

WORKINGPAPER



Sponsored by Stanley Foundation, the Center for Strategic and International Studies,
and the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Nonproliferation
Workshop on Centers of Excellence Collaboration

October 8, 2014
Vienna, Austria

**NATO'S Centers of Excellence:
A Key Enabler in Transforming NATO to
Address 21st Century Security Challenges**

by

Guy B. Roberts

“Transformation is not only about developing new weapons systems or improving capabilities, but rather a process and mind-set focused on the adaptation of unexpected challenges within a dynamic, joint environment. This evolution has a significant impact on military doctrine organization, capabilities, training, education and logistics.”—Admiral Ed. Giambastiani, First Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, NATO, 2005ⁱ

Introduction

Today, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) remains the most successful collective security organization the world has ever known. Part of the reason for its success has been its ability to adapt and change to deter and defend against a wide range of security threats in an insecure and chaotic security environment.

While NATO structures and organization have never been static, the end of the Cold War required a radical shift in NATO's roles and missions. Consequently, beginning in 1990, NATO nations called for a process of adaptation to Alliance structures and policies to the changes that were reshaping Europe and the post-Cold War world. Events, such as the terrorist attack on 9/11, created a new impetus in NATO's transformation process that has been embraced by the Alliance in the most recent (2010) iteration of the NATO Strategic Concept. The widened scope of NATO military operations in places like Libya and Afghanistan, coupled with the subsequent enlargement of NATO to 28 nations, radically transformed the military requirements of the Alliance.

A combination of present unforeseen conflicts and challenges, and restrained resources, however, continues to challenge NATO's ability to adapt, even as the unknown future requires steady vigilance and constant innovation. Consequently, at the 2002 Prague Summit the Alliance launched a modernization process to ensure NATO can efficiently and effectively deal with the multi-faceted security challenges of the 21st century. As agreed, this process will have no end point; transformation and adaptation will continue in perpetuity as long as NATO exists.

As a key element in the transformation of the Alliance and key factor in developing solutions for an uncertain future, the Alliance at Prague agreed to develop and support a range of Centers of Excellence (COE) that would be an integral part of the educational and training support community to bolster and significantly contribute to NATO's ability to identify, prioritise, respond and implement the defence objectives for twenty-eight Allies.

The eventual success of the NATO COE is rooted in a concept that allows nations to offer multinational solutions to enhance capabilities and capacities in order to meet NATO's transformational goals. This concept was initiated at the Prague Summit where Allies recognised the need for a mechanism to better promote and achieve transformation. In 2003 Allies quickly agreed on the COE framework, and in 2005 the first fully NATO accredited COE began its program of work. In less than a decade, COE have grown into a vital network of transformational support to the Alliance recognized primarily for their technical expertise. This paper will address the development, evolution, framework, and operation of NATO COE to illustrate and inform on the process NATO used to create and sustain the COE community. Based on this detailed examination of the effectiveness and success of these COE, it suggests that they could serve as a useful model for how COE should be established and developed to meet the training, education, research, and innovation needs of other international governmental organizations and nations.

The Genesis of NATO's Centers of Excellence Concept

“NATO sees transformation as a process and not an end-state; what is important is the journey, not the destination. Managing transformation implies always looking ahead for new concepts, ideas and technology, and quickly integrating the useful ones into all aspects of the organization... It is a cyclical process, requiring a different mindset, a different culture. For this reason, an organization such as ACT COE can serve as a forcing agent for change,” —Lieutenant-General J.O. Michel Maisonneuve, Deputy Commander, ACTⁱⁱ

While the 2002 Prague Summit was supposed to focus on the enlargement of NATO with the accession of seven new members, the 9/11 terrorist attacks changed the focus and provided a heightened level of urgency and impetus for accelerating the transformation process of the Alliance.ⁱⁱⁱ The Prague Summit, in effect, gave the Alliance a clear orientation to both strengthening and creating more efficient, effective, and deployable capabilities and capacities to combat new threats and security challenges in the decades to come. One of those new capabilities was the creation and establishment of Allied Command Transformation (ACT).^{iv}

Among the decisions agreed upon by NATO Heads of State and Government during that

Summit, three have had far-reaching consequences, two of which are not relevant for our discussion here.^v For our purposes, the key decision was for NATO's military command arrangements (NCA) to be streamlined, in which it was agreed that an entirely new strategic command – Allied Command Transformation (ACT) – would be created.^{vi}

ACT became the first-ever NATO functional command to be completely focused on the ever enduring process of transformation with the vision of being “NATO’s *leading agent for change, driving, facilitating, and advocating continuous improvement of Alliance capabilities to maintain and enhance the military relevance and effectiveness of the Alliance.*”^{vii}

Instead of just reacting to change, ACT's mission is to be a catalyst for change, evolution and development, providing continual improvement and advancement of the Alliance's capabilities to deter and defend against all threats and adversaries. ACT's main responsibilities include, among other things, implementing and conducting rigorous training and education programs within NATO in order to ensure that common NATO standards are applied and personnel are capable of operating effectively and adapting in a combined and joint force military environment that is constantly changing. However, in the fiscally constrained environment now facing the Alliance, transformation is focused more on solutions that already exist within NATO and/or member nations.

