

# The Norwegian Approach to Afghanistan: Civilian-Military Segregation

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NUPI Working Paper 825

Publisher: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs  
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# **The Norwegian Approach to Afghanistan: Civilian-Military Segregation**

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This text was written in 2012 and will be published as a chapter in an edited book about civilian-military relations. It will be published by a US military publisher and is aimed primarily at a US military audience.



## The Norwegian Approach to Afghanistan: Civilian-Military Segregation

In a way, one could consider Norway a typical example of a small International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) partner in Afghanistan, with 400 troops at its disposal and responsible for one of the 26 provincial reconstruction teams (PRT). Norway is a signatory to the Atlantic Pact and a staunch North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member. At the same time, the people and the government of Norway—like those in many European countries—share reservations about the extraterritorial use of military force. They consider Norway to be a “peace-nation,” a small state without strategic global interests. Norwegian foreign policy favors the multilateral institutional approach, providing stability and predictability through the United Nations (UN). The government of Norway has to balance military needs with civilian demands for humanitarian aid and the support of human rights—in particular women’s rights. In Afghanistan, Norwegian civilian aid priorities included the strengthening of Afghan governance capacities, rule of law, education, and rural development.

Understanding Norway’s approach to civilian-military relations in international operations requires one to look at both the tactical/operational (theatre) and the strategic levels. Challenges identified in the field are often rooted in higher-level differences in policy between ministries, departments, and agencies. There is a certain tendency to overlook this fact in studies of PRTs, civilian-military coordination, and other instances of civilian-military interaction. Therefore, this chapter begins with an exploration of the Norwegian strategic approach to Afghanistan and then proceeds to the tactical, PRT application. I will demonstrate that there was deep-rooted resistance among civilian actors to close collaboration with the military, based on a fear of “militarization of aid.” This resulted in strong divisions and stovepiping in the PRT. While Norwegian civilian aid has several positive features compared to many other donor countries, I also argue that the insistence on separation of all civilian and military efforts to a large extent is based on a flawed conflation of humanitarian and

development aid and the reluctance by the government to prioritize among security, development, or humanitarian efforts.

## Strategic Level

### Norwegian Aid and Foreign Policy Traditions

The Norwegian government has a long tradition of utilizing civil society in providing aid and support to development overseas—both in crisis response and development aid. UN agencies and Norwegian nongovernmental organizations (NGO) have often been the implementers of Norwegian humanitarian and development programs. This outsourcing has provided the government with flexibility, as it could respond quickly to crises by supporting local and international NGOs already present in the field. Furthermore, it has sometimes shielded the government from criticism as the implementers have been ‘nongovernmental’ and therefore not representatives of official Norwegian foreign policy. However, this policy has also strengthened the NGO community in Norway, and they have become significant political players. Some commentators describe it as an “aid industry,” with too much influence on foreign development policies.<sup>1</sup> Per capita, Norway is an “aid superpower,” having more than tripled its development budget since 1990, and is one of the few countries that meet the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development target of aid, amounting to seven-tenths percent of the gross national income.<sup>2</sup> Yet, Norway has been reluctant to attach conditions or political demands to these vast aid resources.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the Norwegian government and public have considered the aid to be apolitical, founded on altruistic principles and universal values, even if it simultaneously promotes politically laden concepts such as “the principles of the rule of law, political pluralism and democracy.”<sup>4</sup>

1 Terje Tvedt, “International Development Aid and Its Impact on a Donor Country: A Case Study of Norway,” *European Journal of Development Research* 19, no. 4 (December 2007): 614–635.

2 See Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “Development Aid Rose in 2009 and Most Donors Will Meet 2010 Aid Targets,” 14 April 2010, [http://www.oecd.org/document/11/0,3343,en\\_2649\\_34487\\_44981579\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/11/0,3343,en_2649_34487_44981579_1_1_1_1,00.html).

3 See Terje Tvedt, “International Development Aid and Its Impact.” Scandinavian readers may also consult Terje Tvedt, *Utviklingshjelp, utenrikspolitikk og makt. Den norske modellen* (Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk, 2003).

