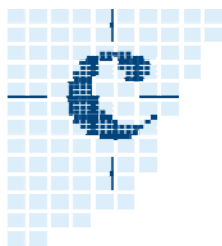




Taking the comprehensive approach beyond the Afghanistan experience

Lessons learned from Exercise Common Effort

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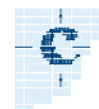


Introduction

In mid-2010, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in particular the Peacebuilding and Stabilization Unit (PSU; or, in its Dutch form, EFV) and the Directorate on Security Policy (DVB) embarked on an innovative and collaborative project with the 1st German Netherlands Corps (1GNC) and the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs focusing on what is often called the 'integrated approach'. The name of this project, Common Effort, refers to a concept of training that is geared towards improving cooperation between military and civilian partners in a peacekeeping, peace support or crisis management context. The idea was originated by 1GNC, but it was further jointly designed, managed and executed by 1GNC and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Germany and the Netherlands. The project started with an inception meeting in November 2010, and this was followed by an intensive 10-month period of close collaboration, during which several preparatory conferences and working meetings were organized. The outcomes of these preparatory meetings were used when the envisaged scenario was actually put into practice in the Common Effort exercise in Münster, 18–23 September 2011. Together, the preparatory meetings and the exercise in Münster form the overall project Common Effort.¹

The importance of this exercise and its underpinning concept is clear, given the fact that the practice of crisis management increasingly involves large numbers of diverse civilian and military actors working side by side. As NATO states in its 2010 Strategic Concept: "[T]o be effective across the crisis management spectrum, we will enhance integrated civilian-military planning throughout the crisis spectrum, (...) identify and train civilian specialists from member states (...) able to work alongside our military personnel and civilian specialists from partner countries and institutions."

1 This section draws on *How to make the comprehensive approach work: Preparation at home is key to effective crisis management in the field*, Luc van de Goor and Claudia Major, CRU Policy Brief No. 21, March 2012, The Hague, Clingendael Institute.



Important as the concept² is, there are also some challenges inherent in its genesis. Its roots lie in the changes that have taken place in international crisis management over the past few decades. First, the spectrum of tasks has expanded from simply containing military escalation to dealing with the security, social, political and economic dimensions of a crisis, with the aim of achieving a comprehensive and sustainable conflict transformation. Second, the timelines of crisis management have expanded, to cover up to several decades – from hot stabilization to post-conflict peacebuilding. Third, partly owing to the expanded range of tasks, the number of actors has increased. All in all, the complexity of crisis management has increased to the extent that it has become 'complexity management'. The complexity relates to a large degree to the need to coordinate so many actors and instruments in a multifaceted political environment. Cooperation between civilian and military players (such as the armed forces of different countries or organizations) has to be coordinated as much as that between the various civilian actors (such as humanitarian aid workers and diplomats).

Although the concept has been evolving over the past few decades,³ its operationalization really took off in Iraq and, more particularly, in Afghanistan. The latter mission context also formed an important starting point for the design of Common Effort. However, despite the fact that valuable lessons were learned in Afghanistan for the comprehensive approach as a concept, the most important lesson to be learned from Common Effort is perhaps that copying the model and its instruments as used in Afghanistan, and transferring them to other contexts, has serious limitations. The main reason for these limitations may lie in the specificity of the mission context in Afghanistan. Here, the focus of the comprehensive approach was on addressing a specific set of challenges: rebuilding the state while fighting terrorist cells and insurgents, as well as addressing the issue of narcotics in a setting where neighbouring countries/other countries in the region are very actively involved. This setting is unlikely to occur in a similar way elsewhere, either in sub-Saharan Africa or in the Middle East and North Africa region. In addition, there is another element to be taken into account: the broadly acknowledged need to work more closely together, in the absence of a general and jointly accepted conceptual model. This may also have been a major reason why, for so many involved in the exercise, the Afghanistan experience played such an important role as a starting point for Common Effort. Although this is understandable, the ability to adapt to new settings is essential, in order to avoid the risks inherent in preparing for the next mission on the basis of the previous one.

The challenge for the future, including for future re-runs of Common Effort as an exercise, is therefore to further develop the concept of the comprehensive approach, allowing for flexibility in different contexts and at the same time safeguarding and refining the approach's most important elements – joint planning and programming. The level of real joint planning and programming will always depend on what the context allows and who is in the lead coordinating

2 Hereafter also referred to as the integrated approach or 3D+H (Defence, Diplomacy and Development + Humanitarian Assistance).

