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Complex Emergencies: Under New Management

MARK R. WALSH and MICHAEL J. HARWOOD

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It was clear to some in the US peace operations policy community during the late 1980s and early 1990s that there were serious, recurring problems in preparing for and conducting international crisis intervention missions. In the early years, the military frequently developed its plans independently of the other government agencies involved in a crisis. When identifying tasks and the resources to perform them, the absence of links between the civilian and military components of these missions led to undesirable outcomes: neglect of civil police requirements and other law and order functions, resource imbalances between humanitarian relief initiatives and military operations, and lack of attention to human rights considerations. The uncoordinated planning produced serious differences in assumptions, concepts, policy recommendations, and plans.

The separate planning processes seldom identified a complete set of strategic objectives and operational needs for these interventions. As a result there was no thoughtful review of all the requirements related to the plan nor an appreciation of the coordination required for success. Consequently, while opinions vary regarding the events that finally led to a new initiative for managing US crisis interventions, there was a clear consensus that the US interagency community had to improve its processes for establishing policy and reaching decisions about US participation in such interventions. The goal of the initiative was to ensure that a complete and balanced division of tasks and responsibilities would exist between the civilian and military components of any intervention before US assets were committed to the operation.

For some of those in the policy community charged with overseeing small-scale deployments, the light went on during the Grenada intervention; for others, illumination occurred during Operation Just Cause. But few remained in the dark after October 1993, when American military personnel died in the streets of Mogadishu. Subsequent interventions in Rwanda (1994) and Haiti (1995) and the current mission in Bosnia reflect many of the lessons learned since 1989. The later interventions have focused attention and pressure on the US interagency process, with a view toward doing everything possible to get policy and management plans about right before sending in the troops.

On 20 May 1997, President Clinton signed Presidential Decision Directive 56 (PDD-56) "The Clinton Administration's Policy on Managing Complex Contingency Operations," to improve the political, military, humanitarian, economic, and other dimensions of the US government's planning for interventions that are identified as complex emergencies. This article describes how the interagency community developed this significant new crisis management tool, and discusses the directive's central features: intent and expectations, assumption management, and key planning elements. The article then explores in depth one of the directive's most unusual features: the requirement for annual training of the Washington interagency team responsible for developing policy to deal with complex emergencies.

The Requirement to Improve

During the 1990s a number of crises produced large displacements of civilian populations, both internally and beyond their national borders, on a scale that transcended the ability of civilian humanitarian relief organizations to respond effectively. While much of this turmoil occurred in Africa, more recent events in the Balkans have been marked by comparable savagery. Disruption of commerce, agriculture, and industry, loss of control by central governments, and predatory interventions by neighboring states or native rogue elements have all contributed to daily death tolls in the thousands and refugees in the hundreds of thousands. Traditional relief mechanisms and the government, business, and volunteer organizations that for years had been adequate to meet the need for relief were revealed to be inefficient, ineffective, or both when dealing with crises involving an entire nation. Challenges of this magnitude gradually came to be described as complex emergencies.

While the terms "complex emergencies" and PDD-56's "complex contingency operations" sound similar, some distinctions between the two are worth noting. The common understanding of a "complex emergency" is derived from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which uses the term to define a humanitarian crisis in a country or region in which there is a total collapse of authority from internal or external conflicts and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency. Such crises can include humanitarian considerations, rehabilitation of political institutions, and economic reconstruction. The expression "complex contingency operations," in the words of the National Security Advisor, refers to "crises, including some resulting from natural disasters, [that] require multi-dimensional responses composed of several components such as political, diplomatic, intelligence, humanitarian, economic, and security: hence the term 'complex contingency operations.'"[1]

Before the appearance of PDD-56, the lack of meaningful coordinated planning produced serious setbacks whenever Washington attempted to manage complex emergencies. Perhaps the most compelling case for reforming the US government's policy planning processes is found in our experiences in Somalia involving the US-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF) and forces deployed under the United Nations Operations in Somalia (UNOSOM II) between late 1992 and early 1995. Vague or unclear strategic interests, objectives, and responsibilities during the transfer of policy oversight from UNITAF to UNOSOM II contributed to the ensuing calamity and eventual failure and withdrawal of UNOSOM II. While a planning and management procedure involving the entire US policy community might have improved the prospects for success in that ill-fated intervention, the US experience in Somalia at least challenged the Washington interagency community to examine and correct its policymaking processes and procedures.

