

# CIMIC from the Aid Organisations' Perspective \*

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## 1. Introduction

A bridge like, for instance, the one across the Hollands Diep (a formidable estuary, separating the north-western provinces from the south of the Netherlands) is seen by aid organisations as a public road, making it possible to travel from south to north. In other words: a public utility for general use; a civilian property, therefore. Seen through the eyes of the military, this same bridge is a military, strategic target to be defended or attacked; which goes to show that one and the same physical object can be viewed entirely differently.

Writing about civil-military cooperation from the perspective of aid organisations is not an easy task. Aid organisations regard reality differently than the military, and the last thing they will do is regard it in terms of the military or from a military viewpoint. Aid organisations are not directed at military targets, much less do they use military strategies aimed at defence and security. They are directed at victims and the possibilities for helping helping those victims.

What the military see as a humanitarian action differs, at least at first sight, widely from a humanitarian action presented on TV by a number of cooperating aid organisations. Carpet bombing in Kosovo and Belgrade has a humanitarian objective and is therefore defined by the military as a humanitarian action, which it is. Aid organisations are puzzled by such a characterisation. They feel violence and help to victims do not go well together. On the contrary, a social worker does not go to a problem family wearing battle fatigues. By presenting him/herself in that outfit, his/her aid mission would be a failure at the outset.

However, aid organisations and the military are dependent on each other. Both operate in conflict situations and both are confronted with violence and violations of human rights. Before going into the details of the cooperation between the military and the aid organisations, it is important to elaborate somewhat further on the differences between the two institutions. This will give us an insight into the reason why cooperation, which is not so evident at first sight, is essential for the success of humanitarian actions, and this insight will give us the opportunity to improve future civil-military cooperation.

## 2. Differences between aid organisations and the military

### 2.1 Target group and impartiality

As indicated above, the target groups are different. The military speak of the enemy, who attacks or who commits genocide, or, even more generally, violates human rights in a violent manner: *the good guys* who have to be protected and *the bad guys* who have to be overcome.

The aid organisations are directed at the victims, and it does not matter to them whether they fall on this side or the other. Victims of war, by definition, never fall among one fighting party only, but among all parties. The aid organisations want to reach and help ALL civilian victims, although that is often impossible. Thus, Cordaid does not only want to reach Albanian Kosovars, but also Serb Kosovars. It supports Serb refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Its help is not impartial, but where it concerns victims, it is. The aid supply of

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\* The present text is a translated and slightly adapted version of an address delivered by the author during the conference 'Zwaarden en ploegsscharen?' [Swords as well as Ploughshares?], On the desirability of Civil-Military Cooperation; Driebergen, 1999.

humanitarian organisations does not distinguish between *the good guys* and *the bad guys*. It is really about relief to all victims.

## **2.2 The strategic difference**

Aid organisations do not define their strategies in terms of the territorial defence of a country or the international legal order as do the military, who are equipped for using violence if necessary. Aid organisations think in terms of aid to victims and have geared their management strategies to that end: what has to be done today, in a material and immaterial sense, to keep victims alive; what is required tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. Aid organisations do not resort to violence and among them it is even accepted to say that violence is counter-productive to relief. After all, fire attracts fire, and aggression spawns aggression.

In the daily practice of humanitarian operations another strategic difference can be discerned. The military are equipped in a material sense to carry out their mission in all sorts of circumstances. They have packages ready, as it were, irrespective of the circumstances on the spot. Whether it concerns a dressing station or a field kitchen, the materials are ready for use, only to be flown in to whatever destination in the world.

Aid organisations, in contrast, are much more reactive in nature. In order to relieve the needs of the victims, they will use local means. If these means are available on the spot, they will be used there. Aid organisations organise their aid in such a way that victims can cook their own food on their own fire or stove. In African camps victims build their own cabins, with the aid organisation only delivering the cheaper plastic sheets.

