CIVIL AFFAIRS ISSUE PAPERS
VOLUME 12, 2025-2026

Redefining Civil Affairs

2025 CIVIL AFFAIRS SYMPOSIUM REPORT
Redefining Civil Affairs
Christopher Holshek and Dennis J. Cahill, Sr. (ed.)

ISSUE PAPER
Organizing for Large-Scale Combat Operations: Consolidation of Civil Affairs Forces at the Division
by Shawn M. Blaydes, J. Mike Teeter, and Walter Ellision II

ISSUE PAPER
Redefining Civil Affairs: A Call for Modernization
by John E. McElligott, Robert J. Bruce, and Chris G. Antonov

ISSUE PAPER
Seizing the Initiative: The Case for Civil Affairs-Enabled Unity of Command in U.S. Stabilization Efforts
by Ryan McCannell

ISSUE PAPER
The Civil Affairs Redefined Image (CARI) Model and Artificial Intelligence
by Marco A. Bongioanni

ISSUE PAPER
Should the United States Adopt a CIMIC Model of Civil Affairs for Homeland Defense?
by Robert Boudreau, Michael Aniton, and Peter Schäfer

REDEFINING CIVIL AFFAIRS

CIVIL AFFAIRS ISSUE PAPERS, VOLUME 12, 2025–2026

THE CIVIL AFFAIRS ASSOCIATION

NIAGARA UNIVERSITY ROTC

Volume 12

2025–26 Civil Affairs Issue Papers

Redefining Civil Affairs

Presented by

The Civil Affairs Association

and the

Niagara University ROTC Department

In partnership with the

U.S. Army Special Operations Command Force Modernization Center,

U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center & School /

Special Operations Center of Excellence,

NATO Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence,

U.S. Army Security Force Assistance and Stability Integration Directorate,

Joint Special Operations University,

Modern War Institute at West Point,

Irregular Warfare Initiative at West Point,

and

Joint Civil-Military Interaction

Edited by

Dennis J. Cahill, Sr.

and

Christopher Holshek

Table of Contents

The Civil Affairs Association is a not-for-profit military professional and veterans organization recognized under IRS Code Section 501(c)(19). It serves as the regimental association of the Civil Affairs Corps. Its goal is to enhance the intellectual capacity and readiness of the extended Civil Affairs Corps and its members, as well as to foster a global civil-military network among the U.S., NATO, other regional allies, and international partners. This is achieved by providing platforms for discussion of topics related to the organizational and professional development of Civil Affairs and partner forces. The opinions expressed by anyone appearing at an Association event or in any Association publication are entirely his or her own and do not reflect the views of any government agency, the person's affiliated office, the Association, or its organizational partners unless specifically cited or referenced in official strategy, policy, doctrine, regulatory documents, and approved media sources or organizational publications.

For more, go to: https://www.civilaffairsassoc.org/. Please subscribe, consider joining, or update your contact information.

NIAGARA UNIVERSITY

LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE

The Niagara University Purple Eagle Battalion is a program of excellence with almost 90 years of experience training leaders of character. We consistently rank in the top 10% nationwide. Our Purple Eagle Battalion's operations and training are Cadet-led with Cadre overwatch. The Cadets are leaders in student government and on campus. They are members of the soccer, lacrosse, swimming, and rugby teams. We have a very cohesive Army ROTC program.
Learn more at: ROTC.niagara.edu

Cover photo: U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Ryan Hill, civil affairs team sergeant, U.S. Army Capt. Dru Simpson, civil affairs team leader, U.S. Army Sgt. William Larson, civil affairs team medic, and Staff Sgt. Tyrone Thompson, civil affairs non-commissioned officer, 478th Civil Affairs Battalion, U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa, pose with members of the Guinea-Bissau Armed Forces at the conclusion of a civil-military operations engagement mission. (U.S. Army photo courtesy 478th Civil Affairs Battalion)

Foreword

With the challenges brought on by the government shutdown that began on 1 October 2025 and new Department of Defense (War) (DoD(W)) limitations on U.S. military travel to non-government events, the Civil Affairs Association postponed its Symposium at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum in Simi Valley, CA, from November 2025 until November 2026. The Association was able to adjust quickly and host a virtual event on November 15th. The shortened Symposium featured two timely workshops and the presentation of the Civil Affairs Issue Papers, followed by an Association Board meeting and the opening of the annual election.

Each year, the Symposium and Roundtable drive an annual topical discussion on the future of Civil Affairs. Now in their 14th year, these events advance a more strategic, comprehensive, and integrative understanding of CA. The *Civil Affairs Issue Papers*, now in its 12th volume, is the Association's capstone professional and force development deliverable to deepen and broaden formal institutional processes for CA force development along the lines of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy (DOTMLPF-P). Since 2012, we have added the *Eunomia Journal* and *One CA* podcast to facilitate further dialogue. This past year, we launched a seminal memorandum on "Telling the Civil Affairs Story—A Narrative Strategy for Civil Affairs," along with an updated strategic communication slide deck and a two-sided handout available for download from our website for adaptive use.

These events and platforms help foster a culture and network of learning beyond those provided by military structures and the CA Corps. They facilitate inclusion of other civil-military organizations and interagency, interorganizational, and private-sector partners (hence our term "extended Civil Affairs Corps"). The Symposium enables this extended CA Corps to come together, network, formulate recommendations to institutional and policy leaders, recognize outstanding members, enjoy camaraderie, and build *esprit de corps*.

The Association maintains a knowledge repository, including the Issue Papers, to support the professional development of the force and to give stakeholders in our extended Civil Affairs Corps a voice in their future. By supporting the analytical, writing, and presentation skills of young CA professionals, the Association—as the *de facto* regimental Association of the U.S. Army Civil Affairs Corps—also promotes CA intellectual capitalization and mission readiness.

The two Symposium workshops covered topics with significant implications for the future of CA while highlighting this year's theme of "redefining civil affairs." The first discussed the dissolution of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), CA's most important interagency partner, and its impact on the use of CA in DoD(W) support to humanitarian assistance and stabilization. These two interagency missions may require CA to take on greater responsibility and develop new interagency coordination methods, but U.S. CA forces cannot fully fill the gaps, as

highlighted in both the *Symposium Report* and Ryan McCannell's issue paper. I recommend reviewing both, along with the other exceptionally strong papers in this volume.

The other virtual workshop session focused on the role of CA in "lethality" and large-scale combat operations (LSCO). As a critical economy-of-force capability, CA preserves lethality and helps 'secure the victory' and win without fighting by building civil-military networks and influencing populations across all operational phases: in security cooperation before, sensing and defeating threats during, and transferring governing responsibilities after LSCO.

In this discussion, the Association was delighted to see that its narrative strategy was a key source for the U.S. Army Special Operations Command's (USASOC's) CA Capability Manager information paper on "The Civil Affairs Role in Lethality." We look forward to similar papers to help redefine the CA role in stabilization and in irregular warfare, given a new DoD(W) Instruction covering this mission, where the CA role is highly important but not yet well defined.

Beyond our Association platforms, convening capacities, and other resources for CA professional and force development, discussed above, I have been in contact with CA proponent and Army leaders currently engaged in Army deliberations on CA force design and development during this pivotal moment in U.S. military and CA history.

In this collaborative endeavor, the Association is honored to work with institutions like: the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD (SO/LIC)); the State Department; our friends and partners formerly with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); the USASOC Force Modernization Center (UFMC); the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School / U.S. Army Special Operations Center of Excellence (USAJFKSWCS/SOCoE); the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade (Special Operations) (Airborne); the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (Airborne) (USACAPOC(A)); the U.S. Army Security Force Assistance and Stability Integration Directorate (SFASID); the U.S. Marine Corps Information Maneuver School (MCIMS); the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU); the NATO-accredited Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence (CCoE); and the United Nations Office of Military Affairs.

In addition, associated organizations include: the Association of the U.S. Army (AUSA); the Reserve Organization of America (ROA); the Foreign Area Officers Association (FAOA); the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA); and the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition (USGLC). We are also linked to: the Modern War Institute (MWI) and the Irregular Warfare Initiative (IWI) at West Point; the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU); and the Joint Civil-Military Interaction Global Research and Education Network (JCMI). We are also establishing relations with the Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) in the Pentagon.

Appropriate to this year's theme of "redefining civil affairs," the Association, at its annual meeting, continued to reform its organization and to bring in energetic leaders like our latest year group of directors. Some interesting innovations are already under way—we will announce them as they are implemented.

Our heartfelt thanks go to Niagara University for helping make this publication possible. Their partnership has been invaluable. Special thanks go to Jaclyn Rossi Drozd, University Vice President for Institutional Advancement; Suzanne Karaszewski, Associate Director of Creative Services; Army Lt. Col. James Silsby, Professor of Military Science; and Nana Bailey, Assistant at the ROTC Department, for their diligence and cooperation.

Additional thanks go to: Vice President for Publications Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Glenn Goddard and Issue Paper editors Col. (Ret.) Dennis J. Cahill, Sr. and Col. (Ret.) Christopher Holshek, who also serve alongside Issue Papers Committee members Maj. Robert Boudreau, Lt. Col. Byron Davidson, Dr. Whitney Grespin, Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ferdinand Irizarry, Lt. Col. Brian Hancock, Maj. (Ret.) James Micciche, Col. Caroline Pogge, Zachary Schmook, Col. (Ret.) Donald "Tony" Vacha, and Joshua Weikert—as well as the authors themselves.

Special thanks go to Association Vice President for Programs & Events Col. Caroline Pogge and Directors Col. (Ret.) Christopher Holshek, Col. J.P. LeCedre, and Maj. John McElligott for hastily organizing and running a remarkably rich and impactful online Symposium.

Finally, our thanks go to the many members and supporters of the Association who quietly contribute to our worldwide civil-military enterprise to educate, advocate, and motivate.

We look forward to seeing you at the online Civil Affairs Roundtable in April 2025 and at our next Symposium, in coordination with the 358th CA Brigade, at the Reagan Presidential Library & Museum on 13-14 November 2026.

To learn more, subscribe to our newsfeeds, and join our Association, visit www.civilaffairsassociation.com. There's no better time to become a member!

"Secure the Victory!"

Hugh Van Roosen
Major General, USA, (Ret.)
President
The Civil Affairs Association

2025 Civil Affairs Symposium Report:

"Redefining Civil Affairs"

Christopher Holshek

Dennis J. Cahill, Sr. (ed.)

After careful deliberation, the Civil Affairs Association decided to postpone the on-site Symposium originally scheduled to take place at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum, 13-16 November 2025. "The continued government shutdown has impacted the operation of the Reagan Library and travel of currently serving U.S. military personnel. This, coupled with a new Department of Defense policy on attendance at non-military events without prior high-level approval, has left us with no alternative but to postpone most of the Symposium until November 2026," explained Association president Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Hugh Van Roosen.

Nevertheless, to maintain its operational tempo and support the organizational and professional development of the extended Civil Affairs Corps, the Association hosted a virtual event on Saturday, 15 November. The abbreviated Symposium featured the two timeliest workshops and the presentation of five papers selected for publication in Vol. 12 of the *Civil Affairs Issue Papers*. The Association Board held its 78th annual meeting the next day, on Sunday, 16 November.

During each era of conflict since the early 20th century, civil affairs has redefined itself to meet changing foreign policy and national security objectives, doctrine, and force development priorities. This time, there is intense focus on force lethality for large-scale combat operations (LSCO) in a rapidly changing, volatile, and dynamic strategic environment. While many senior military leaders are coming to understand the value of CA as a unique strategic economy-of-force capability to shape, set conditions, and "secure the victory" before, during, and after LSCO, the dominant view of CA remains as an "enabler" or "multiplier" for post-conflict stabilization and governance. As a non-lethal information force in the human dimension that wins without fighting, the future of civil affairs is once again open to adapt to the next generation of warfare.

At the same time, a growing consensus has emerged for a unifying narrative to help service institutions, commands, and joint, interorganizational, and multinational (JIM) partners better understand, leverage, and integrate CA. This had led to an Association narrative strategy on "Telling the Civil Affairs Story," with adaptive deliverables available on the Association website. Its narrative allows us to explain what CA is, what it does, and why and how it is important.

The Symposium originally looked to address the following questions:

How must CA redefine itself to meet current requirements while anticipating future imperatives? What DOTMLPF-P[1] changes should occur within and beyond current Army, Marine Corps, and JIM capacities to realize CA's full potential? How should we prioritize and implement them?

Major Findings

Although, as Association president Van Roosen said in his opening remarks, "there are a lot of changes right now in the works," the shortened Symposium managed to address some of these questions with findings and insights of great interest, with relevant DOTMLPF-P implications:

- *The dissolution of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which was the extended Civil Affairs Corps' most important interagency partner and for which CA was USAID's most important military partner, has been a hard blow. The implications for CA are not yet fully understood but are well initially identified in the third issue paper. The most obvious relate to CA's longstanding support of USAID in two critical U.S. whole-of-government foreign engagement activities—U.S.-led or backed humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR), and stabilization.*
- *There is a significant opportunity for CA to redefine itself beyond its role in preserving "lethality" in LSCO. It must leverage and develop its unique capabilities and capacities to fill the sudden HA/DR and stabilization gaps, recognizing the many significant implications of this action, especially with regard to irregular warfare, as discussed in the first and third issue papers.*
- *The largest gaps relate to political transition, such as USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives, or OTI. CA should leverage emerging tools, like data analytics, private-sector partnerships, and local governance networks to sustain long-term influence and legitimacy in fragile environments, while supporting State-led HA/DR efforts.*
- *In addition to refocused training and education, CA needs stronger and more direct steady-state institutional relationships with non-profit and for-profit organizations, as well as United Nations agencies, with which USAID once partnered or contracted to implement its programs. Of particular importance are private-sector, development-related consulting groups such as those represented at the Symposium, where many former USAID colleagues can share their knowledge, best practices, lessons, and more.*
- *CA should thus re-emphasize "building a global civil-military network"[2] through an extensive civil network development and engagement (CNDE) effort for operational mission preparation and CA campaigning. Utilizing such networks in areas of strategic importance fosters access and influence, which are critical to setting conditions for deterrence and "winning without fighting" before, during, and after LSCO. This is*

[1] Doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy.

[2] See Volume 8 of the *Civil Affairs Issue Papers*, 2021-22, "Building a Global Civil-Military Network."

especially true with respect to contemporary Army 38G Military Government and other functional specialists, as discussed extensively in Vols. 9 and 10 of the Civil Affairs Issue Papers.

- *Another important implication concerns Department of Defense (War), or DoD(W) authorities and funding streams, such as using Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid (OHDACA) appropriations to help fill gaps caused by the reduction of USAID disaster assistance and response personnel. Its limited funding, however, highlights an immediate need for a CA "champion" to advocate for increased authorities and funding with Congress, primarily through professional staff on both the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, as discussed in Ryan McCannell's issue paper.*
- *NATO civil-military coordination (CIMIC) efforts exemplify how CA can work with civil organizations and private sector entities to gain positional advantages in support of deterrence and LSCO planning.*
- *Discussants reaffirmed that the window of opportunity is narrow for CA institutions and commands to seize the initiative and establish a leading interagency role in HA/DR and stabilization on behalf of DoD(W). Given the limited time available, the Association is ready to support the process, even beyond its established programs and platforms.*

Workshop I: With the Dissolution of USAID, How Can Civil Affairs Lead DoD(W) Efforts to Maintain Strategic Access, Placement, and Relationships to Counter Our Adversaries?

The first workshop took on an issue with profound, albeit mostly indirect, impact on the redefinition and civil affairs force development. The March 2025 dissolution of USAID created a considerable vacuum in development programming, civilian validation, and interagency cooperation in HA/DR and stabilization. While some of this has been delegated to the U.S. State Department, especially at operational and tactical levels, the only other U.S. government agency that can fill these requirements is DoD(W), whose only capability to take this on is CA.

Leading the discussion was Mick Crnkovich, Founder and CEO of Stratagem Consulting and former Director of Irregular Warfare at the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD(SO/LIC)). Discussants included Ciara Knudsen, Senior Advisor at Pax Strategies Group and former Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Conflict Prevention and Stabilization Bureau at USAID; Michael Stanisich, Solutions Group Lead for National Security at Tetra Tech; Ryan McCannell, former USAID development advisor at ASD(SO/LIC) and former Association director; and Lt. Col. Peter Schaefer, Concepts, Interoperability, and Capabilities Branch Chief at the NATO CIMIC Centre of Excellence (CCoE).

Mr. Crnkovich, a former CA officer, organized the tightly packed, hour-long discussion by asking certain panel members to examine the issue at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. He did this through a series of standard questions for each panelist, followed by specific questions tailored to their backgrounds, experiences, and places of work.

He began by noting how, in the vacuum created by USAID's disappearance, the Department of State has assumed many—though not all—responsibilities, such as in the new Office of International Disaster Response (OIDR) to coordinate U.S. humanitarian responses for up to six months, after which it transitions responsibilities to the regional State Department bureaus. Most OIDR personnel are re-hired USAID civil servants, many of them from the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance.

Ciara Knudsen was first to respond to the question: "Without USAID field representatives or implementing partners, how should civil affairs teams identify, vet, and coordinate with local actors to sustain governance and stabilization efforts, and what mechanisms could replace the civilian validation layer previously provided by USAID and made great use of by civil affairs?"

Ms. Knudsen, who was the keynote speaker at last year's Symposium, offered a more strategic perspective by reminding the audience that, while many of USAID's organizational capacities are gone, much of its human capital and expertise remain accessible through new private-sector consulting groups such as paxstrategies.com. She pointed out, for example, that the former head of USAID's Humanitarian Assistance Bureau currently represents an NGO at the Civil-Military Coordination Center (CMCC) in Gaza. Consulting groups like Pax Strategies, in turn, utilize a model of making former USAID transition and conflict experts available more broadly to the world as a bullpen capability, as "on-call experts that can assist with a whole range of issues."

While the State Department has also lost a significant portion of its own capacity, "the embassies are still there" and continue to fulfill work demands, suggesting there may be even more demand for CA at the country team level for security cooperation and strategic competition. "I think in the interim, there is the need to surge a lot of different relationships with civil affairs," she said, "helping the political-military affairs team pivot, rethinking the way defense attaches operate, work, and engage with civil affairs..." Another challenge for CA is access to funding and authorities that allow it to support combatant command enterprises in collecting and collating civil information using AI or other systems. "Now, the expertise on economic security, civilian resistance, all of these things that we used to be able to just access within the interagency system, we now need to think about as a capability system that has to be accessed in a different way."

She continued, "The old ways of doing business are not going to work. The cooperation infrastructure that we've built, the training, doctrine, authorities, funding lines... all need to be reviewed, changed, updated, and reworked to the new reality. The problem is that a lot of the people who would have done that work on the civilian side are no longer there, and so we have to be really creative on how we work on this. I think this is a wake-up moment for DoD[W], however you look at it. [It] has been so focused on its internal transformations, and now it really needs to take a step back and see where it fits in the larger [interagency and interorganizational] system. And CA can help lead that conversation."

Mr. Crnkovich reiterated Ms. Knudsen's points in a statement that could be the most important takeaway from the workshop, if not the Symposium. "I think everybody should pay attention that this is a huge opportunity moment for the [Civil Affairs] Regiment (sic) and the entire civil affairs community. We have not historically done a very good job of seizing some of these opportunities. I think we need to figure out how we can actually… help fill this gap, because it's a pretty big gap. And we don't have much time."

Ryan McCannell focused more on the tactical level. For example, CA teams that obtained ground validation of OHDACA projects through USAID must now do so through defense attachés, who, going forward, will need to get guidance from a combination of the Defense Intelligence Agency and the Office of Global Partnerships, which is part of OSD Policy. As OSD Policy works this on a case-by-case basis with combatant commands, it is trying to put the necessary guidance into place. One question every embassy now faces is, "Who's doing humanitarian assistance now?"

Mr. Crnkovich followed up by noting that USAID's indirect role in information, influence, and irregular warfare was one of the most critical resident capacities lost when it was dismantled. "Every single day of the week, the civil affairs community is an irregular warfare asset, if not the lead irregular warfare asset in strategic competition," he noted. This strongly implies a need for CA to deepen its professional understanding of the authorities available to it.

"I can't tell you how many times I talked to a CA team leader on the ground in a country who didn't know what the four approved mission areas or activities that could be conducted under OHDACA [are]." he said. "They didn't understand the timelines, and so when they talked about quick-impact projects, they didn't realize that it's a two-year turn, and so they lose a little bit of credibility. So, I think there's a lot of opportunity here for the civil affairs community, now in the vacuum, to figure out what we do next. And I do think the corporate engagement is going to be especially helpful."

Michael Stanisich reminded the audience that USAID, for all its pluses, was not an implementation agency. Rather, contractors such as MSI and Tetra Tech, along with partner local and international NGOs and UN agencies, have carried out most of the work that USAID previously funded or managed. "So, the inherent intellectual capacity still exists. However, this window of opportunity is decreasing, and it's because of the networks, the operational footprint, the in-country registrations, just the relationships that have spanned sometimes decades, to capture information that hasn't traditionally flowed across the interagency."

CA needs to develop this important capacity, along with other key skills, including gathering information to assess the environment, monitoring security cooperation initiatives, and determining whether they are achieving their desired end states. CA's ability to gather information was largely based on USAID professionals with interagency experience guiding them to where they needed to go. However, even the information USAID collected wasn't particularly relevant beyond the activity level. "So, it's really about how we realign these structures of data collection for the purposes of informing decision-makers more efficiently and effectively," he added.

