

No One Wants to Be Coordinated: Obstacles to Coherence in Multidimensional Peace Operations

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ABSTRACT

The change in international peace operations throughout the 1990s led to a broadening, deepening and lengthening of the nature of international engagement in states emerging from conflict (Lund, 2003). Independent sectoral activities (peacekeeping, development, human rights, rule of law) have become known as the broad spectrum of peacebuilding activities (de Coning, 2007). Given institutional obstacles, conflicting objectives and mandates, the complexity of the enterprise, and the mixed results to date of whole of government and integrationist agendas, the question of how different parts of international efforts can best be brought to work in harmony has become a major concern. Although the dominant paradigm frames the problem of effective peacebuilding as lack of coordination amongst the complex array of actors involved, with more and better coordination as the solution, many analysts now argue that a more even-handed analysis examining the negative consequences and tradeoffs involved in coordination is required. This review of the main academic and policy approaches to the challenge of effective peacebuilding shows that the field is in urgent need of innovative research and novel approaches to address the many questions and dilemmas that have arisen in the post-conflict context.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The change in international peace operations throughout the 1990s led to a broadening, deepening and lengthening of the nature of international engagement in states emerging from conflict (Lund, 2003). Independent sectoral activities (peacekeeping, development, human rights, rule of law), when considered together in the context of their combined and cumulative effect over time, have become known as the broad spectrum of peacebuilding activities (de Coning, 2007). Given the complexity of the enterprise and the mixed results to date, the question of how different parts of the United Nations (UN) system and bilateral efforts can best be brought to work in greater concordance has become a major concern. Since Kosovo in 1999, the trend has been greater integration of international efforts and the necessity for collaboration between relief, development and security organizations.

By the late 1990s, from key donor countries to UN agencies and non-governmental organization (NGO) networks, a common understanding emerged that efforts for peace must become more strategic and coordinated if they are to have the ambitious impacts that are intended (Anderson & Olson, 2003; Chesterman, Ignatieff, & Thakur, 2005; Tschirgi, 2005). In many of the conflicts of the 1990s, the fact that the international peacebuilding system lacked coherence resulted in, amongst other outcomes, inter-agency rivalry, working at cross-purposes, competition for funding, duplication of effort and less than optimal economies of scale (Fukuyama, 2004, p. 40). The 2004 Utstein Study propelled a push for greater coordination between and among governments, inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), and NGOs, by exposing a major “strategic deficit” in peacebuilding efforts (Smith, 2004). As a result, lack of coordination and coherence are now widely considered among the most urgent problems in international efforts to support war-to-peace transitions.

Major efforts to improve coordination in recent years have occurred at four distinct levels. First, at the multilateral level, the UN and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have led in pushing improved coordination and coherence. Within the UN, reforms have included UN Integrated Missions (the 2000 Brahimi Report; see UN, 2000), the 2005 creation of a UN Peacebuilding Commission (UN, 2007), the “Cluster Approach” in the UN humanitarian sector, and the “Delivering as One” initiative (UN, 2006) to streamline UN presence in-country. Since 2005, the OECD has hosted an intensive process on development in fragile states expanding on the 2001 Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Guidelines (OECD, 2001). This concerted work produced the 2005 Principles For Good International Engagement in Fragile States, mandating greater coordination amongst the various departments of donor governments (“coherence”), between donor governments (aid “harmonization”), and with national recipient governments (“alignment”). Despite these robust policy reforms, practice has lagged far behind. Even within the UN family, these integrationist agendas have produced mixed results and substantial friction between UN agencies whose governance and fundraising mechanisms are not aligned (Campbell, 2008). These recent measures are described throughout the literature as “showing promise” but often failing to reconcile the competing agendas of various agencies and fundamental conceptual and practical dilemmas in implementation of these plans (de Coning, 2007; Eide, Kaspersen, Ken, & von Hippel, 2005; Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2006).

Second, within donor governments, bilateral efforts and OECD policies promoting “whole of government approaches” have been widely adopted with mixed results. Measures such as standing interagency task forces (e.g., Canada’s Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force, or START), shared analysis and planning practices (e.g., the ICAF – Interagency Conflict Analysis Framework developed within the United States government), pooled funding (the United Kingdom’s Conflict Prevention Pools) and interagency decision making all have advanced practice but faced similar institutional obstacles. Competing objectives, inadequate incentives, and resource competition among departments mean that impacts are still far short of expectations, and fundamental conflicts of mandate and lack of parity between development, foreign affairs and defence ministries block the creation of a common strategic vision (Patrick & Brown, 2007). Risks that enhanced donor coordination weakens dialogue with NGO and civil society groups are also widely cited concerns (Smith, 2004; Stoddard, Harmer, & Haver, 2005).

Third, field coordination measures involving the UN, NGOs, donors, and militaries are now common place, and ad hoc, informal coordination has proven possible in some cases (Smith, 2004). However, coordination generally remains very problematic, given fundamental differences in agendas, operating styles, roles, principles and doctrines, and the inability of existing coordination practices to deal effectively with these. Current models of aid as a “tool” to address security threats compromise independence, credibility and the ability to operate, though adhering to international humanitarian law can help “de-conflict” activities (Eide et al., 2005; UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs/UNOCHA, 2008). Furthermore, good field cooperation often depends on personal relationships, and is vulnerable to rapid turnover. Within the NGO sector, coordination bodies, codes of conduct, best practice projects and experimentation with inclusive, multi-actor exercises to advance peacebuilding strategies have all been undertaken in the effort to improve outcomes at the field level (examples include the “War Torn Societies Project,” the “Reflecting on Peace Practice Project,” and the wide-ranging work of “International Alert”).¹

