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## The Closers Part VI Dealing with the U.S. Military

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“The PRT was hard to focus; it was always going in several directions at once”

--A Marine Corps veteran of Afghanistan commenting  
on his experience with civilians in COIN

Many of the civilians who gravitate to counterinsurgency (COIN) work for the Departments of State and Justice have some knowledge of the military or have served in uniform. But many people from other agencies will not have such a background. Suddenly living among the military on a daily basis, and often depending on them totally for security can come as a culture shock that is almost as great as that experienced by stepping into a host nation's culture. It helps to come somewhat prepared. The Provincial Reconstruction Team classes given by the State Department's Foreign Service Institute are good but short, and they give out excellent advice, but it would help if you do homework on your own. This piece will attempt to give some background and perspective.

### **The Military Culture**

Many civilians dealing with the military culture for the first time are surprised by the mix of informality combined with strict discipline that permeates a unit in a combat situation. They are also often surprised how flexible soldiers are as compared with the myth of the military martinet that many civilians grow up with. However, they are inflexible about safety and security, and it is important to learn the rules of the road when traveling anywhere “outside the wire” with them. Outside the wire means any time they travel outside the security of the closely guarded military compounds where they work and train. They will treat every trip outside of the wire as a combat mission and have planned for it carefully in advance to include the provision for overhead reconnaissance and fire support. Consequently, they will not take kindly to spontaneous request for changes of plan on your part, and you need to listen carefully to their pre-mission briefs. They treat such things very seriously.

### **Read FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency***

This manual is the military doctrine for COIN, and it is recognized as interagency doctrine as well; for that, if for no other reason, you should be familiar with it. Much of what it contains is the basis for the myriad of working groups you will encounter when working with any military

headquarters. Good doctrine is meant to give guidelines and form a language which allows units from different organizations to communicate effectively within a common framework. The Army creates task organizations drawn from many of its diverse elements. Without a common language and framework for action an Army Brigade Combat team would be a virtual Tower of Babel.

Doctrine is not meant to be applied blindly, and that manual in particular, was written in the knowledge that an insurgency can vary widely from province to province or even from village to village.

In some areas of Afghanistan, COIN has been put on the back burner and is eclipsed by counterterrorism (CT) because COIN is expensive in people and treasure, and with the coming drawdown it cannot be done everywhere; in this CT is an economy of force effort.

One of the first questions you should ask your military counterpart is if his main effort is COIN or CT. In some areas, particularly in the eastern portion of the country along the Pakistani border, U.S. forces have learned that the tribes largely want to be left alone and don't want the development that comes with COIN. It doesn't profit you to be waging a full-fledged COIN effort on your own if you are out of step with the military you are working with. In some cases the military is concentrating more heavily than others on killing or capturing insurgents. In some areas still controlled solely by the Taliban, the military is reportedly organizing guerilla campaign to conduct irregular warfare (IW) to undermine the Taliban and their al Qaeda allies

In other areas, the military may actually pay tribal leaders to keep the foreign fighters out. Getting rid of al Qaeda was, after all, why we went to Afghanistan to begin with.

Indeed, in Afghanistan, we may increasingly see a true hybrid form of warfare where COIN, CT, IW, and paid surrogates are used simultaneously in a concerted strategy. In this respect COIN is not a strategy, it is one technique used in an overall Stability and Security strategy.

In those areas where CT is the prevailing approach, there is still work for civilians; and it will be up to you to figure out where you fit in the mix. In CT, the military and intelligence agencies will always be in the lead; however in COIN, the objective is to eventually hand it over to a civilian lead.

## **Military Security**

Unless you are working directly in the embassy or a consulate, you will likely be protected by a military security detail, most likely military police. As mentioned earlier they will want you to plan your missions at least a week in advance.

Before every mission they will want you to attend a mission brief. Listen carefully at these briefs, particularly when they tell you what to do if you get into contact with the enemy or are hit by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED). Practice unbuckling your seat belt quickly with your eyes closed. If you are hit at night or the vehicle fills with smoke and you have to leave quickly, you don't want to have to fumble around. It is always good to carry a sharp knife in the event

that your seat belt jams. Be aware of where the fire extinguishers are and how to use them. If others in the vehicle are injured, you may become the damage control crew by default. You will receive a first aid class in pre-deployment school. Listen carefully and be mentally prepared to render first aid if required. You do not want to become a liability in an emergency.

