The Joint Support and Enabling Command (JSEC) was created a little more than three years ago after NATO Defense Ministers approved the establishment of JSEC and its sister headquarters Joint Force Command Norfolk (JCF NF). JSEC was set up in response to the deteriorating security situation in Europe, after Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea and terrorist attacks in Europe. Following the decision of the Defense Ministers in February 2018, a small international group started its work in Ulm, Germany. The staff has continued to expand and the international headquarters now comprises more than 280 people with the goal to increase to 400. Its concept is unique and no comparable command existed during the Cold War.

During the Cold War, the deployment of full divisions to defend Europe was regularly trained. In the two decades that followed the end of the Cold War, NATO focused almost exclusively on out-of-area operations. A renewed focus on collective defense – albeit in a 360-degree approach – thus necessitated the relearning of a lost art. Previous plans and procedures could not simply be dusted off – these were clearly obsolete. Societies and their militaries had changed fundamentally during the past thirty years. Most of critical infrastructure has been privatized, and nowadays, civilian and commercial organizations play an indispensable role in transporting military units. These organizations (and societies in general) are targeted even in peacetime, through cyberattacks, mis- and disinformation campaigns and sabotage operations.

As described in detail later in this article, JSEC will focus on ensuring the enablement of Supreme Allied Commander Europe’s Area of Responsibility (SACEUR’s AOR), enabling the reinforcement and sustainment of forces wherever and whenever required. As such, JSEC is a functional headquarters at the operational level, under the operational command (OPCOM) of SACEUR. JSEC is part of NATO Force Structure, rather than NATO Command Structure, where the latter is financed through common funding. For NATO Force Structure, a framework nation – Germany, in the case of JSEC - together with other nations that choose to participate, agree on the terms of cooperation and the financial contribution. Germany, with its central location as a logistics hub in Europe, has offered much assistance and support to set up JSEC from the beginning. The headquarters is co-located with the Standing Joint Logistics Support Group (SJLSG) in Ulm, and the two headquarters cooperate closely, striving to achieve more efficiency and synergy by working together.

THE PATH TO FULL OPERATIONAL CAPABILITY

As part of the NATO Command Structure Adaptation process, JSEC started on a path with several milestones on the horizon. The first official event was the Rear Area Conference in September 2019, when the German Vice Chief of Defense declared JSEC’s Initial Operating Capability in the presence of more than a hundred dignitaries and staff. Several key-
notes and two panels consisting of military and civilian experts stimulated debate on how JSEC could fulfill its future mission, and generated new ideas and insights for the staff.

A planned role in the large U.S. exercise DEFENDER-Europe 20 in spring 2020 was cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the new headquarters itself was built under lockdown conditions. In the meantime a battle-rhythm was established and fine-tuned. Some directorates contributed to work strands run from the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Mons, Belgium; others built a network of stakeholders (the reinforcement and sustainment network). From May 12 to 20, 2021, JSEC participated in Steadfast Defender 2021 (STDE21), NATO’s flagship exercise this year. A command post exercise was conducted in Ulm, involving around 300 personnel from 18 countries and with assistance from the Joint Warfare Centre in Stavanger, Norway.
The exercise was based on an Article 5 scenario where a fictitious adversary conducted an incursion into NATO territory. In response, JSEC coordinated the reinforcement of forces to the Joint Force Commands (JFCs). Steadfast Defender 2021 tested JSEC’s standing operating procedures, and the headquarters showed that it had mastered the required battle-staff processes to support the commander in his decision-making. For JSEC it was the first time that it had participated with JFC Naples, JFC Norfolk and the SJLSG in a large exercise in the broader NATO family.

Two other events in the spring/summer of 2021 solidified the foundations for JSEC’s further development. First, the Technical Administrative Arrangement (TAA), equivalent to a Memorandum of Understanding, was signed by representatives of the contributing nations in Mons, Belgium, May 2021. The TAA as a founding document defines the legal framework for the JSEC and contains clear, agreed and binding rules for all nations that choose to participate. Second, in July 2021 the North Atlantic Council designated JSEC as an International Military Headquarters, according to the 1952 Paris Protocol. This status confers several obligations on the headquarters – and grants some valued rights to the staff. While the administrative fundamentals for JSEC are now set, conceptual thinking on its role and mission has been refined along the axis of enablement, reinforcement and sustainment.

**ENABLEMENT – REINFORCEMENT - SUSTAINMENT**

JSEC’s roles, responsibilities and authorities, regarding enablement, aim at creating the conditions that allow the movement of forces across SACEUR’s AOR. In military language, this is similar to setting the theater. As described in an unclassified NATO document, enablement efforts must span the governmental, civil, military and commercial dimensions, requiring a whole-of-government approach. Enablement is therefore a very broad concept, and initiatives have been clustered around four different categories: capabilities, infrastructure, authorities and legislation, and command and control (C2).

