



# Proposed Framework for AJP-9 Civil-Military Synchronization (CMS)

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*Concepts, Interoperability, Capabilities Branch*  
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## Introduction

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This document sets out the proposed framework on Civil-Military Synchronization (CMS), including its rationale, purpose, functions and application within NATO Multi-Domain Operations (MDO). It is intended to provide a common basis for further development of an Allied Joint Doctrine Publication on CMS (AJP-9), and to support the development of a coherent Alliance approach to synchronizing military activities with relevant non-military activities across the continuum of competition.

### 1. Rationale

The civil environment has become a decisive operational condition in contemporary warfare because the character of conflict has fundamentally changed. While the civil environment has always been an essential factor in military operations, emerging and disruptive technologies have increased the permeability of the boundary between military and civilian systems.

The NATO Strategic Concept (NMS) 2022 recognizes that competitors exploit this interconnectedness and that emerging and disruptive technologies are altering the character of conflict.

Indeed, this transformation is driven by the digital revolution, which has exposed critical infrastructure, supply chains, financial networks and societal trust to unprecedented vulnerabilities that adversaries can now disrupt remotely at low cost. Recognising this transformation as fundamental to future warfare, NATO adopted the Digital Transformation Implementation Strategy to provide the Digital Backbone enabling Cross-Domain Command to orchestrate and synchronize activities in accordance with the Alliance Concept for MDO.

Therefore, military success is no longer determined solely on the battlefield; it depends on the resilience, accessibility, and functionality of interconnected civil systems that enable military operations. Adversaries do not target civil systems merely for disruption; they seek to deny NATO the ability to utilize those civil capabilities that underpin military effectiveness. Transportation networks, energy systems, communications infrastructure, industrial capacity, digital services, public institutions, and societal resilience are all essential enablers of deterrence, force projection, sustainment, and operational freedom of action.

Consequently, commanders must understand the civil environment and synchronize military activities with relevant non-military actors and activities to preserve military effectiveness. This understanding is firmly embedded in AJP-01 and the Alliance concept for MDO.

Moreover, NMS 2022 and the BI-SC Directive on the Military Operationalisation of RtCP further consolidate this rationale by linking the civil environment, resilience, and the employment of military and non-military tools to counter interconnected global threats, thereby supporting credible deterrence and defence.

Resilience constitutes a particularly important link. As military operations increasingly depend on dual-use civil systems, their ability to absorb, withstand, adapt to and recover from disruption directly affects NATO's capacity to generate, project and sustain military power. Enshrined in Article 3 of the Washington Treaty and further developed through NATO's resilience framework, resilience therefore has direct operational relevance. CMS supports this by enabling commanders to understand civil dependencies and vulnerabilities, coordinate with relevant authorities and actors, and account for resilience requirements through understanding, planning, and execution activities.

## 2.Void:

Despite its increasing operational importance, CMS remains one of the less clearly understood aspects of MDO. No single Allied Joint Publication currently provides a coherent operational-level framework for CMS. Existing NATO doctrine addresses relevant aspects of the requirement; however, these sources do not provide a unified doctrinal framework explaining how NATO commanders and staffs synchronize military actions and activities with relevant civil activities, authorities, capabilities, constraints and dependencies.

The doctrinal gap is therefore not simply a lack of doctrine on the civil environment. Rather, it is the absence of dedicated operational-level doctrine for the synchronization of military and civil actors, plans, capabilities, systems, dependencies and effects. This gap is becoming increasingly significant as digitalisation and interconnectedness make the civil environment more permeable to hostile influence and increase military dependence on civil, commercial and digital systems that remain outside military command authority but can directly affect operational freedom of action.

A dedicated Allied Joint Publication on CMS is therefore required to establish a common Alliance understanding and provide commanders and staffs with practical, operational-level guidance for understanding, planning, coordinating and executing CMS in support of NATO operations and activities across the continuum of competition.

# CMS IN MULTI-DOMAIN OPERATIONS

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## 3.Purpose and Scope

Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) require military activities to be orchestrated across domains and, where relevant and feasible, aligned with activities conducted by actors outside military command authority. These actors include national authorities, international organisations, critical-infrastructure operators, commercial providers, civil-society organisations and humanitarians.

