

NUPI

Comprehensive Approach

Challenges and opportunities in
complex crisis management

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Pia Jarmyr (eds)



NUPI Report

Security in Practice no. 11
[A Publication in the NUPI Series on Security in Practice]

Norwegian Institute
of International
Affairs

Norsk
Utenrikspolitisk
Institutt

Utgiver: NUPI
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ISSN: 0800 - 0018
ISBN: 978-82-7002-190-1

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[Summary] This report discusses challenges related to the comprehensive approach in complex crisis management today. The first chapter conceptualises 'comprehensive approach' by developing categories and definitions of various kinds of interactions and between various kinds of actors. The second chapter discusses five topic areas that represent a challenge to achieving a comprehensive approach: conflicting values, principles and priorities; organisational and operational challenges; how to organise a comprehensive approach; the challenges of leadership and management; and the challenges of local ownership. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it includes important challenges that organisations attempting to engage in a comprehensive approach must heed. One of the conclusions is that a successful comprehensive approach requires increased organisational flexibility but also basic things like appropriate leadership, and reduction of prejudices and cultural barriers across the range of actors engaged in crisis management.

Preface

This report is based on some of the findings of the ‘Comprehensive Approach Workshop’ organised in Oslo, Norway, 26–27 March 2008. The workshop was hosted by the Norwegian National Joint Headquarters, in cooperation with the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, the Defence Staff College and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI).

The purpose of the report is not to capture everything that was discussed at the workshop, but rather to use it as a source of knowledge-sharing that can further illuminate the concept of ‘comprehensive approach’. This, and similar concepts like ‘integrated missions’ and ‘concerted planning and action’, have become fashionable terms in multinational crisis management in recent years, and this report aims to contribute to addressing the concept more systematically. The objective has been to write a report that could be of interest and use for all those seeking to come to grips with these terms and concepts and that can help to focus the debate.

The report will highlight a number of particular challenges which practitioners in the field have encountered in attempting to coordinate their activities with other actors. Our objective has not been to discuss all these challenge areas in detail, but rather to map the terrain and indicate what some of the challenges are. Few of the challenges identified have ‘quick fixes’, but some are perhaps less deeply rooted than others, and if addressed systematically could contribute to achieving a more comprehensive approach.

The main authors or contributors to this report are the participants in the workshop. Their names are listed at the end of this report, and we would like to thank them for their valuable contributions and insights, as well as their engagement in the discussions and debates. In particular we would like to thank the panellists, Giovanni Manione (Director EU CivMil Cell), Spyros Demetrious (UN Consultant), Ed Schenkenberg (ICVA Coordinator) and Arne Opperud (Norwegian Army). In addition we would like to extend our gratitude to the four syndicate leaders, Elisabeth Schwabe-Hansen (Norwegian MFA), Annika S. Hansen (FFI), Turid Lægreid and Cedric de Coning (NUPI). Cedric de Coning also made a valuable introductory presentation at the start of the workshop; he has co-authored the introduction chapter and has contributed to other sections of this report, especially sections 2.1 and 2.3. The other parts of the report were written by the workshop scribes, Ingrid Aune, Magnus Aasrum, Petter Hojem. Editing was undertaken by Pia Jarmyr and Karsten Friis.

This report, with the above-mentioned Workshop, is part of the Norwegian engagement in the Multinational Experiment 5 (MNE5), where Norway participates through NATO ACT. The project is financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Defence and is managed by the Norwegian National Joint Headquarters. Besides NUPI, the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) and the Defence Staff Collage are also engaged in the programme. Further information can be found at: <http://mne.oslo.mil.no>

1. Introduction:

How to conceptualise ‘comprehensive approach’?

Cedric de Coning
Karsten Friis¹

The comprehensive approach concept should be understood in the context of an increasingly complex and interdependent international conflict management system. The scope of the crises faced by the international community is often of such a scale that no single agency, government or international organisation can manage them alone. In response, a wide range of agencies, governmental and non-governmental, and regional and international organisations have each developed specialised capacities to manage various aspects of these complex crisis systems, and together they have been able to respond with a broad range of interlinked activities.

This multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary response has been able to manage some highly dynamic crisis environments reasonably well. However, in others, lack of coherence and coordination among the diverse international and local actors in the international conflict management system has resulted, *inter alia*, in inter-agency rivalry, working at cross-purposes, competition for funding, duplication of effort and sub-optimal economies of scale. All of these, taken together, have contributed to poor success rates, as measured in the sustainability of the systems produced as a result of these international interventions.²

In order to address these shortcomings and improve the overall success rate of the international conflict management system, various agencies, governments and organisations have started exploring, independently of each other, a range of models and mechanisms aimed at enhancing overall coherence, cooperation and coordination. All these initiatives have a similar aim: to achieve greater harmonisation and synchronisation among the activities of the various international and local actors, across the analysis, planning, implementation, management and evaluation aspects of the programme cycle.³ The term ‘comprehensive approach’ is used here as an umbrella concept for all such initiatives.

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the topics typically addressed in debates about comprehensive approach. Further, we will try to help to organise the debates by offering some categorisations of the motivating factors, categories of comprehensive approach, categories of interaction and some key challenges.

¹ Whereas the rest of the report is an edited version of the workshop findings, this introductory chapter was written separately by the two authors, both of whom are affiliated with NUPI.

² Cedric de Coning, *Coherence and Coordination in United Nations Peacebuilding and Integrated Missions: A Norwegian Perspective*, Security in Practice No.5. Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, December 2007.

³ The ‘comprehensive approach’ concept used for the purposes of this workshop and report is based on *The Comprehensive Approach: A Conceptual Framework for Multinational Experiment 5*, Suffolk, VA: United States Joint Forces Command, 15 November 2005..

1.1. What are the incentives for participating in a comprehensive approach?

Various actors and agencies will have differing motives for engaging in a comprehensive approach. Broadly speaking, there are both ‘pull’ and ‘push’ factors: some are a result of an interest in performing better, whereas others result from the realisation that missions are about to fail due to lack of coordination among the actors.

