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GUEST ESSAY

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Getting the Functional Expert to the Battlefield

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“Handle it Captain”. Very common words given to our Civil Affairs Teams on the battlefield and likely the same to many other Soldiers when handed a task that they were not explicitly trained to execute. For the last twelve years, this was a critical problem when given the mission to conduct Civil-Military Operations (CMO) or stability operations throughout war zones. A task such as standing up a local government or economic development was thrown at our very capable troops without the type or amount of expertise required for those missions. This often resulted in haphazard methods and some solutions that were counter to efforts undertaken by U.S. Government agencies tasked with similar goals. Often the answer was simply to throw money at the problem, which is almost never the right answer.

The Army long ago realized the need for functional experts on the battlefield in order to provide a coordinated, resourced plan at all levels to carry out these nation-building tasks. The World War Two model upon which this was based was that citizen-soldiers with years of daily experience in engineering, finance, management, etc., would deploy to the battlefield and focus their efforts on the application of their expertise to rebuild a post-conflict civil society. This worked in the World War Two context when the entire country was mobilized and had a wide variety of skilled personnel available to slot in these functional areas.

The current problem is that the Civil Affairs functional specialty teams are, in fact, not populated with the expertise that the mission requires. The functional experts are supposed to be found primarily in Brigade level and higher Civil Affairs units. Titles such as Economic Team Chief, Public Works Officer, and Public Transportation Officer can be found on paper. The truth is that very few of these positions are actually held by officers who have expertise in economics, engineering, or transportation. These skills are very difficult to find in today’s society and the Army Reserve is a reflection of that society.

Why are these positions so important to have on the battlefield? The objective of nearly all our military operations is stability. To achieve stability, the general consensus is that key areas of civil society need to be created, reformed, or improved. In military parlance, these key areas are referred to as Lines of Effort (LOE). A common list of LOE that are required for stability operations are:

- Governance
- Economic Development
- Rule of Law
- Security

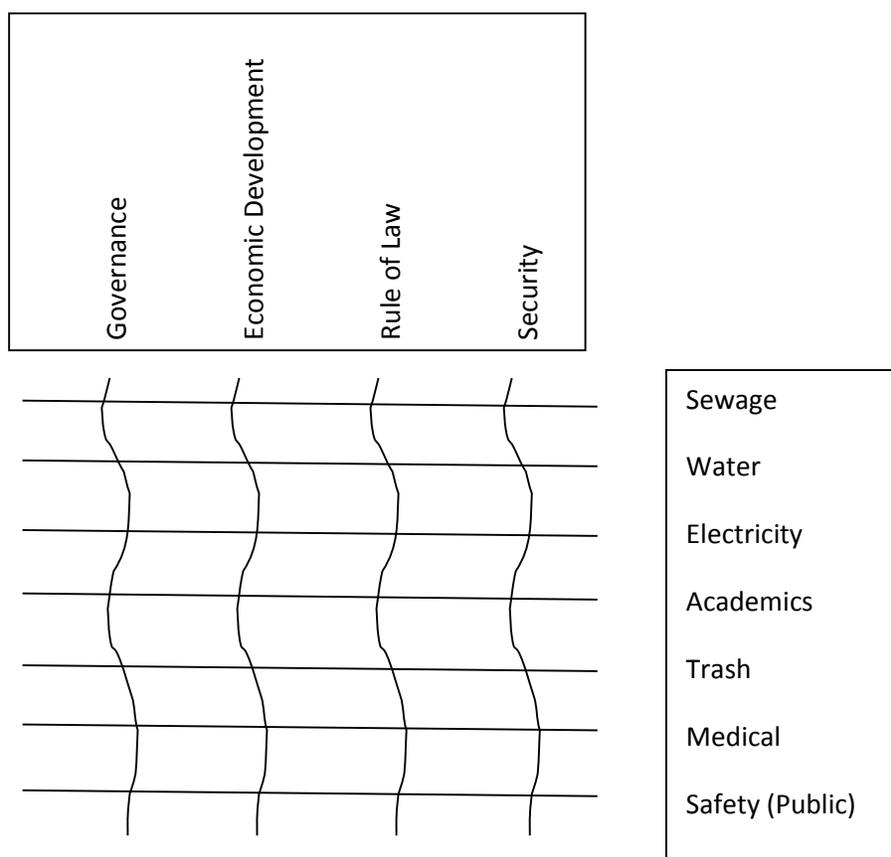
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While the military only has primacy for the last LOE of Security, they need to support the other three lines since they are all mutually supporting. Much like strands of a rope, each of these strands of the overall effort lend to the strength of the campaign. A weak strand, or its complete absence, makes the rope unable to support the full load and it risks breaking.

