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Not only troops for peace operations: Strengthening civilian capacities through training

The recent decision of the US administration to deploy 30.000 additional troops to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) renovates public interest over the multinational peace operation in Afghanistan. In facts, international politics' focus and media coverage, not to mention the mission's ambitious objective of bringing security to Afghanistan and eliminating terrorist safe heavens in the region, burden the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan with great significance and expectations. ISAF is however one, although one of the most challenging, of the 58 multilateral peace missions currently deployed all over the world, according to SIPRI, to restore peace, preserve fragile peace agreements, bring security or help local governments in post-conflict reconstruction. Most of these missions are not under the public spotlight, but yet are faced with great challenges. One of these has to do with the multidimensional character of most current peace operations, each of them being called to provide security and stability while at the same time designing and implementing peace building strategies. With such complex mandates, peace missions are ever more often composed of military, police and civilian components that must be able to both accomplish their component-specific tasks and coordinate/cooperate with each other and with other actors that might have a role in the area of operation. The need for "more predictable, professional and adaptable capacities [...] to match the global enterprise", to say it with the words of the UN DPKO is self evident. How to ensure the predictability, professionalism and adaptability of these capacities is instead under current scrutiny.

Being the civilian element the "newcomer" of the peace operations enterprise, the debate among practitioners and policymakers has focussed, in these past few years, on the urgent need to strengthen civilian capacities

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for peace operations as for the recruiting, deploying and above all the training of civilian experts. How to ensure that civilians serving in peace support operations have the skills and competences required to professionally coping with the responsibilities they are given? How to guarantee that civilians deployed by different international and regional organisations, and by different national governments within these organisations, have the same understanding of and ability to perform their mandate and to work in an integrated manner?

There is a clear recognition within UN, regional organizations as well as sub-regional international organisations and national governments of the importance of harmonizing training activities for civilian personnel of peace support operations. The UN Secretary-General report on peacebuilding of July 2009 contains only the most recent recommendation to the UN system and the international community to work towards the development of common training standards. The EU efforts to harmonising training and recruiting procedure among its member States through the work of the European Group of Training as well as the considerable support given to the African Union for the training of its peace support civilian capacities offer an evidence of a similar activism at the level of regional organisations. As initiatives in this direction are in continuous development, there seems to be a genuine interest in giving a systematic response to some of the major internal challenges to peace operations, waiting for the external ones to be addressed on a more day-to-day basis.

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