

Lessons in coalition warfare: Past, present and implications for the future

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Abstract | Nations are increasingly choosing to conduct military operations alongside coalition partners despite the fact that coalition warfare is extremely difficult to prosecute. What can we learn from past and present coalitions that can better prepare soldiers and policymakers for the next multilateral military operation? Starting with the Napoleonic wars and continuing through to NATO in Afghanistan, this article explores some of the key coalition warfare challenges

as highlighted by a number of key scholars in the field. It concludes by drawing implications on planning and preparing for future multilateral operations.

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Introduction

I was introduced to the complexities and challenges of coalition warfare in 2007 when I joined the NATO Operations in Afghanistan desk in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Having been a think tank wonk before that assignment, I was already well acquainted with the strategic-level frictions that the NATO alliance has endured throughout its 60-year history. But I'd never had the opportunity to see how the Alliance performs when actually conducting military operations.

Therefore, it was with a combination of intellectual curiosity and a 'can-do' attitude that I visited Afghanistan for the first time. During that trip, I spent time at the US embassy, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Headquarters and visited a number of other compounds in and around Kabul. It was the intellectual equivalent of drinking from a fire hose. Every detail of the mission seemed more complicated than it ought to be. Take, for example, traveling from the US embassy compound to ISAF headquarters. The facilities are situated approximately 200 m from each other, but at the time I was required to don body armor and be driven in an up-armored vehicle to get between the two.

Not only was it difficult to travel between meetings, it was also difficult to determine who were the right people to actually meet *with*. Determining who was doing what, to whom, and how, was nearly impossible. At that time it was generally agreed that success in Afghanistan required the correct application of the 'Three D's' of national security policy instruments: defense, diplomacy and development. Thus, many of the nations involved in Afghanistan deployed civilian governance and development experts, as well as peacekeeping and stability operations forces. Yet whereas the military was expected to report through the ISAF and NATO chain of command (a reporting chain that was somewhat confusing due to the fact that two parallel missions existed – Operation Enduring Freedom and ISAF), civilian elements would report back to capitals. And, as it turned out, there were often considerable differences of opinion on how to best go about the mission between the various authorities in question.

Further complicating matters: the myriad international organizations and non-governmental organizations operating in Afghanistan. The United Nations, European Union and the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe each had missions with their own mandates. And,

of course, the Afghan government also had its own perspective on what needed to be accomplished. I distinctly remember thinking that if I had tried to draw an organization chart it would undoubtedly resemble a hairball.

My trip culminated in a meeting with one of the Generals in ISAF headquarters. He had been slogging through the daily grind in Afghanistan for 11 months by the time I met him; he was tired. I asked him what I could do from my perch in Washington to help him. He looked at me carefully, took a deep sigh and said, 'I just don't know. I've always been taught that there are nine principals of warfare, and ISAF violates just about all of them'. It was then that it really sunk in: managing and operating in a military coalition is really, *really* hard.

During my tenure on the ISAF desk, I learned that the NATO operation in Afghanistan is a coalition requiring extraordinary coordination and care at all levels: between capitals, within Brussels, around Kabul and in dusty villages. Building cohesion – strategic, operational or tactical – is not easy, even among the closest of allies. Add to this the extraordinary challenge of performing security operations against a resilient enemy while simultaneously building the capacity of the Afghan government. The sheer enormity of the task – 'win' in Afghanistan while managing these multifaceted dynamics – makes one wonder how on earth military commanders have been able to deliver any success at all.

Fast forward a couple years. The United Kingdom publishes its Strategic Defence and Security Review (2010) and the United States publishes its National Security Strategy (2010). Despite the fact that the prosecution of ISAF has been (by many accounts) an extraordinary headache, both countries underscored their preference to prosecute their military objectives in a coalition context. The United Kingdom's Strategic Defence and Security Review notes the MoD will act in ways that 'strengthen mutual dependence with key allies and partners who are willing and able to act, not least to make our collective resources go further and allow nations to focus on their comparative advantages' (Her Majesty's Government 2010, p. 10). Likewise, the US National Security Strategy notes, 'Alliances are force multipliers: through multinational cooperation and coordination, the sum of our actions is always greater than if we act alone' (The White House, 2010, p. 41).

Thus, it appears that military coalitions will be a feature of the international security landscape for the foreseeable future. It therefore behooves us to spend some time exploring the unique features of this complicated way of warfare. Although there are certainly a number of important advantages to coalitions – aggregation of forces and international political legitimacy being two important ones – coalitions always come with their own baggage. As we will see through this review, the multilateral prosecution of warfare always adds an often-overlooked layer of complexity that can have a significant, negative impact on operations if not managed carefully. Adapting to and overcoming the enemy is difficult enough; adapting to and overcoming one's coalition partners is exponentially more so. Indeed, as Churchill once quipped, 'there is at least one thing worse than fighting with Allies – and that is fighting without them' (Military-quotes.com, 1874).

Warfare via coalition will never be an easy affair. It will always be frustrating; allies and partners will *always* bring their own sovereign perspective to the fight. That said, we do not have to doom ourselves to endless exercises in frustration. By seriously studying and learning from the dynamics of coalition warfare at strategic and operational (and even in some instances tactical) levels, we can better allow our military men and women to focus their attention on taking the battle to the enemy ... instead of each other.

Each of the books surveyed in this article looks at particular aspects of coalition warfare, both past and present. Three are more historically oriented; the other three discuss the particular challenges of the contemporary NATO ISAF coalition. All of them point to theoretical and historical lessons that are important to be learned, lest we be doomed to repeat the same coalition management mistakes.

This review will therefore proceed in a somewhat unorthodox manner. Rather than simply proceeding book by book and drawing out the key themes from each, it will instead draw out principles and lessons in a historically iterative fashion. Put simply, I will use J.P. Riley's 'Napoleon and the World War of 1813: Lessons in Coalition Warfighting' as a historical mirror against which I will reflect on those scholarly works describing more contemporary coalition experiences. It may seem an odd choice: much of Riley's book explores the details and chronologies of the various campaigns in question – with somewhat less rigor applied to the extrapolation of key lessons drawn from the campaign. However, I do so for three reasons.