To continue the analogy, think of the above LOEs as vertical threads of a fabric. The cross-threads are the functional expertise and capability of the various support systems of the country's infrastructure. This is modeled in Civil Affairs by each of the areas of an acronym named SWEAT-MS as shown in the figure below. Each of the lines shown in this fabric requires functional expertise to support it. We need Rule of Law experts, but also the electricity expert who can keep the lights on in the courtroom.



It is likely that there are enough functional experts in every field required on the battlefield within the military. The problem is that unless they are slotted in a functional expert position they have little chance to use that expertise for the benefit of the overall mission. Commanders are typically reluctant to give up any Soldier, no matter how much they are needed elsewhere, without a replacement for the Soldier's duty position. The Army does a poor job of identifying the skills and educational background of their Soldiers and using those skills to fit

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the overall needs of the mission. Thus, the FA officer who had a degree in economics is left as a Fire Support Coordinator even though few artillery missions are fired.

Various attempts were made in Iraq and Afghanistan to solve the problem of getting the functional expertise required for planning and execution of stability operations. Integrating USG agency personnel with Civil Affairs soldiers on the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT)ⁱ, POLADs down to the Division level, the Bi-Lingual Bi-Cultural Advisor (BBA) Programⁱⁱⁱⁱ and contracting for expertise were all tried with mixed success to get the functional expert to the battlefield. However, the typical occurrence was that a CA unit would arrive for a tour of duty and be told that they needed, for example, an economics team, agricultural team, and a Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) Team. They had to produce these and other skills with the best fit possible even if the fit was tenuous. Thus, JAG officers became Agricultural Officers, a kindergarten teacher became the Education Officer, or a high school vice principal was named the Economics Chief. This is not to say that there were not functional experts, but there were never enough and too often a CA unit was like "a box of chocolates" that could contain plenty of one type of expertise and none for the other. This often led to pet projects that capitalized on a specific expertise, but that was abandoned when that individual left and the replacement did not possess the same expertise. The next unit rotating in would then decide on their own, often different, priorities. This resulted in a zig-zag approach to the goal of a stable and peaceful society.

There are several possible solutions that would alleviate the lack of expertise. Assign government functional experts to deploy to the battlefield; hire contractors to deploy functional experts; an Army (or military) wide civilian skills database that is updated and used with the Request For Forces (RFF) process; improve our existing Civil Affairs capability to field functional experts, devise a "reach-back" computer system to utilize U.S.-based experts, or a Wikipedia-style, crowd-sourced, web-based platform that would be a virtual FM for any subject.

The first, and seemingly easy, choice of assigning Government civilians to go to the battlefield and lend their expertise was tried in the last two wars without much success. The basic problem being that, unlike the military, the Government does not "order" their civilian employees to go to a dangerous area and carry out the job needed there. As civilians, they have the right to terminate their assignment if it is undesirable. In one example from the Iraq War, there were 12 project managers and 14 contracting officers to rebuild the Al Faw Bridge, near Tal Afar, during a three year period. This is extremely disruptive to accomplishing the goals required for the successful transition to the host government and the ability for the U.S. to disengage.

Although the Department of State took steps to form the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS), now known as the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO)^{iv}, this is still subject to the personnel available to deploy for short periods to a conflict zone. This again gets us back to the "box of chocolates" scenario where the skill sets available are dependent on the personnel willing to staff the CSO. They also experience the significant drawback of being restricted from going to many conflict areas by the Regional Security Officer (RSO) of the Embassy's Country Team. The typical RSO does not wish to take risks with civilian casualties and keeps the needed expertise from going to hazardous areas even when accompanied by military personnel.

While the CSO is an improvement in that they do have some personnel that are full-time as part of that bureau and thus must deploy to a conflict zone, the majority of strength is in a "reserve" force of a theoretical 2000

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additional Government employees who work full-time for another agency and a further 2000 private civilian volunteers. There is still a fundamental issue of sending the right number and right skills to where they are needed. The chance that the USG will change their rules to mandate involuntary assignments to a conflict zone seems remote and a solution from this method unlikely.

