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# Spanning "Bleeding" Boundaries: Humanitarianism, NGOs, and the Civilian-Military Nexus in the Post-Cold War Era



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Theory to Practice

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# Spanning “Bleeding” Boundaries: Humanitarianism, NGOs, and the Civilian-Military Nexus in the Post–Cold War Era

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*How do nongovernmental (NGO), international (IO), and military organizations cope with their dependencies and address their perceptual and real differences in order to coordinate their field operations? This question is addressed through the creation of a matrix grouping civilian (NGOs and IOs) and military operations into four general types: peacekeeping; disaster relief; complex humanitarian emergencies/warfare; and stabilization and reconstruction. Second, using Galbraith’s information processing approach to organizational design, a range of formal coordination mechanisms that organizations use at the strategic and operational levels to help them cope with their dependencies in different field operations is identified. Third, the author underscores how communities of practice are emerging as informal mechanisms of coordination among civilian and military organizations. And finally, a framework of organizational forms that views communities of practice as an alternative to hierarchy and markets is offered. Believing communities of practice hold the most promise for coordination in the human security domain when hierarchies are politically untenable and markets lack accountability, the author concludes with implications for interorganization coordination research and practice.*

Over the past two decades, one of the most challenging developments for civilian-military (civ-mil) relations around the world has been finding ways to work together. The transformation of warfare in the post–Cold War era and the military’s expansion into “operations other than war”—into “nonkinetic” or nonviolent facets of operations—continues to fuel conflicts between civilian and military organizations. It also has diminished the effectiveness of co-located and interdependent operations of both communities worldwide. The late Sergio Vieira de Mello, former undersecretary-general

and emergency relief coordinator for the United Nations, summarized the dilemma in a brief to the UN Security Council in 1999:

Contemporary armed conflict is seldom conducted on a clearly defined battlefield, by conventional armies confronting each other. Today’s warfare often takes place in cities and villages, with civilians as the preferred targets, the propagation of terror as the premeditated tactic, and the physical elimination or mass displacement of certain categories of populations as the overarching strategy. The acts of warring parties in recent conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Sierra Leone, and Afghanistan bear testimony to this. Breaches of human rights and humanitarian law, including mutilation, rape, forced displacement, denial of the right to food and medicines, diversion of aid, and attacks on medical personnel and hospitals are no longer inevitable by products of war. They have become the means to achieve a strategic goal. As a result, even low-intensity conflicts generate enormous human suffering. Humanitarian needs are disproportionate to the scale of military conflict. Meeting these needs has become more difficult, as the dividing line between soldiers and civilians has grown blurred. (Vieira de Mello 1999)

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How do military and civilian organizations cope with their interdependencies in the human security domain as the boundaries between them have blurred? What mechanisms exist to coordinate field activities and overcome the perceptual and real differences between the two communities? Public administration researchers have been largely silent on these questions, despite their import and

relevance. Thus, this essay has a threefold purpose. First, it alerts *PAR* readers—as citizens, practitioners, and researchers—to the sources of tensions that have arisen between military and civilian organizations in the post–Cold War era. It then offers a four-part typology of civ-mil operations based on the level of threat (Crocker, Hampson, and Aall 2001) and the level of domain consensus. Next, building on Galbraith’s (1973) information-processing approach to organizational design, the article identifies a range of formal and informal interorganizational cooperation (IOC) mechanisms used in civ-mil operations, each with its own constraints and limitations. The article concludes by offering a research agenda for filling the conspicuous public administration gap in studying the civ-mil nexus in the twenty-first century.

### **The Civilian-Military Conundrum in the Post–Cold War Era**

One of the most striking developments in contemporary warfare is how the dividing line between soldiers and civilians has blurred. Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid made the point when he claimed there was no distinction between civilian and military personnel when justifying the Taliban’s attacking and killing of International Rescue Committee workers in Logar, Afghanistan. They were the “foreign invader forces.” They were “not working for the interests of Afghanistan and they belonged to those countries whose forces . . . took Afghanistan’s freedom” (BBC News 2008). Such incidents are expected to increase in the future, not only in Afghanistan but in other conflict areas as well. Poorly delimited boundaries between military forces and civilians, as recent events in Gaza illustrate, make urban warfare particularly destructive (Elkington 2009).

Insisting on guidelines to separate civilians and combatants when the nature of combat and adversaries make those boundaries obsolete is unlikely to produce successful outcomes for either civilians or the military. Civilian and military organizations are being thrown by mission and mandate into interdependencies. Both operate in the domain of human security, framed from a military perspective as freedom from personal attacks and violence, and from a civilian perspective as providing both emergency and long-term basic needs of life such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and employment. Both are co-located and interdependent in threatening environments and confront very challenging problems—peacekeeping, disaster relief, postconflict reconstruction, and warfare. Civilians need the military to provide information about the terrain, operations, and affected populations, and in high-threat conditions, they often rely on military transportation and logistics. The military needs civilians for humanitarian assistance and for their knowledge and expertise in the reconstruction and development of devastated areas.