“I think a lot of times, our European CIMIC partners specifically are further down the road than we are,” Mr. Crnkovich noted as he introduced Lt. Col. Schaefer from the CCoE. “They've been doing it for a very long time. I think one of the interesting things, talking to some of the states themselves along NATO's eastern flank, is they are trying to figure out how to hire and partner with for-profit companies or granting service provision requirements to NGOs or others, and they don't have those mechanisms yet.”

Lt. Col. Schaefer explained that the CIMIC connection to NGOs, for example, is usually established by, with, and through the host nation or local government, rather than directly with either the NGOs or population. One example is a Latvian CIMIC officer coordinating on behalf of NATO with Latvian national or local government officials. This marks a return to a more traditional European approach to CIMIC from the out-of-area stabilization efforts in Afghanistan, Kosovo, and other non-NATO countries like Libya or Iraq.

“The most important CIMIC capability is for reach-back,” he explained. “When you don't know, or when you don't have any connection to a mission area, you need to have a network, and you need to have a reach-back capability in order to make an assessment, especially on the civil situation, because knowing the civil situation and having very good civil assessment or assessment on the civil factors of this operating environment is crucial from our point of view.”

Mr. Crnkovich then asked the panel to consider: “How can civil affairs [or CIMIC] integrate the tactical influence piece, specifically around civil reconnaissance and feedback loops?”

Ms. Knudsen began by noting how USAID has been examining how civilian populations respond to drone and cyber warfare. “In a lot of cases, we had to help populations go much more analog than digital,” she said, “not abandoning the first principles of how to promote resilience and resistance in those conditions.” This includes the use of artificial intelligence (AI).

“There is a wealth of information about how to work with populations in conditions that are really evolving fast,” she advised, “and see what are the lessons that come out of what does it mean to work with civilian populations in these very different geopolitical and tech environments.” CA should “capture a lot of those lessons, from Syria to Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Burma... We had a set of countries where we were getting very interesting lessons coming out of what does it mean to work in conditions like this. Ukraine is an amazing place for this, but it's not the only one.”

Moving forward, a deliberate and purposeful synchronization of both analog and digital methods of conducting civilian reconnaissance and civil analysis of feedback loops is essential, as people with different cultural, social, and political backgrounds respond to conflict conditions and interact in various ways. “In the wider conversation, populations are still the critical component of [conflict management]. Whether it's large-scale combat or irregular warfare, civilian resistance or resilience among populations are still at the center. And so, the civil affairs ability to do that work of interfacing with the population, whether it's through local organizations or directly, is going to

continue to be so important, and that narrative is missing from a lot of the conversations in the wider sphere." This is why there is also a great opportunity for CA to focus on building steady relationships with local organizations, NGOs, and UN agencies.

Ryan McCannell added that USAID was obviously not the only source of information for civil affairs. "There are places where civil affairs is at work now, or has been at work, where USAID is not present. USAID is an important pillar in that relationship, but it's certainly not the only pillar. We've served as kind of a buffer between those wearing uniforms and the humanitarians." One challenge that CA will face is the large number of local groups and international humanitarian organizations that may not want to partner with the U.S. military. However, Mr. McCannell added, "some of those interlocutors with the big contracts or connections who are there and not wearing uniforms can be that sort of intermediary."

Lt. Col. Schaefer pointed out how humanitarian principles are nonetheless more in the minds of CIMIC than CA operators, noting that even development specialists observe them to a large extent. "When I'm talking about civil-military cooperation from a NATO point of view, I'm talking about warfighting. CIMIC is a military function. And what we do is, at the end of the day, to fulfill the purpose, to achieve our mission goals. So, when it comes to the military and humanitarian assistance, it's the last resort. I have concern if we think we could take over some tasks from the humanitarian community."

Mr. Crnkovich reminded the audience that, especially in HA/DR, "the majority of the time, it's the international community, it's the ICRC, Mercy Corps, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) with its cluster system, and non- and for-profits like Tetra Tech and Pax Strategies that are organizing, coordinating as well as providing the response."

There is a role for the military, and civil affairs may support or secure such operations, but it never leads them. The focus, in fact, should be more on stabilization, especially the CA presence and support to stabilization "left-of-boom" more than post-conflict. "It's either make it stable now, or it never gets there," he said. "And because USAID's presence is gone, the presence of civil affairs or proxies… is the way you can continue to have that presence."

The presence of CA and CIMIC is more relevant in conflict zones or irregular warfare environments where civilian humanitarian or development actors may operate; in places where civilians struggle to meet their basic needs; or in areas where the civilian population is the center of gravity, which is most of the time. The Syrian earthquakes of the last decade have been an example of this, Ms. Knudsen noted. In such situations, civil affairs "plays such a critical role in helping to parse out what are those lines for the military." Gaza is another such place. "The civil-military coordination in Gaza has been incredibly poor." (This is largely because the Israeli Defense Force has no designated CA or CIMIC military specialists.)

Ms. Knudsen continued, “You either really empower the UN, or you empower a framework nation. So, the question is how can CA be an integrator, orchestrator, make use of this bigger tent, and for responsible use of the private sector. Everybody and every logistics company in the world is trying to get into Gaza right now. So, how do you do that in a way where it's intentional and coherent inclusion, as opposed to just a scrum. And so, whether it's a cross-functional team, whether it's the task force integration role, whatever it is that ultimately comes out of civil affairs doctrine, this is the moment to have it. This is the moment when civil affairs needs to be there.”

Overnight, she noted, the U.S. “went from having a ton of capacity in the ability to be a framework country to a symbolic capacity. We were used to being able to manage the transition between immediate response and what comes next. That civilian capacity is not there right now. We don't have the breadth to do multiple DARTs [disaster assistance response teams] at once, or for transitions in conflict response from humanitarian to recovery moments that are strategically important to the national security system.” There’s only CA, she pointed out.

“The OHDACA strategy for what it needs to do on the ground in Syria is going to be way more important than it was before. But that's not how OHDACA's being done. It doesn't follow one clear strategy for impact in the same way as we had to do on the civilian side. This is a moment to think, how do we do strategic coordination? How do we do strategic integration? How do we make that big tent actually work? And for the military purposes, and for national security purposes, and then how do we make OHDACA as strategic as we can.”

An additional problem, Mr. McCannell offered, is the absence of civilian adjudicators to strike a balance between strategic or political imperatives and tactical or security concerns. “In the past, we've had some very ambitious or excited commanders who want to use humanitarian response as a way of doing public relations with countries like Pakistan. And so the question then becomes, how do we do the least damage? How do we make this available? One way is to ensure robust funding. So that's the appropriations piece. The other piece of that, which is more of a segue into civil affairs and how it could help determine where some of that money might get spent.”

Mr. Stanisich responded by pointing out that the State Department's assumption of USAID responsibilities runs counter to its organizational culture. State is neither operational nor expeditionary, so its ability to respond effectively will be significantly limited. “DoD[W] is going to absorb this,” he predicted, “whether they want to or not.” How DoD(W) will create the structure to manage and execute this unfamiliar task will fall upon contracting mechanisms (as done in Iraq and Afghanistan), but DoD(W) traditionally goes to its usual contractors who are not structured, culturally or operationally, to understand or accommodate these kinds of missions.

“Taking a fraction of the expenditures and investing them into ways and means to get information and build networks, for security cooperation, but also for stabilization and humanitarian response, would be money better spent,” he suggested. And with the pivot into more transactional foreign policy, foreign assistance dollars will focus on critical supply chains, both existing and emerging.

“So that means it's not going to be USAID, but a lot of the programs and activities you're going to have to execute will have that element to it, whether it's stabilization or whether it's governance.”

Lt. Col. Schaefer provided his summary insights: “First, the big advantage of CIMIC is that it is a strategic enabler for deterrence and defense. And that is made based on the fact that we have it everywhere. So, everywhere, on every level, for every decision-maker, you will find someone who is responsible for the connection to the civil environment. And you need this because then you can also exchange information through all those levels and maintain connection points to the right levels of the civil community. To have CA and CIMIC institutionalized on every level is crucial.”

“Secondly,” he continued, “the resilience of societies and nations is crucial when we are talking about deterrence and defense. Resilience not only means that we have to prepare for warfighting, but also for misinformation and disinformation in hybrid threats. The third thing is that situational understanding through CIMIC or CA enables a military decision-maker to understand the civil environment that contributes directly to operational freedom of action.”

Workshop II: How Civil Affairs Contributes to Lethality – Observations from an Emergent State

The second workshop addressed how the extended CA Corps helps preserve “lethality,” first through a discussion of civil-military operations (CMO) that contribute to campaigning in the Middle East, followed by a more focused topical discussion. Col. Michael R. Hanneken, Ph. D., Director of Strategic Plans at Combined Joint Task Force—Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), and a Senior Fellow at the Peace Innovation Lab of Stanford University, facilitated this discussion. Presenting on current CMO were Col. Joe Coolman, Chief of the Civil Affairs Operations Division, at USCENTCOM CCJ3, and Ms. Mary Bell-Ruiz, Regional Director for the Middle East & Central Asia at Spirit of America. Providing comments on preserving lethality was Col. (Ret.) Christopher Holshek, a Civil Affairs Association director and a Distinguished Member of the Regiment (DMOR) for the Civil Affairs Corps, who also spoke on behalf of Col. (Ret.) Dennis J. Cahill, Sr., Deputy Civil Affairs Capability Manager at the U.S. Army Special Operations Command Force Modernization Center; a Civil Affairs Association vice-president; and a DMOR for the Civil Affairs Corps.

Col. Hanneken first provided the audience with context on the term “lethality,” which is defined in the most recent Field Manual 3-0, Operations, as “the capability and capacity to destroy.” This is a provocative term that has gained increased notoriety and has been present since at least 2018. Its use reflects not only the changing priorities of various U.S. administrations but is also invoked to devalue certain military capabilities by oversimplifying the complexities of warfighting. Over the years, CA leaders at all echelons have continuously had to justify what their units bring to “the fight” for and during LSCO.

In fact, this was the key question posed by the USACAPOC(A) commander at the April Roundtable, where, at that time, Col. Hanneken offered the example of how civil affairs can contribute to lethality by contextualizing civil data within today's AI-driven sensing and targeting capabilities. More broadly, CA's critical contribution to lethality and LSCO is in the consolidation of military and political gains and the transfer of governing responsibilities to the host nation, both of which are crucial in achieving the combatant commander's desired end state.

While some U.S. war leaders may believe that such activities do not contribute to lethality, he explained how recent historical events may reshape that perception. For instance, during his visit to the White House the previous week, Syrian President Ahmad Al-Shuraa stated that Syria's decision to join the Global Coalition against Daesh marked a reversal of non-cooperation with the West over the past 20 years. Syria reached this decision after observing how Coalition forces were transitioning military operations in Iraq to the Iraqi Government in the global effort to defeat ISIS. This policy reversal was exemplified by bilateral U.S.-Syrian diplomatic, economic, and military agreements, involving DoD(W), other U.S. agencies, and regional allies.

Col. Joseph Coolman presented live from Tel Aviv, Israel. He started with an overlay showing the locations of all CA personnel across 10 countries, including Army CA supporting CJTF-OIR and SOCCENT, and Marine CA supporting the Marine Task Force under NAVCENT, as well as at ARCENT and CENTCOM headquarters. He also mentioned periodic CA engagements in Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

The majority of CA personnel deployed are from the reserve component (COMPO 3), with active-duty (COMPO 1) SOF CA interspersed among these areas. This includes the CMCC in Kiryat Gat, Israel, a central hub for coordinating stabilization efforts in Gaza, monitoring the implementation of the ceasefire agreement, and facilitating HA/DR aid at local, regional, and international levels. At that time, the CMCC had established six working groups focused on security, intelligence, humanitarian affairs, engineering and infrastructure, multinational force preparations, and civil administration. CA and CIMIC personnel were posted there to facilitate civil-military coordination. As discussed in the previous workshop, with the dissolution of USAID, these military personnel are taking on greater responsibility for reintroducing humanitarian supplies into Gaza, previously coordinated through the Joint Coordination Board.

In addition to ongoing operations, CA in CENTCOM supports current theater and operational exercises like *Eager Lion*, *Bright Star*, *Regional Cooperation*, and *Eagle Resolve*. These exercises utilize OHDACA and other tools in a security cooperation or irregular warfare role. Other CA-supported activities include the repatriation of Iraqi, Syrian, and third-country nationals back to their home areas since the Syrian regime change, aiming to thwart ISIS influence. Additionally, in coordination with host nation civil and military authorities, CA teams continue to support civic action projects and cultural property protection in Lebanon (as briefed at last year's Symposium).

Mary Bell Ruiz began her comments by explaining that the Spirit of America (SoA) is the brainchild of Mr. Jim Hake, who appears in Episode 245 of the *OneCA* podcast. A tech entrepreneur from Stanford University, he was deeply concerned about the lack of opportunities for civilians to support the war effort in the wake of 9/11, since he was neither a military nor government department employee. "Jim recognized this as an opportunity... to provide humanitarian aid and to further the spirit of America," as well as American civic and social values, she said. "Literally and globally, it was a way to protect our national security interests and to protect our Soldiers abroad. And that was the birth of Spirit of America over 20 years ago."

Unlike most non-government or private-sector organizations, SoA secured an engagement agreement specifically with the DoD(W) to support military troops and diplomats abroad. This often involves working directly with CA teams to enhance U.S. force protection, foster goodwill, and promote American values. As a "force multiplier," SoA, similar to civil affairs, contributes to "lethality" indirectly and through more subtle, irregular means.

Over time, SoA's relationship with civil affairs writ large has broadened and deepened to the point where SoA liaises with every CA team in its own area of operation. This has resulted in projects such as: repairing schools in Syria's eastern province and similar civil initiatives in Iraq as a counter to ISIS influence that also mitigates radicalization among targeted populations; developing a drone detection program for northern Iraq's Kurdish region to help detect unwanted drone and other airborne activity from Iran and secure the Kurdish-Iran border; launching an English language pilot program in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to "increase their ability to communicate with us, so it shows them our vested interest and their continued growth away from communism and towards democracy;" and, finally, donating monitors and computers in direct support of an Uzbekistan government-approved program for aerial surveillance to improve information collection and processing for border area protection.

Regarding the competing influence from China, Ruiz pointed out that "what we see typically in our regions, the Middle East and Central Asia, is an economic angle where they attempt to gain superiority by monopolizing economic resources or ability and then purse-stringing that to the locals." She also noted Russia's significant presence in Syria.

In its final segment, the workshop refocused on CA's role in preserving military lethality. Col. (Ret.) Holshek provided comments on behalf of Col. (Ret.) Cahill, who is currently developing an information paper, titled "The Civil Affairs Role in Lethality," for the CA Capability Manager's Office in USASOC's G9 Directorate.

The pre-decisional paper examines CA's lethal and non-lethal effects on the civil component of the operational environment, such as political and social instability, destabilized or failing infrastructure, essential service needs, and more. It also explains how CA forces help understand and defeat threats from the civil environment, preserve lethality, gain military advantage, reduce

DoD(W)'s resource requirements, and mitigate future threats to the United States and its allies. The paper also includes two enclosures: the first describes the CA's role in each of the warfighting functions; the second presents a historical vignette from World War II. The paper concludes that "the CA role in lethality must be incorporated into Army and joint warfighting discussions, seminars, exercises, and experiments for senior leaders to develop understanding and guidance."

Col. (Ret.) Holshek also noted that the paper drew heavily from the work of the "Telling the Civil Affairs Story" project, which in turn draws from a rich discussion of the role of CA in LSCO in the Civil Affairs Issue Papers. The project's deliverables were posted on the Association website at the beginning of the year. Given recent developments, it is even more imperative for the extended CA Corps to communicate within the common narrative framework outlined in the Narrative Strategy. In addition to using these deliverables, he urged CA and civil-military professionals to provide feedback on them by the end of March 2026, as he and Col. (Ret.) Cahill will revise them every spring, shortly after the Civil Affairs Roundtable.

As mentioned earlier in this Report, the ability of COMPO 3 CA, especially Army 38G functional specialists, to build and strengthen professional networks as part and parcel of their security assistance mission deployments is a critical capacity to leverage for deterrence and LSCO. "Embedded 38G officers convert social and professional capital into operational advantage by acting as brokers between military command structures and high-level civilian sectors across academia, industry, NGOs, and international institutions," noted Heritage and Preservation Officer (38G/6V) Capt. Jessica L. Wagner in a separate but related discussion.

"38Gs enable commanders to rapidly access specialized knowledge and external capacity that would otherwise be unreachable or too slow to mobilize. In this sense, the program enhances warfighting not merely by embedding expertise, but by embedding trust networks, expanding the Army's reach, legitimacy, and freedom of maneuver at the speed modern conflict demands (FM 3-57; ADP 6-0). This isn't a distraction from lethality. It is how commanders reduce strategic risk and win when firepower alone is not decisive."[3]

Lastly, with the new DoD(W) Instruction 3000.07, Irregular Warfare, Col. (Ret.) Holshek proposed that the USASOC G9 prepare a paper on the role of CA in IW as well as stabilization. Going forward, he believed the extended CA Corps could demonstrate significant value to the Services, the Joint Staff, and DoD(W) as the foremost national civil-military capability to support LSCO, irregular warfare, and stabilization. All of these could include a version of the concluding statement mentioned above.

[3] See Capt. Wagner's LinkedIn post at https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jessicalynnwagner_currently-thinking-through-social-network-activity-7411495475868200960-SYsF?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAAQKF64Bdml6X2JgXjUPwcRFkCnaeFUJcEc

Civil Affairs Issue Paper Presentations

Closing out the Symposium, the authors of the five *Civil Affairs Issue Papers* that appear in this year's volume presented summaries of their papers and, through electronic audience voting, competed for cash prizes of $2,500 for first place, $1000 for second, and $500 for third.

Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Glenn A. Goddard, Issue Papers Committee Chair, presided over the presentations. He noted that this year's 14 submitted papers represented an increase in both the quantity and quality of submissions compared to previous years, posing a challenge to the Committee. This was likely due to changes made to the solicitation process, as discussed in the 2025 Roundtable Report. He also mentioned that authors of non-selected papers could submit their articles to the *Eunomia Journal* or other military journals with the help of the Publication Advisory Board, as outlined in the *Issue Papers Guidelines*. Finally, he encouraged anyone interested in serving on the Committee to contact him via papers@civilaffairsassoc.org.

The vote produced the following order of the five papers, which, along with the final version of the Symposium Report, are published in this 12th volume of the *Civil Affairs Issue Papers*:

- "Organizing for Large-Scale Combat Operations: Consolidation of Civil Affairs Forces at the Division"
  - *Maj. Shawn M. Blaydes, Maj. J. Mike Teeter, and Mr. Walter Ellison II*
- "Redefining Civil Affairs: A Call for Modernization"
  - *Maj. John E. McElligott, Sgt. Maj. Robert J. Bruce, and Maj. Chris G. Antonov*
- "Seizing the Initiative: The Case for Civil Affairs-Enabled Unity of Command in U.S. Stabilization Efforts"
  - *Mr. Ryan McCannell*
- "The Civil Affairs Redefined Image (CARI) Model and Artificial Intelligence"
  - *Col. Marco A. Bongioanni*
- "Should the United States Adopt a CIMIC Model of Civil Affairs for Homeland Defense?"
  - *Lt. Col. Robert Boudreau, Lt. Col. Michael Aniton, and Lt. Col. Peter Schäfer*

Previous volumes and Roundtable Reports are available on the Civil Affairs Association website under "CA Media Enterprise/CA Issue Papers & Reports." The slide decks and paper summaries for all the Issue Papers and other presentations from this year's Symposium are available, after member log-in, under Resource Library/Events/2025/Symposium.

Final Remarks

Association president Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Hugh Van Roosen closed the Symposium by thanking the event organizers, the CA community, its allies around the world, and especially civilian partners for their flexibility and continued commitment. Despite the late changes, the event was quite

productive. However, there is much unfinished business, some to be addressed at the Roundtable in the spring, and some that may require further discussion before that, which the Association is willing to host. He has made this known to key CA institutional and command leadership.

The morning after the Symposium, the Association Board of Directors held a highly productive online meeting. A summary of the meeting will be posted in the *Eunomia Journal* in early 2026. The Board also agreed on a plan to retain the venue for next year's Symposium at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum, again organized in coordination with the 358th Civil Affairs Brigade, in November 2026, to be confirmed and announced this spring.

The next Association event will be the online Civil Affairs Roundtable in April 2026. For more, visit: https://www.civilaffairsassoc.org/ and subscribe or update your contact information.

Colonel (Ret.) Christopher Holshek, Vice President of Narrative Strategies, LLC, has served on the Civil Affairs Association Publications Committee as co-editor of the Civil Affairs Issue Papers and on the Events Committee since 2013, including as Vice President for Programs & Events until 2025. A 2017 Distinguished Member of the Regiment for the Civil Affairs Corps and a 2021 CIMIC Centre of Excellence Award recipient, he is the author of "Travels with Harley: Journeys in Search of Personal and National Identity," the final chapter of the book, "Warrior-Diplomats," and the Peace Operations Training Institute course handbook on "Civil-Military Coordination in Peace Operations," as well numerous articles on national strategy, civil-military, humanitarian, and peace & stability issues.

