



## **Enabling Cooperation via Common Situational Awareness – Pragmatic Considerations on NATO-China Cooperation**

**Ralph D. Thiele**

**March 2013**

### **Abstract**

The Asia-Pacific region is confronted with the same new global threats as the rest of mankind, i.e. climate change, scarcity of resources, migration, terrorism, health risks and environmental hazards. Asia and NATO together should strive for common comprehensive capabilities to meet the challenges ahead. Of particular importance will be the NATO-China relationship. Up to now NATO's comprehensive approach has rather been based on grand ideas than on concrete and pragmatic action. Implementing a Comprehensive Approach begins with a vision, but then it needs a pragmatic plan addressing people and their mind-sets, organization – i.e. processes and architecture – and last but not least technology in order to make grand ideas work. NATO's growing global role, combined with China's growing security engagement in regions to its west – Afghanistan, Central Asia, Gulf of Aden and the Mediterranean – require further political dialogue, but also a number of practical, technological steps. First steps could include joint anti-piracy exercises between their parallel missions in the Gulf of Aden. Additionally cooperation in emergency response and humanitarian assistance could provide a feasible avenue towards getting NATO and China engaged in substantial cooperation. To this end a collaboration environment like the Afghan Mission Network and a common Situational Awareness capability would bring enormous benefits.

### **About ISPSW**

The Institute for Strategic, Political, Security and Economic Consultancy (ISPSW) is a private institute for research and consultancy. The ISPSW is objective and task oriented and is above party politics.

In an ever more complex international environment of globalized economic processes and worldwide political, ecological, social and cultural change, bringing major opportunities but also risks, decision-makers in enterprises and politics depend more than ever before on the advice of highly qualified experts.

ISPSW offers a range of services, including strategic analyses, security consultancy, executive coaching and intercultural competency. ISPSW publications examine a wide range of topics connected with politics, economy, international relations, and security/ defense. ISPSW network experts have worked – in some cases for decades – in executive positions and possess a wide range of experience in their respective specialist areas.



## ANALYSIS

---

### 1. What is on the mind of NATO's likely future Chinese cooperation partner?

In September 2011 I had the opportunity in Beijing for a longer exchange with General Xiong Guangkai, former Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) on comprehensive security and its possible benefits for China and the international community. With regards to U.S.-China relations he emphasized that instead of strategic zero sum considerations he clearly would favour a win-win-approach. Afterwards he was giving the opening remarks for a German-Chinese conference titled "International Security Architecture – European and Chinese Perspectives" (Institute for European Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) and emphasized that the concept of national security in China has been expanded to an extensive concept which includes political security and home defence as well as security in the fields of economy, culture, information, energy resources and climate change; a definition which corresponds well to the Western understanding of security.

One year later, at the occasion of the pairing of the Chinese frigate Yi Yang with the U.S. Navy guided missile destroyer USS Winston S. Churchill on 21 September 2012 in a subsequent press conference in Beijing, Chinese Defence Minister Liang Guanglie stated: *„The two sides should, within the framework of building a China-U.S. cooperative partnership, promote a new type of military relations featuring equality, reciprocity and win-win cooperation in an active and pragmatic way“*.

What do I take out of that? The essence of several meetings and conferences with Chinese partners indicates: China is willing to cooperate striving for a win-win-approach. This appears to me not only legitimate, but more than that mutual beneficial.

### 2. What is on the mind of NATO?

The Asia-Pacific region is confronted with the same new global threats as the rest of mankind, i.e. climate change, scarcity of resources, migration, terrorism, health risks and environmental hazards. Asia and NATO together should strive for common comprehensive capabilities to meet the challenges ahead. Climate-induced change is introducing instability in the maritime domain that will require political and also legal foresight as well as cooperation to resolve. The melting of the Arctic ice pack is opening stretches of formerly inaccessible sea lanes and ocean floor to transit and deep-sea mining. This topographical change, combined with advances in deep-seabed exploration and mining and the rising value of scarce mineral resources, is making the northern continental shelves of Asia, Europe, and North America more accessible and therefore more desirable.

