It’s Not Rocket Science

America’s Future and the Need for Interagency Cooperation

Based on an interview with Gregg Nakano

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When one meets Gregg Nakano, one does not realize that the soft-spoken Inspire Fellow at Tufts’ Institute for Global Leadership (IGL) and mentor of the IGL’s Alliance Linking Leaders in Education and the Services (ALLIES) has nearly a decade of field experience dealing with reconstruction and stabilization operations – as a uniformed officer in the United States Marine Corps, as a disaster response coordinator in the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and as a civilian in the private sector. Gregg served in Kuwait and Iraq during both invasions, first as an infantry platoon commander and then as a civil-military liaison officer for USAID. He was also deployed as part of the Special Purpose Joint Task Force Los Angeles and helped coordinate operations between the United States Marine Corps and the Compton Police Department during the Rodney King riots; supported the United Nations (UN) damage assessments after the earthquake in Bam, Iran; and facilitated the coordination of humanitarian assistance as the USAID liaison officer to the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) in Afghanistan in the wake of the 2001 invasion.

In the one-on-one conversations I had with Gregg, we talked about interagency cooperation and the role of the United States in an increasingly chaotic world. Drawing from his past experiences, he shared why interagency cooperation must be at the center of any reconstruction and disaster response missions that the United States undertakes, and how this relates to his work with ALLIES.

ALLIES is an undergraduate-led initiative started in 2006 that creates a bridge for shared understanding between future civilian and military leaders by developing educational, training and internship opportunities. Founded with the idea that a rift still exists between the civilian and military populations of the United States, ALLIES seeks to address this disconnect at its earliest stages. It is focused on developing programs for civilian university

student and military academy cadet interaction and engagement at the undergraduate level.

Why ALLIES? There are three logistics parameters to any mission; **good, fast, and cheap**. "You cannot have all three at once," Nakano said. "You can have any two at one time, but you cannot have all three. Initial White House estimates for the cost of the war in Iraq were around $50-60 billion.[1] Once we pinned ourselves to having it **cheap,** then we had to give up **good** or **fast**. When we wanted it **fast** and we'd already pinned ourselves to cheap, then you know it's not going to be **good**. Today we are going for **good** and **fast** but the results will not be **cheap.**" The recent change in strategy focusing on good and fast results in Iraq will require an enormous investment in American blood and treasure. After five years in Iraq, the most recent estimates place the cost of the war at over $600 billion[2] with over 4,000 casualties. That is 10 times more than the original estimated cost and four years longer than we wanted to be there.

"When you are talking about someone who is doing development work," Nagano said, "you are talking about somebody impacting thousands of people's lives in a disaster response or famine situation. If you are a diplomat at the policy level, you are potentially affecting the entire country. That's millions of people's lives. So if our country is investing all this time, energy and resources on training someone, do we want to spend it on a person who is shooting a weapons system that has a reach of maybe 5 km? How many people is that going to impact? Is that impact going to be enduring in a positive or negative manner? How does that help us for the long-term reconstruction process? How about rebuilding the peace or positive relations with other nations? Do you want to focus your efforts on the person who is going to destroy stuff or the person who is going to build stuff? That's a choice we make."

Sun Tzu, author of the 6th-century B.C.E. military strategy classic titled "The Art of War," wrote, "Know your enemy, know yourself and you will never fear defeat in a hundred battles."[3] This principle of warfare is still applicable today, not only for the military's combat operations in Iraq but also for the whole range of engagements that the United States government undertakes, including reconstruction, stabilization and disaster response operations.

When asked to comment on the transition between the Office of

Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) to the Coalition Provisional Authority, Nakano explained, "I was not in Iraq when Bremer was there. I left in May 2003," but in the lead-up from February until May 2003, he worked in the interagency Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) that was charged with coordinating the U.S. government's response to the situation in the wake of the invasion. "It wasn't that there was no plan," he said. "It's that everyone had a plan and it wasn't coordinated in a hierarchical manner … We were in a hotel compound just outside of Kuwait City. ORHA had people in the same compound as the DART. But because leadership in Washington, Secretary of State Colin Powell and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, were having communication challenges, it translated down to the operational level. Those on the ground merely followed their example."

This lack of interagency communication was mirrored in the L.A. riots where, Nakano said, "the Marines and the National Guard were called in to respond after the state governor called a state of emergency. Why? Because the mayor and the chief of police, like Powell and Rumsfeld, had not talked to each other in months.[4] Issues of overtime pay for police and the extraordinary legal measures weren't done so they had to call in the Marines and the National Guard." The failure of leadership at the top to communicate amongst themselves translated to similar failures on the ground.

Nakano made a parallel to America in 2001. "In fact," he said, "in the months and weeks before 9/11, the warning lights were going red, but internally, because of lack of interagency communication, we had planes hijacked and casualties greater than that Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Operators on the ground had the information that something was going to happen. It was not that we didn't have the information … it was that we didn't share information internally with our own partners in the U.S. government." We failed in "knowing ourselves."