Colonel (Ret.) Dennis J. Cahill, Sr. is the Civil Affairs Association Vice-President for Legacy and Enlisted, serves on the Publications Committee, and Chairs the Legacy Committee. A 2014 Distinguished Member of the Regiment for the Civil Affairs Corps and a past Honorary Colonel of the Regiment for the Civil Affairs Corps, he serves as Deputy Civil Affairs Capability Manager in the G9 Directorate of the USASOC Force Modernization Center at Fort Bragg, NC. Author of the 2003 Army/USMC Civil Affairs Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures Manual and numerous articles on Civil Affairs in multiple publications, his article on "Revisiting Civil Affairs Operations in Operation Restore Hope" was published in the Eunomia Journal on October 1, 2023. He is also the Team Leader/Writer/Lead Editor for The Civil Affairs Team Room blog at civilaffairs-teamroom.com.

Organizing for Large-Scale Combat Operations: Consolidation of Civil Affairs Forces at the Division

Shawn M. Blaydes
J. Mike Teeter
Walter Ellison II

This paper began as a discussion about tactics and the array of civil affairs (CA) forces supporting brigades and divisions. In response to the National Training Center (NTC) Warrior Chronicles and Civil Affairs Issue Papers Call for Papers, we developed this piece to spur conversation within the CA Corps about the doctrinal employment and integration of CA forces in large-scale combat operations (LSCO). Our recommendations are not oriented towards special operations forces (SOF) or conventional forces (CF), but rather the total CA force. Feedback, discussion, and counterarguments are encouraged to help define how we will fight and win in future conflicts.

Introduction

The CA Corps must redefine itself based on its contributions to LSCO. The branch provides essential capabilities to enable maneuver and consolidate gains on the modern battlefield, but forces are not currently allocated at the most effective echelons to achieve these outcomes.[1] In future conflicts, the division's close area will be a rapidly shifting amalgamation of friendly and enemy manned and unmanned systems fighting to destroy one another. As the Army seeks to reduce the scope and complexity of brigade operations, CA forces must consider both the outcomes that they must achieve and where they can best achieve them. Simply assigning one CA company per brigade combat team (BCT) will not meet the needs in anticipated future operating environments.[2] Forces must be appropriately assigned against problem sets across the operational framework to enable effective transitions and consolidation of gains.

The current allocation of forces prevents effective integration with the supported units' planning process, inhibits effective transitions, and disrupts continuity of operations. The recent loss of CA planning positions at the division and BCT levels further complicates the integration of CA operations (CAO) at these echelons. As the Army reorganizes enabling forces at the division and corps levels, the CA Corps must assess current organization, command relationships, and anticipated transitions to enable critical tasks central to the consolidation of gains.

In line with these changes, the force should reestablish active component division G-9 positions, allocate consolidated CF CA battalions at the division level, and assign CA companies in general support of BCTs when necessary. These changes support increased lethality and synchronization of division operations through updates to doctrine, organization, training, leadership, and personnel within the CA Corps. Reorganizing and redefining CA based on its contributions to

LSCO will ensure that forces are postured to fight, win, consolidate gains, and return to competition after the next conflict.

The Primacy of Planning and the Burden of Command

Current doctrine directs CA unit commanders to serve as both the commander and the CA planner at BCT and division levels.[3] This embraces an *ad hoc* planning relationship as an acceptable method and disrupts unity of command at the CA company and battalion echelons. With the bulk of CA forces in the U.S. Army Reserve, CA commanders at company level and staff officers at battalion level have often not completed the professional military education for understanding the planning methodologies used at brigades and above. This gap in education impacts the ability of CA companies and battalions to integrate proficiently with supported unit staff and complete essential CA planning processes outlined in Army Techniques Publications, Training Circulars, and Task and Evaluation Outlines (T&EOs). This results in the exclusion of CA inputs to planning and the disintegration of CAO at division and BCT levels. In other words: It is not working.

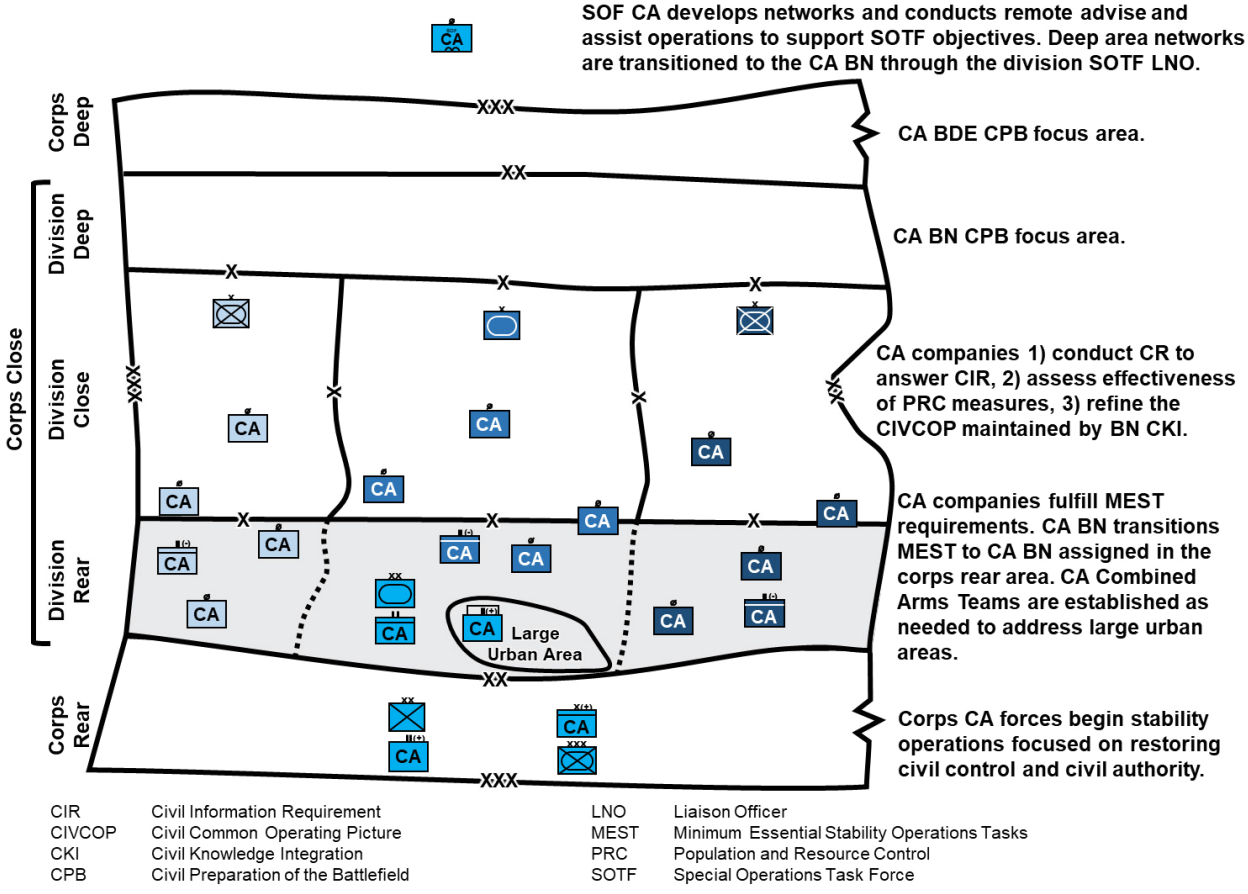
Instead of fighting to retain relevancy at the forward line of own troops (FLoT), the CA Corps should embrace the Army's updated operating constructs and innovate to succeed across the operational framework. As the division and corps focus on shaping the deep, protecting the rear, and sustaining the close to enable smaller, more survivable, and increasingly lethal BCTs, there are opportunities for CA forces to enable operations.[4] These actions must be planned in detail at the corps and division levels to ensure nesting while accounting for deliberate transitions.

While CA staffs recognize the importance of the civil environment to the common operating picture (COP), they often fail to effectively display its operations integration to the maneuver commander. This is attributable to gaps in training, institutional instruction, and habits developed during the concept of operations (CONOPS)-driven Global War on Terror and competition eras.[5] Many of our Soldiers are familiar with the military decision-making process (MDMP), but most units training at the National Training Center (NTC) in 2024 and 2025 were not proficient at conducting CA-specific tasks associated with MDMP as part of a larger staff. Units consistently missed timelines to integrate civil preparation of the battlefield (CPB) products alongside the supported unit's intelligence preparation of the operational environment (IPOE) and sustainment preparation of the operational environment (SPOE) products.

Without adequate CPB input, units cannot demonstrate the need to align CA forces with maneuver elements during course of action (CoA) development or anticipate the actions of civilian populations during CoA analysis. Simultaneously, the CA commander is trying to prepare his/her unit for operations while also attending key planning events and rehearsals. Once the order is published, it becomes increasingly difficult to reallocate CA units to better nest with the maneuver commander's intent.

Arraying CA companies under the CA battalion at division level enables centralized CA C2 and the ability to fully leverage both the civil knowledge integration (CKI) section and the CA planning team (CAPT) to synchronize CAO across the division area. During CoA development, CA forces can be allocated and weighted to enable civil reconnaissance (CR), assessment, and the completion of minimum-essential stability tasks (MEST) to set the foundation for stability operations in the corps, army, or joint task force rear areas (see Figure 1). Having fewer CA teams (CATs) near the FLoT promotes purpose-driven CR missions in the close area and delays detailed assessments until urban areas are in the more secure division rear area. Additional teams will be available in the division rear area to address MEST, deal with civil threats more likely to emerge in the rear area, or to establish CA combined arms teams[6] in large urban areas, stabilize populations, and mobilize civil security networks to assist maneuver commanders in maintaining operations tempo.

Consolidation of forces at the division level allows the CA battalion commander, G3, and division commander to array CA forces and establish appropriate command relationships to accomplish division objectives. Finally, this allows CA battalion commanders to re-task and reorganize their forces, surge support to areas of particular concern, and pursue positions of advantage.



CIR	Civil Information Requirement	LNO	Liaison Officer
CIVCOP	Civil Common Operating Picture	MEST	Minimum Essential Stability Operations Tasks
CKI	Civil Knowledge Integration	PRC	Population and Resource Control
CPB	Civil Preparation of the Battlefield	SOTF	Special Operations Task Force

Figure 1. CA priorities across the corps operational framework.[7]

This still does not solve the problem CA battalion commanders face when performing staff and command functions simultaneously. Division engineer forces are commanded by an engineer and are represented by a separate division engineer staff officer, as are intelligence capabilities. Likewise, sustainment forces are commanded by sustainers and represented by the division sustainment planning officer. CA forces require a CA commander and a separate CA staff section to plan and synchronize CAO on behalf of the division commander. The CAPT may supplement this section, but this negates their surge capability to plan CAO at the corps or BCT level in support of division rear or close area requirements. The G-9 section is ultimately responsible for planning CAO on the division staff to ensure CPB is integrated during mission analysis, CA forces are assigned to support the maneuver plan, and civil considerations are accounted for in wargaming.

The best way to ensure tactical CAO mission success it to reestablish division G-9 positions and fill them with active component Soldiers. If they are unavailable, options exist to establish Active Guard Reserve (AGR) positions, Active Duty Operational Support (ADOS) positions, or to employ a sufficiently manned and trained Mission Command Post Operational Detachment (MCP-OD) to fill these primary staff positions. Employment of reserve component elements must account for the additional funding and time required to mobilize and deploy these Soldiers.

Transition Between Units

Many questions have been raised about how our forces should transition responsibility for CAO between echelons during LSCO. Maintaining continuity of effort among CA elements exerting influence from the joint deep through the joint security area is a large but solvable problem. It would be helpful to establish principles to help us determine priorities and responsibilities to focus our efforts—and, accordingly, have them reflect in both CA and Army operations doctrine.

The following principles regarding tactical CAO can provide a starting point:

1) CA forces orient on the consolidation objective.
2) Population and resource control planning are CA priorities; keeping civilians away from military operations and controlling dual-use resources enable maneuver and consolidation.
3) CAO in the division close area are only conducted when they directly enable division maneuver, protect resources, or identify requirements for follow-on division consolidation activities that occur after the division rear boundary is moved forward.
4) CA assists in fulfilling MEST and stability operations requirements through pre-planning the use of host nation or unified action partner resources and personnel whenever possible.
5) CAO are planned using military symbols and graphic control measures. This includes published areas of operations, handover lines, and coordination points as necessary to ensure continuity of effort and effective transition of responsibility.

6) Civil information requirements are issued at all echelons from CACOM through the CA company. They are nested with the higher headquarters' information requirements in defined geographic areas with the latest time information of value.
7) Networks developed during competition or in the joint deep area are handed over from the army service component command G-9/G-39 and theater special operations command J-39 to the corps G-9 section and disseminated down through the division G-9 sections.
8) If two CA units are conducting operations in the same area, they will exchange LNOs to deconflict operations and share civil information.

Some helpful assumptions may assist in visualizing the civil environment LSCO will present.

1) Networks established before conflict will be degraded in LSCO as civilians flee. They must be assessed and reestablished using resources from those parts of the network that remain.
2) Most urban areas will have 10-20% of the prewar population present during combat operations.[8]
3) While some government officials will remain in place during an enemy occupation, most elected officials and political appointees will leave under threat of persecution by the occupying force.
4) Those civilians with the means to leave will flee once the cost of staying (threat of harm) exceeds the cost of displacement. This will result in waves of internally displaced persons as the situation evolves.
5) Those who remain in place either lack the means to displace, have a compelling reason to stay, or have waited too long to evacuate.

Much like maneuver unit reconnaissance or battle handover, CA units must conduct a deliberate, planned transition of civil information and partner relationships during LSCO. There will not be much time for transition, and relationships may be handed over "cold" until they are incorporated into the corps or joint task force (JTF) rear areas. Instead of converging effects forward, CA forces build capability and converge effects in the rear area to enable civil control and civil authority as the corps or JTF integrates stability operations into their deliberate plans for consolidation of gains. Reconnaissance handover and maneuver battle handover procedures offer valuable insights into best practices that can be applied to civil network handovers, as depicted I Figure 2.

> "The reconnaissance handover consists of a battle handover, or a transition of area of operations responsibility, as well as an intelligence handover, a transition of targets and collected information requirements. Squadrons must be able to facilitate the transition of intelligence, targets, and terrain knowledge to the protected force during reconnaissance handovers in order to set conditions for the follow-on force to accomplish its mission."[9]

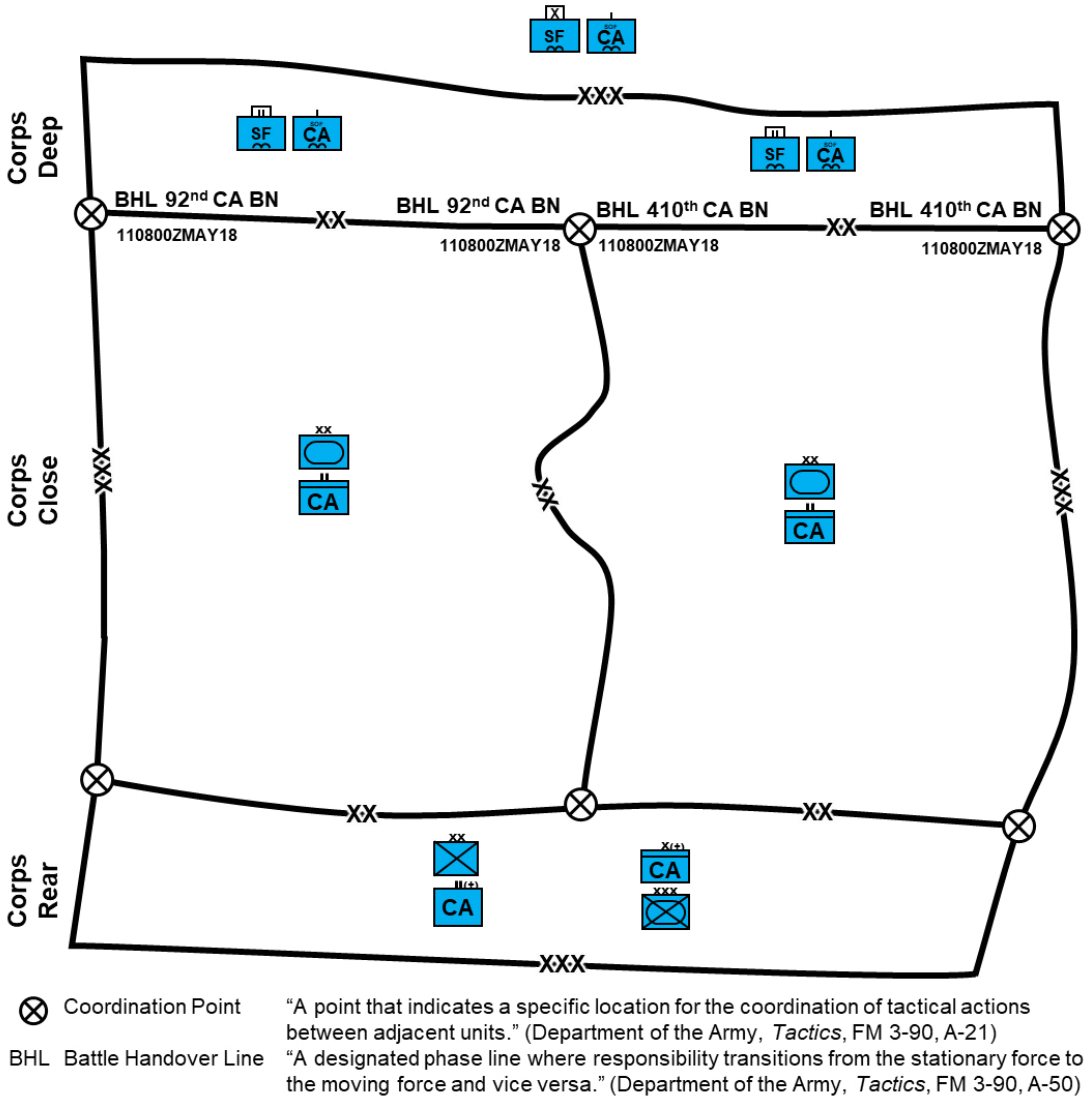


Figure 2. Use of battle handover lines and coordination points to direct the transition of networks and civil information at the division level.

CAO transition plans at the division and corps levels must be accounted for in the supported commander's decision support matrix as well as in the concept of operations, scheme of maneuver, and coordinating instructions paragraphs of CAO annexes. This handover should be controlled at the G-9 section in coordination with the CA battalion or brigade, since they have dedicated CKI sections that can receive, interpret, and disseminate the knowledge across the formation. BCTs are focused on fighting, winning, moving, and fighting again. If a handover occurs at the company level, there is a significant risk that information will be lost or unusable after the transition.[10] While programs such as the Maven Smart System, Operational Environment Visualization (OEVis) application, and Mobile Awareness GEOINT Environment have made it easier to share civil information, the CKI section remains the premier element for processing, analyzing, producing, and storing civil information across the formation.[11] CAO transition must also reflect in both CAO and Army operations doctrine.

Transition as a Nested Approach to Consolidation of Gains

CAO must be nested to build upon one another in a series of transitions that successively yield larger networks. For CA forces, this begins with vigorous CR in the division close area and culminates once civil security, civil control, essential services, governance, and infrastructure are restored and have been transitioned to the control of the host nation or other competent authority. In LSCO, all CAO must lay the foundation for the higher headquarters to eventually conduct successful stability operations in the corps of JTF rear area. This can be visualized to develop a useful template that can be adjusted as needed based on the situation.

In the division close area, CAO are severely limited in duration and scope. While BCTs focus on defeating enemy forces, CA units assigned in general support of the BCTs conduct CR to identify population numbers and requirements, assess the effectiveness of PRC measures, and develop civil knowledge to inform division consolidation of gains planning. Operations in the division close should be limited to only those actions necessary to enable maneuver or plan follow-on operations. When required, operations should be conducted in the BCT rear area if one is established. While BCTs have a legal and moral obligation to conduct MEST, this requirement is heavily caveated by limitations on resources and the imperative to defeat enemy forces in the division close area.[12] Pushing BCTs to conduct MEST in detail will inherently degrade their ability to fight and win. Their primary role is to defeat enemy forces and report conditions to the division for action once areas are reasonably secure, before civilian populations begin returning.

In the division rear area, operations expand to address all feasible MEST and civil threats, setting conditions for the corps to begin limited stability operations focused on civil security and civil control. Those tasks include enabling security, food, water, shelter, and medical treatment to civilian populations. Completion of these tasks is limited by resources and should be completed through coordination with local authorities and unified action partners whenever possible. It may be appropriate to assume some risk in these tasks when the risk to operations outweighs the risk to civilian populations. A CA company may simultaneously conduct CR in the division close while also conducting assessments or civil engagement to develop civil networks in the division rear.

Remaining and continuing MEST requirements must be completed in the corps rear area. CA forces focus on reestablishing civil security and civil control through remaining, returning, or newly established civilian leaders and essential service providers. Civil control and civil security represent essential prerequisites for the reestablishment of governance. Essential service and infrastructure repair priorities should be determined by the corps G-9 in conjunction with the local government whenever possible. Not all stabilization tasks must be completed immediately. They must, however, be prioritized and layered operationally, as this is a long-term endeavor that is ultimately best implemented by the host nation government when feasible.

