

THE BENEFITS OF CIVILIAN-MILITARY COOPERATION

German military missions to Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan highlight the need for civilian involvement

By Dr. Sebastian von Münchow, Marshall Center
Photos by EPA

The senior civilian representative (SCR), a Foreign Office diplomat, shares the leadership in international stabilization efforts in Afghanistan with the military commander of Regional Command (RC) North. Both represent the Federal Republic of Germany — one the Armed Forces on a mission abroad, the other the civilian aspects of Berlin's foreign policy. Experts on foreign and security policy are familiar with this arrangement, but very little of it is public knowledge. What is the idea behind it? What is the value added? What are the overlaps between the SCR's work and that of the general staff in the field? What is the potential for friction?

The atmosphere in the room is rather tense. The commander of RC North and the SCR do not like to be kept waiting. They are sitting in the commander's field office in Mazar-e Sharif, reviewing their meeting with two Afghan dignitaries the day before. The objective had been to welcome the provincial governor installed by the government in Kabul. And since in Afghanistan nothing substantial happens without the local military commander present, the general of the Afghan National Army (ANA) in the region had also been invited. So the Germans and their highest ranking representatives had gone to the provincial capital: the commander of RC North representing the Bundeswehr and the SCR representing the executive's civilian side.

Both are well aware of how delicate the situation is. The governor from Kabul is a Pashtun with close ties to then-President Hamid Karzai, and the region he is supposed to govern is populated mainly by ethnic Turkmen and Uzbeks. So what kind of welcome would he receive from a population highly critical of the Pashtun-dominated security structures? To defuse the situation, the Germans had prepared a memorandum of understanding containing customary phrases about the peaceful coexistence of different ethnicities as well as the promise that, if all sides cooperated, they would be rewarded with additional money for reconstruction. And yet, both the new governor and the ANA general, also belonging to the Pashtun minority, had refused to sign the "key leader engagement" memorandum.

The Afghan general explained in a supercilious tone that this was patronizing behavior and completely unacceptable. There were none of the eagerly anticipated

pictures in the local news, no photos of an Afghan and a German civilian signing a document and presenting it to the camera with conciliatory words. So the diplomat got in touch with Berlin late that night and had the promised funds canceled. In the morning, he informed the provincial governor. As a result, the Pashtun general got terribly upset. He turned to his International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) counterpart, the commander of RC North, accusing the Germans of breach of promise and trust and pointing out the fragility of the security situation — not a good sign so soon before the withdrawal of the Bundeswehr. The only thing the German diplomat and German general could do was wait to see how the Afghans would react.

Training scenario

Situations like these might occur in Afghanistan at any time. The one described here was part of a command post exercise of the 1st German Armored Division that took place in Wildflecken in April 2014. The objective of the Crystal Eagle 13 exercise was to familiarize the division with elements of civil-military cooperation relevant to transition periods as well as with support measures required in a multinational environment. The scenarios were designed to reflect the anticipated state of affairs in Afghanistan in late 2014 and early 2015.

The exercise was organized by the Multinational Corps Northeast, the NATO Baltic Corps based in Szczecin, Poland. Danes, Poles, Germans and others convincingly and enthusiastically played the roles of Afghan officials. For the first time, the SCR was made part of the division staff. While the Brisk Taurus exercise at the beginning of 2013

An Afghan boy watches a German Armed Forces soldier patrol the Char Darreh district, near Kunduz, Afghanistan, during the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force mission. Civilian-military cooperation played a large role in Germany's successful engagement.



featured a military commander and his lower-ranking political advisor; exercise Crystal Eagle 13 was based on the actual situation in RC North's headquarters, where the commander of the German military contingent had a civilian of equal rank at his side.

Lessons from history

So what are the origins of this arrangement? Close cooperation between military and civilian elements in a stabilization mission is not exactly a new thing. With the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1992-93, it became clear that large-scale missions with a mandate for reconstruction and democratization require coordination between the military and the political side. Back then, the mission included armed, blue-helmeted UN military forces and thousands of civilian experts under the auspices of the UN and Chief of Mission Yasushi Akashi.

