



“Divorce Counseling”

Civil Affairs Proponency under a New Support Paradigm

Captain Sean P. Walsh, U.S. Army

ARMY CIVIL AFFAIRS (CA) units are increasingly recognized as important tools that America has available in its fight against terrorism in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other states. However, Civil Affairs as a proponent has not received funding, support, or recognition commensurate with its mission. Perhaps the most significant challenge the branch faces is overcoming a command structure that separates Active and Reserve components, reducing CA units’ capabilities and hobbling their relationship with maneuver units.

The current CA structure does not properly align with the rapidly expanding and maturing needs of the CA total force. While it is tempting to continue to examine the problem of a CA proponency from the Reserve component versus Active component perspective, the continuing demands placed on the CA branch compel us to embrace a new support paradigm.

Gun-toting Diplomats

Described by the Army as “gun-toting diplomats,” CA units in both the Active and Reserve components conduct counterterrorism holistically by helping partner nations address the underlying grievances that lead people to violence and extremism.¹ Operating in four-man teams either to support conventional forces or as part of a special operations task force, CA units garner local support for U.S. and host nation policies, develop capability and institutions, and help deter terrorist recruitment. CA soldiers are commanders’ cultural advisors, regional experts, and the Army’s experts in negotiation, reconstruction, and civil reconnaissance.² Testifying before Congress in 2007, then-Army Special Operations Command commander, Lieutenant General Robert W. Wagner, described CA units as “experts in both advancing U.S. interests and objectives and developing the capabilities of partner nations through regional engagements.”³ As described in RAND Corporations’ *War by Other Means*, CA operations are most effective when they go beyond merely “winning hearts and minds” and become a key part of a transformational counterinsurgency operation that aims to “change the underlying structure of society and governance . . . to make insurgency an irrelevant mode of pursuing a grievance.”⁴

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PHOTO: LTG Robert W. Wagner, commanding general, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, transfers the command of the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command to LTG James R. Helmly, commander, U.S. Army Reserve Command, during a ceremony held at Fort Bragg, NC, 23 May 2006. (Photo by Gillian M. Albro, USASOC PAO)

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Currently, about 80 percent of the Army's CA Soldiers are in the Army Reserve, assigned—along with reserve psychological operations forces—to the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (USACAPOC), which is subordinate to the United States Army Reserve Command (USARC).⁵ The majority of CA units have traditionally been in the Army Reserve to facilitate access to the rare skills of functional specialists—such as veterinarians, agricultural experts, and economists—that are better developed in the civilian sector.

The remaining 20 percent of CA strength is in the active component, assigned primarily to the Army's lone active duty CA unit, the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade (Airborne).⁶ The brigade reports directly to the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) along with other special operations units such as the Special Forces groups and the 75th Ranger Regiment. Outside of USASOC, Active component CA Soldiers also serve as brigade combat team S-9s, division and corps G-9s at theater special operation commands, and in other assignments.

USACAPOC civil affairs units support general-purpose forces, while CA Soldiers assigned to USASOC support missions within Special Operations Command (SOCOM). Current Army rules of allocation for deployed units generally result in a CA company attached to each brigade combat team and a CA battalion attached to each division. Civil affairs functional specialists also provide support to provincial reconstruction teams and other civil-support elements. The Reserve component CA commands support higher echelons.⁷

The Problem

Until November 2006, the entire CA force, both Active and Reserve, was assigned to USACAPOC. In 2003, the Department of Defense (DOD) under then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld questioned why CA, with its focus on the indirect approach to war, belonged in the same command as special direct action units like the Ranger Regiment. According to a report on CA from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, DOD took the position that reassigning CA out of USASOC would allow better integration between CA and general-purpose forces. The report also stated that

the Army resisted moving CA, arguing that doing so would hinder CA capabilities in the short term and not improve their integration with conventional forces in the end. Despite the Army's resistance, DOD reassigned all Reserve component CA units from USASOC to USARC. Active component CA remains under the purview of USASOC.⁸ Members of the CA community call this reassignment "the divorce"—with all the negative connotations that word conjures.

