

# The Evolution of Civil Affairs Reporting in a COVID-19 Environment

News From the Front

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## Introduction

The Civil Affairs Support Detachment (CASD), Detachment (DET) 10, provided insights and lessons learned on reporting during their recent mobilization and deployment support at the operational level—a three-star Army component command—at U.S. Army Central (USARCENT) during the COVID-19 crisis. The detachment identified the civil affairs (CA) mission set in doctrine, the evolution of civil-military reporting during the global pandemic, and the practical application of reporting in support of an operational-level command. The detachment provided several recommendations on how CA organizations at the operational level can support staff planning efforts in the COVID-19 environment while maintaining the core CA mission set.



Figure 1. Elements of CASD assist in planning a table-top exercise with the Gulf Cooperation Council's Emergency Management Center in Kuwait City, Kuwait. Picture by CASD staff.

## Background

CASD conducts civil affairs operations (CAO) in the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility (AOR) with civil liaison teams (CLTs) in five countries. Through civil reconnaissance, partnerships, and engagements, CASD publishes weekly civil information management (CIM) reports and products ranging from civil atmospheric, critical civil infrastructure assessments, and geospatial civil-component mapping, which provides staff support to USARCENT's General Staff Anti-Terrorism/Force Protection (G-34) Civil-Military Operations (CMO) Directorate. These reports and products are disseminated to a variety of staff directorates as necessary, and ultimately support the USARCENT commander's decision support matrix and overall civil-component common operational picture (COP).

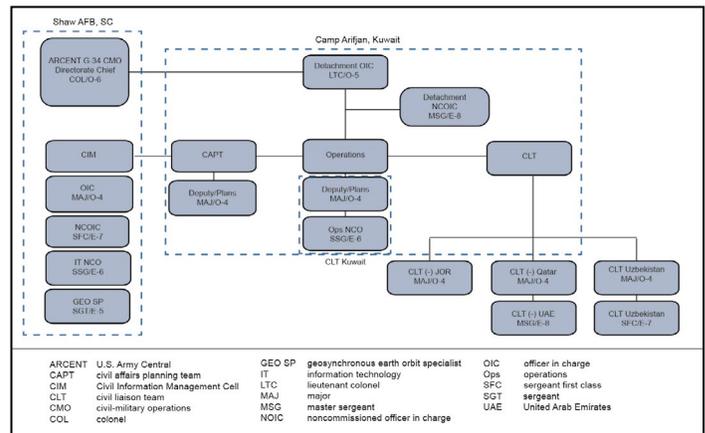


Figure 2. CASD, Detachment 10 Task Organization by Location

## How Civil Affairs Doctrinally Supports Theater Operations at the Operational Level

To fully understand CASD's mission, the CAO doctrinal references mentioned below explain CASD's integration into USARCENT's CMO Directorate.

Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (06 October 2017), Chapter 2, Army Echelons, Capabilities, and Training, Theater Army Organization, Civil Affairs Command.

2-28. Each theater army receives support from an apportioned Reserve component civil affairs command (CACOM). The CACOMs provide theater-level planning, coordination, policies, and programs in support of a geographic combatant commander regional civil-military operations strategy and stabilization, reconstruction, and development efforts through planning teams. CACOMs provide support to theater armies, joint task forces, land component commands, or the senior Army forces headquarters. Each CACOM has the capability to establish civil-military operations centers to integrate, coordinate, and synchronize civil-military operations in support of civil administration or transitional military authority.

USARCENT CASD is sourced as a force tracking number mission requirement out of the 352nd Civil Affairs Command, Fort Meade, MD, which is part of the U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (USACAPOC). It consists of U.S. Army Reserve Soldiers selected from within its command on a nine-month rotational basis to serve as an extension to USARCENT's G-34 CMO Directorate forward in the CENTCOM AOR. CASD is operational control to USARCENT and administrative control to USARCENT's forward company (Fox Company), in Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.

FM 3-57, *Civil Affairs Operations* (17 April 2019), Chapter 2, Civil Affairs Operations.

