

Conference Report

“Transatlantic Approaches to Post-Conflict Management”

Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and National Defense University (NESU),
Near East South Asia Center, Washington, DC, June 23 and 24, 2008

On June 23 and 24, 2008, the second part of our conference project took place at the premises of and in cooperation with the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Near East South Asia Center of the National Defense University (NESU) in Washington, DC. While the first workshop looked at the actor dimension of post-conflict management (PCM), the second event focused on the content dimension of PCM approaches, the issues of security, development, and governance. Our debates were guided by the following questions: How can the goals of security, development and (good) governance be accomplished? What are the lessons learned on the ground in the Balkans and in Afghanistan? Finally, based on our findings we discussed necessary adaptations of current approaches to civil-military and NATO-EU cooperation.

In the following, we will give a short overview of the discussions during the conference. The results of the project were presented at a meeting at the German Marshall Fund headquarters in Washington, DC on October 31, 2008. A publication is planned that aims at making the results accessible to the wider public.

Part IIa: Conference at CSIS in Washington, DC, June 23, 2008

On the first day of the conference we convened at the premises of CSIS. In three different sessions and during an evening event, we approached the issue of post-conflict management (PCM) from a variety of angles, looking at transatlantic convergence and divergence, lessons learned on the ground and the changing landscape of donors and actors. Each session was started by short presentations given by speakers from the United States and different European countries, including academics, administrative officials and staff working on the ground in the regions under scrutiny. The main portion of each session was reserved for discussion.

Transatlantic Convergence or Divergence?

Looking at recent declarations and efforts regarding post-conflict management, the question as to whether views **converge or diverge** across the Atlantic is not an easy one to answer. On the one hand, the declaration issued at the EU-US Summit in June 2008 praised the two partners’ “effective transatlantic cooperation” and “global leadership” with regard to PCM. On the other hand, even within the European Union (EU) there is no consensus on how to deal with post-conflict situations. As the EUROFOR/CHAD operation demonstrates, sometimes differences among Europeans are even greater than between Europeans and Americans. Furthermore, forging consensus also poses a problem within state governments. Certain national cultural convictions will always need to be taken into account. However, the optimistic tone of the 2008 EU-US Summit declaration may point to a rapprochement of the European partners as well as the transatlantic partners, due to the changing political landscape on the European continent. Maybe even, as one speaker pointed out, differences have never been as big as perceived.

As with many points of discussion relating to PCM, **definitions** also play into the discussion on transatlantic convergent or divergent views. What is “post-conflict management”? When does a “hot” conflict turn into a post-conflict situation? And what are the goals of engagement by external actors? It was argued that, for example, Europe tends to be pleased by the mere fact that

an operation does take place. But from a pragmatic point of view as well, some argued, aiming low rather than high makes cooperation easier. By defining clear and pragmatic goals, transatlantic consensus would become more likely.

However, the divergence with regard to the **goals** of PCM may be linked to the significance it is awarded by the EU and the U.S. respectively. On the one hand, both share the interest of stabilizing the targeted countries. On the other hand, the U.S. views PCM as an important instrument in its quest for victory in the war on terror, while for the EU it constitutes a significant tool to boost European integration and the EU's role as an actor in international relations. Further European interests relate to the post-colonial ties some member states hold with certain conflict-ridden countries and security concerns with regard to conflicts in the EU's immediate neighborhood. Generally, views differ across the Atlantic concerning the use of force, which is seen but as a last-resort option by the Europeans.

