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The Future of the Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC)

By

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the
requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily
endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Unless steps are taken to mitigate them, the concept of network-centric warfare is likely to increase rather than solve the interagency coordination problems in HA operations. The U.S. military must take precautions against the tendency to use technology to solve its interagency coordination challenges. While network capabilities can enhance the CMOC, it should not be used as a substitute for the interpersonal relationships fostered there. With personal relationships as a firm foundation, a "network-centric" CMOC could be immensely more effective and efficient than the current forum. Without the personal relationship foundation, however, a network-centric CMOC becomes a recipe for disaster.

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ABSTRACT

In 2010, the Commander, Joint Task Force (CJTF) is likely to face continued challenges from interagency coordination in humanitarian assistance (HA) operations, especially in a network-centric environment. A crucial tool for improving interagency coordination is the Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC). The CMOC is an open arena for information exchange among all the disparate humanitarian relief organizations. It is designed to assist the CJTF achieve unity of effort and accomplish the humanitarian assistance mission. This paper will examine the impact of network-centric warfare on the CMOC in HA operations.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the Commander, Joint Task Force (CJTF) is likely to face continued challenges in humanitarian assistance (HA) operations. Unless steps are taken now to mitigate them, the concept of network-centric warfare envisaged for the future is likely to increase rather than solve the problems faced in HA operations.

One of the reasons for this potential negative impact relates to the nature of the operations themselves. A significant difference between HA operations and other more conventional military operations is the level of coordination required between vastly diverse organizations, each with its own agenda. Typically, any HA operation which involves the U.S. military also involves a host nation as well as several other government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private volunteer organizations (PVOs). Currently, coordination between the military and these other organizations is a challenge for the CJTF and requires a spirit of cooperation among all the organizations.

A crucial tool described in doctrine today for improving interagency coordination is the Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC). The CMOC is an open arena for information exchange among all the disparate players and has proven vital to successful HA operations. The CMOC is designed to assist the CJTF to achieve unity of effort and accomplish the humanitarian assistance mission. In a future network-centric environment, will the CMOC still be able to perform its critical job?

The concept of a network-centric environment places the emphasis on a network of information available simultaneously to multiple individuals, thereby significantly increasing the effectiveness of the system as a whole. In a HA operation, the challenge becomes the

ability to create a functional network which is able to include the broad range of agencies and private organizations involved, each with different requirements and limitations.

In order to ensure we are not creating one problem as we solve another, the U.S. military needs to expand its discussion of network-centric warfare to include the interagency coordination challenges faced by the CJTF in HA operations. This paper will examine the impact of network-centric warfare on the CMOC in HA operations. It will describe the HA environment faced by the CJTF, the role of the CMOC in HA operations, the basic tenets of network-centric warfare and the additional challenges it creates, and the future of the CMOC in HA operations. While this paper confines itself to CMOCs in HA operations, future research would likely show that the issues which surface here are representative of the effects of network-centric warfare on coordination across the entire spectrum of military operations other than war (MOOTW).

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE ENVIRONMENT

CJTFs faced with a HA mission step into a completely different operational environment than that faced in a more "conventional" combat mission. The most notable difference between the two environments is the command and control structure required to successfully complete the assigned mission. The HA environment is one that requires coordination of a variety of agencies and organizations with different purposes in order to succeed. In point of fact, the CJTF neither commands nor controls most of the organizations involved in a HA operation. Accordingly, the <u>Joint Task Force Commander's Handbook for Peace Operations</u> states "In peace operations, interagency *coordination* (emphasis added) may be your top priority."[1]

The military is usually tasked with a humanitarian assistance mission "when the relief need is gravely urgent and when the humanitarian emergency dwarfs the ability of the normal relief agencies to effectively respond."[2] The CJTF is likely to be thrust into the middle of an escalating crisis where all other efforts are failing or have already failed. In addition to the problem of a rapidly escalating crisis, individual CJTFs are unlikely to be experts in the vast complexities of HA operations.

