The Comprehensive Approach: From 'Theory' to Practice to Theory

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SUMMARY:

This paper argues that the official NATO documents on the comprehensive approach can be considered layman's theories in the sense that they include conjectures and opinions and are not necessarily based on facts. Largely as a result of the mismatch between these 'theories' and practice, implementing the comprehensive approach remains often improvisational, pragmatic, and ad hoc. The objective of the paper is therefore to identify recurring patterns within the practice of the comprehensive approach and to provide suggestions how to craft an adequate theory on the comprehensive approach. Following a regular project cycle the paper identifies several recurring patterns in the preparation phase, the execution phase and the monitoring and evaluation phase. The paper concludes by providing suggestions how to craft an adequate theory on the comprehensive approach. To do this the paper introduces the concept of evidence-based thinking and outlines how the fundamental facets underlying this concept can be applied to the comprehensive approach.

1.0 INTRODUCTION: 'THEORY' SURROUNDING THE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

The comprehensive approach has become en vogue amongst politicians and practitioners who are active in international peace operations. Several of the recent NATO summits stress the importance of the concept (see e.g. Williams, 2010) and also the NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen is very clear on this[1]:

> "We need what we call a comprehensive approach. And that is the first lesson of this mission. The days when the military could defeat the enemy, then hand the baton off to the civilians and go home, are past us…And Afghanistan is not unique. There are 16 major armed conflicts underway today. All of them are within, rather than between states. In many cases, it is the basic pillars of society that need to be rebuilt. This means that the military and civilians need to work much more closely than they have in the past."

In a similar fashion many other institutions and top-level politicians have plead for a comprehensive approach including the former British prime minister Gordon Brown (De Coning & Friis, 2011), the United Nations Security Council[2] and the European Union (Drent, 2011).

In an attempt to institutionalize the comprehensive approach many countries and supra-national institutions have developed their own 'theories' and models. NATO has developed a Comprehensive Approach Planning

[1] http://archive.atlantic-community.org/index/Open_Think_Tank_Article/The_Future_of_Peace_Operations (Accessed March 3, 2014)

[2] Security Council addresses comprehensive approach to peace-building , Press Release SC/7014, 20 February 2001.

Directive (COPD) (NATO, 2010) that addresses NATO's contribution to a comprehensive approach. In addition, the newly ratified Allied Joint Publication on Civil-Military Cooperation (AJP 3.4.9.) (NATO, 2013) focuses on the interaction between civilian and military actors within a comprehensive approach.

These documents should provide, or at least contribute to, the frame of reference or mental model of NATO troops when they are deployed to a mission area. They can however be considered *layman's theories* in the sense that they include conjectures and opinions and are not necessarily based on facts. In other words, these 'theories' are only modestly consistent with true descriptions of reality. There are several underlying reasons for this. First, NATO's 'theories' on the comprehensive approach are primarily written behind a desk and are often ill-informed with empirics, let alone based upon a structured comparison between different empirical datasets or case studies. Second, the 'theories' are almost entirely developed and commented upon by military personnel. As a result perspectives and concerns of civilian actors such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations (IOs) are hardly included. Third, the 'theories' are a compromise between the 28 independent member countries. This leads to blurring of political rationales of (one of) the member states with the process of crafting a 'theory'. Fourth, the 'theories' are not backed by proper (scientific) research. But despite this, they contain lots of prescriptive knowledge and aim at a *one size fits all approach* as if they were scientifically sound and tested.

In sum, one observes a mismatch between 'theory' and practice. Largely as a result of this, implementing the comprehensive approach remains often improvisational, pragmatic, and ad hoc. When meeting on the ground in theater, personnel works out solutions overcoming differences for the common good. As such, coordination evolves over time in response to specific needs on the ground (Rietjens et al., 2013b). Some say there is merit in this ad hoc approach and argue that every crisis has unique characteristics in which strategies and structures for the comprehensive approach need to reflect the specific and dynamically evolving circumstances. That being true, there are at least two reasons to search for constants and patterns. First, to build on experiences and become more effective. And second to train and prepare to become more proficient.