The big strategic difference in every-day practice is the humanitarian actions of the military, mentioned above. Aid organisations are demand-driven, they use the possibilities that the victims and their environment have. The military are supply-driven, which is a major difference in approach.

## **2.3 Difference in objectives**

How can victims regain their self-respect, so that they can begin to work again on their development and society as quickly as possible, without our support: that is our objective as aid organisations. The objective of the military is subsidiary to the political objectives of the government they work for. In the Dutch constitution the primary task of the military is:

*to ensure the external safety, i.e. the defence of the national and allied territory.*

Since the establishment of the United Nations, and in the context of an advancing globalisation, a second important task has been added:

*the protection and implementation of the international legal order within the framework of a supra-national authority, in casu the UN.*

As a government institution the military are subordinate to the political objectives. Aid organisations are independent and directed at societal objectives.

## **2.4 The statutory difference**

Aid organisations are not government institutions like the military. They are independent private institutions and they wish to remain so for more than one reason. Nine out of ten victims of war are civilians and not military. Aid organisations do not want to be government instruments, and because of their objectives and strategies, they cannot be. The military are a government institution; aid organisations like Cordaid are private initiatives. The military

work with government money, non-governmental organisations, for a considerable part, work with gifts.

### **3. Cooperation between armed forces and aid organisations**

Aid organisations and armed forces meet when they are carrying out their humanitarian missions, whether they are of a civilian or military nature. They need each other, and they can help each other. Their differences, however, create dilemmas that have to be solved.

#### **3.1 Safety**

In order to ship aid goods to the right place and target group, accessibility to an area is a prerequisite. The local employees of Cordaid do not venture into a minefield. The aid organisations count on the military – green berets or blue berets, that does not make a difference – to guarantee their safety. Cordaid will never send its personnel to victims, armed with a pistol in their pockets or a rifle slung over their shoulders. Help is not achieved with physical violence, on the contrary: it will frighten victims off. Delivering a sack of rice in an armoured vehicle creates confusion. Victims, who because of the violence have left their hearths and homes, do not want to be helped by an institution, in this case the military, that comes up to them in an armoured vehicle.

And still: what if it cannot be done otherwise? What if victims cannot be reached because of the immediate proximity of warring factions? Should we leave the victims to fend for themselves or should we call in the armoured vehicle? Experience shows that this sort of situation does not occur very often. My view on this dilemma is as follows: necessity knows no law, but make sure it is an exception.

#### **3.2 Logistic cooperation**

I began my presentation with an example of the bridge across the Hollands Diep. Large infrastructural objectives such as bridges, sea and air ports, main roads, etc., are necessary from a logistical point of view to transport aid goods and humanitarian workers to the areas in which the victims are. Such infrastructural artifacts have often been demolished by the warring factions because of their military strategic importance. This makes it impossible to get the aid goods to the victims.

The present employment of the military on the airport of Tirana is an important support for the aid organisations in their attempts to get their aid goods transported. Where do we draw the line with regard to the employment of armed forces for the benefit of relief to victims?

The aid organisations can handle a great deal in the way of logistics. They are capable - and have been for a number of years now - of realising Operation Lifeline, without any support from the military. Lifeline is an airlift operation that has saved the lives of many Sudanese people. Aid organisations do not knock at the military's door just like that. Only when we are faced with acute shortages and no cheaper alternatives can be found at short notice, do we appeal to the military for their support.

Within the context of the present-day privatisation tendency, it is not at all obvious to call in the help of the military. Private enterprises or aid organisations are also involved in public works in peacetime. So why not in times of war? Oxfam may serve as an example. This organisation has specialised, among others, in the construction of water supplies for large groups of refugees, as, for instance, in the Great Lakes area and in Albania today. The actions of Cordaid – the supply of thousands of cubic tons of food and other aid goods – were realised without the help from the military.

It is, however, possible to give a converse argumentation: as the military have already been equipped for this kind of major infrastructural work and for logistic support, why not work

together and make use of each other's capabilities? Why should private organisations invest in expensive means of transport to realise these tasks, while the military have it all ready. 'Make use of the capabilities of the military', the argument goes.

