

# Navigating

## *Civil-Military Relations*

### in Kabul

**by Maria J. Stephan**

In Afghanistan, civil-military (civ-mil) cooperation is both a strategic imperative and a formidable challenge. Ensuring that security, governance, and development are synchronized and directed toward a stable, secure, and sovereign Afghanistan requires that soldiers, diplomats, and development experts from Afghanistan and the international community are working from the same script. At U.S. Embassy Kabul, a small interagency team of planners, assessors, and trouble-shooters in the Political-Military Affairs (Pol-Mil) section has helped orient civ-mil relations toward the main goal of helping the Afghan government and people build the institutions and capabilities that will enable them to stand on their own against the extremists who threaten their future. As the only office within any U.S. embassy around the world composed of full-time planners, the Civ-Mil Plans and Assessments Sub-Section, or CMPASS, plays a unique role within a most unique Embassy.<sup>1</sup> The CMPASS experience with civ-mil planning in Afghanistan offers lessons for diplomatic posts in cooler climates as well.

The CMPASS team is charged with coordinating among the Embassy, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and U.S. Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A) and providing planning and assessment support throughout the U.S. Mission. The seven-member team, grown from an original team of five, includes four State Department planning officers from the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, two additional State Department planners, and a U.S. Army field grade officer (a graduate of Fort Leavenworth's prestigious School of Advanced Military Studies). As its name suggests, CMPASS (which reports through the Pol-Mil structure within the Embassy<sup>2</sup>) helps navigate the complex civ-mil waters in Afghanistan—mainly by ensuring that different perspectives and approaches of those in boots and those in suits are mutually reinforcing. That is not always an easy task, but given the high stakes in Afghanistan, where neither military nor civilian tools alone are sufficient to guarantee success, it is essential.

To set theater guidance for U.S. personnel—both those under Chief of Mission authority and those under military command—and maximize the alignment of U.S., Afghan, and coalition

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activities, COMPASS works from the Integrated Civ-Mil Campaign Plan. The first iteration of this document, developed by COMPASS's predecessor, the Integrated Civ-Mil Action Group, was signed in August 2009 by both former Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry and former ISAF Commander General Stanley McChrystal.<sup>3</sup>

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Since that plan was signed, the Embassy and ISAF have developed a number of mechanisms to partner and harmonize their respective civ-mil efforts. They also review and revise the plan annually and adjust their efforts accordingly.

To support civ-mil coordination in the field, COMPASS works closely with the Embassy's Interagency Provincial Affairs (IPA) office, whose primary responsibility is to coordinate between Kabul and the field.<sup>4</sup> IPA pioneered the regional platforms concept, where civilians serve as equals with military commanders and adopt parallel and integrating structures with the military. The State Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations has supported IPA's efforts by detailing civ-mil planners to IPA and the regional platforms and providing subject matter experts on topics such as sub-national governance. The office work has intensified as a result of the civilian uplift, which saw the number of civilians deployed to Kabul and the field grow from 320 before the

surge to over 1,200 today. COMPASS members work closely with IPA's Tiger Team, a small mobile team that deploys to assist with sub-national planning, and with IPA's four regional coordinators, who serve as the Embassy's primary interlocutors with the senior civilian representatives and their field staff.

In addition, COMPASS frequently collaborates with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), notably its Stabilization Unit in Kabul, which contains civilian development experts and military liaisons from Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command and the ISAF Joint Command (IJC). USAID's plans and assessments experts have played a critical role in promoting civ-mil integration in Kabul and in the field, where USAID governance and development programs are helping anchor security gains.