The objective of the paper is therefore to identify recurring patterns within the practice of the comprehensive approach to international peace operations and to provide suggestions how to craft an adequate theory on the comprehensive approach.

To meet this objective the paper first explores what we exactly mean when referring to the comprehensive approach. Following a regular project cycle, the sections that follow address three distinct phases of the comprehensive approach, namely the preparation phase (section three), the execution phase (section four) and the monitoring and evaluation phase (section five). Within each of these phases the paper identifies some recurring patterns within the comprehensive approach. Section six closes the paper and provides suggestions how to craft an adequate theory on the comprehensive approach.

2.0 THE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH IN PRACTICE: WHAT DO WE MEAN WITH IT?

From the many documents and publications it becomes clear that the concept of the comprehensive approach means different things for different organizations and individual countries (see e.g. De Coning and Friis, 2011; Hallett and Thorngren, 2011). Schnaubelt (2009, p. 7) observes that "despite the frequent use of the term neither the UN, nor EU nor NATO has an official standard definition of 'comprehensive approach'". And while NATO's official documents on the comprehensive approach, the COPD and the AJP 3.4.9 on Civil-Military Cooperation, contain dozens of definitions on all kinds of concepts, no definition is included on what the comprehensive approach exactly means.

Many commentators and researchers have proposed definitions on the concept. A definition with which many seem to agree is formulated by De Coning & Friis (2011). They define the comprehensive approach as:

"*a process aimed at facilitating system wide coherence across security, governance, development and political dimensions of international peace operations*".

In operationalising the comprehensive approach De Coning and Friis (2011) have developed a model consisting of a matrix with two different axes. The horizontal axis of the matrix identifies four levels of coherence within the comprehensive approach. These levels are:

1. Intra-agency coherence (i.e. coherence within one single organization);
2. Whole-of-government coherence (i.e. coherence among different government agencies of a country);
3. Inter-agency coherence (i.e. coherence between different organizations);
4. External-internal coherence (i.e. coherence between international and actors of the host nation such as Afghanistan, Mali or Somalia).

The vertical axis of the matrix consists of six types of relationships ranging from the actors are united (e.g. the actors have established a unified structure and undertake joint action) to the actors compete (actors work at cross purposes). In-between these two extremes they identify levels such as the actors are integrated, they cooperate, they coordinate or they co-exist.

If both the different types relationships and the levels of coherence are mapped against one another a matrix appears (see figure 23-1), which contributes to understanding the complexity of the comprehensive approach. For illustration purposes several examples have been included in the matrix.

Level of coherence / Type of Relationship	**Intra-agency**	**Inter-agency**	**Whole of government**	**External-internal**
Actors are united		*Members of operation Desert Storm in Iraq*		
Actors are integrated			*UK Stabilisation Unit*	
Actors cooperate				
Actors coordinate		*UN cluster approach*		
Actors coexist			*DFID and MoD fail to agree on common evaluation criteria for UK PRT*	
Actors compete	*Various sections of a ministry compete for funding*			*Taliban & ISAF/UNAMA*

Figure 23-1: Comprehensive Approach Model (Adapted from De Coning and Friis, 2011).

3.0 THE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH IN PRACTICE: PREPARATION PHASE

In the preparation phase of the comprehensive approach I will address three issues that show recurring patterns. These issues are training, planning and situational awareness.

Train as you fight[3]

Already in 1973 General William DePuy, first commander of the U.S. Army's Training and Doctrine Command, emphasized that it was necessary to expose soldiers to realistic battlefield conditions before they experienced actual combat (Reeson, 2006). Doing this should improve the soldiers' preparation and thereby their internal efficiency, which in the long run should enable external effectiveness. This belief was widely shared and led to the development of new training methods and a training philosophy that is often referred to as *train as you fight*.

