

History of the Conference of Commandants

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The Conference of Commandants was set up in 1972. The purpose of the conference was to foster cooperation in the field of higher defense training between colleges in NATO countries, permit the exchange of information between military authorities who shared identical responsibilities in the field of higher defense education, and encourage improvements in curricula and educational methods.

There were three historically important enlargements of the Conference of Commandants – when Partnership for Peace program, Mediterranean Dialogue, and Istanbul Cooperation Initiatives nations were invited to join the initiative. The history of the Conference of Commandants, the spirit of cooperation and open dialogue on topics of military and defense education give reason for optimism to make things better.

Introduction

There is only one constant since beginning of time, it is change. Security, defense and education have been continuously changing, too. The question is, “How can one plan, build, and train to be effective in a world that constantly shifts underfoot?”¹ In the modern world where the pace of change is fast, there is little enough bedrock to build on. Where should we go for guidance? The answers must be sought in our collective wisdom and experience. It is the academic community, which has a long-term vision.

Lord Robertson in 2001 on the 50th anniversary of the NATO Defense College talked about revolution in strategic education, in his view the NATO Defense College was well placed to lead that revolution. By a revolution in strategic education he meant that the academic community needed to focus its attention on new, complex and sometimes amorphous challenges.² It appears at a moment of great need and great opportunity. Great need because the problems of defense and security are among the most difficult ones of the world’s problems. Great opportunity comes from the profound changes in learning that give us powerful new tools for international exchange and interaction.

At the establishment of the Conference of Commandants (CoC) hardly anybody thought what a splendid and magnificent initiative had started. Twenty years after its initiation commandants of military academies of Partnership for Peace program, then

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participants of the Mediterranean Dialogue, later on the Istanbul Cooperation Initiatives were invited to join.

The Conference of Commandants of the Defense Colleges of the Atlantic Alliance countries was set up on the initiative of Vice-Admiral J. C. O'Brien (Canada), Commandant of the NATO Defense College from 1970 to 1973, acting on a suggestion by Rear Admiral S. Mathwin Davis, who was Commandant of the Canadian Defense College at the time.³ The first Conference was held in Rome 24–26 May 1972. Until 1988 each conference was hosted by the NATO Defense College.⁴ Afterwards every second different allied and partner institutions hosted the event. Alternating year conferences have been hosted in Istanbul (1989), Lisbon (1991), Madrid (1993), Bonn (1995), Athens (1997), Oslo (1999), Budapest (2001), Vienna (2003) and, exceptionally, in 2004, Sofia.

In the history of the CoC, 2001 was a milestone, when Hungary (Budapest, Zrínyi Miklós National Defense University) out of the three countries, which joined the Alliance in 1999, organized the conference. In 2003 the conference was held in Austria, in 2004 Sofia hosted it, the 2005 conference was organized by Rome, then it moved to Luzerne (Switzerland) in 2006.

The first Conference of Commandants of the various Defense or War Colleges of the NATO countries was held in Rome at the NATO Defense College. The main reason for establishing this annual meeting was to offer a point of contact to the Alliance countries' military authorities, which share identical responsibilities in the field of higher defense education. The aim of the conference was to discuss achievements so far in the training of civilian and military personnel responsible for defense and to consider what changes may be necessary to take into account developments in the political, social and economic fields.

This conference took place on 24–25 May 1972, chaired by Vice Admiral J. C. O'Brien, Commandant of the NATO Defense College, and 22 delegates from 12 countries and 13 Colleges took part. The first day of the conference was devoted to short ten minute addresses by each delegate. The commandants' presentations concentrated mainly on the future of higher education in defense and security environment of change. The following subjects were discussed on the following day: the composition of the student body at national courses and the qualifications of students, the structure of the different courses, individual activity of students, the method of selecting faculty, the place of management and automatic data processing systems in a modern defense curriculum, the exchange of information on lecturers and other useful information of mutual value.

The place of the NATO Defense College in relation to other national defense colleges was discussed, too. It was decided that a similar meeting should be held in 1973 and it was agreed that the ideal place for this meeting was Rome. In the first meeting, fundamental decisions were taken which were of a practical nature, enabling progress to be made. They agreed to use the NATO Defense College as a focal point or clearing house for the exchange of ideas. It was decided, whenever possible, to send a faculty adviser to call on the other colleges in the countries visited during tours. The composition is as follows: the commandant of the NATO Defense College is the chairman. He is assisted by the permanent secretary. The delegates are the commandants (or their representatives) of the major defense colleges of all nations of the Alliance. They are invited by the chairman of the conference or by the permanent secretary acting on his authority. If the heads of delegation consider it advisable, they may bring members of their college staff with them. However, it was requested that the total number of participants do not exceed three per college.

