Small Wars & Insurgencies

ISSN: 0959-2318 (Print) 1743-9558 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fswi20

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To cite this article: Jaïr van der Lijn (2015) Comprehensive approaches, diverse coherences: the different levels of policy coherence in the Dutch 3D approach in Afghanistan, Small Wars & Insurgencies, 26:1, 72-89, DOI: 10.1080/09592318.2014.959773

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2014.959773

Small Wars & Insurgencies, 2015
Vol. 26, No. 1, 72–89, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2014.959773

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Comprehensive approaches, diverse coherences: the different levels of policy coherence in the Dutch 3D approach in Afghanistan

Jaïr van der Lijn*

Institute for Management Research, Radboud University Nijmegen, Nijmegen, Netherlands

(*Received 16 November 2013; accepted 25 April 2014*)

Since 2000, international organisations such as the UN, NATO and the EU, but also countries, have started to apply what has been called the comprehensive approach to crisis management. This article unpacks this comprehensive approach implemented by the Dutch in Uruzgan province, Afghanistan. It first borrows and expands a conceptual framework developed by De Coning and Friis. Subsequently, it maps the different sorts of coherence in the mission by applying the framework. It shows how in practice there was not one single comprehensive approach, but many different forms of interaction between a number of organisational units. Each interaction had its own distinct issues and its own level of coherence. The level of coherence differed depending on the level at which the interaction took place – strategic at headquarters level versus operational at field level – and at what point in the mission it happened – in most cases it moved towards more cohesion.

Keywords: comprehensive approach; peace operations; crisis management operations; Netherlands; military; diplomats; NGO; development cooperation; Afghanistan

Introduction

Historically, the United Nations (UN), regional security coalitions and national armies have been the main actors involved in peace and crisis management operations, each with different agendas, jurisdictions, aims and approaches. In today's operations, however, more than ever direct relationships are important between the military, local populations and humanitarian agencies.[1] The UN was perhaps the first organisation to realise the importance of coherence when, at the start of the 1990s, it became involved in large-scale multidimensional peacekeeping operations. Such operations not only dealt with the military aspects of a conflict, but also organised elections, repatriated refugees and provided humanitarian assistance. This culminated in the concept of integrated

*Email: vanderlijn@sipri.org

missions as set out in the Brahimi report in which other parts of the UN system were integrated in peacekeeping operations to guarantee better coherence.[2] Such an approach in which different types of actors strive for different levels of coherence has subsequently been applied by other organisations as well. The European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) generally label it as the 'comprehensive approach'. At a national level also governments, such as the United Kingdom, Canada and the Netherlands have implemented similar approaches in their individual contributions to missions.[3]

Between 2006 and 2010, the Netherlands deployed its armed forces as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Uruzgan province in southern Afghanistan, as part of the ISAF comprehensive approach for the whole of Afghanistan. During this mission, aimed at security, stability and reconstruction in Uruzgan, the Dutch strove for coherence in their policies and actions by applying a comprehensive approach, they called the 3D - Defence, Diplomacy and Development approach. Like in other cases the Dutch 3D approach is usually described as a singular approach with little differentiation between the different locations of interaction – field (operational) or headquarters (strategic) level; the different types of organisations involved – e.g., inter-agency or intra-agency; and the extent or level of coherence – ranging from united to in case of failure competing actions.

This article unpacks the comprehensive approach implemented by the Dutch in Uruzgan province, Afghanistan. It first borrows and expands a conceptual framework developed by De Coning and Friis.[4] Subsequently, it maps the different sorts of coherence in the mission by applying this framework.

This study is primarily based on literature survey and four focus group meetings. In the first three focus groups, NGO representatives, military personnel and diplomats (the latter working on political and development affairs) met separately. It was decided to hold separate meetings before organising a common meeting to allow as free as possible an environment for participants to reflect on the topic. Representatives of all three groups took part in the fourth focus group meeting, with discussion based on input from the earlier meetings and the literature studies. Only a free and interactive discussion could generate the needed input for the analysis and therefore it was agreed beforehand that participation in the focus groups would be strictly anonymous and that none of the statements would be traceable to participants. All participants' statements and opinions were given on a personal basis and should not be seen as representing the policy of the Dutch government, its armed forces or of any NGO. Next, sections of the draft manuscript based on the focus group discussions were sent to group participants for review. As well as functioning as a last chance for them to check their anonymity and comment on factual mistakes, it also generated additional comments that strengthened the analysis and addressed misinterpretations. These comments were collected at a feedback meeting.