Hence, some motives for engagement could be:

- *Efficiency*: Joining and coordinating limited or scarce resources is likely to be more cost-effective. This applies to both the kind of efforts employed as well as their sequencing, as timing is often as important as the amount of resources spent.
- *Consistency*: The notion that ‘the one hand should know what the other is doing’ is particularly relevant for governments that have several agencies (e.g. military, development, and diplomatic). This is not solely a question of efficiency but is also about sending the right signals to domestic tax-payers as well as other actors in the field. It could also apply to the motivation behind the UN Integrated Mission process, where there has clearly been an interest in making the UN a more coherent actor.
- *Urgency*: It is no secret that e.g. Western governments are struggling with not only lack of progress, but even recession in some of their operations. This applies particularly to Afghanistan and Iraq, and new solutions are needed. Improved international coordination has been launched as one such solution.
- *Security*: In a globalised world, failed states are often seen as a security risk, for example by becoming a training ground for terrorists. However, military means alone cannot create a stable state. A whole range of activities is needed, ranging from humanitarian relief and economic stabilisation, to democratisation, the rule of law and security.
- *Politics*: Electorates in the West are growing increasingly impatient and less willing to accept military losses. Patience with long-lasting military struggles is limited, making it urgent to find additional tools for securing a territory and eventually withdrawing.
- *Legitimacy*: With more actors working together, legitimacy – moral and political – will tend to increase. A certain degree of solidarity may also be built, making it somewhat easier to sustain temporary setbacks.

More motives can surely be found: the purpose here is simply to illustrate that various actors may come to the table for various reasons. This may obstruct practical achievements despite what may appear to be a shared interest in developing a comprehensive approach. Understanding the differing motivations may contribute to avoiding or addressing such difficulties.

1.2 Categories of comprehensive approaches

Comprehensiveness can be achieved among various groups of actors at various levels and at various stages. These levels and groups often get mixed in the debate. It is obvious that the nature of the comprehensive approach will differ depending on who is involved. One way of categorising the several levels could be:

- *Whole of Government Approach (WHOGA)*: This takes place within a specific country. The purpose is to harmonise the efforts of the various government agencies, for more rational use of resources and to contribute to multinational-level efforts. This will be discussed in greater detail below.
- *Intra-agency*: Within a larger agency, several departments may work in overlapping fields. Or various contributors in an organisation may seek to harmonise the activities that take place under the umbrella of that organisation. One example could be the attempts to harmonise the efforts of the NATO PRTs in Afghanistan. This type of approach could also relate to the UN's process of integrated missions where it seeks to harmonise the efforts of all or some of its agencies. This too is discussed below.
- *Inter-agency*: This is perhaps what most people associate with a comprehensive approach: collaboration and cooperation involving several actors in a crisis area. These can be military actors, international organisations, government agencies, NGOs, host government agencies etc. Most of this report will focus on challenges on this level.

Whole of Government Approaches

Several national governments have been experimenting with improving the cooperation among government departments, with a view to improving the management of their respective national and international challenges.

It was the Canadian government that originally developed the '3D' (diplomacy, development and defence) concept, later adopted by many other governments. Today the 3D concept has become a general catch-phrase for the comprehensive approach because it so concisely captures the main axis of the inter-relationship.

The United Kingdom also applied its more comprehensive approach to the international arena and created a inter-agency unit, first called the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit (PCRU), and later re-named the Stabilization Unit. It brought together the Ministry of Defence, the Department for International Development and the Foreign Ministry, and, *inter alia*, managed a joint funding pool.

The USA developed something similar, the Office for the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS), but never seemed to achieve the same degree of inter-agency cohesion and participation as the UK initiative.

Various other governments, including those of Norway, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands, have attempted similar national-level coherence initiatives. Most of them involve inter-departmental coordination meetings, some at various levels ranging from the ministerial to the working level. In some cases more ministries or departments (e.g. Justice,

Correctional Services, the Interior) have been engaged, and in many cases these initiatives have been aimed at better managing specific deployments.

All the countries mentioned thus far are deployed in Afghanistan, and most participate in or lead a specific Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). The PRT concept is, in itself, a whole-of-government experiment, in that each PRT is meant to have political, development, police and military experts, in addition to a security detail. The idea is that this joint inter-departmental deployment should result in an improved whole-of-government, multi-dimensional stabilisation and reconstruction initiative within each PRT's area of operation.

Intra-agency: Regional and International Comprehensive Approach Initiatives

At the multilateral level, the United Nations, European Union, African Union and NATO are each also engaged in various initiatives aimed at improving coherence within different parts of their own organisations, as well as between their organisations and the other international and local stakeholders they work with in international conflict management .

The *European Union* has developed a sophisticated Crisis Management capability, including military, police and civilian capacities, but it has not yet deployed integrated missions where these three elements operate together as one mission. Until now, they have been deployed in parallel missions, alongside other EU presences in the same countries, such as election monitoring missions, development and humanitarian missions, and political/diplomatic council and commission representation. The EU has developed a new civilian/military coordination tool (CMCO) to manage coordination among the Crisis Management actors, but it has not yet developed a capacity to integrate its Crisis Management, development and humanitarian missions.

NATO has made explicit reference to the importance of a comprehensive approach to respond to the challenges in Afghanistan and elsewhere in its 2006 Riga Summit and 2008 Bucharest Summit Declarations.⁴ *NATO* is essentially a military alliance and can only deploy as such. As it is incapable of achieving a system-wide effect on its own, *NATO* can thus participate only in a larger comprehensive approach. However, it has been developing an Effects Based Approach to Operations (EBAO), which could be interpreted as the military contribution to a comprehensive approach. EBAO is based on effects-based management not unlike the results-based management applied by many civilian organisations, focusing on the results of the actions rather than the actions themselves. As such, it has the potential of at least partly bridging the civilian/military gap: for example, the development of indicators and measurements could be conducted in a more cooperative manner than today. Work on improving coordination among the various national PRTs in Afghanistan can also be regarded as an attempt at intra-agency coordination.

