

Principles of the USG Planning Framework for Reconstruction, Stabilization and Conflict Transformation

"Planning involves elements of both art and science, combining analysis and calculation with intuition, inspiration and creativity. Effective planning demonstrates imagination rather than over-reliance on mechanistic processes. The fundamental challenge of planning is to reconcile the tension between the desire for preparation and the need for flexibility"

-Army Stability Operations Field Manual

Introduction

The success of the U.S. Government (USG) in complex reconstruction and stabilization (R&S) environments will require an integrated, interagency approach that allows both civilians and the military to plan for and respond quickly to rapidly evolving conditions on the ground. To address this challenge, National Security Presidential Directive 44 designated the Secretary of State to coordinate and lead integrated USG efforts to prepare for, plan, conduct, and assess R&S activities in coordination with international, other governmental and nongovernmental partners.

Purpose

R&S planning is undertaken in support of achieving transformation in the specified country or region undergoing or projected to undergo violent conflict or civil strife. The goal of this approach, referred to as "conflict transformation," is to reach the point where the country or region is on a *sustainable positive trajectory*, where it is able to address on its own the dynamics causing civil strife and/or violent conflict. This requires simultaneously supporting sources of social and institutional resilience as well as other factors that mitigate civil strife and violent conflict while reducing the drivers of conflict and other factors that continue or escalate violent conflict or civil strife.¹ One fundamental principle of conflict transformation is that, over the longer term, the host nation must develop its own capacity to ensure stability and conditions for economic growth – those conditions cannot be imposed from outside.

The *USG Planning Framework for R&S and Conflict Transformation* ("Planning Framework") is designed to address two related but distinct activities: *crisis response planning* and *long-term scenario-based planning*. A major crisis response would require significant and complex humanitarian, security, reconstruction, governance, and economic efforts utilizing all the elements of U.S. national power. R&S operations are not limited to situations where the U.S. military will or is conducting combat operations. Long-term scenario-based planning would be a more limited planning effort for the purposes of preparing for a potential event. Both employ the same planning framework but to differing levels of detail and with different time demands and personnel constraints. This *Principles of the USG Planning Framework* lays out for senior policymakers the key principles, decision points, and processes to be used in planning for such operations, and will be supplemented by a comprehensive planning guide for practitioners. This Planning Framework does not alter existing Department or Agency authorities prescribed by law.²

¹ The Conflict Transformation approach referenced here is taken from the book [The Quest for Viable Peace: International Intervention and Strategies for Conflict Transformation](#).

² In this document "Agency" or "Agencies" is synonymous with "Department(s)."

When is it Used?

Crisis response planning is triggered by senior officials (NSC Deputies, Principals, or a direct request from the Secretary of State or Secretary of Defense) to address in greater detail an imminent or existing crisis with R&S and/or conflict transformation implications. A decision of the Reconstruction and Stabilization Policy Coordinating Committee (R&S PCC) can also trigger whole-of-government planning, with the concurrence of the State Regional Assistant Secretary and Chief of Mission (COM).³ Crisis response planning may be done with or without triggering the entire Interagency Management System for Reconstruction and Stabilization (IMS).⁴

*Long-term scenario-based planning*⁵ addresses potential future R&S crises in a country or region over the next two to three years. The Principals and Deputies Committees, COM, and Regional Assistant Secretaries may request that the R&S PCC initiate long-term scenario-based planning for a country. This will allow the USG to examine likely challenges and solutions in a hypothetical R&S operation in order to improve response time and identify key factors to be addressed and capabilities required if the postulated crisis were to occur in the future. In addition to producing a long-term scenario-based plan, this process may also produce recommendations for preventative actions that can be integrated into existing USG planning processes, such as Mission Strategic Plans, Country Assistance Strategies and Combatant Command Campaign Plans.

