Coexistence International at
Brandeis University

Complementary Approaches
to Coexistence Work

Focus on Coexistence and Security

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by Lisa Schirch

Why should military, police, and policymakers who care about secure states and borders think about inter-group relations? Levels of security correlate closely with the quality of coexistence both within and between groups. Where people feel safe and secure, there is a good chance that societal diversity is valued, equality is actively pursued, interdependence among different groups is recognized, and violence among communities and nations is rare.¹ In war zones in Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Colombia, and many other countries, people at all levels and in all sectors increasingly see the connections between security and positive coexistence. Coexistence programs that foster dialogue and community problem-solving can help defuse tension and build security between Shia and Sunni in Iraq, between Tutsi and Hutu in Rwanda, between urban and rural communities in Indonesia, and between African-Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and Caucasians in the United States. At the same time, violence and other forms of insecurity can quickly wear away goodwill between communities and impair their ability to develop the positive social and economic contexts necessary for preventing violence.

Development, coexistence, and security personnel have often ignored or opposed each other’s work in conflict areas, and each has seen the other as getting in the way of the “real” efforts to build security. Increasingly, however, military personnel and coexistence professionals are recognizing the importance of dialogue with one another. Conflicts in Darfur and Rwanda, for example, have compelled coexistence professionals to discuss the need for military approaches to security to prevent or end genocidal violence. And in countries like South Africa, Guatemala, Indonesia, and Northern Ireland, coexistence workers have seen how reforming the security sector (both army and police) is essential to the process of peacebuilding. On the other hand, conflicts in Iraq and Colombia compel military personnel to shift questions away from how to “win the war” toward how to
“win the peace” after years of little evidence that a primarily military approach is working. Increasingly, a new wave of “soldier diplomats” and nongovernmental organizations are recognizing that in order for their work to be successful, they need to know about and support security system reform (SSR)—the transformation of the entire security system including all its actors and their roles, responsibilities, and actions, so that the system reflects democratic norms and principles of good governance.²

This focus paper begins by recognizing the similarities and differences between civilian coexistence professionals and traditional security personnel working in conflict areas. It then explores the impact of recent trends, particularly SSR, on the nexus of coexistence and security. The second half of the paper explores recommendations for infusing coexistence frameworks and skill sets into security policies and programs.

Methodology
This focus paper synthesizes ongoing research by the 3D Security Initiative, a program sponsored by the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University. The 3D Security Initiative promotes civil-military dialogue and consensus-building between coexistence professionals and military personnel. It draws on experience with the “Winning the Peace” curriculum taught at West Point Military Academy, and other seminars and workshops on civil-military coordination at the U.S. Army War College, National Defense University, and U.S. Joint Forces Command, as well as on conversations with military leaders in Europe and Africa. It also draws on work undertaken as part of a two-year research and pilot training program on NGO security by InterAction, a U.S. development network. Finally, the content is also based on the author’s fifteen years of experience in coexistence and peacebuilding work in East and West Africa, parts of Asia, and Latin America working with civilians who have thought deeply about the role of the military in peace and security.

Common ground between security and coexistence approaches
Security and coexistence professionals share important attributes that set them apart from other types of workers. Most security and coexistence professionals aim to contribute to ending or preventing violence, although they pursue these goals in different ways. Many military and coexistence workers also show exceptional courage, working in war zones and traveling to remote, often dangerous communities. People in both sectors often are willing to sacrifice their personal lives on behalf of what they believe is the larger common good.

Security and coexistence workers also share the fact that their work can have unintended consequences. Despite the good intentions held by many in both fields, often their efforts simply are not enough to bring about coexistence and security. The unintended fall-out from their work can be harmful to the very people and communities they are trying to protect. By working in crisis situations under stress for many months or years, security and coexistence workers face similar challenges of burn-out, disillusionment, and frustration.

