PRACTICE NOTE

Operationalizing Civilian Protection in Mali: The Case for a Civilian Casualty Tracking, Analysis, and Response Cell

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This practice note details an emerging best practice of civilian harm mitigation in armed conflict: the creation of civilian casualty tracking, analysis, and response processes by a warring party or peacekeeping force. It asserts that in Iraq, Afghanistan, and soon Somalia, processes aimed at better understanding civilian harm and addressing its consequences have positively shaped mission tactics, training, and overall operations. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, tracking and analysis has led to a marked decrease in civilian casualties and facilitated the making of amends for any civilian losses. The paper argues that for warring parties to achieve their mission—particularly one with a protection of civilians mandate, such as the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)—they must fully understand the impact of their actions on the civilian population, positive or negative. For this reason, a Civilian Casualty Tracking, Analysis, and Response Cell should be created for MINUSMA to improve its ability mitigate risk to civilians as required by its UN Security Council mandate.

Contemporary conflict is often conducted amongst the population, making civilian harm a tragic and all too common consequence. While it is unlikely there will ever be war without suffering, innovations developed or adopted by warring parties over the past decade provide some best practices in civilian harm mitigation. One best practice in particular, known as civilian casualty tracking, analysis, and response, can provide warring parties a better understanding of the impact of their operations on civilians and enable them to (a) adjust tactics to prevent future harm and (b) make amends[1] for the harm they do cause. Such methods are particularly important in situations where stakeholders are attempting to protect the population—such as newly mandated stabilization forces in Mali—given that civilian harm can gravely damage the legitimacy and success of the mission.

Civilian harm tracking, analysis, and response mechanisms can and have saved lives. For peace operations, this practice should be regarded as 'mission critical'. Establishment of a Civilian Casualty Tracking, Analysis, and Response Cell (CCTARC) in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) will enable the success of the mission by bolstering its ability to "protect and mitigate risk to civilians", as stated in the mandate (UNSC 2013). The cell's work can reinforce the mission's legitimacy among Malian civilians and wider audiences within the international community; hence, it will help to maintain

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crucial support for the mission. An effective tracking, analysis, and response mechanism will not in itself 'win' the conflict, but the lack of one may very well lose it, turning tactical successes into overall strategic failure.

What Is Civilian Harm Tracking, Analysis, and Response?

Civilian harm tracking, analysis, and response is an internal process by which a particular coalition, military, stabilization, or peacekeeping operation gathers data on civilian harm caused by its operations and then uses that data to improve operations and properly respond to civilian losses. Data can come from a variety of sources including formal and informal reporting chains among troops, investigations of alleged incidents of civilian harm, and external sources such as civil society, hospitals, and the media. Data is fed into a centralized, professionally-staffed information system or 'cell' which houses, analyzes, and disseminates findings. This analysis informs decision-makers, including operational military commanders, and allows them to adjust their planning, tactics, and training to address these challenges.[2]

Beyond its practical utility, there are strong ethical and strategic reasons to better understand civilian harm; there may also be legal reasons for doing so. Ethically, many warring parties—not only in protection and peacekeeping missions, but also in stabilization, counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and major combat operations—have stated their commitment to minimizing civilian harm. Public release of some analysis and the resulting changes in tactics including open and factual reporting to the public and the prompt making of amends to victims and their families can back up those statements.

Strategically, peacekeepers may find that mission success depends not only on protecting civilians from other armed groups but also on ensuring that they (the peacekeepers) are not harming civilians. Building this legitimacy and trust among the population is important in Mali, where the stabi-lization mission is being conducted with a parallel political process to end the conflict and establish a government that represents all Malians. Expectations among the population can be very high, and civilian casualties, when ignored, can quickly diminish the legitimacy of both the peacekeepers and the Malian government. MINUSMA, the Malian Armed Forces, and the Malian government must be transparent and must be seen to be acting on behalf of the people. To do this, peacekeepers and the Malian Armed Forces must understand—through a CCTARC—where, when, and how their operations have harmed civilians in order to improve their tactics and enable them to respond properly.

