

The Comprehensive Approach Initiative: Future Options for NATO

by *Fris Arne Petersen and Hans Binnendijk*

Overview

Experience has shown that conflict resolution requires the application of all elements of national and international power—political, diplomatic, economic, financial, informational, social, and commercial, as well as military. To resolve conflicts or crises, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) should adopt a Comprehensive Approach that would enable the collaborative engagement of all requisite civil and military elements of international power to end hostilities, restore order, commence reconstruction, and begin to address a conflict's root causes. NATO can provide the military element for a comprehensive approach. Many other national, international, and nongovernmental actors can provide the civilian elements.

In May 2007, the Royal Danish Embassy in Washington, DC, and the Center for Technology and National Security Policy at the National Defense University held an informal workshop of experts from across the Alliance to explore options for creating an international comprehensive approach to postconflict stabilization and reconstruction. This paper is the product of that workshop and subsequent collaborations. It endeavors to describe the major requirements for conflict resolution, what NATO has learned from its post-Cold War experiences to date in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, and how a more effective program of international civil and military engagement can be put in place.

Much work remains to be done to flesh out the initiative, but already it is clear that military efforts in the field must be complemented throughout any operation by nonmilitary means that bring to bear the expert civil competencies of other actors, both national and international. In the Balkans and Afghanistan, NATO engaged with other actors belatedly through ad hoc, situational arrangements. Not knowing in advance what roles and which participants will eventually come into play results in longer and more costly conflict resolution in terms of lives, treasure, and ultimate effectiveness.

The adage that “NATO works in practice better than in theory” has become a convenient excuse for not reaching much-needed comprehensive agreements on civil-military cooperation, from the top levels down to face-to-face relationships in the field. More than enough operational experience has been gained to indicate that it is past time to replace expedient constructs with systemic, institutionalized procedures for cooperation on what, as is widely agreed, must be accomplished quickly and effectively.

The last remaining core task of NATO transformation is to link the Alliance's military capabilities effectively with the indispensable nonmilitary elements of power essential to successful conflict resolution. Failure to finish that work hampers and at times frustrates success in the field by operational personnel, civilians, and military across all organizations who are simply trying to get the job done.

The Riga Initiative

The government of Denmark, with the support of like-minded North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members, took the initiative in late 2004 to put the concept of a comprehensive approach on the Alliance agenda, initially under the heading *Concerted Planning and Action* (CPA). At that time, it was clear that even though NATO had no capabilities for purely civilian use, the Alliance had in fact already taken a number of pragmatic steps in these areas. The work and results in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan demonstrated that. But there was no defined frame of reference or codification of existing practices, especially regarding NATO's collaboration with other actors in the field.

In June 2005, Denmark convened a seminar to kick-start the discussion within the Alliance. Political disagreements on the broader aspects of NATO's future role led to skepticism from some countries on the idea of CPA, so a lot of time was spent in the first phase spelling out what the initiative was not. It was stressed that the aim was not to develop new, independent NATO capabilities but to strengthen Alliance ability to engage in cooperation with—not control of—other actors and to improve NATO mission planning in these areas.

In the spring of 2006, Denmark and six other countries—Canada, the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, and Slovakia—circulated a paper within the Alliance describing some of the basic ideas underpinning the CPA approach and what they were trying to achieve in the Alliance. The United States later joined the initiative through an eight-nation letter further clarifying the ideas behind what had by then become known as the NATO *Comprehensive Approach* (CA) initiative.

At the Riga Summit in November 2006, the Alliance decided to formally put the Comprehensive Approach initiative on its agenda. The summit tasked relevant entities to begin work on elaborating an Action Plan for how the Alliance could incorporate a comprehensive approach into its work. With this tasking as a starting point, significant progress has been made in many areas, but broader institutional questions relating in particular to NATO cooperation and interaction with the European Union are not yet resolved. Many of the elements and ideas outlined in this paper are reflected in the NATO Action Plan and have been the subject of discussion within the Alliance since Riga. Outside the formal setting, workshops have also been organized by the United Kingdom in Brussels and by the United States in Munich. It is critical that the focus on both the practical and conceptual work relating to the development and implementation of NATO's Comprehensive Approach initiative continues. Concrete progress on creating a common understanding among NATO members must be made. The cooperation between the Royal Danish Embassy and National Defense University is a contribution to this effort.

The Bucharest Summit in 2008 will be an important opportunity to take stock of how well the Alliance is responding to the critical challenge of forging an effective comprehensive approach. At the heart of the issue is the future role of NATO and its ability to contribute to global peace and security. The Comprehensive Approach initiative and its practical application in critical peace operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere form an integral part of this current transatlantic debate and will set the tone for future cooperation between the United States and Europe.

