Odd Couples: The DoD and NGOs

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From the time of the conflict in Vietnam until the end of the Cold War, NGOs and the military rarely thought of themselves as having anything in common. In fact, people like ourselves—a career naval officer and a career pacifist—almost never met.

Then, the collapse of communism in Eurasia and the terrorist attacks in 2001 changed many seeming geopolitical certainties. Many in the NGO world actually found themselves supporting military and other interventions in the world's hotspots of the 1990s and early 2000s. Meanwhile, the military found itself doing things it preferred not to, from disaster relief to state building. Perhaps most importantly of all, we realized that we were all victims of that terrible Tuesday morning in 2001.

Groups of NGO and military leaders that have been meeting over the last five years have discovered that we have far more areas of common ground than we used to think. It has not always been easy. Huge cultural chasms separate us. We speak different languages and practically needed simultaneous translators at first.

From the Three Block War to 3000.05

Before discussing the concrete advances our partnership has achieved, it is important to show how and why both groups are in the midst of what is still a work in progress. We will start with the military, the focus of this *PS* symposium.

The shift in the U.S. military may seem surprising to some readers, given the widespread criticism of the George W. Bush administration's policies in academic circles. But important changes have been endorsed at the highest level at DoD and have the support of both civilian policy makers and serving officers. The changes also antedate 9/11. That something was afoot with the military became clear late in the 1990s when then Marine Commandant General Charles Krulak argued that the United States had to expect to deploy troops who would be doing three things—fighting, peacekeeping, and offering humanitarian relief—often in the same place and at the same time.

Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, military and other policy makers in the security community realized both that they were going to be involved in operations other than traditional warfare, and that they did not know very much about how to do so.[1] A key initiative came with the Defense Science Board's "summer study" in 2004, much of which was very familiar to someone from the NGO community. The board used what is now a fairly standard typology of the stages of a conflict in both of our worlds.

Phase 0. Conflict prevention
Phase 1–3. Pre-combat and combat operations
Phase 4. Post-conflict stabilization
Phase 5. Reconstruction (or reconciliation in NGO speak)

What was new was the Board's emphasis on Phases 4 and 5. The strategic work continued, culminating in the publication of Directive 3000.05 in late 2005. In simplest terms, the Directive stated that military support to Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction operations was to be as important as fighting the war itself.

At about the same time, President Bush extended the logic of 3000.05 to the civilian side of the United States government through NSPD 44 (National Security Presidential Directive). Most notably, it charged S/CRS (State/Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization) as the lead civilian office for this work. S/CRS is housed at the Department of State, but it was established to bring the military officers together with those from all of the relevant civilian departments and agencies.

This line of thinking was reinforced by the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) issued in early 2006. Though it makes almost no mention of a military role in conflict prevention and resolution, its emphasis on "long wars" reflect Krulak's concerns and imply that the military is going to be doing a lot more than just fighting battles. That being said, the QDR was inspired in large part by the realization that "Phase 0" operations would be a major part of the military's work with potential allies and adversaries in conflict-prone zones.

None of this new thinking was developed in a vacuum. Obviously, the difficulties faced by American and other forces in Afghanistan and Iraq were influential. But so were other events that started as natural rather than human disasters. The most important was the tsunami that devastated much of Asia in the days after Christmas 2004. The Navy deployed the carrier Abraham Lincoln and the hospital ship Mercy to Indonesia, which had been involved in a bloody ethnic conflict for more than a generation. Two things became clear very quickly. First, the military can work with NGOs when they share a common purpose. After all, who is in favor of a tsunami? Second, the U.S. military has capacities that no other organization in the world can match. The Lincoln was able to

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generate as much as 100,000 gallons of drinkable water a day. Its crew of 5,000–6,000 approaches the number of foreign service officers at the State Department

The corporate sector has also become involved. Microsoft, for instance, has an office on humanitarian relief which is run by a veteran aid worker from the World Health Organization. In August 2006, a group of military and civilian relief workers who had worked together since the 1990s organized the Strong Angel III demonstration in which they examined responses to a complex humanitarian emergency—in this case a simultaneous (and simulated) terrorist attack and outbreak of pandemic flu in San Diego.