Legally, data gathered and analyzed through the CCTARC can provide peacekeepers with the means to properly assess their adherence to international humanitarian law obligations of 'proportionality' and 'distinction' during conduct of hostilities and report to political institutions (as required by the UN Security Council Mandate).[3]

Knowledge as a Change Agent

A CCTARC helps a force organize and understand what was previously simple, raw information concerning civilian harm. This process involves: (1) the systematic gathering of data (through field reports); (2) the gathering of further data and evidence through investigations; (3) the analysis of data for trends and challenges; (4) the learning of lessons from the analysis, including in order to shape commander's guidance and training; and (5) the facilitation of appropriate responses to incidents of harm.

Over time, an internal recording of civilian harm accomplishes four things: (1) creates a mindset among troops/peacekeepers that the impact of their operations on the civilian population is documented and taken seriously; (2) enables the reduction of civilian harm by analyzing data over time to provide commanders and military planners information to increase operational effectiveness; (3) enables commanders to appropriately

respond to confirmed incidents of civilian harm with factual information and credible evidence to push back against false claims; and (4) helps forces make amends to civilians using information about who was harmed and where.

Tracking civilian harm and the resulting analysis enables better reporting to the United Nations Security Council on mission progress as required in mandates such as MINUSMA's. It also allows the mission to respond publicly and authoritatively to any alleged reports of civilian harm. Post conflict, information gathered can help identify civilians in need of assistance to rebuild their lives and livelihoods by providing a source of data from which to verify how individuals and families were harmed, thus qualifying them for available victims assistance. These are benefits to the mission, the host nation government, and to the civilian population.

How Does It Work? The Cases of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia

During major combat operations in the early days of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, the issue of civilian harm was largely overlooked by US and allied officials who believed casualties would be 'minimal.' The US Department of Defense reportedly did not keep track of civilian casualties in the beginning of those wars, even for internal use, leaving US officials no way of analyzing the impact of their combat operations. Further, by most accounts, the United States was woefully unprepared to address the civilian harm it did cause, having no policies in place to properly investigate allegations, analyze trends across provinces or time, or offer affected families anything other than silence or denials. The US armed forces missed important opportunities to cull best practices, lessons learned, and patterns in order to make necessary adjustments to rules and tactics to ensure fewer civilians were harmed. In both theaters, incidents of civilian harm were often followed with knee-jerk denials to the media, followed by retractions sev-

eral days later when evidence arose proving the US had indeed caused civilian casualties. Each such incident chipped away at US credibility with the local population.

Tracking checkpoint incidents in Iraq
Until January 2005, there was no tracking of civilian casualties by US forces in Iraq (Lewis 2013). However, shortly thereafter US tactics and procedures changed in response to data gathering and analysis; these changes resulted in fewer civilian casualties.

In the first half of 2005, there were 500 civilian casualties (deaths and injuries) resulting from escalation of force (EOF)[4] incidents such as checkpoint or convoy shootings (Lewis 2013). Despite US forces' adoption of enhanced EOF measures in mid-2005, the latter half of that year there were still 3,000 incidents with 480 casualties. In January 2006, General Peter Chiarelli took command of Multinational Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) and reinforced tactical fixes such as: (1) standardizing procedures to get potentially threatening vehicles to stop, including the use of new technology such as laser dazzlers to get the attention of distracted motorists; (2) instituting common sense measures such as 'counting heads' in a vehicle (suicide bombers are usually alone); and (3) reiterating the importance of only using warning and disabling shots as a last resort as many motorists were being killed when these shots ricochets or were misplaced (Montgomery 2006).

From January 1, 2006 to May 31, 2006, the number of EOF incidents severely dropped. In the 1,700 incidents reported during that period of time there were 200 casualties (Fischer 2006). These numbers show how changes to rules and tactics—based on tracked and analyzed data—were implemented down the chain of command to save lives.

