

# The Impact of the Covid Pandemic on Security and the Military: Civil-Military Cooperation in the Fight against the Covid Pandemic

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*A global health crisis can have long lasting effects on many areas of life, and the military is not exempt of its effects either. This article aims to highlight the possible usage of the military in various forms of emergency situations, especially in the case of the current coronavirus pandemic, particularly focusing on cooperation based on partnerships, while also highlighting the effects the Covid-19 epidemic had on the military. Civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) is a cornerstone of military operations these days, and its positive effects on military operations, especially in the struggle against the pandemic are also detailed. This study is based on the events and experiences of the first seven months since the outbreak of the Covid pandemic.*

**Keywords:** CIMIC, Covid, pandemic, cooperation, military

## Introduction

This article aims to highlight the possible usage of the military in various forms of emergency situations (currently, in the case of the coronavirus pandemic), particularly focusing on cooperation based on partnerships, while also highlighting the effects the Covid-19 epidemic had on the military. The study is based on the events and experiences of the first seven months since the outbreak of the Covid pandemic.

The deployment of the military in crises did not start with the coronavirus at all. Soldiers have already proven their preparedness in countless disaster management situations, let those be either natural, or industrial occurrences. The same may be stated also about international peace support or peacekeeping operations from Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina to Cyprus. The fact that military forces are both able and ready to fulfil such tasks is neither questioned nor has it been doubted. This current research in relation

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to the novel virus shows that, where they treated this threat with an appropriate level of seriousness, military forces were among the very first to be deployed in response to it.

It is thus worth asking why the deployment of the military is so efficient in such cases. The answer to that question lies in previous experiences.

The military operates in a strict order, where tasks and responsibilities are clearly outlined, while it is also equipped with an appropriate leadership structure to control this complex system. This allows for a rapid and efficient mobilisation, the involvement of professional experts in a fairly limited amount of time and adequate reserves.

Another advantage of using the military in such cases is that they are already equipped with special tools and professional knowledge, while they operate their own lines of logistics, as well. Thus, the supply of the entire staff involved in the tasks (including food, transportation, medical support, rest, communication, shifts) is there, it does not place a burden on other organisations involved in disaster management at the same time and location.

Last but not least, the discipline of military personnel is a determining factor that contributes to a higher level of efficiency.

Although mentioned less frequently, but the appearance of soldiers also has a positive psychological effect, as they represent security in the eyes of most of the population. They radiate a sense of support, care and attention, which raises the levels of security among the citizens while also improving their determination. Based on first hand personal experiences, it can be stated that if a uniform clad person appears in a crisis management situation, the trust of the populace in the successful management raises. The questions of civil-military cooperation – let it be in the course of wars or crisis management operations, such as military responsibilities during the coronavirus pandemic – receive increasing attention and importance these days.

## **The principles of civil-military cooperation**

Military operations never take place in a vacuum. Both during the preparatory phase and the actual execution of operations, military planners pay particular attention to the civilian populace, to non-governmental organisations, and to all those other civilian actors who could in any shape or form affect the success of the operation. It is clear to see that the level of who receives this particular attention the most changes with the different type of missions. Cooperation with the civilian populace, and fulfilling their needs is significantly different in a wartime environment than in the case of a flood prevention operation. Equally, the room for manoeuvre for NGO-s is much different in a migration crisis than in an armed conflict. It is not among the aims of this study to delve into the particularities and differences of these scenarios. The aim is to draw up a uniformly accepted set of principles, tasks, cooperation possibilities and necessities that have already been tested and proven in practice.

Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) is viewed today as a form of support for the military leader in aiding that person making the best possible decision. A prerequisite of this is that, during the course of the operation, a continuous, mutually respectful cooperation must

be established with the local populace and their leaders, with civilian governmental and non-governmental organisations, law enforcement organisations, civil protection services, religious organisations, the leading figures of the private sector, national authorities, and last but not least, with the various international organisations present. Therefore, the roles of the CIMIC staff, as part of the greater military organisation, may be classified into these three areas:

1. supporting the work of the military leadership (commander)
2. supporting the civilian sector
3. maintaining a continuous cooperation between the military and the NGO-s

In the long line of partners, the most important is naturally the civilian populace, since maintaining a balanced relationship with the local communities guarantees the establishment and maintenance of a secure environment. It should also be accepted that, in most cases, the military is not the most significant actor in a crisis response operation.