First, it is helpful for scholars and policy practitioners alike to understand the similarities and differences in coalition warfare between past and present experiences. Much of what we ascribe to the contemporary coalition experience as 'new' is actually the latest expression of centuries-old coalition dynamics. As Riley (2000) writes,

'The grand alliance of 1813 in Central Europe is particularly interesting because it is a prototype of all modern coalitions, with all their troubles. Indeed when one reviews the command relationships, and the fundamental disagreements of its members in terms of political ambition, it is hard to believe that it survived its first encounter with the enemy' (p. 4). Second, the other authors in this survey more closely examine specific aspects of coalition warfare that Riley addresses in broad sweeps: culture, strategic incoherence, unity of command and so on. Thus, it makes sense to use Riley's work as a backdrop against which we can compare other author's interpretations of the contemporary coalition experience.

The third reason for using Riley's work as a mirror pertains to his own experience managing coalitions in wartime. Riley had a distinguished military career that placed him in the heart of organizations that managed contemporary coalition dynamics. He served in Northern Ireland, the former Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan – many of those postings in command positions – before he retired. And it is clear from his book that he very much explored the coalitions of 1813 with his own hard-won experience at strategic and operational levels in mind. Yet extrapolating from his detailed blow-by-blow analysis of the different campaigns, Riley raises some interesting strategic-level points to ponder about the construction and operation of military coalitions informed by his own practical experience. Indeed, Riley makes assertions that are eerily reminiscent of my conversation in Kabul.

Riley closely scrutinizes one year during the Napoleonic wars (1813) and the three different theaters in which military campaigns took place. By drawing interconnections between the three theaters (Central Europe, the Mediterranean and Canada/the United States), he builds a detailed picture of the interplay of coalition dynamics at operational and strategic levels and how they eventually translated into the defeat of Napoleon during the sixth coalition. Riley (2000) writes, '... however great a bogeyman Napoleon was then, he continues to arouse interest not just because of his military genius, but because in the situation of his opponents, the allies of 1813, can be seen problems which mirror those which continue to be experienced today. In particular, their incomplete success in agreeing war aims, and the effect this had on operational effectiveness, has for example been seen among the members of NATO in Bosnia before the Dayton Agreement of 1995' (p. 436).

The Napoleonic Wars

Before proceeding further, however, it is useful to reacquaint ourselves with the Napoleonic wars and their context. It took no less than seven coalitions over 12 years (1803–1815) to finally defeat Napoleon (Rothenberg and

Keegan, 2000, p. 16). Historians have attributed his success to a variety of explanations including (but not limited to): Napoleon's own military genius, brilliant leadership, comprehension of the industrial revolution and its implications for the military arts, advances in technology, and conscription. Yet Napoleon also comprehended – and took advantage of – the strategic and operational level disconnects between the allies in the coalitions that opposed him. During the first through the fifth coalitions, conflicting views on the ultimate European post-war end prevented some allies from going 'all in'. For example, differences of opinion existed on whether the ultimate aim of the war was to depose Napoleon or merely constrain him. These differences of opinion were ultimately rooted in diverging notions of what was required to restore the balance of power on the Continent (Riley, 2000). This created cracks between the coalition partners that were relatively easy to exploit. Indeed, Napoleon is quoted as saying, 'If I must make war, I prefer it to be against a coalition' (Holsti *et al.*, 1973, p. 22).

It was only after Napoleon's disastrous debacle in Russia during 1812 that the sixth coalition was able to put its strategic-level differences aside and concentrate on the task of defeating Napoleon, which is where Riley's book begins: the year 1813. And as Riley notes, at the beginning of 1813 it was by no means certain that the Allies would be able to effectively challenge Napoleon. Even though he was bitterly defeated during the Russian campaign in 1812, Napoleon's advantages were considerable in the beginning of 1813. He still commanded significant swathes of territory from which he could draw conscripts to replace those forces lost in Russia. Furthermore, Napoleon's very presence on the battlefield was worth 'two corps' worth of troops. He still loomed large over Europe and his eventual defeat was by no means certain.

Coalition Formation

As Riley outlines, both Britain and Russia observed Napoleon's still-considerable might and (once again) determined that defeating him would require the aggregation of a several different nation's military capabilities. And time was of the essence; serious delays would play to Napoleon's advantage, as he needed time to reconstitute his forces. Thus, during the first half of 1813, significant effort was applied toward overcoming continental skepticism (and, in particular, Austrian resistance) toward overthrowing Napoleon. Key to this effort: British financing. Britain allocated upwards of 10 million GBP to the formation and maintenance of the coalition on the continent – an extraordinary sum at the time.

From Riley's discussion, we can draw a couple of key themes from the experience in 1813. First, the powers opposing Napoleon recognized the limitations of their own

strength and concluded they must form a coalition with other like-minded powers if they were to have any chance at defeating him. No one nation had the military strength to break Napoleon's forces; they had to aggregate their capabilities. Second, the threat Napoleon posed was both apparent and immediate. And while there was some quibbling among allies during the early portions of 1813 about the post-war end state, these concerns were ultimately subordinated in favor of finally defeating the threat Napoleon posed to continental stability. The practical upshot: the threat was immediate, and the allies *had* to work together in a coalition if they wanted a prayer at beating Napoleon.

Do those conditions exist today? As with just about anything when it comes to strategic studies, the answer is both yes and no. The United States, for example, does not need to operate through a coalition; it has enough military might to be able to prosecute military missions largely independent of Allies and partners. Thus, if capability aggregation is not a requirement for military success, why bother building a coalition?

This brings us to Sarah Kreps' book, 'Coalitions of Convenience: United States Military Interventions after the Cold War'. Kreps begins her study by asking why contemporary coalitions are formed in the first place. Kreps (2011) starts with the 'straightforward observation that even if a multilateral coalition confers legitimacy and creates opportunities for burden-sharing, pursuing a multilateral response is more time-consuming, less reliable and more limiting than operating alone' (p. 6). Normative arguments put forward in the literature suggest that coalitions are forged in order to enhance the international legitimacy of a mission. By contrast, structural realists argue that powerful states are disinclined to form coalitions – she quotes Max Boot as saying 'power breeds unilateralism' (Kreps, 2011, p. 5). Quite simply, both arguments cannot be true without significant theoretical reworking, which is ultimately Kreps' project.

