

Coherence and Coordination

The Limits of the Comprehensive Approach

Cedric de Coning

Research Fellow with ACCORD and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI)
cdc@nupi.no

Karsten Friis¹

Senior Adviser, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI)
kf@nupi.no

Abstract

This article explores why international actors assign such high importance to coherence. It argues that the assumptions on which the principle of coherence is based are flawed, and that the empirical and theoretical evidence indicates that there is much less room for coherence than generally acknowledged in the policy debate. It recommends that the international community should lower its expectations and adopt a more realistic policies. The current approach tends to put pressure on all partners to adopt a maximal approach to coherence, regardless of their relations to each other and the operational context. Coherence should not be understood as an effort aimed equally at all, nor should all partners be expected to achieve the same level of unity of effort. Coherence should rather be understood as a scale of relationships, and the most appropriate and realistic level of coherence that can be achieved will depend on the exact constellation of organizations in an interdependent relationship in that specific operational context. This article offers a typology of the range of likely relationships, as well as an explanation of the circumstances that may determine the level of coherence that can be realistically expected to develop, depending on the context and the nature of the relationships among the partners.

Keywords

Peace operations, stability operations, comprehensive approach, coherence, coordination, cooperation, integration, whole-of-government, local ownership, UN, EU, NATO.

Introduction

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Pursuing coherence is now accepted as a core objective in all international peace and stability operations. Policy statements at the highest level assign strategic importance to a comprehensive approach, and it is often presented as the key to successful operations. For instance, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, in his very first statement as NATO Secretary General, declared: ‘we need a comprehensive approach, a reinforced interaction between our military efforts and our endeavours with regard to civil reconstruction.’² Similarly, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, referring to Afghanistan, has argued that what is needed is a ‘comprehensive approach including better governance, economic development such as a single financing mechanism, and when necessary appropriate military pressure.’³ Already in 2001 the UN Security Council stated that it ‘reaffirms that the quest for peace requires a comprehensive, concerted and determined approach that addresses the root causes of conflicts, including their economic and social dimensions’.⁴

This article is aimed at improving our understanding of why coherence has become so important and how it is perceived to be linked to mission success. Consideration will also be given to the limits of coherence: how much coherence can one realistically expect to achieve, and what factors would influence its limits? Our objective here is to move the coherence debate beyond politically correct calls for ever more coherence. We argue for more realistic expectations, informed by an improved awareness of the limits on coherence. More realistic expectations should ultimately result in more efficient and effective operations, by avoiding the waste of unnecessary energy and time in pursuing coherence beyond reasonable expectations. Introducing more realistic expectations of what coherence can, and cannot, offer should also reduce the risk of the whole coherence initiative losing credibility due to unrealistically high expectations and subsequent disappointments.

In order to position coherence in the international peace and stability operations field, this article frames coherence within the context of the comprehensive approach. The comprehensive approach is defined as a process aimed at facilitating system-wide coherence across the security, governance, development and political dimensions of international peace and stability operations.

The first section explores how the quest for a comprehensive approach has become an integral part of contemporary peace and stability operations. In the second section, coherence is analysed, and what it is we expect coherence to achieve when we speak of more efficient and effective operations. In the third section we turn to the limitations of coherence; and in the fourth and concluding section we indicate what could constitute a more realistic approach to coherence and how such an approach might best be operationalized.

The Emergence of the Comprehensive Approach Concept

The comprehensive approach concept should be understood in the context of an increasingly complex and interdependent international conflict management system. The scope of the

² First NATO Press Conference, 3 August 2009, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_56776.htm, accessed on 14 September 2009.

³ Gordon Brown Welcomes Pakistan’s President to Downing Street, Downing Street Press Release 28 August 2009, <http://ukingeorgia.fco.gov.uk/en/newsroom/?view=News&id=20783367>, accessed on 14 September 2009.

⁴ Security Council addresses comprehensive approach to peace-building, Press Release SC/7014, 20 February 2001.

crises faced by the international community is often of such a scale that no single agency, government or international organization can manage them alone. A wide range of agencies, governmental and non-governmental, and regional and international organizations have developed specialized capacities to manage various aspects of these complex crisis systems. However, the lack of coherence among these diverse international and local actors has resulted in inter-agency rivalry, working at cross-purposes, competition for funding, duplication of effort and sub-optimal economies of scale, among other things. This lack of coherence is one of the factors often cited as contributing to the poor success rate and lack of sustainability of international peace and stability operations. Research indicates that 25 to 50% of all peace processes may relapse within five years.⁵

In order to address these shortcomings, and in an attempt to improve the overall success rate of these missions, various agencies, governments and organizations have developed – mostly independently of each other – a range of concepts, models and tools aimed at enhancing overall coherence. All these initiatives have a similar aim: to achieve greater harmonization and synchronization among the activities of the international and local actors, as well as across the analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation phases of the programme cycle.

The African Union, the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the United Nations have each developed specific approaches aimed at fostering greater coherence. Several countries have also started exploring ways in which to improve coherence across government departments: these national-level initiatives have become known as a ‘whole-of-government’ approach. The United Nations stands out as having developed perhaps the most sophisticated system to date. Its coherence initiative was first referred to as ‘integrated missions’, but later refined as the ‘integrated approach’. This term refers to a specific type of operational process and design, where the planning and coordination processes of the different elements of the UN family are integrated into a single country-level UN system when it undertakes complex peacebuilding missions.⁶

A Note of Guidance by Kofi Annan on integrated missions, in Annan’s former capacity as UN Secretary-General, establishes the integrated mission concept as the guiding principle for future post-conflict complex operations. It states that: ‘Integration is the guiding principle for the design and implementation of complex UN operations in post-conflict situations and for linking the different dimensions of peacebuilding (political, development, humanitarian, human rights, rule of law, social and security aspects) into a coherent support strategy.’⁷

Current UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon’s Guidance Note on integration introduces the notion of the integrated approach. This differs from the integrated mission concept in not requiring structural integration, although providing for it where appropriate. Instead, the integrated approach refers to a strategic partnership between the UN peacekeeping operation

⁵ Paul Collier et al. estimate a relapse figure of 50%, but this has been questioned by Astri Suhrke and Ingrid Samset, who argue for a figure closer to 25%. See Paul Collier et al., *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil Wars and Development Policy* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2003) and Astri Suhrke and Ingrid Samset, ‘What’s in a Figure? Estimating Recurrence of Civil War’, *International Peacekeeping*, vol.14, no.2, 2007, pp. 195 – 203.

⁶ Cedric de Coning, *The United Nations and the Comprehensive Approach* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2008), p. 14.

