# What will distinguish this meeting of minds?

In this era of rapid 'transition', budgetary constraints, large-scale natural disasters, and complex political situations emanating from fragile states, the international community is caught in a vicious circle when responding to crises. As the magnitude, complexity and incidence of these events escalate, more and more parties become involved, and people suffer from 'interaction and information overload'.
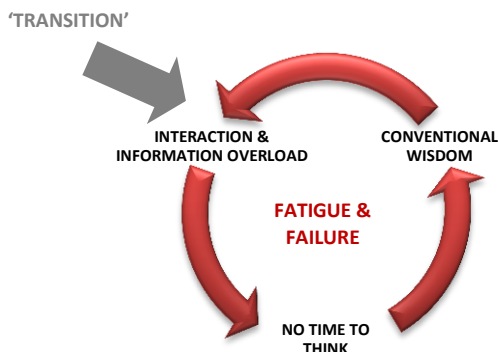
The result is less time for people to think, and so rather than challenge the conventional wisdom, acquiescence becomes the default option. At best the wheel is re-invented and more of the same expands the body of literature that already fills libraries and lessons centres across NATO countries.

So in answering DSACEUR's question about how to achieve more effective civil-military interaction when addressing the security challenges of the 21st Century, how can we ensure that this conference plays a part in breaking the vicious circle – especially for those involved where the 'rubber hits the tarmac'?

SHAPE's intention is for us not to engage in a policy debate over definitions or already agreed divisions of labour within the international community, but to take a different approach to the challenge. Small groups of civilian and military **practitioners** will focus on four key **processes** of working together in crisis environments: *assessment; planning; operations;* and *learning.*

To help inform the dialogue, a carefully selected diverse group (military, diplomatic, aid, finance, academic) was invited to a workshop in Washington DC, for a pre-conference 'test drive'. The conversation was framed by their characterisation of the current and desired future state of 'a comprehensive approach'.

Several observations resonated with conclusions drawn from our practical experience and action research in some of the world's most fragile states (Afghanistan, DRC, Haiti, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan):

- The initial brainstorm could be categorised along the same four lines as the following principles of an integrated approach outlined in UK doctrine[i]:

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proactive engagement
collaborative working
outcome-based thinking
### shared understanding

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- Several available definitions of the approach resonated due to the emphasis on a 'more nuanced, cooperative effort', where actors are: *'not compelled to work together toward a common goal; instead, they participate out of a shared understanding and appreciation for what that goal represents'.[ii]*

- The way forward lies in not restating the 'what' and the 'why', but to figure out the 'how', which affirms SHAPE's intention for this conference.

- Three key questions emerge as a litmus test for periodic checks to ensure that any dialogue is making real progress:


LITMUS TEST

Is it grounded?

Is it creative?

Is it actionable?
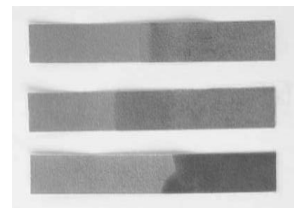
We propose that the above three questions be used to help keep the break-out sessions on track.

It will be crucial when focusing on process-related issues that 'the human dimension' is duly considered. When General Paul Newton threw down the challenge to bring the UK's joint doctrine to life, those responsible agreed that doctrine must be 'corrected' to capture this dominant factor in responding to complexity.[iii]
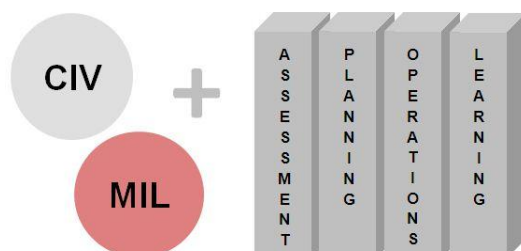
Is our dialogue grounded?

