

THE ROLE OF CIVIL-MILITARY COOPERATION IN THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS:

The Ukraine Experience



CENTER FOR
CIVILIANS IN CONFLICT
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ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION AND VISION

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) is an international organization dedicated to promoting the protection of civilians in conflict. CIVIC envisions a world in which no civilian is harmed in conflict. Our mission is to support communities affected by conflict in their quest for protection and strengthen the resolve and capacity of armed actors to prevent and respond to civilian harm.

CIVIC was established in 2003 by Marla Ruzicka, a young humanitarian who advocated on behalf of civilians affected by the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Honoring Marla's legacy, CIVIC has kept an unflinching focus on the protection of civilians in conflict. Today, CIVIC has a presence in conflict zones and key capitals throughout the world, where it collaborates with civilians to bring their protection concerns directly to those in power, engages with armed actors to reduce the harm they cause to civilian populations, and advises governments and multinational bodies on how to make life-saving and lasting policy changes.

CIVIC's strength is its proven approach and record of improving protection outcomes for civilians by working directly with conflict-affected communities and armed actors. At CIVIC, we believe civilians are not “collateral damage” and civilian harm is not an unavoidable consequence of conflict—civilian harm can and must be prevented.

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ACRONYMS

AFU	Armed Forces of Ukraine
AOR	Area of Responsibility
ATO	Antiterrorist Operation
BI	Building Integrity
CIMIC	Civil–Military Cooperation
CMI	Civil–Military Interaction
COE	Centre of Excellence
GS	General Staff
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
KIA	Killed in Action
LO	Liaison Officer
MA	Military Administration
MCA	Military–Civil Administration
MoD	Ministry of Defense
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
MTT	Mobile Training Team
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
OPCOM	Operational Command
PAO	Public Affairs Office
POC	Protection of Civilians
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PMESII-PT	Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, Infrastructure, Physical Environment, and Time
STRATCOM	Strategic Command
TDF	Territorial Defense Forces

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a comparatively smaller and less equipped Ukrainian military rapidly swung into action. Among those Ukrainian soldiers on the front lines were civil–military cooperation (CIMIC) officers, who can play a vital role in protecting civilians by engaging key community stakeholders, helping military commanders properly assess the human environment to strengthen military operations and mitigate harm to civilians during operations, and helping to coordinate the activities of civilian and military authorities. Under Russian bombardments that were, at times, relentless and indiscriminate, Ukrainian CIMIC officers helped alert civilians about curfews and protocols at military checkpoints, personally evacuated some civilians while helping coordinate the evacuation of others, and supported the repair of critical infrastructure.

CIMIC was created as a Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) in 2014. Between 2014 and the start of 2022, Ukraine gradually established doctrine on CIMIC, built CIMIC structures within the Ukrainian military, and developed CIMIC capacity. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) supported Ukraine in some of these efforts through various training and consultation mechanisms established as part of the strategic partnership between NATO and Ukraine. Although NATO member states have significant experience implementing CIMIC activities in peacekeeping, counterterrorism, and stabilization contexts, the war in Ukraine matches none of these paradigms. Since February 2022, the war in Ukraine has been a high-intensity armed conflict between global powers requiring territorial defense by one nation against the largescale invasion of another. Drawing on a literature review and a series of interviews with military and civilian officials in Ukraine, CIVIC's research charts the development of early CIMIC capabilities in Ukraine and how the CIMIC function has shifted in the new context of high-intensity armed conflict. This report summarizes CIVIC's findings and outlines recommendations for senior decision-makers on how to address gaps and challenges that have arisen while implementing CIMIC activities in 2022 and 2023.

CIVIC's research charts the development of early CIMIC capabilities in Ukraine and how the CIMIC function has shifted in the new context of high-intensity armed conflict.

With Russia's 2022 offensive, the need for the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) to perform CIMIC activities massively increased. CIMIC mechanisms are still adapting to the scale and pace of the conflict, which exacerbated many pre-existing challenges such as limited CIMIC training opportunities, insufficient transportation for CIMIC units to access communities, and the absence of legislation that clearly establishes the role and authority of CIMIC officers. For example, the rapid formation of the Territorial Defense Forces (TDF) meant that CIMIC officers established within the TDF did not undergo a competitive selection process or CIMIC training. Many were moved over from other areas of work or specialization. Additionally, the emergency measure of converting many civilian administrations into military administrations (MAs) has precipitated some confusion about authorities as well as conflict between MAs and military commanders.



Serhiy Tarasov / CIVIC

March 2016, Donetsk region: CIMIC team of 93 brigade on a mission.

While CIMIC officers have contributed to protection of civilians in many individual cases, their success has been limited by a lack of full understanding regarding their role among both military leadership and civilian authorities. The result has been a lack of centralized or standardized efforts. Such limitations have had a real impact on CIMIC officers' ability to help coordinate civilian evacuations and participate effectively in military planning processes, among other concerns.

The war has created many simultaneous urgent needs in Ukraine. The government and military are undoubtedly being stretched in many directions to try to meet these needs. Nevertheless, additional political will is needed to help address some of the gaps and challenges CIVIC identified and to promote a greater awareness of CIMIC's role in the AFU. Moreover, the importance of continued professional development for CIMIC officers and providing CIMIC officers with adequate resources cannot be overstated, particularly given the evolving nature of the military's tasks in the ongoing war.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Parliament of Ukraine:

- Revise The Law of Ukraine on the AFU to include a directive that the AFU prioritize POC in the conduct of its operations and to acknowledge the roles, rights, and responsibilities of CIMIC officers in supporting this mandate.

To the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine:

- Ratify the draft National Strategy for the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict to ensure that POC is a strategic priority in the current high-intensity war and that the role of CIMIC officers in supporting POC is clearly outlined, including its role in conducting threat assessments, coordinating the efforts of military and civilian authorities, supporting evacuation procedures, and mitigating the negative impact of the conflict on the population.

To the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine and Armed Forces of Ukraine:

- Increase the institutional capacity of the CIMIC function within the AFU by expanding the number of cadets with access to training on civil–military cooperation through the program at the Military Institute of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, widening the availability of the “CIMIC Professional Development Course,” identifying top students to serve as future trainers, and deploying mobile CIMIC training teams.
- Reinstitute professional evaluations as part of the selection and appointment of officers to CIMIC positions.
- Create a consultative “CIMIC-MA red team” to test CIMIC concepts and practices in the context of high-intensity warfare and contribute to the development of knowledge and guidance on implementing CIMIC activities in such contexts. In addition to MA and CIMIC representatives, include civil society participants in the exercises and incorporate findings into joint exercises, military training curriculums, and exchanges with partners.
- Conduct conferences, seminars, and roundtables with public authorities, military commanders, volunteer organizations, and scientific community on CIMIC tasks and activities to increase awareness of the CIMIC function’s existence and purpose. If in-person meetings are challenging in the current context, consider online forums, video-teleconferencing, or recorded messages to share information.
- Progressively equip CIMIC units deployed to areas of high-intensity combat with armored vehicles to enable them to perform their mandated duties more effectively and avoid endangering civilians when they support evacuations. This measure will minimize casualties of CIMIC officers during their missions in communities near the front lines, as well as reduce civilian deaths and injuries during evacuations.

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on secondary analysis of publicly available information and on primary analysis of qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted by CIVIC with key informants. The research was carried out in two stages. During the first stage, CIVIC consulted open-source information on trends in CIMIC and civil–military cooperation. The publicly available data reviewed included information from the official websites of Ukrainian national governmental institutions, local Ukrainian administrations, NATO, and the AFU, as well as the websites of non-governmental organizations, international organizations, and the media. CIVIC reviewed doctrinal documents as well academic journal articles. The gaps identified through this first research phase helped inform the research questions CIVIC formulated for the second phase of research.