Specific Steps in the Planning Process

The Planning Framework establishes a four-stage process: situation analysis, policy formulation, strategy development, and interagency implementation planning. These stages should be viewed as a planning cycle, with each stage informing revisions and changes to the others. For example, challenges encountered in the implementation stage may require a re-examination of policy or a revision of the USG R&S Strategic Plan. A guiding principle of whole-of-government planning is the inclusion of all relevant USG agencies in the planning process. To facilitate this inclusion, the R&S PCC will be notified when whole-of-government planning for reconstruction, stabilization and conflict transformation has been triggered.

1. Situation Analysis

With the triggering of whole-of-government R&S planning, a strategic planning team is assembled that includes the members of the appropriate regional Foreign Assistance Working Group (AWG),⁶ augmented by planning, geographic (including in-country expertise) and functional experts from across the USG as appropriate. The first task of the strategic planning

³ Imminent is defined as within the next six months. For full explanation on long-term scenario-based and crisis response planning triggers, see, *Triggering Mechanisms for “Whole-of-Government” Planning for Reconstruction, Stabilization and Conflict Transformation*, March 2007.

⁴ For an explanation of the IMS, see *Interagency Management System for Reconstruction and Stabilization*, March 2007. When a significant crisis occurs or begins to emerge, the Secretary of State may decide to establish an Interagency R&S Management System based on a decision by the Principals’ or Deputies’ Committees and implemented at the direction of the NSC.

⁵ Scenario-based planning is commonly referred to as “contingency planning”.

⁶ In the case where no AWG exists, the strategic planning team would serve as the AWG and members would continue in that role later as the transition to steady state (non-R&S) foreign assistance planning occurs.

team is to analyze the current environment for the R&S operation. This will draw, where possible, on consultations and information exchanges with U.S. personnel and other multilateral, governmental and non-governmental partners in the field.

Situation analysis is an on-going activity that assembles data and strategic information from across government partners and builds a knowledge base on vulnerable countries. Situation analysis for R&S planning purposes should include the performance of a comprehensive interagency assessment using, whenever possible, the Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework (ICAF) that: 1) diagnoses the conflict or civil strife and 2) completes a pre-planning mapping of current efforts against Drivers of Conflict and Mitigating Factors. Information generated from any prior planning and assessments, as well as existing data and intelligence from interagency partners will be used in the analysis and mapping.

Drawing on the results of the ICAF, the strategic planning team will develop a Situation Analysis Overview that provides a clear depiction of the Drivers of Conflict and Mitigating Factors that mitigate civil strife or conflict, current USG and international efforts as well as U.S. interests relating to the country and region, the expected actions of key actors (both partners and competitors), gaps in current and expected efforts to address the instability or conflict, risks associated with both action and inaction, legal considerations for providing assistance to the country, and critical gaps in knowledge/intelligence.

2. Policy Formulation

The *Situation Analysis Overview* lays the foundation for the second step of the planning process: the articulation of clear policy options with associated risks and benefits in the form of a *Policy Advisory Memo* for Principals/Deputies. The *Policy Advisory Memo* combines the most important elements of the *Situation Analysis Overview* with an explanation of how differing assumptions about critical planning considerations (conditions within the country, the behavior of other regional and international actors, and resources from the USG and other sources) lead to options for an overarching R&S policy goal and strategic objectives that are required to achieve the R&S policy goal. These strategic objectives correspond to the drivers of conflict and local capacity needs and are termed Major Mission Elements (MMEs).

Principals/Deputies respond to the *Policy Advisory Memo* by either issuing a *Policy Statement* or requesting new policy options. The *Policy Statement* determines the overarching R&S goal by approving one of the policy options, including stipulating the critical planning considerations that planners should use as they develop the USG R&S Strategic Plan and providing a preliminary estimate of the USG resources likely to be available for the R&S operation. The *Policy Statement* also designates the U.S. official responsible for implementing the plan⁷ and identifies the U.S. Agency tasked with leading the planning around each MME in support of the development of the USG R&S Strategic Plan.