Some may think that moving CA companies away from the BCTs will reduce the required. The force structure or sacrifice the CA force's role in the division close area. This is not the case. BCTs are currently reorganizing to reduce their physical and electromagnetic signatures, increasing lethality, and maximizing their potential tempo to fight and win against a near-peer threat. The Army has already begun moving former BCT-enabling forces to division and corps formations. The CA Corps should proactively reorganize to stay ahead of forced reorganization.

Defining and reducing the scope of CAO objectives by echelon can assist corps and division CAO planners to phase objectives and priorities for CA units. This will require refinement and practice at warfighter exercises and "division in the dirt" rotations at the combat training centers to answer key questions about the 38G Military Government Officer program force reorganization beyond 2026. Immediate reestablishment of division G-9 sections, consolidation of the CA battalion at the division level, and deliberate practice will yield refined recommendations.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The following recommendations support the consolidation of CA forces at the division level.

1) Doctrine. Update FM 3-57 *Civil Affairs Operations* and ATP 3-57.60 *Civil Affairs Planning* to reflect handover of civil networks, priorities of work across the operational framework, and transitions. Update FM 3-94 *Armies, Corps, and Division Operations*, FM 3-96 *Brigade Combat Team*, ATP 3-06 *Urban Operations,* ATP 3-06.11 *Brigade Combat Team Urban Operations*, ATP 3-91 *Division Operations*, and ATP 3-92 *Corps Operations* requiring a permanent division G-9 section as well as the impact on each of those manuals' specific focus areas.

2) Organization. Restore G-9 sections in all divisions. This is essential to integrate CAO planning into division and BCT maneuver plans. BCT S-9 sections need not to be restored.

3) Training. Send CA battalion headquarters, reserve and active, to participate in division warfighter exercises and CTC "division in the dirt" exercises with a frequency of one exercise every five years for reserve battalions and one exercise every three years for active battalions. Elements of all sections assigned to the CA battalion headquarters should participate in developing effective tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for all functions listed in doctrine and battalion mission essential task T&EOs. CA Brigade headquarters should participate in corps warfighter exercises at similar frequencies.

4) Leadership and Education. Current professional military education (PME) on MDMP is often delivered after completion of key developmental assignments at the O-4 and E-8 grade plates in the reserve component of the CA Corps. To rectify this, enroll all active and reserve majors into

intermediate level education (ILE) and master sergeants into master leaders course (MLC) within one year of selection for promotion. Allow no more than one deferral, not to exceed one year.

5) Personnel. Assign ILE complete majors and MLC complete master sergeants to fill division and corps planning sections. Their ability to integrate into the MDMP is essential to successful planning and synchronization of CAO.

These recommendations are not comprehensive, and they can certainly be improved through experimentation. This is a best estimate intended to start a conversation across the CA Corps. There are no perfect answers, but there are indeed "best practices" and anticipated methods of operations that can be embraced. To train the force and adequately prepare for the challenges posed by LSCO, the CA Corps should commit to a model that can be refined through exercises and wargaming before conflict.

Without adequate staff at the corps and division levels, deployed CA forces will lack guidance, synchronization, and oversight to meaningfully consolidate gains in LSCO. Corresponding doctrinal templates and methods of operation must likewise be developed to provide defined outputs that support maneuver elements in the next conflict. The old trope "it depends" will not suffice. It's time to redefine the CA Corps as a force ready to "secure the victory" for the Army, the joint force, and the Nation in LSCO.

Major Shawn Blaydes is the Senior Civil Affairs Trainer at the National Training Center. He previously served with the 91st Civil Affairs Battalion (SO) (A) and 92nd Civil Affairs Battalion (SO) (A) with deployments to the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. Shawn holds a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations and a Master of Military Art and Science degree.

Major Mike Teeter is currently serving as the XVIII Airborne Corps Deputy G-9. He has served with the 91st Civil Affairs Battalion (SO) (A) and 92nd Civil Affairs Battalion (SO) (A) with deployments to the Middle East and Europe. He holds a Bachelor of Arts, a Master of Operational Science, and a Master of Global and International Studies from the University of Kansas.

Mr. Walter Ellison II is an Information Warfare Planner at the National Training Center and currently serves as a civil affairs First Sergeant in USACAPOC(A)'s 1st Training Brigade. He has been deployed to locations across the Middle East and Africa. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and a Master of Global Policy Studies in Law, Security, and Diplomacy from the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas.

Endnotes

[1] Association of the United States Army, " Chief of Army Reserve Forum," video, 13:24, YouTube, October 11, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuVZQITXqu4&t=798s; Thomas R. Geisinger, "Civil Affairs History and

Doctrine: From Military Government to Interagency Partner," *InterAgency Journal* vol. 8, no. 1, (Winter 2017): 38, https://thesimonscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/IAJ-8-1-Winter2017-pg36-57.pdf.

[2] Army Futures Command, *Concept for Brigade Combat Team Cross-Domain Maneuver 2028*, AFC Pamphlet 71-20-2, (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2020), 15, 22, 47.

[3] U.S. Department of the Army, *Civil Affairs Operations*, FM 3-57 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2021), 2-105.

[4] Office of the Secretary of the Army, "Letter to the Force: Army Transformation Initiative" (official memorandum, Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2025), https://safe.menlosecurity.com/doc/docview/viewer/docN7F2DFEE6D93Dd00e3233518c66160f42353513d86a674f5fe285a70e6f7ee083c8f95505773f; Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Army Transformation and Acquisition Reform" (official memorandum, Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2025), https://media.defense.gov/2025/May/01/2003702281/-1/-1/1/ARMY-TRANSFORMATION-AND-ACQUISITION-REFORM.PDF

[5] Thomas Doherty, "Failing to Plan is Planning to Fail: When CONOPs Replace OPORDs," *Small Wars Journal, August 28, 2012, https://archive.smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/failing-to-plan-is-planning-to-fail-when-conops-replace-opords*.

[6] An emerging doctrinal concept from the Civil Affairs Proponent team at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

[7] Adapted from U.S. Department of the Army, *Brigade Combat Team*, FM 3-96 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2021), Figure 2-2.

[8] U.S. Department of the Army, *Urban Operations*, ATP 3-06 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2022), 1-34, 4-85, A-3; U.S. Department of the Army, *Brigade Combat Team Urban Operations*, ATP 3-06.11 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2024), 5-21, B-11; John Spencer, "The Eight Rules of Urban Warfare and Why We Must Work to Change Them," Modern War Institute at West Point, last modified January 12, 2021, https://mwi.westpoint.edu/the-eight-rules-of-urban-warfare-and-why-we-must-work-to-change-them/

[9] Christopher E. Kiriscioglu and Jordan L. Woodburn, "Forgotten Fundamentals in Reconnaissance and Security," *Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin,* 34, no. 22-3 (July - December 2022): 2, https://mipb.ikn.army.mil/media/waghuxhd/2022-07-12-woodburn_fundamentals_online.pdf.

[10] Bryan C. Valdes and Shawn M. Blaydes, "Reserve Civil Affairs Command and Control at the National Training Center" (unpublished, April 23, 2025), 7, 11-12.

[11] The Maven Smart System is an analysis and knowledge management tool located at https://mss.data.mil/; The Operational Environment Visualization (OEVis) application is a network analysis tool hosted at https://oevis.tradoc.army.mil/;The Mobile Awareness GEOINT Environment (MAGE) is a geospatial information application hosted at https://www.nga.mil/resources/Products_&_Services.html.

[12] Department of the Army, *Brigade Combat Team*, 2-105. 2-55, 2-65, 7-97, 8-46.

Redefining Civil Affairs: A Call for Modernization

John E. McElligott
Robert J. Bruce
Chris G. Antonov

Civil affairs (CA) faces an inflection point. The strategic environment is characterized by rapid change, volatility, and increasing competition and crises. Adversaries like China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea are cooperating or allied at levels previously unseen, posing threats to U.S. national security. This environment raises the specter of large-scale combat operations (LSCO) in areas of responsibility (AoRs) like the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) and U.S. European Command (USEUCOM).[1] To effectively contribute to deterrence or support LSCO, U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) CA must evolve beyond traditional roles. This paper argues for a redefinition of CA forces, focusing on enhanced personnel quality over quantity, organizational alignment within an Information Warfare framework, improved training methodologies, and modernized doctrine, materiel, policy, and leadership development. The proposed changes aim to maximize CA's ability to deliver influence effects, integrate with other warfighting functions, and contribute to achieving strategic objectives across the spectrum of conflict.

Key Observations & Analysis

Current CA capabilities, while valuable as such, are increasingly mismatched to the demands of modern warfare. The rise of hybrid or irregular warfare threats, information warfare, and the complexities of operating in contested urban environments necessitate a CA force that is more agile, adaptable, and technologically proficient.[2] Existing challenges include: a diluted talent pool due to inconsistent accession standards across components; fragmented organizational structures; a broad, often unfocused training curriculum; and insufficient integration with key warfighting functions such as intelligence, fires, and protection.

The recent emphasis on LSCO highlights the critical role of understanding and influencing the civil component of the operational environment. Effective civil-military engagement is no longer a secondary consideration for maneuver commanders but a core component of successful operations. Failure to adequately address the human dimension can undermine both strategic and military objectives, exacerbate instability, and erode legitimacy. Furthermore, CA's potential to contribute to deterrence is often underutilized, particularly in competition when building relationships and understanding local dynamics are paramount.

To support our argument, we made the following assumptions:

- LSCO will remain a prominent planning consideration of the future security environment.

- The U.S. Government will shift resources to focus on the homeland and USINDOPACOM to prepare for potential conflict with China and North Korea.
- The U.S. military will continue to operate in complex, contested irregular environments with significant civilian populations.
- Information warfare, hybrid or irregular warfare threats, and weaponized migration will continue to evolve and pose significant challenges to the U.S. and its Allies and partners.
- Interagency or civil-military cooperation and coordination are essential for effective civil-military engagement.

Findings & Recommendations—DOTMLPF-P Analysis

The following recommendations address deficiencies across the domains of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy (DOTMLPF-P) to enhance CA's effectiveness. They are listed in order of potential impact:

Personnel: Improving the quality of CA personnel is paramount. Current accession standards are inconsistent between active and reserve components, leading to a diluted talent pool.

Recommendations:

1) Implement uniform selection criteria across all components, requiring a minimum rank of O-3 and E-5 for accession. Prioritize candidates with prior life experiences, maturity, and regional expertise. Screen all candidates for interpersonal communication skills and an intellectual curiosity about foreign cultures. Actively recruit qualified personnel with relevant language and cultural skills. A higher-quality force will possess enhanced analytical capabilities, cultural awareness, and adaptability, leading to more effective engagement with civilian populations and host nation governments. These actions would make CA a more attractive branch for both recruitment and retention.

2) Establish 8-10 person Army CA Teams as proposed during the 2022-2023 force design update, including a medic and adding an unmanned aerial system (UAS) specialist. Fewer but larger CA Teams will allow CA to better support the shift to larger formations like the Army's division-centric force. Having a medic and someone trained in UAS and counter-UAS will permit the CA Teams to operate more independently in LSCO environments when the military predicts communication between echelons and adjacent units will be difficult in degraded or denied spectrum environments.

3) Battalion or brigade executive officers and sergeants major should interview and screen the military files of officers and senior non-commissioned officers prior to accepting incoming personnel to better align qualifications with mission requirements. The Integrated Pay and

Personnel System includes data fields for professional licenses, professional certifications, attributes, hobbies/interests, self-study, civilian work experience, civilian education, cultural experience, and additional duties. Human Resource personnel could provide guidance on how troops should complete the self-processed data fields. By investing a little more time in advance, command teams can recruit officers and senior NCOs who are committed to the mission and fit culturally with the CA community.

4) Reduce the overall number of U.S. Army Reserve (USAR) CA service members, with the most reductions coming at the tactical level. There are too many for the current mission set and global requirements, as witnessed by recent Army Structure Memorandum decisions to downsize the active component.[3] A smaller overall force will help commands to provide consistently higher-quality troops than today. It will also better balance personnel with available opportunities, giving CA personnel options to apply their skillset in support of OCONUS operations.

Organization: Integrating CA within an Information Warfare framework will maximize its impact.

Recommendations:

1) Align Army CA forces across all components with the Army's planned Information Warfare elements. Reserve component CA units must have better institutional as well as operational coordination and integration with Psychological Operations (PSYOP) and Information Operations (IO) troops. More closely integrated non-kinetic fires will generate combined-arms effects that support operational and theater strategic objectives.[4]

2) Ensure Army CA troops are included in Tables of Organization and Equipment for Theater Information Advantage Detachments (TIADs). Ensuring the best active and reserve CA troops are included in TIAD formations will help to extend CA influence across information branches and lead to more combined-arms non-kinetic effects.

3) Shift a few USAR CA battalions to CA Commands (CACOMs) aligned with higher priority AORs like USINDOPACOM, USEUCOM, and U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM). Under the umbrella of the Army Transformation Initiative, U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), or USACAPOC(A), has a window of opportunity to shift battalions not engaged in current national defense strategies to the AoRs receiving funding and attention.

Training: CA training must become more focused and relevant to modern warfare.

Recommendations:

1) Develop a CA-specific mobile training team that can provide the latest tactics, techniques, and procedures for UAS, counter-UAS, digital civil reconnaissance, urban warfare, AI tools for analyzing civil considerations, etc. Without staying current with trends in warfare, CA risks not integrating with the maneuver formations we support or, worse, irrelevance. It's entirely possible to develop a small cadre of Army and USMC NCOs who train CA units in person and remotely to fill gaps in schoolhouse slots, keep costs low, and enhance the impact of training.

2) Adopt a vector-based approach to analyzing civil considerations within the complex system of systems of the human environment. The vector-based approach to civil considerations narrows the scope of what CA troops analyze by tracing "someone or something as it maneuvers through the human terrain."[5] One resulting product is a root map that can help staff determine how adversaries influence the local or regional population and how friendly forces can uproot or alter those ties to support the commander's end state.

3) Implement structured training programs with interagency partners who operate in a unit's aligned region. With the absorption of some U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) functions into the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, CA units need to build rapport with interagency staff in country teams where they may deploy for exercises or conflict.

4) Conduct joint training exercises between USAR and USMC Reserve (USMCR) CA units biennially. Field grade officers and senior NCOs are taught to function from a joint perspective. Move that approach outside of the classroom by conducting intermittent joint training. This would require exercise planners to include joint forces in the task organization, source units, and provide funding.

5) Use USAR CA teams to fill active component Civil Military Support Element vacancies. Enhanced training will improve CA's analytical capabilities, interoperability, and readiness to support operations in theater. This requires more lead time for reserve units to prepare for CMSE rotations, but it would be worth the effort.

6) Develop a centralized, integrated Civil Knowledge Integration system that can be queried. Broach with non-government organizations whether they would be willing to share their data, especially those related to humanitarian assistance or disaster relief. Active and reserve CA units could use a more developed Maven Smart System or whichever knowledge management system the unit's active component maneuver commands use. Learn from the theater component's office of knowledge management to correctly classify, name, archive, and make searchable commonly used reports. These data need to be integrated with whichever AI-supported common operating picture the maneuver command uses.

7) Ensure personnel slated for operational staff positions complete a Command Post Exercise (CPX) prior to deployment. After watching CA units underperform at high-level exercises, we believe units should send their best and brightest whenever possible. That includes running personnel through a CPX prior to deploying for anything outside of conflict or combat.

Leadership and Education: Developing effective CA leaders requires a focus on influence operations.

Recommendations:

1) Make the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) Operations in the Information Environment Practitioner Course (MOPC) into a joint course open to Army as well as Marine O-4 and O-5 CA officers and E-6 to E-8 CA NCOs. Formal IO and influence-related training will provide CA personnel with the necessary tools to effectively execute CA support to influence operations, providing commanders with optimized combined arms non-lethal fires effects against near-peer adversaries employing hybrid or irregular warfare tactics, such as China and Russia. Like the USMC's Civil-Military Operations Planner Course, the month-long MOPC is short enough to serve as annual training for USAR and USMCR personnel, while also providing the added benefit of serving as a venue for networking and cross-pollination of ideas and best practices between U.S. Army and USMC colleagues.

2) Develop an online course to train mid-career CA officers and NCOs as operational and theater strategic staff officers. Consider modeling the staff course on the NATO Civil-Mililtary Cooperation (CIMIC) Staff Worker Course offered by the CIMIC Centre of Excellence (CCoE), which fills an equivalent educational need within NATO. Field grade Army officers attend Intermediate Level Education common core and Area of Concentration courses to operate at the joint, combined, and interagency environments at operational and theater strategic levels of warfare. Beyond the Battle Staff course for some NCOs, no one teaches those officers and NCOs how to be effective members of a General Officer staff, which some people will experience, especially during OCONUS deployment.

3) Revive the Strategic Planning and Operations course at USACAPOC(A) for senior CA leaders. We need more senior CA leaders trained to conduct strategic and campaign planning and operations at a division or corps.

4) Prioritize PME completion for anyone volunteering to fill exercise rosters or six to nine-month deployments during competition. We appreciate how units often take any reservist willing to fill OCONUS rosters. However, we could improve the quality of teams by including PME completion as a strong differentiator for selection to OCONUS manning rosters.

Doctrine: Doctrine must reflect the evolving nature of warfare and the importance of civil-military engagement in support of countering enemy hybrid or irregular warfare operations.

Recommendations:

1) Update Army and USMC doctrine to address countering enemy hybrid or irregular warfare influence capabilities.[6] Current doctrine lacks an emphasis on the growing threat from hybrid or irregular warfare. For example, Army FM 3-57 has two scant references to hybrid threats, and USMC MCRP 3-03A.1 does not mention them. Updated doctrine will provide a common framework for CA operations and enhance interoperability with other warfighting functions.

2) Develop an Army Technical Publication focused on CA integration with other branches like IO, PSYOP, PAO, and Intelligence for targeting. Our doctrine should reflect the modern way of conducting combined-arms irregular warfare targeting and how that feeds into the larger targeting enterprise.

3) Update Army and USMC publications to reflect the dissolution of USAID (as discussed in the 2025 Symposium Report) and how interagency or civil-military coordination will be conducted for missions tied to humanitarian assistance. Units deserve updated doctrine that reflects big decisions by the White House, like dissolving USAID and moving its limited legacy functions to the Department of State.

Materiel: Leveraging technology will enhance CA's situational awareness and analytical capabilities.

Recommendations:

1) Deploy AI-enabled tools like Maven Smart System across all CA formations to share CA operations, activities, and investments with maneuver commands and vice versa. CA units that integrate the latest technology will gain enhanced situational awareness, analytical capabilities, and communication tools.[7] Failing to adapt to emerging technologies will limit our ability to provide accurate and relevant analysis of civil considerations to enhance the commander's common operating picture. To operate Maven on the high side, where the active component uses it, USAR and USMCR units need to be fielded more SIPR laptops, and personnel need to be given SIPR accounts and tokens.

2) Provide UAS with high-quality cameras for CA Teams. Having UAS accessible to mobile and dismounted CA troops will enhance their ability to conduct tasks like monitoring movements of dislocated civilians or conducting assessments of critical infrastructure.

3) Provide c-UAS systems for CA Teams. Mounted and dismounted CA Teams need to protect themselves from the growing threat of adversary one-way attack drones or swarm attacks.

4) Expand the Mission Partner Network (MPN) to integrate with Allied and partner forces' CA and CIMIC units. The MPN enables mission command for Army, joint, and coalition forces. When U.S. military personnel encourage Allied and partner CA and CIMIC forces to adopt MPN and share data sources and knowledge management best practices, it leads to more productive CA/CIMIC working groups, international exchanges, and exercises.

Policy: Commands should consider updating policies that enable troops to maintain access to classified information, prepare for relevant language and cultural training, and incorporate evolving technologies.

Recommendations:

1) Request different information security policies for reserve component CA units to allow up to 60 days before SIPR accounts are suspended. To leverage secure networks more frequently, we need to maintain access that is too often suspended between monthly training events.

2) Require the Defense Language Aptitude Battery before accession to CA. While a minimum score shouldn't be needed to be accessed, units in all components need to know whether the troops they receive have an aptitude for learning a foreign language.

3) Increase funding for language training across all components, including access to the Defense Language Institute. Expand cultural awareness training as pre-deployment preparation. Enhanced language and cultural skills will improve CA's ability to engage with local populations.

4) Fund certificate programs in AI, knowledge management, or related fields. Equipping personnel with these skills will improve decision-making processes and accelerate adaptation to evolving technologies. A skilled workforce in these areas will be crucial for successful integration of AI-enabled systems, fostering innovation, and maintaining a competitive advantage in future conflicts – all while improving talent management and retention within the force.

Facilities: Remodel existing buildings to accommodate increased classified square footage.

Recommendation: Install more SIPRNet and MPN data drops, classified conference rooms, and SIPR laptops. Provide requisite Operations and Maintenance funding. In return, provide more reliable and useful classified information access at company level.

Conclusion

Redefining Civil Affairs is not merely an organizational exercise; it is a strategic imperative. By embracing the recommendations outlined in this paper, the U.S. military can transform CA into a more effective, relevant, and impactful force, capable of deterring aggression, supporting LSCO, and achieving strategic objectives in a rapidly changing world. Failure to adapt will leave the military vulnerable to the challenges of modern warfare and undermine its ability to succeed in complex operational environments. Failure will also lead to CA losing relevance and value added to maneuver commanders.

