

What is United Nations Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination (UN-CMCoord)?

Humanitarian and military or paramilitary actors increasingly operate in the same contexts. In natural, technological or environmental disasters, humanitarians' use of military assets and their coordination with the military focuses on improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the combined efforts. In a complex emergency, such as an armed conflict, co-existence often best describes the relationship

between humanitarian and military actors. Coordination focuses on minimizing competition and inconsistencies, and ensuring a distinction between humanitarian and military objectives and strategies.

It thus ensures humanitarian action is viewed as neutral, impartial and independent. In complex emergencies and natural disasters, the key function of UN-

CMCoord is to determine the most suitable UN-CMCoord structure; assist in developing context-specific guidance—based on internationally agreed guidelines—to establish humanitarian civil-military coordination structures; and ensure all relevant actors understand and apply UN-CMCoord principles.

UN-CMCoord tasks

In complex emergencies and natural disasters, the key coordination elements are information sharing, task division and planning. The scope and technique of these key elements will change with the context, but the five primary tasks are:

- Establish and sustain dialogue with military forces.
- Establish a mechanism for information exchange and humanitarian interaction with military forces and other armed actors.
- Support the development and dissemination of context-specific guidelines for the humanitarian community's interaction with military and armed actors.
- Monitor military forces' activities and ensure they have no negative impact on affected people or the humanitarian community.
- Assist in negotiating issues in critical areas of coordination.

UN-CMCoord definition

"The essential dialogue and interaction between civilian and military actors in humanitarian emergencies that is necessary to protect and promote humanitarian principles, avoid competition, minimize inconsistency and, when appropriate, pursue common goals. Basic strategies range from co-existence to cooperation. Coordination is a shared responsibility facilitated by liaison and common training." (MCDA Guidelines, 2003)

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 works with all actors to overcome the challenges that could arise, such as a lack of humanitarian access, which can be addressed through regular humanitarian negotiation with military actors. OCHA is the custodian of UN-CMCoord Guidelines and related documents. It also conducts the UN-CMCoord training programme, assists in large-scale military exercises and maintains rosters of specifically trained expert personnel. OCHA's Civil-Military Coordination Section is the UN-CMCoord focal point in the UN system, as decided by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in 1995.

What does OCHA say?

“Overall, I think it worked very well, it was a good example of how military and civilian actors can coordinate in a natural disaster situation. When we pulled out, my understanding is that things continued to work well and that the NGOs had a good handle on it. The ERC [Emergency Relief Coordinator] has mentioned that in her view, Panay Island was a good example of how to do UN-CMCoord, so we are quite proud of that!”

Maj. Michael Percy,
Officer in the Canadian
Armed Forces,
describing UN-CMCoord
during Typhoon Haiyan,
2013

- 1.** Militaries can contribute to humanitarian action through their ability to rapidly mobilize and deploy unique assets and expertise in response to specifically identified requirements.
- 2.** Military action supports political purposes, but humanitarian assistance is based solely on need, and is provided neutrally without taking sides in disputes or political positions on the underlying issues.
- 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.
- 4.** Humanitarians must be observant when working with the military to ensure their work does not compromise the impartiality, operational independence, neutrality and civilian nature of humanitarian assistance.
- 5.** Effective and consistent humanitarian civil-military coordination is a shared responsibility, crucial to safeguarding humanitarian principles and humanitarian space.

UN-CMCoord in South Sudan

In South Sudan, OCHA has played an active role in coordinating inter-agency humanitarian action with the national military and international forces. Since 2012, there has been continuous fighting between national military forces and non-State armed actors. This was initially concentrated in the Greater Upper Nile states in the north and east, but in 2016 it spread to Greater Bahr el Ghazal states in the west and Equatorial states in the south. OCHA acts on behalf of the Humanitarian Country Team with a Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination and Access Team to negotiate access to remote areas that remain blocked or contested, or are no longer under State control. OCHA maintains contact with all armed conflict parties, engaging at strategic, operational and tactical levels, securing all sides' commitment to carrying out unhindered cross-line movements to assess and assist conflict-affected civilians. Working closely with the Logistics and Protection clusters, OCHA facilitates coordination with the elements of the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) to provide a humanitarian notification system for deconfliction and to highlight areas of protection concern. A process is in place to approve, as a 'last resort', force protection from UNMISS, under **Military and Civil Defence Assets**, for convoys and in areas with the worst levels of insecurity. This is closely linked to the assessment of risk undertaken at a local level by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security. Work is also undertaken to highlight, at a strategic level, the importance of the UNMISS security mandate in maintaining and enabling humanitarian space, while limiting the delivery of direct assistance by UNMISS.

To find out more

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- Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief (Oslo Guidelines), 2007.
- Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies (MCDA Guidelines), 2006.
- United Nations Civil-Military Coordination Field Handbook, 2015.
- United Nations Civil-Military Coordination: A Guide for the Military, 2017.
- IASC Non-Binding Guidelines on the Use of Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys, 2013.
- IASC Reference Paper on Civil-Military Relationships in Complex Emergencies, 2004.
- www.dialoguing.org