⁷ United Nations, *Note of Guidance on Integrated Missions*, issued by the Secretary-General on 9 December 2005, paragraph 4. See also the Revised *Note of Guidance on Integrated Missions*, dated 17 January 2006, and released under a Note from the Secretary-General on 9 February 2006, paragraph 4.

and the UN Country Team that ensures that all components of the UN system operate in a coherent and mutually supportive manner, and in close collaboration with other partners.⁸

The EU and NATO have both adopted the comprehensive approach concept to describe their respective initiatives to pursue coherence.⁹ The EU's European Security Strategy, adopted in 2003, stresses that the Union must 'pursue coherent policies' – 'bring together the different tools and capabilities of EU policy, such as European assistance programmes, the European Development Fund and the Member States' military and civilian capabilities'. It also underlines the importance of 'working with partners', i.e. major powers and organizations.¹⁰ Concretely, in connection with what is now called the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP),¹¹ the EU has been developing its crisis management capabilities in the wake of the Cold War, the Balkan crises, the 9/11 attacks in the United States and the subsequent operations in Afghanistan. Much of the focus is on weak, failed or failing states, which are considered a potential breeding ground and exporter of threats to Europe, such as terrorism, organized crime and trafficking. To coordinate the various EU instruments in field operations, a civilian-military coordination (CMCO) process has been established, but thus far its impact has been limited.¹² The EU has developed a sophisticated crisis management capability, including military, police and civilian capacities, but it has not yet deployed these capacities together in one integrated operation. Until now, they have been deployed in parallel missions in military or police missions alongside other EU presences in the same countries, such as election monitoring missions, development and humanitarian missions, and political/diplomatic council and commission representation. Internal institutional divisions, the pillar divide and the lengthy ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty are among the factors that thus far have prevented a more coherent EU, despite the huge potentials in the military, political and economic sectors.¹³ Nonetheless, progress has been significant over the last decade. The Lisbon Treaty has now been ratified, and efforts are being made to improve planning and coordination despite the obstacles.¹⁴

NATO has made explicit reference to the importance of a comprehensive approach to respond to the challenges in Afghanistan and elsewhere in its 2006 Riga Summit and 2008 Bucharest Summit Declarations.¹⁵ NATO is essentially a military alliance and can deploy only as such. As it is incapable of achieving a system-wide effect on its own, NATO's role is limited to participating in a larger comprehensive approach. The comprehensive approach has been the subject of substantial internal discussions between the summits, where it was stressed that NATO shall not compete with the UN and EU, and that it shall not develop its own civilian

⁸ *Decision Number 2008/24 – Integration*, Decisions of the Secretary-General, 25 June 2008 Policy Committee, United Nations.

⁹ For an exploration of the attempts by the UN, EU, NATO and AU to cooperation on the strategic level, see Kristin M. Haugevik, *New Partners New Possibilities*, Security in Practice No. 6 (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), 2008).

¹⁰ See *European Security Strategy*, http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/justice_freedom_security/fight_against_terrorism/r00004_en.htm, accessed 12 March 2010.

¹¹ Previously called the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)

¹² Eva Gross, *EU and the Comprehensive Approach* (Copenhagen: DIIS Danish Institute for International Studies, 2008)

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 26.

¹⁴ The recently established Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD) could be an example. See Per Martin Norheim-Martinsen, *Matching Ambition with Institutional Innovation: The EU's Comprehensive Approach and Civil-Military organisation* (Oslo: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2009).

¹⁵ See *Riga Summit Declaration*, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2006/p06-150e.htm> and *Bucharest Summit Declaration*, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2008/p08-049e.html>, accessed 24 September 2009.

capabilities. Instead, it will pursue the comprehensive approach in coordination with other organizations.¹⁶ As a result, the Bucharest Declaration clearly states that NATO should be regarded solely as a contributor to the comprehensive approach of the wider international community.¹⁷ Beyond these declarations, NATO is still struggling with the practical challenges – as a when NATO, with its International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation in Afghanistan, feels itself forced to take on certain civilian tasks in the absence of civilian actors in the field. Despite having developed a comprehensive approach action plan, and although NATO has taken initiatives to strengthen its relationship with the UN, EU and others, both at headquarters level and in the field (Pristina and Kabul), NATO remains in ‘slow progress’ when it comes to developing its contribution to a comprehensive approach.¹⁸ On the other hand, the day-to-day challenges in Afghanistan are a constant reminder for NATO that a military operation cannot achieve peace and stability on its own. The introduction of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in ISAF, where civilian actors are embedded in these otherwise military units, may be regarded as an attempt to remedy this. However, the PRTs have been too few, too small and accompanied by their own set of challenges (see below). Hence, they cannot be said to represent a solution to the comprehensive approach challenge for NATO.

At the national level, many governments, predominately in the West, have developed a whole-of-government approach to their international engagements. This typically entails some form of systematic process aimed at ensuring that the different ministries or departments engaged in its international peace and stability operations do so in a coherent manner. The original Canadian 3D concept – referring to the relationship between defence, development and diplomacy – is the signature example of the whole-of-government approach. However, today most proponents of the whole-of-government approach, including Canada, engage not only the three ministries mentioned, but also typically the office of the prime minister or president, as well as the ministries responsible for justice, police, correctional services, home affairs and finance.

Some countries, among them Canada, the UK and the USA, have developed an institutional approach to coherence and have established dedicated units, typically housed in their foreign ministries, to manage their whole-of-government systems. Others, such as the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, have developed a process approach, typically based on a white-paper level requirement for policy integration, backed up by a series of meetings at the ministerial and technical levels.¹⁹ They generally have an in-country level process as well, designed around the ambassador, to ensure operational coherence among the various government agencies with a presence on the ground. One non-Western and non-Afghanistan inspired example is the establishment of the National Office for the Coordination of Peace Missions (NOCPM) in South Africa, following the adoption of the White Paper on South African Participation in International Peace Missions in October 1998.²⁰

¹⁶ See Peter Viggo Jacobsen, *NATO's Comprehensive Approach to Crisis Response Operations – A Work in Slow Progress* (Copenhagen: DIIS Danish Institute for International Studies, 2008), p. 11.

¹⁷ Bucharest Summit Declaration, paragraph 11.

¹⁸ Jacobsen, *NATO's Comprehensive Approach to Crisis Response Operations*.

¹⁹ Kristiina Rintakoski and Mikko Autti (eds.), *Comprehensive Approach – Trends Challenges and Possibilities for Cooperation and Crisis Prevention Management*, (Helsinki: Ministry of Defence, Seminar Publication, 2008); Cedric de Coning, Helge Lurås, Niels Nagelhus Schia and Ståle Ulriksen, *Norway's Whole-of-Government Approach and its Engagement with Afghanistan* (Oslo: NUPI, 2009).

²⁰ Cedric de Coning, ‘The White Paper on SA Participation in Peace Missions: A Unique Beginning’, *Conflict Trends*, no. 2, April 1999, Durban: ACCORD.

