Military Provision of Humanitarian and Civic Assistance: A Day in the Life of a Civil Affairs Team in the Horn of Africa

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Complex operations encompass stability, security, transition and reconstruction, and counterinsurgency operations and operations consisting of irregular warfare (United States Public Law No 417, 2008). Stability operations frameworks engage many disciplines to achieve their goals, including establishment of safe and secure environments, the rule of law, social well-being, stable governance, and sustainable economy. A comprehensive approach to complex operations involves many elements—governmental and nongovernmental, public and private—of the international community or a “whole of community” effort, as well as engagement by many different components of government agencies, or a “whole of government” approach.

Taking note of these requirements, a number of studies called for incentives to grow the field of capable scholars and practitioners, and the development of resources for educators, students and practitioners. A 2008 United States Institute of Peace study titled “Sharing the Space” specifically noted the need for case studies and lessons. Gabriel Marcella and Stephen Fought argued for a case-based approach to teaching complex operations in the pages of Joint Forces Quarterly, noting “Case studies force students into the problem; they put a face on history and bring life to theory.” We developed this series of complex operations teaching case studies to address this need. In this process, we aim to promote research and to strengthen relationships among civilian and military researchers and practitioners.

The Center for Complex Operations (CCO) emphasizes the importance of a whole of government approach to complex operations and provides a forum for a community of practice and plays a number of roles in the production and distribution of learning about complex operations, including supporting the compilations of lessons and practices.

Dr. Karen Guttieri at the Naval Postgraduate School provided the research direction and overall leadership for this project.
“It’s the drug deal,” said Staff Sergeant Hicks.¹ “We can’t buy them tools, only pieces directly used in the project. We can’t leave anything behind once we finish. So we buy paint. A lot of paint,” he smirks.

We are sitting in a tea shop in Lamu, a town on a small, remote island off Kenya’s northeastern coast and within a few hundred kilometers of the Somali border. Hicks and his group of two other Civil Affairs soldiers look like young American tourists, wearing the universal uniform of khaki pants, t-shirts, and baseball caps.² The three young men ferry from the mainland to Lamu and begin to walk around. Instead of the camera of the tourist or the gun of the soldier, however, they are armed with shovels and water pipe fittings.

It is June 2007, and Staff Sergeant Hicks is the noncommissioned officer in charge of the Civil Affairs team located at the Manda Bay “contingency operating location” of the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA). His group is in charge of running the Humanitarian and Civic Assistance program of the CJTF-HOA from as far north as Lamu to the area south of Mombasa, an area known as the “Swahili Coast” of Kenya. Another team was operating in Kenya’s northeast province, in the Somali-inhabited area near the border between Somalia and Kenya.

Civil Affairs teams (CAT) like theirs have been sprinkled throughout the Horn of Africa since 2003, operating according to guidelines established by USCENTCOM (United States Central Command) and USAFRICOM (United States Africa Command) (beginning in 2008). The CJTF-HOA operates in the Comoros, Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles islands; on the coast of Tanzania; in select parts of Uganda and Rwanda; and in Ethiopia when the political climate permits. The headquarters is located in Djibouti, and in that country Civil Affairs teams operate either from the base camp at Camp Lemonier or, when the political situation is stable, from apartments rented on the northern shores of the bay of Tadjoura. Most
recently the teams have extended operations into the Rift Valley of Kenya and northern Uganda (around Gulu and Lira).

Hicks tells me about his group’s work as we sit in a steaming café at long wooden tables, sipping chai and eating fried dough. The tea vendor’s long stall is open on the sides, and outside the rain is pouring down. Everyone in the group is soaked to the bone, for it is the beginning of the rainy season in this remote area. As we huddle around the table, Hicks begins talking.

The Civil Affairs team was in Lamu that day to check on the progress of several ongoing efforts to refurbish schools and repair or upgrade water systems, projects that comprise the main focus of their efforts. Earlier that morning we had visited the Wiyoni water project, an initiative to install over four thousand feet of two-inch pipe to a community of 1,500 people on Lamu Island that did not previously have access to municipal potable water. In this small village, the issue is not an absolute lack of water: just beyond the houses the beach begins, and across the bay is the mainland of Kenya. A mere one hundred miles north or inland and the climate becomes semi-arid, but in this humid area of mangrove swamps there is plenty of water. The problem is that often the water is not potable, drinkable, and desalinized.

This is just one project of many. In Mpeketoni, a village on the mainland, the team was completing several projects. One initiative replaced more than 195 sheets of tin roofing in a secondary school, while another painted a hospital and installed privacy curtains in the patient wards. There were a number of similar, small projects—painting schools, repairing chalkboards, replacing tin sheeting. Larger projects focused on building better latrines for schools, completely refurbishing the interiors and exteriors of schools, and digging wells for human and animal consumption.

Once this project is completed, Wiyoni’s women and children will no longer have to walk to the neighborhood’s one spigot to fill buckets and water jugs. Instead, the community will be able to run smaller water lines to every street in the village. Just the day before, the women in the town had grown impatient with the pace of the male workers, so they had banded together and completed digging a two-hundred-meter trench into which the new pipe had been laid.

As Hicks and I were talking, I recalled a scene from earlier that morning that demonstrated how valued some of these projects were by local communities. As we had tested the new central spigot, a woman asked me to take her picture by the running water, so that I would have a record of what she and her friends had done. For a woman in this region of Kenya to consent to have her picture taken is unusual. For her to ask for her picture to be taken is absolutely unheard of. This water project would change her life and that of the other women in the village, and both her personal pride and the community’s feeling of ownership over this initiative to improve the water system was clear.

