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**THE NATO CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE AS RESOURCE
FOR CAPABILITY TRANSFORMATION MANAGEMENT
IN THE NORTH-ATLANTIC ALLIANCE**

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Abstract:

The paper debates the emergence of NATO Centers of Excellence (COEs) as valuable resource for capability development within the framework of NATO transformation efforts.

For this purpose, COEs provide a broad range of deliverables in their area of service, covering aspects pertaining to doctrine and concepts development, evaluation and validation of new theoretical and practical solutions to meet identified gaps and shortfalls, delivery of education and training services, managing the lessons learned and analysis process and providing advise on matters covered by their subject matter expertise.

A meaningful example for the value added to a military discipline is the NATO HUMINT Centre of Excellence (HCOE) from Oradea, and the paper offers a brief overview of its most relevant achievements that contribute to an enhanced HUMINT capability within NATO.

Key words: NATO Centre of Excellence, HUMINT, capability, resources

1. Introduction

The North-Atlantic Alliance, deeply involved in the current geo-political developments, as a complex political-military organization, although not necessarily seeking to become a global-security alliance, is looking, however, for strengthening its military power and expanding the security umbrella covering the Allied Nations in order to discourage, deter, and counter any emerging threat.

The new deterrence posture encompasses a series of actions meant to accommodate the effects of the financial crisis, the challenges of the security environment and hybrid threats, the partnership extension [1], development of the military capabilities, human environment consideration, strategic communication, and other aspects that are all defining the frame on NATO transformation.

In this respect, prospective and pro-active approach on understanding the future and the associated risks is a must, and NATO offers a good example for such ventures. The Multiple Futures Project (MFP) [2] is a very interesting model that could be considered as reference to foresee evolutions of the global security environment in the next couple of decades which could influence and determine the requirements for NATO transformation.

The NATO document MC 324/1 defines the transformation as a permanent and pro-active process of developing and integrating innovative concepts, doctrines and capabilities, with the aim to enhance the efficiency and interoperability within NATO and in relation with partner forces. The NATO transformation model is based on promoting the above mentioned requirements by the support of well informed strategic and operational planning process, innovative thinking, integration of lessons learned and best practices, the

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process of education and training, and also relying on proper technological support, all of them contributing to an improved shape of the features defining NATO military capabilities – the doctrine (standards), organization, education and training, materiel, leadership, personnel, facilities and interoperability.

This process embraces many characteristics, all driving to a better preparedness for meeting actual and future challenges, in a cost effective manner, and having as end-state:

- improved capabilities (ability to fulfill the missions set by the Nations);
- increased interoperability (Nations operating as one);
- strengthened shared values (NATO functions by consensus and relies on shared values to accomplish missions).

Under the patronage of the Allied Command Transformation (ACT) – which is the leading agent for change, driving, facilitating, and advocating continuous improvement of capabilities to maintain and enhance NATO's military relevance and effectiveness [3] – the Transformation Network congregates the deliverables of Centers of Excellence (COEs) and other multinational and national entities supporting the whole process. The consistence of this network is a great deal of added-value and cost-effective support for NATO, leveraging resources and sharing expertise and information across the Alliance.

The Transformation Network Branch (TNB) is the ACT structure tasked to coordinate information exchange, to integrate and optimize the Centers of Excellence and other national and multinational entities' activity aiming to support NATO transformational process in accordance with identified priorities. Specifically regarding NATO Centers of Excellence, the Transformation Network Branch is the supporting organization responsible for all aspects of Centers of Excellence interaction within NATO, from the initial concept development, through establishment and accreditation, including the yearly process of building the NATO Requests for support to the COE (setting up the basis for their programs of work).

2.The NATO Centers of Excellence as enablers for military capabilities transformation

2.1 The NATO Centers of Excellence – general considerations

The origins of the Centers of Excellence could be found at the beginning of the NATO command structures' reorganization process lead by the Allied Command Transformation (ACT), after the Prague Summit in 2002.

The need for supplementary resources in support of transformation once identified, the Military Committee (MC) gave mandate to the Allied Nations to set up Centers of Excellence within the framework of its Concept defined in MCM 236-03.

The expectations set by MC to the centers are way higher than just offering education and training, these are supposed to provide products and deliverables covering a large spectrum of NATO's requirements for capability development.

The NATO Centers of Excellence (Fig.1) are nationally or multi-nationally sponsored, memorandum of understanding based entities, capable of providing recognized expertise in support of Alliances' transformational process.

A COE is not part of the NATO Command Structure (NCS), but forms part of the wider framework supporting NATO Command Arrangements (NCA) having the status of International Military Organization (decided by the North Atlantic Council), under the provisions of Paris Protocol (1959).

