



RIGHT STRATEGY, WRONG PLACE-WHY NATO'S COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH WILL FAIL IN AFGHANISTAN

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Abstract:

NATO has been right to adopt a joint Comprehensive Approach (CA) involving the international community since it is a prerequisite for success in its crisis response operations. However, it has been wrong to hail its CA as a “sine qua non” for success in Afghanistan, as the new strategy remains a work in progress. This article demonstrates that NATO's CA will fail in Afghanistan because three necessary conditions cannot be implemented in time: (1) Creation of NATO consensus on how the CA should be implemented, (2) Institutionalization of CA doctrine, procedures and thinking within the Alliance enabling it to plug and play with other actors, and (3) Establishment of effective cooperation with the organizations and local actors that NATO must cooperate with in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Afghanistan, COIN, Comprehensive Approach, crisis response operations, ISAF, NATO, PRT.

Resumen:

La OTAN ha tenido razón en adoptar conjuntamente una Aproximación Integral (CA) implicando a toda la comunidad internacional ya que es un prerequisite para el éxito en las operaciones de respuesta en situaciones de crisis. Ha sido un error sin embargo alabar el CA como condición “sine qua non” para el éxito en Afganistán, ya que la nueva estrategia sigue estando en proceso de elaboración. El presente artículo demuestra que la actual CA de la OTAN fracasará al no cumplir los tres siguientes requisitos que han de ser ejecutados a tiempo: (1) Crear un consenso en el seno de la OTAN sobre la ejecución del CA, (2) Una institucionalización de la doctrina, procedimientos y pensamiento de la CA en el seno de la OTAN que permitan su interacción con otros actores, y (3) El establecimiento de una cooperación efectiva con las organizaciones locales con las que la OTAN debe cooperar en Afganistán.

Palabras clave: Afganistán, COIN, Enfoque Integral, operaciones de respuesta en situación de crisis, ISAF, OTAN, PRT.

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1. Introduction

In 2006 NATO adopted the Comprehensive Approach (CA) to enhance the scope for success in its non-article five crisis response operations. The adoption of the CA reflected the lesson learned by the Alliance in the Balkans and Afghanistan that it cannot win the peace alone even if it conducts a textbook military operation. In addition to military security, sustainable peace also requires development, good governance, rule of law and local ownership. NATO has consequently conceptualized the CA as a collective endeavour involving all the actors engaged in such operations. It is not NATO owned and should not be NATO driven. The CA is supposed to foster “cooperation and coordination between international organisations, individual states, agencies and NGOs, the private sector and the host government, and effective implementation requires the cooperation and contribution of all major actors”.² To this end NATO emphasizes that this cooperation and coordination should be “done in a way that does not compromise any organisation’s independence. Nor must it infringe on the humanitarian space to which Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) understandably attach great importance”.³ Similarly, the Alliance has pledged not to develop “purely civilian capacities” in order to reassure the United Nations, the EU and the NGOs that it does not intend to trespass on their turf.⁴

NATO has been right to formulate its CA in this way as the Alliance will always depend upon other civilian actors for success on the crisis response operations that it becomes involved in. Being a military organisation it cannot provide all the civilian contributions that sustainable peace requires, and the adoption of a collectively owned CA is essential to ensure the Alliance’s continued relevance in a situation where its members are no longer threatened by conventional military attack. Its future relevance will depend on its ability to support crisis response operations outside of Europe since it is only a matter of time before the EU will take over responsibility for the Alliance’s last remaining operation on the European continent in Kosovo.

NATO has been wrong to present the CA as a sine qua non for success in Afghanistan however. Three years on NATO’s efforts to implement the CA have failed to make a difference on the ground in Afghanistan, and this article will demonstrate that it will continue to do so because three necessary success requirements cannot be realized in time to turn the deteriorating situation around:⁵ (1) Creation of NATO consensus on how the CA should be implemented, (2) Institutionalization of CA doctrine, procedures and thinking within NATO facilitating the formulation of common operational objectives and strategies, as well as joint planning, implementation and evaluation with other actors in all operational phases (pre-deployment, deployment, post-deployment), and (3) Establishment of effective cooperation with the organizations and local actors that NATO has to cooperate with in Afghanistan. Nothing suggests that the Alliance can meet these success requirements within the time frame

² “Speech by NATO Secretary General at the Microsoft-BBC-NATO”, *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Defence Leaders Forum*, Noordwijk aan zee, Netherlands (23 April 2007) .

³ Bisogniero, Claudio: “Assisting Afghanistan: the importance of a comprehensive approach”, Keynote address by NATO Deputy Secretary General Ambassador, *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), GLOBSEC Conference*, Bratislava, Slovak Republic (17 January 2008); See also: “Bucharest Summit Declaration”, *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Bucharest Summit, Press Release (2008)049*, Bucharest, Romania (3 April 2008).

⁴ “Riga Summit Declaration”, *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Riga Summit*, Riga, Latvia (26 November 2006) , para. 10 .

