On the Conditions for CIMIC during Humanitarian Operations

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1.   Introduction

In July 1994 the world watched as approximately 2.3 million Rwandans spilled over the Zairan and Tanzanian borders in a human migration reminiscent of biblical times. On the other side of the globe Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims viciously battled for ethnic dominance in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Soon thereafter, in yet another part of the world, Chechens and Russians launched endless, gruesome attacks at each other. At the end of the decade hundreds of thousands of Kosovars fled their hometowns for fear of President Milosevic' Serbian militias. Almost overnight cities bustling with life like Pristina, Pec and Prizren turned into ethnically cleansed ghost towns.

During the last decade of the 20th century upsurges of intense animosity among many of the world's five to eight thousand ethnic groups induced large-scale human suffering and, severely disrupted social, political and economic structures and relations with the afflicted regions. In the beginning of the 21st century the intrastate conflicts seemed to be rooted deeply throughout all layers of society. They occurred between the population groups with different identities living together in the same regions. For this reason these conflicts are referred to as identity conflicts. According to UNHCR up until the mid-nineties the world-wide number of refugees totalled between 13 and 15 million. During the same era it was estimated that the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) lay between 10 and 24 million (Frerks, 1998). Although from the mid-nineties onwards these numbers have been declining, there is still a remarkable difference with previous times. In the 1970s, for instance, UNHCR estimated the number of refugees to be 2.5 million (U.S. Mission to the United Nations, 1995: 3). As a result of the identity conflicts during the 1990s, the number of complex humanitarian emergencies soared. From the mid-nineties onwards the international community has become increasingly aware that in order to deal with the consequences a wide spectrum of resources and a multi-faceted response are required. Amongst others, this has brought forth new linkages between differing and non-traditional partners, such as civilian humanitarian organisations and international militaries who have been pulling together on humanitarian operations.

In spite of positive results, civil-military cooperation during humanitarian operations has been controversial from the onset. One of the reasons underlying this controversy may be that both sets of partners seem to be highly aware of the cultural, political and motivational discontinuities between them. Civilians, for instance, have argued that the use of military units in support of humanitarian operations and peace renewal is really a contradiction in action. The use of armed force, they believe, simply reinforces the notion that coercion is necessary as a means to settle disputes. Also, aid-organisations have expressed their fear that in collaborating with the military, the latter may try take over control, which may lead to a situation in which humanitarian goals are subordinate to the pursuit of political and military objectives. As a consequence, they may prefer to keep the military at arm's length during humanitarian operations. In line with the above, some humanitarian organisations have been strongly advocating a clear line between military and humanitarian responsibilities. At a press

conference in Skopje, April 9th, 1999 a spokesman of 'Médecins sans Frontières' (MSF) stated:

> Although heavy logistical assistance by NATO has been useful, NATO is first and foremost a military organisation, currently involved in the conflict and not a humanitarian actor. NATO is neither responsible nor able to co-ordinate humanitarian relief activities, nor should it be.

Meanwhile, among the military, there are some who have voiced the opinion that intermingling with civilians may cause the military to get involved too deeply in humanitarian operations and may in fact promote mission-creep (Janssens & Visser, 1999: 5-99). Confronted with civilian operational cultures, many representatives of the military disapproved of the lack of coordination and the absence of unity of command in the humanitarian field. According to them, relief workers tend to act in an undisciplined way, seem to be accountable to no one and seem to have little regard for military rank and hierarchy. Moreover, in the perception of the military the activities of many relief agencies seem to be strongly driven by their need for publicity, rather than humanitarian goals only.

More than a decade into multi-actor humanitarian operations, civilian and military parties alike still seem to be divided on matters of civil-military cooperation, which may put the effectiveness of civil-military alliances at risk (Gordenker & Weiss, 1993: 1-12).

This paper focuses on three questions. Firstly, what causes civilian actors and the military to cooperate? Secondly, is civil-military cooperation limited to specific areas and, finally, how to decide to which civil-military alliances time and energy should be devoted?

