



Intelligence Support to the Prevention and Mitigation of Civilian Casualties

by First Lieutenant Nathaniel L. Moir

Introduction

It is an oft-quoted truism that “Intelligence drives Operations,” as the Intelligence Section is responsible for the preparation and assessment of the battlefield. However, many Intelligence sections do not always fully utilize enablers in shaping and assessing the battlefield environment as it relates to preventing and mitigating civilian casualties (CIVCAS). This may lead to an incomplete assessment of the battlefield which potentially weakens the prevention of CIVCAS. What, then, is the role of Military Intelligence (MI) as it relates to CIVCAS incident prevention and mitigation and why is it important?

The issue of CIVCAS is addressed in this article along two main themes. The first regards support that may be provided in preventing CIVCAS. This is examined by looking at how force ‘enablers’ may contribute to Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) as a tool in mapping human terrain more extensively. Increased use of enablers is also discussed as a way to increase population-centric approaches to counterinsurgency (COIN) operations such as Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Population-centric approaches, versus enemy-centric approaches, are keys to more effective prevention of CIVCAS and this may be achieved through greater inclusion of enablers into the IPB process.

The second theme of the paper addresses the mitigation and control of CIVCAS when it does occur. This focuses on how intelligence sections, through use of enablers and Information Operations (IO), may more effectively assist in lessening the opera-

tional impact of CIVCAS in the public’s perception at both local, and potentially, international levels.

CIVCAS—Why it is Important, Why it is a Problem

The issue of civilian casualties continues to be a major issue during OEF and directly impacts the effectiveness and legitimacy of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission. Therefore, the importance of preventing, and quickly responding to CIVCAS in the battlespace, whether caused by insurgents or Coalition Forces (CF), is critical. In this regard, CIVCAS has important operational implications for the local base of support for the CF. Insurgents seek to manipulate incidents of CF-caused CIVCAS. They further blame the CF of CIVCAS that insurgents themselves have unintentionally caused and, in many cases, intentionally caused for the explicit purpose of weakening support for the ISAF’s mission.

Due to the speed and ease of communications technology, reports of CIVCAS may be broadcast internationally. This factor is manipulated by insurgents to decrease support for Coalition and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan’s efforts in courts of public opinion. CIVCAS, thus, is an ostensible strategic concern; its prevention and mitigation should be a priority for battlespace owners from squad leaders and up the chain of command. Unfortunately, Intelligence Sections are not fully utilized in efforts to prevent and mitigate CIVCAS. All too often, S2 Sections demonstrate an overall enemy-centric focus.

This, of course, is Intelligence’s modus operandi but all operational approaches must be consistently refined and adapted to the conflict at hand. This is not to suggest that targeting and destroying the enemy effectively should be shortchanged or under-resourced in any way. Finding, fixing, and destroying the enemy is absolutely critical to achieving security in an area of operations (AO). The scope here however, is preventing and mitigating CIVCAS. Gaining local support for operations entails support for multiple lines of operations to include governance, and development, not just security. Regarding COIN, population-centric efforts remain the preferred approach to achieving long-term success as multiple historical case studies indicate.¹

Intelligence can better adapt to COIN however, by adding substantive augmentation and greater population-centric assistance as it relates to the prevention and mitigation of CIVCAS. Including enablers such as Human Terrain Teams (HTTs), Psychological Operations (PSYOP), Red Teams, and Civil Affairs (CA) provides such augmentation for developing more population-centric IPB. Perhaps paradoxically (but not surprisingly), most of these enablers are not organic to brigades which may explain why Intelligence, Operations, and Planning Sections (which are organic to brigades) are hesitant, slow, or even refuse to incorporate enablers into their operations.

