Pfc. Michael Elliott, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, Task Force Fury, talks with Mohammad Dode, a village resident, 5 February 2010 in Southern Afghanistan. The unit worked with members of the Canadian Armed Forces to mentor forces from the Afghan National Army 205th Corps during Operation Mesmar.

The Civil Engagement Spectrum
A Tool for the Human Domain

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An eager twenty-three-year-old "All-American" lieutenant, full of energy, would be trying to talk to a local villager through an interpreter. Inevitably, the conversation starts sounding like a tactical interrogation: "Hello I am Lieutenant Jones; I am from America. Can you tell me where the Taliban are? Have you seen any IEDs? Have you seen any suspicious people?" We don't do small talk. And of course the patrol doesn't get any useful information.

—Maj. Fernando Lujan, COMISAF Advisor

The U.S. Army lacks sufficient doctrine and training on how conventional forces should productively engage with, or talk to, local populations across the range of military operations. This lacuna is due to unsynchronized doctrine, common key terms that are inconsistently used or undefined, and the lack of a methodology designed to meet conventional-force needs. Units have attempted to bridge this gap by improvising a multitude of civil engagement tactics, techniques, and procedures, without an institutionalized approach to civil engagement, driving a cyclical process in which units learn through casualty-producing trial and error. The result is units that are unable to effectively interact in the human domain and unable to understand and influence their area of operations. This article will examine the civil-engagement capability gap for conventional units and propose the *civil engagement spectrum* as a starting point for discussion on how to fill this gap.

Requirements of the Human Domain

The idea that focus may be shifting away from counterinsurgency training with the end of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan does not obviate the requirement to document the lessons that the U.S. Army has learned concerning the importance of the civilian environment in which it conducts operations. Rather, the rise of the regionally aligned forces concept mandates that conventional units be able to quickly and effectively operate in numerous capacities across the human domain. Army Doctrine Publication 1, *The Army*, the Army's core doctrinal document, recognizes the complexity inherent in land operations by stating that "the land domain is the most complex of the domains, because it addresses humanity—its cultures, ethnicities, religions, and politics."[1] This is echoed by Gen. Raymond Odierno, the Army chief of staff; Gen. James Amos, commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps; and Adm. William McRaven, then commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, in their white paper, "Strategic Landpower: Winning the Clash of Wills." The authors write that "the success of future strategic initiatives and the ability of the U.S. to shape a peaceful and prosperous global environment will rest more and more on our ability to understand, influence, or exercise control within the 'human domain.'"[2] In order to reduce the complexity engendered by humans, the Army fielded various systems to make sense of the chaos inherent in the human domain.

During recent operations, the Army implemented various solutions to improve its understanding of the human domain; these efforts have included human terrain teams, fusion centers, atmospheric programs, cultural support teams, and stability operations information centers. These initiatives experienced varying levels of success, but the one common denominator of this veritable alphabet soup is, the majority of the time, these entities operated at higher echelons; flag officers had cultural advisors, key leader engagement cells, and Department of State political officers. However, very little of the expertise resident in such staff elements trickled down to the lower levels where the majority of the war was actually being fought.

After the publication of the revised counterinsurgency manual, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency,* in 2006, platoon leaders knew that they were supposed to operate in the human domain but were not instructed on how to do so productively.[3] This lack of instruction and training resulted in unit leaders conducting "movement to *Shura*" (meeting with local leaders) without specific benchmarks, guidelines, or standards.

The lack of unified doctrine for interactions within the human domain springs from the multitude of doctrinal stakeholders for this issue and their respective parochial perspectives. Because civil engagement—the process of interacting within the human domain—crosscuts proponency and affects the Army at large, it is essential that the Army standardize doctrine amongst its stakeholders.

Civil Engagement Proponents

The two main proponents of civil engagement are information operations (IO) and civil affairs (CA). Each group practices civil engagement from a different perspective. In IO doctrine, the purpose of civil engagement is to convey information to a population to induce behavioral change. In contrast, CA doctrine practitioners use civil engagement to gather information to populate various surveys and databases in order to help plan civil support operations. In short, IO is essentially concerned with messaging a population to shape attitudes, while CA is more concerned with collecting information about a population's needs.

