

Protection of Civilians: Key international debates and the role of the EU

Civil Society Dialogue Network - organized by EPLO and EUEA

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Report by

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Among the approximately 35 participants, pre-eminently from Belgium, were members of Nonviolent Peaceforce (Tiffany Easton, Doris Mariani, Atif Hameed and Rolf Carriere), EPLO, Paul Lansu of Pax Christi, delegates of UNPO (simultaneously working for PBI), Search for Common Ground, an officer of EEAS, QPS (Tim Wallis) and two or three Ph.D Students.

The roundtable talk was introduced by three different inputs:

Mel Duncan, founder and director of Advocacy) talked, supported by numbers and figures of UNHCR and Amnesty International, about the need to do more with regards to the protection of the civil society, and which role unarmed professionals can play. There are, indeed, increased numbers of civilians in military peacekeeping operations, however, only few of them are responsible for the immediate help of the population. He mentioned the new UNITAR online course about UCP (which in the words of the UN, that Mel used as well, is called *unarmed civilian protection* and not *peacekeeping*), and flavored his presentation with some remarks from his work at NP. Towards military peacekeeping he sprinkled in some critical remarks: solid peacekeeping is eventually an offensive mandate, and the perception “more soldiers lead to more protection” has to be questioned.

CDR Vincenzo de Benedictis, member of the EU Military Staff of the EEAS, explained the realization of new guidelines for the protection of civilians, which has just been acquired for the EU military missions. They are in the works since 2013. In September 2014, there was a referendum by delegates of all EU member states, currently, however, these guidelines are still classified, until they will be published on March 2nd, as long as there is no contradiction. He didn't mention much about the content of these guidelines, neither after further requests. The guidelines will approach the topic of protection in all episodes of a mission, starting with the planning phase, until its evaluation. A definition of civil society has been annulled at the request of the member states.

These guidelines refer as well towards international bodies of law for human rights, as well as the international humanitarian law. Obvious was that de Benedictis only sees the military in the role to accomplish such protection. De Benedict himself, who was the coordinator for these new guidelines, is a member of the Italian Navy, and has (as far as is known) no experience in EU- or other military missions by land.

Borhan Osman, of the Afghanistan Analysts Network, and who spent a lot of time on field research in Afghanistan, introduced three mechanisms, how the civil society in Afghanistan could be protected more efficiently:

1. Make the Taliban responsible on local scale, by entering into a dialogue with them (e.g. were the access to humanitarian help, or polio vaccination, which would not have been possible without such local negotiations)
2. Use rules, norms and statements of the militarized groups yourself, by appealing to them. The Taliban f.e. have a Code of Conduct – Osman cited two examples, were Taliban commanders who contravened these rules, were executed.
3. Empower the local communities, to defend their interests. The militarized groups cannot afford it to alienate the local communities, since they are rooted in these communities,

themselves, and need them for their command. In areas where the Taliban didn't consider this, there have been riots against them.

Following the inputs, there were three rounds of questions – each attendee had one opportunity to talk. Among other things, the topics were:

- Is, what has been said about Afghanistan, transferable to ISIS? (Answer: Only so far, as parts of the IS are “local guys” as well – it gets more complicated if they are from further away)
- Reporting towards the government? Mel: Depends on the mandate, in the Philippines its very close
- Coordination with the military (Cimic): necessary, where international military is present. In South Sudan, there are arrangements about patrol times – The night patrols are made by NP, because the UNMISS is not allowed to go out after 7pm
- Difference between UNMISS and NP: another example: NP professionals accompany women when they collect water, since there are repeatedly occasions, were women were raped and raided by soldiers. The UN soldiers observe these cases from a distance, and report to their superiors.
- Which conditions must be met on site, in order for civil peacekeeping to be working? Key is to find a point of leverage, to exercise influence
- Terms like “hybrid warfare”, and problematic definitions of “civilian” or criminal violence, were cues that appeared several times
- In the high level panel concerning the review of the UN Peacekeeping, the EU gave an input, whereby the protection of civilians played a big role
- The role of the ICC in Afghanistan? According to Osman, by all means

During the announcement of the roundtable, the emphasis was on the role of the EU regarding the protection of civil society, which instruments are used and how they support the African Union. Eventually, these topics barely made it to come up, since the EU delegate focused on the guidelines, and the other speakers didn't have real experience with the EU. Solely the host, Catherine Wollard, mentioned it in conclusion, again.

Translation of the report from German:
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