

CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN AFGHANISTAN AND BEYOND

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To the layperson, the term civil-military coordination evokes notions of a seamless division of labour between aid workers and international military forces. Media coverage from crises such as Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan has reinforced this expectation, showing relief agencies distributing food and medicines under the guard of heavily armed soldiers, or aid workers and military working together to construct refugee camps, set up field hospitals, provide emergency water and sanitation, etc. Publics of donor countries like Canada providing relief and development aid and troops to such missions expect such efficient teamwork as pure common sense, and donor governments and the United Nations have adopted many policies advocating closer integration of the various assistance streams known variously as “3-Ds” (defence, development and diplomacy) or “whole of government approaches” or within the UN, “integrated missions”.

The problem is that this image of civil-military teamwork is too simplistic and assumes too much. This prevailing approach frames coordination as a technical exercise that the right combination of meetings, information flow, and coordination focal points can solve. It also frames civil-military coordination as an agreed goal. Yet in areas of active conflict and in fragile post-conflict settings, the mandates, timeframes,

guiding principles and methodologies for working of civilian aid agencies and military forces are radically different and often clash, despite good intentions and a sincere common desire to “help the people” between most international military and civilian aid personnel involved in international peace operations.

The contributions in this issue present very different views on the best relationship between civilian and military assistance providers, but agree that real common strategies amongst such unlike international assistance actors are not emerging from current civil-military coordination approaches, which too often focus on field-level interactions, civil-military liaison and mechanistic structures of integration. One contribution to this issue strongly supports current models of civil-military coordination and integration, but cautions that they do not go far enough or reflect a sincere strategic level alignment between security and development agendas in Afghanistan (Capstick). Another argues that the structures for civil-military coordination in UN integrated missions (often seen as a model) have deliberately limited goals and were never meant to harmonize the broader security-development agendas of the mission (de Coning). Another argues that current civil-military coordination models have not helped achieve security and development goals better or faster in Afghanistan (Stapleton), while another documents the difficulties, challenges and tradeoffs for protection of civilians and their right to assistance posed by such integrated approaches (Cornish). Finally our own contribution (Olson and Gregorian) argues that tradeoffs between important values and goals held by these diverse international assistance actors have been masked behind blanket prescriptions for greater coherence and

coordination and the lack of truly inclusive processes to deal with these fundamental differences undermines any sincerely common approach.

This collection unpacks these diverse orientations, and in bringing in views from the NGO community, also questions the notion of a common “civilian” side of the civil-military equation. This notion of “civilian” encompasses entities as different as donor government development agencies or political missions, the UN, the World Bank and other intergovernmental bodies, as well as the vast spectrum of non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations, who in some sectors implement up to 90% of internationally funded programs. In Afghanistan, many international and national NGOs resist greater integration with the more politically-driven agendas of the UN and government donors, and international military forces, concerned to preserve their independence, neutrality and operational space. Consequently, “civilian” agencies can be more different than alike and there is a big difference between government agencies with a clear need to get “their internal house in order” and those non-governmental agencies that may not see themselves as part of the “team” but who in fact do most of the work on the ground.

This special issue dives into this debate to offer an opportunity to hear frank views from all quarters on the challenges and opportunities posed by civil-military coordination in Afghanistan in particular, but more generally as well. Only with a more balanced view of both sides of the coin is it possible to devise effective strategies to meet the real needs of populations caught in conflict for security, relief, development and ultimately, sustainable peace.

We thank the Journal of Military and Strategic Studies for the opportunity to profile these issues here. We are proud to present this collection of articles from leading experts and highly experienced practitioners who know intimately the difficult dynamics of civil-military coordination in Afghanistan currently, and from their work in many other crisis settings.

Origins of this Special Issue

The idea for this collection emerged from an experts' workshop held at the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies at the University of Calgary in March 2007.¹ The *Coordinated Approaches to Security, Development and Peacekeeping: Lessons from Afghanistan and Liberia* workshop brought together 35 expert practitioners from international assistance agencies, donors, military forces active in Afghanistan and Liberia along with representatives of the national government and national NGOs, to review lessons learned in the ongoing international peace operations in the two countries. The workshop aimed to better understand the gap between the policy level consensus promoting greater aid coordination and coherence in recent years and the actual practice in the field. (For detailed workshop report and policy brief synthesizing recommendations for practice from this research effort, see: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pdsp/node/34>)

¹ Generous financial support for this workshop was provided by the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, the Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) Conference Secretariat, the Department of National Defence's Security and Defence Forum, NATO's Public Diplomacy Division, and several departments of the University of Calgary – the Faculty of Social Sciences, the International Centre, and the Political Science Department. Equally generous in-kind support was extended by the Institute of World Affairs, and many participating agencies covered the time and costs of their personnel.