4 See Stortinget, *Felles kamp mot fattigdom. En helhetlig utviklingspolitikk*, Stortingsmelding 35, 2003–4 (Oslo, Norway: Stortinget, 2004); and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

Consistent with this apolitical policy position, Norway has nurtured a self-image as a peace nation, e.g. the nation's status as the awardee of the annual Nobel Peace Prize and a strong supporter of the UN. It is well-positioned to gain trust from all parties in conflicts. Thus, Norway welcomes the opportunity to use its good reputation, good offices, and good economy to mediate numerous contentious international disputes from the Middle East to Sri Lanka to Sudan. In other words, Oslo has the will and the way. While these mediations have not always been successful, they have enhanced Norway's international standing and self-image.<sup>5</sup>

Norway's ISAF participation in Afghanistan came as something new and challenging to this altruistic peace identity, since it implied taking sides in a conflict and using military means. Norway suddenly became a more political actor than had previously been the case, with the military helping the Kabul government to expand control over its sovereign territory and help fight against insurgents. Norwegian military and civilian actors in the PRTs had to find a new paradigm for working alongside each other in the field. These changes proved difficult to reconcile with Norway's identity as a nonpolitical, altruistic, peace-loving nation and complicated the previously harmonious or neutral relationship between the Norwegian government and civil society actors.

### **The Norwegian Approach to Afghanistan**

According to former Norwegian foreign minister Jonas Gahr Støre, Norway's participation in Afghanistan advanced the goals of establishing security and stability, preventing terrorism, and fostering development in a manner appropriate for Afghan society:

First, the purpose of Norway's presence in Afghanistan is to promote social and economic development in the country and stability in the region. We will help to

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(NORAD), "Grant Schemes for Humanitarian Assistance and Development Cooperation by Norwegian and International Voluntary Actors: Guidelines," 2001, <http://www.norad.no/en/Tools+and+publications/Publications/Publication+Page?key=129252>.

5 See: Øystein Haga Skånland, "'Norway Is a Peace Nation': A Discourse Analytic Reading of the Norwegian Peace Engagement," *Cooperation and Conflict* 45, no. 1 (March 2010): 34–54; Christopher S. Browning, "Branding Nordicity, Models, Identity and the Decline of Exceptionalism," *Cooperation and Conflict* 42, no. 1 (March 2007): 27–51; Mark Leonard and Andrew Small, "Norwegian Public Diplomacy," *Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2003, <http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/UD/Vedlegg/public.pdf>.

build Afghan capacity to provide security and development, and we intend to strengthen the UN's coordinating role.

Our aim is to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a base for international terrorism.

Afghanistan must therefore be further stabilised. Social and political nation-building and state-building in Afghanistan are not merely goals in their own right; they are measures to make the country more stable. . . .

Second, there is no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. . . . A political solution must therefore be found. And it must be firmly rooted in Afghan society.

Third, a military presence will be necessary on the way towards a political solution. Not just as a means of resolving the conflict, but [also] to provide sufficient security to create a space in which political and economic development are possible. . . .<sup>6</sup>

Based on these stated goals, it appears that the security and civilian dimensions were well integrated in Norwegian strategic thinking. The interdependence of civilian, political, and military progress was explicit. To facilitate such coordination, the government established a cross-ministerial body, called the Afghanistan Forum. Here the state secretaries (deputy ministers) of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Defence (MOD), and Justice (MOJ; equivalent to a Ministry of Interior), as well as the Office of the Prime Minister politically coordinated Norwegian engagement in Afghanistan. They prepared the government decisions related to all Afghanistan policy and supplied the government with coherent input and advice on priorities. They also traveled jointly to Afghanistan. The higher level of the civil service, where the chief officials coordinated policy implementation, mirrored this political structure. The Norwegian embassy in Kabul was also partly linked to this structure.<sup>7</sup> The purpose was thus, by and large, to streamline Norway's policy and expand ownership of its Afghanistan engagement beyond the MOD and specialized MFA circles.

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6 Jonas Gahr Støre, Norwegian Foreign Minister, "Address to the Storting on the Situation in Afghanistan and Norway's Civilian and Military Engagement in the Country," (address, The Storting, Oslo, Norway, 9 February 2010), [http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/ud/Whats-new/Speeches-and-articles/speeches\\_foreign/2010/afghanistan\\_address.html](http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/ud/Whats-new/Speeches-and-articles/speeches_foreign/2010/afghanistan_address.html).