In the second phase of research, primary data was gathered through expert interviews with representatives of local government authorities, civilian subject matter experts, and military officers who had previously or were currently working in the CIMIC department and units. CIVIC interviewed 31 former and current military officials working in the CIMIC field and 10 local government officials and civilian subject matter experts. Interviews were conducted both in person and remotely. All participants agreed to speak with CIVIC on the condition of anonymity. Each interview was assigned a unique number that is referenced in the citations. Citations provide relevant information about the source of the information without identifying the individuals who shared their observations with CIVIC.

The conclusions and final recommendations of this report are based on the existing literature and doctrine that CIVIC reviewed and analysis of the primary data collected through semi-structured interviews. They are also informed by the experience of the primary author of this report, who served as a CIMIC officer in the AFU in 2016 and as a command officer in the Territorial Defense Forces in 2022.

BACKGROUND

For western militaries, civil–military cooperation was conceptualized and implemented as a technical support function during the Cold War. It was deployed at the tactical level rather than as a critical function central to the success of military and political objectives. CIMIC activities focused on helping remove obstacles to the success of military operations and providing resources and logistical support to them. In the 1990s, when NATO was first deployed to stem violence in Bosnia and then Kosovo, the military alliance’s concept of CIMIC was grounded in an understanding of it as a subsidiary or support function. However, the reality NATO troops met in Bosnia and Kosovo, as well as the tasks assigned them, challenged this conceptualization. Likewise, when western troops undertook counterterrorism and stabilization operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the armed forces played a large role in supporting civilian authorities and performing a wide range of other crucial CIMIC tasks.

These experiences prompted NATO to reconsider how CIMIC was conceptualized in its doctrine and to elevate its status as part of a comprehensive approach to crises.¹ Following three decades of evolution prompted by crisis management, counter-insurgency, and stabilization operations, NATO now defines civil–military interaction (CMI) as encompassing “a group of activities, founded on communication, planning and coordination, that all NATO military bodies share and conduct with international and local non-military actors, both during NATO operations and in preparation for them.”² CIMIC is defined in NATO doctrine as, “A joint function comprising a set of capabilities integral to supporting the achievement of mission objectives and enabling NATO commands to participate effectively in a broad spectrum of civil–military interaction with diverse non-military actors.”³ The overall goal of CMI, according to a NATO guidance note, is an increase in the efficiency of civilian and military actions in response to crises—an approach that sees civilian and military aspects as mutually reinforcing rather than one being subordinate to the other.⁴

Current approaches to CIMIC vary among organizations and nations. Even among NATO member states—who have agreed on common definitions—national approaches differ. However, most militaries now have a professionalized civilian interaction function under the CIMIC or “9” branch, as do the military components of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations. This function is referred to as J-9 for joint operations and A-9 for army operations.

While CIMIC branches are the backbones of civil–military interaction, they also support wider coordination measures, including those undertaken by other branches or by the commanders’ staffs. And while “civil-military cooperation” concept is perceived as a military function, “civil-military interaction” includes a broader range of actors with different mandates, capabilities, and operating modes, especially in areas of active operations. These include civilian authorities, individual civilians, and the broader civil society. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), for example, helps facilitate civil–military engagement in disaster response and conflict settings and often hosts regular civil–military coordination meetings to promote coexistence and deconfliction among impartial humanitarian organizations, civilian agencies, and militaries.⁵ Conducting CIMIC activities on behalf of militaries, therefore, requires an openness to different modes of working and an understanding of mutual priorities, timeframes, and limitations.⁶

Although Ukraine is not a member of NATO, the country has maintained a relationship with the military alliance since the early 1990s. In 1997, the relationship was formalized as a partnership through a charter signed between Ukraine and NATO, and this partnership has involved NATO



February 2016, Donetsk region: CIMIC team and volunteers distribute food to civilians

support for developing Ukraine's military capabilities.⁷ Following Russia's invasion of the Crimea region of Ukraine in February 2014, NATO issued a declaration at the Wales Summit in September 2014 stressing its support for Ukraine and the importance of the NATO–Ukraine partnership.⁸ Since then, NATO has reinforced its capacity-building and capability development support to Ukraine. Civil–military relations and the protection of civilians are two critical areas of cooperation where NATO support to Ukraine intensified following Russia's invasion of Crimea.⁹

Ukraine responded to Russia's invasion of Crimea with initial commitments to grow its military capability, as announced by Dmytro Shymkiv, Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration of Ukraine.¹⁰ In addition, Ukraine reinvigorated its participation in the Partnership for Peace (PfP), a framework for NATO and partner countries to jointly develop their capabilities and cooperation.¹¹ A string of commitments and arrangements followed that were aimed at improving Ukraine's military capabilities as well as the interoperability of Ukrainian military systems and those of NATO member states. For example, Ukrainian and NATO representatives signed a NATO–Ukraine Roadmap on defense and technical cooperation in December 2015¹² and a Ukraine Strategic Defense Bulletin in 2016, which was issued by Ukraine's Ministry of Defense and outlined interoperability with NATO as a key goal of military reforms.¹³ NATO and Ukraine then signed a Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP) in 2016 to help Ukraine achieve these goals. As the CAP and other NATO documents outline, achieving interoperability involves investments in physical infrastructure, technology systems, and

information systems as well as building common doctrine, training systems, and structures. Capabilities that support interoperability include, for instance, the ability to deploy forces and the ability to exchange information between civilian and military authorities.¹⁴

In June 2017, the Ukrainian parliament adopted legislation reinstating membership in NATO as a strategic foreign and security policy objective, and a corresponding amendment to Ukraine's Constitution entered into force in 2019.¹⁵ On March 25, 2021, a new Military Security Strategy of Ukraine was approved by Ukraine's president. The Strategy provides for the development of a distinctive partnership with NATO with the aim of NATO membership. It clearly defines the goals, priorities, and objectives for Ukraine's defense policy, and it introduces a comprehensive approach to defense through deterrence, resilience, and interaction.¹⁶ NATO supported Ukraine's defense and security sector reform through a variety of mechanisms established for this purpose, including the Joint Working Group on Defense Reform, the P2P Planning and Review Process, the NATO Building Integrity (BI) Process and the Annual BI Tailored Program, the NATO Defense Education Enhancement Program, the Joint Working Group on Defense Technical Cooperation, and the NATO Representation in Ukraine, which serves as an advisory mission.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has pushed CIMIC into new territory. High-intensity, large-scale combat operations have displaced nearly 8 million people, many of whom have required assistance to evacuate under heavy Russian bombardment. While many Ukrainians have evacuated from Russian-occupied areas, significant numbers of civilians have remained in occupied areas and on the front lines of combat between the AFU and the Russian army. In this context, the AFU has been called on to assist in the evacuations of civilians, provide information to civilians that will support their ability to make decisions about their protection, mitigate harm to civilians on the battlefield, and support civilian authorities—including law enforcement operations—in the middle of large-scale operations and in newly liberated territories.

Even though revisions to NATO doctrine have elevated CIMIC to a key function in military operations, much of the experience and guidance generated by western countries on CIMIC activities has been derived from the experience of counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, stabilization, and peace support operations rather than a situation of great power competition and conventional state warfare of the sort Ukraine is facing today. In US army practice, for instance, Civil Affairs staff who support CIMIC activities tend to be seen as a tool that enters the fray after the end of major combat operations, and their role is not discussed in new guidance for a possible confrontation between great powers.¹⁷ NATO's current CIMIC doctrine states that CMI is relevant to all types of operations and highlights some of the differences between crisis management and large-scale combat operations. Additionally, a NATO handbook notes that while the assumption in territorial defense cases is that the host nation will be primarily responsible for CIMIC functions, allies might nonetheless be called upon to provide support, especially with managing population flows and protecting critical infrastructure.¹⁸ The handbook states that the "military profile will be high, resulting in resource intensive activities and enhanced demand for CIMIC liaison to remainders of authorities and/or community leaders and existing international organizations (IOs)/non-governmental organization (NGOs)."¹⁹ However, these documents offer little guidance or detail on what CIMIC activities to prioritize in large-scale combat operations, how to prepare, and how to adapt CIMIC activities to situations of territorial defense.²⁰ Given these gaps, analysis of Ukraine's experience implementing CIMIC activities in its fight against the full-scale Russian invasion can offer lessons not only for Ukrainian authorities, but for other countries and militaries seeking to update and test their assumptions, doctrines, and approaches to CIMIC in large-scale combat operations.