When he referred to paint, however, Hicks meant tools. According to Hicks, the local people do not have enough money to buy the tools necessary to execute or maintain the project, so the Civil Affairs teams buys equip-
ment and supplies on the local economy and invoices the expenses as paint. But according to the regulations by which the Civil Affairs team delivers civic assistance, it cannot leave any durable goods other than the actual project behind, and therefore the tools are supposed to leave with the Americans. If he follows the system’s rules, Hicks argues, the villagers will not be able to fix the water system when it breaks. So Hicks leaves behind the tools and submits an invoice that lists many liters of paint.

THE CREATION OF THE CJTF-HOA

“The Marines Have Landed,” screams a headline in a newspaper. The article describes a military vehicle racing over dusty dunes and roads, filled with soldiers quickly and purposively heading out on an urgent mission. In the next sentence, however, the tone quickly changes—the vehicle suddenly stops in front of a school, and the soldiers get out of the vehicle carrying shovels, building material, water, and food. The article describes how the U.S. military has arrived to deliver humanitarian assistance and to “develop” Africa. The accompanying picture shows a desolate region, sparsely settled, with a few U.S. soldiers talking with poor Africans and holding children. They are on a mission for the CJTF-HOA and are not waging war, but peace.

This is a stylized description typical of many early accounts of the CJTF-HOA shortly after its establishment in Djibouti in 2003. The CJTF-HOA had actually been established the year before at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, when Marines had embarked on a twenty-eight-day training cruise aboard the USS Mount Whitney. They arrived in the Horn of Africa in early December and commenced an extended counterterrorism exercise in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden.

The CJTF-HOA operated from the Mount Whitney until May 2003, when the mission transitioned to a base in Djibouti City initially established by the French Foreign Legion, Camp Lemonier. The fact that it was organized as a task force indicated that it was meant to be oriented toward a specific mission and of short duration, so for the first three years the core staff of U.S. Marines rotated every six months. The mission was to capture terrorists that the U.S. military planned to push out of the Middle East and into the Horn of Africa.

In 2006, the navy took over administration of the CJTF-HOA, and since then subsequent core staffs have been comprised mostly of navy personnel drawn from the active and reserve forces. Because the outfit is still a task force, the tours of the core staff were extended to one year, which is the legal limit for a task force administrative structure. The noncore staff rotates into the CJTF-HOA for periods of three to nine months, with both Seabees (naval construction units) and Civil Affairs teams on six-month rotations. There are no permanent or long-term personnel.
CJTF-HOA MISSION AND OPERATING PROCEDURES

With the transition from marine to navy administration, the mission also changed, evolving from the capture-kill of its early phase to one focused on reconstruction and stabilization and most recently (2007 onwards) to increasingly emphasize military exchanges and training events. From the headquarters at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti, the CJTF operates in over nine countries in eastern Africa, depending on the state of internal affairs and the relations between individual countries and the U.S. government.

The basic model of operations is that the command and control element stays at the base in Djibouti, and projects are carried out by groups of military members located within the various countries. These smaller groups are most often composed of Civil Affairs teams and/or Seabee detachments, based in outlying areas within the country in which they operate. Each group is authorized to conduct projects in a specific area of the country, and they vary in size from almost eighty people in Lamu, Kenya, to independent Civil Affairs teams of five to eight people living in hotels or rented apartments in Uganda.

A “country coordination element” oversees the work of the CJTF-HOA within each country and is headed by an officer in charge at the 04–06 rank (major/lieutenant commander to colonel/captain). The country coordination element functions as a liaison between the Civil Affairs and Seabee teams operating at satellite locations and the U.S. embassy in each country; assists with the approval process for large projects; and in some countries also includes a dedicated Civil Affairs Liaison Officer.

Most of the civil affairs and humanitarian assistance projects undertaken by the CJTF-HOA are funded through an established set of Humanitarian and Civic Assistance programs that have been setup by the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). The CJTF-HOA draws primarily on three particular funding streams for their major projects: the Humanitarian Assistance Other, Humanitarian and Civic Assistance, and Overseas Humanitarian Disaster and Civic Assistance programs. All are carried out by the Civil Affairs teams attached to the CJTF-HOA, the naval engineers (Seabees) at the camp, or through local and international contractors. In late 2008, the newly established Maritime Civil Affairs groups began to operate alongside the U.S. Army civil affairs soldiers.

Through these humanitarian assistance programs, the U.S. Department of Defense hopes to utilize military assets to shape a country’s strategic environment, to help avert political and humanitarian crises, to promote democratic development and regional stability, to build local capacity, and to enable countries to begin to recover from conflicts. All projects must address some or all of these goals, and there are strict limits on what sorts of projects can be undertaken, who should execute the program, and what the objectives are (often they are security focused).

In this vision, the Humanitarian and Civic Assistance program is first and foremost meant to train U.S. military members through the provision of
humanitarian assistance as an exercise. The program itself becomes the vehicle through which the U.S. military are trained, rather than a project pursued solely for its own merits.