***Lesson 1: While military and civilian organizations increasingly are co-located and need each other to deal effectively with theater challenges, differences in cultures, organizational structures, beliefs, and priorities have made effective coordination challenging.***

Better coordination between military and civilian organizations is needed to protect human life; however, differences in philosophies and operating procedures have made civ-mil relations difficult

during field-based operations (Sommers 2000; Whelan and Harmer 2006). Although all members share a “commitment to service, a willingness to work among the dead and dying, and also an acceptance of significant risk in their daily lives,” their organizational characteristics are “profoundly different” (Seiple 1996, v) in terms of cultures, structural features, and behavior (Aall, Miltenberger, and Weiss 2000; Frandsen 2002; James 2003; Seiple 1996). Civilian organizations, especially nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), believe that human suffering should be relieved without regard for nationality, political or ideological beliefs, race, religion, sex, or ethnicity. They attempt to fulfill their mandates by being autonomous, neutral, and impartial. In general, they resist taking instructions from those outside their organizations and eye with suspicion any attempts to organize or integrate with others, lest they compromise their freedom of operation. Their organizational designs typically depend on a decentralized authority structure, enabling them to focus on field-level operations to quickly adapt to austere conditions. They tend to assemble on an as-needed basis and execute on the fly. They strive toward transparency, accountability, and consensus-based decision making rather than directives from headquarters.

Military organizations operate on a different rationale. Their organizational designs reinforce hierarchical authority, clear lines of command and control, and explicit rules of engagement to ensure accountability to policy makers. Their general mandate is to establish and maintain public order and ensure operational security and force protection. Thus, they are less inclined to share information to protect operational security. Clear delineations of roles, responsibilities, and unity of command are viewed as necessary for mission success. They pride themselves on advanced planning and systematic execution of operational orders and seek a positive public image.

Coordinating costs tend to be higher for civilian organizations compared to those of the military. In general, civilians believe that close alignment with the military in political disputes or political positions compromises their principles of humanity, impartiality, and neutrality (IASC 2004; Phelan and Wood 2005). Their fear is that if they are viewed as partial, their members will be prevented from gaining access to vulnerable populations, exposed to greater risks when in the field, and even targeted by combatants (Dziedzic and Seidl 2005; IASC 2004). This perception has been reinforced by recent attacks against the United Nations in Afghanistan and Iraq and by the assassination of Margaret Hassan, director of Care International’s operations in Iraq (Tomb 2005). Thus, their objective is to maintain a clear distinction between combatants and noncombatants and refrain from presenting themselves as part of a military operation.

Interaction potential between the military and civilians also is limited because of their mutual suspicions. These derive from a host of factors, such as a perceived lack of common goals and values between the military and civilian organizations, as well as the absence of a common task-related language for discourse. Frandsen illustrates the point in terms of military-NGO relations: “NGO personnel have many feelings about the military: general disdain, nervousness (around weapons, camouflage, saluting, the ‘hoo-ah’ attitudes), ignorance (which often leads to nervousness or

disdain), previous bad experience (Kent State University, Somalia, etc.) or philosophical opposition” (2002, 140). Moreover, as Ford, Hogan, and Perry write, NGOs sometimes “perceive the military as responsible for the destruction of homes, crops and livestock and guilty of serious offenses such as rape, torture, genocide and violations of human rights. And when the conflict does end, they see the military leaving behind unexploded ordnance and landmines that cause long-term human damage” (2002, 12).

The military, in turn, directs “a slew of . . . verbiage aimed at NGO inefficiencies, whimsical patterns, media hunger and lack of absolute independent logical capabilities” (Frandsen 2002, 140). Likewise, Ford, Hogan, and Perry note that “[f]rom the military side, NGOs are often viewed as difficult to work with. . . . They want support yet they demand autonomy. NGOs will not respond to orders given by the military even if their personal safety is at stake” (2002, 12). And they “will openly criticize the military, while at the same time request logistics, communications and transportation support from those same military forces” (Ford, Hogan, and Perry 2002, 13).

**Civilian-Military Operations: An Analytical Perspective**

Despite these real and perceived differences, as well as the often constrained and inhibited coordination that characterizes the human security domain, a review of the organizational theory literature confirms that not all civ-mil interaction needs to be addressed in the same way. Yet it also reveals that a key element of the civ-mil nexus is ignored by theorists and needs to be incorporated into our thinking: the level of the threat facing potential domain partners.

*Lesson 2: In the civ-mil nexus, environmental threat interacts with domain consensus to create four analytically distinct categories of civ-mil operations that practitioners and researchers need to consider when crafting coordination mechanisms.*

Various dimensions have been used by organizational theorists to characterize environments in terms of their technological, legal, political, economic, demographic, ecological, and cultural elements (Aldrich 1979; Hall 1999). In order to conduct their studies, theorists have reduced and simplified these content areas into analytical dimensions, such as the level of munificence, complexity, and dynamism in a particular environment (Dess and Beard 1984; Van de Ven and Ferry 1980). However, one dimension that is critical to the security domain is not addressed by organizational theorists: the level of threat to human life. Most researchers assume the existence of competitive forces, but not life-ending ones. Yet threat level is a central dimension in understanding the human security domain and the range of tasks and operations that are conducted within it. These include intelligence, policing, justice and legal administration, emergency management, and national security.