Subsequently, at a follow-on NATO Defense Ministerial Meeting the next year the new command structure for NATO was approved, and the Military Committee of NATO^{viii} proposed and endorsed the idea for creating a network of NATO COE as part of the new military command structure.^{ix} The Military Committee subsequently provided detailed guidance on the procedures and requirements for creating a COE,^x and established a comprehensive set accreditation criteria to validate and ensure these centers were truly “centers of excellence.”^{xi} Once the idea and the concept were firmly established, the first NATO COE was formally accredited on 01 June 2005.

Concurrently, Defense Ministers agreed that the new structure would be supported by a range of nationally or multi-nationally sponsored COE.^{xii} Each COE would be focused on different aspects of military disciplines and provide opportunities to enhance training, improve interoperability, test and develop doctrines, and conduct experiments to assess new concepts. In December 2003 the Military Committee Concept for Centers of Excellence was approved and adopted.^{xiii}

The Development of NATO COE: The Process

“Co-operation, collaboration, and partnerships are the roots that stand up the foundations of the NATO Centres of Excellence.”—Vice Admiral Bruce Estes Grooms, United States Navy, Deputy Chief of Staff, Capability Development, NATO^{xiv}

The COE have attracted interest as an opportunity for nations—particularly new members—to carve out a niche capability within the Alliance and also to gain a foothold in an ever-shrinking NATO Command Structure.

The Centers of Excellence as originally envisioned,¹ were to complement and not duplicate the education and training functions of a number of other NATO educational institutions such as the NATO Defense College in Rome and the NATO Training Center in Oberammergau, Germany.^{xv} All of these organizations, including COE, are designed to provide a range of supporting services not only for NATO but also for potentially other customers including international organizations and institutions.

How then does NATO define a COE?

“A COE is a nationally or multi-nationally sponsored entity, which offers recognized expertise and experience to the benefit of the Alliance, especially in support of transformation. It provides opportunities to enhance education and training, to improve interoperability and capabilities, to assist in doctrine development and/or to test and validate concepts through experimentation. A COE is not part of the NATO Command Structure (NCS), but forms part of the wider framework supporting NATO Command Arrangements (NCA).”^{xvi}

Notwithstanding the fact that COE are not part of the command structure and not subject to funding by NATO as an organization (an important condition for accreditation), nations nevertheless have embraced the concept for several reasons. It is a constructive way to build-up special knowledge and/or capabilities. It serves as a vehicle for improving existing capabilities and to learn and follow NATO procedures, doctrines and standards.

Establishing a COE on one’s territory is also a way to “burden share” within the Alliance, which has proved to be important consideration for new and smaller nations. There is also a prestige element in which Allies find it attractive to have a NATO flag fly on their territory, and it is a palpable representation of collective security.

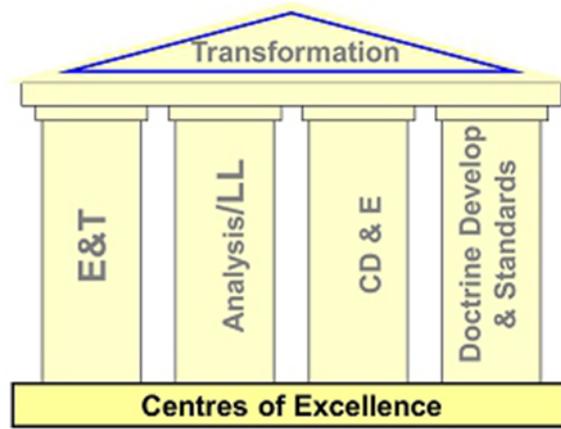
Any Allied Nation can offer to establish a COE on its territory. Such a nation will then be recognized as a Host or Framework Nation for its particular COE. A proposal to establish a new COE may arise either from NATO itself, or a member state, or even a group of member states. Additionally, if a (multi-)national organization already exists, it might nevertheless be offered to the Alliance as a COE in order to gain additional NATO accreditation.^{xvii}

Advocates for a COE develop a concept for the area of specialization and its contribution to NATO’s transformation. Additionally, the advocates for the proposed COE must demonstrate how the COE would satisfactorily fulfill at least three of the following criteria (usually referred to as the four COE support pillars):

1. Education and training (including exercise support)
2. Analysis and lessons learned;
3. Concept development and evaluation/standardization; and
4. Doctrine development and standards to ensure effective Interoperability

All accredited COE, while diverse in nature and supporting a broad scope of work, must demonstrate how their products and services performed on behalf of NATO’s transformation process are balanced along the four Pillars of Support illustrated in the following graphic.^{xviii}

¹ Actually, the first official use of the term “Centers of Excellence” can be traced back to the Meeting of Defense Ministers on 06 June 2002. In their statement on the necessity of a new capability initiative they mentioned the establishment of a multinational “Virtual Centre of Excellence for NBC Weapon Defence” which was then endorsed at the 2002 Prague Summit.



