

NATO CIMIC & US Civil Affairs
Doctrinal Review & Comparative Assessment
June 2022

CIMIC Centre of Excellence
Concepts, Interoperability, Capabilities
NATO CIMIC – US CA Synchronisation Project
LTC Stefan Muehlich & Dr. Nicholas Krohley

Introduction & Overview

The NATO-accredited CIMIC Centre of Excellence (CCOE) has commissioned this paper to provide a comparative overview of NATO CIMIC and US Civil Affairs doctrine. It is offered as a resource for NATO CIMIC and US Civil Affairs professionals, in order to foster collaboration, enable interoperability, and enhance performance. This paper also is offered to the wider NATO and US military communities, in order to optimise the understanding and employment of NATO CIMIC and US Civil Affairs.

Alignment between US Civil Affairs and NATO CIMIC is a delicate political and institutional issue. From the perspective of NATO members other than the United States of America, national-level doctrine should nest within NATO doctrine. The NATO alliance is what it is because of the collective unity and interoperability of its members. Alignment and consistency are paramount. As such, NATO CIMIC doctrine is the lodestar for national-level CIMIC doctrine amongst all NATO members—with the notable exception of the United States, which fields Civil Affairs forces and does not have CIMIC as a joint function or capability (although the United States is a signatory of AJP 3.19).

From the American perspective, as the pre-eminent military and financial contributor to NATO, leadership might justify certain liberties. NATO is central to American national security, but it is not prescriptive. Put another way, NATO membership and the strength of the NATO alliance furthers American national interests, but it does not define them. Moreover, Civil Affairs' heritage within the US military pre-dates the establishment of NATO. In this respect, US Civil Affairs personnel might argue that NATO should have followed the Civil Affairs model from the outset.

This divergence of perspective is evident in the following discussion of US Civil Affairs and NATO CIMIC doctrine. The latter, by virtue of its place as NATO doctrine, *should* be definitive. As detailed below, it is not—although the two capabilities are broadly comparable and interoperable in many respects. The core point of divergence is between NATO as a purpose-built, multinational defensive alliance and the US military's independent and expeditionary ethos.

- **Section 1** examines the core doctrinal texts of NATO CIMIC and US Civil Affairs, highlighting commonalities and divergence with respect to purpose, usage, and procedures. The discussion begins with two key distinctions between NATO

CIMIC and Civil Affairs—those of *orientation* and *ambition*—before reviewing the key features of their respective doctrinal tasking.

- **Section 2** presents key challenges facing NATO CIMIC and US Civil Affairs. The discussion examines doctrinal gaps that undermine the execution of key missions and questions the viability of achieving extraordinarily broad mandates with limited resources. Finally, the discussion addresses NATO CIMIC and US Civil Affairs' efforts to articulate a clear, consistent, and compelling value proposition for their "customers".
- **Section 3** outlines prospective paths forward for NATO CIMIC and US Civil Affairs, with a view to enabling interoperability, building upon mutual synergies, and elevating both capabilities to positions of greater prominence within their respective force structures.

Section 1. NATO CIMIC & US Civil Affairs: Common Purpose?

NATO Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) and US Civil Affairs (CA) are the eyes and ears of their respective military organisations vis-à-vis the civil components of an operational environment. Strategically and institutionally, they share common tasking: to assess and understand civil dynamics, to liaise with civilian stakeholders, to enable governance and stabilisation, to contribute/enable to protect civilians, to enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and to advise and assist military commanders as they navigate the human terrain. NATO CIMIC and US Civil Affairs, hereafter referred to as “CIMIC” and “CA” respectively, are thus broadly comparable capabilities that should be interoperable and mutually supportive.

That said, there are important distinctions in the relative emphasis placed upon the above-mentioned tasking of CIMIC and CA and also in the manner in which CIMIC and CA achieve their objectives. These distinctions must be understood within the CIMIC and CA communities and likewise by those who employ these forces operationally within NATO and the US military.

Two Critical Distinctions: Orientation & Ambition

The most important distinction between CIMIC and CA is one of *orientation*. CIMIC is, fundamentally, a laterally oriented capability. This is evident in its very name: Civil-Military Cooperation. The primary responsibility of CIMIC forces is to enable cooperation with non-military actors, which is central to NATO’s comprehensive approach. CIMIC doctrine emphasises the criticality of liaison, wherein CIMIC acts as a bridge between NATO military assets and non-military actors. This dynamic is made clear in *AJP-3.19, Allied Joint Doctrine for Civil-Military Cooperation (Nov 2018)*, and in *MC 0411/2, NATO Military Policy on Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) and Civil-Military Interaction (CMI) (2014)*¹, both of which are reviewed in further detail below.

CIMIC’s core approach to an operational environment and to achieving results therein is to liaise with non-military actors and enable mutual provision of insights and effects in the framework of a comprehensive approach. Implicit in this posture is NATO’s role as a defensive (military) alliance with its original purpose of collective defence and the

¹ Both AJP-3.19 and MC 0411/2 are under review at the time of this publication. This text examines the current, endorsed versions.

assumption that military action will occur *within* a sovereign NATO member state's borders in response to external aggression. With respect to NATO's other core tasks, crisis management and cooperative security, NATO CIMIC's focus is on the strategic and operational levels (and that is the level addressed by policy and doctrine) vis-à-vis NATO's civilian partners and stakeholders on the supra-national and national level including local governments, NGOs, and civic leadership—as opposed to the population writ large. The population, after all, is assumed to be the citizenry of either one or more fully functioning sovereign NATO member states or at least supported by challenged but still sovereign national governments. As such, interaction with the population is the primary mandate of said sovereign governments and their executive organs, including domestic CIMIC. If and when NATO is mandated or invited to support it is executed by CIMIC elements on tactical level.

In contrast to CIMIC's lateral and collaborative approach, CA is vertically oriented. *FM 3-57, Civil Affairs Operations*² describes a capability that is primarily focused on delivering effects within the “civil component” of an operational environment. CA has important lateral liaison and stakeholder engagement obligations, but its core mission is oriented downward toward the human terrain itself. Inherent in this posture, which is evident throughout *FM 3-57*, is CA's expeditionary and exploratory character.

The second key distinction between CIMIC and CA is the *scope of their ambitions* and the extent to which they are asked to achieve direct effects. CIMIC, as a laterally oriented liaison and coordination capability, takes an intrinsically deferential view in its engagement with non-military actors. *AJP-3.19* clearly emphasises the need for “civilian primacy” in key areas and the need for NATO commanders to “work alongside” civilian experts. Underpinning all of this is the message that civilian experts have unique skills, and non-military actors have pivotal roles to play. It is the task of CIMIC to ensure synchronisation with the potentials of these non-military actors through coordination activities and likewise through the development of “knowledge networks”. CIMIC doctrine does task CIMIC forces to assess and understand the civil factors of an operational environment as part of its “support to the force” function, but the overall capability is not framed as a forensic, investigative asset.

² FM 3-57 has been updated twice in the past five years, and is thus a “newer” document compared to the NATO texts noted above. Whereas the NATO documents focus at the strategic and operational levels, FM 3-57 is a single-service document that is oriented at the operational and tactical levels.

