



Pioneering the Comprehensive Approach: How Germany's Partners Do It

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The Comprehensive Approach remains a key challenge in international conflict and crisis management. Experience has shown that successful interventions depend on the coherent and targeted employment of diplomatic, development, and security means. Looking at four countries which have been pioneering the Comprehensive Approach, this Policy Briefing, which is partly based on interviews, generates insights that are also relevant for improvements in the German approach.

United Kingdom: Yes, we can!

In order to build stability overseas, the UK employs an **Integrated Approach**, bringing together diplomatic, development, and defense activities. Its development is driven by a political process, where overarching strategies are complemented by specific policies, and regular reviews. Civil servants know the main messages of these documents and use them as guidance. Much effort is made to learn and to adapt to problems encountered in conflict environments. Nevertheless, stove-piping remains a challenge.

Joint institutions | In 2004, the government established the **Stabilisation Unit** whose activities cover fragile and post-conflict states. The Unit is a center of government expertise that is staffed from across the government and works as implementer on behalf of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International

Development, and the Ministry of Defense. These departments govern the Unit through the **Building Stability Overseas Board**. The Unit manages and administers the **Civilian Stabilisation Group**, which is made up of over 800 deployable civilian experts and over 200 members from the **Civil Service Stabilisation Cadre** (UK civil servants from over 30 government departments and agencies, including police officers). The Unit also conducts assessment missions on stabilization requirements, evaluates the impact of activities, and provides training. A **National Security Council**, which includes ministers and state secretaries of key government departments, was established in 2010 and meets at least once a week.

Joint instruments | The 2010 **National Security Strategy** describes the whole-of-government principle and the Integrated Approach as underpinning national security. Details on early warning procedures, crisis prevention and rapid response,



and upstream crisis prevention are developed further in the 2011 **Building Stability Overseas Strategy**. In 2012, an inter-ministerial working group developed a **Guidance for an Integrated Approach to Strategic Planning for Conflict and Stability** that is used by geographic and thematic teams across government to ensure an appropriate and coordinated UK response to crises. **Joint Assessments on Conflict and Stability** for specific regions or countries of particular interest to the UK aim to provide an agreed basis to support integrated planning, policy, and resource allocation.

The UK also established the **Conflict Pool**, a tri-departmental fund that provides financial resources to prevent conflict. It contains an annual Early Action Facility to enable quick funding in response to early warning signals and to other challenges that arise in situations of instability and conflict. A recent evaluation of the Pool brought mixed results¹. It stated: “At its best, the Conflict Pool is an important, flexible and responsive tool for supporting conflict prevention initiatives.” On the downside, the Pool’s administrative procedures are “cumbersome,” and it lacks a strategic framework, which would point out its comparative advantage as well as its approach on how to improve coherence between the departments involved.

The Netherlands: Let’s organize it!

The Dutch Comprehensive Approach builds on a political culture, the so-called **Polder Model**, which favors consensus and cooperation irrespective of individual rank, and on pragmatic trial and error processes. Assessments that things could run better quickly translate into a “let’s organize it” attitude rather than into the initiation of lengthy strategic discussions. Recent cuts in defense and development budgets led to a rethinking of priorities, and created a momentum in favor of a Comprehensive Approach believed to be more cost-efficient.

Joint institutions | The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) unites diplomacy and development, with two ministers being responsible for the

policy areas. The former Peace Building and Stabilisation Unit was dissolved in an MFA reshuffle in summer 2012 and a **Coordinator Security Issues/Comprehensive Approach** was introduced in the new Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid Department instead. **Inter-agency working groups** on prominent or emerging conflicts are now standard in the Dutch whole-of-government approach.

At the highest political level, a **Steering Group on Military Operations** includes the Chief of Defense, the Directors-General for developmental and political affairs, and their counterpart from the Office of the Prime Minister. Weekly meetings in a small, informal setting build trust between the participants, and due to their ranks the Group musters a high degree of authority. A similar **Steering Group on Civilian Missions** brings together a wider circle of stakeholders every three months, including the ministries of economy, finance, and justice.

Joint instruments | A **National Security Strategy** is to be drafted in 2013. Its main benefit is seen in drawing those ministries into crisis management planning that have been often left out, e.g. interior. This strategy is expected to provide a shared political commitment and implementation guidelines. Also in 2013, a practical **Guideline on the Comprehensive Approach** will be drafted. For the 15 priority countries of Dutch development cooperation, there are **multi-year strategic plans**. However, they are of limited use in acute crises, which often develop much faster and in other countries than those covered by these strategies.

The Netherlands subsume all budget funds for international cooperation that the different ministries employ under a budget construction called **HGIS** (Homogeneous Group of International Cooperation). It is coordinated by the MFA and key issues, such as priority setting, are decided in the Council of Ministers. Article 20 of HGIS governs the conditions for the use of funds for international crisis operations. It allows for quick disbursements and the ability to waive procurement rules.

¹ Independent Commission for Aid Impact: Evaluation of the Inter-Departmental Conflict Pool. Report 12/2012. See also: Andreas Wittkowsky: Evaluation of the British Conflict Pool: Comparative Advantages and Strategic Requirements. ZIF Paper October 2012.



