



Executive Summary: Civil-Military Relationship in Complex Emergencies – An IASC Reference Paper

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At a glance

The paper serves as a non-binding reference for humanitarian practitioners to formulate country-specific operational guidelines on civil-military relations for particular complex emergencies.

Four guiding principles

1. The guiding principles of impartiality, neutrality, humanity and independence from political considerations are the same as those governing humanitarian action in general.
2. The military nature of the assets may, however, require increased attention to be paid to the need to ensure that humanitarian action is not only neutral and impartial in intent but also perceived to be so by the parties directly concerned.
3. Particular caution should be exercised in circumstances where there is a risk that either the motivation for the use of military or civil defence assets or its consequences may be perceived as reflecting political rather than humanitarian considerations.
4. This risk is likely to be greatest in humanitarian actions in countries where military forces are operating under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, even if the operations are not considered integrated.

Six operating principles

1. Decisions to accept military assets must be made by humanitarian organizations, not political authorities, and based solely on humanitarian criteria.
2. Military assets should be requested only where there is no comparable civilian alternative and only the use of military assets can meet a critical humanitarian need. The military asset must therefore be unique in nature or timeliness of deployment, and its use should be a last resort.
3. A humanitarian operation using military assets must retain its civilian nature and character. The operation must remain under the overall authority and control of the humanitarian organization responsible for that operation, whatever the specific command arrangements for the military asset itself. As far as possible, the military asset should operate unarmed and be civilian in appearance.
4. Countries providing military personnel to support humanitarian operations should ensure that they respect the code of conduct and principles of the humanitarian organization responsible for that deployment.
5. The large-scale involvement of military personnel in the direct delivery of humanitarian assistance should be avoided.
6. Any use of military assets should ensure that the humanitarian operation retains its international and multilateral character.

What does the full paper offer?

Part 1 of the paper reviews, in a generic manner, the nature and character of civil-military relations in complex emergencies. Part 2 lists the fundamental humanitarian principles and concepts that must be upheld when coordinating with the military. Part 3 proposes practical considerations for humanitarian workers engaged in civil-military coordination.

The full IASC product is available at <https://iasc.ch/cmc-ref-paper-2004>.

For support using this product, or to provide feedback on the product or this summary, contact the IASC secretariat at: iasccorrespondence@un.org.

The guiding principles are excerpts from the 'IASC Guiding and Operating Principles for the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Support of Humanitarian Operations', endorsed by the IASC Working Group on 27 September 1995. The 'Operating Principles' are excerpts from the 'IASC Principles on Military-Civilian Relations' of January 1995.