



# Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) & the Military in Complex Emergencies~ Collision of Mindsets

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## Abstract

This paper offers a perspective on the relationship between Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the military in modern complex Peace Operations, whether or not mandated by the United Nations (UN). The relationship between the two has often been marked by acrimony and mutual exchange of accusations for the claimed lack of success for advancing a joint agenda nested within the Comprehensive Approach. It suggests that the need for cooperation and mutually agreeable objectives between both sets of actors has never been more pressing. The paper further argues that much of this ‘Collision of Mindsets’ is predicated on fundamental ‘fault lines’ of cultural differences accentuated by a lack of understanding or unwillingness to see the others perspective, and that, correspondingly, each needs to actively embrace an agreed *Modus Vivendi* so both can share and cooperate on the stage of modern crisis management/humanitarian scenarios.

## Keywords

NGOs, Non-Governmental Organizations, military, collision of mindsets

## Introduction

The intense field experience of the past few years has tended to reveal the fact that effectiveness of contemporary peace operations will depend on the collaboration of military and civilian actors (Abiew, 2003b: 7).

Most academics and scholars would agree that this assertion for the need of interdependence between NGOs and the military is self-evident, yet such an assertion raises the point as to why the need for such collaboration needs to be communicated so overtly, unless the author wanted to convey an implicit conjecture about the repercussions of it not occurring. Counter intuitively it is the focus of Abiew’s assertion that suggests the possibility of a mutual unease between both parties which adversely affects their ability to work collaboratively together.

The end of the Cold War fundamentally changed the engagement of the UN with evolving international security and how the global community addressed it (Egnall, 2009) and consequently the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have witnessed a fundamental

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change in the way the international community and the UN in particular have grappled to deal with these new and ever evolving security challenges.

Perceptions to threats have transformed since the 2001 terrorist attacks in the U.S.A and multi-lateral responses to security challenges have become even more complex, which in turn underscores the scale of the challenge facing NGOs and military forces that find themselves engaged in responding to complex emergencies and who wish to cooperate in order to achieve common goals (Hearns, 2013).

Indeed, Modern Peace Support Operations (PSOs) have witnessed an ever increasing ‘exposure’ of NGOs and the Military to each other when deployed in crisis situations. Indeed, the kernel of the Comprehensive approach on which modern PSOs/Peace Keeping Operations (PKOs) are predicated advocates close cooperation between these two often very culturally different organisations. Weir (2006) reinforces this point in noting that current and future deployments being “...entirely military in composition and entirely military in mandate” are consigned to the past. Keyes (2012) concurs positing that “it is widely agreed that the common ground of future PSOs will be the interface between military and humanitarian objectives (p.17). But recent deployments have often witnessed friction and a lack of trust between the two on various PKOs/PSOs under the auspices of the UN. At this point it is useful to distinguish that Chapter VI UN mandated missions allows military forces to defend themselves – this is the classic ‘peacekeeping’ force deployed to patrol a line of truce between opposing forces and is often referred to as a PSO, whereas PKOs are usually associated with a Chapter VII mission which allows a UN force to engage in combat to achieve the mandate and not just in self-defence (Ramsbotham *et al.*, 2011).

This paper will examine the nature of both organisations in order to determine the culture that forms not only their respective doctrine and *modus operandi*, but also their individual strengths and weaknesses, and the ‘fault lines’ that occur between military forces and NGOs that will in turn provide an outline of the shifting context in which those relations are being played out. Problems that have occurred in the past will be highlighted which in turn will provide a lessons learned analysis of common grounds that can be sought out to establish better cooperation, as will some efforts made so far to remedy these and create a mutually agreeable *modus vivendi* while acknowledging that each is uniquely culturally separate and embracing the philosophy of ‘*vive la difference*.’ Finally, challenges and prospects for the future will be assessed.

As Thornberry (1997) based on his experience as a former UN Deputy General Secretary has noted:

Without pretending to the gift of prophesy, it seems to me likely that the current pattern of mixed, or multi-component peace support operations will continue into the future and that these will, to a lesser or greater degree, be accompanied in the field by an array of inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations (1997:34).