It is thus also worth looking a little back in time to see how military science writers and soldiers approached factors influencing military operations in the past.

The importance of the operational environment – and in particular of the population – had been highlighted by the earliest of military science works. Numerous ancient Chinese classical works deal with this question. It was frequently stated point even in military science literature from the ancient Warring States period in China that wars needed to be won not only on the battlefield, but also in the hearts of the populace (including the general enemy populace and military personnel as well). Winning the hearts and minds of the people was an important element of contemporary Chinese military science and this concept is still frequently used these days.

Every well-trained military leader has recognised – either through compulsion or at their discretion – the importance of civil-military cooperation. Later on in history, as the circumstances of warfare changed, so did the framework for civil-military cooperation. Non-governmental organisations started to take part in CIMIC, the self-organisation power of the populace has increased while the role of the press and the media has become even stronger. The military force entering a crisis area has to pay more attention to creating the conditions for political, economic, humanitarian development, laying the foundations for social and legal stability not by force, but rather by creating and maintaining a secure environment. This shift in approach was well emphasised by then General Eisenhower near the end of World War II when he exclaimed: ‘The sooner I can get rid of all these questions that are outside the military in scope, the happier I will be! Sometimes I think I live ten years each week, of which at least nine are absorbed in political and economic matters.’<sup>3</sup>

Following the end of the war in the Balkans, peacekeeping operations have once again raised the importance of civil-military cooperation to a new level. ‘In November (1995),

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<sup>3</sup> Robert M Gates, ‘Secretary of Defense speech, Brookings Institution Dinner (Washington, D.C.)’, *U.S. Department of Defense*, 21 July 2020.

we had never heard of CIMIC, we had no idea what you did [...] now we can't live without you', said Admiral Leighton W. Smith, the Commander of IFOR (Implementation Force).<sup>4</sup>

NATO has also realised the importance of CIMIC hence, and in 2007, decided to establish the NATO Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence. The aim of the Centre is to provide opportunity for its members to assess their CIMIC experience, and to share it through timely education and training.<sup>5</sup>

CIMIC principles will effectively guide commanders and NGOs provided that the following general requirements are met:<sup>6</sup>

1. Understanding and acknowledging the civil environment and civilian actors which includes, among others, data collection, analysis and evaluation. This way, military forces are able to define the cooperation framework in a credible, confident manner with as little hindrance as possible.
2. Understanding the aims, objectives, symbols and history of all non-military actors impacted. This act will unlock synergies in cooperation that will eventually strengthen the acceptance and respect of military forces.
3. Respecting others, being open, taking competent responsibility, demonstrating and applying the necessary skillset, that is, creating and maintaining credibility and authenticity are all required. Furthermore, these have to work on a mutual basis, they are not functional in a one-way relation.
4. Joint preparation and planning of tasks of common interest. Namely, defining the path to achieving the goal, clarifying joint efforts in time, including a possible division of labour and distribution of responsibilities.
5. Defining the order and organisational framework of the cooperation.

The consistent application of the aforementioned actions during the coronavirus pandemic has enabled the military to be able to support the civilian sector effectively without major roadblocks.

## Specific tasks

Reviewing coronavirus related news, one can draw some generic conclusions. In the 42 countries that were examined for this study, military forces were mobilised in every state – to a varying degree but on the basis of similar principles – to solve certain tasks in the epidemic situation. Before analysing the Hungarian response to Covid-19, it is worth looking at some international examples, as well.

As it has been stated earlier, military forces are equipped with special tools and professional knowledge that can be well applied in crisis situations. In the fight against the coronavirus, their equipment was used for logistic activities in the air, on water and

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<sup>4</sup> William R Philips, 'Civil-Military Cooperation: Vital to Peace Implementation in Bosnia', *NATO Review* 46, no 1 (1998), 25.

