

## Lessons from the Strategic and Operational CIMIC Role in NATO's COVID-19 Pandemic Response

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### Project Overview



The Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) function was critical in facilitating NATO's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. From providing military airlifts, setting up field hospitals, sharing medical expertise, NATO CIMIC staff helped the civilian efforts in delivering aid to parts of the world most in need.

Such complex coordination falls under the NATO premise that CIMIC is *"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."*

Therefore, SHAPE J9 and the CIMIC staff at the military-strategic and operational levels continuously liaised with NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre, national authorities, and humanitarian and international organizations.

### Tasking

The CIMIC staff's activities within the NATO COVID-19 pandemic response demonstrated the importance of CIMIC in reacting to current and future global emergencies. It is therefore crucial to capture their knowledge and experiences before these are lost due to staff rotations and competing priorities. To this end, data collection relied on first-hand accounts from stakeholder interviews, and was supplemented by relevant document research.



**"...the concept of making friends before you need them is a critical enabler of successful civil-military liaison, a central component of the J9 function."**



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## Key Takeaways

After investigating the experiences of CIMIC staff directly involved in the initial COVID-19 response, two key takeaways were identified. The first takeaway is that, during the initial COVID-19 response, CIMIC staff were reliant on *ad hoc* arrangements. The second asserts that, in order to be a successful civil-military liaison, you have to “*make friends before you need them*”, highlighting the importance of civil-military interaction and familiarity prior to crisis response.



## Conclusions

Three overarching conclusions regarding what could be improved in future pandemic responses emerged. One conclusion was the need to ensure cross-functional coordination between all CIMIC actors, both within and external to NATO. The second conclusion found that CIMIC Education as well as Individual Training would benefit from being more dynamic, in order to account for the constantly evolving Strategic Environment and CIMIC’s role therein. Lastly, additional CIMIC staff resources and tools should be provided to facilitate stronger civil-military partnerships and assist in the execution of the CIMIC staff role.



## Project Team

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