The current arrangement, Active component CA as part of USASOC and the Reserve component as part of USARC, has hindered the development of a total force CA capability without noticeably improving the relationship between CA and conventional forces. While the move breached the operational wall between general purpose and special operations forces, placing USACAPOC under USARC built a brand new wall in its place. In addition, the divorce has exacerbated existing Active and Reserve component tensions and strengthened the view that Reserve CA forces are not as capable as their active duty counterparts.⁹ These tensions hurt the development of CA as a proponent and diminish the perceived importance of reserve units.

The divorce has also hindered the evolution of CA doctrine and training. Fort Bragg's John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School is the proponent for both Reserve and Active component CA even as it writes doctrine and develops education for special operations forces. Active component CA officers at the center and school are writing doctrine meant for both Reserve and Active component CA units, despite the fact that the majority of their operational assignments are in Active component special operations units. As a result, USACAPOC is not the proponent for the 80 percent of CA Soldiers it administers. In

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effect, neither the two-star reserve commander of USACAPOC nor the four-star commander of Joint Forces Command supervises or directs the development of doctrine and schooling for CA.¹⁰ These factors are significant because of the current extremely rapid pace of development of CA doctrine and the large-scale expansion of the CA force.

USACAPOC's assignment to USARC means that reserve CA units are no longer able to obtain Major Force Program 11 (MFP 11) funds earmarked for special operations forces. Civil Affairs struggled to meet its budgetary needs while under USASOC, but now USACAPOC must compete against every other reserve unit in the Army for funding. Under USARC, reserve CA units have had more success obtaining some kinds of equipment, but the inability to access Major Force Program 11 funds makes it difficult for reserve units to obtain the specialized equipment and training they need.¹¹

Academic and military observers have suggested a number of solutions to correct the fallout of the "divorce." Most notable is a Secretary of Defense-commissioned report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies that calls for USACAPOC to return to USASOC and administer all CA units under a single, robust, active-duty, general-officer command. The principal advantages of this plan are that it would help address funding issues by giving Reserve Component CA units access to MFP 11 funds and alleviate Active/Reserve component tensions by making all components equal under a single command. It would also clarify the issue of command and control by returning to a simple organizational structure that, while far from perfect, is certainly preferable to the existing one.¹²

A New Paradigm

A return to the old system as advocated by the Center for Strategic and International Studies report certainly has merit. USACAPOC would again be part of USASOC and Active and Reserve component civil affairs units both would be designated as special operations forces. However, the center's recommendation examines the issue of total force Civil Affairs through an outdated lens. Solving the problem of how to organize

CA requires a new perspective because of the rapid increase in the size of the CA force and its mission requirements since 9/11. The major organizational challenge is no longer managing Active and Reserve components, but appropriately supporting conventional and special operations forces. While in general active-duty CA units support SOF and Reserve CA units support conventional forces, exceptions are becoming increasingly common. During the surge in Iraq, CA units supported general-purpose forces in Iraq and elsewhere, while Reserve component CA units conducted special operations-like missions.¹³ More important, the planned 2013 addition of the 85th CA Brigade (an Active CA brigade supporting conventional forces) and the need for active-duty CA staff officers at the brigade combat team level and higher will make the old Active/Reserve component frame of reference increasingly obsolete.¹⁴

Looking at the CA mission from this new perspective gives us three critical insights for developing a new proponenty. An Army proponent is the agency that develops doctrine, organization, training, and education for a specific area of responsibility. Because of the demands of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the primary requirement of CA has become supporting conventional forces, while supporting SOF has become a secondary concern in terms of manpower, deployments, and funding.¹⁵

The increased demand for CA generalists rather than functional specialists in Iraq and Afghanistan has exacerbated this trend. To be most effective, CA doctrine and military education should focus on how CA can best support general-purpose forces; support to SOF should be a specialty.