<sup>5</sup> More details can be found at [www.cimic-coe.org/about-ccoe/sponsoring-nations](http://www.cimic-coe.org/about-ccoe/sponsoring-nations)

<sup>6</sup> *CIMIC Handbook*, Civil-Military Cooperation, Centre of Excellence, 2020.

also on land. Several military aircraft were involved in the repatriation of citizens when civilian air traffic was no longer available. Thousands of people were able to return to their home country because their government sent military aircraft to pick up civilians who were stranded abroad. The various air forces were tirelessly delivering medical supplies and equipment to countries which experienced shortages of ventilators, medicines, PPE and disinfectants.

Furthermore, the military also used off-road vehicles (ORV) to supply hard-to-reach areas with food and medicine. For instance, the military used ORVs in Albania to help vulnerable mountain communities with supplies while in Austria, they assisted in the replenishment of shops. Portugal shows another example of CIMIC where military officers assisted homeless citizens during critical times.

In the United Kingdom (U.K.), 150 soldiers were trained and deployed to perform special road transport tasks (transporting oxygen, personal protective equipment and rescue equipment). Further tasks of these troops included the support of mobile testing sites and ambulance services, increasing medical capacity and building field hospitals.<sup>7</sup>

There have also been examples of Covid-patients being transported by the military. The German Air Force airlifted six coronavirus patients from Italy and later did the same in France to reduce the burden on their respective healthcare system.

U.K. military personnel – based on their previous engineering experiences and their existing tools and equipment – built a temporary hospital with a capacity of 4,000 beds in just nine days. In the United States, experts of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers were also building dozens of hospitals across the country while U.S. Navy hospital ships were deployed at the most impacted coastal cities to relieve the burden on hospitals there.<sup>8</sup>

In South Korea, the coronavirus epicentres were effectively dissolved by experienced and well-equipped CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear) units. In Spain, military officers were engaged in the decontamination and disinfection of critical infrastructure (ports, airports, train stations, healthcare facilities) and currently there are 2,500 soldiers who are fighting against the coronavirus in 172 cities.

Several countries have deployed their troops along with civilian authorities and police to monitor compliance with quarantine requirements. On the top of that, various tools were applied in the fight against Covid-19, such as joint patrols, drones, smart systems (mobile applications, contact and infection tracking).

Leadership and organisational skills are particularly valuable in such cases, and these are all required of military personnel anyway. Regarding the defensive measures in the U.K., one of the most significant element was the deployment of military planners who have supported the work of the local Coronavirus Task Forces.<sup>9</sup>

Increasing military presence in public areas helped to strengthen the confidence of the populace, which also affected the work of the police in a positive way. This strong presence also helped to maintain curfews, quarantines and similar restrictions. On a European level, the fight against the coronavirus has become more complicated due to the

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<sup>7</sup> 'Coronavirus: What The Military's Doing To Fight COVID-19', Forces.net, 15 August 2020.

<sup>8</sup> 'USACE COVID-19 Response Efforts', *US Army Corps of Engineers Headquarters*, 21 July 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

simultaneous presence of the epidemic, closed borders and large number of refugees. For this reason, the military provided assistance in these situations as well. Austria mobilized 2,200 military personnel to support border guards in patrolling its borders. Controlling border crossing was one of the most critical activities that required military assistance in several countries, including the United States, Poland, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro.<sup>10</sup>

The coronavirus has emerged with different intensity in each country, which – luckily – allowed the nations to mutually support each other in their defence against the virus. Military forces have also excelled in this area. Albania sent a medical team of 30 to Italy to help local doctors. With their military aircraft, Russia sent eight military medical teams, around one hundred virologists and epidemiologists with international experience, mobile disinfection systems as well as other medical equipment to Italy. Additionally, Russia also sent supply packages to the U.S. with its available aircraft. Poland deployed 15 Polish doctors and paramedics to a Lombard field hospital. Germany offered nearly 45 tons of medical equipment to Romania including 100,000 pieces of PPE. The supply was delivered by the Romanian Air Force. On the other hand, the aircraft of the Romanian Air Force flew both doctors and equipment to Milan from Bucharest to support Italy in its fight against Covid-19.<sup>11</sup>

Although it may seem peculiar, but maintaining the mental health of the populace and enhancing their mood were also important tasks of the military that included public performances of military bands, making military museums available online, or organising tribute flights to recognise the tremendous job of healthcare workers.

