

The 21st Century Force Multiplier: Public–Private Collaboration

For about the last decade, the U.S. government has been recruiting private business and non-profit collaborators to volunteer expertise, exchange information, and even operate together to enhance national security, provide humanitarian assistance, or promote economic development around the world. The main objective of such collaboration is to improve effectiveness. The federal government has worked to harness expertise it doesn't have—in the cyber arena, for example, by working with industry experts to help the U.S. government, its NATO allies, and the business community itself improve their cyber defenses. In the development field, Uncle Sam tapped into the operational experience of multinational businesses to bring clean water to poor communities in developing countries. With the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) leading the way, the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, and State, among others, have been steadily increasing collaboration with private entities. Indeed, the most recent National Security Strategy calls on the executive branch to work with the private sector, repeatedly referring to public–private partnerships.¹

Now, as government and private sector budgets tighten, working together and pooling resources serves a more immediate and overriding objective—achieving resource efficiency. Finite resources provide a compelling imperative for more and better public–private collaboration. Such collaboration—a voluntary interaction between governments and non-government entities where one or

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both parties draw upon the expertise of the other—does not necessarily involve a financial transaction or even a contract. But if they do, the idea is to share the resource burden between the government and outside interested parties. The private sector can volunteer resources that the government cannot afford. For example, the U.S. European Command was able to help facilitate the provision of cyber expertise for one of our Baltic allies this past year—on a voluntary basis—that would have been prohibitively expensive for most, if not all, European countries.

To be truly efficient, public-private partnerships need to be prioritized; right now, they aren't.

But to be truly efficient, public-private partnerships need to be prioritized within agencies or within the government. Right now, they aren't. They often involve working with the same companies or organizations, allowing the private sector (presumably with visibility across all collaboration with the government) to set priorities, rather than the government. Sometimes, projects are pursued because they are easy to execute, but not necessarily because the public-private collaboration will bring significant results aimed at addressing priority issues. Lack of

institutionalization—models, guidelines, dedicated staff, and training—also results in resources committed to “one-off” or ad hoc projects when the same amount of effort could result in a strategic long-term sustainable program.

Transparent, fair relationships between the government and private sector entities can harness non-governmental know-how, resources, and patriotism to help address the complex national security and foreign policy challenges of the day. To be most effective, however, the government needs to decide where it needs private sector assistance most and focus on those areas. It will also have to work to clarify the legal, regulatory, and policy parameters of such interactions. Agencies will need to improve the internal processes for organizing and implementing public-private collaboration. Finally, measures of effectiveness will need to be developed, improved, and used to inform ongoing efforts. If these tasks are accomplished, public-private collaboration can be a particularly timely variant on decades-long efforts to improve the functioning of the U.S. military and government agencies.

“Jointness” Evolves to “Whole-of-Society”

Fostering non-commercial relationships between the government and the organizations outside of it is one manifestation of a “whole-of-society”

approach to security. It is a step beyond the interagency “whole-of-government” concept and, when deliberately employed, can save the government money. For over a quarter of a century, since the passage of the landmark 1986 Goldwater–Nichols legislation, the U.S. military has been working to become more “joint,” to plan and execute military operations in a way that maximizes effectiveness and efficiency in order to achieve the objectives of the Department of Defense (DOD) and the commander-in-chief—as opposed to just one or more of the military services. Simultaneously, starting in the early 1990s, there was an increased tempo of peace and humanitarian operations, as well as the Clinton administration’s Presidential Decision Directive 56 (PDD-56), which mandated interagency planning. Agencies involved in international operations began to work on coordinating their efforts. Through the Bush administration, this expanded to include more agencies. In the wake of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, the concept of jointness was further extended to intelligence and domestic disaster recovery activities. Whole-of-government—the planning and implementation of policy and operations by all relevant agencies together—has become an accepted desirable way of achieving the federal government’s objectives.

Meanwhile, with globalization and the revolution in cyber communications, the actors and forces that determine our collective welfare and security proliferated, becoming more complex and intertwined. Increasingly, entities outside of governments have a determining, influential, or at least interested role in the dynamics of international relations and national security.