Small rays of hope appeared during the run-up to comparable US-led and UN missions in Haiti in late 1994. Those experienced in complex emergencies, primarily military peace operations planners, recognized that mission requirements in Haiti extended well beyond the purview and capabilities of the US and other military forces preparing for the intervention. Indeed, nonmilitary tasks and responsibilities of the US-led Multinational Force and the United Nations Mission in Haiti became the focus of questions from both the US Atlantic Command, which was responsible for the military theater of operations, and the Washington policy community. As planning began, US Atlantic Command identified a host of questions related to tasks and responsibilities that were well beyond the capability of military forces committed to the operation. These questions from the military required fully coordinated answers from other parts of the US government.

The military inquiry into stated and derived tasks that were beyond its means to fulfill went to planners in departments and agencies outside of DOD. The queries became the basis for integrated political and military plans to resolve the Haitian crisis and to conduct the subsequent peace operation. The National Security Council (NSC), assisted by the Pentagon's joint staff military planners, developed and produced a civil-military plan for the Haiti mission that resembled the military's operations order. All involved in this collaborative effort concluded that NSC participation in any such planning was essential if the plan was to succeed. Subsequent NSC interest in reforming policy for US participation in complex emergencies put it squarely behind efforts to help the interagency community improve itself.

The Directive

The intent of PDD-56 is to define a specific US national governmental policy planning process--one related to managing complex emergencies--to achieve unity of effort within and among the responsible federal agencies.[2] The directive seeks to reduce delays and eliminate redundancy that had marked responses to some earlier emergencies; it also is intended to help agencies avoid overextending their capabilities. It follows that close coordination and cooperation among those charged with crisis intervention also diminish the risk of incorrect or inappropriate use of resources.

When fully implemented, the PDD-56 management process is expected to reduce confusion and delay in getting organized by identifying and directing missions and tasks appropriate to each of the federal departments and agencies charged with responding to a complex emergency. With missions and tasks identified and allocated to the appropriate bodies, expectations are that an effective strategy can be developed early in the crisis response cycle. Early agreement on national policy objectives should have several useful outcomes: rapid identification of potential policy gaps or redundancies, accelerated planning and implementation within non-DOD elements of the government, early

identification of resource shortfalls and preparation of plans to address them, and development of an integrated national-level strategic plan which can provide direction for plans and actions at the operational level and below. PDD-56 defines a process that can facilitate the integration and coordination of civilian and military efforts to respond to complex emergencies.

It is useful to explain first what the provisions of PDD-56 are not designed to achieve. The directive is not intended to provide policy oversight for responses to domestic disasters, terrorism, noncombatant evacuations, or, at the other end of the conflict spectrum, international armed hostilities. And it is not the purpose of the directive's planning process to determine whether the United States should deploy US government personnel, military or civilian, in response to a crisis. Other documents, such as the Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations (PDD-25), promulgated in 1994, were prepared to help policymakers reach sound conclusions about conflict prevention and resolution and to help shape decisions about committing the United States to intervene in humanitarian crises. Should PDD-25 deliberations conclude that intervention is needed, the US interagency process would then determine the role of US government organizations in the intervention. PDD-56 was created to guide the process of integrating diplomatic, military, humanitarian, and other responses to complex emergencies, but only after a decision to intervene has been made.

The intent of the directive is that the US government would respond to a complex emergency as a member of a coalition while retaining the option to act alone if required. The strengths and weaknesses of a military response to these kinds of crises are recognized, as is the cost of an open-ended commitment of military forces to resolve the conflict. Operations that fall within the purview of PDD-56 range from peace accord implementation, such as the operation presently under way in Bosnia, through humanitarian intervention similar to Operation Provide Comfort in Northern Iraq in 1992-93, to humanitarian relief such as Operation Support Hope in Rwanda in 1994.

