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# Herding Cats

## Overcoming Obstacles in Civil-Military Operations

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One distinctive aspect of humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and complex emergencies is the broad range of institutions engaged in these operations. They include the United Nations and its operating agencies, international and nongovernmental organizations, national governments and their military forces, corporations, individuals, and the media. Coordinating this cast of characters is particularly difficult when national militaries with disparate operating cultures are figured into the equation. This challenge is relevant because of the considerable role that the Armed Forces assume in such operations, on the one hand, and the limitations imposed on American commitments on the other. To surmount this barrier, effective cooperation and coordination must be ensured.

Cultural differences among actors, and the perceptions that they have of each other as well as operations which they conduct, complicate coordination. The military conditions its personnel to coordinate and be coordinated, while humanitarian organizations train their employees to be self-reliant in their areas of expertise. This should not be surprising since every institution, including the military, has its own chain of command and the diverse actors have little in common except for agreement on the need to help. In other words, operations occur in an arena (or on a battlefield) with independent characters or *cats*. Success largely relies upon gaining support and cooperation which implies overall coordination—what some wags have termed *herding cats*.

### Current Doctrine

One approach to coordinating operations—the civil-military operations cell (CMOC)—was devised by the Armed Forces. The first was established in Somalia and worked reasonably well as a formal point of contact between humanitarian organizations and the military. It was later codified in Joint Publication 3-08, *Interagency Cooperation During Joint Operations*.

The portion of that joint pub that explains CMOC lacks structure and internal consistency. It is covered under the rubric of “Organizational Tools for the JTF,” which implies that it exists to exercise control over nonmilitary organizations, and offers the following lead sentence in bold type: “Commanders should establish control structures that take account of and provide coherence to the activities of all elements in the area.” CMOC is “a means to coordinate civil and military operations and plays an execution [vice policy] role.” This doctrine authorizes commanders on every level to establish centers to facilitate coordination and to use them to provide guidance to commanders and to receive and validate requests for support from other agencies. It also directs how centers should be organized, to include participation by U.S. and international civil agencies. It proposes meeting schedules, asserts that centers should handle public affairs, and directs the organization of logistics systems, including the chairing of committees to run airfields and seaports.

Moreover, Joint Pub 3-08 states that CMOC “appeals to [nongovernmental organizations] because it avoids guesswork by providing positive direction for their efforts when and where most

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Grain distribution,  
Somalia.

DOD (D.W. Mobley)

needed." A diagram with overlapping circles portrays the cell as the center of the entire operation. Importantly, it is suggested that even when there is a coordination mechanism established by a host country or the United Nations, CMOC serves as the focal point for coordination once

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the military arrives. According to current doctrine, "although the U.S. forces may be latecomers compared to many relief and international organizations, they bring considerable resources . . . protection, logistic support, information, communication, and other services . . . frequently sought by these agencies. The assistance provided often leads to their cooperation."

Despite the delineation of a command/control CMOC, references are found throughout this section that stress cooperation and flexibility. For example, the military must not "dictate what will happen" but instead "coordinate a team approach to problem resolution," and a commander cannot "direct interagency cooperation among engaged agencies." Similarly, "organization of the CMOC is theater—and mission—dependent" as well as flexible in both size and composition.

Finally, in comparison to CMOC, the treatment of the humanitarian operations center—"the generic name for the most likely alternative coordinating mechanism"—is well written and sensitive to the independence of participants and need for cooperation. It is part of the CMOC chapter and outlines a leading role for the center in coordinating operations organized by a host government or the United Nations. Moreover, it notes that in the case of unilateral action, a representative of the Agency for International Development would most likely be the center director. In these situations, the CMOC role would be subordinate or supportive.

