

Civil Military Operations Targeting in Large Scale Ground Combat Operations: Lessons from Warfighter 22-01

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Introduction

In October 2021, V Corps concluded a demanding collective training cycle with the successful execution of warfighter exercise (WFX) 22-01. Pitting the corps against a capable, near-peer adversary during large scale combat operations (LSCO), the exercise took place within an operational environment (OE) both dynamic and challenging. In addition to the enemy threat found throughout the area of operations (AO), there existed an array of military, governmental, and civil actors with varying interests, goals, and means for influencing the environment. Mission success required the corps headquarters to integrate and synchronize operations across space and time and between multiple echelons of command.¹ Deliberate systems and processes were vital to ensuring unity of effort and maintaining a shared purpose; of the tools available for facilitating the latter, targeting played a key role.

V Corps' G-9 Directorate (Civil Affairs Operations), split between two command posts (CPs) on as many continents, prioritized the integration of Civil Military Operations (CMO) into targeting. The G-9 sought to move beyond simply providing input in the form of civil considerations—though this remained an important function—and on to providing the commander with options to influence key civil variables through targeted CMO.² While this may seem straightforward—especially to Civil Affairs professionals experienced working at the lower end of the tactical spectrum—targeting at the corps level presented unique challenges that required the G-9 to reexamine assumptions and move beyond previous operational experiences to support V Corps' operations effectively.

What follows is a description of the G-9's approach to CMO targeting and lessons learned during WFX 22-01. By no means is it an exhaustive look at the subject. Nor does it claim to be authoritative in terms of how Civil Affairs planners should support targeting, as a consensus on this subject among the CA community remains elusive. However, the V Corps G-9's experiences still provide valuable lessons for Civil Affairs professionals supporting targeting across the conflict continuum. This summary demonstrates an

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effective means to integrate CMO into the targeting process and can be adapted at echelon to achieve the commander's objectives by, with, and through the civil component of the operation environment—the civil domain. Seven key observations are highlighted in call-out boxes throughout this article. Civil Military Operations planners are encouraged to consider them for planning, experimentation, and validation as best practices for Corps-level CMO targeting in LSCO in future exercises and beyond.

Framing the Fight

Understanding how a corps fights as a tactical headquarters during LSCO is necessary before diving right into the discussion on CMO targeting. V Corps was one of several corps headquarters under the operational control of the Combined Forces Land Component Command. Within this construct, the Corps' role was to employ divisions and brigades in decisive action "to destroy enemy land forces, seize key terrain and critical infrastructure, and dominate the land portion" of the AO.³ A key task for the corps in this setting was to create conditions for subordinate forces to achieve success in close combat with enemy forces.⁴ To do this, each headquarters had to prioritize resources and direct the application of combat power across time and space.⁵

A tool that assists the commander and staff with conceptualizing this task is an operational framework. An operational framework aids in the orientation of friendly forces relative to the enemy by providing a means for visualizing, describing, and organizing operations within a given geographical context. The operational framework also provides a means for linking activities at multiple echelons in purpose and in accordance with the overarching concept of operations and commander's intent.⁶ Figure 1 below provides a doctrinal template for an operational framework. In line with this model, V Corps divided its area of operations into a close, deep, and rear area (see dashed region). Most close combat took place in the close area, which belonged to the divisions. Within the close area, the division headquarters organized their OE similarly. For the Corps, a central effort was setting conditions for the divisions' success in the close fight by shaping the deep area. Operations in the rear area sought to ensure continued support to the close and deep fights with the goal of sustaining tempo, maintaining freedom of action, and ensuring operational reach.⁷

