

# The George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies

## Conference

### A Comprehensive Approach to Modern Conflict: Afghanistan and Beyond

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## First Report

Prepared by Michael Crawshaw  
Senior Editor, ARAG

## Introduction

This report is intended as an early indication of main points emerging from the Conference, whether from the principal speakers, panel discussions, or working groups. It does not attempt to be comprehensive. The George C. Marshall Center intends to publish a full record of the Conference proceedings later in 2007.

## Main Themes

### The Comprehensive Approach

- It was apparent from the outset that the concept of the Comprehensive Approach has been accepted across the international security community as a foundation for future counter-insurgency, stabilisation and reconstruction operations.
- It was equally apparent that there was no single definition of the approach which was common to all nations attending. There is a need to work towards harmonization of understanding of the concept to minimize possible difficulties in the future, and facilitate progress towards achieving unity of effort.
- NATO will be coordinating *with* other actors, not coordinating other actors.
- There are missions that require uniquely civilian capabilities, for example counter-narcotics.
- All levers of government power must be used to deliver a comprehensive approach – not just military power.

### Afghanistan Situation

- Afghanistan is winnable, but is not yet in a post-conflict situation. The reconstruction effort is therefore a 'during conflict' rather than a 'post-conflict' activity and must be aligned accordingly.
- 2007 will be a critical year, building on the downturn in incidents from September 2006 onwards.
- The focus of operations in Afghanistan is the local population, not the Taliban.
- Insurgent groups in Afghanistan have become "learning organizations"
- Counterinsurgency operations usually take upwards of 10-15 years to succeed.
- International public opinion is a centre of gravity for coalition operations.

### Ownership

- A recurrent theme in the main presentations, panel discussions, and working groups was the necessity of visible in-country ownership of security and

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reconstruction effort. Without this, outside agencies, whether military or otherwise, will be regarded as occupiers, and the indigenous government as a puppet of the outsiders.

- However, 'ownership' involves a major role for the government in the direction of both military and civilian operations, and at levels up to and including strategic. If this is the case, then strategic planning and execution must be carried out to a substantial extent in-country.
- In Afghanistan, the existence of a legitimate national government permits a substantial degree of participation at national level. This is not the case at province and below, where local government remains weak, corrupt, and unable to play a significant role. Unfortunately, it is at local level where perceptions are formed.

### **Bureaucracy**

- A further subject which received frequent mention was the adverse effect of bureaucracies on the ability to deliver resources, whether military, humanitarian, or reconstruction.
- Procedures need to be speeded up and risks accepted; as was said in one of the panel discussions, 'it is better to accept a degree of fraud than the consequences of broken promises'.
- NATO allies and partners must institutionalize best practices from current and previous missions to avoid ad-hoc responses.
- We should consider establishing an institution that serves as a repository of corporate knowledge regarding counterinsurgency and PRT best practices and lessons learned.

### **Civil-Military Interaction**

- The long history of mutual suspicion between military and civilian agencies, amounting to downright hostility in the case of some NGOs, must be eradicated. The Comprehensive Approach is predicated on bringing this about.
- Action is necessary, both on a top-down and a bottom-up approach. The guideline 'as civilian as possible and as military as necessary', quoted both by NL and UK representatives, merits wider application.
- Civilian ministries need to emulate the military 'can do' approach.

### **Force structures**

- Shortage of NATO ground combat forces has had two serious adverse consequences:
- Air power has had to be used to compensate for lack of ground troops, leading to collateral damage which would not have occurred if sufficient land forces had been available.
- Afghan National Army units have had to be committed earlier than was desirable from the point of view of training and force building.

### **Aspiration**

- Security remains the principal aspiration of the Afghan population, ahead of all other considerations.

## **Panel Discussions**

### **Panel 1 – ISAF Operations in Southern Afghanistan**

*Topics: National perspectives on current operations and lessons learned; interaction between security and development; relations with local government and local communities.*

#### **Bullet Points (selected)**

- Opium amounts to only 2.5 percent of total cropped land. Little or no export opportunity for other crops. Opium production thrives on instability.
- Security sector reform is central to NATO exit strategy but is held back by:
- Afghan National Security Forces committed too early in their development.
  - Lack of will to reform corrupt security establishment.
  - Justice system inadequate.
- Afghanistan is less about reconstruction than construction from scratch.
- Government of Afghanistan (GoA) is in charge, but needs supporting without creating a dependency culture.
- Counter-narcotics strategy key to success in South.
- Corruption can be countered by paying adequate salaries in an efficient manner.
- We need to reduce the delay between delivery of security and development.
- Parliamentarians need to visit other nations' PRTs, not just their own
- Need to "rebalance" civilian and military efforts – military plays predominant role in Afghanistan but operations should have more of a civilian face.