Another obstacle to convergent approaches is posed by the **resources** at the partner's disposal. Europe has only a limited number of deployable forces and is further restrained by limited financial means and short periods of operation, making it difficult to reach sustainability on the ground. In addition, all EU operations are carried out under a mandatory UN mandate, which due to its broad scope, as one participant contended, leads to a poor perception of the utility of force. With regard to the financial means employed, it was argued that the huge gap between military and development spending needs to be reduced. And as far as the transatlantic gap in spending is concerned, Europe cannot duplicate what the U.S. does but should rather provide complimentary resources, thus developing its "niche capability". One participant also argued that it is less the amount of money spent which matters but rather *how* it is spent respectively invested. An additional important, yet non-material resource is **public support**. Without the support of both the domestic constituency and the people in the targeted country an operation will be barely successful. Again, views differ on both sides of the Atlantic. Europeans generally support their troops but show much less enthusiasm when it comes to specific operations. In the US, however, broad support for an operation is easier to obtain. The levels of public support also differ within Europe. While it is easiest for countries such as the United Kingdom, Denmark or the Netherlands to make a link between fighting terrorism at home and abroad, public opinion in other European countries, such as Germany, makes it difficult to reach strong and long-lasting commitment to PCM.

Finally, the question of PCM **effectiveness** was intensely discussed. While effectiveness is generally hard to determine, its long-term effects in particular are unknown. Sustainability, multilateralism and local ownership were considered to be important measures of effectiveness, yet views diverge on how they are defined. However, given the large number of actors involved, divergence is normal and will always be existent. One way to cope with it is to occasionally leave out certain actors if a consensus cannot be reached otherwise.

To Defeat or To Negotiate with Insurgents?

Several of the general divergence/convergence issues discussed in the previous session also came up in the debate on how to deal with insurgents: questions of framework, public support and definition of goals, to name but a few.

The question as to whether or not to negotiate with insurgents must take the **political framework** into account in which operations in the targeted country take place. In the case of Afghanistan, the Bonn architecture did include efforts to reach out to the Taliban politically. However, the governance structures put into place by Karzai in Southern Afghanistan systematically alienated certain groups driving them across the border to the Neo-Taliban. Besides the necessary political framework, the **public support** of negotiations is another

important factor. Again, legitimacy is what makes an operation succeed. Polls in Afghanistan, for example, show that 65% of the people interviewed were in favor of negotiating with the insurgents. Public support also has to be raised among the domestic constituencies of the international actor(s) involved. One participant, for example, spoke of the necessity to raise awareness in Germany that talking to the (Neo-)Taliban may not be equated with talking to terrorists.

However, not just public opinion but also **cultural backgrounds** need to be considered when debating whether to defeat or to negotiate. Western actors often bring in the value question, deeming it “immoral” to negotiate with insurgents labeled as “terrorists”. This focus, one participant argued, is often limited to one group, leaving out others, as in the case of Afghanistan, where the Mujaheddin may be talked to, while the Taliban are ignored. From an Afghan perspective, the “immorality” of talking to insurgents does not exist, due to the inherent openness of the Afghan people to talk to everyone no matter what their ideological background. And while Europeans tend to be outcome-oriented, in Afghanistan it is the process that matters too. This cultural feature of the Afghan society may make power-sharing a fit and feasible instrument. One participant objected, however, that a process without a goal would not make sense. When talking to insurgents, clear goals must be set and expectations kept realistic.

Restraints to talks with insurgents are posed by a variety of factors. First, fragmentation is a serious problem. Usually, there is no coherent insurgent unity that could deliver a deal. The Taliban have always been fragmented making it difficult to address them as one group. Second, another obstacle is posed by the national parliaments of the involved actors both in Europe and the U.S. Third, not just the international and national actors involved but also the targeted insurgent group must consent to the negotiations. Fourth, the impact of negotiations is questionable. They are usually considered but a temporary tactical option. In addition, negotiations depend on the government of the target country to declare them legitimate and push them through. However, not talking to insurgents represents a short-sighted strategy. Sooner or later, somebody else will talk to the insurgents and the chance to influence the outcome and hence the development in the region will be missed. The participants seemed to agree that although at first glance the **force option** may seem easier to implement, we should be cautious to rely solely on it and always explore political options, too.

New Donors versus Traditional Donors: Challenges and Responses

The relationship between traditional and new donors was discussed by the last panel of the day. First of all, the importance of **definitions** was again pointed out. While international NGOs based in Western countries and government actors are so-called traditional players, the “new actors” include the (U.S.) military, the private sector, the Gulf states, China, Hizbollah, Hamas, and local NGOs. However, this definition is disputed, as some of these actors – such as China or the U.S. military – have a long-standing role in providing humanitarian assistance in post-conflict situations. Even the definition of an NGO may be difficult since some are NGOs by title but government bodies in reality.

