



# Unrealized Potential: Improving Tactical Interagency Operations

by CPT Marc C. Dudek

Tactical units and civilian agencies cannot expect to accomplish strategic objectives in areas of conflict if we as professionals do not admit that tactical-level interagency relationships are strained and understand their importance in achieving a desired endstate.

The Army's strategic leaders are encouraged to use the "whole of government approach" when partnering with other agencies.<sup>1</sup> At the tactical level, specifically battalion and below, are company and field-grade officers using the same approach? Although much attention has been given to the role of interagency relationships at the brigade level and higher, very little has been written or evaluated on the integration of civilian agencies at the battalion and company level.

The addition of civilian agencies – such as the U.S. Agency for International Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Transition Initiative, Department of Justice and Department of State – to battalion-sized task forces during Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom exposed an operational gap in the Army's ability to conduct interagency operations at the tactical level. This article illuminates an inherent operational gap, explains the relevancy of interagency relationships at the tactical level and proposes a three-tiered solution that addresses the causal factors of the interagency operational

gap. Furthermore, this article raises awareness and promotes discussion within junior levels of the officer corps and U.S. government agencies about tactical interagency operations.

## Inherent problems

The interagency gap at the tactical level ultimately stems from three factors: a lack of awareness of and exposure to each other's capabilities; company-grade officers' narrowed perception of stabilization and the operational environment; and the absence of a baseline model for tactical interagency operations and planning.

The largest factor behind the interagency gap is the lack of awareness and exposure between USG agencies and the military. Typically, battalion- and squadron-sized task forces in Iraq and Afghanistan were complemented with an assortment of civilian agencies, including DoS, DoJ, USAID, USDA and OTI. The amount of personnel and General Schedule "rank" varied among the various forward operating bases and task forces; nevertheless, these agencies became a permanent fixture for most units. Unfortunately, the battlespace owners viewed personnel from these agencies as a mere "supporting effort" and either relegat-

ed them to a menial unneeded task or simply cast them to a back office and forgot them. Civilian-agency personnel often viewed their military counterparts as domineering and, at times, an impediment to many of their own programs.

No quantifiable metric can accurately depict the perception from both sides or how well integrated each agency was into their partnered task force's campaign plans; however, several company- and field-grade Army officers and agency civilians throughout Afghanistan's Regional Commands-South and East were canvassed about their experiences and perceptions about interagency involvement to support this claim. Many of these interviewees asked to remain anonymous. Typically, officers and civilians shared a mutual misunderstanding and ignorance of each other's capabilities and expressed frustration with each other's priorities and operations.

Frances Z. Brown further illustrates in a United States Institute for Peace study that military predominance in interagency planning, at high and low levels, was a key factor as to why the civ-mil Afghan surge was unsuited to accomplish sub-national transformation.<sup>2</sup> Essentially, for most units operating in Afghanistan, unity of effort between USG civilian agencies and battalion-sized task forces was not established and ultimately detracted from achieving a desirable endstate.

The "battlespace owner mentality" and the egos of both agency civilians and Soldiers further compounded each of these issues. Predicated on the stated missions of maneuver units (both infantry and armor), the predilection for "lethal" tasks may appear counterproductive and misguided to personnel from civilian agencies and counterintuitive to programs for sustainable peace and stabilization. Likewise, the more diplomatic and time-consuming approach of civilian agencies appears "softer," lacking in quantifiable yields and ultimately less important than pursuing lethal activities.

The next causal factor behind the interagency gap is junior officers' narrowed perception of stabilization and the operational environment. Counterinsurgency operations is a paradigm that has pervaded company-grade officers' tactical training over the past decade. COIN is comprised of three operational elements: offense, defense and stability.<sup>3</sup> I would submit that company-grade officers are more familiar with the offensive and defensive aspects of COIN and that a systemic ignorance of stability operations exists within the junior-officer corps.

