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Introduction

The highest realization of warfare is to attack the enemy's plans; next is to attack their alliances.

—*Sun-tzu*, *The Art of War*¹

In war it is not always possible to have everything go exactly as one likes. In working with allies it sometimes happens that they develop opinions of their own.

—*Sir Winston Churchill*, *The Hinge of Fate*²

The United States is the land of Eisenhower, the man who led the most successful alliance of the 20th century—indeed, one of the most notable in the history of warfare. The United States is the nation privileged by its partners to lead the coalition that swept the Iraqi Army from the field in a matter of hours in 1991 and again in a matter of days a dozen years later. What value could there be in contemplating how such a proven exemplar might improve its performance as leader of coalitions at the dawning of the 21st century?

The United States' is also the military that saw GEN George S. Patton clash with FM Bernard Montgomery in Sicily and northwest Europe. It is the U.S. government that struggled to find an effective relationship with Vietnam during more than a decade of fighting in Southeast Asia. And it is the world's premier military power that has made missteps while leading the coalitions that work to rebuild the nations of Afghanistan and Iraq. There are still many lessons to learn—and relearn—when it comes to finding the keys to successful coalition leadership, regardless of whether that leadership is civilian or military. That is the focus here—in particular, identifying elements crucial to the oversight of coalition ventures during stability operations.

Alliances and coalitions are close kin; many of the observations made with respect to one are no less relevant to the other. The former are defined as “the relationship that results from a formal agreement (e.g., treaty) between two or more nations for broad, long-term objectives that further the common interests of the members”; the latter are “an ad hoc arrangement between two or more nations for common action.”³ Each provides lessons drawn from the other. But it is a coalition that poses difficulties beyond those found in its more formal and aged relation. The lesser formality inherent in a coalition means that members are less familiar

¹ Sun-tzu (1994, p. 177).

² Churchill (1986, p. 573).

³ JP 1-02 (2001 [2008a], pp. 31, 92).

with each other; likely share less in the way of common equipment, doctrine, and procedures; and have a more fluid membership. It is also coalitions that more frequently characterize recent and ongoing deployments to stability operations. Thus, in the pages that follow, we focus primarily on the greater challenges posed by coalitions and solutions to those challenges, even while we occasionally draw on relevant lessons from the history of alliances.

Multinational and interagency undertakings continue to challenge both U.S. leaders and those from other nations and organizations. The problem is not a trivial one. Misunderstandings between members of these cooperative ventures have cost men and women their lives, lost battles, and underpinned the demise of nations. There are many reasons that the tasks at hand can be even more difficult when alliance or coalition members find themselves threatened with an adversary that does not threaten survival interests, as is typically the case during stability operations (with some exceptions—e.g., the nation that is at once threatened by an insurgency and a member of the coalition battling that insurgency). The pages that follow first contemplate what comprise a coalition and what forces tend to bind or separate its members. Analysis addresses three particular challenges: (1) structural considerations that a military leader can influence to improve coalition effectiveness, (2) difficulties associated with unity of command, and (3) characteristics that should be considered in selecting individuals for coalition leadership positions. The overarching objective is to provide insights of value to leaders—primarily those military, but others as well—as they prepare for and participate in coalitions during stability operations in years to come. A quick look over our collective shoulder demonstrates the value in such consideration. The coalition supporting operations in September 2006 Iraq numbered 31 nations; that in October 2008 Afghanistan included 39 such participants.⁴ Far from diminishing in importance, the demand for effective leadership has become all but ubiquitous during international deployments as coalitions grow in size and complexity.

The ties that bind nations during coalition operations often extend beyond military activities to include economic, diplomatic, and other functions. Military concerns need not dominate alliances and coalitions; they should not during many of the activities undertaken during stability operations. Recognition of this fact carries with it a number of nontrivial implications, including the possibility of civilian leadership during some or all phases of a coalition operation and expansion of our definition to include non–nation-state members in such collective enterprises.

Coalitions (and Alliances) 101: The Basics

The multinational dimension acts, to a great extent, as Clausewitzian friction, multiplying the “countless minor incidents . . . that combine to lower the general level of performance, so that one always falls short of the intended goal.”