Most Western countries that have adopted a whole-of-government approach have done so over the past decade, and in most cases this development has been largely shaped by their engagement in Iraq and especially in Afghanistan.²¹ Many of them are responsible for, or participate in, a PRT in Afghanistan. The Afghanistan PRT model is an attempt to apply the whole-of-government model to a nationally deployed entity, consisting of a military component responsible for security-related tasks, development advisors responsible for development projects, political advisors responsible for engagement with local authorities and political analysis, and police and/or judicial advisors, including in some cases correctional service officers, responsible for rule of law assistance. There is no commonly agreed PRT model or structure. Each lead nation has developed its own model, and the degree of whole-of-government integration differs significantly. The UK PRT in Helmand province is headed by a senior civilian; others are led by the military, with hardly any civilians at all. In general, civilians are a small minority in the PRTs. Coordination between the PRTs and the ISAF HQ, although better than a few years ago, is limited, and as a result there are significant regional differences in terms of scope, resources and approaches.²²

As is clear from this overview, the comprehensive approach means different things for different organizations and individual countries. The UN's integrated approach is primarily concerned with the security-development nexus – with coherence between the peace, security, development and humanitarian elements of the UN family. The EU comprehensive approach is primarily concerned with the civil-military relationship among the elements of its crisis management approach, i.e. the military, rule of law, protection and conflict management aspects. The NATO comprehensive approach concept aims at addressing the relationship between NATO and the other internal actors engaged in the same theatre. The various national whole-of-government approaches are primarily concerned with coherence amongst the government departments and agencies of the specific country.

Implicit rationale of the comprehensive approach

The presentation above also indicates that while there are numerous practical challenges associated with building coherence, most of the actors also share an implicit theoretical assumption. There appears to be consensus that peace and stability operations will be more efficient and effective, and thus have a more meaningful impact, when the different actors engaged have a common strategy, based on a common understanding of the problem, a common theory of change, and an agreed synchronized plan for implementing and evaluating such a strategy.²³ There is thus an assumed cause-and-effect relationship between coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, and this rationale is extended from the national to the international context, or vice versa.

More specifically, policy-makers appear to base the call for coherence on the assumption that inconsistent policies and fragmented programmes entail a higher risk of duplication,

²¹ Stewart Patrick and Kaysie Brown, *Greater than the Sum of its Parts: Assessing 'Whole of Government' Approaches Toward Fragile States* (New York: International Peace Academy, 2007).

²² Oskari Eronen, *PRT Models in Afghanistan – Approaches to Civil-Military Integration* (Helsinki: CMC Crisis Management Centre, 2008); Touko Piiparinen, 'A Clash of Mindsets? An Insider's Account of Provincial Reconstruction Teams', *International Peacekeeping*, vol.14, no.1, 2007, pp. 143–157.

²³ Karsten Friis and Pia Jarmyr (eds.), *Comprehensive Approach: Challenges and Opportunities in Complex Crisis Management*, Security in Practice No. 11 (Oslo: NUPI, 2008); Claes Nilsson, Cecilia Hull, Markus Derblom and Robert Egnell, *Contextualising the Comprehensive Approach. The Elements of a Comprehensive Intervention* (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI)).

inefficient spending, lower quality of service, difficulty in meeting goals and, ultimately, of a reduced capacity for delivery.²⁴ Consequently, the policy community has come to believe that by improving coherence one will also improve the efficiency²⁵ of operations, and more efficient operations would translate into more effective²⁶ and more sustainable²⁷ operations.

The logic is that the greater the coherence achieved among the different parts of the system, the more meaningful, effective and sustainable the impact is likely to be. While this may appear to be merely common sense, such assumptions also seem to overlook a number of deeper impediments to enhanced coherence. All the above-mentioned actors tend to take a relatively ‘technical’ approach to the problem, searching for organizational and systemic solutions to the challenges of coherence.²⁸

We will argue that there are also other, more deeply rooted hurdles to achieving coherence, and that these concern conflicting values, principles and mandates. In turn they could be grounded in conflicting ideologies, identities, theories of change or politics – and they cannot be resolved simply through improved organizational measures, coordination bodies or weekly meetings. Some might be better managed through careful politically informed processes, while others are probably insurmountable. Ignorance of these deeper challenges is likely to limit the success of coherence-building efforts. More importantly, it may also lead to failed expectations, creating new tensions between the external and the internal actors.

Before exploring these challenges, however, we will need to understand what the comprehensive approach means – all the potential modalities, levels of interaction and relationship associated with a comprehensive approach. Only when these have been mapped out can we gain a better understanding of what coherence is meant to achieve, and how this takes place.

Understanding Coherence?

Here we will define ‘coherence’ as the effort to direct the wide range of activities undertaken in the political, development, governance and security dimensions of international peace and

²⁴ OECD, ‘Policy Coherence: Vital for Global Development’, *OECD Observer*, 2003, <http://www.oecd.org> accessed 10 May 2009.

²⁵ According to the *OECD Glossary of Key Terms*, ‘efficiency’ is ‘a measure of how economically resources and inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted to results’. ‘Economy’ in this context refers to the absence of waste for a given output: ‘an activity is economical when the costs of the scarce resources used approximate the minimum needed to achieve planned objectives’. *OECD Glossary of Key Terms*, 2002, pp. 20 – 21, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/29/21/2754804.pdf>, accessed 1 December 2009.

²⁶ Effectiveness refers to ‘the extent to which a development intervention’s objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance.’ *OECD Glossary of Key Terms*, p. 20.

²⁷ Sustainability is defined by the OECD as ‘the continuation of benefits from a development intervention after major development assistance has been completed’, *OECD Glossary of Key Terms*, p. 36.

²⁸ Robert Egnell puts forward a similar argument from a theoretical position. He calls for an *integrated* civil-military organization, arguing it would enhance conduct and effectiveness. However, he ignores the potential deeper conflicts, such as diverging mandates, which make such integration unrealistic. Robert Egnell, *Complex Peace Operations and Civil-Military Relations. Winning the Peace* (London: Routledge, 2009).

stability operations towards common strategic objectives.²⁹ Coherence is pursued because it is assumed to generate increased levels of efficiency and effectiveness.

As we saw in the previous section, coherence can be pursued among a broad range of actors, across various dimensions, and at various levels. The levels, dimensions and actors often get mixed up and cause confusion. We propose a comprehensive approach model that distinguishes between four levels of coherence and six types of relationships. The four levels of coherence are: intra-agency coherence, whole-of-government coherence, inter-agency coherence and international-local coherence:

- *Intra-agency coherence*: consistency³⁰ among the policies and actions of an individual agency, including the internal consistency of a specific policy or programme. Examples could be the internal coherence of a ministry of foreign affairs, or an agency such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- *Whole-of-government coherence*: consistency among the policies and actions of the different government agencies of a country, e.g. among the ministries of defence, foreign affairs and international development assistance of the UK.
- *Inter-agency, coherence*: consistency among the policies pursued by the various international actors in a given country context (harmonization)³¹. An example could be NATO-EU-UN coherence in the previous Kosovo pillar system.
- *International-local coherence*: consistency between and among the policies of the internal and external actors, in other words the host nation and international actors, in a given country context (alignment)³². Examples here could be an agreed national strategic framework between the international community and host government, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy of Liberia.

This categorization is not meant to suggest that coherence is pursued exclusively at one or another level – quite the contrary, actors are likely to pursue coherence at all four of the levels where they are active. For instance, an actor like the Foreign Ministry of the Netherlands will be concerned with coherence in connection with its policies towards, for instance Afghanistan, and is likely to pursue coherence at the same time: firstly, among the various

²⁹ For alternative definitions, see for instance *OECD Policy Brief: 'Policy Coherence: Vital for Global Development'*, where policy coherence is defined as '...the systematic promotion of mutual reinforcing policy actions across government departments and agencies creating synergies towards achieving the agreed objectives', *OECD Policy Brief*, July 2003, p.2.

