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Why Civil Military Operations will be a Combat Multiplier in Counterinsurgency Operations

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The First, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, that is alien to its nature.¹

-- Carl Von Clausewitz

For the second time in a generation America went to war prepared to fight utilizing a conventional war strategy against an irregular army. Again, the U.S. failed to understand the premise that Clausewitz articulated, by entering into a war that we wanted to fight, not the war that we ended up with. Historically the U.S. defense and military establishments have focused efforts on the institutionalized combat operations of modern warfare, never completely understanding the enemy we were fighting. This lack of strategic vision crippled efforts to stabilize Iraq & Afghanistan and now has the U.S. embroiled in counterinsurgency campaigns in both countries. The United States is again seeing the emergence of fourth generation warfare, where terrorist groups and other factions use irregular warfare to devastating effect. Defense and military staff planners failed to move beyond the concepts of high technology and conventional attrition warfare that is ingrained in U.S. military doctrine. The insurgency the U.S. found itself fighting after the 2003 invasion of Iraq was the result of three failed premises of American strategic planning: over-utilization of traditional military doctrine; failure to plan for post stabilization operations; and failure to embrace the concept of civil military operations.

Debate rages within the U.S. defense community whether to embrace counterinsurgency techniques or to fall back on traditional conventional war fighting strategies. Unfortunately, current military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown a lack of strategic thinking in counterinsurgency operations, resulting in hampered U.S. operations in both countries.

Military planners never embraced the concept of civil military operations as part of a viable strategy for military operations. After decades, the military had discounted the need to prepare for counterinsurgency. U.S. military doctrine preferred a technological solution with an overwhelming decisive blow.² In Iraq the general officer corps refused to believe that they were

¹ Von Clausewitz, Carl. *On War*. New York: Princeton University Press, 1976. Pg 100.

² Sewall, Sarah. Modernizing U.S. Counterinsurgency Practice: Rethinking Risk and Developing a National Strategy. *Military Review*, (Oct 2006) : Pg 1

facing an insurgency following the defeat of the Iraqi army in May 2003. U.S. military units were trained in conventional warfare but did not have the training that was needed to deal with counterinsurgency operations in Iraq. When they did react, it was with heavy-handed conventional tactics that failed to win the support of the population. This was exactly how the French operated throughout the French-Algerian conflict, much to their detriment.

Civil Military Operations (CMO) that focus on the civilian population will be a force multiplier in counterinsurgency operations. The central tenet of any counterinsurgency is separating civilians from the insurgency. Military planners need a detailed civil military operational plan in order to achieve this effect.

Since the end of the Second World War, the nature of warfare has evolved: all conventional operations will ultimately transition into stability operations. The end of the Cold War has only increased the likelihood that the U.S. will find itself engaged in failed states or semi-failed states. Recent operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan have emphasized to military commanders the changing nature of warfare.

Counterinsurgency rests on the importance of using the civilian population. Unlike classic conventional war doctrine, the center of gravity is the civilian population first and foremost. The new counterinsurgency manual (FM 3-24) places emphasis on the significance of civil military operations. The integration of civilian and military efforts is crucial to successful counterinsurgency operations. Political, social, and economic programs are usually more valuable than conventional military operations in addressing the root causes of conflict that support an insurgency.³

In any counterinsurgency operation, successful civil military operations lead to the establishment of basic governance and security; this in turn leads to economic progress until the host nation is able to govern itself. Until recently U.S. military forces never put a premium on the importance of civil military operations despite engaging in numerous stability operations throughout the 1990's. U.S. military planners did little to bolster their capabilities for civic reconstruction and security force development.⁴

"The military probably since Vietnam, maybe before, became more and more saddled with conflict resolution -- strange conflict resolution -- peacekeeping, humanitarian efforts, nation building. The military has resisted this. They don't like it. They're not trained for it. But there's no one else to do it and it continues to be the mission that confronts us.

Now either we legitimize it for the military, which means we would revamp civil affairs, have a large and more powerful, more robust capabilities, psychological operations, we would have the ability to reconstruct economies, reconstruct the

³ Petraeus, Lt Gen.David. *The U.S. Army & Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, Chicago: University Chicago Press, 2007 Pg 54.

⁴ Yingling, Paul. A failure in Generalship. *Armed Forces Journal*, (May 2007): Pg 2.