—*Lt Gen Sir John Kiszely*, *Coalition Command in Contemporary Operations*⁵

⁴ D. Wright and Reese (2008, p. 21); Burns (2008).

⁵ Kiszely (2008b, p. 2, citing Clausewitz, 1976, p. 119).

The Nature of Coalitions

Many of the command challenges inherent in a coalition force are similar to those inherent in an alliance—for example, the problems of integration, interoperability, decision-making, and achieving unity of purpose. But an alliance, particularly one as closely integrated and of such long-standing as NATO [the North Atlantic Treaty Organization], can achieve—and, in NATO's case, has achieved—considerably more progress in overcoming these challenges than a coalition.

—*Lt Gen Sir John Kiszely, Coalition Command in Contemporary Operations*⁶

It behooves us to begin our trek toward better understanding coalitions—and alliances—by asking what motivates their formation. What forces act as adhesives, and which, instead, tend to weaken the bonds holding participating countries together? Appreciation of these basics is a forerunner to achieving the more-extensive objectives sought.

Their definitions tell us that alliances and coalitions share the characteristic of bringing together several participants in a cooperative venture. The two differ primarily in the formality of the ties that bind members and duration of the affiliation. For most Americans, the most familiar alliance is NATO, due to its lengthy history, recent high profile during operations in the Balkans, and post–Cold War pursuit of membership by several eastern European nations. The formal agreement binding its members is the North Atlantic Treaty signed in Washington, D.C., on April 4, 1949, the opening lines of which make its objectives clear:

The Parties to this Treaty . . . are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area. They are resolved to unite their efforts for collective defence and for the preservation of peace and security.⁷

Contrast this broad commitment to mutual defense, one now more than half a century old, with the less-formal ties that brought countries' armed forces to Iraq or Afghanistan during the past decade. No single agreement obliges participants to maintain support. The number of nations committing forces to either contingency has varied considerably over time as objectives changed or other influences affected membership. Each of these cooperative ventures constitutes a coalition (though that in Afghanistan also includes the NATO alliance among its members).

Commitments made to a coalition can take forms other than those requiring the physical presence or participation of its representatives. Turkey supported the 1991 coalition seeking to oust Saddam Hussein from Kuwait by allowing U.S. aircraft to launch wartime missions from Incirlik Air Base and sending 100,000 personnel to the Iraqi border, the latter causing the Iraqi dictator to divert forces that could otherwise have been committed to defend against the attack that ultimately came from the south.⁸ Germany and Japan supported operations with financial outlays of \$6.5 billion and \$9 billion, respectively, amounts exceeded only by those

⁶ Kiszely (2008b, p. 2).

⁷ NATO (1949)

⁸ Pierre (2002, p. 21).

from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.⁹ Such participation recalls U.S. provision of intelligence to the United Kingdom during the 1983 Falklands War or the various types of support the United States provided to Britain in the months prior to formal U.S. entry into World War II.¹⁰

Reasons for Joining a Coalition

Although there is great political strength to be gained from a large number of participating nations, and potentially an increase in combat power, it is also true that the amount of friction in an operation rises in direct proportion to the number and diversity of participating nations.

—*Lt Gen Sir John Kiszely*, *Coalition Command in Contemporary Operations*¹¹

I use the analogy of a rope to describe peace support operations in a post-conflict situation. The provision of security is only one strand; the other strands are political progress, humanitarian aid, demobilization of the factions' armies, reconstruction and economic progress. Once the strands are woven together, the rope is stronger than the sum of its parts.

—*Gen Mike Jackson*, *Soldier: The Autobiography of General Sir Mike Jackson*¹²

There are two fundamental motivations for creating an alliance or coalition. The first is straightforward: to bring together the combination of capabilities necessary to achieve the ends shared by its members. Those joining the partnership might provide armed forces, allow basing of an international force, agree to overflight rights, back the collective whole with intelligence, support the undertaking financially, or provide aid otherwise unlikely to reach a needy population in timely fashion. Such assemblages might, in theory, consist only of those nations that substantively add to the capabilities of the whole, since adding other participants would seem an unnecessary (and, thus, undesirable) burden. The quotation from General Kiszely suggests that the greater the number and variety of members, the more difficult is the coordination and more strained are logistics pipelines weighed down with personnel and materiel excess to needs. Yet, many are the coalitions that would never exist were effectiveness and efficiency the sole determinants of participation. The United States arguably had little need for the tactical capabilities added by regional military units' participation during 1983 operations in Grenada. Some countries sent forces to 1992 Somalia, 1999 East Timor, and 2003 Iraq lacking in even basic necessities, causing logistical problems that outweighed the immediate tactical value of their soldiers. Military leaders from wealthier countries would have found the going easier if their political leaders had forgone the opportunity to bring these less-endowed nations into the collective fold.