Differences between traditional security and civilian approaches
It is important to recognize the diversity of experiences and opinions within the two categories of “security” and “civilian” actors. The security system is diverse and includes soldiers trained for combat, peacekeepers, police, civilian-security contractors, and a wide variety of other roles. Civilian actors also come in a variety of forms: humanitarian aid and development workers, human rights advocates, civilian peacekeepers, and coexistence or peacebuilding practitioners.³ While there is great diversity within the traditional security and civilian sectors, some research shows these two sectors tend to have different approaches to conflict analysis and different ideas about the role of coercive force.⁴
Traditionally, the security sector has tended to understand conflict as a competition for power, sometimes rooted in greed. Threats to national territory or economic interests, and/or disruptions to law and order are seen as most important. Security personnel tend to believe that governmental institutions are a prerequisite for achieving peace. Violence is understood as an unfortunate but necessary means of forcing people to change or stop behavior that threatens the social order that security personnel want to protect.

Civilian actors, for their part, tend to understand conflict as an expression of grievances over unmet needs for resources or threats to people's dignity, identity, culture, or religious freedoms. Coexistence workers largely depend on persuasion to change people's behaviors. They believe that people can be convinced that it is in their interest to change their beliefs and behaviors and to make structural changes through dialogue, negotiation, and relationship-building with others. They tend to see violence as a short-term strategy that in the end is often self defeating. Coexistence workers believe that when people voluntarily make their own choices about structural change as a result of a learning process such as negotiation or dialogue, not only are they more likely to feel positive about the change, but it is more likely to be lasting.

As the military and civilian sectors begin to coordinate their work in conflict zones, there is an increasing need to address analytical differences and to blend insights into the roles of power, greed, and grievance in inciting conflict.

Trends in the coexistence-security connection

Expansion of conflict-analysis skills and frameworks: Over the last two decades, scores of researchers have built an impressive set of data and theories about the causes of violent conflict. New research correlates global, regional, and local insecurity with failed, fragile, or weak states. Failed states lack the capacity to provide basic economic, political, and security services to their citizens. Failed states are statistically linked to a vulnerability to trans-national crime; trafficking in weapons, drugs, and people; the spread of deadly diseases; genocide; civil war; regional conflicts; and terrorism. They become "incubators" for security threats. These days, when the security policy-making community examines the root causes of insecurity, it focuses on the problems of economic inequality and poverty, intra-state tensions among diverse groups, climate change, deadly diseases, and energy dependence, alongside the more traditional concerns of nuclear proliferation and terrorism.

The institutionalization of coexistence and peacebuilding: The 2006 Human Security Report observed that the number of deaths from violent conflict, crises, wars, and genocides had declined over the last decade due in large part to the upsurge of international peacebuilding through UN, World Bank, and civil-society efforts beginning in the 1990s. These peacebuilding and coexistence interventions in conflict regions have the explicit intention of reducing or preventing violence, building relationships across the lines of conflict, and increasing a community's capacity for a culture of peace.

Linking crisis response and long-term planning: After the Asian tsunami, humanitarian aid groups tried to link their short-term relief efforts with long-term sustainable development in both Aceh and Sri Lanka. Likewise, security experts are seeing the need to link short-term crisis responses with the long-term approaches required to address the economic, political, and social roots of insecurity. While involving civil society and drawing on coexistence skills may complicate efforts in the short-term, a growing number of experts understand this to be essential to the long-term sustainability of security.

Toward "whole of government" or "3D" approaches: At the state level, there is growing recognition that today's environmental, health, and violent threats require a larger set of tools than currently held by most militaries. In Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and now in the United States, a "whole of government" or "joined-up" institutional approach is now being used. By coordinating infrastructures, governments are able to devote greater resources to these complex problems. The expansion of security policy to include development, diplomacy, and defense is sometimes referred to as the "3D" approach.

