A highly unscientific guide to civil-military coherence

As a former field-level practitioner of civil-military coherence now engaged in policy review, I always keep an eye out for implementable recommendations. In my recent study of coherence strategies in the EU’s responses to external crises, I believe I may have found a simple and highly unscientific guide to success.

Coherence: a user’s manual

Coordinating external instruments in reality is quite easy. Regardless of whether your approach is comprehensive or integrated (pick your preferred definition of either), it should be inclusive in the broadest sense of the word so that you maximise coherence and thereby effectiveness at all levels. This typically also refers to all phases, including inter alia, planning, execution and evaluation. (An exception here is if you are under CSDP, in which case evaluation is confined to the internal strategic reviews so as to not risk signposting your shortcomings.) If you pay attention to the views and settings included, the action becomes context-sensitive and if you go so far as to accommodate anything non-generic, it is context-adapted. Context here refers to the operational, strategic and political levels, which are all of equal importance and should be considered in the target country, EU-28, partnering non-member states and in Brussels.

If you are in a contested environment, you should at this point add a bit of threat context and preferably share your analysis with as many as you can. In any event, you should always remember to consider the unique social context of the target country, which is very important to attain the pro omnibus mandatory local ownership. And, whatever you do, remember that your primary objective is to ensure that your action benefits the target population and is consistent with the priorities of the EU-28.

As you are progressing, it is imperative that you coordinate internally with other EU actors; externally with international and regional organisations, EU member states and non-member states, and the host country; and very importantly across the civil-military divides to avoid duplicate efforts and capabilities and instead gain strategic, operational and civil-military complementarity and synergy.

When you have collected sufficient checkmarks for inclusive, internal, external, civil-military coordination, you will have naturally established a context-adapted, tailor-made and harmonised model of action that should implicitly solve any inherent contradictions such as asking civilian missions to monitor (requiring distance and impartiality) and mentor (requiring closeness, trust and partnerships); or tasking military operations with training host nation forces in effective counter-terrorism operations, but failing to provide them with the necessary equipment or operational embedment.

Where things get tricky

The idea of a comprehensive approach nurturing a culture of coordination under a shared responsibility between equal actors presents significant inherent challenges that are rarely addressed: The hard reality of coordination is that it
requires compromise – and compromise requires priorities. Frequently, priorities between operational objectives, multiple actors and multidimensional peacebuilding efforts are not provided from a strategic level. Too often shared responsibility becomes no responsibility and actors are left with very little incentive to let themselves be coordinated.

This is a justifiable dynamic between truly independent actors, but is it a justifiable cost to incur between the EU’s wide – but operationally independent – array of instruments and multiple command chains? I hope that our upcoming research on coordination will push our shared understanding beyond the strategic collection of buzzwords and closer to the difficult realities of compromise. As our research progresses, I make this challenge: that we speak of coordination less in terms of the beauty of the vision and more in terms of the complexities of the reality. It will be a fine day when operational guidance tells us not to simply coordinate or harmonise, but rather what and what not, with whom and to what – specific – end.

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Events


Some 100 experts, policymakers and practitioners met at the premises of the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) in Brussels to discuss the concept of ‘resilience’ and its implications for EU conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

The opening statements from four panellists prompted a lively debate on the concept and its implementation.

Elisabeth Pape from the European Commission’s Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) outlined the process of consultation with NGOs, international organisations (including the World Bank, the United Nations, and OECD), the Member States, and think tanks as the Commission (together with the European External Action Service) is drafting a new communication on resilience.

Tim Heath from the EEAS provided an overview of the communication’s substance. He highlighted that conflict produced serious stresses on resilience and that this meant that issues such as transitional justice were relevant to the concept. Stability must not mean preserving the status quo, and EU values
are not an optional add-on to its policies and approaches, he argued: the EUGS is all about fostering ‘human security’, the conceptual problems of that term notwithstanding, and at the heart of this is the bridging of different perspectives on peace and conflict.

Lembit Uuido, Estonia’s ambassador to the Political and Security Committee, presented a more security-focused view of resilience. Social cohesion, he said, is a core element of resilience, but at the same time the concept also includes critical services that ensure the functioning of society and the state (transport, energy, and communications, for example).