But their political leaders did not forgo the opportunity. They instead sought out broader membership. Operational effectiveness without diplomatic legitimacy is a dangerous tool to wield in today's world. Andrew Pierre of Georgetown University notes, "politically, a coalition, especially a broadly based one, will be perceived by the international community as acting with

⁹ Pierre (2002, p. 22).

¹⁰ Powell (1998, p. 5).

¹¹ Kiszely (2008b, p. 4).

¹² Mike Jackson (2008, p. 266).

greater legitimacy than the actions of a single state, especially if the coalition is supported by an international mandate such as a United Nations (UN) Security Council resolution.”¹³

Why is legitimacy crucial? Pierre goes on:

The *political* advantages of coalitions are . . . greatly increasing. . . Public opinion polls consistently show that the American public feels much more comfortable with the use of U.S. forces when done in conjunction with allies, especially nations that are democracies and subject to their own democratic processes. At home, coalitions can be facilitators that are helpful, perhaps even a prerequisite, for assuring congressional and domestic political support. Internationally, coalitions can serve as political force multipliers.¹⁴

Diplomacy and domestic politics ace military efficiency. In coalitions, as in war, policy dictates to the military.

Factors Affecting the Cohesion and Stability of Coalitions

There is almost a paradox in that it is when the coalition is close to achieving its goals that it is most difficult to maintain [its] solidarity. When the common threat recedes and the individual members start looking past the current conflict, the inherent differences between partners are most likely to reassert themselves.

—*Keith Powell, An Historical Examination of International Coalitions*¹⁵

Having considered the initial two questions of “What is a coalition?” and “What motivates its formation?” we turn to our third query: “What forces act as adhesives, and which instead tend to dissolve the bonds holding participating countries together?” Relative to an alliance, a coalition is an impermanent entity. It consistently experiences forces that act to bind on the one hand even as others work to rend it asunder. Cultural ties, moral obligations, promises of reward, and immediate financial or other inducements join any shared objectives as some of the elements that can act to keep nations cooperating. Adapting a list from the U.S. Army’s Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) provides a partial catalog of divisive elements that can instead work to loosen coalition ties:

- ulterior *goals*, different interpretations of the shared goal, or goals that change over time
- *logistical support*, either the cost of its provision or the perception that expected support is not forthcoming
- differences in capabilities that interfere with operational efficiency or that marginalize one or more participants, making them unable to maintain a position of sufficient substance in the coalition, such as variations in *training* and level of professionalism and *quality and quantity of equipment* and its *capacity to interoperate* with other member nations
- dissimilarities in operational doctrines
- willingness to share intelligence
- language
- disagreements regarding leadership and command relationships

¹³ Pierre (2002, p. 4).

¹⁴ Pierre (2002, p. 5).

¹⁵ Powell (1998, p. 22).

- culture, including religion, class and gender distinctions, discipline, tolerance (e.g., willingness to accept friendly-force, noncombatant, or even enemy casualties), work ethic, expectations regarding standards of living or dissatisfaction with differences observed during a deployment, and national traditions.¹⁶

An example of culture impeding cohesiveness comes from recent U.S.-Philippine operations. A special force (SF) captain commanding an operational detachment alpha (ODA) during my recent visit to that theater related a lesson he identified during his service as adviser to an Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) battalion. The captain originally planned to break down his trainers by staff section:

I would send my S3 [operations sergeant] to his S3 [an officer in the AFP]. No, you have to go through the battalion commander, then the XO [executive officer], and then he goes to the S3 rather than us ever coordinating with him directly. And it is always the team leader [the SF captain] that has to go to the battalion commander.¹⁷