³⁰ 'Consistency' in this context is not necessarily ethical, i.e. doing like under like circumstances with respect to any one rule or norm, and avoiding double standards. Instead it refers to one agency, government, or system not working at cross-purposes with itself in a more general sense. This does not imply that there is no room for differences and debate during the policy formulation and review process – but once a policy or intervention has been agreed on, it needs to be implemented in such a way that all the different elements of the agency, government or system contribute to the overall objective in a complementary fashion. We are grateful to Ramesh Thakur of the Centre for International Governance Innovation for pointing out this difference (e-mail correspondence, 15 May 2007).

³¹ 'Harmonization' in this context refers to the harmonization between donor approaches. Note the *Rome Declaration on Harmonization* of 25 February 2003. See <http://www.aidharmonization.org>, accessed on 12 May 2009.

³² 'Alignment' is a development concept referring to the alignment between the interests of international donors and the needs and priorities of the recipients. Note in this context the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, of 2 March 2005. See <http://www.oecd.org>, accessed on 12 May 2009.

units within the Foreign Ministry; secondly, in a whole-of-government context with other government agencies; thirdly, in the inter-agency context among donors or as a member state of NATO, the EU, and the UN; and lastly, in the internal/external coherence context in its bilateral relations with Afghanistan and its participation in collective efforts at international-local coherence, such as international donor conferences. Hence, the degree to which a specific international state actor can be considered to be more or less coherent will be a factor of all four levels of coherence.

In addition, we propose a comprehensive approach model that provides for a range of relationships that represent differing degrees of coherence, depending on the context within which these relationships emerge. Pursuing a comprehensive approach need not imply that all the actors involved must have the same degree of coherence towards each other, or towards an agreed common strategy. Although the context is crucial to shaping the climate within which relationships function, there are also many other factors that determine relationships – such as perceived roles and responsibilities, legitimacy, credibility and mandates. The types of relationships that influence the degree of coherence that can potentially be achieved can be represented on a scale ranging from unity to competition:

- *Actors are United:* Actors voluntarily agree to established a unified structure and undertake joint action directed by a unified leadership and command arrangement, e.g. a multi-national military coalition. This level of coherent action will typically require an agreed strategic vision and specific aims and objectives formulated in an official mandate and/or campaign plan. In the military context this is often termed ‘unity of purpose’. Unity of purpose is a prerequisite for unity of effort. This level of coherence will require a unified organizational structure with a high degree of discipline and clear command and control arrangements that determine and direct joint assessments, joint planning, joint implementation and joint monitoring and evaluation. However, in the real world, such level of coherence is rare between independent agents. It is thus likely to occur only in certain unique circumstances and cannot be sustained for long. Examples include the US-led multi-national coalition that undertook the 1991 Gulf War (Operation Desert Storm) and the Australian-led multinational coalition ‘INTERFET’ that stabilized East Timor in 1999.
- *Actors are Integrated:* Actors agree to seek ways to integrate their approaches and activities, but without giving up their individual identities or their right to take independent decisions about the allocation of resources. In other words, the individual agencies come together to undertake joint assessments, joint planning, and even some degree of joint implementation and monitoring and implementation, but they implement separately, each using its own resources and own organizational means. The UN’s integrated approach model would be a clear example, with the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) perhaps representing an example at the successful end of the scale.
- *Actors Cooperate:* Actors with complementary and/or overlapping mandates and objectives may choose to cooperate, including joint or collaborative action. They retain their organizational independence, but are willing to go rather far in organizing activities together with others, although such arrangements are typically temporary, context-specific and may need to be renegotiated on a case-by-case basis. The collaboration between the EU and the UN in Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR) may exemplify this kind of opportunistic, pragmatic and ad-hoc cooperation.

- *Actors Coordinate*: This would describe an activity aimed at sharing information and acting on that information with a view to avoiding conflict, duplication or overlap, so as to ensure a more coherent overall undertaking. It takes place between independent actors with different mandates, or between those who require strong organizational independence but who nonetheless share some similar interests or strategic vision, and thus see the need for a degree of coordination with others. Typically, there will often be a network of coordination mechanisms – some more densely connected than others, some operating in hierarchies at various levels between the same actors, whilst others are only loosely connected. An example of a standing arrangement in this category would be the UN humanitarian coordination system; it is pre-arranged and agreed, but allows for maximum independence and voluntary participation. Another example could be the pillar structure used by the UN, NATO, EU and OSCE in Kosovo. An ad hoc arrangement would be the coordination between military and humanitarian actors in a natural disaster like an earthquake or a major flood. The difference between coordination and cooperation is that, in the latter category, coordination results in joint action, whilst in the former it results in independent or separate action. In both cases, the behaviour of the agents has changed as a result of the coordination that has taken place, but ‘cooperation’ implies that they have reached agreement on and actually implemented joint action.
- *Actors Coexist*: This would describe the relationship between actors that are forced to interact but that have very limited ambitions concerning coordination – for example, neutral humanitarian actors who wish to maintain their distance to other, more political, actors in the field. It could also describe a relationship involving sceptical or even opposing political and military forces: they may not be directly hostile but could resist activities that threaten to interfere in their sphere of interest. A certain amount of communication and de-conflicting may take place, as well as some opportunistic or pragmatic cooperation, but the normal state of their relationship can be categorized as coexistence. For instance, humanitarian and military actors operating alongside each other in a complex emergency may, under normal circumstances, follow a policy of deliberately maintaining separate identities; but when the humanitarian agencies come under direct attack they may seek shelter in military compounds, or be evacuated under military protection.
- *Actors Compete*: This category would describe the relationship among actors that have competing values, visions and strategies. It may, for example, describe the relationship between an NGO committed to non-violence and an international military force with a mandate to use force; or it can refer to groups that politically, or even violently, oppose the presence of an international operation in their country

We have proposed a comprehensive approach model with the following characteristics:

- (a) Four levels of coherence: (i) intra-agency coherence, (ii) whole-of-government coherence, (iii) inter-agency coherence, and (iv) international-local coherence
- (b) Six different types of relationships: (i) actors are united, (ii) actors are integrated, (iii) actors cooperate, (iv) actors coordinate, (v) actors coexist, and (vi) actors compete.

Taken together, these characteristics form a composite understanding of coherence in the context of international peace and stability operations. There may be many other characteristics that could be considered as well. We could use various combinations of these characteristics to explore the inter-linkages among them, or to develop typologies that may be useful in further analysing the complex range of relationships that may exist among actors involved in a peace-and-stability operation.

For instance, comparing the four levels of coherence with the six different types of relationships, we can distinguish among 24 different types of coherence (see *Table 1*). Some are obviously more realistic than others, and, as with any model, there are real-world cases that would straddle some of these typologies. Most real-world models will move between them in the course of the lifetime of a mission. For instance this model could be used to trace improvement, or deterioration, in coherence among a specific set of actors over time. Such frameworks can assist us in gaining a better understanding of the complexity of the comprehensive approach.

