



A coalition soldier speaks with children 13 March 2018 at a market in Raqqa, Syria. The reappearance of vendors in Syrian markets is a sign of returning normalcy following the Syrian Democratic Forces' defeat of the Islamic State. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Timothy Koster, U.S. Army)

# Order from Chaos

## Inside U.S. Army Civil Affairs Activities

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Since 9/11, civil affairs forces have consistently contributed to the success of military campaigns, from reassuring local Afghans after their

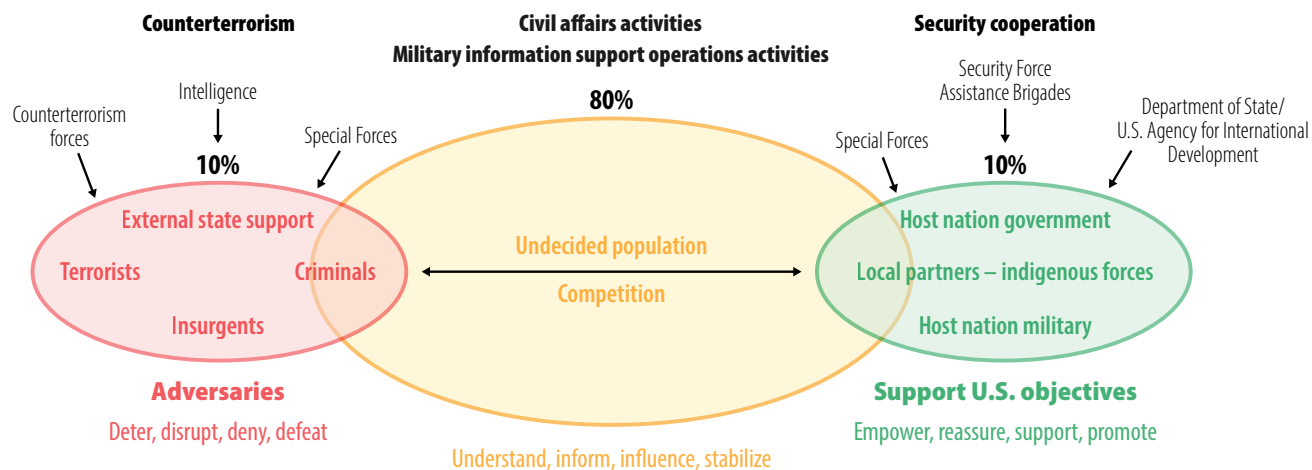
liberation from the Taliban in 2001 to understanding Sunni grievances during the Sunni Awakening in 2006 that ultimately defeated al-Qaida in Iraq. In the

ongoing campaign against the Islamic State (IS), civil affairs forces working through interorganizational partners are stabilizing post-IS areas to deny IS reemergence and maintain coalition freedom of action.

Over the past eighteen years, commanders have learned that civil affairs activities enhance their understanding of the operational environment. For example, civil affairs personnel can help identify critical infrastructure, and they can develop local civil networks that

## Department of Defense and U.S. Special Operations Command Directives

Department of Defense (DOD) Directive 2000.13, *Civil Affairs*, directs combatant commanders to conduct civil affairs operations in their areas of responsibility. This directive provides commanders the authority to integrate civil affairs forces with either military forces or interagency partners to support DOD and U.S. embassy objectives



(Original figure by French officer Lt. Col. David Galula, adapted by author. Population by percentage: 10 percent support the adversary, 80 percent are agnostic, and 10 percent support U.S. objectives. \*Percentages represent populations. \*\*Does not represent other intergovernmental organizations/nongovernmental organizations.)

**Figure 1. A Modified Diagram of the 10-80-10 Theory**

support U.S. efforts. Moreover, these efforts contribute toward a common understanding with interorganizational partners, which provides opportunities for all stakeholders to develop ways to mitigate civil vulnerabilities that complement U.S. military and whole-of-government objectives. Based on the knowledge gained from years of combat, civil affairs forces must now evolve and identify innovative ways to enable the U.S. Army (as part of a joint force) in the future multi-domain battlefield.