Even within brigades, some battalions will be very receptive to ‘outside’ organizations while others may not. Ultimately it depends on the unit. However, until maneuver elements plan and direct population-centric operations, and thus direct Intelligence Sections to increase its focus on the population rather than solely on the enemy, COIN will continue to challenge the U.S. military’s ability to achieve the results it seeks. Such a “shift” in approach is a paradigm change with many challenges that authors such as John Nagl and David Kilcullen have cogently discussed at great length.³



Whether a maneuver unit is enemy-centric or population-centric is demonstrated by the operations it conducts. In the case of enemy-centric operations, the obvious and inherent focus is the enemy and its courses of action (COAs). The army is traditionally enemy focused so the process of IPB is inherently enemy-centric. In the case of OEF, enemy-centric approaches have caused the U.S. Intelligence community to conduct an anti-insurgency campaign rather than a COIN campaign. As one source states, “Anti-insurgent efforts are, in fact, a secondary task when compared to gaining and exploiting knowledge about the localized contexts of operation and the distinctions between the Taliban and the rest of the Afghan population.”²

Prevention of CIVCAS—Mapping Human Terrain

Increasing the communication channels between S2 sections, HTTs, Red Teams, CA Teams, PSYOP Teams, along with other enablers, is a key factor in making Intelligence Sections more relevant in the prevention and mitigation of CIVCAS. An example is in order to highlight this issue. The Field Artillery is one of the most lethal capabilities within the U.S. Army; it is critical to emphasize the importance of ground clearance of fires. One way to achieve this is by utilizing Collateral Damage Estimation methodology. This process is already in place for lethal en-

gagements but could potentially be used every time a lanyard is pulled to include ground clearance. This is relevant because indirect fire is a primary source of CIVCAS. However, while all CF-caused CIVCAS is unintentional, the source of CF-caused CIVCAS is irrelevant.

Regarding improvised explosive devices (IEDs), for example, local nationals still hold CF accountable for having failed to protect them. A commonly stated argument by Afghans is, to paraphrase, “Insurgents wouldn’t plant IEDs if the CF weren’t present.” The CF are regularly put into such paradoxical situations regarding CIVCAS in the public’s perception. Direct fire, and especially indirect fire, however, may be potentially prevented, and certainly mitigated with more success, through a greater understanding of the human terrain in AOs through Open Source Intelligence and greater input from enablers.

Population-centric approaches to successful COIN operations are imperative. To be successful with more population-centric approaches, S2 Sections must allocate more analysis of the civilian environment rather than allocating its attention solely on the enemy. Clearly, this would require a major shift in priorities but one that is necessary for conventional forces to truly address counterinsurgencies successfully. As it is noted in the paper, *Fixing Intel*, co-authored by Major General Flynn, a “vast and underappreciated body of information, almost all of which is unclassified, admittedly offers few clues about where to find insurgents, but provides information of even greater strategic importance: a map for leveraging popular support and marginalizing the insurgency itself.”⁴ Reducing CF-caused CIVCAS, and communicating the fact that insurgents are the primary cause of CIVCAS, is possibly one of the most powerful tools to successfully conduct COIN that the CF can further refine. One possible solution, as discussed earlier, is to bring enablers and analysis of human terrain together for more effective and relevant IPB. This could also be accomplished by an extended Fusion Cell Structure that incorporates and applies more population-centric analysis to operational planning.

Due to the importance of gaining Afghan local nationals’ confidence and support, MI has an important role in preventing and controlling the negative effects of CIVCAS when caused by CF. When

CIVCAS is caused by insurgents, communicating the occurrence to the local population more appropriately falls within the IO (S7) lane. However, S2 sections, and potential population-centric Fusion Cells, are relevant and provide critical support to shaping the Information Environment.

Mitigation of CIVCAS—The Information Environment

S7 staff sections cannot work in a vacuum. To more accurately and quickly address CIVCAS, S7 sections should proactively assist in contributing to the population-centric elements of IPB that S2 staffs develop. Naturally, this entails S2 sections seeking and accepting S7 sections’ contributions. CIVCAS preventive steps, as clearly articulated steps within the IPB process, could be a reference that demonstrates measures in place to prevent CIVCAS. Further, these steps could be referenced, in an unclassified format, as insurance when CIVCAS incidents still occur that CF did everything possible to prevent. When CIVCAS does occur, efficient mitigation of its negative consequences in the Information Environment has a significant impact on mission success at tactical, operational, and potentially strategic levels. This is especially true in COIN where success is measured by local nationals’ confidence in counterinsurgent forces’ efforts. Failure to successfully mitigate authentic CIVCAS incidents at the tactical level may have operational and strategic consequences. Therefore, S7 sections, which synthesize multiple enablers such as PSYOP, Public Affairs, Combat Camera, and may include HTTs and Red Team depending on the brigade combat team, should be more directly partnered with Intel Sections regarding assessment and IPB development.

