



AUSTRALIAN CIVIL-MILITARY CENTRE

**RECURRING ISSUES FROM AUSTRALIAN
CIVIL-MILITARY RESPONSES 1997 – 2022**

SUMMARY REPORT

DATE: 15 SEPTEMBER 2024

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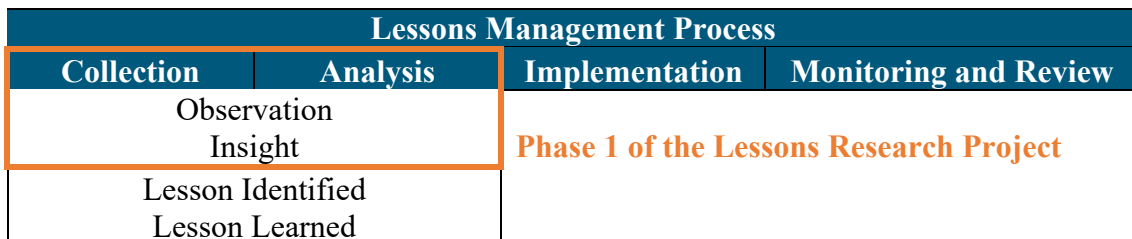
INTRODUCTION

1. The Australian Civil-Military Centre (ACMC) commissioned research report *Recurring Issues from Australian Civil-Military responses 1977 - 2022* in 2024 (The Report). The Report involved a meta-analysis of Australian civil-military responses to international and domestic crises between 1997 and 2022. The goal of this Report is to develop an evidence base to improve Australia’s preparedness for civil-military activities. The data collected offers practitioners the opportunity to conduct deeper analytics and research into Australian civil-military relations.
2. The Report found that there is an imperative to build and maintain ‘information literacy’ among agencies involved in civil-military crisis responses. People involved in response activities need to be aware of each others’ roles, processes and organisations in the first instance. They also need to understand how civilian and military elements come together to implement Government direction at home and abroad.

CONTEXT

3. The Report was broadly conducted according to a standard lessons management process. The Australian Institute of Disaster Resilience (AIDR) identifies four stages in lessons management¹: Collection, Analysis, Implementation, and Monitoring and Reviewing. A supplementary tool known as OILL—standing for Observation, Insight, Lesson identified, and Lesson learned—was also used.
4. As shown in Figure 1, the Reports includes elements of the Collection and Analysis stages of lessons management, and the Observation and Insight components of OILL.

Figure 1 – Context of Phase 1 in Lessons Management Processes



METHOD

5. The Report gathered observations from activities, submissions, reports, or other debriefing artefacts. This included debriefing artefacts such as after-action reports, post-activity reports, or other kinds of reflective materials. Information was sought from the 1997-2022 timeframe, with the view to capture activities from Australia’s response to Timor-Leste’s transition to independence, and through to the response to COVID-19 pandemic.
6. **Observations.** An organised, coded and searchable database of observations was created from the contents of the collected documentation. Each entry was then coded based

¹ Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, 2019 *Lessons Management*, 2nd ed. Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection.

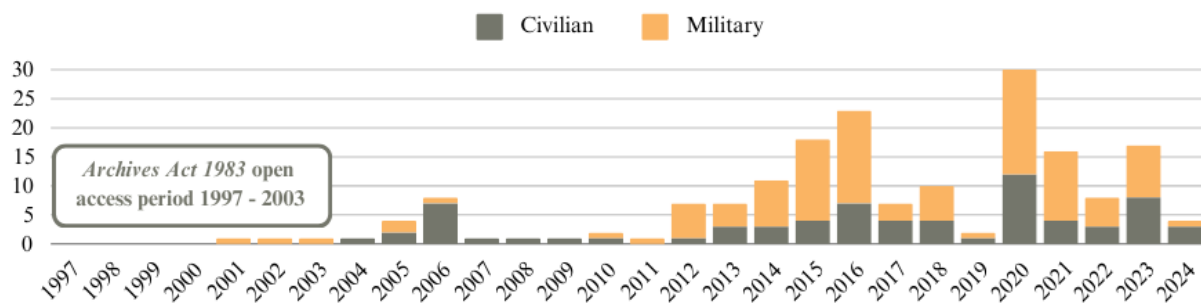
on author type (military or civilian), crisis response type (domestic or international) and the AIDR’s two-tier library of national themes and sub-themes (available at Annex A).

7. **Insights.** Once coded, similar observations were grouped in order to inform the development of insights. Insights are deductions based on observations, ideally three similarly themed ones drawn from multiple sources. This Report steps through the observations by national theme and sub-theme. Themes or sub-themes that contain fewer than three observations were excluded from further analysis. Deidentified observations are reproduced throughout this Report to illustrate typical issues in civil-military interactions.