The purpose of this text is to explain the doctrinal meaning of CMS as a function, its relationship with MDO, Cross-Domain Command (CDC) and Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC), and its application across levels of command, joint functions, domains and dimensions.

***CMS is not a political coordination of all instruments of power, does not create military authority over non-military actors, and does not require shared objectives or formal collaboration.***

# CMS FRAMEWORK

## 4.CMS terminology

MDO describes the operational approach to create converging effects through the coherent employment of military capabilities across domains and dimensions. CDC provides the command approach through which commanders orchestrate military activity and establish the conditions for alignment with relevant non-military activity. CMS is the command-led function that enables this alignment. CIMIC provides the civil understanding and interaction mechanisms required to support it.

| Terminology        |                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| MDO                | Operational approach for creating converging effects across domains and dimensions.                                                                                                  |
| CDC                | Command approach for orchestrating military activity and enabling alignment with relevant non-military activity.                                                                     |
| CMS                | CMS is a command-led function that integrates understanding, planning alignment and liaison to deliver synchronized actions and activities and ultimately create converging effects. |
| CIMIC              | Joint function that primarily enables CMS through Civil Factor Integration and Civil-Military Interaction.                                                                           |
| Converging effects | Effects produced when actions across domains, functions and relevant civil systems reinforce one another in time and purpose.                                                        |

## 5.CMS Description, Purpose and Functions

CMS is a command-led function that integrates understanding, planning alignment and liaison to deliver synchronized actions and activities and ultimately create converging effects.

Creating convergence is ultimately the aim but not always feasible; it also relates to military activities being aligned with relevant non-military activities outside military command authority to reduce friction, identify and exploit complementary actions, mitigate civil dependencies, and contribute to creating converging effects.

Finally, CMS may involve awareness, deconfliction, coordination, alignment or, where mandates and authorities permit, integrated planning. The appropriate degree of CMS depends on the operational requirement, the willingness and mandate of the non-military actor, national sovereignty, legal constraints, information-sharing conditions and the nature of the relationship.

### CMS functions

#### 1.Understanding through Analysis & Assessment of the Civil Environment

- Develop the white picture of the Civil Environment.
- Identify Civil dependencies, vulnerabilities, opportunities and constraints.
- Determine where military success depends upon, affects or can be complemented by civil systems, capabilities and activities.
- Identify opportunities for converging effects.
- Identify where synchronization is required.

Output: Shared understanding and synchronization requirements

## 2.Align Civil-Military Planning

- Align military and civilian plans.
- Identify complementary military and non-military actions and activities.
- Align planning of activities.
- Resolve planning conflicts and competing priorities
- Design converging effects.

Output: Aligned plans and synchronized activities.

## 3.Execute synchronized Civil-Military activities

- Deliver coordinated military and non-military activities.
- Monitor implementation.
- Adapt synchronization as conditions change.
- Assess effect and feed lessons back into analysis.

Output: Converging effects in support of the commander's objectives

## Creating converging effects

Ultimately synchronized military and non-military actions and activities can create mutually reinforcing effects resulting in: enhanced situational understanding, freedom of manoeuvre, improved access to civilian resources and narrative dominance amongst others.

## Ways of CMS

- Awareness – understanding relevant non-military actors, activities, capabilities, dependencies and constraints.
- Deconfliction – preventing military and non-military activities from obstructing or endangering one another.
- Coordination – exchanging information and adjusting specific activities where appropriate.
- Alignment – adapting timing, location or purpose so that separate activities produce compatible or complementary effects.
- Integration – conducting closely connected or common planning where authority, mandate, consent and information-sharing conditions allow.

