

Civil Affairs: Gathering the Reins

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As the extremists are squeezed out of the Middle East the emerging sanctuary for their cadres is Africa, especially the Trans-Sahel across northern Africa. As a result the U.S. government has an increasing interest in preventing their exploitation of the region's poor socio-economic climate to recruit to their cause. For the U.S. to succeed an increase in diplomatic, economic and military resources will have to occur. For the military this means yet more demand for Civil Affairs units. Added to the looming demand certain to result from renewed efforts in Afghanistan, the value of Civil Affairs to the conflict response is undeniable. Yet even as their value is demonstrated by high demand for their low-density skills, Civil Affairs units remain constrained by inefficient mission taskings, competitive encroachment and a few self-inflicted problems. The Civil Affairs community needs to reassert its mission or risk losing its relevance as a prime DoD battlespace multiplier.

Specializing in civil-military operations, Civil Affairs (CA) represent one endpoint on the range of military options, marking the non-kinetic end of the military spectrum. In recent testimony to Congress the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, stated "We can't kill our way to victory... It requires teamwork and cooperation." Mullen further stated that the U.S. urgently needs to improve its nation-building initiatives.¹ Derided in the past by senior military officers as 'work for the Peace Corps,' nation building and associated activities are receiving renewed attention as preferred solutions in the war against terrorism. Note the recognition of stability operations as a core mission in the 2005 Department of Defense Directive 3000.05. President Obama and Secretary of State Hilary Clinton have both stated a preference for renewed efforts at humanitarian assistance, nation building, stabilization and reconstruction, reviving efforts that were previously a priority in American foreign engagement. The question becomes one of how, exactly, to implement such a policy of pre-emptive engagement. The years since the terror attacks of 9/11 have seen growing agreement among the numerous stakeholders that American policy must rest on a "whole of government" (WoG) approach (coincidentally the well-established and preferred term of NATO, European and Canadian governments). Within the Department of Defense (DoD) the question becomes: who will be responsible for DoD's contribution to integrated, whole of government preemptive engagement? The answer seems obvious: Civil Affairs.

In December, 2005, President George W. Bush issued National Security Presidential Directive 44 (NSPD-44), directing that "the Secretary of State shall coordinate and lead

¹ CNN, September 10th, 2008.

integrated United States Government efforts, involving all U.S. Departments and Agencies with relevant capabilities, to prepare, plan for, and conduct stabilization and reconstruction activities.” The crux of NSPD-44’s relevance is found in the directive to “lead interagency planning to prevent or mitigate conflict.” This directive marks a sea change in U.S. engagement strategy: conflict prevention preferable to conflict won. We military professionals should recognize the echoes of Sun Tzu: the best victory is one requiring no fight. While the U.S. military and government necessarily focus on winning the present fight, NSPD-44 charts a course towards minimizing the future expenditure of blood and treasure by seeking to prevent conflict in the first place. Experience demonstrates that the cost of doing so is cheaper in both coins.

Official military doctrine has begun to evolve toward this end as well. Joint Publication 3-57, *Civil-Military Operations*, “amplifies the use of CMO as a primary military instrument to synchronize military and nonmilitary instruments of national power, particularly in support of stability, counterinsurgency and other operations dealing with asymmetric and irregular threats in the 21st century.”² Unfortunately this tasking highlights another facet of the current debate on foreign engagement policy: the type of conflict America should be preparing for and who will be responsible for the efforts. Though strategists, practitioners, theorists and politicians agree we’re not in a conventional war, whatever war we *are* in is under intense debate. If we’re not fighting a conventional war, what sort of war are we fighting? Whether irregular, asymmetric, 4th generation or “other,” the answer is not merely academic. Identifying the fight we’re in ripples across the spectrum, from the choice of weapons and strategy, to legal authorities, to funding decisions, to the choice of units to conduct the fight and the targets for those units, to the diplomatic choices in engaging both enemies and allies, and to the vision of an end state for the effort. No matter how the issue is ultimately defined there remains the matter of responsibility and implementation. This paper argues that the responsibility for the non-kinetic missions is correctly the mission of Civil Affairs units, and that the CA community needs to reclaim that mission. Civil Affairs units are uniquely positioned, with one foot in both the military and civilian camps, to lead DoD efforts at pre-emptive engagement, conflict mitigation and the Interagency coordination they will require. The problem is that CA units are instead seeing responsibility, authority and inclusion diminish.