Developing investigation and tracking in Afghanistan
As Afghan President Hamid Karzai increasingly pressed international forces to prevent civilian casualties, the NATO-led Interna-

tional Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) began to make changes to its tactics. However, early changes such as the 'Karzai 12' rules aimed at reducing civilian casualties and a 2007 directive from the ISAF Commander (COMISAF) were not successful (Lewis 2013). In late 2008, General David McKiernan, then the ISAF Commander in Afghanistan, established the first Civilian Casualty Tracking Cell (CCTC) to better enable him and his commanders to monitor harm to civilians.[5] In July 2011, ISAF created the Civilian Casualty Mitigation Team (CCMT) to oversee the CCTC and to analyze data gathered to identify civilian casualty trends and advise COMISAF on ways to reduce civilian harm.

In mid-2009, as many were coming around to the notion that civilian casualties were in fact indelibly damaging the mission, US General Stanley McChrystal took over as COMISAF. In his first Tactical Directive (a commanders guidance to his troops) just weeks after arriving in Afghanistan, McChrystal refocused the troops' thinking on the use force and set the tone for what was to come, writing:

> We must avoid the trap of winning tactical victories—but suffering strategic defeats—by causing civilian casualties or excessive damage and thus alienating the people…. I expect leaders at all levels to scrutinize and limit the use of force like close air support (CAS) against residential compounds and other locations likely to produce civilian casualties…. The use of air-to-ground munitions and indirect fires against residential compounds is only authorized under very limited and prescribed conditions (ISAF 2009).

This directive was applauded by some in the human rights community for exceeding legal requirements of international humanitarian law. It also amplified existing reporting requirements for civilian casualties, ensuring that more and better information—from which to spot trends and set new tactics—was available.

McChrystal's staff continued identifying trends and issuing additional guidance to soldiers, changing tactics and procedures designed to decrease civilian harm. For example, when data began to identify that Afghans were being killed in traffic accidents with ISAF forces, a directive was issued directing soldiers to stop their aggressive driving. Likewise when night raids were found to terrify, anger, and kill/injure Afghans a directive was issued to cease using night raids when possible and amending night raid procedures to better accommodate Afghans and their culture (Sewall/Lewis 2010). McChrystal's directives are the most widely documented, but there are certainly examples of how subsequent commanders have changed tactics to decrease civilian harm. For example, GEN Petraeus modified the ISAF Tactical Directive to more effectively protect civilians in the host of situations where they can be found, resulting in a drop in the number of civilian casualties caused per airstrike. However directives alone cannot change the course of conflict; it was the tracking cell, which provided critical data and trends that informed tactical changes and enabled commanders to inculcate those changes among their staffs and troops.

The results speak for themselves, with civilian casualty rates dropping significantly in the months and years following implementation. According to UNAMA, 828 civilians were killed by pro-government forces (PGF, including ISAF and Afghan forces) in 2009. However, in 2009, PGF-attributed deaths dipped to 596 (UNAMA 2009). In 2010, 2011, and 2012, despite a surge in troops and operations, 440, 517, and 316 civilians were killed by PGF in each year (UNAMA 2012).[6] There may have also been other factors contributing to this decrease in casualties, but changes in both mindset and tactics played a significant role. Only by tracking, analyzing, and recognizing why and how much civilian harm was being caused could commanders create successful solutions.

Developing a mechanism in Somalia

In 2011, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), in response to several high profile cases of alleged civilian casualties, contracted retired British General Roger Lane. Lane brought in Center for Civilians in Conflict to consult with AMISOM on an indirect fire (IDF) policy aimed at restricting the use of IDF in order to reduce civilian harm. The IDF policy (AMISOM 2011) recommended:

> Create a civilian casualty (CIVCAS) tracking cell, which collates all information from Operations, Intelligence, PA [public affairs], legal staff, Force Fire Directive Center and contingents to brief the Force Commander on the incidents….This cell will investigate all incidents to enable accurate attribution of responsibility and AMISOM's follow up…. The cell will also contribute to the [After Action Reviews] and lessons learnt process.

Two subsequent UN Security Council resolutions recognized the importance of civilian harm tracking. The first, incorporated in AMISOM's 2012 mandate renewal (UN Security Council Resolution 2036, operative paragraph 17), supported the creation of a CCTARC by the African Union.