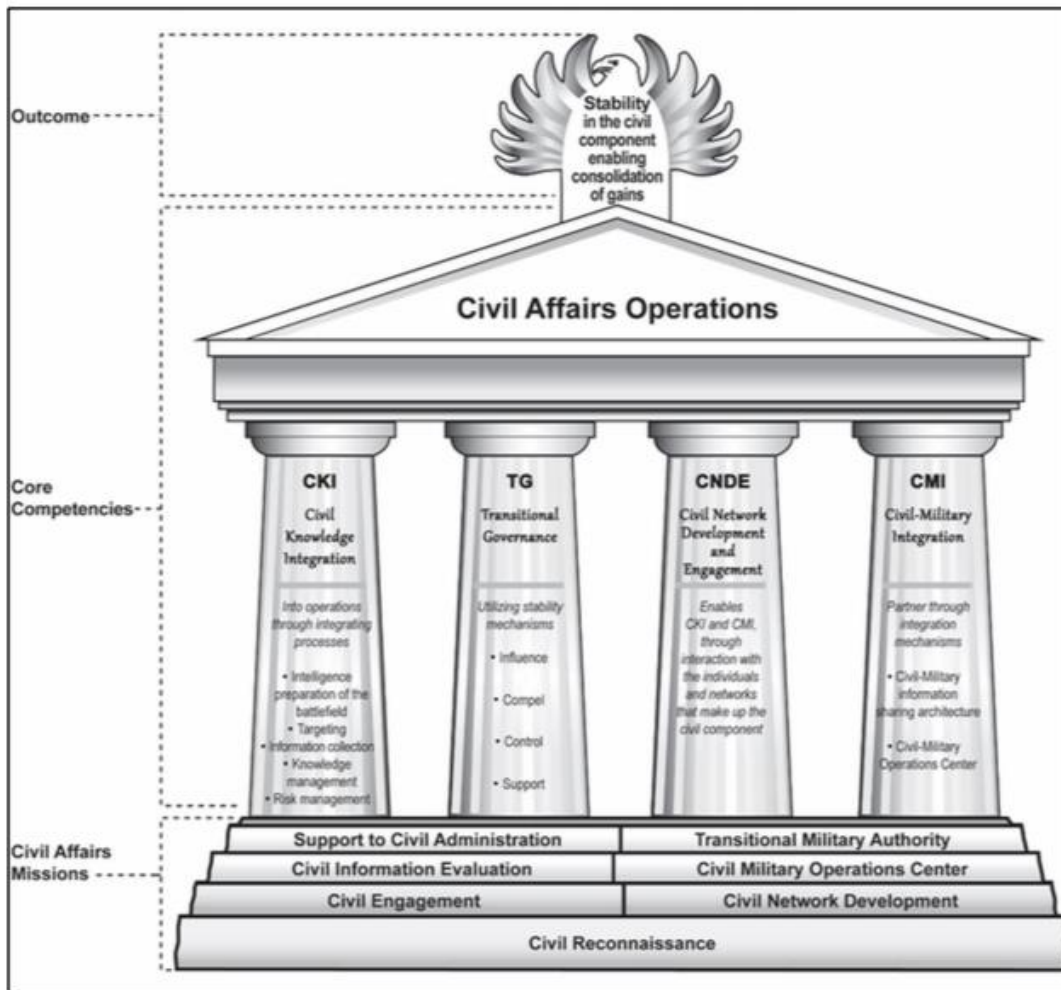
In contrast, CA is a vertically oriented capability that is tasked to deliver a broad range of services. As such, it takes a notably more direct, ambitious approach. CA forces are tasked to assess and understand the civil component of an operational environment. They are tasked to develop civil networks and then leverage those networks toward operational ends. They are also tasked to provide governance, either independently or as an advisor/enabler of indigenous actors. These are far broader mandates than those of CIMIC, and they require CA forces to independently deliver effects amongst the populace writ large via a distinctly “hands on” approach.

These two distinctions—of orientation and ambition—are important contextual considerations for CIMIC and CA forces, which should inform efforts to collaborate operationally and in the sharing of insights, best practices, and lessons learned. These distinctions are also important for the “customers” of CIMIC and CA within US military and NATO structures in order to set appropriate expectations and optimise the employment of these two capabilities.

CA and CIMIC’s core doctrinal texts offer further detail for the consideration of practitioners and customers alike:

FM 3-57, Civil Affairs Operations – Key Points

CA is tasked with “understanding and managing the complex and ever-changing civil component of the operational environment”. This mission statement incorporates several distinct yet inter-connected lines of effort that are shown in the diagram below. This diagram offers a valuable framework through which CIMIC forces can understand the orientation and posture of CA.



- **Civil Reconnaissance** is a foundational task which generates the contextual understanding that is vital to all other lines of effort. The primacy of Civil Reconnaissance is the defining feature of CA's vertical orientation. CA forces are *investigators* tasked to explore the civil component. Notably, CA doctrine connects this mission to the historical legacy of the Lewis and Clark expedition, which explored the lands acquired via the Louisiana Purchase in the early 1800s.
- **Civil Engagement** and **Civil Network Development** are tasks through which CA forces manoeuvre within the civil component to cultivate relationships and networks of influence—that will, in turn, be leveraged to develop understanding and achieve effects.
- **Civil Information Evaluation** and the establishment of a **Civil-Military Operations Center (CMOC)** are processes through which information (gathered via Civil Reconnaissance and through engagement with civil stakeholders and

networks) is processed into insight and thereafter integrated into planning, targeting and other decision-making processes.

- **Support to Civil Administration and Transitional Military Authority** are CA forces' governance-oriented tasks, which draw upon the insights and relationships developed through the tasks outlined above.

To execute these tasks, four core competencies are identified:

- **Transitional Governance:** CA forces are tasked to directly provide governance in a mid- or post-conflict environment using in-house expertise before gradually transitioning to local civil leadership. This is a notably more ambitious mandate than is laid out for CIMIC forces, which are tasked to enable and facilitate the delivery of governance by non-military actors—principally, the friendly civilian government of the country in which NATO forces expect to be operating. This highlights a point of tension between CA and CIMIC forces when working within NATO borders and in NATO exercises: there is little appetite among America's NATO allies for "governance" by tactical- or operational-level CA forces, and few plausible scenarios in which such support might be required within NATO member states. Within the CA community, Transitional Governance is discussed principally in reference to operational environments like Eastern Syria or Northern Mali—whereas its applicability in a defensive NATO context requires careful consideration.
- **Civil Network Development & Engagement:** CA forces are to identify, empower, and/or *create* civil networks (social groups, tribes, economic organisations, religious communities, political factions, etcetera) that can be leveraged for operational purposes. This is an extremely ambitious mandate for social engineering, which has no equivalent within CIMIC doctrine. CIMIC, for its part, focuses on collaboration with "actors" in the civil environment, which are partner entities or civil organisations that are responding (alongside NATO forces) to a particular situation. CA doctrine lays out a structured process through which civil networks are to be identified, engaged, analysed, developed, and leveraged. At the conclusion of this process, civil networks are intended to provide CA and the wider joint force with information, effects, and resources. As discussed above with reference to Transitional Governance, the ambition of this

mandate can be aligned with the realities of operating in under-governed spaces such as Syria or Mali—but must be approached with due consideration for the sovereignty of NATO member states and partners when operating in a NATO context.

