

“Civil-Military Co-operation: The Case of Afghanistan”

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Introductory remark

Kinderberg International e.V. (KBI) is often accused of putting its projects directly under the protection of the military. This is neither true for the past nor the present nor for our plans for the future. Since 1999, KBI has been actively involved in civilian-military co-operation projects with the German Army and has been present in Afghanistan since 2002. There have been no cases whatsoever in which the army was asked to provide military protection for a KBI project location or a KBI member of staff.

Keeping a distance from the military and/or armed groups

In our experience the reality is that it is impossible to keep “a distance” from the military (be it regular national or international military forces) or armed groups in a failing/failed state or in most complex emergencies. In our daily project work there are, inevitably, contacts with various troops and armed groups. In this context, it is worth remembering that there is far less contact between our international members of staff and the military than there is on an everyday basis between our local members of staff or, particularly, our beneficiaries and regular armies or armed groups, respectively.

Given that the overall political situation in these environments has usually been unstable for many years, many people have lost members of their extended families as a result of war or have family members who serve in the military, work for the police or serve in paramilitary units, either voluntarily or because they have been forced to do so. Their desolate, inhumane situation prevents them from establishing any kind of distance at all from the military. To a population infiltrated by irregular military forces, the option of keeping one's distance from the military is the privilege of those living in orderly, stable, free democracies that are in a position to sue for their right to freedom, equality and respect of their human rights. The reality in failing or failed states is very different.

NGOs must face this new reality, the extent of escalating armed conflicts and their own ability to cope with these conflicts and develop context-related innovative and flexible approaches for their projects. These actual and incontrovertible contacts between civilian and military players need to be influenced proactively in order to make sure that, when a humanitarian mandate is carried out, the radius of action is not reduced to mere reaction but also includes proactive measures. This also includes effective approaches to co-operation between civilians and the military within the framework of peace support operations and peacekeeping operations.

Generally, when passing resolutions to participate in peace support operations, governments should not only define the number of soldiers and the permitted weaponry to be used, but should also exclude the direct implementation of civilian, humanitarian aid projects by the military. However, this cannot and must not be allowed to lead to a situation where, by restricting the military to their core competence and by preventing a blurring of lines, fewer relief and reconstruction projects are carried out in practice.

In what follows, the remarks concerning the matter of “civil-military co-operation” refer exclusively to co-operating with UN-mandated troops within the framework of peace support operations. Within this framework, KBI generally acknowledges that needs-oriented action by the international community for the benefit of human beings within the complex context of current conflicts and complex emergencies may require the use of military troops with a UN mandate. The claim that a “proximity” to the military in the form of a “civil-military co-operation” automatically negatively impacts on the general security conditions for civilian actors is not confirmed by the practical experience of KBI. However, the content, structure and execution of such co-operations must adhere to certain principles and rules. But before these can be considered in detail, we must first take a look at the overall context.

One of the scenarios for future military action within the framework of multinational forces includes peace support operations with a view to re-establishing state sovereignty in fragile states, which involve various tasks with the purpose of stabilising the overall situation. In this context, governments are increasingly advocating holistic approaches, such as the German “networked security approach” or “whole of government” approaches in general. In these approaches, the fields of diplomacy, defence, and development are seen as an interacting entity. This design is intended to promote a synergistic approach which takes the intrinsic challenges and demands of peacekeeping and stabilisation tasks into account. The same trend can be observed in the UN’s multidimensional peace-keeping operations which also employ an integrated approach.

For the military forces this trend means that within their peace support operations and stabilisation missions for the restitution of state sovereignty, not only do they have to end the armed conflict which prevailed at the start of their mission, they are also largely responsible for retaining general stability, so that the processes of peaceful reconstruction and rehabilitation can be initiated and supported. This involvement in the stabilisation of the country along with the fact that the maintenance as well as promotion of overall security is strongly influenced by developments in the civilian sector invariably brings the military into contact with civilian processes and players. The overstretched mantra of the “security-development nexus” is often used to describe this predicament. Within the framework of the “networked security approach”, the military tries to understand and influence developments in the civilian field by involving all relevant actors in the stabilisation process. However, as it cannot always be assumed that there are sufficient numbers of civilian actors in non-permissive environments, from the point of view of the military, peace support operations and stabilisation missions require that they are able to carry out “full spectrum operations” on their own.

