

Looking to the Future: Exercises, Training and Innovation

Whilst the Joint Warfare Centre delivers higher command and staff collective training for three- and four-star NATO headquarters, it can also harvest a huge dividend in warfare development and innovation. Exercises may be the most conspicuous aspect of what we do, yet it is our role in joint and combined warfare development at the operational and strategic levels that offers enduring benefit to the Alliance.

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Nobody could have predicted world events in the nearly twenty years since the Joint Warfare Centre's (JWC) early days of 2003. The unfolding geopolitical circumstances seem remarkable and just as fascinating is the Centre's leading role in transforming NATO's warfare development agenda to meet global challenges.

Reflecting on that history, and with the benefit of hindsight, it is notable how swift and significant change has been. Such evolution has required an innovative and adaptable attitude by our teams towards warfare development. For instance, the seismic shift brought by the Wales and Warsaw Summits of 2014 and 2016 initiated a change in emphasis from crisis management and cooperative security back to assurance, deterrence and collective defence as well as the challenges of facing a large and capable opponent.

Despite a return to collective defence, there is much in our past two decades of experience that remains relevant. So, it is as well that we continue to reflect on those elements of the "war on terror" years that persist in the character of warfare; complex networks, insurgency to achieve political ends and the continuing need for capacity building, to name only three aspects which endure, albeit with marked evolution.

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To that end, the focus on “conventional” major combat operations acknowledges that asymmetric warfare is very much alive and well, only its character continues to morph and change. So our analysis considers not just what has changed, but also looks for the continuities; where traditional rivals employ new tactics, honed through study of conflict in the early years of the twenty first century.

Consider for a moment real-world hybrid strategies employed by our adversaries with a complex and adaptive mix of conventional and unconventional means, designed to complicate and delay decision making — this is what our Scenario Branch writers seek to reflect in their work. Think of the prevalence of narrative distortion, cyber threats, organized crime, corruption, denial, deception, the use of proxies as well as conventional forces — this is what occupies our Content Branch. Manipulation of social media by opposing forces to influence and shape attitudes and behaviour is also presented as operational dilemmas for NATO’s Joint Headquarters to work through on the exercises. Such realistic and credible scenario and content material is vital to exercise delivery and warfare development work, not to mention deterrent messaging by the Alliance.

Challenges for the Joint Operational Level

In the present day, to paraphrase Mark Twain, “if history is not exactly repeating itself, it certainly is rhyming”. At the Joint Headquarters level, we find ourselves addressing once familiar aspects of major combat operations, like how to integrate joint actions to overcome layered defences associated with anti-access/area denial, anti-submarine warfare, operating in contested airspace, massing logistics, speed of assembly, freedom of movement, deception, concealment, electronic warfare and emissions control, to name only a few challenges resurfacing from the Cold War era.

Still, newer considerations have arisen, such as the extent to which military commanders should wage information war to counter an adversary’s narrative, thrusting leaders into far more public roles, not to mention highlighting contentious normative, ethical and legal considerations. These are the challenges faced by staff in the Exercises, Training and Innovation Directorate. Our exercises are helping to frame and conceptualize this new era of major joint operations. If scenario opens the door to interoperability, then our developing suite of sophisticated Article 5 scenarios represents a quantum step forward to ensure Alliance preparedness for collective defence.

Seizing Opportunities in Warfare Development

So, whilst the JWC delivers higher command and staff collective training for three- and four-star NATO headquarters, we can also harvest a huge dividend in warfare development and innovation. Exercises may be the most conspicuous aspect of what we do, yet it is our role in joint and combined warfare development at the operational level that offers enduring benefit to the Alliance. Indeed, our role in this is greater than ever as we refocus NATO’s agenda for experimentation, interoperability and doctrine development against collective defence and Article 5 scenarios.

RIGHT, CLOCKWISE

Situational update briefing during Exercise STEADFAST JUPITER-JACKAL 2020; the author, Colonel Neil Wright; Major General Piotr Malinowski, Commander JWC; Commander Sveinung Wersland during an exercise planning meeting; the space response cell during Exercise TRIDENT JUPITER 2019-1

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Judging by present security dilemmas and trends in geopolitics, this will be the trajectory of our work for the foreseeable future, whilst maintaining capacity to conduct small joint operations and out-of-area operations.

To the Next Twenty Years

Analysts view this fast-changing geopolitical landscape as perhaps the most consequential for European security since the end of the Cold War. This makes for challenging and interesting warfare development work in NATO's "warfare centre". Our exercises give us a unique and privileged view of Generalship, and how higher commanders and staff within NATO practice operational art.

We see talented commanders and staff operating in challenging and stressful conditions and it would be impossible not to be humbled and impressed by this. Yet the privilege comes with responsibility, which is to offer valid observations from training back into warfare development; the *raison d'être* of training and innovation in NATO. That linkage plays to the very heart of interdependence and interoperability within the Alliance.

So, it is safe to assume that the next twenty years will be just as unpredictable as those that have passed. In these accelerated times there seems little prospect of respite or let up, and our history and experience are likely to offer the best handrail to the future. Those first twenty years in exercises, training and innovation have been of huge importance in shaping our approach to warfare development and have ensured we are well poised to take on the challenges that lie ahead.

The role of the JWC's Exercise, Training and Innovation Directorate is to harness innovation and transformational thinking in our people and shape NATO's approach to future challenges. As the articles that follow demonstrate, we have talented and capable people working within the Directorate, at the forefront of innovation, adaptation and warfare development—and the team works! Professional life continues to be just as fascinating, varied and rewarding as ever and we are limited only by our own imagination. ✦

Did you know?

The JWC-directed command post exercises may involve up to 5,000 military and civilian personnel.

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