2-1. Civil affairs operations are actions planned, coordinated, executed, and assessed to enhance awareness of, and manage the interaction with, the civil component of the operational environment; identify and mitigate underlying causes of instability within civil society; and/or involve the application of functional specialty skills normally the responsibility of civil government (Joint Publication 3-57).

CMO are a commander's activities performed by designated military forces that establish, maintain, influence, or exploit relations between military forces and indigenous populations and institutions by directly supporting the achievement of objectives relating to the reestablishment or maintenance of stability within a region or host nation. At the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of warfare, during all military operations, CMO facilitate unified action between military forces and nonmilitary entities within the operational area. CMO facilitate this unified action, particularly in support of shaping, stability, counterinsurgency, and other activities that counter asymmetric and irregular threats (JP 3-57).

2-2. Figure [3] depicts that CAO are the CA contribution to the commander's CMO responsibility that is required in all elements of decisive action.



Figure 3. Field Manual (FM) 3-57, Figure 2-1, Page 2-1, Civil Affairs Operations' Contribution to Unified Action

### Core Competencies and Functions

2-4. The three CA core competencies nested within CAO describe the overarching capabilities that the CA branch provides. CA functions are aligned under the core competencies, organizing tasks and systems (people, organizations, information, and processes) into executable capabilities. These functions may be executed prior to, simultaneously with, or in the absence of other military operations, across the range of military operations and all levels of war.

2-5. Figure [4] shows how the three core CA competencies are mutually supporting and form the basis for training, organizing, equipping, and employing CA forces.



Figure 4. FM 3-57, Figure 2-2, Page 2-2, Civil Affairs and Core Competencies and Nested Functions

Although there are many core competencies and functions, CIM and the civil-military operations center (CMOC) highlighted in Figure 4, are the primary areas that best align with CASD’s reporting in the COVID-19 environment.

### Civil Information Management

2-16. CIM is conducted in six steps that generate situational understanding through collection, collation, processing, and analysis and evaluation of information, leading to the production and dissemination of civil information products that are fused with supported units and can be shared with unified action partners. The six steps are depicted in Figure [5].

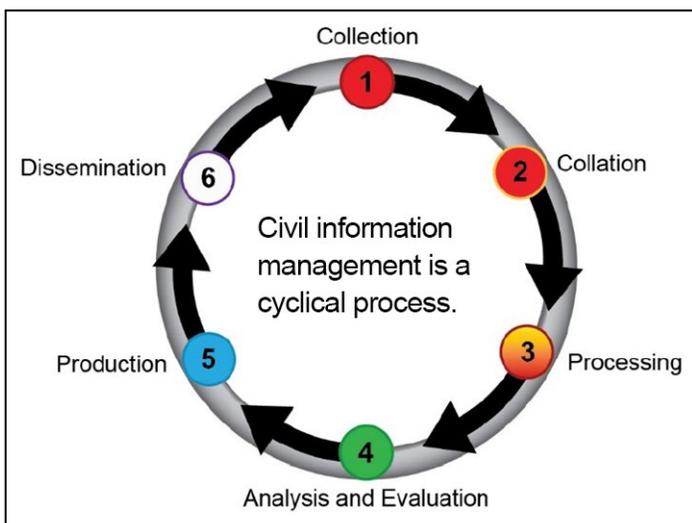


Figure 5. FM 3-57, Figure 2-3, Page 2-4, Civil Information Management Process

2-17. The data collected provides current civil-component information for dissemination through the CIM process. Civil considerations are developed from data with relation to areas, structures, capabilities, organizations, people, and events (ASCOPE) within the civil component of the commander’s operational environment. The management of civil information is the fusion of analyzed data into the COP to enhance the supported commander, Department of Defense (DOD), interagency, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGO), and indigenous populations and institutions situational dominance.

2-18. CIM is not solely a task of a CA unit’s CIM cell. Every CA element has a role within CIM. CA forces should also actively incorporate the supported unit’s information requirements into the civil information collection plan to enhance the COP and the intelligence preparation of the battlefield/battlespace process. CIM enhances situational awareness and facilitates understanding for all elements in the operational environment, allowing those elements to achieve decision superiority. Every CA Soldier has the ability to conduct basic analysis and evaluation of civil information, while CMOCs, CIM sections, and higher CA headquarters analysts conduct in-depth analysis and evaluation of that civil information as part of the process that enhances the situational understanding of the supported commander and unified action partners.