For example, IPB development may be affected by nomadic populations that enter an AO as part of seasonal migrations; the Kuchi Tribe in Eastern Afghanistan is one such example, possible influxes of refugees into an AO is another. However, understanding human terrain is more than knowing simple facts of where people reside. A possible COA, and one discussed earlier, is utilizing Intelligence that supports specific efforts made to prevent CIVCAS (for example, as part of pre-operations check-lists similar to Karzai’s 12). Just as Most Likely COA and Most Dangerous COA are articulated, clearly de-

finer steps to prevent CIVCAS should be included as part of IPB and shared with maneuver and S7 sections in particular. These steps will assist in mitigating CIVCAS when it does occur.

- Adopt holistic Population-Centric approaches to Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield.
- Further develop and increase Analysis of Human Terrain through IPB. Implement a human terrain-specific modified combined obstacle overlay.
- Develop an Intel Fusion Cell at brigade level that assists in formulating CIVCAS preventive steps and coordinates this preparation with IO Sections.
- Directly assist IO Sections in the mitigation of CIVCAS when it occurs. Utilize prescribed preventive steps, in an unclassified format, for reference in mitigating CIVCAS through press statements, and in shuras conducted to lessen operational impact of CIVCAS.

Prescriptive Solutions

Conclusion

Civilian casualties will happen in war. However, any mistake in this area is inexcusable to the majority of local nationals. It thus begs the question: Is any potential CIVCAS worth the operational risk of losing local national trust or confidence? In counterinsurgencies, such as OEF, CIVCAS typifies tactical incidents that have strategic repercussions. As one source states, “one of the peculiarities of guerrilla warfare is that tactical-level information is laden with strategic significance far more than in conventional conflicts.”⁵ Conventional IPB and current approaches to preventing CIVCAS can always be more effective. To achieve this, population-centric approaches to IPB and greater synchronization between IO Cells and S2 Sections is necessary. This may happen through greater inclusion of non-traditional ‘enabler’ assets into IPB: HTT, CA Teams, PSYOP Teams, and, overall, an increased focus on and analysis of human terrain.

In conclusion, CIVCAS must be effectively prevented and mitigated in order to gain the trust of

local nationals. Clearly, local support for CF and the partnered efforts of Afghan Security Forces are critical in counterinsurgencies, such as that ongoing in Afghanistan. When insurgents cause CIVCAS, communicating their criminal actions to the local populace is important in order to degrade their bases of support. Conversely, poorly handled CIVCAS management, when caused by CF, is highly damaging to operations and may irreparably negate the credibility of CF. CIVCAS will continue to be a problematic issue with long-term consequences. It is also likely that CIVCAS will only gain in importance as news cycles increase in speed and reach. Even if CIVCAS remains impossible to completely prevent, greater utilization of enablers and Open Source Intelligence in preventing and mitigating CIVCAS is critical. Intelligence sections are urged to remember that their work should entail more than analysis focused on the enemy. In counterinsurgencies, lack or loss of popular support for counterinsurgents is arguably as much of an enemy, possibly more, than insurgents themselves. Preventing and efficiently

mitigating CIVCAS is a cornerstone to fighting both enemies effectively.



Endnotes

1. David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla: Fighting Smalls Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
2. Major General Michael T. Flynn, Captain Matt Pottinger, and Paul D. Batchelor, “Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan” Center for a New American Security (Washington D.C., January 2010) 23.
3. Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla* and John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
4. Flynn, 7.
5. *Ibid.*, 11.

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