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Intellectual Capital for the Army

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Joint Missions Ahead

By Keith J. Hamel, WPAOG staff
In 2003, while serving as a Civil Affairs Officer in Iraq, John P. DeBlasio ‘89 witnessed something that deeply troubled him. “The Army was not prepared to engage with local populations and achieve military objectives in a non-kinetic fashion,” he says. Years later, Class of 2013 Vice President Tommy Daniel reached a similar conclusion after his first two-and-a-half years of education and training at the United States Military Academy. “The current operating tempo in the world says cadets are going to need to know information related to working with international populations and civilian counterparts,” Daniel says, “but there was a vacuum at West Point.” That is, however, until March 2012, when DeBlasio pledged a gift to the West Point Association of Graduates that formally established the Center for the Study of Civil-Military Operations (CSCMO), which explicitly addresses the changing role of junior officers in its mission statement: “To develop all West Point leaders so that they are prepared to employ an understanding of Civil-Military Operations (CMO) within the framework of the broad spectrum of challenges they will face in military service.”
The center also supports the development of the Academy’s rotating faculty by sending them to CSCMO-sponsored seminars and CMO-related conferences. “Already this year,” Melkon states, “I’ve sent four faculty members down to USIP’s Table-Top Exercise to discuss relationship building and conflict resolution via partnerships with U.S. armed forces and non-government humanitarian organizations, I’ve sent a number down to the Peace and Stability Operations Training and Education four-day workshop at George Mason University, and I’ve created the CSCMO Scholar’s Program, which allocates financial resources for individual research among the faculty.” Melkon is also hoping to start a semi-annual journal as a forum for faculty to publish their work, and he himself remains current in the field by participating in CMO research. Last October, he and Kristine Ringler of Minerva met with Ph.D. candidate Lisa Karlborg from the University of Upsalla in Sweden to evaluate the effectiveness of various CMO methods used by international troops in Afghanistan (how well they achieve support and acceptance).

“‘When you graduate here as a second lieutenant, you will work with civilian populations. I guarantee it.’

—Colonel Bill Martinez ’74

Figuratively speaking, Melkon sees all of CSCMO’s operations as existing in a vertical stratum with outreach at the top (in terms of professional military education and the field at large) and cadet learning at the base. “It all distills down to a lesson that a cadet can learn,” Melkon says. One project that hits on all levels (bringing intellectual capital to the Army at large, contributing a scholarly focus to the development of doctrine, and positioning West Point as the fountain of thought on CMO issues) is the Pikine research project, staffed by four cadets. Last summer, Major Tom Hanlon, assistant professor with the Department of Geography & Environmental Engineering, responded to a research solicitation from United States Army Africa Command. It was seeking a study on the effects of security in sprawling megacities in Africa, namely Pikine, which is an informal municipality adjacent to and sharply contrasted with the more developed city of Dakar, Senegal. Melkon helped Hanlon develop the civil-military concept for the project and used his network connections to pair Hanlon with an international non-government organization called Partners for Democratic Change (PDC). One of PDC’s branch outfits is Partners Senegal, which helped Hanlon and the cadets conduct interviews with neighborhood chiefs, social organization leaders, ordinary citizens, and even a Grand Imam during a two-week period from December 30 to January 13. After analyzing the data they collected, the research team put together a paper on the effects of sprawling megacities and...
debriefed the commanding general of USAFRICOM. Reflecting on the scope of the Pikine project as it relates to CSCMO, Melkon says, “Here you have a problem; you have the intellectual capacity and a pedagogical mission here at West Point informing the research; you have service in the field that exposes cadets to working in an austere environment with a host country team requiring them to perform intercultural exchange; you have applied learning within the existing curriculum and independent research; finally, you have the experience of presenting a product that can be given back to the Army for use toward future planning.”

If the last decade is any indicator, West Point graduates will be facing many more “Pikine projects” in the future. “More and more company-grade officers are finding themselves engaged with civilian populations, local leaders, and non-government agencies,” Melkon claims, “but the Army doesn’t often teach them how to handle these issues and situations until the field-grade level.” Given this new reality, the need for CSCMO is obvious. “Cadets are hungry for information that is going to make them better leaders,” Daniel says, “and CSCMO is filling the vacuum.”

Members of the team (left to right) CDT Mike Zweifel ’13, MAJ Tom Hanlon (D/GenE), CDT Charles Susong ’14, and Dr. Garth Myers (Trinity College) learn how informal traditions originating in rural areas blend with formal functions of governance in the city of Pikine.

Read more about the Center for the Study of Civil-Military Operations.

ACRONYM GUIDE

CSCMO – Center for the Study of Civil-Military Operations
CMO – Civil-Military Operations
USIP – United States Institute of Peace
AIAD – Academic Individual Advanced Development
PDC – Partners for Democratic Change
USAFRICOM – United States Africa Command

The West Point Association of Graduates thanks USAA for being a proud sponsor of the West Point Women’s Summit

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