The military mission is usually in support of (vice in charge of) other organizations involved in the crisis; this is sometimes an unfamiliar (and uncomfortable) position for a CJTF. Compound this with the relative magnitude of the problems on the scene and an unfamiliar command and control structure, and it is not difficult to imagine the CJTF's desire to control his environment. However, control is not his mission. His mission is one of support and coordination among all the organizations involved. In order to facilitate interagency coordination, the CJTF is encouraged by doctrine (and past success) to utilize the Civil Military Operations Center.

THE CIVIL MILITARY OPERATIONS CENTER

The Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC) is "a field office or coordination center responsible for interfacing U.S. forces with various government, international, nongovernmental, and private volunteer organizations."[3] In a HA operation, it is designed to coordinate military and civilian operational level functions. The purpose of a CMOC is to create a forum where all sides can participate in decision making. In both Operation PROVIDE COMFORT (Kurdish refugees) and Operation SUPPORT HOPE (Rwandan refugees), for example, the establishment of a functional CMOC significantly assisted in

coordination and transition efforts between the U.S. military and the other organizations involved.[4]

1. CMOC Organization

Essentially, a CMOC and its ability to perform sets the stage for interagency coordination among the disparate organizations involved in humanitarian relief. It is critical to set up a dialogue among these organizations. "The best means to achieve this dialogue is to use the CMOC, establish liaison, use frequent meetings, and establish a social atmosphere based on interpersonal interaction and networking."[5] The personal exchange of information and perspective can dramatically improve understanding and respect among HA participants. The resulting information flow between the U.S. military and the other relief organizations creates a degree of unity between them.[6] Developing a CMOC in and of itself, however, does not guarantee any degree of unity of effort. It is the CJTF who provides the balance between people, equipment and procedures to ensure the CMOC can succeed.[7]

Of equal importance is the CMOC's ability to make and implement decisions at the operational level. "If the CMOC is not organized and staffed properly, NGOs may perceive it as an unnecessary bureaucratic cog in the military machine."[8] "The CMOC must be the military's operational focus of effort within the humanitarian intervention. . . . If it becomes a liaison center, then it becomes divorced from reality."[9]

In building the CMOC organization and structure, it is particularly important that the military CMOC representative has direct, unlimited access to the CJTF. Military cooperation and credibility can be fostered through the CMOC. To achieve this, the military

representative must be "empowered to solve coordination problems at the same table, person to person, with the NGOs and other humanitarian personnel."[10]

Chair responsibilities for the CMOC should be assigned to the lead organization involved in the HA operation, if one has been designated. If not, the CJTF or his representative may be forced to chair the meetings initially. Because of the wide cultural gap that sometimes exists between the military and NGO communities, chair responsibilities for the CMOC should be transferred to an organization that both communities are comfortable with as soon as practicable.

CMOC organization is theater and mission dependent. It is also flexible in size and membership. Because it is task organized based on the mission, it can be tailored to effectively satisfy the CJTF's requirements. Some of its responsibilities include the following:

- Carry out guidance and institute CJTF decisions regarding civil-military operations
- Perform liaison and coordination between military capabilities and other organizations to meet the needs of the populace
- Provide a partnership forum for military and other engaged organizations
- Receive, validate, and coordinate requests for support from the NGO, PVO, and regional and international organizations.[11]

2. CMOC Principle

The most fundamental principle for the CMOC is that it should be **mutually beneficial** for all organizations involved. That does not imply that the CMOC is always

going to exist in harmony; however, it does imply that the humanitarian relief effort as a whole should benefit from the coordination and dissemination of information. An example of one way to make a CMOC mutually beneficial was used in the Goma CMOC during Operation SUPPORT HOPE. This CMOC created the administrative and prioritizing process through which the NGOs could get military transport for the supplies they required.[12] In effect, without the CMOC, NGOs could not request military transport assistance. With input from all the organizations needing various forms of military support, the CMOC was able to prioritize effectively and ensure the right support would be given when and how it could have the most positive impact.