Though OIF and OEF have increased the awareness of stability operations within the Army, most officers lack a comprehensive understanding of stability operations, its tenets, and its holistic and integral impact in an operational environment. Also, Army officers and civilians do not share a common understanding of "conflict" and the nuances among stabilization, COIN, development and peacekeeping operations. Most company-grade officers cursorily assume that all types of low-intensity conflict conveniently fit into the COIN paradigm when the environment may resemble a greater need for stabilization, development or peacekeeping operations.

Further compounding the issue, company-grade officers compartmentalize stability operations as mere "non-lethal" tasks; however, the breadth of stability operations encompasses aspects that commonly blend with and affect offensive or defensive operations. Perceiving actors, actions or areas as either lethal or nonlethal is problematic because the operational environment is not a mutually exclusive system. Every factor within the operational environment – whether social, criminal, political or economical – has varying levels of mutual interdependence. For example, a Commander's Emergency Response Pro-

gram-funded school refurbishment may present apparent political and social gains, but local leaders may use a large portion of those funds to placate destabilizing groups.

Many company-grade officers view governance and infrastructure development as tangible projects (roads, wells, refurbishments, etc.) and narrow-mindedly evaluate the projects' success through quantifiable metrics such as CERP dollars spent or kilometers of road paved. Company-grade officers' reliance on measures of performance obscures comprehensive subjective assessments that might lead to more effective governance and development efforts. Especially applicable to battalion S-9s in OIF/OEF, more or at least equal attention should have been paid to developing low-cost civic programs that improved governmental capacity and integrated existing tribal structures, rather than building an unsustainable road or hospital.

Currently, there is no baseline model for tactical interagency operations and planning. The Army thrives on order and an established chain of command, whereas other agencies lack the rigid structuring of personnel. Task forces simply assume these agency personnel are mere "enablers" or are there to solely support the battlespace owner. The Afghan "civilian surge" attached thousands of USDA, DoS and USAID personnel to military units; however, most task forces lacked a clear organizational model for civilian-military integration. As a Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction audit stated, "The consensus among both civilian and military officials we spoke with is that civilian-military integration relies primarily on individual personalities even at platforms where more formal structures exist."<sup>4</sup>

The audit further stated, "There are no clear lines of communication for civilians in the field on how to act with the military portion of their provincial reconstruction teams, or how to delineate 'taskings' from their military partners." Though the merits of the Afghan civilian surge fall outside the scope of this article, if the military incorporated a doctrinally based integration model before and during the addition of these agencies, a stronger unity of effort in governance, development and security could have been achieved.

## Relevance of tactical-level interagency operations

Tactical-level interagency operations are relevant for two primary reasons: future deployments and their requisite scope of tactical duties will necessitate interagency operations; and Army doctrine dictates that interagency integration is necessary for COIN, stability operations and security-force-assistance missions.

Though COIN and stability operations are not maneuver units' primary missions, it would be naïve to assume that a future protracted military engagement would not pair civilian agencies with regular tactical units again, as was seen in Afghanistan and Iraq. If the multi-hued interagency operations of Panama, Haiti, Balkans and OIF/OEF serve as a barometer for future tactical operations, tactical units should embrace the prospect of training with civilian agencies for full-spectrum operations. As Dr. Frederick W. Kagan argues, "[W]e, the military – which will have always, I think, the primary responsibility for this task [Phase IV operations] – have to be reaching out and working as hard as possible to integrate with other agencies."<sup>5</sup> Though Dr. Kagan is probably referring to higher echelons of government, I would submit that tactical interagency relationships are just as important as they are at the strategic level.

Regardless of the level of conflict, tactical U.S. Army units will always be considered as a principle means to achieve a political

endstate. Company-grade officers, inescapably, are ultimately responsible for employing strategic policy at the lowest level. We would be remiss as an organization if we did not critically evaluate our interagency shortcomings at the tactical level and attempt to improve them for the next conflict.

Some may argue that Regular Army units are ill-suited for COIN or stability operations, which are better left to Special Operations A-teams, civil affairs or PRTs. Though these teams' contributions have been crucial to the missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, their area of operations is far less than what a brigade combat team can be responsible for, and a natural disparity of interests arises when these teams conduct operations within a task force's battlespace. Furthermore, a regular unit that patrols regularly will have much greater situational awareness of the environment than the less-frequently-patrolling PRT or civil-affairs team. By integrating civilian agencies directly with battalions, as opposed to being attached to PRTs, civilian personnel will have greater accessibility to their areas and an increased understanding and involvement with military operations.