### **Panel 2 – Whole of Government and Whole of Effort Approaches to Conflict Response and Mission Requirements: Challenges and Opportunities**

*Topics: How have key nations in the current situation attempted to deliver a 'whole of government approach'?; how are they preparing their personnel to operate in this complex environment where the desired outcomes require coordination across several key actors?*

#### **Bullet Points**

- Should taking care of immediate needs of people take precedence over state-building?
- 'Kandahar model' – attempt to overcome lack of visible GoA presence at local level by targeting aid in limited area with full GoA involvement.
- Primary goal of any intervention to reconnect people with government.
- Number of different international actors in Afghanistan is mind-boggling.
- World Bank assessment – 50 percent of countries emerging from conflict relapse within five years.
- Value of gendarmerie.
- Quick implementation of development projects is key – and must be publicized at every opportunity
- PRTs can do more – but civilian-military coordination in theatre must improve

### **Panel 3 – Institutional Changes to Deliver a Comprehensive Approach**

*Topics: long-term reform both at the IO level (NATO and EU) and at the national level within inter-agency processes; lessons learned within national capitals for bringing more civil-military planning, training, and education prior to crisis and war; national efforts to transform militaries to conduct non-traditional operations.*

- Military planning may overwhelm civilian agency processes.

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- Need for a cross-agency oversight body. How does a government integrate:
  - Strategy
  - Empowerment
  - Funding
  - Capacity
- Intelligence needs to place increased emphasis on cultural, social, and religious aspects.
- Need for improved information sharing, and to overcome problems of security classification.
- Requirement for a Civilian Reserve Corps.
- How aid is delivered is as important as its volume
- Aid should be coordinated around the host country's development strategy (if they have one)
- There is a lack of suitable civilians to work in semi-permissive environments. Potential solutions include:
  - Specialist agencies to pull personnel (similar to UK/PCRU or Canada's START)
  - Contractors
  - Private blue-chip firms
  - Military personnel develop these capabilities

### **Reports from Working Groups**

*Each of the eight Working Groups was tasked with identifying (at least) two themes and two recommendations for further examination.*

#### **WG 1 – Applying Nato's Strength to the Taliban's Weakness**

- **Themes:**
- A lot of Taliban weaknesses can be exploited. The Taliban has alien ideology, and a track record that portrays brutality, e.g. killing civilians with IEDs. The Taliban is strong because NATO is weak.
- The importance of defeating the Taliban is to have our forces in the lead. But there is a need for an Afghan face.

#### **Recommendations:**

- We need to defy propaganda about occupation.
- We need to hunt down, kill or capture high profile Taliban targets.
- Need to generate more presence in the South, both NATO and Afghan.
- More NATO trainers to empower and enable Afghan forces.

#### **WG2 – Mobilizing and Institutionalizing the Comprehensive approach in National Capitals**

##### **Themes:**

- Variability of meaning of Comprehensive Approach (CA). Different states come up with different interpretations of what CA means for them. In order to achieve an alliance, it's not necessary for every country to do everything. Selectivity does not equal lack of commitment.
- Critical public and political opinion limits the degree of national commitment.

**Recommendations:**

- Common vision – must aim for a situation where everyone would have the same message and vision. This is only achievable if there is credible belief it was adequately funded.
- Wider engagement – must involve not only NGOs, but also business, media, even celebrities.
- Micro-investment into social improvement.

**WG3 – Mobilizing and Institutionalizing the Comprehensive approach in International Organizations**

**Themes**

- Need to explore mechanisms for codifying coordination without imposing it (Civilian agencies won't tolerate).
- All IOs bring different capabilities.
- How do we institutionalise CA at strategic level?
- How do we make NGOs accountable?