Most will attest that only *direct* engagement with the right people at the front will keep us grounded in reality. Who are these people, and what are the 'civ' and 'mil' categories?
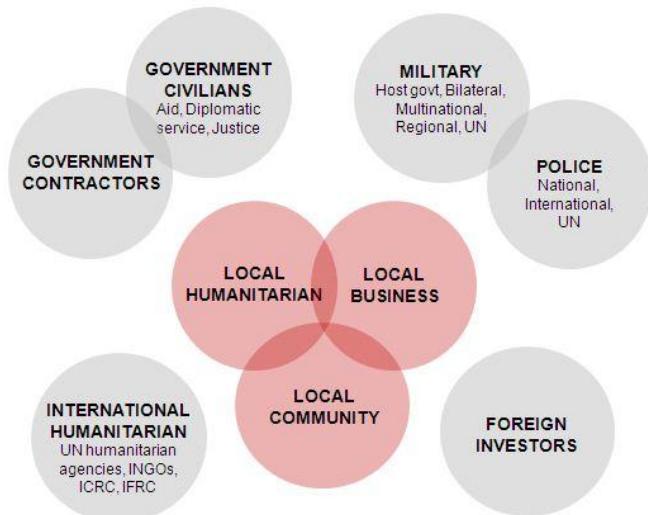
Until recently, discussions and doctrine have accentuated the *pol-mil* relationship, while the most 'noise' generated in the *civ-mil* space has been at the 'humanitarian-Western military' interface. This is in spite of the fact that the greatest interaction between INGO staff and an armed security actor tends to occur with the national police, followed by national government forces,[iv] and much of the implementing work is now carried out by government contractors, rather than traditional aid actors.

With the proliferation of stabilisation missions and counter-insurgency campaigns, there has been a shift in focus toward the local community. Importantly, there are two key influencers beyond the tribal leaders who might contribute constructively to a comprehensive approach – those who work inside local or international aid agencies, and the owners of SMEs (small/medium-sized enterprises, as distinct from micro-enterprises) – the engine of every functioning country's economy.

It can be very helpful for each party (civ and mil) to view the other through the lens of these people (in addition to any hostile parties), whose perceptions can be extremely significant for all concerned. There are however severe practical issues to achieving the right level of local participation (security clearance, language, access to bases, awareness of who the right people are to engage, etc), which must be overcome.

Practitioners must also think creatively when tackling the multi-dimensional problems of current and future operations, while grounding them in their specific context – or even in a 'context within a context'.

Are we being creative?

The creative process is an iterative journey where we are continually deconstructing and reconstructing challenges. For this event, the idea of a comprehensive approach is broken down into four processes to create more manageable chunks. But these processes do not exist in isolation – there are additional overlaying dimensions, such as sectors, contextual constraints, principles, etc. New insights and connections can be identified by slicing and dicing along the various lines.

As an example, the cube below includes some of the constraints that characterise the context in Afghanistan – and no doubt other fragile states[v]. Layers can be substituted with other cross-cutting themes, such as on the vertical axis, replacing the sectors with the principles from UK doctrine referred to earlier.
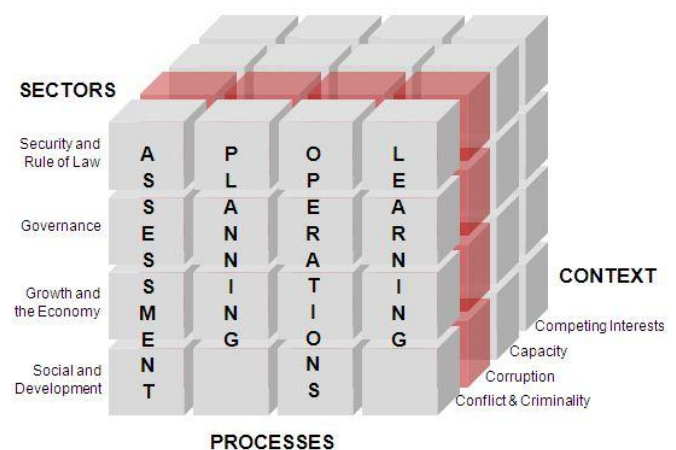
All models, however, have their limitations. The real world can rarely be depicted as a neat symmetric cube. Furthermore, there is no gain in simply reassembling the parts without creating a more meaningful and embraceable shape, where the whole exceeds the sum of the parts. Otherwise, our thinking is linear and then may not fully account for the interdependencies.

Those on the frontline of operations attest to the importance of avoiding being locked in the box, so that they can respond to rapidly changing complex environments, and strive for practical actionable outcomes.

