

NATO Comprehensive Approach Roundtable

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On 21 May the Danish Embassy in Washington, D.C., in cooperation with the National Defense University's Center for Technology and National Security Policy, hosted a roundtable discussion under the heading "NATO's Comprehensive Approach: Implementation After the Strasbourg-Kehl Summit." It brought together representatives from the US Government, Denmark and other NATO countries, American and European think tanks and educational institutions, NATO's International Staff and the United Nations, as well as non-governmental organizations.

The goal was to continue the informal transatlantic dialogue on the Comprehensive Approach (CA) begun two years ago to further common understanding of the concept, of current implementation challenges on the ground particularly in Afghanistan, and of how to reflect CA in the upcoming discussion of NATO's Strategic Concept. The discussions focused on: 1) coordination and collaboration between NATO and other actors operating in theatre and 2) NATO's own capacity to organize, plan and deploy civilian assets - both as an institution and by drawing on the emerging resources of its members and partners - in the context of complex peace operations.

Main Points

The fundamental question is whether and how NATO should improve its cooperation with other actors or develop the alliance's own civilian capabilities. However, these are not mutually exclusive efforts; it is not a matter of either-or. NATO needs to move forward on both fronts if CA is to be applied successfully. It must build on the Alliance's substantial (if undeclared) experience in improvising its own civilian instruments, from the NATO Defence Reform Commission in Bosnia to the Secretary General's Senior Civilian Representative in Kabul. The Alliance must also build on its steady (if piecemeal) collaboration with essential external partners such as the EU, UN, OSCE and major NGO's.

The following seven steps, distilled from our discussions, indicate where NATO could move CA forward internally as well as with international partners:

- The NATO SG should engage more often and directly with the leadership of the UN, EU, OSCE, key NGO's and other appropriate actors both when crises occur,

but also beforehand to prepare the ground for an eventual operational relationship

- NATO should add a Comprehensive Approach Center of Excellence to its portfolio of such Centers to further define the concept as well as nurture its implementation
- NATO should define civilian CA requirements planning goals similar to its military force planning goals, and solicit commitments for planning from members, partners and even external actors. On the latter point, NATO, the UN and perhaps other organizations could establish a Joint Task Force to address transparent planning.
- NATO should nominate a corps of “first responders” from within NATO's own civilian and military staff with appropriate expertise who can deploy quickly in crisis situations; a dedicated training program should be established for this group while incentives for their deployment should be developed.
- NATO should train and certify personnel for PRT's and replacement personnel to a common basic standard before deployments, using a roving team of trainers to provide top-up training for deploying PRT staff.
- As a long term goal, NATO should develop a deployable civil-military Stabilization and Reconstruction Force (SRF)
- Together with the EU, NATO – under the initiative of the SecGen but with strong involvement of nations - should more directly engage in resolving the Cyprus/Turkey impasse that thwarts progress on NATO-EU cooperation and limits development and implementation of CA.

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The Riga Summit decision on CA in 2006 and the adoption in 2008 in Bucharest of a Plan of Action for its implementation have been critical catalysts for establishing a more coherent and systematic Alliance-wide approach to civil-military coordination. At the Strasbourg-Kehl summit, NATO leaders charged the Alliance to move forward, with further reports of progress in December 2009 and at the next NATO summit in 2010. It is clear that significant progress is still required before a common NATO framework is in place that bridges different national experiences and sets priorities that will yield improved results in the field.

Lessons from Afghanistan continue to be a principal basis for development of civil-military approaches and capacity at the national and NATO levels. Each country's engagement in this mission, including the nature and extent of domestic political support, informs views on how and with what level of urgency the CA agenda should move forward within the Alliance. Countries view CA from different perspectives and employ different definitions of these efforts, e.g., counter-insurgency in Helmand Province is not directly comparable to civil-military efforts in Northern Afghanistan, for example. Creating common understandings between different NATO countries and between NATO and non-NATO actors present in the field remains a first order task for the Alliance.

The United States and other Allies are increasing their footprint in Afghanistan, strengthening their military presence to improve security, but also expanding civilian efforts to create conditions for longer-term stability, reconstruction and ultimately a return to normalcy. Lessons drawn must be channeled into the NATO context as an impetus for enhancing and developing CA.