⁷ While the Chief of Mission is the usual USG official tasked with implementing the USG R&S Strategic Plan, the President may designate a special envoy or senior official for such purposes. This document will use COM to refer to the USG official designated to implement the USG R&S Strategic Plan.

3. *Strategy Development*

The strategic planning team, whether part of the Country Reconstruction and Stabilization Group (CRSG) when the IMS is activated or working with the relevant PCC when the IMS has not been activated, uses the *Policy Statement* to begin the iterative process of developing the USG R&S Strategic Plan.⁸ This plan will determine how the R&S operation will address the prioritization, sequencing and cross-sectoral linkages of USG efforts. The CRSG or relevant PCC will initiate a budget planning process drawing on interagency members including Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Office of the Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance (F), and implementing agencies in coordination with the strategic planning team and U.S. presence in the field. The strategic planning team is also responsible for synthesizing the constant flow of information from the field into its deliberations on the plan, including, where possible, input from host nation authorities. As a guiding principle, host nation authorities should be engaged, as early as possible, in strategic planning. In extreme instances, where outside actors have assumed authority, criteria for triggering a Transfer of Authority (TOA) to a responsible Host Nation government should be established early and reviewed regularly for continuing relevance to changing situations.

The locus of planning during the strategy development phase will depend on the nature of the R&S operation, as indicated in the *Policy Statement*.

- A major national security engagement requiring the use of the IMS dictates that the strategy development would be centered in Washington with significant participation and input from non-Washington actors, including the Geographic Combatant Command, the US Mission, a USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART), bi-lateral and multi-lateral partners and/or NGOs. In non-presence countries, once U.S. personnel are deployed into the field, their input becomes a critical component of strategy development and may include recommendations for revisions to the overarching USG policy goal.
- The PCC/DC may determine that strategy development should take place primarily in-country, under the direction of the COM in order to take full advantage of on the ground interagency regional, sectoral, and functional expertise, as well as assure buy-in from host-country leaders and stakeholders.

An R&S operation likely involving significant U.S. military presence creates the need to integrate crisis action planning or long-term scenario based planning occurring simultaneously at the Geographic Combatant Command with the planning in Washington and the field. A team of civilian planners will deploy to the applicable command to ensure this integration occurs.⁹ Likewise, a team may deploy to a multinational planning headquarters to integrate USG efforts with an international response.

The strategic planning team will establish Major Mission Element planning teams to produce *MME Concepts* describing the proposed approach for the achievement of each MME. The term Sub-Objective is used to identify the subordinate objectives that are necessary to achieve a particular MME. The *MME Concepts* developed by MME teams will address:

- How the MME relates to other MMEs;

⁸ A CRSG is made up of two components: an augmented PCC established for the specific country response, and an interagency planning, operations, and coordination staff (CRSG Secretariat).

⁹ This team of planners is called an "Integration Planning Cell" in the IMS.

- Rough order of magnitude capability requirements (both foreign assistance and operational) to achieve the MME;¹⁰
- The Sub-Objectives that are necessary and sufficient to achieve the MME, including a discussion of Sub-Objective sequencing and priority decision points;¹¹
- Criteria for success for each MME to ensure that there is a shared understanding of the desired outcomes;¹²
- How additional planning considerations not in the *Policy Statement* relate to the MME;
- Identification of critical information requirements and knowledge gaps;
- Potential impediments to success; and
- Potential strategic, regional, and local consequences, positive and negative, of successful achievement of the MME.