### **The Civ-Mil Landscape in Kabul**

U.S. Embassy Kabul has surpassed Baghdad as the largest in the world. It is not your typical diplomatic post. Five ambassadors, with Ambassador Ryan Crocker at the helm, are responsible for recommending and executing U.S. policy and managing the day-to-day affairs of a heavily fortified embassy and field facilities in the midst of a war zone. As with any large, complicated organization, bureaucracy sometimes obfuscates the mission. In the case of Kabul, nine U.S. departments<sup>5</sup> are represented in the Embassy. These diplomats, agronomists, water management experts, investigators, interdiction experts, financial institution advisors, and border control specialists work alongside military counterparts from USFOR-A and ISAF. ISAF, a multinational four-star military command currently led by General John Allen and located across the street from the Embassy, focuses on high-level policy and strategy. The IJC, whose headquarters are located just north of the Kabul

International Airport, is charged with sub-national and operational issues. On any given day, civilians from the Embassy trek to ISAF or IJC headquarters (or vice-versa) to collaborate on civ-mil issues ranging from alliance relations to stabilization initiatives.

Of course, the Embassy and ISAF are only a part of the larger civ-mil tapestry in Kabul. Both actors work closely with the military and civilian institutions of the Afghan government to build its capacity to serve and protect the Afghan people. Corruption, predatory government practices, and international aid that unintentionally bolster malign actors are a few major obstacles to this ultimate goal. Still, both remain committed to supporting governance in Afghanistan that is both participatory and representative. The Presidential Palace, where President Karzai lives and works, is located within a few hundred meters of the Embassy in a highly secured area, alongside a few key Afghan ministries. Other ministries, allied embassies, the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan, the United Nations Development Program, and a number of other international and non-governmental organizations are concentrated within a 10-mile radius of the Embassy. In Kabul, civ-mil planning often demands communication and coordination between all of these diverse Afghan and international actors.

### **The Embassy's J5 Shop**

In 2009, the U.S. Embassy Kabul decided to move from the Integrated Civil-Military Action Group (ICMAG) model and establish CMPASS as the new J5 (Plans) shop alongside the existing Pol-Mil Operations team (J3). The then-new Pol-Mil Counselor, Philip Kosnett, became the civilian equivalent of the military's J3/5 Director. Fresh from Iraq, Kosnett was not sure what he was getting into. "I saw in Iraq how critical the Plans shop is in a military context, but it was breaking new ground to build an enduring planning and assessment capacity at

an embassy—although we got a big boost from the work...the Integrated Civ-Mil Action Group had done earlier in the year."

Since then, CMPASS has grown into a robust and respected force within the Embassy. Based on their involvement with CMPASS, now former Pol-Mil Counselor Kosnett and his deputy, JoAnne Wagner, strongly support greater planning capacity at other embassies and within the Foreign Service generally. As Wagner put it:

I'm a believer. No matter what your job, in the crush of daily work it can be difficult to find adequate time to focus on long-range planning. I think every embassy should have someone—either at post or, for small missions, maybe regionally—whose job it is to wake up in the morning and advise the front office on what the mission should be doing today to achieve goals a year or two out—not just dealing with the crisis of the week.

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### **The Art of Civ-Mil Planning**

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multiple contingencies is a core function. Plans tend to energize military officers and enervate foreign service officers, who often point out that the art of diplomacy and building relationships does not neatly align with structured ends-ways-means planning. While that is certainly true, every U.S. embassy around the world is required to prepare an annual Mission Strategic Resource Plan that describes what it is doing, planning to do, and why—and how it will measure progress against mission goals.

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In Afghanistan, where billions of dollars, over 100,000 U.S. military personnel, and thousands of civilians are supporting the fight, shepherding resources and ensuring interagency and civ-mil unity of effort is both a mission requirement and an obligation to U.S. taxpayers. Prioritizing strategic and operational objectives, synchronizing civ-mil activities across time and space, developing ways to measure progress, and building flexibility and room for adaptation constitute the essence of civ-mil planning and the core of CMPASS's work at the Embassy.