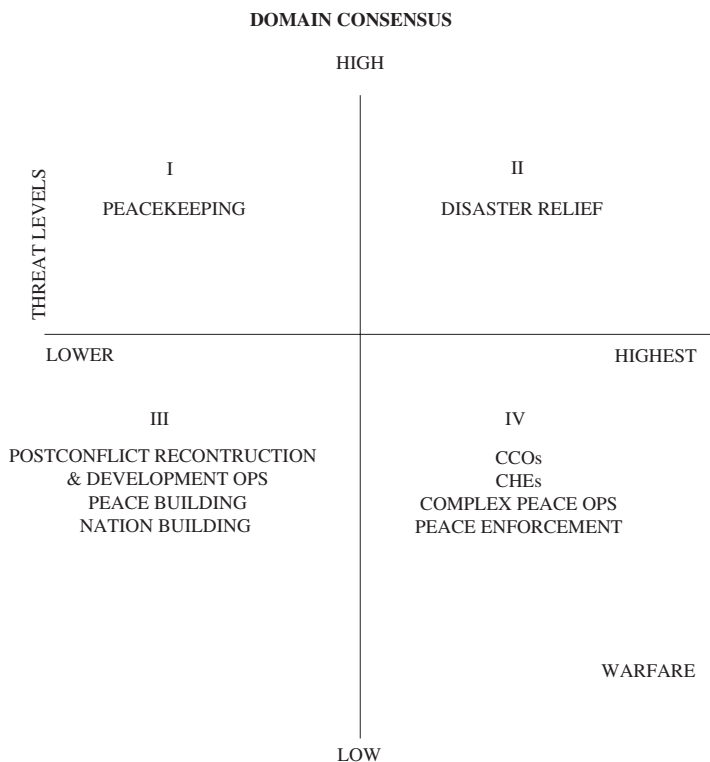
Within the national security domain, civilians tend to focus on affected populations, while the military tends to focus on

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combatants. But, as suggested earlier, separating combatants from civilians becomes much more difficult given recent changes in the nature of warfare (Hoehn et al. 2007; Van Creveld 1991). When this blurring occurs, not only are security risks heightened for all, including the populations that both are trying to protect, but blurred boundaries between civilian and military organizations prompt conflicts over what organizations have the “right” to be in which space, at which time, and for what purpose. Basically, they activate what researchers call domain conflicts.

Domain consensus, a critical dimension in IOC research (Aldrich 1979; Aldrich and Marsden 1988), has been found to be a “necessary precondition” for organizations to coordinate (Alexander 1995). The converse also appears to be true: “when conflict between organizations over their mutual domains is latent or open, the prospects for IOCs are low” (Alexander 1995, 20).

Combining these two factors—threat level and domain consensus—into a two-by-two matrix makes it possible to map civ-mil operations (see figure 1): peacekeeping (quadrant 1); disaster relief (quadrant 2); development and reconstruction, stabilization/ security/ transition/ reconstruction, peacebuilding, and nation-building operations (quadrant 3); and complete humanitarian emergencies (CHEs), complex contingency operations, peace enforcement, and warfare (quadrant 4). Each presents different coordination challenges.



**Figure 1 Civilian and Military Operations under Varying Conditions of Threat and Domain Consensus**

*Peacekeeping* is defined as the use of military and civilian personnel to separate combatants, police demilitarized zones, and monitor cease fires after they have been negotiated and accepted by all belligerents (Jett 2000). The general threat level is reduced because a ceasefire has been accepted by all parties, although a potential threat remains if the combatants do not maintain their agreements. Domain consensus, however, remains high for both the military and civilians who monitor agreements. Both operate under restricted “rules of engagement,” and both have their specific duties and responsibilities: civilians monitor the ceasefires and elections, and the military keeps former combatants separated and polices the demilitarized zones. The challenges of IOCs in these cases result from “mission creep,” when the goals of operations are redefined and expanded, thus requiring the renegotiation of the rules of engagement for both civilians and the military. Examples of peacekeeping operations include UN interventions into Cyprus and the Golan Heights (Jett 2000).

*Disaster relief* refers to any response to natural disasters and environmental emergencies that pose threats to human life (Auf der Heide 1989). They can range from low to high levels of threat depending on their scale. However, military involvement in disaster relief tends to occur when the threat levels are high and calamities overwhelm the ability of civilian responders to provide immediate care. In terms of domain consensus, civilian and military organizations generally agree that their missions are similar: to provide emergency food, water, shelter, and medical care to those in need. Although both the military and civilians end up working in the same humanitarian space, friction points tend to be fewer because both acknowledge their mutual dependencies and the complementarity of their efforts. The military contributes transportation, “lift,” and advanced communication and information technology; civilians provide in-depth cultural and historical knowledge and functional expertise in disaster relief. Thus, as organization theory predicts, “significant differences between organizations’ outputs . . . reduce the potential for main disagreements between them, and increase their chances of mutual involvement in IOC” (Alexander 1995, 20).

The third type of civ-mil operations—*postconflict reconstruction and development operations*—is defined by the United Nations as *peacebuilding* operations, by the U.S. military as *stabilization, security, transition, and reconstruction operations* (DOD 2005), and as *nation building* (Dobbins et al. 2003; Dobbins et al. 2007). Others have referred to these activities as “fourth-generation peacekeeping” or “complex peacekeeping” (Rittberger 2007). Activities include the following:

- *Security*: peacekeeping, rule of law, law enforcement, and security sector reform
- *Humanitarian relief*: return of refugees and provision of medical care, food, and shelter
- *Governance*: resumption of public services and restoration of public administration

- *Economic stabilization*: establishment of a stable currency and a legal and regulatory framework for the resumption of local and international commerce
- *Democratization*: creation of political parties, free press, civil society, and a legal and constitutional framework for elections
- *Development*: economic growth, poverty reduction, and infrastructure improvements (Dobbins et al. 2007, xxiii)

As major combat subsides, one would expect the domain conflicts between military and civilian organizations to lessen. This can be the outcome, as nation-building exercises in Bosnia and Kosovo demonstrated (Dobbins et al. 2003). However, despite the official endings of war, U.S. operations in Afghanistan and Iraq still activate domain conflicts between civilian and military organizations. Several factors contribute to the ongoing tensions. First, in military terms, Afghanistan and Iraq are considered nonpermissive environments where military forces in country are still engaged as combatants. Even though operations (until recently under President Barack Obama) transitioned from major combat to stabilization, friction between military and civilian organizations exists around the same key issues activated during CHEs and warfare: information sharing

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and securing a humanitarian space. Development space is also contested when military organizations engage in civic action projects such as building schools and medical clinics, although those involved in reconstruction and development appear to be “less wedded to the concepts of independence and impartiality” (Dziedzic and Seidel 2005, 6). Even new coordination mechanisms to assist in stabilization and reconstruction, such as the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan and Iraq, are contentious.