Other climate change related concerns revolve around the use of natural resources, such as water. Among the nations at greatest risk to climate change and natural disasters are those in Asia and the Pacific. The region is also home to the internationally shared watersheds of the Himalayas that are crucial to the wellbeing of 1.3 billion people downstream. In many parts of the world, water issues cross national borders. Access to consistent and reliable sources of water in these regions is greatly valued. Changes in the timing and intensity of rainfall would threaten already limited water sources and potentially cause future conflicts. Threatened food



security in parts of Asia could also lead to conflict. Rapid population growth and changes in precipitation and temperature, among other factors, are already affecting crop yields. Resulting food shortages could increase the risk of humanitarian crises and trigger population migration across national borders, ultimately sparking political instability. International cooperation or competition for the management of such natural and other resources will be important from a security perspective, in the region and beyond.

All of Southern Asia – from Afghanistan to Myanmar – will be affected by factors such as snowmelt in the Himalayas, the Karakorams, the Pamir and the Hindu Kush and rising sea levels. The consequences for low-lying countries, such as Bangladesh, could be dramatic. It is imperative that all countries of the region find ways to cooperate in order to tackle climate change-related problems, such as sustainable water management and food security. Related key challenges include sustainable production and consumption, climate change adaptation, disaster preparedness and energy security.

NATO's interest in engaging China derives from Beijing's rising potential to shape the international security environment. Most emerging security challenges lie well beyond alliance territory. This very fact is making NATO's ability to serve as a global security hub and to contribute to stability in other regions fundamental to its future relevance.

The missions in Afghanistan and Libya represent important steps in this direction. They also reveal the profound political and operational difficulties confronting the prospect of a *global NATO*. Accordingly the alliance has recognized that a key contribution to security from challenges *out of area* will be facilitating regional integration and building regional capacity. To this end, the anti-terror missions and the engagement in Afghanistan have opened the door of Asia to NATO, just as trade did for the European Union.

Yet, to this point, NATO's comprehensive approach has rather been based on grand ideas than on concrete and pragmatic action. Unfortunately I have found in the recent past decade that particularly European foreign & security policy makers have difficulties with technology as they consider the issue too pedestrian for great minds. In my assessment this exactly has been a key reason, why grand ideas don't work. Implementing a Comprehensive Approach begins with a vision, but then it needs a pragmatic plan addressing people and their mindsets, organization – i.e. processes and architecture – and last but not least technology in order to make grand ideas work.

Clearly, in the future, decision-making processes will rely on an even closer integration of political, military, economic, humanitarian, and policing and intelligence instruments for conflict prevention and crisis management. This integration is the core of a comprehensive answer to the issue of effective structures for cooperation between the public sector and other parts of society – at national level and, in particular, across borders.

### 3. What is in NATO's Basket?

Standards & Interoperability have been to NATO's success of the past. In looking at the future, NATO has two outstanding best practices that should be considered: The Afghan Mission Network (soon to become future NATO's Future Mission Network) and NATO's Common Operational Picture. Both developments will serve in a global scale as best practice examples for security, defence and its related business. Consequently they will shape both requirements and markets.



The Afghan Mission Network provides for a highly effective Collaboration (Cooperation) environment – quasi the I-Phone/I-Pad/PC for warriors and first responders. With the Afghan Mission Network for the first time in Alliance history a common C4ISR network has been established for all ISAF forces and operations consisting of the ISAF-Secret network as the core with national extensions. In times of austerity cuts these national extensions have an enormous shaping impact on national C4ISR structures. The Afghan Mission Network is pure revolution in NATO's history, yet to this point NATO's top policy making circles don't take sufficient notice. The Afghan Mission Network supports a NATO Common Operational Picture (NCOP). Soon this NCOP will provide NATO commanders and operational staffs with essential and reliable information that enables their understanding of comprehensive security environments in order to significantly improving situational awareness and supporting rapid decision-making.