Conceptual framework for analysis

There are different ideas about what a comprehensive approach such as the 3D approach entails, but basically it strives for greater coherence in the different approaches of different organisations, in the Dutch case in particular between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence. In order to be able to analyse coherence in the 3D approach, this article uses a framework developed by De Coning and Friis, within which they distinguish different degrees of coherence and the different types of organisational interaction.[5] Such a framework is useful because it allows a more precise description and mapping of the different forms of coherence within missions, making them more comparable. Furthermore, the framework embraces the fact that today's comprehensive (peace) operations have a multilevel and multi-actor character of interaction.[6] Last but not least, the framework is purely an instrument to structure the analysis and has no normative intentions.

In their framework, De Coning and Friis differentiate between six levels of coherence, ranging from unity to competition. When actors are united, they voluntarily agree to establish a unified structure and undertake joint action under a unified leadership and command arrangement. This requires an agreed strategic vision and specific aims and objectives. In practice, such a high level of coherence between independent actors rarely occurs and probably only in certain unique circumstances. It cannot be sustained for long as situations continuously change. When actors are integrated, they seek to integrate their approaches and activities without giving up their individual identities or their power to take independent decisions about resource allocation. They use their own resources and organisational means. The UN applies this model in its integrated approach. Actors cooperate if they have complementary and/or overlapping mandates allowing them to decide to undertake joint or collaborative action for instrumental and pragmatic reasons. Such initiatives tend to be ad hoc, temporary and context-specific, and to be renegotiated case by case. When actors coordinate, they try to prevent friction, duplication or overlap. They aim to ensure greater overall coherence between different activities by sharing information and acting on that information. This model allows for maximum independence and voluntary participation. While cooperation results in joint action, coordination results in independent or separate action. If actors merely coexist, they are forced to interact, but have minimal interest in coordinating their activities with those of other actors. When actors compete, they have opposing values, visions and strategies.[7]

The De Coning and Friis framework describes the different types of organisational coherence as follows. Coherence is regarded as intra-agency when it deals with the policies and actions of a single agency and the internal consistency of a particular policy or programme. Whole-of-government coherence is consistency among the policies and actions of different ministries and agencies within the same national government. Inter-agency coherence

describes consistency between the policies and actions of the various international actors, ranging from international organisations to national governments and NGOs. Internal-external coherence is about consistency between the policies and actions of the various international actors on the one hand and the various local actors on the other.[8]

De Coning and Friis projected these different levels and forms of coherence in a matrix (see Figure 1). It is this matrix that this article uses to map the Dutch 3D intervention in Uruzgan province. However, during the research it became clear that an expansion of the original framework by De Coning and Friis was needed because in order to categorise coherence in the matrix further detail was needed on the different levels of coherence. Figure 2 elaborates in detail on these different levels of coherence. In practice, it appeared that organisational coherence never fits completely in one single level. In the mapping, the level of coherence is therefore determined by the emphasis of the interaction between different actors.

Mapping 3D: differences in coherence

This section delves deeper into coherence between: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence; the civilians and military in the mission, the Task Force Uruzgan (TFU); the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) and the battle group (BG); the Dutch and their allies; and the Dutch government and NGOs. It sets out to establish the levels of coherence between these different organisations within the broader 3D approach.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence

The mission to Uruzgan was a joint effort by the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs. The three ministers of Defence, Foreign Affairs, and Development Cooperation were therefore actively involved. In practice, this meant that officials cooperated 'intensively' on a daily basis, and that all letters to

	Intra-agency	Whole-of-government	Inter-agency	Internal-External
Actors are united				
Actors are integrated				
Actors cooperate				
Actors coordinate				
Actors coexist				
Actors compete				

Figure 1. Coherence matrix. See: De Coning and Friis, "Coherence and Coordination."