Table 1: Comprehensive Approach Matrix that Compares Levels of Coherence and Types of Relationships

	Intra-agency	Whole-of-government	Inter-agency	Internal-External
Actors are United	Various sections of the Swedish Foreign Ministry	Various Canadian government agencies	Members of the coalition Operation Desert Storm, 1991 Gulf War	International agencies and national IEC work together to organize elections in DRC in 2006
Actors are Integrated	Various components of a UN Peacekeeping mission	UK Stabilisation Unit, or Canadian Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START)	UN Peacekeeping mission and UN Country Team in, e.g. Liberia, 2009	Liberia 2009: International agencies and local actors agree to use PRS as common framework and action plan
Actors Cooperate	DPKO and OCHA (both UN Secretariat) work together on UN Protection of Civilians guidelines	Civilian and military pillars of USA PRT in Afghanistan, 2009 ³³	Afghanistan Bonn-process 2003; UN-EU cooperation in Chad, 2008	EULEX and the Kosovo government, 2009
Actors Coordinate	DPKO and OCHA in the field	Civilian and military pillars of Norwegian PRT in Afghanistan, 2009 ³⁴	Humanitarian cluster approach to coordination; Kosovo UNMIK pillars; Bosnia Peace Implementation Council (PIC)	UN and Sudanese Independent Electoral Commission in April 2010 elections
Actors Coexist	Various parts of EU in Chad in 2008	DFID and MOD fail to agree on common evaluation criteria for UK PRT in Afghanistan, 2008	Humanitarian community and MONUC in Eastern DRC, 2009	UNAMID and Government of Sudan in Darfur, 2008
Actors Compete	Various sections of a ministry compete for funding	US State Department, US Department of Defense and CIA in Afghanistan, 2007 ³⁵	Humanitarian agencies and UNMIL disagree on movement of IDPs from Monrovia, 2005	Taliban and ISAF/UNAMA; Government of Chad and MINURCAT, 2010

³³ See USAID <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/Page.PRT.aspx> and US GOA <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-09-86R>, accessed 3 March 2010.

³⁴ See Piiparinen, note 21 above.

³⁵ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Viking Adult, 2008)

This section has explored coherence and proposed a comprehensive approach model with various levels of coherence and types of relationships. This mapping can help us to better understand the categorizations and typologies that may develop in the comprehensive approach context, from a coherence perspective. However, the challenges facing the comprehensive approach are far more complex than the mere structural differences outlined above. In the next section the focus is on the limits of coherence. An analysis of the limits of coherence will help us to further delineate the coherence space that can realistically be expected with a comprehensive approach.

The Limits of Coherence

There appears to be a considerable gap between the degree to which the benefits of coherence are held to be self-evident at the policy level, and a persistent inability to achieve coherence at the operational level. The lack of coherence within and among the humanitarian relief, development, political and security dimensions has been well documented in evaluation reports and studies.³⁶ The evaluation studies cited have consistently found that the peacebuilding interventions undertaken to date have lacked coherence, and that this has undermined their sustainability and ability to achieve their strategic objectives. For example, the 2003 Joint Utstein Study of peacebuilding, which analysed 336 peacebuilding projects implemented by Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Norway in the 1990s, identified a lack of coherence at the strategic level, what it termed a ‘strategic deficit’, as the most significant obstacle to sustainable peacebuilding.³⁷ This study found that more than 55% of the programmes it evaluated did not show any link to a larger country strategy.

There are two ways of responding to this apparent contradiction between policy and practice. The first approach would argue that the gap is caused by poor or insufficient policy implementation – so the coherence deficit can be addressed by more coordination, better training and improved organization, systems and processes. It is probably fair to say that this is the most common and prevalent policy response. The second approach would hold that the gaps between policy and practice in the field are caused, at least in part, by inherent contradictions in the mandates, interests and value systems of some of the actors, so that the degree to which these actors can be coherent with each other are limited.³⁸

³⁶ Amongst others: Nicola Dahrendorf, *A Review of Peace Operations: A Case for Change* (London: King’s College, 2003); Toby Porter, *An External Review of the CAP* (New York: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2002); Marc Sommers, *The Dynamics of Coordination* (Providence, RI: Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute of International Affairs, Occasional Paper #40, 2000); Nicholas Stockton, *Strategic Coordination in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), 2002); Antonio Donini, *The Policies of Mercy: UN Coordination in Afghanistan, Mozambique and Rwanda* (Providence, RI: Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies, Occasional Paper #22, Brown University, 2002); Nicola Reindorp and Peter Wiles, *Humanitarian Coordination: Lessons from Recent Field Experience*, A study commissioned by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (London: Overseas Development Institute (ODI), 2001); and Mark Duffield, Sue Lautze and Bruce Jones, *Strategic Humanitarian Coordination in the Great Lakes Region 1996-1997* (New York: OCHA, 1998).

³⁷ Dan Smith, *Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding: the Synthesis Report of the Joint Utstein Study on Peacebuilding* (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute (PRIO), 2003).

³⁸ Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk (eds.), *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations* (London: Routledge, 2009).

We will argue that both responses have value and in fact complement each other. Improved coherence can be achieved by working harder to find common ground. However, there will also be a point at which doing more will no longer yield further benefit. There are thus limits to how much coherence can be achieved, even in areas where it is possible to expand the room for coherence. If these limits are not recognized, the system will keep on trying to improve coherence beyond reasonable expectations, and the energy and time invested in this effort will be wasted. Pursuing coherence beyond certain limits will thus have a perverse effect, generating the exact opposite outcome than intended: pursuing coherence will actually contribute to inefficiency and ineffectiveness.

However, coherence also needs to be understood in the context of the natural tensions between competing interests, and therefore specific trade-offs can be made that may not always have coherence as the overriding principle. In the real world, those pursuing coherence generally find that they have to settle for ‘second best’ or ‘partially coherent’ solutions in order to establish a workable foundation for cooperation.

Thus, there are some areas where coherence is simply not possible, but there are other areas where coherence can be meaningfully pursued up to a certain point. To understand these nuances better, we need to take a closer look at the limitations of coherence. In this section we explore three aspects of the limitations to coherence: impact/output limitations; conflicting values, principles and mandates; and external-internal power imbalances. We argue that these three aspects start to define the limits of what can realistically be achieved in pursuing coherence.

Long-term Impact vs. Short-term Output

Most actors do coordinate and cooperate with each other on a range of issues at the operational and tactical levels. They often exchange information and adjust their actions to avoid obvious overlap and duplication, and they do sometimes do things together at the tactical level. Much more can be achieved at this level as well – but what we are focusing here is not cooperation at the level of practical activity but strategic-level coherence, i.e. impact-level coherence. Actors cooperate at the practical level to maximize their own interests. At the strategic level, however, we are talking about actors working together for the common good, measured as sustainable impact on a peace process over time. This implies that a prerequisite for acting coherently at the strategic level is that actors have to adjust their understanding of what is in their best interest from the immediate output or operational level, to the strategic or longer-term impact level. They must view it from the systemic perspective, seeing their contribution in connection with the long-term sustainability of the peace process that they are trying to influence. In other words, success in the impact context is measured as long-term sustainable peace, whilst success at the output level is measured as maximizing the role and image of the individual actor. The comprehensive approach assumes that organizations are motivated by the former: the empirical evidence suggests they are motivated by the latter.