**Significant Sub-Issues:**

- Need for division of labor among IOs, nations, NGOS
- Who is a major player, an IO, if there is one, and if there isn't an IO, is UN the default organisation?
- Is there a need for an integrated campaign plan? What mechanisms are needed to produce one?

**Recommendations:**

- Encourage international conferences and planning sessions prior to and during major international efforts that include as many actors as possible to cooperate on planning and share information on missions and capabilities to the extent possible.
- Encourage exchange of liaisons to inform planning and build habits of trust and cooperation prior to crises erupt.

**WG4 – NATO Coordination with International Organizations and Other Entities**

**Themes**

- Lack of common understanding.
- Need for unity of effort.
- Problems presented by the different structures of different organisations.

**Recommendations:**

- Assess the ability of Afghanistan to coordinate all our efforts. If it can, allow it to coordinate, if it cannot, assist the nation in building that capacity as the first priority.
- Review NATO's HQ structure with a view to making it more compatible with those of other organisations, and invite them to carry out a similar exercise.

**WG5 – Humanitarian development in Hostile Environment**

**Themes:**

- PRTs are a way to operationalize the comprehensive approach.
- Varying capabilities of PRTs arising out of the fact that they are nationally owned and funded.

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- PRT projects tend to be costly and not well coordinated with local requirements.
- Need for a common framework of discussion, to improve our ability to operate effectively in a civil-military environment.
- PRTs tend to be military-heavy, for variety of reasons. This is undesirable; one result is lack of continuity due to rotation, another incompatibility with NGOs.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Establish working practices for the different actors in the different phases from warfighting to reconstruction
- Establish clear definitions of terminology.
- Set up 'lessons learned' facility for PRT experiences in Afghanistan
- Conduct evaluation of PRT effectiveness with a view to employment of PRT in future situations
- Develop a strategy for working with an indigenous government.

### **WG6 – Security Sector Reform in Non-Permissive Environments**

#### **Themes**

- Security Sector Reform has been around for some time now, although frequently poorly planned and executed
- SSR is the route out, we have to create institutions and conduct reform.
- Role of military – far beyond what it was in Bosnia. Major effect is training police. How do we address that gap? Civilian component would be better at doing it, but this is unlikely to happen anytime soon.
- Clausewitz would advise us to find out what war we are fighting.
- 80% political, 20% military; if that indeed is the case, why are states not resourcing accordingly?

#### **Recommendations**

- If inter-agency approach is genuine, PCRU and SCRS should be properly resourced. They should have spending authority, not just operating costs.
- SSR must be viewed as a mainstream, holistic approach, not Cinderella.
- Police forces have a pivotal role. Their training and organisation must be adequately resourced

### **WG7 – Reflecting the Comprehensive Approach in Pre-Deployment Preparation and Training**

#### **Themes**

- Underlying theme is the need for trust, which takes time to build, and is personality-dependent
- All parties, civilian organizations, NGOs, and private sector and the Military all should participate in the design of preparation and training. It must be inclusive and integrated, and allow that some may not be able to attend every element.
- Includes mutual respect.
- It isn't just the military training that a few others are invited to take part in
- Leverage technology and training system so as to develop and improve corporate memory.

#### **Recommendations:**

- More connection between trainer and end user.

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- Much training is on national lines with multinational training as a thin veneer. Ad hoc units such as PRTs need just as much, if not more training, than proper units.
- Capture and institutionalise organisational learning so that each new rotation builds on the previous hard-won experience. Avoid SFOR experience of 6 months of experience, repeated 20 times. Or 4 months of experience, repeated 30 times.

## **WG8 – Media Relations, Public Diplomacy, and Strategic Communications**

### **Themes**

- Policy should reflect ground realities but does not always do so.
- Home public of participating nations are largely unaware of facts.
- Winning hearts and minds is the responsibility of GoA, the international will that of the international community.
- GoA message is not getting down to village level, and local issues are not getting up to GoA level.
- In-country strategic communications need totally Afghan institutions and Afghan mechanisms, not just an Afghan front.
- You're unlikely to root for democracy on an empty stomach. GoA legitimacy suffers because it is unable to provide for its people's needs.

### **Recommendations:**

- Concentrate on comprehensive understanding of problems in the world. Suicide bombing is a problem, but it is also a tactic.
- Need to focus much more on local issues.
- More of a bottom-up approach.