The PRTs combine military and civilian personnel from various government agencies, as well as diplomats and specialists in economic development, stabilization, and reconstruction activities (Dziedzic and Seidel 2005; Perito 2007). To accomplish their mission, they interact with regional political, military, and community leaders and sponsor various civic engagement and reconstruction projects (Dobbins et al. 2003). Despite their many contributions, however, questions have arisen about the ability of PRTs to establish security in the medium and long run. Many ask, “Does the use of military resources to fill the void in civilian humanitarian assistance result in the pacification of hostile territory more effectively than using military resources exclusively to establish a secure environment so that civilian relief and reconstruction efforts can flourish?” (Dziedzic and Seidl 2005, 7). Development NGOs and international organizations (IOs) also have raised strong objections to PRTs; they see them as the expansion of the military’s role into their development space, challenging their areas of comparative advantage. In response, the military sees the PRTs as born of the unstable situation in Afghanistan and the changing nature of warfare, where insurgents and terrorists view anyone aligned with the Afghan government as the enemy, including humanitarian and development organizations that provide easy, soft targets.

More serious domain conflicts surfaced with the publication of the U.S. Department of Defense's Directive 3000.05 (DOD 2005). The U.S. military now has a new mandate—support for stability, security, transition, and reconstruction—in addition to its traditional mandate of combat operations. Once stability is restored to an area, or even during large-scale combat operations, the military's short-term goal is to reestablish essential services and meet humanitarian needs. Its long-term goal is to develop indigenous capacity for ensuring essential services, a market economy, the rule of law, democratic institutions, and a robust civil society. With this new directive, "stability operations [have become] a core U.S. military mission that the DOD shall be prepared to conduct and support. They [are] given priority comparable to combat operations and [are] explicitly addressed and integrated across all DOD activities including doctrine, organizations, training, education, exercises, materiel, leadership, personnel, facilities, and planning" (2).

The promulgation of this new directive sent shock waves through the civilian community. Although it states that operational tasks are best performed by indigenous, foreign, or U.S. civilian professions, U.S. military forces are now to perform all tasks when civilians cannot do so. Tasks include rebuilding indigenous institutions, including security forces, correctional facilities, and judicial systems; reviving or rebuilding the private sector to include encouragement of citizen-driven, bottom-up economic activity and the construction of the necessary state infrastructure; and the development of representative government institutions (Counterinsurgency 2006). From the perspective of civilian organizations, 3000.05 moves directly into their reconstruction and development space. Thus, military organizations are now pitted against a new set of actors—the civilian reconstruction and development organizations that challenge the military's expanding roles into civil society.

Finally, domain conflicts are high in quadrant 4, as are the threat levels that both confront. As alluded to earlier, various terms are used to describe these operations: multidimensional peacekeeping (second-generation peacekeeping) and robust peacekeeping (third-generation peacekeeping) (Rittberger 2007), *complex humanitarian emergencies*; *complex contingency operations*; or *complex peace operations* that often require *peace enforcement* (Byman et al. 2000; Pirnie 1998). Unlike natural disasters such as earthquakes or floods, these operations occur in "a country, region or society where there is total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict" (IASC 2004, 5). They often result in massive numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons, gross violations of human rights, and large-scale disruption of people's livelihoods. Thus, the forcible restoration of peace without the consent of the parties in the armed conflict, or peace enforcement, as in the no-fly zones in Iraq and Bosnia, is characteristic of quadrant 4 operations.

During the early stages of CHEs, emergency relief in the form of food, water, and shelter is a priority, yet its distribution can be hampered because of a lack of security and a supportive government or social infrastructure. Thus, interventions require both a civilian and a military component. The civilian component has a large contingent of humanitarian relief organizations populated by NGOs and IOs whose purpose is to relieve human suffering and "to protect the human rights of victims of violence, persecution,

and other misfortunes" (Sommers 2000, 99). Aid is provided on the basis of need, with a commitment to "do no harm" (IASC 2004). In addition, NGOs and IOs may engage in a variety of humanitarian tasks, including conflict resolution and reconciliation efforts, capacity building, and mobilization of international support for action in conflict areas. Depending on the intervention, the military component could be composed of UN, regional (e.g., NATO), and/or national security forces (e.g., U.S. military) (Byman et al. 2000; Pirnie and Francisco 1998; White House 1997; USIP 2000).

Apart from taking a more coercive role in disarming adversaries, restoring public order, demobilizing and reintegrating former combatants, and enforcing peace agreements, the military also supports and facilitates civilian activities: the distribution of assistance; the provision of safety for refugees, displaced persons, and civilian NGOs and IOs; the protection of relief supplies in unstable situations by securing warehouses, convoy routes, and distribution points; and the provision of logistical expertise to civilian organizations. Depending on the mission, the military also may work with civilians in demining, reuniting divided societies, organizing elections, and promoting representative governments and economic growth (Dobbins et al. 2007).