Kreps argues that there are two primary determinants of whether a state will seek allies and partners in the prosecution of military operations. 'The two main factors are (i) a state's time horizon, which is a function of the directness of the threat, and (ii) the operational commitment, or how resource-intensive the intervention is expected to be' (Kreps, 2011, p. 6). With respect to the first criterion, the less immediate and direct a threat is, the greater the likelihood that nations will pursue a military objective through a coalition. By contrast, nations are more likely to go it alone when faced with a more immediate threat, such as that underscored by the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001.

Yet the actual anticipated costs of a given intervention certainly plays a role in national decisions to pursue

objectives through coalitions or go it alone. Much like we saw during the Napoleonic wars, when nations comprehend they do not have the military might to pursue an operation unilaterally, nations will opt to construct coalitions. 'By contrast, conflicts where the lead state is uncontested – in which it thinks it can win quickly or on the cheap – create fewer incentives to assemble a broad multilateral coalition' (Kreps, 2011, p. 8). On top of this theoretical framework, Kreps overlays variables such as international norms on the use of force, domestic politics and regional power influence on multilateralism versus unilateralism decisions, building a rather rich portrait of coalition building decision making.

At the time of writing this article, the United States is currently debating whether or not to intervene in Syria in response to Assad's use of chemical weapons. The Obama administration has articulated very narrow national security objectives – punitive strikes – and ruled out any long-term, boots-on-the-ground operation. The mission could easily be pursued quickly and unilaterally, and there are good arguments for why delays to conducting 'surgical strikes' only serve to embolden the Assad regime. Yet the Obama administration is going to great lengths to build an international coalition to pursue the mission. Thus, the Syria example (at present, at least) appears to challenge Kreps' formulation of whether to act multilaterally or unilaterally.

Even more interestingly, however, is how difficult it has been for the Obama administration to formulate and sustain the international coalition supporting punitive strikes. Britain's Parliament voted to abstain from participating in any military action – and the United Kingdom is America's closest ally. In the post-Cold War security environment, it has been taken as a given that the United States can construct coalitions to manage a given security threat. The Syria experience suggests that this is an assumption that should not be made so lightly in the future. The practical upshot: although the United States may want to operate through coalitions for political reasons, its ability to actually do so in the future is now in question.

Kreps' work begs another question: to what extent are her insights applicable to other states which choose to form and lead coalitions? Kreps admittedly scopes her discussion to focus on US decisions to build coalitions rather than taking a broader view. She therefore only briefly touches on these questions in her concluding sections, mentioning coalitions formed by other states, such as France, the United Kingdom or Australia. But ultimately, one wishes for a little more discussion on the subject. One wonders, for example, to what extent other nations today view time constraints and threat levels as the primary determinants of decisions to operate unilaterally versus multilaterally. With defense austerity measures translating into painful budgetary choices, nations are finding that they simply do not have the

choice *but* to operate through coalitions. Take Mali, for example. While France made the decision to quickly intervene, it immediately asked for support from its Allies and partners (Sanger and Schmitt, 2013, p. A8). The same is largely true of the Libya intervention (Erlanger, 2011, p. 5). Fiscal realities mean that for many, unilateralism versus multilateralism is an increasingly false choice.

Even in the US context, wherein the United States ostensibly has the resources to go it alone, its *de facto* posture is to operate through coalitions comprising the United Kingdom and Australia at a minimum. Yet the United States often provides the overwhelming bulk of resources for a given mission, meaning that other nation's participation in a coalition is often more a show of political solidarity than a contribution of military capability.

This raises an interesting point. National leaders often go to great pains to stress the number of countries (or flags) supporting an operation while downplaying the actual level of capability contributed. So how can one tell if a particular coalition is truly multilateral? Kreps suggests five criteria: the number of states, the percentage of lead state's troops relative to the coalition, the percentage of lead state's financial resources relative to the coalition, power asymmetries in the coalition and the presence of key regional actors. She then asks the question: Was 'participation highly multilateral along these dimensions outlined ... or did few if any states provide broad, materiel sanction?' (Kreps, 2011, p. 16). She further suggests that one should consider whether the lead state obtained authorization from a multilateral organization before conducting the mission. One can envision adding other criteria to the calculation, including whether the operation is taking place utilizing the command arrangements of a multilateral organization (such as NATO or the United Nations). Yet Kreps' criteria certainly provides a useful starting point in understanding whether an operation is a coalition in name only, or whether it is truly multilateral.

Culture in Coalition Warfare

Let's assume that policymakers have chosen to construct a genuinely multilateral coalition to address a common challenge. So far, so good. Yet political will is necessary – but not sufficient – to build a truly effective multinational force. Cultural differences among coalition partners are often significant enough to challenge a multilateral force's ability to achieve its military objectives. Questions of cultural frictions in coalitions are not new, although they appear to have received insufficient academic scrutiny thus far.

Back to the Napoleonic Wars and the sixth coalition. Riley obliquely observes the importance of culture in the formation and maintenance of coalitions. In 1813, the overwhelming majority of his forces were not French.

This was due to the losses incurred in Russia; the only manner in which Napoleon could reconstitute his forces was through conscription of annexed territories including Italy and Spain. Napoleon did his best to mitigate this dynamic through constructing multinational units led by French officers. Indeed, the only unit that was non-French led was that of the Polish Brigade, whose anti-Imperial instincts were on par with those of their French counterparts.

On the whole, non-French soldiers from annexed territories do not appear to have shared the same *esprit de corps* and love for Napoleon's leadership of most French conscripts, which did not help Napoleon's cause as his opponents grew in strength. This may be in large part due to the functions that Napoleon assigned his non-French forces. Comparing British-led versus French-led coalitions, Riley (2000) notes, 'Wellington always used his best British troops to cover a withdrawal, but in central Europe, as the campaign of 1813 drew to a close, we find the French client contingents being used, cynically, as rearguards' (p. 29).

On the Allied side, the formation of multinational units led to significant language barriers that complicated operational effectiveness. 'Such [multinational] formations may be highly desirable in terms of solidarity but they bring some significant practical problems to the field commander. Among these is likely to be language; most of the allies' business in Central Europe seems to have been conducted in the language of the enemy ... [f]rench' (Riley, 2000, p. 443).