3 That is, outside the UN. Within the UN, the idea was already around, starting with Brahimi's proposals on integrated missions.



position. In this regard, the exercise as it took place in 2011 focused on the various actors getting to know their counterparts and sharing information, while most of them nevertheless acted independently – albeit to varying degrees – within their own domain. This was also the main frustration during the exercise: sharing information does not equal working jointly towards one goal, nor does it guarantee a joint understanding of the challenges in a mission. Common Effort in that sense provided numerous important lessons for improved future cooperation, not least because the exercise succeeded in bringing together a wide range of civilian and military actors in a real mission context. These lessons are reflected in this short summary document of the main findings of the review of Common Effort.

A short preface

The findings of this assessment are based on a two-person team's participation in a limited number of meetings throughout the project.⁴ The review team has worked on the basis of guidance questions provided by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), using them to process a) the analyses of documents and presentations shared during the project period, b) the observations made while participating in the activities and meetings that were organized, and c) the interviews with participants. The review team is aware that, given that it was unable to take part in all meetings and activities, there are some limitations as to what could be analysed and assessed on the basis of actual observations. In order to capture overall developments, measures and views throughout the process, the review team held interviews with members of the steering committee, consisting of representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and 1GNC, during and after the meetings that were held throughout the process, as well as during and after the exercise in Münster.

Focus of the review

The Netherlands Government has adopted the concept of 3D (diplomacy, defence and development) and has applied it in the contexts of Afghanistan and Burundi.⁵ It is expected that future international missions will also be of a combined civilian–military nature. Against this background, the Netherlands Government has indicated that it plans to continue this approach in the future, also in relation to contributions to NATO and EU missions. The likelihood of 3D cooperation and the plans to continue the 3D policy in the future reinforce the importance of the Common Effort project. It is against this background that the MFA has supported and actively participated in the project.

4 Meetings that were attended by Sylvie More and Luc van de Goor: Billerbeck, November 2010, IAWG 3, Berlin, February 2011; the CAC and SSR workshops and the IPC in The Hague; IAWG 4, the Harmonization Conference, Berlin, September 2011; Common Effort, the exercise in Münster, September 2011.

5 Focusbrief OS (March 2011), pp. 6–7.



The Netherlands MFA saw the project's objective as being to further develop and test the comprehensive approach while making certain that all elements of the approach (including humanitarian assistance elements) were promoted and used in the training. However, in view of other reviews taking place simultaneously, it was agreed that this review should not aim to address and answer all these questions, but that reference would be made to the questions where relevant.

The aim of the present assessment, therefore, is to see how the lessons of Common Effort can strengthen the role and performance of the Netherlands MFA in crisis settings with a strong security component, where cooperation with a wide range of local, national and international actors – particularly the military – is to be expected and considered essential for success. As part of the assessment, special attention was paid to cooperation in the area of security and justice. In particular, the review's focus is on 1) assessing the performance and achievements of the MFA during the entire Common Effort project, and 2) assessing whether participation in this type of exercise is a useful training tool for MFA staff. Finally, the assessment will address the overarching question of what are the key lessons for future policy and planning with regard to the comprehensive approach.

The findings, lessons and recommendations set out in this document are made on the basis of a review of the 10-month period that covers the project Common Effort. The lessons and recommendations in this report are not exhaustive (additional evaluation activities have been carried out by TNO and IGNC), and they focus on the main guidance questions that were provided by the Netherlands MFA:

1. How *comprehensive* was the project Common Effort?
 - a) Were all elements/parties of the 3D+H approach equally involved in each phase?
 - b) To what extent was there consensus on a conceptual level and how did this affect cooperation between all elements/parties of the 3D+H?
 - c) What lessons can be learned with regard to the concept of the comprehensive approach?
2. What lessons can be learned at the *institutional level* for the MFA and in relation to cooperation with the military?
3. Have the *specific training objectives* of the MFA been reached, i.e., as regards:
 - a) developing new insights concerning the capacities and qualities required for working effectively in integrated missions;
 - b) what is required to develop and improve these capacities and qualities of MFA staff with the aim of participating successfully in integrated missions;
 - c) preparing MFA staff for more effective engagement with military counterparts and promoting civilian objectives;
 - d) Common Effort forming a vehicle for promoting better civil-military cooperation, even outside mission contexts;
 - e) improving individual skills and experience of MFA staff?

Was the project comprehensive?