⁵ That the security situation is deteriorating is generally accepted. For the most recent UN assessment see: “The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security”, *United Nations (UN), General Assembly-Security Council, A/64/364-S/2009/475* (22 September 2009), para. 29-37.



of the next twelve to twenty-four months that many analysts regard as critical to prevent the American and hence NATO's commitment to the operation from collapsing.⁶

In what follows NATO's efforts to meet the three conditions necessary for CA success are discussed in turn. A conclusion at the end sums up the main points and identifies American leadership, blood and treasure as the key to turn the Afghan operation around.

2. Little Consensus on CA Implementation within NATO

Progress with respect to implementing the CA has been slow since Denmark put it on the Alliance's agenda in late 2004.⁷ The Danish initiative was followed by difficult negotiations that led to the endorsement of the idea by the Alliance in the Riga Summit Declaration in November 2006.⁸ It took another sixteen months to reach agreement on an Action Plan for developing and implementing NATO's contribution to CA. The Action Plan was finally adopted at the Bucharest summit in April 2008, but this did not speed up the process. The wording of the Action Plan was very general and a CA Task Force at NATO Headquarters (HQ) tasked with its implementation has not made much headway with respect to turning it into practical policy that can make a difference in Afghanistan.⁹

Profound disagreements in three areas explain why. The first is the disagreement over NATO's role in world politics, in particular, whether NATO should remain a regional actor with a focus on the transatlantic region, or become a player in the management of global security issues in cooperation with like-minded democratic countries in other parts of the world such as Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea. The United States (US) has been the principal advocate of a global role since the late 1990s, whereas France has led the opposition insisting that NATO remain a regional organization with a principal focus on collective national defence.¹⁰ French president Sarkozy, who has taken France back into NATO's military command, has also taken this position since he entered office in 2007.¹¹ This disagreement has had a negative impact on the development of NATO's CA role because of French concerns that the US may seek to use the CA to give NATO a global role. Moreover, the new members who joined the Alliance in order to obtain a security guarantee

⁶ See for instance Ackerman, Spencer: "Obama Faces Rising Anxiety on Afghanistan", *The Washington Independent*, 12 August 2009, at <http://washingtonindependent.com/54840/>; Interview with Steven Biddle, "U.S. Needs a Stronger Commitment to Improving Afghan Governance", Council of Foreign Relations (CFR), 30 July 2009, at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/19936/>; Exum, Andrew M; Fick, Nathaniel C.; Humayun, Ahmed A. and Kilcullen, David J. (2009): *Triage: The Next Twelve Months in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, Washington DC, Center for a New American Security; Lubold, Gordon: "In Afghanistan, time is running out, Pentagon worries", *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 June 2009; Woodward, Bob: "McChrystal: More Forces or 'Mission Failure'", *Washington Post*, 21 September 2009.

⁷ Fischer, Kristian and Christensen, Jan Top: "Improving Civil-Military Cooperation the Danish Way", *NATO Review* (Summer 2005).

⁸ "Riga Summit Declaration", *op. cit.*

⁹ Interviews with sources in NATO HQ, June 2009.

¹⁰: "The future of NATO and European defence, Ninth Report of Session 2007-08", *UK House of Commons, Defence Committee* (2008), para. 38.

¹¹ Jakobsen, Peter Viggo: "NATO's Comprehensive Approach to Crisis Response Operations: A Work in Slow Progress", Danish Institute for International Institute, *DIIS Report*, no. 15 (2008), p. 11, at <http://www.diis.dk/sw69155>.



against Russia also have an interest in ensuring that NATO does not divert too many resources away from collective defence towards out-of-Europe CA activities.¹²

The second area of disagreement hampering CA implementation concerns the extent of the military involvement. Determining how much of a role the military should play in CA and with what capabilities remains a topic of debate both at the national level within member states and at the Alliance level. Although NATO Response Force has “deployed” Stabilization Battalions on exercises,¹³ this debate is unlikely to be settled in the near future as it taps into the fundamental identity question concerning what “proper soldiering” is all about. Although most NATO member states realize that their armies may have to fill gaps and conduct civilian tasks in a transitional period if no civilian actors are present to do so, they still remain deeply ambivalent about it, and none of them have taken effective steps to prepare their forces for such “gap-filling” functions. Any such development is hampered by the fact that NATO’s armies are caught in a dilemma. Most if not all of them would prefer the relevant civilian organizations to establish the deployable civilian capacities that are required for effective stabilization, reconstruction and peacebuilding in the aftermath of war. They consequently have little incentive to move ahead and prepare their forces for civilian gap-filling, as this would lessen the pressure on the civilian sector to establish these capabilities. The problem with this approach is that civilian capacity-building remains in its infancy, and that the relevant civilian government agencies and organizations have generally shown little interest in developing the rapid reaction capacities required.¹⁴ Since the civilian rapid-reaction capacities established by the UN and the EU also remain limited, the implication is that the responsibility for performing important civilian tasks in the foreseeable future will continue to fall to armies precisely because the civilian actors have a limited capacity for rapid reaction and for operating in hostile environments.