The G-9's overarching focus was on mitigating impacts to friendly operations emerging from the civil environment while leveraging civil capabilities—existing and latent—to provide the commander with options for creating desired effects through CMO.⁸ The G-9's chief concern for much of the exercise was managing the flow of displaced civilians (DCs) in a way that minimized disruptions to corps operations. Not only would massive displacement put the populace in harm's way, but it would also increase risks to friendly forces. Closely related to managing DC movements was the need to mitigate those factors driving additional displacement. The G-9 sought to do this primarily through Unified Action Partners (UAPs) but remained prepared for contingencies that might require friendly forces to act directly. A third focus area was supporting consolidation of gains and stabilization, which were central to making permanent the corps' short-term

successes and to the goal of transferring responsibility to host nation (or other legitimate) authorities.⁹

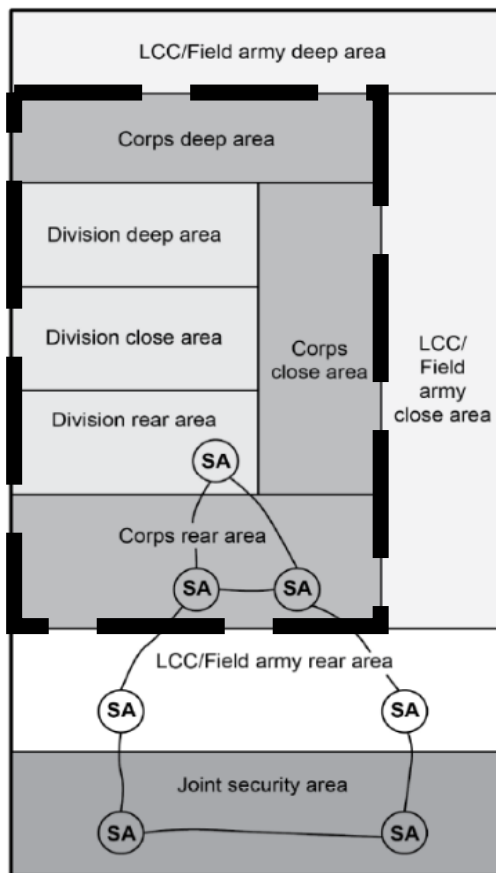


Figure 1 Doctrinal Operational Framework (FM 3-94)

The G-9 characterized the three areas outlined above as 'routine' CMO. These requirements existed throughout the AO and called for an integrated response, including external coordination with other military, governmental, and civilian stakeholders. However, this term belies the fact that these activities were tremendously important and took up a large portion of the G-9's bandwidth throughout WFX 22-01. The purpose of these CMO was to create favorable conditions for the Corps' operations more generally. However, the G-9 simultaneously planned CMO that more narrowly focused on achieving discrete effects in the civil domain. This latter category became targeted CMO.

Observation #1: Routine CMO formed the foundation of the G-9's support to the corps' overall operational efforts. These CMO were similar in purpose but took on a unique character according within the different areas of the operational framework (deep. close. rear).

Defining Targeted CMO

Without first establishing categorical boundaries, efforts to differentiate ‘targeted’ from ‘routine’ CMO can lead to a tautology providing little in the way of clarity—such as calling CMO targeted just because it went through a targeting cycle. The downside of failing to articulate the distinction is that it can marginalize Civil Affairs planners who fail to communicate the utility of targeted CMO; worse, it can lead to time and resources wasted in pursuit of marginal gains. Yet, arguments to the effect that all CMO should be *targeted* add little value to the discussion.

All CMO should be *deliberate*, in that they be directed toward achieving a clear military objective and nested with the mission, commander’s intent, and end state. But routine CMO seek to create desired general conditions in the wider OE (or remove undesired ones). The factor distinguishing the two is that targeted CMO pursue distinct objectives: the creation of a specific effect, at a specific time, in a specific place. Though nuanced, the distinction is real. To ensure adherence to this standard, the G-9 developed three CMO targeting guidelines (not all required to be present simultaneously).¹⁰

Guideline 1: Answer specific Information Requirements

The first guideline for developing targeted CMO was to answer specific information requirements related to the civil domain. The G-9’s overall civil information collection effort nested with the corps’ commander’s critical information requirements (CCIR). This category of targeted CMO went directly after information requirements both tied to the civil domain and related to defined activities and/or times. As with routine Civil Affairs efforts, the information collected through these CMO fed the corps’ common operational picture (COP) and other processes through civil knowledge integration (CKI) (Figure 2). This information provided additional value by further refining the commander’s understanding of the OE and supporting follow-on operations or additional CMO (further discussed under guideline 3).

