

Inter-group Planning, Coordination, Communication, and Training as Critical Processes for Effective Coalition Operations

William J. O'Mara, M.S.

Nancy J. Heacox, Ph.D.

Richard T. Kelly, Ph.D., C.P.E.

Pacific Science and Engineering Group, Inc.

San Diego, California, U.S.A.

e-mail: omara@pacific-science.com

Robert J. Smillie Ph.D., C.P.E.

SPAWAR Systems Center-San Diego

Simulation and Human Systems Division

San Diego, California, U.S.A.

William J. O'Mara is a scientist with the human factors firm of Pacific Science and Engineering Group in San Diego, California. He received his M.S. in industrial-organizational psychology from the California School of Professional Psychology. His research interests include the application of social psychological theory to organizational behavior. He is currently studying the perception of justice in organizations, and its impact upon performance and citizenship behavior. He has 10 years of experience guiding organizational change efforts.

Nancy J. Heacox is a scientist with Pacific Science and Engineering Group. She received her Ph.D. in industrial-organizational psychology from the California School of Professional Psychology. Her research interests focus on the dynamics of individuals within organizations, and on the workflow patterns of organizational systems. She has experience conducting research in numerous types of systems, including educational institutions and public and private organizations. She also has over 10 years of applied experience in the human resources field.

Richard T. Kelly is principal scientist of Pacific Science and Engineering Group. He received his Ph.D. in engineering psychology from New Mexico State University. Dr. Kelly has been involved in human performance research, human factors engineering, and technical management for over 15 years. His research and development activities have been recognized within the medical device, Navy C3 and combat systems, and Army training system communities. He has published over 50 technical papers and reports. He has also provided human factors services as an expert witness, and has taught several university courses and industrial seminars.

Robert J. Smillie is a senior human factors research scientist with the U.S. Navy's Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center in San Diego, California. He received his Ph.D. in human factors/psychology from North Carolina State University. His research interests include design and development of advanced concepts for command and control focusing on the

visualization of information and innovative interfaces to access information. He has been employed by Navy research and development laboratories for 21 years. He has authored over 50 technical reports and presentations.

ABSTRACT

The US military is frequently involved in coalitions of military and foreign military and civilian groups, including governmental organizations, private volunteer organizations, and various special interest groups. Such coalitions operations pose significant organizational challenges. The Information Support Systems for Coalition Operations (ISSCO) project, uses a macroergonomics perspective and focuses on how inter-group processes (and cultural dynamics) impact the effectiveness of coalition operations. Project researchers interviewed subject matter experts and reviewed the doctrine, military analyses, workshop reports, and several case studies relevant to coalition operations. A synthesis of this information led to the identification of four inter-group processes that are critical to mission effectiveness. These processes are inter-group planning, inter-group coordination, inter-group communication, and inter-group training. The implementation of these processes is crucial to the effective performance of the coalition partners. Development of a decision support toolset to assist coalition planning and operations personnel to meet these challenges of coalition operations is planned.

INTRODUCTION

Today, a U.S. military operation is most frequently a coalition operation¹. Coalition operations encompass a wide range of mission types — from war to disaster relief. Since the mid 1980s, operations other than war (OOTW) has been the most frequent type of mission in which the U.S. military has engaged.² Projections are that this trend is likely to continue.

Coalition operations often have huge implications for national security, national interests, conflict deterrence, and world peace. They may have a high profile worldwide due to a large media presence. Yet, problems have been encountered in several recent coalition operations. Many of the challenges the U.S. military faces are related to the following issues:

- *Changing roles:* The U.S. military is still gaining experience in the wide range of new roles it may be called upon to fill in coalition operations. These include: support, life-saving, conflict resolution, and suppression of aggression.
- *Disjointed efforts:* Coalition operations require a high degree of inter-group cooperation and planning between multi-national military forces. In addition

¹ In this paper, the term “coalition operation” includes both coalitions and alliances.

² The number of OOTW counted on an annual basis depends on the criteria used; i.e., the level of involvement, whether continuing missions are counted. Hartley (1996) reported 30 per year. Other sources report that CINCPAC alone stands up a response approximately 25 times per year, and that NATO stands up a response approximately 10 times per year.

there may be involvement of multiple civilian organizations who have rarely worked well with the military.