Another set of civic assistance projects is funded through the operating funds of the base camp in Djibouti, and these are called “minimal expenditure” or “de minimus” projects. These projects are smaller and less regulated than the official humanitarian assistance programs, as they are financed through Camp Lemonier’s operations and management budget. This budget provides a pool of discretionary funds that the commander of CJTF-HOA makes available to Civil Affairs teams for use in quick impact, low-cost projects that a team can complete on the spot. Once the funds are spent, the team has to send back statements that invoice the expenses and report the projects.

Until 2008, there was not much more oversight than this reporting of expenses and ongoing projects. After 2008, a new requirement stipulated that the team leader could only take out funds to cover specific projects rather than a lump sum to cover all potential projects. There is no other reporting requirement or approval process for these small projects; they are exempt from the more detailed project nomination and approval system that is mandated for the projects financed by the official humanitarian assistance programs.

Prioritizing Human Security

The primary mission of the CJTF-HOA has been and continues to be to counter terrorism. In a classic counterinsurgency strategy, the camp promotes development and goodwill as a way to combat terrorism. CJTF-HOA activities are conducted on a project basis within each country and, regardless of their funding source, all the humanitarian and civic assistance projects fall within three broad categories: water, schools, and health clinics. There are also civic action projects to deliver medical, dental, or veterinary care in short-duration events and, increasingly, projects in theater security cooperation or military-military assistance and training. Through these activities, the CJTF-HOA aims to advance four official goals: (1) to prevent conflict, (2) to promote stability, (3) to protect coalition partners’ interests and, therefore, (4) to help to prevail against extremism. These are called “the four Ps.” The four Ps are enacted through a “3-D” construct—an integration of development, defense, and diplomacy, which enables a “whole of government” approach to the CJTF-HOA’s operations that involves other agencies.

Unofficially, these projects are supposed to provide access for the U.S. military, should they need to engage in more aggressive activities in the region, and to open up areas for U.S. influence more broadly. The CJTF itself does not expect its actions alone to create these ends nor does it know how to evaluate its successes, but it generally sees itself as contributing to an overall U.S. government effort.
As with the United States Africa Command, for the CJTF-HOA, defense has been broadly construed in human security terms. In this conception, security includes not only the traditional concepts of state-centric national security conceived of in military terms (arms rivalries, strategic alliances, and defense and military training) but also dimensions of human security: individual security and human rights, economic prosperity, societal reconstruction and stabilization, regional organization development, and capacity building for states and their institutions.

The rationale for prioritizing human security above traditional, interstate security is that in Africa, the root causes of political instability, military coups, and vulnerability to transnational threats can be located in poverty and inequality, poor governance, weak states, and vulnerable populations. As USAFRICOM itself has described it, addressing African insecurity not only necessitated a broader view of what makes for a stable environment but also a new approach to the tools and resources employed to create desired ends.

The designers of U.S. Africa Command clearly understood the relationships between security, development, diplomacy and prosperity in Africa. As a result, U.S. Africa Command, or AFRICOM, reflects a much more integrated staff structure, one that includes significant management and staff representation by the Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and other U.S. government agencies involved in Africa. The command also will seek to incorporate partner nations and humanitarian organizations, from Africa and elsewhere, to work alongside the U.S. staff on common approaches to shared interests.

In this vision, tackling the problems of insecurity in Africa demands more than just a focus on interstate rivalries and security issues as traditionally conceived. The Civil Affairs projects are just one weapon in this arsenal.

THE VIEW FROM BELOW:
EXPEDIENCY VERSUS COORDINATION

Back at the steamy eatery, Hicks explains the logic of how he does his job. “We have to be creative when executing projects,” Hicks says, noting that technically, projects have to be run through an approval process that takes at a minimum six months. His entire tour with the CJTF-HOA is six months. Hicks’ demeanor is typical of the senior noncommissioned officers in the Civil Affairs community in the Horn of Africa: He is slightly jaded about what he can hope to accomplish and yet still enthusiastically pursues projects.

To Hicks, the headquarters in Djibouti exists to create paperwork and issue instructions that obstruct his ability to do good work. To those in the headquarters, the nominations process is there to foster coordination
between the CJTF-HOA’s efforts and those of the State Department and USAID. The process of nomination and approval requires that State and USAID be consulted by the Civil Affairs teams and, where possible, CJTF-HOA projects should be coordinated with other ongoing efforts. This should avoid duplication and enable synergies that could magnify the effects of otherwise small projects.

Hicks needs to nominate for approval any projects that cost above a certain threshold. This includes most well-drilling initiatives; major school refurbishment efforts; and medical, veterinary, or dental civic action programs. The projects are the elements of the official Humanitarian and Civic Assistance programs discussed above. Humanitarian and civic assistance is one of the mainstays of the CJTF-HOA activities, both in terms of budget and numbers of activities.9

Any project that draws on the Overseas Humanitarian Disaster and Civic Assistance or Humanitarian and Civic Assistance programs for funding requires approval by three separate authorities—by the civil-military operations shop at the headquarters in Djibouti, by the Humanitarian Assistance branch of USAFRICOM,10 and by the U.S. embassy in each country. The purpose of this review is to ensure that the nominated project meets the goals of the humanitarian assistance program and that it is coordinated with the U.S. embassy and its programs and goals.

To Hicks, however, this process means that he has to complete a lot of paperwork and to spend a lot of time waiting around to see if a project will be approved. He also has to liaise with the villages repeatedly during this nomination process. Any project he nominates will be executed by a completely different Civil Affairs team, and the villagers will have to wait a long time for the improvements to begin. Hicks sees this as a tradeoff between expediency and effectiveness, on the one hand, and the rules that foster coordination, on the other.