Were these complications unique to the Napoleonic Wars? Gal Luft in his book 'Beer, Bacon and Bullets: Culture in Coalition Warfare from Gallipoli to Iraq' asks the question whether cultural differences among coalition partners can have a negative impact on military effectiveness when not carefully managed. Through an examination of several twentieth-century coalitions, he convincingly argues that the answer is yes. Culture shapes perceptions, which in turn affect decisions by coalition partners – for better or worse. Maintaining coalition cohesion therefore requires a fair degree of cultural sensitivity toward one's own allies at all levels.

It is in many ways a brave study, as scholars and practitioners alike often bristle against the notion that culture can help determine behavior. Yet just because the subject can be somewhat uncomfortable does not mean that the phenomenon – tension among allies – does not exist. The reason Luft's work is so accessible is that he treats culture (and its manifestations) as just one of the many variables that needs to be managed by military coalition leaders. Differences are a fact of life; failure to appreciate and carefully manage those differences can lead to battlefield failure. And Luft credibly backs up his assertions; through case studies of five coalitions during the twentieth century,

he shows the operational impact of successful – and unsuccessful – management of cultural dynamics.

What are the forms that these cultural differences can take? First, and perhaps most obvious, is language. Much as Riley points out with respect to the sixth coalition, the lack of shared language makes the transmission of battle orders across a multinational force a significant challenge. For example, despite the fact that Germany had invested considerable time and effort in bolstering its relationship with the Ottomans (including establishing German language schools in Turkey), the majority of those few Turkish officers who were bilingual spoke French. Another: the Austro-Hungarian army. The respective regiments within that military communicated in at least ten different languages, making it very difficult for officers to communicate orders to their subordinates. In some instances, troops could barely talk to each other (Luft, 2009).

Referencing literature associated with business and multicultural workforce management, Luft also delves into the differences between monochronic versus polychronic cultures. The former is associated with being highly organized and attentive to detail; it 'stresses scheduling, concentration on one thing at a time, and an elaborate code of behavior built around promptness in meeting obligations and appointments. Schedules in this culture are sacred and time commitments are taken very seriously' Luft, 2009, p. 17). Polychronic cultures, by contrast, are less focused on time management and more focused on building relationships and human interaction. This obviously becomes extremely significant in a military context, as precision of timing is often a prerequisite for battlefield success. Once again, Luft's exploration of the German-Ottoman coalition is instructive; both sides became extremely frustrated with the other due to failure to appreciate these fundamentally different approaches to time management.

Another interesting aspect of culture and its impact on the battlefield: religiosity and a nation's appetite for risk. 'Militaries from societies that value martyrdom and self-sacrifice usually enjoy greater freedom of operation than those from societies where individual life is sacred' (Luft, 2009, p. 23). It is, of course, disputable whether religiosity is the cause – or the expression – of this kind of risk tolerance. But differences in risk tolerance can have important operational- and tactical-level impacts on issues such as: prisoner treatment, rules of engagement, attitudes toward civilian casualties, torture and abuse and so on. Luft explores this dynamic in more detail as he examines the coalition between the US and the Chinese Army under Chiang Kai-shek. After detailing some horrific anecdotes pointing toward a callous approach to human life at the time, Luft (2009) goes on to argue that Chinese '[o]fficers had no problem sacrificing their troops as long as they knew that they would be replaced. Nor were Chinese commanders concerned at all with the welfare of their soldiers'

(p. 135). Another source of difference that is somewhat related to religiosity: attitudes toward the future. Individuals hailing from cultures that tend to believe in one's own power to shape the future are more likely to engage in careful, detailed planning. By contrast, those cultures (or perhaps, more precisely, military leaders) that believe that fate is predetermined – and therefore so are battle outcomes – will have less incentive to spend considerable effort planning an operation.

But differences do not necessarily equate to frictions. Indeed, there are a number of examples of reasonably effective coalition partnerships – notably the Japanese and British before World War II. Seeking to illuminate the sources – and symptoms – of cultural friction, Luft offers three hypotheses that can help explain the emergence of culture-oriented tensions between coalition partners. First, 'the level of exposure of military organizations to other cultures in the pre-coalition stage determines their ability to minimize cross-cultural tension with other coalition partners' (Luft, 2009, p. xvii). Second, 'the disparity of power between the partners can cause the senior partner to show less cultural sensitivity toward the junior partner' (Luft, 2009, p. xviii). And finally (and, as Luft admits, the most problematic), 'the general attitudes of the home society toward the culture of the coalition partner could percolate into the collective consciousness of military personnel and hence affect their ability to tolerate the cultural differences of their allies' (Luft, 2009, p. xviii). Simply put, it seems that frictions emerge when one or another coalition partner fails to appreciate and respect the other's cultural norms and taboos.

So how has NATO ISAF fared on this count? ISAF has invested significant time and energy into understanding its Afghan counterparts through initiative such as the Human Terrain Teams. Rightly so. And on balance (and despite the snarky comments that are a fact of life in any coalition operation) leaders have done reasonably well when it comes to understanding the cultural differences among coalition partners. This is not without reason. Luckily, the NATO allies have spent the past 60 years working on improving the interoperability of their forces through joint training, exercising and the establishment of multinational commands. However, it must be noted that in the wake of budget cuts associated with the 'peace dividend' at the end of the Cold War, the priority that was once placed on joint and multinational exercises has diminished. Some infrastructure remains, but it can certainly be expanded upon and improved. And indeed, there are promising signs that the NATO allies have every intention of doing so. A recent proposal to rotate US Army Brigade Combat Teams through Europe in order to conduct joint operational-level training is one such initiative, although one wonders if it will survive budget cuts.

Throughout Luft's discussion of culture and its impact on coalition operations, one is reminded of relatively recent initiatives within the US Department of Defense to 'Build Partnership Capacity', or 'BPC'. Faced with global interests and diminishing resources, the concept as currently configured is to train foreign forces in peacetime for three purposes: (i) build military-to-military relationships in order to build trust among individuals from each nation's armed forces; (ii) help ensure that host nation forces are best prepared to manage security threats within their borders; and (iii) improve interoperability to facilitate the easier operation of military coalitions. Luft's book certainly highlights the need to become more culturally savvy – and BPC is one mechanism through which US armed forces can become more so. However, Luft's exploration of the German-Ottoman coalition gives one some pause when compared with contemporary BPC efforts. Essentially, German forces engaged in a program that had many similarities to our own BPC initiatives; they had officer exchanges, invested in infrastructure, and trained Ottoman forces to understand and implement German military planning practices. Yet on the whole, these efforts were not particularly successful. Despite the fact that Atatürk spent time on an exchange in Berlin, he did not feel any particular sympathy or affinity with his German colleagues. Indeed, the Ottomans grew resentful of their patron, and in many instances could not effectively collaborate on the battlefield. Indeed, as Luft (2009) notes, 'in fact, there is no correlation between the length of peacetime cooperation and the quality of the cooperation [among coalition partners]' (p. 240).