Section 2 describes an episode of the repatriation of Kosovar refugees during operation Allied Harbour in 1999. In this section we point out some of the collaboration processes that have developed between the military and civilian actors within the Emergency Management Group (EMG). In addition, we present some examples of failing civil-military cooperation. Next, in section 3 we discuss some conditions for civil-military cooperation to occur and we describe some of the characteristics of civil-military alliances. Section 4 focuses on the ways in which specific kinds of military contributions may influence the need for prolonged cooperation from the civilian actors' perspective. In section 5 we provide some notes on how to decide which civil-military alliances are important to enter into. Finally, section 6 summarises the findings of the paper.

2.   Civil-military cooperation on repatriation during operation 'Allied Harbour'

From March until May 1999 international militaries and aid organisations collaborated to provide accommodation for hundreds of thousands of Kosovar refugees spilling over the Albanian borders. Throughout the country hundreds of camps and collective centres were built. In July 1999, as the first author of this paper interviewed the Canadian assistant chief of staff G9 at AFORHQ, many of these camps had already been deserted. Ever since Kosovo-Force (KFOR) was deployed in Kosovo, refugees had gathered their belongings and hurriedly left for home. In their wake, many NGOs closed up their activities in Albania and left the camps to follow the refugees.

The consequences of this spontaneous repatriation thwarted the goals of the Albanian authorities and the remaining aid organisations. Firstly, almost all sites had been looted and valuable resources, such as generators and medical supplies and equipment designated by the Albanian authorities for the Albanian people, had vanished overnight. It was assumed that they had either been taken into Kosovo or else were being traded on the black market. Secondly, the security situation in the camps had seriously deteriorated. Nobody seemed to be

able to guarantee the safety of the refugees that stayed behind. Thirdly, representatives of UNHCR worried about the safety of refugees en route to Kosovo.

According to the government of the host country and UNHCR, repatriation should take place in an organised way under the auspices of the UN, supported and protected by AFOR. Following the request of the government and UNHCR, AFOR-military assigned to the transportation desk of the Emergency Management Group (EMG) in collaboration with the Albanian Ministry of Transport planned staff and transportation needed to repatriate the Kosovar refugees in an organised and safe way.

According to the Canadian CIMIC officer at AFORHQ, never before in the history of Albanian railroads trains had been known to keep to their schedules as punctually as they seemed to be doing now. The general euphoria about this was dampened only by one problem. There turned out to be almost no refugees to board the trains. So far, in spite of the meticulous planning, the organised repatriation seemed to be missing its point. According to the Canadian officer this might be caused mainly by the military's lack of humanitarian expertise:

> The military have too little humanitarian expertise. (...) We don't know how the refugees think. We know now they don't want to be repatriated by train, because they are not on the trains. We are good at logistics. Never before have the trains in Albania kept to their schedules. We planned transit points at Mjede. That is convenient, because of lots of open space for the buses and trucks to park. No refugees showed themselves. Apparently, they want to be near a town when boarding a train. Mjede is no town. Also it appears they need more room for their stuff. On the trains there is no room.

To compensate for this lack of humanitarian expertise the Canadian officer suggested that instead of devoting lots of time and energy into planning and talking to high-ranking officials, the military should focus on cooperation with civilian relief workers and local authorities. According to him, civilian actors at the operational level only know about the actual living environment and needs of the refugees, because they live and work under the same circumstances:

> Civil-military planning of activities is a problem. AFOR relies on higher policy levels for assessment, but the trouble is, you can only find out what is needed by talking to the people on the ground. Talking with representatives from Geneva is of no use. They are too far away from reality.

From the observations of the Canadian officer, it may be concluded that during repatriation within the EMG civil-military cooperation between AFOR, UNHCR and representatives of the Albanian government had taken place. These collaborating parties were agreed on the absolute priority of organised repatriation. They felt that in this way the interests of both the Kosovar refugees and the host country were best protected. The Kosovar refugees, on the other hand, who did not participate in this alliance, seem to have perceived reality from a different perspective altogether. In their view, organised repatriation would have meant they would have to stay in the camps for a longer time, whereas they would only be allowed to take a limited amount of luggage. Therefore, they preferred to arrange their own means of transportation and leave whenever it suited them best.