Doctrinally, the Army acknowledges the importance of tactical-level interagency relationships and planning in Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*; FM 3-24.2, *Counterinsurgency Tactics*; FM 3-07, *Stabilization*; and FM 3-07.1, *Security Force Assistance*. FM 3-24 addresses tactical-level interagency considerations with a 15-point coordination checklist that highlights important factors for company-grade officers to consider.<sup>6</sup> FM 3-24.2 specifically states that companies preparing for COIN operations must "organize for interagency operations."<sup>7</sup> FM 3-07.1 states that interagency relationships and integrated planning are still important for tactical units deploying with a SFA mission.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to note that these field manuals contain the collective expertise of civilian professionals and several high-ranking military officers with years of experience in interagency operations. As Army doctrine and previous military campaigns indicate, the roles of civilian agencies and the Department of Defense are inextricably linked, regardless of the type and level of conflict. Though civilian agencies specializing in development and stabilization have a limited role in high-intensity conflict, it should not preclude their integration into planning and operations before, during and after campaigns.

## Three-part solution

We must address three issues if we expect to improve interagency relationships at the tactical level:

- The Army must increase awareness and exposure of each other's organization and capabilities at company-grade levels;
- The Army must broaden company-grade officers' understanding of stabilization operations; and
- Most importantly, the Army needs to establish a baseline as to how civilian agencies and personnel integrate into tactical units.

I propose the following recommendations as a potential course of action to address these issues.

A mutual lack of understanding of both sides is, undoubtedly, systemic and problematic for interagency relationships. Maneuver officers receive no interagency training at their basic courses or the Maneuver Captain's Career Course. It is not until officers reach the field-grade level and attend Command and General Staff College, participate in an interagency fellowship or at-

tend the Joint War College that they receive any formal training on interagency operations.

Awareness and training for interagency operations should begin with each branch's basic course. Initially, each officer basic course can feature blocks of instruction taught by civilian junior agency reps that describe their respective agency's history, capabilities and organizational structure. The captain's career course could offer a more in-depth integration and block of instruction into its curriculum about interagency operations and planning. For example, junior DoS foreign-service officers or OTI/USAID representatives (with field experience) can integrate into the battalion staff military decision-making process modules.<sup>9</sup>

Also, at least one of the battalion-phase operations-order modules should feature a low-intensity scenario in which the students have to think critically about the human terrain and even more critically about the integration of civilian agencies into their plan.

Finally, civilian agencies can also integrate into the training rotations at the Combined Maneuver Readiness Center, Joint Readiness Training Center and National Training Center. Formal exposure and integration of civilian agencies should not wait until officers are at the field-grade level. By promoting awareness and integration in the nascent phases of an officer's development, future leaders and staff officers will be more inclined to accept and incorporate civilian agencies in future deployments.

The broadening of company-grade officers' understanding of stability operations is a daunting task that requires considerable time to accomplish. Specialized training from and with civilian agencies and perennial academic instruction are the most viable ways to broaden company-grade officers' intellectual understanding of stability operations. Starting with the officer's commissioning source, classes could introduce the basic principles and relevance of stability operations in a historical and political context. These initial classes would stress how often an officer's scope of duties could potentially fall outside offensive and defensive operations. In officer basic courses, their intellectual development would continue with further exploration of stability's doctrinal tenets: civil security, civil control, essential services, governance and economic/infrastructure development.<sup>10</sup>

When developing OPORDs, platoon trainers would instruct and encourage lieutenants to weigh area, structures, capabilities, organizations, people and events equally with other factors such as weather, terrain and enemy situation. Finally, at the captain's career course, officers would receive a class on Phase IV operations (stabilization) and how, historically, tactical-level units and USG civilian agencies have been integral in translating the success of military operations into political goals through stability operations. The career course could also feature forums featuring junior members of USG agencies that would encourage stimulating dialogue and help company-grade officers see conflict through a broader lens.