## CMS Principles

- Command responsibility. The commander is responsible for directing military activity and determining the required degree of CMS.
- No implied authority. CMS does not confer command, control or tasking authority over non-military actors.
- Respect for mandates and sovereignty. Interaction must respect national law, political direction, institutional mandates and humanitarian principles.
- Alignment without agreement. CMS may be required even where actors do not share objectives or do not wish to collaborate formally.
- Early preparation. Relationships, agreements and information-sharing mechanisms should be established before crisis or conflict whenever possible.
- Cross-functional execution. CMS is integrated across the headquarters and implemented through all relevant joint functions.
- Continuous assessment. Civil dependencies, opportunities, risks and unintended effects must be reassessed throughout planning and execution.

#### **Civil-Military or Broad partner liaison network**

- Facilitates information and assessment exchange.
- Builds and maintains relationships.
- Enables access to planners and decision makers.
- Supports military and Civilian planning alignment.
- Establishes coordination mechanisms.
- Enables coordinated execution and implementation.
- Provides continuous feedback and adaptation

## **6.Role of CIMIC**

CMS is a command responsibility, integrated across the headquarters and implemented through all relevant joint functions. CIMIC is the primary facilitator because it provides the civil understanding, relationships and interaction mechanisms required to align military activities with relevant non-military activities.

- Civil Factor Integration: incorporating civil actors, systems, dependencies, vulnerabilities and effects into assessment, planning, execution and assessment.
- Civil-Military Interaction: establishing and maintaining appropriate liaison and relationships with relevant non-military actors.
- Identification of complementary activity: determining where military and non-military activity may reinforce, constrain, compete with or unintentionally affect one another.
- Advice to the commander: advising on civil dependencies, opportunities, risks, authorities, second- and third-order effects and feasible coordination mechanisms.

CIMIC facilitates CMS but the Command groups, Staff functions and the affected joint functions remain responsible for integrating CMS into decisions, plans and execution.

## **7.CMS across the levels of Command**

Political authorities coordinate the instruments of power and establish political objectives, authorities and constraints for Alliance action. Military commanders provide advice and execute the military instrument, but do not exercise authority over the diplomatic, economic, or civilian instruments. CMS, therefore, does not replace political coordination. It enables the military instrument to align its activities with relevant non-military activities within the political framework established by competent authorities.

#### **Military-strategic level: establishing the conditions**

At the military-strategic level, commanders translate political direction into military requirements and establish theatre-wide priorities and mechanisms that enable CMS at lower levels. This may include standing liaison arrangements, host-nation agreements, information-sharing frameworks, military mobility requirements, commercial access arrangements, civil-preparedness assumptions and theatre-wide guidance.

## Operational level: integration into campaign design and joint planning

At the operational level, commanders integrate CMS into campaign design, operational planning and execution. Relevant tasks include identifying civil dependencies and constraints, determining where complementary non-military activity may be required, developing requests and coordination arrangements, incorporating civil factors into decision points and assessment, and adapting military activity to independent civilian action.

## Tactical level: local and time-sensitive execution

At the tactical level, CMS is often local, dynamic and time-sensitive. It may involve movement coordination, access to infrastructure, emergency response, population movement, force protection, municipal services, police, emergency services, local military authorities and commercial operators. Tactical commanders act within host-nation law and established command and liaison arrangements.

## 8.CMS within the Joint Function Framework

CMS applies across the Joint Function Framework because each joint function may depend on, affect or need to align with actors, systems and activities outside military command authority.

| Joint Function      | Illustrative CMS Requirement                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Intelligence        | Integrate relevant civil information while respecting ownership, classification, privacy, legal restrictions and differing data standards.     |
| Command and Control | Establish coordination and information-exchange mechanisms without implying military command over civilian organisations.                      |
| Manoeuvre           | Align military movement with civilian traffic, infrastructure capacity, population movement and host-nation authorities.                       |
| Fires               | Incorporate civilian risk, critical infrastructure, airspace, warning arrangements and precautions in attack.                                  |
| Information         | Coordinate authorised military and government communication while respecting legal constraints, institutional mandates and media independence. |
| Sustainment         | Align military requirements with commercial transport, energy, infrastructure, labour and supply-chain capacity.                               |
| Force Protection    | Coordinate protective measures with police, emergency services and civilian infrastructure operators.                                          |
| CIMIC               | Integrate civil factors and facilitate the interaction that enables CMS across the headquarters.                                               |

## 9.CMS – Domains – Dimensions

CMS enables the Joint Forces to account for non-military actors, activities and dependencies that affect operations across multiple domains and the physical, virtual and cognitive dimensions. Planning should therefore be domain-informed, cross-domain and not constrained by a single-domain perspective.