NATO's Post-Cold War Record

NATO has been engaged in transformation since the end of the Cold War, modifying its processes, structures, and missions to meet its members' security interests. Collective defense remains the core mission of the Alliance. However, in the absence of overt military threats, and facing new challenges, NATO has resolved to

strengthen regional security through engagement, expansion, and crisis response beyond Alliance borders.

Much has been accomplished over the past 15 years to turn NATO toward its new missions. The Partnership for Peace, Euroatlantic Partnership Council, and other forums have been added to the NATO institutional base, strengthening European security. The Alliance has downsized and reorganized its military command structure. Combined joint task forces and the NATO Response Force have been operationalized to provide the Alliance with capabilities to respond to crises on short notice. Airlift and sealift capabilities are being organized as well.

For 12 years, NATO has been engaged continuously in major military crisis response operations, first in the Balkans and Mediterranean, and now in Afghanistan. These critical land, sea, and air operations have involved tens of thousands of troops deployed well beyond Alliance borders, providing NATO with considerable experience in deployments, strategic sustainment, and complex multinational command and control. These operations also have afforded Alliance military forces considerable interoperability experience from the tactical to strategic levels of training, planning, and execution. In brief, NATO has remade itself into an unquestionably able multinational military resource for crisis prevention and conflict resolution while remaining capable of carrying out Article 5 missions, as it demonstrated in September 2001.

The Alliance cannot go back; it must continue to adapt both politically and institutionally as a force for transatlantic action when crises or conflicts threaten collective interests. It must become a credible, collaborative player within the context of a far more comprehensive approach to conflict resolution in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and wherever its members agree to commit military resources under NATO command. The Alliance has gained enough experience since 1995 to replace some of the cobbled-together arrangements that have degraded its planning and coordination with the United Nations, European Union, and other actors.

The next steps in NATO transformation should concentrate on honing Alliance resources to operate more effectively within the framework of a comprehensive approach to crisis response and conflict resolution. It is most critical to adopt new accommodations in Afghanistan, where civil-military cooperation must be greatly improved to achieve a successful outcome.

Challenges Today

A key difficulty in moving beyond ad hoc arrangements is the inability of allies to come to an enduring agreement on NATO's future roles beyond collective territorial defense, such as crisis management. This situation has persisted since the Soviet threat disappeared, with some seeking to turn the Alliance's considerable organizations and resources to address new risks to mutual interests beyond collective

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defense, and others desiring to diminish the Alliance commensurate with the now-remote threat to members' territories. Notwithstanding this long-running tension, NATO has engaged in crisis response almost since the end of the Cold War, reaching hurried agreements to improvise political arrangements and cooperative mechanisms in lieu of more permanent, less risky, and more effective procedures.

The debate stands in stark contrast to the reality of NATO's actual missions. Though difficult, there will be resolution. What should be possible now is to replace some of the most basic expedient arrangements with preestablished procedures that can be counted on as agreed methods for civil-military engagement, both internally and externally. The Alliance should identify some of the most important areas for planning and coordination and set up processes to put these into effect, including exercising.

Some resist institutionalizing any of the cooperative relationships that served in past crises, even as NATO expects to be committed in future crises that will require these same relationships. Advocates believe high-level political discussion and consensus on NATO's future purpose must come first. Once that is agreed, it is held, requisite civil-military and interorganizational mechanisms will readily follow. However, the long and continuing history of NATO's engagement in crises alongside other actors argues for moving beyond ad hoc frameworks without delay. If political consensus remains elusive, NATO should still push forward in important areas. But we must avoid institutionalizing cumbersome arrangements that will frustrate how our forces are already working together—internally and externally—in practice.

National capacities for a comprehensive approach have developed with NATO's operational experience. Members and partner countries have responded to the need for civilian capabilities by taking steps to develop some of these capabilities to work with their national militaries. The next step is for NATO to coalesce these capabilities at the international level in a way that provides the necessary teamwork with multinational military capabilities. Negotiating toward standardized goal setting, planning, operational interfacing, and resourcing will be necessary. Information-sharing modalities will be critical but must overcome national prerogatives.

NATO's engagement in crises has involved three broad operational phases: military operations (Kosovo, Afghanistan), postconflict stability operations (Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan), and reconstruction operations (Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq). So far, NATO has been able to organize only for the military phase by creating the NATO Response Force to provide a ready initial military response. This force is the best planned and most organized crisis response capability, though it still requires much fine tuning in terms of mission definition and sustained force commitments.

What NATO lacks is any organized deployable civil-military capacity to address either stabilization or reconstruction operations. The solution may not necessarily be a standing force but should be

at least a preplanned menu of capabilities organized and exercised together periodically that constitutes a viable set of civilian skills and military resources to provide immediate triage to destabilized populations in conflict or crisis areas. These capabilities require equitable resourcing agreements, basic multinational doctrinal concepts, appropriate command and control architectures, sustainment profiles, and deployment flow schemes.