It is therefore the quality of cross-cultural interaction that matters, not the quantity. And if that is the case, how should a nation with global interests like the United States prepare its military for working with coalition partners? Among other recommendations, Luft suggests a combination of joint exercises, training and – crucially – selecting general and flag officers with the patience and savvy (and one assumes a high degree of intestinal fortitude) for coalition leadership positions. Indeed, those leaders who have been able to comprehend and patiently work through cultural differences among partners are usually able to successfully prosecute coalition operations. And interestingly, this is a lesson that rings true across history. As Riley (2000) points out, '[a]t the end of the day, the personal qualities of the allied field commander may well be the major factor in determining the success or failure of a coalition force at the operational level' (p. 443).

Unity of Command

Which is a nice segue back to the Napoleonic Wars. Given his experience commanding in military coalitions, it is hardly surprising that Riley spends time considering the

political-level interference in the conduct of the Grand Alliance's military operations. And he appears to grudgingly accept that this interference is a fact of life when it comes to coalition operations, for good or ill. 'Operational plans may ... be subject to political interference and it seems that Allied field commanders must be prepared to fend this off' (Riley, 2000, p. 442). He goes on to detail the experiences of Wellington (who had to communicate daily with his political masters in London) and Schwartzberg (who had to grapple with Tsar Alexander's interference that produced both negative and positive outcomes at different stages of the campaign). This interference can become doubly complicated when multinational units are formed and fielded, as conflicting political directives can be ordered to the same fighting unit.

By contrast, Napoleon maintained a coalition in name only; in practice, he had near total authority over coalition troops and unity of his command. Napoleon did not have to contend with differing preferences and perspectives from coalition counterparts; 'there were no war councils', as Riley (2000, p. 23) notes. This unity of command was one of Napoleon's key advantages and certainly contributed to his campaign successes until at least 1813.

Yet Napoleon's experience appears to be the aberration, not the norm, and NATO ISAF is no exception. Rynning's (2012) quote of General David Richards is instructive: 'The problem is that of confusing and highly politicized command and control. The risk, and sometimes the result, is an incoherent and "Balkanized" operation' (p. 117).

All this is somewhat puzzling when one stops to think about it. Go to just about any military staff college around the world and one of the first things that will be impressed upon you is the importance of unity of command; of total command authority on the battlefield. This is important for a whole host of reasons. But probably the most important is this: unless you can order troops to do what you need them to do, when you need them to do it, it becomes rather difficult to win a war. We all recognize that unity of command is critically important. So why is it so hard to achieve in practice?

In their forthcoming book, Steven Saideman and David Auerswald apply principal-agent theory to understanding the unity of command challenge. Their analytic starting point: NATO ISAF comprises forces from a number of different states, each with their own national chains of command. When push comes to shove, which chain of command actually matters more? The formally agreed-upon structures associated with the NATO operation? Or the more informal control mechanisms exercised by leaders in national capitals?

Perhaps unfortunately for operational commanders, the authors argue that despite the fact that ISAF has its own formal chain of command through NATO, the informal control mechanisms exercised by leaders in national

capitals is often more compelling to military leaders. This is where Auerswald and Saideman's use of principal-agent theory becomes quite interesting. 'In its simplest form, principal-agent theory focuses on the problem of delegated authority and compliance with orders' (Auerswald and Saideman, forthcoming, p. 67). In a NATO context, principals are decision makers in national capitals who can give orders; agents are military forces operating in theater required to execute orders. As any manager can attest, ensuring that a basic principal-agent relationship works smoothly can be quite challenging. When applied to the coalition in Afghanistan, the level of complexity increases almost exponentially. Overall, 49 nations are involved in ISAF at the time of writing, each with their own principal-agent relationship with their own military forces. And as if this was not complicated enough, the use of NATO command structures means that ISAF commanders actually have to report to two authorities – their national capital plus the North Atlantic Council. The existence of two principals (NATO and national capital) is called a 'hybrid' principal-agent relationship and the practical upshot is that military commanders have to report to two authorities. Given the fog and friction of war, it is easy to imagine situations in which commanders receive incongruous – if not incompatible – orders from the two different principals.

So which reporting chain matters more? Despite its more informal nature, Auerswald and Saideman argue that on balance directives from national capitals ultimately matter more than those from NATO. And this is for reasons that, upon reflection, are pretty obvious from a 'management 101' perspective. National capitals are able to select and promote its military leaders; NATO cannot. National capitals are also able to limit the authority and capabilities of its military leaders. 'Significant restrictions on agent behavior, of one form or another, were enacted by virtually every national contingent operating in Afghanistan. Commanders going into the field were usually given a set of instruction from their home government informing them of the limits of their authority; when they could act on their own judgment, when they must say no to multilateral commanders, and when they needed to call home for authorization of specific operations' (Auerswald and Saideman, forthcoming, p. 76).

To ensure that it remains comfortable with its military commander's actions, national capitals often engage in rather intrusive oversight. Crucially, national capitals have control over matters such as 'an agent's tenure in office, promotion, portfolio of responsibilities and budget' (Auerswald and Saideman, forthcoming, p. 77). NATO does not. The upshot is that capitals can powerfully incentivize its military commanders to adhere to its directives in a way that NATO cannot.

In policy circles, these scoping directives are called ‘caveats’. When a given nation signs up to perform a particular task or mission, they often articulate a series of restrictions on the employment of forces. And as Auerswald and Saideman point out, caveats can be formal (an explicitly stated set of conditions at the time of pledging forces to a given mission) or informal (restrictions on the use of force that are more privately communicated to leaders of national military elements). The question therefore becomes; Why do some capitals impose explicit caveats on their forces while others utilize more informal mechanisms to assert control? And indeed, why do different nations have different degrees of risk tolerance?

