

What is United Nations Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination?

When an emergency or natural disaster creates humanitarian needs, many countries will deploy their militaries or paramilitary organizations to respond. Bilateral support to disaster-affected States can also be provided through international deployment of foreign military actors and assets. When local and international humanitarian organizations are also involved in that response, it is essential that they can operate in the same space without detriment to the civilian character of humanitarian assistance.

It is for this reason that United Nations Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination (UN-CMCoord) facilitates dialogue and interaction between civilian and military actors—essential for protecting and promoting humanitarian principles, avoiding competition, minimizing inconsistency and, when appropriate, pursuing common goals.

UN-CMCoord is a framework that enhances a broad understanding of humanitarian action, and guides political and military actors on how best to support that action.

It helps to develop context-specific policy based on internationally agreed guidelines, and it establishes humanitarian civil-military coordination structures, ensuring staff members are trained to make that coordination work. UN-CMCoord is particularly essential in complex emergencies and high-risk environments in order to facilitate humanitarian access, the protection of civilians and the security of humanitarian aid workers.

UN-CMCoord in natural disasters

The Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief (Oslo Guidelines) were developed through an intergovernmental, inter-agency process. It sought to ensure that foreign military and civil defence assets, such as helicopters and ships, deployed

in response to a natural disaster can support and complement relief operations. However, such assets must not be used in a manner that would compromise the civilian nature and character of humanitarian assistance. With military assets frequently used by States to support relief efforts, OCHA

and its humanitarian partners are obliged to work with Member States to incorporate the possibility of military-asset use into contingency planning, and to engage military actors early in the response in order to guide military efforts and protect humanitarian space.

UN-CMCoord in complex emergencies

In a conflict or high-risk environment, using military assets to support humanitarian action becomes more complicated, particularly if military actors are party to the conflict. The Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies (MCDA Guidelines) explain that even greater restrictions should be placed on military asset use in a non-benign environment. This is to preserve the impartiality, neutrality and operational independence of humanitarians

and humanitarian assistance. In complex emergencies, the interaction facilitated by UN-CMCoord aims to ensure the security of humanitarian personnel and operations, and maintain humanitarian access. In certain circumstances, this may involve mobilizing military and civil defence assets to support humanitarian assistance. This can take the form of engineering support, and the provision of escorts, security patrols or transport. If the security environment prevents humanitarian access to certain areas, military actors may be asked to provide direct

life-saving support, but only until access is restored.

The UN integrated-mission model creates a way for UN peacekeeping contingents and humanitarians to work alongside each other (see *OCHA on Message: Integration and IASC Reference Paper on Civil-Military Relationship in Complex Emergencies*).

However, some Governments have adopted strategies that include humanitarian-type activities as part of a comprehensive or whole-of-Government approach to achieve stabilization. This is to

be avoided, as it can undermine the core principles of humanitarian assistance and reduce humanitarian space. Such overlaps with humanitarian assistance can

hamper aid delivery, create access problems and threaten the security of humanitarian personnel. Effective humanitarian civil-military coordination in complex

emergencies ensures that humanitarian action is seen as distinct, while also identifying areas where humanitarian civil-military interaction is possible.

What is OCHA's role?

Humanitarian civil-military coordination is one of OCHA's core functions. In humanitarian operations with a military presence, OCHA leads the establishment and management of interaction with military actors. This relationship will change depending on the type of emergency and the roles and responsibilities of the military. OCHA supports humanitarian and military actors through training and advocacy on the guidelines that govern the use of foreign military and civil defence assets and humanitarian civil-military interaction. OCHA also seeks to establish a predictable approach to the use of these

assets by considering their use during preparedness and contingency-planning activities.

OCHA's Geneva-based Civil-Military Coordination Section (CMCS) supports relevant field- and headquarter-level activities. As custodian of UN-CMCoord-related guidelines, CMCS helps humanitarian actors develop context-specific guidelines tailored to a particular situation. CMCS also runs a training programme that equips humanitarian and military actors with the skills and knowledge necessary to communicate and, where appropriate, effectively interact with each other. It also

prepares and deploys personnel to act as dedicated UN-CMCoord experts to the field.

When necessary, CMCS advises the international community on needs related to mobilizing foreign-military assets in support of relief operations or humanitarian assistance. This takes place through an advocacy strategy that complements and supports discussions at the Under-Secretary-General level, coupled with the publication of operational guidance to the international community.

What does OCHA say?

1. Militaries can valuably contribute to humanitarian action through their ability to rapidly mobilize and deploy unique assets and expertise in response to specifically identified requirements.

2. While military action supports political purposes, humanitarian assistance is based on need and is provided neutrally without taking sides in disputes or political positions on the underlying issues.

4. Humanitarians must be observant when working with the military to ensure it is not compromising the impartiality, operational independence, neutrality and civilian character of humanitarian assistance.

5. Effective and consistent humanitarian civil-military coordination is a shared responsibility, crucial to safeguarding humanitarian principles and humanitarian space.

3. Interaction between humanitarians and the military can range from cooperation to coexistence. OCHA manages coordination within these differing relationships through the UN-CMCoord framework and the application of related guidelines.

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To find out more

- www.unocha.org/what-we-do/coordination-tools/UN-CMCoord/overview
- Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief, (Oslo Guidelines), Rev. 1.1, November 2007
- Civil-Military Guidelines and Reference for Complex Emergencies, 2008, comprising:
 - Civil-Military Relationship in Complex Emergencies – an IASC Reference Paper, June 2004
 - Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies (MCDA Guidelines), Rev. 1, January 2006
 - Use of Military or Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys – IASC Discussion Paper and Non-Binding Guidelines, September 2001 (under revision)
- United Nations Civil-Military Coordination Officer Field Handbook, 2008 (under revision)