In May, 2006, the Army realigned operational control of Reserve Civil Affairs units, roughly 90% of capacity, from Special Operations Command to the conventional army. Combined with earlier changes that placed the majority of CA capacity in the U.S. Army Reserves, Civil Affairs professionals find themselves the most qualified for the evolving methodology yet moving backwards from involvement. The military needs more of the readily available (read: active duty) CA forces to support ongoing and anticipated operations. Conventional army commanders with supporting Civil Affairs assets too often have a perfunctory understanding of those assets and only a cursory inclusion of their skills in the larger battle plan. In too many instances entire CA units are reduced to mere contract managers, doing little more than overseeing spending to ensure the tally of schools built and wells dug increases. However, the onus for correcting this situation lies

² Joint Publication 3-57, *Civil Military Operations*, 8 February 2001.

squarely on the CA leadership. Civil Affairs leaders must educate the commanders they support, demonstrate the highest and best use of their capabilities and seize that mission.

U.S. Army Field Manual 3-05.40, *Civil Affairs Operations*, delineates five core tasks for CA units: population and resource control, foreign humanitarian assistance, civil information management, nation assistance and support to civil administration. However, these responsibilities are slowly being eroded away from CA units by, ironically, the increased focus on CA-type missions. This increase by all branches of the military, as well as numerous civilian branches of the government, on nation building, pre-emptive humanitarian engagement and irregular warfare has brought encroachment into mission sets previously the sole purview of CA specialists. The sheer number alone of governmental agencies seeking to make a contribution has led to incremental losses to the CA mission.

A certain amount of confusion is caused by the lingering debate over irregular warfare (IW): what is it, how is it conducted and who is responsible for what? To date the strategic and doctrinal communities continue to struggle with an effective definition of IW, defaulting to a description as 'the indirect approach.' The indirect approach currently means anything other than the door-kicking, laser-dot-on-the-forehead work of kinetic operations, an attempt to capture all the non-kinetic options in a single phrase. In common practice the indirect approach is seen to mean those activities typically conducted in the military arena by civil affairs and other governmental agencies, the 'soft power' newly preferable in working towards goals like favorably influencing a population and mitigating poor economic conditions that make a population susceptible to an extremist message. IW is the door through which so many agencies and programs are entering the battlespace, a door propped open by NSPD-44. And it is this increase in effort at the indirect approach that is nibbling away at the edges of the CA mission.

For example, the military began a program in 2005 of providing combat brigades with Human Terrain Teams (HTT's), teams of civilian specialists including anthro-pologists and ethnologists in response to complaints by commanders of too little insight and understanding of local cultures, tribes and values. The HTT's have seen some success... but the Human Terrain Team product is already a subset of CA work. In addition to the HTT's there are numerous contracted services for population assessment, other contract services that embed Iraqi-US citizens into maneuver commands for "social situational awareness and guidance," and multiple other US governmental agencies developing their independent intelligence and engagement networks at local, provincial and national levels. This is true in both current theaters of operations, Iraq and Afghanistan. All of this is information CA units are already producing in the course of their missions and capable of providing to supported commanders.

Similarly the whole of government approach, "the Interagency (IA)" in common reference, is creating a large new window of involvement for agencies previously far less engaged (at least in an expeditionary manner). The Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol are sending agents into war zones with the idea of improving security for the U.S. by teaching better security methods

to local agencies. However, in practice this means importing western security protocols into Islamic societies, often resisted as an intrusion of secular governmental coercive force in opposition to Muslim practices, a challenge that needs to be recognized and overcome. Other agencies such as USAID (the United States Agency for International Development), the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Energy, the Department of Transportation and the Department of State are expanding their operational involvement as well. Much of this increase has occurred over the past five years as the political administration has responded to charges of failing to plan for post-war conditions. Seeking solutions to the growing crisis in Iraq, and recognizing the value of quashing the insurgency by means other than violence, the previous administration charged numerous U.S. governmental agencies with developing contributions to a WoG solution in Iraq. The result has been a tremendous increase in personnel, teams, specialists and advisors “downrange” and the same is certain to happen in Afghanistan as that conflict reignites. As a result of this influx of ‘expertise’ into the battle space CA units find themselves relinquishing traditional areas of responsibility to specialized teams from multiple agencies and contractors.

