

## **Civil-Military Relationships in Multinational Forces: National and Organizational Cultural Issues**

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### **Research background**

This paper represents a package of work conducted in year-two of a three-year programme of work investigating the Organizational and Sociological Factors of Multinational Forces.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this three-year research programme is to “identify the national and organizational cultural factors likely to impinge on optimal coalition inter-working”. The work is being conducted for the UK MoD customer for the Corporate Research Programme (CRP) under Research Area 10 – Command: Teams, Technologies, and Operations.

### **Introduction**

It is anticipated that the non-military domain is likely to feature more prominently in future coalition operations, and that the military and a range of humanitarian actors, other government departments (OGDs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will increasingly interact at various levels. This is often referred to as CIMIC (Civil Military Co-operation). Hence, both the military and the humanitarian community have begun to develop best practice guidelines to help smooth the interactions between these different organizations [1,2,3]. It was therefore decided to further investigate the relationship between the military and Non-Military Organizations (NMOs).

There are various abbreviations and acronyms that are used to describe the diverse organizational actors within this area, and they can be broadly referred to as:

*Non-Military Organizations (NMO)* - a generic term referring to any organization that is not a military force. This term is generally used to encompass all the other types of organizations listed below.

*Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO)* – institutional non-state actors who vary considerably in their size, geographical scope, and topical coverage. They represent a diverse range of interests, such as human rights, environmental protection, and economic development [4]. Examples of such organizations include Oxfam, Christian Aid, and Save the Children Fund.

*Other Government Departments (OGD)* - state-owned governmental organizations or bodies, such as the Department for International Development (DFID).

*Private Voluntary Organizations (PVO)* - a term much akin to NGO and encompassing the same types of organizations. This is reflected in the fact that NGOs are expected to adhere to the Private Voluntary Organization Act (PVOA).

*International Organizations (IO)* - larger global organizations, such as the United Nations (UN) or The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

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<sup>1</sup> QinetiQ Centre for Human Sciences is the primary contractor for this programme of work.

## Method

A qualitative approach was adopted, based upon semi-structured interviews, with each interview lasting approximately 90 minutes. Participants were taken from an *opportunity* sample of established contacts, with the identification of future participants recommended by the initial interviewees. The interviewees were from a variety of NMOs, mainly from the humanitarian and aid agency domain. There were no explicit criteria for interviewee selection; however, early communications with individuals outlined the topic for investigation and, ideally but not exclusively, preferred self-selecting volunteers who felt that they could contribute to a discussion on the subject matter of NMOs, and who had previous interactions with the military in the context of multinational/coalition operations. Interviews were conducted at various establishments and organizations throughout the UK.

## Results

Results from the descriptive analysis of the interview tapes and field notes led to the identification of various themes and issues. These issues can be categorized under three main headings: (1) Organizational factors, (2) Sociological factors (including sociocultural and psychosocial), and (3) Technological factors (including socio-technology). This structure reflects the emerging themes and issues that arose from the research conducted in year one, investigating the organizational and sociological factors from a military perspective.

## Discussion

There are a plethora of discussion points and issues that are encompassed within the three factors highlighted above. However, a few of the more pertinent issues regarding the implications for military and NMO interactions are briefly discussed below.

### *Organizational factors*

For the military to interact with NMOs more effectively there is a fundamental requirement to better understand the underpinning ethos and values of these organizations. It should not be assumed that the military possess an explicit awareness and appreciation of NMO ethos and values. According to Slim, the mantras of humanitarianism are ‘humanity’, ‘neutrality’ and ‘impartiality’ [5]. These words were consistently used in the interviews, and it was no coincidence that different organizations consistently used the same terms. However, differences do exist among NMOs. Whereas most organizations are ‘neutral’, others may be ‘rights-based’. This illustrates the impartial and non-negotiable stance of NMOs and indicates that it would be difficult to establish an overarching civilian governing body for these NMOs for who the military could interact and communicate with, either pre-, during, and post-operation.

Variations in doctrine are also a contributing factor to sub-optimal interoperability. There are four main doctrinal issues that confound the CIMIC relationship: (1) differences exist between civil and military doctrine, (2) differences exist between NMO doctrines, (3) differences exist between the doctrines of contributing militaries in multinational operations, and (4) doctrinal differences exist between militaries in their procedures for interacting with NMOs. There are also regular shifts both within and between NGO policy-principle-practice. This produces internal problems within the various NGOs with their own development of doctrine.

The goal attainment process between the military and NMOs is generally disparate. The standard military approach is to have a high-level strategic end-state goal in mind and to work toward it, whereas the majority of NMOs start at ‘square one’ and then try and move forward.

A complaint of the NGO interviewees was that there appears to be no formal channel for such organizations to provide input into a pre-operational military scenario. The NGO actors interviewed felt that by providing some preparatory input, potential barriers and problems with interfacing could be anticipated, and thereby, reduced once in the theatre of operation.

The structures, frameworks and processes of NMOs often conflict with those of the various militaries. It was reported in both the NMO and military interviews that the inflexibility of centralized military nations can produce barriers and problems, particularly related to decision-making and tempo. Centralized organizations (military or civilian) are based on existential inequality that is reflected in large power-distance situations, and although NMOs may be structured in some form of hierarchy, they are to some degree de-centralized, thus, their power-distance relationship is much smaller. By their very nature NGOs are consensual. Authority is not always clearly defined, and neither is their formal structure. This may be reflected in their underpinning ethos and values.