3. CMOC Membership

Membership in the CMOC is voluntary and extended to every organization involved in the HA operation. While CMOC membership is extended, attendance may be sporadic based on individual organization needs.[13] The following is a categorized list of typical organizations that should be included in CMOC membership:

- Liaisons from military Service and functional components, and supporting infrastructure, such as ports and airfields
- U. S. Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) representatives
- Department of State and other USG representatives
- Military liaison personnel from participating countries
- Host nation or local government agency representatives
- Representatives of regional and international organizations (e.g., United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC))

- Representatives from NGOs and PVOs (e.g., Doctors Without Borders USA, Food For The Hungry)[14]

- Others representatives as may be appropriate.

As the potential membership list of the CMOC depicts, there are a wide variety of organizations, each with a different perception of the "right" course of action, in any HA operation. As a result of the interplay between organizations, the process often appears out of control, especially to the CJTF who is more comfortable with a definite division of tasks and responsibilities. Nevertheless, the CJTF needs to find ways to take advantage of the information and insights the CMOC can provide without allowing the appearance of "chaos" to overwhelm him.

3. CMOC Meetings

"The CMOC usually conducts daily meetings to identify components within the interagency forum capable of fulfilling needs."[15] A "common sense" prioritization can (hopefully) be derived from the analysis and discussion at the meeting. However, if disputes arise, someone (usually the chair) has to have the authority to determine the final priority. The goal of the meeting is to coordinate and prioritize daily and longer-term efforts to best meet the humanitarian mission.

The value of the personal interface at CMOC meetings should not be underestimated. Because large cultural gaps often exist between the military and other organizations, the interplay among individual relief workers is key to providing a better understanding of each side's role in the humanitarian crisis. These interpersonal relationships can have both short and long term impacts. In the short term, they are the cornerstone of interagency

cooperation. In the long term, they can lead to future cooperation beyond the current emergency. In the final analysis, "nowhere will you find more selfless, dedicated, and professional people than you will find at the operator level in the military and humanitarian response community."[16]

THE NETWORK-CENTRIC ENVIRONMENT

"Information technology is undergoing a fundamental shift from platform-centric computing to network-centric computing."[17] U.S. military leaders are advocating a parallel shift in military operations to coincide with the information technology. The result will be a military that derives full advantage from a network-centric information system, which draws its power "from information-intensive interactions between very large numbers of heterogeneous computational nodes in a network."[18] Basically, the network-centric environment implies a shift in focus from the individual with access to information to the more powerful network of individuals with access to information. This environment may have serious implications for interagency coordination for the CJTF in the future.

The primary concern in a network-centric, humanitarian assistance environment will be to build a network from a group of diverse and often competing organizations. Because there will probably not be any existing network when the military arrives on scene, creating a network would be one of its first priorities.

Assuming the military has the capability to establish a network, difficulties will likely arise in three areas, stemming specifically from the network-centric environment and cultural differences. These difficulties are in addition to the lessons learned from HA operations well documented in other work. The primary areas of concern include equipment capability and

compatibility problems, the hesitancy of other organizations to link with the U.S. military, and the possible creation of a dependent relationship between the U.S. military and the other agencies.

1. *Equipment*

The first of these concerns is that of equipment availability and compatibility on scene during a HA operation. It is safe to assume that some, if not all, of the other organizations involved will not have the equipment necessary for networked communication with U.S. military forces. As a result, the military may be expected to provide the equipment to the other organizations. This expectation may develop in U.S. policymakers and/or the other involved organizations themselves. In some respects the precedent has already been set; in the 1990s, the military community provided telephone and other equipment required to allow the CMOC to operate in several operations.[19] Moving from that to the computers required to support a network-centric environment, however, would be a giant step up in terms of cost. Whatever the source of the expectation, the reality is an extremely expensive proposition for the U.S. military - certainly one it can ill-afford.

2. *Direct Link*

The next area of concern is the hesitancy of non-military organizations or host nations to create a direct, network link with the U.S. military. The direct link problem is threefold.

- **Politics:** Because U.S. military presence is an extension of U.S. government policies, non-U.S. organizations and host nations fear losing worldwide and/or

local credibility if their association with the U.S. military includes linked communications.