Currently, because IO and CA each have different approaches to obtaining information but may, by necessity, be targeting the same population, their efforts may compete and overlap, often spelling confusion for outside units that try to adapt their procedures to support both endeavors. Consequently, for many small-unit leaders, the lack of a coherent engagement framework causes many civil engagements to drift unproductively into the realm of tactical questioning, as illustrated in the introduction.

Doctrinal Shortfalls

At present, the cornerstone of IO doctrine is FM 3-13, *Inform and Influence Activities*. IO doctrine divides civil engagement into *inform* and *influence* activities (IIAs), and identifies *soldier and leader engagement* (SLE) as the key subcomponent. FM 3-13 defines SLE as "interpersonal interactions by soldiers and leaders with audiences in an area of operations … to provide information or to influence attitudes, perception, and behavior."[4] Note the fundamental nature of both the IIA and SLE is disseminating, not gathering, information.

This framework makes sense from a pure IO perspective, but its implementation by units poses two major challenges. The first is that, paradoxically, in order to effectively inform and influence, it is necessary to have a detailed understanding of the target audience (the human domain). FM 3-13 recognizes that preparation is required to properly conduct SLE by stating, "critical to this process is the social and link analysis to determine the scope of influence that each engagement target may have."[5] The U.S. Special Operations Command Socio-Cultural Awareness Section recognizes this need and states that "the cultural, identity, and normative elements of a battle space cannot be discerned in any other way than through direct, interpersonal engagement."[6] This places leaders in a conundrum: they require information to properly conduct a civil engagement, but the only way to gather information is from a civil engagement.

The second challenge that FM 3-13 poses is the paucity of applicable doctrinal SLE guidance for the small-unit leader. FM 3-13 states that for deliberate (preplanned) SLEs, it is important to "integrate other sources of information-related capabilities," and that

(U.S. Air Force photo by Capt. Dustin Hart)

Members of the Nangarhar Provincial Reconstruction Team and the Chaparhar Police Mentor Team meet with village elders 24 December 2008 at a school in Terelay Village, Chaparhar District, Afghanistan, to discuss conditions in the village and to pass out school supplies and clothing for students.

A village caretaker hands a baby goat to Spc. Janet Peace, a medic with the 414th Civil Affairs Battalion, 22 April 2009 in the village of Chabellier, Djibouti. Members of the 414th Civil Affairs Battalion interact with local key leaders and villagers to foster better understanding and communication while building relationships that allow Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa forces to partner with the host nation.

"military information support soldiers are trained, educated, equipped, and organized to plan, monitor, and assess engagement with foreign populations and select audiences."[7] Problematically, military information support operations (formerly PSYOP) soldiers are rarely found at company and platoon level, leaving the small-unit leader, again, on his own with few specifics.

The guidance provided by FM 3-13 for dynamic (impromptu) SLEs is even vaguer, stating that preparation for these engagements "starts as early as initial entry training when soldiers begin internalizing the Army Values found in ADP 1."[8] Undoubtedly true; however, this guidance provides few tangible suggestions to the twenty-three-year-old lieutenant who must conduct his first engagement with an unhappy local leader.

The other main proponent of civil engagement doctrine is civil affairs. FM 3-57, *Civil Affairs Operations*, lays out doctrine for U.S. Army civil affairs and labels civil information management (CIM) as one of the five core CA tasks. FM 3-57 defines CIM as "the process whereby data relating to the civil component of the operational environment is collected, collated, processed, analyzed, produced into knowledge products, and disseminated."[9] Again, the devil is in the details. At no point do the CA manuals fully detail a methodology for actually collecting this information.

FM 3-57 does address the role of conventional units by stating, "the heart of collection is the daily

interaction between U.S. forces and the myriad of civilians in the supported commander's AO [area of operations], and the capture of these contacts and data points. Every soldier who encounters the civilian elements of an AO is a potential sensor of civil information."[10] The manual does not provide guidance on how this collection is supposed to occur. This may not be as critical for CA units as most develop these skills over time, but it is critical for the non-CA units that conduct the majority of the daily interactions. Early in their tours, non-CA units often lack experience in how to conduct these types of interactions in a logical and sequential manner.