The team of interagency personnel that will assemble to take responsibility for recommending and implementing policy in these kinds of contingencies is tailored to meet the operational requirements of the crisis at hand. At a minimum, interagency-approved strategies and plans to define the range of tasks to be undertaken will be needed for diplomatic initiatives, military stability and weapons control, humanitarian relief, refugee and displaced persons programs, civil police and criminal justice reconstruction, economic rehabilitation, and public information campaigns directed at the regional target audience. Mine clearing, demobilization, elections, war crimes, and human rights violations may be other important aspects of a crisis that demand attention by the policy community.

Once a range of issues has been identified, a diverse group of national government officials assembles to evaluate them and then develop US policy for an extremely complex crisis environment. Staffs that routinely work together--the NSC, the State Department, and the Department of Defense--are joined by partners not traditionally involved in crisis management, including, but not limited to, the Office of Management and Budget, the Department of Justice, the Treasury Department, the US Agency for International Development, and possibly a representative from the US Mission to the United Nations. Add to this new policy team input from field offices of the US government, regional bodies, the United Nations, and nongovernmental organizations, and it soon becomes apparent why interagency commonality of purpose and unity of effort can be elusive.

PDD-56 also provides for an Executive Committee (EXCOMM) to supervise the production of the strategic plan. The EXCOMM is established by Department Deputy Secretaries through their Deputies Committee, and provides day-to-day management of US participation in the crisis. The EXCOMM is responsible for policy development, planning, oversight, and implementation. It is composed of Department Assistant Secretaries who constitute a standing crisis action group that includes all appropriate federal departments and agencies, including those that are normally outside the interagency working group structure. The EXCOMM is also directed by PDD-56 to ensure that lessons learned from previous missions are regularly and routinely made available to those managing the operational process. The EXCOMM relies on proven management, coordinating, and integrating procedures to improve the prospects for success in complex emergencies.

The EXCOMM's responsibilities include determination of valid tasks and responsibilities, early intervention and resolution of the crisis, synchronization of civilian and military planning timelines, timely identification of necessary resources, and satisfaction of personnel and funding requirements. Perhaps the most important node in the emerging structure for managing complex emergencies, the EXCOMM keeps pace with crisis events, assesses responses to those

events, seeks to anticipate problems, assigns tasks, and monitors planning and operations in each of the federal agencies involved in the crisis. When anticipating actions and coordinating tasks, the EXCOMM uses an integrated interagency plan to identify critical issues, establish priorities, evaluate agency concepts of operation, and organize planning reviews. It brings unsolved problems and issues to the attention of the Deputies Committee for decisions. Of perhaps greatest significance for all concerned, the EXCOMM is responsible for conducting an interagency after-action review of the intervention.

The principal provision in the directive for rationalizing civilian and military contributions to the policy process is the political-military implementation plan. Commonly referred to as the "pol-mil plan," it is a vitally important product for developing the policy and associated operations plans needed to resolve the crisis. The intent of the pol-mil plan is to provide direction for a comprehensive assessment of the crisis, which in turn helps to forge a consensus on the intervention's purpose, mission, and ends. It also helps to outline coordinating mechanisms and to identify participants' responsibilities and priorities. The plan includes assessments, mission, objectives, end-state, concept of operations and organization, preparatory tasks, functional tasks that broadly apply to crisis responses, mission specific tasks, and participating agencies' mission area plans. Finally, the pol-mil plan establishes agency accountability, ensures that each agency's planning process is understood by all participants, and identifies legal disconnects and resource shortfalls.

Two other features of PDD-56 are worth noting before discussing the directive's training requirement. First, prior to the commitment of resources in the mission area, the pol-mil plan is to be rehearsed by the interagency team. The purpose of the rehearsal is to refine and sharpen the integration of what can be a broad collection of individual agency implementation plans that must come together in a unified and strategically coherent manner. Directed by the Deputies Committee, the rehearsal reviews the agencies' mission area plans, establishes the basis for synchronizing all US government operational activities in the crisis area, resolves competing priorities and perspectives, and highlights agency accountability and critical resource issues. A comparable rehearsal is to be conducted before each key milestone in the plan, such as in preparation for the transition from one phase of the operation to another.

