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Keynote Speech / Rainer Lucht Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe Germany

Civil Military Cooperation (CIMIC) – Is Humanitarian Aid becoming more and more a tool for foreign and security policy?

I would like to begin with two perhaps provoking remarks:

1. Though we are in a humanitarian congress I would like to look at this issue from a broader angle. Because it is also about military and politics and it concerns more civil actors than humanitarian aid. Only in this broader context it can be understood better and we can give a sound opinion as “humanitarian” instead of withdrawing our selves to the island of humanitarian principles.
2. What is civil military cooperation about? Behind the often used terms stabilisation, security or peace operations, it is essentially about war or to use a modern term - armed conflict - of different intensity. Civil Military Cooperation is a tool of modern warfare: how in new conflict scenarios to wage and to finish war more successfully.

After the end of the Cold War and the successful advance of globalization it was no more a matter of classical war between armies. The military was to take up new, unfamiliar tasks. It should help to re-establish control and order in the troubled regions of the former third and second world. Here, a new world disorder of economic hardship, social misery, power struggles, and state failure had developed with its results: uncontrollable regimes, armed insurgencies, terrorist groups and civil wars. It was the birth of a new foreign and security policy.

- The powerful western states, often through military alliances and endorsed by the UN Security Council, relied on robust military interventions to eliminate so-called “elements of unrest”, to bring these regions under control, to establish reliable states and to pacify the population. As defeating militarily the enemy was by far not sufficient it was combined with a bunch of civil activities as well as aid, reconstruction and development measures. This strategy was named “comprehensive approach” (CA).
- The military was assigned new civil-military tasks. It had to gain acceptance in the population as a foreign force and to win over important civil actors, amongst others aid organizations. Furthermore extensive information on the adversaries and the environment should be collected and used for their protection and action. This became the new field of Civil Military Cooperation and Coordination.

Pioneer of this CA strategy was and is the US because of their role as the military world power. The strategy has become a global export article. In the NATO, in the states, moving closer to the NATO via the “Partnership for Peace” cooperation, in the EU, in the “integrated” UN military missions, even in traditional neutral states these or similar strategies have been adopted and CIMIC concepts has been introduced, in between also Austria. Many would like to deny the origin, the US fatherhood, but it is evident.

Nobody else personifies this better than David Petraeus, former US General, now CIA Director. The manual he co-authored “Counterinsurgency” – on the successful defeat of insurgen-

cies in so-called host countries – has become the compulsory reading for the new type of military. The manual uses fortunately a very clear language, whereas followers often do not.

- For example his position on the involvement of the population and civil actors: The military's „*task is to build trusted networks. This is the true meaning of “hearts and minds” ... “Hearts” means persuading people that their best interests are served by counterinsurgency success. “Minds” means convincing them that the force can protect them and that resisting it is pointless. Note that neither concerns whether people like Soldiers and Marines. Calculated self-interest, not emotion, is what counts.... (These networks) displace enemy networks, which forces enemies into the open, letting military forces seize the initiative and destroy the insurgents ... Trusted networks include local allies, community leaders, and local security forces ... they should also include nongovernmental organizations, other friendly or neutral non state actors...*”
- On the cooperation with aid organizations: “... *Many NGOs...do not want to be too closely associated with military forces because they need to preserve their perceived neutrality...cooperation may involve a shared analysis of the problem, building a consensus that allows synchronization of military and interagency efforts. The military’s role is to provide protection, identify needs, facilitate civil military operations...*”
- And on the role of humanitarian aid in conflict: “*There is no such thing as impartial humanitarian assistance or civil military operations in counterinsurgency. Whenever someone is helped, someone else is hurt, not least the insurgents. So civil and humanitarian assistance personnel often become targets. Protecting them is a matter not only of providing a close-in defense, but also of creating a secure environment...*”¹

Such logic inevitably has consequences for civil aid organizations and aid. Who once submits to this logic can hardly adhere to neutrality, impartiality and independence, everything will be judged if it brings benefit or hurts.

- Who delivers aid to the population and therefore gains influence and valuable information is a factor in the conflict.
- Either an aid organization is useful as cooperation partner and informant or it is disagreeable, even dangerous, if it refuses or even has or is suspected to have contacts with the enemy.

Politics and military have undertaken a range of efforts to draw aid activities and organizations near to the boat, even into the boat -. all lead in the same direction, of course with differences. What is feasible in Afghanistan is different from Kosovo. What is possible for Germany or the US, is not the same for Austria, what you can achieve with aid organization A, you still cannot with B. I mention some trends:

1. *Military as aid worker:* The intervening military itself implements aid projects, from distribution of food via quick-impact-projects to house building. This is the most direct way of control and presence, heavily criticized by the civil aid sector. However, soldiers as aid workers in a “humanitarian mission” is a tempting way to get support for the military at

¹ Headquarters Department of the Army (2006), *Counterinsurgency*, A-26, A-46, A-47.

home. There is also the official position of “last resort”, military should only provide humanitarian aid if there are no civil alternatives.