Academic and intellectual preparation should not be limited to professional-development courses. Company, troop and battery commanders should also stress the importance of stabilization operations to their subordinate leaders through professional-development classes.

## Tactical interagency operations model

A proposed model for tactical interagency integration is the "tactical interagency operations model." The TIOM is neither prescriptive nor solely applicable to OIF/OEF task forces. The flexibility of the TIOM structure can account for many agencies and is relevant to any tactical military formation regardless if

the DoD or DoS has the lead. For the sake of this model, this article will collectively refer to all civilian agency personnel as tactical civilian-agency counterparts. TCACs encompass individuals from USDA, DoS, USAID, DoS, DoJ, OTI, etc.

Before discussing the TIOM's formation and processes, there is an important lesson-learned from my unit's previous deployment that is essential to the TIOM's formation and execution. During our initial months of deployment, TCACs were rarely consulted or integrated into our operations and planning cycles. Moreover, they were cramped within a small building that was isolated from our plans cell. By the fourth month of deployment, new buildings were established that featured multiple workstations in open-spaced rooms. The squadron commander and executive officer ordered all TCACs on the FOB to relocate to a room adjacent to our tactical operations center and plans cell. The consolidation of these individuals into one room provided two primary benefits: first, it increased physical and verbal interaction with the squadron military staff, and it forced the various agencies to interact with each other and share information. Though geographic proximity may sound trite, it is the first and most important step to ensuring interagency integration.

The TIOM is essentially self-contained, but each individual can and should have open discourse with two other entities: the battalion S-3 shop and the command teams. The open discourse serves only to foster communication and cohesiveness; however, it is not the primary means of planning or facilitating operations. The battalion S-9 acts as the primary conduit for integration and information flow among the S-3 shop, the S-2 shop, the TIOM and the commanders.

Though often overlooked and not considered a "primary" staff position, the S-9 (usually filled by a junior captain or lieutenant on staff) should possess three skills: extensive knowledge in planning processes (district stability framework; MDMP; decide, detect, deliver, exploit and assess, etc.); basic knowledge of civilian agencies' capabilities; and a high degree of emotional intelligence.<sup>11</sup> The S-9 should understand that his ability to create strong relationships among the TCACs, the military staff and the commanders is the TIOM's foundation.

The S-9 is not in charge of the TCACs and should not be responsible for their performance. The TIOM has no inherent command structure and functions as more of a collective thinking group. The TIOM consists of, at a minimum, TCACs, S-9, S-3, S-2 and company intelligence-support team representatives from each maneuver company. Although stronger personalities and biases may arise within the TIOM, all personnel, to include military, are equal members. The TIOM should meet daily to discuss their respective operations and priorities and to share information.

Once every two weeks, the TIOM should record their programs' efforts and battlefield understanding on some type of running document (something similar to the DSF). This meeting serves as a forcing function to share information from patrols or field data and maintain a common understanding of the battlefield environment.

DSF provides a quite comprehensive system for analyzing the environment, identifying sources of instability and establishing/resourcing programs or projects to address those needs. (The TIOM is not bound to DSF; however, DSF is somewhat accepted and understood among civilian organizations.) On weeks that DSF is not discussed, the TIOM should have a working group

that will take the DSF's findings and incorporate them into the targeting process of the S-3 shop.

Task forces might refer to these meetings as "non-lethal working groups." I submit that the term "non-lethal" is misleading and creates a disparity in priorities between TCACs and the military. Another term for this meeting could possibly be the "civilian operational nesting work group." This work group would collectively assess the previous weeks' operations and prioritize and nest efforts for future operations with the S-3 shop and company-level targeting officers. During this meeting, company representatives and TCACs could coordinate for future patrols or request various assets from each other.