If you do get into a contact situation, do what you are told and stay out of the way. Let the pros do their job, and keep your mouth shut. They will not have time to have a conversation. It will help you to learn how to read a military map and identify the places you want to go by grid coordinates. It will help the military greatly to not have to play twenty questions to determine which village with an unpronounceable name you want to go to. Some people simply can't get the knack of map reading (including a few colonels and general officers I have known). If you can't pick up the skill, at least ask your escort to give you the grid coordinates of a place when you are visiting if you plan to visit again. Write the name and grid coordinate down, and at least you can give them the grid when you want to visit again.

### **Sources of Information**

The military's extensive practices of patrolling and engagement with locals can be a great source of information in your area of expertise if you learn to exploit it properly. There are a number of sources that you should become familiar with:

**Human Terrain Teams (HTT):** These teams were designed to allow the military to understand the human landscape as well as it has traditionally sought to appreciate the physical terrain in which it operated. They consist of sociologists, cultural experts, and other specialists whose job is to understand the local human networks ranging from tribal and clan alliances to the politics and economic considerations in the area to which they are assigned. Along with the knowledge of nongovernmental and international organizations with a long history of the area, they can be of great assistance to you in understanding the human environment you are working in. The teams are only as good as their membership. I've seen good ones and poor ones, but they can be a very valuable resource.

**Civil Affairs Teams (CAT):** The CATs are the military's way of implementing and monitoring their civil-military situation. They will be the local commander's method of sponsoring projects with the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds. They are the organizations other than yours that will have daily contact with the population, and a good one will have a feel for the attitude of doctors, farmers, school teachers, and businessmen. By reading their daily reports, you can get a good feel for progress or lack thereof in the area. The limitation is that their focus may be different than yours and will depend on the specific nature of the missions assigned by the local commander. If they are assigned to concentrate on business development, they will likely not know much about the agricultural situation. A team assigned to concentrate on road building will likely not know much about the water situation in your area. There is usually one CAT assigned to each battalion in a regiment or brigade, and their focus will depend on the local commander's civil-military emphasis.

**Civil-Military Working Group (CMWG):** From battalion sized units on up the chain of command most military organizations will have a CMWG. It will usually consist of the senior

Civil Affairs Officer, the CAT leaders, the Joint Project Management Officer, and the unit's engineer and surgeon. It will also likely include the head of the HTT. If you are invited to be a member, or can be allowed to sit in on its meetings, you are strongly encouraged to do so. It is the organization charged with implementing the command's Civil-Military strategy, and will be a way of coordinating your efforts with the military in order to avoid duplication of effort and to identify potential gaps in key capabilities.

**The Joint Project Management Office (JPMO):** Most brigade sized units and higher are creating "out of hide" JPMOs to oversee the use of their CERP funds. Although these funds are distributed by the CATs, the JPMO administers them. Often they are looking for worthy projects and if you develop a relationship with the JPMO, you may well be able to leverage their money to do a project that your agency cannot or will not fund.

**Key Leader Engagement (KLE) Program:** KLE is the military's way of keeping up a dialog with local officials and tribal/clan leaders. They are at a fairly high level, but if you can gain access to the reports of these engagements you can get a fairly good feel for how both formal and informal governance is perceived to be working by the local leadership. If you have a job that puts you in regular contact with the general population it will give you a feel for any divergence between the general perception of the population toward their civil government and security forces. If you are invited to attend a KLE, I would suggest you do so. Even those that are between soldiers will remain purely military in nature in a COIN environment, I found this particularly useful as a governance advisor because the areas of disparity between the leaders and the population and the leadership were generally those where I would try to put the most emphasis; this was particularly true regarding public works and health care.

**Morning and Weekly Situation Updates:** If you have access to a portal to your partner military unit's command and control chat function, generally known as the Command Post of the Future (CPOF), or a similar command and control tool, you are well advised to listen in to their morning and weekly situation updates. Here the major subordinate commands and staff functions will update any changes to the situation. It will give you good awareness of both the civil-military and security status on a day-to-day, week-to-week basis.

**Advisory Teams:** You should also get to know the advisory teams working with the local host nation military and police. They will interact with the civil population as part of their job, and should be able to give you insights regarding the attitudes and situation of the population that will augment your personal contacts.

**Counter Improvised Explosive Device (C-IED) Working Groups:** If you spend a lot of time among the population, you will be valuable to the C-IED Group's Attack the Network (AtN) function. You will likely be one of the first to spot the kind of abnormal activities and behavior that indicates IED activity.