In the United States, there is increasing collaboration among the Department of Defense, the State Department, and USAID. The State Department's new Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) is tasked with leading, coordinating, and institutionalizing U.S. government civilian capacity to perform diplomatic and development tasks related to reconstruction and stabilization of fragile or failed states. Further steps toward a 3D approach in the U.S. include the National Security Presidential Directive 44 calling for increasing civilian capacity in reconstruction efforts and the Department of Defense Directive 3000.05 calling for development of stability, security, transition, and reconstruction (SSTR) capacities.

From national security to human security: The trends detailed above are shifting the language of security. While traditional military views on security focus on protection of territory and the pursuit of power and national interests, the concept of "human security" poses a broader view. Human security exists in societies where all people are able to meet their basic needs for food, healthcare, education, participation in
community life, cultural expression, etc. Human security broadens the focus, approach, types of actors involved, and the time span for judging success. Human security focuses on threats facing individuals and communities, rather than those facing national business interests or the state.9

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<th>Traditional National Security Paradigm</th>
<th>Human Security Paradigm</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td>Territory and economic interests of the nation state</td>
<td>Well-being of individuals and communities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Approach</strong></td>
<td>Top-down military imposition</td>
<td>Multi-track efforts at top, mid, and community levels using creative efforts in development, diplomacy, and defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actors</strong></td>
<td>Primarily military</td>
<td>Military, government, civil-society, business, academic, religious, and media leaders, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time span</strong></td>
<td>Short-term</td>
<td>Long-term</td>
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Table: Security Paradigms

Security policy-making should be “wide” and “deep”

Security planning should take a wide “whole of government” approach coordinating with regional and international actors in development, diplomacy, and defense. And it should take a deep approach to link with mid- and community-level civil society leaders. The pyramid below illustrates three tiers of decision-making in most countries. At the top level, government leaders make national and international policies that impact global economies, war, and relative decision-making power of other countries. At the mid-level, business, media, religious, and academic leaders help shape public opinion that sets the stage for policy decisions. They have access both to top-level leaders and those at the community level. Community-level leaders make decisions about local security and coexistence efforts.

![Security Pyramid Diagram](https://example.com/security_palm_tree.png)

Figure 1

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<th>Top-Level Leadership:</th>
<th>Security policy-making coordination government programs in development, diplomacy, and defense. “Track I” diplomacy is responsible for coexistence efforts at the national level.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Level Civil Society Leadership:</td>
<td>Religious, business, media, academic leadership shapes public opinion and conducts security and “Track II” coexistence efforts at the regional level.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community-Level Civil Society Leadership:</td>
<td>Local security and coexistence efforts.</td>
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People at all levels of the pyramid talk about security, but traditional state approaches to security put the responsibility on those at the top who initiate the use of armed force on behalf of the protection of the state. In many countries, top-level leadership faces a crisis of legitimacy, as the elite use military or economic means to maintain power rather than deriving their authority from wide public support. When top-level leadership is opportunistic or greedy, state institutions fail to address human needs, and violent conflict becomes more likely. Security requires partnerships between legitimate state institutions and a healthy civil society to counteract corruption. Political leaders and military generals at the top-level need to work in coordination with mid- and community-level leaders committed to engaging in security-system reform.10

“Whole of government” approaches and international efforts at coordinating security policies and developing “cooperative security” arrangements help ensure a “widened” top-level coordination. Security policy-making should be “deepened” by including stakeholders from all levels of the pyramid.

Include all stakeholders: An analysis of all stakeholders and their interests is an essential first step in creating inclusive processes that have a better chance of initial acceptance, long-term sustainability, and effectiveness. There is a history of civil society being left out of security discussions, which needs to change. Civil society provides an important set of checks and balances on government institutions, and thus assists in the development of good governance. Civilians are resources for their own security; they can take part in neighborhood watch programs, work alongside community policing programs, assist in researching threat assessments, and promote SSR processes.