Another alternative, which was used to a great extent in Iraq and Afghanistan, is to hire private contractors to provide the necessary expertise. Without a doubt, the civilian world has great experts in everything from engineering to economic development. There are still two issues with going down this path. The most important is cost. To get civilian experts to risk life and limb, their employers must offer them very high wages and bonuses. Through personal experience of working for one of these civilian employers, I know that these costs are often \$500,000 a year or even more per person^v. The second issue is similar to the first solution of getting Government employees to go to a conflict zone – they must volunteer. Even with the high pay offered, there are not a plethora of highly-competent takers and consequently, the employers must continue to lower acceptable qualifications until they have enough personnel to fill all the contracted positions. Again, this solution can be pursued, but given the resources and quality of personnel this is not sustainable, nor preferred.

If it is so hard to get the civilian to the battlefield, perhaps another method is to station them in the U.S. but available as “reach-back”. Reach-back is a common term to denote that the expertise for a given situation is available, but only when required. The reality is that this method has not panned out when it was tried, to a limited extent, over the last decade of conflict. One problem was deciding how to have ready, yet temporary, expertise available to the Soldier down range. Communication is one problem where a non-expert is tasked with framing the problem to an expert when the non-expert may not even be asking the right question. Eyes and ears are keys to gathering data on a problem and the best we can currently do is send an email with pictures attached to try and give the expert enough data to advise the non-expert on what to do. We can probably improve in this area with live streaming video sent back to the expert, much as what is now happening in the medical field. However, this will require resources and bandwidth which may not be available. Next is obtaining an expert who is able to drop everything that they are normally working on to address a down range issue.

Government workers typically have a full-time job which they are expected to perform and may have issues from their management if they are diverted to supporting the military at the drop of a hat. Similarly, the Government could contract for the expertise, but unless they want to pay for a functional expert full-time, it is difficult to call in a contractor for a question that may last ten minutes or ten hours. If a full-time person is dedicated to the task, they may go many days without activity which would be wasteful. Lastly, there is the common problem of sending an issue back and having it turn into much more of an effort than intended. As the old saying goes, they don't need to tell the SM how to build a watch, when all they asked for was the time.

A fourth method, which has yet to be widely applied, is to require the military's Reserve Component (RC) to register civilian skill sets in a database. This database can then be used to select the right functional experts based upon education, years of experience and professional certifications. Instead of a military Request for Forces drawn up based upon units of military members, the RFF would list the skills and qualifications required for restoring civil society based upon the ground commander's needs. Then these functional experts would be plucked as individuals and augmented to either combat units needing their expertise or formed into ad hoc units to be placed in headquarters to assist with planning efforts and advising the commander.

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Since these are all Service Members, they can be ordered to deploy and are trained to defend themselves thus getting past a chief obstacle for deploying civilians. The SM will also receive less pay than most civilians and be a more economical choice. There is a key drawback to this method. Although the skill sets available for this method should be vast as it mirrors our civilian society, it goes against a key military principle. The principle of unit integrity means that for the sake of providing functional experts, you may be crippling the RC units from which they are drawn. Is the licensed engineer with 30 years' experience better off providing that expertise in the conflict zone or commanding a RC unit and lead them on a deployment? Not an easy choice to make.

A corollary to the above method of getting the necessary skill sets from the military reserve is the newly approved 38G program for Army Civil Affairs^{vivi}. Under this program, the Army Reserve Civil Affairs units will have their functional expert positions (580 in total) coded as 38G instead of 38A or the medical or legal positions currently present. The 38G will then be brought into a unit as a direct commissioned officer at a rank appropriate to their experience level in their civilian field of expertise. This type of commission is already available for the medical branches and commonly used. The functional expert will never command or have the typical development requirements of a typical Army officer, but instead concentrate on building their functional expertise through additional education or professional certifications.