Interaction between the EMG transportation desk and representatives of the refugees or the supporting NGOs did not exist. As a result, staff at the transportation desk were not aware of the refugees' perspective on repatriation, nor were they able to anticipate on the refugees' courses of action. This, in its turn, frustrated the interests, motives and needs of the parties involved in the EMG-interface, who were getting increasingly annoyed with the behaviour of refugees and the NGOs that supported them.

Another consequence of the lack of interaction between the parties involved in spontaneous versus organised repatriation was the deterioration of the relationship between the transportation desk and the WFP. In spite of the fact the refugees were making far less use than expected of the appointed facilities, members of the transportation desk of the EMG held on to their initial planning. As a result, they had to reject many requests for logistical support by WFP. Meanwhile, the empty trucks waiting in vain for the arrival of refugees did not escape the attention of the WFP-officers, who perceived reality from yet another point of view. Due to the shortage of transport facilities their feeding pipe lines to Kukes were becoming endangered. Since the refugees had rented most commercial means of transport, the WFP became increasingly dependent on military support. According to the WFP-officers the transportation desk at the EMG was "virtually run by AFOR". Therefore, they were holding AFOR responsible for their troubles at Kukes:

> In the beginning AFOR gave a lot of help. Ever since the organised repatriation started, however, they have rejected many requests for transport capacity. I don't understand why AFOR is this pigheaded. They have the capacity for moving 3,000 people a day. They are only moving 800. That means they have capacity to spare for food transports. The thing is, they want to stick to their planning, even though their trucks are empty.

According to the officers of the WFP the military were not fully committed to their job of supporting the aid organisations. They felt the military were bureaucratic and unable to change their planning, even if reality dictated change. The CIMIC-officer at the EMG transportation desk was getting increasingly irritated. Although in the first weeks he praised the WFP for being 'the best international organisation'during repatriation, he complained about the lack of understanding and the single-mindedness of representatives of the UN food organisation.

During operation Allied Harbour there were many instances in which civil-military co-operation was considered a success by both sets of partners. However, the actors involved varied widely with respect to their motives, interests and the goals to be achieved. Because of these discontinuities, multi-actor cooperation was to a large extent dependent on the actors' expertise in conflict management. To complicate matters even more, due to the dynamic context of the operation the demands for help shifted considerably over a short period of time.

In order to be able to fulfil the demands for receiving and accommodating refugees, different sets of actors with different skills, expertise and knowledge are required than those needed in case of repatriation or rehabilitation of affected area in the host country. As a consequence, alliances that may have been appropriate during one phase of the operation are not necessarily identical to those needed in subsequent phases.

In the following section we discuss some of the causes and characteristics of civil-military alliances.

3.   On the causes and characteristics of civil-military alliances

Civil-military cooperation does not occur naturally. The military and civilian organisations represent different interests and are backed by different resources. Besides, both sets of parties will be differentiated in terms of power. Because of discontinuities such as these, alliances between the military and civilian organisations will be conflictuous by nature (Long, 1989).

By no means does civil-military cooperation constitute an exception with regard to other interorganisational alliances. Sociologists introduced the concept of *antagonistic co-operation* to describe one of the more prominent characteristics of interorganisational relationships. With it they refer to interorganisational processes that occur notwithstanding the many conflictuous elements between fundamentally differing parties. Based on this view, interorgani-

sational alliances will be viable to the extent that the cooperating partners are able to recognise and accept their differences and conflicts of interest (Lammers et al., 1997).

The questions arise as to why civilian actors and the military may decide to cooperate and by what characteristics these alliances can be described. In their study on interorganisational cooperation Pfeffer and Salancik have introduced the *resource dependency perspective* (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). According to these authors organisations that are either dependent on the same resources or else are sequentially connected may decide upon a strategy of collaboration to strengthen their position in the market and to increase their independence with regard to suppliers or competitors in their line of business. Whether interorganisational cooperation will indeed take place also depends on the attendance of potential partners and on the market share of the lead-organisations in a specific line of business.