	United	Integrated	Cooperate	Coordinate	Coexist	Compete	Levels
Organisational structure	Unified	Joint or collaborative	Independent	Independent	Independent	Independent	Strategic and operational
Actions	Joint	Joint or collaborative	Ad hoc joint or collaborative	Independent or separate, while avoiding conflict, duplications and overlap	Ad hoc pragmatic and opportunistic cooperation, but may resist activities that threaten or interfere	Competing	Operational
Interests, visions, aims and objectives	Agreed	Some degree of agreement	Complementing and overlapping	Some similarity	Separate	Competing	Strategic and operational
Mandate	Agreed	Some degree of agreed	Complementing and overlapping	Different	Different	Competing	Strategic
Campaign plan	Agreed	Some degree of agreed	Complementing and overlapping	Different	Different	Competing	Operational
Leadership and command	Unified	Joint or collaborative	Different	Different	Different	Different	Strategic and operational
Planning	Joint	Joint	Ad hoc joint or collaborative	Independent or separate, while avoiding conflict, duplications and overlap	Separate	Separate	Strategic and operational
Assessments	Joint	Joint	Ad hoc joint or collaborative	Individual	Separate	Separate	Strategic and operational
Implementation	Joint	Some degree of joint	Ad hoc joint or collaborative	Individual	Separate	Competing	Operational
Monitoring and evaluation	Joint	Some degree of joint	Ad hoc joint or collaborative	Individual	Separate	Separate	Strategic and operational
Identities	Joint	Individual	Individual	Individual	Separate	Competing	Strategic and operational
Decisions on resources and organisation means	Joint	Independent	Independent	Independent	Independent	Independent	Strategic and operational
Information	Joint gathering	Sharing	Sharing	Sharing	Certain amount of sharing and deconflicting may take place	No sharing or even spreading of disinformation	Strategic and operational

Figure 2. Different levels of coherence in a comprehensive approach.

parliament were sent jointly.[9] The interaction also became visible in joint ministerial visits to Afghanistan, the first of which was organised shortly after the new Dutch government came into power in 2006.[10] There was disagreement among participants in focus group meetings over the extent to which joint planning took place in The Hague, Kabul and Tarin Kowt. Some argue it did, while others argue that planning remained separate and unintegrated. This may be explained by their different expectations of joint planning.[11]

Several structures were established during the mission to improve cooperation between both ministries. First, the Department of Foreign Affairs added a military advisor to its staff, while the Department of Defence received a development advisor. Second, coordination groups were created. The Chief of Defence Staff and the Director-General Political Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs meet in the *Stuurgroep Militaire Operaties* (Steering group Military Operations), which coordinates military operations. Activities in the light of Security Sector Reform, such as the training of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP), are coordinated in the *Stuurgroep Veiligheidssamenwerking en Wederopbouw* (Steering group Security and Reconstruction Cooperation).[12] In addition, the *Stuurgroep Civiele Missies* (Steering group Civilian Missions) was established in 2010, which is presided over by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and also includes the Ministries of Defence, General Affairs, Security and Justice, Interior and Kingdom Relations, Finance, and Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation. It is a sort of '3D plus' steering group, which is a step further towards broader integration.[13]

Financially, the *Homogene Groep Internationale Samenwerking* (Homogeneous Group International Cooperation, HGIS) originates from 1997. This part of the national budget relates to the total financial flows used for foreign policy, thereby providing an overview of the policy of all involved ministries. All extra mission-related expenditures of both ministries for developmental, diplomatic and military involvement in Afghanistan are included in the HGIS note.[14] The costs for crisis prevention in Afghanistan are included in the 'non-Official Development Assistance (non-ODA) spending'.[15] The Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund and the Law and Order Trust Fund Afghanistan are supported financially by the Netherlands and are therefore included in HGIS. Some of the funds were channelled directly to the Afghan Department of Finance and earmarked for activities in Uruzgan.[16] Although the HGIS note seems to integrate financial sources, formally it is not an independent 'budget' but combines the financial inputs of all ministries involved in foreign policy. After that, the finances are redistributed according to the tasks of different ministries. According to the Dutch government, the HGIS is an important instrument for the integration and coherence of foreign policy.[17]