Striking the right balance that will enable NATO to provide enough gap-filling to hold the ring until other actors are capable of taking over without removing the civilian incentive for capacity-building is difficult. While it is easy to agree with the recommendation made by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the approach should be “as civilian as possible and as military as necessary”,¹⁵ this recommendation offers no guidance as to exactly what capacities the military should deploy. Agreement has yet to be struck as to what gap-filling capacities NATO should be capable of deploying, in what quantities and by whom. Reluctant gap-fillers consequently have a strong incentive to sit back and wait for other members to move first in the hope that their actions will remove the need for them to act. The uncertainty about what is required and the deep military reluctance to engage in “civilian” gap-filling will prevent the rapid development of relevant CA capabilities.

The third area creating problems for the implementation of the CA Action Plan is the internal disagreement that NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan has given rise to. For the US, ISAF is a counterinsurgency (COIN) operation and

¹² On this point see Gaspers, Jan: “France’s Rapprochement with NATO: Paving the Way for an EU Caucus?”, *European Security Review*, no. 40 (September 2008), p. 4.

¹³ Stabilization Battalions were deployed in *Exercise Steadfast Jaw 2007*.

¹⁴ The 10,000-strong Canadian civilian roster CANADEM is the exception to the rule. According to CANADEM Executive Director Paul LaRose-Edwards, CANADEM is capable of deploying more civilian experts at short notice than the Canadian government has been willing to fund. CANADEM facilitated the deployment of 150 civilian experts to Afghanistan in the 2001-2007 period and has established a 300-strong roster of Afghanistan experts. See: CANADEM web page, *Government of Canada*, at <http://canadem.ca/canadem-in-afghanistan/>.

¹⁵ “Recommendations for increased synergy between defence, diplomacy and development”, *Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs- The Centre for European Reform (CER)* (2007).



in American eyes COIN equals CA and may involve high-intensity combat.¹⁶ Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (UK), who are conducting COIN operations in the southern parts of Afghanistan, agree with this interpretation in the sense that they view a coordinated approach in which combat (if necessary) and reconstruction go hand in hand as a sine qua non for success.¹⁷ By contrast, other NATO members, including Germany, Italy and Spain, who have refused to deploy forces to the south and allow their troops to engage in combat, interpret the ISAF operation as a peace support operation that should focus on winning hearts and minds through reconstruction and development. In their view, the US and the NATO members in the south should re-consider their high-intensity approach and place greater emphasis on civilian means and Afghan capacity-building.¹⁸ This dispute is not easily resolved as it goes far deeper than the short-term electoral considerations that figure prominently in analyses of this problem: it is also a function of different strategic cultures and threat perceptions that cannot be changed overnight. Since the member states will view the development of CA capabilities through the prism of Afghanistan and seek to push it in the direction they prefer (COIN versus peace support operation), it will continue to brake the process.

3. Little CA Institutionalization within the Alliance

A second necessary requirement for effective CA is the institutionalization of the relevant doctrine and procedures allowing NATO to plug and play with other actors involved. This institutionalization must occur at both the strategic and the operational levels which is why we will look at both in turn.

3.1. No Institutionalization at the Strategic Level

Given the problems and disagreements identified in the previous section, it is hardly a surprise that NATO has made little progress at the strategic level. The Alliance is still in the process of laying the foundation for future institutionalization. The Allied Command Transformation's (ACT) efforts to incorporate the Effects Based Approach to Operations (EBAO) into current NATO doctrine and procedures should make NATO military commanders and planners more receptive to the need to involve outside actors into the planning, conduct and evaluation of NATO operations.¹⁹ The pace of EBAO institutionalization has been slow to date and it is not being helped by General Mattis' decision of August 2008 to cease the use of the Effect Based Operations concept in the US Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM) on the grounds that the concept had been misapplied and

¹⁶ US Under Secretary of Defense Edelman, Eric: "A Comprehensive Approach to Modern Insurgency: Afghanistan and Beyond", Keynote Address, *NATO Conference on A Comprehensive Approach for Afghanistan*, Freising, Germany (27 March, 2007), p. 4.

¹⁷ See Elmer, Jon and Fenton, Anthony: "Canada's Counterinsurgency Strategy", *Znet*, 27 March 2007; Gabriëse, Robbert: "A 3D Approach to Security and Development", *PfP Consortium Quarterly Journal*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Summer 2007), pp. 67-73; "Den danske indsats i Afghanistan 2008-2012", *Udenrigsministeriet and Forsvarsministeriet* (2008), pp. 22-23; "Speech by Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, Chief of the Defence Staff", *UK Ministry of Defence-Royal United Service Institute* (3 December 2007).

¹⁸ "The future of NATO and European defence..", *op. cit.*, para. 81-82.