Both best practices have been supported by the Allied Command Operations Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive (COPD), dated 25 Feb 2010, which constitutes an important milestone in NATO's operational planning adapting to the requirements of the comprehensive approach. The comprehensive approach builds on a holistic analysis of the challenges to be addressed. To get there, a system of systems analysis is required, taking account of the knowledge requirements of all stakeholders. In any crisis situation, decision makers and actors must have correct, relevant information in time, in order to be effective.

The COPD covers in detail planning principles, doctrine and processes. It is the repository of planning knowledge and therefore details and explains each step of operations planning at the military strategic and operational levels of command in Allied Command Operations. It brings together, in place, theory and practice – process and products.

The COPD already has been shaping NATO's operational planning as an approach in which

- systems in the operations environment are analyzed, i.e. through a system analysis;
- knowledge about the different political, military, economic, social, infrastructure and information domains of the strategic environment will be developed in order to understand the behaviour and capabilities of key actors, their interaction within the operations environment and to make informed decisions that are specific to each of the stages of the planning process.

Within the COPD planning process situational awareness has gained an indispensable function in developing and maintaining a level of understanding to support operational assessments, the provision of operational level of advice and decision making during the planning for and conduct of operations. Situational awareness is the prerequisite of comprehensive security. The purpose of situational awareness is to generate actionable knowledge. Knowledge is the decisive resource of all social processes and social organizations. As society turns into a knowledge society, access to knowledge and the exchange of information are becoming more and more universal: for individuals, social groups, politically and economically relevant actors, states, and alliances.

In future situational awareness will contribute to cultivating decision makers' capacity for increased awareness, mindfulness, and focus in an age of information distraction. It will force *learners* to expand their collection of inputs, selectively identify their filters used in synthesizing and sense making. And it will help to mainstream system thinking and the imperative of understanding structure, relationships and feedback loops in a globally interdependent world.



Much of this is presently occurring outside NATO's military in a broad scope of applications. For example, IBM's vision of a Smart City has become a viable concept in Moscow, Amsterdam, Dubai and many other places in the world with tremendous dynamics. As an increasingly instrumented, inter-connected, and intelligent urban system, it has been focusing on positive impacts of Information Communication Technologies on the efficiency and effectiveness of healthcare and security, power and transport, and the practice of commerce and work. The Smart City is viewed as a 'system of systems' with the city realizing benefits through integration and coherence amongst its systems. It is addressing urban performance as a function of the complex interplay between systems composed of infrastructures, capital, assets, behaviours, and cultures, addressing the economic, social, technological, political, and environmental spheres. Especially situational awareness is important for a Smart City as the addressed potentials can only be mobilized, if inhabitants, companies or the administration are aware of the cities' position, knowing the city from the inside but also being aware of the surroundings – including global networks – and the system of cities the city is located in.

Exactly this is the challenge in the security and crisis prevention/management context. Key actors need to be analyzed and understood from various perspectives, with particular attention paid to political, military, economic and social, information and infrastructure aspects. Consequently holistic approaches addressing issues like border security, maritime domain security, the protection of critical infrastructure or disaster relief operations as the Haiti earthquake in 2010 with its catastrophic magnitude – all of these concepts build on system of systems analysis and situational awareness as core functions to manage complex, dynamic and time critical challenges, i.e. for in Brazil, in Qatar, in Saudi Arabia and Singapore.

For an inter-agency approach to work it must draw together the strengths of the relevant organizations involved in addressing security issues. Much expertise is resident within NGOs. Numerous governmental, military and business organizations already possess valuable inputs into shared situational awareness. These are particular valuable resources when it comes to design action and effects, methods for assessments and interpreting results. Often civilian agencies have presence in crises regions prior to military engagement. They provide continuity during transitions and are focused on long-term solutions. However, no one source captures all of the information needed or currently available. In better use of limited resources to address the omnipresent, multi-national security challenges the output would be most valuable for governments, international organizations and the commercial sector as well. The information exchange between these actors, in particular, sharing common databases, is the real power behind situational awareness.