The project aimed to move 'from scratch to match'; i.e., to operationalize the training in such a way that it indeed would make the process as comprehensive and joined-up as possible, thereby resulting in more effective future missions. It was noted that the project had succeeded in bringing on board a very wide range of actors, all of them relevant parties for the 3D+H approach. All actors showed real commitment, and participated fully in the various meetings, conferences and workshops throughout the project's duration.

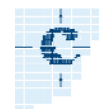
It was also noted, however, that the presence and role of the military was dominant throughout the process. This was not deliberate, but a result of the way 1GNC prepares this type of training. On the one hand, having so much capacity available allowed for the process to move forward on the basis of the agreed time lines towards the event in Münster. On the other hand, it forced civilian participants to stay actively engaged and to deliver on a par with their military counterparts. It was mentioned several times that keeping up with the military pace was difficult. Nevertheless, the military 'dominance' and rhythm did not scare away civilian organizations. They engaged strongly and with increasing intensity towards the execution phase of the exercise in Münster. Therefore, the joint exercise management has succeeded not only in bringing a wide range of actors on board, but also in keeping them engaged throughout the process. This can be regarded as quite an achievement, given the size of the project.

Key messages:

Joint project management is essential for the success of this type of training, and must not be seen, in projects of this size, as simply an 'add-on'.

- The lesson for the military is to be aware of the limitations of civilian counterparts for whom training is not part and parcel of their daily work.
- The lesson for the MFA is that jointly designing and organizing this type of training requires dedicated capacity, preferably in-house. This suggests the need for a broader vision on the role of training, particularly in relation to the 3D+H concept.

The word comprehensive also refers to the concepts, themes and sectors underpinning such an approach. The Netherlands MFA made it its mission to strengthen the focus on the governance, diplomacy, development and humanitarian elements of the exercise. The fact that these issues figured prominently throughout the meetings and the exercise is an indication that the MFA has succeeded in getting them on the agenda. However, it also became clear that balancing activities for short-term stabilization on the one hand with creating conditions for longer-term development and reform on the other can present quite a challenge. It proved difficult to keep the focus on the much wider range of activities and objectives than those of the one-year NATO Interim Multinational Force (NIMFOR) mission. The significant investments made throughout the project in joint conflict analysis and planning sessions did help to bridge some of the gaps in the respective views and approaches of the military and civilian communities. However, promoting the importance of longer-term development and reform remained a task left mainly



to the MFA. This suggests that for a comprehensive or 3D+H approach, MFA participation and input right at the conceptual stage is essential.

Common Effort also provides an important lesson in that this type of training exercise can expose some of the key challenges in integrated stabilization missions, as well as providing opportunities to improve practice. The importance of Common Effort-type exercises as a training platform for jointly discussing and learning from the challenges of integrated missions should not be underestimated. The mantra that more information-sharing will solve these problems is only partly true. There is also a need for a dialogue on how planned activities fit together and how they affect longer-term development and stability.

Key messages:

- Translating the concept of 3D+H into concrete issues and activities in a joined-up way remains a challenge and requires constant attention. This is a key lesson from Common Effort. The difficulties do not per se result from lack of interest, but rather from the need to show results in the short term (i.e., during NIMFOR) as well as from the lack of a sense of joint ownership over issues related to longer-term stability, development and reform.
- Another lesson for the MFA is that more attention should be paid to joint assessments, planning and implementation – this would help in establishing and deepening consensus on a more conceptual level. Common Effort-type training is a good vehicle for doing this and can show how improved consensus on concepts and language can enhance effectiveness by leading to a better joint understanding of problems and solutions for dealing with them.
- A related lesson therefore seems to be that the MFA should take on a key role in future training of this type as a preparation for actual missions. Preparing for such missions through this type of training involves learning how to engage with the military and how to promote different perspectives to the military seems to be an important opportunity for civilians to promote their views on stabilisation.

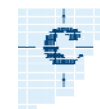
The project also provided some lessons regarding the concept of 3D+H and its application in practice. Although some improvements in applying the concept are possible, it is important to realize that there are limits as to what can be achieved, especially within a short time frame such as a training event. Nevertheless, a number of important positive observations can be made. Common Effort has shown that, as a training instrument, it can help in testing and stretching the limits of what is feasible. It has demonstrated that many of the problems related to how the 'other' was perceived. By simply working more closely together, participants found that their perception of their counterparts was in many cases erroneous. This realization resulted in greater willingness to cooperate than some perhaps would have expected or considered possible at the outset. It also resulted in pragmatic and flexible solutions to existing problems of cooperation. An important example was the improvement in information-sharing. This led to civilian participation in what originally were exclusively military meetings, such as the Commanders' Update Briefing and the Commanders' Advisory Group. All participants, whether civilian or military, found their comfort zones stretched.