The focus of the March workshop was much broader than civil-military coordination - to rather analyze the broad dynamics of mission-wide coordination amongst the enormous array of governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental actors that comprise these complex international missions for peace. However, many insights on civil-military relationships in the field emerged and the authors here, all participants in the March workshop, agreed to develop their presentations further into the articles for this special issue. Their contributions are profiled below.

Mike Capstick

Colonel Mike Capstick (retired) brings a perspective grounded in 32 years of service with the Canadian Armed Forces and as the Commander of the first deployment of the Canadian Forces Strategic Advisory Team in Afghanistan – the mixed military – civilian team providing strategic planning advice and capacity building to the Afghan government. Capstick argues that civil-military coordination specifically, and coordination overall are weak in the Afghan mission and that too often civil-military coordination issues are discussed only at the tactical level, while the most important level is the strategic one. He faults the mission overall for both “strategic incoherence” and an “economy of force” approach to both security and reconstruction assistance.

In his view, effective coordination in the Afghan mission at the strategic level means following the lead of the broad framework agreed between the international community and the Afghan Government, the Afghanistan Compact, and its embedded framework for development, the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS).

Guided by these frameworks, in his view a “unity of effort” approach must be part of the operating culture of every single entity involved, civilian and military.

He argues that old distinctions between civilian and military roles are no longer relevant in Afghanistan, reviewing the Canadian Forces experience along with other departments of the Canadian government, in security, development and governance work. Furthermore he argues that contexts like Afghanistan pose real challenges to traditional civilian aid delivery models and principles when statebuilding, rather than emergency relief and development, is the goal of the effort. Capstick suggests some far-reaching structural solutions for the Afghan mission to achieve the kind of coherence needed, but also cautions that structural solutions alone will not help without a sincere unity of effort by all parties, that is currently lacking.

Cedric de Coning

A foremost expert in civil-military coordination policies and practices within UN missions, Cedric de Coning reviews the lessons and challenges highlighted by UN experience and evolving practice on civil-military coordination. In his view, the whole civil-military debate has become confused, with the concept of civil-military coordination often misleadingly used to refer to strategic level coherence between the security and development goals of an international peace mission. He shows how, within contemporary UN peace operations, civil-military coordination (UN CIMIC) is a very specific, and limited, body of knowledge centering around liaison between UN military forces and civilian counterparts, providing mission support for external civilian partners such as transport, equipment, security escorts for humanitarian convoys, providing

community support for rehabilitation projects like schools and clinics, and reconciliation activities like festivals and sports events.

While this limited function is important in UN missions, he argues it in no way involves the kind of mission-wide strategic planning and coordination at senior levels that aspires to provide system wide coherence on issues pertaining to the broader security and development agendas.

De Coning also shows that given the overlap between roles and functions of civilian and military actors in contemporary UN integrated missions, security related tasks such as reform of the security sector, or reintegration of excombatants often involve many civilian actors and it is impossible to separate civilian and military roles or assets in practical terms. (Existing policies on civil-military and military-humanitarian coordination, he notes, are premised on a clear distinction between civilian and military assets.) Overall, echoing Capstick's observations on Afghanistan, de Coning suggests established UN guidelines for civil-military coordination and the terms and constructs used in the vigorous debates between the military and humanitarians are outdated and simply don't apply in current UN peace operations contexts and this presents a clear challenge for civilian humanitarian groups to redefine humanitarian principles in a way that makes sense in this new reality.

Stephen Cornish

Stephen Cornish's perspective comes from decades-long work in conflict areas with humanitarian organizations including Médecins Sans Frontières and the Canadian Red Cross, and his current role as Policy & Advocacy Advisor at CARE Canada. He

argues that the current constructs for civil-military integration, in the form of integrated missions and whole of government approaches by donors, while motivated by good intentions, have in fact resulted in humanitarian and development aid programming becoming subordinated to political interests. He notes that aid workers and particularly NGOs are seen as obstructionist in resisting these integrationist agendas, but do so because they witness the concrete implications for the protection of civilians, and for aid agencies' ability to effectively and equitably meet civilian needs.

He argues that the politicization and militarization of aid that has emerged from a decade of experience with so-called "humanitarian interventions", and is firmly evident in Afghanistan, is an issue that should concern policy makers more than it has. He faults the lack of true consultation processes and the lack of a level playing field amongst the three D actors (defence, diplomacy and development), for resulting policies where in Afghanistan, the defence "D" dominates all other agendas. He argues that the evident failures of the 3D effort in Afghanistan, are often blamed on what is seen as a "weak and ineffectual" development D, and on the unwillingness of NGOs to cooperate with the military, when in fact the whole integrationist model may be counterproductive for the development gains required to security stability.