As the United States moves toward great-power competition, the U.S. Army must invest in future civil affairs capabilities to understand and influence civil networks and facilitate interorganizational cooperation in multi-domain operations. Additionally, civil affairs forces must contribute to the Army's calibrated force posture in an era of constant competition to help deter aggression, prevent conflict, and, if necessary, rapidly transition to support armed conflict should deterrence fail.

across the conflict continuum. For this reason, commanders can deploy civil affairs forces as a part of a joint task force or independently to support unified action in great-power competition.<sup>1</sup>

Using DOD Directive 2000.13, the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) developed USSOCOM Directive 525-38, *Civil Military Engagement*, which outlines a civil-military engagement program. USSOCOM Directive 525-38 supports DOD and U.S. embassy strategies, stating that civil affairs forces work by, with, and through unified action partners to shape conditions and influence indigenous populations and institutions to support a commander's objective within the operational environment.<sup>2</sup> These directives provide civil affairs forces the flexibility to work with interorganizational partners, which include U.S. government departments and agencies, local indigenous institutions, international and nongovernmental



organizations, and the private sector.<sup>3</sup> Hence, civil affairs forces are vital to build strong, indigenous military and civilian partners, which are essential for meeting future challenges such as countering Russian and Chinese expansion into vulnerable states.

## Role of Civil Affairs

Civil affairs forces, whether conventional or special operations, are experts at three activities that are vital to shaping and influencing the operational environment: civil reconnaissance, civil engagement, and civil information management. Field Manual 3-57, *Civil Affairs Operations*, defines these activities accordingly:

**Civil Reconnaissance.** CR [civil reconnaissance] is a targeted, planned, and coordinated observation and evaluation of specific civil aspects of the environment for collecting civil information to enhance situational understanding and facilitate decision making.

Potential sources of civil information include areas, structures, capabilities, organizations, people, and events (ASCOPE) assessments.

**Civil Engagement.** CE [civil engagement] includes those planned and targeted interactions which promote the building of relationships between military forces, unified action partners, IPI [indigenous populations and institutions], and the interagency to reduce civilian impacts to ongoing or planned military operations and mitigate the military impact on the civilian population. ... It may be in person or by other means of communication.

**Civil Information Management.** Civil information management is the process whereby data relating to the civil component is gathered, collated, processed, analyzed, produced into information products, and disseminated. The data is used as civil considerations input into possible courses of action to determine the impact of military operations on the civil component of the OE [operational environment] and to provide updates on the civil component to enhance the commander's common operational picture (COP).<sup>4</sup>

The combination of these civil affairs activities provides commanders and unified action partners a shared understanding for the civil component of the

operational environment. Civil affairs forces continually accomplish this through civil reconnaissance and civil engagement to develop an accurate picture of the civil environment and provide them critical context on the ground. The civil information collected is analyzed and integrated into the operations and intelligence processes to support the commander's decisions and ensure unity of effort toward mission accomplishment.

## Recent Civil Affairs Activities

During the Global War on Terrorism, civil affairs forces have used information collected through a range of activities to improve commanders' understanding of the operational environment and facilitate information sharing with joint, interorganizational, and multinational (JIM) partners to leverage resources toward common objectives. As figure 1 (page 20) demonstrates, civil affairs activities range across all aspects of the civil component of the operational environment. Hence, civil affairs forces collect information from the civil component that overlaps pro-U.S./coalition areas and population centers that are sympathetic to U.S. adversaries' objectives. Therefore, civil affairs forces continuously gather and analyze civil information to enhance military commanders' understanding of the local sociopolitical dynamics of a complex operating environment. Civil affairs units share this information with JIM partners to facilitate cooperation in areas of mutual interest and establish trust with both civilian and military organizations.

In Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, civil affairs forces assisted with synchronizing humanitarian efforts to meet the immediate needs of the populations and to mitigate the effects of combat operations. Civil affairs forces in these contingency operations were often the first U.S. personnel on the ground collecting real-time information through civil reconnaissance and civil engagement activities. These activities

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provided the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) with essential information to plan U.S. foreign disaster relief efforts that helped alleviate suffering in these postconflict areas.<sup>5</sup>