- **Access:** Direct links imply two way information sharing. Both military and non-military organizations have the need to restrict access to internal information. Direct links require screening mechanisms to ensure organizations can filter sensitive information for appropriate distribution.

- **Information/Intelligence:** Fundamentally, HA organizations cannot be perceived as intelligence sources for the U.S. government. That perception would have a serious negative impact on their ability to provide assistance. Because of the philosophical ideals held by many NGOs, PVOs, and other involved organizations, the issue of providing information versus intelligence to the U.S. is a legitimate concern.[20] These organizations possess a wealth of knowledge about the local culture and peoples; however, they are anxious to avoid the perception among worldwide and local supporters that they are being used as an intelligence source for the U.S. government.

The above problems exist in the HA environment today to some extent, however, the direct link situation enabled by network-centric warfare further complicates these interagency coordination problems.

3. Dependent Relationship

The next area of concern is one of creating a dependent relationship between the military's information system and the larger HA effort. Typically, U.S. military involvement in a HA effort is relatively short compared to the other HA organizations. If the

humanitarian assistance organizations rely heavily on information accessible only through the U.S. military's networking capability, successful mission accomplishment for the larger HA effort may become dependent on a military presence. In HA operations to date, the ability to transition relief responsibilities from the military to the humanitarian assistance organizations is often what signals completion of the military portion of the relief effort. In 2010, however, military-supported information networks may greatly extend the need for military involvement well beyond the point when all other military support activities could be transitioned. In short, the information that the U.S. military provides, whether via direct links or through its networking capability, will likely become critical to the larger humanitarian mission and prolong the military presence.

THE CMOC OF 2010

The CMOC, as a facilitation and decision making mechanism, is likely to remain the tool of choice to assist the CJTF in coordinating an effective humanitarian assistance team. While the HA operating environment may change significantly by 2010, the need for interagency cooperation and coordination will not. The CMOC may, however, need to undergo significant changes in form due to the impact of network-centric warfare.

1. Intranet CMOC

One of the possible changes in form for the CMOC may be the creation of an "intranet CMOC." At first glance, this CMOC form appears encouraging, especially to the network-centric warrior, because it takes advantage of the capabilities a network of

information can provide. Upon further review, however, the intranet CMOC form by itself has significant limitations which impact HA operations.

Advantages

One of the advantages from the intranet CMOC is that it would maximize the capabilities provided by a network of information. There is no doubt that near-real-time access to information would be helpful for the large number of CMOC members. By logical extension, HA efforts should improve by virtue of the fact that as a humanitarian need emerged throughout the day, it could be acted upon more quickly if assistance assets were available. Additionally, continuous updates throughout the operation would provide the CMOC member organizations with a better understanding of the overall situation.

Another advantage from the intranet CMOC is that it helps alleviate two of the direct link challenges. First, each agency would implement an internal screening process to determine what information was appropriate for posting on the intranet CMOC. For example, the CJTF may not want military transport schedules available throughout the area for security reasons; however, because the CJTF knows who is connected to the intranet CMOC, he may be more inclined to release the information over the intranet. Today it would be similar to handing the schedule out at a CMOC meeting rather than publishing the schedule in a more public forum.

Secondly, an intranet CMOC also lowers the risk of being perceived as an intelligence source for humanitarian assistance organizations. Because of the variety and number of organizations connected to it and its relative freedom of access for member organizations, the intranet CMOC provides a better forum for information exchange.

Furthermore, the precedent for using on-line data concerning current humanitarian operations exists today. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has a web site on the internet, which provides information concerning current humanitarian relief operations.

Disadvantages

The biggest disadvantage resulting from the intranet CMOC would be the elimination of the daily meetings and personal interfaces. The same information could be exchanged via e-mail and intranet postings instead of at the daily meeting. Additionally, staff members could be dispersed throughout the area and still have access to information necessary to coordinate their activities. While an intranet CMOC could improve information access, it simply cannot duplicate the added benefit which results from individual, face-to-face communication. The negative impact of the elimination or reduction of direct personal contact between military and non-military individuals might offset the positive impact from information access.