Major John E. McElligott is serving as the Deputy Foreign Policy Advisor for U.S. Army Europe and Africa. He is a member of the U.S. Army Reserve with civilian experience in health policy and government relations.

Sergeant Major Robert J. Bruce is serving as the J9 Sergeant Major for Security Assistance Group—Ukraine. He is a member of the U.S. Army Reserve with civilian experience in law enforcement and security protection fields.

Major Chris G. Antonov is serving as the Deputy J9 for Security Assistance Group – Ukraine. He is a member of the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve with civilian experience in real estate portfolio strategy and data and business analytics.

Endnotes

[1] Secretary of Defense. *Fiscal Years 2027-2031 Defense Planning Guidance*. Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 07 August 2025.

[2] Headquarters, Department of the Army. *The Army Warfighting Concept 2040*. Washington, DC: U.S. Army, 2021; Department of the Army. "Letter to the Force: Army Transformation Initiative." *Army.mil*, May 1, 2025. https://www.army.mil/article/285100/letter_to_the_force_army_transformation_initiative; Marine Corps Combat Development Command. *Force Design 2030: Annual Update*. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps, June 2023. https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Docs/Force_Design_2030_Annual_Update_June_2023.pdf.

[3] Headquarters, Department of the Army. *Army Structure Memorandum 2025-2029*. Washington, DC: U.S. Army, 2024.

[4] U.S. Marine Corps Deputy Commandant for Information, Information Maneuver Division. *17XX: Information Maneuver Occupational Field CY2024 LATMOVE Solicitation Roadshow Presentation,* 2024; Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps. *MCDP 8, Information*. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps, 2022.

[5] Krohley, Nicholas. "Uprooting the Enemy: A New Paradigm for Irregular Warfare Analysis." *Irregular Warfare Initiative*, February 26, 2024.https://irregularwarfare.org/articles/uprooting-the-enemy-a-new-paradigm-for-irregular-warfare-analysis/.

[6] Headquarters, Department of the Army. *FM 3-57, Civil Affairs Operations*. Washington, DC: U.S. Army, 2019; Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps. *MCDP 3, Operations*. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps, 2022; Joint Chiefs of Staff. *JP 3-57, Civil-Military Operations*. Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 2023; Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps. *MCRP 3-03A.1, Civil Affairs Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps, 2024.

[7] Bahoque, Benjamin; Taylor, David; Smith, Michael, et al. *Forging Future Advantage: An Elastic Approach*. Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, May 2025.

Seizing the Initiative: The Case for Civil Affairs-Enabled Unity of Command in U.S. Stabilization Efforts

Ryan McCannell

With the State Department undergoing reorganization and downsizing, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and other U.S. foreign affairs and assistance agencies having been dismantled by the Department of Government Efficiency, the Department of Defense (War) (DoD(W))[1] should seize the initiative to develop a new strategic paradigm for U.S. post-conflict stabilization efforts. This new paradigm would rely on military-led unity of command, rather than the problematic, decades-long attempts to mobilize interagency unity of effort to achieve stabilization goals. A DoD(W)-led unity of command structure would redefine civil affairs (CA) as an essential capability for commanders to consolidate gains during and after violent conflict, providing the CA Corps with an unprecedented opportunity for leadership and action.

This paper examines how enhancements to doctrine, organization, training, matériel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy (DOTMLPF-P) could establish unity of command for stabilization, as well as how these changes would likely redefine and quite possibly elevate the role of CA in the eyes of military commanders, their civilian counterparts, and the foreign populations among which they operate.

The case for developing a renewed, DoD(W)-led approach to stabilization derives from the risks and opportunities inherent in the current administration's foreign policy approach, as well as lessons from U.S. history. Under the second administration of President Donald J. Trump, the United States is applying greater pressure against its adversaries, allies, and partners to achieve the peaceful resolution of various global conflicts.[2] However, beyond brokering peace deals and exerting America's substantial political, economic, and military leverage to coerce compliance, U.S. policy makers must prepare for the periods of fragile peace that typically follow such diplomatic achievements. If not, the U.S. and its partners may fail to capitalize on short-term events that could potentially advance long-term U.S. interests, such as the implosion of hostile regimes or a sudden, significant political breakthrough in areas wracked by violent conflict.[3]

This potential for backsliding reflects the growing chasm between the rhetorical emphasis within America First foreign policy on "utilizing the U.S. military for its intended purpose [to ensure] America does not become entangled in prolonged efforts such as nation-building exercises abroad,"[4] and the limited, real-world capacity of the State Department, other civilian foreign policy agencies, and overwhelmed[5] or underfunded multilateral efforts—such as United Nations peacekeeping operations[6]—to follow up on such opportunities, at least while profound reforms to those institutions are underway.

Beyond the near-term risks and opportunities, the rationale for DoW leadership in stabilization has notable precedents across centuries of U.S. history. Dr. Nadia Schadlow's 2017 book, *War and the Art of Governance*, is a deeply researched study of how the U.S. Army (and to a more limited extent, the U.S. Marine Corps) has repeatedly been the "option of last resort" for consolidating political gains following battlefield victories, as well as taking on hybrid challenges such as stabilization, humanitarian relief, and irregular warfare.

Despite this track record, Schadlow highlights the "consistent tensions among American actors over 'who controlled what' when it came to the reestablishment of basic political order."[7] With respect to the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, she notes: "The United States adopted what might be called a 'divide and fail' model that prevented unity of command over critical parts of the war effort that needed to be integrated in order to achieve objectives. Because most policymakers did not consider the consolidation of political gains an integral part of war, they created dual and often competing chains of command to conduct governance tasks."[8]

Schadlow's conclusions foreshadowed the findings of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) John Sopko's 2018 report summarizing lessons from the U.S. experience with stabilization in Afghanistan.[9] Many of the key tactical-level lessons the SIGAR study recounted reflect the core values and lived experience of civil affairs personnel who served in that country, as well as Iraq, Syria, Somalia, the Sahel, and other global hotspots over the past several decades. These lessons include putting physical security first among local populations' hierarchy of needs; taking the time and effort to absorb local knowledge of the host-country government and population, including examining objectively what has succeeded and failed in the past; ensuring the presence and support of credible local government administrators; and improving the standards for assessing, monitoring, and evaluating stabilization activities, including the substantial amounts of funding appropriated for reconstruction and development.[10]

The SIGAR's strategic and operational lessons echoed Schadlow's concerns about the bifurcation of ends, ways, and means into civilian and military spheres, as well as the need to man, train, and equip an interagency workforce with expertise in stabilization best practices. The report's chapter on lessons learned summarized these challenges as a call to action for U.S. policy makers:

> In fact, the poor results of this particular stabilization mission make it tempting to conclude that stabilization should not be conducted in the future at all. However, in any area that has been cleared, the absence of reliable alternatives to stabilization means that rather than discourage the use of stabilization writ large, the best course of action may be to help the U.S. government (1) balance the importance of any given stabilization mission with a realistic understanding of the level of effort required and what is achievable and (2) improve its ability to prepare for, design, execute, monitor, and evaluate stabilization missions when it elects to undertake them.[11]

These lessons led to a flurry of efforts to improve the functionality of interagency unity of effort, with the State Department clearly in the lead. During the first Trump Administration, policymakers completed the 2018 *Stabilization Assistance Review* (SAR),[12] which introduced a joint, interagency division of labor, abbreviated as "3D," to indicate the alignment and synchronization of diplomacy, development, and defense capabilities. Congress codified the 3D concept with the *2019 Global Fragility Act* (GFA),[13] which mandated a subsequent, ten-year *U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability* (SPCPS),[14] which was completed in 2022 under the Biden Administration and piloted in several developing countries around the world.

Despite modest but consistent multi-year appropriations, a National Security Council-led coordination effort, the creation of a State Department-led interagency secretariat, and robust engagement with international partners, the opportunities to demonstrate this new approach in GFA countries failed to gain convincing traction.[15] Moreover, with USAID and the State Department's Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO) having wound down, the SAR and GFA appear to be policy orphans under the second Trump Administration.

From this perspective, the relative weakness of the State Department in the near term, along with the disappearance of USAID and others, presents the DoD(W) with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine stabilization as a fundamental aspect of warfighting, rather than an endeavor centered around diplomacy and development. Here, the America First foreign policy rhetoric runs up against the evidence of actual U.S. military engagements over the past 200 years. As Schadlow notes, stabilization operations have never been popular with the American public or its military, but they are a necessary consideration for warfighting:

> When civilian and military leaders debate the use of force, they must also determine whether the U.S. has the will, organizations, and resources to go from combat successes to achieving political outcomes. They should decide if this burden is too great and therefore decide against military action. This is an enduring problem with the American way of war and must be part of any calculus to use force.[16]

By this logic, tasking the DoD(W)—and specifically the U.S. Army, as the world's premier land power force—to lead U.S. stabilization efforts as an extension of its warfighting mandate would increase the likelihood of enduring political outcomes that favor U.S. interests. It would also transform these efforts from something the U.S. Army is compelled to do only as a last resort, into something for which it can proactively man, train, and equip itself, with sufficient appropriations and authorities to be negotiated in advance with its supporters in the administration and congressional armed services committees. This process of negotiation would allow policymakers to review whether Title 10 authorities align with the Army's likely responsibilities to manage

occupied rear areas during conflict—either uniquely or, more likely, in coordination with partners and allies—and transfer those responsibilities to civil authorities as the conflict terminates.

This recommendation aligns with one of the SIGAR's key lessons: "Most U.S. government capabilities and institutions necessary in a large-scale stabilization mission should be established and maintained between contingencies if they are to be effective when they matter most."[17] However, rather than broad, "large-scale" nation-building, the focus of an America First-aligned stabilization intervention would be much more limited and time-bound, for example, enabling sewage, water, electricity, schools, trash collection, medical facilities, safety, and other basic services to be provided on a short-term, emergency basis.

Clarifying the authorities and command structure—for example, in the annual National Defense Authorization Act—would facilitate the development and testing of concepts of operations across multiple scenarios using familiar Joint and Army planning methodologies, creating a repertoire of possible options for policymakers. Consistent with America First priorities, planning should focus initially on specific cases where post-conflict stabilization would conceivably be feasible, acceptable, and suitable in the foreseeable future, following a decisive victory, the capitulation or implosion of an adversary, and/or a negotiated peace settlement: for example, Taiwan, the Korean Peninsula, Ukraine, the Baltics, and possibly the Gaza Strip, if the pending peace deal holds. This critical planning step has proven to be an almost insurmountable challenge during the unity-of-effort era, given the limited personnel and resources civilian agencies have consistently been able to devote to joint planning, even in high-profile settings such as these.

Ironically, preparing for stabilization operations under DoD(W) unity of command may also represent a form of deterrence that would align directly with the America First commitment to avoid prolonged entanglements and nation-building. Just as ensuring the readiness of America's nuclear arsenal is the key to strategic deterrence, preparing U.S. forces to conduct stabilization as part of their warfighting mandate may prevent adversaries from exploiting the historical gap between battlefield victory and lasting peace on favorable terms. Schadlow refers to this lack of willingness to plan as the "American denial syndrome," highlighting how enemies exploited the *ad hoc* nature of post-conflict stabilization under the unity-of-effort paradigm.[18] Putting the military in charge of stabilization would signal a new, hard-power approach to this age-old problem. It could provoke creative policy innovations to address the challenges of peacemaking as a matter deriving from the conduct of warfighting and conflict termination.

The downstream impacts of this profound redefinition from 3D unity of effort to DoW-led unity of command would cascade through the DOTMLPF-P cycle in ways that favor civil affairs.

Policy

Starting with policy, a revised DoD(W) Directive on Stabilization, known in the policy community as "DoDD 3000.05" and last updated in 2018,[19] would supersede the concept of defense support to stabilization, which doctrine-writers and policy analysts have struggled to translate into concrete operations and tactics.[20] An updated policy centered on DoW-led unity of command would reassert the military necessity of operationally sound and properly resourced stabilization capabilities in order to translate battlefield successes into strategic gains. As a policy matter, it would realign stabilization to irregular warfare (IW) "activities during competition below armed conflict to create and exploit strategic advantages to win without fighting."[21] IW has recently benefited from a surge of policy interest, doctrinal reforms, and the creation of a dedicated Irregular Warfare Center in response to adversaries' gains in the gray zone.

In contrast, the DoD(W)'s stabilization policy and operations have focused narrowly on the SAR, GFA, and SPCPS planning and implementation.[22] Rather than augmenting the soft-power activities of other departments, the DoW would apply the "warrior ethos"[23] to stabilization, using those capabilities to drive a stake through the heart of insurgents' and other defeated enemies' ideologies and efforts to control the civil population. As a form of ideological or strategic lethality consistent with American values, stabilization would thus resume its place alongside offensive and defensive capabilities, without the shackles of unity-of-effort that traded bureaucratic deference for operational success in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Doctrine, Training, Education and Leadership

Doctrine, training, and education and leadership development would proceed from the revised stabilization policy, draw lessons from the past failures of the unity of effort approach, and incorporate the vast, recent changes to civilian foreign affairs and assistance agencies. Joint and Army doctrine urgently requires a rapid overhaul to account for the latter.

For example, as recently as June 2025, after USAID had already ceased operations, the Army Technical Publication on *Military Government Operations in Support of Transitional Governance* nevertheless included more than a dozen references to USAID as a key partner agency for the Army for humanitarian assistance,[24] development assistance,[25] stabilization, resiliency, and, if necessary, reconstruction efforts.[26] Within the State Department, the elimination of the Undersecretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, as well as CSO, removed much of the diplomatic capacity to lead and coordinate a unity-of-effort approach to stabilization.[27]

Replacing unity of effort with unity of command would diminish civilian agencies' cross-cutting control over stabilization, as well as correct for their lack of capacity and cultural disincentives to participate robustly in DoD(W)-led planning. These changes would allow stabilization

capabilities, which are fundamental to civil affairs' occupational repertoire, to be absorbed more easily and fully into traditional command-and-control (C2) structures. The goal would be to close the cognitive and operational gaps that have treated military governance and other civil affairs capabilities as distinct and separate from conventional warfare.

Here, the NATO resilience concept[28] is helpful in demonstrating how civil affairs could be reconceived as a joint function, as important to durable military success as C2, fires, movement and maneuver, intelligence, sustainment, and so on. Furthermore, the realignment of stabilization with IW would allow civil affairs to train and deploy on other related IW capabilities, such as information operations, security force assistance, or a proposed new focus on economic warfare,[29] during "down times" when stabilization deployments may not be active or imminent.

Organization

In terms of organization, geographic combatant commands (GCCs) have used joint interagency coordination groups (JIACGs) for whole-of-government coordination on competition, counternarcotics, and disaster assistance, but less frequently on stabilization. This distinction is a result of the DoD(W) 2018 stabilization policy, which prioritizes "defense support to stabilization" led by the State Department and implemented by other civilian agencies, chiefly the now-defunct USAID.[30] Shifting from unity of effort to DoD(W)-led unity of command for stabilization activities would create opportunities for joint, interagency planning on stabilization, with theater civil affairs planning teams (TCAPTs) in an ideal position in most GCCs to participate or even lead those groups.

One way to do so is to focus initially on adjacent lines of effort, for example, coordinating disaster response, which has become an urgent, unsolved problem with USAID's demise. Other complex interagency challenges, such as bolstering regional resilience against adversaries, integrating economic tools, or aligning irregular warfare capabilities with other elements of national power, may be more appropriate as starting points in each command. Whatever the starting point, participating TCAPTs could then potentially use new or existing JIACG structures to organize interagency collaboration for stabilization under DoD(W)'s aegis. As convenors of these coordination groups, civil affairs personnel would exercise a high degree of interagency leadership and influence that would be manifestly valuable to commanders.

Matériel

The effects on matériel—specifically funding for public administration, infrastructure, and community-led development projects—would be profound and powerful for the civil affairs community. Indeed, civil affairs representatives at the combatant commands have already begun conferring with the Defense Security Cooperation Agency and DoD(W) policy and legal advisors[31]

about the operational impacts of USAID's demise on the Overseas Humanitarian Disaster Assistance and Civic Aid (OHDACA)[32] authority, as well as the reduced capacity of the State Department to manage politico-military oversight and direction over security cooperation. With so many other constitutional checks and balances currently under reconsideration, the congressionally mandated submission of certain Title 10 authorities and appropriations to other agencies' bureaucratic and policy oversight could be streamlined with the help of sympathetic Office of Management and Budget and White House officials. Unshackling DoD(W)'s ability to assert leadership on humanitarian response operations by eliminating the need to run virtually every operation through an executive secretariat review process[33] would make responses more rapid and less bureaucratic. The same would be true for the stabilization elements of OHDACA.

Furthermore, if DoD(W) takes a leadership role in these areas, the department could negotiate a return of the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) authority and appropriations,[34] with adaptations that reflect key lessons from the Iraq and Afghanistan experience.[35] For example, over the past several years, the civil affairs community has taken strides to integrate assessment, monitoring, and evaluation (AM&E) best practices into its management of OHDACA and other security cooperation resources. The Department could propose that a portion of any newly authorized and appropriated CERP or expanded OHDACA resources be allocated to develop qualified personnel and institutionalize proper AM&E techniques equivalent to those of previous development and diplomatic practitioners, to ensure the money is spent properly. Naturally, civil affairs personnel would become the key workforce to administer, or at least provide expert advice on, the use of new-and-improved OHDACA and/or CERP authorities and funds, as well as how to measure their impact and report those findings back to DoW and civilian policymakers.

Personnel and Facilities

The impact of all these changes on civil affairs personnel, organization, and facilities would be profoundly positive. It is easy to contemplate the potential for abundance and renewal in the context of a policy-driven redefinition of civil affairs capabilities to align more intuitively the warrior ethos, affixed more confidently to commanders' intent under a unity of command structure, with fewer institutional hurdles, centered on a specialized set of occupational roles with clear return-on-investment and an intellectual requirement to improve impact measurement, combined with the potential for greater financial resources and authorities.

Conclusion

If the DoD(W) were to embrace stabilization as a core requirement aligned with strategic success—before, during, and after conflict—the redefinition of the civil affairs community would justify more billets, better facilities, and a broader range of services and components with civil affairs

capabilities, all united through their joint schoolhouse in a common culture with common tactics, techniques, and procedures.

These potential changes may seem unimaginable, unless one considers how profoundly the mandates of civilian foreign affairs and assistance agencies have been redefined since the 2024 Civil Affairs Symposium in Philadelphia. As of this writing, the strategic impact of the profound transformation of key interagency partners with whom civil affairs has worked so closely has yet to be felt, but the risks and opportunities are emerging. The next few years will either present a great opportunity for civil affairs to rise to the challenge or reveal a daunting chasm that civil affairs will scramble to help fill until some new arrangement emerges. The question for civil affairs is how the CA Corps can positively shape this environment, leading the way in securing the victory for the United States and its partners.

Mr. Ryan McCannell served on the board of directors of the Civil Affairs Association from 2019 to 2025. From 2022 to 2024, he served as development advisor to the Department of Defense, detailed to the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict in the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy. Previous assignments included: director of the USAID Center for Conflict and Violence Prevention; faculty instructor at the U.S. Army War College and senior advisor to its Peacekeeping & Stability Operations Institute; various positions in the USAID Bureau for Africa, shaping U.S. democracy promotion and conflict prevention programs; and program officer for African political development programs at the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs in Washington, D.C. For his outstanding lifetime contributions to the extended Civil Affairs Corps, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command inducted him as an Honorary Member of the Civil Affairs Regiment in 2025.

Endnotes

[1] President Donald Trump indicated his intent to refer to the Department of Defense (DoD) as the Department of War (DoW) by executive order, effective 5 September 2025, although the U.S. Congress has yet to approve it. Accordingly, the editors have decided to refer to it, in abbreviation, as the "DoD(W)" at the time publication.
[2] Brett Stephens, "The Trump Presidency Takes a Better Turn," New York Times, July 29, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/29/opinion/trump-president-policy-success.html.
[3] They may also risk violating the principles of the Geneva Conventions and related international humanitarian law as relates to occupation: International Committee of the Red Cross, "International Humanitarian Law on Occupation," https://www.icrc.org/en/law-and-policy/occupation.
[4] Scott Toland, Aaron Hedlund, and Steve Smith, "Establish an America First Foreign Policy," Chapter 28 in *America First Agenda: A Guide to the Issues*, America First Policy Institute, 2024. Available at https://agenda.americafirstpolicy.com/strengthen-leadership/establish-an-america-first-foreign-policy/
[5] Abby Stoddard, "A Decade of Compounding Crises," The Wilson Quarterly, Fall 2024, https://www.wilsonquarterly.com/quarterly/confronting-unprecedented-humanitarian-needs/a-decade-of-compounding-crises.
[6] Nolan D. McCaskill and Bo Erickson, "Trump Cancels $4.9 Billion in Foreign Aid, Escalating Spending Fight with Congress," Reuters, August 29, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/trump-cancels-49-billion-foreign-aid-escalating-spending-fight-with-congress-2025-08-29/.