***Lesson 3: To understand the challenges, choices, and opportunities for civ-mil coordination, practitioners and researchers need to pay attention to the temporal coincidence or sequencing of humanitarian and military operations in any given theater of operation.***

The temporal coincidence of security operations and assistance complicates IOC for both civilian and military organizations, as occurred in Somalia, the former Republic of Yugoslavia, and Kosovo, where humanitarian interventions occurred at the same time as military operations (Oliker et al. 2004; Studer 2001). At the heart of conflict is the issue of "humanitarian space" (Studer 2001; Whelan and Harmer 2006). To have access to those in need, civilian organizations must be able to "cross the 'lines' of conflict," which in contemporary warfare are fluid and vary over time (Dziedzic and Seidl 2005, 6). Being associated with any one of the combatant parties puts them and those they are attempting to help at risk. The safest action in this situation is to avoid any association with belligerents. Therefore, the goal for civilian organizations is to establish and preserve a neutral, impartial "humanitarian space" in which to work safely and effectively without undue interference from combatants or governments during peace operations (Dziedzic and Seidl 2005; IASC 2004; Oliker et al. 2004; Whelan and Harmer 2006).

Even civilian humanitarians within the UN system take pains to distance themselves from UN-sanctioned military actions, noting that "whenever we are associated with political strategies, we increase our own vulnerabilities and risk" (Reindorp and Wiles 2001, 44). If the distribution of aid, which humanitarians consider to be a civilian task, is militarized, it "blurs the boundaries" between military and civilian organizations and heightens security risks by turning humanitarian facilities and staff into perceived enemies and ultimately into targets (Bessler and Seki 2006; Dobbins et al. 2007; Whelan and Harmer 2006). For example, the attempt to apprehend the warlord Mohammed Aided in Somalia was viewed by his

supporters as the United States and the United Nations taking sides in the conflict. NGOs believed their neutrality was compromised by these actions and ultimately led to armed militias' attacks on World Vision personnel as an expression of displeasure with the U.S.-led enforcement action (Abiew 2003).

**Lesson 4: While the military sees NGOs and IOs as “force multipliers” (a reality that they resent), NGOs and IOs see the military as trying to “politicize humanitarianism” (a reality that they resent).**

Civilians also resist and resent the military's attempts to treat them as a “force multiplier” for the purpose of “winning hearts and minds” (Oliker et al. 2004; Tomb 2005). During an insurgency, for example, the military may provide support to displaced civilians and initiate civic action projects in order to cultivate popular support among the locals, increase force protection, and ultimately reduce the overall threat level in the area (Counterinsurgency 2006). NGOs in particular have serious concerns about being co-opted into a military strategy and inadvertently becoming pawns in a “politicization of humanitarianism” (James 2003; Reindorp and Wiles 2001; Studer 2001; Whelan and Harmer 2006).

For the military, humanitarian aid dispensed during a conflict is not a neutral act (Seiple 1996). It can sustain a conflict because the combatants, as well as their supporters who receive aid, are reinforced rather than weakened. The military cites civilian difficulties in disentangling assistance from the political objectives of governments and warring factions, which affects their ability to be perceived as neutral actors in Afghanistan. The military notes that despite their intentions, “NGOs were perceived by Afghans generally and by the Taliban in particular as partisan” (Oliker et al. 2004, 37).

In addition, given the tensions between military and civilian organizations over what constitutes security, as well as the number and diversity of civilian organizations, security in the humanitarian space is difficult to establish. The UN-affiliated Union of International Associations recognizes more than 14,500 different international NGOs (Jett 2000). Not all appear in the same operations, but reports indicate that some 1,700 NGOs were active in Bosnia (Pollick 2000, 59), and more than 800 are registered to work in Afghanistan (Tomb 2005). Moreover, these figures do not take into account those operating without the consent of the governing authority, all of which makes coordination complex. Civilian organizations also tend to be independent and widely dispersed geographically. Each has its own specific area of expertise, and each competes with others for funding and for media coverage to attract more funds (Abiew 2003; Cooley and Ron 2002; Oliker et al. 2004; Reindorp and Wiles 2001). Under these circumstances, it is difficult for civilians to coordinate with one another to establish humanitarian space, let alone coordinate as a whole with military organizations (Donini 2000; Eisenhour and Marks 1999).

Also located in quadrant 4, *warfare* produces the highest levels of threat in the environment and the highest level of domain conflict between civilian and military organizations, especially when the military is one of the combatants. In this case, battle space is difficult to establish, and combatants may be unwilling or unable

to provide civilians with a safe and secure environment. In fact, civilians may become a primary target that belligerents, through intimidation, coercion, and brutality, use to achieve their objectives.

Under these conditions, force protection becomes a high priority for the military. It is reluctant to share operational information about deployments or capabilities with civilian organizations, many of whom the military does not know given their vast numbers and diversity, for fear of endangering the troops. A great deal of information, such as maps and terrain data previously shared, even data submitted by civilians, becomes classified, creating additional friction (Oliker et al. 2004). In turn, and although they are forthcoming with information concerning the needs of suffering people, civilian organizations, particularly NGOs, are reluctant to share sensitive information, fearing that it might jeopardize their access to crisis areas. This makes their ability to gain information about the changing security environment, the location of unexploded ordnance, and any major population movements precipitated by combat operations more difficult to obtain.