The emergence of new actors poses certain challenges to the traditional ones and their **relationship** with the new competitors. To take the U.S. military as one example, some traditional actors appreciate the security provided by the military presence, yet others fear the latter will affect their ability to live by the rules of independence and impartiality. Most NGOs cooperate with the military; the Red Cross even explicitly seeks cooperation with NATO. The U.S. military has learned to appreciate the insight knowledge that NGOs can provide.

One consequence of the marketplace of donors becoming more crowded is a growing **competition** among donors. With their survival being a primary goal, NGOs even fight each

other. Reflecting on changing the traditional rules of neutrality, impartiality, and independence, one must take into account the differing **reasons** actors have for providing assistance. Is the provision of assistance considered a means or an end? What conditions do donors place on their assistance? Who are they accountable to (if at all)? The U.S. and EU involvement in democracy promotion in post-conflict societies, for example, is motivated by their interest to ensure their own security and to accomplish their particular foreign policy goals. There are also countries where it is reasonable not to become engaged due to overriding considerations, among them China and Saudi Arabia.

The **capacities** of actors do not always match their proclaimed goals. Despite good governance being the “mantra” of EU external relations, the European Union is not good at providing and promoting it – with the exception of election-monitoring. With regard to the Balkans, the EU does have the structures to support the civil society in the region, but implementation is hampered by the EU’s slow bureaucracy and conflicting responsibilities.

Perceptions also determine the success of an actor. Countries with an excellent human rights record, such as Sweden, will be more welcome than countries perceived as “armed missionaries”. One participant pointed out that on the ground perceptions do not diverge with regard to the type of actor. Whether locals are confronted with the military or NGO employees, they will consider them all as “foreign”. Another participant referred to NGOs specifically. In Albania, for example, society regards NGOs as foreign-paid elements (reflected by their nickname as “Sorosani”, off-springs of George Soros) and by their “cosmopolitan” orientation as potentially dividing the national unity of the country. The political class, on the other hand, tends to see NGOs as spoilers which create a negative image of the country abroad. The perception in the countries the actors originate from also play a significant role in determining the outcome of their efforts. Some critics view NGOs as economic enterprises; others use NGOs as the whipping boys for all “evils” linked to intervention abroad – because NGOs are easy to criticize.

A large part of the debate was dedicated to discussing the work of NGOs. Several participants contended that too much **regulation** of NGO work would deter organizations from actually doing their work. By regulating NGOs, governments seize power over them – and possibly abuse this power, as has been seen in Russia. One participant pointed out that disruptive NGOs do not thrive because of poor regulation but because of poor performance of the government.

As to the specific activities of NGOs and other actors in post-conflict situations, **democracy promotion** was the one most intensely debated. The participants repeatedly stressed the importance of local ownership. The perceived benefits of democratization must also be taken into account. In the Balkans, EU efforts may profit from the promise of membership, providing them with certain leverage, non-existent in other cases. Democracy promotion seems to be most successful in post-conflict societies without an internal conflict and a strong political consensus, such as Croatia. In fragmented societies – such as Bosnia, Kosovo, or Macedonia – democracy export has been less successful.

Part IIb: Conference at NDU – NESACenter in Washington, DC, June 24, 2008

On the second conference day, on which the working group was hosted by the NDU – NESACenter, discussions focused on specific aspects of the issues debated the day before. During the first session, we looked at possible ways of coordination among international organizations. During the second session, NGO-military relations were debated in more detail and, in the third session, the issue of nation-building was taken up.

The Strategic Triangle – How to Coordinate Major International Organizations?

Post-conflict situations are becoming more and more complex. Each PCM case seems to take more time and involve greater commitment than expected. Against this **background** coordination and cooperation among major actors is increasingly needed. Additionally, the actors have been going through changes, which have enabled them to be more ready and willing to coordinate. NATO is pursuing a comprehensive approach. In the UN system, interaction between the military and civilian components has been improved, paving the ground for cooperation with other major actors.

