



Airborne troops, Purple Dragon '00.

55th Signal Company (Clinton J. Evans)

1st Combat Camera Squadron (John E. Lasky)

NATO Exercise Programs

A Case for Improvement

By PHILIP COX *and* JAMES M. HUDSON, JR.

Last year the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) recast its strategic doctrine at the summit meeting held in Washington to mark its 50th anniversary. The new doctrine states that, while operations conducted under Article 5 (self-defense) of the North Atlantic Treaty remain unchanged, the Alliance must be prepared to mount peace support operations outside its traditional geographical employment region. The current NATO-sponsored exercise

program is designed to support and train toward these two primary missions. However, it is failing to achieve this goal. A thorough revision is required to produce capable commanders and well trained staffs.

Exercise Mechanisms

NATO was founded to counter an attack against Western Europe by the Soviet Union. In the wake of the Cold War, its General Defence Plan, along with myriad supporting plans, became largely pointless and left the Alliance without purpose. Leaders soon recognized that military staffs must be trained to develop and execute operational plans for any crisis throughout the

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Live fire demonstration,
Dynamic Response '98.



Atlantic Fleet Imaging Unit 019 (Mike Powell)

spectrum of conflict. This was in line with doctrinal moves from static to maneuver-based operations linked to reductions in friendly forces. Training in such an environment would produce a well drilled battle staff which thinks jointly and can quickly develop contingency and operational plans for emerging crises like Kosovo.

To meet this requirement planners must accomplish two features of training, planning, and execution while not violating political sensitivities. First, they must create an exercise scenario with enough detail to originate a plan. Second, they must conduct an exercise that presents commanders and staff officers with challenges by using the general scenario and the approved operations plan to yield a specific situation. Devising a scenario with enough detail is a major challenge.

The scenario in the General Defence Plan during the Cold War was fairly straightforward. Different parts were tested using real world intelligence to craft the scene. Now exercise directors are confronted with political constraints regarding planning against a potential real life enemy; thus there is a tendency to use fictional countries. Inventing a notional aggressor has usually involved redrawing the map of Europe or devising an imaginary land mass where friendly and enemy states are situated. Exercise and operational planners no longer have access to real world intelligence and must produce their own, normally by inventing country books or studies. This demands a great deal of imagination on the part of a small planning staff, partially because NATO has not accepted the use of a generic opposing force. Contractors help in this area but at a direct cost to the Alliance and without always including details which operational planners need.

During exercise development, planners on the regional level are usually tasked with creating

a complete joint operations or campaign plan. This is hampered in a number of ways. Operations planners and intelligence staffs are not being trained in accordance with doctrine since they cannot use normal procedures to request intelligence support. Those agencies usually approached are not typically involved in the exercise. It thus falls on the planners to simulate this function. And if the exercise is set in a fictional land, there is no readily available information on friendly nations.

Moreover, Article 5 exercises tend to be focused on actual combat operations which miss build-up phases with their emphasis on crisis management, movements, and logistics. The same is true of post-conflict issues involving reconstitution, nation rebuilding, and force redeployment. Staff elements would receive more benefit if scenarios exercised pre- and post-conflict periods.

Once an exercise begins, the training audience is presented with a specific situation which may be unlike the general scenario which the operations plan was originally written against. While this appears to accord with reality, planners would have been participating in the build-up instead of being thrown directly into a crisis. During one regional exercise the scenario showed the build-up toward a major attack against NATO nations. The starting point was 14 days after the initial strike. That required the participants to deal with a dearth of details about an enemy which in a real conflict would have been generated over two weeks of intense combat. Snapshot play versus actual campaign planning contributes to the dissatisfaction of training audiences, who are constantly reminded of the artificiality of the environment. Most intensive planning early in exercise development is seen as wasted because it is not used or tested to ensure planners covered all factors of operations.

Participants have suggested a specific combat situation rather than a transition to combat in part because of the desire that the headquarters be exercised at the same tempo for the same length of time. The intent is exercising the joint arena simultaneously while satisfying subregional and single service objectives. Unfortunately, it tends to ignore the most recent examples of joint warfare, which show an inclination toward air and maritime capabilities at the start with land forces providing the focus in the later stages.

Exercise Mindset

Since NATO has become actively engaged in peace support in the Balkans, a scenario that stresses ground forces later on has gained favor

Range outside Glamoc,
Bosnia-Herzegovina.



1st Combat Camera Squadron (Carl Fountain)

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and is the most likely employment of allied forces in the future. Therefore it makes sense to train commanders and staff officers who are most likely to perform such operations. Article 5 exercises, while supposedly addressing the employment of the Alliance in war, have received much less attention. For example, in the recent development of

such a major exercise in the Central Region, it was recognized that it had been five years since the region and its command structure had last participated in a warfighting exercise. This dynamic of training in two opposing directions is difficult to resolve, though there are still basic procedures present in both types of operations which require practice.