- *Complexity:* Coalition operations require much greater precision in a wide range of ambiguous situations — some with a non-human “enemy,” some involving show of force.
- *Tools:* Current information systems do not adequately address inter-group success variables.

The U.S. military is taking steps to promote effective coalition operations. One of these, the Information Support Systems for Coalition Operations (ISSCO) project, is sponsored by the office of Naval Research to apply organizational architectures and decision support technologies for planning and managing multinational coalition operations. The project applies a macroergonomics perspective and focuses on how inter-group processes impact task performance of cooperating political, military, and civilian coalitions.

REVIEW OF OPERATIONS

The high degree of interest in meeting the challenges of coalition operations can be seen in the large volume of writings (e.g., Diehl, 1994; Easter, 1996) and workshops (e.g., Center for Advanced Command Concepts and Technology, 1995; Davidson, Hayes and Landon, 1996) on the topic. In addition, military doctrine has been developed to guide these operations (e.g., Joint Staff, 1996). These substantial efforts have guided the review and evaluation of several recent large coalition operations. As examples, four recent operations are presented below, with analyses of inter-group strengths and weaknesses.

OPERATION PROVIDE COMFORT IN IRAQ

In 1991, after the Gulf War, the U.S. was asked by Turkey (a NATO ally) to resolve a tremendous refugee crisis on the Turkey-Iraq border. The crisis was due to the smashing of a Kurd rebellion (greatly influenced by the U.S.) in northern Iraq by the Iraqi military. Thousands fled in fear of their lives and were dying in freezing mountain conditions with no supplies. President Bush gave full support to the military to do whatever it took to complete the mission rapidly.

The U.S. Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and task force commanders rallied a multitude of special military forces and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to set up camps, save lives, and persuade the Kurds to move out of the mountains into the camps. Eventually, with U.S. military security, the refugees returned to their homes. This was a huge mission, regarded by experts as a great success. Key players lived together in the same compound. All phases of the mission were handled professionally, many lives were saved and the end state — Kurds safely back in their homes — was achieved. Participating

organizations: U.S. State Department, United Nations (UN), NGOs, militaries of Canada, France, Great Britain, Netherlands, Turkey, and the U.S.

STRENGTHS

- There was unprecedented coordination between diverse organizations—“each time the NGOs and the military coordinated, each side had something to offer the other. The NGOs offered expertise and transition; the military offered security, an instant infrastructure to address the situation, and the logistics to enable the response” (Seiple, 1996, p. 60).
- There was a high level of interaction in day-to-day planning.
- The concept of the Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC) was introduced and became the true operations center. U.S. civil affairs personnel were essential players.
- The NGO Coordinating Committee for Northern Iraq (NCCNI) was formed and represented scores of participating NGOs; it was a model of effective leadership, voice and communication.
- Civilian expertise was sought by OFDA to solve the problem of motivating the Kurds out of the mountains.

WEAKNESSES

- Trust was initially low, resulting in slow involvement of NGOs with the military (due to suspicions about being used as potential pawns).
- The U.S. military proceeded to build organizational command structures and supporting foundations (e.g., extensive and expensive latrine system in the camps) that were not appropriate to the needs of the situation.

LESSONS

- OFDA played a critical role as the mission leader.
- For effectiveness, there must be clear goals, consistent across organizations, and with full political support.
- The CMOC was introduced and is an essential key coordinating body.

- Close proximity of field personnel facilitates interaction, relationship building, and coordination.
- Confront false expectations; repeat goals and limits.
- Use Civil Affairs personnel early, often, frequently. They are specially trained for Civil-Military duty and offer an effective civilian bridge to solve problems without walls of military stigma.
- The culture of the host population needs to be understood.

OPERATION SEA ANGEL IN BANGLADESH

In early 1991 a cyclone hit the shores of Bangladesh and killed 150,000 people in 48 hours. The entire coast line was devastated. The U.S. military, in proximity after the Gulf War, was quickly mobilized to help. Clearly, no organization in the world could restore order and save lives quicker than the U.S. military under these conditions. Within 24 hours the U.S. diverted a task force with equipment. The challenge was not to take over, but to consult the new fledgling democratic government, let them make decisions, keep a small foot print, and help the country and NGOs create the infrastructure necessary to restore order and save lives.

