ACFC25 - From Foresight to Action: Evolving CIMIC Capabilities

Concepts, Interoperability and Capabilities Branch
2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Annual CIMIC Foresight Conference 2025 (ACFC25), hosted in The Hague from 15 to 19 September 2025 by the **Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence (CCOE)** with the support of **NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE)**, advanced the work initiated during ACFC24 by transitioning from conceptual exploration toward practical adaptation of Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) capabilities. Guided by the theme **"From Foresight to Action: Evolving CIMIC Capabilities,"** the conference explored the role of CIMIC across both internal and external priority areas within a security environment defined by accelerating hybrid pressures, deepening interdependence between civilian and military systems, and increasing demands for resilience.

This report does not aim to summarise the content of each session but to provide a consolidated overview of the discussions and outcomes of ACFC25. It captures the key insights and recommendations from the working sessions and plenary exchanges, emphasising actionable outputs to enhance the role of CIMIC in improving operational effectiveness and societal resilience within the framework of Deterrence and Defence.

SETTING THE SCENE: A SHARPENED FOCUS FOR ACFC25

ACFC25 was held as an in-person event to promote professional trust, open exchanges, and network expansion. The conference attracted over **150 participants from 32 countries**, including NATO and national Armed Forces, governmental bodies, academic and research institutions, humanitarian organisations, and private-sector entities (Annex A – *Participants' Organisations*; Annex B – *Location of Institutions)*. The presence of commercial actors and infrastructure stakeholders during the event highlighted the growing operational significance of civilian-owned capabilities and services in Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) and hybrid warfare.

The ACFC25 served as a dedicated forum for connecting professionals from various military, institutional, academic, humanitarian, and commercial sectors. It fostered mutual understanding, unified the overall view of the issue, and critically evaluated current and emerging requirements for CIMIC. The expected goal of these efforts is to reposition CIMIC as an essential enabler of the Alliance's mission success and societal resilience. This will be achieved by establishing new interfaces, networks, and procedural mechanisms that support systematic integration of civil actors into operational processes.

**Civil-Military Cooperation
Centre of Excellence**

Conference Report

SESSION FLOW & STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

The ACFC25 featured keynote speeches, panel discussions, and breakout sessions that brought together various perspectives on CIMIC, challenging the narrow view of CIMIC as merely a military function and expanding the opportunities for collaboration.

For the first time this year, the CCOE also hosted two working groups with invited experts prior to the official commencement.

A. The **NATO CIMIC Doctrinal Working Group** gathered experts from the CCOE, NATO Command and Force Structure, Allied nations and academia to discuss the vision and level of ambition for further development of NATO doctrinal publications.
B. The **CIMIC Interoperability and Synchronisation Working Group** aims to be an innovative forum, bringing together experts from CCOE, NATO Command and Force Structure, Academia and Private Sector to align objectives, foster effective communication and identify areas for cooperation.

Both sessions emphasised the growing need for professionally secure, "safe" discussion spaces to address conceptual frictions and integration challenges. They also set the tone for a conference where participants engaged in challenging but necessary conversations. This section aims to summarise the main insights from the plenary and thematic sessions (for a detailed agenda, Annex C).

DAY 1 – Setting the Scene & Academic and Private Sector Perspectives

Day 1 set the stage by reaffirming the enduring relevance of CIMIC within the framework of Deterrence and Defence. After the opening session, which linked ACFC24 to this year's edition, two panels engaged the audience: "Hybrid warfare vs. Conventional warfare – An academic perspective" and "Synchronisation with non-military activities – A private sector view. " The discussions highlighted that hybrid warfare increasingly targets civilian infrastructure, raising the importance of commercial actors in societal resilience and in maintaining civilian support for military operations. While private-sector representatives show motivation, openness for learning, and a willingness to improve their understanding of both the threat environment and military requirements, their specific roles and mechanisms for synchronisation remain insufficiently defined. The main takeaways emphasised the need for:

• Increase knowledge and **mutual understanding** of the private sector (for instance, the ownership and responsibilities of Cloud-based systems) and military requirements through joint training, exercises and tabletops.
• Emphasise the commercial attractiveness of collaboration between the military and the private sector as well as the moral obligations to contribute to societal resilience.
• Creation of **systematic interfaces** for common development of interoperability and security standards.