Nevertheless, **relations among actors** remain difficult. The picture provided by *EU-UN relations*, for example, is an ambivalent one. On the one hand, the EU has developed capabilities in view of complementing UN efforts. Instead of military participation in UN operations, the EU has focused its support on civilian efforts. However, the EU has no genuine capabilities to provide to the UN but must always draw upon national capabilities. On the other hand, the EU is regarded as a partner by the UN. With lessons learned being accumulated through joint activities on the ground as well as through regular meetings of the DPKO (Department of Peacekeeping Operations) and the EU, prospects for further and improved cooperation are positive. The evaluation of the *relationship between NATO and UN* also yields an ambivalent picture. One participant contended that even though NATO is pursuing a comprehensive approach to PCM, its relationship with the UN is not that close, even as a declaration of cooperation has now been signed. Another participant, however, described NATO-UN relations in a very positive light. Exchanges take place on a daily basis and cooperation has never been an issue. As for *NATO-EU relations*, the picture is a direr one. Both organizations are in the process of redefining themselves and their specific roles. While the context is constantly evolving, the organizations are not moving as fast as they could or should. Even though the two institutions have 21 member states in common, cooperation on the political level is particularly difficult. On the operational level, however, it is working in a satisfactory way.

Apart from these specific obstacles, all relationships face **general challenges**, among them bureaucratic obstacles. Bureaucratic cultures are reluctant to change, making it hard for an organization to open up to cooperation with other institutions. National interests also hamper cooperation. In the same vein, the tension between the national and the multilateral is exemplified by some states demanding a stronger national profile than others when providing resources. Consensual decision-making is another reason why coordination among major actors is difficult to accomplish.

During the discussions, many suggestions were put forward as to **how cooperation could be enhanced**. One participant recommended the implementation of managerial instruments used in the business community. According to him, a new organizational model and real managers are needed to make international organizations work together more effectively. Other participants also called for more flexibility with regard to the organizational models in use. Institutions should be tailored according to what is needed on the ground. However, changing the workings of a long-standing institution is a task for generations, not one that can be accomplished within a short period of time. Generally, a more pragmatic approach was called for. The involved organizations should focus on practical issues, because that is where cooperation usually works best. Exchange of information ought to be improved, e.g. through internet platforms. It was questioned, though, whether the political and practical level could really be dissociated. Finally, it was argued that a common goal needs to be agreed on and pursued.

Civil – Military Relations in Afghanistan

By looking at military-civil relations in Afghanistan from a German respectively US-American perspective, this session aimed at identifying lessons learned.

In the **German case**, some civil actors (NGOs) are deliberately distancing themselves from the (German) PRTs, while others (governmental organizations, GOs) are increasing cooperation. The two components are interdependent, with security and civilian goals being intrinsically linked to each other. German PRTs seek to provide a security umbrella for civil actors who are considered to be the main agents of development activities. This is reflected by the four-pillar structure on which this approach is based and which brings different actors together (the military, the Foreign Office, the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Ministry of the Interior). From the **US-American perspective**, military and civil efforts are also intertwined. The Afghan people are at the center of counterinsurgency activities. The underlying philosophy is driven by the fact that civil activities account for up to 90% of the success of an operation.

In both cases, security was seen as the most important link between civil and military actors. NGOs and GOs rely on the military for security reasons. Leaving them without military presence on the ground would make them a significant target. One difference between German and US civil military relations in Afghanistan pointed out by one participant was the impact on the public debate. While German NGOs operating in the country actively contribute to the national debate on the purpose of German Armed Forces being in Afghanistan, US-American NGOs seem to identify more clearly with US-American efforts and goals and hence do not question them as much.

As in the previous session, more flexibility was called for with regard to the structure of the actors operating on the ground. The **local perspective** should be put into focus and actors and activities tailored accordingly. Cultural sensitivity is also needed to adequately heed the needs of the locals. Afghans need time to develop trust, which is why activities should be carried out within a long-term framework. In this context, local ownership is another key issue: A school built by the Afghans themselves will meet much wider acceptance than one built by external actors. Stressing the local perspective would also include stronger involvement of the Afghan government, as one participant pointed out.

