The Military Contribution to the Prevention of Violent Conflict

Thomas Boehlke and Edward Canfor-Dumas

Abstract: The Understand to Prevent (U2P) process arises from the changing nature of armed conflict, which is prompting NATO forces to adapt to new challenges. U2P argues that military effort must shift away from crisis response and towards *persistent, modulated engagement* that seeks to manage conflict, prevent violence and build peace. The new challenges presented by contemporary hybrid conflicts require smart responses by NATO's military operators and planners to be able to act in the gray zone between war and peace. Key is the need for military actors to develop a *common understanding* with others working towards the same ends and, where possible, to design with them *complementary preventive actions and structures*. To apply this new approach, military actors must extend their competences to become capable in the non-violent management of conflict as well as war-fighting.

Keywords: NATO strategy, conflict prevention, military competence, comprehensive approach, hybrid conflict, hybrid threat
Stichworte: NATO-Strategie, Konfliktprävention, Militärkompetenz, umfassender Ansatz, hybrider Konflikt, hybride Bedrohung

1. The Understand to Prevent Project

Understand to Prevent (U2P) is a four-year project that has been nurtured under the umbrella of the Multinational Capability Development Campaign (MCDC) since 2013. The twenty-three partner nations and international governmental organizations that make up the MCDC[1] are a coalition of the willing who collaborate to develop and enhance interoperability, while maximising benefits of resource and cost-sharing. The products developed are intended as recommendations for common national and organizational capability development in the areas of interoperability, doctrine, organization, training, leadership education, personnel and policy. The strategic context of hybrid threats presented to NATO members – e.g. in the Eastern Baltic and elsewhere – puts emphasis on such a concept that seeks to avoid a violent military confrontation.

U2P focuses on how the military can contribute to the prevention of violent conflict as part of a comprehensive approach. As befits an MCDC project it is both a multinational and multi-disciplinary team effort, involving military and non-military personnel over two two-year cycles. The first of these (2013-14) produced a concept note[2] that defined more precisely what is meant by the terms 'conflict', 'violence' and 'prevention', and how the military does (and *could*, if otherwise configured) relate to each of these terms.

The next two years (2015-16) have been dedicated to turning the concept note into an operational handbook for military planners, which will be published in early 2017. The essentials of this product are outlined in the text that follows.

2. Realities of Contemporary Conflicts and Hybrid Threats

Contemporary violent conflicts display a high level of complexity. Most are intra-state conflicts with ambiguous causes that make any resolution challenging. Most are waged by multiple belligerent groups, with no clear frontlines (e.g. Syria), and often civilians are not just affected by hostilities but the deliberate targets of violence. The term *three block war*[3] has been coined to describe this complex, rapidly evolving conflict environment, which might simultaneously comprise elements of intense fighting, peacekeeping and humanitarian relief activities. An additional sphere that increasingly impacts conflicts is the information domain; *three blocks* has become *four blocks*, thus further expanding the complexity of what General Sir Rupert Smith has called 'war amongst the people'.[4]

The emergence of *hybrid threats*[5] has added yet more layers to contemporary conflict. Although there is no generally accepted definition, *hybrid threat* refers to the convergence and interconnection of different elements used by a state to achieve its strategic ends. The following descriptions reveal some of the inherent challenges:

- **Hybrid conflict** is a situation in which *parties refrain from the overt use of armed force* against each other, relying instead on a combination of military intimidation (falling short of an attack), exploitation of economic and political vulnerabilities, and diplomatic or technological means to pursue their objectives.
- **Hybrid war** is a situation in which a country *resorts to overt use of armed force* against another country or a non-state actor, in addition to a mix of other means (e.g. economic, political, and diplomatic).[6]

Hybridity is well-suited to many contemporary violent conflicts because their root causes are often to be found within the political, social and economic conditions determining the conflict-affected

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1   Austria, Canada, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, European Defence Agency, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, NATO-ACT (Allied Command Transformation), Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, South Korea, Spain, Sweden Switzerland, Turkey, UK, USA. Japan has observer status.
2   West, Simon et al., editors. *Understand to Prevent – the Military Contribution to the Prevention of Violent Conflict.* MCDC U2P Project Team, 2014.

