

NATO's Comprehensive Approach

CIMIC branch focuses on civilian-military cooperation

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Over the last decade international conflict management has undergone significant changes. Increased complexity demands a new approach to face these challenges and streamline the efforts of various stakeholders, both civilian and military. An integrated approach has been adopted in the policy and planning doctrines of various organizations and nations. But when it comes to implementation, it seems fine tuning is needed to make it work more effectively and efficiently. The term used by NATO for this kind of approach is Comprehensive Approach, or CA. This article will deal with the Alliance's contribution to CA, giving special attention to the use of the Civil-Military Co-operation doctrine, or CIMIC for short.

The end of Clausewitz?

Violent conflicts in states such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Sudan have captured global attention. The international community often spends huge amounts of money to deploy troops and facilitate diplomatic efforts to broker a peace. In the last 20 years there has been a steep increase in the number of peace operations involving new players such as NATO, the EU, and the African Union. Despite the profound attention these conflicts or emergencies receive, most conflicts resume within five years of a peace agreement. Throughout the world we can distinguish several regional clusters of war, including Afghanistan/Pakistan, the Horn of Africa and the Balkans. These new types of conflicts are hard to contain. Belligerents don't behave like parties to wars envisioned by von Clausewitz. Their goals and tactics are different. The warring parties are a combination of state and non-state actors organized in loose horizontal networks, rather than hierarchical militaries. The influx of new actors has changed the character of war as these new types of conflicts are more and more a mixture of political conflict, human rights violations and crime. Furthermore, modern violent conflicts are significantly influenced by social, economical, and environmental factors.

To resolve these type of conflicts, the sole use of traditional military tools (stop violence, defeat the enemy) is not adequate. As a result we have also seen that modern peace operations have expanded their tasks. Not only does a peace operation need to guarantee a cease fire, separate warring parties and monitor a peace process, it must also implement comprehensive peace agreements and help with reconstruction. The military alone lacks the capacities to overcome these challenges because it is not equipped to carry out civil tasks. It needs enhanced help from civilian agencies to fill the humanitarian gap via civil-military interaction. Such an approach is needed because of the many linkages that exist between security and development.

NATO's reaction

The experience of NATO in Kosovo and Afghanistan led to the development of the Comprehensive Approach in



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Norwegian Soldiers talk to an Afghan civilian in Faryab province, Afghanistan.

late 2004. Despite extensive efforts there still is no single binding idea about what CA should be or operationalized. Progress on CA has been slow and large disagreement exists within the alliance if NATO even wants to look into further developing CA and enhancing civilian capabilities. At the 2010 Lisbon summit, the Alliance stressed that a comprehensive political, civilian and military approach is a must for effective crisis management. And it addressed incentives to actively engage other actors in the international community to manage crises.

At a NATO stakeholder meeting in September 2010, the Comprehensive Approach was defined as the synergy of all actors and actions of the international community through the co-ordination and de-conflicting of political, development, and security capabilities to face today's challenges. This is a conceptual framework to describe civil military interaction. NATO uses the term to stress the need for the international community to improve co-operation and coordination of crisis management instruments.

Where the Comprehensive Approach is a political-civilian process, CIMIC is a military organization that facilitates cooperation between the military and civilians. CIMIC's origins can be traced to Civil Affairs units in the U.S. Army during the World War II and the Vietnam War and by the British in the 1950s to support counter insurgency operations. Apart from its civilian leadership, NATO has no deployable, operational civilian capacity. Its focus on civil-military co-operation is therefore via the civilian agencies that are outside its military parameters but present in

theater. Since the 1990s, the Alliance has progressed into the civilian sphere, making CIMIC a vital part of its operations and missions.

CIMIC is a complex process linking military contribution and civil contribution within comprehensive and cohesive actions to help stabilize societies. In theater, it is the non-combat function through which the military commander links with the civilian organizations active in his field of operations. It is an operational support tool that integrates the political, security, development, economic, rule of law, human rights and humanitarian dimensions. The three core functions of CIMIC are: support to the armed forces, through military planning and operations; support to the civil environment, through information and advice for civilian agencies; and civil-military liaison.