2. *CIMIC & civil Counterparts*: Military and government allocate special funds for aid programs to private contractors, civil government organizations or compliant NGOs. Their programs are coordinated directly with the military and the counterparts are firmly bound to civil-military cooperation structures.
3. *Military protection*: Military offers aid organizations protection against threats of the opposite side. This leads aid organizations to coordinate their aid programs and areas of operation with the military and therefore to take sides in the conflict.
4. *Influence on NGOs*: Politics and military exert their influence on NGOs with stronger links to politics and dependency on government donors to act in concert as far as possible in their aid programs and public positions.
5. *Division of tasks and complementarity*: The military accepts a division of tasks with civil aid organizations and therefore wins aid organizations over for the idea of complementarity and coordination of both areas.
6. *Civil-military coordination and exchange of information*: Where NGOs publicly want to keep their independence and neutrality and an open cooperation is not possible, exchange of information and coordination is established and possibly institutionalized.

Not to forget: Politics and military accompany these efforts with massive lobby activities: They invite aid organizations constantly to fora, conferences, workshops and trainings to promote convergence and to develop common goals and practical links between civil and military actors.

Not to forget: To gain civil cooperation in military interventions, the debates are led on a high level. Concepts like human security, “responsibility to protect”, and stabilization of fragile states are promoted. Local Ownership, civil society, human rights and conflict prevention are top arguments. The promise is about securing humanitarian aid, reconstruction and development - all appealing issues. They play an important role in aid organizations with wider goals and make them receptive.

The reaction of NGOs is quite diverse because of their dependencies and particularly because of their mandates. A lot of them combine humanitarian aid with development, human rights and peace. And their reaction changes with regard to the situation at home and in the country of conflict. Let us take the example of Afghanistan:

1. 2003 more than 50 NGOs appealed to the NATO to extend their mandate and to send more troops to protect the humanitarian and reconstruction activities against remaining rebels. Other NGOs opposed the armed protection and meddling of military in humanitarian aid, some temporarily pulled out of Afghanistan because of the threats.
2. A lot of NGOs and networks opposed the participation in civil-military Provincial Reconstruction Teams, other NGOs accepted the cooperation under an “independent civil leadership”.

3. Some NGOs strictly declined funding by governments involved in the conflict; many others funded their work nearly completely with such funds – even if they were conditioned – but continued emphasizing their independence and neutrality. A lot of them endorsed the concept of division of tasks.
4. With increasing public criticism, worsening security situation for Afghanistan more and more NGOs call again for more distance to the military. They invoke acceptance by beneficiaries and humanitarian principles, extending their application now even to reconstruction and development - and hope therefore to be respected by all parties and able to continue their work.

Now back to our questions: Which impact has this approach on aid organizations and particularly on humanitarian actors?

1. The influence of the new security policy on aid organizations has increased, because of their dependencies, but even more because of their receptiveness for security, development and human rights arguments and ideals brought in from outside. This applies more to multi-mandate organizations. At the same time the pure humanitarian organizations who defend their principles find themselves more and more in a minority position.
2. As many aid organizations pour into the country together with the intervening military and cooperate or work under its protection, not only they but also other organizations are stamped as complementary “soft power” to the military “hard power”. They also lose acceptance, access gets more difficult and they increasingly become soft targets.
3. Often it is only the real failures, impacts and shady sides of the military intervention as well as resistance and public opposition which lead aid organizations to reflect and to get back to more critical independence and impartiality.

Looking at the more important question: Does this approach help better people in need?

- It would be good if it brought more and better aid for the population without risks and exclusion. But what if aid is only delivered where military has the control or will take over control and expects good conduct and cooperation of the beneficiaries and the opposite side threatens with punishment?
- It would be good if it gave the people the desired security. But what if it would be connected to transgressions and arbitrary violence, and would not be permanent or reliable?
- It would be good if it led to a sustainable improvement of living conditions. But what if poverty and dependency further determine the life of the majority of the population?
- It would be good if it led to real inner peace and reconciliation. But what if it creates new conflicts or intensifies existing conflicts and splits the population?
- It would be good if it led to the rule of law and self-determination. But what if these “state structures” are built upon arbitrariness and enrichment and control and dependence from outside remains?
- In short: It would be convincing if it were to create real human security and solidarity. But if economic and political self-interests of the powerful states and their security interests are the main drivers, then the boat of this security policy is neither sustainable, nor solid. As there are too many weak spots, leaks and limited capacity, promotion for such a

boat and even more a ride on the boat would be too dangerous. To be responsible, one should call for a major overhaul if not a new design and construction.

We all have to face this debate on the contradiction between the big claims and promises of this security policy and their real results and interests. If we take stock of the interventions with CA and CIMIC in their baggage – Somalia, DRC, Balkan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya - the results go from mixed to alarming, thus they should be reflected carefully by all:

- By politics, who has established instable „multinational protectorates“ which hang on a thread and are supported from the outside without end;
- By military, who has been totally overstrained outside their area, who has itself worn out and finally has to pull out without real success. Even all these recipes of their civil-military outreach did not help to overcome the other handicaps;
- By civil aid organizations who first moved trustfully into this direction and let themselves be involved into this missions. Disillusioned by the reality they have to review their goals with regard to the political context and have to regain their independence and credibility;

And finally by humanitarian organizations who have withdrawn defensively on their decreasing island of humanitarian principles. These organizations should be encouraged to better understand and face their political environment and venture with more courage and arguments into this sea. In the public debate they thus would be able not only to defend their humanitarian significance and principles better but also could exert positive influence in the greater sea.