As executed by the CASD, CIM is an ongoing process that CLTs (Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Jordan), detachment headquarters (Arifjan, Kuwait) and the CIM team (Shaw Air Force Base, SC) feeds the process in Figure 5. CLTs provide weekly country-specific information that is collected, collated, processed, and analyzed for production and dissemination to USARCENT via the CIM team. These reports follow a weekly battle rhythm to complete the CIM process shown in Figure 5.

## Civil-Military Operations Center

2-20. The CMOC serves as one of the primary coordination interfaces for U.S. forces with indigenous populations and institutions, unified action partners, and the interagency. A CMOC is tailored to the specific tasks associated with the mission and augmented by assets (for example, engineer, medical, transportation) available to the supported commander and unified action partners. The CMOC facilitates continuous coordination among the key participants with regard to CAO and in support of the commander's CMO plan to manage civil information, analyze civil considerations, and develop civil inputs to the COP. This occurs from tactical levels to strategic levels within a given area of operation depending on the level of the CMOC.

The naming convention of CASD is a non-doctrinal civil affairs term. When USARCENT gained operational control, the team was named CASD, but operates essentially as a theater-level CMOC supporting USARCENT. The CASD is tailored for the mission set and, therefore, it has capabilities not always present in a doctrinal-theater CMOC.

## Civil Liaison Team

2-21. A CLT provides limited civil-military interface capability as a spoke for the exchange of information between indigenous populations and institutions, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), NGOs, and other governmental agencies, and has limited capability to link resources to prioritized requirements. The CLT is a stand-alone team for the CMOC that provides the supported CMOC with a civil reconnaissance and civil engagement capability for CAO and CMO coordination without interfering with the regular staff functions.



**Figure 6. Elements of the CASD CLT with Al-Ahmadi Oil Refinery personnel tour the refinery and firehouse with a focus on emergency management. Picture by CASD staff.**

CASD had five CLTs located in Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan (with coverage of Tajikistan), Jordan, and Kuwait. Long-, near-, and short-term planning priorities were derived by the USARCENT G-34 CMO Directorate, which helped develop the detachments' key supporting tasks nested within USARCENT's lines of effort: The requisite CENTCOM Country Campaign Plan and the relevant U.S. Department of State (DoS) Integrated Country Strategy.



**Figure 7. Elements of CASD CLT receive a briefing with a focus on emergency management in the command center of the Al-Ahmadi Oil Refinery. Picture by CASD staff.**

In December 2019, China first reported a cluster of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei Province. These cases would later be identified as the origination of today's novel coronavirus or COVID-19. COVID-19 stayed relatively isolated in China into January 2020, which happened to coincide with an increase in ongoing U.S.-Iran tensions. CASD had been primarily focused on events in Iran and reported on the impacts to the civil component throughout the CENTCOM AOR. COVID-19 reporting among the USARCENT staff at the time was minimal. However, in early February 2020, CASD began to report initially on potential impacts of COVID-19 to the civil component in Central Asia and the Gulf Cooperation Council states, with occasional weekly CIM products.

By the end of February, it became apparent that a more detailed rolling staff estimate would be needed. CASD, through its CLTs, leveraged in-country relationships to assist with reporting. These entities ranged from U.S. Embassy DoS cables, Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports, and partner-nation reporting. CASD also leveraged relevant reporting from other adjacent units such as USARCENT's area support groups, and also collaborated extensively with other USARCENT staff directorates, in particular the general staff military/civil affairs (G-5) country desk officers and surgeon. These organizations, coupled with a variety of open-source reporting, most notably Johns Hopkins University's COVID Tracker, set the foundation for what would become daily COVID-19 reporting focusing on the potential civil impacts of the pandemic across the CENTCOM AOR. These initial reports were collated into an initial slide deck running-estimate product, for February 2020.