A second important, if not unique, aspect of PDD-56 is its requirement for an interagency after-action review at the conclusion of US participation in the intervention. The review includes a comprehensive assessment of the operation to analyze the performance of the Washington policy team and US operations in the crisis area. As with all after-action reviews, every effort is made to capture relevant lessons from the operation to improve the prospects for success in future interventions. What is unique to the PDD-56 review is the requirement for the EXCOMM to distribute lessons learned throughout the interagency community (not just to those that participated in the operation) and to integrate the lessons into policy, procedures, and operational practice. This EXCOMM responsibility, together with the requirement for cosponsored annual training for the interagency peace operations policy community, sets PDD-56 apart from other presidential directives.

Interagency Training

Most organizations, civilian and military alike, understand the importance of training their work force. This part of the analysis of PDD-56 examines that proposition in the context of the US federal government's interagency system of management and crisis response.

Incomplete or failed integration of non-DOD agencies into the development of strategy and plans for responding to complex emergencies can undermine unity of effort in execution. It can also result in demands for the military to perform tasks outside its range of skills and competencies. Deficiencies in the interagency process could extend the military's involvement in an intervention beyond the need for unique military personnel and assets to cope with the complex emergency.

The Requirement

The training program mandated by PDD-56 is intended to familiarize key members of the US federal government's interagency community--at the level of Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office Director, and their staffs--with lessons learned from complex contingency operations. It also has as an objective defining and describing the most current planning tools and procedures in the political-military planning process.

PDD-56 requires the National Security Council to develop and conduct an interagency training program for managing complex emergencies. The program, to be presented annually, is supported by the State Department and the Department of Defense, and is conducted in conjunction with the appropriate US federal educational institutions, including the National Defense University, the National Foreign Affairs Training Center, and the Army War College (US Army Peacekeeping Institute). The training familiarizes federal officials with processes and procedures for developing and implementing pol-mil plans to deal with complex emergencies. Those participating in the training have an opportunity to interact with experienced federal agency practitioners and with experienced members of field organizations to learn what was or was not effective in previous operations. PDD-56 calls upon all appropriate federal educational institutions to explore ways to incorporate the pol-mil planning process into their curricula and for federal agencies to develop their own internal training programs on the topic.[3]

The intent of PDD-56 with regard to training is to establish the pol-mil planning process within the interagency community as the way to respond to complex emergencies. That process has to deal with a vast array of topics that must be included in policy deliberations, and do so effectively in a very short time without all the information needed to make decisions. Political, military, humanitarian, economic, environmental, and less obvious considerations are subject to examination. All are essential to a comprehensive understanding of the range of peace operations policy and to a well-coordinated and complete pol-mil planning process. The PDD-56 training program is designed to sharpen agency officials' planning skills and to give them an opportunity to discover the utility of the pol-mil planning process by participating in a simulated crisis situation.

For the planning process to respond to lessons derived from actual operations, the after-action review is an essential first step to understanding what succeeded, what failed, and why each outcome occurred in an operation. In compliance with the provisions of PDD-56, the EXCOMM initiates an after-action review involving those who participated in the operation on the ground and those who monitored its conduct from outside the theater of operations. The assessment includes a review of interagency planning and coordination, both in Washington and in the field, legal and budgetary difficulties encountered, and proposed solutions to problems. Without constant feedback and updating, the pol-mil planning process could become outdated; the after-action review and subsequent dissemination of the results are intended to ensure that good ideas are carried forward, unsuccessful initiatives are analyzed, and that both are disseminated throughout the community to better prepare for the next crisis.

Training

A training program for the US interagency community was initiated late in 1995; it resulted in the conduct of a pilot training session in February 1996 and a subsequent session in December 1996. The success of these early attempts at interagency training and the release of PDD-56 in May 1997 led to the first formal training session for the US federal interagency community in mid-December 1997.[4]

The first formal "Interagency Training and Education Program for Complex Contingency Operations" came about as a result of a joint effort by the National Security Council Staff, the Department of State, and the Department of Defense. The stated purpose was to enhance interagency planning and coordination for complex contingency operations. It was cosponsored by the Foreign Service Institute, National Defense University, and the US Army Peacekeeping Institute, under the direction of the Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Global Issues and Multinational Affairs on the National Security Council. Approximately 70 participants and ten observers attended.[5]