Active CA support of general-purpose forces will grow in the next few years until it meets or exceeds Active component requirements to support SOF. The creation of the 85th CA Brigade (dedicated to supporting conventional forces) and the addition of Active component CA staff positions within brigade combat teams, division and corps staffs, and higher echelons will eventually require a larger Active component contribution than that required for SOF. As a result, CA support to general-purpose forces will no longer be a primarily Reserve component mission.

The Army should recognize and embrace the significant differences between the missions and capabilities of CA units that support SOF and those supporting conventional forces. Testifying before Congress in 2007, then-SOCOM commander, General Bryan D. Brown, specifically mentioned USASOC Civil Affairs units as special operations forces “trained, organized, and equipped to perform functions that conventional forces are not.”¹⁶ CA support to SOF requires CA Soldiers to live and work directly with SOF teams in isolated, austere, and remote environments, and be familiar with special operations command and control procedures. On the other hand, CA support to conventional forces requires understanding the military decision making process at the tactical and operational level and knowing how to integrate CA organizations within the operations of large conventional units.

Civil Affairs units supporting special operations forces need training in more specialized skills such as languages, advanced negotiation, and operating nontactical vehicles, while CA units supporting general-purpose forces focus on conventional operations. Unique doctrine, schooling, and education are required for each kind of CA support.¹⁷ Instead of

ignoring these distinctions in the interest of lessening Active/Reserve component tensions—the Army should recognize and embrace them as a way to maximize support to both SOF and general-purpose forces. (See table.)

The Aviation Branch as a Model for Propensity

Because the current CA organizational structure is insufficient and returning to the old system is not acceptable, the Army should examine other branches for potential model solutions. The John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School has already examined Special Forces, Infantry, and the Chaplain Corps as potential models.¹⁸ However, it is better to look at a model from a branch containing both conventional and special operations units. The Aviation Branch is probably the best example; it supervises a large conventional force as well as USASOC’s 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, which supports the Ranger Regiment, Special Forces, and special mission units. Viewed broadly, the 160th essentially has the same mission as a conventional Aviation unit—to transport personnel in and around the battlefield and

	Civil Affairs Support to Special Operations Forces	Civil Affairs Support to General Purpose Forces
Unit Size	Attached to small special operations task forces	Attached to battalion, brigade, and higher
Type of Operation	Contribute directly to Foreign Internal Defense and Unconventional Warfare	Contributes primarily to conventional operations and large-scale COIN
Command and Control	Controlled by Theater Special Operations Command or Ambassador/Country Team	Controlled by a conventional command structure
Operational Base	Must be able to operate in isolated, austere environments independently or with other special operation forces	Operate in developed theaters with general purpose forces
Examples of Rare Skills Required	Navigation of nontactical vehicles and advanced language skills	Significantly greater level of functional expertise
Patrol and Combat Operations	Small unit patrolling and integration with other special operations forces	Conventional patrolling and integration with general purpose forces

provide attack aviation fire support—but its highly specialized equipment and techniques, rigorous selection process, and the often classified nature of its operations distinguish it. The Aviation Center of Excellence at Fort Rucker is the Aviation Branch proponent and writes doctrine and field manuals for the entire aviation force, while Fort Bragg's Special Warfare Center and School (in coordination with the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment and USASOC's Directorate of Special Operations Aviation) is the proponent for special operations aviation. While special operations aviation has its own field manuals and doctrine, the manuals refer to Fort Rucker regulations, and like all special operations field manuals, "complement and [are] consistent with Joint and Army doctrine."¹⁹ Pilots and aviation support personnel frequently serve in both the aviation regiment and conventional units throughout their careers.

