



## Factsheet CIMIC and SOF

*Concepts, Interoperability and Capabilities Branch  
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### INTRODUCTION

Special Operations Forces (SOF) are uniquely trained, highly adaptable military units capable of executing missions that conventional forces cannot, often operating in politically sensitive or denied environments. Their specialization in unconventional warfare, direct action, and counterterrorism makes them cross-domain effectors, seamlessly integrating land, sea, air, cyber, and information operations to achieve strategic objectives. Civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) enhances SOF's ability to shape the battlefield, build partnerships, and stabilise conflict zones. By bridging the military and civilian spheres, CIMIC maximises operational effectiveness and minimises unintended consequences.

CIMIC, as defined in AJP-01 Allied Joint Doctrine, is a Joint Function and must be applied across all domains in support of virtual, cognitive, and physical effects. The Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) concept ensures synchronization of military and non-military activities. Though SOF missions differ significantly from those of conventional forces, CIMIC remains essential. This factsheet aims to highlight CIMIC's relevance in SOF operations, drawing on AJP 3.19 CIMIC (Edition B) and AJP 3.5 Special Operations (Study Draft 2).

### SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND THE MULTI-DOMAIN ENVIRONMENT

Special operations are military activities by designated forces using distinct techniques, conducted independently or alongside conventional forces. They typically involve small units engaging in tactical actions with strategic or operational significance.

In land environments, urbanization complicates operations, requiring civil factor integration and coordination with non-military actors to maintain freedom of action and address human security. In maritime settings, CIMIC liaises with actors such as shipping authorities and NGOs to enhance operational safety. Air operations require coordination for airbase security and the shared use of airspace. In the space domain, CIMIC fosters ties to protect space-based capabilities. In cyberspace, CIMIC supports and enhances military cyber capabilities, situational awareness and infrastructure protection.

Targeting in MDO combines physical, cognitive, and virtual effects. Effective synchronization with non-military actors ensures coherent planning and execution. Across all domains, CIMIC enables crucial liaison between military and civilian sectors.



## NON-MILITARY ACTORS RELEVANT TO SOF

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Modern operational environments demand engagement with a wide spectrum of non-military actors, including government agencies, NGOs, civil organisations, and private sector entities. These actors bring distinct cultures, mandates, and goals, sharing the operating space with military forces.

CIMIC ensures effective communication, fosters mutual understanding, and establishes cooperative networks. Ideally, these relationships are nurtured through pre-crisis training and education. Commanders must maintain flexibility to engage relevant non-military actors as needed throughout campaign phases. CIMIC's mapping of these actors—their motivations, mandates, and interactions with military activities—is vital to mission success.

## PRINCIPAL TASKS OF ALLIED SOF AND THE LINK TO CIMIC

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### Military Assistance (MA)

MA includes a wide array of activities to support and influence friendly actors: training, advising, partnering, and combined operations. It may involve working with local leadership or populations to build capabilities and resilience. Inter-agency support fosters relationships that, when mature, can transition to CIMIC for broader civil-military cooperation.

### Special Reconnaissance (SR)

SR involves collecting information in sensitive environments using specialized methods. It includes human environment reconnaissance, assessing factors like demographics and human security. Close coordination with CIMIC prevents duplication and ensures a shared operational picture.

### Direct Action (DA)

DA entails precise, short-duration offensive operations to achieve time-sensitive objectives. Civil factor integration in the planning and targeting processes helps mitigate or exploit civil aspects relevant to DA, improving the effectiveness of mission execution.

## THE CONTINUUM OF COMPETITION

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Hybrid threats target all domains, requiring NATO's peacetime vigilance and enhanced planning. SOF contributes within this context, supported by CIMIC through civil factor assessments, red teaming, cultural property protection guidance, and evaluation of second- and third-order effects. CIMIC also supports resilience monitoring among NATO members.



## CONCLUSION AND WAY AHEAD

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Civil Factor Integration (CFI) strengthens SOF situational awareness, enabling precise and effective missions. Coordinating with civilian actors helps reduce collateral damage and enhances legitimacy, supporting strategic objectives.

Positive local relationships improve SOF force protection through early threat warnings. CIMIC also aids intelligence gathering and integrates civil considerations into planning. By shaping the civil environment, CIMIC reinforces the effectiveness and credibility of SOF operations, fostering unified civil-military efforts.

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