One group that appears strangely silent on the debate over how to interact in the human domain is the military intelligence community. In 2010, then Maj. Gen. Michael T. Flynn published his widely read article "Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan," which bluntly assessed the capability of military intelligence in understanding the human domain. He wrote, "Having focused the overwhelming majority of its collection efforts and analytical brainpower on insurgent groups, the vast intelligence apparatus is unable to answer fundamental questions about the environment in which U.S. and allied forces operate and the people they seek to persuade."[11] By 2012, when the Army published FM 3-55, *Information Collection*, this interest in operating in and understanding the human domain seemed to have completely evaporated.[12] Not only does the latest intelligence manual not address how a small-unit leader can gather this information, it does not address any type of information regarding the human domain.

The Army last provided guidance regarding the specifics of civil engagement in the 2008 edition of FM 3-07, *Stability Operations*. This edition—since

superseded—presented the *Tactical Conflict Assessment and Planning Framework* (TCAPF). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) created TCAPF to "assist commanders and their staff to identify the causes of instability."[13] While not included in the 2014 edition of FM 3-07, TCAPF still remains a good start point for developing a framework for solving the civil engagement capability gap for conventional units.

The first phase of TCAPF—collection—actually laid out specifics of how leaders and units are supposed to gather relevant sociocultural information. As described in 2008 edition of FM 3-07, the collection portion of TCAPF consisted of four questions:

- Has the population of the village changed in the last twelve months?
- What are the greatest problems facing the village?
- Who is trusted to resolve problems?
- What should be done first to help the village?[14]

The major advantage of the TCAPF collection process was that it was simple enough that, with a modicum of training, almost any soldier had the ability to effectively collect information in the human domain. This process guided soldiers and assisted them from drifting into *a priori* tactical questioning as described in the introduction to this article. The key to TCAPF was that it focused on gathering information rather than disseminating information. This process provided a start towards gathering the sociocultural background information that any small-unit leader would require. However, TCAPF lacked context in how to integrate these street-level engagements with other civil engagement efforts, such as meetings and individual engagements.

Civil Engagement Spectrum

To address the lack of common terminology and structure in civil engagements, I am proposing a civil engagement spectrum (CES)—a framework that expands TCAPF to comprehensively address all forms of civil engagement. The CES framework contains nested steps and objectives that allow leaders to track their units' progress during the civil engagement process, as well as during subsequent steps if necessary. The end state is understanding the key grievances, sociocultural factors, and significant battlespace

influencers. This knowledge will increase small-unit leaders' effectiveness by improving both their understanding of their battlespace and their ability to influence their battlespace.

The CES is composed of three types of engagements: street-level engagements (S-LEs), meetings, and individual engagements (see the figure on page 25). These steps do not have to dogmatically take place sequentially, but this flow will meet most units' needs. Each unit's mission and situation will determine where they start on the CES; a unit conducting stability operations would start with S-LEs, while a unit conducting security force assistance would start at individual engagements.

Street-Level Engagements. S-LEs are generally the first step in the CES. They are the initial engagements that take place between soldiers and local people when a unit enters a new area or when the soldiers feel that their knowledge of the battlespace may be incorrect. The purpose of the S-LE is to gain initial information about an area, with a focus on tentatively identifying local leaders for subsequent engagement. U.S. forces can engage in an S-LE as the focus of a mission or as opportunity presents itself during the execution of other missions. As seen below, the S-LE consists of a modified TCAPF collection; the difference is two additional questions asking the name and boundaries of the area where the exchange is taking place and what group (tribe, ethnicity, etc.) occupies the area:

- What is the name of this village/area?
- What group occupies this area? Nearby areas?
- Has the population of the village changed in the last twelve months? If so, why?
- What are the greatest problems facing the village?
- Who is trusted to resolve problems?
- What should be done first to help the village?

The initial S-LE should take approximately ten minutes per iteration. Ideally, multiple teams will conduct S-LEs, simultaneously providing more data points for cross-checking and verifying information. While the concept of *every soldier as a sensor* is useful, the linguistic reality of most operational environments limits the amount of personnel who conduct S-LEs to those who have an interpreter. A critical issue that is beyond the scope of this article is data and knowledge management. Despite the introduction of

numerous tools, there currently is no industry standard, and units use whatever system is standard for their unit or follow-on units.

The desired end state of the S-LE is basic situational awareness of an area and the ability to set up or attend a meeting with local leadership, as leaders are unlikely to meet units during initial S-LEs. At the conclusion of the S-LE, a skilled team should have obtained the name and boundaries of the local village or area; the population of the area; the basic demographics, ethnicity, and tribal information of the area; the construct of the local economy; any local problems and grievances; and the local power structure, including tentatively identified local leadership.

