
Civil-Military Marriage Counseling: Can This Union Be Saved?

by Adam B. Siegel

Since the early 1990s, a plethora of international interventions — from Somalia to East Timor to Afghanistan — have forced civilian and military actors to unite in what have proved to be unhappy marriages. Cross-cultural misunderstandings and tensions within these civil-military shotgun marriages have led many on both sides to long for a divorce. Unfortunately, because civil-military operations are today's — and likely tomorrow's — reality, the international community isn't a no-fault state!

As in many difficult marriages, each side of the civil-military union has wanted (if not sought to force) the other side to conform to its desires and expectations. In some ways, lessons-learned processes and multiorganizational conferences represent marriage-counseling sessions for civil-military peace operations. These counseling sessions, like those for a committed, but troubled, marriage, continue seemingly without end, with the same issues reappearing time after time, unchanged.

Unlike marriage counseling, the civil-military sessions do not always involve the same actors, nor, perhaps more importantly, do they involve a counselor who can help each side hear the other and translate the actors' meanings. Perhaps because of these differences, fundamental misunderstandings still dominate perceptions and attitudes on both sides of the civil-military union. Those misunderstandings (or fail-

ure to reach broad understandings) often undermine relations on the ground, making effective cooperation and coordination all the more difficult.

On the civilian side, it is not uncommon to hear humanitarian workers comment, with surprise, on the decency of the military personnel whom they encounter. Some civilians express seeming disbelief that military officers could be loving spouses and parents. (Some Civil Affairs officers carry packs of their family photos on deployments in order to build relationships with other workers.)

This article will focus on the military aspect of the relationship to show several commonly held military views of civilian organizations that can undermine cooperation in the operational environment. The following are some commonly held — if strongly stated — views that the author has heard expressed in operations from Haiti to Bosnia to Albania, in multiple conferences and from many nations' military personnel:

- The military is organized and structured; civilian organizations are not.
- Military personnel are dedicated and hard-working; civilians put in office hours.
- The military is resource-poor; civilian organizations are resource-rich.
- Military personnel cost less; civilians are expensive.

As with many stereotypes, each of the four views has some grounding in truth,



Photo by Adam B. Siegel

A U.S. Air Force colonel assigned to Joint Task Force Shining Hope gives a briefing on helicopter delivery of relief supplies. Military rank, organization and uniforms are often confusing to civilian agencies.

but none of them will stand close scrutiny. In addition, if we are proud of our own organization, we have a natural tendency to assume a superiority over other organizations — i.e., to emphasize our own strengths while exaggerating others' weaknesses. This tendency contributes to the cultural misunderstandings that dog civil-military operations.

The following discussions will examine the four stereotypes through real-world examples drawn mainly from the operations of NATO's Implementation Force, or IFOR, and Stabilization Force, or SFOR, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, or BiH, in 1996 and 1997. Each discussion will show the misunderstanding and suggest ways of fostering better relations and, perhaps, better results from civil-military partnerships.

Organization

One common complaint from military personnel about civilian organizations is that civilians are disorganized, making it nearly impossible to work with them. Military personnel believe that the civilians have no one in charge, and they contrast the perceived civilian dysfunctional organization to the clear military chain of command.

During NATO's first year of operations in BiH, this stereotype did not reflect the reality of military operations. Consider the following characteristics of military opera-

tions at that point:

- IFOR contained military forces from more than 30 nations (the forces spoke many primary languages).
- Many of those nations had multiple services involved.
- The divisions, brigades and battalions across the force employed different organizations, procedures and operational approaches.
- The personnel and units of those commands rotated frequently, in different patterns and across national lines.
- Many military forces on the ground were not part of the NATO force. Those forces included national support elements, a legacy U.N. force, and Swiss military forces who were working with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

While military personnel may have managed to navigate this maze, civilian personnel (even those who could distinguish a sergeant from a general) had reason to be confused.

Emergency evacuations represented perhaps the most significant potential military support to civilian organizations. On the ground, however, NATO did not establish a standard operating procedure for such an evacuation until well into 1997 — more than 18 months after NATO operations had begun in BiH. Until that time, every unit had used a different set of procedures for conducting an evacuation.

