

# RESILIENCE TRAINING IN OPERATIONAL-LEVEL EXERCISES COMMUNITY OF INTEREST

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**W**HILST NATO Nations invested heavily in civil preparedness during the Cold War, the post-Cold War reductions in tensions threatening NATO territory created a climate in which nations reduced such efforts. Arguably, this climate started to revert to a more threatening one as early as the 2007 cyber-attack on the Estonian Government and banking systems.

In any case, over the next five years, further cyber-attacks on NATO or friendly nations, taken together with other international developments, built a threat picture that needed to be addressed in NATO thinking. An important element of this was a need for enhanced resilience, first reflected at NATO's 2014 Wales Summit and significantly developed at the 2016 Warsaw Summit.

Since the 2016 Defence Ministers' advancement of the seven baseline requirements for resilience, NATO has progressively built a framework to support its nations in characterizing and then rebuilding resilience. As the NATO Nations started to reinvigorate resilience through civil preparedness, NATO had itself to start to address how to exercise it.

While national resilience remains a national responsibility, it must also affect the Alliance's ability to conduct operations in defence of NATO Nations' territory. Consequently, national resilience has to be incorporated in those JWC-directed exercises set within NATO territory. This, however, presents problems to exercise developers due to the diffuse nature of national resilience itself.

A nation's resilience is built from multiple and disparate activities, some resulting from civil preparedness action, some more organically from the nature of a society, per-

haps due to market conditions, governmental frameworks (designed for the functioning of society in peace rather than explicitly for resilience), from geography, and myriad other factors. Just as national resilience builds on this complex mesh of components and interactions, its degradation — and potential breakdown — will build up from smaller fractures or dislocations that are complex and composite in nature.

All exercises, as with any simulation of reality, require an abstraction process; it is not possible to "simulate the world". So, judgements have to be made on how much of this complexity to build into an exercise: too much and it becomes unwieldy; too little and the problems presented to the training audience may lack the substance and granularity required to stimulate the degree of analysis that they would need to undertake if confronted with real resilience problems. They must not be served too thin a gruel to fortify them for real operations.





**ABOVE:** The author, Adrian Williamson, at the JWC Vision 2025 workshop, warfare development syndicate. Photo by JWC PAO

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In fact, resilience presents other challenges, not least of which is the fact that our command post exercises are executed over a limited (approximately 10-day) time window, while changes in resilience states are likely to move at a slower pace, albeit with the potential for more rapid fracture.

And indeed, the import NATO places on resilience is for good reason: a breakdown in resilience could profoundly affect operations. A consequence of this from an exercise perspective is that “resilience play” in exercises has the potential, if not carefully managed, to “leak through” into other training objectives. It is always important in exercises to ensure that all training objectives can be met.

In summary, the challenge presented to the JWC when designing resilience play in its command post exercises is that it is a rapidly evolving subject; it is highly influenced by cyber and other non-conventional actions within a hybrid wrapper; it is, as outlined above, rather complex and follows timelines that do not align that well with exercise timelines — the detail underlying the complexity is within the purview of nations, which means that there is a potential need to reach out to nations for levels of support not normally required in JWC-directed exercises; and, if this were not enough, there is also limited doctrine that applies.

**Considering all this**, and recognizing the high importance nations ascribe to resilience, Rear Admiral Jan C. Kaack, the Commander of the JWC, created a “Resilience Training in Opera-

tional-Level Exercises Community of Interest” (RTiOLE CoI), inviting the NATO Command Structure (NCS) to provide subject matter experts to meet the RTiOLE mission.

That mission is to determine the detailed requirement for resilience training in operational-level exercises, consider the scope and nature of stimulation to operational-level training audiences, and to review and provide guidance on implementation proposals. That is, by first helping to articulate the fundamentals of the requirement, and then by working through what this implies in terms of stimulation (and hence simulation), the RTiOLE CoI helps the JWC to strike a balance that avoids “simulating the world”, whilst ensuring that the training audience is presented with the detail it needs to tackle this difficult subject area.

In constructing the terms of reference for this new community, the Commander recognized that, even given greater clarity on requirement and on “balance”, the implementation would remain challenging, envisaging the ongoing dialogue between the implementers and the Community of Interest on the designs proposed to meet the requirement.

The Commander also envisaged the RTiOLE CoI as an information exchange forum. In part, this recognizes that while much of the subject matter expertise on resilience resides within J9 communities (civil-military cooperation), the implications of breakdown of resilience will be to other “J-codes” and ultimately command decisions will be needed to deal with the more severe impacts that re-

silience breakdown may have on operational plans. The RTiOLE CoI participants are not only envisaged as *critical shapers of resilience designs*, but also as advocates within commands to help explain how best to exploit the richer resilience play that will result.

The inaugural meeting of the RTiOLE CoI was held virtually on May 6, 2021, and involved participation from Allied Command Operations, including SHAPE, Joint Force Command Brunssum, and Joint Force Command Naples, and from Allied Command Transformation (ACT), including HQ SACT and the Joint Force Training Centre, with the JWC’s Lieutenant Colonel Svein Rødland as chair. NATO HQ also participated in the role of policy mentors.

The output of that meeting is feeding into the ongoing crafting of resilience play in upcoming exercise, STEADFAST JUPITER 2021, and to early design thinking in STEADFAST JUPITER 2022 (STJU22).

The latter is a particularly complex exercise that provides a rich and diverse environment within which resilience has the potential to create challenges both subtle and profound for training audiences.

As the JWC develops our designs, we are able to reach out to the RTiOLE CoI for the latest thinking on resilience, but also for collective insight into the application of that thinking to the STJU22 problem set. This places the JWC in a strong position to deliver exercises that truly challenges our training audiences to tackle this important subject. ✦