

Explaining the Apparent Paradox of Norway's Comprehensive Approach

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ABSTRACT

Norway has championed the need for coordinated efforts in complex operations, most notably in Afghanistan, and measures have been taken to develop a Norwegian version of the comprehensive approach. However, a trademark of Norway's interpretation has been a strict separation of civilian and military efforts in the field. In this respect, Norway's comprehensive approach has been different from nearly all other contributing states to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). This paper explores how this apparent paradox came about and argues that it was a result of mainly politically motivated efforts to promote the general idea of the comprehensive approach on the one hand, whilst Norwegian development traditions, previous experiences and vocal Norwegian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) paved the way for the strict divide of civilian and military efforts on the ground in Afghanistan on the other hand. A perceived gap emerged between realities on the ground and Norwegian political rhetoric.

1.0 INTRODUCTION¹

Simply put, the ultimate aim of a comprehensive approach is that actors such as the military, development and humanitarian actors, judicial experts, diplomats and the police coordinate their work and pull in the same direction in international operations. Both states and international organisations have recognised that a comprehensive approach is crucial for acting effectively and accomplishing goals, agreeing that challenges in complex conflicts could not be solved by one actor alone. By working together the outcome was believed to be better than the sum of its parts. Norway has been an eager champion of the comprehensive approach, in both the domestic and international arenas. At the same time, Norway has developed its own version of the comprehensive approach. The distinguishing feature of the Norwegian interpretation was a clear division of civil and military roles and responsibilities in the field, but tight coordination. This approach was tried out in practice in the Norwegian-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Meymaneh in northern Afghanistan.

Frequently referred to as “the Norwegian model”, the separation of civil and military efforts has been controversial. A paradox seemingly emerges when Norway on the one hand has acted as an enthusiastic advocate of the general idea of the comprehensive approach and coordinated efforts, whilst promoting the Norwegian model and practising separation in the Norwegian-led PRT on the other hand. Military actors have been frustrated by what they have seen as a discrepancy between political rhetoric and realities on the ground. For instance, a former Norwegian National Contingent Commander repeatedly questioned what he saw as a gap between commitments to pursue an integrated and comprehensive approach and the Norwegian policy to keep civilian and military efforts strictly apart on the ground in Afghanistan (Fauske, 2010, 2012).

This paper will not examine how the Norwegian model has been practised on the ground in the Norwegian-led PRT in Afghanistan. However, it does assume that a clear separation of different actors' roles and responsibilities does not preclude tight coordination. In other words, separation of civil and military efforts

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on the ground does not contradict coordination of these efforts. This proposition requires us to qualify the paradox.

The aim of this paper is to discuss how the apparent paradox surrounding Norway's version of a comprehensive approach came about. The paper argues that Norway seized a window of opportunity to play a visible role as the concept of a comprehensive approach emerged as a key priority on the international agenda. Championing the comprehensive approach turned out to be politically useful, both at home and abroad. At the same time, a vocal NGO sector, experiences from previous operations and Norwegian development traditions influenced the Norwegian take on the comprehensive approach and paved the way for a separation of civil and military efforts in practice (Ekhaugen, forthcoming 2014). The paper suggests that the policies adopted by Norway partly served other purposes than mission effectiveness and ultimate success. Examining the Norwegian take on a comprehensive approach makes for an interesting case for three main reasons. First, the Norwegian interpretation is different from the equivalent concepts of nearly all other countries contributing to ISAF in Afghanistan when it comes to separating civil and military roles and responsibilities. Second, the case demonstrates how domestic factors can be crucial in deciding *how* a small state participates in an international operation. Third, the attested gap between what are perceived as more or less self-evident benefits of coherence and operational reality (de Coning, 2007:5), remains an understudied topic. Insights into the politics of the comprehensive approach can be valuable for future inquiries into such questions.

Internationally, there is a growing body of literature covering various aspects of the comprehensive approach. Different national and organisational approaches have been detailed and scrutinised in reports and scholarly work (see for instance Friis and Rehman, eds. 2010; Stepputat, 2009; Brett, 2009; de Coning, 2008; Jakobsen, 2008 and de Coning et al., 2010). The Norwegian literature on the topic is also growing, but remains fragmented. Scholars have analysed aspects of the Norwegian model (Gjørvi, 2014; Ekhaugen, forthcoming 2014). Implications of the model, most notably how it resulted in a PRT approach arguably at odds with NATO's counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine have also been scrutinised (see for instance Halsne, 2013).