3   A term coined by US Marine Corps General Charles Krulak to describe the spectrum of complex challenges Marines face in contemporary operations (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Block_War).
4   Smith, Rupert. The Utility of Force – the Art of War in the Modern World. Penguin Books, 2005., p. 266 ff.
5   Pawlak, Patryk. "Understanding Hybrid Threats." 2015, https://epthinktank.eu/2015/06/24/understanding-hybrid-threats/.
6   Ibid.

area i.e. grievances have accumulated over time to form *protracted social conflicts*.[7] Typically, these are enduring ethno-political conflicts between identity groups, of which at least one party feels that its basic needs for political participation, economic wealth sharing, security and equality are not respected. The insurgent party often strives to redress the balance by gaining access to state-related power.

There is general agreement that there is no purely military solution to such conflicts. The complexity and nature of the root causes call for a *comprehensive approach* i.e. a 'joined-up' political-social-economic-military response that sees civilian and military actors and agencies working together. For this to be effective, achieving a unity of purpose – and a *complementarity* of effort – is paramount.

U2P suggests that a starting-point for forging this unity and complementarity is to understand how conflict can escalate into violence through action-reaction-counteraction, gathering momentum to pass from a latent to a manifest and, finally, a violent form.
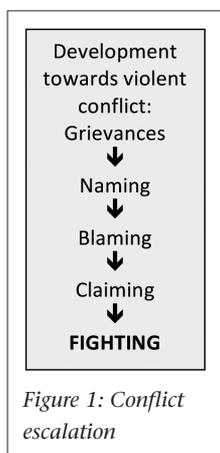
How does this momentum develop? According to William Felstiner[8], a social or political grievance that is previously not recognized becomes apparent (it can be *named*). The next step is transforming this realization into an accusation (somebody can be *blamed* for it). Finally, the discontent will be voiced and a remedy will be *claimed* from someone (person or institution). This progressive transformation is true for all social conflicts and does not necessarily lead to physical violence, but once a certain threshold is cross ed it is very difficult to turn back. At this point *fighting* becomes the fourth sequential element (Figure 1), which is the common characteristic of an insurgency, rebellion or internal war. This will inevitably see the deployment of military forces.

Development towards violent conflict:
Grievances
↓
Naming
↓
Blaming
↓
Claiming
↓
FIGHTING

Figure 1: Conflict escalation

Such protracted social conflicts do not start overnight.[9] Rather, perceived grievances might spark a dispute that slowly escalates and eventually leads to violence. However, as this is a process and not a sudden outburst, there are opportunities for constructive intervention. Kriesberg and Dayton[10] provide further encouragement with five core ideas about social conflicts:

■ Social conflicts are universal, and can be beneficial (*if they stay non-violent*)

■ Social conflicts are waged with varying destructiveness

■ Social conflicts entail social constructions

■ Social conflicts are dynamic and tend to move through stages

■ All social conflicts can be transformed

Understanding that the dynamics that transform a dispute seem to progress principally towards escalation – unless prevented by conciliation or intervention – the objective for *military actors* is to provide for conditions that encourage a peaceful settlement of the conflict through negotiation and dialogue. The aim is to remove the element of *fighting* from the escalatory sequence of *naming-blaming-claiming*; for example, by delineating where military contingents and police forces would be employed to end hostilities and prevent a resumption of fighting. Maintaining a ceasefire (including through coercive means) provides the opportunity for the belligerents to enter dialogue and transform violent (or potentially violent) conflicts into non-violent processes of social and political change.

A word of caution, however: the military represents a state's claimed monopoly of the use of force. The legal and legitimate application of military force must be a last resort but, in the context of the prevention of violent conflict, it can sometimes seem to be the first resort. Whenever the military is called in, its mere existence will have an effect on the conflict environment. The challenge for military planners and operators alike is to find appropriate ways to make it an effective element of violence prevention and conflict resolution, rather than adding fuel to the flames.

3. Military Contribution to the Prevention of Violent Conflict

It goes without saying that it is always a political decision to employ a state's military forces or resources. The military's operations planning process commences with a thorough analysis of the conflict situation and its defining parameters i.e. the relevant actors and driving factors of the conflict. Their thoughts are guided by the wisdom of military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, which highlights the importance of civil-military relations with respect to military operations:

> *"War is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means … the political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose."*[11]

In the context of the U2P project, a simple conflict curve serves as a navigational aid for aligning military efforts. A comprehensive conflict analysis, which determines the stage of the conflict and its tendency towards escalation or de-escalation, is the basis for delineating a strategy for how to avert violent conflict.

