



New challenges; new approaches

An international conference at UNESCO in Paris discussed the challenges of humanitarian diplomacy recently. **Patrick Lagadec** talks to Xavier Guilhou, who advised on the initiative

ON JANUARY 27 AND 28, 2011, international crisis management professionals met at UNESCO's headquarters in France to discuss the new challenges of 'humanitarian diplomacy'. This meeting, which was organised by the French Foundation of the Ordre de Malte, in conjunction with the French Navy, opened up dispassionate and pragmatic debate based on individual experiences.

All those in charge – experts, diplomats, military and humanitarian workers – welcomed this initiative, which was marked by exceptional maturity and attentiveness. Xavier Guilhou advised the Foundation of the Ordre de Malte and the French Navy on the project.

Patrick Lagadec (PL): I attended the extremely successful international conference at UNESCO on humanitarian diplomacy and the management of large international crises. How do you see these challenges and the changes ahead?

Xavier Guilhou (XG): For about ten years we have been witnessing a true change of

lexicon as regards international security. Terminology such as: 'The end of utopia'; 'globalisation of economies'; 'emergence of new entrants'; 'identity claims'; and 'large population displacements' are emerging, along with an increase in natural disasters in extremely urbanised areas, or those with a high human density.

Failing model

The world has to face up to the permanent presence of dozens of crises of differing nature, some of which bring the risk of regional flashover that could escalate in terms of international security.

The senior echelons of those responsible for managing international security have admitted to being faced with a failing model, translated on the ground by a proliferation of failing states, the development of extremely violent situations and the emergence of organised criminal networks. But this also results in failures within richer states, which are no longer willing to intervene – either militarily or in terms of development

Xavier Guilhou



Xavier Guilhou, CEO of XAG Conseil (a firm specialising in risk prevention and crisis management) is also Captain (reserve) in the French Navy. www.xavierguilhou.com

policies. The Westphalian model, which has prevailed for more than three centuries, is becoming diluted and no longer provides an answer to new international power struggles.

Today, the older Western States work through a filter of coalitions with complex mandates and increasingly cumbersome multi-lateral combinations. Agencies such as the UN and humanitarian aid groups have predicted a certain collapse of the '3D' pillar (Development/Diplomacy/Defence). The US Department of State and the European institutions have together affirmed the need to reinforce the role of regional institutions and, above all, to get closer to populations and the protagonists on the ground. But, as many have admitted, even if everyone agrees on the checks and limits of the current models, nobody has managed to implement a satisfactory and effective operational alternative. Angela Gussing, Assistant Director of Operations at the International Committee of the Red Cross expressed it very well: "Everybody wants to co-ordinate, but nobody wants to be co-ordinated!"

We do not lack capability, but methods

A long history of collaboration

The singularity and the strength of the Order of Malta on this emerging theme of the new challenges of humanitarian diplomacy, like that of the French Navy, lie in their great knowledge of, and presence in, most theatres of operations where the credibility of the West is at stake. The Order of Malta and the French Navy are linked by long history. Several French Navy boats still bear the names of great knights and sailors from the Order. This historical link perpetuates the continuity of humanitarian and hospital aid brought by these two institutions, in particular by the transporting of medicines and humanitarian freight. (www.conferenceordredemalte.org)

need to be refined and adapted better to the constraints of space and time. Recent crises have been characterised by a marked increase in military and humanitarian resources being deployed during the emergency phases, for example, in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and Haiti. The latter example has been commented upon abundantly, since it combines simultaneously the pathologies of a major earthquake and those of a country which was already in political and economic bankruptcy.

Yet these resources have proved too weak in terms of risk prevention, as well as increasingly powerless and out of touch during the exit stages of the crisis. These delicate phases that are so vital for peace and the re-establishment of institutions among affected communities are lasting longer and longer (as shown in Lebanon and Kosovo, for example). They reveal the limits of current thinking in both civil-military and civil-humanitarian terms, combined with increasing confusion regarding ways of navigating a crisis.

Boundaries have become fluid and often conflicting, generating arguments about doctrines and usage at every level. On the ground, they very often generate loss of confidence, scepticism of the opinions, disarray amid the population and a cynical media.