The strategic planning team for major engagements will submit the USG R&S Strategic Plan to the CRSG Policy Coordinating Committee, or relevant PCC in cases when the IMS has not been activated, for approval. The USG R&S Strategic Plan includes the following products:

- *Plan Overview Template*, a one-page graphic depiction of the plan;
- *Strategic Plan Narrative* addressing the situation analysis, the overarching policy goal for R&S, critical planning considerations, Major Mission Elements, MME prioritization, sequencing and linkages;
- *Comprehensive Resource and Management Strategy (laying out rough order of magnitude requirements and availabilities for each MME)*;
- *MME Concepts*;
- *Relevant technical annexes (e.g., security, personnel, knowledge management, logistics, etc.)*; and
- *A determination of what decisions remain in Washington (e.g., the decision whether to work with host nation armed forces)*.

4. Interagency Implementation Planning

The planning efforts performed in-country will be a critical determinant of mission success. Following the approval of the USG R&S Strategic Plan, implementation planning becomes the responsibility of the Chief of Mission. Interagency implementation planning is an iterative process to synchronize diplomatic, development and defense implementation planning and tasks,¹³ towards the goal of executing the USG R&S Strategic Plan. Interagency Implementation Planning is distinct from Agency Implementation Planning in that the planning effort involves the input and participation of a number of separate agencies.

Staffing the development of a large, multi-sectoral, multi-agency planning process is a complex undertaking requiring expert planning, coordination, and facilitation as well as technical and

¹⁰ Processes and decisions on USG resources will follow established Administration policy and applicable laws (e.g., foreign assistance MMEs and Sub-Objectives will reference the F program structure and definitions).

¹¹ During the strategy development phase, references to Sub-Objectives are largely illustrative and preliminary in order to provide greater detail to *MME Concepts*.

¹² MME planning teams should draw on accepted USG performance measures when at all possible and public reporting must not contradict currently accepted USG performance measures.

¹³ This document uses the three “Ds” as short hand for the broad spectrum of instruments of U.S. national power, which include infrastructure, governance, public health, security, among many others.

operational expertise. If the IMS is not activated and a U.S. Mission exists, the COM informs Washington of his/her additional planning personnel requirements. If the IMS is activated, the CRSG, in consultation with the COM, forms the Advance Civilian Team (ACT) to support the COM and the development of the Interagency Implementation Plan.¹⁴

The ACT forms an implementation planning team to support the COM. The implementation planning team will consist of the implementing Agencies that will be accountable for carrying out the actions and developing the programs that will produce R&S results and impact, as well as relevant U.S. Mission staff. This team will function throughout the life of the plan and will be responsible to the COM for planning, monitoring and achieving the R&S policy goal.

To accomplish the planning task the implementation planning team will form multi-sectoral sub-objective teams for each MME that will consist of representatives from the various implementing agencies to detail multi-sectoral approaches within MMEs and consolidate sectoral implementation plans across the MMEs. In cases where the implementation of a sub-objective falls within the mandate of one Agency, the planning is carried out by that Agency with its own planning processes with relevant information informing interagency implementation planning. Implementing agencies will provide operation and technical specialists as necessary to support implementation planning. It is critical that planning teams charged with designing and implementing programs have the authority, command over resources, and field expertise to operate flexibly in uncertain and changing environments. The implementation planning team will be joined by member(s) of the strategic planning team in order to provide continuity.

The implementation planning team will provide the following planning functions:

- Provide the COM and the CRSG with strategic information and facilitate communications;
- Design, coordinate, organize and manage the interagency implementation planning process, including provision of data collection and analytic support;
- Provide interpretation and guidance on the intent of the senior policy makers and strategic planning team decisions;
- Facilitate stakeholder input into the planning process;
- Coordinate the operations and inputs from sub-objective teams;
- Provide support in the development of indicators, performance monitoring plans, and data collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting; and
- Serve as the mechanism for communicating feedback, including proposed revisions to the USG R&S Strategic Plan, and additional planning requirements.

The implementation planning team will need to validate the strategic planning assumptions, "ground truth" the broad outlines of the USG R&S Strategic Plan, and determine a planning approach that will assure host-country ownership, civil society participation, and the strong donor coordination that will be critical to the development and acceptance of the plan.