Kathrin Schick, director of VOICE, expressed a certain scepticism towards the notion that resilience would really one day guide the EU’s action in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Resilience is not a goal but a process and falls more in the development field than it does in humanitarian action. The humanitarian community has, according to her, been pushing for a more political approach to conflict for many years. Schick is concerned about the relatively short timeframe allocated to the development of resilience communication and said that the EU was not good at institutional knowledge and lessons learned.


Maastricht University organised a workshop at its Campus Brussels on EU, UN and OSCE capabilities in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The aim of the workshop was to bring consortium researchers together with policy-makers and practitioners in Brussels as well as other relevant experts on the topic. During the workshop, DL 4.1 (published in November 2016) was presented and discussed with a view to disseminating its findings to relevant end users in Brussels. A draft version of DL 4.2 was also presented and discussed with the aim of gathering input and feedback in line with EU-CIVCAP’s co-production objectives. Furthermore, a roundtable was organised on the EU’s integrated approach with the intention of gathering insights for DL 4.3, which is due for completion in the second half of the project.

During the second part of the workshop (chaired by Dr. Petar Petrov, Maastricht University), Dr. Nicoletta Pirozzi of IAI in Rome, Bert Versmessen of the EEAS/CPCC, Annick Hiensch of the UN Liaison Office for Peace and Security, and Nabila Habbida of EPLO in Brussels provided insights on the EU’s integrated approach in the context of the implementation of the EU Global Strategy. These introductions were followed by a discussion with the audience.

Event reports published
All reports from previous EU-CIVCAP events have now been published in full online. They are available at:
https://eu-civcap.net/category/events/
Our Expert Network is growing. We have a new member, Dr Anita Lacey, who is an Associate Professor in Politics and International Relations at the University of Auckland. Her bio is available at: https://eu-civcap.net/portfolio/anita-lacey/

The Expert Network presently numbers 45 experts in total from around the world and across professions:
https://eu-civcap.net/about-us/expert-network/

Expert of the Month blog articles

Craig Oliphant is a Senior Adviser in the NGO sector, at the London-based Peaceful Change Initiative (PCI). He was previously Europe/Central Asia adviser at the NGO Saferworld (2011-2015). Until the end of 2010 his career was in the British diplomatic service and he was Head of the Eastern Research Group at the FCO, dealing with Russia and Eastern Europe, and with a particular focus on protracted conflicts in the Caucasus.

In his article “Perspectives on the situation in eastern Ukraine” – the Expert of the Month blog post for May – Oliphant concludes:

“There are those who say that the situation in eastern Ukraine will not be solved until Ukraine decides what kind of country it wants to be. The more salient factor to add here is that that point will not come until Moscow is prepared to start backing a political settlement. Moreover, and further complicating the situation, there remain far more questions than answers about a broader context issue: the direction of Russia-US relations under the Donald Trump presidency. So, none of that assists in the drawing of early insights or conclusions on what this all might mean for Ukraine.

The dispiriting outlook, as aforementioned, is that Ukraine clearly faces a long-haul challenge before it will see any palpable change on what is set to be a protracted conflict. All of that, though, serves to underline the key purpose of reaching out in small but practical ways to engage with people at the local level and in vulnerable areas, in otherwise admittedly raw circumstances.

That is crucially important to show that Kyiv takes an inclusive approach towards its different communities and should recognise the potential of tapping into, for example, the ‘connectivity’ of the regular daily flow of people back and forth across the checkpoints (often as many as 30,000 or more per day) between DNR, LNR and the rest of Ukraine, and as a possible platform for future, although as yet elusive, confidence building.”

The article is available here:
https://eu-civcap.net/2017/05/01/perspectives-on-the-situation-in-eastern-ukraine/

April 2017: Nicholas Whyte, Senior Director, Global Solutions in APCO Worldwide’s Brussels office, writes:

“Those who have straddled both sides of the analyst/practitioner divide will be all too aware of the problems of applying theory to practice when it comes to conflict. It is a tough assignment to explain consociationalism or disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) to local actors who may have been locked in conflict for decades, and who may well be convinced that their local struggles are uniquely complex in the history of the world. I have also encountered the opposite circumstance – that of local actors who are so well-versed in international precedent that they can floor visiting international officials in debate (some in the Transnistrian leadership are unsurprisingly better informed about the status of the Åland Islands than, say, the average Finn).