The upcoming revision of the Strategic Concept under the auspices of the new NATO SecGen, a new US Administration taking a “fresh look” at NATO and France’s reintegration all contribute to creating a window of opportunity for CA. This must be utilized. Nations must be prepared to invest political capital in ensuring that NATO is placed at the forefront of the effort to develop effective long-term civil-military strategies. This is critical for success in Afghanistan but also broader as part of defining NATO’s future roles and missions.

Cooperation between NATO and External Actors

Challenges like Afghanistan illustrate that the current international security architecture is inadequate. However, it is not politically viable to pursue dramatic changes to the current institutional framework. The priority must be to ensure that the different actors – NATO, EU, UN, NGOs – are better connected and work together more effectively and deliberately on the ground. No single organization can achieve its objectives alone. NATO should be seen as contributing to a broader comprehensive approach of the international community. Yet, the UN and others cannot fill all gaps in an operation. NATO will be forced to take on a greater role in certain situations, including on non-military efforts. The Alliance must be prepared to meet this responsibility on the civilian side, based on contributions from nations. This is why agreeing on an elaborated CA concept and plan is critical to the Alliance.

Success in missions like Afghanistan will depend on more than just ensuring additional civilian contributions are available when and where needed. Implementing CA will not in itself be a guarantee for success. Nations must be willing to provide the necessary military resources as well. At the end of the day, the necessary political support behind the common effort in Afghanistan must be mobilized – it is too easy to get caught up in “box thinking” and institutional-bureaucratic disagreements. The transatlantic community must take a hard look at what is truly needed to reach the goals that we have defined for Afghanistan – then bring in the institutions that can do the job. Without focusing on whether the EU or NATO should take the lead, we need an honest assessment of what non-military resources are truly available for deployment. If the international community wants to implement a comprehensive approach, we must be prepared to provide the resources necessary to make it effective.

In the discussion of EU and NATO roles, recent years’ experience shows that while the ESDP has come a long way in terms of military engagement, the EU will not be able to undertake operations such as the NATO presence in Afghanistan. The EU has considerably greater potential to bring civilian expertise and capacity to the table, including police, though it still deploys these assets in very limited numbers under ESDP. The conclusion is that EU member countries could contribute more by accelerating their ability to mobilize and train non-military assets and experts while the EU military capacity unfolds in a more measured way.

The EU and NATO should endeavor to work together in more productive and imaginative ways. The following proposals might be explored as practical steps towards more effective NATO-EU collaboration on post-conflict stabilization in the near to mid term:

- Develop a broader EU-NATO Defence Education Concept and in time establish a NATO-EU School for Post-Conflict and Stabilization to provide training.
- Ask three defence ministers to form an informal group to host discussions on improving NATO-EU cooperation, on the model of the “RS South meetings” held by the countries deployed as part of ISAF’s Southern Command.
- Host a joint conference on “Berlin Plus” to assess the workings and recommend updates/new agreements for the NAC and Defence Ministers.
- NATO SecGen and EU HR/SG jointly commission a study of how NATO and EU can collaborate on Security Sector Reform – a key component of effective post-conflict stabilization.
- Institute high-level, table-top joint EU-NATO exercise, which involves the NATO SecGen, the EU HR/SG and the EU Troika.
- Institute an NATO-EU Fellowship for a group of officials from NATO IS, EU institutions and member states to undertake short-term secondments in each other’s offices, work on joint projects and regularly report to the NATO SecGen and the EU SG/HR.

While it is positive that many countries are now establishing national civilian rosters, national approaches vary widely and, when mature, will be difficult to synchronize. NATO should consider creating a template for national civ-mil action plans similar to what was developed for military capabilities in the early days of Partnership for Peace. That would help all participating countries develop sufficient standardized capacity to deploy sustainable and effective multinational civilian teams. Currently, only four or five NATO countries can be considered “civilian powers,” i.e., nations with sufficient civilian expertise and deployment capability to make substantial CA contributions on their own. Other powers must plan to participate in multinational efforts. Hiring from the private sector is another possible solution to the problems of recruiting civilians that should be considered in completing NATO's CA model. However, experience from Iraq shows there are both advantages and disadvantages to contracting unless it is well managed and transparent.