FINDINGS

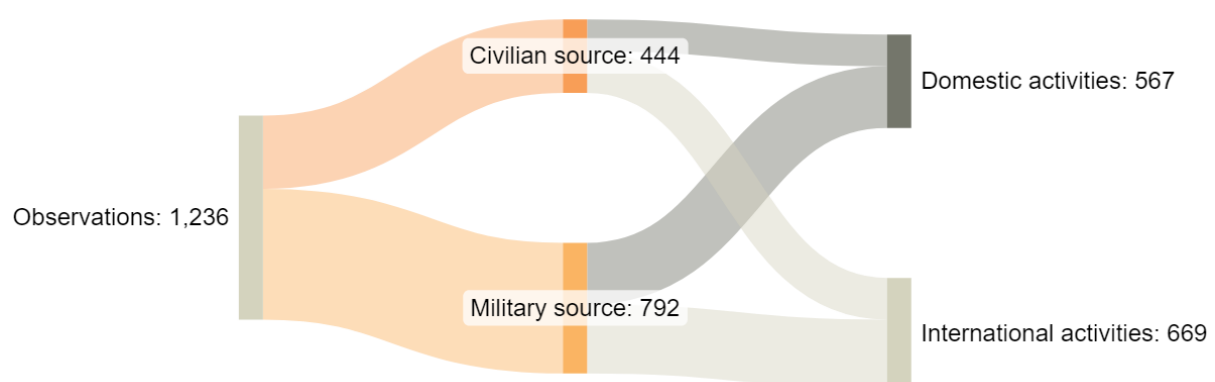
8. 182 debriefing artefacts were collected, of which 71 (39%) were authored by civilian stakeholders and 111 (61%) by military stakeholders. As shown in Figure 2, the files collected spanned the 2001-2024 timeframe. Those published after 2022 were included either due to their relevance, or because some responses were prepared bespoke based on internal records.

Figure 2 – Collected files by year and source type



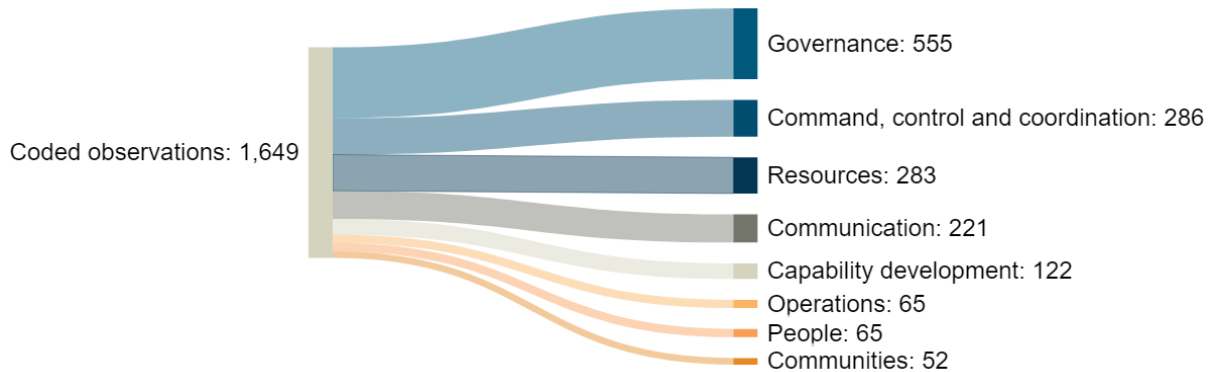
9. From the collected documents, 1236 observations were identified that were relevant to the nexus of civilian and military interactions. Figure 3 shows the breakdown of uncoded observations according to author type and crisis response type.

Figure 3 – Distribution of observations based on author type and crisis response type



10. 1649 thematic codes were applied across the observations in order to facilitate their synthesis, a *one-to-many* approach, whereby each observation could be assigned up to two national themes and corresponding sub-themes was applied. Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of coded observations against the first tier of national themes.

Figure 4 – Coded observations by national theme



11. While all national themes were reflected across the observations, Governance was by far the most frequently identified with 555 observations. It is also worth noting that several tier-two sub-themes recorded more observations than some tier one categories, namely:

- a. Internal communication (part of the Communication theme, 159 observations)
- b. People (part of the Resources theme, 141 observations)
- c. Incident management (part of the Command, control and coordination theme, 116 observations)
- d. Organisational structure (part of the Governance theme, 105 observations)
- e. Operational planning (part of the Command, control and coordination theme, 104 observations).

12. Numerical data concerning the collection and coding of observations is at Annex B.

SUMMARY OF INSIGHTS

13. The insights summarised below are structured around the first tier of national themes. These are generalisations across multiple data points and come at the cost of detail. A deeper breakdown of the insights generated from this Project is available at Annex C.

14. **Governance.** Civilian and military agencies need to understand each others' roles, responsibilities, capabilities and processes.

- a. More than one third of all observations captured were grouped under the Governance theme. A common challenge cited is the lack of information literacy among agencies. For the purposes of this Report, information literacy refers to the level stakeholders involved in domestic and international crisis responses understand each other, their functions and processes.²

² See A. Lloyd, 2010, *Information literacy landscapes: Information literacy in education, workplace and everyday contexts*, Cambridge: Woodhead Publishing, Chapter Four 'Information literacy in the workplace landscape' pp. 71-109.