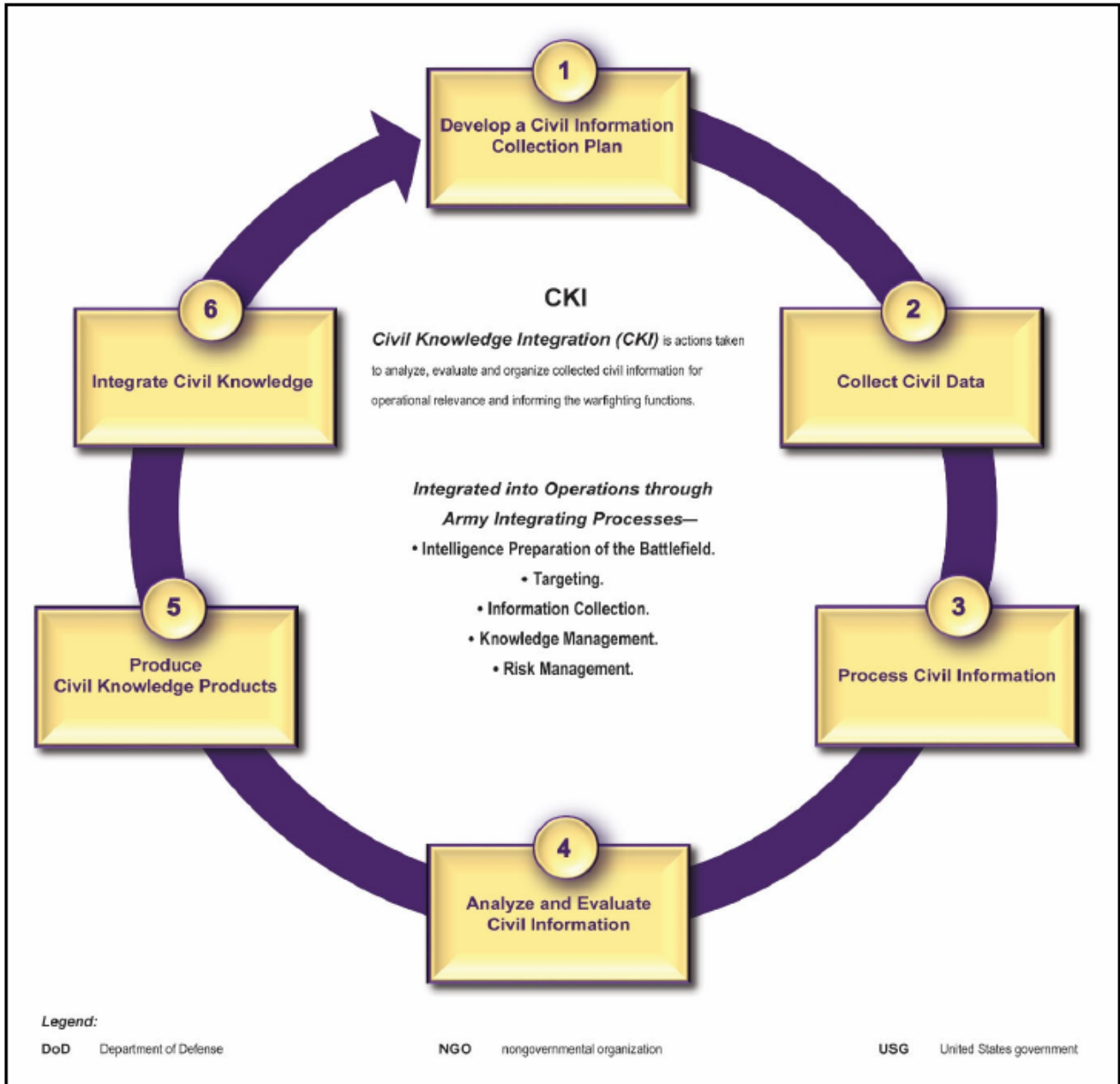


Figure 2: Civil Knowledge Integration Process (FM 3-57)