7 Cedric de Coning, Helge Lurås, Niels Nagelhus Schia, and Ståle Ulriksen, *Norway's Whole-of-Government Approach and Its Engagement with Afghanistan* (Oslo, Norway: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2009), 26–28.



However, this was an ad hoc arrangement established for engagement in Afghanistan only. It was not backed-up by a permanent secretariat or a formalized organization of any kind. Furthermore, in contrast to many other similar-sized countries, such as Sweden and Finland, there existed no government-level political strategy paper for the Norwegian engagement in Afghanistan or stability operations as a whole. Only partisan statements by government representatives when addressing the parliament or the media indicated the Norwegian strategy, like the previously mentioned quote from former foreign minister Gahr Støre. The Afghanistan Forum appeared to operationalize such sentiments supporting civilian-military coordination. Despite this, the interaction became much less apparent in the specialized ministries or branches.

### **Development Aid**

Norwegian support to Afghanistan was significant because it targeted and aimed at sustainability, providing the host authorities some leverage to actually run their own country. Norway was a significant contributor to Afghanistan development aid in relation to Norway's gross domestic product and spent almost as much on development aid as on military operations. The Norwegian government pledge approximately \$120–130 million dollars annually in humanitarian and development aid for the period 2010–2015.<sup>8</sup> In 2009 the bilateral aid amounted to \$126 million, which was distributed as follows: 37 percent to economic development and trade, 30 percent to good governance, 19 percent to health and education, and 14 percent to humanitarian aid.<sup>9</sup>

A leading principle for Norwegian donor funds was that they are dispersed without earmarks or conditions and in close collaboration with local authorities and major international actors (like the World Bank and United Nations Development Program) and to Norwegian and international NGOs. Approximately one-third of the Norwegian support to Afghanistan was channeled through a World Bank administered trust fund, the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. This and other similar funds provided the Afghan government with resources to cover budgetary expenses,

<sup>8</sup> Gahr Støre, "Address to the Storting."

<sup>9</sup> See NORAD, "Afghanistan," 28 June 2012, <http://www.norad.no/no/ombistand/landsider/asia-og-oseania/afghanistan>.

such as salaries, while the World Bank maintained a level of influence and controlled corruption or the misallocation of funds. This model also provided the Afghan authorities the opportunity to define their own development priorities and the resources to implement projects

A common challenge for foreign donors in Afghanistan was that too often local or international contractors and NGOs distributed the funds directly to the field. Additionally, the funds dispersed to the local government often were earmarked. It was estimated that about two-thirds of all development expenditure in Afghanistan bypassed the government. As a result, local Afghan authorities were effectively undermined.<sup>10</sup> In this context, Norway did relatively well, channelling aid through the trust funds.

Furthermore, Norwegian foreign aid strategy did not “buy stability” or “reward instability” in the sense that it was being spent in the parts of the country where the insurgency was the strongest. Several commentators have pointed out the paradox of the international community spending most of their funds on troublesome areas to win the peace, while communities are, in a sense, “penalized for being peaceful.”<sup>11</sup> Norwegian aid largely attempted to counter such trends by focusing on the central government. Only approximately 15 percent of the above-mentioned \$126 million in civilian funds were allocated to the Faryab district, where the Norwegian PRT was located. Some of these funds were later allocated to Faryab, but it was accomplished through national authorities.<sup>12</sup>

However, the Norwegian development and humanitarian aid approach appeared to have been formed in relative isolation from the security and military priorities. There was no reference, for example, to the ISAF priorities in the documents of the Norwe-

10 See Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), “Afghanistan: Gov’t Questions Effectiveness of Foreign Aid Billions,” *Afghanistan Online*, 7 May 2007, [http://www.afghan-web.com/economy/foreignaid\\_effect.html](http://www.afghan-web.com/economy/foreignaid_effect.html).