Auerswald and Saideman’s conclusions are a nice counterpoint to Luft’s discussion of culture and risk aversion. Essentially, they examine the characteristics of ‘principals’ (in this case, national governments) and how these characteristics might have a bearing on the degree of risk nations are willing to assume in the prosecution of coalition operations. One characteristic they explore pertains to the type of governing institution. Is the government in question comprised of a coalition of different parties? Or does it have a strong central authority? They argue that a government with a high degree of concentration of executive power is more likely to take operational risks than a decentralized system. In other words, a government formed through a multi-party coalition is less likely to take risks; risks can lead to the defection of a crucial coalition partner and bring down a government – which is essentially what happened in the Netherlands in 2009 *vis-à-vis* its Afghanistan deployment.

Another characteristic they examine pertains to the ideologies of parties that are in power. Building on Brian Rathbun’s work on foreign policy preferences of left- and right-leaning political parties, they ask whether the parties in power more concerned with the promotion of values and human welfare (Rathbun, 2004). Or are they more concerned with protecting the national interest? These ideological starting points can, in turn, impact the degree of ambivalence toward the use of force and ultimately whether risks should be taken in combat.

The authors then turn to case studies that are grouped into four categories: presidential systems, single-party parliamentary governments, coalition party governments and non-NATO members and examine the principal-agent relationship in each. Crucially, they explore the kinds of control mechanisms each type of system tends to utilize when contributing forces to a multinational coalition. They write, ‘Presidential states are adept at using agent selection, for example, to control their deployed military forces. Coalition governments tend to use restricted delegation (i.e., caveats)’ (Auerswald and Saideman, forthcoming, p. 106).

Put simply, Auerswald and Saideman’s exploration of national participation in NATO ISAF is both an interesting and extremely useful explanation of the structural challenges associated with coalition cohesion. National sovereignty makes true unity of command as traditionally understood in a coalition context a pipe dream, at best. Military commander will always have to grapple with political-level interference in their operations (which, on balance, is probably not a bad thing, all things considered). As Riley (2000) writes regarding the Grand Coalition opposing Napoleon, ‘... Schwartzberg often found that his own orders were being contradicted by other orders from national commanders, and which the system of liaison officers instituted by the British only partially solved since it was designed chiefly to provide information to London’ (p. 443).

Unity of Effort: The ‘Comprehensive Approach’

Thus far, we have examined the military and operational aspects of coalition cohesion and sources of friction. Yet our experience of post-Cold War intervention operations (the Balkans, Africa, Iraq and Afghanistan) largely speaks to an enduring need for combined, integrated civilian-military approaches to post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction. Putting aside for a moment the question of whether the West should have been involved in these campaigns in the first instance, recent experience suggests that success only translates into lasting strategic effects if post-conflict dynamics are well managed.

So how to manage these dynamics? Many argue that is not enough to kill or capture the enemy. According to this line of argument, focusing on the ‘kinetic’ aspects of a mission often produces the ‘whack-a-mole’ effect: you hit one, but others keep popping up. Logically, therefore, intervening forces must also work to ensure that local populations are not motivated to join the opposing force (which is essentially what defeat looks like in these contingencies). And right or wrong (about which there is considerable debate), the logic for the past decade can roughly be summed up as follows: improvements in governance and increasing standards of living through economic development will motivate local populations to support the ‘legitimate’ government rather than join an insurgency or other destabilizing groups. It was these sorts of questions that drove policymakers and operators on both sides of the Atlantic to carefully study and debate the principals and execution of counterinsurgency and stability operations doctrines. The shorthand for the strategy eventually became ‘clear, hold and build’.

This essentially means that military force is used in the first instance to ‘clear’ an area, or remove nasty elements from a local population. Once that is accomplished, ‘quick impact’ development assistance is used to help restore

order and calm the affected community – the ‘hold’ phase. Eventually, longer-term assistance (which can be in the form of improvements in agriculture, infrastructure, capacity of local governance) is delivered, which is the ‘build’ phase. Unfortunately, the West’s track record when it comes to clearing, holding and building – particularly with respect to Afghanistan – is somewhat fraught.

Quite apart from questions of whether these activities were properly executed, there are both structural and strategic reasons for the incoherence. Auerswald and Saideman (forthcoming) discuss how difficult it is to get meaningful unity of command when it comes to the military dimensions of coalition operations. However, as Williams (2011) points out, many of the nations participating in NATO ISAF have their own, largely autonomous, civilian operations as well. For example, the United Kingdom, Canada and the Netherlands all deployed civilians from their foreign and development ministries to work alongside (to varying degrees) military forces on the ground in order to ‘hold and build’ after the military ‘cleared’ an insurgency-dominated area. But these civilian elements were (and are) not a part of the NATO ISAF chain of command; instead, they report directly to their respective national capitals for direction, guidance and authority for their activities. Civilians were obliged, but not forced, to coordinate their activities with their military counterparts in ISAF. For better or worse, working relationships and interpersonal skills between civilian and military colleagues became critically important to the overall success in the campaign.

Structurally speaking, therefore, many nations’ presence in Afghanistan resembled a hybrid principal–agent relationship on steroids. Each nation’s military forces received instruction from their national capital (via their respective ministry of defense) as well as from the NATO chain of command. And each nation’s civilian personnel reported directly to their own capital via the ministries (foreign, development or, in some instances, stabilization) they hailed from. Many nations’ missions in Afghanistan had multiple principals and multiple agents: a muddle indeed.

This dilemma was quickly recognized. Under Operation Enduring Freedom, the United States established ‘Provincial Reconstruction Teams’ or ‘PRTs’. In the US construct, PRTs were commanded by a military officer and augmented by one or two persons from the US State Department or United States Agency for International Development (or both). The civilian augmentees provided advice to the military commanders, and had the ability to allocate monies for post-conflict reconstruction projects such as building schools or digging wells. As Operation Enduring Freedom shrank and ISAF expanded, other nations adopted their own version of the PRT construct. By contrast, the United Kingdom’s PRT, situated in Lashkar

Gah, was civilian-led and largely staffed by civilians. The co-location of civilian and military personnel certainly helped facilitate the execution of ‘clear, hold, build’ strategies. But the principal–agent dilemma was (and still is) present; differences of perspective between representatives from different governmental agencies often led to significant, frustrating disagreements on PRT priorities and tasks (see McNerney, 2005). As Williams (2011) writes, ‘If there was progress on the ground, it was only due to personalities’ (p. 97).

