Summary of the Symposium "Comprehensive International Engagement in Conflicts – Civil-Military Interaction as Challenge and Opportunity"

Karin Kneissl

"Reality Check" in Crisis Management

One can be sceptical or confident about the future of peace-keeping. For Jean-Marie Guéhenno, the United Nations' Under-Secretary for Peace-keeping, the latter is the case. According to Guéhenno, the growing demand for Blue Helmets is a good sign that a number of conflicts are about to end. This is wishful thinking, for the nature of conflict has only shifted further from interstate warfare to ethnic and civil strife, ever since the end of World War II and, more decisively, in the aftermath of the various state-implosions since 1989. This trend has profoundly affected the drafting of mandates for peace-keeping operations as well as recruitment and training of peace-keepers. But the position of this UN official deserves further investigation.

One approach is to assess cases of a very specific aspect of peace-keeping, namely the growing field of civil-military interaction (CIMIC), from the Balkans to the Middle East, Afghanistan and Africa. In November 2006, the National Defence Academy, Vienna undertook the effort to invite civil and military experts in peace-keeping, in order to establish some sort of inventory of what has worked in CIMIC and where missions have failed, and if so, for what reasons.

Two and a half days of conflicting views, brainstorming and "reality-check" of existing policies by military experts, academics, diplomats and people from the field offered valuable insights. The objective of this meeting was, inter alia, to improve the concept and implementation of

civil-military interaction. Approaching the subject along the line of case studies and each of their specific contexts without losing the perspective for the larger set of institutional improvement, is a tightrope walk. Critical debriefings of this type are essential in order to improve missions and meet the mandates. However, too harsh stocktaking might bear the risk of coming to gloomy and discouraging conclusions. Decision-takers, mission commanders and first and foremost all the individuals involved in civil-military interaction have to be encouraged by positive outcomes, lest the entire process should suffer, due to lack of motivation. It may be underlined that both the lectures and the debates were of high analytical quality and frankness and thereby did well in this difficult balancing act.

This sort of conference was indeed timely in light of the establishment of the UN Peace-building Commission, launched on October 11, 2006 at the UN Headquarters in New York. This new body can be perceived, as an additional actor in CIMIC, for it will marshal resources at the disposal of the international community to advise and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict recovery, focusing attention on reconstruction, institution-building and sustainable development, in countries emerging from conflict. The Commission will bring together the UN's capacities and broad experience in conflict prevention, mediation and peace-keeping, thereby mending a hole in the United Nations institutional machinery, for no part of the United Nations system is currently addressing the challenge of helping countries in their transition from war to lasting peace. The Commission will also develop best practices on issues that require extensive collaboration among political, military, humanitarian and development actors. In his explanatory note on the Commission, the UN Secretary General stated furthermore.[1]

Therefore, this conference organised by the National Defence Academy in Vienna can be considered, as a realistic and solution-oriented debate forum where actors and aspects referred to by the Peace-building Commission were present. One important recurrent theme at the meeting was the risk of both military and political overstretching. The international

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[1] Addendum 2 of the report on the Peace-building Commission was transmitted by the UN-SG to the GA on April 19th, 2004.

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community "gets in easily, but tends to never get out" was an often-mentioned statement. The enormous contingents of various CIMIC operations in the Balkans illustrate this trend. Various armed forces are strained by foreign operations and tend to refuse new contributions. This holds true for Austria as a traditional contributor of Blue Helmets to various peace-keeping operations, which rejected participation in the European-led operation UNIFIL II in Lebanon, following the Israeli war in Lebanon in summer 2006. Recruiting soldiers of high professional and moral standard becomes ever more difficult. It is mostly developing countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and India and Jordan, who are ready to contribute troops to increasingly dangerous missions. The political overstretch is evident. Powerful capitals tend to concentrate their political will and resources on a few issues, the overarching one being, of course, the "war on terror". The UN is left to deal as best it can with many chronic or less visible conflicts, namely on the African continent, where the three largest UN-peace-keeping operations are conducted.