**Lesson 5: Civ-mil relations are likely to deteriorate during warfare when the military engages in humanitarian efforts.**

Domain conflict reaches a high point when a situation is deemed to be too dangerous for civilians to continue their work, so the military steps in to dispense humanitarian aid. The military now assumes a dual role—combatant *and* provider of humanitarian assistance, as it did in the cases of Kosovo and East Timor and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. In this situation, coordination becomes “a complicated and vexing matter in an environment where the UN and NGO community fear that association with one of the combatant forces imperil[s] its perceived neutrality, increase[s] the security threat, and limit[s] its subsequent ability to accomplish its missions over the longer term” (Oliker et al. 2004, 82). When some civil affairs military units put on civilian clothes to distribute aid—what some viewed as a violation of previously established agreements between military and civilian organizations—relations reached their low point (InterAction 2002). The blurred lines between military and civilian organizations apparent during CHEs (Whelan and Harmer 2006) became “bleeding boundaries” in warfare (Phelan and Wood 2005), with domain consensus becoming another casualty of war.

### **Interorganizational Theory, Administrative Constraints, and the Civilian-Military Nexus**

Certainly, increasing linkages between and among organizations have their advantages, as studies in other policy arenas have documented (e.g., Alter and Hage 1993; Huxham and Vongen 2005; Provan and Milward 1995). But tighter connections among organizations also have their challenges. Greater connectivity among organizations can increase their interdependencies (Alexander 1985; Gray 1985, 1989; Luke 1991; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Scott 2003). These interdependencies, in turn, have to be managed if interorganizational relationships are to be maintained (Alexander 1995; Hatch 1997).

Given the mix of organizational characteristics, coordinating costs, and interaction potential in IOCs, organizations consider a range of coordination mechanisms and choose those that they perceive fit

the situation and its requirements (Alexander 1995). In the case of civilian and military organizations, experimentation has been under way for some time as organizations have struggled to move beyond the “blight of adhocacy” (Reindorp and Wiles 2001, 50), which many agree is an unsatisfactory condition in which organizations operate without regard to others in their domain. Finding the right balance between self-interests and domain interests is a delicate maneuver, however, as each organization seeks mechanisms that enable it to coordinate *with* others and yet not be coordinated *by* others. As one person put it, “You’ve got to work closely together and keep your distance” (Reindorp and Wiles 2001, 46).

***Lesson 6: Mechanisms for coordinating civ-mil relations during theater operations are similar to those identified by Galbraith in his intraorganizational information-processing approach, and each has run into formidable constraints on effectiveness.***

Although Galbraith’s (1973) information-processing approach to coordination focuses on intraorganizational coordination, it nonetheless provides a useful framework to examine coordination mechanisms used in civ-mil relations. Galbraith identifies five different coordination strategies: rules and programs, hierarchy, goal and targets, reduction of the need to process information, and increased capacity to process information laterally.

Applying Galbraith’s model of information processing and coordination to civ-mil relations, we find that all of his strategies have been attempted to date, at least to some extent. Standard operating procedures are evident in the attempts to establish “rules” to govern humanitarian space. But as we saw with changes in the threat levels after the Cold War, the rules of humanitarian space have been challenged, straining civ-mil relations. When efforts to reaffirm rules are inadequate, as Galbraith would predict, the organizations involved then turn to *hierarchy* as a mechanism of coordination. One example is the United Nation’s experiment with the Strategic Framework, an effort to create a top-down mechanism to coordinate all in-country organizations in Afghanistan. Although it did have some limited success (Roberts and Bradley 2005), it was discontinued after its second attempt to employ this tactic in Sierra Leone failed to integrate political (which includes military), humanitarian, and development strategies.

Even when there has been a political consensus—for example, when a UN resolution authorizing peace operations is signed by major civilian and military organizations—the weak international authority structure makes it difficult to rely on a single hierarchical chain of command as a mechanism of coordination. There is no one authority that all IOs, governments, and NGOs acknowledge. Even the special representatives of the secretary-general, nominally the head of UN missions in country, do not exercise direct control over independent heads of such UN agencies as the resident representative of the United Nations Development Programme or the humanitarian coordinator of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, much less over NGOs or military forces.

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Finding the right balance between self-interests and domain interests is a delicate maneuver . . . as each organization seeks mechanisms that enable it to coordinate *with* others and yet not be coordinated *by* others.

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So without agreement on hierarchical authority, Galbraith’s third coordination strategy is also constrained. There is no leadership that is able to establish *goals and targets* to guide all intervention efforts. Vertical information transfers likewise suffer from the same limitations of hierarchy and goal and target setting. Without agreement on an overarching authority, no one can initiate, develop, and implement a vertical information system for the purpose of integrating all civilian and military organizations in any

given theater. Each organization tends to have its own system and limits access to others (Holohan 2005).

Galbraith’s fourth strategy—the *reduction of the need to process information*—is used by both military and civilian organizations. It involves two options, and each has its constraints. First, organizations can lower the number of exceptions with which they have to contend by reducing their expected performance levels. For example, they can allow for extra time and resources to work together. They can be more accepting of delays in information processing between and among organizations. They can be willing to tolerate budget overruns as a result of coordination problems. Of course, these examples of slack increase costs and reduce overall system efficiency, potentially eroding effectiveness as benefits to needy people decline. Alternatively, organizations simply can decouple their activities from other organizations and attempt to operate as autonomous entities. Either because of conflicting mandates or because they find the transaction costs in dealing with other organizations too high, they can ignore or refuse to work with other organizations in the human security domain, with human security becoming less than it could be.