The conflict curve (or cycle) describes the key stages through which a conflict escalates into a violent phase and then de-escalates out of it. According to this model, preventive actions must be appropriate to the relevant point of the conflict curve, and always seek to direct the conflict dynamic 'downhill' on both sides of the 'peak' (Figure 2).

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7   Conflict Theory developed by Edward Azar identfies the deprivation of human needs as source of protracted social conflicts and are usually expressed collecively. It is the prolonged and often violent struggle by communal groups for such basic needs as security, recognition, and acceptance, fair access to political institutions and economic partici-pation. See Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2016, p. 115 ff.

8   see Felstiner, William L.F. et al. "The Emergence and Transformation of Disputes: Naming, Blaming, Claiming..." *Law and Society Review*, vol. 15, no. 3-4, 1980-81, pp. 631-654.

9   ibid.

10   Kriesberg, Louis and Bruce W. Dayton. *Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution*. 4th edition, Rowman&Littlefield Publishers, 2012.

11   Clausewitz, Carl von. *On War*. edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Revised edition, Princeton University Press, 1989. chapter 1, paragraph 24, p. 87 refers to the character of war and policy; the original notion of *war* should be read as military operation.

12   Own graphic adapted from: Ramsbotham, Oliver et al. *Contemporary Conflict Resolution -the Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts*. 4 (fully revised and updated) edition, Polity Press, 2016. p.14-15.

Figure 2: Prevention and the Conflict Cycle[12]
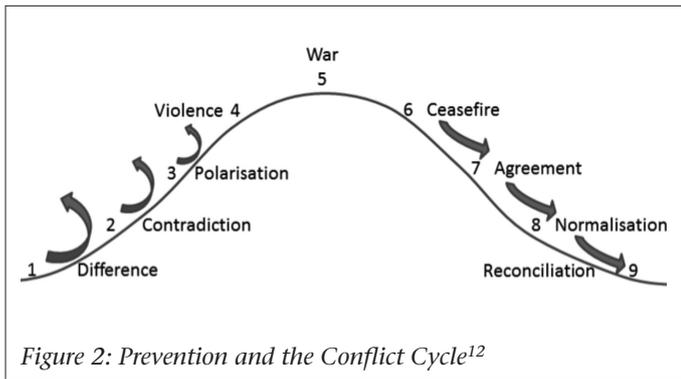
The challenge explored in the U2P process is to engage as early as possible – at *difference* and *contradiction* (1-2) – to avoid prevention being enacted predominantly in terms of crisis management/response. Similarly, actors now understand that if little or no action is taken towards *normalisation*[13] and *reconciliation* (8-9), the chances will increase that the cycle will return to *contradiction* and *polarisation* (2-3), with the continuing danger of escalation once again into *violence* and *war* (4-5).

The military operations planners need to take all this into account and work out activities that are suitable to complement other, non-military activities that seek to prevent violence and support conflict resolution. The spectrum of possible military contributions comprises e.g. public diplomacy, confidence building, peacekeeping, mentoring, stakeholder engagement and technical assistance; but also measures that resort to coercion or intimidation (if required). Table 1 offers an example of some possible military contributions to prevention at the *difference* stage of the conflict curve:

Stage of Conflict: Difference[14]

Main Goal of Conflict Prevention	■ Encourage Stability / Strengthen Resilience with Consent of Host Nation required
Possible Desired Outcomes	■ Increased human security ■ Good governance ■ Stable & legitimate state institutions ■ Civilian control of security sector ■ Nonviolent management of conflict
Military Contribution to Host Nation	■ Defence Diplomacy[15] and relationship development with U2P focus ■ Security System Reform (SSR)[16] ■ Joint military/police/civil society training ■ Prevention (U2P) advice ■ Influence advice ■ Anti-WMD training ■ Subject Matter Expert Exchanges – international conferences, workshops, seminars etc ■ Observer missions