In South Africa, the broad inclusion of civil society, particularly women’s groups, in the National Defence Review is a successful example of the intersection between the coexistence and security fields. The open process built trust between the security sector and the public in South Africa following many decades of distrust. It also increased public ownership of the security sector. Following the Review, an annual women’s peace seminar with civil society and military personnel began, particularly important given the level of violence against women in South Africa.

Joint assessment: All stakeholders need to take part in a joint threat assessment and analysis of local contexts and conflicts, as these assessments are blueprints for budgets and programming. Analysis shapes action. Coexistence workers should join government departments responsible for diplomatic, development, trade, military, and other sectors in developing shared assessments, planning, and design to ensure that a “deep” approach to security planning includes all relevant stakeholders and takes coexistence values into account.
Create coordination forums: Ensure forums that allow for full participation and direct lines of decision-making for civil-society actors. Coordination forums can allow civilian coexistence and development professionals and military personnel to exchange essential information on resources, tasks, possible types of collaboration, etc. Coordination forums can also help defuse the natural tensions that arise between different organizations with different goals. Communication technologies such as the Internet, wikis, and compatible cell or satellite phones can also contribute toward creating forums where diverse actors working in conflict zones can exchange information and knowledge about the local context.¹¹

In Iraq, an NGO forum for coordination brought together humanitarian, development, and coexistence organizations working throughout the country. At the same time, the U.S. military organized forums to meet with NGOs to inform them of military movements that affected development workers. However, it was often difficult for NGOs to get their agendas included in the meetings. A more neutral space was needed to bring together civil and military personnel working in the same regions to allow NGOs a greater voice in participating in security assessment and planning.

Create civilian infrastructure and capacity: The disparities in resources and size make it challenging for civilian and military agencies to act as equal partners in security policy-making and implementation. Greater resources for civilian security-sector programs are required. Coexistence programs central to SSR such as reintegration programs for soldiers and reconciliation efforts at all levels of society are severely under-funded.

Coexistence skills for security-sector personnel

Foster constructive conflict: Coexistence workers learn to distinguish between constructive and destructive forms of conflict, so they can encourage and create forums for constructive problem-solving. Constructive forms of expressing conflict can be productive in helping relationships become less violent and more secure. But when violence, threats, or lack of communication characterize relationships, conflict becomes unproductive and even destructive. Coexistence skills include learning to maintain a respectful demeanor to help channel conflict into a constructive conversation and away from situations where growing hostility can escalate into violence.

Use power conservatively: People feeling insecure or threatened are more likely to use violence. People tend to feel disempowered and threatened when others around them appear to possess more power than they do. Security personnel need to increase their sensitivity to this issue, and specifically to the effect of symbols of power such as hi-tech equipment, expensive vehicles, contextually extravagant lifestyles, uniforms, guns, Western “know how” and education, money, and skin color. Security personnel can make a conscious choice to divest themselves of some of the symbols of power, thus fostering better relationships and greater empowerment of local communities. This approach can greatly decrease community hostility and increase the personal security of security workers.

Demonstrate respect: Security personnel may find themselves in situations where they need to attempt to defuse aggressive and angry people. When faced with anger, it can be difficult to respond with respect. But demonstrating respect even in tense situations is a primary means for de-escalating hostility and aggression. Any actions which are considered inappropriate in terms of a lack of deference to local customs, leadership, and ethical/moral norms can increase local hostility and insecurity. Workers trained in coexistence can defuse aggression and maximize security by communicating respect with appropriate listening skills and non-aggressive, non-challenging body language, and by showing concern for the specific, personal needs of others.

During a train hijacking in an Asian country, the train personnel followed a standard security procedure to de-escalate the situation. The male attendants sat down and instructed the male passengers to take off their jackets and ties and to lower their eye position. The female attendants attended to the hijackers in an attempt to address their needs in a non-threatening way, while also communicating their own interest in the safety of all the passengers and crew. Everyone survived the crisis.