At their second conference (21–22 May 1973) the participants agreed on the necessity of an annual exchange of information. The main objective of the conference was to permit the exchange of information in the field of higher defense education and, in particular, to assist in improving academic programs and instructional methods. This objective was accurately defined when the North Atlantic Council approved the setting up of the post of permanent secretary to the conference with effect from 1 April 1981. The functions of the Permanent Secretary were adopted by all Commandants at the 10th conference on May 1981.⁵

Since the main aim of the conference was to exchange information, the choice of the subjects to be discussed during the first conferences depended entirely on the delegates. Any subject that conformed to the objectives of the Conference was therefore acceptable. At the beginning there was only informal exchange of information, later on the venues have become more and more result-oriented. The organization and the agenda of the conference evolved.

The first part of the conference started with an exposé by the permanent secretary on his activities and the results of his work, followed by each commandant. Their briefings concentrated on important changes that occurred during the year at their Colleges; any problems and difficulties of general interest encountered over the year; major topics studied and lessons drawn from the studies carried out by the students, and the results of study tours. The second part of the conference was devoted to the study of conference papers presented by delegates and of new problems they wished to take up. After approval by the chairman, the summary record of the conference was published in English and in French and sent to the delegates. It was submitted to the following conference for approval and if necessary for discussion.

Milestones of the Conference of Commandants

As a result of the fundamental changes to the security environment in the late 1980s, the conference was given an important new dimension. In accordance with the 1991 guide lines laid down by the Rome Summit and the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) Work Plan for intensifying dialogue and cooperation in Europe, for fostering co-operation with the Central and Eastern European countries in the field of training, the conference was enlarged in 1992 to include a number of Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)⁶ countries with higher defense education establishments (see Table 1). This was the first enlargement of the conference. Commandants of colleges from Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland and Czechoslovakia had been invited to attend the proceedings. Three countries (Czechoslovakia, Finland and Bulgaria) did not honour the invitation. With enlargement, a dual format was adopted. The first part of the conference was reserved for NATO commandants, while the second part, the Enlarged Conference, was open to commandants of higher defense educational establishments in the Partnership for Peace nations.

Table 1. The enlargement of the Conference of Commandants 1992–2006

Date	Location	Country/New invitees	Enlargement of the Conference
3–4 April 1992	Rome	Austria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland	First enlargement of the conference CSCE countries were invited
31 March –2 April 1993	Madrid	Finland, Bulgaria	
23–25 March 1994	Rome	Czech Republic, Slovakia	
22–24 March 1995	Bern	Slovenia	
20–22 March 1996	Rome	–	
19–21 March 1997	Athens	Ukraine	
26–27 March 1998	Rome		
26–28 May 1999	Oslo		Baltic Defense College participation
22–24 March 2000	Rome	Israel, Jordan	Second enlargement Mediterranean Dialogue countries participated
21–23 March 2001	Budapest	Algeria, Ireland	
21–23 May 2002	Rome	Azerbaijan, Egypt, Tunisia	
25–27 March 2003	Vienna	FYROM, Uzbekistan	Dual format of the conference was abolished
22–24 March 2004	Sofia	Albania, Croatia, Mauritania	
	Rome	Belorussia	Allied Command Transformation participation
24–25 April 2006	Luzerne	Saudi-Arabia	Third enlargement Istanbul Cooperation Initiative countries participated

Source: Summary reports on the Conferences of Commandants (Ed.: Klára Sipos Kecskeméthy)

Commandants' briefings revealed that there were similarities and convergences in the assessments of the new political-strategic situation, in the changes to study programs and in the various actions undertaken.⁷ It was a general observation that alterations to curricula and restructuring were made prudently and on a step-by-step basis. The process revealed the uncertainties and the hazards in the changing European landscape. All commandants experienced problems in updating instructions, studies on issues related to political-military security, defense and strategy and their extension to international bodies, new roles in the security field, studies on military operations, the increasingly joint and multinational nature. The consequences resulting from the force reductions imposed by disarmament agreements or defense budgets and their impact on organizations and operations were also a subject for study in all colleges. Research units were often being joined up or created within colleges in order to meet these requirements for adaptation. In different forms according to the various educational institutions, financial savings were the order of the day and this was reflected in reductions in the length of courses and study tours, in the numbers of students and in the manpower levels of staff members.