There is something to be said for this, even if it is an upside-down reasoning. Following it, we soon find ourselves in the discussion that Achterhuis (1981) describes in his book *De markt van welzijn en geluk* [The market of well-being and happiness]. This approach leads to the question that Achterhuis posed to the international aid organisations: Do institutions preserve themselves, irrespective of their mission or objectives? They are equipped with their specific capabilities and means, but they preserve themselves more for their own sake than for realising their objectives. Not for nothing have I stressed several times in this address that for aid organisations the help to victims comes first. A help that is directed at the victims picking up their own development as quickly and in as large numbers as possible. It must not be so that we help victims because we have the means to do so, on the contrary: we need means because we want to help victims. Should such a question on institutionalisation not be posed to the military? Is the objective not made subordinate to the available means in the upside-down argumentation?

When we talk about the means with which the military are equipped, a second question immediately forces itself upon us: how available is the material of the military? I have just applauded the employment of the military on Tirana airfield. But for a few weeks now the preparations for the military campaign into Kosovo have been in progress, and we are now a few days into the actual campaign itself. In circumstances like these, aid organisations have a hard time getting the military to arrange food transports for refugees in Northern Albania. The military operation has the priority. For the aid organisations, however, the victims in Northern Albania are a priority, too, even if they cannot appeal for help to the military right now. The trucks are needed for the transport of soldiers and materials, in other words, they are not available for food transport for the refugees.

A closer cooperation and a better tuning seem more than desirable. The question is, how far this cooperation must be carried through. What are the limits? Under which circumstances and in which form must the cooperation be realised? These questions take us right to the heart of the debate on civil-military cooperation. Within the framework of this conference I would like to go into two aspects of this cooperation. The objectives of the military, or in the words of Professor van Iersel, the ambitions, and the conditions.

#### **4. Aspects of cooperation**

##### **4.1 The ambitions of the military**

Just like individual civilians, an aid organisation has an interest in armed forces that *ensure external safety, i.e. the defence of the national and allied territory*. As an aid organisation it matters very much to us to have safe access to the areas where the victims are. Therefore, the second objective of the military, which I mentioned above, is equally important to us: *the protection and implementation of the international legal order, preferably within the framework of a supra-national authority, in casu the UN*.

Aid organisations often have to operate in extremely perilous circumstances, in which personal safety is hardly ever guaranteed. On more than one occasion, many of my colleagues and I, as relief workers, have stared death in the face. When this happened there were no armed forces for miles around. In war situations such as these, protection of civilians, and consequently relief workers, by the military is insufficient. The safety objective of the military with regard to civilians should have priority, in my view. After all, let us not forget that nine out of ten victims are civilian and only one in ten military. If we, as aid organisations, can do our bit to diminish the number of victims, we are quite willing to do that. Cooperation

between aid organisations and the military to enhance the safety of civilians is a challenge that we must meet.

There is a second important reason why I, as a relief worker, would like to discuss the ambitions of the military. Both organisations operate in the same field, namely that of humanitarian aid. They both claim a certain share of that market and in many areas the humanitarian task of the military is complementary to that of the aid organisations. More and more, however, we are ending up in the grey areas where our activities overlap.

Why should the military not make themselves more useful, especially in times when the main tasks with regard to protection and security are making fewer demands on them. This would mean killing two birds with the same stone: an optimal employment of means, available anyway, and, simultaneously, the useful employment of the military for the benefit of aid to victims. Such a point of view is quite understandable from a psychological and sociological perspective. Once this road has been chosen, it stands to reason that, from an institutional angle, this orientation is preserved and, if necessary, improved. By placing the military in a global peace environment, the change-over to what Van Iersel calls the “civilising” of the military is rather small.<sup>1</sup>

However attractive this train of thought may seem – especially for pacifists - a number of criticisms with regard the civilian supply of aid by the military are justified.