- **Civil Knowledge Integration³:** CA forces must integrate their understanding of civil dynamics into military planning and decision-making processes. The integration process is laid out in detail within CA doctrine, through which CA forces deliver structured insight (framed around the PMESII-PT construct) to the joint force. CIMIC forces are similarly tasked to provide a contextual understanding of civil considerations, but CIMIC doctrine presents this as something to be done in deferential coordination with civilian subject matter experts.
- **Civil-Military Integration:** CA forces liaise with civilian stakeholders and harness external resources and capabilities. This is the main “lateral” element of CA’s mandate and a near-replica of a core CIMIC task. The distinction is that CIMIC doctrine focuses on enabling and supporting non-military expertise and activity, whereas CA doctrine describes Civil-Military Integration as a more opportunistic give-and-take between US military forces and their non-military counterparts in an operational environment.

CA doctrine further emphasises the importance of CA as an informational capability. Most critically, CA forces’ investigation and analysis of the civil component generates insights that are critical to the development and delivery of informational campaigns. CIMIC shares a broadly similar role but with a subtly different orientation. In keeping with its vertical posture, the CA doctrine focuses on information campaigns that target segments of the general population. CIMIC doctrine is more laterally oriented, with a focus on messaging and influence toward NATO’s civilian partners and other non-military actors. Driving this divergence is NATO CIMIC’s defensive orientation and the implicit assumption that military operations will be conducted on the sovereign soil of a member state or in support of a government within crisis management or cooperative

³ Civil Knowledge Integration (CKI) is a new term in CA doctrine, which has replaced Civil Information Management (CIM). This shift reflects an evolution in thinking within CA, wherein CA forces have recognized the criticality of not merely cataloguing and managing information about the civil component, but of pro-actively feeding knowledge into planning and decision-making processes in the form of actionable insights.

security—a reality that demands caution in the conduct of information operations targeting civilians.

CA's relationship to the targeting process and to intelligence more broadly is another key consideration. CA forces, particularly those within CA's special operations element, pro-actively engage the targeting process "to find, disrupt, and defeat threats within the civil component". CIMIC takes more of a compliance-oriented posture toward targeting. CIMIC doctrine emphasises its role in establishing "no strike" lists and anticipating possible negative second- and third-order effects from kinetic action. CIMIC is not only a red-card holder in the targeting process, however, but also contributes to it, especially when it comes to non-lethal targeting (although it should be noted that there remains a "philosophic principal separation" in some nations, where CIMIC shall not contribute to intelligence).

AJP-3.19, Allied Joint Doctrine for Civil-Military Cooperation – Key Points

CIMIC doctrine is grounded in recognition that contextual understanding of the civil environment is absolutely critical for commanders, "especially the multinational and inter-agencies complexities, the host nation sovereignty and the role of the host nation government in conflict resolution"⁴. This is a distinctly different, more laterally-oriented view of context than is found in CA doctrine. CIMIC, operating within the multinational structures of NATO, is designed to enable NATO's comprehensive approach. This is the framework through which NATO's multinational forces harmonise their efforts with stakeholders from the international community and host governments party to a given conflict, disaster, or event.

Notwithstanding this lateral emphasis, the first principle established within the fundamentals of civil-military cooperation is the need to **understand the civil environment** in its totality. Similar to CA, CIMIC doctrine emphasises the importance of contextual understanding and civil knowledge in all aspects of the planning process. CIMIC is thus tasked to provide "a comprehensive picture of the civil environment for mission planning and execution."⁵

⁴ AJP-3.19 Allied Joint Doctrine for Civil-Military Cooperation, Edition A, Version 1. November 2018, Chapter 1, Section 6 – Operating environment 1.21, 1-7.

⁵ AJP-3.19 Allied Joint Doctrine for Civil-Military Cooperation, Edition A, Version 1. November 2018 Chapter 2, Section 2 – Civil-military cooperation principles 2.5, 2-1.

The additional core CIMIC principles are to:

- **Understand the aims and objectives of non-military actors:** This reinforces CIMICs lateral focus in an operational environment and its role as a liaison to external stakeholders.
- **Respect civilian primacy:** This reflects the distinct posture of NATO forces within the comprehensive approach and the overarching mandate (not found in CA doctrine) to defer to external civilian actors. “Military support to non-military actors and to the civil environment should only be conducted if it is required to create the conditions that support the accomplishment of the military mission”, states *AJP-3.19*. “This should be done for the shortest time possible to prevent any dependency on the military force.” This is a markedly different posture from CA’s approach to Civil Network Development & Engagement, wherein civilian actors and networks are to be instrumentalised toward operational ends, and likewise to Transitional Governance, wherein CA forces assume direct administrative responsibilities.
- **Act with integrity:** CIMIC doctrine emphasises the need for “openness” and the importance of mutual respect between military and non-military actors. “Transparency” is highlighted as a means to avoid misunderstandings and to manage expectations regarding “what realistically can be achieved”. This reinforces the conservative, limited horizons of CIMIC, in contrast to CA’s more ambitious mandate.
- **Integrate planning with non-military actors:** For CIMIC, integrated planning is not just the coordination of lines of effort with external stakeholders (as found in CA doctrine) but also features “collaborative analysis” with civilian partners. This can achieve “integrated planning and interaction... supporting unity of purpose and effort”. The underlying message is that CIMIC is a bridge to external expertise.⁶ This differs markedly from CA doctrine, which presents CA as the US military’s experts on civil considerations.

⁶ The “need to know” principle remains a significant obstacle to information sharing, even with respect to civil issues, due to the military’s tendency to over-classify.

- **Establish effective relationships and communication with non-military actors:** Here, emphasis is placed on the sensitivities of collaboration with non-military actors and the need to “avoid perception that [civil] organisations are part of an intelligence-gathering mechanism.”

To enable the integration of civilian actors and expertise within the comprehensive approach, CIMIC has three core functions:

- **Civil-military liaison:** As established above, CIMIC’s primary focus is to enable NATO’s contribution to a comprehensive approach by serving as a liaison between military forces and their civilian counterparts. Core tasks are to identify, liaise, and share information with NATO’s civilian partners. Ostensibly, this is a straightforward task, yet intra-NATO political sensitivities pose challenges. In an active conflict, the writ of NATO military forces is clear. But, what is the appropriate role of NATO military personnel, CIMIC or otherwise, in a peacetime competitive environment? NATO member states on the front lines of competition with Russia, for example, have placed deliberate limits on the access of NATO forces to non-military stakeholders and institutions within their borders. CIMIC thus encounters its own challenges vis-à-vis sovereignty and domestic sensitivity within the NATO alliance, which constrain CIMIC forces in pursuit of their primary mandate.
- **Support to the force:** Tasking in this sphere is closely aligned to CA doctrine. CIMIC is asked to assess the civil environment, identify key civil indicators and sensitivities, advise on the mitigation of harm, assess how civil dynamics may impact military operations, cultivate support among the population, engage with civil society, and enable access to civilian resources. This tasking is presented at a high level—providing, in effect, a job description for CIMIC forces—but there is minimal guidance on how these lines of effort should be achieved. In this respect, current CIMIC doctrine is comparable to CA doctrine circa 2018, before two successive large-scale revisions were conducted to add further practical details for CA forces. At present, CIMIC doctrine asks CIMIC forces to achieve many of the vertically-oriented effects of CA, but as a secondary set of responsibilities and with limited guidance or resources to do so. Moreover, doctrine does not adequately explain how CIMIC forces might deliver these various inputs and effects via liaison or how a more vertically-oriented and pro-

active approach to analysing the human terrain can be reconciled with the above-noted sensitivities around sovereignty and civilian primacy.