The training requirements developed by commanders, staffs, and exercise planners in peace support drills are different from the mindset needed for high intensity warfighting exercises. Peace support exercises have a tightly controlled opposing force in order to accomplish specific training objectives. Most decision points are confined to the highest levels, which detracts from integrating a battle staff with the commander.

Unfortunately, NATO has continued to use the notion of a tightly controlled opposing force in warfighting exercises. This can be attributed to the

unstated need to be seen as winning in order to fully achieve training objectives. The fact that more can be learned from losing than winning is missed. Instructive was the British battleship commander in the early 1900s who was sunk three times by submarines (a new and not widely accepted weapons system) and was asked to leave the exercise: "You be damned!" was his response.¹ This attitude toward submarine warfare typifies the inflexibility sometimes displayed by senior staff.

One aspect of warfighting which is lost by NATO is that an enemy has a vote. Moltke the Elder stated that "an enemy always seemed to have three alternatives open to him and he usually chose the fourth."² During a recent Article 5 exercise the air campaign did not progress as planned because opposing forces developed good intelligence pertaining to enemy operating parameters and placed themselves to counter Alliance actions. The result was not used as a learning experience but rather brought a demand for the controlling staff to limit opposing force capabilities. The attitude of winning by controlling an enemy must be removed to improve performance.

Another adjustment is recognizing that NATO combat capabilities have shrunk. Since 1991 there has been a reduction of 25 percent in

Offloading vehicles at Camp Lejeune, Purple Dragon.



Looking through TOW sight, Dynamic Mix '00.



U.S. Marine Corps (Kevin R. Reed)

land and air forces and increased reliance upon reserve forces. Most senior commanders and their staff officers matured during the Cold War, which did not prepare them to plan with current restricted force levels. When planners try to inject this reality into exercises, they are compelled to bend mobilization timelines or make greater forces available to appease commanders. In preparing for a recent Article 5 exercise, operational planners demanded 100 percent of the naval forces maintained by participants without acknowledging mobilization lead time or the fact that forces were not being maintained at previous readiness levels. This calls for more training using realistic force levels without allowing the expectation of unlimited capabilities to dominate planning.

There is also a perception that commanders and their senior staffs exert undue influence on the exercise controlling staff. Different reactions occur in various headquarters when the directing staff introduces difficult issues. Sometimes an issue is accepted, with the headquarters devoting its energy to solving the problem while maintaining awareness of the rest of the conflict. In the more common approach the directing staff modifies or removes the problem. This was illustrated during an exercise when a mistake in establishing logistics stockpiles gave NATO forces unlimited logistic support even after 14 days of high intensity combat. The directing staff discovered the problem and limited some weapons availability, leading a member of the regional command staff to order that the original numbers and availability be restored. In this case the directing staff was able to resist the order. However, most of the staff is provided by a participating headquarters and tends to be compliant to its wishes. Commanders, especially multinational, sometimes avoid operational or strategic level decisions that are sensitive and highlight deficiencies of a particular nation.

55 Signal Company (Michelle Labrié)



Live fire demonstration,
Dynamic Response '98.

Atlantic Fleet Imaging Unit 019 (Mike Powell)

One can argue that modifying exercise inputs is not serious because commanders will do what is right in a real operation, but that is not always the case. Prior to the Battle of Midway, the Japanese conducted a wargame in which the United States attacked their carrier force by surprise. Several Japanese carriers were severely damaged and two ruled sunk. The commanders overruled the umpires and disavowed the sinkings in order to obtain the desired results.³ But history would prove the umpires correct.

Continuum Approach

To address the issue of modifying exercise inputs, a different approach to exercise planning and conduct should be explored. This proposal involves a *continuum* method of staff training.

NATO recently completed a successful series of Partnership for Peace exercises known as Cooperative Guard. Forces from allied and partnership

countries conducted peace operations set in a fictitious country with mostly real world geography. The Alliance also used that same setting for a combined

joint task force trial. In each iteration, both planners and players submitted numerous requests for information, which the directing staff provided to the best of its ability. In turn, the staff captured the requests and answers in standing country books. Because the same scenario was used throughout the series, the background information became very robust.

The Cooperative Guard example can be followed simply by expanding the current scope to encompass an Article 5 scenario while not limiting its location and possibly using a computer

modelling support system. Once the basic scenario is determined, the next step would be creating the initial background information and country studies and picking a timeline for the first exercise. The most important planning factor in the continuum approach is establishing a policy by which the ending situation from each exercise determines the starting situation of the next.

The background can be plagiarized from previous exercises and modified for the scenario. It should concentrate on intelligence requirements such as geopolitical setting, military capabilities, mapping information, and support infrastructure. This enables operational planners to start on the overall joint campaign plan as exercise planners begin the computer data base for exercise support. The timeframe for beginning should be set to pre-conflict. The first exercise in an Article 5 series would cover the pre-conflict phase, the second transition to conflict, the third major conflict, and the fourth transition to post-conflict.