11 Matt Waldman, *Falling Short: Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan*, Agency Coordination Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) Advocacy Series (Kabul, Afghanistan: ACBAR, March 2008), <http://www.oxfam.org.nz/sites/default/files/reports/ACBAR%20Aid%20Effectiveness%20Paper.pdf>. See also Andrew Wilder and Stuart Gordon, “Money Can’t Buy America Love,” *Foreign Policy*, 1 December 2009, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/12/01/money\\_cant\\_buy\\_america\\_love](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/12/01/money_cant_buy_america_love).

12 It may be argued that the very idea of building a strong centralized state in Afghanistan is futile, given the traditionally relative strength of the regions and districts, but that is not the topic for this article.

gian Agency for Development Aid (NORAD), except a statement that Norway promoted regular contact with the armed forces. Nowhere was the role of development aid in relation to security discussed and defined, and there were no guidelines or priorities from the government in this regard. Norwegian policy appeared to largely ignore the fact that security was a key priority in the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) and the Afghan Millennium Development Goals (MDG).<sup>13</sup> Hence, despite the words of the government and the existence of an Afghanistan Forum, coordination between the security and development domains was largely nonexistent. As shall be described, this transcended to the tactical level as well.

## Tactical Level

### Guiding Principles

The Norwegian humanitarian and development communities and many sections within the MFA were from the outset skeptical about the very idea of a PRT with respect to the integration of military and civilian roles. For them, separation of civilian and military activity was crucial and the primacy of UN principles of humanitarian assistance was deeply rooted. The Norwegian government thus referred to UN guidelines and principles for civilian-military interaction.<sup>14</sup> A key document in this regard was the 1994 UN “Oslo Guidelines,” regulating the use of military assets in disaster operations, and the subsequent 2003 UN “Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defense Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies.”<sup>15</sup> The UN developed several other guidelines for Afghanistan specifically, including the 2008 “Guidelines for the Interaction and Coordination of Humanitarian Actors and Military Actors in Afghan-

13 The government of Afghanistan has even added a ninth Millennium goal, “Enhance Security,” to the eight global MDGs, recognizing the critical role of peace and security in achieving the other MDGs. See

[http://www.undp.org.af/demo/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=62&Itemid=68](http://www.undp.org.af/demo/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=62&Itemid=68) and Erin Foster, “Afghanistan: Social Well-Being: The Millennium Development Goals,” *Civil-Military Fusion Centre* 4, no. 10 (5 October 2010), 3, [https://www.cimicweb.org/Documents/CFC%20AFG%20Social%20Well-being%20Archive/SWB\\_Monthly\\_October\\_6%20October%5B1%5D.pdf](https://www.cimicweb.org/Documents/CFC%20AFG%20Social%20Well-being%20Archive/SWB_Monthly_October_6%20October%5B1%5D.pdf).

14 Arne Strand, “Drawing the Lines: the Norwegian Debate on Civilian-Military Relations in Afghanistan,” *Noref Policy Brief* 8 (June 2010).

15 <http://www.coe-dmha.org/Media/Guidance/3MCDAGuidelines.pdf>. See also Cedric de Coning, “Civil-Military Relations and U.N. Peacekeeping Operations,” *World Politics Review*, 19 May 2010, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/5553/civil-military-relations-and-u-n-peacekeeping-operations>.

istan.”<sup>16</sup> The Afghan PRT executive steering committee also issued guidelines.<sup>17</sup>

All these guidelines recommended a clear distinction between humanitarian and military activity. The guidelines issued by the Afghan PRT executive steering committee stated that “humanitarian assistance is that which is **life saving** and addresses urgent and life-threatening humanitarian needs. It must not be used for the purpose of political gain, relationship building, or ‘winning hearts and minds.’ ”<sup>18</sup> (emphasis in original)

In addition, the PRT Guidelines also stressed that United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was the lead agency when it came to provincial development, and that “the PRTs should [have] support[ed] UNAMA offices and follow[ed] guidance provided by UNAMA and other concerned donors on this issue.”<sup>19</sup> Based on such guidelines and the strong support for the UN in the NGOs and the MFA, the government sought to keep civilian and military efforts strictly separated in its Afghan policy and in the PRT.<sup>20</sup>