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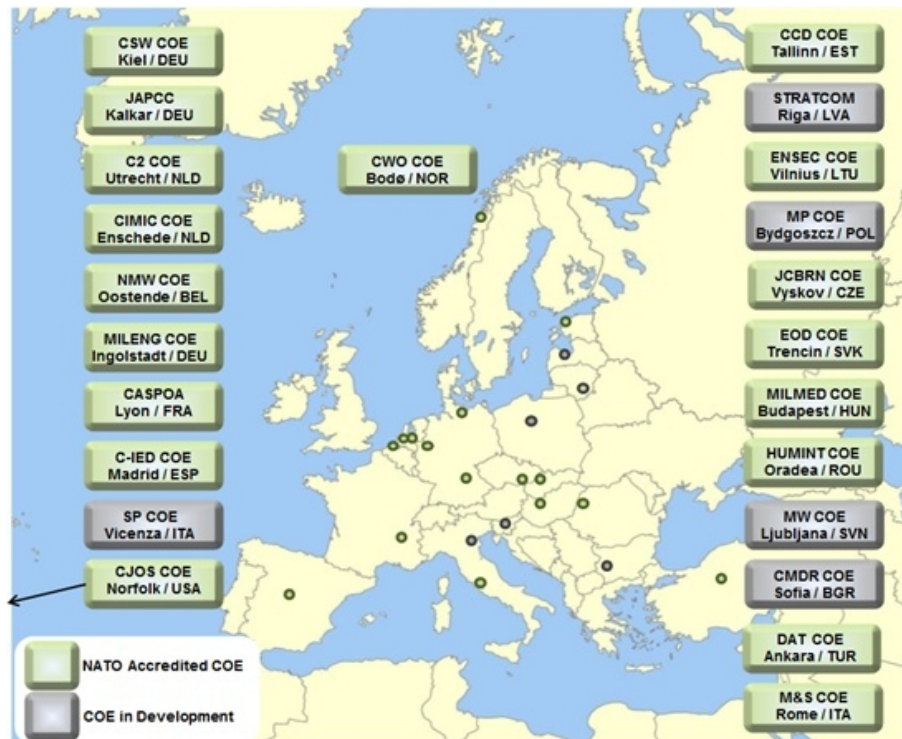


Fig 1 NATO Centers of Excellence – current status [4]

COEs' primary aim is to support the Alliance's transformation requirements in multiple areas of competence – standardization, concept development and experimentation, education and training, lessons learned and analysis. In this respect, COEs cover a broad range of specialties, relevant not exclusively for military (NATO and partners), but as well for customers belonging to a broad security system environment, Academia, etc. As a matter of facts, it constitutes a valuable pool of knowledge, in different areas of expertise.

Based on Participating Nations funding, the NATO Centers of Excellence network is profiled as a quality-based structure, covering a large range of vital branches for a military system. The COE products fully withstand NATO transformational end state, while also bearing the pattern of the involved Nations and Structures. Hence, the involvement in COE projects ensures for NATO Nations both a necessary visibility and an opportunity to access valuable findings.

NATO COEs activity is based on the following principles:

- Centers are open to the participation of all NATO member states, the access of non-member states or other organizations to their products is subject to their respective Steering Committee decision according to specific security limitations;
- non-duplication of resources and means and avoiding competition with existing NATO capabilities with the final goal of bringing value-added to the capabilities;
- financial support (infrastructure, operational and maintenance costs) provided by the Participating (Sponsoring) Nations in accordance with the level of participation with personnel;

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- conformity with NATO procedures, doctrines, standards and security policies;
- clear working relations within the Participating Nations and the Steering Committee (as decisional body of the centre) as specified within the memoranda of understanding and other technical agreements;
- Program of Work in accordance with and sustaining NATO's requests for support.

All these principles are self-defining for what a COE means as complex resource for NATO. Further on, an analytical approach would reveal practical aspects related to COEs tremendous contribution to the transformation network and capability development. [5]

2.2 Features of the NATO Centers of Excellence

The political dimension. As much as we would like to deny it, support for NATO COEs has political dimensions. One of these dimensions is the unwritten reciprocal arrangements that go on between nations. For example a nation may agree to support your COE if you support theirs. It is advised to closely examine and evaluate one nation's support for other COEs and determine what leverage this brings. Whilst it should not make a difference, in practical terms one nation may have the best idea for a COE but without support from other nations this idea will fall short. In another political dimension, many of the recent NATO COEs have come into being because of a strong commitment and involvement of senior politicians. (*The Lithuanian ENSEC COE is a good example here. During the information campaign, both the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Foreign Affairs were actively promoting the centre and soliciting support through their personal contacts. Additionally, both Ministers attended the first conference and made speeches that promised support and resources*).

The operation of the Centers of Excellence covers to some extent or completely a large spectrum of responsibilities, such as:

- support of NATO forces in improving their planning, education and leading capabilities;
- experimentation, validation and implementation of new concepts, techniques, tactics and procedures (TTPs) resulted from scientific research as well as lessons learned / best practices from operations or exercises;
- support of innovations as well as technical and technological research in their respective area of expertise;
- providing products and services specific to the standardization process, in support of interoperability requirements;
- provide expertise for NATO structures and partner states;
- set the framework for individual and collective education and training in their respective area of expertise.

