Defence Diplomacy and the Civil-Military Relationship

Dr. Myszka Gużkowska

Good Morning Ladies and Gentleman,

I am going to give you some perspectives on defence diplomacy and the civil-military relationship. For the purposes of this presentation, the changes in the nature of conflict and security over the course of the last century will be simplified into three main phases. I will then give three specific examples of civil-military relations, not necessarily the obvious ones, prior to considering some conclusions and looking forward.

Changing Nature of Conflict and Security.

Phase 1. Nation States.
The first phase in the historical aspect, which I refer to as the nation-states, accompanied the period before WWII when the British Army was very visible in every town in the UK. The same was true across Europe and often beyond that within their respective countries. There was an army barracks in every urban area in the United Kingdom; a drill hall in every high street; the Army recruited locally and it had a territorial base. This territorial base was in very close contact with the local community. Generally speaking, during this phase conflict resolution and the management of security were at the national level with conflict being between nation-states.

Phase 2. Cold War.
Moving to the mid-1950s, there was a sort of bi-polar power bloc. By this time, in terms of the armies, it was the Cold War. The armies were smaller, less connected to the localities from which they recruited, with much larger bases and no longer in the cities but rather outside the urban areas. As a result, the armies had fewer direct links with the local communities. The power base was really between the two big power blocs of the USA and USSR.

Phase 3. Globalisation.
Moving into post-1990 to the present day, we are in a different phase completely. This is the phase of the globalisation era. In this period, we have communications which are global and instantaneous, thereby allowing people, ideas and products to travel easily around the world. People are moving easily between countries, whether that is for economic work reasons, natural catastrophes or other reasons. Crime has increased across national borders and global climate change is a major threat which has accelerated and will most likely continue to do so. Just in the Arctic, since the 1950s, temperatures have risen by 13 degrees. This is a trend that will not diminish. Climate change has introduced huge issues; water security resulting in the mass movement of people is one simple example.

What is also characteristic of this period is that small factions have emerged on the basis of different cultural identities. Conflict has become asymmetric. Security is

more much complex – and really the biggest security threat is internal, from within our own cities because of the factionalisation that has followed cultural diversity. No single group, no single faction or single state can tackle this alone. We have to work together to address the problems that have emerged in the era of globalisation.

We have gone from a century of change wherein armies have gone from dense representation in every country to very thin representation. The UK has 7 major bases, which is a major change from having a base in every city. Armies face very new challenges. European armies are smaller; they are losing touch with society, which is increasingly diverse. They need to make a conscious and very deliberate effort to engage with civil society to understand the potential threats, to avoid and manage conflict and most importantly to support the government, society and local communities.

Civil-Military Relations.

I am now going discuss some civil-military relationships. I am not going to talk about conflict resolution in a wartime situation. We know that that happens, as is similarly the case in peacekeeping operations. Instead, I am going to look at three rather different examples, which are about supporting civil communities. The first of those is Ebola, the second is a flooding example and the third is working with local schools.

1. International.
The first example of civil-military relations is an international outbreak of disease. Although Ebola has been around for quite some time, in 2014 there was a very severe outbreak of Ebola in West Africa. The countries affected were Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, all of which had recently emerged from very long periods of conflict and instability and which have relatively weak health systems and infrastructural support. The outbreak threatened to become a global pandemic spreading the disease through our very efficient international transport system. Four travellers threatened to spread this pandemic into cities across the world, travelling by air and train.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared a public health emergency of international concern under the international health regulations laid out in 2005. They formed UNMEER, the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response, and that organisation coordinated a massive medical and humanitarian assistance programme, which was delivered by governments, agencies and charities from around the world. The following is a summary of how organised their response actually was. The British Army went out with a large medical contingent of field hospitals designed to assist with Ebola. The medical contingent consisted of military doctors, nurses, and health professionals, some of who were full-time members of the Regular Army. Also included were members of the Army Reserves, people who worked in the National Health Service (NHS) on a daily basis but were part-time soldiers in their spare time.

The outcome was resolute international action, which was effective. Working together, the participating nations prevented the feared global pandemic from spreading and they were able to defeat the disease in countries that did not have the resources or capabilities at that time to do it alone. The WHO's model is robust, is well-tested and it is one that works efficiently. As a model, it is one that could be used elsewhere in other types of catastrophes and in other problem areas.

2. National.

The second example of civil-military action is flooding. Catastrophic annual flooding is increasing year on year across Europe and many other parts of the world. The c ivil-military support for flooding could be at an international level, but this example is within a national context in the UK.

In 2014, two regions in the North East and North West of England, respectively, flooded simultaneously and unexpectedly. The UK has a well-tested civil contingency planning process which is handled by the local authorities and, depending on the crisis, involves many stakeholders and agencies, including the Army. The regional civil contingency plans for each of the two regions were put into action, with the police and emergency services in the lead and the Army in support.