Another disadvantage would be equipment limitations. It is reasonable to assume that not all organizations involved in a HA operation will have the required equipment to connect to an intranet CMOC. To lessen the impact on those organizations and keep the CMOC membership all-inclusive, a limited number of terminals could be established at a physical CMOC location. These terminals, probably provided by the U.S. military, while expensive, would demonstrate the U.S. military's commitment to coordination among all organizations involved.

A third disadvantage is equipment interoperability. Interoperability is a critical issue which, unless solved, could make the whole concept unworkable. Sun Officesystems, which

is at the forefront of efforts to share information between dissimilar computers, may come up with a way to do this using each player's own computer system. Solving this problem is essential to making the concept a reality.

A fourth disadvantage is that an intranet CMOC probably increases rather than decreases the risk of HA operations becoming dependent on the information provided by the military network capability. It is possible, assuming equipment issues are resolved, that network maintenance and administration activities could be transferred to an organization remaining on scene after the U.S. military departs. However, transferring the **equipment** necessary to support the network is not a policy the U.S. military can afford. A solution to this problem would be essential to making an intranet CMOC practical.

2. *CMOC Combination*

A better future form for the CMOC is a combination of the intranet CMOC and the daily face-to-face meeting. This option combines the best of the current CMOC with the benefits from network-centric warfare. The current CMOC form of daily meetings provides the opportunity to develop professional relationships between the military members and the relief organization members. Consequently, those relationships help to bridge the cultural gaps and misunderstandings that exist between organizations. Daily meetings and close working arrangements foster the sense of ownership and teamwork. The intranet CMOC, while maximizing the advantages of networked information, should not be used as a substitute for the face-to-face interplay among individuals.

CONCLUSION

The key to successful HA mission accomplishment for the CJTF is the unity of effort provided by a cohesive team of diverse organizations. Essential to the team building process is the CMOC. "If for no other reason than self-interest, the CMOC must become the priority because it represents – through close coordination with the NGOs and the rest of the humanitarian community – the military's best chance to design and control its exit strategy."[21]

In 2010, the requirement for team building in HA operations does not change even though the operating environment in 2010 is significantly different. Interagency coordination will remain a challenge for the CJTF especially in a network-centric environment.

This paper examined the impact of network-centric warfare on the CMOC in HA operations. The U.S. military must take precautions against the tendency to use technology to solve its interagency coordination challenges. While network capabilities can enhance the CMOC, it should not be used as a substitute for the interpersonal relationships fostered there. **With** these personal relationships as a firm foundation, a "network-centric" CMOC could be immensely more effective and efficient than the current forum. **Without** the personal relationship foundation, however, a network-centric CMOC becomes a recipe for disaster.

NOTES

[1] Joint Warfighting Center, <u>Joint Task Force Commander's Handbook for Peace Operations</u>. (Fort Monroe, VA: June 16, 1997), xvi.

[2] Joint Chiefs of Staff, <u>Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War</u> (Joint Pub 3-07) (Washington, D.C.: June 16, 1995), III-5.

[3] Thomas F. Greco, "Unity of Effort in Peace Operations," (Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS: 1995), 18.

[4] John M. Metz, "Making Organizations Talk: An Assessment of Military-Interagency Interoperability," (Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS: 1996), 36.

[5] Greco, 56.

[6] Metz, 14.

[7] Ibid., 16.

[8] Guy C. Swan III and others, "Uneasy Partners: NGOs and the U.S. Military in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies," (Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA: 1996), 12.

[9] Chris Seiple, <u>The U.S. Military/NGO Relationship in Humanitarian Interventions</u> (Peacekeeping Institute, Center for Strategic Leadership, U.S. Army War College 1996), 182.

[10] Ibid., 182.

[11] Joint Warfighting Center, II-8.

[12] Seiple, 182.

[13] Ibid., 150.

[14] Joint Warfighting Center. II-9.

[15] Joint Chiefs of Staff, <u>Interagency Coordination During Joint Operations Volume I</u> (Joint Pub 3-08) (Washington, D.C.: October 9, 1996), III-18.

[16] Seiple, 9.

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[20] Joint Pub 3-08, III-13.

[21] Seiple, 136.

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