

Delivering Realistic and Credible Exercise Content

Credibility, resilience and legitimacy are inextricably linked with the Joint Warfare Centre's institutional responsibilities to train NATO, advance doctrine and integrate concepts. Guided by these overarching requirements, the Content Branch continues to evolve and adapt to both an increasingly ambitious exercise programme and NATO's wider training requirements.

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The Content Branch consists of posts from eight NATO nations. These are divided into two teams: the Grey Cell team and the Main Events List/Main Incidents List (MEL/MIL) team. Despite its name, the Content Branch is not the singular focus for content development, as it relies heavily upon the Scenario and Opposing Forces (OPFOR) Branches to develop coherent and synchronized exercise content for the Joint Warfare Centre's (JWC) training audiences.

The MEL/MIL team is responsible for the development and delivery of exercise content during the planning and execution phases of an exercise, the latter known as Phase IIIB. Guided by the MEL/MIL team and scripted by the trusted agents from the training audiences, participating nations and supporting response cells over a series of three developmental workshops, the exercise script is synchronized with the exercise scenario, the training audience's operation and coordination orders, as well as OPFOR actions. The result is an artificial exercise environment in which the training audience is provided the opportunity to achieve its training objectives.

The Grey Cell team consists of staff officers who prepare, activate, and manage a diverse team of contracted subject matter experts (SMEs). During an exercise, these SMEs replicate the complex military and civil aspects of the international and security environments in which the training audience would normally expect to operate.



Operational Dilemma

A multifaceted military theme that represents a set of complex problems that can challenge a commanders' decision-making process at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of warfare, within the context of a specific joint operation

Event

A major occurrence or sequence of related incidents

Incident

Actions or situations that provide greater clarity on an event by the use of injections

Injection

The way of bringing an incident to the attention of the players within the training audience

The SMEs brought into the Grey Cell as part of the exercise control (EXCON) organization within a JWC-directed exercise are often retired senior military officers, civil leaders or diplomats, who contribute to the exercise with their extensive knowledge of political, economic and social matters as well as the infrastructure and information environments. Interacting with the training audience by face-to-face meetings or video conferences, these Grey Cell SMEs represent the JWC “front of house”.

During the execution phase of an exercise, the Grey Cell can generate and replicate key leaders from NATO and non-NATO host nations alongside non-military actors such as the United Nations, the European Union, the International Committee of the Red Cross et al., with whom the training audience would expect to liaise in a theatre of operations, depending on the exercise scenario.

In addition to contributing to all phases of the MEL/MIL development process, the Grey Cell can prepare and provide personnel to participate in the training audience’s operational planning processes to replicate the interactions that would take place during initial reconnaissance and liaison phases of an operation. All of the Grey Cell’s work brings a sense of realism to a training audience, preparing a staff for operating in a complex, multidimensional environment that is typical of the modern operational theatre.

The Content Branch follows an exercise planning process that reflects the corporate experience gained from having dedicated staff focus on exercise content development. Since the Content Branch’s formal inception in 2015, the staff has continuously refined and adjusted procedures and practices to adjust to the varying levels of training audience and exercise ambitions of the assigned TRIDENT and STEADFAST series of exercises. Content development through to 2020 was focused on the staged and structured collective collaboration of the JWC staff, training audience augmentees, contracted SMEs, representatives from international organizations (IO) and non-governmental organizations (NGO), and senior mentors. The branch has always been confident of its collective ability to plan and lead the development of exercise content.

But it was not until 2020 that the Content Branch’s ability to lead the development of a computer-assisted command post exercise (CAX/CPX) script was really put to the test with the development of the STEADFAST JUPITER-JACKAL 2020 CPX (STJU-JA20) — an exercise planned and executed in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Adjustments to the process demonstrated the ability to adapt to fit the modified exercise ambition and reduced planning timeframe. All aims were met, and a credible script was produced.

The STJU-JA20 modifications resulted in a training event similar to the training audience-led battle staff training, but with a volume of injects more akin to a CPX. Moreover, STJU-JA20 also presented the training audiences with the opportunity to engage with real members of the IO/NGO community — a part of the training that had been traditionally developed and guided by the Grey Cell. STJU-JA20, overall, provided a challenging operational exercise and exceeded the expectations of the training audiences.

The Content Branch also contributed to the development of vignette-based exercises and wargaming throughout 2020 and in 2021. The CPX portion of STEADFAST DEFENDER 2021 was one such vignette-based exercise, where



Comprehensive Approach

Military means, although essential, are not enough on their own to meet the many complex challenges to our security. The effective implementation of a comprehensive approach to crisis situations requires nations, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to contribute in a concerted effort. Implementation of the comprehensive approach is integral to many recent and ongoing NATO activities, such as the Alliance’s contributions to the international community’s fight against terrorism and efforts to project stability, and its role in responding to hybrid threats.

RIGHT

The JWC provides the Grey Cell and the MEL/MIL expertise (including the contracted subject matter experts), which together provide core exercise support to the JWC-directed exercises



the ambition of the exercise was focused on the development of vignettes to stimulate and test particular areas and staff processes within a training audience's headquarters. Although this concept is new, it is nevertheless expected to provide another means of delivering an exercise to a training audience for the future.

The JWC next conducted STEADFAST JUPITER 2021, which was NATO's largest CAX/CPX in 2021, designed to train and evaluate the NATO Response Force 2022 and involving approximately 5,000 participants from 26 NATO and two partner countries, Finland and Sweden. Based on a pre-Article 5 scenario, the exercise practiced deterrence against hybrid threats, improved the capability to plan and execute up to a major joint operation, and strengthened Allied interoperability and cooperation with partner nations.

The JWC concluded the year with STEADFAST JACKAL 2021, which involved the participation of nearly 2,500 civilian and military personnel focusing on the Alliance's Strategic Direction South. The exercise used a new setting to present a wide variety of dilemmas for the training audiences, such as countering hybrid threats and supporting the rules-based international order.

The Way Ahead

Wargaming is a developing area of expertise for the JWC. Due to the cost-saving nature of tabletop wargaming, existing scenario materials, proven storylines, and common operational dilemmas should be recycled where possible. As the JWC develops its wargaming capability, it may provide an alternative or supplementary activity to the large-scale CAX/CPX and the newly established Wargaming Branch is well-placed to work with the Content Branch to offer possible solutions.

Since its formation in 2015, the Content Branch has continued to adapt and refine its ability to develop and deliver exercise content in support of CAX/CPX as well as wargaming and vignette-based exercises, with the ultimate aim of maintaining the JWC's credibility, resilience, and legitimacy to train NATO. Like we say at the JWC, as One Team, we make NATO better. ✦

Exercise Content Goals

- Drive the exercise process by delivering the ends, facilitating the ways, and managing the means
- Ensure a successful exercise through vital collaboration between the triad of Chief Scenario, Chief OPFOR and Chief MEL/MIL
- Develop and deliver realistic, flexible and challenging exercise content in the Joint Exercise Management Module (JEMM) programme
- Provide tailored training opportunities in line with the agreed training objectives
- Ensure comprehensive dynamic scripting during an exercise, tailored and adjusted to challenge the training audiences' operations plan (OPLAN)

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The MEL/MIL Incident Development Workshop for Exercise STEADFAST JACKAL 2022