Civil Affairs could follow a similar model. The 95th CA Brigade should continue to report directly to USASOC as a special operations unit within the larger CA force, just as 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment is a special operations unit

within the aviation force. All CA units that support conventional forces, regardless of component, should be under USACAPOC. For the next few years, this will be mostly Reserve component units, but as the CA branch grows, an increasing number of Active component CA units such as the 85th CA Brigade could migrate to USACAPOC. In accordance with AR 5-22, USACAPOC cannot be the proponent for CA, so it would have to work closely with another organization, most likely Training and Doctrine Command, to provide doctrine, guidance, and schooling for the CA branch and community. This is similar to the role Fort Rucker plays for the aviation force. Similarly, just as the Special Warfare Center and School prepares doctrine for other special operations units, under this model it would only write doctrine for USASOC-assigned CA units and provide education and training for CA Soldiers supporting special operations.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Aviation Branch Model

This model has five key advantages over returning all CA units to USASOC. It recognizes



U.S. Air Force, TSGT Aaron Crann

Loadmasters with the 17th Special Operations Squadron send signals from the back of a MC-130P Combat Shadow to the crew of a U.S. Army MH-47 helicopter from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) during an aerial refueling mission near the Korean peninsula, Osan Air Base, Republic of Korea, 12 February 2009.

and embraces the differences in capabilities and training required to provide proper support to both special operations and general-purpose forces. Rather than writing catch-all doctrine and providing non-specific training for both kinds of CA units, the school and center could focus on what it does best: training, educating, and writing doctrine for special operations forces. Just as important, USACAPOC would be able to drive the development of general CA doctrine.

This model also allows better integration of CA and general-purpose forces. One of the original rationales for moving USACAPOC out of USASOC was to remove a bureaucratic barrier between SOF and general-purpose forces. Unfortunately, the move simply put a new barrier in its place. Having USACAPOC as an Active component command outside of USASOC would remove both bureaucratic barriers.

This new model will also help alleviate existing Active component/Reserve component tensions within the CA community. Under the Aviation branch model, CA support to general-purpose forces will be a total-force mission rather than simply a Reserve component one. As a result, the perception of Reserve component CA units and their contributions will improve, as will the overall image of the CA community.

Another significant benefit: Active component CA Soldiers and officers will be able to serve in assignments in special operations and in the conventional forces just as their aviation and infantry counterparts do. This ability will allow the cross-pollination of ideas and tactics, techniques, and procedures that will improve the quality of CA support and strengthen the entire CA community. We should also institute a program allowing mobilized Reserve component CA Soldiers to serve in special operations assignments to

strengthen this cross-pollination of concepts and experiences in the CA total force as well.²⁰

The elevation of USACAPOC to an Active component command outside of USASOC will help make CA equal to older branches such as Infantry, Armor, or Signal. Such a move, along with the creation of additional Active component CA general officer positions at the Pentagon and within USACAPOC and USASOC, will help reverse the perception among many Army officers that joining CA is a “career ender” and help attract the ambitious and talented officers that the branch requires.²¹

Even so, the Aviation Branch model does pose a number of disadvantages. For example, increasing the number of Active component positions outside of SOF will make the assignment and assessment of active-duty CA Soldiers more challenging. Currently, all active-duty Soldiers selected for CA training report to the 95th CA Brigade upon successful completion of the CA Qualification Course. However, if many positions for Active component CA Soldiers reside outside of USASOC, other assignments may be necessary. Assignment to the 95th CA Brigade might eventually require a selection process similar in purpose to Special Forces assessment and selection, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment’s Green Platoon Course and Selection, or the Ranger Regiment’s Ranger Indoctrination Program. This will be a bureaucratic hurdle and will extend the already lengthy training pipeline, but instituting such a program is a manageable challenge. In addition, a CA selection course will enhance the reputation of selected CA personnel within the special operations community by giving them additional *bona fides*.²²