Over the course of 2012 and early 2013, AMISOM mapped out existing information systems and created an implementation plan for their CCTARC. That plan is in the process of being approved and funded. Although it is still in the implementation phase, this development is important to note here as it represents the first mandate including the creation of a CCTARC.

The Case for Establishing a CCTARC in Mali

The African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) troops—which has 6,000 troops already in Mali—will be re-hatted as MINUSMA in July 2013. The peacekeepers are intended to hold and stabilize communities while the Malian Armed Forces and a parallel French-led force continue counterterrorism operations in the North. The stabilization mission, with 11,200 military personnel and another 1,440 police personnel, has a robust mandate focusing on the protection of Malian civilians (UNSC 2013). According to operational paragraph 26 of its mandate (Ibid.) MINUSMA should: "take fully into account the need to protect civilians and mitigate risk to civilians, including in particularly women, children and displaced persons and civilian objects in the performance of its mandate." But how exactly will MINUSMA 'protect civilians and mitigate risk' if they don't know what impact their operations are having on the population?

As the United Nations rushes to train and incorporate AFISMA, a multinational force already facing questions about its capabilities, into a UN peace force it must prepare for a very real possibility: peacekeepers will likely find themselves carrying out offensive operations to hold the territory they are tasked with stabilizing while simultaneously defending themselves and Malian civilians from attack by other armed groups. It is also likely they will find themselves in situations where they may cause harm to the very civilians they are tasked to protect—with no standardized way of capturing the information they need to learn from mistakes and make improvements. With such a diversity of forces in Mali, each with differing standards and forms of training, a centralized repository is needed sooner rather than later. A CCTARC would enable MINUSMA and associated forces to understand the impact of their operations on Malian civilians.

Tracking civilian harm and recording data[7]

Tracking and recording incidents and allegations of civilian harm—in order to identify accurate and defensible trends on civilian casualties—is essential for the stabilization mission in Mali. Commanders must be fully aware of all allegations of civilian harm and other protection concerns. This must happen before MINUSMA personnel will be

able to take any steps to respond to civilian harm. It also provides the empirical basis for systematic analysis aimed at minimizing civilian casualties.

Having regular access to defensible data and analysis on civilian harm from a CCTARC allows the mission to seize the initiative before opposing forces can disseminate false rumors. With access to their own figures gathered through a credible methodology, peacekeepers can accurately communicate actual and alleged civilian casualty incidents and trends, be better positioned to respond to questions about (and allegations of) civilian casualties, and initiate an appropriate response. It may also be helpful for the mission to track relevant actions by enemy forces that will otherwise frequently be underreported and/or ignored.

Analyzing the information gathered and operationalizing findings

The analysis of data gathered by a CCTARC in Mali can feed into MINUSMA's decision making processes and provide a repository of immediately accessible, informed advice for the mission staff and leadership on all matters relating to civilian harm. It is a sophisticated and responsive command support tool assisting the Force Commander in identifying particular areas of concern and adopting concrete steps to address them, including through changes to training, planning, doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures to be disseminated mission-wide.

In order to identify lessons learned for use in ongoing operations, staff would seek to determine the cause of the civilian harm. However, it is important to understand that the CCTARC is not a legal accountability mechanism. For example, it would not be staff's role to determine blame or assess accountability for such harm. Rather, if during the course of their work, staff discover evidence of violations against any elements of the force, then the case (along with any evidence) would be promptly referred to the mission's law enforcement and legal officers.

Responding to individual incidents

There is an ethical imperative for conflict actors to recognize and address harm done to civilian victims during lawful operations.[8] However, there are also practical benefits— including safeguarding and maintaining trust between international missions (e.g., MINUSMA) and host-nation populations. For example, the Malian public, particularly civilian communities in the North, have high expectations for MINUSMA forces. Hence, having a CCTARC in place at the outset, by July 2013, will help ensure that any incidences of civilian harm are addressed promptly and in a manner that limits resultant public outrage. As in other contexts, when left to fester, public anger not only jeopardizes the credibility of the mission, but also hurts the credibility of political processes, which are often central to preventing a return to war. That is, poorly handled incidents of civilian harm in Mali will not only taint the peacekeepers but also the broader international engagement in Mali (e.g., involving humanitarian aid, socio-economic development, improved governance, security sector reform, election, etc.).