Partly due to this new environment, the U.S. government—DOD, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), the State Department, and USAID, among others—is working deliberately to harness private sector capabilities in its efforts to achieve national security, diplomatic, and development objectives. Meanwhile, the U.S. Southern Command, U.S. European Command, U.S. Northern Command, U.S. Pacific Command, U.S. Special Operations Command, and U.S. Africa Command all have full-time personnel dedicated to garnering efficiencies and fostering effectiveness for DOD by collaborating with the private sector—businesses, academic institutions, and non-profits. These activities do not involve contracts or money changing hands. Indeed, they are voluntary and come at negligible cost to the government.

In its entirety, the government has moved beyond the enduring—and still critical—paradigms of private enterprises, like the Merchant Marine or Red Cross, pitching in to contribute in times of war or humanitarian disaster in order to bring the full measure of the generosity and self-interest of our citizens to bear. It now seeks to cooperate in mutually-supportive ways with organizations that are already active in geographic or functional areas—such as logistics, internal

auditing, innovation, and entrepreneurship—to bring such skills to the government, international partners, and recipients of U.S. assistance. And this collaboration is often now intended to be enduring, not ad hoc.

Volunteers, such as the members of Business Executives for National Security (BENS), have worked at their own expense with the U.S. Southern Command, Special Operations Command, and others to study the business models of drug cartels and to make recommendations about how to counter illicit drug financing, logistics, and operations. At the request of the European Command, these businessmen and women have also provided advice to NATO forces in Afghanistan on contracting to counter corruption, and have helped the U.S. government and our NATO allies understand the extent of the Baltic States' vulnerability to cyber attack, something that would have serious implications for the NATO alliance.

Meanwhile, NGOs are increasingly working in tandem with the military on mutually agreed projects and objectives across the globe. Arzu, a Chicago-based NGO that is a significant foreign employer of Afghan women, and the non-profit Spirit of America have teamed up to sell “peace cords,” bracelets that symbolically and literally support U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan. Employment in Afghanistan generated by the sales of the cords creates an environment conducive to the success of those operations.

New small NGOs with less compunction about teaming with militaries are emerging—with Spirit of America breaking the paradigm. Instead of simply operating side-by-side government agencies, or on contract to them, Spirit of America was established in 2003 to explicitly address the needs which military personnel encountered among the Iraqi communities where they were deployed. This organization also responds specifically to requests from local citizens in Afghanistan that are forwarded by the U.S. military for items such as clothing, furniture, school supplies, and even a television studio. Dog Meets World, a small non-profit focused on public diplomacy and empowerment by getting photographs from volunteer photographers to children in developing countries, was linked to special operations forces in Afghanistan, with the objective of garnering Afghan goodwill for the special operators.

Since 2009, U.S. Southern Command's Navy component has conducted a humanitarian operation called “Continuing Promise,” which delivers construction services, medical training and care, and other donations to the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. Groups such as Operation Smile, Project HOPE, and Rotary International have all participated. Finally, Project Handclasp, a U.S. Navy initiative with a non-profit foundation that distributes donated private sector materials (e.g., ambulances and school supplies) as Navy ships pull into already scheduled port visits, is coordinating its efforts with several military combatant commands.

The intelligence community (IC) is even getting into the public–private partnership business. Among its many interactions with the private sector, the IC is in dialogue with domestic energy and infrastructure experts to help assess terrorist threats as well as foreign vulnerabilities and activities. Meanwhile, the State Department and USAID have created offices for global partnerships where the mission is to bring private sector resources—including financial—to bear on priorities identified by the secretary and administrator. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton put it, “The problems we face today will not be solved by governments alone. It will be in partnerships—partnerships with philanthropy, with global business, partnerships with civil society.”²

The intelligence community is even getting into the public–private partnership business.