NATO and the UN have made modest but encouraging progress in staff-to-staff consultation and cooperation at HQ level. However the beginnings of ties must quickly be built upon with additional progress. In the field, transparency and information-sharing, clarity about division of labor, and careful public messaging to avoid complicating other actors’ efforts must all be seen as top priorities if UN-NATO relations are to grow stronger. It is vital that NATO and others are “good partners” in the field, understanding and respecting each others’ mandates. This includes respecting the central identity as humanitarians that is at the core of relief organizations/NGOs. NATO must improve its communications and outreach to indigenous civilian populations. NATO's overarching objectives of providing security and working towards local ownership must be embedded in all communications and actions. Here cooperation with the UN, NGOs and civil society groups to create partnerships with representatives of the Afghan people is vital.

Establishing durable cooperative frameworks between NATO and NGOs is often complicated in the field due to differing time horizons as much as differing cultures. NATO's operations are long yet of much more limited duration than NGO development efforts, which typically predate NATO missions and extend long after NATO's departure. Pre-mission contacts and informal dialogue between NATO and the NGO

community will help forge common understanding of each other's mission, objectives, time horizons and methods. Pre-mission cooperation can also help facilitate practical cooperation in theatre.

International actors such as NGOs, the EU and the UN should be engaged from the very beginning in the planning process of civil-military operations. However, all agree that security is the first step in state-building, and in the current environment in Afghanistan the military mission must be NATO's priority. In Southern Afghanistan, conditions for long-term reconstruction do not exist. First and foremost, the Afghan population is seeking security in its broadest definition based on military as well as other critical efforts. Closely following that, the international civilian effort must provide basic services – in terms of health and human services as well as job creation, police training and development of governance capacity – to every Afghan village.

NATO's Internal Civilian Capabilities

While there are opportunities for a renewed, open and more pragmatic discussion of the Alliance's own civilian capacities, in the current environment it is unlikely that consensus can be reached on any new civilian structures or entities within NATO. Fundamental political barriers remain. Yet, NATO can do more within its existing civil frameworks, and this could be an important task for a new NATO SecGen.

NATO needs more precision regarding requirements on the ground in terms of civilian capacity. NATO can play a role in generating common standards and certification for civil-military cooperation, for example, as they relate to PRT's in Afghanistan. The current PRT structure with lead nations generates very different approaches from one PRT to the next, confusing NATO's international partners as well as the Afghan government. There is inadequate collection and sharing of lessons-learned, and there are many inefficiencies. National PRT units are sent to Afghanistan with very different mandates and understandings of what engaging in CA as a team entails. NATO should establish travelling PRT training teams that can prepare new PRT units from nations before deployment.

Each NATO country deploys a certain amount of civil affairs capability within its military contributions. These initial CIMIC-activities could be better aligned, for example by ensuring that NATO HQ has better civil-military management capacity. A possible way of achieving that is the establishment of a Civil-Military Committee. NATO could also take on a clearing house function for these first-phase civil-military activities. In addition, a body of full time NATO experts could be formed to serve as liaisons with the civilian components of other international missions. These liaisons should be internally tied into SHAPE planning and operations staffs to serve as a bridge between military planners and external civilian agencies.

The upcoming process of revision of NATO's Strategic Concept may not generate a quantum leap forward in terms of implementing the CA agenda. There is still a long way to go in forging political agreement among nations on 1) NATO's enduring roles and missions; and on 2) what civilian capacities within the Alliance are needed versus what NATO can and should rely on from its external partners. While this discussion should be taken head-on over the next year, the Alliance should also focus on incrementally moving NATO forward where possible to enhance civilian capacities. An

important way to pursue progress is for individual nations and groups of countries working closely together in Afghanistan to experiment with methods and best practices and then share the lessons learned – good and bad – with other nations across ISAF.

Those countries ready to explore new processes should forge ahead collectively in generating an effective civil-military CA model. The United States must be part of this. The Obama administration can apply the necessary energy and incentives for willing Allies to move towards a common NATO approach. This will help mobilize political will among all nations on both sides of the Atlantic, not just to devote the necessary military and civilian assets to Afghanistan – and increasingly to Pakistan – but also to commit to developing a truly effective common comprehensive approach for NATO.