

Medical Aspects of Civil-Military Cooperation During GRC Participation in NATO, UN, and EU Missions

Aspects médicaux de la coopération civilo-militaire lors de la participation du GRC à des missions de l'OTAN, de l'ONU et de l'UE

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Abstract

Civil-Military (CIMIC) cooperation is crucial for effective deployment, particularly during participation in NATO, UN, and EU missions. The medical aspects of CIMIC cooperation involve strategies such as joint medical teams, standardized procedures, and interoperable systems to ensure medical readiness and response capabilities. Training initiatives and capacity-building efforts are essential for strengthening healthcare infrastructure in mission areas. Effective CIMIC cooperation enhances operational effectiveness by integrating diverse capabilities, improving resource utilization, and building local capacity. The contributions of the Hellenic Armed Forces Medical Services, Greece (GRC) to peacekeeping and disaster response missions illustrate the practical application of these strategies. Overall, the integration of medical readiness within CIMIC cooperation frameworks significantly enhances the effectiveness of international missions, supporting humanitarian efforts and ensuring civilian protection.

Keywords: Civil-Military Cooperation, medical readiness, humanitarian assistance, disaster response

Résumé

La coopération civilo-militaire est primordiale pour un déploiement efficace, en particulier lors de la participation à des missions de l'OTAN, de l'ONU et de l'UE. Les aspects médicaux de la coopération civilo-militaire impliquent des stratégies telles que des équipes médicales conjointes, des procédures normalisées et des systèmes interoperables afin de garantir la préparation médicale et les capacités de réponse. Les initiatives de formation et les efforts de renforcement des capacités sont essentiels pour consolider l'infrastructure des soins de santé dans les zones de mission. Une coopération efficace renforce l'efficacité opérationnelle en intégrant diverses capacités, en améliorant l'utilisation des ressources et en renforçant les capacités locales. Les contributions des services médicaux des forces armées helléniques, Grèce (GRC) aux missions de maintien de la paix et de réponse aux catastrophes illustrent l'application pratique de ces stratégies. Dans l'ensemble, l'intégration de la préparation médicale dans les cadres de coopération civilo-militaire améliore considérablement l'efficacité des missions internationales, en soutenant les efforts humanitaires et en assurant la protection des civils.

Mots-clés : Coopération civilo-militaire, préparation médicale, aide humanitaire, réponse aux catastrophes

Introduction

Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) forms a critical link between military capabilities and humanitarian objectives. CIMIC is embedded in international doctrines and is vital for peacekeeping, disaster response, and stabilization missions. It underscores the importance of respecting human rights, adhering to international law, and upholding the principles of humanitarian assistance.

Main Part

Definition

Civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) is a joint function that supports mission objectives by facilitating effective interaction between NATO commands and diverse non-military

actors (1). The primary aim is to harmonize activities with civilian organizations to minimize conflicts and enhance operational effectiveness, ensuring that all actions contribute positively to the mission and the civil environment(1). CIMIC enhances operational effectiveness by integrating diverse capabilities, improving resource utilization, and building local capacity(2).

Historical Evolution

CIMIC has evolved from ad-hoc military interactions during wartime to structured formal engagements in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions post-WWII(2,3). Key historical milestones include the establishment of NATO CIMIC and the expansion to include disaster response, stability operations, and health crisis management(2). Until the early 1980s, Greece's (GRC) participa-

tion was limited to a small number of observers and small military units, at the Battalion level, with a few exceptions, such as the Korean War(4). The Peace Support Operations, in which the Hellenic Armed Forces participated in the last decade of the 20th century and which continue in the early 21st century, have shown the quick and effective adaptability to the scenarios and requirements that concern the International Community.

Medical Readiness and Contributions of CIMIC

Medical readiness is a fundamental component of successful CIMIC collaboration. Key strategies include joint medical teams, standardized procedures, continuous training initiatives, and interoperable systems to enhance response capabilities(5). In inter-



Figure 1. Hellenic Armed Forces Officer with Local Children During the Mission in Afghanistan.
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national missions, medical readiness goes beyond preparedness—it encompasses swift and effective action in the field. CIMIC has been crucial in managing health disasters, with joint efforts between military and civilian authorities being essential. Effective CIMIC ensures that medical teams are coordinated, procedures are standardized, and systems are interoperable, which is vital for medical readiness and response capabilities. Moreover, establishing robust legal and institutional frameworks is fundamental to sustaining these efforts, ensuring that both civilian protection and health disaster management are carried out systematically and effectively. Medical CIMIC in Europe reveals a proactive and collaborative approach to health crises, with notable efforts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Research by Gad et al. (2021) highlights how multiple European countries have leveraged civil-military partnerships to support their national health systems, particularly during the early phases of the pandemic(6). In Portugal, as Reis (2021) points out, the Armed Forces played a key role in reinforcing the logistical backbone of the health-care system(7). These examples underscore the significance of integrating military capabilities with civilian medical expertise to address public health challenges.

