



CIVIL AFFAIRS SUPPORT TO



THE SURGE

In the spring of 2007, the United States Army Special Operations Command was called upon to support the surge in Iraq with Civil Affairs forces. It employed the newly-formed 95th CA Brigade to support conventional brigade combat teams, or BCTs, in Iraq. The CA missions there in support of civil-military operations, or CMO, were crucial, and national attention would be directed at their successes and failures. In the end, the 95th's support to CMO achieved the commander's intent and demonstrated CA's capability, strategic utility and flexibility as a member of Army special-operations forces and yielded valuable lessons regarding CMO.

Combating insurgents in Iraq is complicated and continues to evolve. Defining the role of the 95th CA Brigade and its Civil Affairs teams, or CATs, in an area of such turmoil is complex, primarily because of the difficulty in conducting CMO, whose requirements vary from province to province. When direct-combat counterinsurgency operations are ongoing, the planning and execution of Civil Affairs missions may appear to be questionable: Why should we start a road-paving project when insurgents destroy the roads? Why open a police station when potentially corrupt authorities may well use it for their personal gain? Why conduct a cooperative medical exercise when the doctors may very well be ambushed or threatened?

Those questions are representative of the challenges to CMO in combat areas. Despite the difficulties of accomplishing CMO in a nonpermissive setting, they are a valuable resource that can help quell the violence and insurgent activity in Iraq.

### Background

The vast majority of U.S. CA forces are found in the U.S. Army Reserve, in units assigned to the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command. The small percentage of CA forces on active duty, assigned to the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, or USASOC, provides a rapid-deployment capability; highly trained, tactically skilled ARSOF Soldiers; and a history of achieving success in working with combined, joint special-operations task forces, or CJSOTFs.

Because of increased CMO requirements in the GWOT, the Army activated two new active-duty CA battalions in March 2007. Prior to that, the Army's only active-duty CA battalion was the 96th. At the same time the 97th and the 98th were activated, the 95th CA Brigade was activated as a headquarters for the three existing battalions. A fourth battalion, the 91st CA Battalion, is scheduled for activation later this year. All four active-duty CA battalions will be regionally oriented, and all are scheduled to be fully operational by the end of fiscal year 2008. There are also plans to activate a fifth CA battalion with the activation of the U.S. Africa Command.

In Iraq, the 95th CA Brigade supported the surge by operating with conventional Army units. The 96th CA Battalion supported units from the 2nd Infantry Division, the

3rd Infantry Division, the 1st Cavalry Division and the 82nd Airborne Division. Most of the 96th's companies deployed to the Baghdad area, attaching their teams to units at the BCT and battalion levels.

The author's team supported the 2nd Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division; a Fort Lewis, Wash.-based reconnaissance, surveillance and target-acquisition squadron. Our area of operations, or AO, was near Baqubah in the Diyala Province. The commander of the 2-1 Cavalry Regiment knew both the importance of CMO and CA's capabilities, and we worked to meet his intent.

### Tactical strategy

Using CA capabilities to a strategic advantage required creativity. Our strategy was to provide the "ground truth" of the civil situation to the commander of the 2-1 Cav and advise him of his civic responsibilities. By interacting with leaders and key players in each town — the spheres of influence, or SOIs, CA Soldiers could assess the human terrain and furnish the commanders of battalions and BCTs with the information they needed to make their operational decisions.

For example, we were able to provide ground truth on the attitudes of local nationals toward coalition forces by conducting civil reconnaissance immediately after cordon-and-search missions. During a cordon-and-search operation, it is critical that coalition forces maintain a balance between civility and aggression. CA teams help to ensure that balance, and by conducting daily SOI engagements, they can gain the people's respect and help maintain their trust.

It became standard operating procedure for the CA teams to conduct dialogues with the populace following cordon-and-search operations and to provide commanders with immediate information. Frank discussion is critical to gaining truthful and time-sensitive information. For the most part, the Iraqi people are eager to engage in discussions regarding their town's infrastructure, their security concerns, the U.S. presence, etc.

Experienced and dedicated CATs can greatly enhance rapport between the ground forces and the Iraqi citizens. During the summer of 2007, there was a major offensive campaign, Operation Arrowhead Ripper, focused on pushing al-Qaeda in Iraq, or AQI, out of Baqubah, the provincial capital of Diyala province. During the operation, the 96th's CA Soldiers supported conventional forces by:

- Providing face-to-face interaction with local leaders and the populace.
- Making themselves approachable to the public by building rapport.
- Coordinating immediate cash pay-outs for damages.
- Negotiating temporary rental agreements for coalition-forces occupation.
- Gaining influential and popular support by providing immediate medical care.



▲ **WINNING RESPECT** A medic attached to the unit provides medical care for an Iraqi child. *U.S. Army photo.*

- Providing quick-impact projects to jump-start local economies.
- Providing limited humanitarian assistance to Iraqi citizens in need.

