

ARMED NATION-BUILDERS:
BALKAN LEGACIES IN CIVIL-MILITARY COOPERATION

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On the one hand, you have to shoot and kill somebody: on the other hand you have to feed somebody. On the other hand, you have to build an economy, restructure the infrastructure, build a political system. And there's some poor lieutenant-colonel, colonel, brigadier-general, down there stuck in some province with all that saddled on to him, with NGOs and political wannabe's running around, with factions in a culture he doesn't understand....For the military, the implications are great.

-General Anthony Zinni, U.S. Marine Corps

[Canada's Strategic Advisory Team-Afghanistan] is explicit recognition that the character of armed conflict has undergone a major transformation since the end of the Cold War and that traditional concepts for the use of armed force are insufficient to establish a lasting peace....This mission clearly demonstrates that the CF can play a vital role in "winning the peace" as well as its primary mission of "winning the battle"....Maybe some people thought Canada had that typical hidden agenda....Well there were some people both in the foreign service and CIDA that again were suspicious. It's an odd thing, not a very conventional thing for military officers to do.

-Colonel Mike Capstick, OMM, CD, Canadian Forces

INTRODUCTION

Military interaction with civilian organizations, and civilian populations generally, has a long and checkered history. But it is now widely accepted that the task of rebuilding shattered states, and the very diverse facets of nation-building today, require close cooperation between the military and civilian actors who take part in international intervention missions, and between such actors in the populations of the troubled countries in which they operate. Thus, though there has been a widespread recognition of the military-civilian nexus in nation-building in recent years - particularly as traditional Cold War military doctrines and postures have given way to the complex tasks of assisting failed and fragile states in different regional settings - the modalities of the linkages and inter-dependencies between intervening armed forces and civilians have been evolving and are quite fluid in practice. In recent cases, such as the NATO mission in Afghanistan, or the American-British led coalition in

Iraq, issues surrounding the methodology of civil-military linkages, and the actual record of success recently achieved in such cases of international intervention - whether in post-conflict or still conflict-ridden environments - have generated considerable controversy. In any event, it is clear that the military forces of both NATO and non-NATO states participating in coalitions to stabilize and reconstruct highly disrupted states have had to go through a process of major conceptual and operational readjustment regarding how their armed forces should conduct themselves, and best contribute in sharing responsibilities for nation-building with civilian governmental and non-governmental actors.

The problems of civilian-military relations in a foreign intervention effort are magnified when there is little or no cessation of the violence which prompted the foreign intervention mission, and when the disrupted society experiences continued or new forms of civil war, or even when an open insurgency erupts against the intervening military and civilian personnel. Moreover, civilian governmental and non-governmental organizations have also faced difficult conceptual and operational issues regarding their cooperation with security forces in the violence-prone and volatile settings of post-Cold War interventions. For example, issues frequently arise to what extent humanitarian workers and civilian nation-builders should rely upon, or integrate their activities, with intervening military forces.

THE BALKAN EXPERIENCE

Foreign Intervention in the Balkans, particularly in the years following the November 1995 Dayton Agreement which ended the war in Bosnia, and after the 1999 NATO war against the Milosevic regime's control of Kosovo, had an important influence on the subsequent evolution of civil-military relations in nation-building missions. The

devastated circumstances in the severely war-torn and ethnically cleansed societies of Bosnia and Kosovo presented nation-building missions in these areas with new challenges, and spawned new mentalities and organizational innovations on the part of the NATO and associated non-NATO military forces taking part in those international interventions. Adaptation to nation-building activities and problems in the Balkans proved more challenging to some countries than others. For example, Canada, with considerable experience in peace-keeping and peace-enforcement, had a somewhat easier time in making a transition to the task of nation-building. And, of course, Canada entered the Balkan region early on in the post-Cold War period as part of the UNPROFOR mission in Croatia and Bosnia, which began some three years before the Dayton agreement. The United States, on the other hand, with a military organization typically concentrated on the core goal of “battlefield victory” on the basis of traditional forms of warfare, and smarting from its earlier defeat in Vietnam, underwent, and indeed is still undergoing, a quite difficult process of readjustment to the task of nation-building responsibilities represented by the Balkan experience during the 1990s (although the U.S. was not without a heritage of civil-military interaction from its own earlier occupations and semi-colonial episodes).

