

COMPREHENSIVE APPROACHES TO INTERNATIONAL CRISIS MANAGEMENT

International crisis management has undergone a significant transformation in recent years. Its expansion in terms of tasks and timelines and the increasing number of actors involved have made effective coordination of activities and instruments an urgent priority. As a result the idea of a Comprehensive Approach has been adopted by many states and international organizations. However, recent efforts to implement it have shown mixed results.



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The changing character of crises has forced security actors to refine their responses. Consequently, international crisis management has changed in three dimensions over the past years. First, the spectrum of tasks has expanded. If traditional peacekeeping focused on containment and reduction of military escalation, contemporary crisis management aims at a social, political, and economic transformation to reach a comprehensive conflict resolution. The tasks today range from humanitarian aid, physical protection of individuals, and ensuring the rule of law and the functioning of political institutions to the establishment of stable and self-sustainable social and economic structures.

Second, this increasing set of tasks coincides with expanding timelines of crisis management. In conceptual and practical terms crisis management spans today from the initial phase of conflict prevention, the actual crisis management encompassing humanitarian intervention, peace building and peacekeeping to post-conflict

management. Depending on the phase, the challenges involved in dealing with the conflict vary. Crisis management is further complicated by the need to handle the junction between the different phases, which moreover often overlap.

Third, the number of actors involved has increased significantly, too. This is partly due to the broadened spectrum of tasks involved. In various phases of crisis management, specific instruments and expertise are required that no single actor is able to supply on its own. Additionally, by involving various state and non-state actors, the political legitimacy of an international engagement increases. Finally, actors from the crisis region itself become increasingly involved. Their ownership in conflict resolution is key to ensure its sustainability. In addition to the local government and administration, this applies to political, religious, ethnic, and other social groups, as well as the private sector, the media, militias, organized crime, and relevant forces from neighboring regions.

Due to this expansion of tasks, timelines, and actors, as well as the enhanced interaction of actors and tasks, the complexity of crisis management has increased tremendously. Thus, crisis management has become foremost complexity management. The internal and external coordination of all available instruments and actors, their timely and appropriate deployment in the various conflict phases, and the specification of common mission objectives have become of paramount importance to allow for a successful crisis response. Put differently, what is needed is a common, multidimensional strategy that coordinates the wide range of international responses to crises.

As a conceptual answer to this daunting challenge, the so called "Comprehensive Approach" has become promoted. National and international actors increasingly favor the approach as a blueprint to reinvigorate the way crisis response should be planned and carried out. It is expected to enhance both the efficiency and the legitimacy of crisis management by harmonizing the interaction and interdependence of tasks and actors involved.

Divergent concepts

However, both at the conceptual level and in its implementation, the Comprehensive Approach poses challenges that tend to be underestimated. First of all, there is no single and coherent model. Instead, a multitude of different and partly contradictory concepts for a Comprehensive Approach have emerged in recent years. While most actors today acknowledge the necessity for better coordination and collective efforts, their approaches diverge significantly regarding priorities, means, and suggested end-states of crisis management. There-

Comprehensive Approach – relevant documents and concepts					
	UN	EU	NATO	Germany	Britain
Key doctrinal waypoints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ «In larger Freedom» (2005) ☑ Brahimi Report (2000) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ EU-Sicherheitsstrategie (2003) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Comprehensive Political Guidance (2006) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ National Security Strategy
Core concepts and instruments at strategic-political level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Capstone doctrine (2008) ☑ Integrated missions (2006) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CMCO (2003) ☑ Crisis Management Procedures CMP (2003) Crisis Management Concept (individual mission) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive Approach Actionplan (2008) ☑ Effects Based Approach to Operations - EBAO (2006) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr (2006) ☑ Action Plan "Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution, and Peace Consolidation" (2004) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☑ Conflict Prevention Pool – CPP (2004/8) Comprehensive Approach (2004)
Examples of concepts and instruments at mission level	UN Special Representative	EU Special Representative/ Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC)	CIMIC/PRTs		☑ Stabilisation Units (2004/7)

fore it may be appropriate to speak in plural about Comprehensive Approaches. Moreover, strategies and models can signify *de facto* a comprehensive approach without explicitly using the term. This points towards terminological variations that risk causing difficulties when attempting to link or compare particular approaches.