The overall effect of the combined activities of the actors is usually observable only from an overall impact perspective, and the sustainability of their individual activities and its combined effect can be measured only over the medium to long term. The interdependence among the actors, and the benefits of improving coherence among them, are thus not

immediately obvious to the actor at the programme or output level. There is a disconnect between those measuring progress at the systems or impact level and those measuring progress at the programme or output level, and pursuing coherence usually makes more sense for those at the impact level. However, very few actors work at the impact level, and those that do – for instance, a Special Representative or Resident Coordinator – are usually individuals and their staffs that have agency for short periods of time and in specific contexts only.³⁹ They are thus less influential, over time, than the organizations that work primarily at the output level, pursuing their own interests, and that do so persistently over time in many contexts.

This tension between impact and output undermines coherence. The incentives that favour the output level are unlikely to change, for two reasons, and will thus continue to limit the scope for coherence. The first reason is that organizations are motivated by considerations of survival and growth, and this requires continuous adjustments based on short-term feedback. Organizations are particularly interested in measuring their output and the immediate feedback from that output. They cannot afford to wait for the long-term effects of their output before making decisions about the next activity, but are forced to act on the immediately available information. On the other hand, it is possible to expect organizations, on another track, to monitor longer-term progress in order to learn from and improve programme-level action. However, and this is the second reason, it is extremely difficult to measure meaningfully the causal effect of one given activity on a highly complex non-linear and dynamic set of systemic events. It is almost impossible to single out one specific activity and then determine its effect on the outcome of a specific sector or phase, let alone the peace process as a whole.⁴⁰ The further away we move, over time and in terms of the scope of factors taken into consideration, the more difficult it becomes to determine impact – and this thus makes it very difficult for organizations to focus on impact, and as a consequence, on coherence.

It is thus not realistic to expect actors to act out of a desire to achieve coherence. In fact, we should rather assume that they will act in their own self-interest, and that they will seek common solutions, or make case-by-case trade-offs, only in situations where they are unable to achieve their objectives independently. In some cases, being seen to contribute to and to be part of a larger collective effort is the self-interest of an actor. The irony is that the latter approach often contributes to the coherence deficit because the actor is motivated not by a desire to achieve meaningful coherence and ultimately sustainable impact, but by the desire to be seen as participating in the effort. Such actors typically spread their contributions thin and wide, focusing on those aspects that will generate the best recognition – and in so doing, they actually contribute to the coherence deficit.⁴¹

These impact/output challenges are likely to be present, in one form or the other, in most of today's complex crisis management operations. Challenging as they are, we would consider them to be within the realm of the first category mentioned above. They are not

³⁹ The UN Development Operations Coordination Office (DOCO) counters this tendency in that it works to support the Resident Coordinator system. Although the individual Resident Coordinators may work in a specific country for only a few years, DOCO helps to build up institutional knowledge that assists the coordination system. See www.undg.org

⁴⁰ Cedric de Coning and Paul Romita, *The Monitoring and Evaluation of Peace Operations* (New York: International Peace Institute (IPI) and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), 2009)

⁴¹ See for instance, Cedric de Coning, Helge Lurås, Niels Nagelhus Schia and Ståle Ulriksen, *Norway's Whole-of-Government Approach and its Engagement with Afghanistan* (Oslo: NUPI, 2009).

insurmountable; significant progress can be achieved through improved communication, organization, systems and dialogue between tactical and strategic levels within and between actors. The challenges discussed below are of a more deep-structured nature, and less likely to be resolved.

Conflicting Values, Principles and Mandates

The values, principles and mandates of some of the actors in a peacebuilding system are sometimes inherently incoherent. Each actor has emerged within a specific context – humanitarian, military, human rights, development, law enforcement, etc. – schooled in the values, principles, philosophy and theories of change specific to that discipline or profession.

This will typically result in the actors having fundamentally different approaches with regard to which aspects to prioritize. Political and security actors may prefer to, or be mandated to, focus on stabilizing a situation. This result in their giving priority to stability rather than to human rights violations, or to dealing with issues such as corruption, black-market trading, racketeering or narcotics, especially if actors they perceive to be the key to stabilizing the situation are also suspected of being responsible for human rights atrocities or criminal behaviour. Those actors for whom justice and human rights are paramount will have a directly opposing view. They are likely to argue that enforcing national and international laws and safeguarding human rights will have a far greater sustainable stabilizing effect in the longer term, because it will also have a deterrent effect on others in future conflicts, in that they will realize that they are likely to be punished, nationally or internationally, for their crimes and abuses. For instance, in Darfur, this kind of fundamental peace versus justice tension has driven the debate between those arguing for the indictment of President Bashir on the one hand, and those favouring some kind of arrangement that can give priority to the peace process, on the other.

Even among the actors engaged in security there are often differing emphases on state security versus human security. The latter is often seen as ‘soft’ security since it focuses on individuals and the civilian population, and has therefore traditionally enjoyed lower priority among peacekeepers or stabilisation forces.⁴² Advocates of human security, by contrast, often stress that sustainable peace can be achieved only by focusing on the needs of the population, including their security needs as they perceive them; and that any security operation which fails to take this into account is likely to fail in the end. The recent focus on the protection of civilians vs. combating opposing forces is a case in point, and also relates to the impact/outputs discussion in the previous section. In Afghanistan, fighting the Taliban made sense from an output perspective that measured progress against number of combat actions, number of Taliban killed, etc. Measured against this kind of output indicators, the NATO ISAF mission in Afghanistan appeared to be performing well in the powerpoint world. However the worsening security situation in the real world has now forced NATO to re-

⁴² However, the Protection of Civilians concept in the UN is becoming increasingly central in the peacekeeping mandates, and even the counter-insurgency literature emphasizes the protection of the population over fighting the enemy. See

<http://ochaonline.un.org/HumanitarianIssues/ProtectionofCiviliansinArmedConflict/tabid/1114/language/en-US/Default.aspx>, accessed 5 October 2009; see also Jon Harald Sande Lie and Benjamin de Carvalho, *Protecting Civilians and Protecting Ideas. Institutional Challenges to the Protection of Civilians* (Oslo: NUPI, 2009), and *US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

appraise its approach and to refocus on the protection of civilians. On the other hand, very few organizations are faced with such stark feedback, and may continue unaware that their output-oriented actions are having little impact – or worse, an adverse impact.

In some cases, the timetable of one actor or dimension may be in conflict with the principles of another. One case in point is the elections timetable in Liberia that motivated those responsible for the elections to encourage the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Monrovia to return to their original communities in 2005, to be registered there to vote. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) put pressure on those agencies responsible for reintegration to persuade the IDPs to return, and to start offering them reintegration support in their communities of origin. However, these agencies disagreed with the return timetable proposed by UNMIL, because their assessments informed them that conditions in the original communities were not yet conducive to sustainable returns. This situation caused tension between the political and developmental/humanitarian actors because their respective goals, short term vs. long term, and operating values and principles brought them into direct opposition with one another.

