

Replies and Comments:

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Focus

MC 411/1 and AJP-9 are the key documents of NATO's CIMIC policy.

The purpose of NATO's CIMIC policy is described in the MC 411/1 doctrine:

"The immediate purpose of CIMIC is to establish and maintain the full co-operation of the NATO commander and the civilian authorities, organisations, agencies and population within a commander's area of operations in order to allow him to fulfil his mission. This may include direct support to the implementation of a civil plan. The long-term purpose of CIMIC is to help create and sustain conditions that will support the achievement of Alliance objectives in operations."

The NATO doctrine on the direct conduct of humanitarian activities:

"In exceptional circumstances, the military may be required to take on tasks normally the responsibility of a mandated civil authority, organisation or agency. These tasks will only be taken on where the appropriate civil body is not present or is unable to carry out its mandate and where an otherwise unacceptable vacuum would arise. The military should be prepared to undertake, when requested by the cognisant civil authority and approved by NATO, such tasks necessary, until the mandated civil authority, organisation or agency is prepared to assume them."

The Debate on Civil and Military Cooperation and NATO's role in Afghanistan.

The assumption by NATO of duties in Afghanistan re-raises a debate, which has been fomenting since the early 1990s, on the appropriate relationship of the civilian, humanitarian and military communities in complex peace support operations. Civil-Military Cooperation, or CIMIC, has been a controversial term applied by the different actors in various contexts with differing implications. The multiple meanings of CIMIC and the inconsistent perceptions of numerous actors regarding this term, have led to a confusion of concepts and misunderstandings which, in turn, have made a valuable debate increasingly difficult to sustain. The NGO community uses CIMIC as a label for military involvement in humanitarian assistance. This differs from the concept of CIMIC developed by western military forces. Even among the different armies, this concept varies. The most advanced CIMIC concept has been developed by NATO, largely in response to NATO's involvement in the Balkans.

The clearest difference between the NGO community and NATO is on the status of humanitarian assistance within military operations. In the NATO description of CIMIC, three characteristics are clear. First, CIMIC refers to a military operation and not to civil-military cooperation as such; the military goal remains supreme. Secondly, CIMIC does not identify the facilitating of humanitarian aid by NGOs or IOs as an objective in itself. Thirdly, the definition implies that CIMIC is a tactical doctrine, not a strategy. The strategy of a military operation can aim at stability and reduction of security risks for the population in a crisis area. CIMIC is used as an instrument to reach the given objectives. NATO has identified CIMIC as a crucial feature in successful accomplishment of military operations. CIMIC then, as defined by NATO, is more an integrated part of the command structure and the overall military strategy, rather than a stand-alone activity. CIMIC is a tactical doctrine, the objective of which can be the support of humanitarian actors or the take-over of tasks with a humanitarian character. However, it is important to understand that this is not the primary aim of CIMIC. NATO clearly states its intention to adhere to the principle of 'mission primacy'. First of all, CIMIC serves as a combat-support function. NATO uses a narrow interpretation. Activities that directly function as assistance to the successful accomplishment of a military operation are considered part of CIMIC. CIMIC is designed to obtain and guarantee the best possible support, recognition and acceptance for the military mission while simultaneously minimising external interference during an operation. Consequently CIMIC does not aspire to exert control over civilian bodies. NATO believes that a high degree of acceptance by the population and the local authority is essential to the success of a military undertaking. In this regard possible engagement in humanitarian tasks is not seen as the Alliance's focal point, nevertheless it is considered to be an ancillary activity within the wider objective of mission acceptance.

Generally, military support for the implementation of civilian tasks has to be conducted subsidiary to a civilian body. Only in exceptional circumstances that have to meet specific criteria, does NATO envision the direct conduct of humanitarian action. The Alliance still considers the successful accomplishment of security-related tasks its core business. The most influential factor is in every case the political will of the international community and in particular the interest of states which dispatch their military forces on the respective mission, since the military is a politically controlled tool of foreign policy. One can easily imagine situations where NATO takes over humanitarian tasks on the basis of political objectives to serve as a substitute for a direct political or military addressing of the root causes of a conflict, to improve staff moral or as a response to the so-called CNN-factor. In these cases NATO will have a difficult time avoiding this kind of involvement.

Responsibility

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