- **Support to non-military actors and the civil environment:** This line of effort is couched in limited terms. Support is only to be conducted in the furtherance of a specific military mission and may take the form of resource and information sharing, capacity building, and direct military support. As noted above, there is an open question as to how CIMIC forces should reconcile this mandate to the realities of the “competition” paradigm. What is NATO CIMIC’s appropriate role, for example, in fostering civil resilience and countering disinformation within NATO member states?

MC 0411/2, NATO Military Policy on Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) and Civil-Military Interaction (CMI) – Key Points

Civil-Military Interaction (CMI) is the process through which NATO forces engage and collaborate with their non-military counterparts within the comprehensive approach. CIMIC forces are *the* key enablers of this process. This document, therefore, reiterates the lateral orientation of CIMIC that is found throughout *AJP-3.19*.

MC 0411/2 opens with emphasis the criticality of “non-military contributions” to conflict resolution and the importance of coordination among military and non-military actors when responding to a given situation. There is clear deference throughout the document to the value of non-military expertise, the significance of national sovereignty, and the importance of clearly conveying military actions and objectives to external stakeholders.

CIMIC’s role as the primary enabler of CMI is multi-faceted. CIMIC forces must minimise civilian interference in military operations, pre-empt conflict between NATO forces and civilian actors, de-conflict and harmonise military and non-military lines of effort, and coordinate planning and operations among a broad range of stakeholders. This tasking is straightforward, albeit quite challenging, in a conflict environment. It is less clear, however, to what extent CIMIC forces can pursue these objectives in a competitive, peacetime environment. This is an issue throughout NATO CIMIC doctrine, which

focuses on CIMIC's role in military operations and crisis response—but does not address the practical realities of competition below the threshold of war.⁷

Within the CMI construct, as articulated within *MC 0411/2*, the human terrain itself is broadly inanimate. The “non-military actors” with which CIMIC is principally concerned are the government bodies, NGOs, and high-level stakeholders who are responding, alongside NATO forces, to the matter at hand. Efforts toward the development of contextual understanding, the coordination of efforts, and the alignment of messaging campaigns are top-down and organisationally focused.

Investigation into the actual problem that has prompted NATO intervention is secondary. The general population within the operational environment is treated as the recipient of action, and a generally passive entity.⁸ Civil assessment, for example, is mentioned only in sections 37 and 38 of a 40-section document. Nonetheless, CIMIC remains the only capability within NATO that is tasked to conduct civil assessments and is the prime conduit through which civil information can reach military leadership. There is no discussion of how these assessments will be conducted—only that “CIMIC and civilian experts within NATO military structures” will ensure that assessments and plans are properly formulated.

Conclusion

In sum, NATO doctrine for CIMIC and CMI articulate an approach to the civil environment that is distinctly different from that of CA. CA doctrine presents a proactive, ambitiously minded capability that explores, shapes, and delivers effects. CIMIC doctrine demands a lateral, collaborative approach with more limited horizons—but also tasks CIMIC forces with developing a comparable depth of understanding. As discussed in the following section, these differing approaches to a broadly similar mission have led to a collection of challenges within CIMIC and CA, some of which are common to both capabilities and others that are unique.

⁷ This issue is currently being considered within an ongoing revision process to the NATO documents referenced herein.

⁸ This issue is also being addressed within ongoing NATO doctrinal revisions, to establish a population centric approach for CIMIC.

Section 2. Key Challenges for CIMIC and CA

CA and CIMIC are tasked with a critical mission: to enable understanding and astute manoeuvre through the human terrain by military forces. Put bluntly, it is a mission that neither CA nor CIMIC has adequately mastered at a consistent, institutional level. Concurrently, neither CA nor CIMIC has achieved a position of integral prominence within the force structures that they support.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully address the challenges faced by CA and CIMIC in their efforts to become integral and valued military capabilities. These challenges are complex and multi-layered. They include internal problems within CA and CIMIC and wider issues within their respective “customers” as well.

One over-arching observation is essential, however, to a constructive discussion of what CA and CIMIC can do to improve their position: *at present, the investigation and understanding of the civil component are not taken seriously by NATO forces or by the US military.* Any effort to enhance the performance of CA and CIMIC or to raise their institutional profiles within NATO and the US military must be grounded in a sober assessment of this reality.

CA and CIMIC are resourced, trained, and equipped at a miniscule fraction of their counterparts in military intelligence. This, despite the inarguable fact that “the enemy” comprises, at best, ten percent of any plausible operating environment. As a result of their limited resources, CA and CIMIC remain under-developed and structurally incapable of achieving their respective doctrinal mandates.

This study does not argue for institutional parity between enemy-centric intelligence and the civil-oriented capabilities of NATO or the US military. Nor does it argue for parity in resourcing and emphasis on kinetic versus non-kinetic operations. Nor does it take a position on whether the root cause of CA and CIMIC's marginality is the fault of their own underperformance or of institutional biases within NATO and the US military. That said, this paper *does* argue that “breakthroughs” of some sort are essential if CIMIC and CA are to disrupt the status quo—and CA and CIMIC must initiate these breakthroughs using the modest resources currently at their disposal.

This section examines three core challenges facing CA and CIMIC, which are among the capabilities' most pressing issues. This discussion is not offered as a definitive assessment. Instead, this study focuses on areas where the two capabilities face broadly comparable problems—and, critically, where they have the opportunity *and agency* to learn from one another to make meaningful improvements. In so doing, CA and CIMIC might make an evidence-based case for further attention and investment from their customers.

1. First, CA and CIMIC are tasked to **understand the civil environment and its components** and relay actionable insights to commanders. Practitioners of civil assessment and/or Civil Reconnaissance confront a vast and dynamic landscape and must identify and make actionable sense of the features that matter most in a given moment. This is an extraordinary challenge which requires focus, structure, and skill. Yet, neither CA nor CIMIC is trained in viable processes and methods to achieve this objective. New investigative approaches are thus vital to the future of CA and CIMIC to enable consistent performance of a critical task.
2. Second, both capabilities are tasked with a **broad range of activities** but neither staffed nor positioned to execute these activities consistently or in depth. As a result, both CA and CIMIC are stretched far too thinly. Underperformance is the inevitable result. To their customers within the US military and NATO, this validates their continued marginalisation. For CA and CIMIC to improve their stature within their respective organisations, hard choices must be made regarding scope of their mandates, their prioritisation of effort, and the manner in which they are employed.
3. Finally, CA and CIMIC are tasked to feed contextual insight to institutional customers that are **deeply wary of such information**—yet, neither capability has developed a signature product that holds the attention of their audience. The most powerful “quick win” for CA and CIMIC would be to develop a compelling and actionable core deliverable for their respective customers.

1. ASCOPE/PMESII: The Wrong Tool for the Job

CA and CIMIC forces are the *only* military assets within their respective organisations tasked to assess and understand the roughly ninety percent of an operational environment that is not the enemy. As noted above, this requires a focused investigative

framework that enables the practitioner to identify the issues that matter most, make sense of them, and rapidly convey their significance to military and non-military decision-makers.