This means that the demands of peace support operations and stabilisation missions are characterised by a range of tasks, which in the future can only be carried out by "full spectrum forces", which, if necessary, can carry out a whole range of tasks from combat operations to humanitarian support and the performance of police tasks. Although it remains doubtful to what extent this goal of "full spectrum operations" capabilities will ever be attained, in view of the current military approach adopted by NATO in Afghanistan, the US-led coalition in Iraq and the restructured US "Africa Command" (AFRICOM), it is beyond any doubt that military actors will institutionalise their advance into civilian sectors within the context of peace support operations and stabilisation missions above and beyond the framework of "civil-military co-operation" in the traditional meaning of the term.

So it is foreseeable that the range of tasks of the peace support operation and stabilisation forces, as laid down by the political sphere, will not change in the short to medium term. And, as a result, there is bound to be contact between civilian and military players in their respective operating environments. The question is, what form will this development take? In terms of leadership and decision-making, will this involvement in peace-keeping and stabilisation processes take the form of a model where the military tries to call all the shots, as the American Armed Forces have been doing? Or will a model with civilian-military leadership and inter-ministerial co-operation prevail, as in the German "Provincial Reconstruction Team" (PRT) model?

As the involvement of the military in civilian areas of post-conflict rehabilitation is thus no longer a matter of "if" but only of "how", KBI is of the opinion that, for instance, German NGOs should try to influence the form that the involvement of the military takes within the framework of the "networked security approach". German NGOs should proactively strive to influence the development of the civilian-military approach within the German armed forces in order to anchor and institutionalise the German approach with dual civilian-military leadership of the PRTs, as well as co-operation on equal terms between civilian and military actors, thereby creating a viable alternative to the approaches biased towards the military that are applied by other nations.

KBI's experience has shown that the most effective way to do so is by direct co-operation with the military. KBI has been gaining experience in civilian-military co-operation since 1999 and during this period has been given the opportunity of shaping the involvement of the military in the civilian sector within the framework of its own co-operation projects. By way of example, the Bundeswehr plays only an indirect and logistical role in our current co-operation projects in Afghanistan, which will be elaborated on below. At this point, it is crucial to highlight that a further trend necessitates pro-active civilian engagement in the role of the military in peace support operations and stabilisation missions.

At the risk of overusing the example of "military outsourcing" to the "Blackwaters" and "Halliburtons" of this world – even if the original Blackwater organisation has now re-branded itself "Xe" – the military's "will to outsource" as a result of "skills shortages" and institutional obstacles within the framework of "full spectrum operations" should

not be underestimated. Consequently, it is not a clearly regulated civilian-military co-operation that should be considered the worst case scenario by NGOs but rather a situation where what we might call "Whitewaters" (private contractors and consultancies in the relief and development sector) directly work for the military in post-conflict environments, taking on large-scale projects. These companies will not try to be neutral, impartial and independent, quite apart from the question of to what extent they will consider themselves accountable to their "customers". The use of so-called contractors by the American army within the context of the activities of their PRTs provides one example.

However, what does all this mean for the acceptance and security of NGOs? Like most organisations, KBI is of the opinion that the acceptance of NGOs among the population in project countries ultimately offers the best protection. KBI's experience in the field of civilian-military co-operation has shown that this acceptance is not undermined by co-operation with UN mandated troops. In the same way, we are unable to confirm the often quoted "blurring of lines" between military and civilian actors.

KBI's projects in Afghanistan envisage that, by prior agreement with the local population, civilian and military representatives of the PRTs are invited to joint "project Jirgas". It is at such joint appearances that the supposed "blurring of lines" which is often associated with a civilian-military co-operation can be cleared up. When civilian and military representatives make such a joint appearance at particular events, which in essence serve the purpose of communication and involving local interests and needs, the strict separation between civilian and military actors and, in particular, the difference in their roles and responsibilities are made transparent for the local population. It is here too that the definition and allocation of the tasks of all parties can take place in pursuit of the common goal of a peaceful future and where the protection and security of each individual as well as questions as to a secure environment for sustainable reconstruction are addressed.