Sweden: Collaborate, but work separately

For the last 10 years, Sweden has been promoting its Comprehensive Approach, which is now codified in a number of government strategies. However, there has been disillusionment with *integrating* activities across ministries and government agencies in the field, particularly in Afghanistan. The focus has therefore shifted towards *collaboration*. The recent government **Policy for Security and Development in Swedish Development Cooperation 2012–2014** explicitly states that it “is important to separate the military and civilian roles, regardless of the type of international presence concerned, due to the risk of an international military presence being perceived as a party to the conflict.”

Overall, there is an understanding that government agencies need more **strategic guidance** in acute conflicts – in particular as the agencies enjoy a high degree of operational autonomy. Such guidance should provide the broader picture of Sweden’s engagement and basic orientation to all actors. It should be specific on where and on which tasks agencies should cooperate. There is a particular need to work comprehensively when it comes to ‘**hard state-building**’ activities, which are those addressing security sector and rule of law reforms.

Joint institutions | Diplomacy, foreign trade and development are all subsumed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), with three Ministers being responsible for the policy areas. **State Secretaries** of all ministries meet in 2–3 week intervals with a view to assessing Sweden’s contributions to conflict management, and providing guidance to the implementing agencies. A **Joint Council on Missions and Operations** meets monthly, which includes ministries and relevant agencies. There is also a number of working groups on single issues, often at the agency level, but some agencies are already overwhelmed with the number of coordination meetings.

Joint instruments | In 2008, the parliament passed the government’s **National Strategy for Swedish Participation in International Peace-**

Support and Security-Building Operations. It introduced the wording of “combined contributions” and “combined civil and military action.” Since 2009, a **Guidance Operationalizing the *allomfattande ansats*** provides the framework for planning and implementing activities and also has a function vis-à-vis external partners. So far, the **Afghanistan Strategy 2010** is the only country strategy which includes overarching goals and priorities for all departments. The country documents for the 25 countries with which Sweden engages in development cooperation are binding only for the Swedish Development Agency (SIDA), but could possibly be developed further to whole-of-government documents.

The United States: Elevating civilian power

In recent years, the US discourse focused on boosting **civilian power** under the guidance of a strengthened Department of State (DoS). Activities aim at improved coordination and coherence in the civilian sphere. Nevertheless, due to different resource endowments, the military remains the dominant actor whenever there is military action involved. The will to provide global leadership remains the yardstick for US efforts to further develop the Comprehensive Approach.

Joint institutions | Including the top ranks from all security relevant departments and agencies, the **National Security Council** is the highest body where national security issues are defined comprehensively. It is supported by the National Security Council Staff consisting of experts from all functional areas of government. Coordination of US government action in the area of crisis and conflict management is mandated to the **Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO)** in the Department of State. CSO monitors over 55 fragile states and focuses its activities on six. The Bureau has incorporated the former Office of Coordination of Reconstruction and Stabilization, but receives fewer resources and lacks the reconstruction mandate.

Joint instruments | US activities are based on the **National Security Strategy**. In 2010, DoS



and the United States Agency for international Development (USAID) jointly conducted the first **Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review**. The review aims at making civilian power act more comprehensively in crisis situations and putting it on an equal footing with the military. Since 2012, DoS and USAID jointly administer a **Complex Crisis Fund** designated for quick reactions to emerging crises. Moreover, the Departments of State and of Defense jointly administer a **Global Security Contingency Fund**, which was established under the DoS budget.

The Bureau (CSO) bears responsibility for the **Civilian Response Corps**, composed of government agents from nine different ministries (excluding Defence). The Corps contains deployable civilian personnel within three different readiness categories (active component, standby component, and expert corps). In parallel, the Department of Defence employs a **Civilian Expeditionary Workforce**. An **Interagency Conflict Assessment Framework** was established as a tool for conflict prevention and crisis response planning. In the field, comprehensive **Mission Strategic and Resource Plans** are put in place by the US Embassies.

Conclusion

Germany's partners emphasize different aspects when further developing their Comprehensive Approaches. The UK has introduced a full-fledged system of interlinked strategies, policies, and reviews that lead to adaptation; it also established the Stabilisation Unit as an integrated government center. The Netherlands give more importance to pragmatic organizational solutions and institutionalized networking. Sweden is somewhere in the middle, focusing on improving a coordinated division of labor. In the US, the

need to enhance civilian power to maintain global leadership prevails. Still, all countries bear some key commonalities:

- *A strong **political will** to find an optimum between integrating and coordinating activities, and active involvement at the highest political levels;*
- *Overarching **national security strategies or sub-strategies**, which provide guidance for the institutional architecture;*
- ***Joint units and joint assessments** which facilitate the formulation of common analyses and policy goals;*
- ***Common conflict analysis and political guidance on common goals** as crucial preconditions for comprehensive action and a sensible, coherent division of labor;*
- ***Joint funds** which provide incentives and flexibility for joint efforts.*

However, there are also critical voices in all countries that progress is slow and does not meet the expectations associated with the Comprehensive Approach. Clearly, behavioral change cannot be achieved overnight. As an interviewed Dutch Political Director concluded: "To manage change you need time – and a lot of humor." It is worth drawing on these common experiences when further developing the Comprehensive Approach in Germany, and linking it to the multilateral level.

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