

# Developing Warfare at NATO's Warfare Centre

**By Peter M. Hutson**

NATO International Civilian  
Capability Integration and Experimentation Analyst  
Concepts, Capability Integration and Experimentation Branch  
Joint Warfare Centre

NATO operates in the context of a constantly changing global security environment, requiring the Alliance to continuously rethink, reprioritize, and transform in response to new risks and opportunities. Central to NATO's strategy is the ability to adapt to the future, and particularly to the increasingly complex and amorphous nature of conflict and warfare.

At the operational level, the Joint Warfare Centre's (JWC) task and responsibility is to ultimately translate key strategic concepts and subsequent guidance down to the level of the warfighter, to skillfully discern potential impact to operations, and to adapt training venues and exercises. The Concepts, Capability Integration and Experimentation (CCI&E) Branch has been instrumental to this effort, seizing opportunities to support warfare development through the integration of new concepts, maturing capabilities, and other experimental activities into the JWC-directed exercises and innovative training venues.

The challenges of transformation for NATO at the operational level were first highlighted in the Alliance Strategic Concept of 1999 and the Military Committee's implementation strategy. As put forth in the Alliance Strategic Concept of 1999, whilst the possibility of large-scale conventional aggression could not be disregarded, the Alliance needed to also take into account the wider risks beyond the periphery of the Alliance to include acts of terrorism, ethnic conflict, organized crime, disruption of the flow of vital resources, the uncontrolled movement of large numbers of people, and the proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

In addition, new fundamental tasks of crisis response operations, partnership, and peace support were added to those of security, consultation, deterrence, and defence. The 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States further brought the risk of terrorism to the fore. This unprecedented event soon drove major internal reforms to modify military structures and capabilities for new tasks to include the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.

These new strategies led to the implementation of a new NATO Command Structure, and Allied Command Transformation (ACT), within which the JWC was required to adjust and translate the new guidance into a framework suitable to its mission and programme of work. For the JWC, this meant

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careful adaptation of its training environment, development of relevant exercise scenarios, and judicious inclusion of experimental opportunities. The earliest requirements for integration of new or maturing concepts and experimentation into exercises included the effects-based approach to operations (EBAO), comprehensive approach, knowledge development, system of systems analysis (SoSA), counter-improvised explosive device operations, and adaptation of the Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive (COPD).

For both the JWC and its training audiences, the introduction of new concepts and experimental activities has been the stimulus for change and adoption of a different mindset — one that involved accepting risks and opportunities, and recognition that transformation requires action as a “present activity” and not as a future event. Importantly, this also means constant and close coordination and interaction with key stakeholders, including the development of programme management of capabilities at Headquarters Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (HQ SACT), requirement owners and operators at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), NATO Command and Force Structure Headquarters, centres of excellence, nations, industry, and academia.

In 2010 at the Lisbon Summit, NATO again revised its Strategic Concept (accompanied by the MC Guidance 400/3, March 2012), endorsing an updated understanding of NATO’s core purpose to reflect on the evolving geopolitical and strategic landscape. Collective defence, of course, received continued emphasis as a core task for NATO. This time crisis management and cooperative security were also elevated to core tasks, reflecting the requirement that NATO must not only protect and defend Alliance territory, but also defend against global, transnational, or non-traditional threats that transcend fixed, conventional boundaries, while also engaging with an international array of actors and partners.

Guided by the 2010 Strategic Concept and lessons learned from both the Balkans and Afghanistan, HQ SACT and the JWC also promptly shifted gears to address new major themes and develop new initiatives to adapt and transform. One example was closer scrutiny and experimentation with NATO’s ballistic missile defence (BMD) capability and related capability integration in multiple exercises to inform doctrine development and operational frameworks.

Cyber defence also received a high level of attention. To challenge the operational level with a cyber-contested environment, the Centre provides dynamic and robust scenarios and Advisory Team support to facilitate cyber training within its collective exercise programme. As such, the JWC facilitates the development of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, education, and interoperability capability strands with regards to cyberspace.

