

NATO Doctrine Article Reviewed

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INTRODUCTION:

Linking to another military organisation, even within a country, is hard. It is not only about technology, but also about terms, procedures and habits. And how do we view upon each other and how does that influence our way of working together? The cultural aspect? What about trust, a main enabler of military formations' success? As that is the case in your region, this even more applies to the European-Atlantic alliance. NATO has been existing for more than seventy years now. It has meanwhile grown to a political-military organisation with thirty member states and many partners all around the globe. These member nations support their international permanent defence oriented organisation, NATO, with offices, HQs, people and equipment. These are brought together for a common goal: to ensure security and prosperity for their populations. Thirty plus nations with their own policies, doctrines and procedures reflecting their cultures. How to work, train, exercise together in peace and if necessary fight in crisis and wartime? A common doctrine is one of the cornerstones to achieve that.

This article aims to provide an overview of the NATO understanding of the term doctrine and discusses the way NATO develops doctrine. I will start with some more philosophical thoughts on doctrine and then give a deeper insight in the formal arrangements within NATO. As a warning: in my sketch of organisations involved in doctrine you will be confronted with a lot of abbreviations. After describing their responsibilities and the 'architecture' I will focus on the doctrine development process itself. Throughout this article you have to keep in mind that NATO is founded upon consensus.

As stated earlier I will provide an outsider's view because of our independent COE position. Also you have to know that our NATO C2COE is not a custodian (owner)of, but a contributor to doctrine. Our topic Command and Control on the operational level is not covered in an own publication but captured in chapters in main NATO doctrine.

Doctrine within the NATO Structure

In NATO Doctrine defined as: “fundamental principles by which military forces guide their actions in support of objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgment in application”. It is this definition which is unchanged since 1973. Having such a definition in NATO means that all members have agreed upon it. The principal purpose of doctrine is to provide the Alliance forces conducting operations with a shared framework of guidance to achieve a common objective. One has to be aware that the main portion of NATO forces are, sometimes per mission, made available to NATO by the nations. Interoperability between these individual contributions is key. Over 70 years now NATO is working, day in, day out, to achieve and maintain this ability to act together coherently, effectively and efficiently to achieve Allied objectives. This ability is a coherent and interwoven package of people, processes and technology. These are laid down in standardization agreements (STANAGS). All doctrine publications therefore are also agreed upon standards, though nations can and sometimes, make reservations for certain (small) parts; despite their involvement in their development. It will be clear that such objecting in a final stage is not always well received but is sometimes deemed necessary not to delay use.

The Committee for Standardization (CS) is the senior policy committee responsible to the North Atlantic Council (NAC) for NATO standardization policy and management, and promoting standardization in the Alliance. Operational standardization encompasses all activities that affect interoperability across operating forces to include conceptual, organizational or methodological requirements with its main effort being doctrine development. The Military Committee (MC) is the tasking authority (TA) for operational standardization.

Standardization shall provide solutions to interoperability requirements. These requirements emanate either from the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP), agreed Alliance initiatives and NATO's operations planning (top-down), or from lessons learned, exercise and evaluations processes (bottom-up).

In principle NATO policy, developed at the International Military Staff (IMS) at the NATO HQ in Brussels, drives concepts and doctrine creation. Due to limited manpower in the doctrinal field the MC and subordinated boards should be careful with tasking development of new doctrines. There needs to be a doctrinal gap which calls for doctrine development or review. On the other hand the fluidity of policies in an alliance, continuous exchange of views, should not cause delays in doctrine the warrior requires today. Policy and doctrine on topics can develop separately as long as in the end they do not contradict. Coherence between policy and doctrine is assured by IMS representation in doctrinal meetings, harmonization activities and regular direction and guidance. Caution is required to prevent that just nice but unproven ideas spark doctrine. In conclusion: custodians should not get hysterical about the political topic of today, overreach and try to hastily insert it into doctrine.

Doctrine sprouts from experience not from theory and as stated by the Joint Warfare Centre (JWC) in 2018 “codifies what is known”. Since a few year under impetus of an Allied Command Transformation (ACT) Brigadier General, this JWC started, supported by the respective custodian, observing the use of existing doctrine in major operational level exercises. The aim is to identify the need for changes in practice. Also the doctrine definition warns that the application of this knowledge and experience needs, case by case, thorough consideration by the actors of the circumstances. Fighting the last war or using the right tools in the wrong environment, needs to be prevented. Higher level doctrine outlines not what but rather how to think. From a philosophical point of view this implies a thinking and not drilled “just following orders” military who is able and willing to adapt. There is also a flipside to it. As doctrine is what (most) people believe in and these documents are often considered authoritative, they can also be an engine for change and a way to retain organizational knowledge.