The case of military medicine has to be mentioned too, since it was – and in many cases it is still – placed under double load. On the one hand, military medical personnel support their civilian counterparts in all possible ways. While on the other hand, they are fighting their own battles against the mass spread of the virus in the armed forces. Since soldiers are on the front lines in the fight against the virus, they are also especially vulnerable. Their protection, and stopping isolated cases of infection becoming mass occurrences, has become the most important tasks of military medicine. If medical personnel were to fail in this task, it would seriously jeopardise the ability of military organisations to fulfil their primary (military) roles.

## **The Hungarian Defence Forces in the struggle against the pandemic**

Upon closer inspection of how the situation unfolded in Hungary, it is clear to see that the country had to face comparable challenges and provide similar answers as its neighbours.

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<sup>10</sup> Shawn Snow, '540 additional troops to deploy to U.S.–Mexico border over COVID-19 concerns', *Military Times*, 01 April 2020.

<sup>11</sup> 'Military assistance in the fight against COVID-19 in Europe – solidarity in action', *European Union External Action Service (EEAS)*, 12 May 2020.

On 11 March, the Hungarian Government announced Government Decree 41/2020 on the measures to be taken during the state of emergency declared for the prevention of the human epidemic endangering life and property and causing massive disease outbreaks, for the elimination of its consequences, and for the protection of the health and lives of Hungarian citizens.

According to its roles described in the Fundamental Law of Hungary, the Hungarian Defence Forces immediately joined the fight against the virus with all its capabilities, personnel and knowledge. On a daily basis, it meant the deployment of over two thousand soldiers and four hundred vehicles. The Defence Forces deployed pre-testing tents, and also participated in the closure and strengthening of the borders. Military Police patrolled in twelve garrison towns and controlled the compliance with curfew restrictions. Hungarian Defence Forces personnel guarded (and in fact, still guard) the warehouses where essential personal protection equipment are stored, including ten millions of masks, rubber gloves, cloaks and ventilators. There was a military officer at the head of 51 hospitals in 13 counties, coordinating prevention preparation, securing hospital beds, maintaining supplies and providing the required data. The so-called Hungarian Defence Forces Management Groups coordinated the operation of 105 companies during the emergency situation. Employing its biological and chemical defence capabilities, the HDF had disinfected 1,034 nursing homes.<sup>12</sup>

The Hungarian Defence Forces also participate in the economic protection action plan of the Government. With the introduction of a new, 'special voluntary reserve' service, the HDF is able to employ 3,000 people for up to one year. After this special period comes to a conclusion, these volunteers are going to have the opportunity to continue their military careers, albeit they are going to have to pass more rigorous requirements than before.<sup>13</sup>

Naturally, the virus did not spar Hungarian soldiers either, but fortunately, less than ten cases have been found so far by concluding more than 1,500 tests.<sup>14</sup>

In a crisis management situation, establishing the culture and the ways of cooperation are essential. While in many cases, this usually works instinctively, it is much better if one is prepared for such role in advance. CIMIC therefore is one of the most important elements of military support, as it serves exactly this purpose. It has established methods, systems and professional experts. Such special preparedness was received as an advantage during the defence against the coronavirus, when military personnel were sent to hospitals, onto the streets and to strategic corporations to do their respective duties there.

Altogether, it can be confidently stated that in the fight against the coronavirus, military forces have a determinative role all over the world. While it is also worth noting that most of the populace does not question the necessity of such actions and does not see these as part of a militarisation of everyday life. They mostly see that human and technical

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<sup>12</sup> 'A hadsereg alkalmazása a koronavírus-járványban' [Deployment of the Military during the Coronavirus Epidemic], *Parlament.hu*, 27 April 2020.

<sup>13</sup> 'Benkő Tibor: a honvédelemre, a biztonságra mindig kiemelt figyelmet kell fordítani' [Tibor Benkő: Particular attention has to be paid to homeland defence and security at all times], *Magyar Honvédség Online*, 14 July 2020.

<sup>14</sup> 'Kulcsfontosságú a honvédség szerepe a koronavírus elleni védekezésben' [Defence forces are vital in the defence against the coronavirus]. *Háború Művészete*, 21 April 2020.

resources alike, do what their duty is: they help in establishing and maintaining a secure environment.