Due to the level of lethal operations in an area, some units may decide to have a separate targeting meeting that focuses exclusively on raids, ambushes and improvised explosive devices. It is imperative that if military units hold separate targeting meetings, representatives from the TIOM or S-9 should be present to ensure that a conflict of interests does not arise. If a conflict arises, the TCAC should appeal with the maneuver company, then the battalion S-3 and, finally, if a compromise isn't reached, with the task force commander or DoS official. The TIOM model does not assume the military will always be in the lead or will have the final say in operations or programming. The agency in the lead for the mission, and its appointed representative, will more than likely have the overall discretionary authority for tactical-level decisions. The TIOM's structure and systems are not held to any set standard; however, the TIOM's primary function is to ensure the integration of personnel, planning and resources.

## Conclusion

The addition of USG civilian agencies to tactical-level Army task forces is crucial for stabilization in areas of conflict and post-conflict. Company-grade officers have to accept civilian agencies into their formations and be willing to integrate the agencies into planning and operations. We as an organization need to be critical of our tactical interagency shortcomings and scrutinize our own understanding of stability operations within the spectrum of conflict. Though increasing our formations' lethality is our primary responsibility, the Army's role in stability operations is imperative to transitioning military success into political goals. The strengthening of tactical interagency operations and relationships will help ensure the achievement of political goals in future areas of conflict.

In conclusion, three factors have contributed to the Army's operational inability to effectively conduct tactical interagency operations: a lack of awareness and exposure to each other's capabilities; company-grade officers' narrowed perception of stabilization and the operational environment; and the absence of a baseline model for tactical interagency operations. To bridge the tactical interagency gap, the Army must increase awareness and exposure of USG agencies' organization and capabilities within company-grade levels, broaden company-grade officers' understanding of stabilization operations; and lastly, establish a model for USG agency tactical integration and planning.



*CPT Marc Dudek commands Troop A, 1-61 Cavalry, 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (Air Assault), Fort Campbell, KY. His previous assignments include assistant operations*

officer, squadron S-9 and squadron S-4 at Fort Campbell, KY; and rifle platoon leader with 1-14 Infantry, 2<sup>nd</sup> Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Schofield Barracks, HI. CPT Dudek's military schooling includes Maneuver Captains' Career Course and Infantry Officer Basic Course. He holds a bachelor's of science degree from the U.S. Military Academy in American history.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Joint Publication 3-08, *Interorganizational Coordination During Joint Operations*, June 24, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Brown, Frances Z., "The U.S. Surge and Afghan Local Governance: Lessons for Transition," United States Institute for Peace Special Report, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, December 2006.

<sup>4</sup> "Strategy and Oversight/Civilian Uplift," SIGAR, SIGAR Audit 11-02, Oct. 26, 2010; retrieved from <http://www.sigar.mil/audits/report.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Kagan, Frederick W. Dr., "War and Aftermath," in DeToy, B., *Turning Victory Into Success: Military Operations After the Campaign*, Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> FM 3-24.

<sup>7</sup> FM 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, April 2009.

<sup>8</sup> FM 3-07.1, *Security Force Assistance*, May 2009.

<sup>9</sup> I acknowledge that most USG agencies lack the resources and personnel to accommodate this training; however, the mutual rewards from this cross-training possess too much potential to remain unconsidered.

<sup>10</sup> FM 3-24.

<sup>11</sup> Goleman, Daniel, *Emotional Intelligence*, New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1995.

## ACRONYM QUICK-SCAN

**CERP** – Commander's Emergency Response Program

**COIN** – counterinsurgency

**DoJ** – Department of Justice

**DoS** – Department of State

**DSF** – district stability framework

**FM** – field manual

**FOB** – forward operating base

**MDMP** – military decision-making process

**OEF** – Operation Enduring Freedom

**OIF** – Operation Iraqi Freedom

**OPORD** – operations order

**OTI** – Office of Transition Initiative

**PRT** – provincial reconstruction team

**SFA** – security-force assistance

**SIGAR** – Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

**TCAC** – tactical civilian-agency counterparts

**TIOM** – tactical interagency operations model

**USAID** – U.S. Agency for International Development

**USDA** – U.S. Department of Agriculture

**USG** – U.S. government