A series of four exercises would thus address the same general situation and setting without an entirely new scenario and background for each iteration. Like Cooperative Guard, background should improve with each exercise as participants capture the information created. In addition, the starting point for follow-on exercises would improve fidelity because they are the ending point of the previous drill. Computer modelling makes this even easier because the data base need not be repeatedly recreated, and computers can give detailed reports on the total situation on completion. Because less time is required for each workout after the first, more resources can be invested in the frequency of exercises. The current practice calls for an annual major regional drill and alternating the theme each year between peace support operations and high intensity conflict. This approach allows commanders to assess staff effectiveness more often while negating required spool-up time for staffs, which results in part from rotating personnel.

Planners would have the period before the first exercise to create an overall campaign plan, with emphasis on the initial stages. Mistakes by training audiences should not be corrected by the directing staff but rather captured for post exercise critiques. There would be time after exercises to modify the plan and address upcoming phases, incorporating lessons learned. That corrects the deficiency of not exercising exactly what the operators have planned since the series encompasses the entire campaign, while delays allow for creative thought on problems arising during the drill.

Probably the biggest improvement this approach offers is that it works all elements of the Alliance structure, albeit not simultaneously. The

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first exercise can concentrate on deployment, crisis management, and the establishment of national and multinational logistic stockpiles, an area that is not normally addressed in exercises on the regional level. The second can be focused on the escalating crisis, mobile defense, reestablishing sea control, and air superiority. The third can then achieve conditions needed for counterattack to restore territorial integrity. The final exercise should cover the decisive counterattack, removing the threat along with transition tasks and redeployment.

The designation of an opposing force and its controlling staff to oversee the exercise is also critical to the continuum approach. The NATO command structure has embedded joint subregional headquarters in major regions which can act as the red team. They can fight an independent battle with strategic and operational restraints but no tactical constraints, contributing a missing element from Alliance training theory. Since most regions have multiple joint subregional commands, and these exercises are based on a fictional landmass (thus without territorial allegiance), the opposing force can be rotated among headquarters to spread training benefits. In addition, these organization will be less susceptible to manipulation by training audiences because of their independence and completeness as joint headquarters.

Adding the Digital Age

One possible solution for the compliant directing staff is the increased use of computer aids in command post exercises. A computer does not care if results conform to a commander's plan. It cannot be forced to change results without disjoining the exercise, making any changes apparent to all participants.

Computers can also increase exercise fidelity. They can generate the myriad reports which modern militaries produce, while a directing staff can prevent erroneous information from reaching training audiences. Moreover, they can provide reports that include joint logistics, medical, and communications details that cannot be simulated on the operational level by paper reports generated by a small directing staff. In addition, that staff can improve the quality of computer output while concentrating on aspects of the exercise the computer cannot replicate, such as political maneuvers or high level intelligence inputs.

The capabilities and limitations of a computer aided exercise must be understood by staff and players. Mid-exercise alterations to a computer model are bound to degrade exercise play and must be resisted unless there is a major threat to exercise aims.

A recent computer aided exercise revealed that commanders *fought the computer*, refusing to believe that a lack of integrated effort on the operational/tactical level resulted in a larger number of casualties than expected. The body-bag syndrome is prevalent in exercises, but commanders and staffs must recognize that NATO plans for combined operations during the Cold War allowed for a large number of casualties. Why should a modern Article 5 operation be different? It is likely that casualty rates will be high because of improved weaponry. To exercise commanders and staff officers to deal with the public reaction to casualties is valuable training in its own right.

The Alliance should create a permanent red cell for exercise support. This group can be the professional element of the directing staff for command post exercises in both strategic commands. A current example is the red element at the Warrior Preparation Center, which acts as the opposing force for corps/divisional level land battles for European based training by the Army. The NATO Command and Staff Training Program recently organized by Supreme Headquarters Allied Forces Europe can take on this role. It can report directly to both strategic commanders, making them less vulnerable to command influence on exercise conduct. They can also become experts on making computer aided drills easier. Knowing how actual models react in given situations would make the results more palatable to commanders. The major problems are the personnel costs and obtaining the billets from NATO.

The continuum approach creates a series of exercises that play every facet of warfighting whilst allowing players to apply lessons learned. It incorporates a motivated joint opposing force to drive innovative responses and allows freedom of action. It saves money, permitting more frequent training of commanders and their staffs. The current NATO exercise program is not delivering the training benefits Alliance nations deserve. Improvements to overall exercise development and conduct are required to deliver a well prepared commander and battle staff. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ Robert L. O'Connell, *Of Arms and Men* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 223–24.

² Martin van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 8.

³ Edwin T. Layton, *And I Was There* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1985), p. 407.