



CIMIC in the Air Domain

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INTRODUCTION

CIMIC, as defined in AJP-01 Allied Joint Doctrine, is a Joint Function and must be applied across all domains in support of virtual, cognitive, and physical effects. Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) increase the requirement to synchronise military activities with relevant non-military actors, capabilities, authorities and processes in the civil environment. Civil-Military Synchronisation (CMS) provides the joint-level framework through which these interdependencies can be understood, considered and aligned in planning and execution. CIMIC contributes to this process as the military function enabling interaction with, understanding of, and integration of the civil environment. This publication explains the relationship between CIMIC and the air domain and provides examples for clarification.

Air operations are characterised by altitude, speed, and reach. These characteristics enable aircraft to operate rapidly and over extensive ranges, while reducing the constraints imposed by ground-based obstacles. This unique operational advantage makes air power a significant contributor to joint operations. The air domain encompasses the airspace from ground level to the Kármán line (approximately 100 km), beyond which outer space begins.

Airspace is used continuously by a large and diverse number of users for different purposes. Its use is subject to a range of restrictions, including weather conditions, airspace classifications, and aircraft performance. Effective airspace allocation and control are therefore essential. This requirement becomes increasingly important as military operations demand dedicated airspace, defined flight areas, and specific operating conditions.

Although CIMIC activities are generally viewed as ground-based, military use of airspace and associated infrastructure and services can have significant effects on the civilian environment and the population. CIMIC contributes to identifying and integrating civil dependencies, requirements, constraints and consequences associated with the use of airspace, airports, air traffic services, meteorological services and other relevant civilian capabilities.

THREATS AND DISRUPTIONS

Airspace is used by a wide range of actors. Commercial airlines operate globally, while private users operate propeller and fixed-wing aircraft. Drones range from small recreational systems to larger commercial platforms. Military users employ a broad range of capabilities, including fast jets, helicopters, drones, and missile systems. The resulting density and diversity of air movements require continuous monitoring, coordination, and deconfliction to reduce the risk of accidents.



Air operations depend on a limited number of critical infrastructures, ranging from small airfields to major airports, supported by complex communications and control systems. These capabilities require significant commercial support for maintenance and sustainment. Because civilian air capabilities are limited and costly, generating large-scale civil support at short notice for military purposes may present significant challenges and impacts. Military users should therefore coordinate the military use of civilian infrastructure with relevant civilian partners in advance. These dependencies demonstrate that the civil environment is not merely an environment affected by air operations; it is an integral part of the operational system upon which military freedom of action may depend.

During conflict, air, surface-to-air, and ballistic weapons may be employed. Civilian users should avoid affected areas whenever possible to reduce unnecessary risk. Where this cannot be avoided, coordination with military authorities is required. Such coordination should include, but not be limited to, accurate flight plans deconflicted with military operations and robust communication procedures to facilitate safe in-flight activities.

NEW TECHNOLOGY – NEW CHALLENGES

The potential applications of drones are numerous and continue to evolve. Commercial applications include aerial photography and delivering goods to locations that were previously inaccessible or difficult to access. While military users explore the operational employment of drones and capabilities to counter them, civilian emergency services also employ drones for fire detection, rescue support, surveillance, and other tasks.

Most non-military users have no malicious intent. Nevertheless, drones may also be used for illegal surveillance, espionage, or the delivery of weapons. From a military perspective, the increasing use of drones creates significant challenges for airspace management, deconfliction, and security.

During the conflict in Ukraine, the use of drones and long-range weapons against critical infrastructure and civilian populations has demonstrated the risk for air capabilities to be employed against the civil environment. Depending on the circumstances, such attacks may constitute violations of the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC). Where potential violations are identified, CIMIC may support the reporting and preservation of relevant information and evidence in coordination with the host nation (HN) and relevant international governmental or non-governmental organisations (IGO/NGO).

CIMIC IN THE AIR DOMAIN

During peacetime, cooperation between military and civilian actors takes place across a range of activities. Air traffic control, meteorological services, and the shared use of airfields for civilian and military purposes are examples in which CIMIC can help clarify responsibilities, establish coordination mechanisms, and facilitate mutual understanding.

Air power may also be requested by civilian authorities on an ad hoc basis. The use of Chinook helicopters with firefighting capabilities during major fires is one example of military air capability supporting civilian authorities. A national CIMIC organisation should therefore be prepared to coordinate and support such requests.



The air component plays an important role in Multi-Domain Operations. Air power contributes significantly to mission success, while air superiority can provide the freedom of action required to achieve operational objectives. At the same time, air operations depend on essential services and capabilities provided by the civilian environment, while civilian actors may depend on military capabilities and support.

Peacetime Civil-Military Interaction (CMI) should therefore not be limited to relationship building. It should establish the mechanisms, authorities, priorities and arrangements required to synchronise military and civilian activities before crisis or conflict creates competing demands for the same resources and infrastructure.

Understanding the civilian environment is essential to enable commanders to make informed decisions. A9/CIMIC contributes to this understanding by providing and integrating essential information concerning the civilian environment and its relevance to air operations. The purpose is not simply to provide information on the civil environment, but to translate civil factors into operational implications, dependencies, risks, opportunities and decision requirements for the commander.

During the targeting process, A9 will review the Prioritised Target List to assess the potential effects of operations on critical civil infrastructure, the environment, and the human situation. The aim is to minimise unintended effects on the civilian environment to the extent reasonably possible, while maintaining the ability to achieve the military objective.

Surface-Based Air Defence systems can defend large areas against enemy missiles and attack aircraft. These systems protect a prioritised mix of military and non-military assets within their operating footprint. During planning and execution, CIMIC can contribute to the prioritisation and integration of Air and Missile Defence requirements through the Joint Defended Asset Working Group, particularly where the defence of civilian or dual-use assets is relevant. This underlines that A9/CIMIC enables the Joint Force to incorporate the civil environment into its own processes.

CONCLUSION

Air operations demonstrate particularly clearly why Civil-Military Synchronisation is an operational requirement rather than a supporting activity. Military and civilian actors depend on the same airspace, infrastructure, services, information and resources. These interdependencies must therefore be identified and integrated into joint planning and decision-making before they become constraints to military freedom of action.

CIMIC/A9 enables this process by connecting the civil environment with the relevant Joint and Air Component functions and processes. In the air domain, the civil environment is therefore not merely something to coordinate with or protect; it is part of the operational system that enables, constrains and is affected by military action.

Address:

Brasserskade 227A
2497 NX The Hague
The Netherlands

Contact Information:

Registry CCOE: +31 (0)889566439
Public Affairs Office: +31 (0)889 566441
E-Mail: info@cimic-coe.org
Webpage: www.cimic-coe.org