He also says that the approval process can create actively negative consequences. If the project does not gain approval, he argues, it creates ill will. Because he has to meet with the village leaders throughout the process to gain their “buy in” for a project, they will have come to expect a project. Even if all the CJTF-HOA officials have been careful not to make any promises or indications that a project will happen, the villagers believe that all the talk will lead somewhere, and they will have waited patiently for a project. So in the end, if a nomination does not pass the triple approval process, all the CJTF-HOA has done, Hicks argues, is to raise hopes and expectations that are not fulfilled and that then create frustration, mistrust, and anger.

Hicks wants to do good for Africans, to get out there and to help people in a real way without making them wait through endless consultations for a project that may never actually happen. In order to deliver real results, therefore, Hicks and his team focus on small projects that cost less than $2,500, financed from the operations and management fund of the camp in Djibouti—the minimal expenditure projects. Instead of large, officially funded and approved humanitarian assistance projects, the team drives around and
looks for small projects that can be completed quickly and cheaply, often relying on locals for labor and supplies. These minimum expenditure projects have to be reported to the headquarters but do not require approval.\textsuperscript{11}

Minimal expenditure projects also potentially build more local ownership and involvement than the larger Overseas Humanitarian and Civic Assistance projects: They would not be possible to complete within the $2,500 limit unless the locals contribute, and the locals will not help unless they want the program. So the minimal expenditure projects have become locally driven and owned, more by virtue of necessity than planning, but the result obtains nonetheless. This is how Hicks and his team navigate through the restrictions and rules put in place by the military’s humanitarian assistance and civic assistance programs so that they can do their jobs.

THE VIEW FROM ABOVE: “THE GOOD IDEA FAIRIES”

Commander Mayer rolls her eyes, sighs, and slumps back in her desk chair. I had just asked her about how Civil Affairs teams operate within the countries, specifically the way that they finance projects through the operating funds of the base.

“They’re not supposed to do that,” she says. “Minimal expenditure projects are only supposed to happen when a team, en route to another project, sees something that they can address quickly—a school that could use a coat of paint, a roof that needs repair, etc. They are not supposed to drive around looking for these projects. That is an abuse of the program.”

Commander Mayer is in charge of the J5 Effects Analysis division of the Civil Military Operations Center at the headquarters in Djibouti. Unlike the humid and lush environment of Manda Bay, Camp Lemonier is arid: a khaki and grey city of gravel, dust, air-conditioned office buildings, trailers, tents, and housing units (the last two are a mixture of tents and container units). It is always hot, and once a week the camp burns its garbage, creating even more heat and unpleasant smells. On “Manic Monday,” everyone takes their mefloquine tablets to ward off malaria.

Like all those stationed at Camp Lemonier, Mayer wears utilities to work, and her armored vest and gas mask rest on a cross holder next to her desk. She rarely wears either, but they are a required part of the CJTF-HOA uniform. The only time she can wear civilian clothes is to the gym or when she is off base on liberty. When Mayer and others in the center travel to visit project sites, they proceed in a multicar convoy with GPS (global positioning system) trackers, bring their meals with them, often include a force protection element, and have to call in at predetermined times to check in with the base. Mayer, like most others at the camp, remains within the compound most of the time, because to go into Djibouti City requires several layers of paperwork, permission, and security procedures.

Commander Mayer’s desk is one of about ten in a large “tent”—a canvas superstructure attached to a concrete base, which is cooled through intense
air conditioning, and with a computer and Internet connection at every workstation. Her desk is a chaotic assortment of papers, pictures from orphanages, and books that have been donated to a library in Uganda that are awaiting transportation. From this station, Mayer runs the shop that evaluates all potential projects and approves or denies them based on their anticipated effects.

Officers at Camp Lemonier unsurprisingly take a broader view of the activities of the CJTF-HOA and become frustrated with the teams operating downrange. Mayer explains that the CJTF-HOA is trying to move away from just doing projects wherever they can to conducting projects with more strategic objectives in mind. Her frustration with what she calls “the good idea fairies” is obvious. Primarily composed of individuals in Civil Affairs teams downrange, the good idea fairies see a multitude of potential projects that they can do, and they want to do all of them.

The problem is that only some will have a higher-order strategic impact. Mayer’s position is that the DoD is not the Department of State or the Agency for International Development. These organizations have different operating constraints, opportunities, and capabilities, and the projects that the Civil Affairs teams pursue should always reflect DoD’s posture. The CJTF-HOA has to get access to new areas, or else the effort and resources put into a project are wasted.

“When teams go out looking for minimal expenditure projects, simply to ‘do good’ for Africa, they undermine the entire strategic posture of the CJTF-HOA,” Mayer says.

Mayer complains that she and her staff spend a lot of time filtering out the projects that are interesting from a humanitarian standpoint but that do not advance the military objective. When talking about these projects, she exhibits the resignation of a parent whose child repeatedly refuses to follow a well-known rule. The use of operation and management funds for minimal expenditure projects is only authorized for problems that the teams notice when traveling to conduct an official humanitarian assistance project, not something that they should seek out. Along with this, Mayer and her team worry that if the Civil Affairs teams and country coordination elements coordinate too much with USAID, they run the risk that they will wind up doing USAID’s work rather than pursuing the military’s objectives.