The goals of this first training session were to:

- Improve US government interagency management and support of complex contingency operations.
- Institutionalize the interagency lessons learned in planning and developing an integrated US response to a complex contingency.
- Enhance interagency cooperation and coordination by developing an understanding of the interests, capabilities, and limitations of the various US government agencies that participate in or support US responses to complex contingencies.[6]

The session lasted two and a half days and included guest speakers, panel discussions, and a scenario-based pol-mil simulation. Speakers and panel discussants were asked to share insights on interagency lessons learned from recent

complex contingency operations in Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, and Bosnia. Participants were provided the opportunity to use and become familiar with the pol-mil planning process, develop key portions of the pol-mil plan (the assessment, mission statement, overall concept, end state, general agency concepts, and mission area team concepts), manipulate the planning decision support software developed at National Defense University, and conduct an interagency rehearsal in a realistic, simulated interagency environment.[7]

The Pol-Mil Simulation

The simulation provided hands-on experience in developing and coordinating the pol-mil plan for a simulated complex emergency in northeast Asia. The objectives of the simulation were to:

- Discuss interagency lessons learned, current issues, and initiatives in developing, planning, and managing an integrated US response to complex contingencies based on recent US experiences, through panel and speaker presentations and discussions.
- Clarify and understand interagency tasks and responsibilities, and the implications of these lessons for coordinating and developing a US government response to a complex contingency, through panel and speaker presentations and discussions.
- Familiarize participants with the pol-mil plan outline and planning process through hands-on experience in developing selected aspects of the pol-mil plan in an interagency simulation exercise.
- Familiarize participants with the interagency rehearsal and its purpose in pol-mil planning and interagency coordination through hands-on experience in an interagency rehearsal simulation exercise.
- Emphasize selected key issues in interagency coordination through an interagency simulation exercise.
- Create an opportunity for networking and familiarity between individuals of different agencies to enhance coordination for real-world complex contingency operations.[8]

A game book was constructed which helped participants prepare for the training and provided a reference for future involvement in the interagency planning process. Among the items provided to participants was what was then referred to as "The US Pol-Mil Implementation Plan Handbook" and associated software for the Planning Decision Support System (PDSS) computer program.[9] Participants were also encouraged to bring relevant information and materials from their respective offices to explain agency perspectives and to develop agency portions of the pol-mil plan during the simulation game.

During the assessment phase, participants reviewed specific examples of potential tasks outlined in the pol-mil plan handbook. Source materials from agency historical files and experiences from previous operations conducted in the Asia-Pacific region provided a basis for developing agency estimates and concepts of operation. The references included estimates of resource requirements, time lines for planning and execution, points of contact from selected international and other organizations and agencies that were consulted, and background data on refugees and displaced persons. Humanitarian organizations routinely operating in the region and representative issues associated with regional humanitarian assistance were also discussed.

During the first phase of the simulation, participants were to develop agency perspectives regarding the situation presented and an introductory view of the mission from their agency's perspective. Guest speakers and a group of distinguished panelists helped shape that outcome. In the second phase, agency Deputy Assistant Secretaries joined the exercise to refine and integrate the assessment and the mission statement previously developed by the entire planning group. Participants were asked to present the views and perspectives of their respective agencies throughout the interagency simulation. Mission area teams were organized to undertake the development of concepts of operations for the specific problem areas identified by this senior level policy group. In the last phase, the concepts were integrated into a coordinated whole and out-briefed to a panel of senior and very experienced practitioners of complex contingency operations.

Outcomes

All training objectives were met during this first formal training session. Participant critiques were encouraging; all involved acknowledged that while PDD-56 mandated training for managing complex emergencies, the experience had

truly added value to the entire interagency process. Participants in the December 1997 session confirmed the need for a continuing education program for members of the federal interagency community.

Those officials who participated in the training acquired a practical understanding of interagency tasks and responsibilities. During their exposure to the pol-mil plan as members of a simulated interagency working group developing integrated policy guidance for a complex contingency operation, they came face-to-face with "intra" as well as interagency cultures. Interestingly, the experience was sufficiently realistic that it highlighted the different cultures, organizations, agendas, training philosophies, working modes, and sense of urgency among interagency players.