#### **4. Fighting Piracy – Setting an Example?!**

Challenges to "Maritime Security" have many faces – piracy and armed robbery, maritime terrorism, illicit trafficking by sea, i.e. narcotics trafficking, small arms and light weapons trafficking, human trafficking, global climate change, cargo theft etc. These challenges keep evolving and may be hybrid in nature: an interconnected and unpredictable mix of traditional and irregular warfare, terrorism, and/or organized crime.

Countering Somali-based piracy in the Gulf of Aden has set an example how the NATO – China (+ EU) cooperation could evolve in future. The Chinese decision in late 2008 to send a naval task force to join the multinational mission in the Gulf of Aden meant that Chinese naval vessels would be operating regularly in the same area as NATO warships. 26 participating nations from the Asia-Pacific region, the Mediterranean, NATO and the EU



have coordinated their operations in this mission under the Shared Awareness and De-confliction (SHADE) forum for maritime security, in 2012 with additional Chinese participation. NATO's anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and engagements with China as well as other navies the past three years sharing information through SHADE has become a successful model of cooperation on maritime terrorism. In fact, SHADE has become the most important cooperation forum between NATO and China. NATO could and should build on this and not let this opportunity go away.

## **5. Maritime Domain and Regional Security**

Of course, the scope of cooperation needs to go far beyond piracy in the Gulf of Aden. Assuring access to the global commons, dealing with climate change and proliferation, managing the global economic crisis, building common situational awareness, developing international institutions and decision-making processes – there are plenty of challenges to security that require close and effective cooperation among nations. For example China could participate in NATO- (and EU-) led natural emergency relief exercises.

Situational awareness needs to and should be instrumental in providing valid orientation to this process of dealing with globally connected security issues in a comprehensive fashion. Building situational awareness would constitute a systemic, networked response to symmetric and asymmetric, traditional and networked security challenges. As a mixing console it would support partners and allies collaborating effectively together thus supporting global and regional contributions to the issue of interconnected security which may take the form of international organizations and regimes, joint task forces, confidence building measures, peacekeeping and so forth. Situational awareness would bring together different types and generations of people, organizations and equipment through a common connector and promote a culture of information sharing. Inherent architectures, processes, and tools would provide for informed, responsive decisions in an interagency and international security environment that includes the services of government actors and private business.

Cooperation on fighting piracy points in the direction of a future cooperation in the Maritime Domain. A comprehensive approach to Maritime Domain Security is indispensable to safeguarding common prosperity and security interests of both NATO's and Asia-Pacific nations as it effectively protects and supports legitimate activities, while countering the threat of current and emerging terrorist, hostile, illegal or dangerous acts within the maritime domain. By ensuring freedom of navigation and commerce, it also has the capacity to promote regional, and contribute to global, economic stability and protect maritime trade as the heart of regional and global economies.

With regard to national/multinational cooperation in such complex operations with many different actors involved, maritime domain awareness is needed in order to create a comprehensive picture of maritime activity based on accessible information in order to

- create the appropriate environment to promote the civilian-military aspects of cooperation, information sharing and maritime surveillance;
- coordinate the participation and actions of all organizations and partners. This includes collaboration suites and integration of existing communication networks to an interoperable network;



- enable Maritime Security within commercial practices; providing for a better situational awareness and understanding of how the commercial shipping sector might contribute to and benefit from Maritime Security, most notably in the energy sector.

## 6. Afghanistan

Afghanistan is likely to remain an important security driver for the years to come. Chinese and NATO representatives both see Afghanistan as an obvious area where NATO and China share security interests and can work jointly. Principally this also applies to the European Union. Not only NATO and the EU will stay engaged in Afghanistan, but so will China. Until today China has been the biggest foreign investor in Afghanistan. In December 2011 China National Petroleum Corp won the 25-year valid contract for the development of oil blocks in the Amu Darya basin, a project expected to earn the war-torn state billions of dollars over two decades. It marks the second major deal for China in Afghanistan after developing the huge Aynak copper mine south of Kabul, which is due to start producing by the end of 2014.

