



## Military contribution to Human Security and its role in military operations

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*Concepts, Interoperability, Capabilities Branch*  
2026

### EXECUTIVE THESIS

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Human Security within NATO has evolved from a normative commitment into a concept in which the military contribution has become a decisive operational enabler. What began as alignment with United Nations principles is now embedded in operational design, directly influencing mission legitimacy, freedom of manoeuvre, resilience, and long-term stability.

The NATO Human Security Unit, established in 2019 within the Office of the Secretary General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security, integrates a people-centred approach into military operations.

The 2022 NATO Strategic Concept mandates the integration of Human Security across all three Core Tasks: Deterrence and Defence, Crisis Prevention and Management, and Cooperative Security. This reflects a fundamental operational insight: military success depends not only on defeating adversaries, but on stabilising the human environment in which operations occur.

Military contribution to Human Security is therefore not a supplementary consideration — it is a prerequisite for sustainable military success.

### FROM NORM TO OPERATIONAL ENabler

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Since its founding, NATO has been committed to protecting allied populations. However, the formal integration of Human Security as an operational framework is a more recent development.

NATO's Human Security Agenda consolidates five focus areas:

- Protection of Civilians (PoC),
- Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC),
- Cultural Property Protection (CPP),
- Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV),
- Countering Trafficking in Human Beings (CTHB).

Grounded in international humanitarian and human rights law, these Cross-Cutting Topics (CCTs) are embedded in doctrine, operational planning, mission execution, targeting procedures, assessment processes and training.



Human Security directly influence operational outcomes because:

- Civilian harm undermines legitimacy and strategic credibility,
- Civilian perception and behaviour shape operational dynamics, including freedom of manoeuvre,
- Population behaviour shapes operational dynamics,
- Adversaries exploit civilian suffering for strategic gain,
- Damage to essential services fuels instability.

These effects are not humanitarian add-ons but operational determinants. In modern conflicts, public perception, infrastructure resilience, and societal cohesion are decisive factors. Protecting civilians and essential systems strengthens resilience while limiting adversarial leverage.

## HUMAN SECURITY-EFFECTS IN OPERATIONAL DESIGN

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A Human Security Effect can be defined as:

*A desired change in the security, protection, and well-being of the civilian population that contributes to the achievement of the operational objective.*

In operational design, this means:

- Defining the desired civilian end state and,
- Determining which vulnerabilities must be reduced to enable mission success.

Human Security effects are population-centric, often non-kinetic, and directly linked to legitimacy and stability. Integrated with CCTs, Civil Factor Integration (CFI) and Civil-Military Interaction (CMI), they translate legal and normative obligations into measurable operational outcomes.

Within NATO's Comprehensive Operational Planning Directive (COPD), Human Security is embedded across all planning phases. It outlines operational objectives, targeting considerations, Rules of Engagement, STRATCOM and risk mitigation. The civil environment is treated not as a background context but as a dynamic operational variable.



## EMBEDDING HUMAN SECURITY ACROSS THE PLANNING PHASES

### **Phase 1 – Initial situational awareness**

This phase establishes the civil operational picture that will shape subsequent planning.

Key elements include:

- Population distribution and displacement patterns,
- Essential services (water, electricity, healthcare),
- Governance and economic systems,
- Vulnerable groups (including children),
- Cultural property,
- Presence of non-military actors.

Human Security representatives coordinate with NATO HQ, SHAPE, and international actors to identify non-military stakeholders and establish early civil-military information requirements.

### **Phase 2 – Operational Appreciation of the strategic environment**

Planners assess how the civil system and actors influence crisis dynamics. Disruption of essential services, for example, may erode public trust, reduce mission acceptance and constrain freedom of manoeuvre.

Human Security considerations, therefore, inform:

- Root cause analysis,
- Identification of actors influencing stability,
- Anticipation of secondary effects.

CCTs are integrated into the overall crisis analysis.

### **Phase 3 – Mission Analysis and COA Development**

During Mission Analysis and Course of Action (COA) development, Human Security considerations shape decision-making.

Human Security considerations:

- Impact of proposed actions on Protection of Civilians (PoC) and other CCTs,
- Risk of civilian harm,
- Cultural property vulnerabilities,
- Exposure of children and other vulnerable groups,
- Risks of trafficking and exploitation,
- Mission acceptance by the population.

*Example: If criminal networks are trafficking civilians for forced labour or sexual exploitation within the Joint Operations Area, a viable COA may include cooperation with local authorities, prohibition measures within NATO forces, awareness training, and strategic communication to prevent exploitation.*

Human Security analysis ensures that COAs enhance protection while reducing unintended harm.



## **Phase 4 – Operations plan development**

Human Security is formalised within planning documents, including:

- Annexes addressing CMI,
- STRATCOM integration,
- Targeting processes,
- Reporting mechanisms for potential violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Law Of Armed Conflict (LOAC),
- Crisis Response Measures.

In that sense, Human Security representatives ensure the inclusion of harm mitigation measures, cultural property protection, reporting procedures for potential war crimes, and engagement frameworks with non-military actors – translating analysis into codified operational direction.

## **Phase 5 – Execution**

During execution, Human Security representative provides continuous, real-time advisory support.

*Example: If a planned strike near a museum risks significant cultural property damage, the Human Security advisor may recommend alternative targeting methods to achieve military objectives while mitigating harm.*

Human Security representatives:

- Maintain dialogue with civil actors,
- Collect and analyse reports from tactical units,
- Monitor essential service disruptions,
- Identify patterns of civilian harm,
- Report potential violations.

They participate in targeting boards and working groups, ensuring civilian-harm considerations remain integrated into operational decisions.

## **Phase 6 - Transition**

Transition planning requires a structured handover of responsibilities to Host Nation authorities and International actors.

Human Security supports continuity of protection mechanisms, prevents renewed vulnerabilities, and strengthens Institutional capacities – demonstrating that Human Security spans the full operation lifecycle.



## THE ROLE OF J9: FROM ADVISOR TO DECISION SHAPER

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CIMIC is the main area in which all human security topics come into play.

The J9 function has evolved from advisory support to a critical enabler, integrating Human Security across targeting, operational assessment, STRATCOM, Civil-Military coordination, and risk mitigation.

By identifying civilian risk patterns and structural vulnerabilities, J9 directly influences operational tempo, target selection, communication strategy, and post-strike assessment.

In complex operational environments, the CIMIC Joint Function therefore directly affects mission legitimacy and credibility.

## HUMAN SECURITY IN CONTEMPORARY WARFARE

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Contemporary conflicts increasingly occur in dense urban terrain, digitally interconnected societies, and politically polarised environments. Adversaries exploit civilian harm, infrastructure disruption, and information manipulation to gain advantage.

Those hybrid strategies target critical infrastructure and vulnerable populations to destabilise societies; Human Security counters this by protecting civilians and essential services, strengthening resilience and limiting escalation.

## CONCLUSION: OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS THROUGH CIVIL PROTECTION

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Human Security is no longer peripheral to NATO operations. It is a structural element of operational effectiveness. Integrated across all planning phases, it enhances situational awareness, preserves freedom of manoeuvre, strengthens legitimacy and reduces long-term instability.

Military success depends not only on defeating adversaries, but on protecting civilians and sustaining the civil environment - embedding Human Security therefore reinforces both strategic effectiveness and Alliance credibility. Human Security does not follow operational success — it conditions it.

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