The different approaches highlighted in these two examples reflect fundamental differences in the mandates, value systems and principles of some of the actors engaged. It would be naïve to assume that these differences can be resolved through coordination. As both these examples indicate, in the end such differences will need to be negotiated and trade-offs agreed in the specific context. These case-specific trade-offs cannot resolve the fundamental value differences. They often leave the specific actors less tolerant towards each other than before they were forced into the situation that required them to enter into such a transaction, so the end-result is not greater coherence. And yet, such trade-offs are necessary, in a given situation, to overcome the practical impasse and find a workable solution that can enable all actors to move beyond that point so that they can continue to carry out their respective mandates. Such ad-hoc transactions should not be confused with strategic coherence, which aims to achieve a common understanding of a situation as well as a common strategic response to it.

However, sometimes the mandates significantly limit the potential for coherence. Humanitarian relief organizations constitute one particular set of actors which operate under a different mandate than all the others. International humanitarian law and their shared Code of Conduct⁴³ stress their independence, neutrality and impartiality. As a result of this operational framework, humanitarian actors have resisted outside attempts to integrate them into a comprehensive approach. Humanitarian actors have no wish to be coherent with the political and military actors, both because of their different priorities and because of their need to remain neutral and impartial. A blurring of these distinctive identities and roles undermines the operational framework of the humanitarian community, negatively impacting on their security. Humanitarian actors therefore resist being made part of the comprehensive approach and react strongly if other actors (the military in particular) engage in humanitarian activities.⁴⁴ This is not to say that it is impossible for there to be a meaningful relationship between humanitarian and other actors engaged in such operations – but such a relationship will need to be built on the recognition of each other's different roles, and not on any

⁴³ See the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*, <http://www.ifrc.org/publicat/conduct/>, accessed on 14 September 2009.

⁴⁴ See e.g. Stephen Cornish, 'No Room for Humanitarianism in 3D Policies. Have Forcible Humanitarian Interventions and Integrated Approaches Lost Their Way?', *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, vol. 10. no. 1, Fall 2007.

preconceived notions of the value of coherence and comprehensiveness. For the humanitarian actors, their humanitarian principles are the overriding guide, whereas coordination is something pragmatic that can be entered into on a case-by-case basis, guided by the humanitarian principles. For political and military actors, coherence plus comprehensiveness is increasingly becoming a core operational principle. These two different approaches to the value of coordination further contribute to the tension between the two communities.

All the above-mentioned differences in mandates, values and principles tend to become even more acute when the security situation is volatile. If security forces are engaged in combat operations against spoilers or insurgents, that is likely to have at least short-term negative effects on the space for progress in other parts of the system, for instance in the political, governance, humanitarian and developmental domains. Casualties, refugees/IDPs, destruction of livelihoods and infrastructure are typical consequences of war. Other actors engaged in humanitarian relief operations or development programmes may therefore be outraged by the human suffering and destruction taking place. Not surprisingly, this impedes coherence. Hence, we can conclude that one of the most important indicators of the degree to which meaningful coherence is likely to be achievable is the degree of hostility present in the conflict system. The organizational values and operating principles that guide the various actors are more likely to be in conflict with each other in contexts where some of the international and local actors are hostile to each other. Violent conflicts tend to sharpen distinctions and to bring differences to the fore, including among those that are allies, or that may agree otherwise on a broad range of issues. An important factor that may determine the scope for coherence in the unity-to-competition scale is thus the extent to which violent conflict is part of the system characteristic. Current conflict situations like those in Somalia, Darfur, Eastern DRC and Afghanistan produce coherence experiences that can be placed on the cooperation-to-competition scale, whereas situations where violent conflict has come to an end, as in Liberia, Burundi, Sierra Leone, etc. are likely to result in coherence experiences that can be placed on the coordination-to-integration scale.

Internal – External Power Imbalance

There is wide recognition that externally-driven post-conflict peace processes are unsustainable.⁴⁵ Peace and stability operations must be needs-based, and the priorities, sequencing and pace of delivery need to be informed by the dynamics of the conflict system, through local ownership and meaningful internal/external coordination. It is also widely understood that peace and stability operations that are not grounded in the socio-cultural belief systems that shape the worldview of the internal actors cause dysfunction. Achieving a coherent partnership between internal and external actors engaged in a peace or stabilization process is thus one of the most important success factors for any comprehensive approach strategy. It is also one of the most difficult to achieve. There are two main sets of challenges: one concerns the reluctance or inability of the external actors to empower local actors, the other is the limited resources and capacities of the internal actors.

The principle that peace consolidation processes should be locally owned and led has become firmly established in the policy realm. For instance, the February 2003 Rome Declaration on Harmonization generated the following four principles of harmonization: (1) recipient

⁴⁵ See *Building Effective Partnerships: Improving the Relationship between Internal and External Actors in Post-Conflict Countries* (New York: Peacebuilding Forum Conference, 7 October 2004), p. 2.

countries coordinate development assistance, (2) donors align their aid with recipient countries' priorities and systems, (3) donors streamline aid delivery and (4) donors adopt policies, procedures and incentives that foster harmonisation.⁴⁶ The Rome Declaration and related aid-effectiveness policies aim at addressing the core structural inequality of the international assistance regime: namely, that the external agency is empowered by virtue of being the benefactor. If left unchecked, external agencies tend to dominate the internal/external actor relationship. The most effective counterweight to this structural imbalance is the recognition that peace processes can be sustainable only when they are owned and led by internal actors. Gradually, donors have come to accept the moral principle, and operational reality, that their assistance must be needs-based and locally owned.

However, this is easier said than done. External actors report encountering a range of obstacles when trying to implement policies that encourage local ownership, especially in the fragile state and post-conflict contexts. External actors find it difficult to identify credible internal actors with whom they can enter into a meaningful partnership, especially in the stabilisation and transitional phases before elections are held. This is because the parties emerging out of conflict typically represent ambiguous constituencies, and there are often conflicting claims of ownership and support. Engagement by external actors with internal post-war actors may reinforce the fault-lines of the war and strengthen war-lords at the expense of civilian leaders, ultimately undermining the peace process.⁴⁷

The internal actors also generally lack the time, resources, technical expertise and support systems needed to engage meaningfully with the external actors. In fact, the concept of 'fragile states' was initially developed in the donor context to refer to countries where the government is unable or unwilling to establish a meaningful relationship with bilateral and multilateral donors.⁴⁸

Internal actors report that they often feel intimidated by the momentum, scope and depth of the external intervention. They are overwhelmed by the pressure to engage with all the assessments, proposals and plans generated by the sudden influx of external actors. Moreover, they feel frustrated that, despite all this activity, there is typically little to show, in terms of clear peace dividends in the first few years of a peace process, for their time and effort. This is especially the case in the stabilisation and transitional phases, before or whilst the necessary capacities have been developed, but it can remain a problem long thereafter. The work of the Peacebuilding Commission in Burundi is a case in point. The development of the integrated peacebuilding strategy for Burundi put considerable additional strain on the government of Burundi. In June 2007, the UN Country Team had to ask the Peacebuilding Commission not to further burden the government of Burundi, and as a result the Commission decided to postpone its work on monitoring mechanisms.⁴⁹

External actors also point to the dysfunction caused by their own institutional cultures that emphasize output rather than long-term sustainable impact. The pressure to respond rapidly, achieve planned outputs and to disburse funds within fixed time-frames (for instance, annual donor budget cycles) often lead external actors to compromise on the time and resources

⁴⁶ Rome Declaration on Harmonization, 2003.