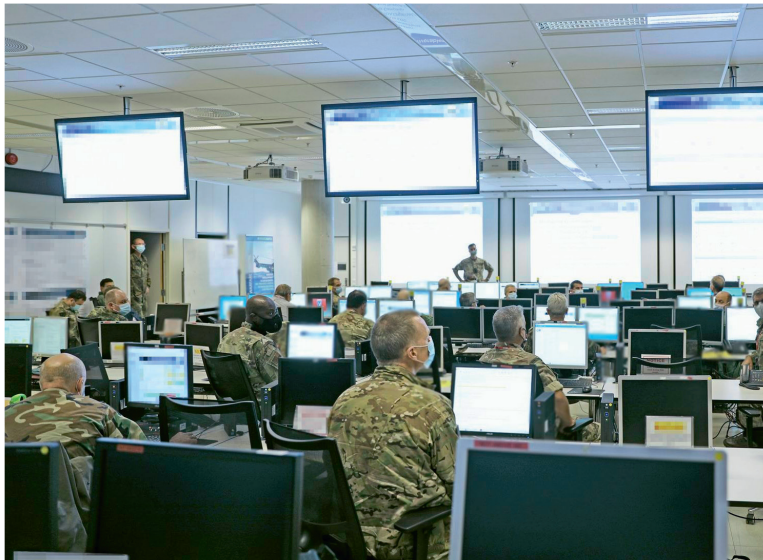
Strategic communications was another key focus area that quickly evolved as a core function in NATO policies and operations. Derived from lessons identified from ISAF and the Ukrainian crisis, particular challenges included how to integrate the concept of strategic narratives at the operational level and how to assess the information environment and its influence on populations.

Over the past decade, ACT continued to persistently monitor the dynamic geopolitical landscape and to address evolving security implications and the evolving nature of warfare.

**RIGHT, CLOCKWISE**

NATO Brussels Summit 2021; the author, Peter Hutson, during a vision workshop presentation; the NATO Military Committee visit to Allied Command Transformation (ACT) was hosted by the JWC in early March 2020; the JWC exercise situation centre (SITCEN) during STEADFAST JUPITER 2021







Besides the continued development of cyberspace as a domain of operations, ACT also focused on the NATO operational dependencies related to the space domain resulting in a successful three-year campaign within major JWC-directed exercises. In coordination with NATO's spacefaring nations, this high-visibility project yielded rapid doctrinal, organizational, training, and interoperability developments and changes for the Alliance.

Hybrid threats was another area that the JWC successfully integrated into its warfare development and training processes. After the Ukraine crisis in 2014 and increased tensions with Russia, NATO rapidly focused on the challenges of confronting and countering hybrid threats and asymmetric warfare, including propaganda and disinformation, cyber disruption and destabilization, economic and energy pressures, movement of conventional forces, and blurring the distinction between civilians and combatants. The JWC-directed exercises actively challenged training audiences with such threats, while offering those training audiences the opportunity to develop doctrinal, capability, and operational countermeasures.

Other projects that the JWC has supported over the years were related to disablement of weapons of mass destruction, joint intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance experimentation to include the tasking and employment of the NATO Alliance Ground Surveillance Force, operations logistics chain management capability development, information environment studies and experimentation, and numerous technology projects to assist with development of medical, logistical, and operational information systems.

Developed to support the 2019 NATO Military Strategy (MC 0400/4), the NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept (NWCC) represents HQ SACT's vision on how the Alliance should approach the future of warfare, and how the Alliance will coherently deliver the military instrument of power over the next 20 years. In essence, the NWCC creates a vision for Alliance warfare development up to 2040 to protect NATO's core interests.

In collaboration with HQ SACT, the JWC is also conducting a consolidated review of how it will contribute to meeting chiefs of defence priorities in response to new "warfare development imperatives" that include cognitive superiority, cross-domain command, influence and power projection, integrated multi-domain defence, and layered resilience. The CCI&E Branch has also been integral in contributing to this effort, including the development of an initial JWC wargaming capability, and ensuring that the complexities of resilience are appropriately represented in exercises.

As NATO continues to evolve in response to both complex threats and a dynamic geopolitical landscape, transformation and warfare development will remain central to enhancing Alliance readiness, relevance, and credibility. HQ SACT and the JWC have been committed to supporting and delivering the ongoing transformation necessary to fight and win in the future. ✦



**Peter M. Hutson** specializes in experimentation and integration of new concepts and capabilities into the JWC-exercises. He is also a postgraduate research student completing a NATO-sponsored professional doctorate focused on cyber risk.