An understanding of the ethos of an organization can also help to recognize the organizational culture that they possess. To the military, what may appear to be diametrically opposed structures, processes, and doctrine, may be easier to conceptualize if one takes the time to understand their organizational culture. It is worth noting that NMOs might be seen as sharing unity of effort, but not unity of command. The military should not expect an overarching convergence in attitudes, perceptions, and interactions among the different organizations. This makes overall civil co-ordination a problematic, and sometimes, frustrating task.

#### *Sociological factors*

Communication in the form of the types of language and terminology used by NMOs and the military is also a point for consideration. This also feeds into future doctrinal developments. NMOs have specific terms that serve specific aims. For example, the use of the words ‘co-operation’, ‘co-ordination’, and ‘collaboration’ should not be confused or used interchangeably when making the same point. Also, the NMOs have become increasingly aware of the military’s use of their own language, e.g. ‘humanitarian assistance’. The military needs to be aware and cautious in their use of language and terminology which has until now been the preserve of the NMO domain. Additionally, and a more serious point than the last, is the inappropriate use of media friendly jargon, such as ‘humanitarian war’ or ‘the humanitarian soldier’. Not only are these terms not recognized by NMOs, but they are also highly offensive to their community.

From a human nature perspective it was reported that the NGO actors and military personnel could work together. The environments in which these organizations are thrown together is likely to appeal to the core emotional feelings of any human, and this should be seen as a source of parity rather than differentiation. Trust is placed in individuals, not in organizations, therefore, the ability to develop the ‘soft skills’ for human interaction and relationship formation becomes more apparent. To assist this process it may be useful to increase the social interaction between the different military and non-military organizations during peacetime, e.g. through workshops, seminars, and symposia.

Personalities and face-to-face interactions are an important aspect of civil-military communication and interactional relationships. Therefore, integrated training courses for both civilian and military actors would help to break down stereotypes and perceptions, whilst simultaneously fostering social collaboration and ‘people skills’. Engagement through such a training course could help to accommodate the organizational cultural differences that exist, whilst improving mutual understanding, and enhancing trust.

*Technological factors*

Effective communication may be perceived as being a productive move toward better integration, interaction and interoperability; however, this issue is more complex than it appears. Again, the problem of neutrality/independence/impartiality surfaces within the debate. NGO interviewees suggested that information sharing, sharing communication systems, or possessing communication systems that promote interoperability could compromise neutrality. Even if they do not actually promote effective interoperability, the ‘perception’ of interoperability is enough to fracture the fragile relationships that the NMOs may have built with local nationals. Therefore, a dichotomy exists whereby it would be beneficial for the military and NMOs to communicate more effectively (e.g. be aware of each others movements), but conversely, the NMOs cannot afford to jeopardize their neutrality and independence by their proximity to the military. With reference to the current military operation in Iraq general guidance has been provided for UN personnel who interact with the military and other belligerent parties [6].

**Emerging issues for future consideration***The political dimension*

There is a perception among NMOs that there is an increasing politicization of the humanitarian domain. At a fundamental level the question of whether the military should be humanitarian has been posited [7]. It was noted that the strategic and political drivers within the overall topic of ‘humanitarianism’ can help or hinder, depending on the political agenda. This growing concern was seen as a barrier to effective co-operation between the military and the various NMOs. However, despite their apparent apolitical stance there was a perception among some military personnel previously interviewed in year-one that NGOs are more political, or politically aware, than they might suggest. NGOs are multi-million pound organizations, where competition for funding is sometimes less than altruistic. Therefore, the military’s interest in developing this area of operations may produce increased competition for national and international funding opportunities and resources.

This disparity in perceptions, attitudes, and opinions again highlights the invisible barrier that contributes to sub-optimal interaction and effectiveness. It reinforces the need for trust, respect and a belief in the motives and actions of each other’s organizations. Perception management, on both sides, would seem to be a key skill required in such environments. Despite this, the relationship between the military, the politicians, and the various NGOs is seen as an important one, but one that needs to be couched carefully, respectfully, and openly.

*Private military and security companies*

There was a boom in private military companies (PMCs) and private security companies (PSCs) during the 1990s after requests to help engage in complex humanitarian emergencies, possibly in response to activities in the Balkans. These organizations have become increasingly involved with the protection of humanitarian aid convoys, the protection of NGO actors, and ‘humanitarian operations’. The use of PMCs and PSCs by NGOs has become increasingly appealing because NGOs are increasingly being superficially perceived as an integral part of military operations. Therefore, it is difficult for NGOs not to be seen as combatants or as party to the conflict, thereby compromising their emphasis on human rights and advocacy, and their stand for ‘neutrality’ and ‘impartiality’. Thus, it may be prudent for

the military to consider the implications, roles, and interactions that they may have with PMCs and PSCs in the future, particularly when the military engages with NMOs and NGOs.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, interviews with various NGO actors were conducted, and highlighted the sometimes frustrating and complex interactions between the military and a host of non-state, non-military organizations. Politicization of the humanitarian domain is seen as a growing concern. Problems with interoperability include differences between military and NMO doctrine, structures, communication, and terminology. However, there were also positive aspects on which to build and promote better integration. This may be in the form of integrated training to (1) help understand the ethos and values of NMOs, and (2) dispel stereotypes, misconceptions, and dysfunctional perceptions and attitudes toward each other's organizations, roles, and capabilities.

## References

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