### **Operationalizing Civ-Mil**

CMPASS helps operationalize civ-mil integration first and foremost through its participation in the national level working

groups (NLWGs), which are civ-mil problem-solving teams<sup>6</sup> that are structured around subject areas to implement the Integrated Civ-Mil Campaign Plan. The Coordinating Director for Development and Economic Assistance (CDDEA)<sup>7</sup> oversees these working groups and includes representatives from the U.S. Embassy Kabul, other embassies, ISAF, IJC, and USFOR-A. The various working groups meet regularly to identify problems and come up with solutions related to governance, elections, rule of law, anti-corruption, population security, reintegration, agriculture, infrastructure, borders, economic development, counter-narcotics, illicit finance, gender policy, and information initiatives.<sup>8</sup>

The NLWGs often tackle issues emerging from the field, where civilians work alongside troops down to company level. CMPASS serves as the Embassy's coordinating body for the working groups and helps prepare agenda items for the Executive Working Group and for meetings between the Chief of Mission and ISAF commander. Its members help identify cross-cutting issues that require special consideration or may not fall neatly within an existing section or working group's terms of reference.

For example, NLWGs stepped in following insurgent attacks on the contracting company responsible for building the Khost-Gardez Road in 2010. In response, the civ-mil Infrastructure Working Group developed ways for the military to help provide security, work with the local communities, and assist by providing explosives for rock blasting, so that work on the road connecting two provincial capitals could continue.

Concurrently, the civ-mil members of the Information Initiatives Working Group engaged in several days of interagency planning to develop an operational communication plan designed to align funding with key communications goals, which was approved by the Embassy and ISAF.

## Measuring Progress in Afghanistan

CMPASS is also the Embassy lead for preparing assessments that help define and measure progress in Afghanistan. Working with the entire U.S. Mission, ISAF, and certain Afghan ministries, CMPASS spearheads data collection and analysis to evaluate the status of governance, development, and other policy issues. In conjunction with State and USAID officials in Washington, CMPASS prepares the quarterly assessment for the National Security Council, which the national security staff uses to evaluate the impact of its strategy and to prepare briefings for Congress. The assessments, which include metrics ranging from Afghan budget execution, to specific anti-corruption and counter-narcotics measures, to progress on sub-national governance, private investment, and international donor coordination are intended to highlight both positive and negative issues and trends that may in time necessitate policy adjustments.

In this effort, CMPASS works closely with the Afghan Assessments Group at ISAF headquarters, along with the assessments group at IJC. ISAF, which is responsible for producing monthly and quarterly reports on progress in the three legs of counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan, seeks input from across the mission, particularly in governance and development. The IJC prepares regular assessments of the 121 “key terrain districts” and “areas of interest,” which are parts of Afghanistan where stabilization is considered critical for mission success.

CMPASS works closely with Afghan Assessments Group, the Commander’s Initiative Group, ISAF’s Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Stability, and others to ensure civ-mil plans and perceptions are shared mutually. This is a key issue for transition to Afghan lead in 2015, which will significantly change the relationship between the Afghan government

and the international community (including the United States). For example, CMPASS has worked with IPA to promote greater civilian input into its assessments. To support setting appropriate expectations and timelines, civilians in the field can provide critical input and give perspectives on both drivers of conflict, such as corruption and unrepresentative political bodies, and mitigating factors, such as local dispute resolution mechanisms and community development councils. This, in turn, can improve the quality of the assessments and better inform policy, strategy, and operations, including, for example, decisions on which Afghan provinces are ready for security transition.

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In addition to measuring progress or success, these assessments also contain a strategic narrative for longer-term U.S. engagement in Afghanistan and highlight negative as well as positive developments so that policy shifts can occur as necessary. U.S. diplomats and development workers will be in Afghanistan long after the troops have left—and deeply rooted progress in this war-ravaged country will not occur overnight.

### **The Rehearsal of Concept (ROC) Drill: A Culminating Civ-Mil Event**

Civ-Mil planning is an abstract concept until military personnel and civilians sit down at the same table to align their operations, programs, and activities and then act on the plan in a systematic and synchronized way. Some of



the most important such exercises to date have been intense interagency reviews of U.S. civ-mil efforts in Afghanistan. These “rehearsal of concept (ROC) drills” were held in Kabul in April and again in October of 2010.<sup>9</sup> The central goal of these drills was to synchronize civ-mil planning and resource requirements along key lines of effort, including security, governance, agriculture, justice, economic development, anti-corruption, counter-narcotics, and border issues.