Along with the military, the development community has been out in front in utilizing public–private partnerships. USAID’s Global Development Alliance (GDA), launched in 2001, has partnered with corporations, foundations, and non-governmental organizations to leverage the resources and expertise of each to further international development (global health, education, and economic growth). Among other initiatives, USAID has worked with The Coca-Cola Company, an entity with a stake in global water supply and quality, on projects in 13 countries. Wal-Mart and USAID are working together in Brazil to educate farmers about environmental sustainability. As of 2005, USAID claimed about 400 alliances with more than \$1.4 billion in funds and leveraging more than \$4.6 billion in partner resources.³ The Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR), which provides the “blueprint for diplomatic and development efforts,” declares, “We will embrace new partnerships that link the on-the-ground experience of our diplomats and development experts with the energy and resources of civil society and the scientific and business communities. . . we will build strategic public–private partnerships that draw on the ingenuity and resources of the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, foundations, and community-based organizations.”⁴

These new “whole-of-society” efforts initiated by government to work with the private sector are not restricted to the United States. EU officials assert, “Security is by definition cross-sectoral and cross-border, so you have to act externally to achieve internal security and vice versa.”⁵ In 2006, NATO adopted the “comprehensive approach,” which acknowledges the indispensable role organizations outside of government can play in addressing 21st-century security challenges, especially in conflict or post-conflict scenarios.

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This approach “is assumed to be more than merely bolting civilian instruments on to a military operation or vice versa. It is not enough for each organization involved to carry out its own mission—whether military, humanitarian or development-oriented—successfully. None of these activities can succeed in isolation; instead they must be consulted as part of an overall plan so that they support and reinforce one another.”⁶

Nonetheless, while there has been much talk of whole-of-society efforts, action has been slower. Old ways of governing, operating, or literally doing business have persisted. Entrepreneurial engagement has not burst forth to accompany the recognition of the need for more and deeper public-private collaboration. Perhaps the cost of changing—always difficult for individuals and organizations—has appeared to outweigh the perceived benefits.

The Case for Collaboration: Effectiveness and Efficiency

Public-private collaboration generally falls into several broad categories of activities: 1) sharing expertise; 2) exchanging information; and 3) executing projects and operations. Both parties benefit in tangible and intangible ways. For the government, the key advantage is access to expertise, analysis, skills, perspective, and resources not always available in the public sector. In the current fiscally-constrained environment, the benefits of such collaboration to the government are obvious. Efficiency—saving money and other resources—accrues, and with the added private sector skills, insights, and resulting innovation, so does effectiveness. Like their business counterparts, these public-sector practitioners manage people, finances, organizational change, and “back office” operations every day. Sharing best practices—or in some cases, the worst ones—can be educational for those who manage our national security entities.

The private sector also offers an agility not often found in government. One NGO representative working to help veterans explains, “If NGO programs prove less effective or [the] needs shift, NGO programs are easier to end than a government program.”⁷ As President Ronald Reagan quipped, “A government bureau is the nearest thing to eternal life we’ll ever see on this Earth.”⁸ Businesses can often “fail” faster than their public counterparts, adopting lessons learned and forging ahead.

It used to be that the government drove innovation across all sectors in its defense and science laboratories, reducing the incentive for collaboration.

That is no longer true. Much of the cutting edge work is now being done in the private sector. This is most obvious today in the field of computer and information technology, but extends to energy and nanotechnology, among other areas. As a result, the government relies on private sector expertise to maintain its lead in defense, space, and other endeavors related to national security. This dependency means that the government is also affected by private sector

vulnerabilities—probably even beyond areas where the private sector has the technological lead. Through collaboration regarding, for example, shared threats on financial fraud and economic espionage, both government and industry can keep abreast of developing challenges. The QDDR speaks for the State Department, USAID, and beyond when it asserts, “Private sector partners can add value to our missions through their resources, their capacity to establish presence in places we cannot, through the technologies, networks and contacts they can tap, and through their specialized expertise or knowledge.”⁹

For corporate or non-profit entities, collaboration with the government may offer access to information and sometimes intelligence, as well as legitimacy. The private sector often lacks the necessary information and/or ability to coordinate entities that often value their privacy and autonomy over concerted effective action. This is why protection of critical infrastructure—both brick-and-mortar and virtual—is a public-private effort. The government can serve as the honest broker to which corporations may safely disclose vulnerabilities or proprietary information, which the government can use to devise appropriate means to protect all corporations and society. Other issues, such as caring for wounded veterans, are best addressed through a comprehensive approach—which entails responsibilities for the government to provide health care and other support as well as for private organizations and individuals to provide employment and social support. And operating overseas, the government often has long-term international networks via its embassies, which even older corporations cannot replicate. Finally, of course, governments can offer access to funding.