Sometimes it’s better to abandon detail for a while and concentrate on the big picture. I contend that most of the elements of building a post-conflict settlement can be put into one of three baskets: coercion, cash and culture. For understandable reasons, international actors tend to obsess about one or other of the first two of these, though in fact it is the third that often proves the sticking point.”
The article, under the title “Coercion, cash and culture: how to resolve conflicts,” can be found here: https://eu-civcap.net/2017/04/01/coercion-cash-and-culture-how-toresolve-conflicts/

March 2017: Johann Rebert, Deputy Country Representative (Sri Lanka) for the Asia Foundation, considers “Community policing in Sri Lanka: a foundation for wider police reform?” He writes:

“Community-oriented policing is not necessarily new, but its popularity has grown significantly over the recent past. The purpose of community policing is often to improve community-police relations and ensure greater police responsiveness to local safety and security issues. Community policing is often spoken of as a ‘philosophy’, which enables its implementation to remain flexible and adapted to local priorities and political dynamics. The community policing approach often has broad and varied objectives, depending on whether one asks citizens, the police, NGOs or donors.

These objectives can range from preventing and reducing crime, and the fear of crime, to building trust and confidence between the community and police, to seeking to ensure a more accountable police service and improving state-society relations (Denney and Jenkins 2013). These multiple and overlapping objectives can often present a challenge when supporting the implementation of community policing, which The Asia Foundation has grappled with over the years.”

For the full article, see: https://eu-civcap.net/2017/03/01/community-policing-in-sri-lanka-a-foundation-for-wider-police-reform/
Deliverables

DL 2.6 – EU Capabilities for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: A Capabilities-Based Assessment
This paper presents a conceptual and methodological framework to support the implementation of the EU-CIVCAP project, and defines the key concepts of conflict prevention, peacebuilding, resources, and capabilities to ensure consistency across different work packages and deliverables. The paper draws on a range of literatures (strategic management, development and military studies, for example) and develops a capabilities-based assessment approach (CBA). This CBA will be used by each WP to identify gaps in capabilities in each of the phases of the conflict cycle. This framework allows for the identification of existing and required capabilities in order for the EU to achieve its goals in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. This framework moves from previous assessments of EU capabilities that have focused on short-term requirements to a more strategic and holistic approach to capability development, by linking goals to capabilities. The paper also summarises the project’s methodology and data collection methods, including ethical and risk-related issues to be considered by those conducting empirical fieldwork, especially where that fieldwork is carried out in conflict areas. The full report will be published in September.

DL 7.4 – Institutional Learning and Lessons Identified in EU Civilian Conflict Prevention: A framework for analysis
The purpose of this paper is to develop a conceptual and analytical framework to help relevant EU-CIVCAP partners operationalise learning-related activities associated with EU conflict Prevention/Peacebuilding policies. This involves identifying, organising, evaluating, and disseminating a range of learning-related findings regarding EU conflict prevention efforts, with a view to improving the EU’s performance in this area. The general framework and initial examples of learning found within this document are the product of a previous EU-funded project (EUCONRES) that ran under Michael E. Smith’s direction from 2008-13. For the EU-CIVCAP project, the rest of this paper attempts to first provide a definition of learning, focusing on its experiential/institutional dimensions. It then turns to the measurement of EU learning-focused efforts in the domain of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. In the third section, the paper presents a framework for organising various lessons identified as a result of EU conflict resolution efforts. Finally, the paper suggests several parameters for inputting lessons into our online catalogue/database of lessons identified. This entire approach will be adapted throughout the course of the project in light of inputs and findings by the project members, and will contribute to the production of key EU-CIVCAP deliverables at the end of 2018.