DAY 2 – Setting the Scene & Academic and Private Sector Perspectives

Day 2 focused on practical collaboration and interactive engagement with specific CIMIC topics. After an introduction by Cambridge University, participants were divided into five parallel breakout sessions where they discussed current challenges and explored innovative solutions. Below is a summary and key takeaways for each session.

A. **ANALYSIA - Tabletop Game:**

The workshop used the tabletop game ANALYSIA as a structured framework to assess CIMIC capabilities within the NATO context. Two phases were conducted, corresponding to deterrence and defence, with scenarios designed to simulate both the pre-invasion environment and the subsequent escalation after an invasion. Analysis across scenarios indicated that although the required CIMIC functions are doctrinally recognised, their integration, visibility, and operational influence within command structures still fall short. The participants emphasised the need for enhancements in the following areas:

• **rapid, multi-level information flow** and dissemination of civil environment analysis;
• **designated CIMIC contact points at every echelon;**
• **systematic embedding of CIMIC into exercise design** (from marginal injects to scenario-shaping);
• **baseline CIMIC literacy in cross-domain areas** (cyber, economic resilience, humanitarian dynamics) coupled with externally sourced specialist expertise rather than internally built silos;
• **trusted, secure civil-military information-sharing interfaces** overcoming IT and clearance barriers.

B. **The Evolution of CIMIC Capabilities:**

This breakout session examined the question: What competencies and structures are necessary to advance CIMIC? A significant gap identified is the inadequate articulation of CIMIC roles from "Day Zero" onwards in large-scale combat operations. Responsibilities remain unclear in important areas, including targeting support, civilian harm mitigation, and counter-disinformation activities.

Doctrinal development was considered vital. Recommendations involved creating a clear yet consistent doctrinal statement for the warfighting core task while maintaining relevance for the other two NATO core tasks, avoiding knowledge loss. The new doctrine should:

• define **which civil factors are to be collected, analysed, assessed, and advised upon;**
• ensure **terminological clarity and coherence** (e.g. integration vs. synchronization);
• guarantee **vertical task alignment and coherence across echelons;**
• **retain flexibility for adaptation and improvisation,** recognising Civil-Military Interaction (CMI) as a **process** rather than a static set of activities.

C. **CIMIC`s Contribution to Human Security**

The session explored the CIMIC role in Human Security (HS) within NATO's operational planning and decision-making, drawing on insights from the NATO Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) Human Security Adviser and academic expertise. The discussion redefined HS not as a marginal normative layer but as a values-centred decision framework, shifting the emphasis from what can be done to what should be done. This approach underpins legitimacy, foresight, and the evaluation of second- and third-order effects. Participants emphasised that HS is both a science and an art: analytical tools (e.g., the ARRC's risk trigram: risk to mission, force, population) need to be complemented by judgement, empathy, and adaptive engagement. The main recommendations to ensure an effective CIMIC contribution to Human Security are as follows:

* Adopting **Protection of Civilians (PoC), including Mitigate Harm,** as the practical backbone of the Military Contribution to Human Security (MC2HS)—especially in Article 5 contexts.
* Including **Human Security considerations in CIMIC planning** through the NATO CIMIC Analyses and Assessments (NCAA), shaping Civil-Military Interaction (CMI) through protection, resilience, and prevention lenses.

D. **The Need for Domestic CIMIC**

The session examined the question: How can CIMIC be more effectively integrated at the national level? The primary issue identified is the diversity of 32 national approaches to CIMIC within NATO, which impedes coherent coordination in a Deterrence and Defence context. While the responsibility for establishing functional civil–military arrangements and ensuring societal resilience rests with national authorities, NATO still requires a clear understanding of national systems to facilitate effective transatlantic synchronisation and operational integration.

