



# CIMIC in the Maritime Domain

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## The joint function CIMIC in the maritime domain

*Concepts, Interoperability and Capability Branch  
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### THE MARITIME ENVIRONMENT

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Nations' wealth and, thereby, their ability to protect and provide for their citizens depends on functioning economies. These economies require functioning global markets to exchange goods, services, and information.

As 90% of traded goods are shipped by sea, keeping these waterways flowing is crucial. Supply chain disruptions at key ocean shipping routes have become more prevalent in recent years, by either natural causes due to climate change or maritime threats stemming from various actors. The highest traffic density from Asia to Europe concentrates at choke points like the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb, the Suez Canal, the Panama Canal, the Cape of Good Hope or the Strait of Gibraltar.

The seabed has long been a source of fossil fuels, both for transport and for generation. Oil and gas drilling platforms, as well as pipelines, are critical infrastructures for our economy. With the growing importance of renewable energy, wind parks and tidal power plants are adding to the civil infrastructures off-shore and in the littoral environment.

With climate change and the reduction of the ice cap, the Arctic becomes increasingly interesting for exploiting undersea resources.

The international flow of information is, to a large extent, relying on undersea internet and telecommunication cables.

The fishing industry contributes to our societies' livelihoods. In addition to fishing on high seas and near shores, the littoral area hosts infrastructure such as fish farms, ports, and processing plants.

The littoral and coastal areas host harbours and terminals as the connecting nodes of sea and land communication lines, and more than a third of the world's population lives within 100 km of the seas'

### THREATS AND DISRUPTIONS

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In 2021, the container ship Ever Given incident blocked the Suez Canal for six days, affecting global supply chains for up to half a year and causing daily financial losses of billions.

The destruction of the North Stream II pipeline in September 2022, the damage to undersea telecommunication cables between Estonia, Finland, and Sweden, and the Balticconnector pipeline between Finland and Estonia, both in October 2023, clearly show the vulnerabilities of maritime infrastructures.

For decades, piracy has been causing risks and costs to merchant shipping in the Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific area. Since the outbreak of the Gaza conflict in late 2023, the Houthi attacks against merchant shipping and international military vessels in the Red Sea and the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb have posed a threat and led to some merchant shipping bypassing the Red Sea via the Cape of Good Hope.



## **NEW CHANCES – NEW RISKS**

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Weather and climate phenomena influence international shipping. In late 2023 and early 2024, the El Nino-related drought in the Panama Canal area led to a significant reduction of the canal's water level. Due to the canal's reduced capacity, merchant shipping is bypassing it via the Cape Horn route to a significant extent. On the good side, The Panama Canal Authority has announced a series of measures aimed at optimizing transit operations while ensuring safe navigation through the waterway lately, which increases daily passage to normal levels.

The reduction of Arctic ice cover may open up new passage routes and opportunities to explore and exploit resources in the seabed, likely leading to more geopolitical competition.

## **CIVIL-MILITARY INTERDEPENDENCIES**

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Military, terrorist, and piracy threats impose risks and costs on merchant shipping. The negative effects not only endanger the well-being of our population but can also adversely affect the capabilities of the military-industrial base.

NATO forces deployment and sustainment rely heavily on non-military capabilities. Merchant ships largely transport forces and supplies. Additionally, non-military infrastructure also serves NATO's military requirements: NATO ships rely partly on civilian harbours, pipelines ensure fuel supply, and military communication at least partly relies on undersea cables.

## **NATO CIMIC IN THE MARITIME DOMAIN**

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NATO is contributing to counter some of the above-mentioned threats through various activities and operations.

Operation Sea Guardian is a non-Article 5 maritime security operation aimed at working with Mediterranean stakeholders to maintain maritime situational awareness, deter and counter terrorism and enhance capacity building. Some of the tasks include supporting maritime situational awareness, upholding freedom of navigation, conducting interdiction tasks, conducting maritime counter-terrorism, contributing to capacity building, countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and protecting critical infrastructure.

The activities of the Standing NATO Maritime Groups (SNMG) and the Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Groups (SNMCG) contribute to deterring threats in the Euro-Atlantic Area.

The MARCOM applies the joint function CIMIC with its two core activities: civil-factor integration and civil-military interaction.

The NATO Shipping Centre (NSC) is the link between NATO and the merchant shipping community and the primary point of contact for exchanging merchant shipping information between NATO's military authorities and the international shipping community.

The Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS) provides naval cooperation, guidance, advice, and assistance to merchant shipping to support the commander's mission and enhance the safety and security of merchant ships.



The Allied Worldwide Navigational Information System (AWNIS) contributes to freedom of navigation by providing safety and security of navigation information for military and merchant ships in support of maritime operations.

Under the lead of the N9 CIMIC Branch, HQ MARCOM is conducting a regular Civil Environment Working Group (CEWG) to ensure the integration of civil factors into a comprehensive understanding of the operating environment. The CEWG is open to all HQ directorates that have relevant content to contribute. Examples are the NATO Shipping Centre, Military Engineering (MILENG), and N4 Logistics. The NSC is a main contributor, providing a non-military shipping picture and maritime pattern of life (MPOL) as well as analysis and assessments.

With the further development of the NATO CIMIC Analysis and Assessment Capability (NCAAC) across the NATO Command Structure, the MARCOM N9 Branch's capacity to understand the civil factors affecting the maritime domain could be increased.

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