### The Norwegian PRT Structure

The mandate of the NATO PRTs in Afghanistan was to promote security and good governance and to facilitate development and reconstruction, all in close collaboration with the government of Afghanistan and the Afghan National Security Forces.<sup>21</sup>

16 [https://ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/Guidelines%20Afghanistan %2 0%2 0v.% 201.0%202008.pdf](https://ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/Guidelines%20Afghanistan%20%20%20v.%201.0%202008.pdf);

17 [https://www.cimicweb.org/Documents/PRT%20CONFERENCE%202010/PRT\\_ESC\\_Charter.pdf](https://www.cimicweb.org/Documents/PRT%20CONFERENCE%202010/PRT_ESC_Charter.pdf). See also IRIN, “Afghanistan: How Should Aid Workers, Military Personnel Interact?” 28 October 2009, <http://www.irinnews.org/printreport.aspx?reportid=86776>.

18 PRT Executive Steering Committee, “PRT Executive Steering Committee Policy Note Number 3”, *Civil-Military Fusion Centre*, 21 March 2010, [https://www.cimicweb.org/Documents/PRT%20CONFERENCE%202010/Policy\\_Note\\_3\\_Humanitarian\\_Assistance.pdf](https://www.cimicweb.org/Documents/PRT%20CONFERENCE%202010/Policy_Note_3_Humanitarian_Assistance.pdf).

19 PRT Executive Steering Committee, “PRT Executive Steering Committee Policy Note Number 1”, *Civil-Military Fusion Centre*, 21 March 2010, [https://www.cimicweb.org/Documents/PRT%20CONFERENCE%202010/Policy\\_Note\\_1\\_Engagement\\_in\\_Provincial\\_Development.pdf](https://www.cimicweb.org/Documents/PRT%20CONFERENCE%202010/Policy_Note_1_Engagement_in_Provincial_Development.pdf).

20 The “humanitarian space” refers to purely humanitarian projects, which are considered nonpolitical and based on international humanitarian law. The guiding principle for humanitarian agencies is often referred to as the “humanitarian imperative” and often summarized as independence, impartiality, and neutrality. See International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief* (Geneva, Switzerland: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 1995).

21 North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “NATOs and Afghanistan,” 03 December 2012, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_8189.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_8189.htm).

The Norwegian-led PRT consisted of approximately 400 soldiers (including 100 from Latvia) and some 10 to 20 civilians. They were based in Meymaneh in the Faryab district in northwestern Afghanistan. The civilian group typically had a civilian coordinator, a political adviser, development advisers, police advisers, and prison advisers, mainly from Norway but also from Iceland and Latvia. The civilians and the military were colocated and were placed under certain common military security regulations but operated otherwise separately.

The civilian members of the Norwegian-led PRT were divided into at least two groups: the police and prison advisers and the political and development advisers. The role of the political and development advisers was to oversee the implementation of development programs; liaise with the local authorities, the UN and others; and help to develop new projects and programs funded by the MFA through the embassy in Kabul. As in most other PRTs, none of the civilians were under the command of the military contingent. They coordinated with the embassy in Kabul and with relevant ministries and directorates in Oslo.

Nor was the military under civilian command. The military chain of command went through Regional Command North (RC N), ISAF HQ and the rest of the NATO structure, in addition to the Norwegian Operational Command and the MOD in Norway.

Therefore, in practice, it was two parallel structures sharing the same compound. There was no tactical (Meymaneh/Faryab) or operational (Kabul) headquarters or equivalent of the Oslo Afghanistan Forum. The civilians and the military may have coordinated, but it was all based on goodwill, not on institutionalized procedures or regulations. There was no common higher level of command to refer to in case of conflict.<sup>22</sup> As a result, the degree of cooperation differed significantly from contingent to contingent, and the institutional memory was limited. It was only recently that the civilian and military structures initiated joint exercises prior to deployment. Different rotation cycles also hampered these exercises.

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<sup>22</sup> For more details on the PRT model, see de Coning et al., *Norway's Whole-of-Government Approach*, 29–33.