As a Senior Concept Developer for NATO/ACT reflecting on the situation in Afghanistan, Sir Michael Aaronson intimates that "Creativity at all levels in finding new ways of getting people to talk to each other, based on a recognition that no-one has a monopoly of the moral high ground"[vi] is key to adapting and breaking the vicious circle. A small number of practitioners are applying innovative and user-friendly tools and techniques that are proving to be very effective at achieving this (see examples overleaf).

To state the obvious, interaction occurs between individuals, not organisations – and people have heads and hearts, differing belief systems, personalities, preferences and prejudices, which influence the way they think and act in different circumstances.

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FRESH EYES AND INNOVATIVE TOOLS

USING A HUMANITARIAN DECISION-MAKING TOOL* TO TRAIN MILITARY OFFICERS

The humanitarian community is usually positioned at the opposite end of the spectrum to the military due to its neutrality and independence. This often leads to perceived moral high ground, and stereotyping of the other. 180 recently-promoted British Army majors were challenged to move out of their comfort zone during an exercise, and see the world through the eyes of humanitarians who are faced with navigating equally tough decisions. In small teams, they addressed a dilemma using a humanitarian decision-making tool that a group of aid workers had already applied to the same issue in Afghanistan. One officer remarked afterwards that he realised there is no clear "owner" of the ground on which we operate – whether it be defined as *battle* or *humanitarian* space.

This exercise raises the question of how to use innovative tools like this as a practical mechanism or framework to foster improved joint decision-making and integrate existing commitments, guidelines and principles into daily management practices and action planning.

USING A BUSINESSMAN TO HELP EVALUATE AID EFFECTIVENESS

As part of a study last year in Afghanistan, a number of local SME owners (male and female) were invited to participate in separate workshops co-facilitated by an international businessman. He was also positioned as a taxpayer interested in the flow and final impact of the UK aid budget. The participants began sceptical of the value of 'yet another meeting', but quickly engaged when they discovered they were talking to someone who obviously understood their world. They were also keen for their voice to be heard by the UK taxpayer because of their concerns about value for money, and readily took advantage of the sophisticated yet easy-to-use collaborative technology** that allowed for their dialogue to be captured anonymously.

Naturally much of the conversation reflected their experience of the various foreign actors that are part of their daily lives. But for them it is about 'donors'; they do not appear to relate to the notion of 'civ-mil'. An added irony is that they find it difficult to distinguish between the contributions of different donors – hence they talk about the 'international community', which implies coherence between the 'donors'.

*www.decision-navigator.com **www.teamwin.com

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DC workshop participants suggested that at all stages, person-to-person engagement is a preferable way to ensure the feedback loop of lessons into operations, whereby advisors are teamed with those who are implementing on the ground. The right people, however, must be selected for this to work.

An important consideration is also how to tap intentionally into the transforming power of informal networks – often driven by unsung heroes with no formal management positions. Of course, the moment any attempt is made to institutionalise informal networks, their potency fades.

Is it actionable?

'What gets measured gets done' succinctly makes the point that action is most likely to happen when there are clear, agreed measurable goals. Unfortunately this has been taken to extremes in recent years where 'measurement madness' has led to mere 'box-ticking'. The multi-faceted nature of stability per se, compounded by the numerous actors involved, lends itself to this phenomenon on a grand scale.

One solution is to identify a small number of key indicators that will also act as a focal point and barometer for overall progress. An example increasingly being recognised by those outside the business

sector is the growth of SMEs. These diverse, ubiquitous enterprises have the potential to employ the most people, and generate the tax revenue required to build public services and improve overall living standards. The owners and operators of these businesses are the best people to consult regarding how to measure their progress, which should reflect the value added by the international community.

Once the measurement system is clarified, the rate of progress must be agreed. Afghans understand better than most that problems which have developed over generations will almost certainly take a long time to overcome. So to frame the challenge, we must clarify where we are and where we want to be next within the longer term co-ordinates of where we are coming from and where we are headed.

Conclusion

Using the litmus test as an objective measure of our thinking will prompt us to avoid simply rehashing or repackaging the conventional wisdom and so push forward on the journey. Perhaps for this conference we should only raise the bar to the level where just one or two radical and actionable ideas are considered a very satisfactory outcome.