The Italian Brigade in Sarajevo, for example, wanted to have detailed information — such as a list showing which cars (with license-plate numbers) would be carrying which people (with passport information) in the event of an evacuation. The Spanish Brigade's staff viewed the situation differently: "We know which international civilians are working here. Only those whom we don't know will have to be screened." A civilian who might have driven throughout BiH — passing through the sectors of several divisions and brigades in a single day — would have had a very difficult time navigating the differing rules on the evacuation issue.

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As another example, civil-military cooperation centers, or CIMICs, existed at the brigade, division, corps and IFOR levels. Civilian organizations were often confused as to which level they should consult about different issues.

In addition, more than one officer has suggested that multinational peace operations do not operate by "command and control," but by "coordination and consultation." The lieutenant general who commanded the ACE Rapid Reaction Corps reportedly described the situation as follows: "I thought I knew all types of command and control that existed (OPCOM, OPCON, TACON, etc.), but my division commanders have managed to teach me three that I did not know. When I want my French division commander to do something that he disagrees with, he has the tendency to remind me that he is under 'OP NON.' My American division com-

mander is a bit more blunt and asserts, 'OP NOWAY.' My fellow Brit is the height of courtesy and simply tells me 'OP YOURS!' " Thus, in Bosnia, military C², rather than representing the traditional "command and control," might have been better defined as "convince and cajole."

Truth be told, military structures are — by definition — more organized than the structures of the large number of civilian agencies that work in post-conflict environments. Most military structures develop organizational charts, and those charts provide important information — at least to those who have been initiated into military culture.

But no organizational chart can easily describe the complex interrelationships between hundreds of civilian agencies regarding a myriad of issues — from psychological counseling to vote monitoring to re-establishing sewer services. There is no "one" person in charge. Thus, there is a reason why military personnel find it confusing to seek structure analogous to military command among civilian agencies — that structure simply doesn't exist. In Bosnia and elsewhere, however, the military clarity of command may have existed only on paper. At any rate, for those outside the NATO military organization who attempted to learn how to work with the military, the process was confusing.

Dedication

In mid-December 1996, the new NATO command staff met with members of a U.N. office in Sarajevo. The meeting led to a mutually-agreed-upon plan of action. At the end of the meeting, the head of the U.N. agency said that the action plan could not start until after the New Year, because he would be taking a two-week vacation to go fishing in Florida. After the meeting, a NATO general who was leaving the room remarked to a staff officer, "How dare he go on vacation, the lazy bastard! We're ready to do this now, and it shouldn't have to wait." It wasn't exactly a subdued remark, and, as intended, the U.N. agency head heard it.

Evidently lost to the general was the

basic difference between the nature of his deployment and the nature of the civilian's career. The general had just arrived — anxious to achieve great things — for a six-month tour (during which he would be eligible for weeks of leave). The U.N. agency head had also recently arrived — not from a home base where he had a nice house in which his wife was waiting at the end of each day, but from another post-conflict environment. In fact, during the previous seven years, the U.N. agency head had seen his wife less than two months out of each year, as he moved about between such “soft” duty sites as Afghanistan, Angola and Mozambique.

The military view that civilians are lazy because they go out to dinner, go away for the weekend or take a vacation is one that emerges almost without exception in post-conflict operations. The perception is evidence of a failure to understand that military personnel deploy for a limited period as individuals, while civilians might remain in a post-conflict environment indefinitely — it becomes, in essence, their home.

Most military deployments are of limited duration — a year is typically viewed as an extremely long period. For most forces in

BiH, tours ran between four and six months. Civilians, however, typically sign up for a longer duration. Civilian employees, with the exception of emergency teams, typically consider a year to be the minimum commitment. In addition, many careerists, like the U.N. agency chief discussed above, move from one crisis to another — and they may take their vacations at times that their military colleagues consider inappropriate. Thus, while military personnel deploy far from their families and work crisis hours, civilians in theater frequently are at their “home base”; therefore, they may perform their work during “home-base” hours.