It is the *United Nations* that has, to date, made the most progress in achieving a comprehensive approach. The UN system is considering some of the recommendations of the high-level panel on system-wide coherence that has looked into coherence among those members of the UN family working in the humanitarian, development and environmental areas, and is already piloting others – under the slogans ‘Delivering as One’ and ‘One UN’.⁵ Moreover, the Secretary-General has approved an initiative to integrate the UN's political,

⁴ See <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2006/p06-150e.htm> and <http://www.summitbucharest.ro/en>

⁵ See *Delivering as One*, Report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on System-wide Coherence, United Nations, New York (www.un.org/events/panel).

security, developmental, human rights and humanitarian agencies under one *Integrated Missions* structure when the UN deploys peacekeeping operations. UN *Integrated Missions* refers to a specific type of operational process and design, where the planning and coordination processes of the various elements of the UN family are integrated into a single country-level UN System in connection with complex peace building missions.⁶

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan issued a Note on *Integrated Missions* in 2006 that describes the concept as follows:

An integrated mission is based on a common strategic plan and a shared understanding of the priorities and types of programme interventions that need to be undertaken at various stages of the recovery process. Through this integrated process, the UN system seeks to maximise its contribution towards countries emerging from conflict by engaging its different capabilities in a coherent and mutually supportive manner.⁷

The integrated missions concept thus refers to a type of mission where there are processes, mechanisms and structures in place that generate and sustain a common strategic objective, as well as a comprehensive operational approach, among the political, security, development, human rights, and where appropriate, humanitarian, UN actors at country level.

1.3 Inter-agency: diversities in relations and collaborations

This report focuses on the challenges in developing a comprehensive approach among actors and organisations engaged in international crisis management. Whereas there certainly are similarities to the national (WHOGA) and intra-agency processes, there are also some distinct obstacles involved in attempting to bring together independent actors. What is perhaps the main one concerns ‘command and control’. States and organisations have a hierarchical structure and a top leadership, and may thus apply a top-down authority to implement comprehensiveness, if so required. This option is not available in an international inter-agency setting, where collaboration has to be voluntary as organisational independence is rarely surrendered. What then, is it that brings them together?

Dependence and interdependence

A feature of today’s complex crisis management environments is the interdependencies among the various actors. A comprehensive approach system is likely to consist of a large number of independent agents that collectively carry out a broad range of activities across the dimensions of the system. These agents are independent in that they are each legally constituted in their own right, have their own organisational goals and objectives, have their own access to resources, and are in control of those resources: they have the power to make decisions about the allocation of those resources.

By contrast, a distinguishing feature of a comprehensive approach system is that all the agents and their activities are interdependent: no single agency, network or sub-system can achieve the ultimate goal of the overall mission – addressing the root causes of the conflict and laying

⁶ United Nations, *Integrated Missions Planning Process (IMPP)*, Guidelines endorsed by the Secretary-General on 13 June 2006.

⁷ United Nations, *Note of Guidance on Integrated Missions*, Issued by the Secretary-General on 9 December 2005, paragraph 4. See also the Revised *Note of Guidance on Integrated Missions*, dated 17 January 2006, and released under a Note from the Secretary-General on 9 February 2006, paragraph 4.

the foundation for social justice and sustainable peace – on its own. Each agency independently undertakes activities that address specific facets of the conflict spectrum, but a collective (combined) and cumulative (sustained over time) effect is needed to achieve the overall mission goal.

Each agent contributes only a part of the whole. It is the overall collective and cumulative effect that builds momentum towards sustainable peace and development. If the peace process fails and the conflict is resumed, the time and resources invested have been wasted. It is only if the combined and sustained effort proves successful in the long term that the investment made can be said to have been worthwhile. The success of each individual activity is linked to the success of the total collective and cumulative effect of the overall undertaking.⁸

Whereas it may seem at the outset that a comprehensive approach will require a whole range of actors joining together under one leadership and one organisation, doing everything together more or less as one organisation, this is neither particularly realistic nor necessarily desirable. Various organisations may have differing incentives for participating in a comprehensive approach, and so the level of their engagement with others will vary accordingly.

Categories of inter-agency comprehensiveness

There are always degrees of coherence, interaction, coordination and collaboration, depending on the actors or groups of actors in question. One way of differentiating the various relationships that may be found within a comprehensive approach could be the following:

- *Coherence*: Partners, e.g. a coalition, who act upon shared mandate, strategic vision and objectives. These will act almost as a unified organisation, conducting their planning, implementation and evaluation together. Typically a command and control (or similar) element is also included. Nevertheless, in the real world, the agencies that are responsible for programmes and campaigns often have to settle for ‘second best’ or ‘partially coherent’ solutions in order to establish a workable foundation for cooperation.
- *Cooperation*: Actors with complementary and/or overlapping mandates and objectives may operate together. They retain their organisational independence, but are willing to stretch relatively far in organising activities together with others.
- *Collaboration & coordination*: This would describe the activity taking place between actors with different mandates, or between those who require strong organisational independence (e.g. being politically neutral) but who nonetheless share some similar interests or strategic vision, and thus see the need for a degree of coordination with others. Typically, there will often be a network of coordination mechanisms – some more densely connected than others, some operating in hierarchies at various levels between the same actors, whilst others are only loosely connected.
- *Coexistence*: This would describe the relationship between actors with limited ambitions concerning cooperation – for example, in the case of sceptical or even opposing political and military forces. They may not be directly hostile but could resist activities that interfere in their sphere of interest. A certain amount of

⁸ For more on the dependence/interdependence tension, see de Coning 2007, footnote 2.

communication and de-conflicting may take place, as well as persuasions, or at times even the use of pressure or force.

The key here is that the various actors may operate in a more or less comprehensive fashion, depending on their motivations, identities and organisational independence. There is a growing understanding that all activities are somehow interlinked, and that success for one organisation will usually depend on the activities of other actors. However, this does not mean that organisational independence cannot be maintained even when participating in a comprehensive approach. The actors may all still be considered to be part of a comprehensive approach, even if they do not sit at the same table or are involved in visible joint activities.