Increase cultural intelligence: Foreign military, peacekeepers, and even local police often take a distant posture in relation to local people and may arrive in communities without fully understanding the local cultural, economic, and political dynamics. The hesitancy to engage in relationships with local populations in crisis regions for fear of losing neutrality often undermines the effectiveness of security interventions. The more security personnel can demonstrate respect for local cultures, religions, rituals—and the more skilled they are in speaking the local language—the more likely local people are to respond with respect toward security personnel.

Listen actively: When trying to defuse hostility, listening actively to others is a far more powerful tool than speaking. If an aggressor identifies a particular concern or interest,
security personnel will benefit from showing a willingness to resolve the issue or meet the other’s needs.

**Negotiation and dialogue:** Advanced coexistence skills such as negotiation and dialogue can also bolster security personnel’s skills in relating to local populations. Security personnel who are able to negotiate and dialogue with local leaders, for example, are more likely to develop relationships with local leaders where they can discover mutual interests and possibilities for cooperation—and local leaders are more likely to share in the responsibility for local security.

**Security-system reform skills for coexistence workers**

**Frame coexistence as a security strategy:** Coexistence personnel will benefit from learning the language and concerns of security personnel and policymakers. Linking coexistence programming to security provides an entryway into current policy discussions on national budgets, military strategy, and institutional infrastructure for a preventive approach to violent conflict.

In Kosovo, a local NGO adopted a “bottom-up” approach to community safety in the village of Viti. Over the period of a year, residents came together with government, police, and military personnel. Together, they researched the safety and security problems and then developed a “community safety plan.” The community participated actively in the safety plan, watching out for wild dogs, reckless driving, and risk of flooding. As active participants in SSR and in the security system itself, the community’s internal ties strengthened, leading to a better quality of relationships and more equality within the village.

**Engage and support SSR:** Civil society’s demand and ongoing support for reform is essential; research shows that SSR programs that do not cultivate local support are doomed to fail. Civil-society organizations play important roles in providing oversight and in creating an environment that supports SSR progress. Coexistence workers have crucial civil-society networks that can be mobilized to support reform. Yet many coexistence workers, like workers from other fields, are ignorant of SSR, unsure of how to participate in SSR processes, or afraid that involvement in SSR somehow will taint their impartiality. Training programs for coexistence workers on basic SSR processes and military organizational culture can help increase the participation of coexistence workers in SSR.

In Guatemala, a peace accord mandated reform of military doctrine. At first, military authorities rejected civil-society participation. Yet the international community did not accept the military’s reform drafts. It took several years of persistent dialogue among military and civil-society leaders driven by concerns for coexistence to build trust and inclusion. Eventually, they developed a draft that was approved by civil society and the international community.

**Research on SSR:** Civil society can engage with local security personnel to research and help evaluate their work and security threats. Coexistence workers can help communities mend relationships between police and local community members through a joint process of identifying and implementing new security plans.

**Participate in reintegration of soldiers:** DDR or “Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration” is an essential element of SSR. With additional training in the DDR process, coexistence workers could play greater roles in assisting communities to develop plans for reintegrating former soldiers or rebels. Existing security institutions rarely have the capacity or knowledge to do this, and communities are sometimes resistant to accepting returning soldiers. Coexistence workers skilled in facilitating trauma-healing processes and community mediations are essential to DDR.

**Promote reconciliation as part of transitional justice:** Transitional justice and SSR often go side by side in countries trying to address the legacies of systematic human rights abuses and to create new justice and security systems. Transitional justice means working with victims and offenders through both traditional and modern justice mechanisms; and reconciliation among divided communities is a central part of that process. Training in the transitional justice process could assist coexistence workers in helping develop local, regional, and national processes of dialogue and healing.

