

## Creating OSD “Mission Teams”

By: Mark Cancian

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### BACKGROUND

Proposals for “mission teams” in the Department of Defense are not new. Jim Locher, the most prominent proponent, has argued for them since the 1980s and included them in his recent testimony to the SASC: “What we really need in today’s environment to move quickly is to focus all of our people on missions instead of on their own functions. . . . Whether it’s counterterrorism or weapons of mass destruction or what we’re doing right now in the Middle East, there is no place in the headquarters of the Department of Defense where the secretary can have all of that functional expertise integrated into a mission team.”

Chris Lamb made similar recommendations in his SASC testimony: “The Secretary cannot be the first point of integration for the Department’s most important cross-functional endeavors. He needs horizontal organizations empowered to generate cross-cutting problem assessments and solution alternatives.”

Supporters of this proposal have argued that these reforms would bring DoD more into line with the practices of major contemporary corporations by using cross-functional teams of experts to develop rapid solutions to specific problems. As Locher commented, “When Toyota did it, they found out they could design an automobile with 30 percent of the effort. DoD could do the same thing.”

**Table 1: Remarks from Congress and Administration**

<b>SASC</b>	<b>HASC</b>	<b>Secretary Carter/ Administration</b>
Creates cross-functional "mission teams."	[No corresponding provision]	Administration objects and includes these provisions in its long list of veto objections.
<p><b>Senate NDAA 2017 Section 941 (Bill Summary):</b></p> <p>"The NDAA would create a new mechanism, called "mission teams," to support the Secretary and the Deputy in performing cross-functional integration more effectively and efficiently.</p> <p>Each mission team would focus on a discrete mission (deterring Russia, for example, or cyber-security) that the Secretary could determine."</p>		<p><b>SAP on Senate NDAA:</b></p> <p>"The Administration strongly objects to sections 941 and 942, which would undermine the Secretary of Defense's ability to exercise authority, direction, and control over the Department. The provisions would blur lines of responsibility and control over resources within the Department, and would require the issuance of numerous unnecessary and burdensome policies, directives, and reports. Section 941 would undermine the Secretary's ability to create effective cross-functional teams."<sup>1</sup></p>

**ASSESSMENT**

Proposals like this, which do not require more people, more funding, or major reorganizations, are generally not controversial. They fall under the heading of "good government" and might even be helpful. Further, the bureaucracy can implement the direction as broadly or as narrowly as it desires. There are many cross-functional teams in OSD already under different names—Strategic Program Review teams, Integrated Product Teams (in acquisition), Deputy's Management Action Group—and these could be relabeled "mission teams." The Department could establish additional teams as pilot programs.

What makes this proposal controversial is its specificity and the tone of the language. The current legislative language regarding Section 941 goes into considerable detail, instructing the Department about who will be present on the team; specifying the number of teams to be established by particular dates; requiring that teams be co-located; allowing team

<sup>1</sup> Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget, *Statement of Administration Policy: S. 2943, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017*, June 7, 2016, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/legislative/sap/114/saps2943s\\_20160607.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/legislative/sap/114/saps2943s_20160607.pdf).

leaders to pull personnel from existing organizations; directing the charters, reviews, and reports that need to be submitted to the secretary; and requiring that team leaders be "available to the congressional defense committees to provide periodic updates on the progress of such mission team."<sup>2</sup>

There is also a risk that management headquarters will increase in size in order to staff the new mission teams. Existing offices, including the military services, will feel they need additional people to send to the new teams so that their ongoing work does not suffer. Offices may also feel pressure to send staff to a large number of teams in order to ensure they are adequately represented. Cross-functional QDR and program/budget review teams, which exist under the current processes, often have large membership as even marginally involved offices send representatives.

The NDAA SAP included these provisions in its long list of objections in its veto threat. However, because there is no political issue at stake, the White House will not be as strongly opposed as the department itself. DoD will likely work on its own to get the language modified.

## RECOMMENDATION FOR WAY FORWARD

Because the concept of cross-functional teams is broadly acceptable, but the specificity and inflexibility of the proposed legislation is the cause of the administration's objections, the way forward is obvious: retain the direction but ease the specificity, allowing DoD some flexibility in implementation.

