Our experiences since the end of the Cold War have demonstrated that development and security are intrinsically linked and that political stability, economic opportunity and lasting peace are predicated on the successful transformation of violent conflict and the creation of sustainable legitimate government. Although we have recognized that the failures and setbacks in implementing peace agreements through traditional UN peacekeeping operations in the early 1990s called for a more comprehensive approach that links development with sustainable conflict transformation, the international community responded to emerging security challenges largely in an ad hoc fashion.

Responding quickly to global crises and emerging threats and engaging in fragile, failing and failed states has become the new face of global security. Our active engagement in conflict or post-conflict environments draws heavily on military and civilian capabilities and resources alike and more than ever before requires the close coordination and cooperation of a wide range of state and non-state, international and domestic actors. In today’s extremely volatile security contexts, the political, security, economic, social and cultural spheres are so highly interdependent that failure in one sphere risks failure in all others. No single actor or agency and no single strategy suffice for developing and implementing sustainable solutions to these challenges.

Effective conflict prevention and transformation, most experts agree, requires greater coherence between security, governance and development policies as well as enhanced coordination among governmental agencies and with local, regional and international partners. The need for the comprehensive integration and coordination of civilian and military, governmental and non-governmental, national and international capabilities to improve efficiency and effectiveness of conflict prevention/resolution and post-conflict stabilization and peacebuilding efforts is widely recognized.

While many academic and policy observers, military experts and peace practitioners have lauded efforts for integrating civil-military relations and strengthening interagency cooperation, some have criticized contemporary attempts at creating so-called “whole-of-government” or “networked security” responses to international crises and conflicts for overcommitment of resources, lack of sufficient funding and personnel, competition between actors and agencies, ambiguous mission objectives and undermining the military’s primary purpose of defending the national interest. The “buzz” generated by ideas of networked security and whole-of-government approaches merit a closer look. The purpose of this issue of Security + Peace is to examine some of the advantages and disadvantages, challenges and opportunities inherent in these concepts.

Analyzing the security-development nexus comparatively from the perspectives of the military and the development communities, Melanie Alamir shows that both are adapting, albeit slowly, to this new joint reality. Although both sides have introduced policies, structures and approaches with the aim of improving civil-military cooperation, she argues that the lack of internationally shared integrated crisis management concepts, strategies and regulatory frameworks as well as still deficient cross-departmental decision making present the most severe challenges to the effective coordination of peacebuilding efforts.

Looking specifically at the military intervention in Afghanistan, Markus Gauster illustrates that recognizing the need for improved civil-military interaction and coordination resulted in the development of comprehensive approaches (CA), bringing together most, if not all, of the relevant actors at different strategy and policy levels in a structured manner. To date, however, Gauster argues there are still considerable political, conceptual, and practical obstacles in implementing a CA. CA has not proven effective on the ground, in part because insufficient communication and coordination among key actors has prevented the achievement of important synergy effects at all mission stages, from planning to execution.

Examining the Comprehensive Approach as the driving element in German security policy, Ralph Thiele conjectures that successful crisis management and conflict prevention require political, civilian and military actors to operate in a coherent and networked fashion. While discussing common strategies and objectives as well as their operational implementation in crisis management offers a unique opportunity to promote the CA, German civilian actors commonly view networked security as a strategy for pursuing (hard) security objectives, thereby misusing the civilian component of civil-military coordination. Thiele cautions that to date we are still missing true agreement on the goals and strategies for integrating security and development and on the most effective way for bringing together state and non-state actors in support of those goals and strategies.

For Sabine Jaberg, traditional security policy poses a number of logical traps for security actors (mainly the state), from the self-serving pursuit of the national interest and the seemingly boundless security dialogue to the securitization of politics. However, Jaberg emphasizes that security policy is not the result of natural law but rather that security practices can be shaped and channeled by the actors involved. Consequently, she conjectures, contemporary security thinking and strategy ought to move from national self-interest to considering regional or global security needs based on a more comprehensive understanding of human security and clear limits on the use of military force for defensive purposes only. Jaberg concludes that we ought to shift the security discourse from one framed by securitization to one focusing on the rational analysis of existential threats.

Based on the premise that democratic security policy evolves in a complex system of checks and balances between executive, legislative and judicative actors and institutions, Christopher Daase and Julian Junk argue that any debate of the concept of comprehensive security should not be limited to discussions of efficiency and effectiveness but ought to also focus on issues of democratic legitimacy. Examining contemporary German security policy, Daase and Junk develop a framework for analyzing the legitimacy of security networks in the executive, legislative and judicative branches of German government.

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