Even more than any doctrinal statement or interagency collaboration, the Defense Department has been driven by new concerns unforeseen before 9/11. The military challenges are so daunting because they are so outside the parameters of what the military did before the end of the Cold War.

Put simply, DoD leaders have realized that to achieve the social, political, and economic goals to which they are committed they *must* effectively engage with civil-military partners (including NGOs, aid organizations, and commercial firms) outside of the DoD enterprise. Such engagement is not a nice-to-have adjunct to the kinetic phases of war; it must be a core part of national and military strategy.

This also requires the ability to share unclassified information effectively across the boundaries of military networks. This means we all will communicate using similar information and communications technologies (ICT), whatever our home organizations. But ICT alone will not be enough. What policies should govern how much information we can share with each other, especially when some of it may be based on classified sources? Moreover, underlying (sometimes called "Hastily Formed") networks should be independent of local unreliable power, and be supported by lift to put them in place quickly.

These capabilities are urgently needed now, from Iraq to Haiti to the southern Philippines, and they will be needed in the future for other stabilization and reconstruction, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief missions. They also can be used to build the capacity of partner nations to avoid conflicts to begin with. Many of these issues can become opportunities as the structure of the new Africa Command (AFRICOM) is put in place, since it is assumed that civilians in government and in NGOs will have to be involved if it is going to succeed.

The NGOs

Change in the NGO community is far less uniform and often far less enthusiastic. This should hardly be surprising, if for no other reason than that NGOs tend to be anything but hierarchically organized and many intentionally try to avoid military-like discipline.

NGOs have been less consistent because they are far more varied than the military. There are dozens of types of NGOs, including those that focus on human rights, humanitarian relief, development, conflict resolution, the environment, and more. They also vary tremendously in size. Some have no more than a handful of employees; others, such as World Vision, have annual budgets well in excess of $1 billion. Some operate only in one or two locations; others have a presence just about everywhere.

We will limit our attention to two kinds of NGOs, U.S.-based humanitarian and conflict resolution NGOs that have significant operations in other countries. We do so because their reaction to cooperation with the military has been rather different, and it tells us much about the challenges both sets of "odd couples" face.

Humanitarian groups tend to work "on the ground" even when a conflict is at its height. Organizations like Doctors Without Borders have built their reputation for their courageous work under the most dangerous of circumstances. Many are reluctant to work closely with the military. Doing so can put them in danger. What's more, many of the senior leaders of their peak association, Interaction, think that working directly with the military compromises their neutrality. This has been a particularly difficult issue in Iraq and Afghanistan where many NGOs have decided to leave or not even start projects.

Conflict resolution NGOs are different. They are also smaller. More than 150 groups belong to Interaction; the Alliance for Peace Building consists of about 50. Search for Common Ground is one of its largest members, but with a budget of under $20 million it is dwarfed by many of the members of Interaction.

That being said, conflict resolution groups have been more open to working with the military than their humanitarian counterparts because they see neutrality in different terms. Their operating assumption is that NGOs have to work actively with all of the parties to a dispute if any real progress is going to be made toward settling it. And, in most of the conflict-wracked regions of the world, the military is one of those parties. The NGOs have to work with the military at all levels, from top decision makers down to the barracks.

9/11 was a shock for NGOs as well, especially for those based in Washington, D.C. and New York. The adjustment was difficult. A number of leaders in the field talked privately and wrote openly about how their organizations should respond to the terrorist attacks. Some, but by no means all, came to the conclusion that they could *not* theorize a non-violent response to 9/11. Even those who opposed the war in Afghanistan understood the need to hold al-Qaeda responsible.