Serious efforts were made to improve the quality of education, to introduce modern educational methods and tools. It was becoming more and more widespread for colleges to open up at the highest level of instruction to the civilian sector, either by admitting civilian students or by increasing and intensifying relations with the universities. There was an almost general international opening up in various forms: increases in the numbers of foreign students or foreign lecturers, instructor exchanges, receiving or visiting other institutes, etc. Germany was mentioned as a positive example, whose efforts were impressive by the reorientation, training and integration of a large number of officers from the former East German Army. With regard to Denmark and Norway, stress was laid on the particular attention paid to the countries bordering the Baltic Sea. The introduction of the German Federal College for Security Policy Studies was also exemplary. The institution, which is under inter-ministerial supervision, completes civilian and military defense teaching in order to provide training in security issues at the highest level and in liaison with the universities and other research institutes.

The meeting on the second day (3 April 1992) was opened by LtGen Pelagio M. A. Castelo Branco who, in his welcoming remarks, explained the reasons for enlarging the conference to the CSCE countries. This day's proceedings were attended by 7 commandants or their representatives from the CSCE countries together with the Allied commandants. Admiral John A. Baldwin, the president of the National Defense University had the introductory presentation on the role of military colleges in a democracy. He described in detail how military colleges in democracy could use their

teaching and research capabilities to influence the formulation of public policy in national security policy. LtGen Giuseppe Degli Innocenti, the President of the Centro Alti Studi per la Difesa (CASD) in his lecture dealt with the setting up a joint war college. The Russian Military Attaché in Rome presented the Moscow Military Academy and problems of its reorganization. It was followed by the lecture of MGen Louis Geiger, the Chief of Staff in charge of operational training in the Swiss Federal Military Department, who briefed the conference on the Swiss model of defense teaching.

Among the items on the agenda MGen Miklós Szabó's presentation – the commandant of the Zrínyi Miklós Military Academy – played an important role. His presentation with regard to the complete restructuring of the Hungarian civil and military higher education, and the new Higher Education Law to be expected and to be approved was of great importance and of central interest. General Szabó gave the audience an overview of the whole process. In his lecture he emphasized that the transformation of military higher education began in 1992 when ministry of defense joined the government program "Renewal of Hungarian Higher Education Until 2000". Ideas and alternatives were formed in professional and scholarly debates on how to reach the standards of European higher education, Hungarian civilian and foreign military higher education. The transformation was urgent because the institutional system did not coincide with the provisions of the Higher Education Act regarding legal, financial, and personnel points of view. Education demanded high financial resources, its economic indicators lagged behind civilian higher education. The general lines of the Ministry of Defense policy was to build a new effective and rational functioning system, which would be in harmony with the spirit of Higher Education Act suggesting the creation of a large, integrated institution. The long-term integration of military educational institutions was to improve effectiveness and cooperation among institutions and organizations.

The second day's final lecture was presented by MGen Klaus Reinhardt, the commandant of the Führungsakademie on problems resulting from the amalgamation of the Bundeswehr and the East German Army, in particular from the educational point of view.

All commandants from the countries invited valued the initiative of the enlarged conference, the spirit of cooperation and open dialogue on topics of military and defense education. They expressed the wish to see this initiative renewed, and a vast amount was learned from the exchanges which deserve to be pursued and deepened.

The second enlarged conference was held in Madrid on 31 March–2 April 1993. Following the tradition commandants of colleges or institutes from 11 countries – Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic, Russia, the

Slovak Republic, Sweden and Switzerland – were invited to attend the two day proceedings.⁸ The Conference of Commandants was chaired by General Evraire, commandant of the NATO Defense College.⁹ It was opened by General Juan Sosa Hurtado, the Director of the Centro Superior de Estudios de la Defensa Nacional (CESEDEN). Allied Commandants reported on the main events that had occurred during the current year and the major changes that had been made to the curricula or organization of their respective establishments. Thematic presentations were made by several commandants in order to arouse discussion and debate, in particular: “The Future of the Canadian National Defense College – The Fundamental Review of its Program”; “Operational Command as Part of German Staff Officer Training”; “Portuguese Public Opinion and Security and Defense Problems” (Portugal); “Spanish Defense Policy” (Spain); “The Advancement in Academic Education and Training within the Framework of Reorganization of the Turkish Armed Forces”; and “NDC Outreach Program Outline”.

On the enlarged day of the conference Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Poland, Romania and Sweden gave briefings on their colleges. Among other things the following topics were covered: “Higher Defense Teaching from the Perspective View of the Austrian National Defense Academy” and “Organizational Structure and Tasks of the Military Academy, Georgi S. Rakovski (Sofia, Bulgaria)”. The conference participants could form a notion of the development of Finland’s military higher education and its linking to the national higher educational system. On the third day of the conference, participants became acquainted with the Austrian views on how the military could contribute to foster democratic developments within the former Warsaw Pact countries. Major General K. Larsson delivered a lecture on Sweden’s Total Defense and Security Policy during the 1990s. Subsequently, the following presentations were also given: “Progress in the Federal College for Security Policy Studies” by Admiral (R) D. Wellershoff (Bundesakademie für Sicherheitspolitik, Germany); “Strategic Crisis Management Exercise 92 for the Swiss Federal Government” by Divisionär L. Geiger, and “Possibilities and Limits of Exchanges between European Non-NATO and NATO Colleges” by Rear Admiral J. Reschke (Führungsakademie).

