

Should the United States Adopt a CIMIC¹ Model of Civil Affairs for Homeland Defense?

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President Donald J. Trump's 2025 inauguration brought with it the Chief Executive's renewed focus on defense of the U.S. homeland. The White House has since issued a string of Executive Orders implementing various instruments of national power supporting homeland defense. The U.S. Secretary of Defense subsequently issued a directive for his staff to draft the 2026 National Defense Strategy (NDS) following President Trump's "America First" vision, and it is anticipated that the NDS will prioritize defending the United States's territorial integrity.

This paper assesses U.S. civil affairs doctrine and its suitability to support a homeland defense mission. As defense capabilities are aligned with this national defense framework, a review of civil affairs doctrine shows that it falls well short of the new mission set: specifically, civil affairs support is geared towards supporting third-party nations, and does not contemplate application in direct defense of the homeland.

Whether as a result of design, delimitation or disregard, civil affairs doctrine does not provide guidance for civil affairs forces to integrate with U.S. civil government and other institutions in the execution of a homeland defense mission.

This paper compares U.S. civil affairs doctrine to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member nations' civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) model, which has been developed on the assumption that NATO forces will need to employ CIMIC personnel to support homeland defense plans and actions amongst the NATO allies.

While U.S. civil affairs doctrine has largely been developed on the experiences of conducting civil affairs in Japan, Vietnam, Afghanistan and other foreign nations, NATO CIMIC doctrine was developed to support NATO operations defending against large-scale threats from the east. This paper recommends that U.S. civil affairs proponents consider adopting several CIMIC principles to improve U.S. doctrine.

Finally, this paper reviews recent lessons-learned from the Russia-Ukraine War. Ukraine, a relatively recent adopter of NATO CIMIC, has worked through several pain points from which the United States can learn in updating its own civil affairs capabilities to meet the current threat environment.

¹ CIMIC (NATO) – civil-military cooperation