¹⁹ "Effects Based Approach to Operations (EBAO) Handbook", *North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Bi-Sc Pre-Doctrinal Handbook* (4 December 2007), para. 1-1.



was fundamentally flawed. Although Mattis explicitly stated that this decision and critique did not apply to NATO's EBAO concept it will not make its adoption within NATO easier.²⁰

Second, ACT participation in Multinational Experiment (MNE) 5 and 6 may also help to pave the way for the CA. MNE 5 was an international experiment that ran from 2006-2008 with the participation of several NATO countries (Canada, France, Germany, Norway, the UK and the US), which, through, a series of workshops, seminars and exercises, aimed at developing better methods and processes for employing the CA in the planning, conduct and evaluation of complex operations.²¹ MNE 6 (2008-2010) focuses on how the CA can be employed to counter irregular adversaries and to prevent non-compliant actors from becoming adversaries.²²

Third, ACT is facilitating the adoption of CA through its conceptual work on NATO's civil-military relations (the Future Comprehensive Civil-Military Interaction Concept) and its experimental efforts to enhance NATO's ability to share relevant information with civilian actors involved in crisis operations (Civil-Military Fusion Centre and the Civil-Military Overview). The objective is to improve NATO's relations with civilian actors involved in complex crises by creating a website where all actors can share and obtain relevant open-source information covering the areas of Economic Stabilization, Governance & Participation, Humanitarian Assistance, Infrastructure, Justice & Reconciliation, Security, and Social Well-being. The website currently covers the conflicts Afghanistan and North East Africa, but its utility is significantly reduced by the fact that you need to be approved by other users to get access to it.²³

Finally, ACT has successfully promoted the idea of establishing a Civilian Actors Advisor (CIVAD) position on NATO staffs in order to enhance cooperation with the civilian actors in the field. The proposal submitted for approval by NATO's Military Committee calls for the establishment of two types of CIVAD: a permanent CIVAD at the strategic level in Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) and an operational level CIVAD to be designated to the operational, specifically selected upon the designation of a theatre of operations on a case-by-case basis. The proposal also states that CIVADs should have extensive leadership experience from the major civilian organisations that NATO cooperates with in the field.²⁴ Implementation of this proposal should therefore facilitate the establishment of the cooperative relationships between the Alliance and these organizations that is required for CA success – but this unlikely to happen until 2012.

While these efforts will facilitate the future institutionalization of CA within the Alliance, they will not have an immediate impact in Afghanistan in the foreseeable future.

²⁰ Mattis, James N.: "USJFCOM Commander's Guidance for Effects-based Operations", *Parameters*, vol. 38, no. 3 (Autumn 2008), pp. 18-25.

²¹ "Multinational Experiment 5 - Key Elements of a Comprehensive Approach: A Compendium of Solutions", *Finnish Ministry of Defence* (March 2009), at http://www.defmin.fi/files/1433/MNE5_Compndium_Mar2009_PUBLIC.pdf.

²² "Fact Sheet: Multinational Experiment 6", *United States Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM), Public Affairs* (March 2009).

²³ See Iccyan, Tony: "Civil-military Fusion Centre and Civil Military Overview (CFC/CMO)", Powerpoint briefing (15 April 2008).

²⁴ Email correspondence with Paul LaRose-Edwards, August 2009.



3.2. Limited CA Institutionalization and Implementation in Afghanistan

Five steps have been taken at the HQ level in Kabul to enable ISAF to implement CA. The first came in 2003 when NATO sent a Senior Civilian Representative (SCR) to Kabul to represent the political leadership of the Alliance. The SCR is tasked to work closely with the ISAF Commander (COMISAF) to ensure that NATO adopts a CA to its own activities and cooperates effectively with the Afghan government, Afghan civil society, international organisations and NGOs engaged in Afghanistan, and neighbouring countries.²⁵ So far the value added by the SCR has been limited by the problem of defining his role. This has left the SCR competing with COMISAF and the diplomatic representations in Kabul for attention and influence and made it an ongoing challenge to ensure that the SCR and COMISAF speak with one voice on the coordination bodies on which both are represented.²⁶ This suboptimal outcome is not surprising considering that the SCR is supposed to influence a huge military organization from outside the chain of command, with no formal powers and without bringing any tangible resources to the table.

The second CA initiative came in March 2006, when incoming COMISAF General David Richards added two development advisors (DEVADs) to his staff.²⁷ This practice has not yet been institutionalized, and its continuation thus depends on whether COMISAF regards this position as useful. COMISAF, General David D. McKiernan (June 2008-June 2009), had one DEVAD, a representative of the United States Agency for International Development, on his staff. The current ad hoc arrangement means that it cannot be taken for granted that the development perspective will be represented in future ISAF HQs.