The UN might obtain soldiers for the missions mandated by the Security Council, but it often turns out to be much more problematic to get enough "enablers", as various speakers, in particular, with regard to the contingents of police forces in Afghanistan and in the Balkans pointed out. Those crucial specialized units enhance the ability of a force to move and operate. These include army engineers, field hospitals and nurses, heavy-lift aircraft and transport helicopters, as well as proper command and control and intelligence gathering. These capabilities are in short supply and are expensive. How to put together a CIMIC unit is first a question of having skilled personnel available for such a mission. The few countries that have them use them for their own goals, while others simply cannot afford them. Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the UN, tended to say that the UN is the only fire brigade that must go out and buy a fire engine before it can respond to an emergency. In some aspects, what the authors of the UN Charter planned in 1945 has never been implemented: the creation of armed forces and a chief of staff in the service of the United Nations. Instead, the concept of peace-keeping was created, in order to enable the UN to fulfil its task by teleological interpretation, but lacking the legal basis within the Charter. Re-

forms to change that lacuna have been tabled, but will most probably not be adopted in the near future. Every mission entails the complex negotiation process of a mandate within the Security Council and troop recruitment.

Currently 100,000 UN peacekeepers are deployed in 18 different missions.[2] The UN has seen a six-fold increase since 1998 in the number of soldiers and military observers. It would be unfair to them and those civil servants within the UN structures committed to enhance the UN's "responsibility to protect"[3] to simply quote failures and not take into account achievements. However, the assessment by General Klein, who headed, inter alia, the UN missions to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Liberia, is quite frustrating for a professional peacekeeper. According to Klein, 50% of all UN missions fail after five years.

No doubt, the UN is derided by much of the media as divided, corrupt and impotent. However, we have to bear in mind that this organisation is an intergovernmental one just like the OSCE, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and many other regional bodies stretching from South-East Asia to the African continent. Such an international organisation can only reflect the sum of the political will of its sovereign members. Even the rather un-diplomatic US Ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, had to admit the following, before he stepped down in December 2006: "While it is easy to blame the UN as an institution for some of the problems we confront today, we must recognize that ultimately it is member states that must take action and therefore bear the responsibility."[4]

A divided Security Council can paralyze the UN, but it is not always torn apart by its five veto-powers. One reason to hope for more cooperation is the fact that for today's big powers there are few direct conflicts

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[2] Among them 74.000 are military personnel, 26.000 comprise police and civilians. The largest mission is MONUC deployed in Congo since 1999. It encompasses 22.167 persons. It is followed by missions in Liberia and Southern Sudan.
[3] This mission-statement for the UN was coined by former UN-Secretary General Kofi Annan.
[4] The Economist: Mission Impossible? January 6th, 2007, p.19.

to deal with. The US no longer confronts the Soviet Union. Russia is newly assertive, but it focuses mainly on its own "near-abroad". China may threaten the US in its role as sole superpower, but the two countries' economies are interlocked and both need fruitful relations. Contemporary conflicts are of a different nature and there is little likelihood of a collision of empires. The disorder stems from conflicts that everybody says they want to solve disintegration of failed states, nuclear proliferation, terrorism – of which everyone has a different definition – and the troublesome Middle East. What the Central Intelligence Agency analyzed as the main security threat in its report "Global Trends 2015"[5] has only materialized further: state-implosion with everything it entails is the scenario the large majority of peace-keeping and peace-making missions have to deal with. Deploying troops to such an increasingly common scenario requires careful and comprehensive planning. New missions are now much more likely to be given a so-called robust mandate, i.e. to be authorized to use all "necessary means" under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, hence, to use aggressive military force. In missions in Congo and Haiti, the UN was even accused of using too much force.

In addition to those general legal and practical aspects, the conference touched upon a series of concrete aspects. The summary of the conference and debates may be presented in form of a "shopping list". This contains lessons learnt and lessons still to be learnt. But before addressing those conclusions, it might be useful to summarize some pertinent aspects raised during the meeting.

Selected Core Issues

The following selected core issues were raised repeatedly and should therefore be highlighted at this point: What are the threats the world has to face in today's international relations?

Threats with a focus on the unconventional category of threats, while not forgetting wars over gaining access to resources, climate change and its

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[5] CIA, Global Trends-2015, December 2nd, 2000.

consequences, stem from the ongoing disintegration of states. We may call it "Balkanization/Lebanization revisited", for the phenomenon of state-failure is not new to contemporary history. "Lebanization of the Balkans" was the title, scholars and commentators used to describe the breakdown of the then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in the early 1990s. Ironically, the quasi-dissolution of the tiny Middle Eastern state Lebanon had been described as a process of "Balkanization", during its 1975-1990 civil war. The terms Lebanization and Balkanization seem almost interchangeable; both refer to the disintegration of state structures, ending either in complete chaos of a "failed state" or in the emergence of new states as we have seen in the Balkans in recent years. So state-building, gradually replacing nation-building, is the main mission statement in current peace-keeping operations.