Thus, despite a number of very good attempts to bring coherence to the civilian and military aspects of the mission in Afghanistan, structural impediments remained. This begs the question: Why not just change the command structures? Why not require civilians to report to – rather than coordinate with – their military colleagues and through the ISAF chain of command? This brings us to the strategic reasons for the incoherence between civilian and military efforts. Put simply, NATO is a military organization, responsible for military tasks. And many NATO ISAF contributing states have been (and still are) deeply skeptical about military forces assuming civilian (governance and development) tasks. Rynning (2012) writes, ‘NATO allies knew that things in Afghanistan could not easily be fitted into separate categories (security, development and governance) and that someone had to look across the board and lead, but they were not willing to establish a NATO lead’ (p. 167). So if NATO should not be doing ‘civilian’ tasks, who should? As Rynning (2012) points out, particularly during 2007–2008, many argued that the United Nations ought to take the lead in coordinating the ‘civilian’ aspects of the mission alongside ISAF (p. 153).

The eventual solution to this problem was an attempt to create a strategic-level version of the PRT. Doing so would create an interface between the civilian and military aspects of the mission, but personalities still mattered. This led to the appointment of Kai Eide as the United Nations Senior Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG). The hope was that Eide would be able to organize the civilian efforts in Afghanistan under the auspices of the United Nations and then coordinate those activities with NATO ISAF. It did not work terribly well. As Rynning points out, shortly after Eide assumed the role of SRSG he had a choice to align himself more closely with ISAF or the Afghan Government. He chose the latter, and de-prioritized building unity of effort between ISAF and the United Nations (Rynning, 2012). Eide’s relationship with the Commander of ISAF, General McKiernan, quickly became fractious; Eide eventually became irrelevant.

The SRSG experiment rested on a number of assumptions, some of which proved to be dubious, at best. First, that the United Nations was willing to take the lead on the civilian aspects of the mission. This is

somewhat questionable, given that Afghanistan was not on the list of the United Nations' 'top ten' priorities at the time. Second, that the United Nations was capable of taking the lead. While the United Nations had a number of offices around the country, it was chronically understaffed; more meaningfully extending its presence around the country – and coordinating activities in Kabul – required significantly more manpower than it actually had. And third, that the United Nations was willing to coordinate its activities closely with ISAF. Both Rynning and Williams argue in their respective texts that this last assumption was perhaps the most dubious of all. As Williams (2011) writes:

As NATO became more willing to broaden its approach ... it became ever more apparent that it had no real ally on the ground The UN needed to work with NATO, but at the same time there were several voices in the organization that kept saying that the UN could not get close to NATO since the UN was a civilian organization and NATO was a military one. (p. 97)

Indeed, Williams (2011) continues: 'As the situation in Afghanistan currently demonstrates, international organizations with what would seem to be shared values are currently "interlocking" rather than "interlocking"' (p. 88). Despite the fact that many of the major Western powers argued strenuously for the creation of the SRSG in order to improve civilian–military unity of effort, the concept failed to live up to its promise for both structural and strategic reasons. And the end result was that NATO ISAF has been given all the responsibility and accountability for success in Afghanistan without any of the commensurate resources and authorities. As he discusses the SRSG episode, Rynning (2012) instructively quotes NATO Secretary General De Hoop Scheffer, 'the problem with the comprehensive approach was and is that NATO cannot steer the process. The leadership should be clearly in the hands of the U.N.: NATO does not have the steering wheel in its hands' (p. 153). These are cautionary words indeed when contemplating civilian–military operations in coalition interventions.

Unity of Purpose

If nothing else, the Afghanistan experience tells us how hard it is to achieve *de facto* (as opposed to *de jure*) unity of command among militaries in a multinational coalition. Compounding the problem: the need for civilian–military synchronization to achieve campaign objectives, as this kind of unity of effort is even, is even more difficult to achieve. This begs the question: Has this been due to the structural and strategic reasons already discussed? Or is this incoherence in military and civilian spheres

indicative of deeper issues confronting the coalition partners?

To begin exploring that question, we must return to the Napoleonic Wars. Recall that as it was being assembled, it appeared that the sixth coalition might be doomed to fail, much like its predecessors. Despite the defeat in Russia, on balance the odds were still stacked in Napoleon's favor at the outset of 1813. What changed? Riley argues that one of the key factors leading to Napoleon's defeat: the Allies during the sixth coalition were able to achieve enough *unity of purpose* to allow the coalition to properly function. True, there were some disagreements on what the post-war future would look like, but as 1813 progressed, the purpose eventually became clear: defeat Napoleon at all costs and restore the Bourbon Monarchy.

The nations of the sixth coalition were therefore willing to subordinate their own various national objectives in favor of coalition cohesion because 'the need for unity outweigh[ed] all considerations of individual gain' (Henry Kissinger, as quoted in Riley, 2000, p. 437). The coalitions before 1813 lacked this overriding strategic purpose, and were therefore quite susceptible to the centrifugal forces that plague coalitions. This is why both the Allies and Napoleon recognized that 'when facing a coalition, several centres of gravity can be reduced to one by striking at the principal coalition partner. By this mean, the vital concept of allied unity – which in a coalition may actually be the centre of gravity than any physical aspect – may be shattered' (Riley, 2000, p. 445).

Napoleon knew this, and knew that the British constituted the center of gravity in the sixth coalition. He therefore spent considerable time attempting to compromise British influence on the continent. And having defeated five coalitions before 1813, Napoleon 'never appreciated that the unifying purpose behind the 6th coalition was stronger than the forces which divided its members and far stronger than that holding his empire together' (Riley, 2000, p. 446). The experience of the sixth coalition begs the question: Is the real key to coalition cohesion actually at the strategic level, wherein all nations agree to use their military forces in pursuit of a commonly shared and overriding purpose?