Commandants’ major concern was to develop the appropriate educational instruments to analyze crisis situations and apply the range of prevention, management and control ways and means. This called for adaptations to be made to education contents, methods and means. Studies were being carried out on joint military operations, usually of a multinational nature, on the non-traditional role of armed forces, including actions such as peacekeeping, intervention, embargo, zone access denial, humanitarian assistance under the aegis of international organizations. New topics were introduced into curricula, new

risks (terrorism, Muslim fundamentalism, drugs, protection of the environment, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, etc.), the economic dimension of international relations, the influence of nations in the concert of events, and the importance of information strategies vis-à-vis the media, just to name a few. They agreed that it was difficult to manage increasingly overloaded curricula, and to maintain the traditional high standards of professional expertise at the colleges.

The various institutions' research departments were also receiving a considerable number of requests from defense staffs for studies on force dimensions, structures and equipment which could easily be adapted for the various types of situations or changes in such situations, on the balance between the level of forces deployed abroad and the ability to project forces rapidly and between maintaining high technology armament and diminishing production, etc.

According to the final report of the conference the dialogue with most of the ex-Warsaw Pact (WP) Commandants sometimes was difficult and delicate. The ex-WP countries, for their part, were trying to bring their structures and curricula more into line with those of Western institutions, but they were encountering problems in freeing themselves from the military yoke, in terms of both vocabulary and attitudes. Allied colleges were increasing their links with non-NATO countries by organizing and participating in common symposia and seminars, by exchanging students, course members, lecturers and teachers or by study tours. Colleges were also developing their contacts with the civilian sector (institutes specializing in defense matters and universities). It was affirmed that exchanges of view were useful, and those exchanges should be pursued and intensified.

Following the progressive element of the past the third annual Enlarged Conference of Commandants of Defense Colleges was held in Rome on 23–25 March 1994, under the chairmanship of Lieutenant General Evraire, Commandant of the NATO Defense College.¹⁰ The meeting followed the dual format; the first part was reserved for NATO commandants, the second part for PfP nations. All commandants (Austria, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Slovak Republic) who had been invited to the Enlarged Conference attended the proceedings on 24–25 March.

Items on the agenda were: major changes and innovations which had been introduced into their establishments' organization and curricula, effects of peacekeeping activities on military higher education curricula, developing cooperation between defense colleges, looking ahead – plans and ideas for future. The participants expressed that the global dimension of the concept of security – taking into consideration cuts in defense budgets effected many defense colleges – pointed towards the further

enlargement of the field of higher defense education, with the stress being increasingly placed on international education, interministerial cooperation and, at the military level, joint capabilities.

The new political-military situation on the European continent naturally led Western defense colleges to develop their exchanges – to various degrees and in specific forms – with the Central and Eastern European countries. The language handicap continued to hang over the development of cooperation and exchanges, in spite of the effort that had been undertaken in the Central and Eastern European countries to improve officers' knowledge of Western languages, of English in the first place.¹¹

Most of the conference exchanges may be grouped under four main headings: current year's progress in each college, effects of peacekeeping, developing cooperation with defense colleges. Commandants from the Central and Eastern European and non-allied countries reported on the major changes and innovations into their institutions.¹² It had been proposed that commandants comment on the effects of peacekeeping on higher defense education. It emerged that all states provided training, to varying degrees, via specific courses or training periods, for all those personnel – from the ranks up to the senior officer level – who would be called upon to serve with international forces in peacekeeping operations.

Switzerland's proposal to host the 1995 conference was approved by the Military Committee. It was a clear indication by Switzerland – as a neutral country – to open a dialogue on European regional security issues and, at the same time, to confirm its traditional claim as the most favored nation for holding international meetings on cooperative matters. The annual Conference of Commandants of defense colleges and institutes was held in Bern on 22–24 March 1995. At the invitation of the Federal Authorities of the Swiss Confederation, this was the first conference to have been held in the capital of a country which was not a member of the NATO Alliance. Lieutenant General Arthur Liener, Chief of General Staff of the Swiss Armed Forces, delivered the welcome address at the opening of the Conference. He underlined the essential role played by the Alliance in respect of European security; and the importance of the missions of defense colleges within the new geopolitical context.