Conclusions

Success in complex contingency operations requires that all aspects of a crisis--political, military, law and order, security, economic, and humanitarian assistance--be addressed nearly simultaneously in a coordinated manner. Most members of the US interagency community recognize that these coordination challenges exist; many have experienced firsthand the difficulties that can arise if planners fail to address them. Many have also learned important lessons over the past years and have developed innovative techniques to improve coordination and accountability within their own organizations and within the government during these operations. These initiatives have proven their worth during our responses to recent complex emergencies.

Most of the experience with alternative planning tools and methodologies resides with those who first developed and used them. There is a risk, therefore, that when these people leave public service, or even depart their current posts, the lessons and procedures will go with them. The PDD-56 training program seeks to broaden the base of experience by sharing these tools within and between agencies to develop and maintain proficiency with planning methods proven suitable to the demands of complex emergencies.

The first formal federal government interagency training program was the product of a two-year effort to record and share an improved concept for interagency planning for complex emergencies and the lessons learned from previous contingency operations dating back to the US experience in Somalia. This effort included vetting strategic lessons learned at a very high level within the government and designing, testing, and conducting a phased prototype training and education program that introduced planning tools to those who would likely use them in a complex emergency. The training gave key members of the interagency community a chance to evaluate the tools and suggest additional refinements. Future interagency training opportunities will depend upon the resolve of leaders within all affected agencies to develop the potential inherent in PDD-56 and its pol-mil plan through training and maintenance of standard operating procedures.[10]

It remains to be seen if US government agencies will internalize the training requirement prescribed in PDD-56. The need for interagency expertise in managing complex contingency operations is apparent to most participants. It will require leadership from the National Security Council and a commitment to policy integration by US government agencies to ensure that this pol-mil planning imperative does not fail for lack of interest. The military, particularly the US Army with its unique capabilities and requirements during an intervention, has a powerful vested interest in the success of PDD-56.

NOTES

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1. The National Security Advisor's foreword to the "Handbook for Interagency Management of Complex Contingency Operations (Draft-Working Papers)." Once published, it will be available through US government sources.

2. White Paper, "The Clinton Administration's Policy on Managing Complex Contingency Operations: Presidential

Decision Directive 56," May 1997, p. 3.

3. Ibid., p. 6.

4. At a meeting conducted in the White House Conference Center on 15 September 1995, the National Security Council approved the interagency training proposal presented by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Strategy and Requirements. There were three phases in the pilot program. In the first phase (September 1995) lessons learned from previous operations were discussed and a pol-mil plan template was presented. The second phase, in November and December 1995, highlighted the development of a pol-mil plan and a rehearsal outbrief to the EXCOMM. The third phase, at Carlisle Barracks, Pa., in early February 1996, produced a pol-mil plan for a simulated operation in Eastern Zaire. While there was consensus that the training sessions were extremely beneficial, the program was shortened to two and a half days to conserve time. A training session in December 1996 assembled action officers, office directors, Deputy Assistant Secretaries, and an Executive Committee to produce a pol-mil plan, review it, test it for coordination and integration, and conduct a rehearsal of it. The stage was set for a formal training session in December 1997.

5. The following federal agencies participated: National Security Council, Department of Defense (Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Staff, US Atlantic Command, US Pacific Command, US Forces Korea), Department of State, US Agency for International Development, US Information Agency, Department of Transportation, Department of Justice, and Department of Agriculture. Active participation by the National Security Council is essential to give this training the requisite credibility, command emphasis, and sense of urgency.

6. Managing Complex Contingency Operations, Interagency Coordination Simulation, 10-12 December 1997, National Foreign Affairs Training Center.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. The handbook is currently known as the "Handbook for Interagency Management of Complex Contingency Operations (Draft-Working Papers)." Once published it will be available through US government sources.

10. Training currently is being conducted on a regular basis by the National Foreign Affairs Training Center, National Defense University, and the US Army War College's Peacekeeping Institute. A PDD-56 basic literacy course was conducted in September 1998 at the National Defense University. This course familiarizes participants with PDD-56; it could be made exportable to requesting agencies. The next formal PDD-56 training session is tentatively scheduled for December 1998 at the Foreign Service Institute in Washington.

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