According to their theory, civil-military cooperation will occur to the extent that both sets of organisations are dependent on the same scarce resources. Secondly, for cooperation to take place the parties should be sequentially connected. Thirdly, a sufficient number of potential partners –neither too few, nor too many- should be present. Usually, at the beginning of a humanitarian operation, there will only be a limited number of humanitarian organisations present. Often, they will lack the coping capacity needed to solve the problems. Therefore, at this stage the military may be regarded as indispensable partners. Finally, in a situation in which their market share enables the leading organisations to control the market, cooperation would not be deemed necessary, since these organisations would consider themselves to be highly independent already. However, in the early stages of a humanitarian operation even institutional pillars in the humanitarian field such as the UN-organisations and influential NGOs seem to lack sufficient means and methods to deal with the consequences of humanitarian disasters on their own. Therefore, fourthly, civil-military cooperation will be facilitated when the market share of the leading organisations in the field is tending towards the average.

During humanitarian operations there are many instances in which civilian organisations and the military alike are depending on the same scarce resources. For example, both sets of parties may need drivers and trucks in order to distribute relief goods, to move patients to a hospital or to relocate refugees. By cooperating on transportation, not only may both sets of parties be able to reach their goals but also synergetic effects may enable them to do so even sooner.

There are also occasions in which civilian organisations or the military depend on their partners' output in order to be able to perform their own jobs. For instance, due to the deterioration of the security situation NGOs may be dependent on the military to protect their food convoys. In order to provide appropriate protection the military in turn may feel the need for additional information on indigenous groups to be supplied by the NGOs.

It can be concluded, firstly, that any civil-military alliance will to some level be characterised by interdependency with regard to reaching the goals. In line with this characteristic, Mijs (1987: 48-61) states interdependency will only result in interorganisational cooperation, under the condition that the partners to the alliance are aware of their interdependence. In other words, this author distinguishes between a kind of objective interdependence –obvious to all the world- and more subjective feelings of interdependence. Only when both sets of parties are able to actually recognise their interdependencies, will actions towards cooperation be taken.

Secondly, in civil-military alliances both sets of partners will be aware of their mutual dependencies. An example was provided during camp construction in Albania. UNHCR and UNICEF were highly dependent on military support to be able to shelter the refugees. At first, the military constructed the camps according to their own military standards. From the perspective of the UN-aid organisations the 'long rows of tents' lacked communal spirit,

child-friendly spaces, etc. Only after consultation with UNHCR and UNICEF, did the military become aware of the sort of camps refugees needed. From that moment on, according to a representative of UNICEF, civil-military cooperation on camp-construction turned out to be a success:

> The help from the military was necessary to increase the shelter capacity. Once we explained the standards they followed them accurately. We secured an arrangement that all new camps would have child friendly spaces, education and recreation, social services and mother and child health care available. A Dutch officer designed playground materials, went into Durrës and got the designs made. I'm sure that if the refugees had stayed over winter, there would have been many more projects like that.

During humanitarian operations the civilian and military parties involved often have little or no previous experience with collaboration. Although the awareness of certain interdependencies may result in tentative alliances, cooperation itself may generate another kind of dependency upon the unknown partners' cooperating behaviour. In other words, collaboration with a relatively unknown partner will increase uncertainty. In order to decrease high levels of uncertainty the partners' behaviour has to become more predictable to some extent. Clearly defined domains are one way by which representatives of the partner-organisation become more predictable. A domain is defined as 'the organisation's locus in the interorganisational field, including its manifest goals and its channels of access to task and maintenance resources' (Warren, Rose & Bergunder, 1974).

Domain consensus constitutes the third characteristic of civil-military alliances. By way of domain consensus both sets of partners are able to define more or less clearly the issues on which they may cooperate and the limits to their shared endeavours as well as the ways in which tasks and responsibilities are to be divided.