The CA manual states: “The commander uses CA’s capabilities to analyze and influence the human terrain through specific processes and dedicated resources and personnel.”³ The mission to ‘analyze and influence’ is key, influence being the most critical function. The CA manual also states: “Plans are developed by and implemented through the use of Civil Affairs Teams (CATs) and CA functional specialists who conduct the key leader engagement, project management, and civil reconnaissance that feed into the supported commander’s common operational picture.”⁴ For at least the past decade the work of project management has come to dominate the efforts of CATs in the field as leader engagement and relationship development efforts are increasingly assumed by conventional units in an effort to embrace the “indirect approach.” The slippery slope to this state of affairs has been paved with CERP, the Commander’s Emergency Response Program. CERP is a program of military funding, among others such as Commander’s Initiative Funds, Operations and Maintenance accounts, and Overseas Disaster, Humanitarian and Civic Aid funding, provided to commanders for critical, emergency or high-impact projects. Tremendous latitude exists in the CERP program for commanders; CERP money can fund nearly any project a commander deems worthy. Anticipated as a means to influence local leadership and conditions, the CERP program suffers several acute flaws.

Rapid turnover of military commanders and CA personnel hinders the accrual of benefit to the Coalition or U.S. military. In societies where the development of established (read: leveragable) relationships may be measured in years the U.S. demand for quick results works to the advantage of the locals. Incoming commanders and CA Team members meet with local leadership with an eye toward purchasing results (i.e., leverage) through the building or funding of projects. Yet local leaders know they don’t need to actually follow through on promises of change, they merely need to wait out the current U.S. military rotation for the new round of negotiations and funding that will arrive when new

³ Field Manual 3-05.40, *Civil Affairs Operations*, Chapter 1, page 1-1.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 1-3.

U.S. units rotate in. The burden of CERP funding is that it be *spent*, and that works against effective exploitation. CA units, at the orders of commanders who are partially judged on their CERP usage, find themselves identifying construction projects that do little more than increase the tally. Commanders, under pressure to spend, do so; CA teams, under orders to get projects completed, do so. The missing component is what bang is being gotten for the buck; there is a lack of any effective mechanism linking expenditures to results. Measures of effectiveness (MOE's) linking money spent to measurable improvement in the local environment are notoriously difficult to construct or evaluate, but can be accomplished if assessed over the right time frame. Since 2003 the U.S. Congress has appropriated more than \$46 billion for relief and reconstruction efforts in Iraq. The consensus opinion is that the U.S. has little to show for it.⁵

A compounding problem is the impact of U.S. spending on local economies. A mud-brick school in Iraq for 250 students, with woodstove classroom heaters and painted-on chalkboards, should not cost over \$100,000. That they do is a testament to the price inflation wrought by overheated reconstruction spending. Orders to stimulate local economies, employ workers and show results supersede concerns over local price inflation. In its current configuration the CERP program is an expectation of commanders and a constraint on CA teams. Commanders feel pressure to demonstrate use of the program and CA units are too often yoked with managing it to the near exclusion of other missions. One solution to the problem is clear: allow commanders to say "no." The emphasis on getting the money spent too often supersedes the value of the project. The CERP program could actually gain effectiveness as a leveragable tool if there were less pressure to spend the programmed funds,⁶ in fact adding a powerful option to a commander's or CA team's negotiation efforts. This would also help reduce the emphasis on spending as a 'grading point' for commanders. Another solution is to provide contracting officers to whom CA units could hand off project management once initiated and allow CA personnel to focus on leveraging the projects for influence. These steps would change the negotiation dynamic with local leadership and allow CA teams to focus on developing and managing influence within the area of operations, a superior use of CA capabilities. Not the least, changing program policy would minimize the inflationary impacts on local economies. Current policy places priority on perceived economic positives (market stimulation and employment) over project cost or the mitigation of economic negatives (price inflation, supply availability and contracting corruption). CA units and contracting offices have the knowledge to assess economic impact on local markets and recommend courses of action. Retracting projects when the local leadership fails to follow through on change or support would send a powerful message, strengthening the value of *quid pro quo* agreements.

Developing influence may represent the ultimate expression of the 'indirect approach,' the central tenet of irregular warfare and pre-emptive engagement. The challenge in developing influence is in having the right tools, to include time. The new Commander

⁵ U.S. Government Accountability Office, Congressional Committee publication, June 23rd, 2008.

⁶Pressure to spending program funding as a result of current U.S. government resource allocation procedures is described in the "Future of Civil Affairs" report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 2009.

in Chief and Secretary of State foresee a future in which pre-emptive engagement receives far greater attention. In an environment in which the desired end-state is that of relinquishing military control to local civilian control Civil Affairs units, specialists in developing and managing the links between the two worlds, are the appropriate Defense Department units for the job. So what evolutions need to occur to better position and support CA units for the task? To address this we must consider what the future will expect of civil affairs units and what the CA community should be asking to do.