But the risk of creating too high expectations, which have to be scaled down later or eventually even abandoned, is high. It should be borne in mind that it took Europe approximately 400 years to move on with the Westphalian system based on territorial structures, the monopolization of violence in the hands of the state, military hierarchy and then add democracy and the rule of law. "In Afghanistan we want all that plus human rights and economic prosperity in two years," speaker Winrich Kuehne warned in his fairly frank statement. The risk of too great ambitions is also reflected in very short time limits for CIMIC, as various participants pointed out.

"A sensible operation needs much more time in order to yield sustainable results," explained General Klein by referring to his CIMIC experience both in West Africa and in the Balkans. He was seconded in his arguments by speaker Jon Brittain, drawing from his CIMIC experience as Provincial Reconstruction Team commander in Afghanistan, who added: "Assignments of 12 months for civil and military personnel make much more sense than those of six months." The reasoning behind it is that it simply takes time to adapt to the new environment. From the civilian side it may be added that "keeping to a strict calendar is not everything", as speaker Michael Pohly, Free University Berlin, pointed out by giving as an example the Petersberg Process 2001 which was imple-

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mented in due time with all items accomplished within set time limits. But did it really improve the situation in Afghanistan?

The international community faces the dangerous and widespread phenomenon of implosion of structures, loss of the legal monopoly on force with all its consequences. The complex insurgency, the "pansurgency" – which according to speaker Thomas Mockaitis is taking place, both in Iraq and Afghanistan – provokes new settings. The real question should be: "Who do we chase? Is it still the Al-Qaeda of 2001?" Defining the threat can be problematic in itself.

Along the lines of possible future threats, divergent definitions of war, of terrorism and above all of "war against terrorism" dominated the debate. Speaking about "one long war" as has been the traditional discourse in the United States and the United Kingdom, however, carries the risk of delegating too much authority to a government, which might abuse it. If the US wants to be a hegemon, it has to act accordingly, as Felix Schneider from the Austrian National Defence Academy pointed out, while discussing the need for more leadership in the current CIMIC debate.

Mockaitis rightly emphasised that the world has already seen every imaginable type of horror – from the Armenian genocide to the Holocaust, from Cambodia to Bosnia, Iraq and Darfur – and that in the context of possible threat scenarios the next step might be to imagine the unimaginable. This leads us to the complex issue of information, intelligence and intelligence gathering. The crucial question was put into simple and convincing terms by speaker Alfred Rolington, when he asked: "Do we really know what we already know?"

Our information society is marked by so-called open source information. Digital communication, criminal and terrorist organisations communicating via their own websites and an easy access to information has brought about the (probably deplorable) fact that the "information authority" is gone, according to Rolington. The CEO of the Jane's publishing group convincingly made his case on the constraints for intelligence in the 21st century by presenting the case study Jane's Information

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Group did in order to find out what could be concluded from 656 articles published on Al-Qaeda by Jane's before 9/11.[6] Everything was actually there. It was published and anyone interested could read facts that a group of young men took aviation courses, who wanted to learn how to handle an aircraft but were evidently not interested in practicing how to land it. The fact that they, i.e. the planning team of 9/11, were training as commercial pilots did not mean that they were planning to open up a commercial airline, one might conclude with a tone of tragic irony.

The key message of speaker Rolington may be quoted as follows: "We were surprised how much we did know and yet didn't". This acknowledgement provoked a shift in strategy at Jane's. It led to changing the teams of both experts and generalists, bringing new ideas to the surface. Various complementary patterns such as the so-called mosaic approach and a much more anticipatory scenario planning are needed in addition to the conventional linear intelligence of collecting and validating facts. According to Rolington it is about linking data to produce immediate analyses of expected trends: "In a global electronic environment, pattern recognition has become as important as linear recognition." Apart from a far-sighted approach in terms of comprehensive intelligence gathering, it became evident in the course of that keynote address that the West is lagging behind on a pretty banal technical level. Rolington gave the example of websites produced by the Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah before 9/11. Hezbollah was running a sophisticated website in English in the mid-1990s, while there was nothing comparable by Western providers in Arabic. The communication strategy of Islamist groupings both in the region and in Europe has by far outdated the traditional public diplomacy of Western governments, one might add. Those first gloomy assessments by the keynote speakers lead us to the question of how all of that affects peace-keeping and peace-making operations?