EVOLUTION OF CIMIC ROLES AND CAPABILITIES BEFORE THE 2022 FULL-SCALE RUSSIAN INVASION

Initial Strides: CIMIC in the First Several Years After Russia's Invasion of Crimea

Prior to 2014, the Ukrainian military did not have a distinct or formalized CIMIC function. It was only after Russia's invasion of Crimea that the Directorate of Civil–Military Cooperation was formed within the AFU and civil–military cooperation between the army and civilian institutions became a distinct operational capability of the military.²¹ The need for this function arose as AFU military units had to work together with civilian volunteers to deliver critical assistance to civilians living in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions of the country.²²

In the first year of Russia's invasion, the AFU's main civil–military cooperation task became leading close interactions between the military and the civilian population to neutralize destabilizing factors and ensure favorable conditions for the performance of offensive and defensive tasks entrusted to AFU units. CIMIC officers achieved these aims by, for example, explaining military operations to civilians and identifying and resolving civilian concerns about the military use of civilian resources and infrastructure.²³ An urgent need also arose to create a mechanism for the search for and return of Ukrainian soldiers killed in action (KIA) from temporarily occupied territories. The AFU launched a project called “Evacuation 200” for recovering the bodies of KIA soldiers and transporting them to medical centers for identification and burial. CIMIC officers and volunteers stepped in to fill this role, which was later formally recognized as a component of CIMIC officers' work in Ukraine.²⁴

During the initial period of the establishment of the CIMIC service, there were conflicting views between the newly formed CIMIC service in the AFU and the existing post-Soviet service responsible for personnel work and morale (also known as political and psychological education). Many military commanders did not fully grasp the importance and functions of CIMIC, which led to disagreements. The political officer cadre sought to assume the CIMIC mission, arguing that their responsibilities involved dealing with “people” and personnel matters, making it easy for them to engage with Ukrainian civilians. However, CIMIC officers successfully defended their position and preserved the structure of CIMIC as a distinct service within the AFU.

On May 5, 2014, the National Defense University of Ukraine launched a CIMIC training for AFU officers, which began the process of transforming CIMIC structures and mechanisms into their current and modern form. At the same time, small tactical CIMIC groups began performing their designated activities in areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions that were termed Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) zones by the Ukrainian government. One CIMIC group was sent to the Kherson and Mykolaiv regions, while a second entered the territory of the Donetsk region.²⁵ Initially, these CIMIC groups were small, mobile configurations of three to five officers. They constantly moved around different settlements, assessed the environment and conditions, and were a kind of “bridge” between the civilian population, local government authorities, and the AFU. Over time, these mobile groups grew in size to about 12 to 15 officers.²⁶

The initial activities of CIMIC groups included a wide range of measures related to helping meet the protection needs of socially vulnerable groups in areas that were impossible or difficult for civilian government agencies and humanitarian agencies to access. CIMIC groups took part in coordination efforts with local authorities, NGOs, and international organizations, provided military escorts to support humanitarian organizations in delivering aid and restoring civilian infrastructure, and at times directly delivered assistance to civilians in areas no other actors could reach. The newly created teams

were also expected to promote a favorable view of the AFU among civilians and support crisis prevention.²⁷ They did so, in part, by participating in state holiday and anniversary celebrations and by helping to broadcast narratives about the AFU that portrayed them in a positive light.²⁸

Public Perception of the AFU

The outbreak of war in Crimea in 2014 fundamentally changed the nature of the relationship between the military and many civilians in the country. The actions of the AFU had a larger daily impact on the lives of civilians, and many citizens had a desire to actively support the army in its fight against Russian aggression. In 2015, a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in all regions of Ukraine (with the exception of Luhansk and Donetsk) showed that the Ukrainian population had a more favorable perception of the military than any other branch of government. Seventy-two percent of surveyed Ukrainians said the military had a positive influence on the direction of events in Ukraine, while 32 percent felt the government in Kyiv was having a good influence and only 11 percent approved of the judiciary's work. However, views of the military were more positive in the western regions of the country than in the eastern regions surveyed. Only 63 percent of civilians in the east felt the military was having a positive influence, as compared to 79 percent in the west.²⁹

In 2015, after the first pilot groups had been tested in 2014, the AFU leadership decided to expand the system of civil–military cooperation in the AFU and established the first two centers in Mariupol and Sievierodonetsk as civil–military cooperation focal points. The primary intent in creating these centers was to increase the AFU's capacity to cope with the challenges arising from the dire situation in the temporarily occupied regions of Luhansk and Donetsk.³⁰ Throughout 2015, CIMIC groups used the resources allocated to them to help create safe and conducive conditions to hold local elections in parts of the ATO zone that were under Ukrainian control. They also delivered 1.5 tons of life-saving supplies to the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, assisted in the evacuation of nearly 1,500 civilians from Debaltseve city in cooperation with volunteer and non-governmental organizations, and launched a project on mine security and demining in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions alongside several INGOs.³¹ Through these activities, CIMIC officers helped minimize the negative consequences of combat actions on the civilian population in the ATO zone. CIMIC officers also helped counter information operations launched by Russia against the Ukrainian population by distributing Ukrainian newspapers and magazines, helping equip radio stations in some locations, and developing and distributing informational booklets.³²

In times of peace, Ukraine was governed exclusively through Civil Administrations (CAs). On February 3, 2015, the Law of Ukraine “On Military–Civil Administrations” (MCAs) was passed, creating MCAs as new temporary government agencies to be established in villages, towns, districts, and regions to ensure adherence to the constitution and laws of Ukraine, promote security and normalization of life, and help prevent humanitarian catastrophes.³³ Ultimately, 19 CAs were transformed into MCAs operating in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. These included Donetsk regional MCA (located in Kramatorsk) and Luhansk regional MCA (located in Sievierodonetsk), as well as 17 others at the city and village level. These structures were intended to more closely link military and civilian authorities to support joint implementation of many protection-related tasks—and CIMIC officers were the primary link points for creating this cohesion.³⁴

However, the MCA legislation has significant gaps and contradictions that have persisted up through today. One of the key problems is the absence of a specific set of conditions that triggers the creation of these administrations. The legislation also does not clearly outline mechanisms for cooperation between the military and civilian authorities under the MCAs. As a result, CIMIC officers

have had to establish communication with MCAs primarily through personal contacts and initiatives.³⁵ NATO supported Ukraine in its efforts to develop the army's CIMIC capabilities more systematically through training. In December 2015, the NATO CIMIC Centre of Excellence (COE) supported the first of many trainings through its Civil–Military Mobile Training Team (MTT).³⁶ During this session, 45 officers of the AFU received instruction about civil–military cooperation. The instruction included the first hand-experiences of trainers and discussions of the practical applications of CIMIC at a tactical level, as well as case studies and role play. Beyond capacity-building of these 45 officers, the NATO CIMIC MTT also assisted in the development of a doctrinal CIMIC framework for the AFU and the creation of a Ukrainian CIMIC Training & Education capacity.³⁷

Following these first few years of experience implementing specialized CIMIC activities, the term civil–military cooperation was officially defined in the White Book of the Ministry of Defence as “Systematic activity of the Armed Forces on coordination and cooperation with bodies of executive power, local government bodies, non-governmental organizations as well as other organizations and citizens in the areas where military units of the Armed Forces are deployed, in order to form positive public opinion and provide conditions to perform the assigned tasks and functions of the Armed Forces by means of assistance provided to civil population in solving their living issues using military and non-military means.”³⁸

