Epilogue: Collaboration in a Comprehensive Approach to Operations

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The NATO HFM RWS-204 Workshop on Collaboration in a Comprehensive Approach (CA) to Operations was held in October 2010, but the need to bring together scientific experts with CA practitioners to address human collaboration in CA was becoming evident years earlier. Certainly, the results of NATO HFM RWS-204 underscored the importance of the human dimension and the magnitude of the uniquely human challenges that exist within a CA. As well it highlighted the benefits that can be accrued when CA is effectively applied. Importantly, the Workshop also began the important task of discerning models, theories, and approaches that might assist in meeting these challenges. Although substantive progress has been made in the ensuing years, much work remains to be accomplished in this area.

Today, the many urgent needs identified during recent comprehensive missions and operations are quickly being overtaken by contemporary defence and security priorities. Western governments and defence and security organisations are focussing on reducing budgets, identifying efficiencies and implementing new measures to increase effectiveness. It is clear that these more recent considerations can significantly affect strategic decisions concerning future government and defence capability requirements. However, there is real danger that this recent focus will silence the important discussions and halt the progress made with respect to effective CA. In fact, we would argue that the influence of these more recent economic considerations make the hard-won lessons learned of CA even more valuable and the need for continued research and development all the more critical.

Current geopolitical trends and global economic realities do suggest that another multinational comprehensive approach endeavor of the magnitude of Afghanistan is unlikely, at least in the near future. Nevertheless, the likelihood of highly complex, collaborative operations on a smaller scale will certainly not subside within the international community. Indeed, small wars and interventions in failed and failing states are expected to be the international norm for the foreseeable future. The need for multinational and multi-agency peacekeeping, security and governance operations and disaster relief missions will no doubt also continue going forward. Certainly, domestic operations such as major events (e.g., the Olympics), national emergencies and domestic crises will necessitate effective collaboration among the joint, interagency, and public spheres. Accordingly, the need for on-going national and international research programs on collaboration in a comprehensive approach remains imperative. So too does the need to translate that knowledge into practical application for civilian and military CA partners. Strong and consistent engagement, commitment and leadership from the NATO governments, militaries and defence science communities will be required to continue to invest in research necessary to optimize CA operations. This will be challenging for several reasons.

First, while consistently emphasized at the strategic levels of many NATO national governments and defence forces, CA typically lacks an identifiable Government- or Defence-level champion, a particular issue when Defence R&D funding priorities are being articulated. Indeed, the problem of “who own’s CA” within government and within the military is ubiquitous. Precisely because CA affects everyone, it is often difficult

to identify a single standard bearer who will assume consistent leadership in this area. For this reason funding for research on CA, and particularly its human dimensions, often takes a back seat to the latest military trend, to more tangible technologies, and to the seemingly more urgent military R&D requirements. Second, collective training for comprehensive approach operations is complex, time consuming and expensive: Although large collective training is standard, even defence forces are reconsidering and reprioritizing many large collective training events. This kind of training is exponentially more difficult for government partners and non-governmental organisations. Civilian organisations have had less need for collective training, and do not have a similar focus on dedicated pre-mission training of this nature. Similarly, civilian agencies' contributions to the planning and conduct of such training often severely stretch their human and financial resources. Thus, such training, especially that which is truly CA in nature, may be an increasingly "hard sell" in the many NATO nations. For all these reasons, it may fall to militaries to become the de facto custodian of important lessons learned and continuing improvements in CA processes, education and dedicated training. In doing so, militaries must never lose sight of the wider community requirements and contributions that are essential to succeed in these complex missions.

Finally, the window of opportunity for recruiting strong and influential military and political "champions" for CA is rapidly closing. With each passing year, the voice of key strategic, operational and tactical-level civil and military personnel, who have lived CA and understand its importance to mission effectiveness, is increasingly distant. With this in mind, NATO countries, militaries and their research communities must identify those key military and civilian strategic leaders who will champion CA programs and facilitate the uptake of new research and development knowledge. This knowledge must continue to influence national-level and defence programs. We simply cannot afford to lose momentum on advancing knew knowledge and understanding of CA. There is too much to lose if we do. It is our sincere hope that NATO HFM RWS-204 and this Proceedings will help maintain the necessary momentum going forward.