1.4 Challenges and obstacles

To make progress towards a comprehensive approach, one starting point is awareness of all the challenges involved. This list sets out some of those potential obstacles:

- *Formalities:* Various organisations may have conflicting mandates, no Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to build cooperation on, or may face other formal and legal impediments to collaboration.
- *Cultures, mindset, prejudices:* The military and the humanitarian ‘worlds’ tend to look upon each other with suspicion, but this could also be the case in connection with, for example, the diplomatic corps, the development communities, and between government ministries like the MoD and the MFA.
- *Bureaucratic rigidity:* Despite good intentions, the organisational system of one actor may not allow the necessary flexibility to adjust plans and budgets to the requirements of other actors, and over time.
- *Security:* Humanitarian actors are very concerned with preservation of the humanitarian space – their freedom to operate neutrally and impartially in addressing human suffering. This may require distance to other actors in the field.
- *Funding:* It is no secret that many organisations compete for funding from the same donors – a zero-sum setting that may hamper cooperation between them.
- *Priorities:* Different actors may share the strategic vision for an intervention, but may nonetheless disagree on what is most important to do at what times.
- *Resources:* Far more funding tends to go to the military forces than to, for example, development, even if the latter may often be the key to a successful intervention.
- *Leadership:* If actors are to coordinate, who is in charge? Is it the UN, or is it the strongest actor (typically the military), or is it the main donor country?
- *Authority:* For a comprehensive approach to work, a more decentralised authority than is the case today is needed in many organisations.

- *Local ownership*: If the purpose of a comprehensive approach is to achieve the mission objectives as effectively and fast as possible, the question of sustainability and local ownership is pivotal. When shall authority be handed over, and to whom?

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it can serve as a starting point for the more detailed discussion in this report. Some issues will be discussed more extensively than others, but the aim is to address a number of key challenges. As a comprehensive approach is as much about awareness, dialogue and organisational flexibility as about generic models for collaboration, it is central to provide a framework for discussions and awareness building. That is the aim of the following pages.

2. Crucial challenges in achieving a comprehensive approach

The concept of a comprehensive approach is based on the assumption that a diverse range of actors will be willing and able to achieve a minimum of shared goals and objectives across the political, security, socio-economic, and human rights dimensions that they represent. Moreover, it is expected that the process of establishing such common objectives, visions and goals will generate some level of coherence, and result in more efficient and effective outcomes.

Experience has shown, however, that the multitude of mandates, strategies, approaches and practices are often perceived as contracting each another, causing tensions and difficult working relations. To what extent are these differences attributable to incompatible objectives and principles? Or are they caused by factors like inadequate communication and coordination? How can we deal with such differences?

As a starting point it must be acknowledged that diversities do exist – in mandates, strategies, approaches and practices. National interests, for instance, often obstruct coherent policies and practices at both strategic and operational levels. Multinational or international organisations, like the ICRC, MSF and UNHCR, have specific mandates that may not always be compatible with the goals of those engaged in the political or security sectors. Even within an organisation like NATO, for example, approaches may vary greatly, despite a shared mandate and command and control structure. The 25 NATO PRTs in Afghanistan are all run in accordance with different national policies, and this sometimes creates tensions between the regions. Lastly, it should be noted that principles and mandates can at times also serve as a cover for institutional interests concerning visibility and competition for funds and donors.

There are nonetheless several examples where institutions and actors have managed to overcome differences, and have come to agreement on overall policies during a crisis management operation. Unless the mandates are diametrically conflicting and opposing, some degree of coordination and comprehensiveness should therefore be achievable.

At least five sets of challenges will need to be taken into account to achieve progress towards a comprehensive approach. Firstly, there is the challenge of overcoming conflicting mandates, principles and priorities of different actors. Secondly, how to bridge the many organisational structures and approaches that exist? Thirdly, how to organise a comprehensive approach – should it be integrated or coordinated? Fourthly, who should lead a comprehensive approach, and on what level should this take place? Lastly, there are the challenges related to the collaboration with the local actors. In the following, these challenge areas will be discussed in greater detail.

2.1. Conflicting values, principles and priorities

Working together to achieve a comprehensive approach presupposes some degree of agreement, some shared platform of values, principles and priorities. A meaningful comprehensive

approach can hardly be achieved if the actors have directly conflicting values and principles. Even if the differences may occasionally be perceived as greater than they need be, this is a key challenge in many conflict areas today.

The organisational values and operating principles that guide human rights and humanitarian actors, for instance, may well conflict with the values and principles of political and security actors, not least in contexts where some of the international and local actors can be hostile to each other.

Such tensions will be especially acute in situations where an international intervention has to deal with a hostile host government (as in the case of Darfur in Sudan), or insurgency (as in the case of Afghanistan), or is engaged in forcefully disarming rebel or militia groups (as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo).

This implies that a comprehensive approach may be more difficult in the early phases of an intervention where there is a dual security (stabilisation) and humanitarian focus. However, this tension can be equally in evidence in situations that have developed into the transitional and consolidation phases, but where pockets of instability remain, or where instability flares up after a period of relative calm. The phase of the intervention is thus not as much of an indication as the degree of hostility.⁹

The tension derives from the fact that the operating principles of humanitarian agencies require them to demonstrate their neutrality toward all parties perceived to be in dispute – including those parts of the international community that are, or are perceived to be, using force or other coercive means against one or more of the parties in the conflict system.

Conflicting priorities

Such fundamental differences in values and principles are not, however, limited to hostile environments. The various actors may also have differing views with regard to which aspects to prioritise. Political and security actors may prefer to focus on stabilising a situation before addressing matters like human rights violations, corruption, or narcotics, especially if the actors they perceive to be the key to stabilising the situation are suspected of being responsible for such human rights atrocities or criminal behaviour.