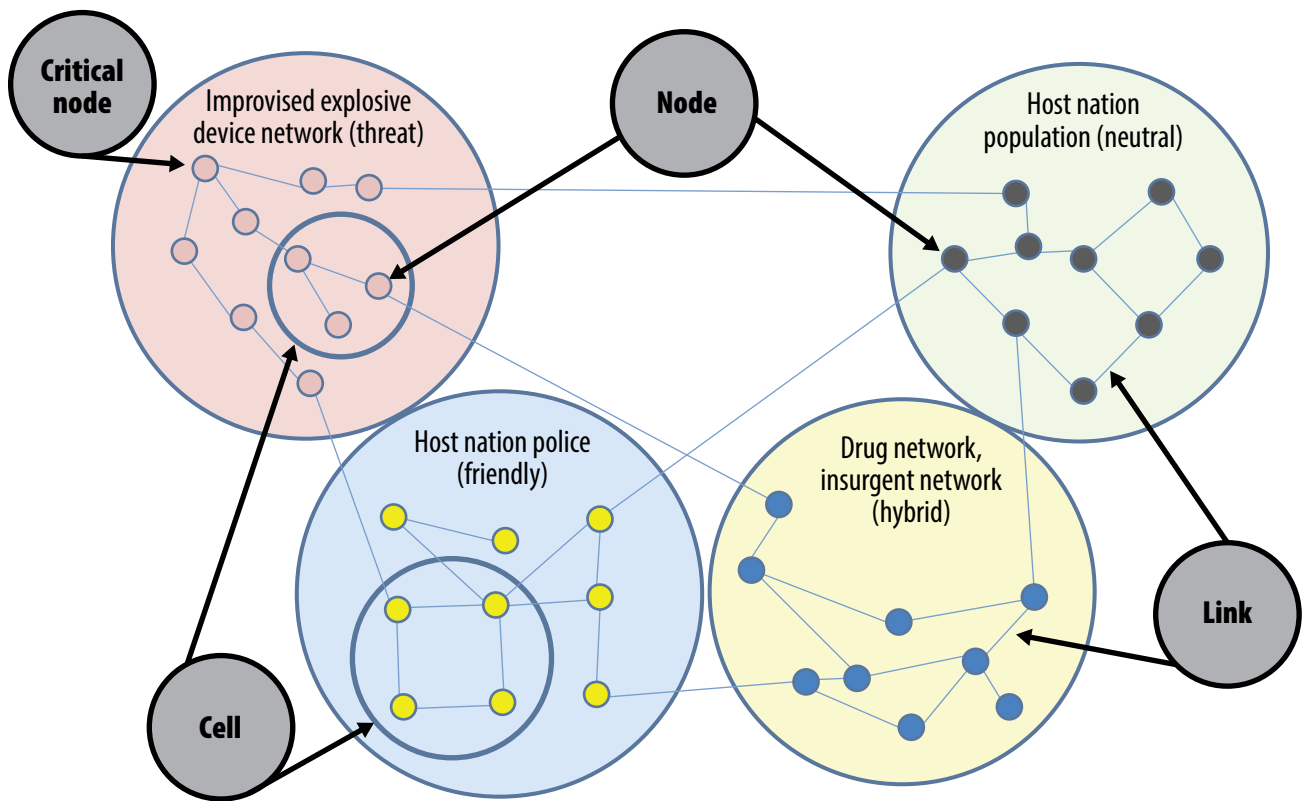
In Afghanistan, civil affairs forces cooperated with private telecommunications companies in support of their efforts to provide cellular mobile services throughout the region. Civil affairs forces shared information with these private companies to help them identify secure areas to build telecommunication infrastructure. As these companies built cell towers in rural areas, their services complemented both the ground force commander's security objectives and local governance initiatives that generated job opportunities, increased communication, and led to local economic growth that aided with countering Taliban influence.<sup>6</sup>

In 2006, as improvised explosive device (IED) threats increased throughout Iraq, civil affairs forces became vital in the counter-IED fight. One of the core counter-IED efforts developed by the Joint IED Defeat Organization was to "attack the network."<sup>7</sup> Given civil affairs access and extensive local networks, it was easy to map the human geography and identify relationships based on commonalities such as family and cultural or

Civil affairs officer Maj. Don Sculli, the executive officer of Company C, 96th Civil Affairs Battalion, passes sodium chloride to a hospital worker 22 April 2003 at the Pediatrics and Labor Hospital in Najaf, Iraq. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Kyle Davis, U.S. Army)

business ties. As illustrated in figure 2 (page 23), identifying and disseminating these links and nodes across the human networks to other DOD entities provided commanders with an increased situational understanding.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, once this civil knowledge was triangulated with other critical information, it led to opportunities for lethal and nonlethal targeting to "attack the network." The latter, layered with persistent civil engagement and increased job opportunities for local populations, contributed to the desired security conditions and reduced violence observed in Iraq in 2010.