The pandemic had a significant impact on the general, overall security of society. One of these impacts in the future could be the re-emergence or intensification of bio-terrorism. The experiences of these last few months have steered the mind of the general public into contemplating such cases, and thoughts like these actually fuel actions of a similar kind. Terrorism, in most cases, is not devastating on its own, but its destructive impact lies in the effect it has on society. The wildfire-like spread of Covid-19 has naturally frightened most people, and with it, their belief in the established order started wavering, which is exactly the same effect an act of terrorism wants to achieve. Cynically speaking, it is possible to say that the pandemic provided those radical groups with an idea, which are interested in the appearance of weak states.

For example, in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has called upon its members to go out and spread the virus, preferably to soldiers and government officials, thereby weakening their organisations. One could ask, if this may be considered a new form of bio-terrorism or not?

As another example, the Islamic State called upon its supporters to use the chinks in the armour of security systems overwhelmed by the pandemic and attack there.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of security, one should also consider the response of organised crime to the disruption caused by the coronavirus. It is not strictly the responsibility of the military, however, numerous countries have strengthened their law enforcement with military officers, since police forces have been regrouped to fight against local crimes.

During this period, several examples highlight that organised crime groups have been particularly active in money laundering, organising mass migration and in the procurement and distribution of protective equipment.<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, one must also stress the impact of coronavirus on cybersecurity in the global security environment. With the outbreak of the virus, the number of cybercrimes and network threats has increased significantly. The spread of false information, frauds related to non-existent companies and fake adverts of non-existent medical products have caused financial loss and moral damage in many households globally. As a result of this phenomenon, several countries – for instance Romania and the United Kingdom – have requested the assistance of military personnel specialised in cybersecurity to respond to the threats and prevent cyberattacks.<sup>17</sup>

Interesting connections may be brought to light, when one looks at the publicity of pandemic related news. The forces and tools involved in the struggle against the pandemic as well as the particular action plans were communicated differently in each country. Western European countries in general provide more clarity when communicating information on the pandemic and its impacts as well as on informing the population about the response plans. German and Austrian officers make nearly every information publicly

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<sup>15</sup> Julie Coleman, 'The Impact of Coronavirus on Terrorism in the Sahel', *International Centre for Counter-terrorism – The Hague*, 16 April 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Jason Eligh, 'Crisis and Opportunity: Impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on illicit drug markets', *Global Initiative*, 13 May 2020.

<sup>17</sup> 'Kulcsfontosságú a honvédség szerepe'.



available. As one moves more towards Eastern Europe, it can be noticed that nations tend to limit the amount of public information. This approach is not necessarily wrong as it may have several security benefits. From a military aspect, if a country loses, even temporarily, a significant part of its military capabilities, it may not want to announce this information to the populace.

## The impact of the pandemic on military forces

In many countries, it has become a practice to postpone the enlistment of conscripts and reserves, keeping instead the already serving personnel in active duty. In some cases, those falling under compulsory conscription were not enlisted yet, in case the already serving personnel got infected. Training exercises were also modified accordingly. All this was leading to instances where combat effectiveness and combat readiness decreased. This is reinforced by a budgetary decision that reallocates – entirely or partially – the military development budget to support defence spending against the virus. Croatia has decreased its defence budget by 25 million Euros, and South Korea has also decided on a similar scale budget reduction.<sup>18</sup>

As the coronavirus infection knows no barriers, the military personnel are exposed to it as well, thus directly affecting military security. The daily lives of UN, EU and French peacekeeping missions in Mali were seriously affected by the emergence of the epidemic within their ranks. Joint forces (mainly German, Spanish and Czech) were withdrawn on a daily basis, and the staff rotation system of the French-lead Barkhane mission has also been changed as an answer to the local health crisis.<sup>19</sup> In one of its statements, an official of the French Ministry of Armed Forces estimated that around 4,000 individuals have contracted the virus in several organisations operating under the Ministry. The pandemic even reached the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle (R91) where more than 50 crew members have tested positive. As a result of the outbreak, the deployment of the carrier was stopped and it had to return to its home port in Toulon, France.