In effect the central question then becomes not whether these organisations can resolve their differences, but how to best ensure that these differences can be overcome in order to achieve the

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mission, because as Abiew (2003) has stressed “only a well-planned and coordinated combination of civilian and military measures can create the conditions necessary for long term stability and peace in societies torn apart by war” (p. 5).

### **Sands of Time ~ Humanitarian Intervention**

West (2001) has noted the nuanced changes that have occurred in Humanitarian action, including preventive and protection action, relief action, forcible action, as well as more general (awareness-raising) activities (p. 14-23), where in addition to NGOs, a broad range of other humanitarian actors feature under each heading, of which the military is considered to be quite significant. West (2001) outlines the historical evolution of NGOs from the late 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> centuries onwards and that this evolution is considered to have come full circle in the sense of ‘fourth generation’ NGOs of the late 1980s/early 1990s. This debate was further propelled in 1992, ‘An Agenda for Peace’, by Boutros-Ghali, the then Secretary General of the United Nations, calling for a fundamental review in the way peacekeeping was performed, drawing on the attention of human security (Goodhand, 2006). Matlary (2002) outlines further changes in the debate of humanitarian intervention predicated on concepts of ‘human security’ and (military) humanitarian intervention. This debate has come to the fore of late with arguments of humanitarian intervention based on the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P), what Murray (2012) posits “seeks to put a face on global security matters, and centres more on the protection of individuals within states” (p. 64). The R2P doctrine as enunciated at the UN 2005 World Summit argues that the international community should use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means to protect populations from crimes against the population. If a State fails to protect its populations or is in fact the perpetrator of crimes, the international community must be prepared to take stronger measures, including the collective use of force through the UN Security Council. One clear outcome of the new R2P doctrine is that it significantly alters in the broadest sense, the description of peacekeeping and peace support operations that has been used in the past by journalists, diplomats, academics and others.

It is in this area in coming years that historians may reflect on profound changes to this concept and how it will impinge on both NGOs and the military in future humanitarian interventions. Arguably R2P only reaffirms a principle that was always inherent in the UN Charter and now requires a reconceptualization of this principle into a modern coherent effective doctrine for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This paper does not propose that the positioning of security policy within a human rights framework is by any means assured, or if it has commenced, that it is likely to be completed in the near future. However, events in Kosovo, East Timor and Libya as well as the continuing debate about humanitarian intervention (or lack of) in the unfolding Syrian tragedy, nonetheless do suggest that military humanitarian intervention is likely to rise again. In the context of this paper, therefore, it is argued that whenever/wherever this occurs, military forces and NGOs will almost inevitably encounter each other despite the fears regarding the ‘militarization’ of humanitarianism. Consequently, logic would suggest that it is better for both sides (NGOs and military) to be prepared for such encounters and to avail of the potential which exists to



assist each other in the achievement of their common goals (Victory, 2002). At the very least, this might allow for more efficient division of labour. At best, it might actively hasten the conclusion of complex emergency scenarios, allow for more rapid transition to the post-emergency (re-building) phase and thereby enable a speedier activation of the respective exit strategies of NGOs and the military.

This qualification having been made, in the next section we will examine the nature of both organisations in order to determine the unique culture that informs both respective organisations and lends them their own unique and individual identity that also *de facto* sets them apart.

