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BRIEFING



Toward the Effective Use of Military Veterinarians in Stability Operations

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Prepared for the United States Army

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Summary

In late 2005, the U.S. Executive Branch put forth a new national policy for how the U.S. government is to plan and conduct stability and reconstruction operations. Existing military policy and doctrine were further revised, with the Army more definitively articulating its concept of “full spectrum operations,” consisting of offensive, defensive, and stability operations, all core missions and of equal importance. In active theaters such as Afghanistan and Iraq, medical civil-military stability operations figure prominently and include activities carried out by military veterinarians. Within the context of stability operations, military veterinarians can contribute to U.S. strategic goals of economic development and humanitarian assistance, especially related to the agriculture sector. This “quick-response” study examines the policy and doctrine guiding the use of veterinarians in stability operations activities, military and civilian veterinary capabilities, examples of their stability operations activities in Afghanistan and Iraq, and perspectives on interagency cooperation. The study took place over two months, March–April 2008. Interviews were based on a convenience sample and revealed a number of findings that can be directly useful to Army planners. This documented briefing reports not on comprehensive and full-blown research but rather on a preliminary exploratory effort pointing to practical next steps for the Army.

RAND found that military veterinarians are contributing in important ways to economic development in Iraq and Afghanistan and will most likely be important to future stability operations. Most of the countries where stability operations will or conceivably could be conducted will likely have a large agricultural component to their economy, as is the case in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Veterinarians, including military veterinarians, play a critical role in the economic development of a country by supporting local veterinarians and

increasing the availability of needed vaccines and medicines that contribute to both animal health and (possibly) human health. Better animal health means more food, more animals for trade or sale, and ultimately in aggregate, an increase in marketing of animal products nationally and possibly even internationally.

RAND's interview data suggest that military veterinarians can also be valuable during initial stability operations by seizing the initiative in less than permissive, remote, austere environments. Their activities have the potential to shape conditions to achieve military objectives by gaining access and working among the people in the host nation, and also to shape conditions for long-term reconstruction efforts best done by civilian agencies and the host nation.

Review of national and DoD policy and Army doctrine indicates that stability operations are to be conducted simultaneously by various U.S. government agencies and must be coordinated across agencies. Although the State Department has the lead role for coordinating stability operations across the whole of government and with host nation and international agencies, it is not currently coordinating stability operations in Iraq or Afghanistan. RAND interviews suggested that this has resulted in ad hoc coordination among the various government agencies, including veterinarians from the U.S. Army, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), as well as those from the host nations, international organizations, and academia. Although the coordination is ad hoc, and therefore results in inefficient or even competitive efforts, the RAND team found a notably high level of professional cooperation and communication among all parties. For example, monthly telephone meetings coordinated by USDA are open to all agencies and parties and help to answer many questions from those of a technical nature to those of pure logistics. The cooperative activities of veterinarians may serve as an appropriate model for other professional specialists to emulate during current and future stability operations.

Our key findings respond to the three main study questions, as follows:

1. What is the appropriate role for military veterinarians in stability operations?
 - Veterinarians contribute to immediate relief and longer-term economic development by addressing animal health and food safety in the host nation, at local to national levels as appropriate.
 - Veterinarians conduct activities that fall within larger U.S. government and host nation strategic plans/goals.
 - Veterinarians build intellectual capacity and infrastructure related to animal health and food safety.
 - Military veterinarians have a comparative advantage to operate on shorter time frames, in less secure settings, and in more remote areas than their civilian counterparts.

2. How can the Army help ensure good mission execution as well as the efficient use and effective contributions of military veterinarians?
 - Define the role/mission of veterinarians in stability operations specifically in Army doctrine.
 - Train commanders at all echelons regarding veterinary assets and how to best use them in stability operations.
 - Train veterinarians before deployment: local cultural context, larger strategic goals, interagency coordination.
 - Place and use veterinarians appropriately: match specialty skills well to tasks, channel veterinary skills efficiently.
 - Plan for transition, continuity, and sustainability through appropriately coordinated rotations, leveraging of other veterinary resources, and “hand-offs” as appropriate to civilian agencies.
 - Develop and conduct monitoring and evaluation to identify and act upon “lessons learned.”

3. How should military veterinarians interact with other stakeholders?
 - Recognize that context often suggests the appropriate lead versus supporting roles for military and civilian agencies, e.g., based on operational context, project time frame, level of interaction with host nation.
 - Train veterinarians before deployment to understand strategic U.S. government goals, current activities, and other relevant actors on the ground in theater.
 - Interact directly with technical and other counterparts in theater, e.g., through routine meetings or calls.
 - Plan for transition, continuity, and hand-off once the military mission is completed.

In conclusion, veterinarians contribute to economic development through infrastructure development, education and training, and provision of essential health services. Veterinarians could contribute to all phases of an operation, not just Phase IV (i.e., stability operations). Challenges related to doctrine, planning, training, education, matching skill sets to needs, and developing measures of effectiveness must be addressed to maximize the potential of this small but highly trained pool of professionals and to ensure that future veterinary stability operations efforts are appropriate, well executed, effective, and efficient.