For example, reinforcement through a strategic port may depend simultaneously on maritime access, land movement, cyber-secured logistics systems, space-enabled communications and tracking, air defence, energy supply and public confidence. Many of these systems are nationally or commercially owned. Military success, therefore, depends on understanding their capacity, vulnerabilities, authorities and competing demands and on aligning military activity with the responsible actors.

## 10.Integration into Planning and Execution

CMS should be incorporated throughout operational planning:

- Assessment: identify relevant actors, systems, dependencies, vulnerabilities, authorities, interests and ongoing activities.
- Operational design: determine where civil factors create opportunities, constraints, risks or critical dependencies.
- Planning: identify required degrees of awareness, deconfliction, coordination, alignment or integration; assign military responsibilities; establish requests and engagement mechanisms.
- Preparation: establish relationships, agreements, technical connections, information-sharing arrangements and rehearsal requirements before execution.
- Execution: align military actions with relevant non-military activity through the headquarters battle rhythm and recognised decision authorities.
- Assessment: measure whether CMS reduced friction, protected freedom of action, mitigated civilian harm, preserved essential services and enabled complementary effects.

### Indicators and effects of effective CMS

- Civil-Military friction and unintended interference are reduced;
- critical civil dependencies are identified and mitigated;
- military freedom of action and access are preserved;
- civilian populations and essential services are protected to the greatest extent feasible;
- relevant military and non-military timelines and decision points are understood;
- complementary effects are achieved without creating unsustainable dependencies; and
- activities remain consistent with political direction, national sovereignty, legal obligations and institutional mandates.

## **11.Integrated Vignette: Reinforcement through a Strategic Port under Hybrid Pressure**

An adversary seeks to delay NATO reinforcement by combining cyberattacks against port management systems, sabotage of rail infrastructure, disinformation about the deployment, and pressure on commercial service providers. The port, rail network, energy supply and digital logistics systems are nationally regulated and largely operated by civilian or commercial entities. Nations and competent international institutions coordinate political, legal and economic measures. NATO provides military advice on reinforcement requirements, risks and timelines. Political authorities determine priorities, authorities and constraints; the military does not direct the other instruments of power.

### **Military-strategic**

SHAPE identifies theatre-wide movement requirements and works through established arrangements with nations and relevant institutions to address transit permissions, infrastructure capacity, cyber resilience, commercial access and information sharing. Several civilian operators cannot provide unrestricted data because of commercial and legal constraints, requiring agreed minimum information requirements and alternative planning assumptions.

### **Operational**

The Joint Force Command integrates port and onward-movement dependencies into the operational design. CIMIC staff map relevant actors and facilitate engagement; J2 fuses military and available civil information; J4 develops movement priorities; J3 and J5 incorporate civil constraints into decision points and branches. A commercial rail operator cannot meet the original timetable, so the commander adapts the deployment sequence rather than attempting to direct the company.

### **Tactical**

The corps coordinates movement windows with host-nation military authorities, police, port authorities and transport operators. A lawful local protest blocks one access route. National authorities manage the protest under domestic law, while the corps shifts selected movements to an alternate route and protects sensitive schedule information. Emergency services and military force-protection elements coordinate responses to a suspected sabotage incident without creating a unified command relationship.

### **Cross-domain and cross-functional effect**

Maritime security, land movement, cyber defence, space-enabled tracking, air defence, sustainment, force protection, information activities and CIMIC contributions are orchestrated within the military command structure and aligned with independent civilian activities. The result is not perfect integration but sufficient CMS to preserve the reinforcement flow, reduce disruption to civilian activity and deny the adversary the intended strategic effect.