We needed a quite intensive rapid response and resource base to work across regions and in this case, the two areas where the flooding occurred were totally different. In the east, it was very flat land. In the west, it was hilly terrain with deep valleys. This resulted in very serious flooding, each requiring very different equipment and personnel. Bridges and buildings disappeared overnight and roads collapsed. The flooding was actually so serious that the Royal Engineers from the Army and many other units were on the ground in hours and began to sandbag everything to prevent further flooding. The situation was elevated to national level very quickly in order to release national assets. Some of the national assets were in Germany such as the big bridging equipment. Given that the nature of flooding was fast, equipment had to be brought over very quickly.

The Army had to mobilize different types of army units to support the activities and work across regional-local boundaries and borders, which do not normally work together using that single resource. The Army also provided effective support to the community both in that initial phase to prevent flooding and save lives, but also in the recovery phase to rebuild the roads and bridges. It was a challenge. What it demonstrated, however, is that the UK has the systems in place to deal with these extreme events and, that local-national-international resilience is possible. If this had been in Europe, it would have been much more complicated given that international boundaries and organisations are much harder to sort out. That said, it is certainly upscale-able and certainly possible.

3. Regional/local.

The third area that I want to cover is about coaching and mentoring in schools. This is a very innovative regional-local role. In the UK and especially in the northwest region where the industrial revolution started, the once thriving industrial cities are now in decline. Britain chose to import cheap labour to run old machinery rather than investing in new machinery and new technology; it imported a vibrant and very varied immigrant population. That is of course the strength that we have now – that varied population, but as with every strength there is also a weakness. Historically, these groups did not mix with each other or with the local English population. What we have now, because we did not manage it properly, are schools that are struggling to cope with very bright pupils for whom English might be the third or fourth language and where there are differences between cultural groups that threaten social cohesion.

In some of these places that were thriving in industry in the past, there have been up to five generations of unemployment with no role models. The levels of deprivation in these cities are high and social fragmentation, poverty and gangs leading to crime are quite common. What we need to do is revitalise the former industrial areas. What we are doing is reaching out into schools – universities do this all the time. When I was Deputy Vice-Chancellor at several different universities, the university would send students into schools as role models. The British Army has a history of doing this because there are Army Cadet units in some schools in the UK.

The Army understands the value of youth movements and is expanding the Army Cadet programme into far more schools. This is not anything to do with recruiting but rather, with engaging local communities, bridging the gap that has been created now that the Army is so small and in danger of losing touch with society. It is about working with new partners in different ways to engage with society. These projects are most effective when they involve partnerships and other agencies. It has to be a win-win for all stakeholders. In this example, it is a win-win for the Army, universities and schools.

What do the schools get out of it? The pupils see role models who are in work; they meet Army personnel who are strong at transferring a whole series of skills to pupils, such as teamwork, leadership, communication skills and project management. Different types of Army units can provide a range of practical skills: for example, the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers can provide electronic and electrical engineering skills to build go-karts or other equipment; the Royal Engineers can provide skills to build bridges; the Field Hospitals can help them with first aid. These pupils can get a qualification that has been negotiated with local colleges.

The very early stages of this programme involved not schools but rather young probationers who had probably dropped out of the system and could well just spend a life in prison. By working closely with them and other partners, the Army was able to give them work opportunities, raise their aspirations, recognise their skills and enhance their employability. The pupils also received leadership, teamwork and communication skills.

What is in it for the Army? For the Army, there is ethical anchoring with diverse elements of society, engaging and understanding the local communities. Army personnel can get a qualification in the form of one-tenth of a credit towards a Master's degree; if they engage in nine other programmes, then they could receive the degree. This helps not only the universities but also the personnel, who become coaches and mentors as part of their own personal development and that of their units.

The local colleges and universities get to reach out into the community, partner with national organisations that they would not normally work with; they get the opportunity to accredit work-based learning and have a research opportunity to evaluate the impact. And what is the impact? The pupils, several years down the road, tend to stay in work or education. There is enhanced employability for both the pupils and for Army personnel when they eventually leave the Army to go into the workplace. The Army is seen as a positive force for good in society and new productive partnerships are being developed.

Conclusions.

In terms of conclusions, the Army has a positive role in supporting society. The civil-military relationships can be scaled up. They work best at the local-regional level but can be scaled up to the national level and they are completely transferable and upscale-able to the international level. We do need structure and planning at all levels and partnership with other agencies is very important. This is partly because the Army moves, and its staff move every few years, which means that there has to be a continuity strategy by working in partnerships to make sure it continues.

Looking forward, we need to scale up resilience to supra-national level. The World Health Organisation model works and we would benefit from applying it to some of these other situations – which has not happened yet in all cases. We need to create understanding and agreement at this level to help prevention before getting into crisis. We need to develop structures to discuss and deal with catastrophic events like tsunamis, pandemics, climate change, violence, water and security, deprivation and other crises.

My question to you is - are diplomats equipped to help the political and scientific sphere? Is that our biggest challenge amongst those many others?