The Hellenic Army Medical Services Contribution(4)

As a full member of the UN, NATO, and the EU, Greece participates in Peacekeeping

Operations, Peace Observation, and Protection of Humanitarian Operations, focusing on areas like the Balkans and the Middle East, with personnel from all the Military Branches of the Hellenic Armed Forces. Greece has actively contributed to various international missions by providing health assistance, demonstrating the country's commitment to global peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts. Notable completed operations include: Somalia "UNITAF" (1993-1994), Afghanistan – Resolute Support Mission (2005), Mission Concordia (2003), Sudan – UNMIS (2004). Two of the most significant missions involving Greek health assistance were in Somalia and Afghanistan. In Wajit, Somalia, the Greek detachment provided medical care to approximately 2,500 patients, examined around 550 patients at the unit clinic, organized 60 food distribution missions, and staffed the Wajit City Clinic under the supervision of "Doctors of the World." In Afghanistan, from August 2005 to April 2007, the 299 Mobile Surgical Campaign Hospital operated at Kabul International Airport, offering support to the Hellenic Force and ISAF staff, training Afghan doctors, and donating medical supplies to the Afghan government (Fig.1). These missions underscore the importance of medical support in enhancing operational effectiveness and ensuring the well-being of both military personnel and civilians in crisis zones. The Hellenic Armed Forces have actively provided medical and humanitarian assistance both internation-

ally and domestically, exemplifying Greece's dedication to humanitarian relief. This commitment was evident during the 2015 refugee crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and natural disasters like the 2023 Thessaly flood caused by storm "Daniel." The Armed Forces have offered medical and humanitarian aid to migrant and refugee camps, extended military medical support during the COVID-19 crisis by managing the supply chain, vaccine distribution, and providing medical assistance to civilians with military medical personnel (Fig.2). They also contributed aid following the storm "Daniel" in Thessaly. Each mission illustrates Greece's unwavering dedication to international support and readiness to extend humanitarian aid.

Challenges, Opportunities, and Future Directions in CIMIC

Challenges in CIMIC include differing organizational cultures, communication barriers, and coordination complexity(8). However, opportunities arise in leveraging military logistical capabilities, sharing expertise, enhancing community resilience, and expanding rapid deployment capabilities(9). Legal and ethical considerations are fundamental to effective CIMIC. These include adherence to international humanitarian law, upholding human rights, ensuring accountability and transparency, and respecting civilian sovereignty(10,11). Effective communication, shared training, local community engagement, and flexibility are crucial lessons from past CIMIC efforts(12). Recent history shows CIMIC's evolution in post-conflict situations, response to environmental challenges, and the strategic importance of the civilian domain in hybrid warfare(13). Future directions in CIMIC include increasing reliance on telemedicine, implementing AI for real-time health monitoring, enhancing medical training and simulations, and strengthening legal and ethical frameworks. Building resilient health systems and fostering long-term partnerships are also essential.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the past achievements and challenges in Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC), it is essential to continuously evolve and adapt strategies to meet future demands. Effective CIMIC cooperation, particularly in the medical field, is critical to the success of international missions. Continuous improvement and adaptation of



Figure 2. Visit of Armed Forces Major Generals to a Vaccination Center Managed and Staffed by Armed Forces Personnel. source: <http://geetha.mil.gr> for educational purposes only

strategies are necessary to address the complexities of modern peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts. President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890-1969) famously said, “Plans are nothing; planning is everything”. This principle resonates deeply within the context of medical civil-military operations. As we navigate an ever-changing world, our commitment to confront these challenges directly will shape our future. Medical readiness is crucial in addressing European challenges such as the Ukraine conflict, pandemics, and climate crises. The stakes are too high for inaction. Our steadfast determination drives our continuous efforts to ensure that our military presence supports and enhances civilian operations, maintaining crucial neutrality and effectiveness.

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CAPTAIN Maria-Christina GIANNAKOPOULOU



Captain Maria-Christina GIANNAKOPOULOU was born on September 30, 1990, in Athens, Greece. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (2013) from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. Additionally, she earned an MSc in Crisis and Disaster Management from the same university, focusing on pharmacological factors in dealing with terrorist threats (2019), and an MSc in Epidemiology where she conducted a prevalence study of the novel SARS-CoV-2 strain in healthy young adults (2022). In her service career, Captain Giannakopoulou served as a Nurse at the 251 Hellenic Air Force General Hospital in Athens, Greece. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she served at the 251 Hellenic Air Force General Hospital as a COVID-19 ward Nurse and she also served as a Staff Officer in the Medical Directorate at both the Hellenic National Defence General Staff and the Hellenic Air Force General Staff providing pandemic-related scientific reporting, and surveillance research. She has also served as a Nurse-Epidemiologist at the 1st Army / EU-OHQ / “Achilles” in Larissa, Greece, providing medical support for armed forces personnel involved in civil aid following the aftermath of storm “Daniel” in Thessaly, Greece.