The CJTF-HOA is not there to develop these countries, the Civil Military Operations Center officers argued. True, the CJTF-HOA is supposed to help stabilize the countries but, more importantly, they are there to pursue explicit strategic imperatives. The three Ds each have a distinct role: development, defense, and diplomacy. While they can coordinate, defense should not be subservient to diplomacy. This is why projects are not conducted countrywide but within a targeted area of each country’s area of responsibility.

When project nominations are reviewed, therefore, Mayer and her team look for the military objectives of the project, not the larger developmental issues. In Djibouti, for example, the planners vet the projects by asking
whether they will curb weapons proliferation, illegal immigration (from Ethiopia to Yemen), drug trafficking, and human trafficking. Projects in Djibouti need to disrupt these situations in order to make it through the nominations process.

**DEVELOPMENT FOR SECURITY?**

Mayer and her colleagues agree that their projects have to coordinate with those run by the ambassadors and USAID but do not want the diplomacy or developmental goals to overshadow the military aspect. In the programs that she and her team manage, while Humanitarian and Civic Assistance projects may seem to be developmentally focused because of their involvement in the communities and their goals to “strengthen” local societies, this is not the main objective of the programs. This distinction, however, is not so clear to those on the ground—neither the Africans who benefit from the programs nor the other U.S. government agencies operating in similar arenas.

The projects on which Hicks works have raised significant controversy, generating a number of questions about what impact groups like Hicks’ Civil Affairs team can have on a broader level and whether using military assets for “development lite” projects is appropriate. The CJTF-HOA’s activities feed into a larger debate that the creation of USAFRICOM ignited in 2007.

The nongovernmental organization (NGO) community has long worried about the impacts of the activities of the CJTF-HOA (and subsequently USAFRICOM) precisely because of the logic that Mayer articulated. Mayer’s assertion that the “good idea fairies” must not hijack the military objectives of the Humanitarian and Civic Assistance program is precisely the outcome and orientation feared by NGOs and others opposed to military involvement in humanitarian and civic assistance. As TransAfrica Forum, a Washington-based think tank NGO has argued,

> [t]his new era of U.S. diplomacy and aid is seeped in an emerging military doctrine, strategy and organization. A ‘Phase Zero’ approach, in which the military operates as both peacekeeper and development organization is changing the scale and nature of U.S. military engagement on the Continent in ways that worries [sic] African governments and civil society alike. The 2007 strategic plan for the U.S. Agency of International Development (USAID) focuses on migration, conflict prevention, counterterrorism, the global war of [sic] terror, [and] security sector reform instead [of] on the traditional purview and work areas of USAID, which were far closer to health clinic construction, microeconomic enterprise, and well-building. AFRICOM, if any lessons have been learned from U.S. Southern Command and the impacts of the military carrying out humanitarian assistance work in Colombia, will, without a doubt, result in the militarization of development and diplomacy on the African continent.
Others, such as the NGO umbrella organization InterAction, fear that military involvement in humanitarian and civic assistance projects jeopardizes the safety of NGO workers. “We don’t want the military wearing civilian clothes when they conduct these projects,” said the director of Humanitarian Policy and Practice. “If they wear civilian clothes, then people on the ground cannot tell who is military and who is an NGO worker. When that happens, NGO workers become the targets of anti-American and anti-military attacks, as we’ve seen in Iraq. Last year we won an agreement from the CJTF-HOA that their troops would never conduct any activities unless they were in uniform, to prevent confusion with NGO workers.”

Back in Lamu, Hicks looks up from the trench he is digging, rain pouring off his baseball cap. “This pipeline is going to change their lives in that settlement, as long as they can keep it working. After we finish this, we’re heading over to the hardware store to buy some paint.”

ENDNOTES

1. Names have been changed to protect the identity of the interviewees. All quotes come from interviews and discussions with people at the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) and the United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM).

2. Civil Affairs teams often are composed of a commanding officer (usually at the major/lieutenant commander level), a senior enlisted person (the staff sergeant), a medical corpsman, and a few others. In a combat environment, the teams will also include force protection elements. This particular team was usually composed of five people and traveled without force protection; on that day, only three people were there with me in Lamu.

3. In 2008, the CJTF-HOA operated in Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Tanzania, Uganda, and Yemen. In the past, it has also operated in Sudan and Eritrea. In May-June 2008, it withdrew operations from Yemen.

4. These are the three main programs in the “official” civic and humanitarian assistance program that the CJTF-HOA draws on most often. The remaining two humanitarian assistance programs are Humanitarian Demining Assistance and Humanitarian Assistance Program Excess Property. The Overseas Humanitarian Disaster and Civil Assistance projects are funded directly through regional combatant commanders to enable them to respond to disasters and promote postconflict reconstruction through “unobtrusive, low-cost, but highly efficacious” projects (Armed Forces Journal, http://wwwarmedforcesjournalcom2007042587549, accessed January 29, 2008). The other humanitarian assistance programs are administered and overseen by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, and information about them can be accessed at www.dsca mil. USAFRICOM has developed an internal document describing these programs, their statutory authorities and funding cycles, and instructing how each should be utilized—“FY08–Humanitarian Assistance Program Standard Operating Procedures,” which is accessible through https://wwwohasisorg [Note: you need a login ID and password to access this site].

There are also two U.S. government/DoD programs designed for natural disaster response—the Foreign Humanitarian Disaster Response program and the Commanders Emergency Relief Funds. Government and economic reconstruction efforts are funded separately; these are the 1206, 1207, and 1210 programs that finance the provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan and Iraq. Each of these programs has
distinct goals, requirements, and funding streams.