Figure 1 Warning to deliberately use doctrine by Von Clausewitz

“
Doctrine is a guide to anyone who wants to learn about war from books: it will light their way, ease their progress, train their judgement and help them to avoid pitfalls. Doctrine is meant to educate the minds of future commanders.....not to accompany them to the battlefields.
”
C Von Clausewitz
On War

(Source) UK MOD, Joint Doctrine Publication 0-01, UK Defence Doctrine (5th Edition), 2014, p. iv.

The Development of NATO Doctrine

As stated earlier the NATO C2COE focusses on the operational level of warfare and it's overlap with the military-strategic level (in NATO represented by the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe) and the higher tactical level. Therefore the main interest is in the Allied Joint Publications (AJPs) which form the highest level of doctrine in NATO. They deal with aspects especially relevant for the operational level commander and his staff in the Joint Task Force Headquarters. Allied Joint Publications relate to the joint operational level but through underlying tactical doctrines and equipment standards drill down to services, functional groupings and finally to vehicle markings, data-labelling etcetera.

Figure 2 The levels of Warfare within NATO

Strategic Level:

national or multinational security objectives determined by a nation or group of nations, and national resources (including military) deployed to achieve them.

Operational Level:

campaigns and major operations planned, conducted and sustained to accomplish **strategic objectives** within theatres or areas of operations.

Tactical Level:

activities, battles and engagements planned and **executed** to accomplish **military objectives** assigned to tactical formations and units.

(Source) Own figure based on AJP-1(E) Joint Doctrine, 2017.

The allied joint doctrine development process including actors and responsibilities is described in Allied Administrative Publication (AAP)-47(C) which is coherent with the AAP-03(K). This latter overarching directive covers the production, maintenance and management of NATO standardization documents. The AAP-47 was last updated in February 2019 to reflect the latest insights and practices.

Many actors are involved in realizing this doctrine development process: the Military Committee (MC), Allied Command Transformation, the Military Committee Joint Standardization Board (MCJSB) and other MC Boards, the NATO Standardization Office (NSO), the International Military Staff, NATO nations, Allied Command Operations as the main user of AJP's ("customer") and custodians. Their roles will be briefly mentioned.

The Military Committee is the tasking authority for operational standardization and requires that its subordinate bodies develop NATO operational standards for doctrine and any related functions. The MC delegated tasking authority for all allied joint publications to the Military Committee Joint Standardization Board (MC JSB). It has to safeguard the joint aspects; also in publications of other Delegated Tasking Authorities (DTA). A Delegated Tasking Authority (Board) will

task, approve and provide guidance for the development/revision of standards in their fields I witnessed that in practice this mandated interference is not always well received and surely not understood.

In the International Military Staff designated staff officers (“sponsors”) link policy to doctrine development. Therefore they should keep close contact with custodians to inform them about policy changes. This link needs permanent attention. The Allied Command Transformation (ACT), located in Norfolk, USA, identifies and prioritizes interoperability goals. The Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) feeds and supports this effort. A dedicated ACT section administrates the status of doctrine, facilitates its development and leads the bi-annual doctrine meeting on the operational level, the Allied Joint Operations Doctrine Working Group. It will be clear that they often have to cross the Atlantic. They are supported by officials from the NATO Standardization Office (NSO) at the NATO HQ which initiates, supports and administers (all) standardization efforts. Finally ACT, nations and some COEs have assigned “custodians” which develop and update specific doctrines. In nations these are often officers working within their national doctrine departments.

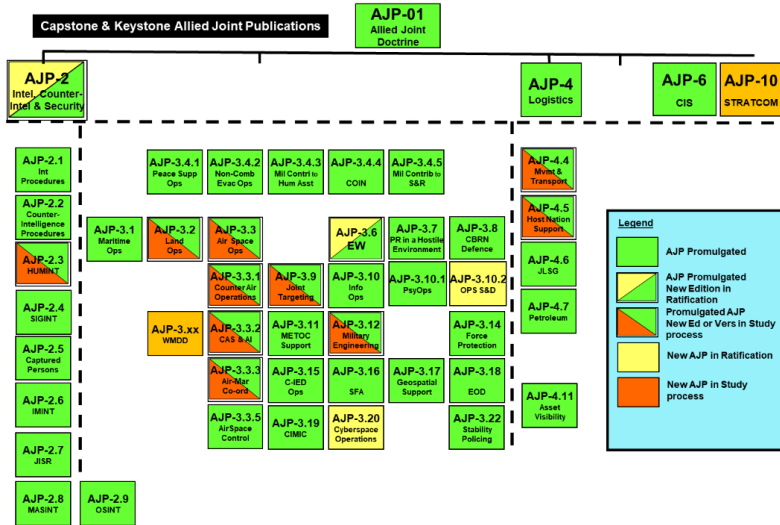
One can conclude that NATO has no own doctrine development centre; no own doctrine department but depends on the efforts of the member states and COEs. Finally the NATO nations have to contribute to doctrine development by commenting on existing publications, supporting data fusion events in which all comments are analysed, participation in writing teams and commenting on draft versions of new, revised or rewritten doctrines. As a final stage they have to formally state they agree on formal versions. Depending on the level of the publication, this promulgation requires the consent of a predefined number of nations.

