



Doctrinal Analysis Report: AJP-3.19 Preliminary Findings

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INTRODUCTION

This report forms part of a broader research project conducted by the CIMIC Centre of Excellence examining how NATO currently conceptualises CIMIC as a joint function within Multi-Domain Operations. The aim of the project is to assess whether the present doctrinal treatment of CIMIC is conceptually coherent and operationally useful, particularly in relation to military synchronisation with non-military actors and the generation of converging effects in MDO. Structured in four stages, the project will first conduct a doctrinal-conceptual analysis to establish a baseline for current doctrine; second, an evaluation of potential operational gaps, contradictions, or conceptual dissonance; third, a comparative case-study analysis; and fourth, the development of solutions or alternative approaches to the gaps identified. This report only addresses the second stage. It therefore presents a preliminary critique and evaluation of AJP-3.19, Allied Joint Doctrine for Civil-Military Cooperation (Edition B, Version 1, promulgated in 2025), assessing whether AJP-3.19 contains conceptual or operational tensions in how it defines CIMIC, assigns its functions, and positions it in relation to MDO.

Indeed, the present version of AJP-3.19 represents a significant doctrinal development. It elevates CIMIC beyond a supporting activity associated primarily with stabilisation or interaction with civilian actors. Instead, it frames CIMIC as a joint function relevant across the continuum of competition and increasingly central to MDO, particularly through its role in synchronising military and non-military activities across domains. However, this doctrinal advance raises deeper analytical questions about how CIMIC is meant to function within MDO, what kind of contribution it is expected to make, and whether current doctrine adequately explains the mechanism through which CIMIC achieves synchronisation between military and non-military systems.

The preliminary findings presented here suggest that doctrine has not yet provided a sufficiently clear and consistent account of how CIMIC's relevance to MDO is operationalised. Two findings stand out. First, AJP-3.19 appears to blur the distinction between the levels of operations by treating MDO both as a military concept and, at points, as a vehicle for collaboration with the instruments of power. This creates ambiguity over where military orchestration ends and where broader, grand-strategic coordination begins. Second, although MDO is defined in domain-agnostic terms, the doctrine's description of CIMIC remains largely structured through domain-specific categories, which risks reproducing the very silos that MDO is intended to transcend. As a result, AJP-3.19 explains why CIMIC matters in different domains but remains underdeveloped on how CIMIC identifies cross-domain civil dependencies, supports synchronisation with non-military actors across domains, and contributes to converged effects at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.



This report therefore sets the foundation for a broader conceptual argument. CIMIC should be understood as a civil-military cross-domain synchronisation mechanism in MDO. Its significance lies in helping military commanders identify, assess, and align autonomous non-military capabilities that may shape, enable, constrain, or amplify military effects across domains. In this sense, CIMIC can allow MDO to turn civil complexity into converged effects by making visible the civil dependencies, actors, infrastructures, and behaviours through which actions in one domain produce consequences in another. The report does not seek to resolve these issues definitively, but to clarify conceptual issues regarding CIMIC's role within MDO and to support future doctrinal development by identifying where further refinement is required. The wider project will build on this critique by proposing alternative ways of understanding CIMIC as a civil-military cross-domain integration mechanism within operational planning in MDO.

AJP-3.19 ANALYSIS PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

1. Confusion regarding levels of operations ¹

The Alliance's approach to multi-domain operations enables the military instrument of power to prepare, plan, orchestrate, and execute synchronized activities, across all operational domains and environments, in collaboration with the other instruments of power to deliver converging effects. (See AJP-3.19, Chp. 2, section 5, para 2.8, p. 11)

The general conceptualisation of MDO in AJP-3.19 reveals a potential conceptual dissonance in how it connects MDO to the instruments of power. MDO is fundamentally a military concept. It functions at the military-strategic, operational, and tactical levels, where the military instrument provides the ways and means to achieve the ends of policy. Its purpose thus pertains to the employment of the military instrument; driving the synchronisation of military and non-military actors across domains to generate converging effects that create an advantage in the battlespace. However, AJP-3.19 conflates this military logic with the broader coordination of the instruments of power, which functions at the grand strategic or political level. Therefore, the issue in this case is that AJP-3.19 seems to give the impression that MDO enables the military instrument to collaborate with other instruments of power, when that is the function of grand strategy (or what is better understood in NATO doctrinal terms as the comprehensive approach).

This delimitation matters because effects at different levels of operations are produced through different modalities and within distinct frameworks. Within MDO, effects are produced through the orchestration of military capabilities, synchronised with non-military capabilities, across domains

¹ Levels of operations in NATO doctrine refer to a framework used to rationalise and organise military activity and planning across the engagement space to achieve strategic objectives. (AJP-01, Edition F Version 1 December 2022, Chp. 2, Sec. 5, Para. 2.36, p. 36) They set the scale, scope, and objectives of specific, practical military endeavors. This is the military operationalisation of "the levels of war" academic theoretical framework employed to link national political objectives to military actions.



to impose complexity on the adversary, create dilemmas, secure freedom of action, and generate exploitable windows of advantage. At the grand-strategic level, by contrast, effects are produced through the alignment of national or alliance instruments of power in pursuit of political objectives. In summary, grand strategy coordinates the instruments of power to achieve political ends, while MDO coordinates military and non-military activities across domains to generate military effects that support those political ends.