Projecting the nature of future warfare occupies hundreds of experts at dozens of think-tanks. There are advocates of preparing for major conflict with state forces such as China and Russia as well as those who anticipate a long future of anti-terrorism and anti-extremist efforts. Then there is an alphabet soup of acronyms to describe the range of possible scenarios: 4GW (4th Generation Warfare), NCO (Network Centric Operations), 5GW (5th Generation Warfare), I/CI (Insurgency/Counterinsurgency), LIC (Low Intensity Conflict), etc. It is my opinion that for at least a decade the United States will be fighting a fluctuating array of enemies, the common thread being an avoidance of force on force engagement. The fight will be in the grey areas *between* 4GW, NCO, I/CI and LIC, a fight constantly morphing between the recognized patterns. This “greywar”, in the form of continuous, low-grade engagement, will be a form of politico-negotiation, a chess game of equal parts diplomacy and military action as sides jockey for leverage over each other. No force short of a state army like China or a revived Russia stands any chance of defeating the U.S. directly, so the dance for dominance will be marked by the factors that constrain the participants’ ability to fight versus their will to fight. Insurgents know they cannot defeat us militarily, but also know we don’t want to fight forever. We’re able to tamp down the extremists but not extinguish them. They can wound us but can neither destroy us nor afford to truly enrage us. Despite the emotion, the attacks of 9/11 did *not* fully energize the fight against Al Qaeda in the manner of Pearl Harbor. It did not truly ignite the deep determination of the people of the United States, though Al Qaeda must have been amazed that it failed to do so. Keeping US rage below the “Pearl Harbor threshold” level will be the goal of any thoughtful enemy; the way to keep us engaged, but not determinedly so.

Greywar is even more likely to represent future war if more weak states come on line under the argument for “self determination.” Many populations around the world are clamoring for recognition as independent states though they would be utterly unviable if they achieved it. With few resources, little industrial capacity, no funds and few global links they are virtually doomed to failure.⁷ The world, especially the United States, is sensitive to charges of modern imperialism but such nascent states will only survive if the world community elects to foster their birth. The problem is that such states, inevitably weak from the beginning, become prime targets for extremists, smugglers and the illicit networks that need weak states for operational cover. Former President Bush and President Obama have acknowledged that U.S. interests are threatened by failing or

⁷ An interesting side effect of the tribalism fueling these numerous movements for individual homelands is that it blocks the formation of larger blocs capable of significant challenges to the U.S.

fragile states.⁸ These are the environments in which the supporters of pre-emptive engagement anticipate greater U.S. governmental and Interagency involvement. For Civil Affairs practitioners to effectively lead the DoD's efforts at the indirect approach in support of this involvement, some evolution in CA practice must take place.

CA units need to redirect their efforts towards their strengths, in particular making use of their ability to penetrate non-permissive environments. CA is "armed social work" as aptly described by Dr. David Kilcullen: "Practice armed civil affairs. Counter-insurgency is armed social work; an attempt to redress basic social and political problems while being shot at. This makes civil affairs a central counterinsurgency activity, not an afterthought. It is how you restructure the environment to displace the enemy from it. Civil affairs must focus on meeting basic needs first, then progress up Maslow's hierarchy as each successive need is met. Your role is to provide protection, identify needs, facilitate civil affairs and *use improvements in social conditions as leverage to build networks and mobilize the population* (italics added)... Protecting them (civil and humanitarian assistance personnel) is a matter not only of close-in defense, but also of creating a permissive operating environment by co-opting the beneficiaries of aid—local communities and leaders—to help you help them."⁹ Armed, self-supporting Civil Affairs units are uniquely capable of working in areas impenetrable to other humanitarian or infrastructure specialists; this is a capability to be capitalized on. Relationship-building and leverage of those relationships once well established should be a key mission for CA practitioners. Favorable influence with local leaders can provide understanding into local/tribal politics, mobilize localized populations, sustain legitimacy and provide credibility for operations. These achievements help foster security, which in turn opens the environment and allows more to be accomplished in all developmental and peace keeping arenas.

