

Centres of Excellence: A Multinational Force - ACT

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Since 2005, NATO Centres of Excellence have provided proven and enthusiastic collaboration among nations. Beyond all the progress they brought in shared know-how, they also answer the call of the Smart Defence initiative.

Smart Defence calls for NATO nations to examine the prioritisation of resources needed to sustain a ready and relevant force. At the same time most Allied nations are facing the realities of financial austerity. Therefore the need for bold and innovate partnerships is more important than ever. One model focused on partnerships already in place with proven results is the NATO Centre of Excellence (COE).



Created by the Nations

A farsighted idea, NATO COEs emerged in 2005 with a design to play a significant role in NATO's transformation efforts. COEs are created by the Nations through agreements which pool resources from willing ones among them for niche areas of expertise. The centres are accredited by NATO; however, they are voluntarily established, resourced and funded solely by the Framework and Sponsoring Nations. Guiding principles such as added value, clear relationships and NATO Standards set out in the COE concept provide a framework for Nations to coalesce around needed capability areas. The symbiotic relationship between NATO and the COE's Sponsoring Nations allow the COEs experience and expertise to benefit the Alliance and the countries that sponsor them.

The COEs are agile entities that can respond to time-critical projects and provide analysis for future needs. Nations have recognised these advantages. And as a result, 16 NATO COEs have been established through the accreditation process.

Focused Vision on Critical Issues

COEs are diverse in nature and support a broad scope of work. Accomplishments include events, projects, training and analysis along four main pillars:

- Education and Training
- Analysis and Lessons Learned
- Concept Development/Experimentation
- Doctrine Development & Standards

A number of COEs chair prestigious NATO Working groups. They support operations through training, assessment and reach back capabilities, and apply expertise to assist the development of critical shortfall areas such as cyber defence, maritime security and space awareness. COEs are also extremely useful to NATO in their ability to conduct dialogue and form relationships with partners in International Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations, Industry and Academia. They operate outside the constraints of the normal bureaucracy which allows them to focus on coherent practices to address emerging challenges.

Anticipation of the Smart Defence Mind-Set

No one doubts the difficult challenges NATO faces in an environment where evolving threats and decreasing budgets run parallel. Despite reductions to the NATO Command Structure, the Alliance must forge ahead to maintain its strength and face changes to the way it does business. NATO strategic guidance asserts that Nations must remain committed to the value of international security. Investments in new and lasting partnerships are required to meet the demands of sustaining cooperative security.

One of the answers to these difficult challenges is the Smart Defence initiative. At the SACT Seminar held in February 2012, Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen summed up the Smart Defence approach: "This is all about creating a new mind set. About better aligning our collective requirements and national priorities. And about focussing our efforts on prioritisation, cooperation, and specialisation."

This spirit of Smart Defence is abundant in the NATO COE community. As Nations commit to long-term strategic projects for Smart Defence and seek new ideas for partnerships and solutions, they will emerge as valuable resources and successful examples of multinational cooperation. National resolve is imperative for the future of NATO, and with the guidance and assistance of COEs the Alliance will likely endure through the current constraints while continuing as a multinational force in the decades to come.

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