Guideline 2: Create Effects in the Information Environment

The second guideline was the creation of a specific effect in the Information Environment (IE) directed toward influencing key civil actors' perceptions and behaviors. Civil Affairs doctrine sufficiently captures the integrated role of Civil Affairs Operations (CAO) and CMO acting in support of the Information Operations (IO) plan to create effects in the IE.¹¹ The CMO under this guideline sought to send specific messages to particular civil audiences through actions in the civil domain.

Guideline 3: Engage and Develop Human Networks

The third guideline focused on identifying and mobilizing the existing and latent capacities of civil networks for collective action¹² to mitigate crucial civil vulnerabilities in support of V Corps operations.¹³ These CMO are best captured by the concept of civil network development and engagement (CNDE) found in FM 3-57, *Civil Affairs Operations*—i.e., identifying civil networks, developing relationships with key stakeholders, and leveraging these civil actors in support of military objectives (Figure 3).¹⁴ These networks helped extend the corps' operational reach to parts of the AO inaccessible to Civil Affairs forces while simultaneously preserving combat power. As these civil networks took on requirements that would have fallen to military forces, they reduced the burden on Corps forces and freed them up for other tasks.

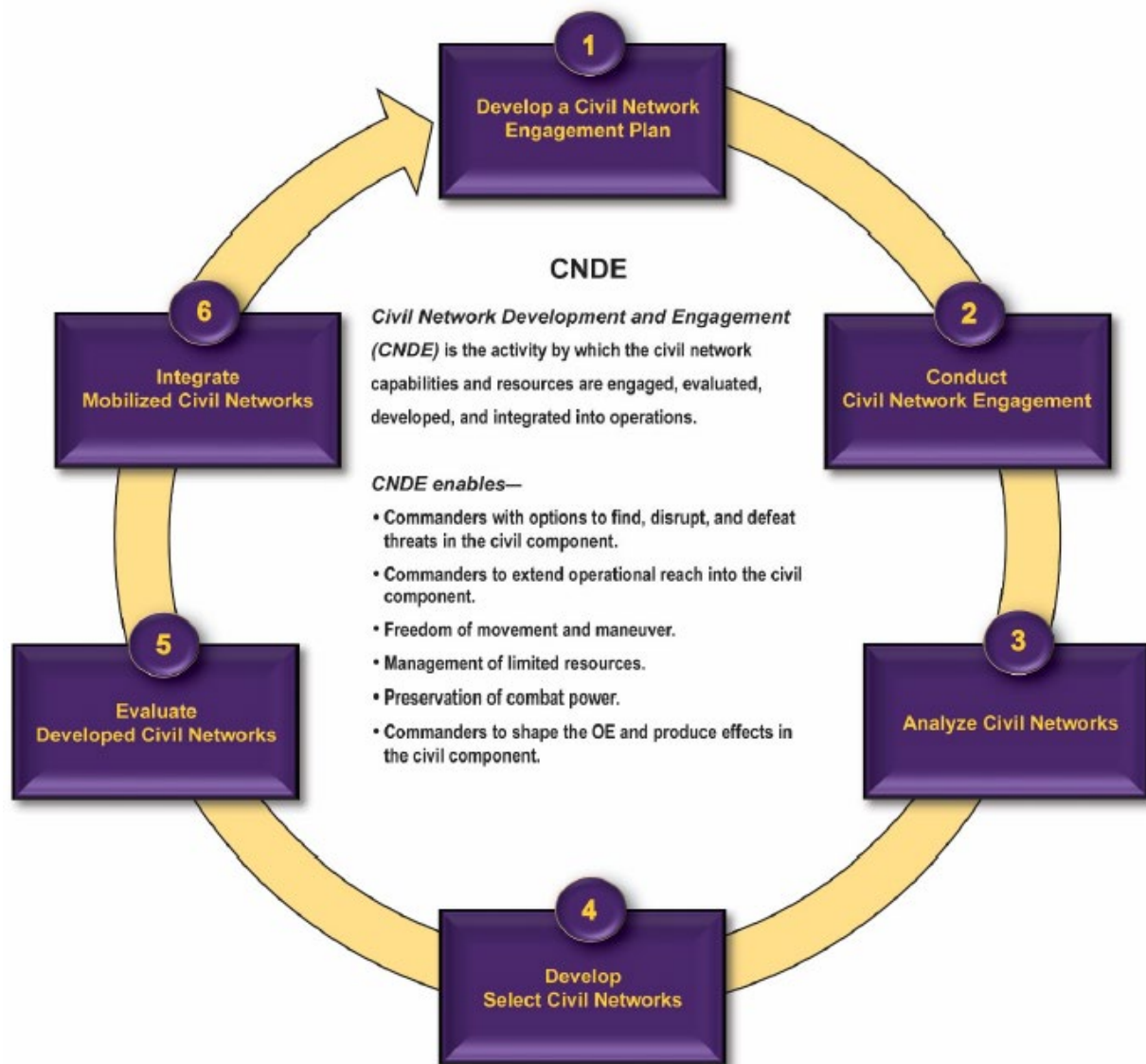


Figure 3: Civil Network Development and Engagement Process (FM 3-57)

Observation #2: Drawing clear lines between routine and targeted CMO ensured CMO remained tied to the overall objective of enabling the corps' maneuver while allowing the G-9 to take advantage of (or create) specific opportunities within the civil domain.

CMO Targeting in Practice

The purpose of CMO targeting was to provide the commander with options to affect the OE through the civil domain. This required a deliberate approach to CMO targeting that in practice resulted in not having a CMO nomination in every targeting cycle. This was acceptable, as operational conditions dictated opportunities for targeting, and these fluctuated throughout the exercise. When those opportunities arose, the guidelines described above helped the G-9 prioritize CMO targeting efforts and manage limited resources more effectively.