Neither CA and CIMIC have such a framework. Instead, both organisations use the ASCOPE/PMESII crosswalk. As discussed elsewhere⁹:

ASCOPE is an acronym representing Areas, Structures, Capabilities, Organisations, People, and Events. These categories are meant to encompass the potential features of an operational environment. PMESII is another acronym, standing for Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, and Infrastructure. These categories are used to classify the features of the operational environment. When laid out on an X-Y axis, a matrix is created, into which the user inputs what is known about the Areas, Structures, Capabilities, Organisations, People, and Events that relate to Politics in a given area and then to Militaries and then to Economics, and so on.

ASCOPE/PMESII

	P Political	M Military	E Economic	S Social	I Information	I Infrastructure
A Areas	Areas - Political (District Boundary, Party affiliation areas)	Areas - Military (Coalition / LN bases, historic ambush/ED sites)	Areas - Economic (bazaars, shops, markets)	Areas - Social (parks and other meeting areas)	Areas - Information (Radio/TV/newspapers, where people gather for word-of-mouth)	Areas - Infrastructure (Irrigation networks, water tables, medical coverage)
S Structures	Structures - Political (town halls, government offices)	Structures - Military / Police (police HQ, Military HHQ locations)	Structures - Economic (banks, markets, storage facilities)	Structures - Social (Churches, restaurants, bars, etc.)	Structures - Information (Cell / Radio / TV towers, print shops)	Structures - Infrastructure (roads, bridges, power lines, walls, dams)
C Capabilities	Capabilities - Political (Dispute resolution, insurgent capabilities)	Capabilities - Military (security posture, strengths and weaknesses)	Capabilities - Economic (access to banks, ability to withstand natural disasters)	Capabilities - Social (Strength of local & national ties)	Capabilities - Info (Literacy rate, availability of media / phone service)	Capabilities - Infrastructure (Ability to build / maintain roads, walls, dams)
O Organizations	Organizations - Political (Political parties and other power brokers, UN,)	Organizations - Military (What units of military, police, insurgent are present)	Organizations - Economic (Banks, large land holders, big businesses)	Organizations - Social (tribes, clans, families, youth groups, NGOs / IGOs)	Organizations - Info (NEWS groups, influential people who pass word)	Organizations - Infrastructure (Government ministries, construction companies)
P People	People - Political (Governors, councils, elders)	People - Military (Leaders from coalition, LN and insurgent forces)	People - Economic (Bankers, landholders, merchants)	People - Social (Religious leaders, influential families)	People - Info (Media owners, mullahs, heads of powerful families)	People - Infrastructure (Builders, contractors, development councils)
E Events	Events - Political (elections, council meetings)	Events - Military (lethal/nonlethal events, loss of leadership, operations, anniversaries)	Events - Economic (drought, harvest, business open/close)	Events - Social (holidays, weddings, religious days)	Events - Info (IO campaigns, project openings, CIVCAS events)	Events - Infrastructure (road / bridge construction, well digging, scheduled maintenance)

10

ASCOPE/PMESII has been adopted as the go-to analytical framework across the Western military community. Several characteristics have fueled its popularity. Its boxes provide clear tasking. It is clean and organised, offering a structured approach to the complexities of an operational environment. It is also scalable insofar as it can be used for a single village or for an entire country. It is user-friendly as well, enabling non-specialists to rapidly develop basic awareness. In the language of reconnaissance, ASCOPE/PMESII is a serviceable tool for presenting “the ground in general”. Additionally, it provides a structured framework for the presentation of information (as its boxes are readily transposed to PowerPoint slides) and likewise for information management purposes.

⁹ Excerpted from: Nicholas Krohley, *Integrated Understanding*, UK Land Warfare Centre Doctrine Note, 24 November 2021.

¹⁰ ASCOPE/PMESII template drawn from: <https://www.civilaffairsassoc.org/post/partnered-mdmp-achieving-shared-objectives-through-remote-advise-and-assist-operations>.

Against these credits, the ASCOPE/PMESII framework suffers from severe limitations as an analytical tool. Most critically, it fails to address the most vital imperative of contextual investigation within the human environment: the need for selective focus. On the contrary, it guarantees the unfocused, blanket collection of information. As we catalogue, for example, the Areas, Structures, Capabilities, Organisations, People, and Events that might relate to politics in a given area, we have absolutely no way of assessing how this information might matter in an operational context or their interconnectivity. Nor does the framework help us prioritise the relative importance of our inputs. We are filling in boxes with a view to making sense of everything at a later date.

As a result, we are inundated with information of uncertain value. An ASCOPE/PMESII grid explains nothing. It can only categorise. As such, while the framework may offer value in describing “the ground in general”, it is entirely unfit for purpose when investigating “the ground in detail”. A chart’s creator can identify, for example, notable individuals and organisations within an economic system. But nothing in the framework enables us to understand why these individuals and organisations might matter in a specific situation, how they might relate to one another, or which merit deeper study. Any actionable insights that may arise from an ASCOPE/PMESII-enabled analytical process will, therefore, be the result of an analyst’s personal instincts and intuition.

In addition to its failure to focus our investigation, ASCOPE/PMESII suffers from a subtler yet no less insidious flaw: it is based upon a reductionist approach to understanding. The framework forces us to take a segmented view of the world. We break complex and dynamic systems down into pieces and compartmentalise their various features. This brings the appearance of order and clarity to our analysis—but “order” comes in lieu of grappling with complexity, and any “clarity” is illusory. In that sense, the framework’s reductionism is an active impediment to... understanding. It offers a view of the human environment that is static, segmented, and structurally misleading: a two-dimensional and atomised impression of a dynamic, inter-connected, three-dimensional world.

The inherent limitations of the ASCOPE/PMESII approach have been fatal to CA and CIMIC’s ability to fulfil a core mission. CA presents itself as a forensic, investigative capability—as an explorer, not a cartographer. Civil Reconnaissance underpins CA’s entire mission set. Nonetheless, CA forces lack a true investigative methodology. This prevents CA from effectively and consistently conducting Civil Reconnaissance.

CIMIC, meanwhile, is meant to harness civilian expertise, gather information, and generate insight through both direct assessment and information sharing. This, too, requires an investigative approach to civil assessment—even if key aspects of the investigation are outsourced to external parties. How should CIMIC forces develop focused and structured investigative plans? It is self-evident that CIMIC cannot rely upon such tasking from their customers, whose interest in contextual civil insight is inconsistent, at best. Furthermore, how should CIMIC forces manage the gathering of

information, evaluate its accuracy, and determine its operational utility? At present, CIMIC doctrine offers no substantive guidance—only the ASCOPE/PMESII crosswalk.

CA and CIMIC approach civil assessment from different angles but suffer from common doctrinal shortcomings. Pressing questions are not defined and answered adequately.

- What questions do we ask?
- How do we identify the key features of the civil environment?
- How do we make actionable sense thereof?

Until CA and CIMIC adopt suitable investigative and analytical frameworks, they will fail to consistently answer these questions. In turn, they will fail to deliver on a fundamentally important mission that, if executed at an elite level, could propel both capabilities into a greater position of institutional relevance.

2. An Impossible Mandate?

CA and CIMIC oversee all things civilian-related in a given operational environment. This is an extraordinary mandate. They are to assess, analyse, and advise. They are to facilitate and enable. They are to coordinate and de-conflict. All of this is to be done by staff elements and forces that are staffed, resourced and trained at miniscule fraction of their enemy-centric, kinetically-minded counterparts.