Next to interdependency and domain consensus, civil-military structures should be characterised by yet another element to be able to cope with the consequences of humanitarian disasters. Webb (1996: 288-301) suggests the magnitude of a crisis and the importance of trust are positively linked, because of the substantial levels of uncertainty that each crisis appears to evoke. Moreover, crisis conditions increase the chance of cognitive and organisational errors. Dependency on others is greater during crises and with that dependency go premiums on determining trustworthy people and trustworthy coping methods. Civil-military alliances should be characterised by trust, because only when a certain level of trust has developed may civilian and military partners dare to depend on one another in situations entailing risks.

Based on the above, we suggest civilian actors and the military will form alliances because, taken on their own, both sets of partners lack the coping capacity to reach their goals. To bring this about, first of all, a sufficient number of potential partners should be available and the market share of the leading organisations should tend towards the average. Moreover, civil-military alliances should at least be characterised by interdependency for achieving their goals. Secondly, civilian and military partners alike have to be aware of their interdependencies. Because the partners to the alliance usually have no former experience in working together, measures will be taken to increase the unknown partner's predictability. Therefore, thirdly, civil-military alliances will be characterised by a certain level of domain consensus. Finally, in order to cope with high levels of uncertainty and dependence induced by crises, mutual trust is needed to be able to take level amount of risk.

In the following section we discuss the coherence of these characteristics from the point of view of civilian actors and their effects on civil-military alliances.

4.   Limitations to civil-military cooperation

According to the Oslo Guidelines military assets are deployed "to provide specific support to specific requirements, in response to the acknowledged gap between the disaster needs that the relief community is being asked to satisfy and the resources available to meet them" (UNDHA, 1994). Thus, many are agreed that the use of military assets to assist in the humanitarian sphere is designed to supplement, rather than supplant the work of traditional humanitarian agencies.

Minear and Guillot (1996) have stated that from a functional standpoint military assets can make three major kinds of contributions. Firstly, the military can work to foster a protective framework of overall stability within which civilian populations are protected and humanitarian activities are carried out. Secondly, the military can support the humanitarian organisations with logistics, personnel, engineering, security advice, etc. Thirdly, the military can carry out relief activities themselves, often referred to as *civic action.*

During the field research of the first author in Albania in 1999 representatives of international aid organisations argued the armed forces (AFOR) were engaged in yet another kind of contribution, namely the organisation and coordination of humanitarian activities.

Deployment of the military in order to foster security and protection for civilian populations and humanitarian organisations is generally regarded to fall within the military domain. Civilian actors seem to be aware of the importance of some level of safety and stability to be able to perform their humanitarian tasks. Military protection will often be accepted, for, when faced with violence, the coping capacity of civilian organisations in general fails to meet the requirements and there seems to be little doubt about the military expertise in this area.

The same can be said about military tasks involving the support of humanitarian organisations and the governments of host countries. As we explained in the previous section, during the early stages of the humanitarian operation civilian aid organisations and the authorities in host countries usually are in great need of additional military support. Therefore, many civilian actors stress the importance of a timely military presence. As at this stage of the operation both the military and civilian actors seem to be aware of their interdependencies some level of domain consensus in these two areas of contributions can usually be reached.

However, domain consensus should not be mistaken for a change in attitude towards the military, nor should it be confused with trust, in the sense of fostering positive feelings about the partner's organisation. As studies among relief-workers in Tuzla and Haiti in 1997 have shown, most relief-workers recognised the need for arms to protect themselves and the local population, but at the same time refused or were not able to carry out these tasks themselves (Miller, 1997). Although they accepted the deployment of the military in order to ameliorate the security situation, they did not change their negative attitudes towards the military on the job. This paradox is explained by the concept of *dirty work.* By transferring the necessary but dirty work to the military, relief workers were able to think positively about the use of military support to guarantee safety and protection. At the same time they could adhere to their negative opinions about the military personnel performing these tasks and the organisation they represented.

Based on the above, it can be assumed civilian actors may want to keep on cooperating with the military as long as they feel the need for protection and additional support.