The Allied Joint Doctrine Architecture

NATO doctrinal publications often have functional relationships and are grouped in an architecture called the Allied Joint Doctrine Architecture (AJDA). NATO differentiates between level-1, -2 and -3 publications. Only level-1 and -2 publications are part of the AJDA and

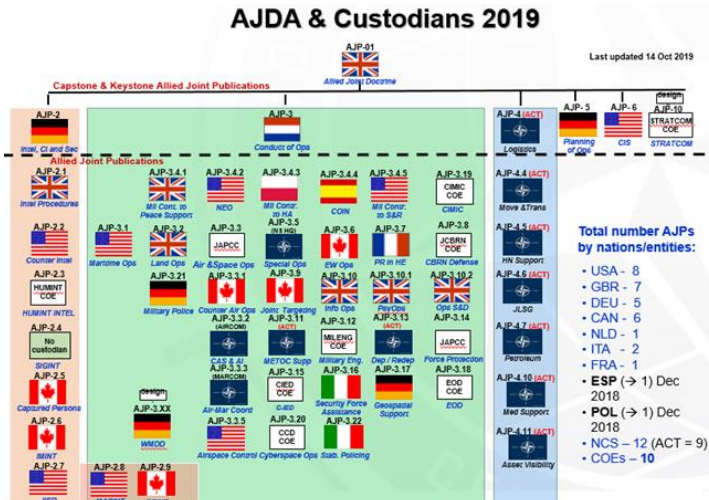
focus on 'how to think'. Level-3 publications contain tactics, techniques and procedural-level doctrine that support and enhance AJPs.

Figure 3 The current Allied Joint Doctrine Architecture (ADJA)



(Source) NATO NSO protected webportal; accessed 2019.

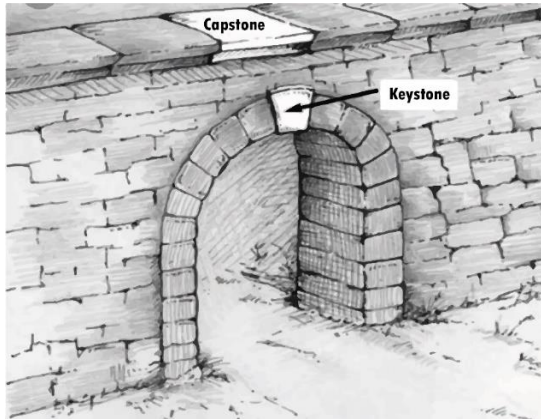
Figure 4 Overview of doctrine custodians (ACT, nations, COEs)



(Source) Powerpoint by ACT presented at the 40th AJOD, October 2019.

The so called Capstone document is the AJP-01 “Joint Doctrine”. It provides commanders and their staff with a common framework for understanding the approach to the employment of the military instrument of power. It describes the strategic context and provides guidance on how Alliance forces and its partners operate. It also provides a reference for NATO civilian and non-NATO civilians operating with the Alliance. As such it is the basis from which all subordinate NATO doctrine is derived. AJP-01 is complemented by the other overarching level-1 so called keystone publications: AJP-2 Intelligence, Counter-Intelligence and Security, AJP-3 Conduct of Operations, AJP-4 Logistics, AJP-5 Planning of Operations, AJP-6 Communication and Information Systems and AJP-10 Strategic Communications. Keystone publications establish the doctrinal foundation for a series of joint publications found in the AJDA.

Figure 5 Explanation of the terms Key- and Capstone-publications



(Source) Picture found at internet; no original source mentioned.