Findings

A key workshop finding was that the Alliance's continuous operational engagement since 1995 and the high expectation for future operations provide compelling arguments against further use of ad hoc arrangements between NATO's military and non-NATO civilian entities in the field. A comprehensive civil-military approach and permanent interorganizational arrangements are needed at both the military-strategic and political-military levels. Not to apply lessons learned in this area—in order to better our collective response—is to expose all our efforts and forces to unnecessary risk in future crises. Should the Alliance not meet its objectives in these endeavors, there is risk of declining political support for future operations.

Movement on a Comprehensive Approach initiative should not be held back due to unresolved, broader political disagreements among major Alliance members on the future institutional frameworks for crisis management. An opportunity for progress on the initiative seems to be developing. It is vital that this opportunity be seized.

Persistence counts on the Comprehensive Approach initiative endorsed at Riga. Many details must be worked out, requiring information-sharing, negotiation, compromise, and ultimately resource commitments. NATO summit initiatives have a spotty history of success. However, repeated initiatives on a single theme over time have found productive areas to move the Alliance toward meaningful change.

If full endorsement of a comprehensive approach is politically difficult for the immediate future, NATO should find seams of agree-

ment and pursue them until some form of the initiative is fully implemented among at least the key contributors to conflict resolution.

NATO need not create any civilian capacity that other organizations already have and can reasonably make available (for example, the European Union's well-known expertise in border control, institution-building, and policing). Notwithstanding the capabilities of civilian partners once they can

be brought into volatile areas of conflict, NATO does need adequate capacity to deal with immediate postconflict stabilization requirements when a nonpermissive environment precludes engagement by other organizations. At present, NATO does not have sufficient organized capacity in this area but could readily

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develop what is required by building up a more robust civil-military cooperation capability.

Ensuring a common political understanding of the strategic objectives of a mission is vital. Cooperation among NATO, the European Union, the United Nations, and other organizations worked well in Kosovo because there was early, high-level political agreement on ultimate goals and what each engaged agency needed to accomplish. For operations such as the one in Afghanistan, mechanisms for agreeing to objectives, roles, and contributions—in Brussels (the North Atlantic Council and the Council of the European Union) as well as in-theater (the Joint Civil Military Board)—are already in place and should be better utilized.

It is critical that NATO and other organizations clarify the division of labor when working together to resolve conflict situations. Many actors are engaged, and, if not coordinated, their different efforts risk colliding or at least yielding suboptimal results due to overlap. NATO must draw on and cooperate with neighboring countries and regional institutional frameworks.

The CA concept is as relevant to conflict prevention as it is to crisis response. NATO should explore ways to reinvigorate its highly successful Partnership for Peace and Euroatlantic Partnership Council mechanisms with the goal of strengthening their influence in conflict prevention. The Alliance should reenergize its relationships with organizations such as Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in this area.

Much of the success of interorganizational collaboration has been personality driven. NATO and other institutions need to make quality appointments of highly knowledgeable, goal-oriented, and diplomatic individuals in order to overcome stove-piped approaches and the current absence of institutional frameworks. Individuals alone cannot be the solution, however. Similarly, NATO and other organizations need to guard against organizational adaptations becoming the goal. The goal must be realizing an optimal interorganizational civil-military enterprise for successful conflict resolution. Organizational flexibility will continue to be essential.

The details of possible initiatives that emerged during the workshop are described below.

A Summit Agenda in 2008

At its next summit, NATO has a fresh opportunity to move forward in its relationships with those organizations and partners willing and able to deploy civilian resources. To seize that opportunity, NATO should focus action on five broad undertakings to optimize its structures for participating with other organizations in a comprehensive approach to crises and conflicts:

- Formalize standing political-military and strategic military forums tasked to engage with all appropriate civil actors in crisis

response, such as the United Nations, European Union, OSCE, African Union, and so forth. These mechanisms should address, as equal partners, top-level policy, planning, and resourcing considerations for integrated civil-military responses in current and future operations.

- Adjust NATO structures to provide optimum interface for civilian counterparts at the operational and tactical levels. This should include preoperational coordination and planning, as well as doctrine and standards for supporting and being supported by civil entities, such as Provincial Reconstruction Teams and police trainers. NATO support might include appropriate levels of security, communications, logistics, and transportation. Agreements will be needed to establish what is required and how resources will be funded.

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- Develop a compatible understanding with other actors on the CA elements of crisis resolution. This could be done by exercising and planning, examining best practices with civil actors, and sharing lessons learned from operations as appropriate.

- Establish a comprehensive database of lessons learned and update it continuously from teams in the field, without regard to organizational source. This database must go beyond current efforts by NATO's Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Center to include civil as well as military lessons from other agencies, and it should be available to all organizations engaged in planning and operating together.