Once cavalry and infantry forces had searched and occupied populated areas, CATs began conducting SOI engagements to gain rapport with the local villagers. Over the past few years, conventional forces have become good at gaining feedback from the populace. However, when commanders are conducting “chai sit-downs,” it takes them out of the fight. Today’s commanders know the importance of dealing with the populace, but they also have a unit to manage. CA can help commanders focus on security, tactics and maneuvers by conducting the interactions and providing daily briefings to the commanders on the civil situation.

*Lethal vs. nonlethal operations.* Conventional forces have learned CA’s versatility, particularly in averting combat operations. In one instance, the 96th helped avert a potentially large-scale lethal operation on a suspected stronghold. The CAT conducted civil reconnaissance in a town that was planned for a forced occupation. The CA team discov-

ered the town was productive, cooperative and receptive to coalition forces. At first, the locals were leery of the team’s presence — it was their first interaction with the U.S. Army. During the team’s second visit, the locals warmed up to the team’s presence and engaged in positive dialogue. CA planned and conducted humanitarian aid missions — delivering meals and much-needed water. We elevated the position of the mokhtar (mayor) by having him assist in food distribution to his people. The gesture gained the people’s trust in our peaceful intent, and they became even more friendly and receptive to coalition forces.

We used our CA medics on a daily basis to treat U.S. soldiers during combat operations and to provide aid to influential leaders and the public. CA medics are typically trained in the Special Operations Medical Course at the JFK Special Warfare Center and School. Their skills allow CATs to deploy and operate independently without a significant medical infrastructure. These highly trained and seasoned NCOs give CA much more flexibility and local impact than standard Army medics. For example, our CA medic advised several local-national doctors on ways of improving their



▲ **GROUND TRUTH** A Civil Affairs Soldier talks with village youth while on patrol. The team is able to gain ground truth by their interaction with the villagers. U.S. Army photo.

clinics and hospitals.

When combat units become heavily engaged and committed to the fight, it is easy to forgo CMO and focus on lethal operations. In those cases, CMO plays a secondary role, but if CMO falls completely by the wayside, commanders could lose their connection with the Iraqi people, who might reject U.S. and Iraqi government interests in favor of the insurgents. Thus, it is imperative that a maneuver commander dedicate a platoon to accompany a CAT on daily SOI engagements, CMO and other related CA tasks designed to separate the populace from the insurgency.

If coalition forces neglect to build upon their newly founded relationship with the people, then AQI will step in and build its own relationship. Power in Iraq moves through interpersonal relationships, and AQI knows the importance of maintaining interpersonal connections with the populace. During Operation Arrowhead Ripper, AQI activities included its own version of meeting the needs of the people.

There is a proverb that says, “Bread bears no name.” If AQI provides bread to the people of Iraq, and we do not, then to the people, AQI appears to be relevant and benevolent. We know of AQI’s atrocities and its hidden agenda, but do the people?

*Movement around the battlefield.* Movement on the bat-

tlefield was by far the biggest problem for us to overcome. Traditional CMO tasks — infrastructure improvement, civil management, humanitarian actions and key-leader engagement — require freedom of maneuver. In some cases, CATs blended into combat operations and proved beneficial; however, it is extremely difficult to carry out CMO tasks when IEDs, small-arms fire and ambushes are ever-present.

The 96th’s CA teams were used to operating in the company of a small SF detachments. That makes the CA mission set of conducting civil reconnaissance fairly easy, because members of the populace are more prone to accept members of a small contingent. But they are less likely to accept CA teams who are travelling in convoy with the larger contingents of conventional units, especially when those units are in the business of clearing homes rather than sitting down and talking. To lessen the intimidation, the CA team leader would usually greet leaders with smiles, handshakes, waves and a welcoming posture. The team sergeant would behave similarly, but he was more involved with internal security, internal communications, contingency management and maintaining overall situational awareness.

*Power vs. force.* The platoons that support civil reconnaissance usually perform outer-security duties — walking



▲ **ON CALL** A medic from the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion checks the health of an Iraqi child. By meeting the physical needs of the populace, Civil Affairs Soldiers are able to earn popular support. *U.S. Army photo.*

around the houses, up and down streets and displaying power rather than force. Displaying power vs. force can be as simple as having all security measures in place but also conducting low-key interaction with curious locals. The security platoons avoid distraction by continually moving around the secured area, which prevents their being swarmed by children or crowds that can lower their guard against insurgent attacks.

## **DIME principle**

Commanders in the 21st-century Army are familiar with the DIME principle — that diplomatic, informational, military and economic factors are key to influencing other nation-states and recognized factions. CMO can assist commanders in accomplishing all four of the DIME factors.

*Diplomatic.* CA units are highly trained in regional relations, cross-cultural relationships and in arbitration and mediation between warring factions. Reconciliation meetings are the best tools for bringing together warring factions within a battalion's sector to establish a peace plan. These can serve as a micro-scale diplomatic model.

*Informational.* CMO can best be used as part of an information-operations campaign aimed at the populace. Most Iraqi ideological views are formed through word-of-mouth communication rather than from published media.

