

Military Humanitarianism in Afghanistan

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The civil-military operations in Afghanistan have been continuing for over a decade. The progress has been turbulent. Civil-military cooperation is evolving with the blurring gaining momentum in recent years. The lines between humanitarian and military operations are merging in unrealistic ways under the guise of civil-military cooperation.

Civil military operations and humanitarian assistance are crucially different in that civil-military resources are solely targeted to the success of the military mission. Humanitarian aid resources are spent where they are most needed by the population under the principles of H-I-N. (Humanity, Impartiality and Neutrality). Civil-military cooperate operates on the premise that the forces take sides. Yet linkages between purely humanitarian aid and civil-military operations in complex conflicts are overlapping. Military operations are financed from national public funding; whereas humanitarian aid is often donor sponsored although much developmental humanitarian aid is provided by national governments for project oriented goals. There are many NGOs and IGOs in Afghanistan developing the nation with health, education, justice and governance structures, infrastructure and transportation. Kabul and Kandahur are both fairly modern cities with people working in high rise buildings in secure environments.

The perennial challenges for civil-military operations in Afghanistan are to understand the human and cultural aspects of the nation and to develop a satisfactory 'end state'. The ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) initially focused on short-term clearing operations and raids on specific targets of insurgency.

The strategic changes arising from the Mc Chrystal Review in 2008 have bought the military into operations that are often seen as humanitarian aid operations.

Under the tactical COIN (counterinsurgency) environment the emphasis changed from chasing and confronting insurgencies to a population protection posture. Counter insurgency typically has a four stage approach of shape, clear, hold and build. Military strategic planning occurs in the 'shape' phase; the 'clear' phase removes the insurgents; the 'hold' phase includes both the maintenance of security and assistance with the 'build' phase. It is in this latter stage that the blurring of humanitarian aid and military tasks blur. The 'build' stage includes creating or re-establishing the basic services, local law and order, mentoring of indigenous people to enable the transfer of the ISAF back to the host nation.

Further in countries of conflict, some areas are still in conflict whilst others are in the reconstruction and rebuilding phases as the military conflict passes through its phases of shape, clear and secure, hold, sustain and develop. An example of this in Afghanistan is the more peaceful and settled provinces in the north which are experiencing many IGOs and NGOs providing much humanitarian aid. The stages of COIN are fluid and dynamic. The states of peace are very changeable. Sometimes the overlap between phases is not sequential but ongoing

between securing and maintaining security during the rebuilding and development phases. The unpredictability of resurgence of militia requires continual military presence to hold the peace to enable the rebuilding and development phases to be maintained. Within three weeks of the NATO forces entering Afghanistan, the civil-military command were instigating parts of the development phase with the host nation and at the same time in a state of war with the Taliban Al-Qaeda forces.

In 2010 the NATO forces under Operation MOSHTARAK took Marjah from the Taliban and began a systematic clearance of the Helmand province. The Helmand district is now supported by the ISAF which provides tactical expertise, resources and mentoring to GIRoA (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan) staff. Quick impact projects such as fixing schools and drilling wells have cost approximately \$1 million of military funding in this province.

Theoretically the dynamics of the practicalities of the Afghanistan experience has not been helpful. Many theoretical models have been developed to encapsulate the humanitarian phases and their management. The theoretical model behind the COIN operations does not encapsulate the transitioning between the phases well. Both civil-military and humanitarian operations rely heavily on logistical support. The theoretical logistical models tend to have phases sequential in nature. The rapidity of transitioning between phases is also not theoretically covered. So it seems fair to say that at present the theory is helpful in some modeling but not in the sense and respond and timeliness of responses.

How long will this military involvement continue? How long can the US and the other NATO forces afford to be involved? We are living in a world experiencing an escalation of conflict and complex emergencies. Often these complex conflict situations have no strategic end state. The US forces are now talking about withdrawing from Afghanistan by 2014. Will it leave Afghanistan with a united rule, a separation of the northern states and the Taliban majority states; or continual conflict and a collapse of law and order again?

In a more general quest, will civil military operations become even more blurred as escalating complex emergencies demand more complex involvement?

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