In some cases, the timetable of one may be in conflict with the principles of another. A case in point is the election timetable in Liberia which motivated those responsible for the election to encourage the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Monrovia to return to their original communities to register to vote. The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) put pressure on the agencies responsible for reintegration to persuade the IDPs to return, and to start offering them reintegration support. However, these agencies disagreed with the return timetable proposed by UNMIL, because their assessments had indicated that conditions were not yet sufficient to provide alternative sustainable livelihoods for the returnees in their home locations. This situation caused tension between the political and developmental/humanitarian actors because their respective goals, short-term vs. long-term, and operating values and principles brought them into direct opposition with another.

⁹ For a more detailed explanation of the three phases of stabilisation, transitional and consolidation, see C.H. de Coning, 'Civil-Military Coordination and UN Peacebuilding Operations', in H. Langholtz, B. Kondoch and A. Wells (eds), *International Peacekeeping: The Yearbook of International Peace Operations*, Volume 11. Brussels: Koninklijke Brill N.V., 2007.

Politicised aid

Another example would be situations where political and security actors may wish to reward certain political or military actors for their cooperation with humanitarian assistance or developmental projects. In some contexts, for instance in a counter-insurgency effort, communities that cooperate with the government and international forces are rewarded with aid to show that working together with them can bring them more benefits than collaborating with the insurgents. Such a ‘winning the hearts and minds’ approach could result in the political and military actors placing undue pressure on the development and humanitarian actors to provide services in selected areas, or the political and security actors could use their own means to provide services that appear to be developmental and humanitarian in action. At the same time the government and international forces may discourage those developmental and humanitarian actors that provide services in areas under the control of the insurgents.

All variations will result in blurring the distinction between political/military and humanitarian action, and thus undermine the independence, neutrality and impartiality of the humanitarian actors, in the eyes of the local communities and the insurgents.

Is the ‘humanitarian space’ overstretched?

Many NGOs and other humanitarian actors are reluctant to engage in a comprehensive approach. They argue that being coordinated into the framework of a comprehensive approach effectively hinders them in doing their work efficiently; moreover, it negatively affects their security, as they may be seen as favouring one of the parties to the conflict. They call for the preservation of their ‘humanitarian space’: to be free to address suffering wherever it is found, irrespective of the politics of the conflict. Typically, these are humanitarian NGOs that deliver ‘neutral’ services like food and water.

It is a challenge that in most of today’s complex conflicts, politics tends to play a role at every level. Also water and food distribution can be exploited politically, or have (unintended) political consequences.¹⁰ ‘Neutral’ NGOs would therefore have some interest in communicating with other actors in the field. Furthermore, many NGOs are engaged in development work, which is by definition political in many crisis or conflict areas. The argument for preserving the ‘humanitarian space’ does therefore not apply to those engaged in such projects. This means that NGOs need to have a clear idea of what kind of activities they are actually undertaking, so as not to falsely label their development work as humanitarian. As a result, coordinating and being part of a comprehensive approach should be of interest to those NGOs engaged in activities that go beyond immediate humanitarian relief.

To conclude, the assumption that there will always be a sufficient level of shared values, principles, goals and objectives is not supported by the feedback from the field. Reality dictates that there will have to be trade-offs, second-best solutions, compromises and even sometimes an inability to come to any kind of agreement. However, this is not to say that it is impossible to achieve meaningful coherence, cooperation and coordination across the various dimensions under the umbrella of a comprehensive approach. In all these circumstances, it is preferable to have pre-agreed mechanisms for dialogue and coordination – even if only aimed at de-confliction – where the different viewpoints can be raised and actors can inform each other of their principles, goals, objectives and approaches. In this way, when tensions occur they can more readily be de-fused in a transparent and well-informed manner.

¹⁰ Chiyuki Aoi, Cedric de Coning and Ramesh Thakur (eds.), *The Unintended Consequences of Peacekeeping Operations*, Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2007.

2.2. Organisational and operational challenges

Mandates and values aside, the various actors operating in a field also tend to have very different organisational and operational approaches. This is partly due to the differences in the nature and origin of the actors involved in such missions. Political and security missions, such as a UN or NATO peace operation, come about as a result of a political process, such as a UN Security Council resolution, and typically result in the deployment of missions in which responsibilities are well-structured in a hierarchical system. The military, for instance, follow organisational cultures and structures that are similar regardless of whether they are deployed or at home, and they typically have sufficient resources, both human and financial, to engage in research, planning and training.

By contrast, most civilian organisations that are active in stabilisation or peace operations have been established to play a particular role – for example, to provide humanitarian assistance to children caught up in complex emergencies – and their focus is on operational action. They thus have limited resources for training and research. These cultural and structural differences between civil and military actors and between various types of civilian actors (UN peacekeeping operations, UN agencies, NGOs, donor agencies, regional organisations, local authorities, etc.) are a central characteristic of these complex mission environments. When pursuing coherence at the field level, it is important to understand the degree of fragmentation that exists among the headquarters of these various actors. In addition, many actors have multiple roles in different arenas – for instance, states who are members of vigorous organisations as well as being donors and active bilateral political actors.

One of the most delicate relationships in a coordinated operation is that between a military force and humanitarian NGOs. NGOs are responsible for approximately 80% of the field-level humanitarian work. They have a flat network-centric organisational structure made up of a number of specialised autonomous agents that work together through a series of voluntary coordination clusters. Most NGOs have clear mandates and responsibilities, with operationally focused organisational structures. As a result, they are quick to respond to new crises, and are able to start working in the field very soon after they deploy in theatre. For military actors, the lack of a clear hierarchical structure among NGOs can be difficult to relate to, not least in the planning phase where the military are used to relating to a higher central command, which in this case does not exist. NGO responses sometimes appear chaotic and disorganised from a military point of view, since the former are often is voluntary self-organised efforts that do not require the same degree of central authority for planning and deployment.