- Ease the overriding, and possible duplication, of the existing organization by allowing teams to report to officials below the secretary, making selection of team members collaborative between the team leader and the owning organization, and having the team leader provide input on annual personnel evaluations but not the sole input.
- Encourage collocation of teams but do not require it, as rearranging space is expensive and time consuming.
- Delete the requirement for team leaders to report to the Congress, retaining the Congress's authority to call hearings on particular topics, including those under the purview of cross-functional teams. DoD can then decide who will testify. Congress retains its right to subpoena particular witnesses, when necessary.
- Retain the direction to create the first three teams, but stop there, pending the results of the required report on the lessons learned (Section 941 (C) (8) "Review of Mission Teams"). That way DoD and the Congress can evaluate the concept and make changes, as necessary, before directing the creation of further teams in future NDAAAs.
- Change deadlines from calendar dates to months from NDAA enactment, to recognize the possibility of NDAA delay. If the NDAA is delayed until after the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

election, or even to the spring, the deadlines currently specified (April and May 2017) could become impossibly short.

- Make “cross-functional” experience an SES promotion requirement, not necessarily membership on a mission team.
- Make GAO conduct reviews as needed, rather than requiring them every six months.
- Retain the direction for DOD to develop an implementing directive.



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## ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND

**Jim Locher, Quoted in Jared Serbu, “30 years after Goldwater-Nichols, Senate eyes another DoD reorganization,” Federal News Radio, November 11, 2015,** <http://federalnewsradio.com/defense/2015/11/30-years-goldwater-nichols-senate-eyes-another-dod-reorganization/>.

“What we really need in today’s environment to move quickly is to focus all of our people on missions instead of on their own functions,” he said. “Whether it’s counterterrorism or weapons of mass destruction or what we’re doing right now in the Middle East, there is no place in the headquarters of the Department of Defense where the secretary can have all of that functional expertise integrated into a mission team.”

**Jim Locher, “Empowering Interagency Teams,” World Politics Review, November 19, 2009,** <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/4663/empowering-interagency-teams>.

**Christopher Lamb, Increasing Effectiveness of Military Operations, 114th Congress (2015) (statement of Dr. Christopher Lamb),** [http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Lamb\\_12-10-15.pdf](http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Lamb_12-10-15.pdf).

“Improving decision-making capacity in the Department of Defense requires holistic organizational reform. However, several fundamental changes are especially important. The Secretary cannot be the first point of integration for the Department’s most important cross-functional endeavors. He needs horizontal organizations empowered to generate cross-cutting problem assessments and solution alternatives. Such teams could manage cross-

cutting functions for the Secretary but also oversee real-world missions that require the rapid integration of diverse functional specialties. They would examine problems 'end-to-end' and be the designated strategic integration point across all bodies of expertise, freeing up senior leaders to focus on key strategic decisions. The teams would intervene selectively to eliminate friction and sub-optimal efforts where component parts of the Department are not collaborating to maximum effect. The presumption is that the Secretary will back up their authority to intervene and obtain the results he wants. Leaders of functional organizations would be free to focus on problems resident within their domains."

**Additional Text: Potential Problem Sections Regarding Specificity and Tone**

"(B) That provides clear direction that the leaders of functional components of the Department that provide personnel to such mission teams—

- (i.) May not interfere in the activities of the mission team;
- (ii.) Shall instruct personnel assigned to teams to faithfully represent the views and expertise of their functional components while contributing to the best of their ability to the success of the mission team concerned."

"(6) Team Personnel—For each team established pursuant to this subsection, the Secretary shall—

A) designate as leader of such team a qualified and experienced individual in a general or flag officer grade."

...

D) ensure that team members are properly trained in teamwork, collaboration, conflict resolution, and appropriately represent the views of their functional components without inappropriately pursuing the interests of their functional components; and

E) make the team leader available to the congressional defense committees to provide periodic updates on the progress of such mission team."

"(8) Review of Mission Teams. . . . The Secretary of Defense shall complete an analysis, with support from external experts in organizational and management sciences, of successes and failures of mission teams and determine how to apply the lessons learned from that analysis."