In order to tap into the best minds and technology, the government must pay for it, or appeal to American philanthropy and patriotism. The appeal and response bring another benefit to government and society: promoting social service and responsibility. Organizations that team up with the government—especially when there is no direct business or personal gain involved—can foster patriotism, civic participation, and even raise public support for government and good governance. Individuals who engage with

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government in this manner gain a sense of accomplishment, lending their knowledge to our foreign-policy and national-security goals.

Businesses can also bolster their public image through collaboration billed as “pro bono,” or “corporate social responsibility.” Neville Isdell, the former Chairman and CEO of The Coca Cola Company, advocates “connected capitalism,” a system whereby businesses connect with governments, non-profits, and civic society to shape their core business strategies in ways that foster sustainable and profitable commercial growth *and* contribute to addressing social problems. He works to recruit corporations that pledge to partner with governments, communities, and NGOs to simultaneously further corporate interests and improve society. His motivation, in part, is a desire to help capitalism—which he perceives as currently under attack worldwide—evolve in order to survive.¹⁰ Executives from General Electric, Sun Trust Bank, and United Parcel Service have signed up to Isdell’s effort and their partners include CARE and USAID.

Non-profit research institutes, universities, advocacy organizations, and humanitarian organizations can also benefit from an association with the government by burnishing their credentials as purveyors of knowledge and expertise, or as agile, relevant actors. To the extent that the public views the government or its representatives, such as military officers, favorably and trusts it to seek qualified collaborators who have skill and integrity, private entities and individuals can elevate their public image.

Despite this, sometimes private entities and individuals prefer to work in collaboration with the government as separate entities, as opposed to joining the government as employees or contractors. This is true for Blue Star Families (BSF), a non-profit supporting and advocating for military families. “Public–private partnerships are key to BSF’s philosophy. Military families serve and sacrifice because we parents, spouses, and children love our service member, and love our country, not because we love the Pentagon. In fact, many families prefer not to interact with ‘official channels.’ So it is right and fitting that the responsibility for helping families falls not only to the Pentagon or the individual services, but to the larger society as well.”¹¹

The Challenges of Collaboration

While these benefits of collaboration might appear obvious, obstacles to public–private efforts still exist, chiefly: 1) legal and regulatory restrictions; 2) lack of trust; and 3) the lack of proper institutionalization of public–private efforts.

The laws and regulations that provide the framework for interactions between the private and public sectors have evolved over the years to address concerns

about monopolies and government control. U.S. laws were formulated to ensure that businesses operate on a level playing field; transparency has been the hallmark of procurement regulations as one way to prevent any companies from gaining unfair advantages over others. As a result, all public-private collaboration must be designed so as not to provide special access to the government by one company or non-profit (to avoid the appearance of preferential treatment) or to suggest that the government, through its activities, endorses a particular corporation, product, or non-profit. This consideration may make it difficult to have a conversation about how organizations might collaborate, particularly in a long-term or sustained relationship, even in the case of unsolicited offers of assistance. Government officials must confer closely with legal counsel to discern among permissible and illegal or unethical proposals as well as to ensure that government equities are protected.

The restrictions on collaboration vary from agency to agency, and even within agencies. While DOD is prohibited from soliciting assistance even in humanitarian emergencies, USAID and State can solicit donations of goods, services, and even money. DOD can discuss general requirements and it can accept assistance or seek to avail itself of prior general offers of assistance. The rationale for the tighter restrictions on DOD is concern about creating a public perception or reality that voluntary donations or collaborations are being used to gain access or preferential treatment or, put in the most extreme terms, as a bribe or inducement to spur official action. Within DOD, there are also different regulations within services and down to the installation level pertaining to charitable activities on bases.¹²

Even when it comes to cyberspace—the area where the notion of public-private collaboration is most accepted—both sides are still somewhat hesitant because of the issue of trust. The private sector builds both the software and hardware that drives cyberspace. Private firms also own and operate much of the nation's critical infrastructure. Yet, they are generally loathe to broadly share information about vulnerabilities with anyone, much less the government.