The U.S. Navy had to face a similar case when one in five sailors (1,000 people) were tested positive for Covid-19 on the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN-71). In order to isolate the spread of the virus, the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier ended its deployment and disembarked in San Diego.<sup>20</sup>

As another example, Israel is considering the coronavirus pandemic a serious security threat since it drastically reduced its defence capabilities. Securing supplies for the populace and maintaining order have required a significant load on the staff and capacities of their security forces, including the Israel Defense Forces, the National Security Services and the Israel Police.

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<sup>18</sup> 'COVID-19 to impact defence budgets: Poll', *Army Technology*, 22 May 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Monica Garske, 'USS Roosevelt, stricken by COVID-19 outbreak in March, returns from deployment', *NBC San Diego*, 09 July 2020.

Even the Mossad (the Israeli intelligence agency) was involved in the procurement of critical personal protective equipment (experiences show that in some cases the already purchased equipment could not reach its destination as it had been previously seized by the states the consignment was passing through). In this unprecedented situation, every solution and method seemed appealing and unprohibited. In Israel, attempts were made to mitigate the increased threat to soldiers by reducing the number of exercises, which at the same time weakened the preparedness of the armed forces.

Soldiers returning from foreign missions also pose a serious risk in terms of the national military force and protection against the spread of the virus. For instance, Polish soldiers on peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan were flown back to Poland, however, 99 individuals contracted the coronavirus right before their departure. As confirmed by the Polish Chief of Staff, the majority of the infected soldiers showed no symptoms, which means that, without a timely diagnosis, they could have easily been an even greater risk.<sup>21</sup>

## NATO's response to Covid-19

When fighting pandemics, one may not think of NATO as the first international organisation to be involved. However, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has reacted fast to the new global situation and has used and still uses all its available tools to assist member states and partner countries in their defence against the virus. NATO troops have been engaged in various areas and their assigned tasks included the effective coordination of supply chain logistics, transporting essential medical staff, medicine and other protective equipment and supplies, supporting civil-military programs that study the virus, providing strategic airlift to evacuate and repatriate citizens as well as disaster relief.<sup>22</sup>

## NATO and disaster management

The role of the 24/7 operating Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC), as the main emergency response mechanism of NATO, is of key importance in the battle against the pandemic. Incoming requests are managed centrally and distributed either to one of the Allied countries (for example, the Czech Republic, Germany or Turkey) or to their partners who then provide assistance in disinfecting hospitals or transporting supplies. For instance, Bosnia and Herzegovina received a large amount of thermometers, 5,000 masks, protective gloves, blankets and disinfectant. Another great example for international cooperation goes back to 9 April, when Luxembourg donated 1,440 kg of Tyvek material for Spain so that they could produce protective equipment for their essential healthcare workers.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> 'Poles stranded in Afghanistan return to Poland by military plane', *The First News*, 05 May 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Attila Mesterházy, 'The Role of NATO's Armed Forces in the COVID-19 Pandemic', *NATO Parliamentary Assembly*, 18 June 2020.

<sup>23</sup> 'NATO's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic', *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 14 April 2020.

Also in April, the Czech Republic demonstrated another great example of mutual support when it sent supplies to the Balkans. As per the request of North Macedonia, the 242<sup>nd</sup> Transport and Special Squadron of the Czech Air Force Command transported 1,000,000 face masks to the country.<sup>24</sup> In addition to transportation activities, NATO has launched a scientific research project within the Science for Peace and Security Programme that aims to develop a new tool capable of diagnosing the coronavirus infection rapidly and accurately.<sup>25</sup>

## NATO and its strategic airlift

Within the framework of its Strategic Airlift International Solution (SALIS) program, NATO is committed to reserve transportation for oversized military equipment in civilian aviation in order to provide sufficient and timely air transport capacity for the deployment of forces as well as for the realisation of individual long-distance national cargo operations.<sup>26</sup> Within the framework of the program, Turkey was able to deliver essential medical supply to the U.K. while the U.S. Air Force distributed more than 15,000 kg of supplies across Italy.<sup>27</sup>

Parallel to the SALIS program, the Strategic Airlift Capability of NATO has also played a key role in the international fight against the pandemic. Ten NATO member states and two partner countries jointly operate three Boeing C-17 Globemaster III aircraft that are home based at Pápa Air Base, Hungary.<sup>28</sup> The operating nations share the costs based on flight hours and use the three heavy military cargo aircraft for national defence or, in the time of a global pandemic, for humanitarian relief missions.<sup>29</sup>

## The NATO–EU cooperation

Both the NATO and the European Union have quickly recognised that a joint response and strategy would be critical to stop the spread of the virus and mitigate its impact on societies. NATO and EU representatives have highlighted two principal areas of concern for their cooperation: military mobility and countering disinformation.