As part of the COE development and sustainment process, SACT established an oversight and assistance office, the Transformation Network Branch (TNB), that's responsible for preparing potential COE candidates and to provide administrative support for COE establishment. They do this in a number of ways including advising on best practices, giving legal advice, and providing advice through their recently published COE Manual on navigating through the process for establishing and accrediting a COE.^{xix}

TNB also assumes the role of facilitator between NATO and the prospective Host Nations.^{xx} This helps expedite approval of the COE by the North Atlantic Council (NAC). Moreover, TNB supervises the accreditation process and, as discussed below, conducts periodic viability assessments, which are mandatory for all COE.

After the Host/Framing Nation has made its formal written offer, usually by letter from a senior government official, to NATO, the concept is initially analyzed at Headquarters for SACT and assessed against the principles set out in NATO document MCM-236-3, MC Concept for NATO Centers of Excellence.^{xxi} Once approved, the prospective Host Nation solicits at least five other Allies to become "Sponsoring Nations" to support the COE with personnel or funding. These solicitation efforts have a "political dimension" in that one Ally soliciting support may indicate that they will support another nations proposed or already activated COE in return as a quid-pro-quo.

There are many benefits to the Sponsoring Nations for supporting a proposed COE. Not only do COE leverage the expertise of their nations for the benefit of the Alliance, but they also provide a channel for their collective efforts to flow back to the Sponsoring Nations. The value of national participation includes access to multinational expertise, influence on COE program of work, access to education and training, and increased interoperability. This symbiotic relationship allows the experience and expertise of the COE to assist (and shape) national priorities. Finally, nations that sponsor COE preserve and improve their own niche capabilities by taking advantage of the multinational and cost-saving design.

Once the prospective Host/Framing Nation has garnered the requisite support or more from other nations, the TNB has develop two templates of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) which then have to be negotiated and agreed. One, the Functional MOU, sets out the relationship between the COE and the Alliance while the other, the Operational MOU, regulates the relationship between the COE and the Nations that had finally decided to support and/or participate in the COE.^{xxii} These will be discussed below in greater detail under the section on Legal Arrangements.

A COE is officially established as soon as both MOUs are signed by ACT and national authorities during a short and formal signing ceremony, usually held at Headquarters SACT. After the COE has been approved and accredited ACT (TNB) will conduct a periodic assessment after three years with follow-on assessment/inspections every 3-4 years.

Guiding Principles for Establishing COE and Their Activities

In approving the COE concept NATO Defense Ministers and the Military Committee approved a number of guiding principles that Host/Framework Nations, Supporting Nations and other entities or organizations that wished to participate in or benefit from NATO COE must adhere to. The principles are:^{xxiii}

1. Level and Type of Participation.
 - a. Participation in specific COE activities is open to all Allies.
 - b. Contributing Partners (CP). Contributing Participant (CP) defines any nation, organization or agency that is not a Supporting Nation that provides a contribution in kind to the COE and uses the services or products provided by the COE as agreed on a case by case basis among the Supporting Nation(s) and the Contributing Participant. Access by partners, other nations and international organizations to COE products and services is the responsibility of sponsoring Nations, taking into account security requirements. Contributing Partners have neither voting rights, nor any obligations; their contribution is subject to a written Technical Arrangement (TA) that must be reviewed by ACT (TNB). Creation of this category of participant is in recognition that other non-NATO countries and entities may bring additional value to COE. Further flexibility in the relationship between Sponsoring Nations and Contributing Participants can be covered by an agreement between a CP and Supporting Nations.
 - c. Manning of a COE is national and/or multinational as decided by the Sponsoring Nations and should be geared to a joint perspective and multinational approach. For example, the Combined Joint Operations from the Sea COE in Norfolk consists of 13 Sponsoring Nations (including the USA as Host Nation) with 62% of billets designated as multinational contributions. COE generally do promote and actively solicit multinational contributions.
2. Added Value and No Duplication. A COE should not duplicate assets and resources, or compete with capabilities that already exist within NATO. One mandatory purpose (discussed below) of a COE is to provide demonstrable improvement to NATO capabilities, thereby adding operational value.
3. Resources. All COE infrastructure, operating and maintenance costs are nationally or multi-nationally—but not NATO!—funded. While a COE can be manned on a national or multinational basis, populating COE cannot be done at the expense of not filling NATO billets.
4. NATO Standards. A COE is to conform to appropriate NATO procedures, doctrines and standards. However, COE are encouraged to suggest improvements and propose amendments to doctrines, procedures and standards as and when appropriate.
5. Clear Relationships. Relationships are established in writing between sponsoring Nations and appropriate supported commands (and other entities as needed) through MOUs/ MOAs and Technical Arrangements (TAs).

