A review of NATO Defence College Forum Paper No 2

The paper's author is currently a researcher on the staff of the NATO Defence College but previously she was a senior civil servant in the French MoD. The paper demonstrates her comprehensive understanding of this subject in all its complexities, interactions and perceptions and can be regarded as a reference work on the topic.

The initiative for this paper is drawn from the Riga Summit Declaration in November 2006: 'Peace, Security and Development are more interconnected than ever'. That declaration was to a large extent an admission that relations between NATO and the Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in crisis response operations were in need of significant improvement. This paper suggests the stabilisation and reconstruction phase as being the most fruitful and problematic challenge for the relationship.

It starts by considering whether cooperation between NATO and the NGOs is a step in NATO's transformation given that the concept of security is no longer confined to the military domain and has expanded to embrace all the principal characteristics of a nation state. In this context the author reflects on the UN view of the increasingly complex humanitarian intervention operations and provides evidence that the old 3-phased approach to such conflicts no longer works.

It is widely recognised that the stabilisation and reconstruction phase is critical to the success of an operation but NATO has no definition for stabilisation despite stressing its importance for the success of intervention. For the US stability operations are a core mission equal in importance to combat operations. An interesting observation by the author is that in intervention operations NATO and associated governments assume that actors should behave in a rational manner, which in contemporary times is a very questionable assumption.

Many readers may be surprised to learn that there is no definition of an NGO, it being mentioned for the first time in Article 71 of the UN Charter. There are tens of thousands of such organisations but there are only 260 major Western NGOs that specialise in humanitarian assistance. The paper considers the institutional culture of NGOs and explains their move towards more professionalism and accountability in the need for legitimacy and credibility.

The use of the term 'humanitarian' brings its own difficulties in this context and can be interpreted quite differently by military and civilian actors depending upon the circumstances and the aims of the respective organisations. According to International Humanitarian Law (IHL) relief for a population can only be described as humanitarian if it meets all the principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality. It is the application of these fundamental principles that creates the main difficulties in the NATO-NGO relationship. Whereas these

principles apply to all actors there is a fourth principle, that of independence, that is specific to NGOs and stipulates that NGOs cannot be directly subordinate to any government or inter-government organisation.

The author quite rightly points out that both military and civilian actors are very critical of each other in other ways, some due to circumstances, others arising from differences in culture. It is these difficulties that have led the NGOs to attempt to codify the humanitarian/military relationship and recognises that interaction is both inevitable as well as a source of difficulties. In particular, the principle of liaison and interaction is normally seen as desirable, if only to differentiate NGOs more clearly from the military. The important point that is repeated later in the paper is that while many NGOs are willing to coordinate with military forces, no NGO would agree to be coordinated by the military.

The relations between NGOs and military forces are complex and different depending on whether those forces are UN, US or NATO. There are two existing cooperation frameworks, one UN and the other US that the author helpfully explains in some detail prior to addressing the particular NATO problem. The UN has taken a 3-step approach starting in 1991 up until 2006 and has a very solid relationship with NGOs. However, in the effort to provide a coherent structure for both civil and military resources for aid, development and peacekeeping, the UN has imposed a system of integration that restricts the independence of the NGOs. The paper explains these steps in some detail leading up to the 'Cluster Approach' of 2005 and has resulted in NGOs being highly critical claiming that it subordinated them to the UN agenda. The result is that the framework is under more stress than ever before that is undermining the good work previously achieved on common principles and codes of conduct.

The framework developed by the US is somewhat different. US NGOs enjoy a degree of legitimacy and freedom that comes with a better status and are often directly asked to pursue US economic and international policy objectives. Furthermore, US aid is frequently only offered to 'friendly' nations and is conditional, normally today in terms of supporting the war on terrorism. The US is adopting the same approach to stabilisation and reconstruction operations and its application can be seen clearly in Iraq. There are a number of proposals under consideration or development by the US to improve the US-NGO framework but in all of them the NGOs are regarded as the instruments of policy that has been decided without consulting them.

NATO's Civil Military Cooperation (CIMIC) doctrine was reviewed post Balkans operations in 2003. The point about CIMIC is that it is directly concerned with creating and sustaining conditions in support of Alliance objectives in operations. It recognises the desirability of common goals and the integration of military/civil planning but acknowledges that the NGOs may pursue other goals. Within the CIMIC framework there exists interaction at all levels and specific agreements are in place as well as mutual training and education opportunities. Before putting forward proposals for more effective relations between NATO and NGOs, the paper examines three aspects that must be defined and understood before progress can be made. Firstly, NATO's mission in stabilisation operations, secondly, the objectives of improved interaction and lastly the criteria for interaction/cooperation. The author analyses

these aspects quite rigorously.

From this it is clear that at any level NGOs are reluctant to enter into a process of integration and that from NATO's perspective the best they can probably achieve is enhanced cooperation. It is suggested that such enhanced cooperation is most likely to be achieved in fields where the NGOs fields of competence are close to military issues e.g. mine clearance. Therefore NATO's objective in the relationship should be to recognise the complementary value that each brings to the table.

The paper concludes by arguing a pragmatic 3-pronged approach of: developing cultural interoperability through dialogue and training, making full use of the UN mechanism of cooperation with NGOs and establishing a consultative and advisory cell at HQ NATO level. For anyone who is involved or working in the civil/military cooperation field this paper is a very useful reference work. It describes in detail the complex framework developed by the UN, US and NATO in their separate relations with NGOs, albeit there is an 'alphabet soup' that is almost inevitable in any description of UN or NATO organisation. The paper is well structured and despite the complexity of the topic, it is written with a degree of clarity that helps the reader's understanding. Equally useful are the 3 annexes that describe the NGO networks at the UN; the Main Codes of Conduct and Principle; and the Red Cross and Crescent Movement.

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