

A Suggestion Regarding Civil-Military Relations in Peace Support Operations

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The Editor of these proceedings asked me for comments on the topic of civil-military relations in peace support operations following the Cornwallis IV meeting. Since these comments are also pertinent to the activities of the Cornwallis V meeting, they are included here. I am always pleased to be asked my informed opinion on interesting and important topics. In this case, however, I feel singularly inept at responding. The context in which civil-military relations are placed is that of peace support operations.

I have only academic knowledge and vicarious experience to bring to bear on the topic. My personal experience with civil-military relations derive from quite different contexts: long term association as a civilian operations analyst in Department of the Army headquarters organizations and short term associations (one two-year tour and one three to four month tour) with field forces, out of a 50-year career in research and operations analysis.

The earliest of the short term connections was an attachment to the last of the true field armies maintained by the US in peacetime: the US Seventh Army, headquartered at Stuttgart-Vaihingen, Germany. That army consisted of five US divisions (two armored and three infantry) and two armored cavalry regiments, apportioned in two corps, with a third (German) corps attached. My work during that tour consisted of operations analytic projects identified by the division, regiment and corps commanders and staffs as important to their well-being and effectiveness. The other short term association was as senior civilian analyst with a large Army study in Vietnam during the war; the project was an analysis of armored operations, tactics and concepts in fighting Viet Cong and North Vietnam Army elements. In all those associations, my experiences were confined to carrying out analyses for and reporting to higher ranked military leaders.

The academic knowledge and vicarious experiences are related more directly to the present topic, that of relations between autonomous civilian organizations and military units in the field during peace support operations. That knowledge and those experiences, flavored slightly by my real contacts with warriors, lead me to rather simple thoughts. First, and

perhaps most radical, is the notion that peace support operations have become a sellers' market. By that I mean that since the establishment of the United Nations, international interventions, by whatever name, have become very complicated and replete with multi-institutional participation. Prior to World War II, interventions, whether for relief and assistance or restoration of governmental stability or punitive action, were conducted by military forces with very limited (often no) civilian participation.

The International Red Cross (and, perhaps, Red Crescent) were involved in some relief operations; sometimes a church-affiliated organization participated. But that was the rare extent of civilian agency involvement. Since the late 1940s there has been a phenomenal growth in organizations willing--nay, determined--to participate in peace support activities. Therein lies the root of the civil-military relations situation. For purposes of the present argument I assume that it is not possible to return to the earlier approach and assign military forces alone to carry out actions to establish a peaceful environment and provide the needed nation-building or other relief efforts needed to restore the unsettled situation to a condition of at least status quo ante. [However, at the risk of seeming to be an ass, I suggest that it might well be fruitful to quietly explore what it would take and what it would mean to return to the earlier type of operation, that is, conducted solely by military forces with the dual mission of restoring order and carry out the re-building.]

The two communities now accepted by most as necessary for peace support operations (civilian institutions and military forces) are distinguished by having entirely different cultures and different languages; even if the mother tongues are the same, the syntax of each is different. Further, they have different objectives at any point in time during the operations, as well as different time lines and different resources; they may have the same end-point objectives. Other than to continue and learn from the extraordinary efforts taken by leaders of both communities, during certain operations, to develop ad hoc procedures and policies for dealing with one another, I can offer only one modest suggestion that might make life easier for both types of organizations.

Because of the different cultures, different objectives and different schedules, barriers that cannot be overcome with any reasonable investment of time and energy, it is minimally necessary that each group understands the other--even if they cannot agree with one another. A step in that direction can be taken by looking to a basic requirement for effective military operations: the commander's intent. [For a demonstration of the importance of the commander's intent in military operations, I commend to your attention a book of Vietnam war experiences: *We Were Soldiers Once — And Young* by Lieutenant General Harold G. Moore (USA, ret.) and Joseph L. Galloway, published in paperback by Harper Perennial. Training, morale, cohesion, and esprit de corps played significant roles in the performances of two battalions, both from the 7th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), in the Ia Drang during November 1965. The extent to which the commanders' intents were verbalized, transmitted and understood within the sister battalions may have been the most significant factor in accounting for the vastly different performance in combat of the two battalions.]

My suggestion to improve civil-military relations in peace support operations is to require that each organization (civilian and military) participating in a particular operation prepare a statement conforming to the concept of the commander's intent, using as a model one that can be derived from the cited book for the 1st Battalion--the more successful of the two battalions. After the leaders of each of the participating organizations have read the concise statements (after all, brevity is next to godliness), they should then meet, with as many

attending the roundtable as possible. Open discussion should lead to the full understanding of each of the intents.

At no time, should anyone attempt to convince others that their intents are incorrect or counter-productive. Differences in interpretation would be identified and aired early in an operation, reducing the chances of misunderstandings at later times. The mere exchange of each organization's ideas about the objective of the peace support operation would have a beneficial affect, even if complete agreement was not achieved. Once clarity and understanding has been achieved, all the intents should be shared with all echelons of all organizations, civilian and military, participating in the peace support operation. No doubt many will reject or ignore the information. But those who take advantage of the opportunity to be informed will, I believe, be more likely to be supportive, or at least neutral about others' contributions to the operation. It is a very small step but potentially of great value. Try it. You might like it.