Military Contribution to Home Nation / Alliance	■ Relationship development i.e., improve cooperation with relevant actors ('whole of government', IOs, NGOs) through Multi-Stakeholder Engagement ■ Knowledge and Understanding development ■ Joint military/police/civil society training ■ Prevention (U2P) advice ■ Horizon scanning ■ Early warning
Complementary Non-Military Action	■ Cultural peace-building ■ Legal reform ■ Support for local dispute resolution mechanisms and conflict resolution/transformation training ■ Joint military/police/civil society training ■ Fact-finding and peace commissions ■ Promote culture of toleration and respect ■ Promote acceptance of multiple and inclusive identities

Table 1: Military and Non-military action at the conflict stage Difference

4. U2P and the Military Operations Planning Process

Military organisations, whether multinational or national, are large systems with a clear hierarchy and agreed processes that provide the foundation for all involved. A common doctrinal basis ensures unity of effort and ensures military efficacy. Military doctrine provides the *fundamental principles by which the military forces guide their actions in support of objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgement in application*.[17] Doctrine development undergoes constant evaluation and adaptation. For NATO members, the realities of contemporary conflicts and lessons learnt in recent military missions are evaluated and incorporated in Allied Joint Doctrine,[18] as expressed in Allied Joint Publications approved by all NATO member states.

The Military Operations Planning Process reflects the broad and evolving set of challenges of contemporary and recent operations and has been adapted accordingly. NATO's *Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive* (COPD*)*, promulgated in 2013, incorporates new conceptual principles and methods such as systemic thinking and an effects-based approach. It strives to inculcate a culture of active collaboration and transparency among those involved in crisis management. The desired outcome is to allow for a more integrated or coordinated civilian-military planning process, thus enhancing the effective complementarity of civilian and military efforts for crisis management. The COPD provides a new and thorough framework for the planning process – the 'what' and methodology for strategic and operational level planning – and its introduction demands a change in the mindsets of military planners as it expands beyond traditional planning methods.[19]

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13   *Normalisation* does not mean simply the return to the 'status quo ante', from which the violent conflict originally developed, but a new state in which the root causes of the conflict are being addressed and transformed without violence.

14   Mallinson, Tom and Edward Canfor-Dumas, editors. *Understand to Prevent – Practical Guidance for the Military Contribution to the Prevention of Violent Conflict*. Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), UK Ministry of Defence, Shrivenham, 2016.

15   Also known as 'Defence Engagement'. See Annex L (pp. 242-4) for more detail on suggested activities.

16   Security Sector Reform when embedded in a wider reform of governance and justice systems.

17   As defined in NATO (NATO Standardization Office). *Aap-15 Nato Glossary of Abbreviations Used in Nato Documents and Publications*. NATO Standaridzation Office, 2016. http://nso.int/nso/nsdd/ListPromulg.html, 16 Oct 2016.

18   Recent doctrinal publications are: AJP-3.4.1 Military Contribution to Peace Support; AJP-3.4.5 Military Contribution to Stabilization and Reconstruction; see also NATO Standardization Office Website: http://nso.nato.int.

19   R. Erdeniz elaborates on the inherent intellectual challenges of the COPD: Erdeniz, Robert. "Operations Planning Revisited: Theoretical and Practical Implications of Methodology." *Defence Studies*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2016, pp. 248-269, doi:10.1080/14702436.2016.1187567.

This is where U2P complements the COPD. The U2P handbook proposes a four-step approach of *Understand-Engage-Act-Endure*. It is not an alternative process but rather complements the COPD with practical elements and a toolbox for strategic and operational level planning (Fig. 3).
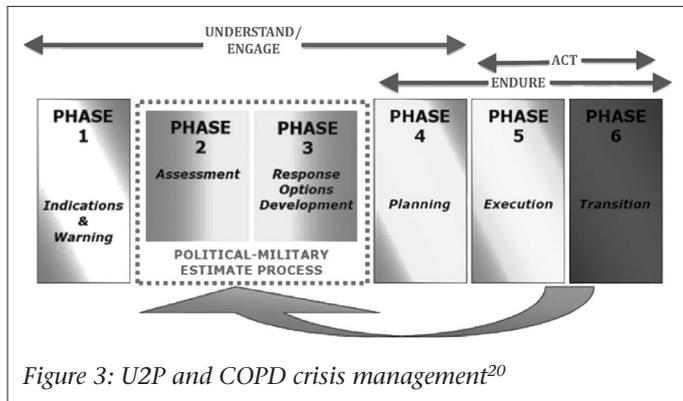

Figure 3: U2P and COPD crisis management[20]

Basically, U2P offers elements of a methodology handbook with quick reference (primarily) for the military planner in a Joint Operations Planning Group of a Headquarters.

