



## Cross-Domain Command, Civil-Military Synchronization and the Role of CIMIC in Multi-Domain Operations

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### INTRODUCTION

In the evolving landscape of military doctrine, Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) are defined as the orchestration of military activities across all domains – Air, Land, Sea, Space, and Cyber. To generate timely and relevant converging effects, these activities are to be synchronized with those of non-military actors. Furthermore, the desired effects extend beyond the traditional physical dimension into the cognitive and the virtual dimensions.

The Alliance Concept for Cross-Domain Command (CDC) is an evolved approach to command and control that addresses the increased complexity of both the operational context and the ways in which effects are generated to converge across domains. It emphasises the responsibility and mindset of commanders to not only orchestrate military forces but to also synchronize military activities with non-military actors and activities in decision-making, delegate authority, focus resource use, increase resilience, and maintain freedom of manoeuvre, ultimately contributing to an overall advantage over the adversary.

CDC defines synchronization as the **“collaborative alignment of military and non-military activities to achieve synergy through converging effects”**. This process requires continuous, holistic collaboration with a Broad Partner Network including non-military actors such as government institutions and services, industry, academia, commercial entities, and non-governmental organisations.

Unlike orchestration, which involves a structured command-and-control system within the military hierarchy, civil-military synchronization can be less formalised. It does not confer legal or operational command authority over non-military actors. As a result, effective civil-military synchronization depends on pre-planned coordination mechanisms established at the strategic level well in advance of operations, through (day zero) Synchronization Integration. This enables civil-military alignment during the preparation and execution of plans at both the operational and tactical levels.

Finally, civil-military synchronization differs from a Comprehensive Approach by its focus on leveraging non-military activities to support and enable military objectives rather than coordinating broader political goals.



## THE ROLE OF CIMIC AS THE PRIMARY FACILITATOR FOR SYNCHRONIZATION ———

Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) serves as the primary joint function for synchronization . It sets the conditions for successful synchronization by integrating the understanding of the civil factors of the operating environment and enabling structured civil-military interaction with non-military actors. Through these CIMIC core activities, CIMIC enables commanders to leverage non-military capabilities – such as those provided by industry, academia, and civil organisations – in support of military objectives, whilst also mitigating the negative impact of non-military actors and activities on the operation. This enabling role is a key aspect of synchronization within Cross-Domain Command.

## SYNCHRONIZATION ACROSS THE LEVELS OF COMMAND ———

### 1. Political-Military Strategic Level: Synchronization of Instruments of Power

At the political-military strategic level, the Instruments of Power (IoP) – Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic – are coordinated to achieve a whole-of-Alliance approach. National political leadership, along with bodies like the North Atlantic Council, ensures the military instrument is coherently aligned with political objectives as part of a broader grand strategy. Overall, this entails that military actions, diplomatic engagement, economic measures, and strategic communication are employed to generate unity of effort in achieving the desired political end state.

The coordination of the IoPs is necessary at this level to ensure unity of effort, but it does not fall within the scope of MDO because military commanders do not lead or direct these efforts. Rather, they provide military advice to political leadership, which exercises authority and oversight over the military instrument and sets the political end state it serves. MDO, and therefore civil-military synchronization , should be understood as the military contribution to a wider political grand strategy and how the military instrument is to supply the ways to execute this.

#### **Vignette (Political-Military Strategic):**

*In response to an adversary's sub-threshold aggression, the Alliance initiates a coordinated response. The Economic Instrument of Power imposes targeted sanctions, while the Diplomatic Instrument of Power secures a UN mandate. The Military Instrument of Power adjusts its posture through increased vigilance measures to demonstrate resolve. At the same time, the Information Instrument of Power conveys a strategic narrative that exposes the adversary's illegitimacy. Together, these actions present a unified and coherent response from the Alliance.*



## 2. Military Strategic Level: Synchronization with International Organisations

At the military strategic level, the focus is on synchronization to achieve political ends and theatre-wide alignment. Strategic commanders set priorities, frameworks, and agreements that enable cooperation with non-military actors across the theatre, particularly those organisations and bodies with authority, reach, or coordinating influence over wider groups of actors. This may include international organisations, national authorities, private-sector associations, professional regulatory bodies, trade unions, industry groups, civil society networks, and other representative structures. This level establishes the governance, policies, and mechanisms necessary to enable effective synchronization at the operational and tactical levels.

### Vignette A (Military Strategic):

*To quickly reinforce the Eastern Flank, SHAPE collaborates with the European Union on Military Mobility. Military needs are coordinated with civilian infrastructure projects, and legal transit agreements are established beforehand. This preparation enables swift movement of forces in times of crisis without being hindered by civilian regulations or infrastructure constraints.*

### Vignette B (Military Strategic):

*SACEUR establishes theatre-wide guidelines for the Protection of Civilians and synchronizes these with the United Nations. Space-based intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and AI-enabled analysis are used to identify civilian movement patterns, allowing the military campaign to be adapted to minimise civilian harm while maintaining operational effectiveness.*

## 3. Operational Level: Aligning Military and Non-Military Activities

At the operational level, commanders are responsible for delivering civil-military synchronized multi-domain effects within a specific joint operations area or campaign. Civil-military synchronization plays a crucial role at this level, as operational commanders (e.g. JFCs) actively seek complementary non-military actions from actors outside their command. Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) staff supports this process by adding Civil Factor Integration in the decision making process and facilitating Civil-Military Interaction (CMI). This enables the identification and implementation of Complementary Non-Military Actions (CNMA) that align with the operational design.