Since the comprehensive approach is about integrating approaches, effectiveness depends on combining military expertise on security with civilian expertise on governance, human rights, rule of law and economic development. To realize this civil-military interaction is of crucial importance. It is therefore remarkable to notice that most military training institutes in both the US and Europe still focus on developing a combat ready force that is physically and psychologically prepared to fight and win wars (see e.g. Leonard et al., 2006).

Over the last years several promising training initiatives have been employed that intend to fill this vacuum. These initiatives include the training courses offered by the NATO accredited Civil-Military Cooperation (Cimic) Centre of Excellence and the German Cimic Competence Centre. Also, a simulation based game - named Go4It - is developed to create a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the comprehensive approach (see Van der Hulst et al., 2014).

A last initiative that is mentioned here is the series of international exercises hosted by the First German Netherlands Corps such as Common Effort (2011), Odyssee Sword (2011), Peregrine Sword (2012) and Reliable Sword (to be held in May 2014). These exercises take place within a comprehensive scenario and have attracted considerable numbers of civilian participants from NGOs, IOs as well as from governmental departments outside the Ministries of Defense.

In such exercises, including the ones hosted by the First German Netherlands Corps, one frequently observes an imbalance in resources. This not only relates to personnel but also to finances and time to prepare the exercise. In this respect it is important to notice that military organizations are often tasked to train during peacetime. For UN agencies, IOs and NGOs, however, this is not the case, mostly because it is an unaffordable luxury in terms of money and time. Generally these organizations have far smaller budgets and numbers of personnel available to dedicate to such exercises.

Civil-military planning[4]

A second recurring theme in the preparation phase is civil-military planning. The increased focus on failed states means that human individuals or groups, be they the enemy or the beneficiary, are increasingly the common denominator for planning military, as well as humanitarian and development efforts (Shetler-Jones, forthcoming). In carrying out their planning processes both military and civilian organizations employ similar concepts of ends, ways and means. However, they dress them up in a different language. Many

[3] This paragraph is based upon Rietjens et al., (2013b).

[4] This paragraph is based on a chapter that is written by Philip Shetler-Jones and will appear in an edited volume on civil-military interaction edited by Gerard Lucius and Sebastiaan Rietjens (Springer, forthcoming).

civilian planning processes explicate a narrative description of the change that they envision in the conflict. They subsequently justify their efforts and programs on the contribution that is made to this ideal process. In doing this many organizations employ so-called 'logical frameworks' in which they link their actions to outputs, results and outcomes. Progress is being tracked using a set of indicators (see e.g. EU Integration Office, 2011). Likewise, a military planning process often "produces a linear narrative punctuated by a sequence of 'decisive conditions' along lines of effort that converge in an end-state" (Shetler-Jones, forthcoming).

Both military and civilian planners take care to keep their planning process and sometimes the product of planning out of the public eye. Military organizations do this to preserve the element of surprise, while civilian planners may want to keep their planning processes independent and objective. Shetler-Jones (forthcoming) argues that "legitimate motives for secrecy, however, may also be mixed with a less honorable desire to avoid accountability, in case the plan goes wrong".

Despite these similarities military and civilian planning processes show considerable differences. Although both forms of planning focus on the human elements, military planning is mostly concerned with the enemy, while most civilian organizations aim at restoring material conditions and freedoms to the individual. This may create tension in the relationship between military and civilian organizations. In particular when "planning objectives are in contradiction over differential treatment of an individual or group that has been designated as the enemy" (Shelter-Jones, forthcoming).

Another major difference that is addressed here concerns the timing. Civilian organizations that focus on the root causes of the conflict are often prepared to stay in the area for a far longer period than the military. On the contrary, military efforts are often planned on the expectations of achieving a decisive result as quickly as possible. This means that they often fall out of synchronization with each other, creating different opinions concerning for instance, what is "reasonable" progress during a certain time period (Rietjens, 2008).