As of this writing in March 2007, the foreign and military presence in Bosnia - a country which is still deeply riven by ethnic divisions, albeit of a non-violent nature, has considerably diminished - with NATO SFOR military forces having turned over responsibility to a smaller EU force beginning in 2004. Meanwhile, Kosovo - which is still deeply polarized between its Albanian majority and the previously politically dominant Serbian minority, has experienced recent episodes of ethnic violence (2004, 2006-2007), and is on the cusp of an internationally brokered redefinition of its status - still requires the presence of a substantial and recently reinforced NATO military

forces. But the experience of the international missions both in Bosnia and Kosovo during the 1990s, and even up to, and parallel with the current NATO operation in Afghanistan, has significantly shaped thinking with respect to later and ongoing patterns of civil-military interaction outside the Balkans. Because there has already been considerable commentary on civil-military coordination in the Balkans, this discussion will only highlight the experiences as they relate to the focus of this conference.

Bosnia

One of the most significant features of the foreign intervention measures in Bosnia following the signing of the Dayton accord, i.e., the General Framework Agreement for Peace (GFAP) was the development of intra-military civil-military cooperation units, so-called CIMIC detachments, to assist in the implementation of GFAP's stabilization and reconstruction goals. As the first U.S. Commander of the NATO Implementation Force (IFOR, later reorganized as the Stabilization Force, SFOR) in Bosnia would later comment regarding the small CIMIC staff in Bosnia: "In November [1995] we had never heard of CIMIC, we had no idea what you did....Now [1998] we can't live without you." Theoretically, the CIMIC mission was to assist in civil-military operations in support of the military side of GFAP, promote cooperation with the civilian population and various agencies and national governments, leverage the capabilities of NGOs, IOs and national governments, help create a unified civilian effort in support of GFAP implementation, and assist governmental, international, and humanitarian public safety and health contingencies.

In practice, because of the circumstances characterizing Bosnia immediately after the war, CIMIC itself accomplished relatively little in overcoming the problems of

civilian-military cooperation. For example, IFOR was initially reluctant to deploy its forces to prevent inter-ethnic clashes, to apprehend war criminals, or to assist in the return of refugees to the country. IFOR's coordination with the large number of international and domestic NGOs active in Bosnia was also confused, and the IFOR philosophy was focused more on preparation for a quick exit from Bosnia, and therefore sought to avoid any close or independent military-NGO relationships. But IFOR did succeed in containing the violence in Bosnia and providing protection for humanitarian and civilian reconstruction activities. Moreover, individual commanders of IFOR's national military contingents typically directed their forces to assist, outside the CIMIC framework, various activities - ranging from health care to the construction of educational infrastructure, as well as governance and elections - which constituted the heart of the nation-building effort in the country. The context of the Bosnian case - a devastated country that had become a de facto protectorate of the international community and was more or less on a life support system - dictated the growing cooperation of foreign military and political personnel, albeit on a largely ad hoc and uneven basis throughout Bosnia. In short, IFOR's military forces were incrementally drawn into the nation-building project and therefore increasingly engaged in cooperation with civilian governmental and non-governmental personnel.

Gradually, as security imperatives in Bosnia eased, IFOR/SFOR began to become more involved in direct and routine assistance to civilian efforts such as repairing plants, and various construction projects. Thus, in late 1997, SFOR and its political masters realized that there was a considerable disparity between what the military had achieved in terms of effective security control, and the rather less effective record of their civilian counter-parts in transforming Bosnia's institutions and political culture. As a result, SFOR expanded its mission to provide greater assistance

and momentum to nation-building. In brief, it had become increasingly clear that enhanced military-civilian cooperation was necessary if Bosnia was to eventually get off its internationally designed life support system (indeed, that system, considerably fine-tuned, has just been expanded to the end of 2007). Generally speaking, the United States was rather uncomfortable with the expanded role of its military in nation-building tasks. Meanwhile, other nations, such as Canada, were only in the initial stages of institutionalizing CIMIC methods into their own militaries. But overall, SFOR recognized that it needed fewer combat troops in Bosnia, but required more engineers and municipal affairs personnel. It was also apparent to SFOR that international military forces in Bosnia needed to coordinate more effectively with non-governmental organizations. It is fair to say that, because Bosnia was NATO's first deployment, the mission there during the 1990s served primarily as a testing ground for civil-military cooperation, and more of a demonstration of what was required rather than an operational model.

Canadian CIMIC capacity grew slowly during 1997 to 1999, and derived initially from Canada's Balkan experience with UNPROFOR, IFOR and SFOR. Of course, some of the Canadian military's activities with respect to the civilian sector were simply the kind of altruistic or "good neighbour" type of nation-building that was conducted on an ad hoc basis by local commanders and soldiers. CIMIC units, on the other hand, represented a more formalized strategy to allow the Canadian mission in the Balkans to achieve its goals. During the Canadian SFOR experience this primarily involved coordinating Community Improvement Programs between DND and CIDA. The post-operation reports and studies based on interviews and anecdotal information regarding such Canadian experiences in Bosnia revealed that a number of problems were encountered, and some lessons were also learned. For example, at times, CIMIC units

were manipulated by local political leaders who derived personal benefit from the aid offered, and indeed at times the wrong kind of people, such as war criminals or local mafia groups, derived direct benefits from foreign assistance. CIMIC projects also proceeded at times without sufficient consultation with the local population, with the result that these efforts were often not as successful, or as fully appreciated, as they might otherwise have been. Additionally, a lack of continuity from one CIMIC rotation to another sometimes led to projects not being completed.