Yet, after 2014 China will no longer be in a position to enjoy economic profit without investing in security in Afghanistan. Terrorism violence, inspired by separatism and religious extremism, is of significant concern to the local government and Beijing. If the Taliban would come into power again, China would face more pressure than ever in order to preventing the international link between the local terrorism and separatism in Xinjiang and its global supporters. It may be high time for China's policy-maker to rethink present diplomatic strategies and policies.

Ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan is of high relevance to the Central and Southern Asian security situation. With NATO's combat troops withdrawal by the end of 2014, great opportunities and challenges are coming up for all actors involved. Now is a critical time for the relevant international actors to rethink how to meet the likely challenges ahead in a cooperative fashion.

To this end – and to the surprise of many – it has been an important step that China and Afghanistan have signed in September 2012 several security and economic agreements during a Kabul visit of top Chinese security official Zhou Yong Kang. These include China's support in the training of up to 300 Afghan police officers in China throughout the next four years and investing in Afghanistan's resources sector prior to the NATO combat troop withdrawal in 2014.

NATO and China (+EU) share security interests that could and should be coordinated vis-à-vis Afghanistan.

- Most obviously, NATO can significantly contribute to build the security environment needed to attract EU and Chinese investment into Afghanistan, helping to develop the country's natural resources.
- A stronger Afghan economy can in turn help generate the revenue the Afghan government needs to support the large security forces that NATO has been training. It also can provide alternative employment for Afghans who might otherwise turn to the drug trade or the insurgency.



NATO cooperation in Afghanistan as in the Maritime Domain would point at cooperation in regional and even global security issues. Cooperation in emergency response and humanitarian assistance could be important initial steps in that direction. To this end a collaboration environment like the Afghan Mission Network could provide an extremely useful and very practical technological platform. Our U.S. friends – as a standard – provide already collaboration environments for free via internet for all parties involved, when they get engaged in large scale humanitarian or disaster relief operations.

## 7. Conclusion

At the very core of comprehensive capabilities is the teamwork of military and civilian capabilities. Both of these distinct but related asset pools are indispensable for successful effects based operations within an overall comprehensive approach to security. Armed forces are not the only – often not even the most important – security instrument available to the state. In the past, society was mobilized in order to support the military in case of attack. Today, it is the other way round: the armed forces are part of the forces a community uses to react to attacks. In the field of internal security and hazard prevention, it is the police, the fire brigade, disaster control and other first responders that are mainly required. There is no doubt, however, that the manifold capabilities armed forces have at hand – partly as the only organization with these capabilities – should become part of a comprehensive security system. This system must integrate all authorities responsible for public security, including the state and police, medical services, fire brigades, intelligence services etc.

NATO's efforts to expand its global role, combined with China's growing security engagement in regions to its west – Afghanistan, Central Asia, Gulf of Aden and the Mediterranean – require further political dialogue, but also a number of practical, technological steps. First steps could include joint anti-piracy exercises between their parallel missions in the Gulf of Aden. NATO's anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and engagements with China as well as other navies the past three years sharing information through SHADE has become a successful model of cooperation on maritime terrorism. Similarly, China could participate in EU and NATO-led natural emergency relief exercises.

My recommendation: use cooperation in emergency response and humanitarian assistance areas as a feasible avenue towards getting NATO and China engaged in substantial cooperation. To this end a collaboration environment like the Afghan Mission Network and a common Situational Awareness capability would bring enormous benefits, as they

- support a common understanding of what is going on;
- would ease the path towards common recommendations of what should be done;
- would provide for orchestrating common action of civil and military instruments and even would be very useful in collaborating in challenging common reconstruction ventures, i.e. Afghanistan!

\*\*\*

**Remarks:** *Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.*



### About the Author of this Issue

---

Colonel Ralph D. Thiele is Chairman of the Political-Military Society (pmg), Berlin, Germany.



*Ralph D. Thiele*