Although coherence in The Hague increased with the creation of a number of structures, the 3D approach at the headquarters strategic level remained largely a matter of coordination.[18] Most daily coordination was on an ad hoc basis and was not institutionalised. The ministries have their own identities, resources and

organisational means, an independent organisational structure and different leadership. HGIS is regarded as a way of coordinating financial flows, but all ministries remain responsible for their own budget. A diplomat argued that 'clear mandates of the "3Ds", joint planning and synchronisation of the effort' lay 'at the root of the success in Uruzgan'.[19]

Within the framework of De Coning and Friis, coherence at the strategic level, between the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs in The Hague, can be described as mainly *cooperation*.

Civilians and military in the mission

At the operational level, until March 2009 actors in the TFU interacted in the same cooperating way as their mother departments. Civilians worked under a different chain of command and only had a functional relationship with their military colleagues. Looking back, some diplomats argue that during the first TFUs the time was not ripe for a civilian lead as the environment was still too violent.[20]

In the field, there was a policy of speaking with one voice. This meant that internal differences in the TFU had to be resolved before further communication could take place with the embassy in Kabul, headquarters in The Hague, and also with allies.[21] In general the cooperation was harmonious. Those discussions between civilians and the military that took place were often about long-term stabilisation and reconstruction versus short-term security. Generally, though not always, civilians were more focused on the long term, and the military more on the short term. This was embodied in dilemmas such as building a school versus training teachers. Discussions took place over time estimates – what is more important in the long run – but also over resources.[22] The long-term stabilisation versus short-term security discussion also influenced views on which powerbroker should be dealt with and which not.[23] It is not unlikely that institutional political conflicts of interest were generated because, as described by some military personnel, the military were sometimes implementing civilian tasks.[24] Lastly, a source of occasional friction was the availability of force protection. The military sometimes had different priorities than civilians. Military personnel thought civilians found it difficult to accept 'no' for an answer, while civilians felt the military gave less relevant issues more priority. During the mission these priorities, however, grew increasingly towards each other and cooperation in the field improved further.[25]

After March 2009, the structure of the PRT changed, combining both civilians and military actors under a single chain of (joint) command. The three pillars of the 3D approach – defence, development, and diplomacy – were all included within the PRT, but maintained – even from 2009 onwards – their individual identities. Planning, assessing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating were done jointly. However, this development did not take place at the strategic level in The Hague, where cooperation structures remained the

same and interaction remained mostly ad hoc.[26] This created a gap between the strategic and operational levels.[27] Integration was to a large extent driven from the field and grew in the field. In The Hague, the integration did not reach the same level.[28]

Within the framework of De Coning and Friis, coherence at the operational level – in the TFU, between civilians and the military – can be described as mainly *cooperation* before 2009 and as *integrated* after 2009.

PRT and battle group

The aim of the PRT was to maximise the long-term stabilisation and reconstruction effort. At the same time, the battle group (BG) was aimed more at increasing short-term security. The capacity of the BG, however, was limited. The same BG had to provide both force protection for the PRT and secure the area controlled by the Dutch forces (the ink spot). Frictions between the PRT and the BG have for this reason often been described as a discussion on how to divide capacities. This friction overlapped with the tension between whether to deepen the ink spot or expand it.[29] Although formally the PRT was in the lead, especially at the start of the mission and at the edges of the ink spot, quite a number of military personnel in the BG felt that the insecurity forced them to aim their actions at short-term kinetics rather than focusing on long-term reconstruction efforts.[30] At the end of 2009, with the 'PRT in the lead' operational plan, the PRT increasingly became the lead in practice.[31]

Once outside the well-protected walls of the camp, the PRT's mission teams and the BG's infantry companies cooperated in the 'Smallest Unit of Action' (SUA), later known as Combined Arms Teams (CATs).[32] In such a unit, personnel of both the PRT and the BG, but also medics and engineers among others, were 'mixed and matched' to generate the optimal expertise for a given purpose. Upon return on base, the different members returned to their own units.[33] While, according to research, some PRTs and BGs interacted smoothly, this was not always the case. The start of the mission was the most challenging period for cooperation, because members of the BG and PRT were not yet completely familiar with each other's skills and objectives, or the environment in which they had to operate. In addition, sometimes the characters of PRT and BG commanders were not compatible. Furthermore, both units had separate rotation schemes as a result of which the composition of the TFU changed continuously. Consequently, members were less able to become familiar with each other and did not have the same experiences during the mission.[34]