As COVID-19 continued to spread worldwide, CASD's ability to gather information through face-to-face engagements and partnerships became limited. By mid-March, it had been almost fully restricted by a variety of CENTCOM movement restrictions placed in the AOR to preserve force health protection, in addition to host-nation travel restrictions, curfews, and government agency closures. What also had been previously a wide array of CIM reporting and products, became reporting that was almost exclusively focused on the impacts of COVID-19 on the civil component. Because of the unfamiliarity of how to best report on civil-component impacts during a global pandemic, it was important to create reports that synchronized effort, synthesized relevant information, and provided timely and accurate information to the USARCENT staff and commanding general for decision making.

Upon the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19, CASD's CIM cycle changed from weekly to daily and began to focus primarily on COVID reporting. All countries within the AOR were divided among members of the CLTs, plans, and civil affairs planning team that submitted daily reporting for inclusion in USARCENT's daily COVID-19 briefs. Each country in the CENTCOM AOR was represented by a single slide that became the rolling staff estimate for how COVID-19 was impacting the civil component in that country. The reporting compiled qualitative and quantitative reports gathered by each CLT.

As the COVID-19 pandemic began to significantly impact countries in the AOR, reporting format, data points, and statistics were ever-changing. CASDs daily updates began as a tool to individually look at each country's quantitative numeric reporting. It quickly morphed into a numeric tracking scorecard system that compared and contrasted the response efforts of countries across four main sub-regions in the AOR. This reporting also now relied heavily on open-source research and non-weighted qualitative data. A weekly scorecard, based on predetermined weighted metrics, was published on Fridays to identify how each country's response efforts compared and contrasted to others in the AOR. The scorecard evaluated a variety of quantitative and qualitative data points to gauge the impact COVID-19 was having on the civil component of each country. The scorecard became a simple red, amber, and green chart with arrows that annotated positive, neutral, or negative civil-component changes. The scorecard provided an end-of-week overview of where each country currently ranked. The scorecard was briefed to the USARCENT commanding general as a weekly closeout on Fridays. Areas of quantitative and qualitative focus included the following:

- Infection totals (derived from Johns Hopkins University COVID Tracker and CDC reporting)
  - Total number of cases, recoveries, and deaths
- Impacts on exercises and engagements (derived from the USARCENT G-5 country desk officer reporting)
  - Multi- and bi-lateral exercises
  - Subject matter expert exchanges
  - Partner-nation short- and long-term engagements

- Access to country and other travel restrictions (derived from the USARCENT G-5 country desk officer and the CENTCOM Deployment and Distribution Operations Center reporting)
  - Border closures
  - Airport closures
  - Passport and visa processing
- Impacts to civil events (derived from a variety of open-source reporting)
  - How restrictions impact holidays and other civic events (i.e., Ramadan)
- Government actions (derived from a variety of open-source reporting)
  - Local municipality restrictions (i.e., curfews, business closures, ordinances, etc.)
  - Coordination between countries
  - Ministry actions
  - Medical decisions
  - Country requests
- Major economic impacts (derived from a variety of open-source reporting)
  - Economic decisions
  - How industry is affected
  - Long-term planning
  - Governmental monetary actions
- Foreign humanitarian assistance (derived from NGOs, U.S. Agency for International Development, DoS, and the United Nations (UN) World Health Organization (WHO)).
  - U.S.-provided
  - Russian- and China-provided
  - NGO-provided
  - International coordination

As reporting continued daily, CLTs searched open-source news and partner-nation reporting, often from Ministry of Health or Ministry of Interior websites and social media outlets, to determine what information met reporting criteria. New reporting was added daily in blue font to the staff-estimate slides to distinguish the updates. Paragraph parenthetical citations were used for references. Additionally, in the notes portion of the slide, the base source web link or citation was added to a running list of sources.

These slides were compiled into a master staff-estimate slide presentation that was submitted to the CASD officer in charge and disseminated via daily unclassified email to USARCENT's CMO Directorate and over 200 staff officers on CASDs external distribution list. In the body of the email, key highlights in the last 24 hours for each country were highlighted as a role-up by country. The larger staff estimate was attached as a PowerPoint presentation. This distribution not only included key USARCENT staff, but also staff officers from U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT), U.S. Air Forces Central Command (AFCENT), U.S. Marine Forces Central Command (MARCENT), Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT), and CENTCOM, along with representatives from the interagencies. All reporting was kept at the unclassified level. It was also shared frequently with coalition, partner-nation, NGO, and IGO community planners after being cleared for release by the foreign disclosure officer. This sharing of reporting helped CASD further build its relationship, in particular with the NGO and IGO community that frequently reciprocated and shared releasable reporting of their own, therefore, furthering the understanding of how COVID-19 was impacting the AOR.