Situational awareness

A third and last pattern that is identified here concerns gaining situational awareness. In complex and dynamic environments, situational awareness is critical for decision making (see e.g. Salmon et al., 2011). One of the main problems however is that so many things are happening at the same time. This complicates the gathering and interpreting of information by the various different actors. Using Endsley's 3 level model of situational awareness (Endsley, 1995; Endsley et al., 2003) one is able to discern some of the patterns that occur in gaining situational awareness within a comprehensive approach.

The first level in Endsley's SA model concerns the perception of elements and involves perceiving the status, attributes and dynamics of task-related elements in the surrounding environment (Endsley, 1995). At this level, the data is merely perceived and no further processing of the data takes place. Within the comprehensive approach one observes a number of factors that contribute to uncertainty at this level. With regard to the quality of the data these factors include missing data, unreliability of the data, incongruent or conflicting data, timeliness of the data and ambiguous or noisy data. Factors that relate to the distribution of data include the many confidentiality and security restrictions held by the military, as well as the sensitivity of data of civilian organizations (Rietjens, 2008; Studer, 2001).

The second level in Endsley's model – the comprehension stage - involves integrating many pieces of data to form information, and prioritizing that combined information's importance and meaning as it relates to achieving the present goals (Endsley et al., 2003). Within the comprehensive approach and particular within military organizations one often encounters very ill-structured databases. Participants are often unsure what information they exactly need. As a result the focus has been on data gathering and less attention has been paid to analyzing these data. A study into the practice of assessing progress in Afghanistan showed that:

> "the assessors had little insight into the usefulness of the data presented in terms of representational value, validity, timeliness, and central tendency (deviations from the average). They did not, however, mind very much, it seemed. The figures were often used as objective indicators and extrapolations were made that may lead to seeming certainties. Certainly, qualitative information was also used, but convincing narratives, level-headed accounts to clarify data, were left out. After all, "We should not have too much information on one sheet", said one British colonel chairing a large working group on effect assessment." (Rietjens et al., 2011)

The third and highest level of situational awareness involves predicting the future states of the system and elements in the environment (Endsley, 1995). "A failure to accurately project (level 3 situational awareness) from level 2 situational awareness may be due to insufficient mental resources (if the person is overloaded with other information processing, for example), or due to insufficient knowledge of the domain" (Endsley et al., 2003, p. 18). With regard to the comprehensive approach one observes significant difficulties in obtaining level 1 and level 2 situational awareness, which makes it very difficult to develop good situational awareness at level 3.

4.0 THE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH IN PRACTICE: EXECUTION PHASE

In the execution phase three levels of coherence as identified in the matrix of De Coning and Friis (2011; see figure 23-1) are elaborated on. These include interagency coherence, whole-of-government coherence and external-internal coherence[5].

Interagency coherence

Interaction between military forces and IOs and NGOs is an often debated topic when discussing the comprehensive approach. Interdependency between these different organizations is apparent and is caused by overlapping tasks and scarce resources in mission areas (see e.g. Williams, 2005). Military and civil operations affect each other at all levels and there is serious risk that they counteract each other.

The relationship between military and civilian actors such as IOs and NGOs is bound with many challenges. Within military as well as civilian circles, multiple and conflicting stances on the appropriateness of the comprehensive approach are part of everyday reality (Rietjens et al., 2013b). Some IO/NGOs are reluctant to be associated with a military force and thereby lose their protective patina of neutrality. Frerks et al. (2006) refer to these organizations as being *principled*, whereas *pragmatic* organizations generally interact more easily with military forces.

Another challenge for this type of civil-military relationship is the temporary nature of the coalition parties involved (Rietjens, 2008). Since civil actors and their military counterparts frequently have different objectives and different ways of achieving these (Rietjens, 2008) they look favorably on cooperation as long as they expect it to serve their best interests (Seiple, 1997). This can easily lead to opportunistic behavior. Moreover, differences in organizational culture (Scheltinga et al., 2004), expertise, methods and objectives between the two sets of actors also contribute to this complexity.

