

## **Civil Considerations in an Era of Great Power Competition** ***Postured for Relevancy in the Informational Environment***

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Through advancements in technology and wide scale access to the internet and social media platforms, foreign malign influence activities target the United States daily. The 2019 coronavirus outbreak has exacerbated these activities. Online media manipulation has given rise to the “Digital Dictator”, thereby contributing to global trends in democratic backsliding. Furthermore, China and Russia are leading the effort in exporting digital disinformation tools and process aimed at censorship and surveillance, making them the buyer of choice for authoritarian regimes. Despite these predatory tactics, our strategic advantage over our adversaries is our democratic values, our continued advocacy in a free and open internet, freedom of speech, human rights, and freedom of the press. Countering these activities requires a nuanced approach from the Department of Defense (DoD) which factors in not only the Interagency but the human component as well.

Civil Affairs has a key role in this space and must take the lead countering enemy influence activities and elevating the role Operations in the Information Environment (OIE). Civil Affairs must aggressively advocate for a whole-of-society and whole-of-government process that leverages all elements of national power, to include information. As Army Futures Command moves to update its operating concept, “Multi-Domain Operations (MDO)”, Civil Affairs must ensure the role of informational power is included and that Civil Affairs has unique capabilities which can support MDO. To effectively do this, Civil Affairs must be prepared to expand its traditional capabilities and embrace a more complicated and contested Information Environment (IE).

This paper analyzes current DoD, Department of State and U.S Agency for International Development policies and process to create a wholistic framework which Civil Affairs forces clearly have a role to play. OIE needs to consider civil society because it matters to military operations, and because it plays to one of Civil Affairs core strengths. That is, open access to information, rule of law, freedom of the press and other democratic values promote the American narrative and it counters authoritarian narratives.

To do this, Civil Affairs must (1) become more proficient at Civil Information Management, (2) understand and integrate relevant data sets into current tools and processes (3) understand and cross train with other ‘information’ professionals to include interagency partners (4) help to fix lexicon issues, (5) help relay to the joint force the importance of civil considerations as a fundamental approach to OIE.