*political systems or we find other agencies of government to pick up that slack. It can't be dumped on a military that is not trained, equipped or organized for that mission.*⁵

-- General Anthony Zinni

U.S. military commanders have traditionally relegated civil military operations to second tier status. The unfortunate consequence of this thinking is that someone other than U.S. military forces must be given the responsibility for assuming this role. However, only our troops on the ground have the resources for these post-conflict stabilization operations. In the early years of the Iraq conflict, with many units needing to adjust to the realities on the ground, CENTCOM never provided subordinate units with any plan for stabilization operations. Col. Alan King, head of civil affairs for the 3rd Infantry Division in 2003, was given only twenty-four hours to come up with a Phase IV stabilization plan.⁶

In order to prepare an operations order that enhances the ground commander's operational flexibility in counterinsurgency, a commander needs a staff trained in civil affairs. Too often commanders believe that any military personnel can take on the role of CMO planner. To be truly effective, staff planners need to have operational staff planning experience relating to post-conflict reconstruction. This type of experience is gained over time and cannot be assigned as a collateral duty. A commander needs trained civil affairs personnel who will prepare a CMO plan in conjunction with the unit's operational plan.

CMO can be a force multiplier if military commanders fully understand how important CMO can be when implemented on the battlefield. CMO plays an essential role in facilitating military operations and in consolidating and achieving operational objectives. CMO should be used by commanders to establish, maintain, influence, or exploit relations between military forces, governmental and nongovernmental civilian organizations and authorities, and the civilian populace in friendly, neutral, or hostile operational areas. CMO activities should be conducted to minimize civilian interference with military operations.⁷ Ideally, political, economic, social, and other issues that arise should be handled by civilian agencies and governmental organization. But if the host government is unable to carry out these functions then U.S. military units must assume responsibility. A viable CMO plan can provide a force multiplier to the commander and will result in a profound impact on the outcome of the conflict.

By failing to incorporate a viable political goal into the operational plans for Iraq, the U.S. failed to win the peace that should have followed. As much as many in the military disdain the concept of any kind of nation building, only the U.S. military can provide the security for civilian organizations to operate in a safe and secure environment. Counterinsurgency is nothing more or less than armed social work, an attempt to redress basic social and political problems (while

⁵ *News Hour With Jim Lehrer*, PBS TV, September 30, 2003, interview with retired General Anthony Zinni. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/military/july-dec03/zinni_09-30.html.

⁶ Ricks, Thomas. *Fiasco, The American Military Adventure in Iraq*. New York: Penguin Group, 2006 Pg 150.

⁷ Joint Publication 3-57.1 *Joint Doctrine for Civil Military Affairs* 14 April 2003 Pg I-1.

being shot at). This makes CMO a central counterinsurgency activity, not an afterthought. CMO is the restructuring of the environment in order to displace the enemy.⁸

A CMO operation should act as a liaison, coordinating with the various elements of the host nation and working with a myriad of non-government organizations (NGO) to interface with the military. A dedicated CMO activity should bring culture awareness and valuable experience working with the host nation's government. CMO operations should begin at the higher level of strategic military planning that focuses on the larger long-range visions of economic and security stability. At the operational level, the CMO mission should focus on the immediate or short-term problems inherent in a combat environment. Issues facing the populace regarding health services, infrastructure rebuilding, and other areas of population management should be addressed. At this level, tactical CMO activities are focused on the immediate effects to the local populace. An integrated CMO operation that is focused at each level, from the strategic to the tactical level, provides a force multiplier to commanders. Having a dedicated section that focuses strictly on civilian interaction in a commander's area of operations allows the commander flexibility to channel his efforts on security.

All Regimental/Brigade Combat Teams need training in CMO. CMO training should occur down to the company level - this will have the greatest benefit to counterinsurgency operations. The U.S. Marine Corps "Mojave Viper" exercise at Marine Corps Base 29 Palms is a great example of training CMO staff and company level personnel in counterinsurgency operations before deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan.

The United States must integrate military strategies with other national capabilities to create a robust counterinsurgency capacity comprised of all elements of national power: economic, political, information, and the military. We must deploy these elements of national power at a much lower level and with a consistency not seen in recent conflicts.⁹ Success in stability operations enables the local populace and host nation to assume responsibility, allowing U.S. forces to disengage.¹⁰

If in 2002 military planners at CENTCOM had dusted off the after action report on "Desert Crossing" they would have realized that other elements of American national power would be needed for Operation Iraqi Freedom.. Desert Crossing was a military exercise conducted by then CENTCOM Commander General Anthony Zinni and initiated after the brief December 1998 bombing campaign called Operation Desert Fox. Zinni realized the U.S. had operational plans to defeat Saddam Hussein, but no planning for stabilizing Iraq after a major war.