During the Bern conference a certain amount of innovation in the organization of the exchanges were introduced. Although the overall format (The first day reserved for commandants from NATO countries, and second and third days enlarged to include the participation of commandants from partner countries) remained extant, a large part of the dialogue focused on the presentation and discussion of themes which had been selected in advance.¹³ Four themes were specially presented and discussed on the conference: the importance of joint training for future civilian and military elites, the new security

environment and its impact on defense teaching, the setting up a European Defense Institute,¹⁴ and ratio of the national and international level within the programs.

The first theme was presented by MGen Gullow Gjeseth, Commandant of the Norwegian Defense College. His study highlighted the importance of joint training, for future civilian and military elites, within one national defense college, and the need for flexible and appropriate solutions to be sought where civil/military aims did not coincide. The second theme was introduced by Lieutenant General Carlo Jean, President of the Italian Centro Alti Studi per la Difesa, and supplemented by Lieutenant General Ervin Rokke, President of the National Defense University. They emphasized the very wide range of academic, political, scientific, and technological information to be integrated into higher defense teaching programs. The third theme was presented by Lieutenant General Bernard Norlain, Director of the French Institute of Higher National Defense Studies. His proposal to establish a European Defense Institute divided opinions of the participants. The fourth theme – ratio of the national and international level within the programs – was the subject of a dual presentation by Lieutenant General Javier Pardo de Santayana, Director of the Spanish Higher Centre for National Defense Studies, and, MGen Miklós Szabó,¹⁵ Commandant of the Hungarian Zrínyi Miklós Military Academy.¹⁶

The Rome conference in 1996 dealt with several important themes: defense colleges and war colleges, special features of their training programs, and their other main activities in the respective fields of competence; the reduction in defense budgets and the various affects on the establishments responsible for higher defense training from country to country; best approach for a defense college/institute to take when faced with these budgetary constraints; discussion on the topic of West-East cooperation in the field of higher defense education; peacekeeping or peacemaking training the officers in the post-cold war period, contribution of defense colleges and institutes; defense training for civil elites in Central and Eastern Europe (creating new colleges or existing establishments) just to name a few.

The 26th Conference of Commandants of Defense Colleges was held in Athens on 19–21 March 1997. Ukraine for the first time in conference history attended the Enlarged Conference proceedings.¹⁷

The second wave of the enlargement

The Conference of Commandants was further enlarged in 2000 to include the Mediterranean Dialogue partners.¹⁸ This was the first time that Israel (Israeli Defense Forces National Defense College) and Jordan (the Royal Jordanian War College)

attended the conference. The conference purpose was to promote cooperation in higher defense education between Colleges in NATO countries and their counterparts in Central and East European and Mediterranean Dialogue countries. The aim of the discussions was firstly to foster mutual understanding and awareness and secondly to identify areas in which colleges could provide assistance or support to each other. An important goal was to facilitate the exchange of information between higher defense educational institutions with a view to improving curricula and teaching methods. Overall, the discussions confirmed that curricula at all institutions had been impacted by NATO's New Strategic Concept, national emphasis on joint and combined operations, and non-traditional military missions such as peace support operations. The main themes of the conference were: NATO's New Strategic Concept accepted in 1999, Senior Officer Education in the 21st Century, Evaluation and Validation of Senior Officer Education, Use of Modern Technologies in Education, and the Status of Relationship Conference of Commandants and Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes.¹⁹

The 32nd Conference of Commandants, sponsored by the Austrian National Defense Academy, was held in Vienna, 25–27 March 2003. Two significant changes from previous conferences were the trial elimination of the NATO-only first day of the conference, and a featured key-note speaker, the NATO Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Minuto Rizzo. Of the 70 participants, there were 37 commandants, representing 27 nations. The conference welcomed two new Nations, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Uzbekistan.

The main general thematic heading of the conference was: "Education for Strategic Thinking in the Future Security Environment." Also there were several presentations on macro issues carried forward from the last conference such as benchmarking and advanced distributed learning, an update on the changes underway at the NATO Defense College resulting from North Atlantic Council strategic guidance.²⁰ The participants got an update from LtGen Raffenne, the commandant of the NATO Defense College on the NAC Strategic Guidance to the NATO Defense College, the key elements of which were a significantly enhanced research capability, new short courses, a restructured modular Senior Course, and a more diversified target audience. The commandants discussed topics of great importance such as: the Teaching of Geopolitics for Future Defense Leaders; Role and Skills of Senior Officers; Masters Degree in Leadership Management and Defense Studies; The Staff Officer of the Multinational Environment; The Role of Staff Officers and Military Education in the 21st Century; Military Courses Opened to Civilians, Strategic Tool for Increasing Understanding and Integration Between the Military and Civilian Society.