It provides practical tools for how to determine relevant stakeholders and how to plan for engaging with them in dialogue and negotiations. Additionally, U2P offers a compendium of underlying common themes of contemporary violent conflicts. It guides the military planner towards an understanding of the relevancy for own operations and how to consider it in own planning efforts. Examples of such themes are: Protection of Civilians, Conflict Sensitivity, Security Sector Reform, or Gender Perspectives.

5. The U2P Process

U2P is an iterative process. While progress is made by working in turn through the four stages of *Understand-Engage-Act-Endure*, ultimately everything is based on understanding and feeds back into it (Figure 4). The *Understand* and *Engage* stages in particular must be viewed as running together in tandem rather than in sequence. Understanding informs greater engagement, which informs deeper understanding, and so on.
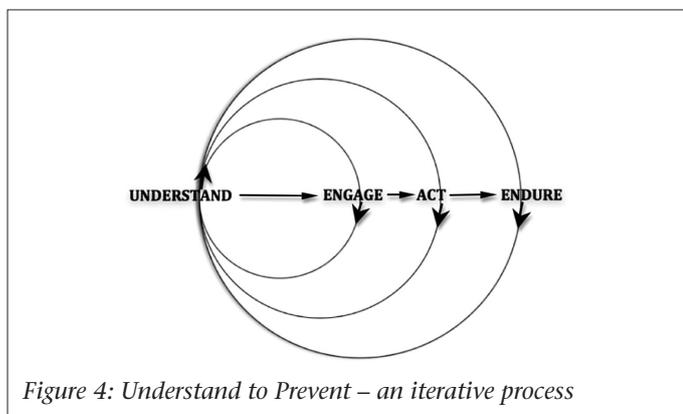

Figure 4: Understand to Prevent – an iterative process

Understand means to develop as deep an insight as possible of the target conflict (or conflicts, as several overlapping disputes can be involved), and to ensure that this understanding is regularly challenged and refreshed. It also means to develop a clear and honest self-awareness – that is, how and why this conflict matters to oneself and one's partner actors – and an understanding of the effects of different types of intervention. It points to analytical tools and relevant issues for conflict resolution in the context of contemporary conflicts.

Engage means to build trust with key actors relevant to the target conflict, including with potential partners (at home and in the host nation) who might have been operating in the conflict-affected space for a considerable period – e.g. NGOs and IOs – and who have related but different agendas. It also means working together with different actors at various levels of interaction, from simply sharing information to fully integrated design, planning, preparation and action. How to conduct *Stakeholder Engagement Planning* is another tool offered to support the detailed planning of operations.[21]

Act means to undertake the best actions that military and non-military actors have identified – based on the understanding and engagement generated in the first two stages – to prevent violence, promote dialogue, enhance security and support conflict resolution/transformation. It means deciding who will take the necessary actions and calculating their second and third-order effects (and beyond if possible). Crucially, it also means ensuring that these actions 'Do No Harm', however unintentionally, and that the alternative options to violence are fully explored.

Endure means to ensure that any actions taken to prevent violence, promote dialogue, enhance security and support conflict resolution/transformation are sustained long enough to be/remain effective. This necessarily involves early planning for sustainability and establishing upfront a meaningful framework for monitoring and evaluating those actions, which should regularly be adjusted, as necessary.

6. U2P – a 'Tiered' Approach

Recognizing that the military contribution is only one element of a comprehensive approach, the U2P process also offers a simple 'tiered' model for improved communication and collaboration between actors seeking to prevent violent conflict.

Such a model is necessary because the persistent challenge of a comprehensive approach is how to achieve commonality of purpose and effort among a range of actors who do not acknowledge a commonly agreed authority, let alone a single chain of command. On the military side, most Western forces and their allies share joint processes that are alien to most non-military actors, who can also often find it hard to coordinate with other civilians, even in the same field.