A CCTARC can go a step further to provide greater focus, a formal structure, and the necessary professional expertise in responding to individual allegations. When particular allegations of civilian harm come to the attention of the mission, the first step is to ascertain their veracity. Undertaking a prompt, professional, and coordinated investigation through the CCTARC reassures the community that their concerns are taken seriously. It allows the commander to determine and initiate an appropriate response, thereby ensuring that allegations do not escalate and undermine the mission's objective.

In some instances allegations will prove ill-founded, such as in cases of false claims and/or propaganda from the opposing side. Where this is the case, accurate information regarding the incident should be disseminated as soon as possible to counter negative long-term effects and dispel any lingering

suspicion or resentment amongst the civilian population.

In cases where actions by the mission's forces likely did cause harm, MINUSMA should recognize and promptly assist civilian victims by making amends such as apologies and offering of in-kind or monetary assistance. The nature of amends should be culturally appropriate and applied uniformly to avoid inconsistent handling of cases. For example, if a working system of amends already exists in Mali (through the Malian Armed Forces, government, or police) it would be necessary to ensure that all systems work in a similar manner so victims are treated fairly and equitably. If there is evidence of unlawful conduct, the matter should be referred to appropriate bodies for investigation.

For MINUSMA, a CCTARC can coordinate and oversee the implementation of all the steps entailed in responding appropriately to alleged incidents. It can thereby ensure that actual incidents and false allegations are fully and appropriately addressed before they cause irreparable harm to the mission.

Conclusion

Best practices on civilian harm tracking, analysis, and response are available and should be replicated in all UN peace operations—whether peacekeeping or stabilization missions—and most immediately in MINUSMA. In addition, given the trend of tasking UN peace operations to partner and/or assist national security forces, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) should be sure to collaborate with national security forces on civilian harm tracking, analysis, and response. National security forces need to understand and feed into the process, building their capacity to maintain the CCTARC after the stabilization mission in gone.

The UN Security Council has recognized the importance of mitigating civilian harm by including the creation of a CCTARC in AMISOM's mandate renewal. However, they missed a critical opportunity to include the

same in MINUSMA's mandate. The missed opportunity to include a cell in MINUSMA's mandate should in no way prevent the mission from voluntarily establishing a CCTARC within its force, as ISAF did in Afghanistan. Doing so would improve MINUSMA's ability to meet its mandate of protecting and mitigating risk to civilians as well as reinforce its legitimacy. To facilitate this goal, DPKO, tasked with configuring MINUSMA's force structure, should, in consultation with relevant UN agencies and outside experts, prioritize the funding and creation of a CCTARC for MINUSMA.

Once the technical design of the cell is complete and a methodology has been developed, staff with the requisite expertise should be identified and trained to process a broad range of information, conduct analysis and reporting, and manage individual cases of reported harm. Outside data analysis experts with experience in working with these types of systems can also be contracted to provide advanced analysis of trends.

Critically, DPKO should create a specific budget line within MINUSMA's overall budget to cover operating costs, including for making amends. While mechanisms of this kind are not particularly expensive to implement or operate—particularly compared to military and peace operations more broadly—they do require dedicated and predictable funding streams to allow it to gradually build up to optimal effectiveness. MINUSMA's budget should also include funds to make amends to civilians harmed by its actions.

Once the CCTARC has been established, it will be crucial that all MINUSMA forces deployed in Mali have a crystal clear understanding of its role and how they should interact with it. DPKO and force commanders will need to develop Standard Operations Procedures (SOPs) clarifying the types of information required by the CCTARC, procedures for feeding into the cell, and guidelines related to the conduct of investigations. MINUSMA should also prioritize educating leaders and

garnering buy-in from all forces in theater, including the Malian Armed Forces and the French-led counter-terrorism force, in order to ensure inclusivity and buy-in. SOPs related to the cell should also be harmonized across all forces.