Early in the "Defeat IS" campaign in Syria, civil affairs forces used social media to monitor local populations' sentiment in IS-held areas. Cooperation among psychological operations, U.S. Central Command web operations, and civil affairs yielded a mechanism to analyze social media information on how both IS and coalition operations affected the local populations during the



(Figure from Maneuver Center of Excellence, Fort Benning, Georgia)

## Figure 2. Interacting with Human Networks

air campaign. Also, the social media data was used to advise the commanders on local perceptions of coalition and partner force operations, to monitor movement of displaced civilians, and to increase collaboration for civil affairs activities with lethal and nonlethal targeting.<sup>9</sup>

Immediately after the liberation of Raqqa, Syria, on 20 October 2017, civil affairs forces assisted ground force commanders in assessing the post-IS operational environment.<sup>10</sup> These civil affairs teams working with the Syrian Democratic Forces gathered information on the status of local infrastructure from roads blocked by debris to monitoring the early return of locals to the destroyed area. Additionally, civil affairs extended the reach of USAID/Department of State (DOS) platforms through civil reconnaissance and civil engagements in liberated areas throughout Syria. The real-time information provided interagency partners with the necessary data to enhance programming coordination to meet the local populations' immediate needs as they started up the Syria Transition Assistance

Response Team–Forward (START-FWD) unit. Once fully functional, this relationship enhanced the sharing of information and resources to achieve unity of effort toward accomplishing common objectives. An article in the *Small Wars Journal* stated,

The Syria Transition Assistance Response Team–Forward (START-FWD) provides a good model for future endeavors. Recognizing the necessity to co-deploy State and USAID civilians with military forces to plan and monitor stabilization, humanitarian assistance and diplomacy activities with local partners, the Civil Military Support Element (CMSE) provided critical administrative and operational support to the Special Operations Joint Task Force–Operation Inherent Resolve (SOJTF-OIR) for START-FWD.<sup>11</sup>

The collaboration between START-FWD and the civil affairs forces was critical to the consolidation of gains in these post-IS affected areas of Syria.

As combat operations shifted in northeastern Syria, civil affairs forces also assisted with training local internal security forces with their civil-military operations. Building the internal security forces' civil-military operations capacity provided them the opportunity to increase their public support and foster legitimacy with the local populace. Additionally, this provided civil affairs teams another means to monitor and validate local grievances that could have contributed to instability in a highly vulnerable area due to deeply rooted Arab-Kurdish tensions. These activities also assisted psychological operations and public affairs activities by providing them the access and information necessary to issue positive media releases, both locally and internationally, to increase Kurdish partners' credibility in the "Defeat IS" campaign.

## Operational Risks

Throughout the Global War on Terrorism, civil affairs forces identified several challenges that put these types of activities at risk. The potential risks identified below do not represent all possible risks that could impact the use of civil affairs forces, but they can be used to develop solutions to better optimize this unique capability in support of multi-domain operations.

**Civil affairs versus lethal operations.** The first challenge was that while civil affairs activities created sustainable outcomes, in the past, they were largely overshadowed by lethal operations. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction John F. Sopko's May 2018 report explicitly described how a U.S. Army Stryker brigade's aggressive actions in Kandahar, Afghanistan, were so counterproductive that they stalled any chance for success in their area of operations.<sup>12</sup> In the same report, Sopko described how U.S. special operations forces, later with the Village Stability Operations mission, defaulted to training Afghan Local Police (ALP), thus overshadowing the governance and development part of the mission:

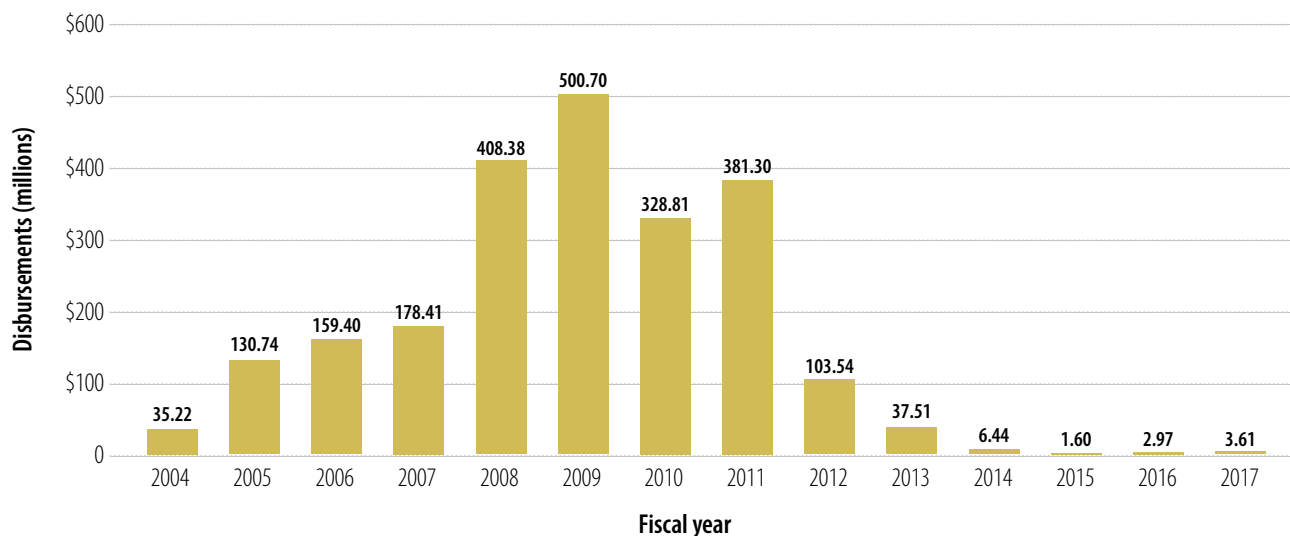
Not only were governance and development de-emphasized as ALP grew, even the idea of representative governance within the ALP itself became secondary. For example, according to Colonel Bradley Moses, commander of the 3rd Special Forces Group, the rapid development of the ALP meant some ALP were not indigenous to the village or village cluster they were assigned to protect, undermining a

fundamental premise of the program. As one military official noted, "Both at the strategic and operational level, doing VSO [Village Stability Operations]/ALP right took a backseat to doing it fast."<sup>13</sup>

**Civilian-military teams.** A second challenge was the timely establishment of civilian-military teams that included representatives from DOS and USAID. History has proven that integrated civilian-military teams were necessary to consolidate gains immediately post-hostilities; examples of this include the U.S. Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support Program in Vietnam, the provincial reconstruction teams in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the collaboration between civil affairs forces and START-FWD in Syria. However, the creation of these teams must happen early on as troops are preparing for deployment stateside to optimize collaboration and establish a shared understanding between civilian and military counterparts prior to deploying abroad. The early coordination can provide commanders a better understanding of policy and funding sources prior to conducting military operations. Early coordination will also assist military planners with forecasting requirements to help with the movement of resources and establishing processes for humanitarian assistance in support of DOS or USAID.

**Inflexible funding.** A third challenge was the lack of flexible funding for civil affairs forces in Syria to quickly relieve human suffering and manage collateral damage to support the joint force's freedom of action. In Iraq and Afghanistan, civil affairs forces used the Commander's Emergency Response Program funds to implement quick projects to support a commander's initiative. However, once the DOD made money a "weapon system" in 2009, commanders felt pressured to spend money loosely with no criteria for measuring effectiveness because they viewed money spent as progress on the ground, as shown in figure 3 (on page 25).<sup>14</sup> The shortage of trained civil affairs forces to advise commanders on effective use of funds combined with some commanders not taking civil affairs advice contributed to the suboptimal application of the program. Overspending and a lack of measuring projects' effectiveness has contributed to civil affairs' dependency on USAID and other agencies to identify resources that complement commanders' objectives. However, this dependency comes with a risk, as commanders may





(Figure from Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Department of Defense)

### Figure 3. Afghanistan Commanders' Emergency Response Program Disbursements (CERP) from 2004 to 2017

not have the resources or funding necessary to support their military operations.

