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2019 Civil Affairs Roundtable Report

“If You’re Just Adapting, You’re Already Dead”

by Christopher Holshek

Among the points of convergence at the Civil Affairs Roundtable at the National Guard Armory in Washington, D.C. was the clear need for the Civil Affairs Regiment to stay ahead of – rather than keep up with – the power curve. For the nearly 100 attending the April 2nd annual meeting on civil affairs policy matters, this was a logical result to the “Optimizing Civil Affairs” discussion among operational shareholders at last fall’s Civil Affairs Centennial Symposium at Ft. Bragg, NC reflected in the *2018-19 Civil Affairs Issue Papers* published as the Roundtable began. The imperatives for a more anticipatory than adaptive approach to CA force development involve keeping up with the pace of change in the strategic ecosystem – as retired Marine General Anthony Zinni emphasized in his keynote speech. While the Regiment senses opportunities to gain more strategic application in support of stabilization at Joint, interagency, and multinational levels, however, there is also the challenge of meeting changing demands from the Army’s evolving strategic land power role in an emerging era of great power competition.

Setting the tone of the packed agenda was Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Stability and Humanitarian Affairs Mark Swayne in his opening talk on “The Civil Affairs Role in the Competition Continuum and Interagency Stabilization.” Noting how that the “great power competition” outlined in the National Security and Defense Strategies includes the full range of operations and activities and not just major combat or post-conflict operations, the OSD Policy Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (SO/LIC) senior executive clarified DoD’s policy guidance to the Regiment, first in stating that the *Stabilization Assistance Framework* and *Defense Support to Stabilization (DSS)* were chief among the policy frameworks for civil affairs operations in the competition continuum.

With the State Department in the lead for overall U.S. stabilization efforts and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) leading non-security stabilization assistance, DoD’s role would be limited to security-related tasks and enabling operational scale-up. It would, however, have ground-level stabilization direct liaison and support authority under the DSS and the new DoD Directive 3000.05. Stabilization also plays widely in the (mostly classified) Irregular Warfare Annex to the *National Defense Strategy* (with an unclassified summary to be published), which provides a more expansive, people-centric understanding of IW and incorporates stabilization principles. In addition to civil-military teaming and co-deployment at the tactical level as seen in eastern Syria, greater civil-military integration will come at operational levels for campaign planning as well as in embassy teams and theater and regional commands and bureaus. The question for CA is thus how it can be a ready Joint and Army force of choice for stabilization at all levels, with greater flexibility, adaptability, and interoperability in interagency and multilateral settings. Beyond civil-military integration are requirements for protecting civilians and cultural heritage among many issues.

Swayne's remarks set the table for the interagency panel to continue discussion of CA's role in stabilization begun at the 2016 Symposium. Moderated by USAID Office of Conflict Management & Mitigation director and Association board member Ryan McCannell, the panel concurred with Swayne's finding that stabilization is integral to great power competition, given how CA is "an indispensable civil-military capability," as explained in a October 2018 *Small Wars Journal* article. Along with FY19-20 funding increases, State and USAID panelists briefed organizational changes to build leadership capacity for stabilization. The Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations draft Stabilization Analysis Framework, Policy Advisor Vickie Ellis explained, provides a baseline analysis of key actors and drivers of conflict and instability that CA civil reconnaissance sees on the ground. It also identifies U.S political imperatives and strategies for human security challenges such as protecting civilians and cultural heritage, women, peace, & security, and security and justice sector reform. CSO's stabilization advisors help integrate SAR principles into COCOM plans, provide expertise on regional conflict and stabilization issues, and support interagency coordination on stabilization. Perhaps most importantly, the 2019 Global Fragility Act commits about \$200-million to enhance interagency stabilization in conflict prevention activities that could ultimately save taxpayers many times that amount and countless lives.