Relationship to NATO Nations, Commands and Organizations

NATO-accredited COE are neither part of the NATO Command Structure, nor are they under command and control of their Framework/Hosting Nation(s).^{xxiv} Rather, COE belongs to their Supporting Nations (the ones who foot the bill in terms of resources and finances) and are directed by a Steering Committee (SC) in which all Supporting Nations participate. The relationship between the COE, its Supporting Nations and SACT is clearly regulated by the two aforementioned MOUs, even though ACT is assigned a general coordination role for the

benefit of NATO. As previously discussed, within ACT, the TNB is tasked with this overall coordination function.

Each COE also defines its own “Community of Interest (COI)” which is generally a specific and individual environment of which each COE is an active and important member. SACT supports the COE COI by acting as a coordinator encouraging internal and external information exchange. The COI is primarily characterized as a cohesive network of a collection of like-minded sponsoring nations, partner nations, International Governmental Organizations (IGOs), Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and potentially other NATO agencies, either as contributors or as customers or both at the same time, who jointly seek to leverage each other’s resources, and/or share expertise and information from across and beyond the Alliance in order to enhance capabilities and increase capacities. Indeed a close relationship between a COE and other NATO agencies, including NATO schools, is desirable in order to avoid duplication of effort and fully profit from the synergy produced by working in close harmony.

In addition, SACT, in its coordinating role, advocates and encourage COE to expand their COIs to include, for example, Partnership for Peace (PFP) nations,^{xxv} Mediterranean Dialogue countries,^{xxvi} and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative countries.^{xxvii} Finally, COE are encouraged to establish and maintain relationships with other external entities (international organizations, industry, private companies, schools, universities, research institutes, etc.). These relationships are to be managed by the Sponsoring Nation(s), keeping SACT informed and, of course, taking security aspects into account.

Legal Arrangements

Allied nations, which agree to establish and operate a particular COE, must sign two Memoranda of Understanding (MOU); an “Operation MOU” and a “Functional Relationship MOU,” in order to become Sponsoring Nations; that is an Allied nation that provides personnel, equipment, funding and other support or resources for the operation of the particular COE..^{xxviii}

The Operation MOU describes and covers such issues as the legal basis for the COE, security, Host Nation support and budgetary and accounting provisions. The Functional Relationship MOU establishes the working relationship between Headquarters SACT and the Sponsoring Nations regarding the COE. The MOU does not create a command relationship between SACT and the COE as the role of SACT remains only that of facilitator or coordinator of COE activities.

Additionally, in order to be “legally” accredited to NATO as a COE, Memorandums of Understanding

/Agreements (MOA/MOUs) need to be negotiated and agreed to between other entities and the appropriate supported Strategic Command. These MOAs/MOUs ensure that the activities of a COE are properly accredited, coordinated and mutually reinforcing to maximize the effectiveness of the COE. These legally binding documents will articulate the services to be delivered by the COE, under what circumstances, and spell out in detail the roles, responsibilities and lines of authority between the COE and NATO agencies. An additional MOA/MOU will detail the administrative arrangements regarding manning, funding and support between the Host Nation, sponsoring nations, and participating nations as part of a separate MOU.

All other legal arrangements are delineated in so-called Technical Arrangements (TAs), which amplify and provide additional details not covered in the more general MOUs/MOAs, as well as specific details on capabilities and resources offered. These include, but are not limited to the accreditation requirements, quality control assurance practices, and specific administrative and logistic arrangements.

The Accreditation and Periodic Assessment Process

As discussed, SACT is responsible for shepherding a prospective COE through the accreditation process and to prepare candidates for Military Committee (MC) approval. Upon MC approval, an accredited COE receives final endorsement from the highest NATO body, the North Atlantic Council (NAC). Significantly, upon accreditation, status as a NATO organization under the so-called “Paris Protocol” may be granted by the North Atlantic Council (NAC).^{xxix} The activation as a NATO Military Body pursuant to Article XIV of the Protocol confers on a COE juridical status with the right to act as a legal entity (i.e., negotiate and enter into contracts, etc.).

However, in order to receive NAC approval and subsequent accreditation, a COE, which is proposed by the Sponsoring Nation(s), must fulfill a set of criteria developed by the SACT and approved by the Military Committee. Each prospective COE candidate in order to gain NATO accreditation has to be assessed against both *mandatory* and *highly desirable criteria* as set forth in the NATO document establishing the criteria.^{xxx} While the former criteria must be continuously maintained, the latter are less binding although a COE is expected to do its best to achieve them. The four support pillars discussed above serve as the basis for the mandatory criteria upon which accreditation is based.