One of the major advantages of subordinating USACAPOC to USARC was that USARC understood the reserve mobilization process better than any other command in the Army. While more CA Soldiers will be Active component in the near future, even by 2013 over 70 percent will still be Reserve component.²³ Managing this large number of Reserve component Soldiers would be somewhat easier if USACAPOC were still directly underneath USARC, but the benefit is not significant enough to prevent moving USACAPOC to another command. Appointing a Reserve component officer as the USACAPOC deputy will also help USACAPOC manage the mobilization process.²⁴

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The greatest disadvantage of this move—compared with simply returning USACAPOC to USASOC—is that the command will remain unable to access MFP 11 funds earmarked for special operations forces. While USACAPOC’s funding would likely be better in USASOC, placing the command in Forces Command rather than USARC is still a potentially significant improvement. To overcome any remaining funding gap, the Army should recognize that CA units supporting general-purpose forces still require a significant amount of specialized training and equipment. While the training and equipment requirements of general-purpose force CA units are not the same as SOF CA units, they differ enough from most conventional units to require supplemental funding. The Army will need to push for increased funding for CA elements supporting general-purpose forces to ensure that they have everything they need to accomplish their pivotal missions.

Joint Proponency

The CA Army proponency question also raises the issue of Joint proponency.²⁵ Currently, SOCOM is the Joint proponent for all CA units, including U.S. Marine Corps CA Groups and the U.S. Navy Maritime CA Group. (The Air Force does not have a formal civil affairs organization but does provide important augmentation to civil affairs-related functions such as provincial reconstruction teams).²⁶

Special Operations Command is not the ideal place for a CA Joint proponency because no other CA unit within the Department of Defense is considered a special operations unit besides the Army’s 95th CA Brigade. Neither Navy nor Marine

Corps CA units are considered special operations forces. Title X legislation specifies CA as one of the core special operations tasks, and SOCOM certainly should have a role in civil affairs proponency, but the need for a better Joint proponent becomes apparent when one accepts the new paradigm of managing CA support for both general-purpose and special operations units.

Joint Forces Command (or the office that inherits its Joint proponency function if the command is closed) is probably the best place for Joint proponency as it will align Joint proponency for CA with Army proponency.²⁷ This arrangement will continue to raise the profile of CA within the conventional military and help establish the branch as a crucial battlefield system rather than a specialized afterthought.

Conclusion

Making USACAPOC an active command outside of USASOC will put it in the best position to take a major part not only in the development of overall CA doctrine and education, but also in preparing the majority of CA units to support general-purpose forces. Similarly, leaving the 95th CA Brigade as the only CA unit within USASOC will enable the Special Warfare Center and School to concentrate exclusively on CA support to special operations. This system will be a dramatic change of proponency from both the current system and the one prior to “the divorce” and will have to overcome significant bureaucratic hurdles. However, such a change is necessary to develop a mature civil affairs total force capable of meeting the new demands placed on it by modern threats. **MR**

NOTES

1. “Gun Toting Diplomats in Action,” 23 April 2009, available at <www.bragg.army.mil/sorb/SORB_CIVILAFFAIRS_MOVIE2.html>.

2. Civil Affairs Operations are defined formally as “those military operations conducted by civil affairs forces that (1) enhance the relationship between military forces and civil authorities in localities where military forces are present; (2) require coordination with other interagency organizations, intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations, indigenous populations and institutions, and the private sector; and (3) involve application of functional specialty skills that normally are the responsibility of civil government to enhance the conduct of civil-military operations.” See Joint Publication (JP) 3-57, *Civil-Military Operations* (Washington, DC: Joint Staff, 8 July 2008), GL-6.

3. Robert W. Wagner, testimony on “Current Manning, Equipping and Readiness Challenges Facing Special Operations Forces,” at a hearing before the Terrorism, Unconventional Threats, and Capabilities Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, 31 January 2007.