Research published in 2008 found that members of the BG were, in general, positive about cooperation with the PRT, but the exact feedback depended particularly on the PRT they worked with. They focused, however, more on the differences and on their own rather than a shared identity. PRT members were far more positive about the common team spirit than members of the BG. According to the research, PRT members felt group dynamics improved on patrol,

because BG members started to understand the work of the PRT.[35] Over time the relationship between the military in the BG and PRT improved and most BG commanders in later TFUs do not recognise themselves in the above findings.[36]

Within the framework of De Coning and Friis, coherence between the PRT and the BG in the SUA can be described as mainly *cooperating*, because the different actors within the units were working together on an ad hoc basis, with ad hoc joint planning, implementation and evaluation, but with independent organisational means and leadership. This remained the same when the PRT came under a civilian lead. While steps were taken to institutionalise civil-military relationships within the PRT, these actions were not completely extended to cooperation between the BG and PRT within the SUAs/CATs.

The Dutch and their allies

Up to 2007–2008, the ISAF mission as a whole was rather one dimensional: i.e., military. It was only in 2007–2008 that ISAF started to pay more attention to the fields of governance and development.[37] In addition, because lead nations are each responsible for their own province, ISAF is very fragmented in character. The fact that at the time the three provinces of Uruzgan, Kandahar and Helmand were commonly referred to as *Uruzdam*, *Canadahar* and *Helmandshire* shows the perceived influence of the lead nation and the limited central direction. Within ISAF there was sufficient reporting and information exchange but, especially at the start of the mission, no real common strategy that was also commonly implemented.[38]

In essence the Dutch 3D approach was not very different from the approaches of the other allies, only the operationalisation was different. Initially frictions between the Dutch and other allies developed as the Dutch were perceived as not aggressive enough. Those who held this view felt it was supported by the fact that at the start of the mission the Dutch suffered only a few casualties. In addition, the TFU had to consult The Hague about larger operations and, in a number of cases, were subsequently not allowed to participate. This was relatively difficult to explain to the allies. At the same time, the Dutch portrayed a picture of a 'Dutch approach', which was more successful than that of the others,[39] and which the Ministry of Defence had already used before to describe the approach in the earlier deployment in Al Muthanna, Iraq.[40] Also within the province of Uruzgan, Dutch diplomats needed to invest a lot of time in coordinating approaches with the allies to ensure, as much as possible, a single approach between the Dutch, Americans and Australians. Again this improved during the mission.[41]

The United States (US) was deployed in Uruzgan in the context of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). They operated mostly outside the scope or at the border of the ink spot, in locations where insurgents were still present. Nonetheless, their actions did have spillover effects on areas where the Dutch were stationed. Moreover, the OEF and ISAF operations were often dependent on

each other.[42] The US's aim was to drive out the Taliban and, in order to reach that goal some development projects were needed.[43] For that purpose they were able to involve all the necessary agencies, including USAID.[44] The Dutch approach was to a certain extent the other way around. There is some overlap, but every once in a while there were disagreements in the grey areas.[45] The Americans were physically based at the same camp in Tarin Kowt, albeit in their own separate section, and coordinated and exchanged information with the TFU. However, depending on personal relations, when views really differed, coherence remained difficult. Moreover, while coordination on a macro level was possible, often more specific operational information was not shared with the Dutch.[46] Although the Dutch mission increasingly thought along the lines of counterinsurgency, only under Commander McChrystal, the Americans also started to think more along the Dutch lines.[47]