Another relationship that is very prominent within the comprehensive approach is the one between military forces with private military firms (PMFs). PMFs are numerous[6] and can roughly be divided into three

[5] To also address the fourth level of coherence – intra-agency – goes beyond the scope of this paper and requires analyses on e.g. the different approaches, strategies and working methods of the individual actors that participate in the comprehensive approach.

[6] At the height of operations in Iraq there were an estimated 190,000 employees of PMFs working for the American Ministry of Defense alone (Heinecken, 2013).

different categories (Singer, 2005): (1) military provider firms, mainly focusing on tactical assistance or combat services, (2) military consulting firms focusing on strategic advice and military training and (3) military support firms providing for example logistics, intelligence and maintenance.

Apart from doing a great amount of work, the rise of these PMFs has led to several unforeseen consequences for the armed forces. While traditionally the military profession had the monopoly on knowledge and skills related to managing violence, over the last years one observes a shift towards outsourcing training and education. For example 80% of all the army training in the UK takes place with outside support (Heinecken, 2013). Linked to this is a loss of autonomy. In the past armed forces were able to determine who was granted access to their domain. However, with the blurring of boundaries between the public and private sector, the military can longer determine this. In addition to these consequences one can observe a loss of sense of corporateness and an erosion of service ethics as a result of the rise of PMFs (Heinecken, 2013).

Despite their great importance within the comprehensive approach PMFs are hardly referred to within NATO 'theories'. And if that is the case, such as within the COPD, their activities are related to host nation support only.

Whole-of-government coherence

Over the last years we saw a significant rise of civilian representatives showing up in mission areas that originate from other departments than a country's Ministry of Defense. These representatives include policemen, political advisors, cultural advisors, development advisors, rule of law advisors, agricultural advisors and counter narcotics advisor. A recurring issue that one often observes is a great imbalance in personnel and finances. While 99% of the personnel tends to be military only 1% is civilian. With regard to the financial resources the division is just the opposite. Here civil representatives often have control and direction of greater financial resources than military personnel.

A second issue is the division of tasks and responsibilities. In many instances it becomes blurred who does what, especially when it comes to tasks and responsibilities at the edge of an organization's domain. Within many military organizations the Cimic officers used to take care of the liaison with IOs and NGOs in their mission area. However, with their steady influx, civilian representatives have slowly taken over the communication with IOs and NGOs. Often this was because these representatives were more comfortable in dealing with IOs and NGOs and had better connections with these organizations. This often left the Cimic officer with a marginalized role. In a similar fashion it is often not clear under what circumstances training and education of local police forces is being done by military police personnel or by 'regular' policemen.

The dual roles of civilian representatives is a third recurring pattern. In many cases civilian representatives have both ministerial responsibilities such as running a development program as well as an advisory role towards their military colleagues. When time and resources are scarce this causes friction.

Finally, information exchange between military and civilian representatives proves to be difficult in practice. It is often hampered by technological means (e.g. civilians not being able to access military systems), or competing goals (e.g. the military spending development money aimed at 'winning the hearts and minds' of the population).

External-internal coherence

Post-conflict peace processes that are driven by external actors are often unsustainable. These processes must be based on the needs of the internal actors, and "the priorities, sequencing and pace of delivery need to be informed by the dynamics of the conflict system, through local ownership and meaningful internal/external coordination" (De Coning and Friis, 2011, p. 267). There are several recurring patterns concerning the coherence between internal and external actors. Barakat's (2005) comparative research concluded that many reconstruction processes use too short a time horizon and reduce reconstruction to a technical fix instead of a

process of reordering state-society relations and power. He also states that local actors are often left out of the equation. Moreover, reconstruction processes are often too oriented to achieving national-level reconstruction (Rietjens et al., 2009). This orientation runs the risk of overlooking the localized threats to individual security or the reconstruction effort itself (Hilhorst, 2008).