- Identify to civil actors what nonmilitary capabilities are needed for future NATO crisis/conflict operations and encourage those organizations to indicate what capabilities they might provide and under what conditions. This set of capabilities should include the reestablishment of basic services, public safety and security, and institutions of government at the local, regional, and national levels.

CA Long-term Agenda

Within the five broad undertakings described above, pre-summit discourse should seek agreement on a fuller, long-term agenda for NATO staffs and decisionmakers. The following initiatives can flesh out a long-term CA agenda that could be agreed at the summit. Some of these initiatives are already under way but require continued emphasis as essential capabilities for civil-military collaboration.

Marshaling External Resources:

- The NATO Secretary General should begin coordination and consultation with external organizations for civil-military collaboration on crisis response and conflict resolution, with priority given to Afghanistan.

■ The North Atlantic Council should appoint an Assistant Secretary General to oversee cooperation with essential civilian counterparts and arrange for regular reports on progress in this area.

■ NATO and each of its members should undertake to strengthen public support for the Alliance role in CA crisis response. This would require that NATO and its members develop vigorous, parallel public awareness campaigns to connect CA commitments to collective interests supported by members' publics.

Marshaling Military Resources:

■ NATO should develop three or four comprehensive approach operational scenarios, involving both military and nonmilitary assets, to provide a framework for preliminary crisis response planning, exercises, and doctrine development.

■ Allied Command Operations/Allied Command Transformation should train and exercise more with a host of civilian partners—not only the European Union, OSCE, and United Nations but also key nongovernmental organizations. These exercises should take into account training and expertise extant at the national level and endeavor to make national knowledge available to all NATO members and partners.

■ Given that police as well as military capabilities are essential to public security, the North Atlantic Council should discuss formalizing release authority procedures for the constabulary forces being organized at Vicenza, Italy, as well as seeking to define commitment modalities for other organizations' policing capabilities.

■ As a tenet of military force planning for crisis response, troop-list a force sufficient to include fielding a standby force for protection of civilian partners, including nongovernmental organizations, when called for by conditions of the operational environment.

■ Training and equipping indigenous security forces are key components of generating long-term stability in semipermissive environments. NATO should ensure that its schoolhouses educate allied forces on best practices and lessons learned associated with training and mentoring these forces.

Marshaling Information and Communications Resources:

■ The Alliance should propose creative and forceful ideas for intelligence-sharing as it relates to the Comprehensive Approach initiative, especially beyond NATO's traditional core group in this area.

■ NATO military authorities should study how to extend necessary communications and data network connectivity to essential nongovernmental and international organizations. One way would be to design a portable communications system that can be provided to essential external actors who do not have resources themselves to link to NATO.

■ The NATO Consultation, Command and Control Agency should inaugurate a Web-based multiservice (blogs, chat, collaboration, informational, linked, and so forth) NATO portal for authorized

users to share information on civil-military cooperation of immediate interest to others in the field, such as Provincial Reconstruction Team best practices.

■ The Alliance should take steps to share NATO standards in key areas and push for interoperability among all crisis responders, especially data and communications systems interoperability.

■ NATO should agree on a process for systematically collecting, sharing, and acting on lessons learned both internally and with civilian partners on a continuous, perhaps Web-hosted basis. These information-sharing activities are best conducted in-theater by institutions set up for that purpose. This is one initiative the Alliance should explore to strengthen the effectiveness of its forces and resources in Afghanistan.

Marshaling Civilian Resources:

■ NATO should encourage its members to identify deployable civilian capacity at the national level and compile a database so that all members will realize where their contributions might fit and where there are gaps and invest in same. There should be no presumption that civilian resources would necessarily be organized under NATO but that these assets would be available to work with the Alliance, either as national contributions or under other appropriate organizations, such as the United Nations, OSCE, or European Union. NATO's interest should be to ensure that the requisite civilian partners are available and ready. The Alliance must also know what levels of support civilian assets will require of its military resources in unsecured, austere environments.

■ The United States, as the principal ally outside the European Union framework, should allocate \$50 million for a deployable civilian corps able to work with civilian capabilities from the European Union in support of NATO as well as non-NATO operations.

■ NATO must determine how to bring its Civil Emergency Planning Directorate and Senior Civil Emergency Planning Committee to bear on the challenges of civil-military coordination, as was done in the mid to late 1990s. Cataloguing available commercial resources, capabilities, and standards is one task. Other tasks would include how to mirror at least some of NATO's Cold War process for civil emergency planning that supports interaction with other agencies in deployed operations.

■ The Alliance should establish a consolidated database of current and anticipated language requirements and available linguists at NATO and by member nations, both civilian and military.

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