MANAGING INFORMATION OVERLOAD

In our state of information overload, we face a pile of documents that are gathering dust and an escalating daily influx of new material. How can this be managed differently and better? Clearly there is material we must read to be qualified to contribute, and other ideas that will be expand our thinking. Based on our experience and that of the DC workshop participants, we suggest the following for this conference and subsequent discussion:

- *A New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States*, International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (2012)
- COMISAF *Counterinsurgency Qualification Standards*
- *Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan*, CNAS (2010)
- *International Network to Promote the Rule of Law* (www.inprol.org)
- *Iraq Enquiry: Personal Statement*, Mark Etherington (2010)
- *Lessons Learned from USG Law Enforcement in International Operations*, PKSOI (2010)
- NATO Allied Joint Doctrine: AJP-01, AJP1-03(D)
- *Solitude and Leadership*, William Deresiewicz, The American Scholar (Spring 2010)
- UN Peacebuilding Commission documents: Report on its fifth session A/66/675-S/2012/70 (2012)
- *Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction*, USIP/PKSOI (2009)
- US Joint Publication 3-08 *Interorganizational Coordination During Joint Operations* (2011)
- *USG Counterinsurgency Guide* (2009)
- *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development*, World Bank

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[i] UK Government Joint Discussion Note 4-05 *The Comprehensive Approach* (2006)

[ii] US Army Field Manual 3-07 *Stability Operations* (2008), 1-5

[iii] The 'initial corrective' takes the form of UK Joint Doctrine Note 3/11 *Decision-Making and Problem Solving: Human and Organisational Factors*.

[iv] See, for example, a 22-country study, carried out by an INGO in its most 'hostile' or 'insecure' operating environments – World Vision International (2008) *Principled Pragmatism: NGO Engagement with Armed Actors* (http://www.worldvision.org.uk/upload/pdf/Principled_pragmatism.pdf).

[v] Taken from BAAG (2012) *Losing the Ability to Dream: Afghan Perceptions of UK Aid* (http://www.baag.org.uk/whats-new/uk-aid-afghanistan-baag-launches-report).

[vi] RUSI Occasional Paper *Comparative Perspectives on Civil-Military Relations in Conflict Zones* (http://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/Cusps_Report.pdf), p.18

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Beechwood International agreed to a request by SHAPE to create a brief 'pre-read' to help inform the break-out discussions for this conference. The following colleagues contributed this piece, and would like to thank those who gave their valuable time in DC to attend the pre-conference workshop.

Dr Edwina Thompson has spent substantial time in fragile states where she has been a strategic facilitator, expert consultant, and aid worker. In 2011, she published a book with Oxford University Press called *Trust is the Coin of the Realm: Lessons from the Money Men in Afghanistan*, and continues to provide advice on financial reform projects in Afghanistan and Somalia. Earlier in Edwina's career, she worked for Amnesty International as a refugee caseworker, and in 1998, she joined the British Royal Navy as a Reserve Officer. Ten years later, she delivered the graduation Key Note Address for Humanities students at the Australian Defence Force Academy.

Col (US Rtd) Dan Roper has a distinguished military career culminating as Director of the US Army Counterinsurgency Center (2007-2011), spearheading efforts to improve counter-insurgency, stability operations, and security force assistance capabilities through training and education, best practices, doctrine, and collaboration with interagency and international partners. Dan conducted multiple counterinsurgency assessments in Iraq and Afghanistan to strengthen the linkage between operational forces and the supporting institutional base, and also served on the CENTCOM Commander's 2010 Afghanistan Working Group.

John Thompson is an international businessman with deep experience in developing and delivering strategic initiatives and projects for major corporates and SMEs around the world. Prior to co-founding Beechwood in 1989, John was European MD for an international advertising agency renowned for its creativity, following the sale of his own Australian agency. He began his career in the agricultural sector with a British multinational chemicals company. He developed Eastern European, Middle Eastern and southern African markets for animal health products, led breakthroughs in stock management systems, and introduced revolutionary minimum tillage techniques in broad acre farming.

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