## **NGOs & the Humanitarian Space Imperative**

Before examining the nature of NGOs it is first important to establish what exactly is meant by a non-governmental organisation. They differ in scale and philosophy and have different roles and goals (MacIntyre, 2011). Human Rights NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International are propelled by the *raison d'être* of basic human rights for all mankind regardless of creed, colour or culture. Humanitarian NGOs such as the Red Cross/Crescent, Oxfam and Medicins Sans Frontiers respond to international humanitarian crises, and concentrate mostly on relief and development efforts (Aal, 2000). But as Weiss (2005) has noted there are hundreds of different NGOs and caution must be taken against any generalisation, in particular when considering their approach to operations (p. 205). But despite the size, variety and type of NGOs, most nonetheless abide by a number of fundamental principles that inherently guide their subsequent actions and attitudes, and directly inform their relationships with not only each other but also the military when deployed in crisis management operations. In this regard a key tenet for NGOs is the necessity to remain neutral and impartial; Byman (2001) contends that “in essence, these organisations stay safe by making themselves non-threatening: their weakness protects them” (p. 104). Additionally, this is perceived as a key enabler for NGOs, as “in order to gain the trust of all sides of the conflict, a humanitarian organisation should not take sides” (Weir, 2006: 21). For NGOs humanitarian space is where an agency can “operate freely and meet humanitarian needs in accordance with the principles of humanitarian action” (Collinson & Elhawary, 2012: 1). Therefore, humanitarian “space was once considered the responsibility of NGOs, operating autonomously from military actions” (Shannon, 2009). It is in this regard that the objection arises by many NGOs, who are fundamentally opposed to operating with the military for ideological reasons. “They perceive the military and humanitarian actors existing in two fundamentally different and unconnected spheres of activity” (Hearns, 2013: 183). Another cause of friction is the issue of perceived impartiality whereby humanitarian actors are not seen to be on any side of the conflict, ergo they are viewed as less a threat to the warring parties or belligerent forces (Byman, 2001). This from their perceived viewpoint allows NGOs to build up trust and confidence with the warring parties, which could later be vital for peace negotiations (Jenny, 2001).

Because of the fact that NGOs are generally perceived as neutral, devoid of any political agenda and pursuing what is regarded as a noble cause, this gives them a number of comparative advantages.



Along with the humanitarian principles, NGOs have a unique role within the conflict theatre and are seen as ‘indispensable interveners’ (Woods, 1996: 684). Their flexibility, ability to adapt and change, and their independence makes NGOs good candidates in terms of complex conflict, which is ever changing (Ahmed & Potter, 2006; Sutton, 1987). In general, NGOs tend to be already working in the country or region where there may be underlying conflict, so when an emergency surges, they have working knowledge of the area (Byman, 2001; Ahmed and Potter, 2006).

In this sense they have an advantage over the military who generally arrive on the scene after a conflict or emergency has broken out (Bellamy & Williams, 2010). But these same characteristics also expose a number of weaknesses. Because NGO personnel are encouraged to act as individuals or in small groups and to be largely self-sufficient, they can be equally difficult to coordinate and specifically because they do not require a mandate they can consequently lack accountability. Just as it is important to outline that there are many different types and size of NGOs, it is equally important to acknowledge that there are also wide variations in the type, size and structure of military forces.

### **Military, Chain of Command**

As Abiew (2003) has noted the military is not a “monolithic body. There are disparities in military capabilities, configuration, competence and levels of professionalism even among northern militaries, and between northern and southern militaries” (p. 7). However, generally speaking, military culture tends to be hierarchical and centralised, with clear delineation of rank and responsibility. Central to military culture is the implementation of the commander’s intent and the overall accomplishment of the stated mission and a defined chain of command and lines of communication (Jenny, 2001). Military forces thus aim to have clear strategies and goals and are usually intent on accomplishing the mission in the shortest possible time. Because of this almost inherent built-in ‘exit strategy’ of most military missions, military forces are often deployed for the short term which often translates that that they can rarely engage in long term planning.

As in the case of NGOs, the weaknesses of military forces, especially in complex emergencies requiring humanitarian relief is directly related to their strengths. They are directly subject to political influences and bureaucratic timeframes, making deployment slower and more cumbersome allied to the fact that implicitly they are almost always associated with a political agenda be it from their national government or a regional organisation.

### **Fault Lines**

Hall (1995) has noted that when differences are not addressed it can lead to obvious misunderstandings with inherent tensions. Byman (2001) has equally alluded to the fact that because military forces and NGOs come from opposite sides of the cultural divide it is inevitable that the differences in core beliefs lead to strain and tensions in operational scenarios and that these differences “present a formidable barrier to NGO-military coordination” (Byman, 2001: 104). Such cultural ‘fault lines’ were identified by Kennedy (1997) in relation to Operation Restore Hope in Somalia, which saw the



US military in the lead role acting under UN mandate during the period December 1992-May 1993. Kennedy in his assessment of the quality of the subsequent interactions between NGOs and the military noted how particular difficulties arose out of cultural/institutional differences between the sides.