Another pattern relates to the motives of military forces. In Afghanistan as well as Iraq military forces often favor activities to increase the safety of own forces over projects aimed at improving grass-root security. In their research on external-internal coherence in Afghanistan Rietjens et al. (2009) illustrate this as follows:

> "In Baghlan province, the Dutch [military] carried out a number of activities for the direct benefit of the community. A considerable number of these activities, however, were conducted in close proximity to the military compound. This was often referred to as the "six-mile rule," describing the tendency to positively influence those communities located within six miles of the compound. Military motives based on force protection may thus create inequality in addressing the needs of the population living in a confined area, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Many Afghans remain doubtful about ISAF's intentions, a fact which hinders local participation." (Rietjens et al., 2009, p. 8)

A last recurring pattern that is addressed here concerns the limited resources and capacities of the internal actors. In many mission areas external actors, be they military or civilian, find it hard to identify credible internal actors to start a meaningful relationship with. This is because "the parties emerging out of conflict typically represent ambiguous groups, and there are often conflicting claims of ownership and support" (De Coning and Friis, 2011, p. 268). Other reasons that hamper meaningful engagement with external actors include the low level of education that many internal actors have, the lack of proper wages, an absence of accountability systems, and at many places the illicit narcotics trade (Rietjens et al., 2009).

5.0 THE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH IN PRACTICE: MONITORING AND EVALUATION PHASE

Both during and after the execution phase, monitoring and evaluating performance is important for several reasons including increased transparency and accountability, the evaluation of outputs, and improve communication and coordination between participating organizations (see e.g. Rietjens et al., 2011). Carrying out monitoring and evaluation activities within the comprehensive approach is however intrinsically difficult (see also Peter Essens' paper at this conference). To start with there are many different systems that focus on performance measurement. These systems are often disconnected, using different methodologies and terminology (Cohen, 2006). And while some of these systems focus on inputs and processes of an organization others aim for outputs or outcomes. In this respect it is often much easier to define what activities an organization employs (e.g. the amount of dollars spent, the number of schools built or the number of weapons collected) but this does not necessarily provide the right answers.
Applying accounting and control concepts (see e.g. Merchant and Van der Stede, 2007) to the comprehensive approach leads us to see several recurring patterns. First, despite an increased focus on metrics within many institutions, selecting the right measures remains a difficult issue. Glenn and Gayton (2008) state that many organizations must balance the desire for simple, easily assessed and comprehensible metrics with a very rigorous approach, in which increased data collection and subsequent analysis attempt to satisfy all prospective users' requirements.

Second, finding a causal relationship between actions and the effects or outcomes is difficult in general, but particularly in international peace operations. To establish causality requires that very specific, in fact impossible, conditions be met (Davids et al., 2011). Hence, within the comprehensive approach there are huge difficulties to determine outcomes and identify causal relationships between these and an organization's actions (Glenn and Gayton, 2008).

Finally, measurement easily increases bureaucracy (see e.g. de Bruijn, 2007). When an organization emphasizes performance measurement it often assigns considerable resources to producing data and information on performance results and - if possible- impact. This can increase the load of bureaucracy enormously. Power (1994) even refers to this as the "audit explosion" or "audit society". A clear example of such a situation was found within ISAF headquarters in Kabul where an entire organization (i.e. the Afghan Assessment Group) was established which focused on measuring dozens of indicators in order to make sense of the progress in Afghanistan (Rietjens et al., 2011).

6.0 TOWARDS AN ADEQUATE THEORY ON THE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

As the previous sections have shown several recurring patterns can be identified in the practice of the comprehensive approach. Identifying these however does not classify for a complete theory. This becomes clear when we consider the meaning of theory. A good starting point for this is Weick (1989, p. 517) who defines a theory as "an ordered set of assertions about a generic behavior or structure assumed to hold throughout a significantly broad range of specific instance". Whetten (1989) suggests that a complete theory must contain the following essential elements: the factors (variables, constructs, concepts) that should be logically considered part of the explanation of the social or individual phenomenon of interest; the relations between these factors as they are ordered into patterns of causality; and the underlying assumptions about the (psychological, economic, social or other) dynamics that justify the selection of factors and proposed relationships or patterns.

