

## Norway's Whole-of-Government Approach

### Challenges for Engagement with Afghanistan and Other Fragile States

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#### Summary

Norway lacks a comprehensive strategy for engaging in fragile states in general, as well as a whole-of-government strategy for any particular country, including Afghanistan. This policy brief recommends that Norway should consider adopting a law, or high-level policy document, that make it a requirement for Norway to have a national whole-of-government policy towards every country where it is engaged in initiatives related to peacekeeping, peacebuilding or conflict resolution.

Such Norwegian whole-of-government strategies should be limited to the higher strategic level. This will provide space for operational and tactical flexibility so that the Norwegian government can pursue coherence with local and international strategic frameworks, while also remaining flexible to changes in the situation on the ground.

In order to address the negative effects a Norwegian whole-of-government approach might have on the special relationship between the Norwegian government and Norwegian civil society, the report recommends that a forum be established where Norwegian civil society and government can regularly engage each other on issues related to the country's international engagements, and its whole-of-government approach.

There is a significant fissure between policy commitments to an integrated or comprehensive approach, and the challenges of navigating the real-world dilemmas that decision-makers face when trying to coordinate multiple independent agencies. Despite the significant policy-level initiatives undertaken internationally, and in Norway, to facilitate an integrated or comprehensive approach, this coherence dilemma remains characteristic – not only of Norway's engagements – but indeed of most peace, stability and reconstruction operations today.

#### Introduction

This policy brief is based on the NUPI-report *Norway's Whole-of-Government Approach and its Engagement with Afghanistan* which represents a first attempt at comprehensively analyzing the Norwegian whole-of-government approach, as well as assessing its effectiveness to date. The policy brief will summarize the report and its findings.

The rationale for a national whole-of-government approach is greater effectiveness. It is driven by the assumption that a government's foreign engagements will have a more meaningful and sustainable impact when the various government departments involved pursue a common strategy, have a shared understanding of the problem, a common theory of change, and an agreed plan for implementing such a strategy.

There is broad consensus, both internationally and in Norway, that peace and stability operations are managed more effectively when the interdependency and interconnectedness of the political, security, governance and development dimensions of these operations are recognized. Various models have been developed, including the *Integrated Approach* and *Integrated Missions* concepts by the United Nations, the *Comprehensive Approach* by the European Union and NATO, the *Effects-Based Approach to Operations* (EBAO) among NATO member states, including the United States, and a range of *Whole-of-Government* approaches, of which the best known is probably the original Canadian 3D (Diplomacy, Development and Defence) concept.

Norway has been a prominent supporter of the UN's Integrated Approach and has actively contributed to the development of NATO's Comprehensive Ap-

proach. Little has been written to date, however, about Norway's own whole-of-government approach, and this study was aimed at filling that gap.

In the next sections of this policy brief we would therefore like to use the opportunity to address three major challenges for Norway's future engagement with fragile states; (i) developing a comprehensive strategy and a whole-of-government strategy for fragile states (ii) the ad hoc nature of the Norwegian approach, and (iii) Tension between strategic and operational coherence. Each of the identified challenges is followed by recommendations on how they could be addressed by the government.

### Lack of Strategic Policy Planning

Despite the leading role Norway has played in promoting integrated approaches to international peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions, Norway does not have a comprehensive strategy for its engagement in fragile states in general, nor a whole-of-government strategy for any particular country, including Afghanistan. However, in 2005 Norway initiated the Afghanistan Forum as an attempt to establish a Norwegian whole-of-government approach, and in 2009 Norway did attempt to develop a strategic vision for its engagement in Faryab province. The Faryab strategy lacks a description of the ground realities that the strategy is intended to deal with, and is more a vision than a plan – but it can offer a good starting point. It is indicative of how a more strategic approach to Afghanistan can help to direct a more coherent whole-of-government approach to Afghanistan, as well as other similar country initiatives. Government agencies will find it difficult to pursue coherence if they do not have clear benchmarks for measuring whether they are acting in coherence with a larger strategy.