The key to effective CMO targeting, and CMO in general, was the foundation of knowledge acquired during planning through civil preparation of the battlefield (CPB), which the G-9 continuously refined by way of bottom-up reporting, staff-to-staff coordination, and open lines of communication with UAPs.¹⁵ With this knowledge, the G-9 developed a robust civil common operational picture (CIVCOP) that provided inputs into the corps' overall COP, intelligence and targeting enterprises, and other battle rhythm events (e.g., working groups and decision boards).¹⁶ The CIVCOP's utility cannot be overstated. When overlaid with operations and information requirements, the CIVCOP not only enhanced the G-9's situational awareness but also helped to illuminate potential CMO targeting opportunities. The G-9's ability to integrate civil knowledge (Figure 2 above) into the corps' processes and pull in information from other warfighting functions was central to effective CMO targeting.

Targeting in the Rear Area

Civil Affairs forces operating in the rear area had relative freedom of maneuver to execute targeted CMO due to a permissive environment. The G-9 identified civil variables of importance in relation to operations, information requirements, and adversary activities. Synchronizing with information related capabilities (IRCs) was simplified by their presence within the headquarters and in the AO. UAPs in the Corps' rear area largely remained mission capable, as they neither experienced significant attrition due to combat operations nor were they forced underground like some in forward areas. CA forces leveraged these UAPs' placement and access to crucial areas of the AO to deliver targeted CMO in accordance with the Corps' priorities.¹⁷

An example of rear area targeting in practice was the G-9's effort to identify segments of the civil populace susceptible to the adversary's influence, supportive of the adversary's activities, or at risk of being mobilized against friendly forces. The G-9 developed CMO to gain a better understanding of vulnerabilities within these segments of the populace with the goal of illuminating and countering adversary influence. These targeted CMO

opened the door to follow-up operations in conjunction with other IRCs and host nation partners to influence these segments of the population and address sources of instability. These CMO occurred in conjunction with routine operations ongoing throughout the rear area. Of note, the Civil Affairs brigade headquarters supposed to operate from the rear area was notional, so the G-9 took on some of its planning functions. This additional requirement only further highlighted the importance of clear targeting guidelines and the prioritization of CMO.