The Comprehensive Approach should be seen as a mindset to implement reconstruction and development to supply the local population with what it needs, whereas CIMIC is the method through which these efforts can be made. CIMIC is essential in the implementation of the Comprehensive Approach because it is the primary military tool through which the Alliance interacts with civilian agencies. Progress on developing civilian capabilities within NATO and engaging with civilian agencies has met with challenges.

How civil is CIMIC?

Ideally, a successful Comprehensive Approach would combine short term crisis response and stabilization with long term assistance and reconstruction. It should effectively coordinate the overarching process of civilian and military actors engaging at the various levels covering the whole spectrum of interactions in crisis response. CIMIC's role in this would be to help a military commander steer the process with civilian agencies to reach the desired mission objective. The implementation of both doctrines hasn't been smooth, probably due to the perceived military ownership. There are large disagreements between member nations about what NATO's role and tasks should be, and inherent to this discussion is whether the Alliance should engage further in extended peace operations and develop civilian capabilities.

In Afghanistan there is a wide range of adaptations of CIMIC in the field and this necessarily does not contribute to synchronization with the population. Because there is no binding NATO CIMIC doctrine, every country can implement it as it likes. In practice, this encourages Provincial Reconstruction Teams to go for quick wins such as handing out toys to children or opening a medical clinic. Such actions guarantee a nice photo opportunity but may undermine the sustainability of long term projects. There is sometimes little focus on developing a long term plan to meet the needs of a village or district.

Aside from the intra-NATO strife, the Alliance also has difficulties engaging civilian agencies. Owing to largely to civilian suspicions, the relationship between NATO and nongovernmental organizations hasn't fully evolved. Some NGOs are reluctant to collaborate with the military. This makes aligning

activities difficult and hampers the overall civil-military effort in a crisis area. This alignment is crucial, however, for CIMIC to add value. A more efficient coordination is needed to avoid duplication of efforts, resolve conflict and help affected populations. Both parties are aware of this misalignment, but cultural and organizational differences make coordination a challenge. The political interests directing military missions and CIMIC can appear to undermine NGO projects.

A way ahead

Some progress has been made regarding the contribution of CIMIC within NATO's Comprehensive Approach. One important and urgent issue is standardization of CIMIC doctrine. For CIMIC to be of more significant value, it should become more prominent in military planning. The future will likely engage NATO in more non-article V operations. It should be prepared to operate in conflict situations where humanitarian skills are essential. The tasks the military has to perform in Afghanistan are often ad hoc and include a wide range of activities. CIMIC should focus on supplying humanitarian assistance, hand over ownership of a region to the local government and people as quickly as possible, and engage civilian agencies to deploy structural assistance projects.

NATO should enhance pre-deployment training and exercises with civilian agencies on all levels. Furthermore, both parties should keep each other informed at all levels. In future crisis management operations, the Alliance will need to rely on its ability to liaise and cooperate with civilian agencies, part of the shift of focus towards human security. This collaboration should take place not only in the field but also at the planning level.

An important aspect is training and educating CIMIC personnel. There is a shortage of deployable civilian personnel and rapid turnover. The incorporation of more functional specialists, could contribute to better needs assessment, better liaising with civilian agencies and better execution of CIMIC doctrine. Adding only a tribal or development advisor doesn't contribute extensively to CIMIC capabilities.

Conclusions

Complex emergencies pose interdependent problems that must be dealt with simultaneously. NATO tries to accomplish this with a Comprehensive Approach and the deployment of CIMIC. Afghanistan has shown how challenging it is to implement new doctrines. To overcome these challenges NATO is moving from a narrow military understanding of CIMIC to a more holistic approach. Furthermore, doctrine implementation requires capacities and common frame of reference in order to standardize CIMIC doctrine. The first step has been underlining the importance of the Comprehensive Approach at the Lisbon Summit. Further steps will include change in the areas of planning, classification of data, development of capacities and doctrinal implementation. This will smooth relations with civilian agencies and eventually deliver a more sustainable contribution. □

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