8. This is Hicks’ experience; most CJTF-HOA and USAFRICOM humanitarian assistance officials reject Hicks’ assertion that the approval process is that lengthy. See the next section for more detail.

9. In 2008, the CJTF-HOA insisted that theater security cooperation and military training were the core functions of the organization, but this was not reflected in their operating posture, budgetary expenditures, or the press releases that publicized their events (three quarters of which reported on humanitarian assistance and civic action projects). For an example of this last aspect, see the “Suggested Readings” for a list of press releases on these projects, along with sample articles describing typical events.

10. Until the fall of 2007, U.S. Central Command was the approving geographic combatant command.

11. In 2007, these projects were called de minimus projects. Now that the CJTF-HOA has transitioned to USAFRICOM, they are called “minimal expenditure” projects, and the ceiling ranges between $2,500 (the old USCENTCOM limit) and $10,000 (the former U.S. European Command limit).

12. Interestingly, this language changed in late 2008, early 2009. By these later dates, the headquarters staff was enthusiastic about coordinating with the embassy staff, arguing that all aspects of the U.S. government had the same goals in mind, just different tools to get there. Therefore, coordination with State and USAID was a requirement for all Overseas Humanitarian Disaster and Civic Assistance projects. These anticoordination sentiments had been replaced with an endorsement of the “whole of government” approach. Minimal expenditure projects were still a concern, however, because they bypassed these coordination mechanisms.

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ABOUT THIS CASE

This case study is designed as a retrospective case study to encourage discussion about the ways that Civil Affairs teams operate; the logic and implications of how and where the U.S. military conducts strategically focused humanitarian assistance; and the impact of the Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) in the region. The case raises larger issues about civil-military coordination in stabilization and reconstruction activities as a secondary focus.

The case engages these issues through an in-depth examination of the activities of one Civil Affairs team attached to the CJTF-HOA in 2007, operating in Lamu, Kenya, and how this team interacted with the headquarters of the CJTF-HOA that was located in Djibouti. From these perspectives, the case introduces the concept of the Civil Affairs team and how it operates, and uses the experience of this particular team to shed light on a large number of debates that surround military provision of humanitarian and civic assistance and the military’s increasing involvement in stabilization and reconstruction operations.

The case takes the form of a narrative that presents a stylized account of the team and the way that it operates, periodically switching from the team’s perspective to the broader background of the CJTF-HOA and then back to the team and its supervising officers at the CJTF-HOA headquarters in Djibouti. In this way, the case attempts to present the lived-experience of a typical Civil Affairs team, to use that experience to raise issues involved in the military provision of humanitarian and civic assistance, and to present some of the larger background that situates the activities of the team. The dialogue contained in this narrative is a near literal reproduction of what I was told as a researcher by the team members and the officials at the headquarters but also includes insights from similar visits in Ethiopia and Djibouti in 2007 and 2008.
The case study is appropriate for courses on stabilization and reconstruction activities, on the military’s involvement in humanitarian and civic assistance, and Africa-specific courses on the Horn of Africa and U.S. foreign policy in Africa.

STUDENT PREPARATION

The case study is designed to provide enough background to orient those not familiar with the CJTF-HOA to understand its basic operation, rationale for existence, and scope of operations. The case should be general enough to be used for various purposes in different courses, but the specific direction of the student discussions will depend on instructor cues and course preparation prior to engaging in the exercise.

If the case is used in courses that include modules on stability operations and military provision of humanitarian and civic assistance, students should be familiar with the following before conducting the case study:

- Department of Defense rules, regulations, and standard operating procedures regarding the various humanitarian assistance programs; AFRICOM-specific guidance on humanitarian assistance programs;
- Doctrine on the U.S. military’s role in stabilization and reconstruction operations, foreign disaster assistance, and related topics; and
- Critiques of U.S. military involvement in humanitarian assistance, civic assistance, and related areas.

If the case is used in courses on Africa and/or U.S. foreign policy toward Africa, students should, at a minimum, be familiar with the following:

- Debates about the militarization of aid to Africa;
- The creation and mission of the United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM);
- U.S. strategy for supporting fragile states;
- U.S. developmental policy and interagency processes in support of developmental objectives; and
- Drivers of Islamic radicalization and terrorism in the Horn of Africa. (If the case is used as an example of combating terrorism through engagement and development.)

The case study is designed to initiate conversation and debate on the following questions/topics (listed in no particular order):
• The rationale for establishing the CJTF-HOA; its goals and whether its methods of operation will achieve those goals.

  – This discussion could be expanded—on a broader scale, the use of humanitarian and civic assistance to achieve counterterrorism goals. Is this appropriate? Effective?
  
  – What are the official goals of DoD’s humanitarian and civic assistance programs?

• Are such militarily oriented goals effective tools for development?

• Are they appropriate tools in a counterterrorism strategy?

  – Is developmental impact an appropriate metric by which to evaluate the impact of DoD humanitarian and civic assistance? (DoD will say no—refer to the previous two questions; the goal is to shape the environment.)

  – Can these types of programs really “shape” the environment through short-term projects spread throughout a country?

• Issues that are important for developmental projects to succeed, and how these are or are not incorporated into CJTF-HOA projects.

