

## TRAINING CIVILIANS TO WORK IN UNSTABLE ENVIRONMENTS

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### 1. The Contemporary Conflict

The initial section of this article aims at spreading ideas about the current complexities of the ongoing conflict areas, either in the framework of the UN Security Council legitimate intervention or in a situation of violence perpetrated by the State itself or by any armed group; situations in which the civilian personnel performing peace process related activities or providing support to the local population need to face in order to accomplish their tasks.

Nowadays, it is extremely hard to characterize and classify conflicts according to the classic view of International Humanitarian Law. The present forms of violence have challenged the International Committee of the Red Cross when it comes to keeping and updating the parameters supporting the protection of civilians and of non-combatants in conflict regions.

The present conflict areas are found in a large spectrum of possibilities and motivations, with the existence or, many times, the coexistence of State actors that usually attempt to respect the rules and of non-State actors that often and deliberately violate the rules a way to become relevant and visible. Recent examples include extremely violent and law-breaking transnational groups.

In fact, the world seems to be more and more dangerous and the unstable areas are seemingly more in need of respecting the basic rules of human protection. Recent events, still ongoing in Ukraine, Syria and Iraq, almost daily, provide evidence of the vulnerability of civilians, either as humanitarian or development workers, journalists, experts on civil affairs, politics, human rights or legal issues, and any other type of consultants.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), a worldwide known institution, after researching and analyzing almost 600 peace operations from 2000 to 2010, expressed in its yearbooks that the current conflict can be somewhat taken as a subproduct of international multipolarity, which, lamentably, has created more competition than cooperation. This fact brings additional consequences to the current conflicts, since the solutions, many times,

suffer interference from conflicting interests of external actors. In Syria, the situation is a typical example in which instability is potentialized by external factors.

The United Nations, in turn, making efforts towards peace, follow the decisions made by the Security Council which, occasionally, produce peace missions in volatile environments, with a low level of local consent and significant risks for peacekeepers of all categories, including civilians in the organization, either the hired ones or the volunteers, and members of international non-governmental organizations. Also, we can cite civil actors from bilateral cooperations of several categories such as agriculture, health, environment, urban violence reduction and many others.

Operational environments in conflict areas are usually constituted by a specific microcosmos, with a multitude of agents having distinct interests and mandates, operating in different levels of instability. At the end, irrespective of the sort of international organization in the host country or of the bilateral relation which might exist, working in unstable contexts require a clear understanding of the environment, focusing on the present threats and local vulnerabilities, as well as the improvement of personal aptitudes.

Environments like that require people with qualifications, capacities and general/specific competencies so that they can, individually or in groups, effectively accomplish their professional duties, while preserving their health and keeping themselves safe.

It is not necessary to go further to understand that the presence of civilians in both national and international contexts, individually working in unstable environments, undoubtedly creates demands for the accurate and intense preparation and training.

## **2. Training civilians to work in unstable environments**

Before discussing the training of civilians, I would like to set a difference between preparation and training. In a simple military view, maybe applicable to this context, preparation means gathering all sorts of needs for the work in unstable environments as well as adequately supplying the demands according to a logic and gradable plan.

In this view, preparation is comprised of establishing guidance, norms and standards, selecting human resources, specially the leadership, obtaining and distributing equipment and supplies, as well as planning and training individuals and teams to work in volatile environments.

This way, training is a vital part of preparation, but it is not the only necessary activity before being deployed in a country with significant levels of violence and instability.

Training civilians is not a novelty and it is part of the routine in several international organizations like the UN, the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), and in many other state and private companies; besides having governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations which offer courses and exercises to enable civilians to be deployed in unstable areas. A significant number of countries train their civilians to work in unstable contexts for bilateral cooperations and assistance programs.

In relation to our geographical area, it is noticed that there is no great training availability despite having a solid demand. Not continuously but for a long time, Brazil has officially sent civilian teams to work in conflict areas as a part of assistance programs and international cooperations. Accordingly, non-governmental organizations and Brazilian trade companies send civilians abroad with different purposes.

Brazil has already deployed electoral observers and monitors, technicians from governmental agencies, from the Brazilian Corporation of Agricultural Research (EMBRAPA, acronym in Portuguese), from the Social Service of the Industrial Sector (SESI, acronym in Portuguese) and many others; some of them were deployed abroad very regularly. These personnel, in general, are not sufficiently trained in terms of security, health and cultural aspects before being deployed. This article does not intend to discuss the characteristics of a potential audience; in fact, the audience already exists.

There are a large number of advantages of carrying out an adequate preparation before being deployed in a new geographical area of work, mainly if this is a risky area with significant obstacles to the accomplishment of tasks.

Besides the aforementioned aspects, a well-conceived and result-focused training will certainly help people acquire knowledge, abilities and attitudes to overcome challenges in the deployment area. Not only is it true for the operational side or for the professional task accomplishment, but also for the logistics side, when it comes to equipment preparation, gathering of supplies and procedure adjustments.