[7] Nadia Schadlow, *War and the Art of Governance: Consolidating Combat Success into Political Victory*, Georgetown University Press, 2017, p. 6.
[8] *Ibid*., p. 274.
[9] Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), *Stabilization: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, May 2018, https://www.sigar.mil/Portals/147/Files/Reports/Lessons-Learned/SIGAR-18-48-LL.pdf.
[10] SIGAR, pp. 186-189.
[11] SIGAR, p. 185.
[12] U.S. Department of State, *Stabilization Assistance Review: A Framework for Maximizing the Effectiveness of U.S. Government Efforts To Stabilize Conflict-Affected Areas*, 2018, https://2021-2025.state.gov/reports/stabilization-assistance-review-a-framework-for-maximizing-the-effectiveness-of-u-s-government-efforts-to-stabilize-conflict-affected-areas-2018/.
[13] 116th Congress, *House Resolution 2116, Global Fragility Act*, https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2116/text. The GFA was enacted as part of the 2020 Consolidated Appropriations Act and signed into law by President Donald Trump on December 20, 2019.
[14] U.S. Department of State, *U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability, 2022,* https://2021-2025.state.gov/united-states-strategy-to-prevent-conflict-and-promote-stability/.
[15] Robbie Gramer and Eric Bazail-Eimil, "Can an ambitious foreign aid program survive Trump 2.0?", Politico, April 24, 2025, https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2025/04/24/foreign-aid-trump-00307842
[16] Schadlow, p. 12.
[17] SIGAR, p. 186.
[18] *Ibid., pp. 260-3.* Dr. Schadlow examines in depth the "American Denial Syndrome" and its effects on coalition efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan in this section.
[19] *DoD Directive 3000.05, Stabilization*, December 13, 2018, https://irp.fas.org/doddir/dod/d3000_05.pdf.
[20] See for example *Semi-Annual Lesson Report: Defense Support to Stabilization (DSS), Vols. 1 and 2* (Carlisle, PA: Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, July 2022), https://smallwarsjournal.com/2022/07/28/pksoi-semi-annual-lesson-reports-defense-support-stabilization-dss/.
[21] Robert Schafer, *et al.*, *Understanding Irregular Warfare*, Paper No. 25-897 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Center for Army Lessons Learned, July 2025), p. 1, https://www.army.mil/article/286976/understanding_irregular_warfare.
[22] Based on personal experience and interviews with subject-matter experts while the author was serving as a policy advisor in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict in the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (2022-2024).
[23] The Pentagon, "Secretary Hegseth's Message to the Force," January 25, 2025, https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4040940/secretary-hegseths-message-to-the-force/
[24] U.S. Army Technical Publication 3-57.40, *Military Government Operations in Support of Transitional Governance*, June 2025, p. 16.
[25] *Ibid*., p. 17.
[26] *Ibid*., p. 14.
[27] Michele Kelemen, "Marco Rubio announces overhaul of U.S. State Department," *National Public Radio*, April 24, 2025, https://www.npr.org/2025/04/22/nx-s1-5372587/marco-rubio-announces-overhaul-of-u-s-state-department/
[28] NATO Allied Command Transformation, *Resilience in NATO*, December 2023, https://www.act.nato.int/article/resilience-in-nato/. NATO's Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) Center of Excellence (CIMIC COE or CCOE) maintains a comprehensive online handbook on civil-military cooperation as a joint function, available at https://www.cimic-coe.org/handbook-entries/.
[29] Jahara Matisek and James Micciche, "DoD 3.0: Rebooting the Pentagon for the Next War," *Modern War Institute at West Point,* June 6, 2025, https://mwi.westpoint.edu/dod-3-0-rebooting-the-pentagon-for-the-next-war/.
[30] *DoD Directive 3000.05, Stabilization,* p. 4.
[31] Per an email exchange between the author with a colleague in the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Global Partnerships Policy, November 13, 2025.
[32] Defense Security Cooperation Agency, "Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid," *Security Assistance Management Manual*, Chapter C-12, https://samm.dsca.mil/chapter/chapter-12. Accessed September 1, 2025.
[33] U.S. Department of State, "About Us – Executive Secretariat," https://www.state.gov/about-us-executive-secretariat. Before USAID's dismantling, its Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance served as the lead federal agency

for international humanitarian disaster response, coordinating requests for assistance from the DoD and other federal agencies by means of formal communications issued through this State Department office. Remaining foreign assistance programs are now overseen by the Department of State, which is taking control of the humanitarian and development functions previously run by USAID.

[34] Susan B. Epstein and Liana W. Rosen, U.S. Security Assistance and Security Cooperation Programs: Overview of Funding Trends, U.S. Congressional Research Service, February 1, 2018, https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R45091.

[35] Specifically, the SIGAR noted: "Increased funding alone cannot compensate for stabilization's inherent challenges, and believing that it will can exacerbate those challenges." SIGAR *Stabilization: Lessons*, 2018, p. 187.

The Civil Affairs Redefined Image (CARI) Model and Artificial Intelligence

Marco A. Bongioanni

"There are known knowns…we also know there are unknown unknowns." - Donald Rumsfeld [1]

In civil affairs (CA), the complexity of understanding the civil component means there are many knowns and unknowns. In an era of great power competition focused on large-scale combat operations (LSCO), CA must redefine itself to meet current requirements while anticipating future imperatives. CA has struggled with establishing an effective narrative to define itself, perhaps because it deals exclusively with one of the most complex variables of any military campaign, the human dimension. Humans are messy, impulsive, and unpredictable. Traditional rigid linear civil-military and operations analysis models, even those specific to CA, such as ASCOPE (areas, structures, capabilities, organization, people, and events) and PMESII-PT (political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, and time), fail to provide CA the flexibility to provide a clear 'so what' analysis to enable senior leader decision making.[2]

Since CA is the force of choice with respect to the human dimension, we need to look to psychology for a suitable collective group model to illustrate where the gaps between the knowns and unknowns of the civil component exist. Enter the Johari Window, a model in psychology originally used to illustrate an individual's perception of himself or herself and others. This model can be modified into the Civil Affairs Redefined Image (CARI) to create a window to reimagine CA and improve its narrative to not only know itself better but also to inform senior leaders. First, the CARI model would help understand the areas that are blind, hidden, and unknown to practitioners of the human dimension. Next is to identify how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can close the gaps identified by the CARI model and present DOTMLPF-P recommendations for how CA can redefine itself and realize its full potential. Finally, a call to action is necessary for how this can be operationalized and recommendations for prioritization and implementation.

The Johari Window Reimagined as the Civil Affairs Redefined Image (CARI)

The Johari Window was created by psychologists Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham while they were researching group dynamics. It is often applied today in organizations to improve interpersonal dynamics. This model is based on two ideas: 1) Trust can be acquired by revealing information about yourself to others, and 2) You can also learn from feedback from others. The Johari Window represents either a person or an organization through four quadrants, or windowpanes (see Figure 1 below). Each of the four windowpanes signifies information, feelings, motivation, and whether that information is known or unknown to oneself (or one's organization) or others (or other's organizations) in four viewpoints.[3] Because the Johari Window can be easily modified to represent an organization, we will use its four-windowpane model to create CARI.

Let's understand how the CARI model works first by understanding its four quadrants.

Open Area (Quadrant 1)

This is the area that represents everything we know about CA and what others know about CA. CA practitioners and senior leaders are most comfortable in this area, as it generally comes out as behavior, knowledge, or skills. We see it, know it, and other military establishments engaged in the human dimension in the world do also. A notional example: CA remains an enabler and multiplier for both post-conflict stabilization and governance, and a non-lethal information force in the human dimension that wins without fighting. Others in joint, interagency, non-government organization (NGO), and coalition partners see this and know it also to be true.

Blind Area (Quadrant 2)

This is the area that represents things that CA is unaware of about itself, but that others in military establishments know. CA is blind to these things. This area can be dangerous to the future of CA and its ability to maintain relevance, especially if its practitioners are naive or in denial. To help CA see in the dark, its practitioners should ask, "When CA is in a blind spot, how does it see?" Asking well-informed framed questions and being open to feedback can be significant allies here.

A notional example is in how CA alone should manage the common operating picture (COP) of the civil component. This is what CA practitioners think about themselves, but then realize they lack certain resources, and only through collaborative knowledge management with joint, interagency, NGO, and coalition partners can they understand the civil component COP. CA practitioners become further aware of this by leveraging critical thinking skills, asking poignant questions, and being open to receiving constructive feedback. CA practitioners now have less of a blind spot and are further aware of how to listen more effectively.

Hidden Area (Quadrant 3)

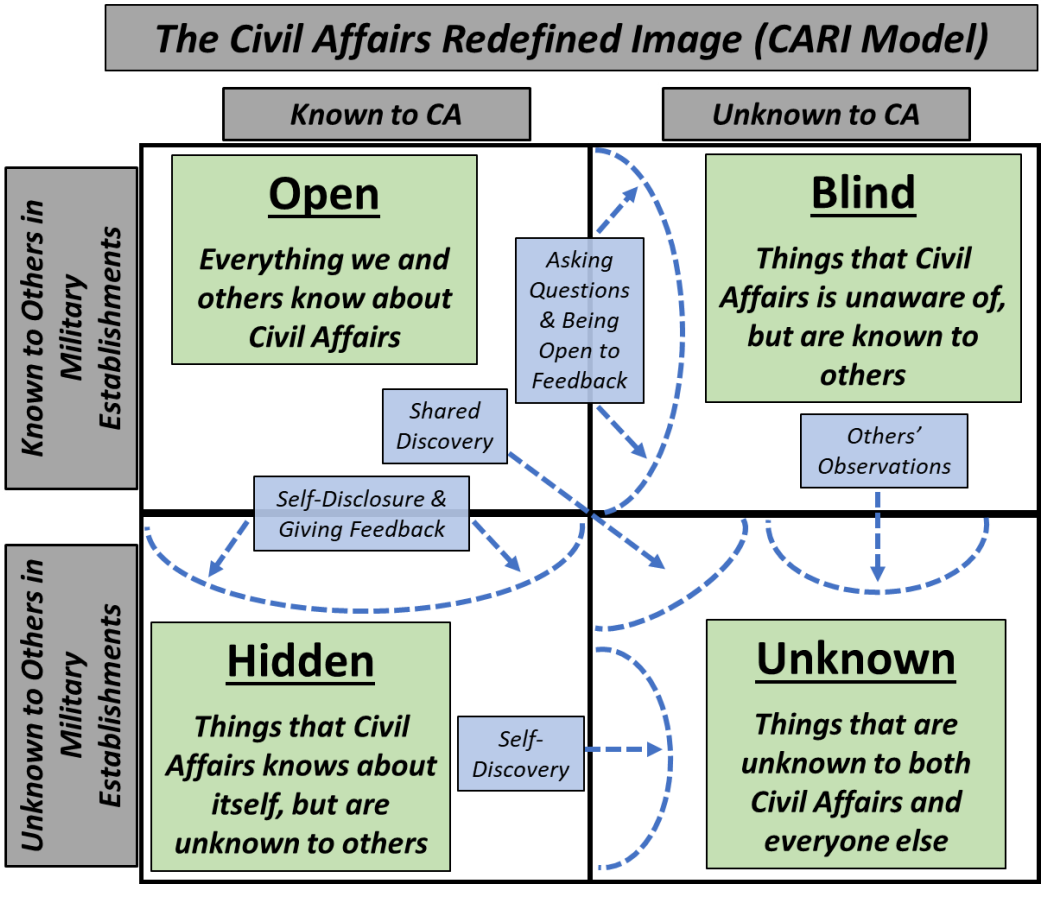
This is the area that represents things that CA knows about itself but keeps hidden from others. This includes unique civil information challenges in overclassification that prohibit partner collaboration. CA practitioners may also be reticent to share privileged civil information with interorganizational partners. As such, they may not be able or willing to paint a genuine picture of the civil environment, potentially avoiding or ignoring inconvenient truths.

A notional example: Some recent performance data and recommendations about the development projects for which CA has secured funding. While supported by military leadership and the Embassy Country Team, they do not seem to be achieving the desired impact. It takes courage and strength for CA practitioners to venture into the hidden area. As experts in their craft, they don't like to feel vulnerable. But they can build significant trust and interpersonal relationships in the hidden area when they self-disclose honest, tactful feedback to leaders or others in the military establishment about how the civil component will impact operations.

Unknown Area (Quadrant 4)

This area represents things beyond the awareness of CA and other military practitioners. This can be a vitally significant gap for CA in the lethal LSCO battlefield, especially if it is resistant to self-discovery. Venturing into this area can be fearsome at times, as humans do not naturally embrace the unknown. Repressed self-judgements and biases toward others, not only from our military experiences but also internalized from our developmental years and families of origin, can also negatively impact this area.

A notional example is in how CA always struggles to maintain its relevance especially with maneuver and operational commands. Despite its successes, commanders and senior leaders in the joint, interagency, NGO, and coalition communities are confused about its mission and often marginalize its practitioners. How does CA learn more about itself? Understanding where it has been, examining the current experience, and being open to further exploring where it is going can reveal things to CA in this unknown area. CA needs to embrace self-reflection and become more understanding of itself and accepting of other benchmark organizations that work in the human dimension space. CA practitioners should be certified experts not only in learning and improving their knowledge about their craft, but also in learning more about different perspectives and ideas.



[4] Figure 1. CARI model quadrants.

Application of the Civil Affairs Redefined Image (CARI)

The CARI Model is a tool to help experts in the human domain identify areas that are blind, hidden, and unknown. It illustrates that, to reimagine fully a redefined image of CA, its practitioners must: ask questions; be open to receiving feedback and others' observations; share discovery; be open to self-disclosure and giving constructive feedback to others; and, finally, embrace self-discovery. This would shrink CA's blind spots and hidden areas, while creating openings to discover and further reveal information in unknown areas. By doing this, CA creates more space for itself to demonstrate its ability to make a critical contribution to strategic and operational decision criteria and for civil component factors to be considered in senior political and military leader decision-making. Ultimately, when we embrace the CARI model, we can better shine a light on both the human dimension known knowns and unknown unknowns.

Limits of the CARI Model

The Johari Window was created to help diminish gaps between our self-perception and others' perception of us. Self-development and self-awareness are often closely linked in this context. However, the Johari Window perhaps places too high a value on the fact that, to increase our self-awareness, we need a certain degree of self-awareness to start with. For example, it would be challenging to understand ourselves accurately if we began with a skewed self-perception. Some have said that self-awareness is not the only tool critical to group and interpersonal dynamics. There are other social analysis and anthropological models that also suggest motivation and wiliness play a role in performance, things that are not taken into account with the Johari Window.[5]

Because a self-awareness gap exists in the Johari Window, these are also visible in the CARI model. As we discussed previously, the CARI Model is a tool to help CA practitioners in the human dimension identify areas that are blind, hidden, and unknown. However, it assumes, perhaps in a limited manner, that these same individuals have at least some baseline self-awareness to know the benefits of asking questions, receiving feedback, shared discovery, self-disclosure, constructive feedback, and self-discovery. Competition, needs, biases, personality, and emotions could all be seen as barriers to self-awareness amongst CA practitioners. What tools can build CA self-awareness to best mitigate the risk of using the CARI model with known limits?

Enter Artificial Intelligence (AI)

In July 2025, the White House published "Winning the Race: America's AI Action Plan." In it, three pillars are identified: innovation, infrastructure, and international diplomacy & security. To achieve these, the action plan highlighted the need to innovate faster and more comprehensively than our competitors in developing and distributing new AI technology. President Trump specifically stated, "Today, a new frontier of scientific discovery lies before us, defined by transformative technologies such as artificial intelligence… Breakthroughs in these fields have the potential to reshape the global balance of power… As our global competitors race to exploit these technologies, it is a national security imperative for the United States to achieve and maintain unquestioned and unchallenged global technological dominance."[6]

For some time, the Department of Defense (War), or DoD(W), has also recognized the importance of AI, and in particular, leveraging it to empower service members and civilians with the tools to innovate rapidly. The U.S. Army, under the Secretary of the Army and the Army Chief of Staff's Transformation in Contact (TiC) initiative, sees leveraging generative AI models as critical to having the right platforms for creatively solving problems.[7] Additionally, The Secretary of Defense (War) recently sent out a memorandum to all DoD(W) personnel announcing GenAI.mil, a secure AI platform for all military personnel, civilians, and contractors, directing that "AI should be in your battle rhythm every single day."[8]

The application of AI in CA has also been no stranger to the *Civil Affairs Issue Papers* and in Civil Affairs Association Symposium Reports. Since 2019, references to AI have appeared in every *Civil Affairs Issue Papers* volume, with significant works being done on the topic, including "The Digital Screenline: Economy of Force in Campaign Civil Reconnaissance," by MAJ Wayne Culbreath (Volume 10), and "Civil Affairs Operations in the Age of Artificial Intelligence," by MAJ Tony Smith (Volume 9). Additionally, during the 2023 Civil Affairs Conference, several senior CA leaders, including MG Kelly Dickerson and MG Isacc Johnson, noted the importance of improved integration between CA, psychological operations (PSYOP), and other information-related capabilities through human-machine learning and AI.

As mentioned, the CARI model identified the areas blind, hidden, and unknown to CA and its practitioners. However, the limits of the model, particularly in creating and building self-awareness, illustrate the need for AI tools to help fill in the gaps. This will allow CA to redefine itself to meet current requirements and future imperatives within the civil component. CA practitioners need AI tools to help ask the *right* questions, be open to *understanding* feedback from others' observations, *provide* shared discovery, be open to *identifying ways to provide* self-disclosure and constructive feedback to others, and *accept* and embrace self-discovery. AI has the potential to not only help us with these "known knowns" but also provide important self-awareness in the "unknown unknowns."

Let's now explore how CA can leverage the existing U.S. Army Enterprise Large Language Model (LLM) Workspace to fill these CARI gaps.

Ask Sage

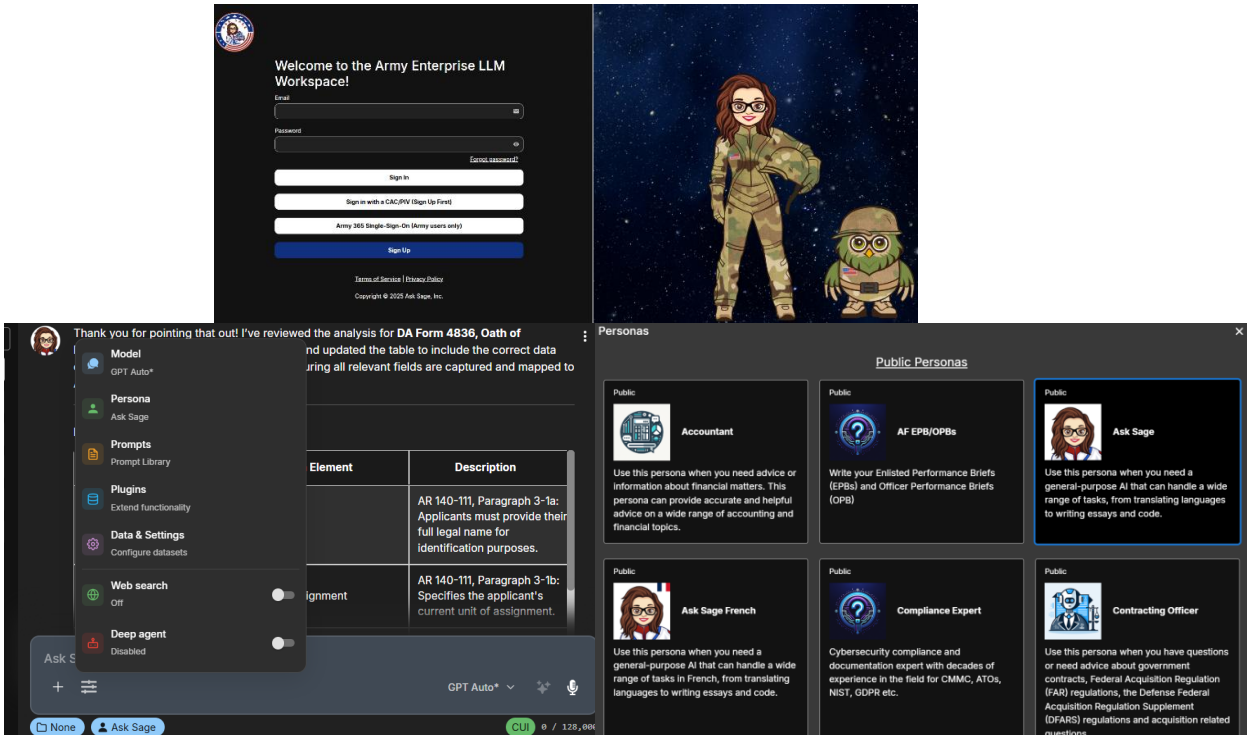
The newly launched U.S. Army Enterprise LLM Workspace is a generative AI platform that showcases how the U.S. Army is harnessing cutting-edge artificial intelligence to streamline communication, enhance operational efficiency, and drive innovation. Powered by Ask Sage IL5 Software-as-a-Service, it leverages Microsoft's Azure OpenAI—a suite of artificial intelligence services that allows users to apply OpenAI models to preexisting data.[9] It is also capable of applying ChatGPT and Google Gemini models within a CUI environment, which ensures compliance with security standards for sensitive information. Unlike other previously developed AI models, such as CAMOGPT, Ask Sage is now an Army program of record available for all users with a common access card (CAC) and an *army.mil* email address. It has a low barrier for entry with no complex software downloads needed, and there is a secure internet protocol router (SIPR) version to support higher classification networks. Centrally managed tokens control bandwidth at an enterprise level to reduce the risk of overexerting processing capability. Other military Services have also adopted Ask Sage as an AI/LLM tool.