Although participants agreed on the need to address this gap, disagreements remain on how to do so. Nonetheless, the discussion settled on discontinuing the term "DOMESTIC CIMIC" and instead developing a "NATO Interface to National CIMIC" as a formal, standardised interface layer to:

* **Map and codify National civil-military organisational structures** and points of contact;
* standardise information flow between national entities and NATO CIMIC;
* **institutionalise pre-crisis liaison and exercising** (train as you fight, with a civil environment-injects shaping rather than decorating scenarios);
* preserve national specificity while ensuring interoperability, avoiding forced conceptual homogenisation.

E.   **acaCIMICs: Live Experimentation**

The acaCIMICs breakout sessions offered participants valuable insights into innovative approaches to CIMIC. The program was divided into two sections:

- a **Table-Top exercise** based on findings from recent Host Nation Support-oriented simulations that tested NATO responses to a crisis on the Eastern Flank led by the European Values Centre for Security Policy (EVC);
- a presentation titled **From Maps to Minds,** showcasing how thematic and story maps can visualise collective identities, such as ethnic, religious, linguistic, and political groups, by the Human Geography Agency of the Dutch Ministry of Defence.

The sessions highlighted two complementary aspects of CIMIC innovation. Based on the results, it is highly recommended to design and run a dedicated exercise or training program that consistently involves not only military stakeholders but also representatives from the private sector and academia to test and enhance coordination mechanisms under conditions of hybrid crisis and armed conflict.

Day 3 – Discussing the Results from the different perspectives

Day 3 concentrated on consolidating the results of the Break-Out Sessions and agreeing on practical priorities. The day started with a **humanitarian perspective**, which highlighted the impacts of ongoing conflicts, pressure from shifts in funding, and the significance of maintaining humanitarian space and protecting civilians. Participants emphasised that CIMIC and UN Civil-Military Coordination (CMCoord) focal points must maintain regular dialogue and reliable data-sharing to prevent fragmentation and foster collaboration opportunities that can assist in preparing for current and future humanitarian challenges.

The **panel of CIMIC military leaders** focused the discussion on CIMIC as a Joint Function and emphasised several recurring needs:

- **improving reporting and information flow** vertically to nations and across levels of command;
- ensuring early integration of CIMIC and Human Security considerations in planning and exercises;
- fostering a **mindset shift** that recognises modern conflicts affect whole societies and that harm cannot simply be displaced;
- identifying key societal stakeholders and reinforcing **whole-of-government communication**, using liaison to inform, educate, and coordinate.

The **final panel broadened the perspective beyond CIMIC** as solely a military function by including external representatives from the European Commission, Uniper, Microsoft, and the Finnish Security Committee. This discussion underscored the importance of shared responsibility in enhancing societal resilience. Specifically, the panellists emphasised these key points:

- A call for the military to **share threat assessments** more openly with critical sectors, irrespective of formal vetting status, while managing sensitivities. The private sector can contribute to threat attribution, particularly in cyberspace, and to countering information threats.
- The requirement to i**ntegrate civilian actors,** including the European Union, earlier and more substantively into preparedness and operational planning.
- Acceptance that preparedness and resilience carry **fiscal and political costs,** which must be evidenced to decision-makers.
- Interaction is needed at the working level, not only high-level dialogue.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

This year's conference united military, academia, private sector, government, and humanitarian perspectives, providing clear value in tackling current CIMIC challenges and capability requirements. As modern warfare increasingly targets civilians and critical infrastructure, building societal resilience becomes a shared responsibility, not solely a military task. CIMIC is therefore more pertinent than ever in fostering understanding and coordination between military and non-military activities.

This report consolidates the key insights from the Plenary and Breakout Sessions and provides practical recommendations for the CCOE and the broader Community of Interest to address urgent needs.