Continued Efforts to Professionalize CIMIC in the AFU: 2016–2020

In 2016, the Armed Forces of Ukraine continued to develop the civil–military cooperation mechanism to ensure its sustainability in the long term. As a concrete step, the AFU established a Joint CIMIC center in Kramatorsk, Donetsk, bringing the total number of CIMIC centers throughout the country to three. Additionally, the Ministry of Defense determined a CIMIC team should be attached to each mechanized (tank, infantry) brigade's headquarters on a temporary basis.³⁹ Moreover, in 2017, an Order of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine introduced a new Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) of “civil–military cooperation” for positions in military commands, military units, and military educational institutions. This order further contributed to the professionalization of CIMIC roles.⁴⁰ During the same year, training courses for CIMIC personnel were organized to comply with new regulations stating that CIMIC officers could only be appointed to a position after successfully completing a training curriculum. In 2017, more than 100 people successfully completed these courses, and the AFU had put 20 CIMIC groups in place by the end of the year.⁴¹

The range and number of tasks performed by CIMIC officers working in the ATO zone continued expanding in 2017 and 2018. For example, in 2017, CIMIC teams—together with local authorities and units from the State Emergency Service of Ukraine—jointly conducted activities to restore vital infrastructure such as electricity transmission lines, water and gas supply, technical facilities, and roadway paving, in populated areas near the front lines. For these activities, CIMIC officers coordinated between local military commanders and other entities, organizing military escorts for repair teams. When the gas pipeline in Mar'yinka and Krasnogorivka in the Donetsk Region was repeatedly damaged from 2015 to 2017 as a result of systematic shelling by Russian forces, for example, it threatened to leave civilians without heat. In response, CIMIC groups worked with local authorities to organize and ensure the restoration of the pipeline, often risking their lives in the process.⁴² Additionally, CIMIC units helped plan emergency relief operations, monitor the humanitarian situation, and assess collateral damage to the civilian population and civilian infrastructure.⁴³

In June 2018, the General Staff, as part of the “Building Capacity for the Protection of Civilian People in the East of Ukraine” project, took a significant step toward safeguarding civilians, including by signing an MoU with the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC). As a result of this agreement, the Joint Forces Operation Commander issued an order to establish a specialized group of CIMIC officers responsible for actively gathering and analyzing information related to civilian casualties and death. This move formalized the role of CIMIC officers in systematically monitoring and assessing incidents impacting civilians, with the ultimate goal of reducing harm and ensuring the well-being of civilians in the Area of Operation.⁴⁴

Domestic training on CIMIC activities also continued to expand, as did training opportunities for Ukrainian officers abroad. In 2018, the Military Institute of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv conducted the inaugural enrollment of cadets for the professional bachelor’s program in “Civil–Military Relations.” Cadets were selected based on an evaluation of their intellectual, physical, and psychological aptitudes, with a competition of six candidates for each position. In 2020, 14 candidates were selected and trained from an applicant pool of 112. This competitive selection method facilitated the identification of high-quality young men and women for CIMIC training and specialization.⁴⁵

Military reserve units were also established to carry out CIMIC activities, and these units were trained through the incorporation of a regulatory discipline known as “civil–military cooperation” into the curricula of higher military educational institutions (the Military Institute of Kyiv National University and the National Academy of Defense of Ukraine).⁴⁶ Moreover, AFU CIMIC officers began to participate in advanced training courses in foreign military universities and the training centers of NATO member states (the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Poland, and Romania). During this time period, CIMIC personnel regularly participated in joint peacekeeping operations and multinational exercises to increase the interoperability of the Ukrainian and NATO CIMIC systems.⁴⁷

Further progress institutionalizing the role of CIMIC officers was made in January 2019, when a Decree of the President of Ukraine added the task of “planning, organization and control of the implementation of civil–military cooperation activities” to the responsibilities of the AFU General Staff.⁴⁸ This decree was followed in April 2019 by the approval and publication of “Guidelines on Civil–Military Cooperation in the Development and Employment of the AFU” by the military’s Chief of General Staff. These guidelines outline how CIMIC activities should be planned and managed, introduce the core functions and responsibilities of CIMIC staff, oblige military commanders to include CIMIC staff in planning groups, and clarify that CIMIC staff should work in close cooperation with all other military staff branches through participation in cross-headquarters processes and bodies. It also explains that, to be effective, CIMIC officers must be involved in ground reconnaissance missions and should maintain close contact with other relevant government entities and non-governmental organizations ahead of operations.⁴⁹

The CIMIC Concept on the Eve of Russia’s Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine

In July 2020, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine approved civil–military cooperation doctrine establishing the modern concept of CIMIC. This significant development occurred prior to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine and played a crucial role in shaping the CIMIC framework.⁵⁰ The doctrine outlines the purpose, basic principles of organization, functions, and components of the CIMIC system, taking into account various forms of AFU deployments. For the first time, the doctrine presents the CIMIC system as consisting of four interrelated components: civil–military liaison, support to the force, support to non-military actors, and assessing the civil environment (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 – CIMIC system



The goal of the “support to the force” component of CIMIC activities is to minimize the negative impact of non-military activities on military operations. The objective of the “civil–military liaison” component is to establish and maintain communication with non-military actors at the appropriate levels, thus facilitating interaction, information sharing, and alignment of activities. CIMIC “support to non-military actors” and “assessment of the civil environment” are generally carried out to create conditions that facilitate the accomplishment of military missions. Establishing relationships with non-military actors can lead to enhanced information exchange, while assessing the civil environment allows military actors to evaluate and better understand the situation in areas where military operations are being conducted. It enables them to predict potential developments and consider the possible impact of combat operations on civilians. Such assessments can have a significant impact on the planning and conduct of operations. Meanwhile, CIMIC officers are also sometimes responsible for facilitating the provision of aid to residents by local government institutions and actors. Beyond these critical functions, the long-term goals of civil–military cooperation, as outlined in Ukraine’s doctrine, are to increase the level of mutual trust between citizens and the AFU and raise the level of awareness among service members of misconduct that violates the rights, freedoms, and interests of the civilian population.

Before Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the CIMIC department developed a draft presidential decree on a national strategy for the protection of civilians in armed conflicts based on the decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine. This draft document, which was developed alongside other AFU institutions and with significant contributions from CIVIC, included a requirement for developing an Action Plan for implementing the strategy. The strategy has not yet been adopted, but, when it is, CIMIC officers are expected to play a considerable role in implementing the policy and creating comprehensive mechanisms for reducing harm to civilians during armed conflicts.

CIMIC IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGH-INTENSITY CONFLICT AFTER FEBRUARY 24, 2022

A Growing CIMIC Role in the Protection of Civilians

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine—which has included indiscriminate aerial bombardment of towns and villages as well as targeting of infrastructure critical to civilian survival and well-being—has driven large-scale civilian flight and evacuations from areas under threat. In 2022, after the invasion, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy declared martial law, which led to the transformation of all Cas and MCAs into Military Administrations (MAs). These MAs supersede and perform the tasks of local authorities, and they exercise additional powers to guarantee the implementation of martial law, territorial defense, and protection of civilians and critical infrastructure. The President of Ukraine approved the formation of 24 regional MAs, as well as Kyiv's city state MA and a number of district MAs throughout Ukraine.⁵¹

During periods of war, MAs are principally responsible for deciding when, where, and how any evacuation efforts will be conducted, while the military bears the responsibility for authorizing routes, selecting locations for refugee camps, and devising security and support plans. MAs combine the knowledge of civilian and military officials; for this reason, their main objective is to devise protocols for utilizing shelters and other installations to safeguard civilian populations.⁵²