In order for MINUSMA to have the clearest picture of civilian harm, it should appoint a liaison officer to ensure effective communication between the stabilization side of the mission and civilian staff, most importantly human rights officers from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and protection-related advisors and institutions. In a multidimensional, integrated mission with a protection (of civilians) mandate, meaningful coordination between the military component and the civilian component is absolutely integral to monitor success, address challenges, and create a protective environment.[9]

MINUSMA does not need to reinvent the wheel, as these systems have already been tested in other contexts. By funding and establishing a CCTARC with appropriate staffing and training, DPKO will have taken the first steps toward mitigating civilian harm. If they don't, they are putting both MINUSMA and Malian civilians in jeopardy of avoidable risk.

Notes

[1] 'Amends' is the emerging practice of warring parties providing recognition and assistance to civilians they harm within the lawful parameters of their combat operations. At its core, the practice of making amends to civilians suffering combat losses is a gesture of respect to victims. Amends can take a variety of forms, but must be culturally appropriate. They can include public apologies, monetary payments, livelihood assistance programs, and other offerings in accordance with victims' needs and preferences.

[2] It is worth noting there are two separate yet connected approaches on documenting civilian harm: Civilian harm tracking and civilian harm recording. Both are emerging concepts and while the two terms seem similar they are actually quite different and refer to distinctive processes. Civilian casualty tracking refers to the warring party itself (state militaries, peacekeepers, military coalition members) systematically gathering and analyzing data about their operations and their effect on the civilian population to include civilian injuries, death, and property damage. The focus of tracking is to use the data and analysis in order to ensure fewer civilians are harmed as a result of future operations and to allow warring parties to know who they have harmed so they may make amends to the victims and survivors. Civilian casualty recording is the process of civil society and states keeping record of deaths from armed violence in a systematic and continuous way. They are both important and complementary; they can be used as a check and balance, and as a way to verify qualification for amends or victims' assistance programs. For more on civilian harm recording visit: http://www.everycasualty.org/about

[3] International humanitarian law (IHL) obligates warring parties to distinguish at all times between combatants and civilians. This principle of distinction ensures that operations may only be targeted at military objectives, and civilians and civilian objects may not be directly targeted. IHL also prohibits attacks that violate the principle of proportionality to ensure that incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, or damage to civilian objects is not excessive compared to the direct military advantage expected from the attack.

[4] Escalation of Force (EOF) is defined by the US Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) in the Escalation of Force Handbook (2008) as sequential actions that begin with nonlethal force measures (visual signs to include flags, spotlights,

lasers, and pyrotechnics) and may graduate to lethal measures (direct action) to including warning, disabling, or deadly shots to defeat the threat and protect the force. Note that this definition ignores the primary purpose of this process in Iraq and Afghanistan: to determine whether an approaching individual or vehicle is in fact a threat to the force (Sewall and Lewis 2010).

⁵ Throughout history, militaries have often 'counted' deaths of their adversaries in order to measure progress toward mission success or inform military planning. It should be noted that tracking goes far beyond this and is actually focused on all forms of civilian harm, including injury and loss of property, and analyzing data to inform better protection of civilians.

⁶ In the complex environment of the battlefield, it is difficult to draw definitive causal links between behaviors and statistics. However, Sewall and Lewis attempted this for Afghanistan by calculating rates of civilian casualties per operation to place changes in raw numbers in context. They determined that drops in civilian casualty rates in key areas were in fact likely attributable to these changes in tactics.

⁷ These processes were developed in the Center's work with African forces in Somalia, and include inputs from Nikolaus Grubeck, Eric Tyson and Romesh Silva.

⁸ IHL obligates warring parties to investigate and hold forces accountable for unlawful conduct.

⁹ It should also be noted that while the CCTARC is housed in the military side of the mission, there could be a complementary and coordinated effort on the civilian side to set up a mechanism to track human rights violations. An example of such a mechanism can be found in the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) called Integrated Text and Event Management (ITEM). Working together

the two systems could capture and analyze information showing a broader range of harm and protection issues in the theater.

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