The reluctance to develop such specific strategies is perhaps symptomatic of Norwegian foreign policy in general. There is no doubt about Norway's commitment to make a meaningful and sustainable contribution, but in the absence of a coherent whole-of-government strategy the default foreign policy and whole-of-government approach often appears to hinge on being recognized as a leading and exemplary liberal peacebuilding, humanitarian and development actor. The lack of a clear strategic planning process has resulted in government agencies and bureaucrats to often pursuing the safe fall-back, or auto-pilot, position: namely to make Norway look good.

Promoting Norway's image on the one hand and pursuing Norway's ability to make a meaningful and sustainable solution on the other, is not necessarily two contradictory policy approaches. However, pursuing

the one does not necessarily result in the other and both require a coherent and interlinked strategy.

Most of the examples provided throughout the report contribute to this finding, but perhaps the most obvious one relates to the contribution of the Ministry of Justice in Afghanistan. The limited number of police officers that Norway can deploy in Afghanistan – approximately 23 in 2009 – have been spread thinly across a broad variety of organizations and projects. Nine officers are serving with the EU mission (EUPOL-A), four are working within the US-led Focus District Development Programme, one is seconded to the UN mission (UNAMA) and seven officers were working bilaterally on various projects, amongst others, mentoring the Counter Narcotics Police in Afghanistan and the Female Police Project at the Police Academy. This broad distribution of the police contribution ensures that Norway is seen to be a partner in a wide range of international police initiatives, and may thus contribute to achieving the objective of furthering Norway's image as an exemplary and prolific partner in international operations.


### Recommendation:

An alternative approach could be to focus these Norwegian resources on one, or a few, limited specific needs-based programmes, so that the investment could more readily produce tangible and sustainable results.

### Process vs. Structure

One strength of the Norwegian whole-of-government approach lies in its *ad hoc* nature that favours process rather than structure. This avoids the main unintended consequences of most of the institutional models, such as the Canadian START, the US C/SCRS and the UK's Stabilization Unit. In most, if not all, these cases, the newly established coordination units became part of the coordination problem and bureaucratic turf battles, competing for funds, power, influence and prestige with the existing departments that they are supposed to coordinate. The Norwegian approach, which is to keep coordination separate from execution, seems to be optimal for the highly complex and dynamic environments in which most peace and stability-type interventions take place.

However, too much of an *ad hoc* nature can be a weakness. Norway's whole-of-government approach seems to be too dependent on the will of the government of the day, the goodwill of the current state secretaries and the personal chemistry of the personnel in the embassy in Kabul and the PRT in Meymaneh. In this context the Swedish, Dutch and Canadian models, where there is a legal, or high-level policy basis for the



whole-of-government approach, are to be commended, because it serves to formalize the processes that need to be followed to ensure that a whole-of-government approach has been integrated into the policy decisions that lead to, and sustain, foreign interventions.

**Recommendation:**

Apart from a national policy on a generic whole-of-government policy making process in Norway, there is also room for a specific whole-of-government strategy for each country, region or conflict system, e.g. piracy of the Somali coastal region, where Norway chooses to intervene. The goals and objectives of such a strategy should be broadly defined at the higher strategic level, leaving room for operational and tactical flexibility. Indeed, part of the strategy should be to remain flexible, and to seek to be coherent with national and international strategic frameworks, as well as to be responsive to changes in the situation. In that way, the strategy would not become locked into a narrowly defined and highly detailed national whole-of-government plan, but would be able to consider Norway's goals and objectives in the context of the dynamic situation as well as national and international strategic frameworks.

Canada, the UK and others use their whole-of-government approaches to coordinate all their international interventions. By contrast, Norway's approach has been limited to the intervention in Afghanistan. The Norwegian whole-of-government approach could be formalized, either in a law, or through a high-level policy process, and could be applied to all cases where the Norwegian government deploys civilians, police and military to international conflict management operations.