All our publicly available Deliverables can be accessed at:
https://eu-civcap.net/portfolio/deliverables/

Other publications

Tim Edmunds published a working paper on “Maritime Capacity Building in the Horn of Africa: States of Somalia”. Maritime capacity building in the States of Somalia remains a relatively recent activity, with few initiatives dating back more than five or six years. In this time, it has undoubtedly had a positive impact in some areas. However, the success of these activities has been narrow and uneven. They have been able to strengthen pockets of capacity in specific organisations and institutions, but they have done so in a manner that has not always been well coordinated with other donor activities or local priorities, and in an environment of wider political, economic and institutional weaknesses that have constrained their impact and on which they have been dependent. Given the scale of the challenge, the transnational and regionally situated nature of the maritime problem space, and the timescales over which such activities have taken place, it is perhaps not surprising that they have struggled to be transformative in nature. Even so, the extent to which they have often taken place in the absence of local involvement at the levels of problem identification and project development and evaluation is also notable. This deficit has led to a ‘thin’ rather than ‘thick’ legitimacy amongst local actors, and has exacerbated existing challenges of relevance, duplication and sustainability.
The working paper is available at:  
https://eucivcap.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/eucivcap-workingpaper-01-17-edmunds.pdf

Policy briefing: “Improving the EU’s local capacity building efforts in post-conflict environments”, by Ana E. Juncos, Gilberto Algar-Faria, Timothy Edmunds, Katarina Đokić, Erik Plänitz, Khadir Abdi and Savannah Simons.

After the failures that accompanied UN interventions in the early 1990s, local capacity building (CB) and local ownership have become matters of concern for the international community. This interest in ‘the local’ stems from the fact that its inclusion is increasingly understood to be essential to successful peacebuilding, providing the crucial link in the search for effectiveness and legitimacy in international peacebuilding initiatives. CB programmes—including training activities, mentoring and advising, and the provision of equipment and large infrastructure—have become key to strengthening capabilities at the individual and organisational levels. But while CB has positively impacted some areas, success has been narrow and uneven.

EU-CIVCAP’s DL 6.1 evaluates international efforts in CB in five geographical areas: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Kosovo, Serbia and Somalia. Overall, the findings of the report highlight that CB programmes have been able to strengthen pockets of capacity in specific organisations and institutions, but they have done so in a manner that has not always been well coordinated with other donor activities or local priorities, and in an environment of wider political, economic and institutional weaknesses that have constrained their impact and on which they have been dependent. Given the scale of the challenge and the timescales over which such activities have taken place, it is perhaps not surprising that they have struggled to be transformative in nature. Yet, as discussed in this report, there are some marked differences between what the international community has been able to achieve in the Horn of Africa and the Western Balkans. The level of success has varied depending on the local context and the level of resources channelled into each of these cases, with the Western Balkans benefiting from a more intensive international intervention in the 1990s/2000s. The prospect of EU/NATO membership has also acted as a catalyst in the Balkans, though not without difficulties.

Despite the differences between the Western Balkans and the Horn of Africa, there was agreement among the report’s interviewees about the extent to which international CB activities have occurred without local involvement at the levels of problem identification, project development and evaluation. This deficit has led to a ‘thin’ rather than ‘thick’ legitimacy amongst local actors, in the sense that the activities have been broadly accepted and often welcomed by a small section of elite local actors, even if they are not always seen to be successful in practice, nor to be particularly cognisant of local needs. The deficit has exacerbated the existing problems of relevance, duplication and sustainability. However, in the case of the Western Balkans, increasing capacities at the local level and more involvement of local civil society actors and regional cooperation has narrowed the gap between the rhetorical commitment to local ownership by international actors, and its implementation in practice. In the Horn of Africa, and particularly in the States of Somalia, this gap remains to be filled.

The paper contains a set of recommendations to improve donors’ CB programmes, specifically in EU programmes and missions.  
https://eucivcap.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/eu-civcap_policy_briefing-2017-01.pdf

Jenny Berglund (EU Satellite Centre) wrote an opinion article under the title “Technological shortcomings for EU Conflict Early Warning and Conflict Analysis”. It is available at  
https://eu-civcap.net/2017/05/03/technological-shortcomings-for-eu-conflict-early-warning-and-conflict-analysis/
Catalogue of Lessons Identified

The EU-CIVCAP catalogue of lessons identified is an online, searchable and living document which gathers all the lessons identified by the project’s Work Packages and published in our Deliverables. The evidence presented in this catalogue will be collected from official documents and reports, secondary sources and interviews with practitioners. To facilitate search through the archive, lessons identified are categorised according to the following criteria: relevant actor/institution, region/country, policy phase, conflict stage, cross-cutting issues and topics. The catalogue will be continually updated to reflect the ongoing research findings of the project until the end of November 2018.

The first ten lessons are now available online at: [https://eu-civcap.net/lessons/](https://eu-civcap.net/lessons/)
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