The 33rd Conference of Commandants sponsored by the Georgi S. Rakovski Defense and Staff College, was held in Sofia, 22–24 March 2004. Of the 84 participants, there were 45 commandants, representing 35 nations (17 NATO, 14 PfP, and 4 Mediterranean Dialogue). The conference welcomed two new nations, Albania and Croatia, four first-time institutions from Mauritania, Romania, Russia and Switzerland, and eleven new commandants who had taken command of their respective institutions during the past year.²¹ The theme of the conference was “Changing Security ... Changing Education”. Commandants agreed to intensify dialogue information sharing throughout the year, particularly in the area of staff officer education. Several excellent presentations by Hungary, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom focused on the standardization of education and training and on international military accreditation.

MGen (Retired) Miklós Szabó (HU) president of the Zrínyi Miklós National Defense University spoke on “How We Can Standardize the Education of Basic Topics in the Staff Officer Training at Academies/Universities”. MGen Szabó made a proposal for standardizing the curricula amongst colleges and suggested that the NATO Defense College take the lead in this activity.²² The proposed 60 hour minimum program for staff officers working in multinational environment was worked out by the Military Science Faculty of the university. The following subjects and topics should be found in the standardized program: basic knowledge of the alliance, combined joint task force (CJTF) concept, peacekeeping and crisis response operations, leadership and management, military scientific definition of support, current issues of military security, lessons learned of military history, military preparation and training.²³ The proposed syllabus, the unified approach of military academies and national defense universities should form an excellent basis of common understanding and successful cooperation without frictions in multinational staff. The proposed initiative formed a minimum requirement program, which could be extendable within a national range. It was a coherent program of studies in an environment of same knowledge and same skills with a goal to prepare senior officers (Lieutenant Colonels and Majors) to be effective and contributing members of an operational level staff (joint or specific), either in a national or combined context. It sought to develop senior officers with a deep knowledge and full awareness of the current international situation, an ability to deal with the basic concepts of security and defense policies (national and international) as well as operational planning processes including national and international logistics concerns. These knowledge and skill sets increase their ability to effectively plan and conduct operations under national and/or international auspices. The commandants agreed that the Hungarian proposal should be examined in order to determine whether the NDC, at

the strategic level, or another institution would be best suited to co-ordinate future collaborative work in this area.

Air Commodore Ger Schrijver of the Netherlands Defense College spoke on “International Military Accreditation: Utopia or Reality?” His general proposal was to pursue co-accreditation between military colleges with a potential ultimate objective of joining a national (or European) accreditation process – along the lines of a European Credit Transfer System as used by the European Consortium for Accreditation (established in 2003) – was in principle generally acknowledged. His specific proposal to start this process by forming a small coalition of the willing as a pilot project was endorsed by the conference as an Action Item.

Conference of Commandants’ Portal

The 34th Conference of Commandants was held in Rome from 6–8th April 2005. The conference was attended by 80 participants, including 46 commandants representing 32 nations. Belarus was present for the first time and Allied Command Transformation (ACT) also sent a representative.²⁴ The theme of the 3-day conference, “New Developments in Educating Tomorrow’s Leaders”, gave commandants the opportunity to analyze and discuss the challenges facing tomorrow’s leaders and the enormous responsibilities for those charged with preparing them to meet these challenges. One of the most important decisions taken during this conference was to set up and maintain a Conference of Commandants Portal (CCP). The Conference of Commandants’ Portal was created on the official website of the NATO Defense College. The aim of the portal is to foster cooperation and consultation between commandants and directors of defense academies and institutes. The restricted access environment provides a set of tools which enables the members of the conference to work together systematically on issues of common interest.

The envisaged CCP is the space where the commandants can talk and share ideas, and develop institutional and educational interoperability. This technical network has several important characteristics, which can be reached anytime, anywhere, it reflects the relationships developed among the institutions, it is a web-based knowledge portal for security and defense high-level education. The CCP effectively serves the original dual purpose of the conference, to facilitate information exchange and improvements in curricula and teaching methods in senior defense education institutions; and to encourage the development of cooperation in the field of defense training between NATO colleges and their counterparts in the PfP/OSCE, and Mediterranean Dialogue countries.

For a long time past the harmonized and transnational curricula, the creation of virtual defense academy, the accreditation process, and the quality assurance has been recurring themes of the conferences.