Which brings us full circle, back to the question of coalition formation in the first instance. Kreps tells us that the time horizons associated with a given threat, combined with the expected cost of an intervention, helps determine whether the United States, at least, will try to construct a coalition to address a threat. If a threat is imminent and overwhelming, the United States will be tempted to go it alone. But if the threat is less than imminent for a coalition leader, how much less imminent is that threat to other coalition partners? And what is the operational impact of these differences in threat perception? The specter Napoleon posed to the stability of Europe was the mortar that held

the bricks of the sixth coalition together; in World War II, Hitler's Germany ultimately performed a similar function, forcing the Allies to work together. But post-Cold War coalitions are largely formed to address threats that are not necessarily existential in nature. Even in Iraq in 2003 – wherein the international community was concerned about the possibility of a terrorist attack involving a nuclear weapon – the threat posed by Saddam was not *actually* existential (and indeed, many allies were deeply skeptical about that worst-case scenario) (Gordon and Shapiro, 2004). And while the events of September 11th, 2001 were both shocking and tragic, the very survival of the United States and its allies was not actually in question at the time. So the question becomes: Is it possible to have unity of purpose in a military coalition – and therefore true unity of effort – in the absence of overwhelming threats?

For the most part, the authors surveyed in this review suggest that in the absence of an overwhelming threat, as the difficulty and risk associated with a given mission increases, coalition cohesion decreases. Without an overwhelming and compelling reason to subordinate national-level interests in support of collective objectives in the face of significant risk, it is only a matter of time before fractures among coalition partners emerge. In other words, there is a limit to how much risk nations will take in support of objectives that are indirectly related to the national interest, which makes the need for strategic-level consensus on the purpose, goals and endstates of coalition operations even more important.

And therein lies the rub. Building consensus requires compromise. And compromise can lead to policies that constrain operational-level effectiveness. Bensahel (1999), a scholar on military coalitions and interoperability, calls this phenomenon the 'coalition paradox'. And as much as some might wish to blame this dynamic on the peculiarities of NATO politics, it is worth noting Bensahel's argument: if the 1991 Persian Gulf War had not been so swiftly concluded, the coalition might have fallen apart precisely because of the push-and-pull between strategic and operational levels.

Was NATO ISAF subject to this coalition paradox? Directly and indirectly, it seems that our authors believe it was. Auerswald and Saideman convincingly describe the lengths to which national capitals went in order to exert control over their military's operations. Extending their argument just a little, this implies a level of discomfort with stated NATO objectives and the respective ISAF commander's plans to accomplish them. The end result was the creation of both formal and informal caveats that reflected (and still reflect) the degree of national comfort or discomfort with the mission.

Rynning traces the evolution of the ISAF mission from 2001, and illustrates that the coalition paradox grew worse over time. The goals for ISAF agreed in Bonn in 2001 ultimately proved to be untenable, and NATO found itself

unable to extract itself from the Bonn vision. 'It is thus poor strategy to erect a Bonn/Karzai regime, consecrate it with a national development strategy, and then pretend that a dogged war can be made to fit into this ambition' (Rynning, 2012, p. 209). He goes on to argue that NATO ought to have paid more attention to the political basis for the war. This is especially true given the long duration of the campaign in Afghanistan. Dynamics on the ground shifted radically – from a peacekeeping mission in 2002–2004 to a full-blown counterinsurgency by 2009 – and the Alliance was unable to effectively adapt at the strategic level. Even those efforts to build strategic-level consensus among NATO ISAF nations (such as the Comprehensive Strategic Political Military Plan of 2008) rested on faulty assumptions that were enshrined in the Bonn Agreement. Rynning is ultimately arguing that the purpose of the war needed to be much more carefully constructed and subsequently revisited by the political leadership of NATO ISAF; doing so requires more than simply endorsing different revisions of military plans.

On this question, Williams leaves us wondering whether, absent meaningful unity of purpose, campaign coherence is a problem that can ever be solved. Throughout his book, he demonstrates the considerable differences of perspective on philosophical, strategic and operational matters between actors on the ground in Afghanistan. Europe and America have different perspectives on the use and utility of force that have important warfighting implications – especially when these perspectives do not neatly align when planning and conducting operations. Williams is making an important point: these differences make the fog of war even murkier in a civilian–military coalition operation like Afghanistan. His solution: embrace the fog through better networking. Unfortunately, while the US military is interested (at least, in my experience) in building those networks and connections, it is questionable whether other on-the-ground actors want to be associated with the US military.

Conclusion

With all the above in mind, it is no wonder that ISAF 'violated all nine principles of warfare' as my interlocutor described all those years ago. Coalition warfare is extremely hard, and requires careful coordination at all levels. And it appears that these dynamics have been present through several centuries of coalition warfare – it was only agreement that the threat posed by Napoleon was overwhelming that eventually led the sixth coalition to stick together. But past is prologue, not prediction. Looking forward, if we are to continue demanding our military forces work through coalitions, coordination is a necessary but insufficient solution.

Some things are unlikely to change. Sovereign states contribute forces to a coalition; each state, in turn, has its own appetite for risk. It is therefore highly unlikely that

all nations in a coalition will remove their caveats (both implied and explicit) because of principal-agent relationships. Both policymakers and battlefield commanders must understand that one can either have coalition partners with caveats, or no coalition partners at all. I, at least, think it unlikely that a future leader would choose the latter option.

However, just because caveats are a fact of life does not mean that more cannot be done to better facilitate coalition cohesion. Having read and contemplated the works surveyed in this article, it strikes me that more can be done to better prepare our respective militaries' men and women to operate in a multinational context. Culture, mindset, philosophy, national comparative advantages, doctrine, training and so on – all of these are dynamics that can lead to coalition friction. And all of these can be better managed through improvements in multinational training, exercising, doctrine development, coordinated procurement and so on. It behooves those nations who increasingly prefer (or will be increasingly required) to operate through coalitions to undertake a serious effort aiming to improve

interoperability between key partners and allies. And ideally, these efforts ought to take place in peacetime, before operations on the battlefield – just like any other aspect of military preparedness.

All too often, discussions of interoperability begin and end with developing common standards for widgets and technologies. Once again, improving technological interoperability is necessary but not sufficient. Rather, 'interoperability' ought to be considered holistically, across the forces from each nation. National defense establishments should be asking themselves what the implications of coalition warfare have for aspects of force planning, including doctrine, training, education, materiel, logistics, personnel and facilities. Interoperability is not simply a solution; it is a philosophy that ought to be applied across the force, in all domains – naval, air, ground. As NATO winds down its operations in Afghanistan at the end of 2014, it strikes me that it could usefully lead the Alliance in developing interoperability as a philosophy. Doing so will help ensure that our forces' frustrations are directed toward future enemies and adversaries, rather than each other.

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