#### **4.2 Every man to his trade**

In the Outline Letter of this conference an example is given (on p. 15), in which the military have appropriated the task of helping problem youths. Allow me to discuss in some detail a personal experience from Tuzla, Bosnia-Herzegovina, in 1994. The refugee camp had been established on the runway of the local military airfield under the protection of Dutch UN troops. The Lieutenant Colonel of the Dutch contingent offered to take over an orphanage that his men had renovated with great enthusiasm. Cordaid already had a programme for orphans in the town of Tuzla, 6 kilometres away. This programme was directed at placing the children in guest families, so not at accommodating them in an orphanage. There was this beautifully renovated orphanage, but no orphans. After consulting the mayor of Tuzla we found an alternative destination for the building, but it took extra expenses to make it suitable for the reception of families that up to that moment had been accommodated in tents.

This example begs several critical questions of the type that we, as professional aid workers, ask ourselves every day:

- Renovation of an orphanage: why and on whose initiative?
- Who is going to pay for the long-term running costs of such a home?
- Has there been a comparative cost-benefit analysis with regard to alternatives?
- Is an orphanage the most sensible solution for orphans from a pedagogical perspective?
- Who is going to manage such an orphanage, provided it is the least objectionable solution?
- How does an initiative like this relate to the policy and managerial capacity of the local organisation or of the local authorities?

In other words, when initiating humanitarian activities, the fact that there are people willing to make an effort and material is available, is certainly not enough to guarantee that those activities will produce an adequate answer to alleviate the needs of victims. Apart from an insight into the managerial and policy aspects, humanitarian aid presupposes a professional know-how of the short-and long-term aspects. The above example shows that the military are/were inadequately equipped with regard to these aspects.

Humanitarian aid is not, as is often suggested, a logistical operation, in which all victims receive shelter, a lump of bread, a bowl of soup and an aspirin. Professional know-how of

nutrition, health, expenses, control, local capacities, local policies, etc., are most certainly of equal importance in humanitarian actions. Respect the professionalism of the aid worker. We, the aid workers, do not feel an urge to tell the military how to conduct their operations. The professional know-how of aid organisations, I venture to say, is not by definition to be found in the backpacks of the military.

### **4.3 Societal construction also in crisis situations**

In the strategic policy framework of *Pax Christi* this aspect of humanitarian aid is described as 'local capacities for peace'.<sup>2</sup> Is it possible, I ask myself, for a government institution to support (local) private organisations in such a manner that they are and remain instruments that contribute to the functioning of an open democratic society, in which law and order have the best chance of success. The government is not society, it only represents a fraction of the whole of that society. Who exclusively works with the government in Goma (Congo) will soon find out that the social reality in the Kivu is quite different from what the government would like us to believe. The Non-Governmental Organisations take part in constructing a democratic society. Societal construction, seen in this light, comes down to reinforcing the local capacities for the sake of peace and maintaining peace.

Conversely, the question is, whether there is not a very great chance of the military employment in humanitarian activities blocking the development opportunities of private organisations, eventually leading to a civilian society modelled along military lines?

Politically speaking, the construction of local capacities is essential in shaping the sense of societal responsibility of the individual citizen. Environmental organisations, human rights organisations, but also interest groups such as trade unions and employers' unions constitute an important pillar in our society. Non-Governmental Organisations like Cordaid see it as one of their objectives to support these organisations and to reinforce them. In crisis situations, too, Cordaid, apart from alleviating the direct needs of victims in the Albanian Human Rights Center, brings up the matter of the violation of human rights in Kosovo and supports the women who have been raped. This does not seem to me to be an objective of a government institution like the military.

