HUMANITARIAN ACADEMY · HUMANITAIRES JOBS

Mini MBA Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination (CMCoord): preserving access and principles with armed actors

Course handout · Week 1 : Why coordinate with armed actors: principles and definition of CMCoord

A programme of exactly 3 months (12 weeks, 144 hours) to coordinate humanitarian action with armed actors: principles, armed actors and their culture, the Oslo and MCDA Guidelines, foreign military assets in disasters, complex emergencies and integrated missions, armed escorts, humanitarian notification and information sharing, access negotiation, liaison and forums, protection, country-specific guidelines and dilemmas. Based on the public texts of OCHA and the IASC. Corrected numerical exercises, three monthly exams with case studies, and a verifiable diploma from the Humanitarian Academy. Independent course: it is not OCHA's official UN-CMCoord course, to which it refers, and it does not award any United Nations certification.

https://humanitairejobs.org/en/academy/mini-mba-coordination-civilo-militaire/semaine-1/

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Week 1 : Why coordinate with armed actors: principles and definition of CMCoord

Objectives

- Define humanitarian civil-military coordination (CMCoord) and distinguish it from military civil-military cooperation (CIMIC).
- Explain how humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence guide every interaction with armed actors.
- Place a relationship on the spectrum from cooperation to coexistence, and justify that choice according to the context.

Aid workers and weapons on the same ground

In almost every crisis, humanitarians share the space with **armed actors**: the armed forces of the affected State, foreign militaries that come to help after a disaster, peacekeepers, coalitions, non-State armed groups, police forces and private security companies. Ignoring them is impossible; being confused with them is dangerous.

After an earthquake, a military helicopter may be the only way to reach a cut-off valley. In a conflict, a convoy that moves without the belligerents knowing may be targeted. In both cases, the question is not "should we talk to the military?" but **"how, about what and how far?"**.

> Humanitarian civil-military coordination exists to protect two things at once: access to people in need and the humanitarian nature of aid.

The reference definition

The United Nations field handbook on civil-military coordination (UN-CMCoord Field Handbook) defines CMCoord as **the essential dialogue and interaction between civilian and military actors in humanitarian emergencies** that is necessary to protect and promote humanitarian principles, avoid competition, minimise inconsistency and, when appropriate, pursue common goals.

The definition contains three ideas:

- dialogue is **essential**, not optional;
- it serves first to **preserve the principles**;
- pursuing common goals is only possible **"when appropriate"**, which depends on the context.

The handbook describes three basic tasks: **information sharing**, **task division** and **planning**. Their intensity varies with the context, from very close to almost none.

CMCoord is not CIMIC

Armed forces have their own functions for relations with civilians: **CIMIC** (civil-military cooperation, in NATO and many armies), **civil affairs** or **civil-military operations** depending on the country. Their purpose is to support the military mission: facilitate movements, win the support of the population, reduce obstacles.

CMCoord, by contrast, is a **humanitarian** function, carried out by civilians, in the service of humanitarian objectives. The two talk to each other, but they have neither the same mandate nor the same criteria of success.

Example. A CIMIC unit offers to distribute school kits in a village where it also patrols. For the unit, it is a way to improve its image. For a humanitarian, it is a risk: people may associate all aid with that force, and schools may become potential targets.

Humanitarian principles as a compass

Four principles, recognised by the United Nations General Assembly (resolutions 46/182 of 1991 and 58/114 of 2003) and by the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, guide every decision:

- **Humanity**: relieve suffering wherever it is found, protect life and dignity.
- **Neutrality**: take no side in hostilities or in political, religious or ideological controversies.
- **Impartiality**: help on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases, without discrimination.
- **Independence**: keep humanitarian objectives autonomous from political, economic or military objectives.

An interaction with an armed actor is judged by its effect on these principles, both real and **perceived**. A sound decision that people misunderstand can cost access.

The spectrum: from cooperation to coexistence

The relationship between humanitarians and the military sits on a **spectrum**:

- **Cooperation**: in peacetime or after a natural disaster, when the affected State's army or foreign forces help under civilian control. Information sharing, task division and joint planning can be close.
- **Coordination**: intermediate situations, for example a peacekeeping mission that is not a party to the conflict.
- **Coexistence**: in armed conflict, especially when the force present is a party to hostilities. Contact is limited to what is needed to avoid competition, reduce risks and protect civilians.

The choice is not fixed once and for all: a disaster in a conflict zone, or a peace mission turning into a fighting force, moves the relationship along the spectrum.

What this programme is, and what it is not

This Mini MBA is an **independent** course of the Humanitarian Academy of Humanitaires Jobs. It is based on the public reference texts: the **Oslo Guidelines**, the **MCDA Guidelines**, the **IASC reference paper** on civil-military relationships in complex emergencies, the **IASC non-binding guidelines on armed escorts** and the **UN-CMCoord field handbook**.

It **does not replace** OCHA's official UN-CMCoord course and does not award any United Nations certification. For the official training, take OCHA's free online modules, then apply for the UN-CMCoord course. The links are in this week's readings.

Exercise: where does the relationship sit?

For each of the following situations, give the position on the spectrum (cooperation, coordination, coexistence) and one action to avoid.

1. A cyclone hits a country at peace. The national army clears roads and offers its trucks.
2. A foreign force is fighting an armed group in the north of a country. It offers to carry food to the villages it has just retaken.
3. A peacekeeping mission, not a party to the conflict, patrols around a displacement camp.

Model answer. 1: cooperation, under civilian control; avoid letting the army choose the beneficiaries alone. 2: coexistence; avoid using its trucks, which would associate aid with a party to the conflict. 3: coordination; avoid handing distribution or registration of displaced people to the mission.

Key takeaways

- CMCoord is the essential dialogue between civilians and the military to protect principles and access, not systematic cooperation.
- Three basic tasks: information sharing, task division, planning.
- CIMIC serves the military mission; CMCoord serves humanitarian objectives.
- Humanity, neutrality, impartiality, independence: every interaction is judged by its real and perceived effect.
- Spectrum: cooperation in natural disasters, coexistence in armed conflict, with intermediate situations.

Quiz

1. According to the field handbook, the three basic CMCoord tasks are:
   A. Negotiation, advocacy and funding of operations
   B. Needs assessment, distribution and monitoring
   C. Information, task division, planning
   D. Armed escort, logistics and convoy security
2. An army's CIMIC function serves first of all:
   A. Donors
   B. The military mission
   C. United Nations agencies
   D. Humanitarian objectives
3. In an armed conflict where the force present is fighting, the relationship is most often:
   A. Close cooperation
   B. Joint planning
   C. Full integration
   D. Coexistence
4. The principle that forbids taking sides in hostilities is:
   A. Humanity
   B. Impartiality
   C. Independence
   D. Neutrality
5. This Mini MBA:
   A. Replaces OCHA's course for NGO staff
   B. Is independent and points to the official course
   C. Is mandatory for all UN staff
   D. Awards the official UN-CMCoord certification

Quiz answers : 1. B · 2. A · 3. C · 4. D · 5. C