The civ-mil ROC drills were co-hosted by U.S. Embassy Kabul, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, U.S. Central Command, and the Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Senior U.S. officials<sup>10</sup> participated, as did Afghan and international leaders.<sup>11</sup> Preparing for and executing the drills were a major undertaking that required extensive civ-mil coordination in Kabul. CMPASS directed the interagency coordination at the Embassy in partnership with the ISAF CJ-5 office. Sector leads from the Embassy, USAID, and ISAF gathered three to four times a week to discuss their programmatic and regional focuses, along

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with the expected outcomes and impacts of their efforts. It was then up to the civilian and military leads to work together to prepare presentations for their principals to describe who was doing what, where, with whom, and to what purpose/ effect and to identify any gaps in synchronizing governance, development, and security efforts.

Describing the actual day of the ROC drill, former Deputy Secretary of State Jacob Lew said, “We spent the day with our partners

listening to their advice as to what we need to do with them in order to be effective. It already has changed our thinking and it will continue to.” The April and October ROC drills led to successive mini-ROC drills on specific topics such as the rule of law, counter-narcotics, and issues concerning Kandahar. These periodic civ-mil planning encounters build relationships and encourage unprecedented civ-mil problem-solving at the national level.

**Civ-Mil 101: Lessons Learned**

The ROC drill highlighted a number of key lessons about civ-mil relations in Afghanistan and elsewhere, which CMPASS members have tried to incorporate in the Embassy’s daily work.

First, *planning really is important*. As Major Jen Munro, a former member of the CMPASS team, put it, “It’s not because the plan itself will be the blueprint for winning in Afghanistan, but because the relationships and trust that develop from the planning process will allow us to succeed together.”

On a related note, *civilians do know how to plan*. From the mission strategic resource plan, to Congressional visits, to the planning for infrastructure, interagency officers outline goals, set priorities, and assess outcomes. What makes Afghanistan different is the sheer volume of activities and the urgent need for results. The need to synchronize these disparate planning exercises so they complement rather than contradict or duplicate each other makes it all the more complicated.

The importance of a robust civilian planning capability does not only apply to U.S. Embassy Kabul or to war-time exigencies. Within a “normal” embassy, a planning team could be empowered to focus on ensuring that the yearly State and USAID mission strategic plan is not just stuck up on a shelf, but rather informs the activities of the mission. Embassy planners could help bring together relevant sections (with host government ministries and international

agencies, where necessary) to work through problems requiring cross-sector approaches—whether that would be supporting elections, planning an international investment conference, or engaging with civil society. As at our embassy in Kabul, planners at other U.S. embassies could help facilitate periodic assessments with the ambassador to measure progress on the goals in their mission strategic plan and propose courses of action to address gaps or deficiencies.

Second, the cultural and operational differences between civilians at the embassy and their military counterparts cannot be ignored, but they should not be exaggerated nor seen as barriers to progress. The remarkably diverse civilian expertise across the interagency community is a force multiplier that both complements and, when necessary, applies a healthy check on the military. There are obvious differences in size and speed between civilians and the military in Afghanistan. U.S. civilians are outnumbered 1 to 100 by their military counterparts, and the disparity increases when you add coalition forces to the mix. During the preparatory meetings for a ROC drill, it was clear that the military team had a much deeper bench. ISAF could assign dozens of military personnel to work on planning products and attend lengthy meetings; for the Embassy, where only two or three people comprise certain sections, sending even a single member to a two-hour meeting at ISAF or IJC came with tremendous opportunity costs. However, it was also clear to the military that civilians brought critical expertise and relationships that the military could not match. Civilians should leverage the military planning teams with their greater capacity and robust data collection. In addition, they should identify the times during the military planning cycle that require critical civilian expertise and be there consistently and with the right people.

The U.S. military takes great pride in its speed and efficient mobilization of personnel to work toward a common end. In Afghanistan, while speed is important, so too is strategic patience and moving from “quick fixes” to sustainable solutions that are devised and owned by Afghans. Enduring security must be anchored by accountable governance and economic development, and the failure to pay close attention to things such as tribal dynamics and local drivers of conflict can end up fueling the insurgency. While it is critical to show short-term gains, particularly in stabilization efforts in areas that have recently been “cleared” following military operations, haste can make waste in the long-term effort to empower Afghans to take responsibility for their country.