In June 1997, the Joint Warfighting Center published the *Joint Task Force Commanders Handbook for Peace Operations*. Its language is much more sensitive to the limitations of CMOC as a directive. Nevertheless, this more recent explanation of doctrine in Joint Pub 3-08 retains the graphic presentation with CMOC shown as the center of the action. However, a curious sentence has been appended which indicates that it "is not the intent of this figure to emphasize the CMOC as the center of coordination for all interagency activities but rather to illustrate organizations that JTF may coordinate with and hold discussions with concerning an ongoing operation." Therefore the handbook is more accurate than the doctrine it purports to explain and implement.

### **Underlying Perceptions**

Not surprisingly, given their perspective and culture, many officers have interpreted extant doctrine as assigning a command and control role to CMOC with regard to everyone on the scene. The cell is regarded as a form of institutional wizardry by which the military can, when involved in a humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, or other complex emergency, organize and direct other participants—a U.S. military-established and led device for herding cats. The fact that doctrine is specific about CMOC functions exacerbates the problem. In effect, doctrine provides a checklist for evaluators that implies that the cell concept is a structure that is necessary in every situation.

Recent exercises conducted for U.S. Pacific Command explored the CMOC option, which used scenarios based on the need for multilateral assistance in complex emergencies, and confirmed the take charge instinct of the military. In each case many officers cited doctrine and established a cell staffed by military personnel to organize other players. The corollary assumption of some officers is that establishing such military-directed coordination mechanisms will facilitate an exit strategy.

Delivering supplies to Kosovo refugees.



1<sup>st</sup> Combat Camera Squadron (Chris Steffen)



2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division, Combat Camera (Jennifer L. Weber)

Security checkpoint, Haiti.

These positions reflect deep seated attitudes over whether humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and complex emergency operations are proper missions for the Armed Forces. Thus *getting it over* (for instance, by reaching conditions to permit withdrawal or outlasting politically imposed considerations) seems to be enhanced by *taking it over*. With control, the military can also realize mission objectives without risk (force protection).

**The Problem**

Current doctrine is based largely on two widely separated experiences, Somalia and Haiti. In the former case there was no local government

or centralized U.N. political structure: it was largely the American military and specialized agencies of the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations. In the latter the role of the Armed Forces was such that the military version of the cell could be made to work. In both cases, the dominant military presence and capability permitted development and use of a directive or command CMOC model.

Interestingly, few U.S. commentators look to other situations where the American role was limited or nonexistent—such as Cambodia or Georgia—for relevant experience. The Somalia and Haiti examples are notable, particularly for the lack of any existing meaningful local or international governmental authority. For instance, in Cambodia there was an impressive U.N. authority on the ground that functioned as a government. The Georgian circumstance was more confused, and the lack of a coordinating relationship among the military peacekeepers, the U.N. political unit, and the humanitarian organizations was obvious and harmful to both peacekeeping and

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**Civil-military  
coordination, Albania.**

humanitarian efforts. These other situations fall into three categories:

- trusteeship model, in which an international authority (such as the United Nations) or designated country (such as the United States) assumes the role of the local government
- institution building model, in which external participants (such as the United Nations, nongovernmental organizations, or individual governments) create or recreate local government functions (as in Bosnia)
- support model, in which external agents help a more or less operative local government to function (as in Georgia).

Under such circumstances several possible combinations of actors are relevant for success. Models of organizational cooperation other than a directive CMOC may be needed if only because the agendas are likely to differ. Often nonmilitary players—certainly local government, generally nongovernmental organizations, and often the United Nations—are in place long before the arrival of forces. And in every case they expect to stay long after the end of the military mandate.

The longer-term perspective is particularly important with respect to the United Nations and the local government. The United Nations represents the legitimacy of the multilateral involvement (once called interference) in the affairs of an afflicted country. All such efforts (even unilateral operations by the United States under U.N. auspices) must feed into continued U.N. involvement and/or handover to the local government or they cannot end except in outright failure.