Beneath these keystone publications are the level-2 publications which constitute the supporting joint doctrine for specific functional areas and themes at the operational level. These publications also carry an AJP designation in their titles. For example, the level-1 doctrine AJP-3 Conduct of Operations is followed by several domain or functional level-2 publications. They address specific Operational Level

concepts (how, not what, to think) relevant to the joint commander. Therefore the Allied Joint Doctrine for Land Operations is numbered AJP-3.2.

The detailed procedures are in level-3 publications. These contain tactics, techniques and procedural-level joint/single service doctrine that support and enhance the AJPs. These publications are Allied Publications (APs) but do not appear on the AJDA.

One has to be aware that NATO doctrine feeds national doctrine publications. Some nations partially copied the NATO doctrine structure.

Keeping doctrine up-to-date and fit for use

NATO's intent is to review each doctrine every four to five years so the operators will have an up to date, fit for use doctrine. At the operational level there are currently fifty one doctrine publications.

Recent years, nations in the Allied Joint Operations Doctrine Working Group have given much attention to harmonizing the content of AJPs and delete duplications. This especially applied to AJP-01 “the sledge dog which leads the pack” and other Level-1 publications. There was quite some discussion to transfer content from Level-1 and Level-2 publications. Somehow nations and functional groups consider this rational approach as a degrading “their” publication. This opinion ignores the functional approach which the levels reflect. Publications are not more or less important but have a different function in achieving interoperability between the forces. This is not always well understood.

In discussing the role of nations in doctrine development I already mentioned the steps which are extensively described in AAP-47. The main tool to manage doctrine development is the Allied Joint Doctrine Campaign Plan (AJDCP). This document reflects all scheduled events related to each Joint operational level doctrine and therefore shows its lifecycle. It provides a basic indication of future workload. One official within the ACT Joint Doctrine Coherence Section keeps it updated. NSO takes care of publishing the “frozen”, consolidated, version of the AJDCP on their web-based portal.

Figure 6 A page of the Allied Joint Doctrine Campaign Plan (AJDCP); the main tool to manage NATO doctrine

Allied Joint Doctrine Campaign Plan

2020

Table A.3 - Doctrine Tasks to begin in 2020

Allied Joint Publication	Current Edition Promulgated	Custodian	IMS Sponsor	RFF Release	Data Fusion	DF Summary Report	Doctrine Task Issued	Doctrine Development Status	Target Date for Promulgation	Priority Assigned by AJOD WG
AJP-01 Allied Joint Doctrine	AJP-01(E) 2017	GBR	(P&C)	2019Q4	(2020Q1)	(2020Q2)	(2019Q2)		2022	(None)
AJP-6 Communication & Information Systems	AJP-6(A) 2017	USA	(NHQ C3)	2019Q4	(2020Q1)	(2020Q2)	(2019Q2)		2022	(None)
AJP-3.18 Explosive Ordnance Disposal	AJP-3.18(A) 2017	DEU	(O&P)	2020Q1	(2020Q2)	(2019Q3)	(2019Q3)		2021/22	(None)
AJP-4.7 Petroleum	AJP-4.7(A) (2017)	ACT	(L&R)	2020Q2	(2020Q3)	(2019Q4)	(2019Q4)		2021/22	(None)

(Source) NATO NSO protected webportal; accessed 2019.

The start event of doctrine review is the “Request for Feedback”. The custodian collects all comments, from nations, NATO HQs (ACO) and organisations such as JWC and COEs, based on the use of the publication in practice and during exercises. One has to be aware that during the complete development process all suggestions for content or structure changes but also the subsequent decisions and the reasoning behind them, are recorded. If a doctrine is intentionally not reviewed, this doesn’t mean the requirement for having one on the topic available doesn’t exist or could not become relevant later. Dormant is not forever.

The next step is the Data Fusion event led by ACT and facilitated by in most cases a national doctrine centre and their analysts. This thorough analysis of comments and additional information, leads to an data fusion report and a recommendation, a draft “doctrine task”. This is either to slightly revise, rewrite and restructure or to delete a doctrine. The MCJSB formally reviews this doctrine task. If it is approved, the custodian is then tasked to fulfil the doctrine task. This completes the review phase and the custodian-led development phase of the doctrine development cycle begins

A writing team will produce in several defined and time-constrained iterations their versions. First within the writing team a working draft will be developed. After internal fine-tuning, as a next step, but within 180 days of issuing the doctrine task, the doctrinal community must have the opportunity to comment on a study draft.