Notwithstanding, co-operation between civilians and the military is not possible in every environment. In contrast to other parts of Afghanistan, in the North of the country the general environment has long been dominated by reconstruction and the ISAF troops were predominantly seen in the context of the efforts to rebuild the country. In contrast, in an environment where ISAF troops are seen primarily as combat troops and not as part of the stabilisation and reconstruction efforts, no such co-operation is possible, nor would KBI wish to engage in such co-operation.

So what are the typical characteristics of civilian-military co-operation in the form practised by KBI?

Basis principles of civilian-military co-operation:

1. Kinderberg International e.V. exclusively implements civilian-military co-operation projects which are based on the principle of humanity. Their prime goal must be to save lives and to reduce suffering.

2. Kinderberg International e.V. only carries out civilian-military co-operations which serve the purpose of building a bridge between the international actors involved in stabilisation and peacekeeping processes and the local actors and communities. This involves a joint, local and previously agreed public appearances in order to demonstrate to a wide section of the population that all actors are working together to create a platform for communication on which prejudices can be broken down, mandates clarified, criticism expressed and needs can be stated, assessed and allocated directly across the various sectors.

3. Kinderberg International e.V. consults representatives of the local population before initiating civilian-military co-operation projects and obtains their permission for the implementation of such projects. The planning and implementation of the projects is in the hands of the local population and the local authorities in association with Kinderberg International e.V. and its civilian project partners.

4. All civilian-military co-operation projects must be conducive to the aim of limiting an independent role of the military in the field of humanitarian aid and in the transition phase towards development co-operation. In the same way, civil military co-operation projects must also contribute to the goal of consolidating a clear demarcation between the civilian and military spectrum of tasks, and must help the military co-operation partner to concentrate on its core mission and core competencies.

Kinderberg International e.V. – the "humanitarian imperative" and humanitarian principles

Humanity and neutrality: All civilian-military co-operation projects are geared entirely towards the needs and wishes of the local population. Thus, in its co-operation projects the actions of Kinderberg International e.V. are based on humanity, i.e. helping people in need and reducing suffering. We abstain from any kind of direct participation in political, ethnic, religious or ideological controversies in the country of operation.

Kinderberg International e.V. does not align itself with any governmental aims, unless they are in accordance with humanitarian principles. The presence of any military partner requires legitimisation by a United Nations mandate.

Independence: Kinderberg International e.V. retains its conceptual and operational independence in civilian-military co-operations by making sure that KBI, the local population and KBI's civilian partners exercise complete control over the planning of the project, the relevant decision-making processes and direct project implementation.

Kinderberg International e.V. only implements civilian-military co-operation projects where the funding is provided by civilian sources. In the same way, Kinderberg International e.V. only carries out civilian-military co-operation projects in which the military makes its capacities available at no charge.

In civilian-military co-operations Kinderberg International e.V. must reserve the right to carry out independent project monitoring and project evaluations and to handle its own public relations activities.

Impartiality: Kinderberg International e.V. and/or its civilian co-operation partners are responsible for determining project locations as well as identifying beneficiaries of the projects. In addition, they guarantee that while the project is up and running there will be no discrimination and that access to (humanitarian) aid is only determined by the degree of need. The military co-operation partner can only play a supportive role in providing indirect and logistical help as well as medical advice. There are no conditions attached to the execution of projects or the access to help, nor is anything demanded or anticipated in return.

Duration of co-operation: Any decisions with regard to potential civilian-military co-operations are, as a matter of principle, taken by Kinderberg International e.V. for a fixed-term only and uniquely tailored to the prevailing situation. Hence, there are no automatism or long-term ties between the partners to the co-operation.

Transparency: Transparency in civilian-military co-operation projects is guaranteed by the clear distinction between the functions and tasks of the civilian and military actors. In addition, a clearly visible optical difference between civilian and military personnel and resources is assured.

These guidelines for civilian-military co-operation form the basis of a pilot project which started on December 15, 2006 in Northern Afghanistan (Kunduz, Takhar, and Badakshan) and is funded by the German Foreign Office. Despite a constantly changing security environment it has at all times been possible to ensure the adherence to these principles.

We would not be so bold as to claim that in our pilot project we have found the solution to problems inherent in the multifaceted issues of civilian-military co-operation in post-conflict situations or complex emergencies. Two and a half years into the project we are, however, in a position to present both our positive and our negative experiences and findings with the German Army and the local population as a basis for discussion in the ongoing intensive search for a practical and feasible form of civilian-military co-operation.