Executives worry that it could lead to public revelations of product or service flaws and of sensitive corporate intellectual property or other proprietary knowledge. Corporations also harbor concerns about the potential use of such information in future lawsuits. Similarly, government is wary of divulging national security vulnerabilities or secrets to private entities, especially those that have international ownership or global interests.

Cyberspace is the area where public-private collaboration is most accepted.

The Enduring Security Framework (ESF), a public–private collaboration between DOD, DHS, DNI, and representative information technology and defense industrial firms, was designed to address some of these challenges. Participating CEOs and chief technology officers receive classified threat briefs on key cyber-security problems. Meanwhile, industry and government experts work in unclassified environments to identify and implement security improvements. To the extent that this forum has been successful, it might be a model for exchanging information and identifying opportunities for public–private collaboration across and among government agencies.

Privacy is a crucial concern that springs from the issue of trust. Executives worry about corporate privacy, but also about the privacy of their clients or customers, in effect the privacy of U.S. citizens. Meanwhile, the government is responsible for protecting the privacy of its citizens, but it can and does often weigh this against its mandate to ensure law and order and national security. Both parties have to believe that the other will protect the information and the privacy of the people to whom they are accountable. To date, they haven't. We need to find new ways for them to do so, if even on narrow issues.

To be sure, there are risks and therefore a need for vigilance in order to maintain a healthy separation between the government and civil society, to ensure compliance with national and international laws, and to protect privacy. But the laws that we have imposed on ourselves are not immutable. In this emerging security environment where non-state actors—terrorists, media magnates, cyber hackers, and others—can innovate with far fewer constraints, it is incumbent upon governments to consider how they might team up with new actors to further national and international interests.

Despite these realities and accomplishments, public–private collaboration is not universally understood and appreciated across the government. In the private sector, its value is better understood, but in neither sector is public–private collaboration sufficiently institutionalized. Right now, government reaches out to the private sector after plans have been made—and sometimes the original design impedes such collaboration in the first place. For example, it is difficult at this stage, in 2012, to bring the business sector in to help develop Afghanistan. If the international coalition of governments had sat down in 2002 with private sector companies, NGOs, and the Afghan government and forged a unified concerted plan for political and economic stabilization for Afghanistan, perhaps all partners could have effectively coordinated and leveraged resources to build a stronger Afghanistan faster.

Likewise, when it comes to developing plans to respond to humanitarian disasters, the military does so largely devoid of input from the private sector. The military plans to deploy people, ships, and aircraft, to open warehouses and send

military medical teams, but with some possible exceptions, the commands don't seek agreements to coordinate or even share information in advance with international or local businesses (which often have their own contingency plans), non-profits, or medical volunteers in order to maximize the use of available resources and to improve on the timeliness of assistance. The result is a mad scramble after a disaster with random, uncoordinated private sector offers of assistance and action on the ground. Often, goods and goodwill are wasted.

This is all the more regrettable because companies on the ground often have the best information, while the U.S. government and international community have the ability to execute on a large scale. (Few noticed that some of the fastest responses—for example, to the earthquake in Haiti—were devised and executed by major multinational companies headquartered in the United States.) If the two capabilities could be consistently linked, the impact might be significant. The same holds true for steady-state humanitarian assistance, where DOD refurbishes schools and medical facilities while USAID funds multi-year educational and medical programs. DOD and USAID do not team up together as a rule to develop humanitarian programs with the private sector—the U.S. European Command has decided, this year, to try.