Negotiation training should be far more greatly emphasized for CA specialists than currently done. The bucks the U.S. government is spending in conflict zones are buying too little bang. Skilled negotiation is a learned skill but it must be taught, emphasized and practiced relentlessly. Every discussion with a local national is a negotiation in some form. Advanced negotiation training is time consuming and expensive; it could be limited to those CA personnel expected to be team leaders or others who anticipate having primary interaction with locals. Further, the training should include more detailed understanding of the cultural interaction styles of the local populations. Learning to not sit with the soles of ones feet toward an Iraqi is helpful; learning how to introduce and support a prime negotiator is even more helpful. The flip side of enhancing CA negotiation skills is equipping the CA negotiator with the proper authorities, both the authority to make promises he can follow through on as well as the authority to say no (in the form of retracting support if local follow through does not happen as agreed). This recommendation in particular means the authority to stop construction projects, even in

⁸ George W. Bush, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, March 2006); Barack Obama, "Renewing American Leadership," *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 4 (July/August 2007).

⁹ Dr. David Kilcullen, "Twenty-Eight Articles": Fundamentals of Company-level Counterinsurgency," *Military Review*, May-June 2006.

the midst of construction if necessary, to establish authority and leverage. That may mean creating language to insert into our contracting documents for that purpose. Further, despite the backflips U.S. units perform to “put a local face on” projects there is something to be gained by the U.S. occasionally taking credit. Consider that the only interaction most Iraqis or Afghans have with Americans is on the receiving end of convoys and patrols, bristling with weapons and de-personalized behind sunglasses. By so thoroughly distancing ourselves from the social positives of a new clinic, repaired sewer pipes or returning electricity we lose the opportunity to be associated with progress and a return to normalcy. The objective of fostering a return of confidence in local governmental institutions is well established. This is about not completely missing the opportunity to be associated with some good, a fact that could do as much for American soldier morale as for that of the local citizens.

Civil Affairs senior officers and commanders must adopt a more aggressive posture on educating supported commanders how to make the best use of CA capabilities. Despite the prominence of CA units in the modern battlespace there remains a persistent deficiency in knowledge of how best to use them. Contract management is not the highest and best use of CA assets; relationship building and influence development is. CA professionals know that CA work usually requires the long view; success may only be visible over multiple rotations of CA units. Even so, milestones of success can be identified for even the relatively short 12-15 months most CA units spend in-country. For example, a measurable reduction in roadside bombs, an increase in credible tips about enemy threats and the reinvigoration of local institutions all represent positive, tangible effects. CA unit commanders must clearly construct achievable milestones, explain those to supported unit commanders and, most importantly, gain the buy-in from that supported commander for what may appear to be non-traditional MOE’s. Achieving this will allow legitimate progress to supplant CERP spending tallies as measures of effectiveness. Senior Civil Affairs officers and NCO’s should be leading the review of the supported commanders’ security plans to develop and integrate these indirect, whole-of-government and interagency efforts.

Civil Affairs must aggressively participate in the Interagency integration process. The IA is only going to become ever more involved in CA-type work, and that’s fine. Accepting that, it is professionally reasonable that CA be the lead DoD stakeholder in coordinating the IA’s integration into the theatre of operations. To date the U.S. still “...lacks a holistic framework for its overseas preventative security activities... (and)... has made only limited progress in institutionalizing a coherent approach to stability operations at the strategic, operational and tactical levels.”¹⁰ As the DoD’s resident experts Civil Affairs must sell the expertise of CA units to other governmental agencies and seek the opportunity to manage the integration of the IA effort in support of civil-military operations. CA should be seeking the mission of crafting that ‘coherent response to stability operations.’ Doing so will require a sharpening of the Civil Affairs mission focus so it can be better explained, and the results better demonstrated, to the consumers of CA skills and products. It will also require renewing the emphasis within CA units on

¹⁰ Hicks, Wormuth and Ridge, “The Future of U.S. Civil Affairs Forces,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, February, 2009.

functional specialties. As a whole the CA community has been edging towards identifying its practitioners as generalists rather than specialists. This is leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy: as other agencies step into the arena of CA work they are able to justify the need for their specialized participation precisely because the Civil Affairs units are positioning themselves as generalists.

Civil Affairs work is an increasingly vital part of addressing the “conflict ecosystem,”¹¹ the outermost skill set of the military’s contributions to defeat America’s enemies. The immediate future promises significant change in the civil affairs domain as the government and military re-align to better counter the security threats. The coming changes represent an opportunity, CA’s to be gained or lost. If the Civil Affairs professionals expect to meet the demands of the future, now is the time to shape that future.

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¹¹ Dr. David Kilcullen, “Counterinsurgency Redux,” *Small Wars Journal*, p. 119-121.