Weiss and Collins (2000) note that relief workers' options are 'altered' by the commencement of an international military intervention and that their efforts are often subsumed within political- military objectives (p. 121-122). Roberts (1996) echoes these points, remarking that delivery of humanitarian aid during war provokes awkward questions about the consequences of such action. The same author also identifies inherent problems faced by the military in humanitarian crisis situations. These include finding itself required to liaise with belligerents, difficulties in maintaining impartiality and insufficient human and material resources, all of which might contribute to fractious relations with the NGO community.

### **Common Ground**

While arguments regarding the differences between NGO and military agendas and the need for operational independence are well made, a rather purist approach can be detected. This paper would argue that it is precisely in those 'few situations' which might require regular contact and coordination with each other that stakes are often highest, thereby rendering it incumbent upon NGOs and military forces to prepare adequately for dealing with one another. As Roberts (1996) points out, the increasing need to secure some form of physical protection in war zones for aid workers and those they assist presents a major challenge to defenders of principles of impartiality and neutrality in absolute terms (p. 53). Van Baarda (2007; cited by Byrne, 2013) defines three basic forms of cooperation between the military and NGOs that provides a useful framework for categorising the different relationships between the two actors. The first of these is 'negative cooperation' described as a general agreement between actors to 'keep out of each other's way.' According to Van Baarda this usually involves a territorial division or a more functional division of tasks. The second form Van Baarda identifies is positive cooperation whereby each agency works under its own authority but coordinates its tactical and operational activities. Early engagement and agreement between actors is critical for success here. The last and rarest form of cooperation is 'concerted action'; here all agencies work under a common policy and programme with one agency taking the lead role in authority. Ferks *et al.*, (2006) categorise the different types of cooperation in a similar vein. 'Principled neutralists,' are agencies who wish to remain independent and avoid all collaboration. Secondly, 'principled pragmatists,' are agencies that abide by their own principles but cooperate with the military when the context requires. The last group is referred to as the 'supporters,' defined as the agencies that fully integrate and cooperate with the military. The next section will explore what are the prospects for future cooperation between NGOs and the military in Complex Emergencies.



## The Road Ahead

Challenges in the field of NGO-military relations will undoubtedly remain throughout the period ahead. Equally, as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in asserting their operational independence once again has noted,

...the fact that military operations and emergency humanitarian action sometimes gives the impression that they are converging must not be allowed to disguise their fundamental different nature: they must be distinguishable not only in substance but also in appearance (n.d).

This valid qualification having been made, and while ongoing challenges in the field of NGO-military relations will undoubtedly remain throughout the period ahead, it is possible to detect some signs of optimism that differences can be overcome. Byman (2001) notes evidence of greater mutual respect and understanding between the sides, chiefly due to repeated interaction and a decline in underlying ideological tensions. Growing NGO concerns about the security of their workers has been a practical driver of closer relations with the military (p. 107). Weiss and Collins (2000) also point to a shared culture of sorts as soldiers came to volunteer repeatedly for humanitarian assignments during the 1990s and become more familiar with relief worker's methods. Keyes (2012) in his essay gives a vivid insight how as a serving military officer he was seconded to an Irish relief and development agency *GOAL* after the Rwandan genocide in 1994. For him it was a salutatory experience that gave him a unique insight into the perspectives of both the military and an NGO.