In addition, the actions of various non-military actors can be determined by internal mandates that set strict limits on the

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20 See NATO Website: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_75565.htm? and NATO (NATO Standardization Office). *Ajp-5 Allied Joint Doctrine for Operational-Level Planning*. NATO Standardization Office, 2013. http://nso.nato.int/nso/nsdd/ListPromulg.html, 16 Oct 2016.

21 Mallinson, Tom and Edward Canfor-Dumas, editors. Understand to Prevent – Practical Guidance for the Military Contribution to the Prevention of Violent Conflict. Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), UK Ministry of Defence, Shrivenham, 2016. See Annex D

degree to which they can interact with other organizations, especially the military. Humanitarian, development and peacebuilding NGOs also operate according to different cultures. Taken together, these factors mean that *there is no one-size-fits-all model that will deliver a truly comprehensive approach to prevention.*

Even so, to maximize their effectiveness it is imperative that military and non-military actors seek to develop a *common understanding* of the conflict they are considering and, on this basis, forge *complementary* approaches to prevention.

While this might be achieved through ad hoc or informal arrangements – which could be all that is possible in certain circumstances – the U2P process proposes a more structured, 'tiered' approach that seeks to balance inclusiveness, flexibility and effectiveness (Figure 5). This offers three broad tiers of engagement between military and non-military actors, both within and beyond the conflict-affected space – namely Integration, Cooperation and Sharing.

Figure 5: Three Tiers of Interaction
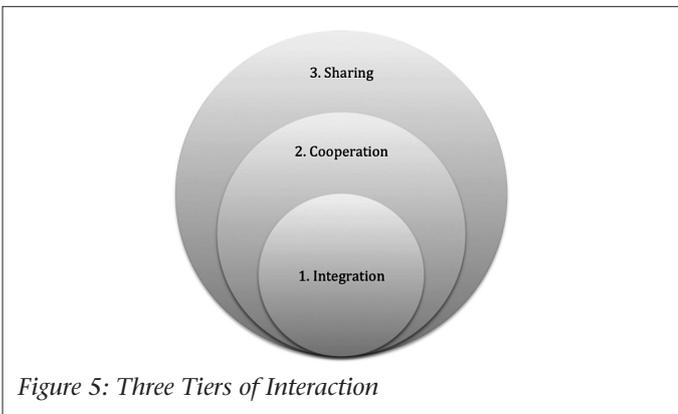
These three tiers are part of a spectrum, so the exact boundary between them is less important than the key characteristic of each tier.

- *Tier 1: Integration* is for those actors who are willing to plan and operate as part of an integrated effort under a commonly recognized authority.

- *Tier 2: Cooperation* is for those actors who wish to negotiate some complementarity in their actions. This can range from developing common goals to some degree of co-planning and action. The actors retain full autonomy, however.

- *Tier 3: Sharing* aims simply for everyone to know (as far as possible) what everyone else is doing, through the sharing of information.

Crucially, each actor decides at which level they wish to interact, if at all. The intention is to establish a flexible and creative approach to interaction that supports the development of a common understanding of a conflict, and complementary approaches towards it.

7. Individual and Collective Competence of the Military

Military competence is understood to be the *disposition of a person to think, organize and act in new, complex and/or uncertain situations of conflict prevention in a self-organized manner.* It should

be distinguished from skills, which nevertheless are part of the individual's competence.[22] Prevention and peacebuilding competence is made up of four base competences,[23] which may be further specified according to the relevant objectives of the military's role in this activity (Table 2):

Personal competence	■ Credibility ■ Holistic thinking ■ Discipline ■ Reliability
Competence of activity and decision-making	■ Decision-making ability ■ Initiative ■ Ability to act/execute
Professional and methodological competence	■ Analytical skills ■ Objectivity
Social communicative competence	■ Ability to solve conflicts ■ Ability to solve problems ■ Ability to understand others' perspectives ■ Ability to work in a team ■ Communication skills ■ Adaptability ■ Sense of duty

Table 2 Competences of a military peacebuilder[24]

Competence is a disposition – the various elements of the required individual's competence for prevention and peacebuilding therefore need to be fostered through training and education and will only be developed over time.

The competent military actor, having developed his or her ability to resolve conflict, has been described as follows:[25]

- Recognizes conflicts of interest with or between others and knows her/ his own position.