The project also revealed some difficulties in applying the concept. For instance, most of the information shared by the military was considered to be of only limited importance. There was still some reluctance to really share, let alone discuss, information. The fact that during the exercise it was decided to shift from an integrated civil–military mission to one consisting of two separate pillars (one civilian, one military) was significant in this respect. Another challenge concerned the difficulty of maintaining a balanced approach towards both the short and the long term. A new institutional instrument, the Inter-Agency Centre (the ‘gateway to the military’), seemed to start off on the wrong foot, with an unclear mandate and a PR approach that alienated the intended clients. It was also a pity that the project failed to effectively link the conflict assessment, the Security Sector Reform (SSR) assessment and the humanitarian assessment to the actual implementation phase in Münster. More will need to be done to improve on the operationalization of such analyses and to transform them into concrete plans. As regards the planning, it was also noted that although information about respective plans was shared, more effort is needed to achieve real harmonization, especially in respect of plans for the short and the longer term.

Finally, the exercise highlighted the need for politics and the host nation government to both play a more prominent role in the exercise. The fact that the scenario allowed for this role to increase was important, but the exercise would benefit from a stronger focus on such political factors earlier on in the process. At the same time, the scenario was packed with introduced elements (‘injects’) at all levels. The ambition to cover as many challenges as possible in a very short time frame seemed to result in a scenario that was perceived as too complex and too focused on several short-term crises instead of on the need to achieve a balance between short- and longer-term objectives for stabilization and reform.

Key messages:

- The training enhanced mutual understanding of the concept of 3D+H, but more needs to be done than just information-sharing. The MFA is best positioned to take the lead in facilitating more dialogue and discussion concerning assessments and plans during exercises.
- The MFA should in particular focus on the need to improve the linkage between short-term stabilization activities and longer-term development and reform. Common Effort ticked the boxes, but failed to adequately bring these two concepts together. Early and more prominent MFA input is needed to safeguard this linkage, whether in an exercise or in a mission setting.
- The MFA is well positioned to strengthen the focus on the role of national actors, politics and ownership. This focus was less visible on the military side and resulted in frustration during the exercise. This is something that needs to be improved in the training set-up.



Was cooperation at the institutional level adequate?

Within the MFA, the lead for Common Effort was provided by the Peacebuilding and Stabilization Unit (PSU or, in Dutch, EFV). EFV was well positioned as main lead, given its mandate to work in fragile and post-conflict settings and the fact that it covers the areas of security and justice, governance and socio-economic development. It was therefore able to do the appropriate groundwork, both in its capacity as part of the management of Common Effort and by providing content-related input through its own staff and experts from its network, as well as content-related input to the various meetings. In addition, EFV conducted some very effective outreach within the MFA, which succeeded in eliciting broad interest and willingness to participate in Common Effort (at one point, a list of some 30 participants was identified, which was later reduced to 16). Representatives from other Directorates – such as DVB (security policy), DMH (human rights, good governance and humanitarian affairs) and DVF (UN and international financial institutions) – were also prominent in meetings and in Münster. This not only suggests that the concept of 3D+H has a solid grounding, but also that there is a willingness to learn more about it in a training setting. However, these Directorates could also be more actively engaged in preparing exercises such as Common Effort.

It was also noted, however, that there was a less clear link with the Ministry of Defence (MoD), through either 1GNC or the MFA. There was MoD support, but no real visibility in the shape of representatives taking part. It was also unclear whether either the Military Adviser (MILAD) to the MFA or the Development Adviser (OSAD) to the MoD were actively involved in promoting and preparing the exercise.

Key messages:

- It is important to have a coordinating Directorate or Unit within the MFA that is well versed in the cross-cutting topics, in order to maintain coherence in the approach, as well as a focus on the key issues.
- The MFA could improve its performance by more actively engaging different Directorates in areas of their specific expertise.
- In particular, the MFA and the MoD could consider using the expertise of, respectively, the MILAD and the OSAD, more effectively in preparing for exercises such as Common Effort or for actual missions. They are strategically positioned and equipped to play advisory roles or to bridge gaps, e.g., between the MoD and the MFA, should these occur.
- It should also be kept in mind that different settings may require different lead actors. This mission put the military in a key position, but there could also be situations where civilian police could take more of a key role. Future training exercises should be flexible enough to allow for this.

Were training objectives met?