On the other hand, during the international intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which started in 1996, the civilian and the military parts of the mandate were kept separate. NATO's Stabilisation Force's (SFOR) mission was responsible for peacekeeping based on the enforcement measures laid out in Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The responsibilities of the International Police Task Force (IPTF) – the UN-sponsored international police advisory mission – the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the political lead agency in the region, the Office of the High Representative (OHR), were derived from the Dayton Agreement.

For the Bundeswehr, this was its first large-scale, out-of-area mission. Compared to other nations, the Germans lacked experience when they got together with representatives from the European Union, the OSCE and nongovernmental organizations to identify duplication of effort in the geographically overlapping parts of their areas of responsibility. Officers affiliated with civil-military coordination (CIMIC) learned it was mutually beneficial to coordinate efforts with civilian counterparts in the international community. Officers and civilian experts managed to avoid wasting funds – something that generally happens if the money gets distributed with a shotgun approach – by exchanging precise information on measures to facilitate the reintegration of returning refugees and by identifying infrastructure such as houses, bridges and schools that could be rebuilt only with the help and expertise of the Bundeswehr.

Very often these initially informal exchanges resulted in successful return projects that credit everyone who contributed: relief organizations, the OHR, the OSCE, the IPTF and the Bundeswehr. In numerous discussions with the civilian-side field offices, CIMIC officers discovered where civilian organizations offered different political assessments than their own. And, in turn, the civilian side profited from the German military's perspective. This sharing of views proved particularly useful for threat assessments. Over the course of the mission, the commander of the German

camp in Rajlovac was supported by political advisors, usually Bundeswehr experts with a background in political science or regional studies. Their advice to the commander included, for instance, information on where a local discussion partner fit into the overall political hierarchy.

The interdependence of the civilian and military components of post-conflict peace-building became even more obvious during the Kosovo missions involving the Kosovo Force (KFOR) and the United Nations Interim Administration. UN Security Council Resolution 1244 placed Kosovo under temporary UN administration. For the first time, the Bundeswehr was assigned its own area of responsibility in the south of Kosovo. Since security, administration and enormous reconstruction funds were all inextricably linked, NATO, the UN, the EU and the OSCE intensified coordination efforts. The Bundeswehr set up the J9 CIMIC staff division at corps level, whose main task has been civil-military interaction. Over the last decade – and particularly influenced by the KFOR and the ISAF missions – new positions for advisors directly subordinate to the commander were created, such as those of a cultural advisor or a foreign area expert, who provide information on issues such as religion, the economy and possible grievances and sensitivities of local dialogue partners.

The Afghan example

In contrast to advisors, the civilian representative is equal in rank to the contingent commander and is not a member of the Bundeswehr or Ministry of Defense. Mazar-e Sharif provides a good illustration of this: An organizational chart would show the mission headquarters at the top with two arrows pointing in different directions underneath. One connects the civilian representative to the German Embassy and the Foreign Office; the other links the commander to NATO headquarters, the Joint Operations Command and the Defense Ministry in Berlin. This structure implies that disagreements can only be settled at the top, i.e., at the interagency level in the capital. Therefore, it is highly recommended to start the coordination and harmonization process at the field headquarters.

For the Foreign Office, it made sense to have a representative at the headquarters of the German-led contingents. The German area of operation was constantly scrutinized by the media, which means that anything that happens there – the failure of rehabilitation measures in the conflict-ridden region, waste of resources or, in the worst case, a resurgence of violence – will be associated with the Bundeswehr. An expert was needed to control distribution of aid, monitor costly large-scale projects such as the construction of the international airport in Mazar-e Sharif or act as mediator between political dignitaries. Also, it was not necessary for the Bundeswehr's area of operation and the host country's capital to overlap geographically. In Afghanistan, they do not. But, by having the SCR in the field, the Foreign Office profited from firsthand information about what goes on in the German area

of responsibility, something that German diplomats at the embassy in Kabul were too far away to provide.