Research Agenda (possible research questions for academia)

- What practical changes to structure, roles, and routines would make CIMIC teams share information faster, coordinate better, and stay accountable in complex operations?
- How do stark differences in values between friendly forces and an adversary (as seen in the war in Ukraine) affect the credibility and limits of value-based messaging in CIMIC work?
- Has defining every "grey zone" concept reduced military adaptability? How can CIMIC help restore decision-making confidence under ambiguity?
- How does prolonged conflict affect young people's trust, emotional resilience, and future outlook, and what preventive CIMIC initiatives can soften long-term harm?
- What drives the perceived decline in civic solidarity among younger generations, and which civil–military engagement models can help rebuild shared purpose?
- Do openly stated values and protection commitments produce measurable advantages (trust, cooperation, resilience) over a purely survival-driven approach, and where are their limits?
- What is the most effective way to organise and govern engagement with the private sector (NATO, host nation, EU, or blended models) while avoiding over-reliance on single companies or platforms?
- How are the EU's expanding defence role and the increase of AI-enabled, multi-domain systems affecting CIMIC's position in planning, training, exercises, and even its relevance within an evolving "kill chain"?

Guidelines for Private-Sector Engagement

- **Establish a Bi-annual Interoperability and Synchronisation Working Group** to:
  - Clarify commercial actors` role in resilience through civil preparedness;
  - Increase mutual understanding of the structures, process and requirements;
  - Identify areas for building interoperability and mutual trust.

- **Create an Innovation Interface ("acaCIMICs")**: Formalise recurring innovation hubs (including representatives from start-ups, defence, academia) using structured roundtables, simulations and tabletop games to address capability gaps in a "safe" space for discussion.
- **Development of standardised frameworks for Civil-Military Interaction (CMI)** with commercial entities to clarify classification thresholds and sanitisation procedures, enabling timely information exchanges.

Action Points for CIMIC Development

- **Draft AJP-9 as a Level 1 doctrine** that:
  - Codifies the coordination of military and non-military activities across domains within MDO.
  - Standardises task–verb–effect linkages (including cognitive, virtual, physical dimensions and articulates interfaces with other joint functions.
  - Ensures vertical coherence (how tactical tasks produce operational and strategic outcomes).
  - Provides guidance on leveraging the civil environment (infrastructure, data, networks, civic actors) to generate operational advantage.

- **Discontinue pursuit of the "Domestic CIMIC" naming convention:** Refocus on standard processes and clarify how national CIMIC approaches (doctrine and practice) diverge from or complement the NATO framework in domestic and other contexts.
- **Enhance Capability Development:** Identify and define new training, tools, and personnel profiles for Civil-Military Interaction supporting deterrence and defence, including skills in engagement, liaison, coordination, synchronisation, data handling, and private sector interface.
- **Structured Civil–Military EU Cooperation:** systematically map and integrate EU civilian crises response mechanisms (e.g., crisis management tools, resilience instruments) through joint training, shared scenario-based exercises, and cross-briefings to clarify civilian contributions to deterrence, defence, and resilience through civil preparedness.

ANNEX A. PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

Universities and Research Institutes

1. Academic Association for Security Studies (BSH)
2. Cambridge University
3. Centre for Geopolitics
4. Clingendael Institute International Relations
5. Coventry University
6. DCAF - Geneva Centre for Security Sector and Governance
7. EPIS Thinktank e. V.
8. European Values Center for Security Policy
9. Helmut-Schmidt-University
10. Hochschule des Bundes für öffentliche Verwaltung (HS Bund), Federal University of Administrative
11. Leiden University
12. Nederlandse Defensie Academie
13. Ostbayerische Technische Hochschule Regensburg
14. Politieacademie
15. RIMMA CoE - Risk Information Management, Risk Models and Applications Centre of Excellence
16. Sciences Po Lille
17. SciencesI2DS2 & CMU-MARCYSCOE ROMANIA
18. Stellenbosch University
19. Swansea University
20. University of Exeter
21. University of Glasgow - The Security Distillery
22. University of Reading
23. University of Regensburg
24. University of the West of England Bristol - UWE Bristol

International Organizations

25. Centre for Information Resilience
26. European Commission - Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
27. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA)
28. Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre - EADRCC

Governmental organization

29. Federal Agency for Technical Relief - THW
30. Finnish Secretariat of the Security Committee
31. Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic
32. NLD MOD - International Program for Human Geography