DART's training is of particular importance and remains a unique case of interagency cooperation because it was the first time the United States did the full range of safety and security training for diplomats, economists and development specialists into a post-conflict war zone at this size and scale since the Vietnam War. "The challenge was that throughout the Cold War, development assistance and the interagency process had become more stove-piped, hampering the ability for members within each of the individual agency, department, and organization to communicate because of lack of familiarity with one another's agencies," Nakano said. Basically, people from different government agencies were being sent into Iraq without knowing the roles, responsibilities and capabilities of their counterparts.

If the United States government is going to send in civilians and other agencies into a war zone, it has to adequately prepare them. The DART training was targeted to address just that, and its focus was on safety and security. "There were some challenges in helping individuals who have never been in a combat zone or had not imagined themselves working in a post-combat or disaster site, to reformat their conceptions of what was normal or the conditions they would be operating in," Nakano said. "Many had not grown up or been exposed to environments where there wasn't running water, there wasn't electricity, let alone where people might want to kill them."

This civilian outlook was the exact opposite of the military mindset of how to train soldiers. Members of the military, he said, have "a mindset of danger, one where people are going to be trying to kill them, and their main mission is to overpower, overwhelm, kill, destroy and eliminate the enemy." That being said, there was resistance on the side of the civilian agencies in undertaking these sorts of training evolutions for their personnel.

"There were significant numbers who did not understand the reason why we – meaning USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and specifically the Military Liaison Unit – why we would want to train people in defensive driving, train people how to recognize that they were being tailed or why we thought we needed to invest the money in purchasing or building bulletproof civilian vehicles so that we could get around the country," he said. "Or why we would need to ensure that the vehicles that we were building were fully outfitted with a communication suite that allowed us to talk not only within country or within the region but internationally on the fly." What was simply common practice and normal operating conditions for the military required an entire shift both in culture and capabilities on the civilian side that unfortunately had enormous costs associated with them.

"Those in the Department of Defense are used to operating in post-conflict environments and they understood that if you can't talk to your people, you are cut off and isolated from them … and this will make you vulnerable," he said. "They build those capabilities into their budget structure. The civilian disconnect is compounded by the fact that, typically, development specialists and diplomats only go into areas that are already secured." A combination of mixed security protocols and an enormous need for civilian sector skills that had been untapped necessitated interagency cooperation from the highest levels of government down to individual interactions on the ground.

Despite the challenges and resistance within various agencies, the DART interagency training moved forward. It included courses such as defensive

driving, environmental awareness, basic first aid, hostage preparation, etc. These seemingly essential skills for anyone entering a war zone proved to be revolutionary and became the basis for some of the pre-deployment training that the State Department and USAID now require of personal preparing to deploy to Iraq or other hot spots.

Before the DART program was created, there was no joint interagency training of its kind readily available within the U.S. government. Not only did the DART course instill basic survival skills into government personnel that were being deployed into Iraq, but it had added incentives that made it mutually beneficial for all involved. Benefits included intangibles that proved to be integral when operating in dangerous conditions.

"I'll use the driving course because that's the simplest one," Nakano said. "There was a person from Treasury, a person from State sitting in the car with someone from USAID and we were all getting the same training. That's useful in itself because besides learning how to back out, how to do a J-turn, or where to hit a car if it is blocking you, you end up talking about what you do in your day job. 'Why are you here? What's your role going to be when we go in as a reconstruction team? How do we work better together?' Those things are nice to work out in a non-threatening situation with a nice hot shower, a warm meal and dry clothes rather than meeting the person for the first time either on the disaster site or in a hostile environment where you don't know the person and you are supposed to trust him. High-stress, high-risk environments are usually not conducive for building trust."

The DART training proved to be one example of how future interagency cooperation could be built. But this new paradigm for interagency training structure will require more than a few training sessions here and there if the United States plans on operating in the demanding environments that exist today. The process of education and training must be institutionalized along three levels: basic, intermediate and professional.

The first level would consist of a baseline introduction where everyone learns the general threats that one may face on the ground. This may include anything from mentally preparing oneself for a hostage situation to learning basic first aid to using simple common sense. For example, Nakano said, "When in a very poor country, don't whip out your expensive multifunction cell phone or flash your super-high-speed laptop and start using them late at night in a bar or café because you won't own it for very long." Basic first aid would include exposing the wound, cleaning it, applying pressure on a deep wound, and learning not to rip off the bandage when it becomes soaked through, but rather put on a new one and reapply pressure. Also, all

personnel being deployed into areas of conflict need at least a basic crash course on how to conduct oneself outside the comfortable familiarity of the United States.