The MFA had specific training objectives, most of which related to enhancing the MFA's capacity to engage more effectively in integrated missions and in particular in relation to the military. Overall, it can be concluded that these objectives have been met during Common Effort. All participants lauded the success of Common Effort in breaking down the walls of misperception regarding the military. New professional friendships were born, and a lot was learned about the motivations for, and limitations of, acting in a specific way.

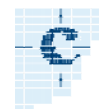
While this was not an objective, the exercise provided at the same time an opportunity to see how people perform under pressure. Likewise, it gave staff the opportunity to learn about working in crisis situations and missions, and to improve personal skills. More seasoned diplomats, on the other hand, found that they could rely on their own experience. Consequently, they would have liked a stronger political component in the scenario that would allow them to sharpen negotiation skills vis-à-vis the military as well as the host government.

On a more general note, it was clear that the range of challenges encountered during Common Effort was quite broad. It was observed during the preparatory meetings, as well as during the event in Münster, that specific expertise is very welcome and sometimes even required for dealing with these challenges. It is significant that the military set up an Inter-Agency Centre that included civilian expertise. This suggests that a similar approach may be necessary for the civilian part of the mission, i.e., for the MFA. This is important for an evidence- and experience-based debate with the military, not only on how to better balance short- and longer-term objectives, but also on how to better analyse, plan and implement activities to achieve these objectives.

Finally, it was noted that more could and should be done with regard to monitoring and evaluation. For exercise purposes, it was now agreed that external monitors would provide feedback, but this proved to be too loose and uncoordinated a process. It should also be borne in mind that there is a difference between monitoring and evaluating an exercise and monitoring and evaluating actual activities, outputs and outcomes. It would be good if M&E were to be introduced as an integral part/role *within* an exercise (and preferably also within real life missions).

Key messages:

- Common Effort ticked all the boxes in terms of enhancing the MFA's capacity to engage more effectively in integrated missions and in particular in relation to the military. It suggests that this type of training can be essential for improving the quality and effectiveness of both MFA and military staff, as well as missions. This points to the need not only for more joint training, but also for more joint training early on in the careers of diplomats and military staff. The latter seems to be particularly important, given that the one community's perception of the other is often quite mistaken.
- The MFA could also use this type of training early on as an assessment tool for selecting candidates for missions such as the one replicated in Common Effort.



- The need for specific civilian expertise suggests that the MFA could investigate how it could build this kind of capacity in its own organization, or find ways to effectively insert this kind of expertise in missions by engaging external experts.
- Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are often referred to as being insufficient or weak. This also applied to Common Effort. The lesson to be learned from this seems to be that consideration should be given to introducing M&E as part of the missions in the exercise. This should be separate from the need to organize M&E of the exercise itself in a more structured way.

Additional lessons and key messages

- The time frame for the actual implementation phase of Common Effort in Münster was quite short. Several of the participants entered the exercise only as it started'. This also applied to some of the key-role-players, such as the Civil Head of Mission.

Suggestion: In order to increase the realism and effectiveness of the mission within the exercise, an attempt should be made to involve participants in key positions as early on in the preparatory process as possible.

- The exercise was described as realistic, complex and perhaps overburdened.

Suggestion: Depending on the training objectives, consideration could be given to making the exercise less ambitious and comprehensive. A possibility would be to work on the basis of a limited number of challenges, which could be dealt with more in depth, or to focus on a limited number of actors and their specific challenges.

- Although the development component is considered important, it has proved to be difficult to promote and operationalize. The finding that little attention was paid to it in the civilian mission indicates that more awareness-raising and promotion is required. In the current set-up of the MFA, EFV is well positioned to take on a large part of this role – and it has done this as effectively as possible within the limits of its own capacity. However, people move on, structures may change, and not all of the knowledge resides within EFV.

Suggestion: Consideration could be given to establishing a pool or community of MFA staff with the appropriate knowledge and expertise to be drawn on in missions or in emergencies, and who could promote the development aspect in a pragmatic and practical way.

- Apart from the need to focus on civil–military relations, Common Effort also highlighted the importance of improving civil–civil relations. Such relations can be as challenging as those between civilians and the military.



Suggestion: One way of improving civil–civil relations is to make this a training objective as well. One possibility would be to give other civilian organizations a lead role in exercises such as Common Effort, for instance, development cooperation or humanitarian assistance organizations, or UN agencies. This would highlight different challenges and emphasize yet other elements that need to be taken into account for improving the effectiveness of the comprehensive approach in real-life settings. The list of participating organizations in Common Effort offers some good potential candidates/organizations for undertaking a lead role.