Battalion-Level Civil-Military Operations — Danish Style —

CAPTAIN BENJAMIN BUCHHOLZ

In preparation for a joint British and American Civil Affairs operation in Iraq, a diverse team under the aegis of the 9th/12th Lancers researched past assessments of the town done by Danish forces at the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom. During this research, the team learned a great deal about Danish techniques for conducting Civil-Military Operations (CMO), techniques which will help battalion-level forces plan and conduct their own operations supporting the transition of governance and security to local Iraqis. The most relevant Danish innovations involve the task organization of their CMO assets and knowledge management in regard to CMO projects.

The Danish Battle Group has approximately 550 soldiers, augmented in Civil Affairs activities by civilians working for the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The unit's mission is to provide operational security for coalition forces, educate Iraqi forces to facilitate a transition to self-sufficient security operations, and to support the reconstruction of Iraqi society. Their concept is to have an overall national strategy to fill the reconstruction gap from the time a regime has collapsed until a new system of governance has been established.

Courtesy photo

Nicholas Keller poses in Basra with representatives of the local Iraqi Sewerage Office during the inspection of one of three new "suction and jetting" trucks which were donated by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in June 2005.

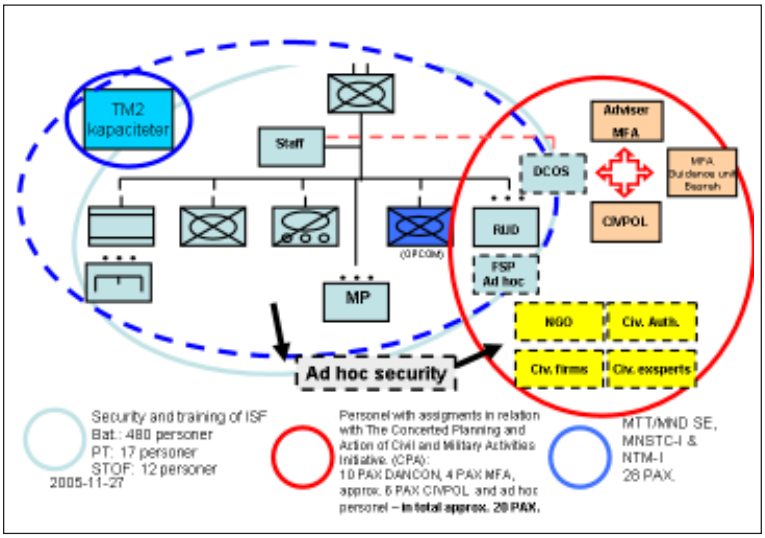
Captain Ferdinand Kjaerulff, one of the Danish officers the British and American team met, said, "the Danish military is not directly interested in state-building but has realized the need to support the transition phase from the conflict to the state-building phase. In the war on terrorism, the military is needed to support the initial phase of the state-building process in order to prevent terrorism and 'failed states' to develop."

To do this, the Danish Battle Group employs three separate but interrelated agencies to conduct CMO — a Civil Military Cooperation (CIMIC) Team responsible for any Civil Affairs actions that impact force protection, a Reconstruction Team (RUD) responsible for coordinating projects designed to improve the standard of living for Iraqis, and the nonmilitary "Concerted Planning and Action of Civil and Military Activities Initiative" (CPA) run by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The American and British CMO team met with the CIMIC Team liaison officer Captain A.I. Gjevnøe, CPT Ferdinand Kjaerulff from the Reconstruction Team, and Nicholas Keller from the CPA.

Nicholas Keller had previously served in a military capacity as a CIMIC platoon leader in southern Iraq. He provided the American and British CMO Team with an assessment completed in 2004. In his current capacity Keller works directly for the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and though he has no direct military mandate, he coordinates the disbursement of Danish funds to civil affairs projects throughout the province. In his role, Keller can quickly approve projects up to $100,000 in cost. His intimate knowledge of military and political objectives allows him to advise on the appropriate disbursement of funds for larger, or longer lasting, projects. He updated the 2004 Danish report on Safwan with his personal knowledge of pending and current projects and will continue to liaise with future British and American efforts in the town to ensure they fit within overall plans for the province.