⁴⁷ Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Simon Chesterman, *You, The People. The United Nations, Transitional Administration, and State-Building* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴⁸ See OECD DAC, *Concepts and Dilemmas of State Building in Fragile Situations*, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/59/51/41100930.pdf>, accessed 5 October 2009.

⁴⁹ See the annual report of the Peacebuilding Commission, S/2007/458-A/62/137 of 25 July 2007, p.6.

needed to invest in identifying credible internal counterparts, generate consultative processes and develop meaningful local ownership. Consultations undertaken under pressure, for instance during rapid needs assessments, often serve to legitimize preconceived perceptions rather than adding value by generating independent and objective opinions and analysis, and thus fail to reflect the true needs and priorities of the internal actors. Under pressure from the internal/external power imbalance, internal actor representatives make the common mistake of telling the external actors what they think the external agents would like to hear, rather than sharing with them their own perceptions and opinions of what kind of support they think they need, and the priorities as they perceive them.

Hence, external actors tend sometimes to deny the existence of enormous differences in power and influence – like seeing oneself as merely a ‘technical’ adviser whereas in reality the local interlocutor may have a marginal say in the priorities, content and pace of the programmes being implemented. Drafting of laws for instance, is often conducted by external experts, ignoring the fact that those who are to implement the legislation neither know it nor have a feeling of ownership or understanding of it. This approach on the part of the external actors also indicates a further attitude: that international norms and standards by default trump domestic legitimacy. Poverty reduction strategies and comprehensive peacebuilding strategies are often based on standardized templates and not on country-specific and needs-based analyses.⁵⁰

The lack of accountability of external actors towards the local population is another challenge that may undermine the sustainability of a peace process. This applies not only to extreme cases of criminal behaviour by e.g. peacekeepers, but also to the fact that powerful SRSGs, Special Envoys, Troop Commanders and Police Commissioners report to their headquarters in New York, Brussels or elsewhere – but not to the host-nation capital. That may undermine local ownership over time, even if ‘things get done’ in the short term. In the worst case, these tendencies may be described as neo-colonial ‘empire lite’ or as ‘empires in denial’.⁵¹

One of the most critical aspects of the comprehensive approach is thus the role of the internal actors and the degree of coherence that is achievable between the external actors and the local actors. This is one of the most problematic relationships in the comprehensive approach, and one of the most neglected. On the one hand, it is clear that no peace process can succeed without local ownership. On the other hand – whether during the conflict phase, in the immediate post-conflict phase and often even beyond – some of the key local stakeholders may either be engaged in the conflict or be overt or covert spoilers in the peace process, so it would not make sense to include them in a comprehensive approach. And yet, at some point in the peace process, a critical mass of local stakeholders will have to become partners to the comprehensive approach. Ultimately, they must take the lead in the comprehensive approach.

In this section we have considered the limitations to coherence, arguing that there are several areas and contexts where there are constraints on the degree to which coherence can be achieved or is desirable. Failure to acknowledge these limitations may lead to unrealistically high expectations as to coherence among internal and external actors, with the potential for subsequent disappointments, loss of faith in coordination, frustration and coherence fatigue.

⁵⁰ See e.g. the Afghanistan Compact and the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), <http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/Documents/AfghanistanCompact-English.pdf> and <http://www.ands.gov.af/>, accessed 1 December 2009.

⁵¹ Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite* (London: Vintage, 2003); David Chandler, *Empire in Denial* (London: Pluto press, 2006); Ole Jacob Sending, *Why Peacebuilders Fail to Secure Ownership and be Sensitive to Context*, (Oslo: NUPI, Security in Practice 1, 2009)

We have also argued that pursuing coherence beyond realistic expectations can even result in coherence contributing to inefficiency and ineffectiveness.

Conclusions

This contribution has sought to explain why international actors find it necessary to assign such high importance to coherence, and why coherence has become a key ingredient for success in the context of international operations today. We have analysed coherence, examining what it is that international actors say they are pursuing when they seek coherence, as well as some challenges they have encountered along the way.

In order to place coherence in the context of international peace and stability operations, we have framed coherence in the context of the comprehensive approach. The comprehensive approach has been defined as action to ensure that international peace and stability operations are embedded in a system-wide strategic approach aimed at combining the broadest possible set of dimensions – typically including the security, governance, development and political dimensions.

We have argued that the assumptions on which the principle of coherence is based are flawed, and that the empirical and theoretical evidence indicates that there is much less room for coherence than generally acknowledged in the policy debate. The result is that the policy debate has been setting itself ambitious targets for coherence that are impossible to achieve in practice. A more realistic understanding of the limitations of coherence and the inherent contradictions in the system should enable the international community to adopt a more sober approach to coherence and to set more achievable goals.

Coherence is not a good in and of itself to be pursued in equal measure, in all circumstances, by all stakeholders. It is a context-specific function aimed at managing interdependencies – and those interdependencies change from situation to situation. The level of coherence achievable in one situation will not necessarily be achievable in the next one, where another type of coherence may be more appropriate. Coherence needs to be managed on a case-by-case basis, and the comprehensive approach concept should be flexible enough to provide for a range of possible levels of coherence, where different actors can engage in varying degrees of coherence, based on their own interests and changing circumstances over time. Today's comprehensive approach tends to put pressure on all partners to adopt a maximal approach to coherence, regardless of their relations to each other and the context.

The actors tasked with coordinating a comprehensive approach, typically the UN, EU, AU, NATO, together with the appropriate national authorities or representatives of the affected state or region, should focus on ensuring that there are processes in place that can facilitate interaction among international actors where they can exchange information, negotiate priorities and manage their interdependencies. By providing a space for coherence to emerge, those that are able to enter into a more meaningful comprehensive relationship will tend to form a coherent core, whereas those able to offer only partial involvement in such an arrangement will tend to arrange themselves closer or further away from the core, as their interests and circumstances permit. Focusing on the process will ensure maximum coherence appropriate to the specific context.

Coherence should not be understood as an effort aimed equally at all partners towards unity of purpose, nor should all partners be expected to achieve the same level of unity of effort. Instead, coherence should be seen as a scale of relationships, where the most appropriate and realistic level of coherence that can be achieved will depend on the exact constellation of organizations involved in an interdependent relationship in that specific context. In this article we have offered a typology of the range of likely relationships, as well as an explanation of the circumstances that may determine the level of coherence that can be realistically expected to develop, depending on the context and the nature of the relationships among the partners.