The intermediate level would build upon the basic level, and probably 20-30% of those being deployed would need this sort of training. If one uses the analogy of medical training, the beginning level would be basic first aid, which everyone needs; the intermediate level would be the next step and equivalent to the more in-depth skills like that of an EMT (Emergency Medical Technician). This may include cardiac defibrillation, controlling severe external bleeding, preventing shock, treatment of bone fractures, immobilizing the neck to prevent further spinal damage, etc. This sort of on-site rapid response would serve as a stopgap until the patient is evacuated or medical professionals arrive.

The third and highest level of this training would be the professionals. People who have essentially dedicated their entire lives to gaining specific expertise and who practice their vocation every day – doctors, pilots, Army Rangers, engineers. About 5% of those deployed to a conflict situation should have these certifications.

The challenge for the government is that in order to develop a "**good**" training program, it is unlikely that it will be also be **fast** and **cheap**. Even if the civilian agencies are funded and staffed at a level which would allow the development and institutionalization of top-notch training programs, there is always the time constraint. While the basic course would be fairly easy to implement and could be as short at 8 to 40 hours of training, more technical intermediate training could easily extend beyond one to three months. Finally, to train people at a professional level, the government would need to allocate the same resources for diplomacy and development assistance as it does for educating and training its professional military. Diplomats from the Department of State and development specialists from USAID would have to be afforded career paths that would nurture their growth from college, like the military service academies, to retirement, meaning continuous training and education opportunities.

Both in natural and man-made disasters, time is of the essence. But if we want to ensure that the response will be **fast** and **good**, we must realize that developing this capability will not be **cheap**. The United States' current allocation of funding provides $11.2 billion for the Department of State,[5] $18.8 billion for USAID[6] and $651.2 billion for the Department of Defense.[7] Given that US taxpayers will spend over $680 billion this year on our foreign policy, the question is not whether to spend more money, but how

to maximize the allocation of those generous resources. With the need to address widespread global poverty, a crumbling energy infrastructure, lack of health services, the threat of global pandemics, environmental pollution and global warming – things that are not readily solved with tanks, submarines, bombers or missiles – one wonders if now is not a good time to readjust the funding to the three pillars of our foreign policy: Diplomacy, Development, and Defense.

Even if the United States government cannot change its budget allocations, institutionalizing interagency cooperation would allow the various sectors of the U.S. government to overcome the insulated nature of each agency and encourage trust that will effect better results on the ground. Leaders who encourage interagency cooperation must be coupled with a national emphasis on public service.

Democracy is about the people. Even if you have all the money and time in the world, without people, nothing will get done. To accomplish this, we need to create internships for the next generation of public servants who would like to become diplomats, development specialists and even soldiers in spite of the increasing challenges that the United States faces.

"Besides the training and education," Nakano said, "what I feel is useful is giving the next generation of professionals as many opportunities as possible to actually see the environment that they are going to be working in ... You may think that a fighter pilot is the coolest thing in the world, but if the first time you fly is in flight school and now you find out that you throw up when the plane is inverted, you've wasted a significant amount of your time. If you want to be a doctor and you go through pre-med and med school ... and the first time you see blood you faint, you've wasted a lot of time.

"So in my mind, the earlier and more complete an internship can be in getting the real deal of what it is, one, we can help people pre-select, and two, from the institutional standpoint it helps you get rid of the toads, because you may have a guy who loves being a fighter pilot, can do the loop-de-loop, can take the 10Gs but is completely unsuited due to intellectual capacity or maturity level to be a pilot.

"So if you want to improve the system, those are the three things you need to do: education gives people the information; training, let them practice the information they've acquired; and internships let them test their level of expertise based on the education and training that they have received. And then the host organization will determine whether or not they are a suitable match down the road."

"The reason I am so taken behind the idea of ALLIES," Nakano said, "is because we are trying to build the education, training and internships [that] civilian students would otherwise never have. They are given the chance to better understand what their government does, how it does it, and the military's role within it, so that, as citizens, they can make informed decisions that will strengthen a participatory democracy that actually represents the will of the people. I am not saying we would have stopped going into Iraq. I think if the general education of the average American was such that we understood completely what the Constitution says, and we understood the history, relationships and interests of Iraq and the United States, we probably could have found a more efficient, effective and economical means of accomplishing the exact same thing we are trying to do, with less bloodshed on both sides. Less expenditure of resources and less destruction of infrastructure. Know yourself. Know the enemy. I don't think any of this is rocket science…"

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1 Mark Gongloff, "How Much Will War Cost," *CNN Money* (March 19, 2003)

2 David M. Herszenhorn, "Estimates of Iraq War Were Not Close To Ballpark," *The New York Times* (March 19, 2008)

3 Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by Lionel Giles, 1910. Chapter 3, 18.

4 William W. Mendel, "Combat in Cities: The LA Riots and Operation Rio," (July 1996)

5 U.S. Department of State, "International Affairs FY 2009 Budget," (February 4, 2008)

6 USAID, "Budget Fiscal Year 2009," http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2009/101416.pdf

7 Department of Defense, "Budget Fiscal Year 2009," http://www.gpoaccess.gov/usbudget/fy09/pdf/budget/defense.pdf