The imbalance between the enemy-centric and kinetically-oriented functions within NATO and the US military versus their civilian-centric and non-kinetically oriented counterparts is perfectly valid. The US and NATO military exist to deter and/or defeat armed opponents. They are not diplomatic missions or humanitarian organisations. Notwithstanding the importance of non-kinetic activities and effects (information activities, information warfare, cognitive warfare, etcetera), it is natural—and essential—that they be lethal and kinetically minded.

The problem, however, is that the extent of this imbalance precludes meaningful, consistent activity by CA and CIMIC. The capabilities tasked to manage the vast majority of any operational environment have no realistic prospect of succeeding without substantive change to their staffing, resourcing, and training.

Operating with paltry budgets and supporting “customers” that are inherently sceptical of their utility, CA and CIMIC dare not address the elephant in the room: they are tasked

to deliver a broad range of services, each of which requires substantive expertise, dedicated manpower, and deep experience—attributes that neither CA and CIMIC possess at scale. The fact that this simple truth has not been articulated within US military or NATO structures is a testament to the precarious marginality of CA and CIMIC. “If we acknowledge our limitations”, the thinking goes, “we might face further cuts”. The inevitable outcome of this dynamic is that CA and CIMIC feel compelled to over-promise but ultimately under-deliver.

For example, Civil Reconnaissance is a defining task for CA forces. But, to what extent are CA forces trained, equipped, and employed as actual investigative assets? CA’s lack of a viable investigative framework has been noted above, but this is only part of the problem. The realities of force structure and deployment schedules are equally significant obstacles.

Within CA’s SOF component, five-person Civil Affairs teams are typically deployed on six-month horizons.¹¹ They are tactical level assets, which are CA’s primary point of contact with operational environments worldwide. These teams are, in turn, supported by lightly staffed, higher-echelon elements. Within CA’s conventional component (drawn from the US Army and US Marine Corps reserves), CA forces are deployed in small teams of various sizes. Overwhelmingly, they are staff and planning assets with limited touch points to the human terrain itself. How can this force posture be reconciled with CA’s aggressive mandate described in the section above?

In a kinetic environment such as northeastern Syria, tactical-level CA teams have the ability to manoeuvre (typically in concert with other US military elements) and directly engage with the local population. They can do first-hand investigative work, albeit within a limited geographic remit. Similarly, during recent campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, CA elements could provide valuable (though far from “comprehensive”) coverage of a Brigade Combat Team or Provincial Reconstruction Team’s area of operations.

¹¹ This study does not examine the SOF/conventional divide within US Civil Affairs. That is an evolving issue within CA, which raises a distinct set of challenges that warrant separate examination. Instead, this study looks at CA in its entirety, as defined by doctrine and as viewed within the US military. As NATO CIMIC examines its own support vis-à-vis NATO SOF, study of CA’s SOF/conventional divide would offer a range of useful insight.

Looking to the current reality, however, to what extent can a five-person CA team conduct Civil Reconnaissance across the breadth of Ukraine, Mali, or the Philippines? These teams have a broad array of day-to-day responsibilities related to host nation liaison, as well as the chain of command that they support. There are only so many hours in a given day and only so many days in a six-month deployment. Targeted, agile investigations into specific issues and areas are certainly viable (and valuable), but this is a far less ambitious proposition than laid out in CA doctrine. Likewise, what does Civil Reconnaissance look like for a CA element serving in a staff position and broadly confined to military installations in Germany, Qatar, or South Korea? Not only is the population within a target area broadly out of reach, but host governments are unlikely to condone direct engagement.

Similarly, CA's mandates for Civil Network Development and Engagement and Transitional Governance pose a range of ambitious objectives. With the steady churn of personnel every six months and extremely limited manpower, how realistic is it to portray CA as a capability that can socially engineer foreign societies and coherently leverage said networks for operational ends? To what extent can CA forces actually provide governance at a meaningful scale, with the requisite expertise and contextual understanding? Likewise, while CA's reserve component can draw upon a breadth of civilian expertise across multiple disciplines, what is the prospect of deploying exactly the right skill sets to precisely the right area in a given moment?

Conceptually, these are appealing capabilities for CA to offer its "customers"—but how credible are they? The deeper one's understanding of an operational environment's complexities, the more *limited* one's ambitions should become vis-à-vis social engineering and the military's wider suite of non-kinetic tools. Working from a superficial understanding of Iraq, for example, Western strategists argued for the existence of "the Shi'a" and "the Kurds" as coherent demographic cohorts that could be instrumentalised toward political objectives. These assumptions, based on a failure to understand the civil component of an operational environment, had disastrous strategic consequences. More recently, Russian strategists have had similarly catastrophic mistakes vis-à-vis ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in Ukraine. Ground truth, acquired via direct investigation and consultation with subject matter experts, is an essential *antidote* to non-kinetic ambition—not an enabler thereof. The ambitious "can do" mindset evident in CA doctrine thus warrants a strong measure of caution.

CA doctrine presents a capability that will understand, engage, effect, leverage, and control features of the human terrain. It is far from evident that this set of objectives is achievable—particularly with the limited resources upon which CA can presently draw. Equally important and tied to questions raised in the previous section, to what extent would the US military’s partners and allies around the world welcome such intrusion? Operational environments like Syria and Mali may offer power vacuums that CA forces can attempt to fill—to what extent is this practicable in Poland, the Philippines, or Colombia?

Within CIMIC doctrine, “support to the force” tasking echoes the ambition of CA doctrine. CIMIC forces are to provide commanders with a “comprehensive picture” of civil dynamics. Yet, this line of effort is presented as a *secondary* role to CIMIC’s primary liaison responsibilities. Moreover, it is presumably to be done indirectly (doctrine is unclear as to how, precisely, CIMIC forces will develop the requisite understanding), in keeping with CIMIC’s lateral orientation and the sensitivities attendant to operating within NATO borders.

The civil environment is overwhelmingly broad, filled with complex interconnections, and is constantly changing. NATO strives for “cognitive superiority”. Yet, CIMIC doctrine does not detail how civil assessments should be conducted. Nor does NATO CIMIC training offer substantive resources in research, analysis, or operationalisation of civil issues. There is only the ASCOPE/PMESII framework. The fact that NATO CIMIC doctrine calls for *comprehensive* understanding (at a time when US and UK doctrine has adapted to recognise the impossibility of such tasking) is evidence that CIMIC has not sufficiently grappled with the reality of delivering on this mandate.

CA and CIMIC are asked to do far too much with far too little. Recent doctrinal revisions within CA indicate that the capability is attempting to raise its ambitions. Facing institutional and budgetary pressure, CA wants to step up its game as the US military’s “global scouts”. The lines of effort detailed in CA’s latest doctrinal revision are substantially more ambitious—and, it must be said, more *theoretically* compelling to the US military—than those described in doctrine several years ago. Yet, it is unclear how these lines of effort might be achieved without substantive enhancements to CA itself.