Military doctrine stipulates that CIMIC units are the principal entity tasked with coordinating POC measures between the newly created MAs and military commanders. Therefore, during the current phase of the war, CIMIC officers have a critical role in facilitating the evacuation of civilians from insecure areas by linking the plans and activities of MAs and military commanders on evacuations. They also help facilitate other types of protection planning and distribute critical information to civilians, such as information about the construction and locations of shelters.⁵³

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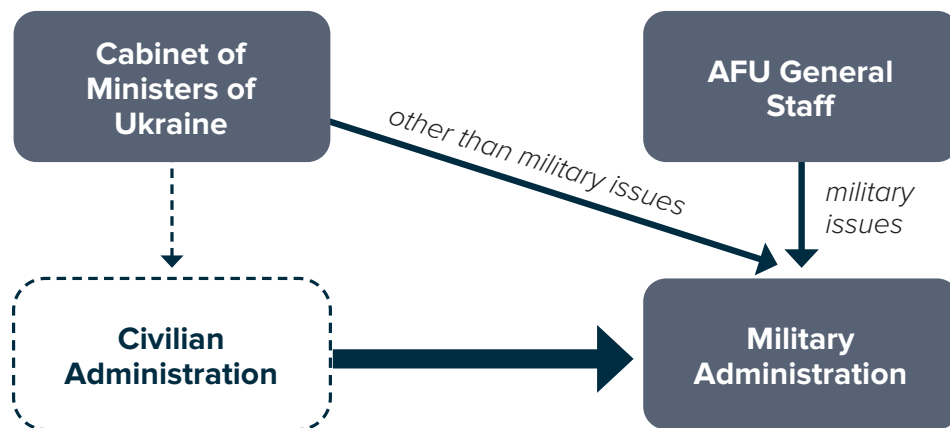
FRAMEWORK FOR ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN CIMIC OFFICERS AND MILITARY ADMINISTRATIONS IN TIMES OF WAR

CIMIC officers have had a role in cooperating with local administrations to support a variety of aims, including:

- protecting the life, health, and physical and psychological well-being of citizens living in territories adjacent to areas of military operations;
- helping citizens living in temporarily occupied territories, or so called “gray zones,” meet their basic needs;
- providing additional protections for certain categories of vulnerable citizens, including internally displaced persons, people with disabilities, the elderly, children, etc.;
- protecting and restoring critical infrastructure facilities under the responsibility of local public administrations;
- organizing patriotic and educational activities.

Military Administrations were established to ensure effective response to security concerns in their respective regions. According to the law “On the legal regime of martial law,” MAs are bodies of dual subordination, depending on the area of activity (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 – MA hierarchy



Under the legal regime of martial law, the AFU General Staff is responsible for directing, coordinating, and controlling the activities of regional MAs on defense and implementing measures related to martial law. Meanwhile, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine is responsible for directing, coordinating, and controlling the regional MAs in matters other than defense. The law also guarantees human and civil rights and freedoms, as well as the rights and legitimate interests of legal entities during the implementation of martial law.⁵⁴

Articles 4 and 8 of this law oblige MAs in respective territories to implement the following POC measures in collaboration with military commanders:

- organizing and participating in actions related to military mobilization preparation and civil protection;
- maintaining and regulating the use of civil protection facilities (which include different types of bomb shelters and basements), early warning systems, and evacuation plans;
- providing the population, when necessary, with a rationed supply of basic food, drinking water, and other non-food essentials;
- carrying out other activities specified by international humanitarian law.

Regarding evacuation, the law states that MAs will support the evacuation of civilians under threat of an emergency situation—as well those in areas of armed conflict or possible hostilities—to safe areas. The law also states that, in such circumstances, MAs will also support the evacuation of material resources, businesses, and organizations that are critical to life support or that have economic or cultural value. In addition, MAs are responsible for evacuating detainees and convicted persons to prisons in safe areas.⁵⁵ The head of the MAs possesses complete control over local budget allocations, thereby giving them the ability to fund POC measures independently—including, for example, the maintenance, repair, and construction civil protection facilities.⁵⁶

How effectively these MAs function and engage with CIMIC officers, as well as the degree of clarity in the legal provisions that have established these administrations, can have a significant impact on protection of civilians. As with the text authorizing the creation of the MCAs, the law establishing MAs does not outline a clear mechanism for the interaction of MAs and military commanders. Furthermore, the law lacks a clear definition of the General Staff's authority concerning POC. These gaps can result in reduced efficiency and can slow down POC efforts. For instance, some military commanders at the tactical level refused to participate in meetings held by MA heads and refused to follow their instructions. In most cases where effective interaction between the parties did occur, it was a result of personal contacts and relationships rather than functioning structures.⁵⁷

In some of the areas under the control of MAs, the authorities have imposed curfews that require citizens to limit or stop outside movement during certain hours or that require special permits for movement during some hours. MAs have authority to establish and control these curfew measures, while the militaries enforce them through the implementation of screening at special checkpoints. In their liaison capacity, CIMIC officers should be involved in coordinating such tasks and protocols between these entities, helping MAs disseminate information to civilians about curfew requirements and, in some cases, producing instructions for how civilians should act to avoid issues at checkpoints.⁵⁸

CIMIC officers shared some positive examples of civil–military collaboration with CIVIC that were driven by local CIMIC officers' initiatives and that they felt saved civilian lives. One CIMIC officer, for example, told CIVIC that between March and April 2022, CIMIC groups successfully organized the evacuation of inhabitants residing in close proximity to the combat zone in Donetsk to safer regions of Ukraine.⁵⁹ A second CIMIC officer told CIVIC that CIMIC units supported the evacuation of over 120,000 civilians from Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions through multiple different routes between March and May 2022.⁶⁰ CIMIC officers supported these efforts by facilitating cooperation between MAs, military commanders, and humanitarian organizations. Notably, the CIMIC officers also reportedly maintained close contact with artillery commanders to avoid the risk of friendly fire during convoy movements.⁶¹ In both cases, the CIMIC officers who spoke about the operations credited their success to the personal initiatives and strong communication of individual military and civilian officials involved.⁶²

One critical protection function of CIMIC components in the current phase of the war has been supporting analysis for all military operation plans on political, military, economic, social, information, and infrastructure (PMESII), as well as developing a sequence of steps for the evacuation of civilians and precautions that will be taken to minimize civilian harm. PMESIIs are designed to give the military holistic insight into civilian environment and how these operational variables will likely aid or hinder the success of the military's mission. They can be critical for ensuring that militaries support civilian protection and avoid harming civilians as they engage in combat. CIVIC has learned that the PMESII approach has not only been incorporated into the training process for CIMIC officers but has also begun to be applied in the decision-making process of military commanders. For example, in Operational-Strategic Command "North," CIMIC officers use this approach to assess the civilian environment and take an active part in planning military operations.⁶³

Despite some warnings and indications of impending Russian aggression, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine caught many actors inside the country off guard.⁶⁴ Many humanitarian agencies were also unprepared for the scale and scope of the humanitarian needs that resulted from the invasion and struggled to deliver assistance because of access and security constraints. While a variety of national and volunteer organizations emerged to help respond to emerging needs, the Ukrainian military—including CIMIC officers—played a significant role in bringing assistance to front-line settlements and evacuees to help fill urgent gaps, including by delivering food, clothing, and heating equipment in the Donetsk region and water purification filters in the Zhytomyr and Mykolaiv regions.⁶⁵ CIVIC's research identified some examples of how CIMIC officers facilitated collaboration between the military and volunteer organizations to deliver such live-saving support.⁶⁶

Despite some warnings and indications of impending Russian aggression, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine caught many actors inside the country off guard.