A number of lessons were learned from the CIMIC experience in Bosnia according to various accounts. For example, the need for more fine-tuning by CIMIC and improved cooperation with the local population; the need for “local ownership”; and the need for more sensitive and cooperation with NGOs (who were often highly critical of the military for reasons that have been much discussed). But all in all, CIMIC in Bosnia constituted an advance in institutional learning by Canadian forces and other SFOR military organizations with regard to nation-building.

Kosovo

Were the lessons learned in Bosnia by NATO carried forward to the next mission in Kosovo? On a general level - not just limited to the short Canadian experience in Operations Kinetic, Echo and Quadrant - civil-military cooperation in Kosovo after the 1999 NATO war with Serbia suffered initially from the same kind of organizational weaknesses and jurisdictional collisions that occurred in Bosnia. But KFOR devoted considerable resources to the so-called “hearts and minds” projects, and in assisting efforts by the United Nations and NGOs in reconstruction and governance-building. In Kosovo there were five multi-national brigades, each of which had its own CIMIC unit. And in Kosovo, as in Bosnia, Tactical Support Teams of 4-6 people did the bulk of the

CIMIC work. These teams visited villages, neighborhoods, and various projects on a repeated basis to foster trust and coordination among local people, IOs, NGO personnel, and the military. Such teams were really the precursors of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) used in Afghanistan over the last five years, and also the PRTs used by the coalition forces in Iraq. Thus, until the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, it was the NATO forces in IFOR, SFOR and KFOR, largely through CIMIC units, that provided insights and experience into modes of cooperation between the military and humanitarian-reconstruction efforts on the ground. The activities of the CIMIC units in Kosovo were coordinated in twelve centres in different areas of the protectorate. In practice, CIMIC operations in Kosovo revealed a number of problems (that also would be apparent in future missions). Most importantly, perhaps, was the fact that the quality and effectiveness of CIMIC units varied considerably depending on the diverse capabilities and resources of the different contributing states in the mission. Moreover, and related, was the absence of an overall CIMIC strategic plan, with the result that CIMIC policies were influenced considerably by the “national interest” of the different militaries in the multi-national mission. This often led to national favoritism with respect to military interactions with NGOs, and also the primacy of “national” interests (e.g., Germany’s goal of resettling Kosovo refugees from Germany). In a mission, if you do it one way in Pristina, another way in Prizren, and yet another way in Kosovska Mitrovica you get an uneven record of achievement, even when you are operating effectively. This uneven pattern of activity by an international force can create confusion or give mixed signals to the country in which you are conducting nation-building (today this might involve one way in Kandahar and another way in Kabul). This proliferation of national approaches may be an inevitable feature of multilateral international missions, but it would be preferable to minimize

the tendency to the extent possible. Of course, it depends on what you want to achieve. An appraisal of the operation in Kosovo by a Canadian officer suggested one approach in the region paid too little attention to national concerns:

The cooperation between the Canadian Forces, Canadian NGOs and CIDA has been more by accident than by design. The haphazard coordination of our national effort was evident in our scattering of Canadian assets across the province of Kosovo. A Queen's University occupational therapy clinic, for instance, was operating exclusively within the Italian sector... and would have been appreciated in the Canadian area. Although there were almost 100 Canadian officers in theatre, not one was employed in the Canadian sector. These are but a few examples of missed opportunities which, had they been employed in a more coordinated manner, would not only have raised our profile within our participating multilateral organizations, but with our own citizens as well....Another benefit of concentrating the components of a national effort in a given geographic area is that of security. Canadians should protect other Canadians; that is the best guarantee of the safety of citizens on peace support missions.

It is reasonable to look out for "national" concerns, but such an approach can also be excessively parochial, particularly when we are trying to advance the virtues of multiethnicity and multilateralism.

Of course, no matter what CIMIC units do, or to what degree we fine-tune the character of military-civilian interaction, international intervention missions can only make a scratch on the reality of repairing or renovating shattered states. For example, for all the good NATO forces and other forces have done in Bosnia over the last dozen years, nation-building in that country remains very much a work in progress. And CIMIC activities in Kosovo, which recently (2004-2007) have focused heavily on achieving inter-ethnic reconciliation and peaceful co-existence in ethnically mixed areas, have had rather disappointing results.