**Information sharing.** The last issue is the constant challenge of information sharing between all stakeholders, from interagency to the private-sector and even between military organizations. Some of the challenges include overclassification of DOD products, access to databases, and organizational attitudes within supported commands. These challenges delay the sharing of civil information with partners that civil affairs must synchronize with to work in areas where interests intersect. The delay or lack of information sharing also prevents partners, especially multinational partners, from sharing information with civil affairs forces that can fill information gaps or the sharing of resources, hence limiting a commander's understanding of the operational environment and not fully optimizing the use of interorganizational partners to achieve unity of effort.

### Seize the Opportunity

As the U.S. Army evolves to conduct multi-domain operations across the conflict continuum, it must invest in its civil affairs forces to operate across multiple domains. Furthermore, the Army must include civil affairs operations early on as part of its engagement strategy to contest adversaries' influence

and compete more effectively at levels below armed conflict. Persistent civil engagement early on is vital, as civil affairs forces are critical in understanding the human geography and leveraging civil networks for the successful execution of military operations. U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, highlights the importance of understanding local infrastructure and civil networks:

**Analyze operational environment and civil networks.** All echelons of forward presence forces conduct terrain analysis and familiarization of friendly territory threatened by an adversary. This effort builds the necessary information that allows the Joint Force Commander to visualize the three-dimensional, multi-domain environment at a level of detail for tactical execution and operational planning. Dense urban terrain requires additional preparatory intelligence activities to understand the human, social, and infrastructure details. The field army focuses IPB [intelligence preparation of the battlefield] on select urban areas that are likely to be of critical strategic and operational importance in conflict.<sup>15</sup>



Civil affairs forces at all echelons are vital in conducting civil engagement to promote the relationship between military forces and the civil component.



Civil affairs forces at all echelons are vital in conducting civil engagement to promote the relationship between military forces and the civil component. In multi-domain operations, civil affairs must perform civil engagement activities across the cyber domain and the information environment to achieve a position of relative advantage for the joint force and unified action partners during competition or armed conflict.<sup>16</sup> TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 states that “engagement enables U.S. forces to outmaneuver an adversary cognitively as well as physically and virtually to deter, counter, and deny the escalation of violence in competition, and defeat the enemy if armed conflict cannot be avoided.”<sup>17</sup>

The knowledge gained since 9/11 has demonstrated the importance of technology in the operational environment. The critical need for reliable connectivity through cell phones and wireless broadband contributes to stabilizing and consolidating gains. Connectivity assists those impacted by hostilities to find displaced family members, enable relief and humanitarian assistance, and create economic and educational opportunities during recovery efforts. Also, the internet provides civil affairs forces another means to monitor local sentiments, triangulate data on sources of instability, and share critical information with indigenous and nongovernmental partners to leverage their resources. Therefore, the Army must identify, develop, and integrate emerging technologies to enable civil affairs activities through multiple domains. New technologies are essential for civil affairs to acquire, process, and share critical information to help understand and affect the future operational environment.

Over the last decade, social media has played an increasingly critical role in swaying political outcomes. For this reason, civil affairs forces should work closely with other U.S. government agencies to identify a common platform that is compatible with DOD and

DOS systems to monitor and analyze local sentiments in the operational environment. A common platform would assist with maintaining situational understanding, evaluate civil trends, and effectively target those civil components that threaten U.S. efforts with JIM partners to sustain the initiative in competition and achieve military and whole-of-government objectives.

In closing, then TRADOC commander Gen. Stephen J. Townsend wrote in the preface to TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1,

In a new era of great-power competition, our nation’s adversaries seek to achieve their strategic aims, short of conflict, by the use of *layered stand-off* in the political, military, and economic realms to separate the U.S. from our partners. Should conflict come, they will employ *multiple layers of stand-off* in all domains—*land, sea, air, space and cyberspace*—to separate U.S. forces and our allies in time, space, and function in order to defeat us.<sup>18</sup>

In great-power competition, civil affairs forces are essential to understanding civil networks and building partner capacity, which will enable the expansion of the competitive space to deter conflict and help position the joint force to rapidly transition to armed conflict if necessary. However, according to Jay Liddick, Thurman Dickerson, and Linda K. Chunga, “Current civil affairs structure, doctrine, equipment, and training are inadequate to combat future near-peer threats. The current civil affairs force was designed and rapidly reorganized to support the Army’s modularity concept of the early 2000s.”<sup>19</sup> Hence, the U.S. Army must re-examine and invest in its civil affairs forces to maximize this unique capability in future multi-domain operations. ■

*The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.*



## Notes

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