An additional challenge was the absence of a common plan. A “Faryab strategy” was developed in 2009, but it represented more of a lowest common denominator between ministries and other relevant agencies than a strategy.<sup>23</sup> As in the United States and elsewhere, good ambitions were plentiful, but they were not organized in a prioritized way in terms of time or resources. This all seemed to represent a compromise and not a political agenda, and as a planning tool, it was of limited value for the PRT.

Furthermore, the political and development advisers may have been considered the extended arm of the embassy, but they had weak direct links to Oslo. The civilian coordinator and political advisors typically were younger civil servants, not career diplomats with a good foothold and network in the embassy or MFA in Oslo. Being deployed to the PRT was not career-boosting for diplomats, so recruitment was difficult. The development advisors were also externally recruited personnel without much network in the MFA or NORAD. Therefore, they were not in a particularly strong position for implementing Norwegian foreign policy or influencing the more senior PRT commander—typically a lieutenant colonel in rank. There was little doubt that it was the military that was the stronger component, both in terms of personnel and operational capacity. The Norwegian armed forces has gradually transformed from a peacekeeping-style force to a credible counterinsurgency (COIN) force, with better equipment and better fighting skills. This may have deepened the divisions to the civilians further. As a result of this, there was no common Norwegian political strategy—no common planning, monitoring, or evaluation of the efforts made in the various sectors where Norway was engaged in Faryab. The civilian and military activities and projects were not being knitted together into a comprehensive strategy to maximize the political effects and fulfill the mandate.

As previously mentioned, the Norwegian NGOs were particularly critical of the PRT concept in its early years. They viewed PRTs as disregarding or blurring the lines between humanitarian and military spaces.

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<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Justice and the Police, *A Strategy for Comprehensive Norwegian Civilian and Military Efforts in Faryab Province, Afghanistan* (Oslo, Norway: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Justice and the Police, May 2009), [http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/FD/Dokumenter/Strategy\\_Norway-in-Faryab-Afghanistan.pdf](http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/FD/Dokumenter/Strategy_Norway-in-Faryab-Afghanistan.pdf).

The civilian actors feared being subsumed to the military operations and being regarded as the extended hand of the military. They typically argued that militarization of aid was short-sighted and unsustainable and that military-driven aid projects, aid aimed at winning hearts and minds, threw money at a problem rather than address the underlying cause of the instability.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, many Norwegian NGOs contended that using money as a weapons system was not only unsustainable, it may also have unintended adverse effects and even create instability. Pumping money into local societies often led to corruption, tribal infighting over access to the funds, and increased revenues to the insurgency groups.<sup>25</sup> Such critiques were widely referred to in the Norwegian debates, further legitimizing and strengthening the policy of separation of military and civilian roles. Given the previously mentioned strong role of the NGOs in the Norwegian public discourse, the government was not willing or able to confront them and generally complied with their demands for such separation.

However, the military had also criticized the government and NGOs for bypassing local authorities when implementing projects in Faryab and for ignoring the political and social considerations. It was argued that unevenly dispersed aid contributed to strengthening insurgents in the province.<sup>26</sup> The government and the NGO community have resisted attempts by the military to strengthen coordination. As a result, the military faced difficulties in implementing the COIN strategy directed from ISAF command. While conducting successful “clear” operations, they lacked the “hold” and “build” elements required to succeed. A replacement for the reluctant Norwegian partners was to some extent found in USAID, which began implementing projects in the Faryab region thereafter. For the Norwegian PRT, cooperation with USAID proved more fruitful, as they appeared more inclined

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24 Lars Akerhaug and Lars Inge Staveland, “Norge og USA vurderer bistand ulikt,” *Aftenposten* (Norway), 13 October 2010, <http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/uriks/--Norge-og-USA-vurderer-bistand-ulikt-5349087.html>.