### **Information Sharing is a Two Way Street**

If they come to trust you, your military counterparts will ask you to share information gained in your interactions with the population. I have known civilian representatives from some agencies

that had come to view themselves as quasi NGOs, and were reluctant to share information with their military counterparts, apparently seeing themselves in a neutral NGO-like status. Make no mistake about it, when you swear to support and defend the Constitution of the United States as a government official or sign a contract with the government as a consultant, you have already taken sides. The insurgents will view you as the enemy, and the population will see you as a representative of our government. You need to accept that responsibility.

When doing so, try to conform to the military style of reporting and use their formats where possible. Each agency has its own way of reporting. The Department of State and USAID tend to communicate in prose and cable writing is a highly developed art form. The military is not used to this approach.

I generally wrote two reports after every mission one in military format and one in cable format for the State Department. It took extra time, but the effort generally paid off in furthering relations with my military counterparts. If you have trouble with the military format, try to confine yourself to one page reports in bullet format. Your military counterparts are busy people, and do not have time to wade through superfluous verbiage.

The opposite of not being invited to any meetings is to be invited to too many. A large brigade, division, or corps staff may well have 20-30 working groups or “tiger teams at any given time. Reconstruction teams or agency liaison offices tend to be much smaller, and your military partners can easily overwhelm you with inclusiveness. At a minimum, try to attend the CMO and JPMO meetings. If they happen to have a group in your area of expertise, it is obviously advisable to join it as well.

### **Interpersonal Relationships with Your Military Partners**

There are some things to remember in your personal dealings with military members. First, make an effort to learn their rank structure. Each service has its own structure, and although Army and Marine ranks are similar, there are subtle differences that can cause embarrassment. A few rules of the road are in order. If you call a Marine master sergeant “top”, he will probably remind you that a top is something that spins around a room. Likewise in both the Army and Marine Corps, the term “sarge” went out of fashion long ago. You may hear Marines refer to their captains as “skipper”, but an Army captain will look at you strangely if you call him that. The best rule of thumb is to listen to what they call each other when they are being formal and stick with that until you feel comfortable doing otherwise.

The best practice is to start by addressing them by their full rank. Officers you work with may ask you to use their first name, but only do that when you are in a semi private setting. When around their peers or their superiors, use their rank. It is always best to address the enlisted personnel by their rank, particularly if they are assigned to work for you. You will be treated as an officer and will be expected to act like one.

Learning the organizational structure will also help. Marine and Army organizations are usually organized as follows:

- Squads are the basic building block of an infantry organization. They will range in size from 10-12 personnel, but may be reinforced with special weapons units and other specialists for independent patrols. They will be led by sergeants or staff sergeants.
- A platoon generally has three squads and is commanded by a lieutenant. It will have 40-50 personnel. It will also likely be reinforced by specialists and heavy weapons for independent patrolling in COIN.
- A company will have 150-200 people and generally have three rifle platoons and a heavier weapons platoon. They are usually commanded by a captain. In a cavalry regiment, companies will be called troops. Artillery companies are called batteries.
- A battalion will have anywhere from 800-1,200 personnel. They will have 3-4 line companies, a Headquarters or headquarters and service company. Battalions in COIN will be reinforced with tanks, artillery, engineers and other specialty units. A cavalry battalion is called a squadron. They will generally be commanded by a lieutenant colonel.
- Brigades (regiments in the Marine Corps) will have at least three battalions. Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) and Regimental Combat Teams (RCTs) in COIN are reinforced with a variety of specialized units. They are commanded by full colonels.
- A division will usually have three or more RCTs or BCTs and will be commanded by a major general (two stars). Corps usually have three or more divisions and will be commanded by a lieutenant general (three stars).

The Marines organize for combat into task organized Marine Air Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs). They can be a variety of sizes, but they will almost always contain an infantry unit, and aviation unit, a logistics unit, and a headquarters unit.

If you are in reasonably good shape, you will probably make points by participating occasionally in physical training or by playing sports. Learning the jargon and using it will also help you to fit in. Soldiers, in combat zones (and out of them) use a lot of profanity; it helps them to relieve the stress. If you are offended, I'd suggest keeping it to yourself.

On the other hand you should not be tolerant of gross misbehavior or a lack of discipline. If it is serious enough, report it to the soldier's superior, but if it is relatively minor, it's probably the best practice to remind the malefactor privately that you are the representative of another agency, and that he or she is a representative of his or her service, and that the behavior is reflecting badly on the service. That should be enough to put a stop to the problem.

## **Conclusion**

If you do not have military experience, it is best to treat the military as you would any foreign culture by respecting its mores and customs, and learn as much as you can.

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