This fragmentation along several lines also points to the prospects of common strategies. Commonly defined goals and coordination often exist only in general terms. Instead, diverging objectives and interests give rise to conflicting interaction between actors and tasks. This can be categorized along the lines of interaction:

Horizontal interaction describes the interaction of different tasks or actors at the same level of hierarchy, be it in the field or at the strategic level. The most prominent example is the strained relationship between the civilian and military approaches of crisis response. Civilian-military cooperation is further complicated by gradually incompatible objectives and organizational cultures. However, there are also discernible tensions *within* these two supposedly homogeneous domains. For the military, the differences between national rules of engagement in peacekeeping operations but also in military cultures underline the limitations of multinational or multiservice interoperability. In the civilian sphere, the interacting activities but diverging goals related to human rights protection, political reform, and economic development frequently spur conflicts over responsibilities, resources, and relevance ranking.

Vertical interaction refers to the interaction between the field level and the strategic

level of a crisis response mission. There are usually different perspectives on problems depending on whether they are seen from the point of view of the mission operating in the field or the institutions in the capital or headquarters that exercise political control and strategic guidance. This may result, for example, in unrealistic orders, delayed decisionmaking, or inadequate allocation of resources.

Furthermore, at both the vertical and the horizontal levels of interaction, problems arise not only out of functional or cultural differences, but also from particular interests and competition between the various entities for resources and influence.

Comprehensive approaches have developed at domestic and the international levels. National-level approaches have also been termed "Whole of Government Approaches". At the international level, it is mainly the UN, the EU, and NATO that have developed concepts for Comprehensive Approaches.

Domestic coordination

"Whole of Government Approaches" usually aim at improving inter- and intra-ministerial cooperation in view of assuring a nationally consistent approach. They respond to the experience that incoherencies in domestic actors' positions and policies obstruct not only a coherent national strategy but also constitute a major stumbling block for an internationally accepted and coherent crisis response. Especially the prevalent "portfolio principle", according to which each minister is responsible for his or her own department, fosters inter-ministerial rivalries and fragmented policies.

A rather successful example for inter- and intra-ministerial cooperation can be found in Britain. Here, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence, and the Department for International Development bundled resources and jurisdictions in the so-called Conflict Prevention Pool. Furthermore, London has integrated civilian and military specialists into Post-Conflict Reconstruction Units.

In other states, such as Germany, efforts at harmonization are often limited solely to the civilian sphere. The government's Action Plan on Civil Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution, and Post-Conflict Peace-Building does not integrate the armed forces as relevant actors. Moreover, within the Action Plan, considerations related to development policy outweigh aspects such as human rights or political institutions, thereby introducing a further imbalance.

UN: Integrated missions

Conceptually as well as by practical experience, the UN constitutes the most advanced international organization regarding the development of comprehensive approaches. The notion of "Integrated Missions", introduced in 2006 and recently substantiated with the so-called Capstone Doctrine (United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines), aims at improving the coherence of the UN system in peacekeeping operations and to bundle all military, political, development aid related, and humanitarian activities.

The UN's difficulties in implementing those concepts result from the size of the UN, the parallel structure of its subordinate and specialized organizations, and the concomitant limits of its effective control. In the field of crisis management, the "Department for Political Affairs" and the "Department for Peacekeeping Operations" rival over the overall control of operations. Furthermore, considerable differences exist in the way problems are perceived and resolved by the various respective UN actors. This results in debilitating frictions as well as horizontal and vertical conflicts over jurisdiction. Eventually, confusion grows when it comes to the distribution of responsibilities for coordination and of the level of authority individual units are equipped with and placed within the structure of a local mission.

EU: Civil-Military Co-ordination

Like the UN, the EU also disposes of a broad range of civilian and military instru-

ments for crisis management. The core challenge for the EU consists in assuring coherence on the one hand between the instruments of the EU Commission (first pillar) and those of European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP, second pillar), and between civilian and military instruments within ESDP itself on the other hand.