Keller works closely with CPT Kjaerulff's Reconstruction Team, helping to fund their projects. Kjaerulff's Reconstruction Team is one of four such teams composed of Danish military personnel who coordinate directly with local governing bodies to suggest, plan, evaluate, find funding for, execute and maintain civil projects. Currently, for three Iraqi towns in the rural area north and west of Basra, these Reconstruction Teams have more than 500 projects in the execution phase, many more in various stages of planning, or awaiting funding. This is a success story, the exact sort of success story not receiving enough press in America, the small but important milestones in rebuilding and establishing a better Iraq.

Sometimes a project has less impact on the local standard of living, but — instead — a definite military importance. Such projects require close coordination with local governmental agencies, and if handled correctly, can serve in a dual capacity,



providing benefits to Iraqis as well as to coalition forces. Take, for example, a project involving the clearing, grading, and leveling of the shoulders of a busy section of highway. For coalition forces this is extremely important in order to eliminate locations for IED emplacement, to improve driving conditions, and to clear lines of sight. Yet, if undertaken with Iraqi cooperation and input, and with the full consent of local governing councils, it has added value — in this instance allowing better pedestrian and bicycle transportation along the route. This type of CMO project is, in the Danish scheme, coordinated not by a Reconstruction Team, but by a CIMIC Team such as the one for which CPT Gjevnøe works.

The three separate Danish CMO efforts are divided logically to provide clear guidance for distinct CMO objectives: military reconstruction, force protection, and funding of civilian projects. However, without close coordination none of these efforts would succeed, or — worse yet — they would either be duplicated or in direct conflict with other military or political objectives. For this reason the Danish have created an excellent system for managing the knowledge and activities of each function.

Knowledge management, especially with regard to Civil Affairs projects, has caused a problem for coalition forces. Specifically, with American troops rotating out of country yearly and British forces rotating every six months, Civil Affairs teams as well as combat patrols and leaders develop but often fail to pass on to their replacement units a wealth of information regarding infrastructure, local politics, local personalities, pending projects, needs and wants of the population, and other pertinent information.

The Danes recognized this at the same time as they recognized the potential for duplication of effort by their three-pronged CMO attack. Therefore, they have created a massive database chronicling all past, present and future civil projects, along with corollary information on the relationships between key local personnel involved in the planning, execution, and future maintenance of such projects. This information proves invaluable at the onset of new projects, allowing the Danes to cross-pollinate successes, benchmark progress, eliminate duplication, communicate instantly between their agencies, choose the most efficient and trustworthy contractors for new work, and maintain and transfer that storehouse of information to their successors each rotation.

The method for this knowledge accumulation and sharing is a simple Access database. It is searchable across multiple fields. CPT Kjaerulff demonstrated how, if necessary, he could call up all projects related to, say, education, and then further sort the results to give him a list of the headmasters for the schools throughout the entire sector, or limit that list to only a single township, maybe eight or nine people. Having selected such a project, or contact, the display page of the database instantly provided him with a project status (planning, waiting funding, execution, maintenance), contact information for all the relevant persons, links to related projects undertaken by the CIMIC team or the CPA, a short synopsis and recommendation entered by the CPA on potential political ramifications of the project (viewable by the Danish government back in Europe), grid locations for the project site, and next steps for the project. The database also allows CPT Kjaerulff's commanding officer Major Christian Ishøj, chief of the RUD, to create and print customized reports in Excel and to monitor the progress of his four Reconstruction Teams. The different teams from CIMIC, RUD, and CPA all work on the same database on a common server. The database can be used by different actors not sharing same server, simply by sending e-mails with small updating Excel files.

American Civil Affairs operations should adopt a similar three-tiered CMO process and augment it with a system of knowledge management to enable close, continual coordination and to facilitate lasting situational awareness as units rotate in and out of theater. This approach allows targeted responses to force protection issues that involve close coordination with local governmental agencies, an interim system for providing civilian relief that does not necessarily meet a military objective, and a means by which to deconflict military and political objectives, thereby easing and speeding the process of reconstruction and eventual self-governance.

Captain Buchholz is currently serving as the S5 and Route Security Element commander for the 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry Regiment, which is currently deployed to Iraq. Prior to his current assignment, he served as the Mobilization and Information Operations Officer for the 32nd Separate Infantry Brigade and a Unit Assistor for the 1-338th Training Support Battalion out of Fort McCoy, Wisconsin.

The Danish anti-IED project not only provided clearer lines of sight and a substantially decreased number of locations for IED emplacement, but also made it easier for local Iraqis to use the road for pedestrian and bicycle transport.