In fact, the humanitarian response is typically the most organised and coordinated aspect of all international efforts in a crisis management operation. Whilst all the various agents that make up the humanitarian response work independently, they operate on a number of pre-agreed understandings as to the common principles of humanitarian action, minimum standards, and shared policies on a range of issues, like humanitarian/military relations. They also have well-established coordination mechanisms, including who will lead the coordination (the UN Humanitarian Coordinator), how the coordination system will function (the Cluster system, with pre-agreed lead agencies in various pre-agreed categories of action) and joint resource mobilisation tools (the Consolidated Appeal process). None of the other dimensions in a crisis response effort (political, security, developmental, rule of law, human rights, etc.) has a similar clear, transparent and pre-agreed system of coordination.

Building a comprehensive approach between organisations with different modes of operation, organisational structures, hierarchies and command & control systems, requires some degree of bridging between them. How can this be organised?

2.3. How to organise a comprehensive approach?

At the outset, it must be recognised that there are very real principled, security-related and organisational factors that may hinder closer cooperation, and that true cooperation will depend on the specific circumstances of the crisis. In some missions more cooperation may be possible, whilst in other circumstances, depending in particular on the degree to which the military component of a mission is engaged in combat, less cooperation will be possible. There is also likely to be a core group that works more closely together, with others on the periphery at varying distances from the core group. A comprehensive approach thus does not mean that all actors are equally engaged in the cooperative venture, but that there is at least a meaningful core pursuing joint assessments, joint planning, etc. There seem to be two main schools of thought about how to pursue a comprehensive approach: in this report we refer to them as the ‘integrated approach’ and the ‘coordinated approach’.

Integrated approach

In the integrated approach, the aim is to develop systems, processes and structures that will ensure that all the different dimensions are integrated into one holistic effort. Such an effort will pursue integration at all levels, starting with concepts and principles. Once the various agents have a common vocabulary and understanding of the concepts (which implies developing new concepts together), they can start working together on a common understanding of their overall theory of change and operational doctrine. They will undertake an integrated assessment, do integrated planning, manage the implementation together and monitor and evaluate progress against pre-agreed indicators of progress. Some will also stress the use of technology to facilitate integration. The overall advantage of such a system lies in the cohesive and concerted action it could generate.

Potential pitfalls involve managing the enormous complexity, and the distortions that may be generated by a process that seeks, at least as a starting point, the lowest common denominator. The UN has, with some degree of success, managed to achieve integration within its peacekeeping operations, and between these operations and the UN humanitarian and development community. However, extending such integration to all the actors that are stakeholders in the context of a comprehensive approach would be a daunting task. There is also a danger that too much focus on cohesion may lead to ‘group-think’, whereby opposing and competing views are discouraged for the sake of integration. Pursuing such an option would require enormous effort and political will, time and resources from all concerned. One aspect indicated above is the disproportional resources available to the various actors that would need to be engaged in this process. In practice, this inequality has led to the military actors having more influence on the conceptualisation of the comprehensive approach than their civilian counterparts. There are also concerns that the amount of effort required to achieve integration among the international actors would leave scant time and resources for coordination with local authorities and communities.

Coordinated approach

The main difference between the ‘integrated approach’ and the ‘coordinated approach’ is that whilst the latter also seeks coherence, it attempts to do so without requiring the various

dimensions to integrate to the same degree as the former does. Instead, the coordinated approach favours utilising the diversity of the actors as a way to manage the complexity, whilst pursuing coherence through bringing the various dimensions together at the country level. This approach values the advantages of independent action, and seeks to coordinate among them, rather than integrating them into a single, larger entity. The coordinated approach does not pursue coherence at all levels – only at the strategic country level, where there is a facilitated initiative to formulate common objectives and goals. It then encourages each agent to undertake its own operational or implementation planning, according to its own principles, mandates and resources, but in a coordinated fashion.

Operational coordination already takes place in most missions. However, it tends to be a facilitated coordination process aimed at creating situational awareness that can stimulate synchronisation. In a comprehensive approach, the objective would be to go one step further and aim at coordinated action. In some circumstances, such coordination could include joint planning and division of tasks, but always on a voluntary basis. At the strategic country level, special initiatives are undertaken to develop a common understanding of the remaining challenges. There should also be a joint initiative aimed at monitoring and evaluating the overall situation against the common objectives and goals, by processing the feedback generated by the dimensions and clusters that comprise the response system.

The advantage of the coordinated approach is that it provides for the freedom of action and independence that most civilian actors demand as a prerequisite for coordination. Such a loosely coordinated system can also be very flexible in the face of new demands: it does not require a central authority to consider, authorise and plan a response. Instead, parts of the system are likely to respond on the basis of their mandate and principles. A coordinated approach is unlikely to generate the level of coherence that the integrated approach may be able to produce, but it will probably involve many more agents in its comprehensive approach. The self-synchronisation effect on which the coordinated approach relies needs time to work, and is more vague and ambiguous than the integrated approach. That makes it more difficult to support and to engage with.¹¹

The most effective approach is likely to be a combination of both: an integrated approach among a core group of basically like-minded actors who are willing and able to work together closely and have integrated systems for assessment, planning, mission management and monitoring and evaluation, together with a coordinated approach for and with those actors that are more loosely interlinked with the core. Using both can ensure that the process is as inclusive and flexible as possible, and that it utilises coordination methods that match the cultures, mandates, structures and situational factors of the various actors, over time.

2.4. Challenges of leadership and management

The identification and definition of roles and responsibilities and who has the lead on processes, planning etc., is crucial to fostering better coordination and integration of efforts

¹¹ For more on this complex-sensitive approach to coordination, see Cedric de Coning, *Civil-Military Coordination and Complex Peacebuilding Systems*, in Ankersen, C. (ed.) *Civil-Military Cooperation in Post-Conflict Operations Emerging Theory and Practice*, Routledge, 2008, London.

and impact. Multiple international actors in the same theatre create challenges for coordination and leadership, as recent examples from Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan have demonstrated. The old saying that ‘everybody wants coordination, but no one wants to be coordinated’ often holds true. There is a need to understand how the presence of multiple international actors and a lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities affect the issues of accountability, national ownership and leadership.

Who: legitimacy or influence?