¹⁴ ACTs are cross-functional interagency teams that are flexible in size and composition. ACTs are formed to quickly set up, coordinate and conduct field R&S operations, in conjunction with Country Teams where extant. They serve under COM authority and can operate with or without a U.S. military deployment. In the absence of an existing COM, the individual designated as COM shall be dual-hatted as ACT leader.

Interagency implementation planning must also balance immediate requirements with long-term transformational requirements to assure progress can be made on both. The implementation planning team is responsible for designing an Interagency Implementation Plan (IIP) that will:

- Provide an overview of the operating environment, including critical elements/impediments that may affect implementation of the plan that were not described in the USG R&S Strategic Plan;
- Map donor and international organization program inputs and determine gaps that the USG approach will address, including tracking negotiations on the use of common approaches and on roles and responsibilities;
- Refine *MME Concepts* based on *Sub-Objective Concepts* developed by Sub-Objective planning teams that focus on required accomplishments in three-month benchmarks throughout the course of the plan;
- Determine program approaches at all levels in the implementation plan: short-term/long-term trade-offs, geographic priorities, and targets;
- Address the multi-sectoral nature of Sub-Objectives for each MME;
- Determine an approach to strengthening host-government short and long term capacity (e.g., resident advisor vs. technical assistance);
- Determine what mechanisms will be used to implement the program approach (use of pre-positioned agreements, new procurements, etc.); which contractors can stand-up programs rapidly; what requests for assistance might be required from the Department of Defense and how to include civil society partners in the implementation process to avoid creation of parallel systems;
- Develop a performance monitoring plan with short and long term stability and social indicators, targets and benchmarks, including use of negotiated common indicators with other partners whenever possible;
- Identify/refine resource and logistics requirements;
- Employ an interagency Knowledge Management system for sharing and accessing information; and
- *At the appropriate time*, begin the process of transitioning into out-year normal budgeting processes of participating agencies.

One of the most vital planning challenges is to estimate when the R&S operation can be completed in total or in part. While iterative planning is likely to predominate, at all times the senior policy makers must be kept informed of what the likelihood is of meeting the desired end states and the interim milestones. Where applicable, planning for the following transfers of authority may be necessary:

- A military TOA from “supported” to “supporting” relationship with civilians.
- TOA from non-host country to host-country authorities.

The COM approves the initial IIP as well as subsequent iterations and forwards it to the CRSG PCC for approval.

Monitoring, Evaluation and the Planning Cycle:

The planning process must be flexible and enable the communication of developments on the ground to senior policy makers in Washington in order to add or modify resource support in these highly fluid environments. Similarly, as the COM adapts and refines the plan in order to

meet new challenges and seize temporary windows of opportunity, communication with Washington is critical to keep policy and implementation in synch.

To drive constant analysis and revisions, the Planning Framework establishes metrics at the MME level to monitor strategic progress and critical assumptions as well as at the Sub-Objective level to monitor additional assumptions and enable ongoing synchronization of activities. These analyses “ground-truth” the core elements of the USG R&S Strategic Plan and Interagency Implementation Plan. Confronted problems and identified/anticipated windows of opportunity are channeled into the plan revision. To support this analysis, the USG must undertake appropriate assessments and immediately begin collecting relevant information.

The implementation planning team will continually update critical planning considerations and budgetary and financial management factors of the USG R&S Strategic Plan and report them to the strategic planning team, which is responsible for proposing to the COM and CRSG necessary changes to the USG R&S Strategic Plan and monitoring MME and USG policy goal-level metrics at established intervals (typically six months). The implementation planning team also monitors the targets for each Sub-Objective at three-month intervals in order to synchronize activities and benchmarks to signal when transfers of authority should occur (military to civilian, USG to host country, etc). The COM will report progress and proposed changes to the USG R&S Strategic Plan to the CRSG or relevant PCC in cases when the IMS has not been activated.