- Is aware of potential (local) sources of conflict and able to recognize conflict dynamics and respective actors.

- Has the insight and willingness/ tolerance required to consider other interests objectively (avoiding bias) and critically challenge her/his own.

- Reaches out to stakeholders in community, fellow soldiers or local leaders sensitively (empathy) and can deal with conflicts.

- Exercises impartiality in addressing and / or resolving conflict issues. Has persuasive power; resolves resistance and obstruction by asserting both sides' interests convincingly; inspires trust and emanates confidence; resolves conflicts to the

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22 Rychen, Dominique Simone and Laura Hersh Salganik, editors. *Key Competencies for a Successful Life and a Well-Functioning Society*. Hogrefe Publishing, 2003. A definition offered: "A competence is defined as the ability to successfully meet complex demands in a particular context. Competent performance or effective action implies the mobilization of knowledge, cognitive and practical skills, as well as social and behaviour components such as attitudes, emotions, and values and motivations. A competence – a holistic notion – is therefore not reducible to its cognitive dimensions, and thus the terms competence and skills are not synonymous" (OECD 2003).

23 Reference: Heyse, Volker and John Erpenbeck, (Hrsg.). *Kompetenzmanagement – Methoden, Vorgehen, Kode(R) Und Kode(R)X Im Praxistest*. Waxmann Verlag GmbH, 2007.

24 Outcome of focus group discussions with civil society organisations and officers and non-commissioned officers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in Mindanao (2014) facilitated by T. Boehlke.

25 Outcome of focus group discussion with staff of 6th Infantry Division (AFP), Awang, Cotabato City (Mindanao/Philippines), July 2014.

conflicting parties' advantage, in a way that increases their personal responsibility, creativity and social communication; is therefore sought as a mediator in cases of conflict.

Since contemporary conflicts drag military actors into the social dynamics of conflict-affected communities, modern soldiery involves tasks that require military actors to expand their individual competence beyond war-fighting. Military operators will require competence in prevention at all levels of command. At the operational and strategic level, the general understanding of the conflict and its dynamics is required to delineate appropriate approaches to conflict transformation; while at the tactical (grassroots) level, soldiers face local communities with various stakeholders directly involved in conflict.

In short, there needs to be a collective competence of the military institution to understand and deal with the destructive escalation of social conflicts, and to come up with operational ideas for constructive conflict transformation.

Collective competence is a demanding task for professional military education and training. It will need to be an integral part of training and education in military staff colleges and schools. It will also need to be embedded in a common doctrinal basis to inform the collective mindset of the military and guide military operations planning and operational conduct in this sphere.

persistent modulated engagement – to use NATO assets more imaginatively, more creatively and more consistently over time. Indeed, were it to become part of NATO doctrine, its application would then be open to each member and partner country operating independently or bilaterally. Currently, elements of the handbook are contributing to the development of new NATO doctrine on the Protection of Civilians.[26] In this way, U2P would be able to prove its worth in a wide variety of situations, at various levels.

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8. Conclusion

What is the way ahead for U2P? The first step is to disseminate the concept. No MCDC nation or organization is under any obligation to adopt any of its products, and so it is with U2P. So the U2P Handbook and concept note will be circulated widely throughout various institutions embraced by the MCDC community – defence academies, staff colleges, concept and training centres etc. – the aim being to start a broad conversation on the suggestions they contain.

At the same time, it is hoped that some specialist military units – for example, the UK's 77th Brigade, but also operational level headquarters – might start to use elements of the U2P process in their operational planning. The results can then be fed into the wider conversation and, where they are beneficial, be further developed in training, education and use elsewhere. To state it again – U2P is an iterative process, not just in its focused use but as a broad, evolving concept.

U2P may be seen as an approach to help develop responses to NATO's strategic challenges presented by hybrid threats. It complements the established crisis response planning process with practical tools for military staffs for an in-depth analysis of conflict dynamics and stakeholder engagement.

NATO is the largest and most powerful military alliance in the world. It was designed for crisis management, which means it takes a crisis to spur it to action. But this also means that for the majority of the time it is on standby. Whether the next alliance-wide crisis response is triggered by Article 5, and whether it is in-area or expeditionary, U2P offers a strategy –

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26 NATO SACT Protection of Civilians concept development workshop, Shrivenham, February 2017