Who should take the lead in coordination? That is a difficult question. Two different models might be advanced, where either the most legitimate or the strongest actor is chosen for this role. In some areas, this might be one and the same actor, e.g. the UN; elsewhere, the two might be two different organisations or countries. In the end, the answer to who gets to lead a comprehensive approach should depend on whether or not this actor possesses the necessary qualities for coordinating others. This includes the power to persuade other, potentially reluctant, actors. It is important that the actors that make the key decisions are the same actors that can actually implement and fund them, in order to avoid empty promises. Not all voices can be taken into account in equal measure.

Moreover, a leader will have to be able to serve as broker between several actors with conflicting interests. Actors might have different incentives for seeking coordination. So, to act as leader in a comprehensive approach and to reconcile these interests, it is necessary to have insight into the views and values of different actors. In general, the UN is seen as the most legitimate actor for the lead role in coordination. However, while the UN has become increasingly good at integrating its own agencies (through e.g. the Delivery as One and Integrated Missions concepts), it can still improve its mechanisms for coordinating effectively and efficiently with other actors in the fields of security and development.

Where: HQ or theatre?

Even if a leader of coordination has been established, a crucial question remains: where, and at what level, the coordination is to take place. In theory, one could assume that coordination on the strategic levels (HQ) would be most efficient, as this would provide the actors in the field with a shared framework.

Whereas such frameworks can certainly be useful, and indeed often necessary, it is nonetheless a fact that in order to be sensitive to the specificities of individual conflicts and be able to include local actors, the most effective coordination needs to take place at the in-country/theatre level. This is where the local knowledge is strongest and where re-organisation and re-planning most efficiently takes place to adapt to an evolving crisis environment. However, for this to be successful, the coordination would have to begin at the strategic level, so that relevant and appropriate resources and authority are delegated to the in-theatre leadership in-theatre. For many organisations this would mean delegating budgetary and management authority downwards in the structure, giving the in-theatre staff the necessary leverage to be able to engage with other actors and adjust plans and programmes accordingly.

How: need for new management policies

Currently dominant management models of international actors often prove inadequate for dealing with the highly dynamic, complex and interdependent context of today’s crises. There

is a need to adjust these, or even to develop new management models designed to cope with the particular needs a comprehensive approach would require.

Managers are traditionally supposed to ensure that projects are managed with a view to goals and objectives, according to pre-approved budgets and inputs, so as to produce pre-determined outputs. Deviations from the project plan are often frowned on and may attract unwanted scrutiny, so significant motivation may be required. The model is there to ensure that the project is carried out according to plan and within budget. It typically makes no or little provision for coordination with other projects, or adaptation to a highly dynamic environment.

However, a comprehensive approach requires that each programme understands not only its independent reality, but also its interdependent reality. Each programme is independent in that it is executed under the auspices of a certain bureaucratic organisation that exists as a legal entity that has its own budget and the authority, and responsibility, to manage the programme. On the other hand, each programme is also interdependent in that its meaning is derived from its part in the larger system: it contributes to achieving a specific effect that makes sense only if one takes into account that others are contributing towards other effects, and that the total combined effect is necessary to achieve momentum.

In such a context, a programme manager needs to be able to establish and maintain a network that can ensure that the particular programme is connected with other programmes that may have an influence on its outcome, and that will result in it being able to adjust to changes elsewhere in the system. Changes to the plan should not be frowned upon but expected, and managers should plan for and report on their efforts to ensure coherence, coordination and adaptation.

The comprehensive approach also requires a culture change within the higher headquarters. Those responsible for developing policy, as well as those planning and managing specific interventions, should be required to recognise and counter the tendency of their own bureaucracies to be self-serving and pre-occupied with self-preservation, and should instead encourage an organisational culture, at headquarters as well as in the field, that embraces both the independent and interdependent realities of working in this highly dynamic and complex environment.

2.5. The challenge of local ownership

The question of how to relate to the population in a crisis area is pivotal to any intervention or engagement. It involves issues concerning the sustainability of the processes, leadership and representativeness, accountability and responsibility, democracy and ultimately the 'exit strategy' of the international community. A comprehensive approach could help the international community to address this more systematically. In the following, the discussion will concentrate upon the main challenges linked to establishing local partnerships and how the organisation of the international efforts affects the local community. Because each situation is case-specific, flexible solutions are needed to address the challenges of local ownership and the comprehensive approach.

Challenges of transition and ownership

First, there are general challenges involved in establishing local partnerships within each strand of the comprehensive approach. Dilemmas touch on when and in what form ownership should be promoted, who should be empowered, and how to deal with shortfalls in local capacity or with corrupt authorities. The main challenges to local ownership may differ in the stabilisation phase, the transition phase and the consolidation phase of the intervention. In each phase, the degree to which local ownership is considered possible and desirable will also vary.

At the outset of an intervention, it is especially difficult to identify local representatives and to evaluate their legitimacy and their capacity. Since the local capacity is often limited when it comes to the ability to govern and bear responsibility for security and the rule of law, the international community may take on more control of the process in the early phase. In some cases this is reinforced by the fact that local partners are criminal, corrupt or simply unwilling to pursue peace. Also, when engaging in a comprehensive dialogue, internationals need to be aware that whoever they identify as partners will be empowered, and to some extent legitimised, by their association with the international community, regardless of how much popular support these local partners enjoy or how representative they are.

The international community should strive towards a dialogue with a wide range of local actors. This is especially true of the initial assessment and diagnostics process, where local actors as well as international organisations should be consulted, and use made of the extensive knowledge that already exists on the ground. However, it is difficult to give a formal and substantial role in the comprehensive planning process to local partners who are not easily identified or who may be traumatised by the preceding conflict. To facilitate incorporating local input, it is useful to approach planning as an iterative process, and allow for increasing the participation of local contributors over time. While ownership may be limited at the outset, planning for a transition needs to start early on, to allow the time needed for building capacity and structures. In the transition phase – at the very latest – international actors can usefully agree on a compact or framework with local authorities to delineate the roles and responsibilities for each and to guide the transition to full local ownership.