CIMIC, for its part, is attempting to establish its value proposition to NATO within the competition continuum paradigm. The crux of the debate within CIMIC is over where the

capability should focus its efforts. One line of thinking presents CIMIC as a deliverer of non-lethal effects. In this view, CIMIC is principally concerned with information operations, engagement, and outreach. The second line of thinking focuses on assessment and advisory support to commanders. In this view, CIMIC forces enable military commanders to navigate within the human terrain. Critically, the fact that this debate is taking place *at all* reflects self-awareness within CIMIC that doing both may not be possible.

CA and CIMIC, facing broadly similar pressures to establish their value, thus appear to be travelling in opposite directions. CA wants to do “more with less”, ramping up the ambitions of its mandate via a succession of doctrinal revisions—at a time when CA forces are being cut. CIMIC, for its part, is considering the possibility of providing more robust results within a more focused mandate.

Both paths pose a risk. For CA, the primary danger is to over-promise and under-deliver. This all-but-guarantees further marginalisation. For CIMIC, the main risk is that if the capability focuses on only one of the two areas outlined above, NATO will cease to have the other one. Collectively, these are debates that must be had within CA and CIMIC and also with their customers. There are no easy answers and little prospect of improved resource allocation. As such, there are hard choices to be made.

Selling CA and CIMIC

CA and CIMIC struggle to hold the attention of their respective institutional customers. One key element in this deeply unsatisfactory status quo is the lack of a compelling set of analytical deliverables. The ASCOPE/PMESII crosswalk is offered to structure research and analysis, but it is not an actionable “product” or a meaningful “deliverable”. When a commander encounters CA and CIMIC, what can they expect?

Per CA doctrine, core outputs are:

- **Area Studies:** A product designed to establish “baseline information” that is completed prior to entering an operational environment. This document will eventually serve as the basis for CA forces’ Running Estimate (discussed below) in support of the planning process. This is an internal document which has no apparent external audience. Its intent is to be informative, not actionable.

- **Civil Affairs Assessments:** These products are divided into Initial Assessments, Deliberate Assessments, and Surveys. Initial Assessments are conducted upon entry into an operational environment as an update to the Area Study. There is no apparent customer for this document outside of the particular CA element that produces it, nor is it oriented toward informing a particular decision. Deliberate Assessments are specific lines of subsequent inquiry, exploring particular features of the civil component. The results of these enquiries will be provided to CA's customers and directly support decision-making. That said, there is no substantive guidance as to what these products should look like or how they should be produced. Surveys are "a detailed assessment in which the object of the assessment is examined carefully, as during an inspection of investigation". Doctrinal tasking presents Surveys as a more detailed iteration of the Deliberate Assessment, yet there is no detail on what they should look like or how they should be produced.
- **Running Estimates:** This is CA's principal input into the planning process, which feeds the common operating picture. These deliverables are completed on an iterative basis within the Military Decision-Making Process, enabling situational understanding of civil issues—to be delivered via Civil Knowledge Integration. This is a pivotally important product for CA, yet doctrine offers no examples or guidance for their production, apart from reference to ASCOPE and PMESII.

CIMIC is doctrinally tasked to produce two core deliverables:

- **The CIMIC estimate:** this product-delivering process provides "a picture of the civil environment to enable all command levels in NATO to understand the situation and better inform future decisions and coherent planning", which is integral the establishment of a common operating picture. CIMIC estimates are to be structured around the PMESII framework, but there are no additional guidelines. The doctrine states that individual judgment must be applied: "CIMIC staff have to determine which CIMIC factors have to be considered for planning purposes".
- **The operations assessment:** this document assesses the progression of a given operation as it relates to civil considerations. There is no guidance on what this

report might look like, or if it is a “report”, per se, or simply an advisory input. The clear intent is to provide actionable advice, yet the execution is left entirely at the discretion and initiative of the practitioner.

With a view to selling the value proposition of CA and CIMIC, there is nothing particularly compelling or distinct about their doctrinally prescribed outputs. Furthermore, there is a glaring absence of guidance on how core deliverables are to be produced and what they should look like. CA and CIMIC must answer the latter question first: if the two capabilities can agree upon what their signature deliverables will be, doctrinal tasking can be developed to dictate how they are produced. Until this is done, CA and CIMIC reporting will remain inconsistent and inadequately valuable.

Conclusion

CA and CIMIC are required to cover far too much ground without the necessary resources or tools—and to do so on behalf of customers who pay only passing attention to the results. Innovative and compelling deliverables are thus an urgent requirement for CA and CIMIC so that the two capabilities might make an evidence-based case for their own utility. In order to consistently provide such deliverables, CA and CIMIC require fit-for-purpose investigative and analytical frameworks. Hard choices must also be made about the breadth of each capability’s tasking and the feasibility of their current mandates as laid out in doctrine.

Section 3. Way ahead (What now?)

This study paper has examined the specifics of CA and CIMIC's doctrinal tasking, alongside critical commentary on challenges that both capabilities face in delivering on that tasking. Notwithstanding important differences in posture and approach, CA and CIMIC face a broadly similar problem set. As such, there are numerous areas in which CA and CIMIC could learn from each other as they work toward a common goal.

The following recommendations are offered as ways for CA and CIMIC to improve their positions within NATO and the US military *without significant additional resources*. There are many other areas in which CA and CIMIC might focus their attention as well, and such introspection is encouraged as a catalyst for innovation. This study's recommendations are for CA and CIMIC to:

1. Center their **value proposition** on understanding the civil environment and enabling astute manoeuvre through the human terrain as the foundational task from which all other lines of effort will develop.
2. Develop new "**signature products**" to enhance the CA and CIMIC brand.
3. Adopt fit-for-purpose **investigative and analytical methodologies**.¹²

1. Understanding is Paramount

CA doctrine must be commended for recognising the elemental importance of Civil Reconnaissance. Contextual insight into the civil component is vital. It is vital not only to CA and CIMIC forces when pursuing the breadth of their respective mission sets but to the US military and NATO overall. Military commanders at all levels require a nuanced understanding of the roughly ninety percent of an operational environment that is not the enemy.

This should be *the* core message of CA and CIMIC, which are the only designated military assets poised to provide this insight. CA and CIMIC thus have the opportunity to own a pivotally important line of effort—but this requires CA and CIMIC to articulate and demonstrate its importance to their customers. To date, CA and CIMIC have not done so.

¹² On NATO side there is an initiative to develop this capability.

Within CA, there have been clear steps toward this objective. While recent doctrinal revisions have added weight to CA's governance-related functions, there has nonetheless been a marked shift toward emphasis on Civil Reconnaissance and Civil Knowledge Integration (the analytical process that translates Civil Reconnaissance into informed decision-making and course of action development). Further movement in this direction is vital to securing CA's future. In this respect, it is notable that voices within US Marine Corps CA have advocated the wholesale re-branding of the capability as "Civil Reconnaissance", as opposed to "Civil Affairs".¹³

For CIMIC, such a shift may prove controversial. How can CIMIC's lateral, liaison-oriented posture be aligned with the embrace of an investigative identity and mission? Moreover, how might emphasis on Civil Reconnaissance feed into ongoing debates over CIMIC's focus as either an advisory asset or a deliverer of non-kinetic effects?

One path forward would be for CIMIC to articulate the criticality of understanding to all aspects of its doctrinal tasking—and to explain how such understanding can be achieved by forces contributing to CIMIC. For example, contextual understanding is vital to effective liaison activity. This is an inarguable fact. Concurrently, liaison activity can be used to develop contextual understanding. Similarly, contextual understanding is a prerequisite for the development and delivery of non-kinetic effects. Irrespective of how CIMIC chooses to focus its efforts, an understanding of the civil environment is essential.