Capabilities involve, for example, ensuring that there are sufficient numbers of flatbed rail cars to transport armored units; infrastructure projects focus on ensuring that civilian bridges meet military requirements, authorities and legislation aim at facilitating customs checks and border crossings, while C2 focuses on clarifying military (and civilian) organizational relationships. A subset of enablement is resilience – the ability to ‘bounce back’ in a crisis and to continue to deliver the required service(s). Of course, this concerns national critical infrastructure like, for example, the energy network. This sector, and many others, underpin a nation’s ability to support military operations during crisis and conflict. Much work has been done by the Alliance in this field, and NATO 2030 proposes further initiatives to improve resilience.

Enablement is an activity that by its very nature will have to be conducted in peacetime, so that the foundations – in terms of network relationships and capabilities – are already prepared before a crisis erupts. Much of the work will be conducted at the strategic level, with Allies at NATO Headquarters in Brussels formulating policy, frequently in response to military requirements set by SHAPE in Mons. A good example of enablement is the European Union’s PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) Project ‘Military Mobility’ which fo-
cuses on enabling and facilitating cross-border military transport. It is run by the Netherlands as lead nation and has 27 other participating countries (and one observer), including three non-EU ones: the United States, Canada and Norway. The topic is linked to the issue of NATO-EU cooperation, with 21 nations being members of both organizations.

At the political level, some Allies have pushed for more cooperation and complementarity, although at a practical level hurdles remain. Nonetheless, developments in Military Mobility remain promising, and an initial Netherlands-German coordination cell will also be based in Ulm from 2022 onwards. While enablement policy initiatives are discussed and determined at the political-strategic level, the proof of pudding lies in the implementation phase. As an operational-level headquarters – that sets the conditions for the tactical level to be able to fulfill its mission – JSEC can contribute by setting requirements, implementing initiatives, testing new concepts and organizing trainings and exercises.

JSEC will play a central role in coordinating reinforcement by forces. This involves the ability to move forces into, through and across SACEUR’s AOR to contribute to deterrence and allow the defense of the Alliance should deterrence fail. Allied nations are responsible not only for force generation – providing the required combat units, fully prepared for their mission – but they also have to plan, organize and execute (if required) transport of the units to their area of deployment.

To be able to do this, sending (or troop-contributing) nations must coordinate with host nations and transit nations. In their journey towards the front lines, the units will transition through air, rail and/or sea ports of embarkation, in a process called Reception, Staging and Onward Movement. The two JFCs on the European continent, located in Brunssum and Naples, would set the requirements, and JSEC’s role is to coordinate this process among all participating actors. A new concept being developed by JSEC will provide an important node in this network: Strategic Force Hubs (also called Interim Staging Bases). In these specifically prepared locations, military personnel can be joined up with their heavy equipment – which is often transported separately - and prepare for the next phase of their journey. JSEC’s role in reinforcement will be to coordinate, synchronize (potentially prioritize) and maintain situational awareness, or a common operational picture. Regarding reinforcement and sustainment, logistics plays a crucial part.

During crisis or conflict sustainment will be essential. Troops in theater will need to receive food, munitions and other supplies; fresh units will need to be deployed and some units will need to be rotated out of theater. In addition to organizing the supply, logistics can also include medical support – an essential component in a crisis or conflict situation. Reinforcement will probably first involve the deployment of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, to be followed by elements of the NATO Response Force. In an Article 5 collective defense scenario, large numbers of follow-on forces would be required to sustain the defensive effort. Most of them are likely to come from the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada. For troops coming from across the Atlantic, JSEC will have to coordinate with JFC Norfolk, and
potentially U.S. Army Europe and Africa (USAREURAF), and U.S. Transport Command. Working relationships already have been established with many stakeholders; they will be expanded and deepened in the coming years. In the next months, JSEC will work with US European Command (USEUCOM) in command post exercises to test force flow management. Exercises like STDE 21 allow parties to test concepts and procedures, share best practices and exchange information. This will also improve the ability to reinforce forces from the U.S. continent to Europe.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

As noted in the Brussels Summit Communique, NATO ‘is developing strategic, domain-specific and regional military plans to improve our ability to respond to any contingencies and ensure timely reinforcement’. In JSEC’s role as a supporting command to the three JFCs and the Theater Component Commands (such as LANDCOM, MARCOM and AIRCOM), it will need to integrate and align the reinforcement and sustainment functions in the current planning process. Therefore, close coordination with the national plans is also vital in the ongoing work. As the go-to command for enablement, reinforcement and sustainment, JSEC has an important role to play in logistics, necessitating a very close link to the SJLSG. By ensuring that NATO’s ability to rapidly reinforce and sustain is maintained and improved – especially now, in peacetime - JSEC will contribute to effective deterrence and defense of the Alliance.

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3. Although more nations have since signed JSEC’s TAA; the list of the first participating nations see https://jsec.nato.int/newsroom/news-releases/setting-a-cornerstone-in-the-founding-process-of-the-joint-support-and-enabling-command