Stephen Lennon, who directs USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), briefed the organizational overhaul of his parent agency, in part due to the *Stabilization Assistance Framework* (SAR). Of greater interest to the Regiment is the Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization combining USAID's programs for conflict-affected states, including OTI and offices for countering violent extremism, conflict prevention, and civil-military cooperation. The Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance will have the offices of Food for Peace and U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, while the Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation enjoins existing units like the Global Development Lab to provide technical and program design support for outsourced development.

Much the interagency counterpart to CA, OTI leads USAID in civil-military teaming at Theater Special Operations Commands. Beyond this, it is looking to institutionalize steady-state planning and training relationships with major CA commands, in particular at OSD SO/LIC, the Civil Affairs Proponent at the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS), and the U.S. Army Civil Affairs & Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), or USACAPOC(A). The panel also urged closer working relationships with allied institutions like the NATO CIMIC Center of Excellence, as its Concepts, Interoperabilities, and Capabilities Deputy Branch Chief Maj. Csaba Szabo pitched in his presentation later that day. It also advocated greater cooperation with other organizations seized with similar stabilization challenges, leveraging lessons from UN peace operations like the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. USAID progress in systemic public-private partnering should also be exploited. The Regiment, it added, would do very well to more actively work with State and USAID in regional and embassy level stabilization planning from the outset, increase participation in resident and online civil and military training events and courses, and leverage civilian interagency networks with non-governmental and civil-society organizations, think tanks, and the private sector.

Together, these proposals will build more complementary civil and military stabilization capabilities, improve cross-organizational familiarity, and enhance civil-military integration, interoperability, and adaptability. They would also make the parts as well as the sum of national and regional stabilization capabilities more proactive than reactive in the pursuit of desired political and strategic outcomes. This includes U.S. access and influence at more local levels within geographic regions, in competition with other powers and actors seeking the same, often at the expense of the U.S. and its allies and partners.

Another priority issue the panel cited is the longstanding information-sharing “misoneism” (resistance to change or innovation) enshrined in military classification and, conversely, State/AID reluctance to share diplomatic cables and other products to improve civil-military common operational picture, knowledge management, and unified action. Additionally, the CA Proponent at USAJFKSWCS should standardize and merge CA’s fractured Civil Information Management (CIM) capabilities and functions, more to facilitate interagency civil-military integration at all levels of stabilization.

The best model so far for tactical civil-military integration is the Syria Transition Assistance Response Team (START). Assigned to START HQ in Turkey, Senior Military Advisor Col. Scott Heil confirmed previous START readouts from the last two Symposia – in particular how it improved inter-organizational networking and popular relationship-building at especially local levels. As such, embedded CA teams are better “eyes and ears” for theater and operational commands on area human geography. However, there are limits to the START model caused by shifting policies on Syria and no embassy for focused political-military guidance (i.e. no dedicated Integrated Country Strategy). This impaired longer term planning and anticipatory actions. Civil-military teams, for example, in AFRICOM may generate more sustainable lessons. In any case, the panel prioritized SAR-level development of conditions-based civil-military operational models for integrated stabilization, as 2018 Symposium keynote speaker and former National Security Council official Dr. Nadia Schadlow proposed.

In addition to CA force design models to support stabilization, the Regiment’s Proponent and major commands are grappling with changing service requirements. In a gathering of CA force stakeholders including USACAPOC(A) Commanding General Maj. Gen. Darrell Guthrie, SO/LIC Policy Assistant for CA Col. Calvin Fish, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Deputy Director for Plans & Strategy Col. Valerie Jackson, and 97th CA Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Ryan Hansen, USAJFKSWCS Director of Civil Affairs Force Modernization retired Col. Dennis Cahill updated on the latest Army initiatives guiding CA force development, in addition to new interagency and DoD references. He first reviewed the capabilities for CA at tactical, operational, and theater strategic levels determined at the Symposium workshop and reported in the *Issue Papers*. Then he reviewed comments and recommendations from the workshop, including shortfalls identified in CA at echelons above brigade. These include:

- At strategic, operational, and tactical warfighting headquarters, there is insufficient organic CA/CMO staff at each echelon [especially for C9 at Geographic and Service Component Commands in regions, as discussed at the Army Peacekeeping & Stability Operations Institute’s Peace and Security Training & Education Workshop after the Roundtable]; and, there are no organic CA units at each echelon, no inter-organizational integration capabilities at each echelon, or no CA capabilities to simultaneously plan, coordinate, and execute irregular warfare support
- There are insufficient Active Component forces for current operations in periods of competition
- Current CA forces were configured in 2005 for modularity in Iraq and Afghanistan – they are not compatible for operational requirements in multidomain operations such as “multidomain operational preparation of the environment” going forward (this requires a new CA force design)
- There is insufficient capability and capacity for CA support to civil authority and transitional military authority; the Department of the Army must fully resource the Institute for Military Support to Governance in the next few years to address associated functional specialist gaps
- The Department of the Army must also address future mobilization and rotation policies to maximize access to Reserve Component CA forces.

In addition to the policy references cited (the SAR, DSS, DoDD 3000.05, and Irregular Warfare Annex to the National Defense Strategy) as well as those shaping the discussion at the Symposium (*The Army Vision* and *Army Strategy*, the *Army 2028 Echelons Above Brigade in Multi-Domain Operations* assessment, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command [TRADOC] Pamphlet 525-3-8, *U.S. Army Concept: Multi-Domain Combined Arms Operations at Echelons Above Brigade 2025–2045* and *Civil Affairs: 2025 and Beyond*, the new “CA White Paper”), and the *Issue Papers* themselves, Col. Cahill updated attendees on additional Army source documents and initiatives shaping future civil affairs.

Among these are the *Army Modernization Strategy*, *Total Army Analysis* for 2022-26, and *Army 2028* (specifically LOE 8.2, Civil Affairs Force Modernization Assessment), as well as the Army Research Lab Technical Report on Civil Affairs Enterprise Top Five Challenges). The *Army Modernization Strategy* will focus on civil affairs, psychological operations, and information operations in FY26; as a lead-up to this, the Proponent is conducting an analysis of requirements, needs, and solutions on civil affairs functional areas. To tackle the ongoing CIM challenge, it is also looking at a Commercial Civil Affairs Solution to Civil Information Management initiative. Meanwhile, TRADOC determined that the new *Civil Affairs Operations* doctrine (FM3-57) does not fully address consolidation issues or the CA role in sustainment in the current Army operations manual (FM 3-0), requiring a rewrite. “Calibrating Civil Affairs Forces for Lethality in Large Scale Combat Operations,” a freshly published *Small Wars Journal* article Civil Affairs Commandant Col. Jay Liddick and others penned, outlines how the Army should modernize CA forces to support both large-scale combat operations and hybrid warfare.

In apparent contrast to the strategic paradigm of stabilization in great power competition as one imperative driving civil affairs force development, the renewed focus of the Army and Marine Corps on warfighting has clouded the future of critical war-winning infrastructure like PKSOI and capabilities like CA. While it did not eliminate PKSOI, the Army swiftly cut two-thirds of its staff. Meantime, only one of four active conventional CA battalions remains, under new command and control, while pressure is mounting to cut CA battalions under USACAPOC(A) by one company each. The renewed emphasis has also affected Marine Corps decisions to convert two of its four Marine Reserve CA Groups into training and assistance battalions for security cooperation as well as increase the percentage of active (versus reserve) civil affairs staff at Marine commands, Marine Col. Valerie Jackson reported.

The real question, Col. Calvin Fish posed, is how does CA optimize its capabilities with limited force structure? Lt. Col. Ryan Hansen suggested concentrating on how CA is integrated with country teams and especially at Army corps at the operational/tactical level, while the 351st CA Command model discussed at the 2016 Symposium may prove ideal especially for CA support of “deep operations space irregular warfare.” As the *2016-17 Issue Papers* noted, CACOMs are “the best laboratory for experimentation for change and improvement for CA.” Their regionally aligned command and planning support structures represent unique CA capability that can engage from strategic to tactical levels.