Security is a pressing issue in the stabilisation phase, and the calls for heightened security often override other concerns. This has several implications for how local ownership can be pursued. First, the degree of international authority will be closely linked to the level of violence. Where conditions are volatile, international forces usually have a more prominent role. Second, the need to stabilise may also necessitate talking to and thereby legitimising ‘undesirable’ but influential partners, such as informal armed groups that may control parts of the territory. Third, the need for stability is at odds with the time needed for local ownership to emerge – for partners to reveal themselves or for capacity gaps to be filled. This creates a perception of time pressure and can lead international actors to bypass local owners.

In the transition phase, and especially in the consolidation phase, the emphasis should shift from stabilisation to the rule of law. In this phase, democratic elections are often held to bring forth legitimate authorities, and it becomes easier to identify other local partners. At this stage, local actors should be involved in the peace process to a greater extent, and the international community has to be more tolerant when local ways of handling challenges differ from its own approach. It is useful to distinguish between different types of involvement. For example, local authorities may have some capacity for making decisions, but may be unable to implement those decisions due to staff or funding shortages or a lack of

capacity to manage change. In the consolidation phase, local authorities should be in the lead, and the international community should focus on assisting and monitoring the situation.

Comprehensive approach from the local perspective

Efforts to strengthen local ownership may be undermined when international actors fail to convey a consistent and cohesive message or to address post-conflict challenges comprehensively. The lack of a common set of objectives and of coordination represents a key challenge to the comprehensive approach, since it makes it extremely difficult to identify who should be held accountable for results or the lack thereof. At the same time, a more coordinated comprehensive approach can make better use of conditionality to push forward a reform process in the face of potential spoilers.

From a local perspective, the absence of a comprehensive approach can be at best confusing. While local actors tend to perceive the international community as an amorphous mass, they are actually facing a wide range of conflicting priorities and methodologies. Where the national authorities in the host country are weak, lack of coordination among international actors can mean increased fragmentation at the national level. Having to cater to various international programmes, projects and partners often exacerbates local capacity and staff shortages.

On the other hand, excessive coordination must also be avoided: it can lead to a centralisation of power and a bureaucratisation which may hinder the development of flexible solutions. There is also a clear danger that too much coordination and resulting introspection can render the international community less transparent and accessible to local partners. This can affect efforts to promote ownership in that the transition to ownership may be delayed; international and local efforts can have developed in different directions and have become disjointed or incompatible; and, finally, responsibility may be transferred to wholly unprepared local owners who have been excluded from consultations and decision-making up until the point of transition.

Transition and exit strategies

Forgetting that the goal of an intervention should be sustainable local leadership and the ultimate withdrawal of the international presence, international staff members often tend to prolong their authority and put off handing over responsibility to the local community. Furthermore, international actors on the ground might make decisions based on their own short-term objectives, rather than focusing on the strategic importance of their actions in the longer run. These problems should be addressed by formulating a coherent policy at the strategic level to guide actors at the operational level. This policy should reflect a comprehensive approach, but it should also indicate how to undertake the transition to local ownership.

In order to avoid some of the pitfalls of a comprehensive approach, basic capacity building, including leadership training, should begin as early as possible. This should enable local actors to better understand the shortcomings of the international community and the mechanisms of the comprehensive approach. Basic capacity building will allow local actors to engage with their international counterparts on an as equal footing as possible, as early as possible. Though this is certainly difficult, the comprehensive approach needs to shift from being basically reactive to be more pro-active and preventative.

3. Conclusion

The motivations for engaging in collaboration and cooperation may differ from actor to actor. On the other hand, those actors who do engage in a comprehensive approach in a crisis management operation are likely to have some degree of shared motivation, vision and objectives. The purpose of their cooperation or coordination is therefore to achieve some common goals.

Professional leadership, good personal relations as well as reduction of prejudices and cultural barriers may in many instances be as important for achieving a comprehensive approach as any organisational structure. However, for real progress to occur, both are probably needed. A key to progress appears to be that the various actors in the field recognise their interdependence and therefore seek to ensure that their respective activities are coherent and complementary. Coherence should be pursued through coordination in the planning, implementation and evaluation phases.

If the various actors are to take other actors significantly into consideration when planning their activities, this would most likely require both the removal of cultural barriers (e.g. between NGOs development communities and military actors) and willingness to decentralise the necessary authority to the level where these actors need to interact. This is not done overnight, but it may not be as challenging or threatening to the organisational independence as some perhaps think. Recognition that all actors are dependent on each other for success is a starting point for such a process.

Fortunately, a comprehensive approach does not require the full integration of all actors in a crisis area into one neat hierarchical structure. Horizontal collaboration in networks and clusters of networks is already taking place in some sectors (like humanitarian relief), and this is the model on which a comprehensive approach can be developed further in other sectors as well. That said, some degree of strategic coherence is a precondition also in this model.

Crucially, if the international engagement in a crisis is to deliver results and be sustainable, the local population must be involved as early as possible. Lack of comprehensiveness from the side of the international actors in their interaction with the local actors may undermine the perception of the international efforts and ultimately undermine the entire intervention. Sustainable security and development can be built only by those who actually live in an area, not by outsiders, and a coordinated and coherent international community will be much better posed to assist in such a process than one which is fragmented and uncoordinated. A comprehensive approach is therefore also a main tool for developing the 'exit strategies' of the international community.

This report has sought to contribute to the ongoing debate about these issues through a systematic discussion of selected major areas of challenge. It is certainly not exhaustive, as comprehensive approach is by nature complex and reflects the complexity of most of today's crisis areas. What the report has done is to highlight some of the areas that cannot be ignored by those tasked with improving inter-agency collaboration, cooperation or coordination.

Lastly, it may be worth remembering that too much effort may also be spent on coordination. Most actors in the field are stretched in terms of time, personnel and resources. That may be one incentive for engaging in a comprehensive approach, but it is also a limiting factor. The perfect plan does not exist, nor does the perfect coordination mechanism. There are limits to

how much coordination one can and should be engaged in, in the midst of a crisis. Comprehensive approach is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH WORKSHOP

OSLO 26–27 MARCH 2008

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