The teams. Teamwork divides the task and multiplies the success. It is amazing what people can accomplish when they believe in themselves and are confident in the group.

COEs usually consist of multinational talented workforce of dedicated professionals comprising experience in their career field; deployments to theaters of operation; years of instructor experience and exercises.

Maybe this is the most important thing to be mentioned and it is what makes the teams even greater, when one supports the differing strengths of his/her teammates and

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allows each person to bring their unique qualities to the project. There could be incredible surprises when we are open to doing things in new and different ways.

Each member of these outstanding teams have a clear understanding of what his/her responsibilities are, everyone knows what the mission and objectives are and what are the expectations.

These teams definitely far-exceeded the expectations of those who initially had the idea of setting up the first centre of excellence. These specialists have the thorough conviction that nobody can get there unless everybody gets there.

With more than 700 people working and producing excellence, NATO has to reconsider the initial role and status of the centers of excellence.

In this respect NATO Strategic Commands decided to select centers of excellence with experience and outstanding results in their area of expertise to become Department Heads for the individual education and training in NATO, for their respective specialties.

Consequently the COEs employ rigorous internal quality assurance and lessons learned programs to improve all aspects of the operations – from academics to administration, support, and logistics.

Transforming theory into practice. An important step in NATO's transformation is putting the updated doctrine and TTPs to work in the classroom and validating them in exercises. These courses offer not only high-quality didactic sessions, but practical application exercises as well.

Transformation, however, is not just about adapting new technologies to operational requirements; it is also about looking at old things in new ways.

2.3 The NATO HUMINT Centre of Excellence from Oradea – facts and figures

HCOE proved to be one of the most important resources for NATO in building and developing the HUMINT capability. It emerged as a coordinated response to the identified shortfalls and difficulties in the use of human intelligence collection and production in theatres of operations, affected by lack of properly trained HUMINT personnel, as well as the lack of adequate standards and a validation exercise.

Based on the NATO Military Authorities Intelligence Coordination Group (NMAICG) resolution on this aspects, and having the platform of the NATO Human Intelligence Working Group (NHWG)¹ as a first step to address these issues, Romania had taken the opportunity of exploiting its commitment in the HUMINT field, launching the offer to establish and host, as Framework Nation, the NATO HCOE.

It was officially opened in Oradea, Romania, in 2010, and currently enjoys participation of nine NATO nations: Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, and the USA.[6]

The assumed mission of HCOE is to improve the interoperability and operational capability of NATO HUMINT through standardized training and education, doctrine development, lessons learned collection and analysis, exercise support, research and experimentation, seeking to become the leading agent of change for the NATO HUMINT enterprise.

¹ vested with the appropriate expertise and authority to coordinate the development of HUMINT doctrine and policy and to establish guidelines and interoperability requirements for HUMINT operations

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In this respect, we can enumerate a series of achievements, standing activities and relevant current projects that critically contribute to HUMINT development in NATO, outlining exceptional contribution of HCOE participating nations:

- subject matter expertise in support to multiple strategic, operational and tactical customers, delivered via a large range of activities subsumed in the yearly program of work: courses, conferences, workshops, seminars, studies, exercises and deployments;
- chairmanship (ensured by HCOE director) and secretariat of the working groups dealing with HUMINT in NATO - NATO HUMINT Working Group (NHWG) and NATO HUMINT Technology Working Group (NHTWG), which give the HCOE a front seat to better capture operational issues and provide NATO solutions to meet identified gaps and shortfalls;
- custodianship of NATO HUMINT doctrine and procedures and correlated work in the HUMINT standardization field;
- running relevant projects in the area of concept development and experimentation (ex. NATO funded research project “*The human aspects of the operational environment*”, coordinated by the Emerging Security Challenges Division/ ESCD);
- delivery of education & training activities throughout specific courses for more than 1200 students (to date) from almost all NATO countries;
- application as department head for HUMINT individual education and training in NATO, with special privileges in the field of quality control on education and training events, in accordance with the Bologna process;
- prominent role in coordinating and hosting the premier NATO Exercise in the HUMINT field, Steadfast Indicator;
- chair and coordination of NATO HUMINT Lessons learned/ best practices Community of Interest (CoI), emphasizing a significant stake on driving the bottom-up transformation process in the HUMINT discipline.

3. Conclusion

As NATO acts in a permanently changing environment, under the pressure of a limited human and financial capital, the COEs prove to become more and more relevant as complex resources for military capabilities transformation management.

Nations gathered into COEs demonstrated once again willingness and commitment into preserving and developing the security values NATO brought to them. These outstanding institutions stand for a valuable force and manpower, the best qualified to support and lead the continuous transformation process of the Alliance in order to discourage, deter, and counter any emerging threat.

HCOE facts and figures are just a tangible example to depict how this effort is multiplied at the level of the entire COEs network, and reverberating both toward NATO and at national level – an admirable example of cohesion and effectiveness.

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