25 Wilder and Gordon, “Money Can’t Buy America Love.”

26 Rune Solberg, “Bistand på ville veier” *Aftenposten* (Norway), 6 December 2010, <http://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/kronikker/Bistand-p-ville-veier-6274301.html>.

to cooperate toward a common COIN goal. The Norwegian NGOs predictably criticized this cooperation.<sup>27</sup>

### **Conflation of Humanitarian and Development Aid**

There was, however, a fundamental flaw in the position of the Norwegian civilian component, which was primarily the NGO position. While humanitarian aid in principle could be regarded as apolitical, development aid, it can be argued, was inherently political. There could be little doubt that the Norwegian objectives in Afghanistan, like those of the UN and the wider international community, were highly political. Development programs aimed at, for example, poverty reduction were political, as they recommended one set of principles over others, whether governance, economic, or legal. It was a question of taking sides in an internal violent conflict, supporting one set of values (liberal-democratic) and one set of actors (the authorities).<sup>28</sup> The model advanced typically was based upon Western or UN best practices, supporting liberal-democratic values over those of the authoritarianism and usually implying redistribution of resources, changes in power structures, or strengthening of a group of actors. The defense of the humanitarian space therefore could not rightly be expanded to include development aid or other programs in which NGOs were engaged.<sup>29</sup> The previously mentioned guidelines of the UN and PRT executive steering committee all referred to the relationship between the military and the humanitarian actors, not the development actors. But many NGOs and the Norwegian government tended to ignore this fact.

The insurgents tended to object to several elements of the MDG, the ANDS, and the Norwegian development aid criteria. They also found objectionable many key Norwegian values, like democratization, empowering women, and the rule of law.

By conflating the humanitarian and development programs, the NGOs were denying the political role and potential powerful political influence such programs wielded, while simultaneously

27 Tor Aksel Bolle, "Forsvaret danser tett med USAID i Afghanistan," *Bistandsaktuelt* (Norway), 8, 2010, 4–8.

28 Jens Stoltenberg, "Derfor er Norge i Afghanistan," *Aftenposten* (Norway), 22 November 2007.

29 Sylvain Beauchamp, *Defining the Humanitarian Space through Public International Law*, (Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Red Cross, 2008): 16, [http://www.redcross.ca/cmslib/general/obeoc\\_beauchamp.pdf](http://www.redcross.ca/cmslib/general/obeoc_beauchamp.pdf).



unnecessarily resisting cooperation with other actors, such as the military. Furthermore, insufficient political analysis and sensitivity may have caused development projects to aggravate rather than mitigate tensions. An internal report by NORAD revealed that there was an ethnic imbalance in Faryab, in the sense that the Uzbek communities received substantially more aid than the Pashtuns. This caused tensions in the latter group who already had been a recruitment base for local insurgents.<sup>30</sup>

Despite arguments for keeping humanitarian and military operations separate, there are valid reasons why development programs should plan and evaluate in a coordinated manner with the military, to ensure that resources are coherently spent and to maximize political efficiency. All Norwegian development aid to Afghanistan should have, in principle, aimed at the same political objectives—those defined by the Afghan and Norwegian authorities. If civilian agencies were concerned with the militarization of aid, there were even more reasons for them to engage with the military and confirm that political development efforts were done “right.”

All actors seem to agree that to achieve sustainable security, military solutions alone are insufficient. Yet, civilians can be reluctant to contribute to the security domain or to fill the gaps unaddressed by the military. Many NGOs do not consider security to be their priority, and thus design their projects based on other sets of criteria, such as advancing health, wellbeing, and human rights. As long as the Norwegian government accepts and supports the separation of development aid and security operations, NGOs are unlikely to change their position. Only through donor guidance can development projects be tuned toward achieving long-term political effects that enhance the security situation.

Of course, it may be argued that with only 400 troops in a district (Faryab) of approximately one million people, it would not have made much difference whether the civilian-military coordination was better. There were arguably far too few boots on the ground to be able to provide security for all citizens or to play a decisive

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<sup>30</sup> Lars Inge Staveland, “U-hjelp kan skape mer konflikt,” *Aftenposten*, 4 November 2010, <http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/uriks/--U-hjelp-kan-skape-mer-konflikt-5351336.html>; Geert Gompelman, *Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan's Faryab Province* (Boston: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, January 2011).

political role. That may very well be the case, but the purpose in this analysis is to draw operational lessons for future deployments. Improved coordination will in most cases increase efficiency, reduce expenses, and possibly save lives—even if it by itself is not sufficient to win a war or build peace.