As the daily COVID-19 reporting continued, a subset of the reporting also focused on three other areas. The G-34 CMO wanted daily visibility of key UN WHO efforts and DoS COVID-19 reporting. The UN WHO reporting was captured in daily open-source situation reports (SITREPs) collected from the UN WHO's website and reporting received from several local UN WHO offices in the AOR. This report was sent separately from the daily staff estimate and was unclassified. The DoS reporting was pulled twice daily from the DoS Coronavirus Global Response Coordination Unit SITREP. Highlights for just the CENTCOM AOR was summarized, and this report was sent to a smaller U.S.-only distribution list, because the information was sensitive but unclassified. The USARCENT commanding general also wanted weekly visibility of

American citizen repatriation efforts in the region being conducted by a DoS task force. This information was pulled once a week from the DoS *Repatriation Task Force Briefing Book*. This product began to accompany the scorecard and staff-estimate master slides on Fridays, but was also sent to a smaller U.S.-only distribution list, because of sensitive but unclassified information.

### **Practical Application: How Civil Affairs Support Detachment Reporting Was Used**

The USARCENT staff used portions of the master staff-estimate slide presentation on the potential impacts of COVID-19 to the civil component for its daily COVID-19 update briefs. It was also used to fill other COVID-19 slides the G-34 CMO and CIM team completed daily, such as the USARCENT COVID-19 COP. Many staff officers used the products to keep situational awareness of current events in the region. In particular, the USARCENT G-5 CDOs used the CASD daily staff estimate to verify their own reporting for 15 separate desk officers. These desk officers published a daily report of their own, mainly capturing updates from the U.S. Embassies in the AOR and highlighting host-nation quarantine protocols, screening protocols, foreign travel restrictions, and country internal movement restrictions. These reports often framed the perspective of how they impacted USARCENT access to the partner country, while the CASDs reports were framed more on the impacts to the civil component of the partner nation. Finally, on Fridays, the USARCENT commanding general reviewed running-estimate master slides, the scorecard, and American citizen product during the weekends.

As time progressed, further individual CIM products were developed as part of the normal CIM cycle that dove deeper into a variety of civil-component issues impacted by COVID-19. These were often framed in an ASCOPE or political, military, economic, social, information, and infrastructure (PMESII) structure and worked at the unclassified level to include the following:

- Estimated COVID-19 peak prediction timeframe in the CENTCOM AOR based on recent open-source statements from key government officials
- WHO preparedness and response plan
- Country-specific products highlighting provincial travel restrictions
- Food insecurity in the CENTCOM AOR impacted by COVID-19
- Upcoming religious events and potential spread of COVID-19 in the CENTCOM AOR
- Overview of international NGO and IGO COVID-19 assistance efforts in the AOR
- Economic impact of COVID-19
- Great power competition: COVID-19 global humanitarian assistance
- COVID-19 medical response capabilities in the CENTCOM AOR
- COVID-19 infodemic and disinformation campaign
- Potential COVID-19 health effects on the CENTCOM AOR national leadership
- Ramadan and the potential impact of COVID-19

### **COVID-19 Battle Rhythm**

- Monday through Thursday
  - CLTs collect, collate, and submit country slides to CASD operations (OPs) by 1200.
  - OPs collates and disseminates daily staff-estimate master slides via email distribution by close of business (COB) Kuwait time.
  - Highlights from the daily UN WHO and DoS Coronavirus Global Response Coordination Unit SITREPs are sent daily via email distribution by COB Kuwait time.