Military Organizations

33. 21st Theater Sustainment Command
34. 353rd Civil Affairs Command, U.S. Army Reserve
35. Civil-Military Engagement Group (BEL)
36. DEU MN CIMIC Cmd
37. General Command of the Polish Armed Forces
38. Headquarter Allied Rapid Reaction Corps - HQ ARRC
39. Headquarters Allied Land Command - HQ LANDCOM G9 Division
40. Homeland Defence Command (Bundeswehr)
41. HQ Allied Rapid Reaction Corps
42. Jordan Armed Forces
43. Landelijk Zorgsysteem Veteranen (LZV) / Defensie
44. Latvia NAF JHQ J-9
45. Lebanese Armed Forces - Civil Military Cooperation Directorate
46. Multinational CIMIC Group
47. Multinational Division North
48. NATO Allied Command Transformation
49. NATO Allied Land Command - LANDCOM
50. NATO Allied Maritime Command - NATO MARCOM
51. NATO Headquarters Supreme Allied Commander Transformation - NATO HQ SACT
52. NATO International Military Staff Office of the Gender Advisor - IMS GENAD
53. NATO JFC Brunssum - J9 CIMIC Branch
54. NATO JFC Naples
55. NATO Mission to Iraq
56. Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO - STRIKFORNATO
57. Norwegian Army
58. Operatives Führungskommando der Bundeswehr
60. Outreach Group, 11 Brigade, British Army
61. Planungsamt der Bundeswehr
62. Singapore Armed Forces\
63. Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe
64. The Finnish Defence Forces' International Centre - FINCENT
65. The Latvian National Guard. 1st Riga Brigade
66. The MoD of the Republic of Slovenia
67. U.S. Army Special Operations Centre of Excellence
68. United States Army
69. United States European Command - USEUCOM
70. United States Marine Corps
71. US Marine Corps Civil Military Operations School

Private Organizations

72. ARTI Analytics Inc.
73. Ceamm
74. Cogito Praxis
75. Consultant Wargaming
76. Contracter CCOE
77. de-cix Group AG
78. Deutsche Bahn AG
79. E.ON SE
80. Envisioning & Growth
81. Gerulata
82. HA Advisors
83. Infodas GmbH
84. Marble Imaging AG
85. Microsoft
86. Qaantara GmbH
87. Sanderson Government & Defence Limited
88. Scharschuh-Zeissler-Partner
89. Uniper SE

ANNEX B. Location of Institutions

Location of Institutions
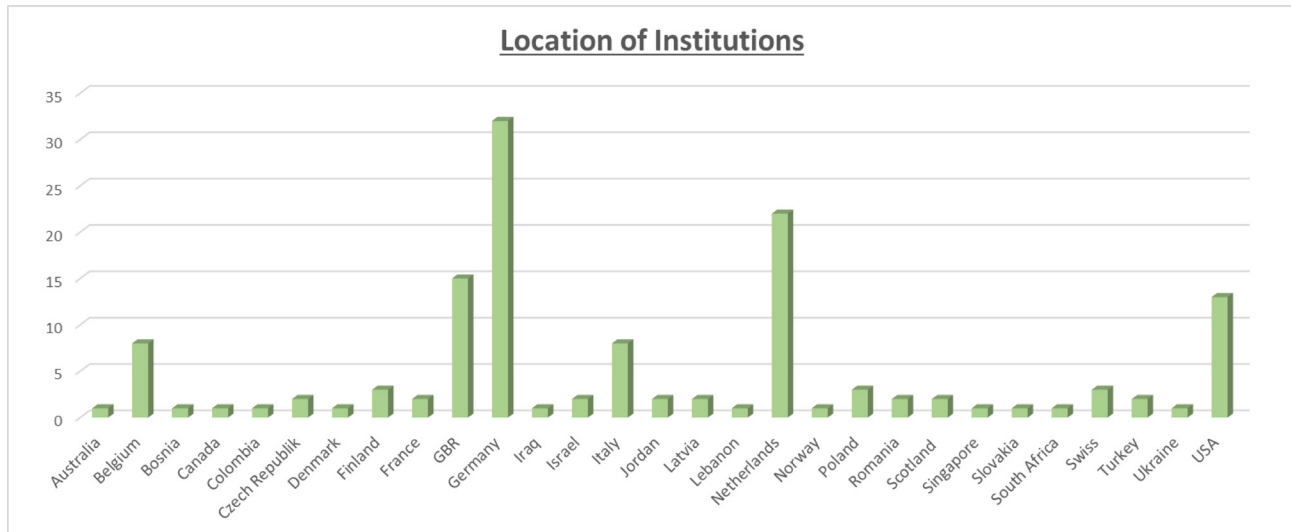
ANNEX C. Agenda