In addition to the many important topics discussed at the Conference of Commandants held in Sofia, 22–24 March 2004, was the need for a more harmonized and transnational professional military education curricula initiative. Concepts surrounding the “Staff Officer of the 21st Century” in a multinational and interagency environment, the need for sound understanding of operational procedures, international military course accreditation, and common topics taught in staff officer education and training were the main points related to the Curriculum Review Process (CRP) project. Italy offered to take the lead action for coordinating the collaborative work effort to define the parameters surrounding Curriculum Review Process Development.²⁵ The Curriculum Review Process is a collaboration effort, involving all interested colleges, aimed at offering nations the opportunity to compare and harmonize their courses. The CRP is not a rigid model for compliance, but rather a tool to facilitate the ability of nations to converge their goals for educating their Staff Officers.²⁶

The Curriculum Review Process matrix is a powerful tool that allows an overarching examination of the curricula of all interested colleges. It allows better visibility of the activities in the field of senior officer education across the programs of interested nations and is a very important step towards course transparency among similar institutions (i.e., a necessary precondition to any further multinational cooperation in the field of military education). The matrix can also be used to compare one’s own national curriculum with those of other nations and apply, at the national level, corrections or adaptations as deemed necessary. The matrix is composed of two parts. The first part is a general description of the courses offered by the various defense colleges. The second part describes the content of the concepts surrounding the various course offerings.²⁷

The conference dealt with the educational and outreach activities of the NATO Defense College, was discussed in details the new possible development trends of education, the curriculum of the senior course, and the utilization of the knowledge portal.

Knowledge Portal – A world of understanding

In September 2004 at a Supreme Allied Command Transformation (SACT) Forum meeting held in Rome, dealt with the feasibility of a Knowledge Portal. NDC gave itself the mandate of coming up with a concept paper for the development of a Knowledge Portal. The Knowledge Portal is inscribed in a larger framework that could resemble a

virtual learning environment covering the NATO/PfP region, its partners and supporting agencies and institutions. It enables the users to access products and services from a single electronic gateway. Services include the PfP Learning Management System (LMS), which is essential to pursue the Advanced Distributed Learning (ADL) courses. The LMS will be joined by a Knowledge Management System (KMS) which will offer new ways to classify, look for and gain access to information and education. The Knowledge Portal will offer the capability to create, transfer, deliver and access information and education without borders. At present NDC Research Branch publications, presentations of lecturers, and a collection of links can be reached.

The core points of the concept paper were as follows:

1. The basic Knowledge Portal brings together information relative to NATO Defense College's onsite and online educational activities (Senior Course, Integrated Partner Orientation Course, General Flag Officer and Ambassador Course, modular short courses), ADL courses (Introduction to NATO,²⁸ Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), etc.) and access to a wealth of Research Branch publications (Research Papers, Occasional Papers, Seminar Reports, Monographs, Forum Papers, Essays).

2. Partner nations can contribute to the pool of information, knowledge, education and training, too.

3. A deepened Knowledge Management System will connect the Knowledge Portal within an integrated online community stretching from one part of the Euro-Atlantic area to the outer reaches of its partnerships. This virtual learning environment would emerge from the agglomeration of ADL and DL courses available for training and education, publications from all partners, relevant database access, and learning and knowledge management tools.

The first point of the Knowledge Portal has been put into practice. The Knowledge Portal provides an opportunity also for graduated course members to reach the NDC website and get information related to everyday life, education and outreach activity of the institution.

What is the long-term plan of the portal? Imagine researchers from different disciplines, separated by oceans, but nevertheless able to connect virtually and work on common projects. Imagine students, hundreds and thousands of miles apart, using an advanced Learning Management System to access online courses that are as good as any offered in the most prestigious universities, at any time of the day or night. Imagine people from far and wide engaging in a communion of knowledge; accessing news and information, articles and publications on what shapes today's security and strategic environment, gaining understanding together. Imagine staff officer courses in which modules of national characteristics can be found, but huge a database compiled by other

nations can be accessed and is also available. The flow of information, the acquired information is vital and mark a new era in the history of military higher education.

Conference without borders – the third wave of enlargement

The 35th Conference of Commandants, organized by the NATO Defense College, was held in Lucerne, Switzerland from 24–25 April 2006. It marked the third enlargement of the Conference of Commandants. The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative nations were invited; Saudi Arabia first time attended the conference.²⁹ Switzerland was the host nation for the second time in the history of the Conference of Commandants. It was a sign of appreciation of the countries outstanding role played in security policy initiatives, managing global challenges, and its participation in different peacekeeping missions.

The theme of the conference, “Education to Shape the Global Environment”, served as the thread to discuss issues related to the challenges faced by security and defense education institutions to ensure their students or course members leave with the right intellectual mindset to meet tomorrow’s environment. Basic requirements of military leadership in asymmetry, the role of military leadership in crisis management, the political process, and the maintenance of war fighting and combat capabilities were conceptualized.