In another instance of CIMIC operations, a CIMIC unit at the Operational Groups of Forces in the North of Ukraine effectively coordinated with military and civilian authorities on the possible evacuation of civilians from areas where hostilities were expected to occur due to a potential invasion from Belarus. All defense and stabilization operation plans included CIMIC components with PMESII analysis of the Area of Responsibility (AOR), a sequence of steps for the evacuation of civilians, and necessary precautions to minimize civilian harm.⁶⁷

Furthermore, CIMIC officers have undertaken activities independently and sometimes in collaboration with international and Ukrainian NGOs, national police forces, and the State Emergency Service to help civilians safeguard themselves. Such activities have included safety training for the conditions of armed conflict, addressing topics like mine awareness, the use of personal protective equipment, safe behavior when encountering missile and drone fragments, and tactical first-aid classes.⁶⁸

Finally, the military has helped calm panic and support community moral and unity through their strategic communications and messaging. To support this area of work, CIMIC officers have organized events in collaboration with the communications departments of local governments and military administrations.⁶⁹



Serhii Tarasov / CIVIC

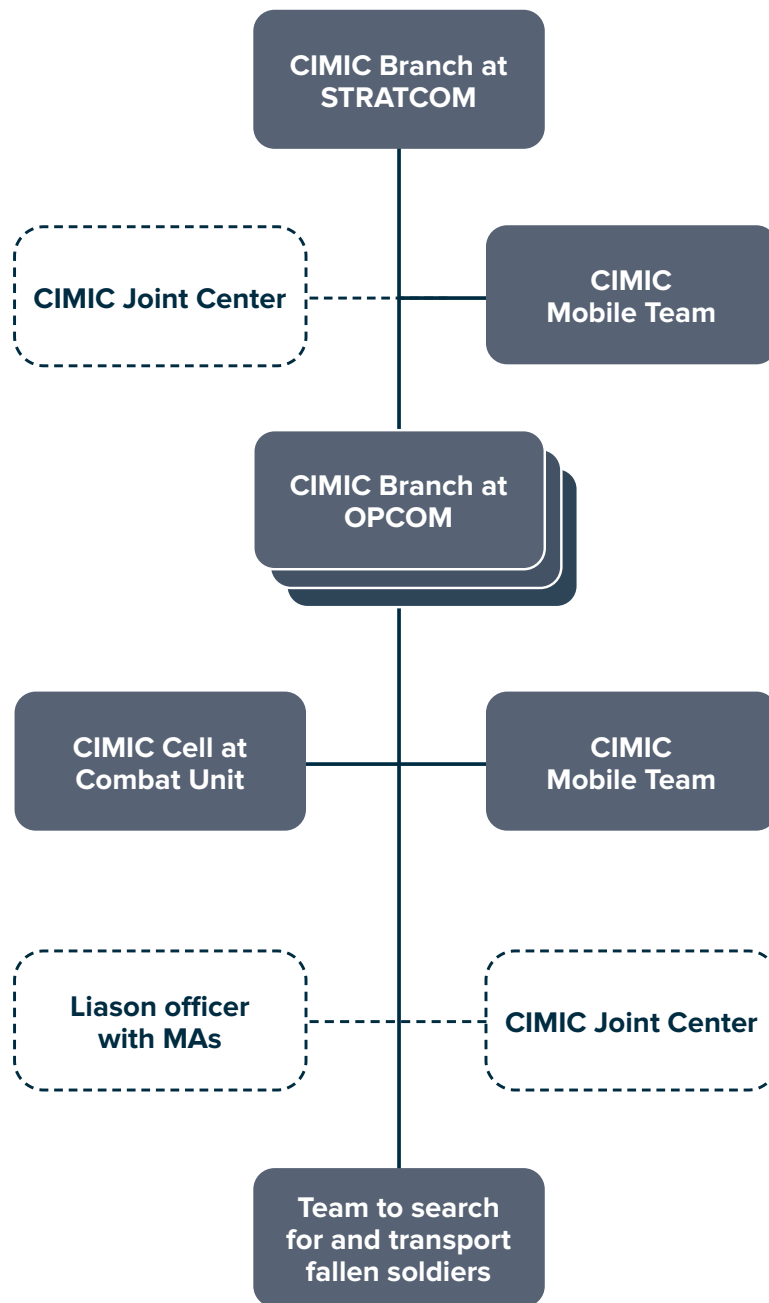
March 2016, Donetsk region: Unloading of humanitarian aid from the ICRC

Shifting CIMIC Structures

Although many of the POC activities undertaken by CIMIC officers since February 2022 are not new for them, the high-intensity context in which they are being implemented is new. Indeed, the scale of the demand for POC activities is unprecedented in Ukraine. The pre-war CIMIC structures, which were still in a stage of growing capability when Russia launched its full-scale invasion, were insufficient to meet the massive demand created by the invasion and the resulting risks to civilians. To meet the new requirements, the CIMIC structure underwent adjustments and modifications in 2022. First, the CIMIC Department of the General Staff for the AFU expanded its personnel.⁷⁰ While the CIMIC Centers in Mariupol, Kramatorsk, and Sievierodonetsk were shuttered when the invasion began, the Special Operations Forces Command established a CIMIC Center after the invasion and the number of CIMIC groups in the Component and Operational Commands increased. At the tactical level, each brigade formed a three-member CIMIC team.⁷¹

In November 2022, the Commander-in-Chief of the AFU also approved the structure of CIMIC units (illustrated by Figure 3). As prescribed by regulation, CIMIC units should consist of several components, including CIMIC branches at Strategic Command (STRATCOM) and Operational Commands (OPCOM), CIMIC Mobile Teams, CIMIC cells at Combat Unit, and CIMIC teams dedicated to searching for and transporting soldiers KIA. Furthermore, where feasible, CIMIC Joint Centers and Liaison Officers to Military Advisors (MAs) may be established. Additionally, the regulation outlines the principal duties, staffing, training, and rotations required for CIMIC units.⁷²

Figure 3 – New CIMIC unit structure



During the early months of 2022, Territorial Defense Forces (TDFs) were being created across Ukraine as a separate component of the AFU. At the point, work began to establish a new structure for the TDF. In January 2022, on the eve of the invasion, the TDF structure was comprised of TDF Command, 4 TDF Operational Commands, and 25 TDF brigades (each brigade per one region of Ukraine). Within this new structure, each command has a CIMIC section comprising between three and five officers, whereas brigade headquarters has a CIMIC cell comprising three officers. On February 24, 2022, additional CIMIC teams of two officers were introduced at the battalion level to increase the CIMIC capability.⁷³

While these structural changes were intended to increase the AFU's CIMIC capacity by creating additional CIMIC positions, CIMIC officers were either redeployed from upper-level commands or reassigned local officers. Most of the officers who were moved into CIMIC roles lacked adequate training, including those in the newly created TDF units. This issue is discussed further on the sub-section addressing challenges.⁷⁴

Challenges and Gaps Under the Pressure of High-Intensity Warfare

One of the most pressing challenges for the system of civil–military cooperation in Ukraine is the absence of legislation that defines a role and status for CIMIC. The texts outlining CIMIC activities include provisions of martial law, presidential decrees, and military directives and guidelines. Such normative documents only regulate the actions and obligations of military personnel. Civilians are not bound to comply with them. The legal status of other units within the AFU are defined in Ukrainian legislation, however there still exists a legal gap concerning CIMIC.

Legislation recognizing the CIMIC role could help to promote greater awareness of civil–military cooperation and its purpose, which is greatly needed. During interviews with representatives of military administrations, government agencies, and military commanders, CIVIC identified a deficiency in understanding regarding the nature of civil–military cooperation. In some instances, local civilian authorities were unaware of the existence of the CIMIC department, and some military commanders failed to comprehend its full or added value. As a consequence, CIMIC officers were frequently assigned duties outside of their primary role or restricted to performing only one of their intended activities, such as the search, recovery, and transportation of soldiers killed in action.⁷⁵ This amounts to a misappropriation of resources and an underutilization of capabilities.

While CIVIC found that some CIMIC officers were restricted to performing only a few of their mandated tasks, others were over-tasked with a high volume of competing demands. For example, CIMIC officers had to visit the communities in their AORs regularly to remain in contact with local authorities, staff at educational and medical institutions, and other community members while also personally participating in the evacuation of endangered civilians and delivering critical material assistance to civilians who remained in front-line areas.

