Annual CIMIC Foresight Conference 2024

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Report EPIS ThinTank e. V. Delegation to – ACFC24 – Annual Civil-Military Foresight Conference 2024

In October, EPIS ThinkTank e. V., had the pleasure to attend yet another insightful conference: The Annual Civil-Military Foresight Conference 2024, in which the Working Group Leaders of Europe and North America, Mihnea Turcitu and Iasmina Stoian respectively, represented EPIS and contributed to the dialogue on the ever-increasing-importance-and-need for Civil-Military Cooperation.

About ACFC – What is it?

What is ACFC?

The Annual Civil-Military Foresight Conference is a high-profile event hosted by the NATO Civil-Military Center of Excellence (CCOE) in partnership with NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (NATO SHAPE). Its objective is to bring experts and key figures from the military and civil domains together to discuss and shape the future of civil-military cooperation (CIMIC). Among the civilian groups, actors from academia, humanitarian sectors, and private industry are most prevalent. Overall, 150 participants, from more than 30 countries showcased the ability of ACFC to be a true global stage for CIMIC discussions.

What is CIMIC?

The term CMIC stands for Civil-Military Cooperation, and in essence, it is a military joint function that integrates the civil dimension into the military operating environment, and that enables and conducts Civil-Military Interaction to support the accomplishment of missions and military strategic objectives in peacetime, crisis and conflict. What CIMIC entails is a fluid relationship between the civilian and military sectors. As the definition suggests CIMIC can be seen as a crucial part of MDO (Multi-Domain Operations) aid in orchestrating military activities in all 5 domains: Land, Air, maritime, Cyberspace, and space.

Centre of excellence

The Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence (CCOE), established in 2001 in The Hague and accredited as a NATO Centre of Excellence, functions as a key resource in both fields of Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) and Civil-Military Interaction (CMI). As its mission, CCOE bridges civilian and military expertise, offering specialized knowledge, responsive education and training, and forward-thinking recommendations.

CCOE's primary role is to assist NATO and partner institutions by providing advanced insights and solutions tailored to evolving challenges, thereby ensuring effective integration of civilian and military efforts in both operational and strategic contexts.

About the conference

General view

The AFCF24 conference combined interactive sessions, panel discussions, and side events to address the complexities of current and future operating environments for CIMIC. Civilian and military participants collaborated in five working groups on key topics (short): understanding the operating environment, resilience, human security, CIMIC's role in Multi-Domain Operations, and the implications of evolving threats. Of these 5 working groups, our delegates participated in The current and future threat landscape and its implications for CIMIC and CIMIC's future role in a Multi-Domain environment, working groups.

Working Group Mihnea – The current and future threat landscape and its implications for CIMIC

Mihnea's contribution developed a general understanding of foresight. As the title implies, the group examined multifaceted challenges, including Russia's use of private military companies in Africa, China's economic influence and strategic maneuvers, and emerging threats on NATO's Eastern Flank. Each topic was distributed in concentrated syndicates, allowing participants to specialize. On the matter of China, Mihnea and peers from the Ministry of Defense of the Netherlands, and partner countries investigated the sub-threshold threats posed by this geopolitical contender.

Working Group Jasmine

Iasmina participated in a working group examining and focusing on CIMIC's role in Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) and NATO's core powers and tasks of deterrence and defense. The group mapped "pre-Article 5 steps" and identified challenges in achieving a unified understanding of CIMIC in MDO, and what MDO is and what is not. Their conclusions emphasized the need for coordinated information sharing, collaborative assessments, and cooperative defense strategies to protect infrastructure, enhance cybersecurity, and address threats. The analysis highlighted CIMIC's vital role in integrating civil factors across domains, particularly in cyberspace, air, and land.

Side events

In addition to the introductory sessions, a memorable side event offered a light break from the working sessions: the CIMIC war game, ANALYSIS. This interactive exercise allowed participants to explore the interplay between military operations and the civil environment, applying key Analysis and Assessment concepts from diverse operational perspectives.

The conference concluded with a classic Oktoberfest, bringing German culture to life with a traditional feast with Bavarian pretzels and a lively atmosphere.

Key speakers

Among the powerful and fast paced working groups, broader plenary sessions included notable speakers such as Dominique Gassauer (Policy and Guidance Lead, CIMIC Service UN OCHA), and Rear Admiral Jeanette Morang (Director of Operations, Dutch MOD). While there was a plethora of ideas being exchanged, one idea prevailed, that we have to bolster military reserves and that the public is heading toward a strong misunderstanding of the workings of the military each year.

Conclusions

The ACFC 2024, was a truly inspiring event, which brought EPIS Think-Tank to a new world of CIMIC, and placed it into the limelight, and at times, a forgotten domain that is critical to the operationalization of defense. We invite you to check Mihnea's October brief which places into perspective this ever-increasing challenge for civil-military cooperation.