Although military operations or activities must coordinate with civilian actors and populations to support the achievement of objectives at all levels, the nature and basis for this coordination is particular to each level. In MDO, the synchronisation of military and non-military activities does not make it a mechanism for facilitating collaboration between instruments of power, since MDO remains a military concept under military ownership. In this case, CIMIC constitutes the function through which synchronisation is achieved. On the contrary, coordination with civilian actors and the whole of society at the political level cannot be treated as part of the same synchronisation mechanism that operates within MDO. The relationship is fundamentally different at the political level because civilian governments do not simply participate as another actor to be synchronised with military activity, but they exercise authority and oversight over the military instrument itself. Consequently, MDO should be understood as the military contribution to a wider political strategy, not as the mechanism by which that strategy is coordinated. However, this does not mean imposing strict boundaries between the levels at which military activity is planned, directed, and executed. The nature and purpose of effects may vary between the grand strategic and the strategic/operational/tactical levels, but coherence and harmonisation of effects across all levels of operations remains a precondition to military success.

To conclude, AJP-3.19 suggests a mismatch between causal and effectual levels, blurring the distinction between orchestration within the military instrument and whole-of-government strategic coordination at the political level. It attributes to MDO a coordinating function that properly belongs to grand strategy, while under-specifying MDO's own theory of victory. The value of MDO lies in enabling the military instrument to generate a decisive advantage through cross-domain convergence, which contributes to the comprehensive approach through the effectiveness of the military instrument in achieving the ends of policy in line with all other instruments of power. CIMIC is therefore strategically important not because it makes MDO a grand-strategic coordinating mechanism, but because it helps ensure that military operations maintain momentum and exploit advantages by aligning with civilian capabilities.

KEY POINTS:

- **MDO is treated both as a military concept and as a whole-of-power coordination mechanism.**
- **AJP-3.19 does not clearly explain where military orchestration ends, and political-strategic coordination begins, resulting in the comprehensive approach and MDO overlapping without a clear boundary.**
- **There is a conflation of “non-military activities” with “instruments of power”.**



2. Persistence of traditional domain specific silos

CIMIC facilitates and enables synchronization of military and non-military activities and can be best described using the environmental framework. (See Chp. 2, section 5, paras 2.8-2.13, pp. 11-14)

There is a notable contradiction between the definition of MDO and how doctrine actually instructs NATO forces to implement it. MDO is officially defined as “the orchestration of military activities across all operational domains and environments, synchronized with non-military activities to enable the Alliance to create converging effects at the speed of relevance” (See [NATO Term OTAN](#)). Despite this domain-agnostic definition, AJP-3.19 states that CIMIC’s contribution to MDO is currently “best described using the environmental framework”.

Firstly, describing the distinct spheres of military activity in which forces can operate to achieve effects as the “environmental framework” creates ambiguity. Doctrinally, the distinction between a domain and an environment is important because the two concepts operate at different levels of abstraction and serve different analytical purposes. A domain constitutes an operational construct with its own capabilities, command structures, technologies, and methods of warfare relating to a specific sphere where military forces operate. On the other hand, an environment is the broader set of conditions, contexts, and influences within which operations occur. Environments shape military activity but are not necessarily operational spheres in themselves, rather they affect how operations are conducted and perceived. For instance, cyberspace is usually considered a domain because military forces can manoeuvre and generate effects directly within it. By contrast, the information environment is often not considered a domain because it is broader than a discrete operational sphere; it permeates all domains and includes human perception, political narratives, media systems, and social behaviour. Treating environments as domains can blur the boundary between operational military activity and wider political or societal processes, which is one source of conceptual tension in some MDO formulations.

Secondly, AJP-3.19 outlines how CIMIC facilitates and enables synchronisation of military and non-military activities domain by domain, which in absence of a domain-agnostic explanation of how synchronisation occurs across domains, is doctrinally counterproductive. Since the definition of MDO is domain-agnostic, the focus on describing the particular characteristics of each domain and specifying how CIMIC functions within them risks forcing MDO back into traditional silos and preserving the very “domain-specific” boundaries that the MDO concept is meant to transcend. In its treatment of CIMIC’s role in MDO, AJP-3.19 misses the core premise that CIMIC should synchronise military and non-military activities across domains, so that actions in one domain can create effects in another. Instead, the doctrine largely describes CIMIC as a set of domain-specific considerations: governance and population in the land environment, shipping and infrastructure in the maritime environment, basing and reach in the air environment, commercial and governmental dependencies in space, and civilian infrastructure in cyberspace. These are all relevant civil factors, but the treatment remains largely descriptive rather than integrative.



AJP-3.19 explains why CIMIC matters within each domain, not how CIMIC enables the force to identify cross-domain dependencies, sequences actions across domains, or assesses cascading second and third order effects across the engagement space. This leaves a gap between the claim that CIMIC supports MDO and the mechanism by which CIMIC would help produce cross-domain convergence in reality.

KEY POINTS:

- **AJP-3.19 creates tension between MDO's domain-agnostic definition and its domain-based implementation.**
- **The doctrine blurs the distinction between domains and environments.**
- **AJP-3.19 describes CIMIC's relevance within domains but does not explain how CIMIC enables cross-domain convergence.**

CONCLUSION

The value of these preliminary findings lies in what they reveal about the next stage of doctrinal evolution with the potential future development of an AJP-09. If CIMIC is to support MDO effectively, doctrine must move towards explaining the mechanisms for synchronisation through which civil factors shape convergence, advantage, and operational tempo. This requires a clear conceptual distinction between political coordination, military orchestration, and civil-military synchronisation, while also explaining how civil factors can be integrated into planning as cross-domain dependencies rather than treated as separate considerations within each domain. This would strengthen CIMIC's role in MDO by showing how it transforms civil complexity into operational advantage and converged effects.

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