

LEARNING



Top and below

JWC wargames aim to accelerate Alliance learning; Exercise STEADFAST JUPITER 2023 Main Events List/Main Incidents List (MEL/MIL) Scripting Workshop. Photos by JWC PAO



FROM EXERCISES

by **Andrew Eden**

NATO International Civilian
Lessons Learned Analyst
Lessons Learned Branch
NATO Joint Warfare Centre

IN 2016, I WROTE in this publication that "we will carry out TRIDENT JAVELIN 2017, a seriously ambitious undertaking with a new setting, SKOLKAN 3.0, and no fewer than three primary training audiences." It is amusing to think that, at the time, three primary training audiences were considered a large undertaking. Since then, ambi-

tion has risen beyond exponential growth, accelerated by the turn of events in Ukraine and persistent horizontal escalation by our adversaries. The new SKOLKAN setting was seen, at the time, to be a return to our Cold War origins, engaging a near-peer adversary in an Article-5 conflict: an existential fight on home turf. The developments in European affairs since then, almost unimaginable even in





Clockwise

The training audience during Exercise STEADFAST JUPITER 2021; CAX presentation at the JWC; Exercise STEADFAST JUPITER 2023 MEL/MIL Incident Development Workshop; the JWC's first Analysis Workshop conducted in partnership with the JALLC. Photos by JWC PAO

2017, underscore the relevance of NATO's exercises and the JWC's role in furnishing them to our many training audiences. The execution of these massive endeavours not only confirms NATO's commitment to preparedness but also reflects the scale of the threat to our societies and the values that underpin them.

The impact of COVID-19 emphasized the fragility of many assumptions regarding accessible economy, freedom to travel, and access to healthcare. As the Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană said at the 2021 NATO Lessons Learned Conference in relation to hybrid threats, "... the very definition of security has changed. [...] We are witnessing threats that could blur the line between civil and military realms, between traditional

and novel elements, between conventional and hybrid tactics. This is an evolution of epic proportions."¹ So where does the Joint Warfare Centre (JWC) fit in?

To put it in theatrical terms, the JWC provides the theatre, the script, the scenery and the props to allow our training audience players to perform their art of war. The JWC readies the actors with training and preparation, and also writes the reviews on the actors' performances in order to refine them for subsequent endeavours. In addition, the JWC and the wider NATO enterprise stand as symbols of our common values, the strength of our unity, and our collective determination to learn from the past by sparing no sacrifice to ensure a safe and secure future for our communities.

The NATO Warfare Development Concept merges Supreme Allied Commander Europe's (SACEUR) Concept for the Defence and Deterrence of the Euro-Atlantic Area with Allied Command Transformation's (ACT) capability development and force preparation

agenda. A key ambition within the NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept is the achievement of the six "outs": to out-think, out-excel, out-fight, out-last, out-pace and out-partner our adversaries, demonstrating our collective and collaborative ability to exceed our adversaries in every way as we exercise the military instrument of power.

It is here that the JWC and ACT are expanding their portfolio and practice in innovative ways, exploring new ground in order to challenge ourselves and our stakeholders. Initiatives such as the development of the JWC's continuous collaborative approach to stakeholder engagement, the development of wargaming as a tool to stretch staff's collaborative thinking, and the planning of more challenging exercises serve to set a very demanding tempo for our stakeholders and of course for ourselves and our families.

Within the current context of heightened friction, uncertainty and belligerence, and our rapid and innovative reorientation to





Above and right

Preparing for NATO Exercise STEADFAST JACKAL 2023 (STJA23). STJA23 will certify Eurocorps as a NATO Joint Task Force Headquarters for 2024, together with its associated Spanish Joint Logistic Support Group and the Spanish Joint Force Air Component (right). Photos by JWC PAO

these conditions after a period of relative European tranquillity, we can expect a degree of adjustment and refinement as we experiment with and trial our practices and performance to improve our precision in delivering effects. Our collective resilience will be both tested and burnished by challenges. We can expect the unexpected and should brace ourselves for setbacks in order to be able to reorientate, refocus and rebound stronger. To say it with former SHAPE Vice Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Michel Yakovlev: "To effect institutional change, we need humility; a recognition that we do not know all and that our ways are not always the best, because if we believe that, then we will never be in learning mode."

We must pay attention to the way we learn, to ensure that we learn not just individually but collectively, and that we learn the right lessons. Our exercises are collective training not just for the very large community of individuals engaged in them, but for their near- and mid-term successors by virtue of the communication of those hard-learned lessons and the way we manage change and learning in our organization.