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[6] Among them the July 2001 issue "cutting Al-Qaeda down to size".

Lessons Learned from the Balkans to East Timor and Afghanistan

The crucial momentum of time

As mentioned above, CIMIC needs much more time in order to yield sustainable results. This was reconfirmed on various occasions throughout the conference. Time-pressure is often exerted on the mission, for domestic political reasons. Short time-frames are apparently needed for the respective public opinion of the country deploying personnel for CIMIC missions. It would be wise to correct expectations with regard to "mission accomplished" as General Klein put it. There simply is no quick fix, neither in Liberia nor in Afghanistan where calendars were met, though compliance with "deadlines" did not substantially improve the overall performance.

In that context it was also mentioned that a better handling of rotations in those risky missions is indispensable for success. This implies real cooperation with (too) many actors in the field and in the capitals. There is a need for more institutionalized co-ordination from the moment of planning on; a liaison officer is not enough, as speaker Diego Osorio mentioned. But where does inter-agency co-ordination really function?

Who does what?

A clear division of tasks guarantees a more efficient performance. The tendency to transform military personnel into a service-section covering tasks from handling traffic to various other non-military tasks did not yield the envisaged results. From the military side, the consistent claim, as General Klein put it, was: "Never use soldiers as police officers or for any other purpose than their original training and mission." The reason is clear, as the police have their own professional culture. A soldier's duty is to destroy targets, while a police officer has to arrest persons suspected of law violations.

Furthermore, courses of action should be driven by needs rather than by agreements (Brittain). Pragmatism is the name of the game and the dynamics in the field have to be taken duly into account. However, during the debate it also became clear that there is a need for agreed assessment. As a point of departure one must determine the priority of the mission at hand. Is it economic development, which is a purely civilian objective or is the main goal the establishment of security?

The current deterioration in Afghanistan stems from blurring the Rules of Engagement. Since the beginning of the mission, according to speaker Fred Tanner, the participating contingents had to face at least three different versions of Rules of Engagement. The demand for more coherence and predictability was voiced at various instances. Streamlining should be much more than just another catchword in UN language usage. It has to be implemented from the very beginning of the mission to avoid confusion, which is counterproductive for the troops and the population to be protected. Finally, also the question of cost-effectiveness will put pressure on the political and military decision-makers. It takes a lot of time, money and equipment to do simple things. Out of 100 persons, 80 protect 20 who are in charge of CIMIC tasks, according to speaker Christ Klep. This calculation leaves little to hope for in the near future, given the tight resources both in the military and in the civilian sector.

"The year 2007 will be a decisive year for peace-keeping operations. The alarm bells are ringing on all fronts," warned speaker Kuehne, referring to failures of former success stories, such as East Timor. Kuehne went even further in his rather pessimistic evaluation, stating, "We are not even successful in small countries, such as Haiti and Kosovo, where we have lots of resources at our disposal!" Another Cassandra who makes a case? Apart from those pessimistic conclusions, another very important aspect was thoroughly debated by the participants: the divergence of perceptions by the military and by civilians.

Cultural approach

How do soldiers and how do civilians perceive a conflict? For the latter – be he/she a diplomat, a politician or a journalist – it is all about foreign policy and diplomacy. However, for the military person diplomacy is something far away in a distant capital. For immediate challenges often soldiers are needed, not diplomats as Klep pointed out. The divergence in their approaches to a conflict at hand can run deep. Traditionally, ministries of foreign affairs are policy oriented, whereas defence ministries tend to focus on what can be achieved with the means available and with the lowest possible risk. In addition to those two types of actors, we have to take into account the chaos in the NGO world, where coordination seems hardly possible. Furthermore, some actors favour secrecy, which clashes with the need for transparency and openness of all involved. It is indispensable that all actors share the same awareness of a situation, for they all contribute to solving it (Brittain).

Another area of diverging perceptions is that of war crime suits. Klein pointed this out by saying: "From the military side the issue is: can you arrest all the war-criminals? Not really; it is a major enterprise to track them down. From the civilian side, it is all about ensuring national reconciliation." In addition, here interests, goals and methods used by the military and by civilians can differ profoundly.