Thus, COE have to satisfy NATO requirements by supporting the development, promotion, and implementation of new policies, doctrines, and concepts furthering the NATO transformation process. They have to provide unique capabilities and their services and products are supposed to promote, enhance, and broaden interoperability and standardization in the COE’s niche area of expertise. A COE, which then fulfills at least three of these four tasks, will have a strong prospect of becoming a fully accredited NATO COE.^{xxxi}

A. Mandatory Criteria

The following are considered mandatory criteria for NATO COE accreditation within the COE network and which must be continuously maintained:

1. **NATO Requirements.** Serve as a catalyst for NATO transformation by supporting the development, promotion and implementation of new policies, concepts, strategies and doctrines that transform and/or improve NATO operational capabilities and interoperability.
2. **Capabilities.** Provide capabilities, not provided by other NATO entities, in support of transformation in the context of joint and combined operations in order to promote, enhance and broaden interoperability and standardization in their niche area of expertise. The COE will promote the knowledge and application of advanced concepts and doctrines and, as appropriate to their mission, provide support to research on new technologies.
3. **Expertise.** The COE will maintain qualified, knowledgeable and credible Subject Matter Experts (SME) for their niche area of expertise.
4. **Education and training.** All education and training is coordinated through HQ SACT and must be consistent with the quality, content and standardization of established NATO educational policy and services.
5. **Safety and security.** Safety and security provided in accordance with NATO standards and regulations, including security measures to safeguard NATO personnel and classified material.
6. **Accessibility to NATO.** NATO Nations and agencies/entities have, as set forth in applicable MOUs/TAs, assured access to COE services and support.
7. **Connectivity.** The COE, minimally, maintains open lines of communication with SACT, Strategic Commands, their subordinate entities and agencies and other nations.

B. Highly Desirable Criteria.

In addition to the mandatory criteria for COE certification, NATO also established “highly desirable” criteria for accreditation in which COE must demonstrably strive to continuously maintain to the maximum extent possible. These criteria complement and augment the mandatory criteria. While not a basis for de-certification, a COE should only deviate from these criteria for specific reasons and, in the event they cannot comply, should work aggressively to re-gain their ability to provide services and support consistent with these criteria:

1. **Capabilities.** The COE should promote ACT’s transformational goals of achieving decision superiority, coherent effects, joint deployment and joint sustainment, and provide services, products, education and/or training to support training and preparation for the range of military operations.
2. **Organizational Structure.** COE should adopt a joint perspective and approach and encourage support and personnel contributions, as appropriate to the mission, from all the services, agencies and Allied nations. Partner countries are also encouraged to participate.
3. **Transparency.** The COE should maintain a transparent and open working relationship with SACT in order to promote efficient and effective coordination and collaboration. Any deficiencies in carrying out the COE mission should be immediately referred to Headquarters, SACT.
4. **Communication and Information Systems (CIS) Capabilities.** The COE should provide sufficient, modern and well-maintained CIS capabilities, compatible to and connected with established NATO systems.

Once accredited, the COE should, but is not required or obligated to, follow NATO procedures, doctrine and standards. However, given the fact that each COE is unique, each center also has its own set of rules that governs its daily routine. Consequently, there is no strict obligation to blindly follow all sets of NATO rules, some of which may not be applicable in any case to a particular COE.

Periodically COE will be (re-)assessed by Headquarters SACT (i.e. TNB) to ensure they comply with the aforementioned criteria and to ascertain that their products and services still meet the quality, standards, practices and procedures established by NATO. The assessment process consists of two parts and involves a formal on-site visit by SACT (TNB) personnel. Prior to the visit the COE has to fill out a self-assessment questionnaire. These questions span categories such as “Work of the COE, Subject Matter Experts, Coordination and Program of Work, Support and Infrastructure, and Safety and Security.” Afterwards the results of the processed questionnaire are discussed during the TNB assessment visit.^{xxxii}

The second part consists of a Periodic Assessment Report (PAR) written by TNB and based upon the COE’s self-assessment and the impressions of the visit. Both documents are then forwarded to the Military Committee for the final approval. Should a COE fail to pass the periodic assessment, SACT will suggest whatever steps may be necessary to mitigate identified shortfalls before reassessment or withdrawal of accreditation.

As of this writing all established COE have been able to successfully pass their initial NATO accreditation procedure with many passing their second assessment as well.

COE’s Program of Work

Generally, a COE is expected to provide NATO with services and products that are not being made available by other NATO entities. Moreover, its activities must to be in line with NATO efforts at transformation and provide tangible improvement to NATO’s capabilities. Each COE (usually on their websites or through NATO’s Public Diplomacy Division) will explain and detail the programs, initiatives, and education and training events it has

planned in a Program of Work (POW). The POW usually covers one calendar or fiscal year. It also incorporates, through its mission statement, included as part of the POW, the overarching transformation goals that the COE intends to pursue for the mid to long term.

