

NATO Forces 2020: Role of connected forces initiative

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Two year plus after official introduction of Smart Defence (SD concept by NATO Secretary General at Munich Security Conference 2011, defense elites and experts all over NATO countries are dealing with Connected Forces Initiative (CFI) concept. More than a natural step indeed: if **SD** is about **acquiring and maintaining capabilities**, **CFI** focuses on making them more **interoperable** (in terms of troops cooperation, common approaches, procedures and terminology).

International context of CFI

As we approximate 2014 end of ISAF, the most robust non-Article 5 and the only combat operation NATO has ever led, we see the Alliance more experienced. It has undergone budget cuts, deepening disproportion of expenses both across the Alliance and inside particular countries and capability shortcomings in ISAF and Libya operations. Nevertheless, after decade of extensive military campaign, NATO is more partnership – friendly and more capable one. ISAF operation was a transformational one as for Afghanistan as for the Alliance itself - it underlined **irreversible shift from robust territorial defense** oriented forces to 21st century forces expeditionary in nature.

What is more important, NATO Strategic Concept 2010 confirmed the Alliance's operational ambition of leading 2 major joint and 6 small joint operations out of NATO area of responsibility concurrently aside to its core task for collective defence of NATO territory. One might argue no large scale operation is foreseeable in near future and Allies have been struggling with operational *fatigue* for a period of time (both on political and public support sides). While major high intensity conflict must not be completely ruled out, current international operational environment favours NATO focusing more on combined and joint training and interoperability, that is the CFI is all about. Therefore, time is ripe for NATO to continue transformation of its forces to be more flexible, deployable and adapted to defend its own territory from any threat as well as to defend from emerging security **threats more of functional**

than geographical nature. While the Alliance will have to train to acquire and further bolster these new capabilities, at the same time it will have to regain its ability to conduct high intensity combat joint operations, the ability which suffered some attrition in recent years due to prolonged focus on large scale stability operation.

Essence of CFI

If Smart Defense is a concept, Connected Forces Initiative is more a process how to make capabilities work and make them work most effectively. CFI includes **education, training** and enhanced focus on **exercises**, especially in terms of NATO Response Force (NRF) that, as some believe, has a potential to regain its role of a strong transformational tool of the entire Alliance. But CFI is also about maintaining a significant momentum gained during ISAF mission („capitalise“ lessons learned) mainly through much closer cooperation, institutionalisation of information sharing, exercises facilitating practical information exchange between countries and usage of technology as capability multiplier in austerity period.

One of the first steps of Allied effort towards consolidation and systemisation of joint training, exercises and education was **shift of responsibility** for collective training from Allied Command Operations (ACO) to Allied Command Transformation (ACT). It is ACT and SACT (Supreme Allied Commander Transformation) in Norfolk that have also responsibility for identification of multinational defense projects and leading the process of „coupling“ countries under Smart Defense umbrella. It is useful that process of acquiring of capabilities and making

them more interoperable will be „under one roof“.

Getting to NATO Forces 2020

So far, ACT has already come out with roadmap how to successfully apply CFI in practice and set up several goals, both theoretical (revise the key NATO documents, work out study on future operational environment and its impact on the Alliance and NATO training concept 2015 - 2020) and practical (find ways how to: use training for sustaining interoperability, raise NRF ability to act, work with industry in the area of procurement).

In the end of 2012, NATO Military Committee proposed 4 ways of improving process of implementation of CFI, from planning **high-visibility exercise** in 2015, through resuming of **Strategic Foresight Analysis** to working out NATO **plan of military exercises** and CFI implementation plan. It also counts with continuous implementation of the new NATO Command Structure and delegating more roles to NATO Force Structure and after its successful execution with its potential revision (as well as the concept of NRF) so that they are most ready to act.

As value added of CFI we can identify also change of focus and „**a new quality**“ of training of NATO forces by focusing more on combined and joint multilevel exercises. It will be re-orientated from predeployment training to operational readiness support: this change also indicates shift from paradigm of classical mission rehearsal training towards more generic stand-by mode of forces ready to act. To make NATO forces more interoperable, CFI goes deeper into enhancing bounds between both NATO command and force structures, national staffs and national

armed forces and units of member and partner countries. This provides for opportunity not only in practical realisation of multinational projects, but also in terms of **confidence building and mutual understanding**.

Further, organisation of military exercises demonstrates willingness and readiness of NATO and its member countries to sustain present capabilities and perfect new ones. Demonstration of this effort will be envisaged by **high visibility** of exercises that will include also „**live elements (LIVEX)**“, so that their authenticity will be very high. First two exercises fully within CFI concept will be organised this year, both on territory of Allies in Central and Eastern Europe.

In June 2013, Slovak Republic will be hosting **Capable Logistician 2013** exercise, NATO's biggest interoperability exercise of military logistics since 2004. It will focus on coordination and common logistic approaches with NATO standards among participating countries (more than 30 NATO member and partner countries) and verification of usability of logistical systems and tools.

In November later this year, **Steadfast Jazz** exercise in Poland, Estonia and Latvia will examine NRF readiness, level of interaction among NRF components and host nation. Not only the Steadfast Jazz will be certification exercise for NRF 2014, it will also be NATO's biggest live exercise since 2006.

Policy recommendations

Connected Forces Initiative is a good example of practical concept that is up-to-date and very practical: it guides NATO member countries to have Forces 2020 that should be „born interoperable“. To reach this end state, bearing in

mind timely recommendations of ACT and NATO Military Committee, Allies should:

1. Sustain momentum and capabilities gained during ISAF

This sustainability means both maintenance (preservation) of them, but also precipitates that finances from Afghan re-deployment will stay in defense departments and will be used to perfect training and exercises.

2. Harmonise and integrate all military components

Harmonisation of all military components (air, ground, naval and space) within CFI is crucial to have truly compatible and interoperable forces. Major lesson learned from NATO's engagement in Afghanistan for over a decade is a value and importance of Special Operation Forces (SOF) in modern warfare and potential future conflicts: therefore, SOF should be integrated into CFI as well.

3. Realise CFI in a most inclusive and transparent way

High visibility live exercises represent an intelligent way of demonstrating accountability of the Alliance both to its citizens and partners. To increase relevance of CFI, NATO could in certain stage include partners when revising relevant documents, e. g. military exercises plan 2015- 2020 or study of future operational environment and its impact on the Alliance (on case-by case basis). It could also continue in inviting partners to the exercises, for it builds confidence, mutual understanding and last, but not least, brings practical interoperability outcomes.

4. Make CFI smart

It is not foreseeable that NATO countries will considerably raise military spending that would be supportable by public across the Alliance, profound military Afghanistan - like campaigning is probably not foreseeable as well. Therefore, Allied defense leaders in effort of assuring high quality of training and exercises within CFI should consider this in mid-term and long-term military budget planning. NATO and member states should focus more on using and better networking of already existing NATO's and national training capabilities and facilities and enhancing their collaboration (creating NATO training federation) rather than building new national capabilities in duplicity to existing ones.

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