- Friday
  - CLTs collect, collate, and submit country slides to OPs by 1200.
  - OPs collect and collates the American citizen product.
  - OPs collect and collates master slides.
  - OPs collates and disseminates master slides, the scorecard, and DoS *Repatriation Task Force Briefing Book*. The American citizen product is sent daily via email distribution by COB Kuwait time.
  - Highlights from the daily UN WHO and DoS Coronavirus Global Response Coordination Unit SITREPs are sent to tailored email distribution lists.
- Saturday
  - CLTs collect, collate, and submit country slides to OPs by 1200.
  - OPs collates and disseminates master slides via email distribution by COB Kuwait time.
  - Highlights from the daily UN WHO and DoS Coronavirus Global Response Coordination Unit SITREPs are sent to tailored email distro lists.
- Sunday
  - Resiliency day: 24-hour pause in reporting.

### Approximate Weekly Man-Hours Used

Significant daily staff bandwidth was consumed by all members of the CASD on a weekly basis to make the daily COVID-19 potential impacts to the civil-component staff estimate a reality. Although this time was significant, the product generated reached a wide audience and helped staff planning efforts far beyond the normal reach of even a small operational-level focused CA detachment. The USARCENT commanding general kept the staff focused on COVID-19 planning and response efforts as its primary short-term focus. This helped the CASD reprioritize from working generally focused CIM products to more-detailed COVID-19 products. Table 1 shows approximate weekly man-hour estimates.

### Recommendations

The daily COVID-19 staff estimate that focused on potential impacts to the civil component was lauded by USARCENT staff for timeliness and accuracy. Additionally, because it was sent to multiple CENTCOM staff directorates and Sister Service component commands, it provided a significant amount of situational awareness outside of where CASD CIM products would normally be utilized. The current scorecard, after several revisions, became a way to visualize scoring criteria illustrating the impact of COVID-19 on the civil populace in the CENTCOM AOR. Although this scorecard could be further refined, similar versions should be used by operational-level staffs as planning staff estimates going forward.

**Table 1. CASD Positions**

Position (Number of Soldiers)	Daily	Weekly
CLTs (5 total)	20 hours (4 hours x 5 CLTs)	120 hours (20 hours x 5 CLTs x 6 days)
OPS (1)	6 hours	36 hours (6 hours x 6 days)
Deputy (1)	2 hours	12 hours (2 hours x 6 days)
Detachment commander (1)	2 hours	12 hours (2 hours x 6 days)
Approximate total	30 hours	180 hours

Conversely, almost all efforts have been focused on COVID, which restricts the amount of other reporting from the CLTs. However, because movement restrictions have limited the ability to conduct direct engagements, civil affairs operations staff support for COVID reporting has been an effective way CASD has continued to contribute civil information for the commander's decision support matrix.

The CASD efforts reporting COVID-19 impacts to the civil component is ultimately a staff planning effort set in the backdrop of a crisis-response framework. As international COVID reporting declines, so should the reporting requirements of the CASD. The process for collecting and collating information is time-consuming, and should be slowed in a timeframe that is commensurate with the importance of international events, such as the current global pandemic. When such crisis events pass, the CASD and its respective CLTs will be able to return to more steady-state operations. A transition plan from primarily focusing on COVID reporting to more steady-state, host-nation engagements, exercises, and exchanges should allow reintegration of personnel and organizations when normal operations resume.

### **Conclusion**

Supporting an operational- to strategic-level, three-star component command with CA planning was a new concept for the CASD, DET 10 Soldiers. Many Soldiers were selected from Reserve CA battalions that primarily focus on CA at the tactical level. Although there is a staff integration function for a CA company and its CLTs at the brigade and battalion level, strategic- to operational-level CMO are far more intricate. It was important to understand USARCENT's mission, intent, and priorities, so that the CASD mission was properly nested within higher echelons of command. Oftentimes, the process of production seemed tedious and arbitrary. Other times, CASD products received attention at the USARCENT and CENTCOM levels. In terms of COVID-19, CASD witnessed an increase in operational tempo and battle-rhythm requirements. Having an understanding of steady-state operations allowed CASD to successfully adapt to reporting changes during a global pandemic. As CASD, DET 10 reintegrates into its respective follow-on assignments, it will look to apply newfound knowledge and experience at all levels of operations.