The main body set up by the Supporting Nations for the guidance, oversight and decisions on all matters concerning the establishment, administration and operation of a COE and its Program of Work is the Steering Committee (SC). The SC consists of one representative from each Supporting Nation. It varies from COE to COE but usually the SC meets biannually. The COE Director or Supporting Nations can call additional meetings. The most important task for the SC is to decide on the Program of Work and approve the multinational budget that enables the Program of Work. Indeed, one of the main differences between the COE and other NATO bodies lies in budgetary authority: supporting Nations—not NATO—decide on the use of money they provide to the COE budget and they also approve the set of rules for shared funding of the COE.

In recent years, the content and specificity of tasks has improved through intensive interaction between ACT and the COE. SACT has acted as “the honest broker” responsible for coordinating all the work of all COE. In that role SACT (TNB) has also developed and established a formal process and timetable for the POW development cycle.^{xxxiii} SACT coordinates the work of COE through a supporting network of agencies,^{xxxiv} thereby encouraging internal and external information exchange to the benefit of the Alliance.

SACT’s subordinate entities participate in this network as well as in other networks. Moreover specialists or subject matter experts are included in the network. A close relationship between the COE and the appropriate agencies, schools of non-NATO countries, and external entities is highly desirable and encouraged in order to avoid duplication of effort and to fully profit from the synergy that can be reached by working in close harmony. Some COE have expanded their reach by developing “reach back” capabilities to tap into, at little or no cost, a cadre of subject matter experts and other relevant capabilities.^{xxxv}

Functioning as the main tool for the coordination of other NATO agencies and commands inputs to the COE POW, this process is usually initiated at the beginning of a year and finalized nine or ten months later by obtaining the respective Steering Committee’s official approval.^{xxxvi}

Throughout this period, NATO-wide inputs as well as requests from Sponsoring Nations and other entities asking for support are collected. Additionally, based on past experience, a critically important avenue for inputs is the annual COE workshop, hosted by SACT, and attended by all COE. This provides a venue for COE to discuss cross-functional projects where more than one COE may have a stake in a particular subject matter. Other NATO agencies may attend as well. When topics of interest are identified one COE or some other NATO agency may request support from another COE or multiple COE. If approved by the appropriate COE’s Steering Committee these formal requests will become part of the following year’s POW.

In addition, COE have the flexibility to accept ad-hoc requests in the course of a year that have not been covered by the regular planning cycle. If accepted by the COE, these requests form part of their modified POW and are executed in the current year. However, as these requests may compete for resources against already approved and budgeted COE POW items, they are not to replace regular inputs.

In sum, this POW development process provides an effective framework for identifying clusters of interest on relevant topics or related projects as well as serving as a vehicle for new COE to establish a Community of Interest.

Conclusion: The Success of NATO’s COE as a Model for Others?

“Gentlemen, We Have Run Out of Money; Now We Have to Think” – Winston Churchill

In their role of assisting with transformation within the Alliance, while avoiding the duplication of assets, resources and capabilities already present within the NATO command structure, NATO COE have been a relative success. Certainly official assessments of the COE are uniformly positive. Today, initial expectations have been far exceeded as the current commander of SACT recently commented:

“The development of Centers of Excellence (COE) has been a key feature for NATO transformation for the last few years. Today, initial expectations have been far exceeded. We must promote collaborative work as a standard, and I think that we have made significant progress in that direction. This collaborative approach should be extended more and more to all sources of knowledge, of progress, of creativity to take the full benefit of our interconnected world. First to come to my mind, are the COE.”^{xxxvii}

In addition to giving NATO and partner country leaders and units the opportunity to augment their education and training, COE also help the Alliance to expand interoperability, increase capabilities, aid in the development of doctrine and standards, conduct analyses, evaluate lessons-learned and experiment in order to test and verify concepts.

Through robust oversight by SACT, COE developed through a process where they have become an invaluable resource of best practices, intellectual horsepower and innovation. From outside the NATO command structure, these COE help inject cutting-edge expertise into NATO’s work. Additionally, through SACT’s coordination efforts, COE are a part of a vibrant supporting network, encouraging internal and external information exchange to the overall benefit of the Alliance and, in many instances, to partner nations as well.