The Australian forces in Uruzgan were partly deployed as part of ISAF and integrated in the TFU, but their Special Forces were deployed as part of OEF and therefore not part of the mission. Coordination with the Australians, especially at the Kabul level, was relatively easy as their diplomats, AUSAID, their Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force, and their Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team followed a similar approach to the Dutch. Their Special Forces, however, took a very different path,[48] which the Dutch, especially initially, found difficult to coordinate with. Sometimes they undertook operations within the ink spot which the TFU was not informed of.[49] Similar to coherence with the US, coherence with the Australians was good when their strategies overlapped with the Dutch, but led to the usual discussions and disagreements when they did not.[50]

At the end of the mission awareness grew among the Dutch that the causes of instability were so deep, an international approach was required. Therefore the PRT sought cooperation with USAID and AUSAID.[51] Moreover, as the Dutch presence was nearing its end, more cooperation was needed in order to allow a smooth transition.[52]

Although, within the framework of De Coning and Friis, coherence with ISAF and Regional Command South at the strategic level may be described as mainly *integrated*, at the operational level within and between PRTs and taskforces, countries participating in ISAF mainly *cooperate*. The level of coherence between PRTs is even less than between different troop-contributing countries operating in the same province. Although NATO focuses on unity of effort and tries to implement the same way of working at lower operational level, PRTs are more likely to follow national goals and provincial responsibilities. Part of the explanation is that all national taskforces have agreed to be under direct ISAF command, but do not have this relation to other nations' PRTs and taskforces since all nations are 'sovereign' and therefore, at least to some extent, 'equal' to each other. Another reason is that NATO is an institution, in which member states have clear roles and rules. Institutionalisation is a precondition for integration, because this relationship is all about joint or collaborative structures. The coherence between PRTs was less institutionalised.

The Dutch government and NGOs

For the first time in history, the Dutch government organised meetings with development organisations, like Cordaid, Healthnet TPO, and ICCO and Kerk in Actie, to prepare the intervention using the experience available within these organisations. When the Dutch NGOs were subsequently confronted with the invitation to go to Uruzgan, they each had their independent considerations about whether to go or not. Those NGOs that decided to join the Dutch Consortium Uruzgan (DCU) and received funding from the government to implement projects in the province, argue that they never really had a common goal with ISAF and the Dutch TFU.[53] Many of their local partners were pragmatic as they operated in a 'survival modus'. Although many claim they are not working with ISAF, in practice they do. Those Afghan NGOs active in the humanitarian field were much more cautious about working, or being seen to work, with ISAF. The positions of partner organisations also differed in different regions, often dependent on the security situation.[54]

ICCO and Kerk in Actie decided not to join DCU, since it had no partners in the region and its Afghani partners had no intentions to establish themselves there. At the same time it also had severe doubts about the extent to which the deployment was for reconstruction purposes and the extent to which the needs of the local population were really central to the mission. Oxfam Novib did have a partner in Uruzgan, but has strict international guidelines which it decided to follow: visible and strict physical separation from the military, while communicating and exchanging information with regard to security. Also Cordaid had a partner already active in Uruzgan. It made joining DCU dependent on the perception of its partners. Security was an important criterion in this choice, but there was also a great fear of blurring lines between civilians and the military. The choice of Cordaid to join the DCU was never based on principles, but rather on the question of what is possible under which conditions. Healthnet TPO had a more fluid approach. On the one hand in debates in the Netherlands it took a principled position. On the other hand, in practice it was much more pragmatist and did accept funds related to the context of the mission by joining DCU. Save the Children took the presence of the mission as a fact, but was not sure whether it could work in such conditions. It decided to start and find out, as in a pilot, whether it was workable, e.g., whether it was secure enough for its local partner to operate. As a small organisation, the Dutch Committee for Afghanistan (DCA) had little manoeuvring space. It wanted to establish a private veterinary network in Afghanistan and needed all the funds it could get to do that.[55]

A number of years before the start of the Uruzgan mission, the military and NGOs in the Netherlands had started to engage with, meet with and talk to each other. Their increasing coherence therefore cannot be related directly to the Uruzgan mission. The operation did, however, strengthen this development.[56] Initially most NGOs and military personnel stood with their backs to each other. Especially at the start of the mission some NGO staff had a lot of distrust and, in

some cases in fact, a principled aversion to the military.[57] DCU decided to pursue a strict policy of separation from the military. It stated that no overlap exists between them and the ISAF mission. It argued that its presence was mandated by the local citizens, with the goal of establishing development in cooperation with local aid organisations. According to DCU, there was no direct cooperation with military actors, except for the exchange of information needed to implement the projects in an effective way.[58] During this period the embassy was an essential intermediary between the military and the NGOs.[59]