The Alliance has been considering the development of military mobility as one of its top priority as outdated infrastructure and bureaucratic procedures often hinder member

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<sup>24</sup> 'Coronavirus response: Czech Republic delivers assistance to North Macedonia', *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 10 April 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Tania Laçi, 'NATO's response in the fight against coronavirus', *European Parliamentary Research Service*, June 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Tamás Nemes, 'A NATO Támogató és Beszerzési Ügynökségének felépítése, feladatrendszere és együttműködése a Magyar Honvédséggel' [The NATO Support and Procurement Agency, its structure, roles and cooperation with the Hungarian Defense Forces], *Katonai Logisztika 2* (2016), 14.

<sup>27</sup> Tania Laçi, 'NATO's response in the fight against coronavirus'.

<sup>28</sup> Member states: Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and the United States. Partner states: Finland, Sweden.

<sup>29</sup> 'The Strategic Airlift Capability – The Essential Facts', *Strategic Airlift Capability*, 21 July 2020.

states to move their forces quickly across Europe both in peacetime, crisis and conflict. In March 2020, the NATO Secretary General and EU defence ministers have agreed that both organisations play an important role in building the necessary infrastructure and legal framework, which would enable the quick movement of military forces in the region.<sup>30</sup>

Regarding disinformation, the coronavirus pandemic has become the first global health event where digital platforms (mainly social media) can largely impact the perception and knowledge on the virus by the population. Due to the large-scale digitisation, its geopolitical impact has also been increasing. Alongside the available real information on Covid-19, disinformation campaigns have also emerged that aim to question the provenance, spread and symptoms of the disease. For this reason, together with the EU, NATO strives to identify, track and disclose these disinformation cases.<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusions

The coronavirus outbreak and its intensity have given new approaches and opened new dimensions for civil-military cooperation. It has become clear that military forces are able to provide human and technical resources whose capabilities cannot be ignored in such a global environment. Special expertise, specific equipment and logistical background are the main enablers of an effective defence against the virus.

For many years, the military has been consciously building the theoretical and practical framework for civil-military cooperation, let it be disaster prevention, administrative support or specific circumstances of peacekeeping operations. In the past few years, NATO has established its own organisation dedicated to civil-military cooperation, while further national CIMIC centres, units and subunits are also being formed. Concurrent to these changes, the theoretical and regulatory background and the procession of experiences are constantly evolving. These provide a solid basis for an effective and smooth deployment of military forces in the fight against the epidemic.

The pandemic has also largely impacted the military personnel and missions of the armed forces, thus indirectly, military security as well. By its nature, military forces operate in closed communities, hence they are more exposed to infection due to the rapid spread of Covid-19. Considering the lack of diligence and prevention, the emerging epidemic may jeopardise entire units, subunits or even naval ships which directly raise national security issues.

Another direct impact of the current situation on military forces may be a reduced effectiveness of operations due to the low number of soldiers available (either because of illness or preventive restrictions). Such a situation would provide enemy forces with more room to operate.

The pandemic has also shown that leveraging military expertise and using special tools for different purposes also enhance the knowledge of teams that have been only put in the

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<sup>30</sup> Mesterházy, 'The Role of NATO's Armed Forces'.

<sup>31</sup> 'Speech of Vice President Věra Jourová on countering disinformation amid COVID-19. From pandemic to infodemic', *European Commission*, 04 June 2020.

spotlight during combat operations so far (for example, CBRN defence). Therefore, due to the change of focus points in the actual fight or, in a broader sense, in military operations, certain areas may receive less attention, but in the development of new equipment one has to always consider the requirements of multi-functionality.

The recognition and acknowledgement of military forces have been improving as a result of their professional, often self-sacrificing service during the pandemic. Although, at first there were voices among the population that feared the militarisation of a given society, by today these concerns have been mostly eased.



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