While many new CIMIC units were formed to help meet the increase in AORs and the range of CIMIC tasks, the logistics and transportation support for the new CIMIC units did not keep up with growing demand, and CIMIC units faced a serious problem with transportation. It is important to emphasize that this was already a problem before 2022. But it has become worse since the full-scale invasion. At the time of CIVIC's research, stakeholders reported that only about 20 percent of CIMIC units were equipped with vehicles that were officially on the brigade's balance and maintained and fueled by respective brigade commanders. Another 60 percent of CIMIC units were using civilian cars that had been donated by volunteer organizations. Due to a complex bureaucratic system, these vehicles could not be officially maintained and fueled by the brigades. Use of these unarmored civilian vehicles in areas where the parties to the conflict are using heavy firepower limits the ability of CIMIC officers to perform their roles. It also places the lives of CIMIC officers—and the civilians who they are personally helping to evacuate—at risk. The remaining 20 percent of the CIMIC teams addressed by CIVIC were not equipped with any transportation assets, and therefore were not always able to reach all settlements in their AORs.⁷⁶

The rapid increase in CIMIC officers has also led to gaps in training that effect the performance of CIMIC units. The Military Institute of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv trains less than twenty cadets per year under the “Civil–Military Relations” program, which is critically insufficient to



Serhii Tarasov / CIVIC

January 2016, Donetsk region: CIMIC team meets with residents of communities in the area of operation

provide CIMIC units with qualified specialists in the current high-intensity conflict. Additionally, officers with other MOS codes were appointed to CIMIC positions without a proper, professional training and selection process. In the 2015–2018 period, there was a system for evaluating officers on their intellectual, communicative, and other professionally relevant qualities during the CIMIC training process to ensure high-quality CIMIC officers. However, this selection and training process was subsequently abandoned, contributing to a decrease in the quality of CIMIC personnel. Moreover, these problems have been further exacerbated by the pace of the conflict since February 2022.⁷⁷

The TDF, which Ukraine began forming in early 2022, have suffered from similar shortcomings. The staffing of the TDF Command and brigades occurred rapidly and, at times, chaotically, without professional recruitment and training. Several positions faced a severe shortage of officers, resulting in the deployment of CIMIC officers without appropriate training or selection. Consequently, during the initial months of high-intensity combat operations, TDF CIMIC officers and their commanders were carrying out CIMIC activities somewhat haphazardly without full understanding of the functions, tasks, and operating procedures of civil–military cooperation.⁷⁸ TDF CIMIC officers lacked strong communication and negotiation skills and did not have the full understanding and support of their commanders to focus on CIMIC activities. The success of CIMIC in this context has been driven by the interpersonal soft skills of individual officers, including the ability to work together, take the initiative, adapt, and think creatively.⁷⁹

CIVIC has learned that the Military Institute has developed a resident course called the “CIMIC Professional Development Course” with a duration of up to one month. This could help fill training gaps. However, since February 24, 2022, none of CIMIC’s structural units have attended the course because the training was difficult to arrange during high-intensity warfare. In May 2023, the institute launched its first course, which attracted 33 CIMIC officers from the Army, Navy, and Air Force units.⁸⁰

To enhance the CIMIC capacity of the TDF, CIVIC, in collaboration with the National Defense University of Ukraine, established a three-day course for TDF troops focused on civil–military cooperation and protection of civilians. The course was delivered by an MTT comprising instructors from the National Defense University of Ukraine and a representative from CIVIC between May and December 2022. This MTT has covered almost all regions of Ukraine. It has delivered training for groups of CIMIC officers representing the TDF brigades in a respective area (from 8 to 15 officers each group) and trained approximately 200 CIMIC officers.⁸¹

Alongside the more general pressures of high-intensity conflict, gaps in legislation on CIMIC functions, limited awareness of the role of the CIMIC officers among civilian and military officials, lack of training for CIMIC officers, and constrained resources have contributed to deficits in civil–military engagement. Military and civilian officials are not systematically engaging in the manner envisioned within CIMIC doctrine and AFU guidance for addressing POC issues. These problems extend to all levels of public administration and military command. At times, this has led to inefficient or ineffective use of resources, as well as less-than-optimal performance. At the strategic level, for example, the CIMIC strategic command was isolated from Military Decision-Making Processes (MDMP)⁸² in part due to the lack of clear legal provisions for CIMIC in the defense management system.⁸³

At the operational and tactical levels, the success of military operations has been heavily dependent on the extent to which MAs understand their new roles, coordinate effectively with military commanders, and are fully aware of the Resolution of the Cabinet Ministers “On implementation of the martial law regime activities,”⁸⁴ which outlines cooperation between military forces and public administrations. Unfortunately, these conditions have not often been realized.

At the time of CIVIC’s research, some administrations understood their duties under the resolution, while some did not. Because the MA roles were new, many of the appointed heads of MAs also lacked a full understanding of the role’s functions and structures, leading to some incorrect or uninformed actions. In many cases, MAs, military commanders, and civilian authorities also operated in silos or developed conflicts with each other.⁸⁵ CIVIC’s research indicates that, in the majority of instances, the nexus connecting military leaders, MAs, and other civil entities is limited to the upper echelons of the administration and does not devolve to the lower levels. It appears that the common practice is for brief courtesy calls to be made to establish formal communication channels, without any inclination on either side to maintain ongoing collaboration.⁸⁶ CIVIC observed that during the initial stages of active combat in 2022, there were only a few instances where CIMIC officers maintained strong and enduring relationships with civilian institutions in the operational theatre. For the most part, CIMIC officers were unacquainted with their counterparts in civilian organizations save for certain exceptions where trust and a steady exchange of data existed. As noted, positive examples of collaboration did exist, but these were primarily based on the personal initiative of individuals rather than a broadly functioning system.⁸⁷

In situations where military commanders, MAs, and civilian authorities face conflicts, mediators like CIMIC officers can play a crucial role in resolving issues. While some CIMIC officers have been successful in mediating conflicts, particularly in the Dnipro and Volyn regions, conflicts remain unresolved in many cases due to MAs’ limited understanding of the CIMIC role and how to collaborate effectively with military commanders.

Considering the possibility that many areas of Ukraine may be under military administration for a prolonged period of time, especially in the event of a protracted conflict, it is essential to prepare CIMIC to assume a key role in these circumstances. AFU governance functions will need to extend beyond day-to-day warfare and yield more substantial outcomes. This calls for supporting CIMIC and fostering the development of governance capabilities in order to address the challenges that may arise in these areas without compromising the civilian nature of governance in Ukraine in the long term.⁸⁸

Conflicts and the failure of MAs and military commanders to coordinate effectively have had real consequences for civilians. For example, according to CIVIC's research, authorities did not always provide consolidated or centralized information to the population about the progress of evacuations and mobilization. This left some civilians without critical and potentially life-saving information. Because of the lack of organization of information campaigns in Ukraine, the civilian population was often left to rely on information from open sources such as social media, leaving them vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation.⁸⁹ Given the experience of CIMIC in safeguarding civilians, CIMIC officers could possibly have provided guidance to the regional and local civilian authorities in developing methods for evacuating civilians. However, CIVIC has concluded that there was no centralized effort or direction from CIMIC structures to assist MAs with evacuation policies and procedures.⁹⁰

CIVIC did find that, in the initial stages after the implementation of curfews, there were examples of CIMIC officers disseminating the necessary information to civilians. However, there was not a centralized response on curfews from the CIMIC structures of the AFU. Due to a lack of information and clear communication about procedures, there were numerous episodes in which civilians were confused about how to conduct themselves at checkpoints or the hours of curfew.⁹¹

The limited availability of adequate shelters and other protective structures for civilians has been a serious problem that has contributed to the high number of civilian casualties since February 2022. According to the State Emergency Service of Ukraine, there were approximately 21,000 civil protection facilities registered in Ukraine at the beginning of 2022. Seventy-four percent of these facilities were assessed as ready or partially ready for use as shelters, while 26 percent were rated as not ready at all. Only 10 percent of the population was estimated as being able to access these facilities in a crisis.⁹² The reality appears to have been even worse than these statistics indicate. Many of the registered protective structures turned out to be buildings that did not offer substantive protection from bombardment, or they lacked safe and sanitary conditions for civilians. Civilians who arrived at some of these shelters to seek safety found them locked, with no way for them to enter.⁹³ CIMIC structures and individual officers could interact more actively with civilian authorities and the responsible civilian structures (e.g. the State Emergency Service) and strengthen informing civilians on availability of the shelters, especially in the areas where civilians do not have any access (combat zones).