Nonetheless, between the military and the NGOs one fundamental difference of opinion remained. Military actors often argue that humanitarian activities by NGOs are not possible in an insecure environment.[60] Moreover, they argue that NGO involvement in insecure areas is less effective, because they would not be able to monitor the outcomes, thereby increasing the chance of corruption.[61] On the other hand, according to almost all NGOs' lines of thinking, conflict has its origins in underdevelopment, social exclusion by those in power, and lack of confidence in government. They aim to assist in development to address the root causes of conflict, and fear that military reconstruction tasks endanger their independent and neutral position. They also claim that, in order to assist, they do not need military protection. Their neutrality is their armour and is proven by the fact that they were already involved in (the dangerous areas of) Afghanistan before the arrival of the military. In fact, they claim the military presence only complicated the situation.[62] At the same time, the number of local NGOs and the aid budget have grown with the arrival of ISAF. Moreover, most aid organisations chose to work within the ink spot where the Dutch were deployed.[63] Increasingly, the whole discussion is viewed by military, diplomats and NGOs alike as a discussion about principles, which may have relevance at the strategic level, but in the field are a lot less relevant. Information exchange is fine, but working together appears to be difficult and context specific.[64]

Initially contact between the mission and NGOs in the field was limited because of the risk of intimidation and violence being directed at NGOs. The contacts took place at the Kabul level, with the embassy. The mission viewed the exchange of information regarding the security situation as 'successful'.[65] During the mission, direct contacts and coordination grew, as well as a less strict implementation of the DCU policy of separation. Slowly the prejudices and initial distrust between the military and NGOs disappeared, although some still remained. They became able to 'look each other in the eyes', relations improved and information was freely exchanged.[66] After 2008, relations at TFU level became more intense as the role of civilians in the mission grew, especially once the PRT was civilian led.[67] Another important reason for the increasing openness of Dutch NGOs in DCU was that, although some local partner organisations stuck to a principled line, more and more local partner organisations started to visit the camp.[68] Also, from the defence perspective, relations with local NGOs improved.[69] Initially they could not appreciate that some NGOs started negotiations with Taliban commanders to ensure that children could go to school

and teachers did not have to fear for their lives. Later in the mission, defence became more open to such a long-term approach. In addition, they started to no longer to see the NGOs as 'enablers'.[70] Also, the role of Dutch NGOs in pre-deployment training for the military improved.[71]

None of the NGOs in DCU felt in the end that they had become an integral part of the governmental 3D approach. Although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the embassy had an interest in 'selling' the presence of NGOs in Uruzgan as a result of the 3D approach, it was never seen as such by the NGOs. Although there clearly is a relationship between the Dutch military presence in Uruzgan and the establishment of DCU, and the Dutch government provided funding, from the perspective of DCU it never became a subcontractor.[72] From the perception of a number of diplomats deployed in the TFU, the NGOs were part of the governmental approach based on the idea that, during the mission, the governmental actors lay the foundations for development, on the basis of which NGOs continue to build. It was expected that there would also be funding for this purpose from the embassy and from the national Afghan budget.[73] However, in 2013 funding for DCU ended and most projects stopped. Also according to a military officer, at the end of the mission one could argue that NGOs united in DCU were to a certain extent involved, and in some cases instrumental, in the mission as they did take funds to achieve common goals.[74]

The boundaries of coherence were made clear when in 2009 the TFU requested several NGOs to start projects in Deh Rafshan which had recently been cleared and secured and from an integrated policy perspective needed signs of progress for the population. These NGOs asked their local partners how they viewed the proposal and the response was that it was premature. As a result the NGOs declined.[75] The Ministry in The Hague and the embassy supported the NGOs in their concerns.[76] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs never again came with such a request and the NGOs never felt pressured to implement certain projects.[77]

Within the framework of De Coning and Friis, at the strategic level the coherence between the NGOs in DCU and the Dutch government can be described as mainly *coordination*, because information was shared and some of the goals were partly the same, but approaches and identities remained different. At the same time, at the operational level DCU underlined the separate identities and actions, and coherence was more *coexistence*. This difference between the strategic and the operational levels grew wider during the mission, because at the strategic level DCU and the Dutch government grew closer over time.