Resources

In the post-conflict operational environment, military elements often look with envy at the wealth of resources that lie at the disposal of civilian organizations. Military staffs hear about billions of dollars of civilian aid money and dream of how they could spend that money more effectively. Soldiers look longingly at brand-new Range Rovers and compare them to their beaten-up “old” vehicles.



Photo by Adam B. Siegel

The camp of U.S. Marines who were providing security for Camp Hope in southern Albania. Civilian organizations do not have the tents, weapons, vehicles and aircraft that allow military forces to deploy rapidly and provide security.

An Austrian Army helicopter loaded with U.S. MREs for delivery to Kosovar-Albanian refugees in 1999. While the military may envy the luxury of Range Rovers, civilians envy helicopters and transport aircraft.



Photo by Adam B. Siegel

Sarajevo in the spring of 1997 provides a different perspective. The SFOR headquarters at that time numbered between 800 and 1,400 people (depending on one's counting style). With the exception of the International Police Task Force, or IPTF, which is a paramilitary force, the SFOR headquarters alone employed more personnel than any other international organization in theater. In fact, again with the exception of the IPTF, the SFOR headquarters (let alone the more than 30,000-strong total SFOR force) was about 10 times larger than the next largest international contingent in BiH. Not surprisingly, the SFOR headquarters personnel worked long hours, and quite a few positions were staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In terms of personnel — perhaps the most valuable asset — SFOR swamped the other international organizations.

In terms of the assets and infrastructure needed for providing communications, transportation, engineering, medical treatment and other support, SFOR had a similarly lopsided advantage over other international organizations. While a new Range Rover might look great and, from our personal perspective, might seem to be a true luxury, a Range Rover costs far less than the typical military armored vehicle, helicopter or airplane — all of which the military force typically possesses in some quantity (along with the mechanics to maintain them).

In fact, each side of the civil-military relationship tends to see the other as more fortunate. From the civilian standpoint, the military seems quite resource-rich, with its helicopters, large numbers of vehicles, transport aircraft, robust communications and computing equipment. From the military perspective, civilian agencies seem resource-rich because they have aid money to disperse — and, after all, dispensing money is the role of many civilian organizations.

When an imbalance favors the military, many military personnel fail to notice it. When the imbalance lies in numbers of personnel, it contributes even further to the perception that civilians are not hard workers. Few civilian organizations have the ability to man positions in a headquarters around the clock. Thus, when someone from an NGO has to travel (for whatever reason) or goes to dinner on a Friday night, there might not be anyone in the office to answer the phone. Too often, military staff members fail to understand that there may be a valid reason why there is no one to answer the office phone in a civilian aid agency late on a Friday evening.

Cost

Military personnel are often shocked — and express jealousy — about the salaries paid to personnel of international organizations. In Bosnia, military personnel of almost all nations involved made envious

and sarcastic comments about the tax-free \$80,000 (U.S.) salaries of the members of the IPTF. Military critics also noted that the per diem paid to IPTF personnel — \$100 (U.S.) — was far more than was required for a more-than-reasonable life in BiH, where the average income is close to \$10 (U.S.) a day. For more than 99 percent of the world's population, \$100 a day is an enviable income.

When military personnel express envy over the cost of civilian personnel, they do so, almost without exception, before placing that cost into a wider context than individual income. The problem lies in assessing cost: Should we consider salary only, or should we consider total remuneration? Should we figure the cost of the individual, or should we consider the cost of the system? Who is paying the costs that we are trying to assess?

If one pursues the concept of “total-cost accounting” (trying to capture the cost of the entire system), then the cost of military personnel skyrockets. Total-cost accounting would include the cost of training and education, recruiting, retirement and all other expenses that are associated with getting a soldier to the front. At its extreme, the accounting would also include all equipment costs — from the cost of a rifle to the cost of the military transport aircraft used to deploy the soldier to the cost of the national technical means of providing intelligence support. Those costs add up.