In both its stabilization and land component operational support missions, Maj. Gen. Guthrie noted, USACAPOC(A) maintains a unique military structure that nests collective influence capabilities critical to both. The next round of CA discussions, he proposed, should take a look at the gaps in integrating these capabilities both operationally and in terms of force management – FM 3-57, for example, makes no mention of CA-PSYOP integration; nor does it address how to conduct transition from special operations to conventional CA lead in an operational area. “In order to remain relevant,” Maj. Gen. Guthrie stressed in his comments, we need to stay ahead of the problem.”

Channeling Col. Jackson's observation that "if you're just adapting, then you're already dead," the panel concluded that adaptability among military leaders is insufficient in a strategic paradigm of competition that demands more anticipation and agility than adaptability at personal as well as organizational levels. The idea was put another way in a later discussion: "Civil affairs has to operate like Wayne Gretzky played hockey – skating to where the puck is going to be instead of where it is now."

No doubt the most persuasive proponent of greater strategic thinking by and for civil affairs that day was retired Marine Corps General Anthony Zinni in his talk on "Civil Affairs in America's Changing Role in Global Security." The longtime civil affairs advocate and 2018 John H. Hilldring Award recipient recalled how he first learned about CA unexpectedly as a three-star in a joint task force in northern Iraq suddenly faced with a large-scale humanitarian crisis, in the aftermath of a major combat operation, for which it was wholly unprepared.

What Gen. Zinni realized was how a large-scale, conventional war like *Operation Desert Storm* had quickly become a "legacy operation," finding himself in a strategic paradigm shift characterized by more complex, less kinetic "operations other than war" in Somalia, Rwanda, and the Balkans, leading to even more irregular, people-centric, and politically charged operations after 9/11. In all that time, one thing held true: "In every operation since I met those CA guys in eastern Turkey, we've needed civil affairs as critical to every mission, especially in answering the nagging question whenever we seized control of the ground – 'and then what?' We're talking a lot about stabilization and consolidation these days, but CA has always been about those things."

Gen. Zinni agreed that, to keep the U.S. and its allies on top in an era of full-range great power competition, policymakers and practitioners must adopt a more anticipatory than adaptive mindset. For civil affairs, this comes more naturally. Just as then, however, the major challenges have been in getting commanders to understand CA's strategic as well as operational values-added and integrating CA into their operations. He likewise saw the most significant point of entry at regional and joint commands. He also agreed that the Regiment must do a more aggressive job of telling its story and explaining its values-added especially to commanders at that level.

"Incremental changes will not be enough – it's time to move boldly ahead," he added. "CA needs to be thought of differently, more a national and global force of its own than just a force multiplier." Beyond what the *2016-17 Civil Affairs Issue Papers* recommended on CA proponent command structure, he proposed that civil affairs should be the joint military capability nested in an interagency, political-military unified command structure for stabilization.

To help the Regiment have greater say in its future through a unified narrative on civil affairs that informs and educates supported commanders, policymakers, partners and the public and media, the Association is adding tools for intellectual capitalization of the civil affairs enterprise. The latest, introduced at the Roundtable, are the Publications Advisory Board with an extensive online research library – including open-source documents cited in the *Issue Papers*. In addition to developing civil affairs leaders to tackle ongoing and emerging issues, these platforms are intended to help the Regiment mainstream civil affairs into the broader discussion of the Army, Marines, and Joint Force.

"The Association is doing a great service in getting civil affairs, the services, senior military leaders, and interagency partners to come together to think about these issues in a more integrated way," Zinni concluded.

As every year, the end of the Roundtable featured an open-floor entertainment of nominations for the theme and topic of the 2019-20 discussion beginning at the 2019 Symposium in Tampa, FL from 25-27 October. This will be reflected in a new Civil Affairs Issue Papers call for papers, for release in May.

For further information, go to the Association website at: www.civilaffairsassoc.org/