Meetings. Meetings are the second step of the CES. Meetings are where a unit engages with multiple representatives from one or more geographical areas. The purpose of a meeting is to validate the key-leader structure of an area in order to facilitate subsequent individual engagements and also to refine the information gathered in S-LEs. Meetings enable a two-way flow of information. U.S. forces can gather information while also highlighting key talking points to support IO objectives. Meetings are composed of two subtypes: primary and ancillary. Primary meetings are called by U.S. representatives, while ancillary meetings are called by someone else without U.S. prompting.

U.S. personnel initiate primary meetings with a specific end state in mind. The purpose of primary meetings is usually to set the stage for engaging with local leaders in individual engagements, thus providing the link between the S-LE and the individual engagement.

Ancillary meetings are those attended by U.S. representatives that would have occurred without U.S. involvement, such as between local people and their police forces. The purpose of U.S. attendance at ancillary meetings is to show support for local leaders and institutions, and to gain knowledge of the local power structure and events, not to take center stage or project any type of information. While gathering information is not the primary purpose for attendance at an ancillary meeting, careful observation can help develop details regarding host-nation information requirements. Ancillary meeting attendance also allows U.S. forces to conduct sidebar discussions with a broad variety of attendees and to set up future individual engagements. Leaders need to remain cognizant that attendance at a meeting can connote tacit support for the organization or individual hosting the meeting or the process that the meeting covers.

Individual Engagements. Individual engagements are the final stage of the CES. This is where unit representatives meet with one or two key individuals—and potentially with the entourages of those individuals—in a relatively closed setting. The term *individual engagement* is the replacement for the ubiquitous catch-all term *key leader engagement*. The often-used and seldom-defined term key leader engagement is a catch-all for meetings with groups, meetings with individuals of any stripe, and, generally, any type of nonkinetic interaction with locals. Since key leader engagement can mean S-LE, meeting, or individual engagement to different people, leaders should substitute the term individual engagement instead of key leader engagement.

Individual engagements fall into four main subtypes: informative, negotiations, maintenance, and information gathering. Usually, individual engagements will include elements of each subtype with one being predominant.

The first category of individual engagement is the *informative engagement*. This corresponds to the previously discussed soldier and leader engagement from FM 3-13. An informative engagement occurs when a unit has specific information or talking points to disseminate to a specific individual. The choice of whom to conduct an individual engagement with is important due to that individual's sphere of influence and also for the second-order effect of potentially adding to his or her legitimacy.

The second category of individual engagement is *negotiations*. Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-22, *Army Leadership*, defines negotiation as "a problem-solving process in which two or more parties discuss and seek to satisfy their interests on various issues through joint decisions."[15] There has been a tremendous increase in the amount of negotiations that small-unit leaders conduct due to the nature of the wars we have been involved in over the past fourteen years. Leaders now routinely negotiate with parties that range from partnered host-nation units, to local leaders, to nongovernmental organizations.

The third category of individual engagement is *maintenance engagements*. In a maintenance engagement, a leader maintains rapport and access with an individual for potential future engagement. There is no set agenda for maintenance engagements; the U.S.

representative may lightly review any pertinent talking points, but the majority of the time is spent developing the relationship between the individual and the U.S. representative. The maintenance engagement may also provide an opportunity to passively collect information about what is locally occurring. Maintenance engagements are important across the spectrum of conflict but are especially critical during partnered operations or security force assistance missions.

Information-gathering engagements is the fourth and final category of individual engagement. This type of engagement entails unit representatives conducting detailed discussions with a local person in order to better understand the local culture, power structure, and history. A key point to remember about information-gathering engagements is that host-nation leaders often stick to their talking points, just as a U.S. leader would. Their information needs to be constantly analyzed, and divergent local individuals must also be engaged. Historically, relying on too few individuals to gain local understanding has allowed the manipulation of units into involvement with, and settling of, local grievances. This has predictably led to poor second- and third-order effects. While most retrospective combat leaders can cite examples of these effects from experience, the most notorious example of

this phenomenon would be Ahmad Chalibi; described by the *New York Times* as "a merry-eyed dynamo [who] tirelessly connived and schemed on behalf of two dreams: for American military might to drive Saddam Hussein from power and to install himself in the dictator's place."[16]

One variable that leaders need to factor into their execution of the CES process is partnering with host-nation personnel. Realistically, some partners will be much more skilled and inclined to participate in this type of activity than others. Additionally, the presence of host-nation governmental or security-force personnel may stifle local civilian participation in S-LEs. However, U.S. forces should strive to include host-nation personnel in the CES process as much as possible.

