2021 Civil Affairs Symposium
Call for Civil Affairs Issue Papers

“Building a Global Civil-Military Network”

Last year’s discussion revealed an opportunity for the Civil Affairs Corps to shape its future by helping the Army and joint force shape theirs. With the U.S. “poorly postured for competition” and the Army “not able to compete aggressively left of bang,” Roundtable keynote speaker Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Eric J. Wesley urged CA and its partners to help the Army “understand what competition truly is and show the available tools and how CA participates in competition.” As a diverse and people-centric force for influence, collaboration, and competition in Multi-Domain and Joint All-Domain Operations and information and irregular warfare, CA is an ideal force to demonstrate U.S. involvement and interest to contest adversarial powers and actors. Symposium keynote Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Charles Hooper noted how “warrior-diplomats” uniquely “strengthen alliances and attract new partners.” An “inside force” in the human geography, civil affairs enables direct, indirect, and narrative competition in interagency-led “influence warfare,” promote good governance to reduce civil vulnerabilities, engage informal as well as formal power structures, and promote women in peace and security. As Military Strategy in the 21st Century: People, Connectivity, and Competition put it: “In the twenty-first century, strategic advantage will emerge from how we engage with and understand people and access political, economic, and social networks to achieve a position of relative advantage.” Such interactions “represent a web of networks that define power and interests in a connected world.” And those who best understand local context and “build a network around relationships harnessing local capacity” will win twenty-first-century competition. These networks, however, must be cultivated institutionally in order to be optimized operationally – and CA commands, related institutions, and partners should start building them up now.

In affirmation of American leadership, CA can engender a collaborative, global civil-military network – starting with CA itself – that leverages the comparative advantages of all partners to generate outcomes none produce alone, as an issue paper recently advised. Nonstop “forward-deployed engagement” (as the British Land Warfare Center briefed) entailing better collaboration with country teams, Security Force Assistance Brigades, National Guard state partners, Foreign Area Officers, NATO and UN CIMIC, the Peace Corps, commercial enterprises, peacebuilders and humanitarians, women’s groups, etc., defrays CA’s handicap as the “visiting team” to secure access and influence. “The challenge is not attracting new partners, it is about retaining partners,” Hooper said. Relations with them “must be persistent, not episodic,” to build the strategic, operational, and human capital necessary for competition even more than conflict. “We’re not building nations anymore,” he concluded. “We’re building networks.”

As a green force that operates in gray zones, how should civil affairs (and the Army) understand “competition?” How would a global civil-military network be a geostrategic game-changer in the struggle with authoritarian powers for global dominance? What should it look like and be its collaborative frameworks, tools, and civil knowledge, convening, and information-sharing architectures – institutionally as well as operationally? How can CA leverage technology, such as artificial intelligence and machine-learning or other automated systems and methods? What other changes in Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership & Education, Personnel, Facilities, and Policy should take place, within and beyond current capacities? How should they be implemented and prioritized?

To address these questions, the Civil Affairs Association and its partners invite civil-military professionals to send original issue papers written in accordance with the Civil Affairs Issue Paper Guidelines. In addition to other references, authors should consider past Issue Papers and reports, OneCA Podcasts, articles in the Eunomia Journal, or documents in the Research Library. The top five papers will appear in the 2021-22 Civil Affairs Issue Papers and authors will present them virtually at the CA Symposium this fall. The top three, as determined by Symposium participant vote, will receive cash awards of: 1st prize, $1,000; 2nd prize, $500; and 3rd prize, $250. Selection is based on: quality of response to the call for papers; relevance and originality; discussion clarity and sourcing of argument; and strategic impact and feasibility of recommendations. Papers prepared jointly by civilian and military professionals across disciplines are most welcome. The submission deadline is Friday, 3 September 2021. Send papers and inquiries to papers@civilaffairsassoc.org.