Through a rigorous program of development, oversight, mandated criteria and requirements, and certification and assessment processes, NATO COE have in a relatively short time become essential key elements of the broader network of within NATO leading military transformation and reaching out, engaging and cooperating with others to enhance interoperability, effectiveness and efficiency. Consequently, NATO’s COE have grown in numbers, starting from one in 2005 to 20 in 2014, and have grown in importance, taking an increasing part in the transformation activities of the Alliance.^{xxxviii}

While the COE are accredited by NATO, it is important to remember that they are voluntarily established, resourced and funded solely by their Sponsoring Nations. Guiding principles such as no duplication, added value, clear relationships and compliance with NATO standards form a clear path for nations to coalesce around needed capability areas utilizing the support provided by the COE. As illustrated in Appendix A, the COE network is diverse in nature and supports a broad scope of work, reflecting the fact that the products and services performed on behalf of NATO are balanced along four Pillars of Support discussed above.

The process discussed in establishing, accrediting and assessing COE is relevant to and a useful model for other international organizations and nations that propose to create subject matter “centers of excellence.” Utilization of the NATO COE model would enhance the credibility and long-term viability of such entities by other organizations assuming they duplicated the rigorous processes instituted by NATO for their COE.

NATO’s process for developing, establishing, accrediting and re-validating NATO COE may also serve as a useful template for establishing and sustaining other subject matter COE. While focused on NATO military areas of specialization, the process is certainly applicable to other disciplines such as nuclear security. Some of the processes and criteria used for creating NATO COE that could be applicable to, for example, nuclear security COE include:

- An independent body, such as the IAEA, charged with certifying/accrediting institutions as a COE, preferably by an international body with subject matter expertise.
- A transparent and open process for certifying a COE to international standards and best practices.

- Established criteria for accreditation which could include but not be limited to:
 - Ensuring the COE maintains a cadre of subject matter experts on site with a robust “reach back” capability to other experts in different countries, regions, or with international organizations.
 - Developing and conducting a robust and comprehensive training and training program to develop technical and professional expertise at standards established by the certifying/accrediting body.
 - Ensuring courses are certified/accredited and occasionally moderated by training and education authorities. This is especially important for courses offered to international students so that students and their superiors understand the level and quality of training received.
 - Ensuring the subject COE program and curriculum are reviewed, validated and re-certified on a regular basis.

The NATO experience has shown that multi-national COE with multi-national staff and support are better resourced and more likely to establish and maintain technical and scientific credibility and build a reputation of excellence. NATO COE have attracted students from partner countries and international organizations. Nations are more willing to consider utilizing a multi-lateral COE than a national one. As noted earlier nations that support a COE in another country are more likely to garner support from that nation for an international program that it supports.

Finally, ensuring that any prospective COE is legally constituted with contractual authority as a legal entity empowered to enter into legal arrangements with other agencies and organizations is important and necessary in order to make the centers viable and sustainable for the long term.

While not all aspects of the NATO COE program would be—or should be—fully adaptable to each instance where an IGO, such as the IAEA, pursues the development of a COE, many of the requirements and attributes of excellence should be carefully considered. Establishing mandatory criteria by which a center could be properly developed and assessed, instituting criteria for accreditation by an independent organization, implementing a process for initial and post accreditation assessment, encouraging multi-lateral participation and resourcing, and conferring legal status on a COE would be critical steps in conferring legitimacy and international recognition. Absent a similar deliberative process it would be difficult to characterize any proposed center as truly “excellent.”

Endnotes:

ⁱ Press Briefing at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_20520.htm?selectedLocale=en

ⁱⁱ <http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/vo4/no4/nato-otan-eng.asp>

ⁱⁱⁱ Paul Cornish, “NATO: the Practice and Politics of Transformation, *International Affairs*, Vol. 80, January 2004, p. 64.

^{iv} The Allied Command Transformation (ACT), situated in Norfolk, USA, replaced the Allied Command Atlantic (ACLANT), having an entirely different purpose, structure and rationale. This was part of a massive restructuring and realignment of headquarters and staff within NATO where upwards of 80% of these staffs were eliminated.

^v The Alliance directed the establishment of the NATO Response Force, and agreed to the “Prague Capabilities Commitment” which committed the Alliance to creating capabilities to respond to terrorist and weapons of mass destruction threats, increase air deployment assets, increase intelligence capabilities, among others. See Progress on Prague Capability Commitments, NATO Parliamentary Assembly Report at <http://www.nato-pa.int/default.asp?SHORTCUT=684>

^{vi} Headquarters Supreme Allied Command Transformation became effective on 19 June 2003.

^{vii} ACT Vision Statement available at <http://www.act.nato.int/mission>.

^{viii} The Military Committee is the senior military authority in NATO under the overall political authority of the North Atlantic Council (NAC). It is the primary source of military advice to the NAC. Its members are senior military officers who serve as national military representatives.