Once creating an account, a CA practitioner using Ask Sage could:

- Create a Persona: Use a built-in persona such as "civil affairs operator," "S9/G9 planner," "civil-military advisor," or "civil component expert." Ensure your individual profile provides context for the type of information you desire and how you will use it.

- Prompt Engineering: Cold Start Prompts provide additional information about the project, intent, and end state. Use an iterative process, when possible, to generate desired product(s) rather than attempting a "big bang" approach.

- Set up a Workspace: There is a standard "ChatGPT" type environment capable of incorporating reference files. Workbooks, self-contained projects with reference files, and sharing are possible for collaboration. Ask Sage can reach external data, but is optimized to work as a single project.[10] (See the Ask Sage screenshots below in Figure 2.)



[11] Figure 2. Ask Sage screenshots.

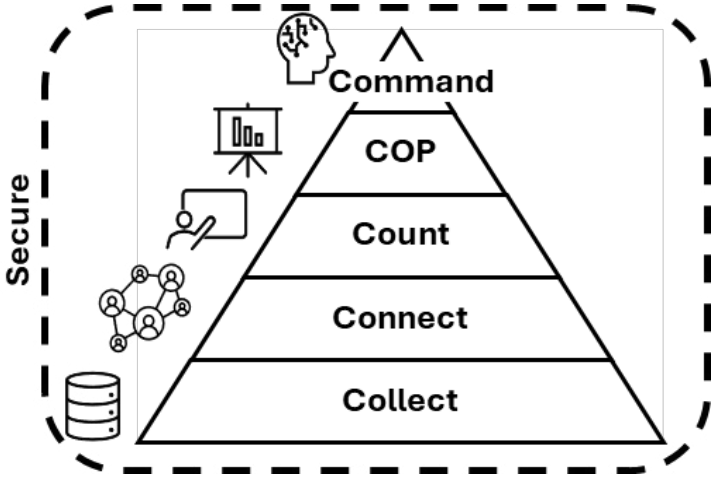
Recommendations for How the CARI Model & AI Can be Operationalized to Help Realize CA's Full Potential

Simply having access to an AI LLM like Ask Sage does not fully provide the CA practitioner with the tools needed to fill the self-awareness gaps identified in the CARI model. Practitioners must know how to use it. What follows are DOTMLPF-P recommendations, particularly for doctrine, training, leadership and education, and personnel.

Doctrine: Build Doctrine for how CA can leverage AI and LLMs

Currently, there is no mention of how civil affairs should leverage AI and LLMs in Army, USMC, or joint doctrine. The CARI model would view doctrine as a current CA *blind* area. Others recognize that AI could help CA redefine itself, but the CA force is not currently fully aware of it. All CA leaders need to have a basic understanding of data science. While joint and Service doctrine for using AI and LLMs is still emerging, there are some tools that are available to CA leaders now.

The Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) recently published the *Commander and Staff Guide to Data Literacy,* which provides an accessible introduction to data literacy tailored specifically for commanders and staff. It bridges the gap between technical expertise and operational needs, helping military leaders understand how to leverage data as a strategic asset. It equips them with the foundational knowledge required to collaborate effectively with analysts and make data-informed decisions with confidence.[12] CA doctrine should also consider how AI and LLMs can be leveraged in CA and how CA fits into the data science pyramid (see Figure 3 below).



[13] Figure 3. Data science pyramid.

Training, Leadership, and Education:

The CARI model would see training and education of CA practitioners in AI as an *unknown* area. Neither CA nor others in military establishments currently know how to accomplish this. The recent launch of the Army Artificial Intelligence Integration Center (AI2C) could provide a model for the training and education requirements that CA leaders of tomorrow will need. As part of the Transformation and Training Command (T2COM), AI2C leverages the AI Hub currently at Carnegie Mellon University to engage further with the robotics and AI communities. Additionally, AI2C oversees the Data Driven Leadership course at Carnegie Mellon University and the AI 101 course to upskill leaders and everyday AI users.

The Army Management Staff College and the U.S. Army Cyber Center of Excellence (ACCoE) both host data literacy courses for leaders. CA leaders should look to attend these courses for both professional development and when preparing for mission sets where they will be briefing leaders at an operational or strategic level. CA practitioners should also know how to access AI tools, such as Ask Sage, and maintain active accounts. Not all CA practitioners need to be data scientists, but they do need the critical skills to feel empowered to assess, analyze, and make decisions.[14]

Personnel:

CA needs to get in on the ground floor of new AI career capabilities being built into the joint force. The CARI model would put personnel in the hidden frame. CA knows well how to integrate and leverage unique skill sets into civil engagement, but others do not know how to integrate these capabilities. Examples can be seen with the integration of Military Government Officers (38G), medical, veterinary, engineering, or rule of law specialists into CA operations. Additionally, Army CA brought in military occupation specialty (MOS) 12Y (Geospatial Engineer) as a unique personnel capability that was leveraged in CA units to map the civil terrain. While effective, CA now needs personnel skilled in data mapping. Just as 12Ys were masters of mapping nodes and tribal affiliations during counterinsurgency operations, data engineers, data analysts, and data scientists are the masters of creating AI ontological models for how data sets relate to one another.

As noted earlier in the White House's "Winning the Race: America's AI Action Plan," in order for the U.S. to lead globally in AI, it needs to accelerate the adoption of AI in government. Historically, Soldiers in Functional Area 49, Operations Research and Systems Analysis (ORSA), were experts at applying quantitative analysis to support decision-making processes. But the building of an AI workforce cannot be done solely on legacy personnel force structure. The Army recently announced plans to establish a new enlisted MOS focused on artificial intelligence and machine learning, designated 49B.[15] In addition, the Army also turned heads when it recently commissioned four senior tech executives into the reserve component as part of Detachment 201 (Army Executive Innovation Corps) to "Work on targeted projects to help guide rapid and scalable tech solutions to complex problems."[16]

Finally, during the recent large multi-component Mojave Falcon Exercise at Fort Hunter Liggett, the U.S. Army Reserve attempted to integrate a small, handpicked operational data team to help accelerate senior leader decision making.[17] CA formations currently do not have organically assigned data engineers, data analysts, or data scientists. CA leaders and force management decision makers should examine whether the new AI career fields and data experts should be assigned directly to CA units or be task-organized as needed based on mission requirements.

Areas for Further Investigation and Risks

One of the major AI challenges is understanding how to engineer prompts so that they can return the desired product. Currently, there are no highly experienced experts in CA prompt engineering. There are also no gold standard datasets for complex interdependent civil systems. However, as CA practitioners begin to use AI and LLMs more frequently, text-to-text, text-to-image, or text-to-audio prompt engineering techniques should be captured to help others. Creating prompt engineer instruction guides tailored to CA practitioners should be further investigated to shed light on the blind, hidden, and unknown parts of the CARI model. Once created, these should be stored in a data analytics workspace, such as Vantage, all CA practitioners to access.

Further identification and stratification of risks associated with AI use within civil affairs operations need to be explored. AI models must be trained, which can be time-consuming and laborious; biases can cause data poisoning and hallucinations, particularly in an environment where data systems may be compromised. We must also still maintain our legacy analog mission analysis processes to mitigate overreliance on AI for CA practitioners.

Call to Action Operationalization and Conclusion

Our minds are frequently challenged in life to discover the unknowns. There are often things that are openly known to us, things that we are blind to, things that we hide from others, and things that are totally unknown to us. This can impact how we perceive or define something. AI is a potential tool that we can leverage to push the boundaries of these knowns and unknowns. However, we need to move with significant haste as our great power competition rivals position themselves to win in the LSCO environment by shaping conditions to win even before the fighting begins.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army already has its own "Information Support Force" responsible for developing and applying network information systems, protecting military information from cyber and electronic warfare, and integrating AI into military operations. This reflects China's emphasis on informatization and intelligentization in modern warfare.[18] Similarly, Vladimir Putin addressed the Russian Collegium of the Defense in December 2022, stating as one of his six main strategic points that Russia needed to "Improve the system of command and control to make operational control more resilient and increase the use of artificial intelligence." On the battlefield in Ukraine, Russia has been observed using various off-the-shelf AI tools, leveraging its society's intellectual power through civil-military partnerships.[19]

Pairing AI and LLM tools with the CARI model provides the ability to operationalize the human dimension and close the CA self-awareness gap by shedding light on the areas that are blind, hidden, or unknown. By enabling CA practitioners to ask the *right* questions, be open to *understanding* feedback received from the observations of others, *provide* shared discovery, be open to *identifying ways to provide* self-disclosure and constructive feedback to others, and to *embrace* self-discovery, we will truly be able to redefine CA to meet current requirements and best anticipate future imperatives.

Colonel Marco A. Bongioanni serves as a U.S. Army Reserve civil affairs officer and has held a variety of command and staff assignments. He is a graduate of the U.S. Army War College Department of Distance Education (DDE) Class of 2019 and, in his civilian career, is a New York State Licensed Mental Health Counselor who works for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. His professional interests include human behavior and applied psychology.

Endnotes

[1] Zak, D. (2021, July 1). "'Nothing ever ends': Sorting Through Rumsfeld's Knowns and Unknowns." The Washington Post. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/rumsfeld-dead-words-known-unknowns/2021/07/01/831175c2-d9df-11eb-bb9e-70fda8c37057_story.html.
[2] Pike, T. "Beyond PMESII: Advancing JIPOE for Integrated Campaigning." National Intelligence University, 03 October 2019. Retrieved from https://www.nsiteam.com/speaker-series-event/2019-10-03
[3] Dialectical Behavioral-Whole Person-Therapy Training Manual. The Wellness Effect Holistic Education Services. Version 1, January 2024, 16.
[4] Adapted from: "The Johari Window," Mind Tools, Retrieved from: https://www.mindtools.com/au7v71d/the-johari-window, February 26th, 2024.
[5] Pilat, D., & Krastev, S. *Johari Window*, Retrieved September 11th, 2025 from https://thedecisionlab.com/reference-guide/psychology/johari-window.
[6] Executive Office of the President of the United States, *Winning the Race: America's AI Action Plan*, The White House, July 2025.
[7] *Army launches Army Enterprise LLM Workspace, the revolutionary AI platform that wrote this article*. Retrieved September 11th, 2025 from https://www.army.mil/article/285537/army_launches_army_enterprise_llm_workspace_the_revolutionary_ai_platform_that_wrote_this_article.
[8] Hegseth, P., *Harness Artificial Intelligence Now with GenAI*, Memorandum for all Department of War Personnel, December 9th, 2025.
[9] Easley, M., *Army implements generative AI platform to cArmy cloud environment*. Retrieved September 11th, 2025 from https://defensescoop.com/2024/09/10/army-generative-ai-capability-carmy-cloud/.
[10] Weiss, P. & Bongioanni, M. "Leveraging AI & LLM Tools: USAREC Accessions Document Reduction Efforts," Presented at the USMEPCOM DADSIWG, 19 AUG 2025.
[11] Screenshots from ChatGPT. Retrieved September 11th, 2025 from https://chat.genai.army.mil/.
[12] Center for Army Lessons Learned, *Commander and Staff Guide to Data Literacy*, No. 25-10 (944), April 2025.
[13] Sayers, M. The Data Pyramid. Retrieved September 11th, 2025, https://www.rise8.us/videos/the-data-pyramid?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
[14] Data For Leaders (DLC), U.S. Army Cyber Center of Excellence (CCoE). Retrieved December 31st, 2025 from https://cybercoe.army.mil/Cyber-Center-of-Excellence/Schools/Signal-School/Signal-Courses/Functional-Courses/Data-for-Leaders/.
[15] Beynon, S. *Army Creating New Artificial Intelligence-Focused Occupational Specialty and Officer Field*, 02 July 2025, Military.com. Retrieved September 11th, 2025 from https://www.military.com/daily-news/2025/07/02/army-creating-new-artificial-intelligence-focused-occupational-specialty-and-officer-field.html.
[16] Myers, M. *The Army's not sure what its new 'Executive Innovation Corps' will actually do*. Defense One, 25 June 2025. Retrieved September 11th, 2025 from https://www.defenseone.com/technology/2025/06/armys-not-sure-what-its-new-executive-innovation-corps-will-actually-do/406325/
[17] Perkins, J. Lessons from the Army Reserve's First Operational Data Team, War on the Rocks, 18 July 2025. Retrieved September 11th, 2025 from https://warontherocks.com/2025/07/lessons-from-the-army-reserves-first-operational-data-team/.
[18] TRADOC G-2, *How China Fights in Large-Scale Combat Operations*, 30 APR 2025, 13.
[19] United States Army Europe and Africa. How Russia Fights A Compendium of Troika Observations on Russia's Special Military Operation, 1st Edition, March 2025, 161, 245.

Should the United States Adopt a CIMIC Model of Civil Affairs for Homeland Defense?

Robert Boudreau
Michael Aniton
Peter Schäfer

Introduction to the Problem

President Donald J. Trump's 2025 inauguration brought with it an intensified focus on defense of the U.S. homeland. In his first address to the Nation, he stated, "I have no higher responsibility than to defend our country from threats and invasions, and that is exactly what I am going to do."[1] Consistent with this stated objective, the White House issued a string of Executive Orders implementing various instruments of national power and focused on, among other things, protecting sovereign airspace;[2] improving cybersecurity;[3] strengthening defense industry mineral procurement;[4] strengthening the electric power grid;[5] imposing tariffs on international imports;[6] and directing the building of an "Iron Dome" for America.[7] The U.S. Secretary of Defense (also known as Secretary of War, as of 5 September 2025) subsequently issued a directive to his staff to draft the 2026 National Defense Strategy following President Trump's "imperatives to put America First and achieve Peace Through Strength."[8]

The Administration's policy shift reflects a concern that the Nation, which has had the luxury of fighting wars for over 160 years in places other than the continental United States, is poorly prepared to face the great-power threat challenges of the 21st Century. As defense capabilities are aligned with this national defense framework, a review of civil affairs doctrine shows that it falls well short of the new mission set: specifically, civil affairs support is geared toward supporting third-party nations and does not contemplate application in direct defense of the homeland. Whether as a result of design, delimitation, or disregard, civil affairs doctrine does not provide guidance for civil affairs forces to integrate with U.S. civil government and other institutions in the execution of a homeland defense mission.

In contrast, member nations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (other than the United States) follow a civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) doctrine that has been developed on the assumption that military forces will need to employ CIMIC personnel to support homeland defense plans and actions amongst the NATO allies.[9] There may be some explanation as to why the CIMIC model naturally diverged from U.S. civil affairs doctrine: for instance, on the heels of the Second World War and a Cold War, comparatively small NATO member states with correspondingly small armed forces have periodically faced existential threats from the east, and for these member states, a call to defend against a much larger adversary's attack requires a whole-of-nation response that synchronizes every part of the nation to meet this singular aim.

In contrast, the United States, a much larger nation that can afford the luxury of an enormous defense budget to support a massive standing army, has not needed to marshal all its industrial, political, and social resources to a self-defense mission since World War II. As a result, the development of U.S. civil affairs doctrine has largely been built on the experiences of conducting civil affairs in Japan, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and other foreign nations.

Despite these differences between the U.S. civil affairs and CIMIC models, the President has made clear that his primary objective is homeland defense. Accordingly, it is an appropriate time to reconsider U.S. doctrine and to determine whether there are gaps in civil affairs doctrine and capabilities that should be addressed to meet mission requirements.

Legal Impediments to Employing Domestic Civil Affairs Capabilities

This paper is not intended to be a primer on the legal framework for the President to declare martial law[10] within the United States. However, some background is helpful to provide context for the discussion of civil affairs limitations.

Martial Law

In times of national emergency, such as when a country is experiencing or facing imminent foreign enemy invasion, the commander-in-chief of a military force may order the military to assume the role of civil government and enforce the laws in the area under military control. The United States has no formal constitutional or statutory provisions defining martial law, or when it may be imposed. But by dint of custom,[11] it is generally believed that the President may order a state of martial law when the executive, legislative, or judicial branches "are unable to function because of war, insurrection, or other disaster."[12] While Congress has not enacted specific legislation defining "martial law," two statutes—the Insurrection Act[13] and the Posse Comitatus Act (PCA)[14]—establish bounds which should apply to situations in which martial law is declared.

Insurrection Act

During times of insurrection or rebellion, the Insurrection Act of 1807 grants the President authority to use the U.S. Armed Forces in three situations: first, upon the request of the state legislature or governor for assistance, when there is an insurrection in a state; second, to quell a rebellion which makes it impracticable to enforce federal law by the ordinary use of judicial proceedings; and third, to suppress in any state, any insurrection, domestic violence, unlawful combination or conspiracy, if it: (1) hinders execution of state and U.S. law protecting Constitutional rights and the state is unable, fails, or refuses to protect those rights; or (2) opposes or obstructs execution of U.S. law or justice.[15]

While none of these situations will necessarily follow an armed enemy invasion or attack, it does not take a stretch of the imagination to find many situations where, following an enemy attack on the homeland, the Insurrection Act would be implicated, and the President could employ the Armed Forces as a *de facto* execution of martial law under the auspices of the Insurrection Act.

Posse Comitatus Act

While the Insurrection Act provides for positive employment of the U.S. Armed Forces in domestic affairs, the Posse Comitatus Act (18 USC 1385), or PCA, presents a negative constraint by barring use of the Armed Forces as a *posse comitatus* or otherwise to execute the laws of the United States, except in cases and under circumstances expressly authorized by the Constitution or an Act of Congress. Enacted in 1878, the PCA was passed specifically to prevent the use of U.S. Soldiers in law enforcement roles.[16] However, the Act applies only to active-duty servicemembers in one of the military branches, to reservists in a drill status, and to National Guard[17] members serving in a Title 10 capacity; the law does not prevent state governors from employing their National Guard troops serving in a Title 32 capacity from executing law enforcement functions while under state control.

In sum, there are various situations in which the President may lawfully employ the military in a capacity that may be seen as the exercise of martial law. However, there has never been a U.S. national declaration of martial law that has been tested in practice, in Congress, or by the courts to establish the limits under which such a declaration may be made, or the bounds on the President's (or the military's delegated) authority to take particular actions under a declaration of martial law.

Historical Case Study: *Hurricane Andrew*

On rare occasions, civil affairs personnel have deployed in response to domestic emergencies. For example, in 1992, the U.S. Army Reserve's 361st Civil Affairs Brigade was mobilized to assist with disaster relief in the wake of *Hurricane Andrew*, along with a reserve civil affairs group attached to 4th Marine Division.[18] The operative instruction[19] contained little guidance on compliance with the PCA, except to limit law-enforcement activities in accordance with yet another reference.[20] At that time, the Department of Defense (DoD(W)) seemed primarily concerned with not employing military personnel "in a direct law enforcement role."[21] Thus, the PCA was not viewed as an impediment to this response effort, which was primarily focused on disaster relief rather than police action following a weather emergency under a whole-of-military rather than civil affairs-specific framework.[22]

During the *Andrew* response, the military provided humanitarian aid, including establishing life support centers, distributing food and water, providing medical care, and clearing debris. The DoD mission began with a tasking to the Second U.S. Army to appoint a Defense Coordinating Officer

(DCO) prior to the landfall of Hurricane Andrew. The DCO was appointed in accordance with the Second U.S. Army Military Assistance to Civil Authorities (MACA) plan and the Federal Response Plan. His advanced Emergency Response Team (ERT-A) deployed to the Florida State Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in Tallahassee, Florida, and began coordination with the FEMA-appointed Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) and his ERT-A teams, which represented the Emergency Support Functions (ESF) deployed to facilitate the Federal emergency response.

Response efforts faced coordination and communication challenges between federal, state, and local agencies. Among other challenges, damage assessments were uncoordinated, and there were difficulties in managing and sharing information about the status of relief efforts. After-action reviews determined that catastrophic disasters that had occurred in the U.S., like *Andrew* and *Hugo,* required greater military response and involvement than anticipated. They further recognized that DoD had the organization and ability to provide rapid, massive initial relief, but it did not then have the mission to do so. If DoD was expected to provide the initial response in a catastrophic disaster, then plans needed to reflect DoD's initial response requirements.

Current U.S. Civil Affairs Capabilities

Federal Troops

Both the U.S. Army and the U.S. Marine Corps have dedicated civil affairs forces.[23] Relevant to this discussion, much of their employment has been in what may generally be described as stability operations, that is, the phase of military operations in which the focus shifts to reestablishing civil governance and rebuilding institutions to restore public order. Historical examples range from running Japan's post-World War II transitional government under General Douglas MacArthur's leadership to reestablishing electoral, legislative, and judicial systems in Iraq after the toppling of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship.

Admittedly, it is hard to envision a situation in which U.S. military forces would be required to subsume all of the government functions of a particular area within U.S. territory. However, over the course of a large-scale emergency, the military could be called upon to support a broad range of state and local government functions, from simply coordinating with local authorities to providing government services. Nevertheless, there is no joint or Service doctrine that lays out the particulars for conducting civil affairs activities in the context of our domestic constitutional order.