To dig into the apparent paradox introduced above, this paper will recount Norwegian attempts to push coordination and separation respectively, followed by an analysis of what appear to be key drivers behind these two components of Norway's comprehensive approach. The paper will mainly look at the period from 2005. General elections led to a change of government in Norway in September 2005, and the new government quickly took a more active role in these issues. The main sources for this paper are official documents, existing research and newspaper articles.

2.0 "NEED FOR BETTER COORDINATION IN AFGHANISTAN"

This was the title of a statement to the Security Council given by Norway's ambassador to the UN in 2007 (Løvold, 2007). Since the so-called red-green coalition government led by Jens Stoltenberg from the Labour Party took office in late 2005, Norway became a vocal champion of increased coordination of efforts in Afghanistan. This did not represent a new political direction. But, the new government quickly assumed a more active role in pushing the need for coordinated efforts on top of the international agenda.

Norwegian activism was soon evident on the international scene. Norway made use of various arenas and channels to promote ideas of coordination, integration, coherence and comprehensiveness in complex conflicts. A larger initiative was the so-called "Project on Multidimensional and Integrated Peace Operations." This was a follow up of the report on UN Integrated Missions, co-authored by the fresh State Secretary of defence, Espen Barth Eide. Regional seminars were held in Beijing, Addis Ababa, Geneva, New York, Johannesburg, Brussels and Oslo during 2007. A final report was submitted to the UN after the concluding Oslo seminar. The project later spurred a special issue of *International Peacekeeping* which took

stock of the integration agenda at the UN. Norway assumed a leading role in developing the concept of Integrated Missions. This has also been highlighted in a seminal work on learning in the UN peacebuilding bureaucracy:

“A few governments, particularly those of Norway and Sweden, have made tremendous strides in the past few years to fill those gaps in some organisations’ learning infrastructures and, even more importantly, to bridge the political divides among member states and overcome the coordination failures between different diplomatic committees. Individual governments can play a role in organisational learning on mission integration that is both crucial and, frustratingly for many reformers, limited. They can provide resources for studies and conferences to spread best practices and raise the prestige of innovators and reformers. More importantly, they can use their convening power as states to set agendas and raise awareness among their peers.” (Benner et al. 2011:179)

Norwegian efforts to promote coordination of efforts in Afghanistan seemed to peak in 2006 and 2007. For instance, the Norwegian foreign and defence ministers seized on numerous opportunities to call for improved coordination. Foreign Minister Støre called for increased coordination during a high-level meeting on Afghanistan at the 62nd Session of the General Assembly. Ambassador to the UN, Johan L. Løvald (2007), repeated the call in his statement to the Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan a month later:

“We must all be willing to coordinate, and let ourselves be coordinated... I must underline the urgency of this issue. Some of us raised the need for better coordination here in New York a year ago, and it is indeed worrying that we are still concerned about inadequate coordination. That means that we still risk wasting our resources, and are still losing time, time that we will not be able to make up for later. This is serious because it undermines our efficiency and our credibility and our ability to reach our objectives. Coordination takes leadership, and we must bestow the mandate of such leadership upon the United Nations.”

The Norwegian mission to the UN made frequent statements on the situation in Afghanistan in different UN forums. Norway championed coordination across multiple levels and between various actors. For instance, Norway called for greater intra-donor coordination, arguing that “we need to better coordinate our individual efforts to offer civilian and humanitarian aid”, but also greater inter-donor coordination: “We continue to engage as individual donors rather than maximising our impact by better coordinating our efforts” (Støre, 2009). As indicated above, coordination of civilian development efforts in Afghanistan ought to be under the auspices of the UN, according to Norway. Hence, there was a need to strengthen the coordinating capacity of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). In March 2008 the Norwegian career diplomat Kai Eide was appointed United Nations Special Representative to Afghanistan and Head of UNAMA.

Norway also actively promoted the need for coordination at several of the international conferences on Afghanistan, for instance in Paris in 2008 and London in 2010.

Norwegian efforts to promote coordination were evident also in a NATO context. Ahead of NATO’s November 2006 Riga Summit, Foreign Minister Støre circulated a letter to allied Foreign Ministers contributing to ISAF, calling for a more comprehensive and coordinated approach in Afghanistan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006–2007). The need for coordination was reiterated in different types of NATO events.