**Vignette A (Operational):**

*A commander needs to accurately identify a time-sensitive target. During the preparation phase, proactive synchronization established a relationship with a commercial space-based ISR provider. Near-real-time satellite data is integrated into the command support system using AI-enabled tools, allowing for precise targeting while minimising collateral damage.*

**Vignette B (Operational):**

*The J9 branch identifies a critical shortage of medical supplies in a contested urban area using Civil Factor Integration. The commander coordinates military logistics with an international NGO to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations. This approach, informed by human security, helps maintain the legitimacy of the mission and prevents the adversary from exploiting the situation for narrative advantage.*

#### 4. Tactical Level: Execution of Orchestrated and Synchronized

At the tactical level, commanders conduct orchestrated military activities synchronized with local non-military activities to create tactical effects reaching into the operational level. Tactical synchronization is often highly dynamic, involving Civil-Military Interaction with local authorities through Mil-Mil liaison (ensuring Host Nation consent) or local private-sector companies, the local population, and local operating NGOs to maintain freedom of manoeuvre and ensure force protection.

**Vignette A (Tactical):**

*A NATO Corps faces manoeuvre disruption along an essential route after local protesters establish physical roadblocks. The commander, through national Civil-Military Interaction arrangements, normally through national local military authorities (Mil-Mil liaison), synchronizes with the national police and transport authorities to facilitate the removal of the obstructions. By providing national authorities with real-time situational awareness regarding military movement schedules, the commander enables law enforcement to reroute civilian traffic and clear the intersections using their own legal jurisdiction. This collaborative alignment restores freedom of movement for NATO assets while respecting national sovereignty. This collaborative alignment restores freedom of movement for NATO assets while respecting national sovereignty.*

**Vignette B (Lower Tactical):**

*A CIMIC liaison officer at the brigade level coordinates with local police and fire services to synchronize the evacuation of a village before a planned artillery strike. Civilians are moved through safe routes, which prevents casualties and maintains freedom of manoeuvre while adhering to the principle of distinction.*

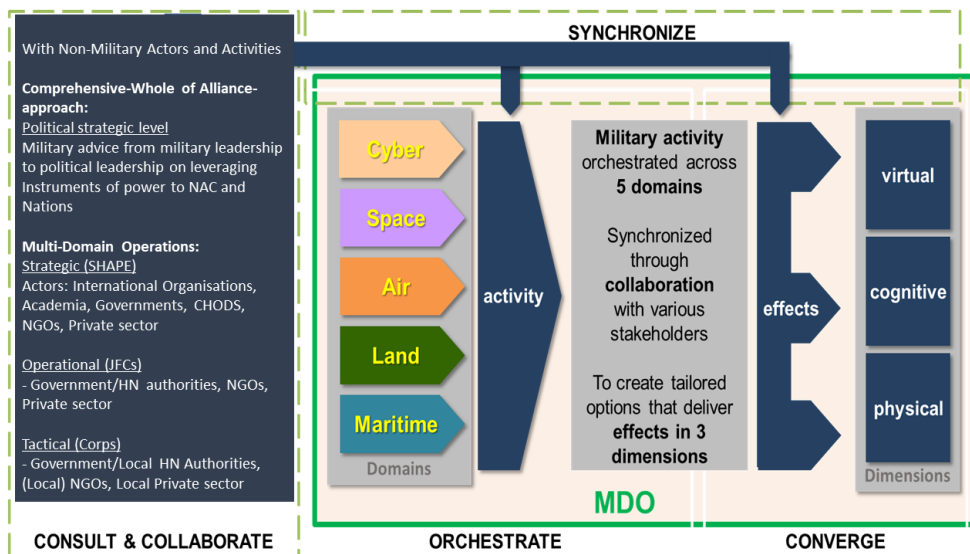


Figure illustrating Multi-Domain Operations, including the provision of military advice on the coordination of the Instruments of Power at the political-strategic level.

## CONCLUSION

The concepts of Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) and Cross-Domain Command (CDC) reflect a fundamental shift in the character of modern warfare, recognising that competition and conflict increasingly involve entire societal systems rather than purely military contests. While political authorities retain responsibility for coordinating the broader instruments of power and setting strategic objectives, MDO provides the framework through which military contributions are integrated into this wider political strategy. In this context, military effectiveness depends not only on traditional combat power but also on the ability to access, align, and leverage civilian capabilities from government institutions, industry, academia, international organisations, and civil society. Consequently, the joint function Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) evolves from a supporting coordination function into a strategic enabler that facilitates the synchronization of military and non-military activities.

To realise the full potential of MDO, civil-military synchronization must be institutionalised across all levels of command, from the military-strategic level, where commanders translate political direction into military requirements, to the operational and tactical levels, where military activities are coordinated and synchronized with relevant national, regional, and local non-military actors. Moreover, civil-military synchronization must be embedded in the preparation phase through Synchronization Integration, establishing the relationships, agreements, and coordination mechanisms required before crises emerge.

Achieving this demands the adoption of a shared MDO mindset and the incorporation of civil-military dilemmas into education, training, and exercises. Together, MDO and CDC represent a transition from a force-centric to a network-centric approach to warfighting, where success is achieved through the coherent integration of military and non-military actors across the physical, virtual, and cognitive dimensions, making civil-military synchronization a decisive element of future operations.

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