  – Local ownership;
  
  – Use of contractors versus local vendors and laborers for projects; and
  
  – Appropriate selection and vetting of projects.

• Why is the CJTF-HOA so short-term oriented? (This discussion can be extended to apply to Provincial Reconstruction teams and the navy’s “partnership” programs like the Africa Partnership Station, the Pacific Partnership, and the Southern Partnership Station).

  – What are some of the effects of the short-term orientation of the core staff of the CJTF-HOA?

  – Should an operation like the CJTF-HOA be pursued with a longer-term administrative structure than the current “task force” model allows?

  – What are the issues and tradeoffs involved in this decision?

• What kind of effect can projects have? This discussion should consider some of the following, and if students are having trouble, refer
them to the section that describes Lamu and what it is like there, how it is (or is not) integrated into the rest of Kenya, etc.:

- The location of projects within countries (sensitive areas versus areas with high population concentrations or areas important to a country's economic activity).
- The cumulative effects (if any) of numerous, short-term projects.
- The effects of targeting Muslim populations as opposed to the general populace.

- How does the way that Civil Affairs teams operate affect their impact?
  - What do students think of the work-around that the teams have developed to avoid onerous paperwork and the approval process for the official humanitarian assistance programs?
  - Is civil mapping undermined by the search for minimal expenditure projects?
  - Can these projects be fit into an overall U.S. policy goal for a country? If so, how? Is there evidence that this happens—either based on the case or outside reading?

The instructor might want to base a minidebate about this aspect of the case study—do the benefits of local involvement and ownership, and quick impact, outweigh the cons that these projects are less integrated into the overall U.S. assistance strategy for a country or region than the official humanitarian assistance projects (since these latter ones require coordination with USAID as part of the approval process). There is an entire field of study about the impact of humanitarian assistance programs that can be captured in microcosm here.

In fact, while this is written as a retrospective case to facilitate discussion about many debates over whether or not the U.S. military should provide humanitarian and civic assistance, the instructor could turn it into a decision-forcing case on this point about the way that Civil Affairs teams bend the rules: Overall, does this action promote positive outcomes? Should the teams be prevented from operating in this way? Are there potential negative consequences that outweigh the benefits? Etc.

- The case could also be used to facilitate discussion about principal–agent problems in military operations, as there are many elements of this in the story of the Civil Affairs team in Lamu and the Horn of Africa, more generally. This discussion would focus on Hicks’ comments and the last few pages with the Djibouti headquarters’ reactions to the story of the Civil Affairs team in Lamu.
If case is used to focus on the principal–agent issues in civic assistance projects, the epilogue could be employed to discuss further the coordination issues stemming from the different operating worlds of the Civil Affairs teams within the countries and the planners in Djibouti.
A year later I returned to the CJTF-HOA. Not much had changed, except that the Civil Affairs teams had been pulled out of Yemen and northern Djibouti due to political unrest, and the containerized living units had been extended to the edge of the base, almost completely replacing the tents. A new cantina had been built; this one was entirely enclosed and air conditioned instead of open to the air. Otherwise, the base and its operations were mostly unchanged, and the teams were operating in the same areas of the countries in the Horn of Africa in which they had been working within for the past six years.14

This time, however, the officers at Camp Lemonier were not so sanguine about the preponderance of minimal expenditure projects. The tensions between the principals in Djibouti and the implementers downrange had finally come to a head. As in the past, country-based Civil Affairs teams were pursuing both minimal expenditure and official humanitarian and civic assistance projects. But the civil-military operations shop was concerned about the low number of Humanitarian and Civic Assistance projects that were being nominated and put into the Overseas Humanitarian Assistance Shared Information System nomination and tracking system. There were not enough nominations to keep up a steady pipeline of ongoing projects for the incoming Civil Affairs teams, and the civil-military operations shop wanted to find out why.

Even though the approval processes for the official Humanitarian Assistance and Humanitarian and Civic Assistance projects had been shortened, the Civil Affairs teams still preferred the minimal expenditure projects. Lieutenant Thomas, the civil affairs officer in charge of one of the Djibouti teams, explained that it was demoralizing to start a large number of projects that her team would not see through to completion. So, she argued, she preferred the minimal expenditure projects, because her team got a sense of fulfillment and closure from them.

In the time that I spent at the camp, there were several meetings—one with all the Civil Affairs team leads—to discuss this problem and to instruct the teams to nominate more Overseas Humanitarian Disaster and Civic Assistance projects. While the officials in Djibouti claimed the problem was not extreme, it was significant enough to recall all of the Civil Affairs team leaders back to Djibouti for discussion. The tradeoffs between expediency and coordination had created a situation in which the entire structure of projects had to be reviewed and new instructions issued.

Coordination was also still an issue, even though the Overseas Humanitarian Disaster and Civic Assistance nominating system had built-in a requirement. All projects that are nominated in that system now have to show that they fit into the country plan that each embassy develops and that the Civil Affairs or Seabee team has pursued active coordination with USAID. The teams still used the minimal expenditure outlet to a significant degree, but their spending was more closely monitored and curtailed.
This time, the coordination problems did not come from the military side but from the civilian. During interviews with State and USAID staff, particularly in Kenya and Djibouti, the CJTF-HOA agents were maligned by the rest of the embassy whether or not they had coordinated. The memory of the days when the CJTF-HOA had not coordinated efforts was still strong, and State and USAID officials complained about a lack of synergy.

