
Chapter 3: Coordinating Mechanisms and Planning Tools

The following discussion provides greater detail on each coordinating mechanism and planning tool required under PDD-56, as well as others that have been successfully used in actual interagency planning efforts. These mechanisms and tools are to be used in developing an integrated pol-mil strategy for a successful complex contingency operation.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (EXCOMM)

Under the National Security System, the Deputies Committee is responsible for crisis management. In a complex emergency, PDD-56 calls upon the Deputies to establish an Executive Committee (ExComm) as the principle coordinating mechanism of interagency activities. It is tasked with day-to-day management of U.S. involvement in complex contingencies. As such, the ExComm is responsible for promulgating unified policy guidance for the operation and subsequent policy development, planning, oversight, and execution. Members of the ExComm are generally at the assistant secretary level and include representatives from all relevant U.S. agencies.

Under PDD-56 the ExComm is the primary coordinating mechanism for interagency management of complex contingency operations. Its purpose is to:

- provide unified policy guidance for agency planners of the operation
- develop a USG pol-mil plan for the operation
- integrate mission area plans within the overall USG pol-mil plan
- monitor the operation
- revise policy guidance, as needed
- update the pol-mil plan as necessary
- implement Deputies and Principals policy decisions
- oversee an after-action review at the conclusion of each operation
- disseminate lessons learned and improvements in interagency planning

The organizing principle of the ExComm is to hold assistant secretary representatives personally accountable to the President for designated portions of an operation. Most of the members of the ExComm not only represent their agencies, but also serve as “program managers” for specific mission areas within the USG pol-mil plan. In this role, individual ExComm members are directly responsible for the development and coordination of their part of the overall plan. This approach has been very successful in clarifying agency responsibilities, getting agency preparations underway, ensuring broad interagency coordination, and resolving policy issues early on in the Deputies Committee.

POLITICAL-MILITARY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Introduction

The pol-mil plan is a planning tool that articulates the critical elements of U.S. operations in response to a crisis situation—mission, objectives, desired endstate, key milestones, and the concept of operations. In addition, the final section of the pol-mil plan contains mission area plans for each of the critical mission areas that comprise the operation. Developing the pol-mil plan is in many ways the centerpiece of the integrated planning process.

The pol-mil plan has the following purposes:

- helps build interagency consensus on the key elements of the overall operation
- assists in synchronizing individual agency efforts
- enhances the transparency of planning among different agencies
- helps ensure that all key issues are raised during planning

The process of developing a pol-mil plan brings a new level of analytical rigor to interagency planning. Specifically, it ensures that the United States develops coordinated policy guidance for the operation; significantly improves USG policy implementation and oversight; provides the interagency with an effective management tool to examine priorities and resource trade-off in a more systematic manner; and improves the transparency of interagency planning.

Writing the Plan

When the Deputies authorize the interagency to begin planning for U.S. participation in a complex contingency operation, the ExComm assembles the relevant participants and begins developing the initial sections of the pol-mil plan. The purpose of these meetings is to obtain interagency consensus on central elements of the plan. Although often laborious, the interagency discussion of key issues—national interests involved, mission statement, U.S. objectives and desired endstate—is crucial to ensuring that each agency understands and agrees with the overall policy that will guide U.S. operations in theater. These opening sections must be completed before work can begin on the remainder of the pol-mil plan.

After the ExComm agrees on the opening sections of the plan, agencies can begin their specific planning as directed by their ExComm program manager. This initial planning will provide the input for the remainder of the pol-mil plan. As the plan takes shape and more details of the operation emerge, the ExComm reviews the plan in its entirety and updates it where appropriate. This iterative process continues until the ExComm agrees on the final version of the pol-mil plan and the mission area plans that it will brief to the Deputies in the interagency rehearsal.

Elements of the Pol-Mil Plan

PDD-56 identifies 11 illustrative components of a pol-mil plan for complex contingency operations. They are:

- Situation Assessment
- U.S. Interests
- Mission Statement
- Objectives
- Desired Pol-Mil End State
- Concept of the Operation
- Lead Agency Responsibilities
- Transition/Exit Strategy
- Organizational Concept
- Preparatory Tasks
- Functional Element Plans

While any pol-mil plan must include all of these elements, each plan will need to be adapted to specific operations. Examples of generic pol-mil plans can be found in appendix B of this handbook but the major elements of the plan are further described here.

Assessments. The principal purpose of the first section is to provide a brief assessment of the situation on the ground. This part of the plan discusses the context for the U.S. operation and the problems it is meant to address.

Mission Statement. The centerpiece of the pol-mil plan is the mission statement. This section, which should be no longer than a paragraph or two, describes the overall purpose, mission, objectives and key elements of the U.S. operation—the who, what, when and how. All parts of the plan and the operation will reflect this statement. The ExComm must come to consensus on the mission statement before any other parts of the plan can be completed.