More than anything else, the ROC experience emphasized the critical importance of building personal relationships. It is remarkable how working relations improve and problems are solved when civilians and service men and women take time to get to know each other, understand the constraints the other is working under, and learn what is motivating them to serve their country in Afghanistan. Once a certain comfort level is reached and people from the Embassy feel at ease picking up the phone and calling their ISAF counterparts (and vice versa), potentially explosive conflicts can be averted—or at least the temperature can be turned down so that real problem-solving can take place.

As a direct by-product of the civ-mil relationships that the ROC drills catalyzed, a wider, international civ-mil planners’ meeting involving representatives from about 10 embassies and the United Nations began meeting every Sunday at ISAF to collaborate and work through complicated civ-mil problem sets, such as planning the stabilization campaign in Kandahar and supporting the District Delivery Program, an Afghan-led initiative focused on education, health, agriculture, and justice at the local level.

CMPASS team members have had the privilege of serving their country in one of the most dynamic, fast-paced embassies in the world. In their roles as civ-mil planners and problem-solvers,

the seven members of COMPASS have helped advance unity of effort and invigorate U.S. Embassy Kabul's central slogan: One Team, One Mission. As former Pol-Mil Counselor Phil Kosnett stated: "I knew COMPASS was working when military commands started begging for our tiny team to join in with their hordes of planners to ensure the 'civ' part in civ-mil got the appropriate attention." It is in this way that COMPASS team members with their support for civ-mil planning have made their contributions to the success of U.S. efforts in Afghanistan. **IAJ**

*The author extends special thanks to Brett Doyle, an interagency lessons learned contractor who serves in the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations.*

## Notes

- 1 This article draws upon the experiences of the COMPASS staff and covers the periods of 2010 to mid-2011. Dr. Kurt Müller (assigned to COMPASS from S/CRS in 2011) and Ciara Knudsen and Jason Ladnier (assigned to Integrated Civ-Mil Action Group from S/CRS in 2008-09) provided additional input.
- 2 Pol-Mil section has three sub-elements within the office: COMPASS; the Alliance Relations and Removal of Weapons (ARROW) section; and the Security Cooperation and Operational Unity Team (SCOUT).
- 3 The ICMAG, established in late 2008, oversaw the development of the first Integrated Civ-Mil Campaign Plan, civ-mil plans in regional commands East and South, and provincial planning that led to the proposals for regional civilian platforms. ICMAG was composed of three U.S. military officers, two USAID staff members, and four Department of State officers and reported to both the Embassy and the Commander of US Forces-Afghanistan.
- 4 In Afghanistan, the field is composed of six regional commands and five task forces along with 27 provincial reconstruction teams, 35 district support teams, and 9 agribusiness development teams.
- 5 Including State, USAID, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of Defense, Department of Justice, Department of Homeland Security, and Treasury.
- 6 At the time of this writing the NLWGs are expected to be restructured and reduced in number from 14 to 7.
- 7 Within the Embassy, the CDDEA is responsible for overseeing the national-level civ-mil framework. COMPASS works very closely with the CDDEA, whose head co-chairs the Executive Working Group with ISAF's deputy chief of staff for stability operations.
- 8 The Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations provides support to Embassy Kabul in many of these areas, such as subject matter expertise in rule of law, agricultural development, communications, and others.
- 9 While the first formal ROC drill began in 2010, Ambassador Holbrooke and then-CENTCOM commander General David Petraeus held an earlier version in May 2009, which formed the guidance for the Integrated Civ-Mil Campaign Plan later that summer.
- 10 Including Ambassador Holbrooke, then-Deputy Secretary of State Jacob Lew; Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Michele Flournoy; and USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah.
- 11 Including 11 Afghan ministries and the Afghan Supreme Court, the military and civilian leadership of NATO-ISAF, then-NATO-ISAF Commander General Petraeus, and ambassadors and senior officials from 11 embassies, the European Union, and the United Nations.