At the same time, when the CJTF-HOA staff did coordinate, either directly or through a Civil Affairs Liaison Officer, USAID officials in particular complained about the time they had to devote to meetings and emails to effect this coordination. Following an NGO coordination meeting at the U.S. embassy in Djibouti City, the project liaison for USAID (a Djiboutian) complained, “Do they [the military] have any sense of how many other programs we have ongoing at any point in time? We don’t have time to sit in on meetings for their projects.”

ENDNOTE

14. As of the time of my writing, the CJTF-HOA's mission was still largely the same, perhaps with a slightly greater focus on military training and theater security cooperation than on the civil affairs mission than in the past.
SUGGESTED READINGS

*America’s History in Nation Building*


This multiauthor volume presents a series of case studies that chronicle the U.S.’s successes and failures in state building in Germany, Japan, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan.


Discusses how as the U.S. Army explored the western region of the United States in the nineteenth century, it built roads, compiled scientific records, improved river transportation, delivered mail, and supported new governmental institutions such as police forces and the agricultural extension service.

*Analyses of the Evolution of Military Involvement in Stabilization and Reconstruction*

Note: This is very selective; there are literally hundreds of works that an instructor could use. When picking, be careful to maintain the distinction between humanitarian assistance as defined by the military and humanitarian assistance as defined by the NGO and development community. The military combines development and disaster relief under humanitarian assistance, while the NGO and development communities treat them separately. In the realm of stability, security transition, and reconstruction, these two different concepts often become conflated.


This study recommends that the U.S. military should increase its capabilities in four principal areas, two of which are related to stabilization and reconstruction: (1) stabilization and reconstruction capabilities; (2) strategic communication; (3) knowledge, understanding, and intelligence relating to stabilization and reconstruction; and (4) identification, location, and tracking for asymmetric warfare. Available at [http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2004-12-DSB_SS_Report_Final.pdf](http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2004-12-DSB_SS_Report_Final.pdf).


This report addresses (1) DoD’s approach to enhance stability operations capabilities and challenges that have emerged in implementing this
approach; (2) DoD military planning for stability operations and the extent to which the department’s planning mechanisms facilitate an interagency approach; and (3) the extent to which DoD is applying stability operations-related lessons learned from past operations as future plans are developed. Available at http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/gaostabopsreport.pdf.


This study focuses on the U.S. Marine Corps’ activities in the initial postconflict transition period in Iraq in 2003, as well as the subsequent protracted efforts to reestablish security under the rule of law, representative government, and essential services in Iraq during 2004.


Discusses the evolution of DoD thinking about stabilization and reconstruction—in particular, moves to create a military stabilization and reconstruction force that would include both military and civilian capabilities in an interagency effort. Available at http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2003/12/mil-031230-afps01.htm.

Development and Defense


Provides a brief review of the CJTF-HOA and its operations from a slightly sensationalist angle, likely to capture the imagination of undergraduates in a way that formal academic writing and histories cannot. Available at http://www.esquire.com/features/africacommand0707.


This document summarizes findings of the CSIS Task Force on Non-Traditional Security Assistance. It proposes policy, institutional, and legislative changes for consideration by the current and future executive branch and Congress. The task force reviewed DoD activities in countterterrorism capacity building, postconflict stabilization and reconstruction, and humanitarian assistance in the wake of natural disaster and complex emergencies. Available at http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/080118-andrews-integrating21stcentury.pdf.

Lischer discusses and critiques the logic of humanitarian aid as a counterterrorism strategy. She also puts humanitarian assistance for counterterrorism within a counterinsurgency framework. Available at [http://hir.harvard.edu/articles/1481/](http://hir.harvard.edu/articles/1481/).

**Selected Issues in Military Involvement in Humanitarian Assistance and Stability, Security Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations**

Note: As above, this is also an extremely small sample of potential works that could be incorporated into the class. It combines case study and general works.


Reviews coordination issues between civilians (government and NGOs) and the military in humanitarian assistance operations. Reviews tensions that are caused by military involvement, particularly for NGOs, and the disjuncture in goals between civilian and military agents.


Discusses the NGOs’ concern that military involvement in a humanitarian mission will disrupt established relations between the host nation and the NGO community.


Note: Instructors should examine the table of contents to this volume, as many of the chapters could be background, depending on what the orientation of the course is and how this case study will be used.

Licina, Derek Joseph. 2007. Developing a Monitoring and Evaluating Capability for the U.S. Department of Defense Humanitarian Assistance Pro-


This is an expanded version of the *Harvard International Review* article, with a larger scope. Lischer discusses humanitarian assistance provision by the U.S. military, arguing that if not carefully executed, such “hearts and minds” operations can undermine U.S. interests at worst and, at best, fail to achieve any positive effects. Available at [http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/events/conference/LischerPaper707.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/events/conference/LischerPaper707.pdf).


The Lischer and Pugh articles all raise issues of civil-military coordination and the impact of military involvement in stability, security, transition, and reconstruction and humanitarian assistance operations.

**Scenario-building Tool**


This book is written as a field guide to all parties in Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction operations—U.S. government civilians, NGOs, U.S. military, and international organizations. It would be useful for scenario building and debate preparation.

**Field Manuals and Official Doctrine on Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance**


**Related Web Sites**

Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa
http://www.hoa.africom.mil/

http://www.dsca.mil/programs/HA/HA.htm

United States Africa Command
http://www.africom.mil

U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (Airborne)
http://www.usacapoc.army.mil/