Other military considerations arise from these diverse agendas. The United Nations and its constituent agencies as well as other independent

international and nongovernmental organizations bring resources to the table. Sometimes their assets are critical in the crisis phase (when military contributions may be decisive), but even when they are not they constitute the follow-on operation. Thus their operational needs should be accommodated to some degree, at the risk of withdrawing from the field and leaving the military in undisputed control and with full responsibility. This is especially important for the Armed Forces as political considerations lead planners to focus almost exclusively on an exit strategy. Other participants with diverse agendas may not fall in line to meet U.S. objectives and schedules, leaving military personnel to deal with the problem on their own.

In other cases nongovernmental and international organizations may grow comfortable with the presence and assistance of an outside military force, come to heavily depend on it, and readily accept a directive CMOC system. But even this development has dangers. To the degree that local cooperation with other participants is vital to mission accomplishment by military commanders, the result could be counterproductive by encouraging others to insist that the military remain to either manage the program indefinitely or pending an alternative management system.

Despite incidents of cooption, most humanitarian organizations, especially their field staffs, regard the CMOC concept differently. Because they perceive themselves as the true disaster relief and humanitarian assistance operators, they generally consider the cell as an unavoidable institution at best once the military arrives in country. Many consider it more a process useful to arranging cooperation between the disparate participants in a given situation than a directive institution.

Therefore, for a senior political-military decisionmaker, the issue is much more complicated because many variables must be weighed. First, except in the case of failed states, it is likely that some type of coordination system will be established when the military arrives. Doctrine seems to assume that everything is broken on the diplomatic and assistance fronts or else the military would not have been called; but it is unlikely that the United States after the Somalia experience would get involved under such circumstances again. In the future the need to preserve or promote something positive may well be a major policy objective. Consequently we will have an increased motivation to piggyback on arrangements established by others rather than replace them.

Second, it is likely that future military operations will be conducted by coalition forces that



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are more sensitive to the desire of a host government and the United Nations to play a prominent role in coordination. The current ambivalent attitude of Americans toward international institutions is unique in the world.

The third variable is the transition to a coordination system that is intended for use by the follow-on force. Based on recent experience, the United States will probably insist that any large involvement will be limited in time—at least in the minds of planners. Because detailed follow-on force planning must begin immediately to replace the U.S.-led force on schedule, the intentions of the follow-on force commander should be considered. Because he is apt to be a non-American, U.N.-chartered commander, it is doubtful that he will continue a system where his force takes the lead role in coordination at the expense of other U.N. entities.

Fourth and importantly, the preferences of a host government must be weighed carefully. Its orientation toward foreign militaries and the management of development assistance can only be ignored in humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, or complex emergencies if the intervention force takes responsibility for everything that occurs in the country. This approach, popular among some

officers, that the humanitarian nature of the mission will insulate them from public responsibility for other affairs is flawed. Under such circumstances the relationship with a host government is crucial, a factor that is likely to have an impact on the final coordination structure.

Some doctrine runs counter to U.S. national interests and should be withdrawn. There is no benefit in having a cookie cutter approach to coordination. In short, we must let the problem of herding cats sort itself out in each situation. Obvious as it sounds, it is difficult to change doctrine. The Armed Forces push the operational environment to adapt to doctrine rather than the reverse.

When an operation like Haiti is unilateral (either with or without a multilateral charter from the U.N. Security Council), the task of herding cats may be relatively simple. In such instances the United States can exercise sufficient control over both participants and resources that a directive CMOC can be employed. These situations may occur rarely, but assuming unilateral responsibility for emergencies is exactly what current policymakers seek to avoid. Although the military may not be the preferred option in a regional crisis, the Armed Forces will continue to be committed to both peacekeeping and humanitarian relief missions. These so-called military operations other than war, best accomplished by coordination among nations, will involve nongovernment and international organizations whose integration into the operational environment must be carefully developed.

The focus on combined action is pertinent to operations involving humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and complex emergencies. Without effective cooperation, the military will be faced with only two options: unilateral action or no action. There have been some instances—usually on a small scale—when the Armed Forces operated as one of the cats. But the arrival of a joint task force with a temporary mandate should not result in a complete takeover of the relief effort on the ground. Instead we must learn to operate as part of a multilateral or country-led team. **JFQ**