Coordination was also on the table in a Nordic context and seemed to be a topic of substantial interest to all Nordic countries. An evaluation published in 2009 looked into the possibilities of increased Nordic development cooperation in and with Afghanistan (Norad, 2009). The report stressed that “Norway places a strong emphasis on donor coordination, particularly on a strengthened Nordic cooperation,” and continued to highlight the aim to

“[S]trengthen the strategic dialogue between the Nordic embassies in Kabul to enhance coordination and policy development. This is done to ensure that the Nordic engagement is complementary, and to clarify where tasks and responsibilities might be divided between which countries. Norway acknowledges that its comparatively large diplomatic presence indicates a responsibility to take such coordination efforts forward.” (Norad, 2009:11)

Domestically, improved coordination was occasionally presented as a silver bullet in the case of Afghanistan. For instance, in 2009, Defence Minister Grete Faremo argued that: “There are no quick fixes in Afghanistan, but some of the success factors seem evident. One is an increased emphasis on Afghan ownership and responsibility. Another is an improved coordination of political, military and humanitarian assistance, in other words, to adopt a comprehensive approach.”

The first detected public call for a comprehensive approach emerged in a newspaper op-ed in December 2005. Defence Minister Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen gave an outline of the new government's policies for the Norwegian military effort in Afghanistan, and maintained that “In order to secure a comprehensive approach in the stability and reconstruction work, the cooperation between military and civilian actors is of great significance.” The Minister pointed to the establishment of PRTs and to national efforts at the capital level to illustrate initiatives taken to secure comprehensiveness. “A comprehensive approach gives better results”, she claimed (Strøm-Erichsen, 2005, author's translation).

3.0 PRACTISING AND PROMOTING CIVIL-MILITARY SEPARATION

Soon after assuming power in 2005, the key ingredient of the Norwegian model, namely the separation of efforts on the ground in Afghanistan, was voiced by members of the new government. Again, it should be noted that neither this line nor that of championing coordination represented a breach with the policies of the previous government.

In the op-ed detailing the new government's Afghanistan policy, Defence Minister Strøm-Erichsen (2005) highlighted that there was no question of military forces doing civilian tasks in the Norwegian-led PRT. Military efforts were to form the basis of reconstruction work under the auspices of civilians. These same views were expressed by Foreign Minister Støre in his November 2005 address to the Storting on Norwegian military and civilian contributions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Støre underscored how military efforts were not sufficient to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan. The newly appointed Foreign Minister continued to make the case for the Norwegian model:

“The government believes it is important to distinguish between the mandate for our military engagement and the mandate for humanitarian organisations. Humanitarian efforts should be designed to help all people in need and should make no distinctions; moreover they should not form a “soft element” in a military strategy to win the support of parts of the population.” (Støre, 2005, author's translation)

According to State Secretaries Raymond Johansen and Espen Barth Eide (2006, author's translation), representing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence, the PRT concept had been configured “in dialogue with Norwegian NGOs working in Afghanistan”. “We have the impression that the Norwegian PRT model in Afghanistan by and large is regarded as positive by Norwegian organisations”, they continued. However, during the first couple of years, the military component of the Norwegian-led PRT was involved in civilian tasks. For instance, various contributions were made to the local hospital in Meymaneh, both in terms of equipment and new facilities. Furthermore, a PRT commander donated USD 10 000 to food distributions (Johansen, 2008). State Secretary Raymond Johansen used arguments frequently employed by NGOs to criticise these efforts: “This is blurring of civil and military roles, and it is a problem... If people come to believe that those providing humanitarian assistance in reality are military, it will lead to civilian aid organisations too becoming military targets” (ibid., author's translation). From 2007

onwards, the Norwegian-led PRT in Meymaneh did not administer funds to carry out reconstruction and development projects. It should be mentioned that from 2010 to 2012, the Norwegian-led PRT cooperated with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and had access to funds for certain projects. The PRT was closed down in 2012.

The civil-military divide has been hotly debated on-and-off throughout the Norwegian engagement in Afghanistan. For instance, during the summer of 2008 the chairman of the Norwegian chapter of Doctors Without Borders published a letter in a national newspaper with the title "Lethal blurring of roles" (Holen, 2008, author's translation). The Norwegian Chief of Defence, General Sverre Diesen, replied with the telling title "Humanitarian puritanism" (Diesen, 2008, author's translation). The main concerns put forward by key NGOs were that civil-military cooperation can cause a blurring of military and civilian roles, can lead to a reduced so-called "humanitarian space", threaten NGO neutrality and the lives of NGO workers and local inhabitants, and hamper NGO access to people in need.