# Conclusion

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Civil-Military Synchronization is an essential component of NATO's ability to conduct effective Multi-Domain Operations in an increasingly interconnected and contested environment. Military operations are fundamentally dependent on civil, commercial and dual-use systems and capabilities that remain outside military command authority but can directly enable, constrain or disrupt operational freedom of action. Effective CMS therefore provides commanders with a means to understand these dependencies, identify vulnerabilities and opportunities, and align military activities with relevant non-military activities where feasible.

CMS does not seek to create military authority over civilian actors, replace political coordination, or require common objectives or formal collaboration. Rather, it provides a command-led framework for determining the appropriate degree of interaction—from awareness and deconfliction through coordination and alignment to, where mandates and authorities permit, integrated planning. Its purpose is to reduce friction, mitigate dependencies and vulnerabilities, preserve freedom of action, and enable complementary and ultimately converging effects.

CMS is consequently a headquarters-wide responsibility that must be integrated across levels of command, joint functions, domains and dimensions and throughout the full planning and execution cycle. CIMIC has a central enabling role by providing civil understanding, relationships and interaction mechanisms, while commanders, staff functions and other joint functions retain responsibility for incorporating CMS into operational decisions, plans and execution.

The operational vignette demonstrates that effective CMS does not require perfect integration or control of the civil environment. In conditions of hybrid pressure, sufficient understanding, timely liaison, planning alignment and adaptation can enable NATO forces to maintain operational momentum, protect essential civil activity and deny an adversary the intended strategic effect. CMS therefore contributes directly to resilience, deterrence and defence by ensuring that civil dependencies and interactions are treated as operational considerations rather than external factors.

A dedicated AJP-9 on Civil-Military Synchronization would provide the Alliance with a common doctrinal framework to institutionalise this approach. It would clarify the relationship between MDO, Cross-Domain Command, CMS and CIMIC, establish common principles and terminology, and provide commanders and staffs with practical guidance for applying CMS across the continuum of competition. Such doctrine would close the identified operational-level gap and strengthen NATO's ability to translate understanding of the civil environment into synchronized military activity, preserved freedom of action and converging effects in support of Alliance objectives.



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# CIVIL-MILITARY SYNCHRONIZATION (CMS)

*Integrating military and non-military actions and activities to create converging effects*

1

**UNDERSTAND**

Analysis & Assessment of the Civil Environment

- Develop the White Picture of the civil environment
- Identify civil dependencies, vulnerabilities, opportunities and constraints
- Determine where military success depends upon, affects or can be complemented by civil systems and activities
- Identify where synchronisation is required

**OUTPUT:** Shared understanding and synchronization requirements

2

**ALIGN**

Civilian and Military Planning

- Align military and civilian plans
- Identify complementary military and non-military actions and activities
- Synchronize actions and activities in time, space and purpose
- Resolve planning conflicts and competing priorities
- Design converging effects

**OUTPUT:** Aligned plans and synchronized actions

3

**EXECUTE**

Synchronized Military & Non-Military Actions

- Deliver coordinated military and non-military activities
- Monitor implementation
- Adapt synchronization as conditions change
- Assess effects and feed lessons back into analysis

**OUTPUT:** Converging effects in support of the commander's objectives

**CREATE CONVERGING EFFECTS**

Synchronized military and non-military actions and activities create mutually reinforcing effects such as:

- Enhanced situational understanding
- Freedom of manoeuvre
- Narrative dominance
- Increased operational tempo and momentum
- Enhanced resilience

**CIVIL-MILITARY LIAISON (ENABLING LAYER – CONTINUOUS)**

Facilitates information and assessment exchange

Builds and maintains relationships

Enables access to planners and decision-makers

Supports military and civilian planning alignment

Establishes coordination mechanisms

Enables coordinated execution and implementation

Provides continuous feedback and adaptation

Civil-Military Synchronization is a command-led function that integrates understanding, planning alignment and liaison to deliver synchronized actions and activities to ultimately create converging effects.

**PRINCIPLES**

- Respect for mandates and sovereignty
- No implied authority over non-military actors
- Alignment without agreement
- Early preparation
- Cross-functional execution
- Continuous assessment and adaptation



*Understanding the civil environment. Aligning planning. Enabling synchronisation. Creating converging effects.*

CMS Diagram