Conclusion

The U.S. Army has recognized the importance of the human domain and the necessity to codify it within doctrine. Gen. Robert Cone, then commander of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), stated in 2013, "Our experiences in these conflicts demonstrate the importance of investing in language, culture, advisory, and other specialized 'people' skills. … These new skill-sets are fundamental to our profession and can only be retained if they
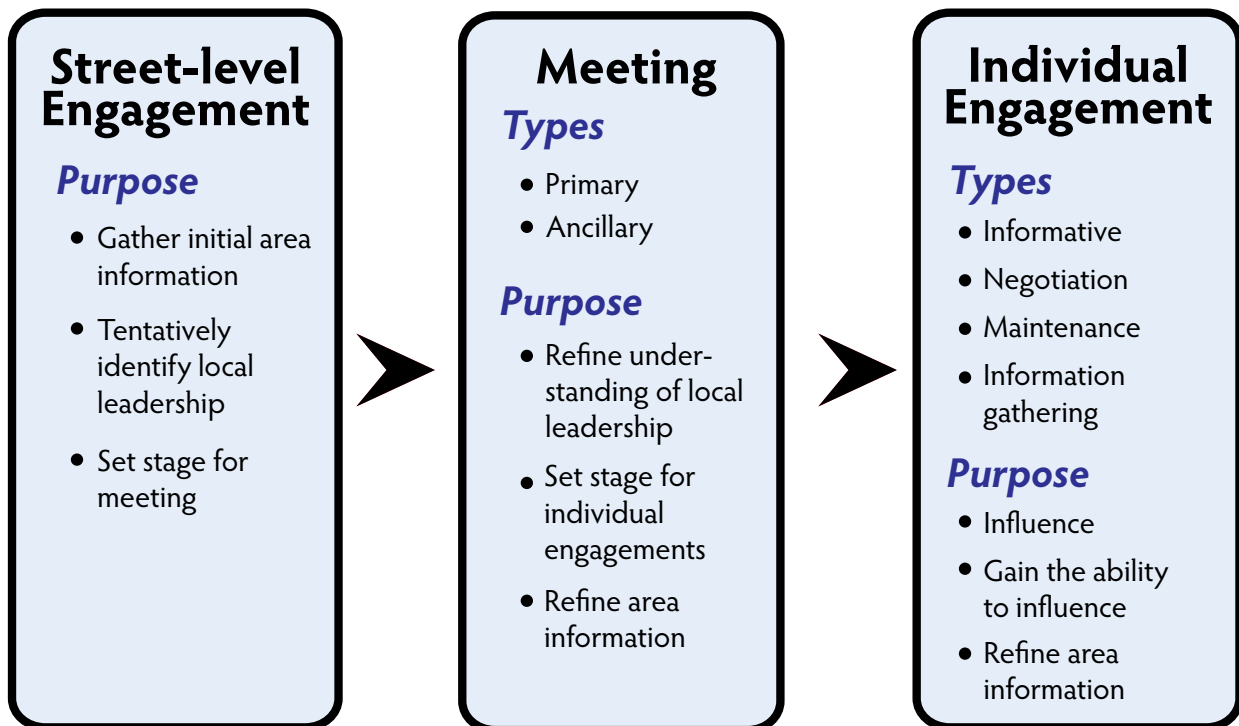

Figure. Civil Engagement System

are codified within our doctrine as a warfighting function."[17] TRADOC is currently conceptualizing adding the human domain as the seventh warfighting function.[18] The CES provides a simple framework that allows leaders to train and conduct operations across the human domain, to establish a viable process for civil engagement, and to avoid the problems that they have been victim to in the past. The development of regionally aligned forces has accelerated the need for conventional forces to understand and leverage the human domain. The civil engagement spectrum provides a start point to begin the conversation of how the Army can fill the civil engagement gap that currently exists. ◼

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Notes

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