-
- ^{ix} NATO Document MC 324/1 “The NATO Military Command Structure,” dated 14 May 2003 (on file with the author).
- ^x MCM-236-03 “MC Concept for Centres of Excellence (COE),” dated 04 Dec 2003. Copy on file with the Author.
- ^{xi} NATO Document IMSM-0416-04 —NATO COE Accreditation Criteria 2004. Copy on file with the author.
- ^{xii} Final Communiqué, Ministerial Meeting of the Defense Planning Committee and the Nuclear Planning Group, 12 June 2003, Paragraph 5, available at <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2003/p03-064e.htm>
- ^{xiii} NATO Document MCM-236-03 “MC Concept for Centres of Excellence” dated 4 December 2003 on file with the author.
- ^{xiv} NATO Publication “Centered on Transformation,” available at <https://www.act.nato.int/article-2013-2-2>
- ^{xv} They also include the Joint Warfare Centre (JWC) in Stavanger (Norway); the Joint Force Training Centre (JFTC) in Bydgoszcz (Poland); the Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre (JALLC) in Monsanto (Portugal); and the Undersea Research Centre (URC) in La Spezia (Italy). All of these were created before the first COE was accredited.
- ^{xvi} NATO Document MCM-236-03 “MC Concept for COE” dated 04 Dec 2003.
- ^{xvii} A good illustration of this was the transformation of the Civil – Military Affairs (CIMIC) Group North HQ22 into the CIMIC Centre of Excellence, which was officially accredited in July 2007. Due to changing circumstances the operational “CIMIC group” no longer had a mission but it could still support NATO as a COE. See COE website at <http://www.cimic-coe.org/about-cimic/history/>
- ^{xviii} Source: NATO Centre of Excellence Establishment Manual, Version 4.0, August 2014, hereinafter COE Manual, available at https://transnet.act.nato.int/WISE/COE/TEMPLATES/NATOCOEEst/file/_WFS/NATO%20COE%20Establishment%20Manual%20Ver%204.0.pdf
- ^{xix} See COE Manual, *supra*.
- ^{xx} COE Manual, *supra*, page five.
- ^{xxi} Copy on file with the author.
- ^{xxii} Templates for these MOAs are available at https://transnet.act.nato.int/WISE/COE/index_html
- ^{xxiii} The following summarizes the detailed guiding principles agreed to by the Military Committee in NATO Document MCM 236-03, MC Concept for NATO Centres of Excellence, 04 December 2003, on file with the author.
- ^{xxiv} Usually, there is only one Framework or Hosting Nation. The CIMIC Centre of Excellence (CCOE) in Enscheda (Netherlands) is the only COE with two Host/Framework Nations. See Appendix A.
- ^{xxv} *In the Euro-Atlantic area, the Alliance engages in relations with non-member countries through the 50-nation Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and the Partnership for Peace (PFP) – a major program of bilateral cooperation with individual Euro-Atlantic partners. See NATO publication, “Partnerships: A Cooperative Approach to Security, available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_84336.htm?*
- ^{xxvi} NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue was initiated in 1994 by the North Atlantic Council. It currently involves seven non-NATO countries of the Mediterranean region: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia.
- ^{xxvii} NATO’s Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, launched at the Alliance’s Summit in June 2004, is intended to contribute to long-term regional security by offering countries of the broader Middle East region practical bilateral security cooperation with NATO. Six countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council were initially invited to participate. To date, four of these -- Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates -- have joined. Saudi Arabia and Oman have also shown interest.
- ^{xxviii} Draft templates for these MOUs can be found at NATO Transformation Network: https://transnet.act.nato.int/WISE/COE/index_html
- ^{xxix} Article XIV Para 1 of the Paris Protocol, states: “*The whole or any part of the present Protocol or of the Agreement may be applied, by decision of the North Atlantic Council, to any international military Headquarters or organization (not included in the definitions in paragraphs b. and c. of Article I of this Protocol) which is established pursuant to the North Atlantic Treaty.*” The Protocol on the Status of International Military Headquarters set up pursuant to the North Atlantic Treaty, a legally binding agreement between NATO Allies, is available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17300.htm?
- ^{xxx} NATO Document IMSM-0416-04 —NATO COE Accreditation Criteria 2004. Copy on file with the author. This section summarizes and paraphrases the criteria discussed in detail in this document.
- ^{xxxi} COE Manual, page 7.
- ^{xxxii} COE Manual, p. 35.
- ^{xxxiii} Interviews with ACT (TNB) personnel, 12 September 2014. Also see COE Manual, p. 29.
- ^{xxxiv} Vividly demonstrated on SACT’s Transformation Website, available at <https://transnet.act.nato.int/WISE>
- ^{xxxv} For example, the Joint CBRN COE in the Czech Republic was recently designated a “Fusion Center” for reach back to relevant subject matter experts. See <http://www.jcbrncoe.cz/>
- ^{xxxvi} Interviews with ACT (TNB) staff, 12 September 2014.
- ^{xxxvii} General Jean-Paul Paloméros, French Air Force, 29 October 2013, at <https://www.act.nato.int/article-2013-2-0>
- ^{xxxviii} See Appendix A for a list of current and prospective NATO COE and their relevant websites.