2. How to Deliver Understanding?

The analytical outputs of CA and CIMIC require a fundamental overhaul. Both capabilities are confronted by customers with limited interest in contextual reporting. It is irrelevant whether this indifference is the byproduct of institutional myopia or the uneven quality of previous CA and CIMIC outputs. Reporting must adapt to the expectations and needs of the customer. It must be concise, consistent, and compelling. Civil Reconnaissance is a focused, agile investigative process. Reporting templates and requirements must reflect this. This is fertile ground for innovation within CA and CIMIC. Potential "signature products" should be developed and field-tested.

This study offers two suggestions for consideration within CA and CIMIC, which might be evaluated within a wider "call for ideas" across both organisations:

¹³ <https://mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/Jabinal-Jackson.pdf>

1. **The Root Map:** At present, enemy-centric intelligence is stove-piped from civil analysis. As a result, the US military and NATO struggle to understand their adversaries as integral features of the societies in which competition and conflict occur. This is a strategic, operational, and tactical liability that could be remedied by the production of a structured product that displays the “roots” of a given adversary in the human terrain. For example, what are the roots of Russian influence within a country like Lithuania, Romania, or Libya? Alternatively, how has the Islamic State established a root structure amongst various communities and networks across the Sahel or within various European cities? Such reporting could be high-level or extremely granular—a theatre-level view or a neighbourhood-level view—depending on the customer in question. It could be visualised in a compelling manner. Critically, it would connect seamlessly to enemy-centric intelligence reporting, establishing an analytical bridge that could carry the attention of CA and CIMIC’s customers into the realm of civil considerations. Such a product would be an ideal signature deliverable for CA and CIMIC because it would integrate their reporting into the enemy-centric analytical lens of their customers.
2. The Root Map described above could also serve as a foundation for concise **issue briefs** that explain where, when, how, and why an adversary has established its roots—and, conversely, where, when, how, and why they have failed to root themselves in the human terrain. As above, such reporting could be tailored to strategic, operational, or tactical audiences. By presenting these products as an outgrowth of the Root Map, CA and CIMIC could validate the practical relevance of their reporting. The root map establishes a bridge from enemy-centric intelligence to the key features of the civil component. Issue briefs then illuminate those key features one-at-a-time, in a digestible and action-oriented format.

Taken together, these two product types might capture the attention of CA and CIMIC’s customers. This, in turn, could *create* demand for additional reporting and the resources to provide additional services.

3. How to Reach and Develop Understanding?

CA and CIMIC's need for new products is inextricably intertwined with the need for new investigative and analytical methods. This is another area ripe for low-cost, high-impact innovation within the CA and CIMIC communities. The ASCOPE/PMESII framework is not viable. Alternatives must be tested. In so doing, several truths must be acknowledged:

- CA and CIMIC forces cannot “map” the entirety of an operational environment. Their customers cannot expect them to do so. There is simply too much ground to cover, and much of it will hold negligible relevance at a given moment. Hence the framing Civil Reconnaissance as the work of explorers, not cartographers. Selective focus is critical. CA and CIMIC require an investigative framework that enables targeted, agile enquiry into the issues that matter most in a given time and place. Civil Knowledge Integration, and CIMIC's support to the force actions within the planning process, *cannot succeed* unless practitioners can reliably determine which features of the human terrain are relevant to a particular decision. Current doctrine defers to personal instinct (and, by extension, to individual talent and initiative). This is a recipe for inconsistency and institutional failure.
- The realities of CA and CIMIC forces' training, education, staffing, and rotational deployments preclude the development of substantive, scalable *geographic* expertise. There is no prospect of CA or CIMIC reliably fielding high-end regional subject matter experts on demand. Nor should CA and CIMIC attempt to do so, due to the inherent limitations and perishability of academic expertise in a real-world environment.
- CA and CIMIC have independently identified elements of a solution that, if fused together, would offer a holistic answer to the question of how “expertise” should be framed for both capabilities:
 1. Drawing from CA doctrine, both CA and CIMIC should embrace the *investigative* character of Civil Reconnaissance. Personnel need not pose as experts on places or issues. Instead, they should be trained and deployed as experts in an investigative process—as detectives who pursue leads within the human terrain.
 2. Drawing from CIMIC doctrine, both capabilities require a framework to efficiently leverage external subject matter expertise. The most compelling argument *against* CA and CIMIC attempting to stand as geographic or issue-based experts is the simple fact that such expertise

already exists in abundance. The open-source offers an overwhelming amount of information on any given topic. The quality of this “expertise” will vary widely, and civilian experts cannot be expected to know which particular facets of their knowledge are relevant to military forces. The core task for CA and CIMIC, therefore, should be to interrogate the open-source and its experts within a structured investigative process. First-hand, face-to-face assessment would remain critical (particularly for CA forces with the requisite freedom of manoeuvre), in order to pursue clearly defined leads and establish ground truth. But, the selling point of CA and CIMIC would be as discerning *consumers* of expertise who are able to harvest expert insight and operationalise their understanding of a given issue.

Conclusion

CA and CIMIC should be complementary, interoperable capabilities. As discussed throughout this study, they are closely aligned in many respects and face many of the same institutional challenges.

In recent decades, most notably in context of NATO’s mission in Afghanistan, CIMIC and CA have worked in tandem, mostly in an ad hoc, unsynchronised way. Such exchanges have highlighted a range of interoperability challenges, including incompatible technology platforms, the unnecessary over-classification of civil reporting, differences in terminology, and cultural differences between US forces’ can-do attitude and NATO’s multinational mindset.

All of these concerns warrant attention. That said, CA and CIMIC face challenges that are far deeper than software integration and clarity of military jargon. Both capabilities are fighting to justify their very existence. Both are marginal and growing more so by the day. This, despite the importance of their missions.

This study has examined how CA and CIMIC have pursued their objectives and the issues encountered in that process. With a view to collaborative problem solving, this study has highlighted various paths forward, whereby CA and CIMIC might learn from one another. The fundamental distinctions between the two—of orientation and ambition—are unlikely to disappear. They exist due to core attributes of each capability, as well as attributes of the military forces that they support.

Nonetheless, NATO and the US military are equally starved for understanding of the civil environment and smooth navigation within the human terrain upon which competition and conflict occur. The fact that both organisations seem unaware of this—or, perhaps more alarmingly, content with it—is the challenge that CA and CIMIC must overcome. CA and CIMIC must disrupt a deeply unsatisfying status quo. They must do so with inadequate resources in the face of impossibly broad mandates.

Shared urgency in the need to reform CA and CIMIC should provide sufficient grounds cooperation and innovation. This study has suggested potential elements of a solution with a view to catalysing collaborative action. In the end, the solution will not be found in a new set of buzzwords or a sharpened sales pitch. CA and CIMIC's respective audiences are sufficiently disinterested that such words will be ignored. Instead, the solution must be found in conspicuous excellence in the pursuit of an essential task. Neither CA nor CIMIC possesses the resources to achieve excellence across multiple disciplines. The provision of compelling insight into the vast (and presently neglected) civil component of an operational environment provides such an opportunity. CA and CIMIC should seize that opportunity—for the long-term strategic benefit of the US military and NATO.