This mission was a huge success—an awesome display of U.S. military disaster relief capability with informed political touches. General Stackpole provided leadership appropriate to the situation: “You must bring aid-giving agencies on board early. You must update them and anticipate future requests. There is a natural distrust of the military because, in most countries where they operate, these aid-giving [NGOs] have been burned repeatedly by people in uniforms” (Seiple, 1996, pp. 76-77). Participating organizations: U.S. State Department, host nation government of Bangladesh, NGOs, militaries of Great Britain, Japan, and the U.S.

STRENGTHS

- The U.S. military operated with a service focus; they did not take over. The military leadership was focused and task-driven.
- The politics of dealing with a small, vulnerable new democracy were fully considered in all decisions. Cultural sensitivity was maintained. As much as possible, there was reduced presence of the military footprint.
- There was strong coordination between NGOs and the military due to the gravity of situation they became tolerant of each others’ values.
- Diplomatic leadership was provided by General Stackpole. He was engaged, operated with a light touch, and was supportive rather than controlling. He understood and worked within the political realities of the situation.

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- There was a clear military role: Support the Bangladeshi government and the NGOs. There was a deferential mindset; the military was NOT in charge!
 - There was clear military doctrine: do no harm, create no dependencies, help stabilize, then leave.

WEAKNESSES

- Due to nature of disaster, there was no pre-planning. The need to react quickly took precedence.
- There was no CMOC; however, a Military Coordination Center served this purpose, it was staffed by personnel familiar with the needs of Civil-Military issues.

LESSONS

- The military must repeat what their mission and parameters are over and over again.
- The fewer the players, the more effective is the coordination.
- Mutual appreciation, respect, thanks, and empowerment moves the effort forward.
- The key to military success when in a support role is an attitude of enabling the other and promoting the effort in a user-friendly, synergistic manner.
- The culture of the host population needs to be understood.
- By keeping a small footprint, the military facilitated arrival at the endstate. They did much to reduce their impact: a limited number of personnel went on shore per day, ships were kept out of sight, planes and helicopters returned to ships daily, etc.

OPERATION RESTORE HOPE — CONTINUED HOPE IN SOMALIA UNSOM I AND II

In late 1992, after years of clan wars, genocide and starvation, an acute famine crisis began. Thousands were starving and homeless due to war lords' control of the country's food. This mission was complex. There was a humanitarian mission, and a Peace Operation, a disarmament, and much more. The U.S. military did not have a clear policy on how to

proceed; they made many mistakes out of inexperience. The most critical mistake was allowing the CMOC to become a liaison center instead of an operations center. Many cultural mistakes were made, leading to soldiers being killed. This led to a military pullout that upset the mission and embarrassed the U.S.

UNSOM I was a success and was called Restore Hope. It ended in May 1993. UNSOM II was a failure (at least politically). Participating organizations: U.S. State Department, UN, NGOs, military forces from more than 20 nations, including France, Nigeria, Pakistan and the U.S.

STRENGTHS

- U.S. military leadership exhibited professionalism, dedication, ingenuity, resolve, and adaptability.
- The humanitarian mission was successful in stopping the famine.
- The CMOC was established with the U.N. Humanitarian Operations Center (HOC), which was coordinated by Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) personnel.
- U.S. Special Military Forces helped clans set up self managed leadership boards.
- An NGO consortium, the Inter Coordinating Committee for Somalia, coordinated the NGO effort.

WEAKNESSES

- There was unclear political agenda, and issues of disarmament and stability were not addressed early enough.
- There was no comprehensive plan and no uniting strategy. The effort floundered from lack of direction.
- The goal of security and no casualties was naïve considering the situation. The issues of long term social health strategies, independence, and stability were ignored.
- There was poor planning and coordination between the military and NGOs. NGOs were not involved in planning prior to the Marines' landing.
- There was misdiagnosis of the real trouble (i.e., it was not a natural famine, but a manmade crisis).

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- The CMOC deteriorated to an ineffective liaison center, far removed from reality.
 - The Marines appeared resistant to the CMOC leadership role.
 - There was a security conflict between the military and NGOs.