The rank structure would require that the officer have a certain professional standard based upon the rank given and the level of unit supported. Thus, a civilian with a bachelor's degree might be fine for a Captain position; however a Lieutenant Colonel would likely need to have a Masters' degree and professional license in their field of expertise. This makes perfect sense as the Captain is a resource for specific projects likely executed at the tactical level, but the Lieutenant Colonel is likely being employed at the Operational or Strategic level and must be able to understand large, complex systems to support their functional expertise field of study. Details are still being worked out, but the Initial Operating Capability is scheduled to start in October of 2015. This certainly seems like a promising way of injecting needed professional-level expertise into the front lines of a conflict. The 38G officers would be trained and equipped for duty in hazardous situations which is the key impediment to bringing civilians into the battle space. As Army Reserve officers, their cost would be the same as any other Reserve Component Soldier and they are not being added to the force, but merely certifying that the functional expertise we purport to have is actually qualified for the position. The key downside is whether the Army Reserve can attract enough individuals with the proper expertise to volunteer to join the Army Reserve. With less than 1% of Americans even qualified to join the military, it may be difficult to find senior, professionally-certified, highly-educated individuals that are willing to join and serve in austere conditions.

A final method is to establish a crowd-sourced reference web site specific to the functional areas required for stability operations, *a la* Wikipedia. Here various experts could write articles on every aspect of governance, economics, engineering, etc. with the key aspect of the typical situations encountered in developing or post-conflict countries. This is where it is distinct from Wikipedia itself. Looking up "sewage treatment plant" in Wikipedia will reference several types of modern, first-world, examples and processes. The chance that our troops will need to get these types of plants up and running is much less likely than the chance that they will inherit a plant built in the 1950's with that level of technology. The input required will necessitate contributions from experts familiar with the typical scenarios found in stability operations.

The key advantage to this method is that it is the least expensive. There seems to be no shortage of experienced people who are eager to give their expert opinion regarding many issues. The key is good

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moderation and editing of the topics, again by volunteers, to ensuring proper referencing and accreditation of articles or edits to articles. Wikipedia has certainly accomplished this without terrible acrimony by relying on the consensus of the crowd. The moderators do not need to be experts in the fields they edit, merely good editors of the various inputs they receive. There is one significant cost, although much lower than any other the other methods listed, and that is the hosting of the servers for this website. The usual support personnel would need to be dedicated to redundancy and anti-viral safeguarding.

The advantages here go beyond cost as this knowledge is then commonly available to anyone with access to the internet. Since it is all open source information there is no need for the typical military classification system which often restricts information that can be distributed to NGOs, allied forces and even other U.S. Government Agencies. One slight drawback is that having a “virtual textbook” is not the same as having that expert on the ground to assess and advise on a specific situation.

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The effective answer is likely to be that more than one of these methods needs to be employed. A few contractors, even if expensive, are likely to be required to handle complex problems and give instantaneous advice. The Wikipedia idea can be a mainstay for the isolated team out in the hinterland, but probably will not fit every situation encountered. Some 38G Civil Affairs functional experts will make it to the battlefield, but it is unrealistic to expect every specialty to be filled.

A compound solution needs to be devised and established prior to the next stability operation or we are likely to be left with an unsatisfactory solution and do a disservice to those who put themselves in harm's way to carry out our national objectives. While some solutions would require substantial funding, many are economically viable for development. These should be funded now to create the network, database system, etc. and exercised in disaster assistance to refine deployment. Failure to do so will offer a repeat of history and the refrain, “Handle it Captain.”

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ⁱ “PRTs and ePRTs also include specialists in specific areas such as city management, agriculture, banking and finance, and public health. Other U.S. civilian agencies--USDA and Departments of Commerce and Justice--may also assign personnel to PRTs as technical advisors in areas such as agriculture, business development, and the rule of law.”, GAO-09-86R, Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan and Iraq, 1 OCT 2008

ⁱⁱ “The bilingual-bicultural advisor is an expatriate Iraqi contracted by DOD to advise PRTs and ePRTs and their Iraqi counterparts. Bilingual-bicultural advisors speak fluent English and either Arabic or Kurdish; they function as a key interface between PRT members and Iraqi government officials.” GAO-09-86R, Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan and Iraq, 1 OCT 2008

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1711723/posts>, Free Republic, 1 OCT 2006

^{iv} <http://www.state.gov/j/cso/>

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^v Author's personal account.

^{vi} P. 21, ARSOF 2022, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2013

^{vii} Rebalancing Army Civil Affairs: The Key to Military Governance, LTC Scot Story, USAWC, 2012