Another issue prohibiting cooperation is the different interpretations of how the military and NGOs should or might coordinate with each other. The coordination of civil-military relations is often referred to as Civil Military Cooperation (CIMIC), which the US refers to as Civil Affairs (CA). CIMIC is defined by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) as: "the essential dialogue and interaction between civilian and military actors in humanitarian emergencies that is necessary to protect and promote humanitarian principles, avoid competition, minimize inconsistency, and *where appropriate* pursue common goals" (OCHA, 2004). A related issue is that both actors are unwilling to share their gained intelligence due to distrust and suspicion of one another. They also use information in very different ways (Abiew, 2003). NGOs are unwilling to share information as this could affect their access to certain areas. Albid (2010) and Fox (2001) controversially argue that NGOs in certain instances have been willing to abstain from reporting human rights violations in order to maintain trust and access to certain areas. Ku and Brun, (2013; cited by Finnegan, 2013) simply state that "neutrality=confidentiality=trust=access" (p. 62). Similarly, the military tend not to share information due to their strict views on intelligence building. So although the two actors share a common purpose in alleviating humanitarian suffering as one of their key goals, they have different approaches and tasks to perform in order to bring the suffering to an end (Byman, 2001). In light of what has been written about the uncooperative stance in past CIMIC operations, it would be wrong to scapegoat either military or NGOs for their part in the dysfunction.

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Because of this it would be better, while acknowledging and understanding, to focus less on cultural differences and more on the complementary nature of their respective roles within the CIMIC operational zone; the aspiration therefore is, “the environment within which all actors are operating, situating the military contribution within a broader civil context, balancing military, political and economic objectives with humanitarian imperatives” (Spence, 2002: 167).

## Conclusion

The central theme explored in this paper relates to whether the military and NGOs will ever be able to resolve their differences and work together efficiently in complex emergencies. This as demonstrated will not be easy as both come from diametric opposite ends of the cultural divide. The military is a centralised collective organisation that puts high value on the coordination and concentration of effort towards the achievement of predetermined mostly short term goals. NGOs value independence, are concerned mainly with humanitarian issues, are mostly decentralised and operate as individuals or small groups, resulting in little coordination or concentration of effort. Military forces are placed in theatre for political reasons by national governments and regional organisations, whereas NGOs are present mostly for altruistic reasons.

In order to bridge the cultural divide, it is necessary to introduce measures at strategic, tactical and operational levels; careful planning should take place prior to deployment involving all the potential actors in theatre of operations including the NGOs. The Irish Defence Forces has been to the fore in this area in cooperation with *Irish Aid* of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), who has developed the Rapid Response Corps (RRC) initiative. This seeks to train and have on stand-by a core group of experts in various fields (*inter alia* water, health, sanitation) who can be seconded at short notice to designated Irish Aid Agencies in the field. As part of their pre- deployment training volunteers are trained by the Irish Defence Forces in Hostile Environmental Awareness Training (HEAT), which includes hostile mediation and negotiation at the United Nations Training School Ireland (UNTSI), one of the Schools that incorporate the Irish Military College. Measures should be adapted to ensure both the military and NGOs are familiar with each other through education and training programmes. In theatre, methods to improve communication and cooperation should be adapted in order to enhance cooperation at local level. The type and level of cooperation will differ depending on the context and therefore should be determined by a thorough needs assessment by all actors. Keyes (2012) has spoken of this in terms of *shared ownership* whereby “the process of visualising a shared end state for the humanitarian-military relationship would bring significant but not insurmountable challenges” (p. 33). As Heaslip (2010) points out, this argument for integration has led to peacekeeping missions to take on the ‘three Ds’ of defence, development and diplomacy in order to bring together the political, peacekeeping and humanitarian actors. This very call for integration has brought with it a need for cooperation between NGO and the military (Jakobsen, 2000), which in turn has been influenced by increasingly hostile environments where the neutrality and impartiality of NGOs is often not respected by belligerents; NGOs have arguably become more security orientated while correspondingly peacekeeping has become more humanitarian



orientated. Perhaps most importantly it is necessary to proactively convince personnel at all levels in both the military and the NGOs that ultimately the beneficiaries of their actions should be the vast majority of the population in the area of operations. Training should be institutionalised that enshrines mediation and negotiation training not only for each party to interface with hostile/belligerent groups on the ground but equally importantly with each other.

The lessons of the past teach us that collaborative forward planning backed up by good communications and coordination between NGOs and the military are crucial in ensuring good outcomes. This will require commitment on both sides of the NGO-military divide, but the complex emergencies both now and of the future may demand nothing less, for as noted by Abiew (2003a), they are “connected and rooted by the common roots of war” (p. 30).



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