As the humanitarian operation continues, the specific demands for support may change, and the number of civilian aid-organisations usually increases. Both changes in demand and support appear to affect the earlier dependence on additional military resources. As the need for civil-military cooperation seems to be mainly demand-driven, civil-military alliances may cease to be of much use from a civilian point of view, when the military are not able to adapt soon enough to the changing context (supposing the security situation does not deteriorate).

Military deployment on the other hand, is a political matter. To end a military mission decision-making processes at political levels are required. To complicate matters, political considerations may not always be in step with the situation in the humanitarian field and besides, political decision-making may take any amount of time. As a result, in situations when their civilian partners no longer seem to have much use for them, military commanders in the field may find themselves faced with serious problems in keeping their men and women employed. It is at this point that the military may take recourse to projects in the field of civic action.

As a rule, civilian aid-organisations will be critical of military initiatives in civic action. Firstly, according to many civilian actors, supplying direct aid traditionally belongs to the domain of humanitarian organisations. Thus, by providing direct aid the military may be viewed as trespassing. Secondly, moreover, the military are often regarded to be lacking the necessary humanitarian expertise to do the job properly.

In an interview held in Tirana in 1999 a relief worker of Merlin described the way in which the American military and Merlin clashed on the degree of medical care needed in camp Hope. According to her, the army doctors wanted to provide the refugees with medical care around the clock. In her opinion, however, such standards were unheard of in this part of the world and besides the refugees were not used to such care at home. Moreover, the suggested standard of medical care in the refugee camp contrasted sharply with the state of the Albanians in neighbouring villages, which fuelled their feelings of animosity towards the Kosovar refugees. The relief worker stated that whereas cooperation with the military on camp construction had been useful, they obviously lacked the humanitarian experience needed in relief programmes.

Thirdly, many civilian actors object to the military's reluctance to timely transfer their services to NGOs or local institutions before their mission expires. Civilian aid organisations will even be opposed to the military extending their own facilities for medical or dental care to the refugees or the local population, because, according to them, the continuation of such facilities cannot be guaranteed.

Fourthly, military initiatives on civic action may be regarded as unfair competition to NGOs. Even more so, when the military are believed to make use of financial resources from the same donor organisations the NGOs depend on. Finally, many civilian organisations are convinced that contributions in the area of civic action keep the military from performing their core-business, such as apprehending war criminals, confiscating illegal arms and protecting civilians.

From a military point of view, however, civic action is believed to create goodwill with the population and local authorities. This may increase the level of acceptance of the military presence at local level, which in its turn may have positive effects on force protection. Moreover, due to the nature of the small-scale projects the military are able to intermingle with the local population or even with refugees. Direct contacts of this kind often seem to have bolstering effects upon the motivation.

Military initiatives in crisis management may be even harder to digest for many civilian organisations. For one reason, by lending a hand to the management of the crisis the military may be regarded to be attempting to make policy instead of restricting themselves to a supporting role only. Military involvement with the coordination and organisation of the operation are likely to evoke high levels of distrust. Civilian actors may suspect the military of trying to take their responsibilities away from them, which adds to their fears that their humanitarian approach to problem solving may become jeopardised by military planning and logistics. In an interview the office-manager of the WFP remarked:

> In Albania there was no coordination on the side of the government. That is because
> AFOR played such a prominent role in the EMG. Instead of supporting functions only,

AFOR was also into policy-making. They took over responsibilities from UNHCR. UNHCR were planning with the government for voluntary repatriation, but AFOR had already set up a logistical plan. They just took the initiative away from UNHCR and we all saw how that worked out.

Military involvement in crisis management is viewed as cutting through the historical roles of the UN-organisations responsible for the refugees and the coordination of humanitarian activities. In line with this, representatives of UN-organisations may fear that close contacts between the military and the government of a host country on crisis management will have a negative effect upon their own influence with these authorities. The fact that host country authorities often have an axe to grind, which at some point may become contrary to the interests and goals international aid organisations strive at, only adds to this anxiety.