A third initiative, ISAF's Post-Operations Humanitarian Relief Fund (POHRF) established in December 2006, can also be regarded as a CA instrument in the sense that it enables the ISAF leadership to provide quick humanitarian assistance, such as the supply of food, water and shelter, or the repair of buildings or key infrastructure, immediately following sizable ISAF military operations.²⁸ Humanitarian relief is to be distributed in accordance with the Oslo Guidelines, and only in situations where no civilian alternative exists. The fund is based on voluntary contributions and as of June 2009 12 of the 42 ISAF contributing nations had given total of 2.9 million Euros to the fund. Of this sum 2.2 million Euros had been disbursed. According to NATO officials, the POHRF has been successful with respect to winning back support from Afghans affected by ISAF operations.²⁹

The most recent NATO CA initiative at HQ level is the establishment of a Comprehensive Approach Team (CAT) in the summer of 2007. The CAT is convened on a regular basis by the planning cell within ISAF and includes ISAF forces, the United Nations

²⁵ NATO: "NATO's Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan", *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (NATO) (30 July 2008).

²⁶ Aronson, Michael: "An Outsider's View on the Civil-Military Nexus in Afghanistan", in Williams, Michael J. and Clouston, Kate (eds.) (2008): *Comparative Perspectives on Civil-Military Relations in Conflict Zones*, RUSI Occasional Paper, London, Royal United Service Institute (RUSI), p. 12; interview with Lars Jensen, former Political Advisor (POLAD) NATO SCR Kabul, August 2008.

²⁷ Parker, Michelle: "The Role of the Department of Defense in Provincial Reconstruction Teams", Testimony, *House Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations* (5 September 2007).

²⁸ "Fact Sheet: NATO-ISAF Post-Operations Humanitarian Relief Fund (POHRF)", *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (NATO) (June 2009).

²⁹ Bertagnolli, Marla: "NATO States Falter on Afghan Aid, Including to War Victims", *CIVIC Press Release*, 1 April 2008.



Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), other UN agencies, and NGOs.³⁰ The CAT was originally established following a suggestion from an American colonel to provide the UN and NGOs with a forum for direct interaction with ISAF's military planners, both to influence the direction of its military operations and to provide a perspective on its six-month planning process. After a good start, the initiative petered out because subsequent military planners did not perceive the same need to involve civilian actors in the planning process. The CAT is therefore no longer used for military planning purposes but instead functions as a forum for networking and information-sharing. CAT meetings are now used to discuss topical issues of mutual civil-military interest such as civil-military cooperation (CIMIC), refugee return etc.³¹

A new mechanism allowing civilian inputs into the planning process may be established as part of the adjustments of the ISAF HQ that the Allies agreed to in August 2009, but it had not happened at the time of writing.

At the provincial level, ISAF HQ seeks to employ its 26 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) to implement the CA. PRTs were initially developed by the US to bridge the gap between major combat operations and civilian-led reconstruction and development efforts. The idea was to use small joint civil-military teams to expand the legitimacy of the central government in Kabul to the regions and to enhance security by supporting security sector reform and facilitating the reconstruction process.³² NATO took command of all the PRTs in Afghanistan in 2006.

The problem with the PRTs from a CA perspective is that they more or less do as they please. There is no agreed concept of operations or organizational structure,³³ and a host of initiatives undertaken by ISAF HQ to ensure that the PRTs conduct their operations in a coherent manner have proven ineffective.³⁴ The PRT military component may be constrained by national caveats, and the civilian components are outside the ISAF chain of command reporting directly to their national capitals. Moreover, ISAF has no way of ensuring that the PRTs are adequately resourced or that they spend their funds in a way that promotes the overall mission.³⁵

All in all, the level of CA institutionalization and implementation within NATO's own organisation remains very limited indeed at both the strategic and operational level. NATO still lacks doctrine and procedures enabling it to conduct its own activities in the coherent and coordinated manner that is required to make its contribution to a CA effective.

³⁰ Bah, Sarjoh and Jones, Bruce D. (2008): *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations 2008*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, pp. 38-39.

³¹ Email correspondence with Lars Jensen, former POLAD NATO SCR Kabul, August 2008, and telephone interview with Peter Dahl Thruelsen, Royal Danish Defence College, August 2008.

³² Jakobsen, Peter Viggo: "PRTs in Afghanistan: Successful but not Sufficient", Danish Institute for International Studies, *DIIS Report*, no. 6 (2005), p. 11.

³³ "ISAF PRT Handbook", Edition 3, *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)* (3 February 2007), p. ii.

³⁴ For a list and detailed description of these initiatives see Jakobsen: "NATO's Comprehensive Approach...", *op. cit.*, p. 25.

³⁵ See Abbaszadeh, Nima et al. (2008): *Provincial Reconstruction Teams: Lessons and Recommendations*, Princeton, Woodrow Wilson School of Public & International Affairs, Princeton University; Aronson, *op. cit.*, p. 12; Jones, James L. and Pickering, Thomas R.: "Afghanistan Study Group Final Report", *Center for the Study of the Presidency* (30 January 2008); Stapleton, Barbara J.: "A Means to What End? Why PRTs are Peripheral to the Bigger Political Challenges in Afghanistan", *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Fall 2007), pp. 1-49.