Thinking about the infrequently true premise - civilian personnel specialized in professional fields as the judicial, electoral, developmental, humanitarian, and many others, in

general, may not be prepared with tools and knowledge to work in a dangerous zone - what necessary qualifications and essential competencies should they have or develop?

An initial observation, which seems obvious to me, is the fact that any training should focus on the performance needs. The task to be carried out by the individual will provide the elements to plan the training.

A survey on the needs for training will account for the objectives, performance deficiencies, time, available resources, and many others. It is the same as saying that the more complex the functions are, the more elaborate the trainings should be.

That makes me believe we could distinguish two different sets of desirable knowledge, abilities and attitudes for the deployment of personnel in unstable environments. These sets should necessarily be the objects of training before the deployment in a conflict area, but it is important to understand there is much more to be learned as the professional arrives in the mission area and starts working.

A first set is the one of essential aspects to work in hostile environments such as first-aid, understanding the political and cultural context, communication, navigation, driving skills, negotiation, risk analysis, self-protection and some others. These are subjects they all should know, irrespective of their function and professional level; for they will help the civilian personnel survive and operate at the desired minimum levels, at least.

A second set may include non-essential topics for survival, but they are of great functional importance and go deep in the specific reality of the deployment area. To illustrate this, we can cite the training for an electoral observer to be sent to a peace mission area in order to monitor the elections. He or she must understand the electoral organization of the host country, relevant documentation and electoral codes, mechanisms to set and run elections, planning, support structures, actors involved in the preparation and execution of elections etc., all in the universe of the international organization and host country.

Briefly approaching the training methodology, it is almost an international consensus in the field of teaching, the adoption of teaching techniques for adults which involve working in different scenarios and case studies, along with practical activities for the development of abilities and attitudes regarding the survival in hostile environments and the operational efficiency at work.

### 3. An initial view of a potential course for civilian experts

Initially, it is relevant to register that CCOPAB, whose mission is defined in the National Defense Strategy, can also enable civilians to work in UN peacekeeping operations and humanitarian demining. It is observed, however, that the participation of civilians in courses related to unstable contexts is somehow reduced and the course syllabus does not focus on the participants needs.

Courses offered by CCOPAB as the UN civil-military coordination course and the UN logistics and reimbursement course, for example, can occasionally be useful for civilian experts; yet, they were created for a military audience who usually carry professional abilities acquired through time, and vital for risky environments. Besides, in the courses, some subjects are not of civilian interests.

Maybe, at the moment, it's useful to analyze, in general, the factors which influence the conception of a possible course designed for civilians, and then talk about its possibilities and limitations.

At first, it is important to observe that the acquisition of abilities and the development of attitudes take considerable time. When the subjects are related to survival techniques and working in unstable contexts, the process demands more time due to the great need of practice and repetition. Think about the necessary time to be proficient in first aid, for example; it is an essential knowledge field for activities in dangerous areas.

Thus, it is undoubtedly necessary to adjust course duration to parameters which result in the minimum competencies to be acquired by the participant.

Another factor to be taken into account is the potential diversity of the audience. It is expected that a course like this be attended by professionals of several backgrounds, which brings us the necessity to level the participants' previous knowledge. The content to be provided to all of them could be carried out through e-learning; prior to the onsite phase. Leveling knowledge, if well conceived and dimensioned, could be successfully carried out for some theoretical parts of the syllabus.

A third point is related to whether or not knowing the host country where the unstable context is present. Generic training is advisable for an audience that does not have information about the place and moment to be deployed. Specific training is appropriate for situations in

which the decision to go to a risky area is already taken. In a brief way, without any deep analysis, a future pilot course for civilians would probably have the characteristics of a generic training.

This way, a course like that, *a priori*, should carry out a basic general preparation in order to work in unstable areas. If destination is previously known, the course can offer specific preparation for the mission or the mission area, lasting for longer, or including that in a previous phase.

Backing to the two sets of knowledge previously mentioned, the potential course could be divided into two phases. One phase could focus on demonstrations followed by short practices on individual training special techniques. Another phase could encompass case studies and scenarios; it should be guided towards theoretical knowledge acquisition regarding planning, international environments etc. This last phase should take e-learning techniques into account.

Courses like this would also have a short practical integrated exercise at the end. In other words, the moment the knowledge, abilities and attitudes are already set, the course provides a practical test to check if participants have the minimum desired capabilities to work in unstable environments.

An integrating exercise seeks to cover different subjects in the same scenario, posing intense and quick response challenges, which may be solved individually or in groups. It must be thought as the last opportunity for the participant to feel prepared, and it should provide conditions to enhance self-confidence.

In its first editions, this sort of course would probably focus on diffusing critical information, but would also expect to achieve the desirable deployment of former participants in real unstable contexts.

There are many possibilities and they may go much beyond fulfilling national demands, when gaining visibility and relevance which, consequently, attract international participants. In spite of potential difficulties, apparently able to be solved, it can certainly be said that a training course for civilians would successfully accomplish its objective.

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