Targeting in the Deep Area

The G-9 faced bigger challenges in terms of CMO targeting in support of the deep fight. The deep area, well beyond the forward line of troops, remained outside the operational reach of the Corps' Civil Affairs forces. Absent a change in approach, the G-9 would be unable to support the Corps' deep targeting efforts effectively. To overcome this limitation, the G-9 adopted three approaches explained below in further detail: adjacent capabilities, Unified Action Partners, and battlefield geometry.

1. Adjacent Capabilities

The G-9 turned first to the capabilities of adjacent units physically positioned to impact the Corps' deep fight. Civil Affairs forces belonging to the Joint Forces Special Operations Component Command (JFSOCC) provided a potential means to affect areas beyond the reach of organic CMO. While positioned to support the G-9's targeting in the deep fight, these Special Operations CA forces remained outside the Corps' operational control and could not be tasked through internal targeting processes. Leveraging these capabilities required either a targeting nomination to make its way to the JFSOCC via the Joint Task Force's targeting process or an informal request for support through the Corps' SOF LNO or JFSOCC Civil Affairs planners (who were not a part of the exercise).

One risk that Special Operations CA could potentially assist with was the possibility for enemy operations to displace civilians who would in turn leave their homes to seek shelter elsewhere and, in the process, disrupt or desynchronize V Corps' movements. Circumstances on the (simulated) ground never called for activating this option, so it remained on the shelf throughout the exercise. However, the G-9 remained prepared for emerging requirements along these lines. Adjacent units' capabilities and position on the battlefield provided a means for executing targeted CMO in support of the Corps' deep fight and for mitigating potential impacts to operations from civil vulnerabilities emanating from the deep area.

2. Unified Action Partners

Civil-military integration provided a second means for CMO targeting in support of the deep fight.¹⁸ The G-9 was the focal point for civ-mil coordination—including with host nation civil actors, the U.S. Interagency (via the POLAD and Embassy), and international and non-governmental organizations. Developing relationships with these stakeholders and leveraging their placement, access, and capabilities in support of V Corps' operations

was a critical aspect of this role. And when it came to targeting, UAPs provided a means to facilitate CMO in areas inaccessible to Corps CA forces.

The success of these operations rested on information sharing and close coordination. This came about through both formal and informal channels that facilitated united action where interests overlapped (e.g., a UAP Working Group and frequent phone calls). However, since UAP capacity differed across organizations, these efforts came with a disclaimer: 'results may vary.' In contrast to the rear area, UAPs in the close and deep areas faced limitations to operational capacity. This was especially true in areas directly affected by ongoing combat operations or occupied by enemy forces.

These partners provided invaluable assistance, as they helped support operations in real-time while setting conditions for future success. They contributed to a stable environment and laid the groundwork for the transition of civil control to host nation authorities. A point worth highlighting is the exercise's artificial environment and how that factor affected the tone (and ease) of the G-9's interactions with UAPs. Civil-Military integration was relatively painless and largely lacked the many nuances and points of friction present in 'real life' scenarios—especially the bureaucratic processes and competing interests. However, the ease with which the G-9 was able to integrate with civil actors does not negate the fact that this process would conceptually be the same—though admittedly more frustrating in real life.