LESSONS

- The CMOC must be an operations center that is accessible all participants — military and non-military.
- Clear intent with political support is key. There must be strong U.S. political leadership and international leadership to support plan.
- Integrated planning across organizations is needed. There must be dialogue to understand both NGO and military goals.
- Cultural awareness of host nations' customs is essential to avoid offense. In addition, the culture of other participating organizations has to be understood
- In crises, the military should support the humanitarian goal.
- Involve Civil Affairs personnel early.
- The participating NGOs should have a coordinating body and leadership and speak with one voice.
- The UN/HOC must coordinate effectively with the military/CMOC.
- The CMOC must be the leader – the focus of main effort. There must be buy-in to this from all parties.

OPERATION JOINT ENDEAVOR IN BOSNIA

Since the collapse of the former Soviet Union, there have been various conflicts and unrest in most of the former Soviet western block nations. However, none had been worse than in Bosnia, where in 1992 ethnic and religious civil war turned the country into a 24 hour battlefield. The UN and the international community took notice and decided to step in. In 1995, a NATO coalition of 36 nations led by the U.S. (IFOR), led a contingency force into one of the largest Peace Operations in many years (over 60,000 troops). This operation commenced 4 years after the war began and after several other missions of various degrees of success were complete (UNPROFOR, Operation Provide Promise, UNPREDEP, UNTAES, Operation Sharp Guard, Operation Deny Flight, Operation Deliberate Force).

As always, Peace Operations have many levels. It is never quite clear if the forces are observing, keeping, enforcing, or imposing peace. Each level suggests greater military involvement and has greater political implications. For the most part the forces kept a peace keeping profile (as per the Dayton Accord), but there were many skirmishes — the Serbs, Croatians, and Bosnians simply didn't want to stop fighting. A decisive show of force and information dominance quickly proved too overwhelming, and the warring factions finally complied. Overall, the mission was a success because it stopped the war and set the stage for the final mission, Operation Joint Guard, that stabilized the peace from 1996 on. Organizations: NATO force of 36 nations.

STRENGTHS

- The U.S. military leadership proved its professionalism, dedication, and resolve.
- Coalition forces integrated and communicated well, and showed great flexibility.
- There were many successful “firsts” for NATO: first ground operation, first deployment “out of area,” first joint venture with Partners for Peace including Russians, first participation by France in support of NATO.
- There was generally effective interface and cooperation across different national military organizations, some of which restructured in order to smooth operations.

WEAKNESSES

- There was an unclear political agenda.
- There was poor planning implementation due to the political climate.
- There were problems in dealing with cultural and linguistic differences. Some information operations were unsuccessful due to a lack of understanding of cultural symbols.
- There was competition between the command structures of NATO and some of the participating national militaries.

LESSONS

- Use U.S. military Civil Affairs personnel early.

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- Peace Operations require different skills than war — the military must anticipate needs and be willing to modify early plans.
 - The impact of the media is very important.
 - Joint exercises proved of great value.
 - The need for information dominance is still keen.

CRITICAL PROCESSES

A review and analysis of the literature and workshop reports, key missions, and numerous interviews showed that coalition operations are indeed complex and multi-faceted. A study of recurrent problem areas led to a focus on inter-group processes as key factors. Four inter-group processes are critical to mission effectiveness. These processes and relevant “make or break” factors are described below.

1. *Inter-group Planning*

- Inclusion Planning.
- Common and consistent goal.

2. *Inter-group Coordination*

- Service-oriented military.
- Reciprocity.

3. *Inter-group Communication*

- Inter-organizational Communication.
- Information Transfer.

4. *Inter-group Training*

- Cultural Awareness.
- Combined Rehearsal.

INTER-GROUP PLANNING

Effective coalition operations clearly begin with thorough planning that includes all participating organizations in clearly defined, appropriate roles. Two key factors that

influence the success of inter-group planning for coalition operations are Inclusion Planning and Common and Consistent Goal.

INTER-GROUP PLANNING Exclusive □ Inclusive Planning

This is the degree to which all participating coalition organizations are included in planning prior to deployment. It can range from being fully inclusive of all organizations to being exclusive where each organization develops its own plans independently. When implemented well, Inclusion Planning creates a positive first step in relationship building between coalition partners and facilitates the exchange of valuable information throughout the operation.

An example of this was seen in Rwanda during Operation Support Hope when the task force commander actively sought out key NGO to participate in pre-deployment planning. On the other hand, it was not done in the Somalia Operation – this led to mistrust and animosity between coalition groups, making subsequent on-site coordination difficult.