National Guard

In Title 10 status, the Army National Guard generally follows the same military doctrine as its active-duty and reserve counterparts. However, while the Army and Marine Corps have substantial reserve civil affairs units, the National Guard does not man, train, and equip civil affairs specialists

akin to active-duty and reserve civil affairs personnel. As of the date of this paper, there are only approximately 70 officers and 30 enlisted personnel in the National Guard whom are in G/S-9 staff positions.[24] State governors often have explicit constitutional or legislative authority to declare martial law within their respective jurisdictions; thus, the National Guard may conduct civil affairs activities while under state control in a Title 32 capacity, but states have not developed civil affairs capabilities for their Guardsmen to the same extent as federal troops.[25]

A short-term measure to improve National Guard capabilities would be to open CA training opportunities for members as a secondary specialty, as the Marine Corps has traditionally done for its officers. This could create a substantially larger pool of personnel, in addition to the Army Reserve, available to conduct civil affairs activities. Further, given the nature of their organizational structure, civil affairs-trained Guardsmen would be ideally positioned to integrate with state and local authorities.

NATO CIMIC Capabilities

NATO member nations follow the Allied Joint Doctrine for Civil-Military Cooperation, which "provides commanders and their staff with the principles and guidance necessary to plan and conduct civil-military cooperation . . . in operations and activities throughout all NATO core tasks within the whole continuum of competition."[26] The NATO doctrine presents several topics and considerations that are not special CIMIC capabilities per se, but are related to CIMIC, and are summarized in the relevant part as follows:

- Resilience: the ability of an entity to continue to perform specified functions during and after an attack or an incident. It describes the system's spectrum of holistic prevention, preparedness, and readiness. In NATO, it encompasses military resilience and civil preparedness throughout peacetime, crisis, and conflict. CIMIC primarily focuses on resilience through civil preparedness and its potential impact on military activities and operations.

- Resilience through Civil Preparedness (RtCP): a critical enabler of deterrence and defense of the Euro-Atlantic area that focuses on three core functions: continuity of government, continuity of essential services to the population, and civil support to military operations. Employed correctly, RtCP should enhance military effectiveness by allowing member nations' territorial defense forces to focus on homeland security and rear-area tasks, thereby allowing NATO forces to focus on combat missions. CIMIC, acting as a gatekeeper for RtCP, facilitates the identification and analysis of potential impacts to NATO activities and operations.

- Civil Emergency Planning (CEP): focused on the protection of societies against the effects of emergencies (crisis, armed conflict, or peacetime emergencies), CEP is a national responsibility, and civil assets remain under national control at all times. The aim of CEP in NATO is to share

information on national planning activities to ensure the most effective use of civil resources during emergencies. NATO concentrates on those planning activities that cannot be executed at the national level. It enables NATO allies and partner nations to assist each other in preparing for, and dealing with, the consequences of crisis, disaster, or conflict.

- Human Security: the NATO alliance is committed to integrating United Nations human security principles into all of the alliance's core tasks. Promoting human security will increase stability and reduce the drivers of conflict, making human security a potentially key component of conflict resolution. The military contribution to human security includes: protecting civilians; combating trafficking in human beings; building integrity in operations; protecting children in armed conflict; protecting cultural property; and preventing conflict-related sexual violence. The NATO approach is people-centered, protection- and prevention-oriented, and respects local customs; functions consistent with international law; respects the humanitarian space; respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states; and engages with relevant actors. Consideration of the comprehensive safety and security of populations will be embedded across all stages and levels of NATO operations, missions, and activities.

- Cross-Cutting Topics (CCTs): commanders at all levels have the responsibility to operationalize and integrate the following CCTs in planning and execution of activities and operations: protection of civilians; children and armed conflict; cultural property protection; women, peace, and security; conflict related sexual violence; combating trafficking in human beings; sexual exploitation and abuse; and building integrity. CIMIC has an inherent responsibility to consider CCTs in contributing to the commander's decision-making process.

CIMIC doctrine applies several principles to promote unity of purpose amongst military forces engaging with non-military actors, including respecting the *sovereignty* of host nations; recognizing the *civil primacy* of non-military tasks; promoting *understanding* of non-military actors; maintaining a *clear distinction* between the role and function of military and non-military actors; *proactively interacting* with non-military actors; interacting based upon *mutual respect* for non-military actors; and *promoting cooperation* to achieve overall aims, objectives, and end states. CIMIC doctrine further describes the level of interaction between military and non-military actors, which can range from co-existence—the state of simply existing together at the same time and, in the same place, to integration, i.e., the process of operating together to attain a unified end state.

CIMIC principles should be applied from the tactical through the operational, strategic, and political levels, and across all operational domains and environments. Additionally, CIMIC capabilities may deploy as dedicated CIMIC units and liaison detachments, through staff elements and at the headquarters level; all other non-dedicated units may still carry out CIMIC-related capabilities that contribute to CIMIC activities.

CIMIC activities are conducted through two core functions: civil factor integration (CFI), which contributes to the comprehensive understanding of the operating environment through integration of the understanding of the civil factors into the decision-making process; and civil military interaction (CMI), which includes outreach and engagement, civil-military liaison, and consultation with non-military actors and stakeholders. CFI must be conducted through the dedicated NATO CIMIC Analysis and Assessment Capability within the J9 branch staff. CMI may be conducted by the commander's direct interaction with non-military actors, or at lower levels through the J9 branch staff and liaison teams.

Implicit in NATO CIMIC doctrine is the recognition that military authorities will conduct activities in direct coordination with domestic stakeholders, including territorial defense forces and host-nation government agencies and personnel. This establishes a whole-of-nation approach to defense, and CIMIC operates at the juncture between civil and military authorities to achieve defense objectives.

U.S. Department of Defense (War) Homeland Defense Policy

In October 2024, the DoD(W) issued Directive 5111.13, which "assigns the responsibilities and functions, relationships, and authorities of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Hemispheric Affairs"[27] (ASD(HD)). This directive lays out a substantial number of responsibilities for the ASD(HD), including developing and overseeing implementation of policy for homeland defense and defense support of civil authorities (DSCA); service as the lead for the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (USD(P)) defense critical infrastructure and broader infrastructure and security initiatives; leading USD(P) support to defense counterterrorism efforts; coordinating with stakeholders for Arctic security; developing international security strategy and policy for Western Hemisphere nations and international organizations; and across several of these and other areas, coordinating with federal, state, and local officials having related responsibilities and functions. However, this policy has been articulated only at the very top of the DoD(W), and implementing guidance to the Joint Force and the military branches has not been issued.

Years earlier, the DoD(W) issued Directive 3160.01,[28] which implements Title 32 provisions relating to National Guard homeland defense activities. This directive specifically provides for the DoD(W) to provide funding to state governors to employ their National Guard units to conduct homeland defense activities and lays out responsibilities and coordination requirements for the DoD(W), Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Combatant Commanders, the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, state governors, and others. The guidance does not provide more specific parameters for civil affairs or civil-military operations in support of homeland defense activities.

In short, the existing policy provides a framework for the DoD(W) to develop a CIMIC program that goes beyond current DSCA/emergency response management and instead establishes a firm

foothold in national defense. The following section borrows from the CIMIC model and provides recommendations for bolstering U.S. civil affairs capabilities to support the U.S. military's homeland defense mission.

Recommendations for Closing the U.S. Civil Affairs Gap[29]

Provide PCA Clarification

Some read the PCA broadly to basically preclude all U.S. military activity for domestic purposes, with extremely limited exceptions for DSCA and other small-scale mission sets. However, the PCA was specifically passed to prevent the military from being used as a law-enforcement arm of federal, state, and local governments. Defense of the homeland from enemy invasion or attack is not a law enforcement activity. If Congress is unwilling to pass legislation specifically clarifying this point, the DoD(W) and military departments should work through their offices of general counsel to develop homeland defense policy within a fair interpretation of the PCA. Compared to the NATO model, this would primarily support the *resilience* aspect of CIMIC.

Professionalize and Leverage Liaison Relationships

The active and reserve components of the military services provide liaisons to FEMA, both as regular staff and on an expanded basis during times of operational necessity. FEMA liaisons should be trained in civil affairs. While other military occupational specialty skills, such as logistics, intelligence, communications, and staff planning, are relevant to these liaison billets and should not be ignored or undervalued, civil affairs lies at the crux of this mission to support coordination among federal, state, local, and nongovernmental stakeholders. Further, liaison billets should expressly require coordination with National Guard and other state officials and departments. By strengthening liaison relationships, the military would achieve the CIMIC goals of *resilience* and *emergency preparedness*.

Develop Civil Affairs Structure for Homeland Defense

Four military commands—U.S. Northern Command, the North American Aerospace Defense Command, U.S. Pacific Command, and U.S. Southern Command—are all directly involved in the defense of the homeland.[30] Beginning with each of these commands, the military departments should staff and train civil affairs personnel to support planning for homeland defense activities. Likewise, the states' National Guard units should develop civil affairs capabilities beyond disaster management and include homeland defense as a civil affairs application. Once the civil affairs structure is established, U.S. civil affairs doctrine and practice will more closely resemble CIMIC *emergency preparedness* and *human security*.

Improve Current Civil Affairs Training for Homeland Defense Missions

The Army and Marine Corps civil affairs schools provide excellent training in conducting civil affairs operations in support of overseas missions, but the programs draw largely on the experiences of World War II, Vietnam, and the Global War on Terror, which have broad applicability to other situations, including homeland defense, but miss significant nuances. For example, the military developed significant experience in these conflicts with developing provisional governments; however, there is no doctrine that describes how the U.S. military should integrate with domestic civil authorities within the bounds of our existing constitutional order.

Likewise, there is no guidance for how the military would coordinate or take on other civil governmental functions; for example, if the military took responsibility for criminal justice activities, would those responsibilities include establishing courts, or simply coordinating with local judicial actors? While there are endless possible examples, not every one of them needs to be specifically addressed; but policy should make clear who would have decision-making authority over various situations, sufficient to guide military commanders in carrying out their homeland defense responsibilities.

In addition, training should encompass a whole-of-government approach that includes not just military actors, but also federal, state, and local officials as well as non-governmental organizations. The first time that civil authorities hear from their military partners should not be in the throes of conflict. Realistic training through tabletop exercises and other means should be pursued to improve homeland defense capabilities. Improved training will lead to better *emergency preparedness*, as laid out in CIMIC doctrine.

Learn from Recent CIMIC Examples

A recent report on Ukraine's CIMIC program highlights some of the hurdles for a nation learning to adopt CIMIC and conduct civil-military activities in defense of the homeland.[31] Ukraine's path to adopting CIMIC formally began in 2014, when cooperation between military and civilian institutions became a distinct operational capability within the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU); in 2018, CIMIC's legal status was established as an element of the AFU; in 2020, the AFU's general staff transitioned to the NATO military structure; and increasingly over this period, NATO supported Ukraine in some of these CIMIC capability development efforts.[32]

Critically, the report pointed out that "[a]lthough NATO member states have significant experience implementing CIMIC activities in peacekeeping, counterterrorism, and stabilization contexts, the war in Ukraine matches none of these paradigms."[33] If the United States faced a large-scale attack or invasion by a great power competitor, it would confront some of the same challenges as those experienced by Ukraine. Of particular note, the report discussed the following:[34]

- Ukraine has not passed legislation defining a role for CIMIC; as a result, military directives and policy only apply with legislative force to the military services and not to impacted civilians. The report notes that formally recognizing the CIMIC role would increase public awareness of CIMIC and its purpose. Similarly, the U.S. public does not have general awareness of civil-military activities, so any coordination efforts in a large-scale war will have to overcome significant friction points.

- CIMIC staff and units should be right-sized for the operational and tactical situation. Some staff were obliged to perform only a few mandated functions; however, others were task-saturated with coordinating with various local stakeholders and managing civilian evacuations in their areas of responsibility, all while lacking appropriate logistical and transportation support. Because the U.S. has not conducted regular training or developed civil affairs doctrine for homeland defense, it will face a steep learning curve to determine appropriate staffing levels in an attack scenario.

- Ukraine did not have sufficient numbers of trained CIMIC personnel. So during the conflict, many un- or under-trained personnel were assigned to CIMIC units, which then led to incorrect or uninformed decision-making. Dedicated civil affairs personnel should receive appropriate peacetime training to be prepared to support homeland defense. In the United States, the National Guard offers a large pool of potential candidates to be trained in civil-military operations for homeland defense.

- Prior to the conflict, Ukraine had many registered civilian protection facilities, but it was later found that many were inadequate or inaccessible. Civil affairs personnel can be employed in peacetime to catalog and verify available civilian protection facilities and other relevant infrastructure, should the need for use later arise. The United States, in coordination with interagency, state, and nongovernmental partners, should be similarly prepared to assess civil capabilities before the start of hostilities.

Conclusion

The United States wields a powerful, well-trained, and well-equipped military ready to respond at a moment's notice to crises throughout the globe. National defense policy is now being redirected to require that the military pay equal, if not more, attention to the defense of the homeland. However, this most basic function of a military—defense of the homeland—appears to have fallen short in a critical aspect: consideration for U.S. civilians. While the Army and Marine Corps have professionally trained civil affairs personnel, their training is primarily focused on application in foreign wars, not on domestic defense of the homeland. By adopting features of the CIMIC model and improving U.S. civil affairs doctrine, the Joint Force can close the gap and better prepare civil affairs forces to operate effectively in defense of the United States within its territorial borders.

Lieutenant Colonel Robert Boudreau, USMCR, is a judge advocate and civil affairs officer. He is currently assigned to a billet as a reserve military judge and is a student in the U.S. Army War College's Master of Strategic Studies program. In his civilian career, he works as an Enforcement Attorney for the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission in Fort Worth, TX.

Lieutenant Colonel Michael Aniton, USMCR, is a judge advocate and a civil affairs officer. He has served as a team leader and detachment commander in his civil affairs capacity, which included mobilizations to Norway and Ghana. In his civilian career, he serves as Deputy General Counsel for the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

Lieutenant Colonel (Bundeswehr General Staff) Peter Schäfer currently serves in The Hague with the CIMIC Centre of Excellence (CCoE) as the Branch Chief – Concepts, Interoperability, Capabilities (CIC). He began his career with the Bundeswehr Military Police and Officer Training. Over the years, he has held various leadership roles, including Platoon Leader, Course Director, and Company Commander. His service has taken him through numerous assignments, including deployments in Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Afghanistan. Since 2021, he has been a lecturer at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College in Hamburg.

Endnotes

[1] President Donald J. Trump, *The Inaugural Address*, January 20, 2025. https://www.whitehouse.gov/remarks/2025/01/the-inaugural-address/.

[2] The White House, Executive Order "Restoring American Airspace Sovereignty" (June 6, 2025). https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/06/restoring-american-airspace-sovereignty/.

[3] The White House, Executive Order "Sustaining Select Efforts to Strengthen the Nation's Cybersecurity and Amending Executive Order 13694 and Executive Order 14144" (June 6, 2025). https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/06/sustaining-select-efforts-to-strengthen-the-nations-cybersecurity-and-amending-executive-order-13694-and-executive-order-14144/.

[4] The White House, Executive Order "Ensuring National Security and Economic Resilience through Section 232 Actions on Processed Critical Minerals and Derivative Products" (April 15, 2025). https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/ensuring-national-security-and-economic-resilience-through-section-232-actions-on-processed-critical-minerals-and-derivative-products/.

[5] The White House, Executive Order "Strengthening the Reliability and Security of the United States Electrical Grid" (April 8, 2025). https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/strengthening-the-reliability-and-security-of-the-united-states-electric-grid/.

[6] The White House, Executive Order "Regulating Imports with a Reciprocal Tariff to Rectify Trade Practices that Contribute to Large and Persistent Annual United States Goods Trade Deficits" (April 2, 2025). https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/regulating-imports-with-a-reciprocal-tariff-to-rectify-trade-practices-that-contribute-to-large-and-persistent-annual-united-states-goods-trade-deficits/.

[7] The White House, Executive Order "The Iron Dome for America" (Jan. 27, 2025). https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/03/2025-02182/the-iron-dome-for-america.

[8] U.S. Department of Defense Memorandum, "National Defense Strategy" (May 1, 2025). https://media.defense.gov/2025/May/02/2003703230/-1/-1/1/MEMORANDUM-DIRECTING-THE-DEVELOPMENT-OF-THE-2025-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF.

[9] For a more general discussion of the differences between U.S. civil affairs and CIMIC doctrine, see LTC Stefan Muehlich & Dr. Nicholas Krohley, "NATO CIMIC & US Civil Affairs - Doctrinal Review & Comparative Assessment" (CIMIC Center of Excellence, June 2022).
[10] For simplicity's sake, this paper will use the phrase "martial law" generally to refer to instances where the President orders military control of any functions of civil government.
[11] George M. Dennison, "Martial Law: The Development of a Theory of Emergency Powers, 1776-1861," pp. 52-79, Vol. 18, No. 1. *The American Journal of Legal History* (Oxford University Press, January 1974).
[12] *Mudd v. Caldera*, 26 F. Supp. 2d 113, 121 (D.D.C. 1998). For a discussion of when the President may declare martial law in wartime, see Eric Merriam's article "Necessary Necessity: Courts' Historical Assessment of the Condition Precedent for Martial Law," pp. 191-257, Vol 18, *Oklahoma Law Review* (University of Oklahoma College of Law, Winter 2003).
[13] 10 U.S.C. §§ 251-255.
[14] 18 U.S.C. § 1385.
[15] The Judge Advocate General's Legal Center and School, *Operational Law Handbook* (U.S. Army, Charlottesville, VA, 2024), p. 275.
[16] Ibid, pp. 269-270.
[17] The term "National Guard" will be used generally to describe all state-controlled militia, both organized and unorganized.
[18] U.S. Department of Defense, Forces Command. Joint Task Force Andrew Hurricane Response After Action Report, Vol 1. (1992), pp. 20-21. https://www.hsdl.org/c/view?docid=765920. The case study facts are drawn from this reference.
[19] U.S. Department of Defense Directive 3025.1, Military Support to Civil Authorities (January 15, 1993). At the time, this directive was in draft form, but was relied upon by the Joint Task Force Andrew staff, p. 2. Retrieved through a search of https://www.dtic.mil/home (CAC-enabled). See ibid p. 2.
[20] U.S. Department of Defense Directive 3025.12, Employment of Military Resources in the Event of Civil Disturbances (August 19, 1971). https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0019/4520439.pdf
[21] Ibid, p. 14.
[22] Jennifer K. Elsea, "The Posse Comitatus Act and Related Matters: The Use of the Military to Execute Civilian Law" (Congressional Research Service, November 6, 2018), pp. 55-56. https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/R/PDF/R42659/R42659.8.pdf. "While inquiries may surface in other contexts such as the use of the Armed Forces to fight forest fires or to provide assistance in the case of other natural disasters, questions arise most often when the Armed Forces assist civilian police." (citation omitted).
[23] The U.S. Navy once had civil affairs personnel as well, though that function was relinquished in 2014. Diana X. Moga and Robert Boudreau, "Joint Information Fusion and Synergy" in *Warrior Diplomats: Civil Affairs Forces on the Front Lines*, ed. Arnel P. David, et al. (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2023), p. 197.
[24] Dennis J. Cahill, "CATR Post #10: What is the Birthday of Civil Affairs?" August 7, 2025. https://www.civilaffairs-teamroom.com/2025/08/07/catr-post-10-what-is-the-birthday-of-civil-affairs/.
[25] By way of analogy, certain states, such as Texas, have trained civil affairs units within their respective state guards, and their primary function is to support the state in disaster response by following the Federal Emergency Management Agency ("FEMA") Incident Command Structure to assist local agencies. Texas Military Department Self-Evaluation Report (2017), pp. 43, 46. https://www.sunset.texas.gov/public/uploads/files/reports/Texas%20Military%20Department%20Self-Evaluation%20Report.pdf.
[26] NATO Standard Allied Joint Doctrine for Civil-Military Cooperation, AJP-3.19 Ed. B, V. 1 (NATO Standardization Office, June 2025), p. xv.
[27] U.S. Department of Defense Directive 5111.13, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Hemispheric Affairs (Ch. 1 effective June 25, 2025).
[28] U.S. Department of Defense Directive 3160.01, Homeland Defense Activities Conducted by the National Guard (Ch. 2 effective June 6, 2017).

[29] Ironically, some two decades ago, author Dennis J. Cahill (Colonel, U.S. Army ret.) presented similar arguments for enabling civil affairs capabilities to support domestic support operations in the wake of the "mid-1990s…threats to America's homeland from natural disasters and terrorist incidents." His points remain useful and applicable to the Nation's current defense posture. Dennis J. Cahill, "Is There a Role for CA in Domestic Support Operations?" *Special Warfare*, Vol 14, No. 1, pp.32-38 (U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, Winter 2001), https://d34w7g4gy10iej.cloudfront.net/pubs/pdf_8223.pdf.

[30] U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Global Security "FAQ" webpage, https://www.war.gov/About/Combatant-Commands/.

[31] Center for Civilians in Conflict, "The Role of Civil-Military Operations in Protecting Civilians: The Ukraine Experience" (October 2023). https://civiliansinconflict.org/publications/research/the-role-of-civil-military-cooperation-in-protection-of-civilians-the-ukraine-experience/.

[32] Ibid, pp. 1, 24-26.

[33] Ibid, p. 1.

[34] Ibid, p. 1, 19, 20.