Conclusions: many layers of coherence

If one looks further into the broader 3D approach the conceptual framework of De Coning and Friis allows for differentiation between participating organisations and their varying forms and levels of interaction. It appears that within the

Six types of relationships	Four levels of coherence							
	Internal-external		Inter-agency		Whole-of-government		Intra-agency	
	Strategic	Operational	Strategic	Operational	Strategic	Operational	Strategic	Operational
United								
Integrated			ISAF – Dutch state actors			Different actors (civil/military) involved in Dutch PRT since 2009		
Cooperating	Afghan national government – Dutch state actors	Afghan local government – Dutch state actors Afghan NGOs – Dutch state actors Afghan NGOs – Dutch NGOs (DCU)	DCU – its members (Dutch NGOs)	Dutch state actors – ISAF allies in other provinces Dutch state actors – ISAF allies in Uruzgan	Involved Dutch Departments	Different actors (civil/military) involved in Dutch PRT until 2009		BG – PRT
Coordinating			Dutch state actors – Dutch NGOs (DCU)	UN organisations – Dutch state actors TFU – certain Afghan NGOs				
Coexisting				Dutch state actors– Dutch NGOs (DCU)				
Competing								

Figure 3. Overview of coherence in the 'broader 3D approach'.

broader 3D approach there were many different forms of interaction between a number of organisational units. At the operational level in the TFU, within the framework of De Coning and Friis there was mainly *cooperation* before 2009 and it became *integrated* after 2009. Coherence at the strategic level, in The Hague between the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs, remained mainly *cooperation*, although some coordination bodies were established. Coherence between the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) and the battle group (BG) in the Smallest Unit of Action also remained mainly *cooperation*, including after the PRT came under civilian lead. Although at the strategic level coherence with ISAF and Regional Command South was mainly *integrated*, and on paper there appears to be a clear ISAF strategy and chain of command, at the operational level within taskforces and between PRTs, and between countries participating in ISAF, the interaction was mainly *cooperation* as countries to a large extent pursued their own goals in their own way. At the strategic level coherence between the NGOs in DCU and the Dutch government was mainly *coordination*. In The Hague NGOs, diplomats and military personnel met frequently and became used to each other. At the operational level the interaction was more *coexistence* as NGOs needed to show their independence and neutrality. These relations and the changes during the mission appear in Figure 3, which provides a quick overview of coherence in the 'broader 3D approach'.

This analysis shows that when countries and organizations such as the EU and NATO mention the comprehensive approach in their policy documents, in practice there is not just one single comprehensive approach, as there are many different forms of interaction between a number of organisational units. Each interaction has its own distinct issues and its own level of coherence. Moreover, the level of coherence differs depending on the level at which the interaction takes place – strategic at the headquarters level versus operational at the field level; and at what point in the mission it happens – in most cases it moves towards more cohesion.

Acknowledgements

This article is partly based on the report: Jair van der Lijn, *3D 'The Next Generation': Lessons learned from Uruzgan for future operations* (The Hague: Clingendael Institute and Cordaid, 2011). The author is grateful to Cordaid for commissioning the work and to the Netherlands Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence as well as HealthNet TPO, Dutch Committee for Afghanistan – Veterinary Programmes, Save the Children, ICCO and Kerk in Actie, and Oxfam Novib for their cooperation in the focus group meetings and for their feedback. The project could not have been done without Christa Hijkoop and Lisette van der Ark. The focus group meetings could not have taken place without Rosan Smit, Kees Homan, Luc van de Goor and Thijs Brocades Zaalberg who co-chaired respectively the NGO, diplomats, military and common focus groups. All the data generated by these meetings were captured in detail by Lindy Peijnenburg who managed to keep up with the, at times, very lively discussions while writing the minutes. Last but not least the author is very thankful for all the comments from colleagues, participants and peers who contributed to this report.

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