Objectives. Immediately after the mission statement, the pol-mil plan should list the key U.S. objectives for the operation. It is important that these objectives are both achievable and measurable—the achievement of all objectives should constitute accomplishment of the mission. The interagency may also find it helpful to include in this section a discussion of objectives that are *not* part of the operation.

Desired Endstate. The final part of the initial guidance lays out the desired endstate. The purpose of this section is to identify the conditions that should exist before an operation transitions to a follow-on operation or is handed over to an international organization, a regional organization, or the host nation. Those developing the pol-mil plan often have difficulty adequately defining what the “end” of an operation is because many individual USG efforts will likely continue far beyond any handoff. The ExComm will decide endstate on a

case-by-case basis, though generally the endstate conditions should apply to a political situation that leads to stability in the affected area.

Concept of Operations. The concept of operations describes how the operation will unfold by phase. This section should include a discussion of the priorities and key milestones within each phase of the operation. To ensure accountability and clear lines of responsibility, the concept of operations should be followed by a section that describes the USG organization for the operation, both in Washington and in theater.

Preparatory Tasks. This section highlights key issues that must be addressed prior to undertaking complex contingency operations. Success in each of these tasks—for example, funding, Congressional relations and public affairs—is critical to the overall success of any operation. Depending on the specific operation, there may be additional tasks that should be examined in this section as well.

Functional Element Plans. The final section of the integrated pol-mil plan contains the specific functional element or mission area plans. These plans articulate how a given assistant secretary level program manager intends to accomplish his or her portion of the pol-mil plan. The structure of the functional element plan should be similar to the structure of the overall pol-mil plan and must at a minimum include an assessment of the situation and an articulation of the mission, objectives, endstate, and concept of operations. Examples of functional element plans include: diplomatic engagement; security and stability; civil law and order; internal political development; infrastructure restoration; economic development; and humanitarian assistance.

INTERAGENCY REHEARSAL

The ExComm briefs the completed draft of the pol-mil plan and its component functional element plans to the Deputies Committee during the interagency rehearsal. *The focus of the rehearsal is to identify problems and disconnects that could arise during execution.* By simultaneously reviewing all elements of the plan, differences over mission objectives, agency responsibilities, the timing of operations and resource allocation can be identified and resolved early. The interagency rehearsal also allows the Deputies to approve the overall mission and concept of operations and underscores the accountability of each agency representative in implementing his or her area of responsibility.

The interagency rehearsal is a decisive coordinating mechanism conducted near the end of the pol-mil planning process. Under PDD-56, the Deputies are charged to ensure that the pol-mil plan meets three important tests:

- *Effective:* Specific functional element plans should support the overall USG mission and achieve the pol-mil objectives according to planned milestones and timelines.

- *Integrated*: All agency efforts should be complementary and synchronized during each phase of the operation, according to an overall concept of operations.
- *Executable*: Agencies should meet all legal, resource, and financial requirements prior to the authorization for an operation.

If there is time and the Deputies determine it necessary, two rehearsals may be held.

The interagency rehearsal will almost certainly result in the modification of specific functional element plans or even the overall pol-mil plan. The rehearsal is *part* of the integrated planning process, not the final presentation of a completed plan. Rehearsals are intended to help identify and resolve potential problems an operation could encounter before they become actual problems on the ground.

The rehearsal begins with an introduction and an update on the crisis by representatives of the intelligence community. The NSC staff then provides a brief summary of the approved mission, objectives, endstate, and overall concept of operations for the USG intervention. This information provides the context for the ExComm “program managers” to make presentations. Each presentation on the specific mission area plan should address the following questions:

- What is the overall purpose of the functional element plan?
- What is the current situation in the area of operations?
- What are the key entry conditions and assumptions for the mission area plan?
- What are the functional element plan’s purpose, mission, and operational objectives?
- How does the mission contribute to the overall USG pol-mil plan?
- What is the functional element plan’s concept of operations for accomplishing the mission?
- What are the timelines/milestones to accomplish the mission?
- How does the concept synchronize with the overall USG concept of operations?
- What are the organizational structure and the chain of authority for operations?
- Who are the key players, from both the U.S. and others, and what are their roles?
- What mechanisms are planned to effect civil-military coordination?
- What difficulties, obstacles or resource shortfalls currently exist?
- What constitutes success on the ground?
- What are the unresolved issues pending decision?

An important tool for the interagency rehearsal is a synchronization matrix. Successful operations generally require synchronization of many individual efforts. Unfortunately, guidance for synchronizing operations is nearly impossible to provide early in the planning process and is generally the most difficult element to rehearse. A matrix should display the functional elements on one side and the phases of the operation, or time, on the other; it is filled in as the functional element plans are briefed. The completed matrix is then used as a guide for improving the integrated concept of operation and the individual functional plans.