The lack of confidence in the military's motives for involvement in crisis management, compounded by the fears regarding their own position, will prohibit many civilian actors from admitting to any dependency on military support in this field. As a consequence, even when civilian actors are complaining that the lack of effective coordination and control interferes with their working methods and goals, this does not mean civilian organisations will accept military initiatives to fill the gaps.

From a military point of view playing an active role in crisis management by organising or coordinating relief activities may accelerate the operation as a whole, thereby promoting the chances of success of the humanitarian operation. Besides, by participating in the management of the crisis, the course of the humanitarian operation may become more predictable. As a consequence, the military may be better able to anticipate on the demands for their support, which may improve the effectiveness of the military mission.

In summary, without the – awareness of - interdependence, domain consensus and trust, civil-military alliances will not be viable. The extent to which these characteristics will develop in civil-military alliances seems to be dependent on two conditions. Firstly, the humanitarian operation can be distinguished in different phases, during which demands for help and the influx of civilian agencies may shift considerably. As a consequence, interdependencies will fluctuate. Secondly, the kind of contributions the military engage in during the operation can either inspire or impede the development of trust. From a civilian point of view military initiatives in the fields of civic action and crisis management will often prohibit the development of interdependence and domain consensus. It is to be expected that in these areas civil-military alliances will be severely impeded. On the other hand, as long as the military concentrate on protection and the assistance of civilian actors, while adhering to a facilitating and supportive role, many civilian organisations will be in favour of cooperating with them and will continue to do so. In the next section we look into some ways for deciding the kind of alliances that are important.

5. Some contextual notes on how to decide which alliances are important

Up to this point we have spoken of civil-military alliances as though they consisted of basically two sets of parties, namely civilian actors and the military. In practice, however, the situation in the humanitarian field is far less homogenous. For instance, NGOs vary widely with respect to their grass-roots ideologies, their operating cultures and the motives and interests they represent. Some NGOs are non-governmental indeed; others are to a large extent supported by governments and public authorities (Aall, 1996). Despite the fact that during the nineties the humanitarian relief industry grew into a booming line of business there are also limits. Although the increase in humanitarian operations has raised the demands for NGOs, they are mostly employed in the same target sectors, such as transport and logistics, camp construction, basic medical care and hygiene. In other words, many NGOs find

themselves on overlapping domains. As a consequence, competition among the various NGOs is not an unknown phenomenon. In combination with their diverging goals and interests, this has resulted in turf battles, complicating the sharing of information and coordination of humanitarian activities.

Throughout the nineties, UN-aid organisations have faced serious problems concerning the tuning in of their responsibilities. Coordinating the various demands for assistance and sampling or distributing of information among members of the UN-family has proved to be extremely difficult. In order to improve the UN reaction to humanitarian disasters and other emergencies that surpassed the coping capacity of any single agency, in 1992 the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) was established. However, in 1996 the UN was again criticised sharply for their response to the humanitarian crisis in Rwanda. Amongst others, they were blamed for their lack of coordinating power and for the uncooperative attitude UN-organisations adopted towards each other (Steering Committee, 1996). In July 1998 the Office superseded DHA for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). According to the Albanian authorities, however, getting the UN-organisations to share their information during operation Allied Harbour, still proved to be 'one of the major problems in managing the crisis'[1]. From the above it can be concluded that with regard to civilian actors also, interorganisational cooperation does not seem to come naturally.

The multitude of interests, motives and objectives civilian actors strive at, may make it difficult for the military to decide which partners they should form alliances with. Usually, those alliances will be considered important that will best satisfy the needs for additional resources and complementary expertise, decrease the costs and risks of the parties involved, as well as offer possibilities for economies of scale and scope (Nohria & Eccles, 1992). These conditions will bolster the collaborating partners in their perception of being partakers of a win-win situation. A situation such as this is, by definition, beneficial to the inter-organisational network as a whole.