What, then, can the ambitions of the military be with regard to CIMIC? On the basis of the above I would like to make the following delimitation:

- The humanitarian task of the military with regard to civilian victims should be reactive. If there is no demand from the side of the victims themselves and/or the aid organisations or the local authorities, then do not deliver it. The fact that there is a supply of aid, does not necessarily mean there is a well-founded demand.
- Even if there is a demand for aid, there is still excellence in restraint. Extending effective aid to victims in an efficient manner can only be realised when the necessary professional know-how is there. Good intentions do not always yield the desired result.
- The humanitarian task of the military is supportive and not initiating. In the light of the political context of durable peace, i.e. a societal construction in which democratic rights and peace are essential, it goes without saying that the military adopt a helpful stance, not only towards the local authorities but also towards civilian initiative, in order for the 'local capacities for peace' to be fully realised.

The financial policy of the government with regard to the civilian tasks of the military should, in my opinion, be placed within the context of these three limitations. As these government resources are limited they should be used professionally and efficiently.

## **5. Conditions for civil and military cooperation**

- a. I will be brief about the conditions in the present context. It is of importance that the aid organisations as well as the military fully realise that both organisations not only have their own statutes, but also totally unique cultures. Regulations and procedures are completely different in both organisations. Authority and responsibilities are structured much more hierarchically than in the world of the NGOs. Such cultural and procedural differences do not always enhance good cooperation. Respect for each other's own identity and position is the basis for a good cooperation.
- b. A second condition is of a completely different nature and often meets with a lack of understanding from the military. Concrete help is not effective with a truncheon. The cooperation between 'Médecins sans Frontières' and the military has foundered on this. Surgeons do not wear guns when operating on people. Military uniforms - and military weapons, in particular - throw up insurmountable barricades for the administering of social and psychological aid.
- c. A totally different condition for cooperation is the basis on which it is realised. In the eyes of the aid organisations the military, is only one of the suppliers of logistic services. It is unacceptable that for a six hour-flight in a C-130 I have to pay twice the amount I would have to pay for a commercial carrier with the same capacity. In that case Cordaid will choose for the commercial alternative, as it allows it to give more aid at lower costs. The military should ask themselves why aid organisations make so little use of their C-130.
- d. Apart from the costs, the availability of the carrier and the time-consuming bureaucratic procedures form a problem for the aid organisations. In other words: our cooperation must be founded on a business basis. The military present the aid organisations with an outline of the costs and the terms of delivery. The aid organisations see whether the other suppliers can deliver the same goods cheaper and/or with the same quality. In the context of the Dutch mercantile tradition and the present-day tendency for privatisation of government services, this last condition should not fall on deaf ears.

## **6. Conclusion**

For a long time the principle of neutrality has formed an obstacle for some aid organisations to cooperate with the armed force. Fundamentally, however, this argument is no longer a reason to forgo cooperation, especially when we see UN-forces being deployed in between warring parties.

The background to the whole discussion is the fact that the military and aid organisations - however different they may be - are complementary and their activities only overlap to a limited extent. At this conference, the theme of which is 'Swords and Ploughshares', I would like to appeal to the military to give priority to their primary tasks of SAFETY and DEFENCE of the international legal order. Together, we will come a long way towards working for peace, a process in which each organisation has its own task. The aid organisations are willing to conclude a contract of cooperation, in which the delimitation that has been described above is respected and in which the services and logistic support are delivered on a business basis. Thanks to such a contract the cooperation between the military and the aid organisations and private initiative can be extended further than is now the case.

## References

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- \* The studies on nuclear deterrence, in which theoretical research and case studies have often been carried out without any vital relation to each other, are an example of this. In the forementioned study Van Iersel refers to this omission.
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- US Department of Defense / Command & Control Research Program [CCRP]  
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## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> A.H.M. van Iersel, *Basic Document* (containing ‘terms of reference’): p. 1. Basic document for the conference ‘Zwaarden èn Ploegscharen?’ [Swords as well as Ploughshares?], On the desirability of Civil-Military Cooperation (Driebergen, 1999).
- <sup>2</sup> For an elaboration of this vision and the concept of ‘local capacities for peace’, see: Pax Christi Nederland (1998), *De Vrede najagen*, Strategisch Beleidskader 1999-2004 [Chasing Peace. Strategic Policy paper], 28 November 1998, Utrecht.