4. David C. Gompert and John Gordon, IV, et al., *War by Other Means* (Arlington: RAND Corporation, 2008), 92.

5. This article only deals directly with the issue of civil affairs proponency; however, one cannot address this issue without also examining psychological operations

proponency. For an excellent discussion of the issue of the psychological operations proponency, see Timothy D. Huening, “Advancing the Art and Science of Psychological Operations Requires a Serious Investment,” 21 April 2009, available at <<http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2009/04/advancing-the-art-and-science/>>.

6. Department of Defense, *Report to Congress on Civil Affairs* (Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations, Low Intensity Conflict and Interdependent Capabilities, 29 April 2009), 7.

7. *Ibid.*, 7.

8. Kathleen H. Hicks and Christine E. Wormuth, *The Future of the U.S. Civil Affairs Force: A Report of the CSIS International Security Program* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 2009), 36; and Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England, “Reassignment and Designation of Army Reserve Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Forces,” 14 November 2006. Hicks and Wormuth’s illuminating and insightful report provides an excellent overview of current challenges facing Civil Affairs.

9. Hicks, 36. For an example of the kind of Reserve/Active component tensions that existed before “the divorce,” see Mark L. Kimmey, “Transforming Civil Affairs,” *Army Magazine*, 1 March 2005, available at <www3.ousa.org/webint/DeptArmyMagazine.nsf/byid/KGRG-6CUQKG>.

10. "USACAPOC (A) Command Overview Slideshow," 10 April 2008.
11. Hicks, 36-37; and Special Forces officer, interview by author, June 2009.
12. Hicks, 38.
13. Ross F. Lightsey, "Civil Affairs Support to the Surge," *Special Warfare*, March-April 2008, 16-23.
14. Christopher Holshek, "The Scroll and the Sword: Synergizing Civil-Military Power," April 2006; available from <www.thecornwallisgroup.org/pdf/CX1_2006_11_Holshek.pdf>, 133; and *Report to Congress on Civil Affairs*, 7-8.
15. "USACAPOC (A) Command Overview Slideshow."
16. Bryan D. Brown, "Testimony before the Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services House of Representatives on Current Manning, Equipping and Readiness Challenges Facing special operations forces," 31 January 2007.
17. *Ibid.* For an examination of the unique military, psychological and physical demands placed on units undertaking special operations civil affairs missions, see Don W. Bryant II, "Into Africa: CA Teams Expand Operation Enduring Freedom into Africa," *Special Warfare*, September-October 2008, 18-25.
18. Ross F. Lightsey, interview by author, Fort Bragg, NC, June 2010.
19. Field Manual (FM) 3-05.50, *Army Special Operations Forces Ranger Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 30 May 2008), iv. See also FM 3-05, *Army Special Operations Forces* (Washington, DC: GPO, 20 September 2006) and FM 3-05.60, *Army Special Operations Forces Aviation Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 30 October 2007).

20. See Huening, 10, for a similar discussion of the possibility of cross-pollination between RC/AC psychological operations personnel if all PSYOP units are under a single command.
21. Hicks, 30.
22. The former SWCS commandant, MG Thomas R. Csrnko, has recently stated that he is already looking into the possibility of assessment and selection for Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations officers and noncommissioned officers. See Thomas R. Csrnko, "From the Commandant," May-June 2009, *Special Warfare*, 4.
23. *Report to Congress on Civil Affairs*, 7-8.
24. Hicks and Morworn first recognized the need for continued high-level reserve officer representation at the command, if USACAPOC became an Active component command. See Hicks, 38.
25. In this context, Joint proponent is defined as a "Service, combatant command, or Joint Staff directorate assigned coordinating authority to lead the collaborative development and integration of a Joint capability with specific responsibilities designated by the Secretary of Defense." See Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, "Designation of United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) as Joint Proponent for Civil Affairs (CA)," 27 April 2009.
26. Hicks, 32-5.
27. Holshek also recommends that JFCOM should be the Joint proponent for CA, but under a system where there is no longer a distinction between special operations and general-purpose civil affairs support. See Holshek, 132.

RED TEAMING



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