4. Ineffective Cooperation with the EU, UN and International NGOs in Afghanistan

Effective cooperation with other key actors is the third necessary condition that effective CA requires. Effective cooperation was defined in the introduction to involve joint planning, execution and evaluation of operational activities, and NATO is not even close to meeting this requirement vis-à-vis the three actors that the Alliance regards as its most important CA partners: the EU and the UN, and the NGOs.³⁶ Not only was its level of institutionalised cooperation with these actors limited prior to the launch of ISAF, but it has also proved very difficult for the alliance to establish it both at the strategic level and in Afghanistan.

4.1. NATO Cooperation with the EU, UN and the NGOs at the Strategic Level

The EU-NATO relationship has been accurately described as a frozen conflict.³⁷ On paper, strategic cooperation between the two organizations has grown steadily and become increasingly institutionalized since 2001, when a practice of joint meetings at the level of foreign ministers and ambassadors was established. In practice, cooperation has been paralysed since Cyprus joined the EU in 2004, because Cyprus has used its membership to veto Turkey's participation in the European Defence Agency. Turkey has reciprocated by using its NATO membership to block official NATO-EU meetings and this has prevented the two organizations from discussing EU-NATO cooperation in Afghanistan formally.³⁸

In addition EU-NATO cooperation has been hampered by the concern held by a group of EU/NATO members led by France that the Anglo-American pressure for closer EU-NATO cooperation would increase American influence over the EU and prevent it from developing a capacity to conduct autonomous military operations.³⁹ The Anglo-French compromises underpinning the development of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) notwithstanding, France and the UK continue to approach the ESDP with two different interests in mind: for France the ESDP remains a tool for enhancing the EU's ability to act independently of the US on the world scene, whereas the UK perceives the ESDP as a burden-sharing tool that will help to preserve the transatlantic relationship. As mentioned above, this dispute has had a negative impact on the Alliance's ability to develop its CA, as France has opposed the development of civilian NATO capacities and has sought to ensure that NATO remains a purely military organization acting in support of the EU and the UN. The French resistance to the CIVAD proposal promoted by ACT demonstrates a continued French insistence on keeping NATO "as military as possible".

Some observers and diplomats have expressed cautious optimism that recent US support for a strong military ESDP and the French decision to rejoin NATO's military structures may pave the way for a resolution of this conflict.⁴⁰ Whether the rhetorical rapprochement between France and the US will lead to enhanced EU-NATO cooperation remains to be seen, but it is

³⁶ See "Comprehensive Political Guidance" *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (NATO) (29 November 2006), para. 3; and Bisogniero, Claudio: "Assisting Afghanistan: the importance of a comprehensive approach", Keynote address by NATO Deputy Secretary General Ambassador, *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (NATO), *GLOBSEC Conference*, (17 January 2008).

³⁷ Scheffer, Jaap de Hoop: "NATO and the EU: Time for a New Chapter", Keynote speech by NATO Secretary General, *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (NATO), (29 January 2007).

³⁸ Jakobsen: "NATO's Comprehensive...", *op. cit.*, p. 31.

³⁹ Yost, David. S.: "NATO and International Organizations", NATO Defence College, *Forum Paper*, no. 3 (2007), pp. 98-103.

⁴⁰ Nuland, Victoria: Speech by U.S. Ambassador to NATO, *U.S. Department of State*, Paris (22 February 2008); The "French White Paper on defence and national security", *Présidence de la République* (June 2008).



important to bear in mind that it is in the US interest to be able to use a militarily stronger ESDP in pursuit of its global interests, just as it is in France's interests to use NATO as a means of building a militarily stronger and more autonomous ESDP. The increasing overlap and duplication between the two organizations that is bound to result from the steady growth of EU military power will not make these divergent interests easier to reconcile.

NATO-UN cooperation at the strategic level is also limited. This is primarily due to the fact that many UN member states, including China and Russia, view NATO as a military instrument of Western "neo-imperialism". The signing of a *Joint Declaration on UN/NATO Secretariat Cooperation* on 23 September 2008 in New York illustrates the problem nicely. The signing ceremony was postponed a number of times by a highly reluctant UN Secretary-General; it was eventually done in a low-key fashion away from the media; the UN has not made the contents of the declaration public; and Russia criticized it strongly arguing that the UN SG had been acting beyond his powers and made clear that it would view the document as illegitimate and as reflecting the UN chief's personal opinion only.⁴¹ As a consequence, the declaration is not expected to make much difference to the cooperation between the two organizations in the foreseeable future.

The NATO-NGO relationship is the least developed of the three, and it is unrealistic to expect NATO to be able to create the culture of cooperation and the joint planning, execution and evaluation of operational activities with NGOs that effective CA cooperation calls for. NATO has actively sought to enhance its cooperation with the NGO community. The Alliance regularly invites NGOs to visit NATO HQ and to attend NATO conferences and seminars on issues of mutual interest. NGOs are also routinely invited to attend CIMIC and Peace Support Operation courses and exercises.⁴² NATO has been particularly eager to expand its cooperation with NGOs in the field of training, but progress has been slow and limited by two factors. The first is the capacity problem, which stems from the fact that NATO has far more resources for such cooperation than the NGOs. It is a problem for NGOs to find the time, money and personnel required to respond positively to NATO requests and invitations for cooperation, especially ones that involve courses lasting a week or longer. The imbalance in resources between NATO and the NGOs has also made training cooperation a rather one-sided affair in which NGO personnel participate in conferences and training arranged by NATO. The traffic moving in the opposite direction remains limited, and this contributes to the perception in the NGO community that NATO-NGO cooperation is driven and dictated by military concerns.