Differences in social mores—in this case, the Americans being less rank conscious than their counterparts—meant that an expert coordinating directly with his staff opposite was disallowed. Recommendations had to pass through the senior officer in the battalion, later to be channeled via the second in charge and only then to reach their intended target. The extra time consumed and chances of miscommunication would be frustrating and a cause of concern even in a nonthreatening environment. (Readers will recall the grade-school exercise of passing a whispered message from person to person and then comparing the original with the final, often-quite-different outcome.) A further observation by our captain points to one of the many ways of improving coalition cooperation, one to which we will return later—familiarity born of previous association: “If one of their officers has been trained in the U.S., he is much more likely to support staff-on-staff coordination.”

Arguably, no factor influences coalition cohesion more than the extent of threat facing the collective effort. Mortal danger is strong glue. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the challenges to holding a coalition together increase in the aftermath of conventional wartime combat, once the adversary has been defeated. Some erstwhile partners lack a unifying compulsion of sufficient importance to override the costs of continued participation. National political, economic, cultural, and other factors come to the fore and act to divide the once-close collaborators. Victory on a battlefield often only sets the preconditions for accomplishing ultimate goals; this disintegration can therefore deny coalition members the collective ends for which they originally came together.

¹⁶ Bowman (1997, pp. 9–11; emphasis in original).

¹⁷ ODA 925 interview with Russell W. Glenn, Tugas and Jolo, Philippines, January 13, 2007. In keeping with policy of U.S. Special Operations Command, Pacific, the speaker is not identified by name.

Coalitions 102: More Observations Regarding Coalition Cohesion

Power within a coalition is never absolute.

—*Raymond D. Barrett, "Coalition Dynamics"*¹⁸

The burdens borne in a coalition are seldom equal. Related to this point is this: Relationships within a coalition are likewise seldom based on perfect equality. Some members are willing or able to risk more or provide more to the cooperative venture. Greater commitment generally translates to increased influence, if not the lead role, in a coalition. Yet, increased influence does not, in turn, imply domination. The ad hoc and transient quality of coalitions means that members are likely to terminate participation fairly quickly when the price of continuing affiliation exceeds perceived benefits of continued membership. Turning once again to Pierre: "Rarely will each party totally get its way."¹⁹ As difficult as forming a coalition might be, its maintenance will be at least as challenging. Coalitions are not fire-and-forget entities. They may not run like a finely tuned sports car, but they require no less maintenance.

The nature of coalitions is therefore little different from most cooperative ventures: There are expectations of reciprocity. No member should believe that it will get something for nothing, and the extent of payback must be in keeping with the relative commitment. An example from a nonmilitary, bilateral coalition provides an example. Agreeing to work together in dealing with illegal-drug threats to their two nations, government authorities in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom formed a coalition to combat narcotics smugglers operating between Amsterdam and London. The Dutch confronted their coalition partners as operations progressed, observing that, as they saw it,

We're both running intercept operations. We give our intercept material to you, and you say, "Thank you very much. Not only will we use this for intelligence purposes, but actually might produce it in court." But when we ask you for your intercept material, you give us the intelligence product and say we can exploit it but don't allow us actually to use it in our courts. This is not mutual assistance; this is a one-sided thing.²⁰

Members of a coalition should expect that they eventually will have to pay their bills.

Yet, a coalition leader must ever remember the primacy of politics; domestic considerations may preclude a coalition contingent from fully meeting what other members feel to be justified expectations. The extent to which this is true will vary over time—e.g., during periods before elections—just as it will depend on the extent to which a country's leaders feel that they can assume domestic risk. U.S. secretary of defense Robert Gates' public questioning of other NATO contingents' effectiveness in southern Afghanistan precipitated an immediate backlash and an equally rapid softening of the secretary's comments. Speaking the day after his inflammatory remarks, Gates reportedly "toned down his public criticism of NATO nations only because many of them, including Canada, have minority governments where support for

¹⁸ Barrett (1992, p. 34).

¹⁹ Pierre (2002, p. 3).