The two State Secretaries also claimed that: "Among other things, on the basis of lessons learned from Iraq, Norwegian authorities have changed their policy in this area, in close dialogue with Norwegian NGOs. We are keen to ensure the clearest possible separation of roles between political, military and humanitarian efforts" (2006, author's translation). The lessons referred to here were drawn from a controversial military force contribution, namely the Norwegian engineering contribution to Iraq in 2003. This contribution, in addition to the Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) contribution to Afghanistan in 2003–2004, played an important part in making Norwegian civilian actors more critical to close civil-military interplay. These contributions provoked the Norwegian NGO sector. The engineer squadron was partly funded through the development assistance budget and mainly justified by humanitarian concerns. This gave rise to strong criticism. The CIMIC contribution to Afghanistan led to debates in Norway. Several vocal NGOs raised great concerns and strongly opposed what they saw as a dangerous blurring of military and civilian roles and efforts.

In 2009 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Justice and the Police published the so-called Faryab strategy. This joint document was a thrust to specify the Norwegian understanding of the comprehensive approach. Its full title was: "A strategy for comprehensive Norwegian civilian and military efforts in Faryab province, Afghanistan". According to the strategy (2009:4), "[t]he respective roles of the Norwegian civilian and military actors shall be clearly distinguished, and the coordination between all actors shall be strengthened and their efforts made coherent".

The civil-military separation was reiterated by Foreign Minister Støre in his address to the Parliament in 2011 on Afghanistan:

"Based on experience from a large number of other complex civil-military operations, and on our own experience and that of others in Afghanistan, we will maintain a clear distinction between humanitarian, development and military efforts. This is also in line with key principles for humanitarian assistance. If these areas are combined, this will eventually undermine both military and civilian efforts."

The humanitarian report published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2009:12) described how Norway regularly raised the matter of civil-military separation in both national and international forums. In NATO, the Norwegian approach was quite exceptional. Norway has presented the rationale for the Norwegian model in NATO, but it remains questionable whether it was widely understood and accepted by NATO allies. Norway's most important ally, the US, had a markedly different thinking and approach. Foreign Minister Støre (2011) has suggested that the Norwegian approach has been influential: "Norway's view in this area is beginning to resonate with a number of our allies and in a range of international forums, and is supported by key international research findings in this field." Evidence to validate the first claim has so far not been found.

Indeed, empirical research on the impact of small-scale development projects has lent some support to the Norwegian model, finding that small-scale, quick-fix development projects did not contribute to increased security (see for instance research conducted by, or under the auspices of, Andrew Wilder at Tufts University. It should be noted that this research was partly funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Later, an evaluation of US foreign assistance to Afghanistan prepared for the Committee on Foreign Relations in United States Senate (2011:8–9) suggested that “Our stabilisation strategy assumes that short-term aid promotes stability in counterinsurgency (COIN) operations and ‘wins hearts and minds’.... These assumptions may not be right.” The evaluation also referred to a Wilton Park conference report, which found “a surprisingly weak evidence base for the effectiveness of aid in promoting stabilisation and security objectives” (2010:1).

Norway was consistently critical of the billions of dollars that was spent on quick impact projects in Afghanistan. According to Espen Barth Eide (Utvalg for sikkerhetspolitikk, nedrustning og internasjonale utfordringer mot norsk sikkerhet, 2011:11), a fundamental lesson from Afghanistan was the significance of comprehensive and long-term planning. Eide continued: “Several short-term projects have been implemented to win ‘hearts and minds’, but these have often been founded on very simplistic understandings of reality of the relationship between politics, security and development.”

A strong commitment to development aid and humanitarian assistance has been a consistent and essential part of Norwegian foreign policy. Norway wants to be an active humanitarian actor. Historian Olav Riste (2005:256) argued that this has been motivated by a “missionary impulse”, seeing “Norwegians’ long and strong traditions of sending missionaries to less fortunate countries as one of the most important roots of Norway’s post World War II efforts for a better and more peaceful world.”

4.0 EXPLAINING THE APPARENT PARADOX

This review of Norway’s role as a champion of coordination suggests that promoting coordination turned out to be politically beneficial to Norway, on both the domestic and international scene. It is difficult to empirically confirm that Norway promoted the need for strengthened coordination in Afghanistan due to political calculations rather than a genuine belief in the merits of the concept. This paper does not claim that Norway, as well as numerous other states and organisations, did not have a strong belief in the merits of coordination. Rather, it sets out to substantiate and discuss how the Norwegian policy of promoting coordination and the comprehensive approach came first and foremost to serve political purposes.