The remaining strategy in Galbraith’s typology—the *creation of lateral relations*—appears to be the most widely recognized mechanism of information processing and coordination. Direct contacts are prevalent where organizations operate without formal lateral mechanisms to orchestrate concerted action. In this case, coordination ends up being reliant on informal, ad hoc, and personal relationships among organizational members who are forced to discover and renegotiate all of their connections afresh at the onset of each international intervention, often with uncertain results (Donini 1996; Reindorp and Wiles 2001; Sommers 2000). As noted by Reindorp and Wiles in their humanitarian coordination study, “The ‘system’ shows determined resistance to cede authority to anyone or any structure,” producing a “blight of adhocacy” (2001, 50) or what Donini (1996) describes as “coordination by default.”

Liaison roles, individual positions created to link specific organizations, are evidenced by the civ-mil liaison officers who are appointed to handle interorganizational contacts and coordination. Task forces and teams also are prevalent, as demonstrated in the Integrated Mission Task Forces, the Civil-Military Operations Task Force, and the Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Examples of new organizational units include the UN On-Site Operations Coordination Center, Civil-Military Operations Centers,



Humanitarian Operations Centers, and the Afghanistan NGO Security Office. But these, too, are hardly panaceas, as some civilian organizations opt out when military personnel are involved for fear of compromising their neutrality.

### **Toward Communities of Practice? Preliminary Lessons from the Front Lines**

Although the preceding has chronicled a variety of formal coordination mechanisms and their constraints, there are important undercurrents beneath the formal level that also must be acknowledged in civ-mil relations. Surfacing in all four quadrants are communities of practice (COPs)—“groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002, 4).

***Lesson 7: Self-emergent hubs—or communities of practice—are promising ways to avoid coordination constraints. They bring civilians and the military together to identify, exchange, and institutionalize best practices that exist across all four types of civ-mil operations. However, much remains before these communities of practice can say with certainty what works, what does not, and under what conditions.***

Examples of COPs can be grouped within the four general types of civ-mil operations outlined in figure 1. Peacekeeping hubs attract those interested in training and preparation for upcoming assignments. These include efforts by the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre. Likewise, the Hawaii Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance and the Asia Pacific Peace Operations Capacity Building Program gather civilians from federal governments, UN personnel, civilian police, and international and nongovernmental agencies. Together with military personnel, they practice dealing with the complexities of peace operations. The U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute also offers peace operations training and education for mid- to senior-level audiences, including U.S. military services, interagency programs, civilian organizations, foreign militaries, and IOs/NGOs.

Similar hubs exist for disaster relief. These include the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and AlertNet, sponsored by the Reuters Foundation. These programs afford access to documents, articles, and links to sites on topics such as satellite images, children and war, working in relief, refugees, and technology. Another good example of emergent COPs are the Strong Angel exercises. Originally sponsored by a small group of interested civilian and military personnel, Strong Angel demonstrations experiment with the use of cutting-edge techniques and technologies to facilitate improved information flow and cooperation related to disaster relief across the civ-mil boundary.

COPs also are emerging around stabilization and reconstruction issues. One example is the Center for Stabilization and Reconstruction Studies, a teaching institute located at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. It provides educational opportunities for the full spectrum of actors—U.S. and international armed forces, government civilian agencies, and representatives from NGOs and IOs—all of whom are involved in

worldwide stabilization and reconstruction activities. Practitioner-oriented programs include games/table-top exercises, short courses, workshops, conferences, and applied research initiatives on topics such as security sector reform, disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, cross-cultural understanding, information sharing, and skill development in collaboration and negotiation. Likewise, the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C., an independent, nonpartisan, national institution established and funded by Congress, supports policy makers by providing analyses, policy options, and advice, including the sponsorship of country-oriented working groups such as the Iraq Study Group and the Task Force on the United Nations.

There also is a growing number of COPs within the development area. The United States Institute of Peace has been a major hub in bringing together civilian and military organizations to address IOC challenges concerning complex emergencies. It has launched a series of efforts to improve information sharing and the designs of new information management and planning capabilities involving humanitarian relief, human rights, and militaries engaged in complex emergencies. Its latest endeavor has been to develop new guidelines to mitigate civ-mil frictions and to preserve humanitarian space in high-conflict environments in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq (USIP 2007).

Still, we need to be realistic in our expectations regarding the role of COPs in civ-mil IOCs. Challenges will not be resolved anytime soon. Some organizations, as a matter of principle, will not work together. Tensions will continue between militaries and many civilian organizations given their numbers and divergent interests. As Oliker and his associates have noted, “[d]octrine and training alone cannot change this. Doctrine and training can, however, help the various actors better understand each other’s roles and capabilities and can thus enable them to be more effective when working in the same theater” (2004, 111).

***Lesson 8: While challenges to civ-mil coordination will always exist, success through communities of practice is more likely whenever low-threat conditions exist, when relations are lateral rather than hierarchical, and when participants embrace their dual identity status and do not hoard information and limit communication and innovation.***

As documented earlier, there have been some successes with various formal coordination mechanisms in alleviating tensions between civ-mil organizations—especially under low-threat conditions during peacekeeping and disaster relief operations. And following Galbraith’s (1973) information-processing framework, we find lateral forms of coordination preferable to vertical forms of coordination. This is especially true when organizations do not acknowledge the authority of any one entity to oversee all organizations and when neither the degradation of IOC performance nor adhocism is viewed as a feasible alternative. Organizations involved in complex emergencies and stabilization and reconstruction operations also have been working to establish “rules of engagement” in order to facilitate interactions.

Still, developing COPs will also require time, resources, and patience (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002, chap. 3).