The second factor limiting NATO-NGO cooperation is a strong NGO reluctance to engage in cooperation that can be seen as legitimizing NATO's growing involvement in humanitarian and development activities. NATO's involvement in the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the building of refugee camps during the 1999 Kosovo crisis and its involvement in humanitarian and development activities in Afghanistan is seen by many NGOs as a grave threat to their "humanitarian space", i.e. the independence and neutrality from military and political forces that allow them to provide life-saving aid to civilians in need on all sides of a conflict.⁴³ NATO's Kosovo operation generated fears of a hegemonic

⁴¹ Jakobsen, "NATO's Comprehensive...", *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34; "Russia stunned by UN-NATO cooperation deal", *RIA Novosti*, 9 October 2008.

⁴² Borgomano-Loup, Laure: "Improving NATO-NGO Relations in Crisis Response Operations", NATO Defense College, *Forum Paper*, no. 2 (2007), p. 49.

⁴³ Mollett, Howard: "No Space for Humanitarianism? NGO perspectives on civil-military relations and the Comprehensive Approach", in Williams et al., *op. cit.*, p. 64; Olson, Lara: "Fighting for humanitarian space: NGOs in Afghanistan", *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Fall 2006), pp. 1-28.



NATO that would dominate civilian-military operations,⁴⁴ fears that NATO's involvement in Afghanistan and the invention of PRT concept have done nothing to diminish.⁴⁵ Most NGOs view the CA agenda with scepticism, since they are extremely wary of being seen or used as force multipliers by NATO. Thus, while increased liaison arrangements, better information and offers of security training are welcomed, most NGOs reject the joint planning, implementation and evaluation with NATO that effective CA cooperation calls for.

4.2. NATO Cooperation with the EU, the UN and the NGOs in Afghanistan

NATO's strong and persistent efforts to enhance the coordination and cooperation among the international actors in Afghanistan have been undermined by the Alliance's inability to provide the level of security required for the civilian actors to operate without military protection. Security is what the other international actors expect NATO to contribute to a joint CA, and the security problems, which in part can be attributed to NATO unwillingness to commit the necessary resources, have made the civilian actors unwilling or unable to provide the funds, the personnel and the overall coordination that effective CA cooperation with ISAF would require. The EU has only pledged 400 police to Afghanistan of which only 245 have arrived.⁴⁶ The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has only deployed 1,639 personnel (1,266 are local Afghans) and it is still not present in all Afghanistan's provinces.⁴⁷ Finally, the deteriorating security situation has made the south, southwest, east and central areas of the country no-go areas for vast majority of the international NGOs that refuse to accept military protection.⁴⁸

The result has been a vicious circle from a CA point of view. The limited involvement of the civilian organizations has forced deeper NATO involvement in humanitarian and reconstruction activities than ever before. This has triggered protests from the humanitarian NGOs, as well as greater reluctance towards deeper involvement in both the EU and the UN. This will force even greater US military and NATO involvement which will then trigger more protests and greater CA reluctance from the civilian actors.

NATO has taken a number of steps to break this circle such as the recent promise to stop its use of white vehicles, which has been a major bone of contention with the humanitarian organisations for years.⁴⁹ Helpful though there are, such steps cannot establish the level of trust and cooperation that is required for effective CA cooperation in Afghanistan. What is needed is a major and durable improvement in the security situation, something that does not seem feasible in the near future.

⁴⁴ Pugh, Michael: "Civil-Military Relations in the Kosovo Crisis: an Emerging Hegemony?", *Security Dialogue*, vol. 31, no. 2 (June 2000), pp. 229-242.

⁴⁵ Cornish, Stephen: "No room for humanitarianism in 3D Policies: have forcible humanitarian interventions and integrated approaches lost their way?", *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Fall 2007), pp. 14-19.

⁴⁶ "EU Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL AFGHANISTAN)", *European Union (EU)* (July 2009).

⁴⁷ "The situation in Afghanistan...", *op. cit.*, para. 62; "United Nations Political and Peacebuilding Missions", Background Note, *United Nations (UN)* (31 October 2009).

⁴⁸ "Afghanistan: High risk humanitarianism", *IRIN*, 18 August 2009; Meo, Nick: "Leaked aid map of Afghanistan reveals expansion of no-go zones", *The Times*, 5 December, 2007.

⁴⁹ "Afghanistan: Aid agencies win NATO concession on vehicle markings", *IRIN*, 1 June 2009, at <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=84634>; Jakobsen: "PRTs in Afghanistan...", *op. cit.*; Waldman, Matt: "Caught in the Conflict. Civilians and the international security strategy in Afghanistan", briefing paper by eleven NGOs operating in Afghanistan, *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Heads of State and Government Summit* (3-4 April 2009), p. 6.