However, civil-military alliances are not only about the job that has to be done. They are also about representatives of different social environments coming into contact. In fact, many of the problems that arise between sets of civilian and military partners seem to be hardly task-related at all. Instead, they seem to arise from different sets of cultural, political and normative values that are mirrored in diverging motives, goals and views on humanitarian operations. Once the emergency job has been done the pressure on performance lessens and civil-military partnerships become less task-oriented. At this point actor-related discontinuities between both sets of partners may become more visible, causing at least one of the parties to reconsider the desirability of prolonging the concerted action. Therefore, in deciding which alliances are important to reach humanitarian goals, it might be advisable to take both task- and actor-related aspects into account.

For instance, before embarking on an international humanitarian operation the military generally assess the emergency situation from a task-oriented perspective. Based on these assessments, the military may plan the deployment of personnel, materials and reinforcements. Another outcome of such an assessment, however, might be an actor analysis of the key players in the humanitarian field. Actor analyses should not only focus on the specific demands for military support, but also on the key actors' approach to the operation, their strengths and weaknesses, their motives for participating and on the ways in which they set about to reach their goals. Based on the outcomes of actor analyses the military may gain an insight into civilian expectations regarding the military role and behaviour, enabling them to anticipate on the cooperative intentions and attitudes towards the military support. Based on these actor analyses the unknown partners may become more predictable, which in its turn may enable the military to foresee potential problems in the field of cooperation and to timely adapt to these problems.

6.   Conclusions and recommendations

During humanitarian operations there are many instances in which civilians and the military are dependent on one another in order to reach their goals. Both sets of parties will decide to cooperate as long as they assume cooperation to be in their mutual best interest. However, as a result of structural fundamental differences between the military and their civilian counterparts alliances are bound to be fragile. Taken on their own, interdependencies generate too few safeguards to shield the collaborators from hidden agendas, self-interest or from their partners' opportunistic behaviour.

1.   Great importance should be attached to the transparency and accessibility of civil-military alliances to all partners. Therefore, structures for civil-military cooperation should be located 'outside the wire'.

Interdependencies for achieving their goals, the awareness of these mutual dependencies, a certain level of consensus concerning the humanitarian and military domains as well as a certain level of trust are characteristic of civil-military cooperation processes. At the beginning of a humanitarian operation the lack of resources and supporting structures, compounded by threat, time pressure and massive human suffering may intensify the awareness of the dependency on the military for additional support and protection. Likewise, on the military side there appears to be a need for additional humanitarian expertise.

2.   From a civilian point of view cooperation with the military is especially useful during the early stages of a crisis. Therefore, civil-military cooperation will benefit from a timely presence of the military mission that has complementary assets and expertise at its disposal.

After the emergency situation has been dealt with and some level of stabilisation sets in, civilian actors may become aware of the fact they are growing less dependent on the military for achieving their humanitarian objectives.

3.   Civil-military alliances appear to be essentially demand-driven. During the different stages of the operation demands may shift considerably. From a civilian perspective, cooperating with the military will cease to be of use when their military partners are not able to timely adapt to these changes.

Civil-military alliances are focussed on getting the job done. They need to work together to achieve shared goals. Therefore, interaction will be primarily task-oriented. However, at the same time, civil-military alliances consist of partners coming from different environments. At some point, shared goals are reached or else have become obsolete due to context shifts. As a result the task-oriented interaction may become less intensive. This may prevent civilian and military partners from experiencing shared positive outcomes. Hence, the level of trust may diminish, thereby hindering the partners to deal with actor-oriented discrepancies.

4.   Without intensive interaction, the extent to which partners to the alliance will foster positive expectations about each other will decrease. As a result, they may not be able to accept their actor-related differences as being natural and legitimate. However, if from the initial stages of cooperation onwards, civilian partners and the military were willing to make an effort to also meet after work, interaction in social settings might help to overcome problems caused by temporary lapses in task-oriented cooperation.

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Notes

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[1] Interviews conducted by Bollen with Mr Islami, special coordinator to the EMG, and Mr Mile, head of the EMG repatriation cell, Tirana, July 1999