From the military side there is a limit to improved cultural awareness, often highlighted by NGOs involved in CIMIC. "You simply cannot train away clan structures," as Kuehne put it. An already complex situation can be even further complicated, once the people who had left the country are brought back, even though a lot of hope is usually placed on the cultural and entrepreneurial role of the expatriates. But the question remains: Whose value system will prevail – that of the residents or that of the returnees? It is the residents who dominate the (traditional) value system, as Michael Daxner demonstrated by giving various examples from Afghanistan. "The Diaspora should make sure that remittances flow into their country of origin, but should not interfere with politics and administration. They only complicate things", as Daxner and others view it.

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An essential aspect was raised in the debate with an Afghan politician present at the conference. How does the population accept CIMIC? The Afghani Member of Parliament Ms. Mehrzad described the interaction between the troops and the population as follows: "In the beginning there was a favourable attitude of the population. But when you have several attacks on wedding parties, people turn angry. The foreigners do not let us live our culture. The foreigners need Afghan advisors." It is a simple albeit often neglected issue, and not only in Afghanistan. But there the price to be paid by NATO troops might be higher than was the case in the Balkans.

Lessons still to be learnt

1) It, therefore, has to be repeated that *more focus on local ownership* and sustainability is essential, from the early start of an operation. "Once we get out, how will it work" – this is the fundamental question to be dealt with on all levels.

2) There is a *real risk of overstretching*. "We get in easily, but don't get out. If you go in, go big or stay out". Tanner pleaded for a more realistic assessment with regard to troops needed.

3) *Over-ambitious goals*: We, the West, are trying to get everything at once: A Westphalian State plus Democracy plus Human Rights plus the Rule of Law. It took the West approx. 400 years to get there. We want to achieve that in two years in Afghanistan.

4) An essential question is: *What kind of state do we wish to recon-struct?* Due regard has to be paid to traditional types of governance and to customary law, instead of importing law and administration.

How can we improve the results of civil-military interaction?

The overall objective has to be to ensure stability and to protect. This can only be achieved if the following goals are continuously taken into account.

1. *Creating Jobs*: This is not only about education. The youth from Liberia to Afghanistan needs economic perspectives; otherwise they will join the radicals.

2. *Managing diversity*: Is there anything like one coherent civil society? There are hundreds. This has to be clear to all those involved in a mission of reconstruction.

3. *More honesty in analyses is crucial* in order to learn from failures and improve:Stop writing too positive reports! There is urgency, both within the military and the civilian sector, to be sincere and use clear language concerning the situation. This includes the issues of how to resolve it and of domestic policy: What price does a society have to pay for it? The latter affects future political actors.

4. *Explain the mission to the parliamentarians*, so that they are able to explain it to their respective electorate.

5. An interesting model to improve CIMIC is the establishment of *multi-ethnic/national peace-keeping contingents*, such as in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Such multi-ethnic units can serve as positive example for wherever there are similar problems.
   The Austrian example of mixed PKO contingents in terms of joint training was presented during the excursion to the training centre in Götzendorf. The integrated mission approach implies that common success necessitates both civilian and military components (Claus Amon/Götzendorf).

6. Finally, *drafting "real" and robust mandates is key to success.* During the process of drafting a mandate, the agenda of the mission has to be addressed and the needs of the people to be protected have to be taken into account. In Afghanistan, the UN and others went for the political backbone, but did not deliver to the

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people. In Lebanon, UNSC Resolution 1701 (2006) for UNIFIL II is not a path to solution.

7. Another step towards improvement is: *Pay better and fair salaries,* for instance, to members of the police forces, to avoid an increase in corruption.

8. *Create better incentives for volunteers for PRTs in Afghanistan.* There are great differences between the mission in Kosovo and the mission in Afghanistan. Fewer police officers volunteer for the distant and much more dangerous mission in Afghanistan than for the one in Kosovo, which is easily reachable and allows for regular contacts with the families back home.

In conclusion, one might say: We are "condemned to cooperation" (Feichtinger). Civil and military partners have to manage the complex conflicts our world faces, together. This symposium has offered a valuable opportunity to exchange views in a frank and critical way. Once we call "a cat a cat", we can start amending deficiencies and think of new solutions.