With salary and per diem, each IPTF officer was paid about \$120,000 per year, and each provided his own housing, food and other upkeep. In order to get a full year of on-the-ground policing from an IPTF officer, the international community might have paid for 15 months (counting leave, training and turnover time) of the officer's time, or \$150,000. That price came with no residual costs such as retirement. If we estimate that the support, recruitment, supplies, travel and administration costs for each officer was approximately \$100,000 each year, then the IPTF officer cost roughly \$250,000 per year.

In computing the costs of military personnel in the same situation, it might be appro-

priate to consider an individual with roughly the same amount of experience as that generally required for a policeman in a peace operation: a minimum of seven to 10 years of service. That individual would be an NCO earning about \$2,500 per month. If we add that NCO's housing, retirement, medical care and other benefits, the cost could easily double — to \$5,000 per month, or \$60,000 per year. In comparison to the \$120,000 to \$250,000 annual cost for police, \$60,000 still looks cheap.

At a minimum, however, the U.S. military requires three soldiers to maintain one soldier on the ground — another \$180,000 per year. In actuality, the 3:1 ratio is quite conservative. Some calculate that the U.S. tail-to-tooth ratio is 11:1 (including training,

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recruitment, administrative costs, supply, etc.). If we calculate the amount using the 11:1 ratio, the cost of a soldier rises from \$60,000 to \$600,000-\$700,000 — or more than twice the total cost of the IPTF policeman, even without considering the far greater costs of equipping and supplying military personnel. Furthermore, while military per diem is minimal, the military provides the serviceman with food, housing, laundry, post, and many other services — all of which cost real money and real resources.

Returning to the challenge of assessing cost, the salaries of the IPTF and other civilian workers look great in comparison to a military paycheck, but for those who have to pay the check, the military's costs don't compare so favorably. For the American taxpayer, the cost of international personnel is cut-

rate compared to the deployment of U.S. military personnel. If an IPTF policeman on the ground costs about \$250,000 a year, then the U.S. taxpayer will pay about \$65,000 of that cost. Putting one U.S. service member on the ground next to that policeman might cost \$1 million or more. For the American taxpayer, the policeman begins to look like a real bargain.

Cost is clearly not the sole or even the principal determinant of value, but military members who look longingly at IPTF salaries and think they are outrageous fail to view those salaries in the context of what it would cost a nation to deploy military personnel on a peace operation. In that context, civilian salaries seem far less outrageous.

Conclusion

Not all military personnel believe the stereotypes of civilians discussed in this article — far from it. However, enough of them do view civilian agencies through those prisms to create tension in the formation of civil-military partnerships.

Again, stereotypes often do have a basis — however tenuous — in reality. When it comes to the four perceptions discussed herein, the author has personally encountered civilians who were more interested in their bottles of champagne than in their mission; who were more concerned with paperwork and turf battles than they were in achieving objectives; who worked seven-hour days while the military personnel alongside them worked 15+ hours a day; and who spent money seemingly without considering whether their programs would produce a positive impact.

Alongside these experiences, the author can place encounters with military personnel who had no initiative; who lacked knowledge about their responsibilities; who were more concerned with counting bureaucratic coup than with finding the most effective multiorganizational approach; who scheduled trips into combat zones in order to maximize their tax-free benefits; and who were more interested in their per-diem reimbursements than in their mission accomplishment. But on both

sides, such nightmares are the exception. As a rule, international people — military and civilian — who enter post-conflict zones are dedicated and are making personal sacrifices to be there.

In post-conflict peace operations, cultural sensitivity matters. Cultural sensitivity relates not only to the local population, but also to our partner agencies. Civil-military partnerships will work better in peace operations if civilians make an effort to better understand military culture and organization. They will also work better if military personnel from all services and from all involved nations make an effort to better understand the culture and the nature of their civilian partners. To date, all too often the actors on both sides have failed to make those efforts.

Amid the tensions and the pressures of complex international operations, such efforts are difficult to make. But without an understanding of their companion's nature, each partner in the civil-military marriage may chafe under the yoke and long for an end of the union. Unfortunately, that union cannot be terminated without seriously undermining the potential for success in future international interventions. ✂

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