Depending on the topic there might be a second study draft. The next version which incorporates the relevant comments, is called the harmonization draft. The aim of this step is to prevent contradiction, undue repetition or voids. The final draft is the ratification draft which after MCJSB approval is send out to the nations for ratification. A publication is ratified when the required number of NATO member states, as set by criteria, have provided their national ratification responses. Despite electronic tooling, the processing through national bureaucracies is ponderous which in practice leads to delays. These hurdles within the nations themselves, disrespect best efforts by the writing team but even more important endanger the use of the latest doctrinal insights by NATO formations.

For doctrine which has to be developed “from scratch” AAP-47 mentions separate arrangements and timelines. In recent years this was the case for Cyberspace Operations and Strategic Communications.

Is it working?

Until now I described a well thought of, NATO doctrine development process but does it work? I observed that the active part of NATO’s operational level doctrinal community, as with other communities in NATO, is limited in number. The bi-annual Allied Joint Operation Doctrine Working Group meetings could do with some more dynamics and the number (and sharpness) of recommendations to the overarching MCJSB are limited. Especially taking the responsibility for all joint level doctrine needs according to me more attention. The AJOD and in the escalation mode MCJSB should force other MC Working Groups to cancel, degrade, timely update or thin out their joint publications. It doesn’t help that the linkage between national representatives in those different doctrine working groups is weak or not existent. Single nations therefore speak with different voices.

This required impetus of the meeting is also weakened by the fact that not all nations show up. Especially the recent absence of the USA who contributed with constructive ideas and deep reflections on doctrine is felt. And despite presence, not all national representatives raise their voices in public. They are sometimes hindered by the fact that the

official NATO languages, English or French, is not the mother's tongue. Is it true as some of my former colleagues said that people working in doctrine are hiding behind desks in far away offices? I don't think they deserve this qualification. Many people I met are very committed. But as in many NATO fora, people come and go; often every three years. Not all therefore seem fully aware of content and process from the start. The conscience and long term memory is with NATO civilians and some longtime national representatives. The presence of a well documented process, AAP-47 and the ADJA and Allied Joint Doctrine Campaign Plan is very supportive. This situational awareness that these meetings and updates provide, is slightly blurred by the fact that not all custodians send in their bi-annual liaison reports on their assessment of their publications in time. Some of these are just "copy and paste".

As an outsider who has been witnessing doctrine development for more than six years now, there is good news though. I must admit that the average 'age' of the doctrines has decreased though there still some remarkable exceptions which negatively impact "the score". But the real success is that the content and readability of doctrine has improved, that duplications are eliminated, that publications were merged, that doctrines are harmonized and that the positioning of documents on the right level despite opposition gets attention. As mentioned the collective assessment of the Joint Warfare Centre and the custodians of the use of their doctrine in major exercises is a real improvement as it links to the practical usability. Most publications have been through two "new style" revision cycles and the limited feedback during the review process proves the increased quality of Allied Joint Publications. This progress does reflect thorough awareness of the importance of doctrine. But the burden for doctrine development is carried by few nations and organisations. The "usual suspects", well known within the community, volunteer and contribute in all phases with people and content. But there is also reluctance by other nations. The Allied Joint Operation Doctrine Working Group therefore has to be disciplined and only accept proposals or even taskers for new doctrine if the current and future burden (writing team, review, custodianship) is well understood and

acceptable. This despite organizational pressure to reflect recent policy in doctrine.

Conclusion:

NATO has a well-established doctrine development process which is fed and driven by the nations itself. In this long article I described the philosophy, the actors and their responsibilities and the process. I mentioned quite some issues which characterize every huge multinational organisation, owned by many. But in the end it is about promoting interoperability; providing the warfighter usable and relevant documents which guide him in his difficult endeavor. I believe NATO, its member nations and affiliated organisations work hard on this customers' satisfaction

About NATO C2COE:

COEs are knowledge centres which are outside the formal NATO structure. They form International Organisations (IO) on their own and are funded and governed by the participating nations. They are established to provide their own independent views and ideas in order to reinforce NATO's development within their specific area. In the NATO C2COE case six nations invest in knowledge gathering, generation and dissemination on C2. The focus is on the operational level of warfare ('joint'). In NATO, we are talking doctrine and definitions already, this is the level on which campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted and sustained to accomplish strategic objectives within theatres or areas of operations. Our scope includes the interfacing of the operational level with the military-strategic and the higher tactical level as this is often a reason for concern. Being aware that the topic C2 can be very broad and that its manning is modest, the NATO C2COE limits itself to three areas: human factors including leadership, information management and staff structures and processes. It might not always reflect the official NATO or members' view. NATO-politeness and following NATO rules and procedures do not always solve issues; COEs can address that.