One agency—the Department of State—has a Senate-confirmed advisor for global partnerships, but the others have senior advisors reporting at various levels to officials below the cabinet level. At DOD, there is a military-stabilization task force that focuses on business in Afghanistan and the efforts to encourage cyber collaboration with the private sector. Most deliberate, concerted efforts, however, are currently located within the combatant commands. The assignment of public-private responsibilities to officials with differing levels of seniority, or at DOD, to officials working for the military commands, rather than the policy offices, makes it difficult for public-private officials to coordinate, solve conflicts, and optimize public-private efforts.

As successful as public-private initiatives have been, there has been no concerted effort to develop policy and military doctrine in order to better delineate the proper types of collaboration and legal limits of such activities. A strategic approach to such partnerships would ensure that public and private resources are dedicated to priority problems, not dissipated, and that the return on investment for both sides outweighs the costs.¹³ Such a strategy should be executed in conjunction with training and incentives to encourage the use of partnerships. All government agencies, as well as the interagency or White House, ought to consider incorporating non-governmental actors into the strategies they develop. Dan Runde of CSIS asserts, "The government is leaving many of the opportunities with the private sector 'on the table.'"¹⁴ At the same time it is important to remember, as USAID puts it, "[Public-Private Alliances]

are NOT a ‘thing we do’ but a way we do things we do.” Public–private collaboration is a tool—much like strategic communications—used to further policy objectives; it should not be an end in itself.

The QDDR sets forth a list of actions that must be taken to initiate and sustain public–private collaboration or partnerships, including: 1) streamlining the process for developing partnerships, including standardizing the process, designating a single point of contact at each agency, and building a central database of partnerships; 2) enhancing training and incentives so that personnel can identify, develop, and maintain partnerships; and 3) emphasizing alliances and coalitions (i.e., seeking to link partnerships).¹⁵

Collaboration: A 21st-Century Force Multiplier

The government and private sector collaborate on a voluntary basis in many small and medium-sized ways—to respond to natural and man-made disasters, prevent cyber or terrorist attacks, or to exchange information about the political–business environment in countries of interest. These efforts range from ad hoc to enduring, but rarely do government and private sector actors work together to identify common objectives and design government programs or business plans that are mutually supportive, leveraging one another to achieve a greater goal such as political stability or economic development.

By far, the biggest obstacle to public–private collaboration is the mindset,

mainly on the government side. It takes extra energy and effort on the part of government officials to consider how to leverage the private sector. Corporations and non-profits are more accustomed to seeking interaction with governments, but too few really creative actors yet exist. Public–private advisors need to work extra hard to overcome the institutional mindset within the government and force officials at all levels to consider how they might work with outside parties. To most government employees, public–private

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collaboration seems either “nice to have,” at most suited only to humanitarian efforts, or “too hard” because of legitimate legal and ethical concerns. The legal restrictions, especially those aimed at preventing preferential treatment, reinforce a general reluctance to get creative with outside actors.

As a result, the most important conclusion to draw after about half a decade of working to promote public–private collaboration is that people need a

strategy, framework, and process for designing and implementing it. First and foremost, public–private efforts must be prioritized and coordinated within agencies and across the government. Officials dedicated to public–private partnerships should work together to build strong relationships—as opposed to individual projects—with outside actors and society writ-large. Second, public–private initiatives should be designed with both partners present at the inception of policy, program, or business design. Finally, public–private collaboration should be recognized and accommodated by laws and regulations which provide greater flexibility to partner and clarity to both sides about what manner of collaboration is permissible and desirable.

For the national security community, priorities include stability operations, non-proliferation, energy protection, cyber security, and better business practices. As the National Security Strategy stated, “There must be opportunities for individuals and the private sector to play a major role in addressing common challenges—whether supporting a nuclear fuel bank, promoting global health, fostering entrepreneurship, or exposing violations of universal rights. In the 21st century, the ability of individuals and nongovernmental actors to play a positive role in shaping the international environment represents a distinct opportunity for the United States.”¹⁶

Harnessing the know-how and resources of corporations, universities, research institutions, and charitable as well as development organizations is and will be critical to maintaining U.S. policy innovation and effectiveness. Just as we need to invest in education and research to cultivate national competitiveness, we need to build relationships leveraging private sector expertise and capabilities to enhance both global development and U.S. national security.

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