He, like many in the NGO community, rejects civil-military integration as combining incompatible goals and rejects its "ultimate ends" logic, with the long term benefits of peace and protection arrived at by sacrificing the emergency protection and assistance needs of large segments of the population now. While humanitarian "minimalists" within the NGO community push for classical notions of humanitarian independence and space, "maximalists" are much more comfortable working with

governments and foreign militaries in support of long term statebuilding and conflict transformation. For multimandate aid agencies like CARE, those who combine emergency relief and long-term development and peacebuilding programming, working in scenarios like Afghanistan poses considerable dilemmas and clear challenges. Ultimately, going forward, Cornish argues that humanitarianism needs to be coordinated off as a separate area independent of 3-Ds thinking, and makes the case that development should be as well.

Barbara Stapleton

Barbara Stapleton's perspective is rooted in decades of international human rights work and her experience in Afghanistan over the past 5 years, first as Advocacy and Policy Coordinator with ACBAR, the main NGO coordination body based in Kabul, and since May 2006 as a senior political adviser with the Office of the Special Representative of the EU. She takes us through a detailed review of the evolution of the main mechanism for civil-military coordination in Afghanistan, the provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT's) and argues that while their impact on security and reconstruction has been disappointing, the main impact of PRTs to date has been a political one, in sustaining international engagement.

In her view, PRTs have kept donors engaged by responding more to the needs of the international community than the needs of Afghanistan. Her review of the political, human, and organizational dynamics that have shaped PRTs over the last five years emphasizes the non-linear and ad hoc nature of their evolution, showing how PRTs reflect a very disjointed, donor driven international engagement in Afghanistan suffering

from too many autonomous organizations in lead roles. In her view, PRTS have in effect allowed the appearance of progress but in fact have been unable to address key political issues in the provinces that are undermining the whole effort.

One key reason she offers for this is that PRTs got the focus wrong, in addressing security needs of the Afghan state instead of the human security of the Afghan people, which allowed Afghans to conclude that PRTS are largely irrelevant to their security. In her view the international community has underestimated the value of basic security as opposed to concrete reconstruction aid and a more consistent defense of human security would have better established the moral intent of the international presence in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the perceived “success” of the PRT concept in terms of expansion of PRT numbers and nations involved, has resulted in “Balkanization” of the aid effort that has, paradoxically, undermined the goals of statebuilding. Ultimately she argues that the civil-military relationship and PRT concept have absorbed too much energy and political will, and in fact have distracted attention from the real issues threatening Afghanistan’s recovery.

Lara Olson and Hrach Gregorian

As we argue in our article, existing field coordination processes commonly have two main outcomes: they result in mere “information sharing” and have no real coordination impact; conversely, they produce a kind of forced, “false coherence”,² referring to superficial changes in language and formal adherence to new frameworks, driven by the agenda of the actor with the most power and resources. Either way, the

² This useful term was first suggested by a participant in the March 2007 workshop - Cheyanne Church, Lecturer in Human Security, Fletcher School, Tufts University, Boston.

dynamics of field coordination between security- and development-focused agencies has consequently resulted in frustration and mistrust between these groups, the exact opposite of what is intended.

We point to some key factors contributing to this problem. Coordination processes often assume agreement among actors on strategies and don't provide opportunities for inclusive and meaningful multi-stakeholder dialogue. Power asymmetries block real dialogue, and funding relationships and competition limit the ability of existing coordination processes to achieve some level of common intent.

As well, groups hold different notions of the purpose of coordination in the first place, ranging widely from greater centralized control, to democratic consensus-building, to credible, reliable information exchange. Furthermore, many NGOs, key implementers of most aid programming in the field, find their engagement with other civilian and military assistance actors results in little to no impact on the broader strategies being pursued, often rendering consultation and consensus building in the field, in their view, "pointless".

We argue that in working side by side in such settings and preserving their autonomous mandates, roles, and specialized focus, civilian and military agencies can still improve the way their efforts link up and support the bigger peace. Further, the key may be to improve inclusive, two-way communication processes that can help diverse actors define minimum common goals and principles to guide their work, which in turn may lay the foundations for better coordination down the road.

While the articles here represent opposing views and perspectives, they are united by a common sense that civil-military coordination is too narrow and limited a construct to get at the relationships and interconnection between security and development goals in international peace missions. The broader challenge of aligning the interlinked goals of security and development will not be solved by field-based coordination mechanisms and structures alone.

To use a rowing metaphor, current civil-military coordination concepts paint a picture in which everyone on the “team” just needs to “pull in the same direction”. However, as the authors here show, it turns out that some on the team don’t remember joining, don’t want to be on the boat and refuse to row. Others who didn’t join the team, will cooperate if the boat is moving in one direction, but not if it turns in another. Some don’t like the unruly nature of the team, and keep asking “who is the captain?” Some are paddling with their hands, while others have huge, mechanized oars. Some complain about that others are not pulling their weight and are slowing the whole boat down. Some want to get downriver, but don’t want to be seen on the boat with the others. Some feel that everyone would get downriver faster if they split up into separate boats. What this, by now, overstretched, metaphor intends to show is simple - this is not a mere engineering problem but represents more fundamental confusion over where the boat is going, why and how?