3. Battlefield Geometry

The final method for CMO targeting in support of the deep fight called for the G-9 to reconceptualize the operational framework. Instead of a purely geographic approach, the G-9 also viewed the deep fight through the lens of time. Thinking deep in terms of time entailed looking beyond the targeting cycle to project how CMO could achieve objectives looking out over days, weeks, and beyond. Admittedly, this took some liberties with the operational framework. However, CMO frequently deal in long time-horizons, so this was not a novel approach. Viewing the problem from this angle opened additional avenues to influence the civil domain. In planning these targets, the G-9 identified specific aspects of the civil environment with the potential to become vulnerabilities or be developed into strengths to provide the commander with options to influence the OE through the civil domain.

A key factor during WFX 22-01 was the G-9's relationship with UAPs in the deep area, as they provided a means to deliver effects. In one case that also contains elements of the second guideline, the G-9 needed to work through the challenge of reconstituting a host nation organization before it could return to normal—or even limited—operations. Of course, the G-9 could not do this alone. This effort required CMO to develop this human network in conjunction with host nation and U.S. Interagency partners. After identifying that this was a key civil organization in terms of Corps operations, the G-9 sought to increase its capabilities and to leverage its resources. As the organization eventually became operational, it increasingly took on tasks supporting the (re)establishment of civil control and governance. The result expanded operational reach by enabling CMO by,

with, and through this host nation actor; however, it required a deliberate investment of time and resources. Unfortunately, the exercise ended before the G-9 could see this effort through to conclusion. Although this approach did not fully overcome the impediments to CMO targeting in the geographically deep area, it did open new avenues for engaging the civil component of the OE.

Observation #3: Thorough civil preparation of the battlefield and a robust civil common operational picture were foundation to the G-9's ability to target effectively.

Observation #4: Leveraging external capabilities and maintaining a long time-horizon expanded the corps' operational reach in terms of CMO targeting.

The Close Fight and Effective Transitions

As the Corps' primary concern was outside the close area, division Civil Affairs planners owned CMO there. However, the G-9 remained tied in with division efforts to shape the civil component of the OE. Synchronization between echelons was vital to continuity of efforts and long-term success. As the fight progressed, the boundaries between the corps and divisions shifted. This led to the V Corps' rear area absorbing parts of the battlefield that until recently fell under the divisions' control. Having situational awareness of CMO in the division AOs and executing deliberate hand-offs were essential to ensuring continuity of efforts and sustained progress as the V Corps G-9 assumed responsibility for CMO and civ-mil coordination in these areas. These hand-offs began during the CMO working group and continued in more detail through staff-to-staff coordination as unit boundary shifts approached.

Observation #5: Close coordination between echelons ensured continuity of CMO efforts as unit boundaries shifted and different headquarters assumed responsibility for portions of the AO.

Assessment and Re-Attack

Targeting did not end with execution. Just as important was the need to understand impacts to the OE resulting from targeted CMO. This was essential for determining whether to build upon a successful operation or to 're-attack' a target after failing to achieve desired effects. While battle damage assessment provides a means for assessing lethal targeting effects, understanding the impact of CMO targeting was less straightforward. This category generally required more time to observe changes in the civil environment and often relied on the capabilities of others—including IRCs, maneuver forces, and UAPs—to capture indicators of change. Thinking in terms of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd order effects—or how CMO impacted the individual target (1st), its associated network (2nd), and the broader OE (3rd)—helped to provide a framework for assessing the G-9's efforts and better aligning CMO with the commander's targeting focus.

Observation #6: Though assessing CMO targeting presented challenges, understanding its impact on the environment was essential to achieving desired effects and refining targeting efforts when failing to ‘hit the target.’

Role of the Information Environment

A final point to emphasize is the important role of the IE and the requisite need to synchronize across IRCs. The G-9 worked closely with Public Affairs and Information Operations staff while coordinating with UAPs, such as the U.S. Embassy and host nation partners, to amplify CMO and target perceptions and behaviors of key civil actors. Planning and coordination were vital to translating effects from the physical environment into the IE. However, not every CMO targeting event was appropriate for amplification. Knowing when to seek out opportunities was fundamental to the G-9’s contribution to the overarching IO effort and to delivering operational advantage to the commander.¹⁹

Observation #7: Maximizing effects in the IE required a cross-functional approach that leveraged the unique capabilities of the staff and Unified Action Partners.