**The challenges of linking security and coexistence**

Linking coexistence and security does have risks. As security strategists articulate the security functions of development-assistance programs like building schools and houses, there has been a trend in some countries to involve the military in these programs to win the “hearts and minds” of local people in conflict areas. The militarization of development assistance frequently endangers local, indigenous community-development workers who become associated, by virtue of their similar work, with the military presence in the region. For instance, in Iraq, where the U.S. military is building schools, many Iraqi development workers doing the same thing have faced death threats, since they seem to outsiders to be colluding with the military occupation.
In addition, development organizations have published statements warning against seeing development as primarily a security strategy rather than as a strategy to reduce poverty, which was its original goal. Likewise, coexistence programs should remain focused on their core task of building equality, appreciation for diversity, and interdependence between groups. And coexistence programming should remain firmly rooted within civil society.

The wide, inter-agency coordination at the top levels may undermine the efforts to include deep civil society participation in SSR. Greater coordination between governments and “whole of government” don’t create a ready space for building better bridges with civil-society organizations at the mid- and lower-levels. Growing high-level civil-military coordination may undermine local leadership. Critics on both the right and left claim that SSR programs are part of a nation-building agenda, and see them as nothing but neo-colonial projects aimed once again at imposing Western “models” of democracy and development onto developing countries. Security-system reform and coexistence efforts must always be rooted in active civil-society participation and real leadership from within.

The way forward

This focus paper has outlined the common ground and diversity among coexistence and security personnel. Coexistence skills can be taught to security-sector personnel to bolster the range of responses they have available to them when interacting with communities in crisis situations. SSR processes can be taught to coexistence workers, so they can make the links and contribute more effectively. Security policy-making should continue to both widen and deepen the inclusion of more stakeholders, more coordinating forums, and longer-term strategic planning.

Additional Resources on this Topic

Other Papers and Publications
• Committee for Conflict Transformation Support, “Is There a Role for the Military in Peacebuilding?” (London: Number 32, October 2006).
• Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland, A New Beginning: Policing in Northern Ireland (Belfast: September 1999).

Web sites
• The 3D Security Initiative. www.3dsecurity.org.
• Partnership for Democratic Governance and Security. www.pdgs.org

Endnotes
1 These are the values that Coexistence International attributes to positive coexistence.
8 The DAC-OECD, Whole of Government Approaches to Fragile States (Paris: 2006).
10 The Patten Report on Policing in Northern Ireland is an ideal example of this type of successful integration.
About Coexistence International

Based at Brandeis University since 2005, Coexistence International (CI) is an initiative committed to strengthening the resources available to policymakers, practitioners, researchers, advocates, organizations, and networks promoting coexistence at local, national, and international levels. CI advocates a complementary approach to coexistence work through facilitating connections, learning, reflection, and strategic thinking between those in the coexistence field and those in related areas.

What is Coexistence?

Coexistence describes societies in which diversity is embraced for its positive potential, equality is actively pursued, interdependence between different groups is recognized, and the use of weapons to address conflicts is increasingly obsolete. Coexistence work covers the range of initiatives necessary to ensure that communities and societies can live more equitably and peacefully together.

About the Series

Fragmentation within the coexistence field, as well as divisions between coexistence and related areas, impede the achievement of effective, sustainable peace. Without cooperation and a recognition of complementarity, key players often work in isolation from one another—a situation that leads to missed opportunities or incomplete responses to conflicts.

With this publication series, Coexistence International examines where and how certain fields intersect with coexistence work. What challenges and opportunities exist when disciplines work together toward the common goal of a more peaceful, just world? This series illustrates the possibilities of effecting positive coexistence through cooperation among related fields.

Other CI Publications

Complementary Approaches to Coexistence Work

- What is Coexistence and Why a Complementary Approach?
- Focus on Coexistence and the Arts
- Focus on Coexistence and Democracy-building
- Focus on Coexistence and Natural Resources
- Focus on Coexistence and Security

Country Studies

This series describes the state of coexistence within different countries around the world—including the Czech Republic, Ecuador, Latvia, Mauritius, and Poland—and compares their diversity and coexistence policies.

Publications can be accessed online at www.coexistence.net/pubs/publications.html.

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