5. Conclusion: Is NATO's CA and ISAF doomed?

This article has argued that the CA envisioned by NATO as a joint undertaking involving all the major international actors in Afghanistan as well as the Afghan government will fail to make a difference on the ground within the next 24 months that many analysts view as critical in order to prevent the collapse of Western domestic support for the operation. It has demonstrated that NATO is incapable of meeting three necessary conditions for CA success within that timeframe.

First, consensus on CA implementation within the Alliance is limited. While all members agree that civilian and military instruments should be employed in a concerted and coordinated manner, the implementation of CA has been hampered by disagreements over NATO's role in world politics (regional versus global actor; collective defence versus non-article five crisis response missions); disagreement over the extent to which NATO should use its military capabilities to fill the gap if civilian actors are incapable of carrying out their CA tasks; and finally disagreement over how the ISAF operation should be conducted (COIN versus peace support operation).

Second, NATO has made little progress both at the strategic and operational levels with respect to institutionalizing CA doctrine and procedures within its own organization. At the strategic level, the Alliance is still trying to lay the foundation that will facilitate the adoption of CA sometime in the future. In Afghanistan, ISAF HQ has little influence over PRT operations, and neither the use of DEVADs in COMISAF's staff nor the involvement of civilian actors in ISAF force planning has been institutionalized. Moreover, the value-added by the SCR is unclear.

Finally, NATO has made even less progress with respect to establishing effective CA cooperation with the EU, UN and the international NGOs, none of whom have been eager to establish closer relations with the Alliance. NATO's efforts to establish such cooperation have been undermined by its failure to establish the level of security that is necessary to allow the civilian organisations to perform their operations without military protection. NATO's failure to commit sufficient military resources has made the civilian actors unable or unwilling to commit the civilian resources required for success.

The failure of NATO to implement the CA in time in Afghanistan raises two questions:

- 1) Should NATO turn its back on CA and go back to basics focusing on the provision of military security?
- 2) Is ISAF doomed to failure?

The answer to both questions is no. CA Implementation should continue since effective CA will be required on future operations. The assumption that NATO needs to enhance its own capability to make an effective contribution to a CA involving the major international actors involved in peacebuilding is a sound one, because it can never succeed on such operations alone. NATO can provide the military component that is necessary for success but not the civilian capacities that are necessary for lasting peace.

That the pace of implementation has been too slow for Afghanistan does not mean that it cannot make a difference on future ones; especially ones where the security situation is less challenging. NATO will become involved in such operations. All members will continue to



support the Alliance regardless of the outcome in Afghanistan. The European members will not have a reliable alternative security guarantee against Russia for another two decades at least, and the US will also continue to support the Alliance because it will become increasingly dependent upon allied support for its out-of-Europe operations in a world where China, India, Brazil and other great powers with a non-Western world view are rising. While the US is likely to blame its allies if ISAF fails, it is also likely to conclude that limited NATO support on future operations is preferable to no NATO support at all.

As regards the second question, the future of ISAF depends on whether the new strategy and the “surge” initiated by the Obama Administration are successful with respect to turning the situation in Afghanistan around. This is obviously too early to say but two positive features of the strategy should be noted. First, President Obama has committed himself strongly to the Afghanistan operation describing it as a “necessary war” and by authorizing a major increase in both personnel (civilian and military) and funds to the operation.⁵⁰ Second, the Administration has articulated a clear US-led CA strategy involving a more limited end-state (emphasis on defeating Al Qaida as opposed to building democracy), greater emphasis on training the Afghan security forces, a regional approach spearheaded by Richard Holbrooke, a more realistic counter-narcotics approach, and a people-centred approach to COIN informed by the lessons learned in Iraq.⁵¹

This US-led CA may succeed because the US unlike NATO has determination and the resources to implement it. The US is currently imposing its version of the CA approach on NATO, the civilian organizations engaged in Afghanistan and the Afghan government by asking them to support the new strategy or get out of the way. When these organizations prove unwilling or unable to make the contributions deemed necessary by the US for success, the US either takes over or makes available the resources necessary to fill the gaps. As pointed out by Jens Ringsmose and Peter Dahl Thruelsen elsewhere in this issue, the US approach is not without dangers,⁵² but it is the only hope left for ISAF.

⁵⁰ The White House: *Remarks by the President at The Veterans Of Foreign Wars Convention Phoenix Convention Center*, 17 August 2009; The White House: *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, 1 December 2009.

⁵¹ “ISAF Commander’s Counterinsurgency Guidance” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), ISAF HQ* (27 August 2009), at http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/official_texts/counterinsurgency_guidance.pdf; “Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan”, *The White House* (27 March 2009).

⁵² Ringsmose, Jens and Thruelsen, Peter Dahl: “NATO’s Counterinsurgency Campaign in Afghanistan: Are the Classical Doctrines Suitable for Alliances?”, *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, no. 22 (January 2010), pp. 56-77.