Conclusion

The lessons captured above show how CMO can support the targeting process to achieve the commander’s objectives. However, it is key to remember that these efforts do not replace the traditional CMO that serve as the foundation of the G-9’s support to large scale combat operations.

In summary, clear targeting guidelines grounded in thorough civil preparation of the battlefield revealed opportunities within the civil domain and ensured that targeted CMO remained nested with operations. Utilizing external capabilities and viewing the civil domain with a long time-horizon helped overcome Civil Affairs forces’ limited operational reach and provided the commander with options for shaping the OE. A deliberate assessment process helped the G-9 refine targeting efforts, while coordination between echelons supported continuity of CMO efforts. Finally, a cross-functional approach utilizing all available information related capabilities helped to create effects in the information environment.

Despite coming out of an exercise environment, the lessons captured above have utility beyond this context. While other Civil Affairs professionals may develop approaches to targeting based on their unique requirements, the need to be deliberate while seeking to achieve specific military objectives remains central to targeted CMO. Every problem requires its own solution; thus, creativity and flexibility remain central to working in the civil domain. Whether during combat operations or strategic competition, CMO has a role to play in providing the commander with options for targeting the OE.

END NOTES

¹ Army integrating processes consist of a series of steps that incorporate multiple disciplines to integrate warfighting functions throughout the operations process, i.e., Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield, Information Collection, and Targeting. Department of the Army. *Armies, Corps, and Division Operations*. FM 3-94. Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2021, 1-15 – 1-16.

² A note on terms: This paper deliberately uses ‘Civil Military Operations’ to capture the entire forces’ potential contribution versus using the term ‘Civil Affairs Operations,’ which is more narrowly focused on the specialized capabilities and missions of Civil Affairs forces--though Civil Affairs forces remained primarily responsible for delivering targeted CMO (typically in conjunction with other capabilities).

³ For the specific roles and functions of an Army corps headquarters: Department of the Army. *Armies, Corps, and Division Operations*. FM 3-94. Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2021, 4-2.

⁴ Ibid, 4-2.

⁵ Ibid, C-1.

⁶ Ibid, C-1.

⁷ Ibid, C-3 – C-10.

⁸ Department of the Army, *Civil Affairs Operations*. FM 3-57, Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2021, 4-6.

⁹ Department of the Army, *Armies, Corps, and Division Operations*, 1-6 – 1-7.

¹⁰ Not all three were required for CMO to be considered ‘targeted.’ Instead, the guidelines were more of a menu that guided the planning of CMO targeting.

¹¹ Department of the Army, *Civil Affairs Operations*, 4-19.

¹² Nicholas Ashley, “Civil Affairs and Civil Society: Harnessing the Latent Power of Social Bonds,” *Small Wars Journal*, January 7, 2019, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/civil-affairs-and-civil-society-harnessing-latent-power-social-bonds>.

¹³ Department of the Army, *Civil Affairs Operations*, 1-5.

¹⁴ Ibid, 3-29 – 3-30.

¹⁵ Ibid, 3-20.

¹⁶ Ibid, 4-4.

¹⁷ The G-9 worked with our Unified Action Partners via the UAP working group and direct coordination. The working group brought together stakeholders from the civil domain and provided an opportunity to work through problems collectively. Direct coordination occurred primarily through virtual means.

¹⁸ Ibid, 1-6.

¹⁹ Department of the Army. *Information Operations*. FM 3-13. Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2016, 1-3.

About the Author

Major Nicholas Ashley is an active-duty Army Civil Affairs officer currently serving in the 5th Security Force Assistance Brigade. Previous Civil Affairs assignments include V Corps—which informed this essay—along with the 97th Civil Affairs Battalion, the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade Headquarters, and the 84th Civil Affairs Battalion.