### **Conclusion**

Norway was not alone in many of the challenges facing the civilian-military relationships described above. All those who are engaged in the Afghan field had to contend with conflicting mandates, visions, priorities, and perceptions among civilian and military partners. Despite these pressures, the Norwegian approach to civilian-military interaction had certain positive features. The civilian aid was significant, almost equal to the military spending, and a large chunk of the civilian aid was provided to the local authorities through established multilateral mechanisms such as trust funds. This approach promoted local ownership and sustainability, as it countered the tendency to reward instability and allowed for higher levels of development aid. As such, these characteristics go beyond the tactical use of aid and contribute to a strategic approach. The development aid generally supported the greater international programs in Afghanistan with considerable discretion afforded to the field rather than invented in Oslo.

On the negative side, the Norwegian conflation of humanitarian and development aid promoted a perception of the militarization of aid and humanitarian space, and thereby stalled a potentially fruitful cooperation between development and military actors. Despite former Foreign Minister Gahr Støre's emphasis on political-military interdependence, this was hardly followed in practice. Political development aid was not designed in conjunction with security/military efforts. This was also the main reason why there was no operational level coordination, for example in the embassy in Kabul, between the military and civilian development actors. It may also explain why Norway did not have an official strategy generally for Afghanistan or specifically for Faryab (the existing one was a strategy in name only), as it would have forced the government to spell out priorities between the security, development, and humanitarian sectors.

Instead the political elite tended to avoid this debate altogether, continuing instead to attempt several things at the same time. The underlying assumption must have been that these ends could be achieved independent of each other, or at least that they were not in conflict, so that tighter coordination was not needed. This was a questionable assumption that reflected the wider problem facing the international community in Afghanistan. As long as key actors had significantly different perceptions, objectives, and solutions and were reluctant to acknowledge these differences, the prospects for enhanced civilian-military cooperation and for sustainable peace remained grim.

What appeared to be the trend among many ISAF countries is to lower the ambition on the civilian-military cooperation. This is partly due to challenges such as those Norway faced, but also a general “Afghanistan-fatigue” among donors as a result of limited progress in both security and development. The military component is increasing their efforts to train local security forces and is, to a lesser extent, engaged in the whole civilian spectrum of efforts as prescribed in the COIN doctrines.

Perhaps the vision of civilian-military cooperation became too ambitious in Afghanistan. The military could not and should not become dependent upon developments in the civilian sector to achieve military ends. The COIN doctrines had very valuable insights into the importance of understanding the political-cultural context and the need for sustainable governance. But they may have confused war and nation-building. The latter usually requires a political settlement to succeed; it is a way to stabilize a fragile peace agreement. It is far more challenging—if indeed possible—to build a state to win a war, as parts of the COIN proponents seem to argue.

What do these lessons from Afghanistan bode for future operations? First, for civilian-military cooperation to work it must be on all levels: strategic, operational, and tactical. The military operations should be in support of the political objectives, not vice versa. Whatever is done on the tactical level should reinforce and support long-term civilian strategies on the higher levels. If not, there is a risk the disconnect will undermine overall stability efforts.

Second, civilian efforts should award peace, e.g. concentrate on those areas in the theatre where there is political stability. The example of prosperous development is a strong signal to other regions.

Third, local ownership is key. Only local people, not foreigners, can build sustainable peace. Civilian funds should avoid bypassing local structures even if it means less efficient aid delivery at the outset.

Fourth, and as a result of the previous points, civilian-military cooperation is most efficient in the stabilization phase of a war, when it can reinforce a political settlement. Civilian efforts usually require more time to achieve the desired political effects than military efforts do. As a result, civilian-military cooperation in offensive operations is less likely to succeed.

Civilian-military cooperation remains crucial in today's military operations. Campaign phases are not linear, and the stabilization phase, with significant civilian-military cooperation, may suddenly slide back to violent conflict with less such cooperation. In the same way, different geographical areas of the theatre may also experience different levels of stability and hence different degrees of civilian-military interaction. This fluidity in today's conflicts requires all actors to know each other well and to be able to support each other when in common interest. Improved awareness and knowledge of each other is a precondition for this and represents the best way to avoid disappointments, frustrations, and false expectations.