CONCLUSION

CIMIC officers have a critical role to play in protecting civilians from harm in Ukraine. The establishment of CIMIC as an MOS and the creation of some doctrine and guidance to support CIMIC officers prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine helped lay some of the foundation needed for the current context. However, the scale and pace of the war in Ukraine since 2022 has stretched the capacity of CIMIC units and revealed some underlying weaknesses in the system—including a lack of broad understanding about the role of CIMIC officers—that have prevented them from systematically contributing to coordination and POC efforts. It has also led to cases where CIMIC officers are underutilized—for example, when they are relegated to performing only one of their many functions (like collecting and transporting KIA soldiers) or when they are asked to perform a variety of activities outside their core role.

Ukraine cannot immediately address every gap facing the AFU in the midst of a large-scale invasion. However, it can progressively begin to strengthen how CIMIC officers are trained and equipped, and it can reinforce the importance of their role by filling gaps in legislation and actively cultivating learning from some of the challenges and lessons that have emerged since February 2022.

TIMELINE OF MAJOR MILITARY AND CIMIC DEVELOPMENTS

<i>Year</i>	<i>Development/Activity</i>
1994	Ukraine joins NATO Partnership for Peace.
2014	NATO countries announce their political support for Ukraine in a declaration at Wales Summit.
2014	An urgent need arises to create a mechanism for the search and return of the bodies of Ukrainian soldiers killed in action (KIA) from temporarily occupied territories.
2014	Civil–military cooperation between armed forces and civilian institutions became a distinct operational capability within the AFU.
May 5, 2014	The National Defense University of Ukraine launches a CIMIC training for AFU officers, marking the beginning of the current civil–military cooperation structure and mechanisms.
Sept. 3, 2014	To address the problems resulting from Russia’s attack on Ukraine’s sovereignty, the Ukrainian government develops the «Restore Ukraine» Action Plan.
Jan.–Feb. 2015	Nearly 1,500 citizens of Ukraine are evacuated from Debaltseve city in cooperation with public organizations.
2015	Ukraine resumes its involvement in the force planning and review process within the Partnership for Peace Program framework.
2015	The term civil–military cooperation is officially defined in the White Book of Ukraine’s Ministry of Defense.
2015	The civil and military cooperation system is integrated into the AFU to prevent a humanitarian crisis in the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) zone.
2015	The CIMIC department makes an unsuccessful attempt to fix the CIMIC function within the AFU and within the Defense of Ukraine laws by proposing amendments to the laws that are subsequently discarded by the Parliament.
Feb. 3, 2015	The Law of Ukraine «On Military-Civil Administrations» (MCA) is passed. This legislation defines MCAs as temporary government agencies that are to be established in villages, towns, districts, and regions.
Dec. 2015	The NATO–Ukraine Roadmap on defense and technical cooperation is signed.
Dec. 2015	The NATO CIMIC Centre of Excellence (COE) supports the Civil–Military Mobile Training Team (MTT) by providing the first training for forty-five officers of the AFU on the subject of civil–military cooperation.

2016	The AFU continues to develop the civil–military cooperation mechanism to ensure its long-term sustainability.
July 2016	NATO’s practical support for Ukraine is set out in the Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine during the NATO Summit in Warsaw.
June 2017	The Ukrainian Parliament adopts legislation reinstating membership in NATO as a strategic foreign and security policy objective.
2017	The first Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) are signed with nine international and public charitable organizations working in Ukraine. These agreements enable joint projects to be carried out in subsequent years.
2017	Together with local authorities and State Emergency Service of Ukraine units, CIMIC teams conduct over 40 joint activities related to the restoration of vital infrastructure.
2017	More than 100 people successfully complete the «civil–military cooperation» course under the new “civil–military cooperation” Military Occupational Specialty (MOS).
2017	By the end of the year, the AFU has put in place 20 CIMIC groups and 3 CIMIC centers operating directly in the ATO zones in Sievierodonetsk, Kramatorsk, and Mariupol.
June 2018	As part of the «Building Capacity for the Protection of Civilian People in the East of Ukraine» project, the General Staff signs an MoU with the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC).
2018	The Military Institute of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv conducted the inaugural enrollment of cadets for the professional bachelor’s program in «Civil–Military Relations.»
Jan. 2018	The legal status of CIMIC is established as an element of the AFU.
2019	Legislation reinstates Ukraine’s membership to NATO as a strategic foreign and security policy objective. The legislation is entered into force as a corresponding amendment to Ukraine’s Constitution.
April 2019	The Guidelines on Civil–Military Cooperation in the Development and Employment of the AFU are approved by the Chief of General Staff. The guidelines regulate the planning and management of CIMIC activities during the planning and execution of military operations.
Dec. 2019	The NATO–Ukraine Roadmap is updated in Brussels as part of a periodic review of NATO–Ukraine cooperation.
2019	AFU Defense Review.
Jan.–Mar. 2020	Transition of the General Staff of the AFU to the NATO military structure.

2020	From a pool of 112 candidates, 14 are selected and trained in CIMIC as part of a training curriculum at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.
2021	The first stage of capabilities-based defense planning («Capabilities Planning») is completed; the Military Security Strategy of Ukraine and the Strategic Defense Bulletin of Ukraine are developed and enacted.
Mar. 25, 2021	The Military Security Strategy of Ukraine is developed and approved by the Decree of the President of Ukraine. It provides for the development of a distinctive partnership with NATO with the aim of NATO membership.
Jan. 2022	21,000 civil protection facilities (74 percent) are registered as ready for their intended use, according to the State Emergency Service of Ukraine.
Feb.–Mar. 2022	Russian troops launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine and rapidly advance in multiple areas in the South, North, and East of Ukraine.
Jan.–Mar. 2022	The reforms undertaken by the AFU are well into the next cycle of capability development (from political guidance through requirement identification) and the subsequent planning steps (through acquisition, fielding, and in-service management).
Jan.–Mar. 2022	Work is underway to establish a new command structure for Territorial Defense Forces (TDF). TDF brigades are being created across Ukraine, with each brigade headquarters featuring a CIMIC cell comprised of two to three officers.
Feb. 2022	There continues to be a significant lack of preparedness for cooperation between civilian authorities and local military commanders, which results in organizational silos.
Mar.–April 2022	CIMIC groups successfully organize the evacuation of inhabitants residing in close proximity to the combat zone in Donetsk to safer regions of Ukraine.
August 2022	A law is passed mandating the placement of civil protection facilities, specifically bomb shelters, during the construction of buildings intended to accommodate more than 50 people.
Nov. 11, 2022	Local authorities and MCA/MAs are obliged to develop and approve their plans for accommodation and sheltering the population in protective structures, dual-purpose structures, and simple shelters.
Nov. 2022	The Commander-in-Chief of the AFU approves a temporary directive on CIMIC units that are part of the task forces established to resist Russian aggression.
May–Dec. 2022	A group of 8–15 CIMIC officers from neighboring TDF brigades are trained in a three-day course.
2023	The Military Institute of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv has been training fourteen cadets per year under the “Civil–Military Relations” program.

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