In the practice of the comprehensive approach, there is little proven knowledge and there are no fixed standards available about how to achieve the intended objectives (Rietjens et al., 2013a). That is the description of the so-called wicked problems, which are ambiguous and fuzzy and extremely difficult to assess (Noordergraaf and Abma, 2003). Formulating a complete theory on the comprehensive approach is therefore simply a bridge too far at this point.

But how should we then proceed? Due to the unique character of the comprehensive approach with respect to e.g. the operational environment, the actors involved and the sensitivities between these actors, an adequate understanding of the empirical data seems critical. There is thus an important argument for introducing more evidence-based thinking into the field of the comprehensive approach. In essence this means a systematic and evidence-informed practice of, in this case, the comprehensive approach. Evidence-based thinking has emerged in medicine (Sackett et al., 1996), but has also been advocated in policing (Sherman, 2002), management (Rousseau, 2006) and recently in military studies (Soeters and Heeren-Bogers, 2013). "This way of thinking attempts to combine the best available external evidence from systematic research with individual expertise and experience [of practitioners]" (Soeters and Heeren-Bogers, 2013, p. 118).

Rousseau (2012) identifies four fundamental facets underlying such evidence based thinking. The first facet is to make use of the best available scientific findings. Due to its multidisciplinary character, the comprehensive approach finds itself on the crossroads of several different scientific domains. These include, but are not limited to interagency coordination, disaster studies, sociology, counterinsurgency, anthropology and public administration. Each of these domains has different insights to offer and it would thus be foolish to rely on one or only a few of them. In addition to the different domains, there is a wide variety of research methods that one can apply to better understand the comprehensive approach (see e.g. Soeters et al., 2014 for an extensive treatment of different research methods in military studies). In addition to the classical *one case one country* studies that are often performed several less traditional research methods seem very promising. These include big data analysis (how can we make better use of the enormous datasets that large institutions such as NATO have?), quasi-experiments (exploiting conditions in the real world that either closely resemble random subject selection into different groups or that take advantage of nonrandom group selection that is methodologically useful because of the group contrasts) and studies that carefully compare different

practices of the comprehensive approach.

The second facet that Rousseau (2012) identifies is the gathering and attending to facts, indicators and metrics in a systematic fashion to increase their reliability and usefulness. Within the comprehensive approach there are many challenges that come along with this. These include the complexity of selecting right indicators, fuzzy relation between inputs and outputs, thoughtless reliance on techniques, lack of cultural understanding and stakeholder participation, and strategic action vis-a-vis the performance measurements (See e.g. Rietjens et al., 2011). To address these challenges demands interpretation, sense-making, and qualitative interpretation. However, in many cases especially military people insist on having quantitative data at their disposal: "a briefing with qualitative date . . . is not yet accepted" (Glenn & Gayton, 2008). It should be well understood that quantitative data, provided they are reliable, valid, timely, and adequately analyzed, and provided they have been carefully assessed on these merits, are indispensable. Simple metrics may render long discussions superfluous, but these simple metrics should be provided with a sound interpretation (Glenn & Gayton, 2008). This resembles the third facet identified by Rousseau (2012), which is the on-going use of critical, reflective judgment and decision aids in order to reduce bias and improve decision quality.

The fourth and final facet underlying evidence-based thinking relates to considering ethical issues such as the short- and long-term impact of decisions on stakeholders. Relating this to the comprehensive approach means that there should be interaction with different stakeholders including those of the host nation about e.g. the goals, timelines and modus operandi. As such there should be room for varied sense-making and thus the possibility to present different views and analyses, including those of the local communities. Enhancing the "local footprint" (Denhardt et al., 2009; Rietjens et al., 2009) seems to be needed in all phases of the comprehensive approach, from preparation to execution to monitoring and evaluation.

In the end, utilizing all these main facets of evidence-based thinking brings us a step closer to a full theory on the comprehensive approach.

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