The **integration of civil actors into military activities** should be carefully considered: Where do international organizations and NGOs fit into the mission? By exchanging people and personnel, civil-military cooperation could be improved and the parameters of cooperation be explored. One obstacle is posed by the large number of NGOs – is it possible to somehow coordinate them or is coexistence the only feasible way?

Finally, **Canada** was cited as an example of successfully bringing civil and military components together (through the 3 D approach: Defense, Diplomacy, Development). The German national debate, however, is more open and scepticism-prone. At its core there is the fundamental question as to the role of the German armed forces should play. This debate has intensified since the end of the Cold War and German reunification radically changed goals and operational requirements of the German military.

Nationbuilding or Neo-Colonialism?

When dealing with the question as to whether nation-building efforts represent in fact a form of neo-colonialism, it is necessary to discuss the **terminology** first. The confusion that exists with regard to the proper terminology points towards confusion with regard to the goals of the missions in Afghanistan and the Balkans, which our discussion focused on. Looking back in history, the post-WWII operation in Germany was labelled “occupation”, whereas in the Balkans

the term used is “peacekeeping”. With regard to the current engagement in Afghanistan, we speak of “stabilization” and/or “reconstruction efforts”. One participant also pointed out that it is necessary to make a distinction between the term “nation” (as in “nation-building”) and “state” (as in “state-building”). Relating to different concepts of what a “nation” is, the use of these terms may differ between the on either side of the Atlantic. In a US-American context, the terms “state-building” and “nation-building” may be used interchangeably. In a German context, a difference is made between “state-building” (referring to a process external actors may influence) and “nation-building” (a process without any external influence). One participant argued that in Afghanistan the U.S. is not pursuing state-building purposes at all but is there to fight terrorism only. Another participant, on the contrary, contended that in the case of the Balkans, nation-building is very much at the core of PCM and that the dichotomy of nation-building vs. neo-colonialism is a false one. According to him, nation-building is in fact a form of enlightened neo-colonialism respectively post-colonialism.

Judging whether PCM efforts ought to be labelled “nation-building” or rather “neo-colonialism” also depends on the **perspective**. Taking the case of Afghanistan, for example, the perception by the locals is an ambivalent one. On the one hand, people realize they rely on external actors for security reasons and because the Afghan government lacks legitimacy and capacity. On the other hand, the external actors are perceived rather negatively because they fail to reach out to the Afghan people and do not accomplish what they had promised.

Questions of terminology are directly related to questions of **implementation** of efforts. For example, does nation-building mean promotion of Western values and institutions? One participant argued that it does. Spreading Western values and integrating the target countries into Western institutions provides the basis of sustainable stability and security. Another participant added that if the West fails to spread its values, including its model of democracy, it fails to help establish the rule of law. However, for the promotion of Western institutions to be successful, these institutions need to present themselves as unified. The recent trend of ‘domestication’ of the foreign policies of NATO and EU member states, which one participant identified, has undermined nation-building efforts in the Balkans.

One key issue of nation-building is (good) **governance**. In the case of Afghanistan, this goal has not been accomplished. Rather than being governed by leaders who represent the cultural diversity of Afghanistan, the country is ruled by those with the monopoly over the use of force. The Afghan government does not have the capacity to govern all areas and take up all issues in need of regulation and has failed to build up a civil administration. In order to comply with the goal of good governance, a law-abiding government needs to be established in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the establishment of a government based on checks and balances was recommended, although such thing never existed before in Afghan history.

As for the role of external actors in improving governance structures, the **PRT concept** should be re-evaluated. PRTs – as all projects carried out by the international community – need to be in line with Afghan national programs. The introduction of more issue-specific reconstruction teams, such as ARTs (agricultural reconstruction teams) and GRTs (governmental reconstruction teams) was recommended as an alternative to the current PRTs.