INTER-GROUP PLANNING Conflicted □ Common and Consistent Goal

This is the degree to which all participating coalition organizations agree on a common objective and strategy (role compatibility) prior to deployment. It can range from being fully agreed upon by all organizations to being conflicted where each organization pursues objectives independently. When implemented well, Common & Consistent Goal creates a positive first step in relationship building between coalition partners and facilitates the exchange of valuable information throughout the operation.

An example of this was seen in Iraq where all organizations agreed to a plan of action. On the other hand, it was not done in the early stages of the Haiti operation. There was lack of agreement between the US and the UN on strategy. This led to friction, separate agendas, miscommunication, mistrust and subsequently it blocks mission unity and effectiveness.

INTER-GROUP COMMUNICATION

A thorough agreed upon plan is the foundation of effective coalition operations. Inter-group communication is the means by which organizations share information on execution of the plan so that efficiency is optimized. Two key factors that influence the success of inter-group communication for coalition operations are Inter-organizational Communication and Information Transfer.

INTER-GROUP COMMUNICATION

Information Gaps □ Inter-organizational Communication

This is the degree of information sharing between leaders from different groups (e.g., participating militaries, UN, NGOs). It can range from being inclusive so that all organizations share and minimize gaps to exclusive where participating organization withhold sharing. When implemented well, Inter-organizational Communication creates ease and speed in accomplishing difficult tasks, improves planning/replanning, and reduces major mistakes. An example of this was seen in Iraq during Operation Provide Comfort when OFDA leaders helped all parties share information in the first ever Civil-Military Operations Center.

In addition, all key leaders lived in the same compound. This facilitated relationship building and communication. On the other hand, it was not done in the Somalia Operation — the CMOC was physically separate from the NGOs and little information was shared. This led to mistrust, an “us versus them” mentality and animosity between coalition groups, making subsequent on-site coordination difficult.

INTER-GROUP COMMUNICATION Info Gaps □ Information Transfer

This is the degree of information flow from group leaders to those performing in the field. It can range from being fully transferred so that all field personnel share are informed of plans to minimally transferred where, due to technological difficulties or lack of a system, field personnel are not informed. When implemented well, Information Transfer enhances unity of effort by facilitating efficient task execution.

An example of this was seen in Iraq during Operation Provide Comfort where NGOs spoke with a coordinated voice, information was shared and transferred to field personnel. On the other hand, it was not done in the Somalia Operation where, for example, the US military dropped food on unsuspecting NGO field personnel who were not informed of the drop. This led to inefficiency, stress, and lack of ability to understand and execute plan.

INTER-GROUP COORDINATION

After planning, coordination must continue throughout all phases of an operation. Inter-group coordination (along with communication) is the pathway to assure positive relations and efficiency. Two key factors that influence the success of inter-group coordination for coalition operations are Service Oriented Military and Task Reciprocity.

INTER-GROUP COORDINATION Take Charge □ Service-Oriented Military

This is the existence of behaviors that reflect mission-appropriate service to the affected populace and to participating organizations. This can range from a full customer service

orientation where the US military seeks to understand how to serve and behaves accordingly to a take charge mentality where there is no customer focus. This is particularly important in OOTW that require a high degree of customer focus — relationship building, diplomacy, negotiation, understanding, problem solving. When implemented well this factor facilitates teamwork; high morale, trust and good will.

Operation Sea Angel in Bangladesh is the finest example of this. Gen. Stackpole stated that “we are here to serve, then leave.” He exemplified the model of “what can we do to help.” On the other hand, the neglect of such a factor in a multi-organizational setting can create division, distrust, hostility, and mission disaster. An example of this was Somalia where many civilian groups stated that the US military came in with too much take charge attitude, wanting to work alone, creating animosity.

INTER-GROUP COORDINATION Singular Task Focus □ Task Reciprocity

This is the existence of a helping relationship among groups such that “you help me do what I need to do for the good of the mission, I help you do what you need to do for the good of the mission.” This is based on the mindset that the only way for us to succeed is to help you to succeed. When implemented well this factor contributes toward solid working relationships leading to high cooperation among organizations and commitment to the mission. An example of this was in Iraq where task reciprocity led to a high level of coordination and effectiveness. An example when not implemented well was operation joint endeavor in Bosnia. Lower than optimal task reciprocity led to inefficiencies due to lack of teamwork and resistance to coordinated participation.