Time	Content	Speaker
Tuesday, 16th September 2025		
0900-1000	**Conference Introduction**	Col (GS) Eckel *DIR CCOE*
		Boris Pistorius (Video) *Ministery of Defense Germany*
		BG Marc Lobel *SHAPE ACOS J9*
		Prof. Peter Roberts
1030-1130	**From Foresight to Action – a CIMIC dialogue**	CCOE Representatives
1300-1430	**Hybrid warfare vs. conventional warfare – An academic perspective**	Prof. Markus Bresinsky *OTH Regensburg*
		Christian Sigl *University of Regensburg*
1500-1630	**Synchronisation with non-military activities – A private sector view**	Prof. Peter Roberts
		Alexander Epp *Marble*
		Dr. Markus Ksoll *DB AG*
		Zsolt Szabò *eON*
		Klaus Landefeld *de-cix*
16:30 – 16:40	**Daily Wrap-up**	Prof. Peter Roberts
Wednesday, 17th September 2025		
0830-0930	**Opening the day – Strategic Simulation Exercises**	Prof. Peter Roberts
		Mrs. Isabell McRae *Cambridge University*
		Mr. Adam Wurr *Cambridge University*
0945-1215	**Breakout Sessions Pt. 1**	
	1.Tabletop Exercise Analysia	LtCol Ralf Baur
	2.The evolution of CIMIC capabilities	LtCol Johan Janson
	3.CIMIC's contribution to Human Security	Maj Linda Rullens
	4.The need for domestic CIMIC	LtCol Christoph Schwier
	5.acaCIMICs: Live Experimentation	Cpt Kathleen Porath
1330-1600	**Breakout Sessions Pt. 2**	
	1.Tabletop Exercise Analysia	LtCol Ralf Baur
	2.The evolution of CIMIC capabilities	LtCol Johan Janson
	3.CIMIC's contribution to Human Security	Maj Linda Rullens
	4.The need for domestic CIMIC	LtCol Christoph Schwier

Conference Report (header)

Time	Session	Speaker
	5.acaCIMICs: Live Experimentation	Cpt Kathleen Porath
1700-1900	**CIMIC Expo – meet our partners (hosted)**	*Marble* *OTH Regensburg* *HS Bund* *Infodas* *University of Leiden*

Thursday, 18th September 2025

Time	Session	Speaker
0830-0930	**Opening the day – a humanitarian view**	Prof. Peter Roberts
		Dominique Gassauer *UN-OCHA*
1000-1030	**Breakout Sessions – a synopsis**	Prof. Peter Roberts
1030-1130	**The way ahead - a CIMIC panel**	Prof. Peter Roberts
		Col Henk Paape *CCOE*
		Radm Thorsten Marx *JFC Naples*
		Col Piero Furlan *MN CIMIC Group South*
		Col Armin Schaus *Operational Command GER*
1300-1430	**CIMIC – more than a function**	Prof. Peter Roberts
		Ben Crampton *Microsoft*
		Kari Pelkonen *Secretariat of the Security Committee - FIN MoD*
		Anna SAMSEL *European Commission - DG ECHO*
		Frank Plümacher *Uniper SE*
1430-1500	**Closing the conference**	Prof. Peter Roberts
		Col (GS) Eckel *DIR CCOE*
		BG Marc Lobel *SHAPE ACOS J9*