The Americans have been moving beyond inter-agency co-ordination and, in 2004, started an initiative to integrate civil and military systems to manage a crisis, with the creation of the Joint Interagency Coordination Groups. Iraq helped to accelerate this evolution with 'net-centricity', relying on stronger integration of civil-military operations and the privatisation of stabilisation operations. This philosophy was systematised further in Afghanistan, before being conceptualised in the 'comprehensive approach' now deployed in almost all theatres of operations.

This transformational model of how to direct

a crisis lies at the centre of the discussions now taking place at the heart of the Atlantic Alliance. It raises many questions, and even opposition, notably from European NGOs.

So it is essential to rethink in depth the concepts and management of these ways of co-operation and the coexistence of the military, humanitarian, civil and economic tools.

PL: No doubt you have some concrete action plans that you would implement from now on. Could you elaborate?

XG: Yes indeed. Should we follow the American way of globalisation which, thanks to technological revolution, involves a network of organisations and opens the way to public/private partnerships, or even the privatisation of 'humanitarian diplomacy' through civil and military co-operation, integrated in private and military companies? Or should we go in another direction, that of creating better co-ordinated co-operation, which would respect the cultures and requirements of everyone while working towards a common goal?

The challenge is important in the face of doctrinal weakness among today's powerful states, with the retreat of authority and

The challenge is important in the face of doctrinal weakness among today's powerful states, with the retreat of authority and the rise of violence, and even the return of barbarity in many theatres of operations

the rise of violence, and even the return of barbarity in many theatres of operations.

My first conviction is that it is necessary to think of new forms of interaction, perhaps less in co-ordination processes (where everyone is aware of the limitations) and more in new modes of cross-disciplinary dialogue, avoiding the classic processes used by states for many years, exploring the use of social networks, mobilisation of civil societies, leveraging large and vital world-wide networks, new or emerging private systems of donation, respect for cultures, religions, etc.

Secondly, these new forms require more humility, mutual listening, proximity to the populations, respect for cultural dimensions and management of the duration of the incident by better integration of prevention and reconstruction.

My third conviction is that we should admit that the new security context requires us to abandon those actors who are mired in their certainties, ideologies, and technicalities, while moving towards more flexibility, pragmatism and empathy as regards the affected populations.

From the unknown

Spearheaded by CRJ Editorial Advisory Board Member Dr Patrick Lagadec, who is Director of Research at the Ecole Polytechnique in Paris, France, this series is devoted to exploring the challenging issues characterised by 21st Century crises. The aim is to go beyond our usual mindsets, helping to clarify pitfalls, redesigning the new landscapes that must be considered and showcasing creative moves that will help to feed positive dynamics. The goal is not to find ready-made solutions, but to stimulate and feed new ideas, new approaches and new methods of thinking

The latter, by the way, should be consulted much more, both before and during the response, and should be invited to become actors and partners within the humanitarian action.

The evolution of international security will require a substantial knowledge of the terrain and actors involved. I think that an association (or integration) of expertise brought together beforehand within multi-disciplinary and anticipatory cells, would bring crucial added-value in terms of operational planning. Most

heads of organisations involved are beginning to equip themselves with these types of cells, which work alongside operational teams. But, taking into account quarrels about identity and leadership, how far could we progress collusion or integration of competences? Finally, this emergent logic surrounding the piloting of international crisis is posing serious basic questions on an ethical level. The 'duty to protect', which is at the heart of the foundations of humanitarian diplomacy cannot justify nor legitimise anything and everything! To remain faithful to the ethos of Admiral Launay: "We must take heed never to reach this 'threshold of moral incompetence' of which Amin Mahlouf speaks about in his book *The disordered state of the world* by increasing our insensibility to individual and collective pain."

CRJ

■ Translation of the interview by Diana Pitt

Author

Dr Patrick Lagadec is Director of Research at the Ecole Polytechnique in Paris, France, and a Member of CRJ's Editorial Advisory Panel



The Ordre de Malte at work in Italy: There is a movement to rethink in depth the concepts and management of ways of co-operation and the coexistence of military, humanitarian, civil and economic tools