A number of NGOs or individuals therein saw the necessity of working with the military. The predecessor of the Alliance for Peace Building helped the United States Military Academy develop a course—Winning the Peace—for cadets majoring in the social sciences. Other NGOs were invited to places like the Peace Keeping and Stabilization Operations Institute at the Army War College. Some worked directly with the Joint Forces Command. Two or three people even obtained security clearances.

Like the humanitarian groups, some conflict resolution NGOs worried that they would be tainted or have their integrity compromised through close cooperation with the military. But DoD officials reiterated that they did not need or want NGO help in Phases 1–3. They also understood from the beginning that it would be easier for the NGOs and the DoD to work together in Washington, D.C. than in the field, where having emails from .mil addresses on one's laptop could be a death sentence if it were stolen.

Iraq slowed everything down. Almost no one in the NGO world supported the war. Few of the conflict resolution NGOs were willing to work in Iraq; none would take money from the U.S. government. But as the conflict dragged on and on, the NGOs had to admit that, like the government, they lacked good ideas for stabilizing the situation in a way that would allow Iraqis to rebuild their society and American troops to leave.

What Has Been Done

Do not expect earth-shattering surprises here. We have come a long way in five years. However, as the military might say, the deliverables have been limited.

Nonetheless, although it may not be concrete, the most important development of the deliverables is that we are talking. One event at a conference we attended suggests how important

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"mere" talking can be. The Highlands Forum organized a session on NGO/DoD cooperation that was held at a small hotel near Gettysburg. We were taken around the battlefield by James McPherson, the leading historian of the Civil War and the Battle of Gettysburg. McPherson later led a group of senior DoD and NGO leaders in a discussion of the parallels between what was unfolding in Iraq and what happened in the American South after the Civil War. To use a cliché, by the end of the evening both groups realized that we are in the same boat, a boat we can only keep afloat by working together.

On a very different front, we are looking to expand the education and training epitomized by the Winning the Peace course at West Point. The Marines, the Joint Forces Command, and others have taken steps to include conflict resolution in preparing troops who might be deployed to combat zones. It's just as important that people in the NGO community learn what the military is all about. As one of Wells' colleagues said to Hauss one day, "you know, we in the military are your best market, because once you've seen combat, you never want to do it again."

The army has a Peace Keeping and Stabilization Operations unit at the Army War College that is spearheading an effort to bring NGOs, the military, civilian USG officials, and security contractors together for joint education and training before those groups are deployed. The Navy Postgraduate School in Monterey, California has launched a post-conflict center that offers serving officers a master's degree in the field. It has also recently secured funding from the Compton Foundation, a major donor to NGOs.

Finally, we are working to bring our communities closer together in policy making. Since the late 1990s, the U.S. government has made a major commitment to enhancing cooperation in these areas among U.S. government agencies. Those discussions now include NGOs, whose outsider perspective lends information and insights innovative to those within the U.S. government.

Most NGOs find none of this collaboration easy, and not just for ideological reasons. It's a problem of sheer numbers. In the conflict resolution NGO community, there may be only 20 people who are comfortable working with DoD officials on a regular basis. That is, of course, more than three orders of magnitude smaller than the number of people who work in the Pentagon alone.

Bowling Together

The bottom line is that we encourage our colleagues in the worlds of the NGOs and DoD to keep searching for ways to work together that reflect one of the most important new concepts introduced into political science in our professional lifetimes.

In *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam (2000) addresses civic engagement and social capital in the United States. In a portion of the book that has not gotten enough attention, Putnam stresses the need for "bridging" social capital by coming together across ideological or cultural divides. We don't have to agree, but we have to talk. We have to build trust. We have to at least come close to laughing when we disagree.

That is what we do.

Notes

*The positions presented in this article do not represent either those of the Defense Department or Search for Common Ground.

1. Some would argue that DoD has had experience with these sorts of operations in the Balkans, in Kurdistan, and in other operations going back as far as the Philippine-American War. However, many lessons needed to be relearned.

Reference

Putnam, Robert. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

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