Finally, between national and international actors, the concept of “local ownership” represents an agreed upon principle rhetorically, with widespread agreement that there is still poor implementation in practice. The reality is a parallel international public sector that often bypasses national governments. Conflicting authority between various levels of government in the host country can significantly complicate the notion of local ownership (World Bank, 2007). National governments lack effective implementing ability as well as human and technical capacities needed to successfully oversee so many aid actors (de Coning, 2007). Relationships between insiders and outsiders are fraught with perceived and real power asymmetries that

¹[http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BB128/\(httpProjects\)/0ABD701FB4400BA880256B64003D053B?OpenDocument](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BB128/(httpProjects)/0ABD701FB4400BA880256B64003D053B?OpenDocument);
<http://www.cdacollaborative.org/programs/reflecting-on-peace-practice/>; <http://www.international-alert.org/>

complicate honest dialogue and ultimately impede the truly collaborative design of programs and policies (Anderson & Olson, 2003; Olson & Gregorian, 2007).

2.0 POLITICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL BLOCKS AND THE NEED FOR NEW APPROACHES

A wide range of political and organizational factors clearly contributes to coordination problems at all levels. Political factors include the primacy of donors' national and strategic interests (Patrick & Brown, 2007; Tschirgi, 2005) and resistance from the developing world to weakening state sovereignty and "donor cartels" (Jones, 2004). Fundamentally incompatible objectives between the agendas of relief, development, security, and political reform within and across intervening organizations undermine coordination efforts (Stoddard et al., 2005). Fundamental political differences include differing concepts of peace (negative peace vs. positive peace)² and radically different "theories of change" held by agencies – assumptions about what causes conflict and how to resolve it that often remain implicit and unexamined (Anderson & Olson, 2003; Woodrow, 2006).

On the organizational side, coordination efforts are frequently blocked by rigid organizational structures and stove piping of departments and units, physical distance and weak links between headquarters and field operations, differing mandates even within the same organization, weak learning cultures, lack of transparency, and operational constraints that tend to stifle innovation and favor the *status quo* (Tschirgi, 2005). Studies within the aid sector have shown how coordination is hampered by competition for financial resources, status, power, recognition, and influence (Cooley & James, 2002; Stoddard et al., 2005). With respect to civil-military cooperation (CIMIC), fundamental differences in approach exist among military organizations that, for example, are reflected in the proliferation of confusing CIMIC terminology (de Coning, 2007)). Very different operating modes, timeframes for engagement, management cultures and approaches to exit strategies, and ultimately, the use of force, bedevil civil-military coordination (Frerks et al., 2006).

3.0 KEY CHALLENGES REMAIN

Everyone is for coordination though no one wants to be coordinated by others who do not share their values, principles or operating modes. Commenting on the UN's coordination problems, some analysts point to prevailing narrow views that contrast coordination "by default," an ad hoc bottom-up approach, and "coordination by command," a top-down approach. Both of these approaches have been tried with only mixed results and both have generated new dilemmas (Herrhausen, 2007; Roberts & Bradley, 2005). Analysts argue that the current frameworks for complex peacebuilding missions misrepresent fundamental disagreements among peacebuilding actors as an administrative problem of coordination. In addition, they suggest that directly examining these tensions is key to dealing with many of the practical problems faced in peacebuilding coordination efforts (Paris & Sisk, 2007). The issue of the politicization and securitization of aid remains one of the most contentious issues – from both a principled perspective and an effectiveness perspective. Many analysts argue that a more even-handed analysis examining the negative consequences and tradeoffs that may come along with greater coordination is required (Eide et al., 2005; de Coning, 2007; Olson & Gregorian, 2007; Paris & Sisk, 2009).

At another level, a small group of practitioners and scholars has begun to question the prevailing hierarchical models of coordination and argue instead for a focus on network theory and systems approaches which frame actors in a system as loosely coupled semiautonomous organizations (de Coning 2007; Nan, 2006; Stephenson & Schnitzer, 2006). In general, the policy world has not sufficiently tapped learning from a

² Negative peace refers to the absence of physical violence. Positive peace refers to structural realignments in society that produce cooperative arrangements to help address human security needs and that can lead to individual fulfillment.

range of disciplines that deal with coordination dynamics and incentives outside of specific peacebuilding contexts. For example, negotiation theory clarifies issues in communication and relationships that create opportunities or act as barriers to cooperation (Strimling, 2006). Some see coordination and coherence as partially management problems and argue that organization theory and particularly approaches to network governance are the most useful approaches (Herrhausen, 2007).

4.0 CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the dominant paradigm frames the problem of effective peacebuilding as a lack of coordination amongst the complex array of actors involved, with more and better coordination as the solution. This review of the main academic and policy approaches to the challenge of effective peacebuilding shows that the field is in urgent need of innovative research and novel approaches to address the many questions and dilemmas identified above. The coordination issue more broadly is one of determining the most effective interagency relationships in complex peacebuilding “systems.” There must be a break with prevailing paradigms and a convening of both systems experts and practitioners from a range of operational sectors to forge a new community of practice and inquiry that can draw from the broadest range of experience with how organizations in complex peacebuilding systems best organize themselves to successfully reach common goals. With the participation of multidisciplinary experts and civilian and military practitioners it will be possible to diagnose and document the range of effective and ineffective interagency relationships in complex peacebuilding systems, providing new options for interagency relationships that avoid the pitfalls of traditional models of coordination. Based on this cross-sectoral collaborative learning process, operational tools and policy recommendations can be produced that support productive, horizontal interagency relationships, and that ultimately help improve the effectiveness of international peacebuilding missions.

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