General Zinni realized the U.S. military would be tasked with the responsibility of post-conflict stabilization in Iraq. Had CMO planning begun at an early stage, other U.S. agencies could have been involved, including but not limited to, the Departments of State, Treasury, and Justice, the

⁸ Kilcullen, David. *Twenty Eight Articles; Fundamentals of Company Level Counterinsurgency*. *Small Wars Journal*. Available at <http://www.smallwarsjournal.com/documents/28articles.pdf>.

⁹ Green, Dan. *Counterinsurgency Diplomacy: Political Advisors at the Operational and Tactical Levels*. *Military Review*, no. 87 (May/June 2007): Pg 24.

¹⁰ Petraeus, Lt Gen. David. *The U.S. Army & Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. Chicago: University Chicago Press, 2007 Pg 61-62.

National Security Council, USAID (United States Agency for International Development), and others.

If military and defense planners had gone over the after action report of Desert Crossing they would have understood the ramifications of removing an existing government. Iraq had a very centralized, ruthless government that never was efficient. It bankrupted itself as a result of the Iran-Iraq War, and then exacerbated the situation with the invasion of Kuwait. The economy experienced corruption at all levels, with a political leadership that was inexperienced. Officials lacked the competence to govern and the will to take responsibility for the government.¹¹

Defense and military planners need to ensure that all elements of U.S. national power are integrated into the CMO planning process. Current operations in Helmand Province in Afghanistan currently have few State Department officials working alongside the Marines. Any successful counterinsurgency must have all elements of the U.S. national security team working in tandem to be successful.

The first important aspect of CMO planning is grasping the national objectives of the operation. In Iraq, CENTCOM needed a coherent strategy for post-conflict stabilization operations. For example, who would have the authority to govern Iraq after the cessation of hostilities? Once objectives are defined and understood subordinate units can then be given missions for combat operations. The same is true for civil military operations. In 2003 CENTCOM should have issued clear instructions on what the strategic goals of the post-conflict stabilization efforts in Iraq were expected to be.

If CENTCOM planners had begun with the basic planning guideline of Annex G of an operations order, the need to involve other non-Department of Defense agencies would have been apparent. When formulating an Annex G, basic considerations need to be addressed and information gathered.

1. Administrative, logistic, and communications support requirements of civil military operations (CMO) forces.
2. The need for early deployment of and employment of CMO forces.
3. The coordination between CMO requirements, plans and strategies.
4. The coordination of CMO requirements with other appropriate staff functions and non-Department of Defense agencies.¹²

With this information provided and placed into the warning order, staff planners could have gathered information that would have produced an adequate Annex G for Operation Iraqi Freedom. CENTCOM failed to plan for Phase IV after combat operations ceased and post-conflict stabilization began. Even after the chaotic aftermath in Iraq, there still was little planning in regard to CMO operations that subordinate commanders could understand.

CENTCOM should have, at the very least, asked the following questions:

¹¹ Cordesman, Anthony. *Iraq's Troubled Future: The Uncertain Way Ahead*. Center for Strategic and International Studies. http://www.csis.org/component/option,com_csis_pubs/task,view/id,3835/. Pg 5.

¹² Joint Publication 3-57.1 *Joint Doctrine For Civil Military Affairs* 14 April 2003 Pg III-2.

1. Extent of U.S. military involvement and role of U.S. Government agencies in civil-military operations (CMO).
2. Liaison requirements with other Department of Defense elements; US government agencies including the Country Team; multinational forces; host nation government officials, other foreign government officials, other civilian organizations; and international public and private groups.
3. Additional lead time normally necessary for Reserve Component forces availability.
4. Procedures for transition, continuation, or termination of CMO relevant functions of other agencies, as directed or required.
5. Identifications of, and relations with, friendly and hostile personalities and groups.
6. Security and hostile force disarmament requirements in uncertain environments.
7. Organization and degree of effectiveness of host-nation government, the condition of the economy, the nature of cultural and social institutions, and the prevailing perceptions and attitudes of the population.¹³

This type of planning should have taken place at the beginning of the strategic planning phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom. If a CMO plan had addressed these basic concerns, it would have made post-conflict stabilization of Iraq easier. Such planning would not have solved all the problems that US military forces faced in Iraq. But it would have been an improvement over what occurred and not unreasonable to have expected at the time.

As in Vietnam, U.S. strategy this decade failed to understand the complex wars it was engaging in. America will continue to face irregular warfare, as insurgents and terrorists have found a gap in our armor. The U.S. is still not equipped to handle complex irregular warfare found on the modern battlefield. If the U.S. is to avoid another debacle, it must not rely on the over-utilization of its traditional military doctrine. The U.S. will need a better plan for post-conflict stabilization – it needs to embrace the concept of civil military operations. Without these changes America will again repeat the mistakes of the past.

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¹³ *Ibid.* Pg III-3.

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