

Wargaming at the JWC: From Idea to Capability

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In August 2019, the Joint Warfare Centre (JWC) started on a journey to create a wargame design capability that would offer a flexible and agile training and education tool to the Alliance. The Centre heard a growing demand signal from its customers for quick-turn training events to delve more deeply into emerging concepts and complex problems in the JWC's command post exercises (CPXs). In addition to the demand for more agile training methods, the JWC recognized an increase in exercise complexity owing to more training audiences, more training objectives, larger geographic scope, and larger scale in terms of the totality of conflict. During the JWC's Fit for Future and Vision 2025 workshops in late 2019 and early 2020, the JWC formalized the idea to pursue wargaming as one method to meet both needs of accelerating Alliance learning and reducing exercise complexity.

Initial Operational Capability (IOC)

The first step towards developing a wargame design capability was to train a core team of staff on the basics of wargaming. Staff members with established CPX expertise in the functional areas of project management, warfare development, analysis, scenario, and modelling and simulation conducted internal training by executing a commercial off-the-shelf matrix-format wargame. Based on that experience, the team outlined what would eventually become the JWC's Wargame Process Standing Operating Procedure (SOP).

During this period of internal training, the JWC was awaiting responses to the call of former Commander JWC, Vice Admiral Jan C. Kaack, for wargame topics from interested NATO centres of excellence (COEs). Of the responses received, the wargaming core planning team chose the Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) COE's "Resilience Through Civil Preparedness" topic as the focus for a proof-of-concept wargame. The Centre achieved IOC status in wargame design in February 2021 following delivery of the wargame named WISE AEGIS to the CIMIC COE, which focused on the impact of operational-level civil-military interaction on national resilience.

Critical to the game's success were two rounds of JWC-internal playtesting, allowing fresh perspectives and constructive criticism from the JWC's Transformation Delivery Division to help the game designers spot and fix flaws before execution with the customer.

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Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the in-person WISE AEGIS matrix/board game format was modified to allow delivery in a virtual and distributed manner, without the need for co-location of all participants. Twenty-three organizations across 12 NATO nations participated in WISE AEGIS, with players hailing from NATO Headquarters, the NATO Command Structure, the CIMIC COE, industry, a NATO national joint headquarters, and a NATO nation's centre for security.

Full Operational Capability

After IOC, the JWC institutionalized the capability by creating a five-person Wargaming Branch and a 50-person wargame design-trained cadre. The JWC also documented lessons learned, established a robust partnership with other wargaming centres and Headquarters Supreme Allied Commander Transformation's (HQ SACT) Audacious Wargaming Tiger Team.

Brigadier General Douglas K. Clark, the Centre's Deputy Commander and Chief of Staff, signed the JWC's Wargame Process SOP on January 31, 2022, marking another milestone in the rich history of the organization. Named SOP 801, the document describes the scope of the JWC's wargames and how the Centre designs, develops, and delivers wargames. It is a living document that will be updated as required to reflect developments in wargaming techniques.

"With today's signature of the Wargaming SOP, the JWC has now reached full operational capability," the Commander JWC, Major General Piotr Malinowski, said. "Congratulations to the team, and thank you for your past, present, and future efforts to make NATO better. We are excited to offer this capability to the Alliance's organizations, as well as to the Nations."

The JWC's wargame design capability is ready to help sponsors explore a myriad of complex problems such as sustainment and campaign synchronization, and operationalize new strategic concepts such as the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA). With the JWC's Wargaming Branch and wargaming cadre, the Centre will deliver bespoke training and problem exploration wargames at the speed of relevance and work with exercise planning teams to design wargames that increase training value, while reducing exercise complexity. ✦

RIGHT, CLOCKWISE

Ron Lohse, wargame planner, during a presentation at the JWC; Major General Piotr Malinowski, Commander JWC, at the signature ceremony for the JWC's Wargame Process Standing Operating Procedure; the pilot wargame with the CIMIC COE in February 2021; the author, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Ziolkowski; the wargame initiative-kick-off in June 2020; the pilot wargame with the CIMIC COE

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Lieutenant Colonel Frank Ziolkowski is an artillery officer. In addition to serving in the German artillery, he has also served in NATO's Joint Air Power Competence Centre and deployed to Kuwait and Afghanistan.