As Wenger and his colleagues note, COPs “can hoard knowledge, limit innovation, and hold others hostages to their expertise” (2002, 139). Practitioners will also have to negotiate dual identities as members of the community and as members of an organization (Wenger 1998), and these role conflicts are likely to exacerbate the already serious domain conflicts that exist. Size will be a factor as well; it is unlikely that all organizations in the human security domain could be core participants.

### **An Agenda for Future Research on the Civilian-Military Nexus**

The use of coordination mechanisms, both formal and informal, offers reasons for optimism, but the paucity of IOC theory provides little guidance to practitioners on what mechanisms are appropriate under which conditions. We need better theory to guide actions in this important arena. The two-by-two matrix of the human security domain that identifies four general types of civ-mil operations is a beginning. Empirical assessment of the coordination mechanisms used for each type of operation, such as the evaluations of the PRTs (Dziedzic and Seidl 2005; Perito 2007), is clearly needed.

Researchers also might build on Galbraith’s information-processing theory to explore the conditions under which different coordination mechanisms are utilized in the four quadrants. For example, if tasks are well understood, the domain consensus is high, and environmental threats are lower, as they are in classical peacekeeping in quadrant 1, then task coordination would more likely be preplanned. Under these conditions, we would expect to find greater reliance on routines, best practices, and “rules of engagement” for IOC. When the threat level is high (quadrants 2 and 3) and the domain conflicts are high (quadrants 3 and 4), we would expect greater task uncertainty. This, in turn, means greater amounts of information that organizational members must process during task execution to determine what needs to be done, by whom, when, and how. Based on this reasoning, researchers should expect to find a greater range and number of IOC mechanisms under warfare conditions as compared to relief operations, complex contingency operations, or stabilization and reconstruction efforts. It is also likely that at some point a growing number of coordination mechanisms would overtax and overwhelm people’s ability to understand and use them. Should that condition obtain, they would become part of the “coordination nightmare” rather than a solution to it.

Researchers also could anticipate the relationships between task uncertainties, levels of information processing, and the choice of IOC coordination mechanisms to be mediated by organizational successes in these operations. Galbraith notes that “task information requirements and the capacity of the organization to process information are always matched. If the organization does not consciously match them, reduced performance through budget overruns or schedule overruns will occur in order to bring out equality”

(1973, 19). Translating this proposition to IOC, we would expect coordination to be mediated by member organizations’ abilities to match their task information requirements and their abilities to process information. If they are not consciously matched, if organizations are unable or unwilling to evolve different strategies to process the greater amount of information necessary to maintain their level of performance, then costs are likely to increase and performance is likely to decline. This would be the case not only for the organization, but also for the human security domain as a whole. Follow-up studies to test these propositions are needed, as are additional studies informed by competing theories of IOC such as resource dependence theory (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978), transaction cost theory (Williamson 1995), and social network theory (Chisholm 1989; Powell 1990).

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The use of coordination mechanisms, both formal and informal, offers reasons for optimism, but the paucity of [interorganizational cooperation] theory provides little guidance to practitioners on what mechanisms are appropriate under which conditions. . . . The two-by-two matrix of the human security domain that identifies four general types of civ-mil operations is a beginning.

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In-depth studies of the various COPs surfacing around the themes of peacekeeping, disaster relief, stabilization and reconstruction, and complex humanitarian emergencies are also needed to provide insights into their long-term viability in the human security domain. A central issue for future research is whether these nascent communities will evolve into more formal network organizations and emerge as a possible alternative to other forms of organizing, such as hierarchies and markets (Anklam 2007). COPs may only be a temporary way station until organizations resolve some of their outstanding coordination issues. Alternatively, they might be one of the few viable options when hierarchy is not politically feasible and

market-like interorganizational transactions are inadequate. This typically occurs when coping with complex political and operational interdependencies and maintaining accountability for organizational and individual performance.

Thus, research that compares and contrasts alternative forms of organizing in the human security domain would be of great benefit. For example, it would be important for all organizations, not just civilian and military organizations, to establish whether COPs have a place on the organizing continuum and offer important advantages over markets and hierarchies. Relatedly, how should organizations be selected to participate in COPs (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 2002)? Would it be possible to develop different degrees of participation in COPs without alienating some organizations? Would it be feasible for a core group of organizations operating in *all four* quadrants to become a COP for the human security domain as a whole rather than relying on multiple, overlapping communities that focus on subsets of issues and problems within the domain? If so, which organizations would serve in that capacity, and what steps should they pursue to build an overarching COP to ensure collective learning for the domain as a whole?

Finally, research attention should be given to small-scale NGOs in the human security domain that are market-based and touted to be more flexible compared to traditional humanitarian and development organizations. They have prompted serious questions of accountability that have yet to be resolved, and their claims

remain largely undocumented (e.g., Abiew 2003; Singer 2006). Also prompting serious questions are the private military companies and their forces that provide services in lieu of government-run militaries (Singer 2006). Their personnel operate in a legal gray area with “little or no supervision” except what their individual firms provide. They are not bound by the Uniform Code of Military Justice and, in Iraq, are exempt from prosecution for crimes committed in country (Singer 2006).

Regardless of the specifics and bounds of any research agenda pursued, public administration scholarship on the domain conflicts between military and civilian organizations and their resultant coordination challenges is badly needed and long overdue. This essay is offered in the spirit of early public administration scholars steeped deeply in efforts to improve governance while simultaneously improving the science and art of their discipline through rigorous research. I urge our field to take up this significant research challenge in the years ahead to improve both practice and theory building.

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