EVENTS IN UKRAINE have demonstrated the force-multiplying effect of creativity, agility and adaptability in unimaginably difficult circumstances. Drone technology has been used to target and deliver munitions, and its exploitation in social media has brought conflict into the living rooms of our populations. But the grim nature of trench warfare has returned to haunt us again, reminding us of British Air Marshall Sir John Slessor's words: "If there is one attitude more dangerous than to assume that a future war will be just like the last one, it

is to imagine that it will be so utterly different that we can afford to ignore all the lessons of the last one."

Longer-term challenges have been the focus of two recent JWC studies. We have scrutinized JWC exercises from two main perspectives: training audience performance and our own exercise planning performance. In doing so, we observe that there are common challenges across exercises that can be ascribed to organization-wide bottlenecks that are characteristic of large, multinational, common-funded organizations; we are well-prepared for these and have robust mitigation measures.

Indeed, coping with such frictions is itself a learning and strengthening experience, consolidating working relationships and expanding our abilities to collaborate and produce results under difficult circumstances. For example, the degree of business-as-usual in the exercise programme as NATO reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that our corporate adaptability and resilience is both





Above

The author, Andrew Eden, during the JWC's first Analysis Workshop conducted in partnership with the JALLC. The workshop paves the way into the drafting of a JWC analysis guide. Photo by JWC PAO

tested and proven by these real-life challenges in providing synthetic training. The JWC's adaptation to working from the recently refurbished In-Rock Facility also exemplifies the can-do attitude of the NATO community.

In terms of training audience performance, our long-term perspective suggests that while we see some common themes in how headquarters staff tackle the challenges of conducting operations from a joint headquarters, these challenges are quickly addressed within the short window of an exercise execution. Training audiences, and in particular their augmentees, endure a steep learning curve but nevertheless prevail, demonstrating adaptability and a positive team ethic to get the job done.

FURTHERMORE, IN 2022 we added another "first" to our trophy cabinet of exceptions, innovations and disruptions: our first training audience to return for an exercise two years in a row. NATO Rapid Deployable Corps Italy (NRDC-ITA) conducted STEADFAST JACKAL 2021 and returned once again for STEADFAST JACKAL 2022. This provided a unique opportunity for a training audience to

refine its practices with broadly the same staff. Usually, a training audience headquarters staff member will not enjoy more than one exercise with the JWC during their three-year rotation with NATO. On this occasion, we were able to demonstrate that headquarters staff continue the positive glide path after exercises, and capitalize on the organizational and individual knowledge gained. For instance, the logistical element of the exercise, including the use of the Logistics Functional Area Services (LOG-FAS), was best-in-class.

"The joint effects cycle is the most demanding element of HQ activity. It is the practice of operational art at its finest."

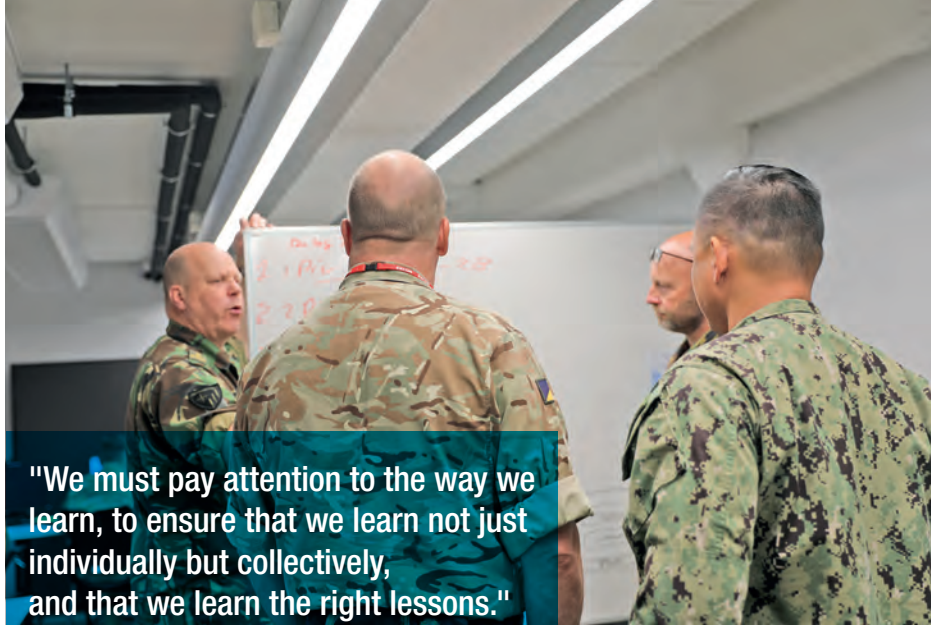
Some longer-term challenges remain, of course; these are rooted in the nature of our business and organization, and the challenges that stem from creating a synthetic conflict in an exercise. Recalling the analogy used earlier, namely the creation of a theatre, the script and the props to conduct an exercise, the JWC is challenged to provide those in a contained, near-real, short-lived context for consumption by a busy audience, with the audience seeing only two out of a number of separate, sequential acts, separated by six months.