²⁰ Albiston (2007).

the mission is ‘fragile.’”²¹ Similar remarks attributed to Combined Joint Task Force 76 U.S. commander MG Benjamin Freakley to elements of the multinational brigade based in Kandahar, Afghanistan, likewise infuriated coalition members. Describing the event, Patrick Bishop reported that Freakley “made it clear that, in his view, the British were not doing enough. In fact, given their superior numbers and weight of equipment, they were doing less than any of the other Coalition partners in the province.” Lt Col Stuart Tootal, commanding the British 3rd Parachute Battalion, challenged Freakley on the spot, replying, “The British had gone far beyond the task they were originally given and had dangerously stretched their resources.”²² Coalition leaders at any echelon cannot afford to view partner performance in light of in-theater conditions alone. They must similarly take a broad view of how any remarks they make will affect a situation much as they would gauge the consequences of each tactical maneuver when planning a combat operation. As noted in a January 29, 2009, article, “After the death of 320 British soldiers in America’s ‘war on terror,’ such jokes are especially wounding.”²³

Coalitions are consequently dynamic institutions, evolving over time as they respond to changes in an operational theater or influences from the home front. That a member retains affiliation does not mean that its level or nature of commitment remain constant. The ends sought in participation—which may differ considerably between parties even at the outset of operations—can also change.²⁴ A coalition leader wishing to sustain partnerships must constantly monitor the conditions affecting each member’s involvement. Pierre advises that

leading a coalition therefore requires listening attentively to coalition partners and having an appreciation of their interests, making judgments about competing priorities, accepting compromise when necessary, identifying and stating clear objectives, and staying focused on the central aim of the coalition.²⁵

The Pages Ahead

Because of their ad hoc character, coalitions start out much as does a pickup football game (that regardless of whether the football is round or oblong). Players have varying degrees of knowledge regarding others on their side; friends having a better grasp of each other’s talents than those with whom they have had less previous association. Initial play is likely to be tentative and not particularly effective. The self-centered player may, over time, be brought in line by appropriate comments or marginalized by being denied possession of the ball. Likewise, one less blessed with speed may be assigned as a blocker (in American football) or put in goal (in soccer). Participants have to adapt to member preferences, some favoring aggressive offense, others defense. Assignments will tend to align with talents and level of commitment given the passage of time. The capability of the whole will come to exceed the sum of its individual parts, synergy having been achieved as each participant molds play to that of others.

²¹ Champion-Smith (2008).

²² Bishop (2007, pp. 178–179).

²³ “Britain’s Armed Forces: Losing Their Way?” (2009).

²⁴ Larson et al. (2003, p. 26).

²⁵ Pierre (2002, p. 6).

Yet, the sports analogy eventually fails us, at least in the case of stability operations following a conventional conflict. Victorious players depart after their win during an athletic contest, commitment free and with no need to maintain ties. Members of today's coalitions rarely have the option of severing ties so easily. Victory on a battlefield may be the least demanding of the challenges confronting them. Theirs will likely be the responsibility to govern or rebuild (if not both) a nation in the aftermath of conflict. Some members will indeed walk away, unwilling or unable to assist with the new challenges. Others, the United States and its closest partners among them, will find that choice impractical and immoral if not impossible. The desired ends may be less clear than they were during the combat just completed. This will challenge coalition leaders having to mold the capabilities of remaining members or the resources of those joining it anew. Dangers of internal friction and dissolution will loom as a greater threat than during the initial competition. The leaders' greatest challenges lay ahead.

It is to those challenges that the remainder of this monograph turns. Chapter Two briefly reviews the histories of two recent stability operations, that in East Timor involving a coalition initially headed by the Australian military and a second in the Balkans, where NATO served as the foundation for coalitions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Chapters following thereafter consider three aspects of coalition leadership, each selected because of its dramatic impact on collective success: coalition structure (Chapter Three), unity of command (Chapter Four), and the personal characteristics vital in those leaders (Chapter Five). The final chapter investigates the implications of those before with respect to future coalition undertakings. Discoveries made along the way include few surprises. Alliances and coalitions have, after all, received considerable attention in the past. It is to be expected that available references have, therefore, to some extent, addressed the inherent leadership challenges. It is in the analysis of how stability operations affect coalition leadership that a reader might find fresh nuance or original insights during consideration of lessons drawn from two case studies and from other of history's offerings. The extent of the challenges involved suggests that there is value in making those insights available to those who might be tasked as leaders in the future.