INTER-GROUP TRAINING

Inter-group training is an essential pre-mission/ between mission method for assuring positive relations, knowledge, and team work. This prepares the groups to be at their best when called to work with each other under the stress of disaster, war or other. Two key factors that influence the success of inter-group training for coalition operations are Cultural Awareness and Combined Rehearsal.

INTER-GROUP TRAINING Misunderstanding □ Cultural Awareness

This is the existence of behavior by military personnel in the field that demonstrates awareness of the customs and values of (a) the host nation and (b) participating organizations. When implemented well this factor promotes positive goodwill and publicity; and enhanced ability for effective operations. An example of this was in Somalia, where the U.S. military worked with local clans to set up local government decision-making groups prior to transitioning out. On the other hand, at different stages of the same mission the U.S. military

unintentionally antagonized the local populace by using offensive gestures and consuming taboo food. In addition, the use of coalition troops from Pakistan and Nigeria, countries the Somali people disrespect, caused friction with the local populace. The impact of poor implementation of this factor can be catastrophic -- alienation of the populace that the military is attempting to serve and creating threatening conditions for military personnel.

INTER-GROUP TRAINING Inexperience with Partners □ Combined Rehearsal

This is the existence of specific combined training or simulation exercises prior to or during mission (or between missions) that allows all organizations an opportunity to start building unity of effort. When implemented well this factor facilitates unity of effort, effective service to the customer, and reduces inefficiency and mistrust. An example was Operation Restore Democracy in Haiti; CJTF Kinzer used a special inter-group training program to help military and NGOs cooperate better (Battle Command Training Program) prior to deployment. On the other hand, in most coalition operations, this factor is generally disregarded. NGOs in the field have had little prior experience with military and vice versa. This leads to inefficiencies from lack of inter-coordination and trust.

Please note that implementing the factors is not a panacea, but rather a big step toward optimizing effectiveness.

MODERATORS

The above-described inter-group processes are key factors in complex inter-agency endeavors such as coalition operations. Of course, these processes do not occur in a vacuum, but rather in the context of complicated political situations. It is suggested that the following situation moderator variables may accentuate the impact of the inter-agency interactions:

- The 'will' to cooperate or do what it takes to succeed (level of existence of: national interest, clear mission objectives, strong leadership, competition) .
- Level of intensity of the conflict or crisis.
- Number of organizations.
- Location of operation (geography, political climate).
- Experience in coalition operations.
- Presence of some intermediary body (UN, OFDA).
- Phase of mission.

CONCLUSION

In nearly every coalition operation, new personnel from diverse groups are thrown together to make a very difficult mission work. In each case the organizations involved, particularly the host government, U.S. military and the NGOs struggle to work together effectively. The ISSCO project is expected to benefit the U.S. military by providing a more effective information support system for planning and monitoring coalition operations. There will be an improved ability of the military to plan and operate effective coalition operations with diverse organizations and nations. The end goal: a greater likelihood of successful mission outcomes and positive inter-national relations.

To accomplish this, four inter-group processes (8 factors) were identified in this paper as critical to the effectiveness of coalition operations. Additionally, factors that may moderate mission performance were also suggested. It is expected that proper implementation of these processes — that is, implementation appropriate to the situation — will assist the U.S. military to meet the challenges of coalition operations. Toward this end, we are working to validate the impact of the processes in the field. A decision support toolset will be developed to assist coalition planners and operations personnel. We hypothesize that several input factors related to culture are essential to understanding how to improve both the implementation of the factors and overall effectiveness in coalition operations.

Plans for development of the coalition decision support toolset may include the following components:

1. *Coalition Database*: This is a database that will offer specialized information about organizations and cultures on issues of most concern to PACOM.
2. *Coalition Planning Model*: This planning aid uses the coalition database along with specific models to predict how relevant organizations and cultures will interact on tasking under consideration in the evolving plan. This helps to identify and reduce organizational and cultural conflict by performing a “what-if” analysis prior to execution of the plan. A Coalition Planning Manual that will serve as a guidebook for planners will be developed as part of this component.
3. *Coalition Task Manager*: The task manager provides collaborative display that enables distributed coalition forces to maintain shared situation awareness in real-time of their activities in relation to other organizations and to offer “how to” advice on performing inter-group tasking. It facilitates situation monitoring and replanning.

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