Setting an exercise within a long narrative comprising all aspects of the PMESII² spectrum, with snapshots of the machinations of the NATO Crisis Management System to simulate political direction, while feeding a rich picture of tactical-level events and incidents, requires some trade-offs in the need for accurate simulation, against the need for timely stimulation to get the audience to undertake the activities required to meet their exercise and training objectives.

ANOTHER SIGNIFICANT CHANGE to how the JWC does business, and an interesting complication to our current projects, has been the updating of our exercise planning guide, Bi-SC Directive 075-003, Collective Training and Exercises. This refreshed doctrinal publication has taken almost a decade to update, due to the seismic changes that we have witnessed over those years. Since the Wales Summit in 2014, the guidebook for planning our exercises has come to require a significant update as it has been geared to developing smaller, discrete and tailored exercises. As the reins of the Officer Scheduling the Exercise (OSE) were recently transferred back to SACEUR after a decade with SACT, so was custodianship of our key directive.

Our major undertakings now require a different model that in many ways simplifies the way we do business, for instance by providing a menu of pre-determined standing training objectives, and by harmonizing terms and events throughout the long exercise planning process, making it easier for newcomers to orientate to exercise planning. What is particularly innovative in the new publication is the degree of concept development at the beginning of the exercise planning stage,





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Above
STEADFAST JUPITER 2023 MEL/MIL
Scripting Workshop. Photo by JWC PAO

now known as Stage 0. During this stage, the linkages in SACEUR's high-level strategic guidance for exercises are developed into overarching exercise objectives, and thereafter into a suite of training objectives and a myriad of supporting tasks for each training audience, in parallel with requisite evaluation objectives. This reflects the increasing complexity of our exercises and the highly ambitious requirement to challenge multiple organizations concurrently in tailored ways, and finally the seriousness with which NATO is exercising. Recently, the urgency and complexity of these demands is reflected in the increase in senior leadership engagement in exercise planning, with close Command Group involvement in every step of the process from inception to exercise culmination.

The increase in exercise ambition is not just about numbers, however. The growth in planned exercise scale since 2014, and in particular since early 2022, challenges participating headquarters to conduct kinetic multi-domain operations across expansive areas of responsibility, demanding optimal synchronization across all levels of command. Single headquarters' exercises develop internal operational art, stimulated by synthetic higher and lower formations by JWC staff, known as HICON (Higher Control) and LOCON (Lower Control). The JWC's previous exercises were therefore simpler by comparison, focusing on the actions and behaviours of the target headquarters' training audience. Now, with multiple headquarters in an exercise, at three levels of command, the JWC

surrenders some of that control, stimulation and simulation to the warfighters conducting their synthetic operation.

The synchronization required to cascade direction and guidance to peer and subordinate commands, and to coordinate and communicate effects, requires a nuanced blend of rigidity and flexibility, to enable a reliable and predictable rhythm of activity while allowing enough room for adaptation, creativity and flexibility as circumstances demand. Reports and returns are an important part of the battle rhythm, maintaining common situational awareness across all headquarters and their staff. In addition, this regular routine-driven activity is overlaid with a more irregular pattern of activity such as the joint effects cycle, driven by the events as they unfold. This is the most energizing and demanding element of headquarters activity, requiring highly time-

sensitive and decisive actions, often with scant information available. This is the practice of operational art at its finest, and it is why JWC exercises are essential. By setting demanding and realistic conditions in which to practice and refine these activities, we are ensuring that NATO is ready for anything. The process is at least as important as the product, and when commanders present their review of the exercise in the after-action review [See "After-Action Review" article, pp 74–75], the satisfaction of a job well done is well-deserved.

As the scale of the exercises has increased, and those demands have stretched exercise stakeholders further, that achievement should not be underestimated or understated. It is hard to believe where we stand now in terms of exercise ambition and training audience performance, in relation to our viewpoint in 2016 as Exercise TRIDENT JAVELIN 2017 lay before us.

Looking back on the past decade, the exercise environment has changed quite radically; this is reflected even in the way the JWC looks now, with new buildings and a finely refurbished In-Rock Facility. We are NATO, and we are ready. ✦

ENDNOTES

- 1 Speech by NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană at the NATO Lessons Learned Conference, March 16, 2021; https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_182229.htm
- 2 Political, military, economy, social, infrastructure and information. We may add PT: physical environment and time.

Below
Content developers at the STEADFAST JUPITER 2023
MEL/MIL Scripting Workshop. Photo by JWC PAO

