case-by-case basis, with actual integration only conducted for areas or particular operations where it shows a clear benefit compared to associated costs and risks. Specific elements of this selective integration approach include:

- **Understanding and mitigating costs of integration.** A key to this is having a good understanding of what factors introduce the costs and risks of integration—referred to in this report as *friction points*. Interviewed U.S. forces indicated that they had not gained a complete understanding of these friction points in their pre-deployment training, and so failed to anticipate some of the challenges they faced in theater. With an improved understanding, forces can lay the groundwork in advance to mitigate friction points and reduce the cost and risk of coalition integration.
- **Recognizing and leveraging opportunities for benefits of integration.** This includes both identifying possible efficiencies and capitalizing on complementary capabilities. Doing so requires both a good understanding of respective capabilities and the interoperability of those capabilities and key enablers in a coalition environment.
- **Posture of integration for coalition leadership.** According to USMC doctrine, “Leadership is the influencing of people to work toward the accomplishment of a common objective.”³⁶ In a coalition environment, effective leadership is especially critical. Leadership in a coalition environment is similar to mission command in both its attributes and its requirements: coalition leadership, which can be viewed as a form of mission command, involves decentralized decision making and considerable freedom of action for subordinates in recognition of the lack of strong unity of command. Similarly, a commander exercising coalition leadership “requires rigorous training and education” due

³⁶ U.S. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 6, *Command and Control*, 4 October 1996.

to both the demanding nature of mission command in general and the increased complexities of coalition warfare.³⁷ This leader would ideally have both familiarity with and trust of coalition partners and encourage unity of effort within the coalition.

There were certain areas of operations—such as aviation—that made huge strides in leveraging complementary capabilities of the two nations and could accurately be described as integrated coalition efforts, where the whole was greater than the sum of the parts. Other areas of operations, such as SFA, could potentially be brought to such integration with sufficient preparation.

Recommendations

Notably, it took many years of operations to attain this level of integration in Helmand. Based on a general pattern from operations over the past decade, and the fact that specific best practices for U.S.-UK cooperation failed to migrate from Iraq to Afghanistan, it is likely that U.S.-UK integration seen in Afghanistan is temporary and a perishable skill. Deliberate efforts are required to preserve these lessons and avoid re-learning them in future operations. These efforts are contained in three main recommendations:

- Build a foundation for future integration.
- Maintain proficiency in integration for select areas.
- Improve combined force generation.

Each is discussed in turn below.

Build a foundation

One of the key challenges U.S. and UK forces in Helmand faced in integration was joining each other in a common area of operations without advance preparation. It is possible, and desirable, to prepare for integration before operations even start. Such preparations should consider the following:

- ***National policies.*** Reach an advance understanding on national policies and caveats. An example is working towards creating a set of U.S.-UK Standing

³⁷ U.S. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 6, *Command and Control*, 4 October 1996.

Rules of Engagement that describe similarities and differences between their policies and caveats. This can serve as a starting point for specific operations.

- **Interoperability.** Improve interoperability in key areas (such as functional coalition networks at the Secret level).
- **Integrated enablers.** Look for opportunities for integrated enabling support (e.g., logistics, intelligence, base support).
- **Building relationships.** Cross-pollinate personnel in respective military organizations to build relationships and familiarity.

Maintain integration proficiency in select areas

For certain areas that are likely to be important in the future, it would be prudent to retain and rehearse integration so that it does not need to be reconstituted in the future—i.e., need to be re-learned over a period of years. Retaining the ability to integrate in select areas can be accomplished through:

- **Select exercises.** Conduct U.S.-UK operational-level exercises/wargames focusing on areas where integration either was reached (e.g., targeting, aviation) or should be pursued (security force assistance).
- **Refinement of doctrine.** Use combined operations in Afghanistan to revisit doctrine in key areas. Begin with fires and targeting, including non-lethal effects.
- **Lessons.** Take steps to help ensure that key lessons are identified and exploited/learned so that the U.S. and UK can be more effective learning organizations.

Improve combined force generation

For coalition operations in Helmand, the force generation processes of contributing nations often did not support the goal of rapid integration when forces were deployed. Rather, sometimes forces were unfamiliar with each other, were unaware of partner capabilities and methods, and did not know the best way to tailor their command and leadership style to take full advantage of the complex coalition environment. This situation could be improved in the future through:

- **Building an integrated staff.** Build coalition headquarters staffs in a coordinated way so that they can prepare collectively and be more coherent from the start.

- ***Leadership in a coalition environment.*** Leaders should tailor their command's organization and leadership style to account for the coalition environment.

These recommendations call for the USMC to focus more closely on integrating with UK military forces than it has in the past. Doing so includes a range of activities, such as involvement in bilateral policy decisions, greater exchange programs with the UK, and increased participation in multinational forums such as the American, British, Canadian, Australian Armies' (ABCA) Standardization Program.

The U.S. and UK militaries are likely to have many opportunities for coalition integration in future operations. Overall, for the U.S. and UK, learning the lessons from Helmand offers an opportunity to make the special relationship a more productive one, and better capture the benefits that can be realized from coalitions in future operations.

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