Norway seized the opportunity to play a visible role as the idea of a comprehensive approach reached the international agenda. A window of opportunity had emerged. Increased international attention, most notably from the UN, made the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs more inclined to pursue this agenda. The idea of a comprehensive approach emerged as a fine way to promote Norway. Norwegian actors had identified an arena where they could play a visible role and gain attention and perhaps influence. Norway aspired to influence the comprehensive and integrated approach agendas both within the UN and in NATO. Promoting the comprehensive approach led to visibility and some status in certain international circles, most notably in parts of the UN. The candidacy of Norwegian career diplomat Kai Eide as Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) in Afghanistan was perhaps a driving force for the persistent Norwegian efforts to promote coordination of efforts in Afghanistan throughout 2007.

The comprehensive approach and its calls for coordination also proved to be politically beneficial at home (see Ekhaugen, 2011). It contributed to creating a broad political consensus where there originally was disagreement, not least within the red-green government coalition. It provided a set of justifications for the Norwegian engagement in Afghanistan, which various political parties could use to convince voters. This has been important not least due to the duration and extent of the engagement. The idea of a comprehensive approach helped secure voter support for a complex operation and gave the impression that Norwegian

authorities had a solution to seemingly insoluble problems in Afghanistan. Depicting the Norwegian engagement in Afghanistan as a joint, comprehensive effort helped secure sustained legitimacy for the engagement. It upheld a Norwegian self-image as an important development and humanitarian actor and resonated well with the Norwegian public. The comprehensive approach also contributed to forging political consensus within the coalition government.

The practical separation of civilian and military roles and responsibilities in the field in Afghanistan was mainly a result of pressure from the Norwegian NGO sector, previous experiences and strong humanitarian and development traditions (see Ekhaugen, forthcoming, 2014). This lends support to the following claims: “The reason for the Norwegian ‘exception’ lies in the country’s distinct profile as a marginal military power but a substantial actor in international humanitarian aid and development”, and furthermore “the debate on the need to establish a ‘humanitarian space’ in Afghanistan has been intense – and humanitarian arguments have proved more convincing than military ones” (Ulriksen, 2010). Longstanding Norwegian efforts within development and humanitarian assistance had resulted in a strongly held belief in the long-term perspective. This conviction ran counter to the widespread practice of quick fixes in Afghanistan, such as implementing quick impact projects as part of the COIN campaign.

Norwegian development policy had led to the emergence of a strong NGO sector whose highly sceptical stance had a substantial impact on Norwegian thinking and practice. NGO concerns resonated with both politicians and government officials, particularly in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The close ties between the NGO sector and central politicians played a significant role. Revolving doors, or “elite circulation” (see Tvedt, 2009), whereby a limited number of people alternate between roles as politicians, researchers and NGO leaders drew attention to the comprehensive approach agenda in general and sensitivities to humanitarian concerns in particular (see Ekhaugen 2011, forthcoming 2014). The new Foreign Minister, Jonas Gahr Støre, came from the position as Secretary-General of the Norwegian Red Cross. One of his State Secretaries, Raymond Johansen, was Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council. And, as previously mentioned, one of the co-authors on the independent study on UN Integrated Missions, Espen Barth Eide, now became State Secretary in the Ministry of Defence. Furthermore, prominent Norwegians held important UN positions during the period, which probably also made Norway even more susceptible to an NGO-friendly policy. From 2003 to 2006, Jan Egeland was UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. Egeland was a former Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Secretary General of the Norwegian Red Cross before Jonas Gahr Støre. The field-level separation between civilian and military efforts was a result of lessons learned from decades of humanitarian and development assistance and a political desire to accommodate NGO concerns.

5.0 CONCLUDING REMARKS

As an idea, the comprehensive approach appeared responsible and commendable. It was launched with a fanfare. States and organisations applauded it and acknowledged the need for a comprehensive approach. The idea emerged in anticipation of improved results in complex international operations. This paper suggests that in the Norwegian case, the motives for pursuing the comprehensive approach agenda were complex. Norway’s comprehensive approach turned out to be a politically useful concept. Promoting a comprehensive approach led to international attention. It helped forge political consensus within the Norwegian coalition government and resonated well with the Norwegian public. The division between civilian and military efforts mainly arose from Norwegian development traditions and vocal Norwegian NGOs. A desire to accommodate the NGO sector whilst simultaneously promoting what appeared to be a useful political agenda resulted in what by many was perceived to be a paradoxical version of the comprehensive approach. Domestic political concerns were at the forefront. Interestingly, factors in the Afghan theatre did not seem to influence the Norwegian model.

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