To this end, the EU has developed the concept of Civil-Military Co-ordination (CMCO), which seeks to ensure and guide a Comprehensive Approach particularly at the political-strategic level, ranging from the planning phase to execution of a mission. The “Crisis Management Procedures” as well as the “Crisis Management Concept”, which is developed individually for each operation, are geared towards ensuring that the Comprehensive Approach concept is applied in the EU’s crisis management activities. As a practical example, “EU Special Representatives”, who are based in the field, increasingly play the role of a coordination hub for EU mission activities, thereby linking both Brussels and the field level, and the different agencies in the field. Besides, the EU constantly attempts to increase the common understanding and organizational culture of its staff, for example by integrated training of personnel. Mission evaluations of Congo and Bosnia indicate that the EU is able to improve its effectiveness and coherence of comprehensive crisis management operations.

However the Union has so far been unable to make full use of its potential for integrated civil-military operations. The inter-institutional cooperation deficits resulting from the EU’s pillar construction can be potentially improved by the stipulations of the EU reform treaty, which is, however, currently blocked. The treaty would have addressed such issues as funding of civilian and military operations, or an integrated staff of the Council and the Commission led by a newly established “High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy” (see CSS Analyses no. 28). However, the implementation of these suggestions for improvement as well as the full use of the already existing civil-military planning cell and the Operations Center for integrated civil-military ESDP operations are repeatedly prevented by member states who cling to their particular (national) interests.

NATO: Comprehensive Approach

With the acceptance of the “Comprehensive Political Guidance” at the 2006 Riga

Summit, NATO established the Comprehensive Approach as its planning blueprint. This is to be achieved by expanding its approach for military planning to include all civilian and military aspects of a NATO engagement. Due to the fact that NATO itself has no relevant civilian capabilities, its approach primarily seeks to improve the external cooperation with civilian actors and other international organizations.

In the field, NATO has made a first and partially successful step towards acting with a Comprehensive Approach by setting up Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). These civil-military units are designed to provide security locally and to facilitate reconstruction measures. However, both the composition of the PRTs as well as their precise objectives and means diverge considerably. This reflects to some extent the PRTs adaptation to the specific needs of the local environment. However, defining the composition of PRTs is essentially the prerogative of the respective lead nation and the other participating nations. Hence, national or even departmental conceptions of crisis management and particular interests of domestic actors gain direct influence on the effectiveness and feasibility of NATO’s Comprehensive approach.

However, the Alliance’s basic problem is its reputation as a military actor who is by definition less aware of the civilian dimension of crisis management. Thus, particularly among civilian actors, its credibility as a cooperative partner and an advocate of the Comprehensive Approach is rather limited. The extent to which NATO can revise its crisis management strategy and therefore gain acceptance for it will largely depend on the commitment of the incoming US president to the transatlantic relationship and the resulting implications for the issues of Kosovo, Afghanistan, and cooperation between the EU and NATO.

Towards effective and legitimate coordination

So far, comprehensive approaches have shown an ambiguous performance. Diverging organizational cultures as well as available resources pose structural limits for harmonization and enhancing efficiency. Furthermore, systemic changes to assure a Comprehensive Approach occasionally require large commitments in terms of transformation costs and time, with frictional losses arising from departmental resistance against the reallocation of power and resources. It is hard to overcome institutional

self-interest and to change traditional administrative structures and privileges in the name of abstract concepts such as coherence or efficiency. This persistence of traditional patterns and structures further reduces the space for successfully applying a Comprehensive Approach.

However, those challenges that made a Comprehensive Approach necessary still linger on. Therefore, and as long as the international community perceives crisis management as an appropriate instrument, there is no alternative than to continue pursuing a comprehensive approach. Conversely, to keep on failing to manage complexity of crisis management will further undermine the legitimacy and the effectiveness of the engagement of the international community in crisis management.

Given the limits of common crisis management concepts and the reasons thereof, the probability of the Comprehensive Approach to advance from a theoretical model to a palpable contribution to international security will depend on the (re-)balancing of system-wide and particular interests. Common strategies cannot be sustained beyond the security cultures of the participating actors. This, however, poses a qualitatively different reason than the ones resulting from inter-ministerial or other agency rivalries over resources, prestige and individual careers.

Concrete concepts of Comprehensive Approaches will always have to manage the tension between effectiveness and political legitimacy. However, this should not lead to the hasty abandoning of every suggestion to improve effectiveness as a result of national or other particularities. Instead, the question to be addressed concerns the consequences of continued uncoordinated activities of different actors. The accompanied frictions do not only imply a waste of resources but also undermine the legitimacy of those acting unilaterally.

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