SOME GENERAL LESSONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The NATO interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo were ground-breaking exercises in terms of going beyond collective defense commitments, but they were not based on a set of pre-existing operational plans that provided a synchronized plan of political and

military cooperation. What is most significant about NATO engagement in the Balkans is that it provided a re-examination of the Alliance's internal procedures for crisis management, planning, and control in future nation-building missions that would require the accommodation of new modes of military-civilian interaction. Thus, operations in the Balkans had a transformational impact on planning for CIMIC activity. In some important areas, such as military-police activities, the coordination of Multilateral Specialized Units composed of Italian carabinieri and French gendarmes were used to assist SFOR and KFOR with riot control. CIMIC units were also developed to facilitate cooperation between deployed forces, local civilian activities, and civilian agencies.

The NATO Balkan experience underlined a good many issues and offered several lessons for the international community regarding civil-military relations. Many of these lessons are quite technical to military operations, but others are of more general utility for intervention missions, both pre-conflict and post-conflict, and even during conflict. There is already a substantial literature on such lessons (for example, one study by a Turkish author published by the Monterey Naval Post-Graduate School provides 44 lessons ranging from core issues of coordination and consultation to specific recommendations, such as the notion that CIMC officers should not carry guns while conducting operations. Of course that's easy to say in Monterey). But it seems to me that the overarching lesson is that one will always encounter contending or sometimes conflicting organizational cultures and goals of the military on the one side, and civilian organizations on the other. Thus, military personnel often see CIMIC involvement in nation-building as a "force multiplier" that facilitates the involvement of non-military and non-governmental officials and groups into the goal structure of the armed forces' stabilization and reconstruction mission. In some cases, and this is

an accusation most often leveled against the United States, the military behaves as if force protection constitutes the mission, rather than a means of achieving the goals of the intervention effort. Meanwhile, civilian organizations, which urgently need a secure environment to carry out their humanitarian and reconstruction tasks, view matters from another perspective. For example, NGOs do not want to be viewed as subordinate to the military's objectives, or having their activities jeopardized by military action. Conducting their tasks primarily through bargaining, risk-taking, and consensus-building, civilian organizations and NGOs typically object to the "militarization of aid." Generally speaking, military officers, in contrast, view compromise, bargaining, and the accommodation of opposing groups, in a decidedly less positive manner than many civilians (leaving aside of course all the military officers at this conference). The military, accustomed to a hierarchical command and control structure, and generally short timelines for mission objectives, is often critical regarding the style of NGOs, the competition among NGOs, and also NGO problems with personnel management and resources. NGOs are often viewed as jeopardizing the military security mission's protection and overall objectives, and also encouraging domestic spoilers who can delay the mission's exit from the post-conflict environment. As one military author has remarked: "The NGO world is a fractured, fractious zoo of weird and wonderful animals."

But if the roles and missions of humanitarian organizations are often at odds, they are not entirely incompatible. Thus, overcoming the mutual and reciprocal negative perceptions is a task facing each nation-building mission. Humanitarian activities must be independent, although in practice there will always be some blurring of the lines between the military-civilian goals and the NGO sector. Military and humanitarian organizations, as is frequently pointed out, operate differently in

terms of their funding and organization, and also have problems communicating with each other (from the conceptual organizational-cultural problems already mentioned, to simply the use of different definitions and acronyms). More coordination is needed between the military and the NGO sector, and refinement of models of information sharing continuously require attention.

Two additional issues have gained greater significance in the Afghanistan and Iraq missions, but in fact have already been evident in earlier missions, including in the Balkans: first, a competition for resources between the NGOs and the military, and second, inadequate training of personnel - both civilian and military - taking part in stabilization and reconstruction missions regarding civil-military relations.

In conclusion, the Balkan crisis of the 1990s stimulated concern with the interaction of the military and the civilian sectors, and substantially accelerated the institutionalization of CIMIC units within the NATO framework. Many of the same problems which occurred in the Southeastern European environment are still evident today in the missions in Afghanistan, as well as the nation-building challenge in Iraq. Moreover, with regard to Canadian military transformation, it is fair to say that there is a straight line between the nation-building approach, which developed in the Balkans, and the innovative and significant insertion of Canadian military personnel into the government of Afghanistan through the SAT-A Team. Related organizational initiatives, and new modes of civil-military interaction, undoubtedly lie ahead, as issues concerning nation-building, state failure, and humanitarian catastrophes in troubled environments are unlikely to disappear any time soon.