- b. The second most frequently identified issue of all Project observations was that civilian and military agencies need to better understand each other. There was a strong indication of a lack of understanding of each others' roles, responsibilities, capabilities, approaches to security, planning, decision making, reporting, resources, culture, ways of working and limitations.
- c. Widely understood and consulted whole-of-government strategic direction for crisis responses is required. Associated elements must be aligned, including domestic and international legal arrangements (such as Defence Assistance to the Civil Community, third party notes or status of forces arrangements), administrative processes and protocols and agreed information management practices. Reporting metrics must be agreed and consistent.

15. **Command, control and coordination.** The ADF integrates well and during crises is particularly capable in logistics and planning. These abilities should be better utilised.

- a. Observations identified in this theme focused strongly on military considerations.
- b. ADF was highly regarded for its capacity, flexibility, and capability during crises. However, the range of effects that the ADF offers is often underutilised, due to a lack of awareness across civilian agencies. This can lead to unnecessary assignments.
- c. ADF ability to move stores, fuel and difficult items was identified, highlighting a need to coordinate efforts with civilian agencies. Inclusive consultation during crisis response planning activities will improve outcomes, including with the active involvement of senior leaders.

16. **Resources.** People and technology are the most important resources for civil-military responses. Both enable information flows and should be adequately resourced.

- a. The resources insights emphasised the value of Liaison Officers and similar representatives during civil-military crisis responses and was the largest number of observations across the entire Report. The greatest weight of observations also highlighted an importance to assign capable individuals to operations, corresponding with access to relevant communication systems.
- b. Observations highlighted Liaison Officers as critical to success, that more are needed, and that they are instrumental to enabling cross-agency planning, coordination, deconfliction, situational awareness and overall response success. Liaison Officers should have sufficient experience and knowledge of the organisation they represent, and be well networked with their colleagues.
- c. Agencies should be more pro-active in training and selecting liaison officers and enabling them with appropriate technologies. There is also a need for access to interoperable technologies such as radio, communications, and internet during civil-military response activities.

17. **Communication.** Multiple information flows and technologies among civilian and military agencies should be avoided as they duplicate administration and overload staff.

- a. Insights generated under the Communication theme reinforced other findings on the importance of clear, understandable and agreed ways of managing information, and interoperable technologies that enable them.
- b. Information needs to be shared in a whole-of-government approach during civil-military emergency responses. Delays and wrong or inconsistent information can cause confusion, affect decisions and planning, and be costly to fix. In a crisis, this can affect people's lives.
- c. A whole-of-government approach to media releases is needed and one that supports a single narrative.

18. Capability development. There is a need to maintain cross-agency understandings. Exercises and combined training were clear enablers for operationally ready task forces.

- a. Inclusive civil-military participation in exercises was well regarded across the observations. Exercises enable relationships and foster mutual understanding of roles during crisis responses. However, they must be resourced and supporting information made available.
- b. Training and development in support of civil-military responses is needed, including on agency roles, responsibilities and the domestic call out process.

19. Operations. A lack of shared understanding among the diverse civilian and military agencies presents challenges during crisis responses.

- a. Operational confusion appears to have resulted from a lack of shared understanding of civilian and military agencies and was reinforced by other findings. Technology and equipment differences magnified these differences
- b. Common across this theme was the importance of information sharing, establishing a common operating picture with a view to enable situational awareness.

20. People. Pre-existing relationships enable crisis response success.

- a. Pre-existing relationships were already in place among civilian and military agencies—whether through training, exercises or from previous responses—collaboration occurred much more easily.
- b. The human element must be reflected across crisis responses. This includes ensuring the mental and physical wellbeing of responders, and cultural considerations.

21. Communities. Responders must take local community needs into consideration.

- a. The number of observations coded to Communities is the smallest of all themes, however it highlighted the importance of stakeholder awareness outside of civilian and military responders.
- b. Communities need to be engaged during civil-military crisis responses so that they understand what support is being provided. Effective responses consider local needs and culture, engage key leaders and involve the community in its full diversity.

CONCLUSION

22. The Recurring Issues from Australian Civil-Military Responses 1977 - 2022 research report has revealed how civilian and military agencies need to better understand each others' roles, responsibilities and processes when involved in crisis responses at home and abroad. This need for 'information literacy' extends to the governance arrangements for domestic crisis responses, especially the call out procedures for Defence Assistance to the Civil Community activities, as well as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) activities conducted outside of Australia.

23. The insights generated through this body of work are not necessarily revelations to civil-military practitioners. Rather, this Reports value lies in the statistically significant and traceable empirical data that underpins each finding. Good policy needs good data, and the database with coded observations that was developed to offer a meaningful way to inform Australia's civil-military nexus.

24. Questions and comments on the Project can be directed to lessons@acmc.gov.au