The presence of the SCR constitutes a decisive advantage in the area of responsibility because he is the spokesman for civilian authorities in the region. In post-conflict areas, local armed forces are usually seen as guardians of law and order even years after hostilities have ended. The administrative and the justice systems, on the other hand, are met with much skepticism, and it takes a lot of patience to build these institutions gradually. So a high-ranking civilian representative of the German government is a person of high symbolic value, someone who is able to emphasize the primacy of politics in discussions with Afghan partners. Military peace-keeping will remain the task of the Bundeswehr, but democratization, the rule of law, reconstruction or the frequently mentioned good governance fall within the area of competence of the civilian representative.

There may, of course, be occasional frictions between the contingent commander and the civilian representative. No matter their nationality, generals tend to find it easier to agree among themselves on situation assessments, priorities and courses of action, which is most likely a result of training, career and professional ethics. They bear the brunt of all responsibilities, for their troops as well as for the security in their area of responsibility while operating in the stressful environment of a post-conflict situation. Nevertheless, the primacy of politics has to be restored in the long run. To put it differently, the judicial, executive and legislative branches will at some point assume control over the armed forces. It helps to have a civilian representative reminding everyone inside and outside the military camp of this long-term objective.

Another value to this arrangement is that the civilian representative's work often overlaps that of the division staff. As far as CIMIC is concerned, his role is to support reconstruction projects. In the area of reconnaissance or psychological operations, the representative can make important contributions by sharing his views on local authorities, politicians and dignitaries. And his work complements the efforts of the political, legal, public affairs and cultural advisors in the area of responsibility. The SCR is also the main point of contact for personnel of international organizations such as the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and nongovernmental organizations. There is room for improvement — particularly in coordination with nongovernmental organizations keen to preserve their independence — because in the Bundeswehr's area of responsibility many synergy effects had yet to be explored.

Conclusion

Academics and policymakers are beginning to understand that the international community is no longer particularly interested in large-scale missions such as those in Kosovo and Afghanistan because of hostility toward the donor states' personnel and the meager success of their efforts, so it might seem like a waste of time to think about how to enhance the



German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, right, speaks with Gen. Volker Wierer during a debate in December 2014 about German deployment in Afghanistan. Close cooperation between Germany's ministries of defense and foreign affairs aided the mission to stabilize northern Afghanistan.

role of the SCR at the Bundeswehr commander's side.

But after 2014 that negative impression changed. One reason was that the economy improved in Afghanistan's Northern provinces. Another point is worth mentioning: German and Afghan casualties in RC North were less than in other parts of the country. The political situation in the North is more stable, which may indeed be due to the close link between the military leadership and the civilian representative.

In case of future large-scale international interventions, including a SCR in post-conflict rehabilitation efforts from the very beginning would make sense. Whenever German soldiers are on a mission abroad, Germany's foreign and development policies need to become involved. It would therefore be unreasonable not to include SCRs in the efforts when their work has proved useful.

In the training scenario mentioned at the start of this article, the Afghan side finally agreed to discuss a compromise. The four protagonists had another meeting, which allowed everyone to save face. In the end, the much awaited photos were produced showing four decision-makers from two executive branches, two men in uniform, two civilians, Germans and Pashtuns, signing the memorandum. From the diplomat's point of view, the primacy of democratically legitimate policymaking was restored. The new Pashtun governor was pleased to receive international recognition and make good use of the media to talk about the extra funds he was able to raise for his province. The generals agreed that the military code of honor had been respected.

It goes without saying that such scenarios are always somewhat artificial. Nevertheless, the members of the Baltic Corps who participated in the ISAF mission confirmed that the facts and sensitivities of the scenario had been inspired by real life experiences in Afghanistan. This scenario considerably contributed to the success of exercise Crystal Eagle 13. Everyone agreed they learned a lot from each other. □