*Military.* The U.S. military currently dominates any head-to-head conventional operations in Iraq. Tactically speaking, no organized insurgent forces larger than a squad will directly engage U.S. patrols or bases. At the same time, CATs typically do not conduct direct offensive operations.

*Economic.* The U.S. dollar can be the most effective instrument in the fight against terrorism, if it is used successfully. When used efficiently, CATs and provincial reconstruction teams have the overwhelming monetary power to influence economically depressed areas and to jump-start local economies.

## **Influential key leaders**

It is crucial that CATs and commanders conduct their “terrain-analysis” — knowing the human element — prior to their deployment to a given area. The foundation of Iraqi society is the family and its ties to the community. Iraqi society has witnessed many changes because of the various regimes that have controlled the tribal communities.

*Al-Ussrah (the family).* The family is the main pillar of Iraqi society. In accordance with Islamic doctrine, the father is the head of the family and has the authority to make all family decisions.

*Qabeelah (tribe).* The tribe is composed of many asheerahs (multiple, blood-related families), but the con-



▲ **HUMANITARIAN AID** Deliveries of food supplies and water helped gain the trust of the populace in the peaceful intent of U.S. forces and made the people more receptive to working with the coalition. *U.S. Army photo.*

nections within the tribe are not as strong as within the asheerah, because they may not be blood connections.

*Sheik (tribal head).* The sheik, the head of the tribe, deals with all issues concerning daily life, as well as economic, social and war-and-peace issues. The sheik mediates conflicts, exerts influence within the tribe and can even wield influence at the national level. It is common for Iraqis to call any respected man in the community a sheik, and that loose usage of the term can be confusing. Nevertheless, we accommodated and honored them by calling them sheiks.

*Mokhtar (mayor).* This is the primary SOI figure that CATs and maneuver units encounter. The mokhtar is much like the chief of the village. Although he also records places of residence and births, he is not like a sheik, because he is sometimes appointed by the government to control the civic affairs of the village. He has an official capacity in the government, whereby he can make some decisions and judgments.

In our area of operations, we encountered one sheik. He was influential and affluent, and his words carried great power within his personal sphere of influence, which included at least 250 Iraqi key leaders and village mokhtars. He probably influenced more than 50,000 Iraqis. During COIN operations, a CAT can bridge the gap between the sheik and the commander. The continual interaction will in-

crease the flow of dialogue and greatly benefit conventional forces interests.

## Key leader review

The Analyst Notebook Program, or ANP, serves as an aid to the CAT in organizing its contacts with key leaders or SOIs. The ANP is essentially a database. We consolidated contact information and standard biographical data. On a daily basis, the unit staff would approach us to get local-leader information in preparation for a key event. The system proved so beneficial that we constructed maps that included leader photos and quick-reference information. The data in the ANP proved beneficial in conveying the political landscape.

## Neighborhood watch program

Another nonlethal approach that CATs helped develop was the formation of a neighborhood-watch program throughout Iraq. The neighborhood-watch program is composed of concerned local citizens who are frustrated with extremists such as al-Qaeda and Shi'ite extremists. They are not vigilantes but Iraqis who want to reclaim their towns and volunteer to help stop the violence, shootings and kidnappings. Most of the violence in Iraq is Arab-on-Arab, often in retribution for acts committed decades or centuries ago.



▲ **HIDE AND SEEK** A concerned local citizen looks inside a culvert for signs of hidden improvised explosive devices during a joint clearing operation with Iraqi National Police and U.S. Army Soldiers. *U.S. Army photo.*

There are some caveats to observe when forming neighborhood-watch groups. First, we insisted that they refrain from calling themselves a “militia.” Second, they were not to engage in any offensive actions; they were only to protect key infrastructure in their towns. Third, they were to affirm that they would join the Iraqi police after the neighborhood-watch program expired. As part of protecting the key town infrastructure, they would operate tactical checkpoint operations at critical intersections to hinder AQI and extremist movement along the routes into their towns.

There are risks inherent in arming locals; however, our options were limited, and we had to rely on non-vetted locals to take charge of their towns. At some point, we must rely on the locals who want to reclaim Iraq and help stop the insurgency, by arming them and expecting that they will do the right thing. This is a grass-roots approach.

The neighborhood-watch program is extremely successful and is quickly becoming effective throughout Iraq. When starting a program, it is extremely important to train group members on ethics, checkpoint procedures, weapons readiness, uniform clarification, friendly-fire mitigation and communications planning.

It is also important to note that conventional forces

neither arm nor support rogue elements that are not sanctioned by the government of Iraq.

## Conclusion

The CATs from the 95th CA Brigade were resourceful in providing CA flexibility and adaptability to conventional forces throughout Iraq. CATs engaged key leaders, assisted with neighborhood-watch programs, assisted commanders in CMO and helped incoming reserve-component CATs transition to supporting the surge BCTs. Through their actions, the CATs demonstrated the capability of all Civil Affairs forces to operate successfully with conventional forces and to provide numerous nonlethal options to an otherwise lethal operation.

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