In connection with it the following important educational demands were formulated:

- Multifunctionality calls for intensive education
- Interoperability calls for multinational education
- Sequential readiness calls for an education independent of time and location
- Technological developments and operational specialization call for specialized education

Military higher education has to meet three demands:

- Reconciliation of permanent learning with constant operational readiness
- Leadership preparation for both symmetricity and asymmetricity
- Delivery of mission-critical skills for both strategic leadership and operational management

Future military leaders core business is to cope with multiple, increasingly non-military risks and threats, manage complex crises with time and resource constraints. The educational demands can be meet by a great variety of methods (classroom, electronic classroom, distance learning, distributed learning). On one hand there are limited resources, on other hand there is growing need for expertise, knowledge, information. The gap can be bridged with access to the highest quality education and training tailored to individual needs and delivered cost effectively, anywhere and at any

time. A professional military education promotes networking of security and defense partners (military, civilian, and public, private, corporate), accreditation and mutual recognition of military and civilian credentials, and life-long learning.

An excellent example was introduced to the conference participants, the Senior Leadership Course for the future generals of the Swiss Armed Forces. This is a civilian executive Master of Advanced Studies degree program in security policy and crisis management enrolling also corporate chief executive officers. The course is financed through corporate sponsorship, participant fees and a cooperation agreement between the Swiss Federal Department of Defense, Civil Protection and Sports and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zurich), a leading university. It bridges the public and private sectors and brings civilian and military decision-makers together to solve security problems, combines security policy and military strategy solutions to asymmetric threats and crises, combines academic research with practical applications, and applies the guidelines of the Bologna reform for tertiary education.

The conference dealt with the results of course accreditation and harmonization of curricula. An important achievement of the Conferences of Commandants was the work done by the various ad hoc groups dealing with issues raised during previous conferences. Several groups presented their findings. Presentations on human trafficking and critical infrastructure protection demonstrated how combined efforts could ensure the rapid delivery of important courseware. It was an important topic of discussion in the security and defense education in multinational environment, which is carried out in the strategic level educational institute, at the NATO Defense College. Dr. Samuel Grier, the Dean of the College, underlined the advantages of such kind of education, the common language, the need of interoperability, and the efficiency of small groups. It is necessary to increase the modularity of the senior course curriculum, the continuous quality insurance and the highest possible fulfillment of the customer's demand.

Conclusions

Between the most important elements of each nation's armed forces are the preparedness, education and training of its personnel. In a few words it is the intellectual and practical value and potential. The basic scene of the creation and increase of that intellectual potential are the educational institutions – military and civil, internal and international ones, places and assignments of service, where one could get the necessary skills. No other means or ways can one obtain practical knowledge and skills. No single nation can maintain military higher educational institutional system, which provides the most perfect, and highest level education for all branches of the

armed forces and works effectively and rationally. Thus it is obvious that they make use of other nation's educational potentials and possibilities. By means of foreign education we can get in direct touch with other – allies and partner countries – nation's military culture, and life. Knowledge and experience acquired in foreign educational institutions, in multinational staff, in missions are indispensable conditions for the interoperability of the mind, the so called human interoperability,

King Whitney Jr. said the following: "Change has a considerable psychological impact on the human mind. To the fearful it is threatening because it means that things may get worse. To the hopeful it is encouraging because things may get better. To the confident it is inspiring because the challenge exists to make things better."

The 35-year history of the Conference of Commandants, the continuous revival of the initiative, the confident response to the new challenges of the security environment, the three historically important enlargements – the invitation of PfP, Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative nations – prove that there is a real chance and prospect to make things better.

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8. Summary report on the *XXIInd Conference of Commandants*, SPC/631/NDC.
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- helicopter pilots, aircraft engineers, air defense missile artillerist just to name a few. General staff course for the highest-ranking officers took place also abroad. As a matter of fact until 1991 it meant only the former Soviet Union's military educational institutions with the exception of Poland and Czechoslovakia. At that time it provided high-level knowledge, and there hadn't been any other choice. From 1991 essential changes took place. Hungary unambiguously announced NATO-orientation policy and implemented it consistently. There is a common feature of the periods that foreign education and training has carried on fundamentally on the basis of foreign aid, programs sponsored by foreign countries. The Hungarian partner had only to choose from the menu offered by those countries. Hungary had a full range of offers to select from, and was not forced to think over and analyze the cost effectiveness of those educational offers, had little information about the courses abroad, their applicability at home and there was no organization in the Ministry of Defense to professionally deal with these issues. The Education and Science Department was established in 1992.
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 26. See publications related to this topic by Várnainé Kiss Ilona and Szabó Miklós in *Humán Szemle*.
 27. Curriculum Review Process Workshop Report, presented at the 34th Conference of Commandants in Rome.
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<http://www.ndc.nato.int/courses/natofund.html>
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