**The Tension between Strategic and Operational Coherence**

The need for strategic guidance at the political level in Oslo has been recognized and implemented, through the functioning of the Afghanistan Forum at the state-secretary level, but there seems insufficient recognition of the need for operational-level coordination in Kabul. Head office political functionaries and officials typically cover a range of issues at the more strategic level, whereas the officials deployed into the theatre of operations have a directed focus on the specific case and end to be more engaged in the operational and tactical issues at hand. As this is also the case with other countries and international organizations, the coordination among international actors in the theatre or at the operational level is a crucial level where those dedicated to the specific context can meaningfully engage with each other. It is here that the local authorities are present at the highest level, and that they can be most meaningfully engaged. It is thus very

useful to have a range of in-country level coordination processes where national, international and local stakeholders can meet regularly to share information and coordinate action.

**Recommendation:**

It is recommended that Norway, following the Canadian example, include as part of its whole-of-government approach a specific set of policy actions required at the operational or country level. These could include an annual national or operational-level action plan, with an assessment, an operational action plan, a description of coordination mechanisms, and a monitoring and evaluation plan. Neither the Norwegian strategy or operational plan, nor the monitoring and evaluation process, should be so intensive as to hinder or prevent the country-level representatives from participating fully in their own functional coordination processes. The whole-of-government coordination process should be intensive enough to inform the Norwegian policy-making process in a meaningful way, but not so intensive that it negatively affects Norway's ability to engage meaningfully with other international partners or in-country and local-level coordination processes.

**Relationship with Norwegian Civil Society**

Norway's special relationship with civil society has several advantages for its whole-of-government approach. First, it can provide the country with flexibility to adapt relatively easily to a changing situation; second, it enables maximizing the range of engagement so that Norway can be involved in a wide range of international processes; third, it can serve as a way for the government to maintain the humanitarian space – as in Afghanistan.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and all the agencies involved in the whole-of-government approach, should engage with the Norwegian NGO and research community, and openly discuss the Norwegian whole-of-government approach, and how that may impact on the special relationship between the Norwegian government and civil society.

**Recommendation:**

A forum could be established where Norwegian civil society, recognized as a key partner in achieving Norway's foreign policy, especially its developmental and humanitarian objectives, can regularly engage with each other on issues related to Norway's international operations and its whole-of-government approach to these.

Such a forum could be replicated at the embassy level, so that the Norwegian Ambassador and other government agencies represented at the incountry level may

regularly engage with Norwegian NGOs active in that country, and discuss issues of common concern. Such organized discussions can create the space for a positively critical analysis of Norway's foreign policy and whole-of-government approach in general, or in a particular country. They can provide both the Norwegian government and Norwegian civil society with useful information about each other's policies, actions and perspectives – offering to both an opportunity to harmonize and align their policies accordingly.

### Conclusion

We have found that Norway lacks a comprehensive strategy for engaging in fragile states in general, as well as a whole-of-government strategy for any particular country, including Afghanistan.

On the basis of our findings we recommend that Norway consider adopting a law, or high-level policy document, that make it a requirement for Norway to have a national whole-of-government policy towards every

country where it is engaged in initiatives related to peacekeeping, peacebuilding or conflict resolution.

Furthermore we recommend that such Norwegian whole-of-government strategies be limited to the higher strategic level. This will provide space for operational and tactical flexibility so that the Norwegian government can pursue coherence with local and international strategic frameworks, while also remaining flexible to changes in the situation on the ground.

We are concerned about the negative effects a Norwegian whole-of-government approach might have on the special relationship between the Norwegian government and Norwegian civil society. To address this concern we recommend that a forum be established where Norwegian civil society and government can regularly engage each other on issues related to the country's international engagements, and its whole-of-government approach.



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