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Dear readers,

It is my pleasure to present the Newsletter No. 11/2026 of the NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence.

In this edition, we bring together contributions from different professional and academic perspectives to explore some of the key dimensions of Security Force Assistance and Defence Capacity Building. The articles highlight how effective capacity building requires not only the development of military capabilities, but also international cooperation, intercultural competence, academic engagement and a continuous commitment to quality and innovation.

The first article examines the role of the Military Technical Committee for Lebanon (MTC4L) in strengthening the operational capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces through the coordination of international military cooperation initiatives. It illustrates how training, professional military education, procurement, infrastructure and humanitarian support can contribute to a comprehensive capacity-building effort. The contribution also reflects on the challenges of operating in a complex environment such as Lebanon and emphasizes the importance of a coordinated whole-of-government approach.

The second article focuses on Intercultural Competence as an essential SFA enabler. Drawing on experience from SFA missions, it underlines the importance of cultural and linguistic knowledge in building trust, gaining local support and enhancing the effectiveness of military personnel operating in complex environments. In this context, understanding different cultures and improving communication become fundamental elements for establishing credible and sustainable relationships with local actors.

The third contribution explores the added value of academia within NATO's evolving security environment through the experience of an intern at the NATO SFA COE. Attention is given to research on SFA in Multi-Domain Operations and to the importance of cooperation between military organizations, academia and civilian stakeholders. This experience demonstrates how multidisciplinary perspectives can contribute to addressing emerging security challenges and supporting the continued development of SFA concepts.

The fourth article provides another perspective on the NATO SFA COE Internship Programme, focusing on Quality Assurance in NATO Education and Individual Training. It illustrates the Centre's commitment to continuous improvement and NATO education standards, while highlighting the contribution that interns can provide to institutional processes, from the Self-Assessment Report and Quality Assurance Policy to course planning, evaluation and the Systems Approach to Training.

Together, these contributions reflect the multidimensional nature of Security Force Assistance and the importance of combining operational experience, cultural awareness, academic expertise and institutional quality. Through cooperation with military and civilian partners, academia and young professionals, the NATO SFA COE continues to strengthen its Community of Interest and contribute to the development and dissemination of SFA expertise across the Alliance.

Director
NATO Security Force Assistance
Centre of Excellence
Col. Moncada



THE ROLE OF MILITARY TECHNICAL COMMITTEE FOR LEBANON (MTC4L) IN DEFENCE CAPACITY BUILDING

INTRODUCTION

The operational outcomes linked to the application of concepts like *Security Sector Reform (SSR)*, *Defence Capacity Building (DCB)*, and *Security Force Assistance (SFA)* – “whole-of-government” activities in nature yet primarily military-led ones – depending on the specific situation, render into the establishment, the capacity development, and the support of the host nation’s security forces and armed forces. This serves the dual purpose of stabilizing the relevant operational environment by improving security, thereby helping to safeguard our national strategic interests (such as commercial trade routes, energy diversification, the security of information infrastructures, and the prevention of illicit trafficking).

MISSION AND STRUCTURE

Consistent with this paradigm, the *Military Technical Committee for Lebanon (MTC4L)* was born with the mission of strengthening the operational capabilities of the *Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF)* by coordinating international bilateral military cooperation initiatives, in order to rationalize resources, avoid duplication, and maximize expertise through a “pooling and sharing” approach. Established between March and April 2024 – upon the initiative of Spain, Germany, France, Great Britain, the United States, and Italy (which holds the Chairmanship) – in the wake of the events of October 7, 2023, and the ensuing conflict between *Hezbollah (HEZ)* and the *Israel Defence Forces (IDF)* along the Blue Line, the Committee’s primary objective was to assist the LAF in recruiting, equipping, and training the recruits needed to reach the 10,000-strong force level man-



dated by the UNSCR 1701 to operate in the South Litani Sector (SLS).



Figure 1. Recruit training conducted by MTC4L instructors (PAO MTC4L)

Working alongside and complementing UNIFIL forces, these troops were to be tasked with disarming any paramilitary or non-governmental forces, maintaining a continuous presence on the ground, ensuring a secure environment, and enabling the Government of Beirut to exert exclusive sovereignty over the entire Lebanese territory.



Figure 2. LAF recruits at the end of training (PAO MTC4L)

The MTC4L currently consists of 23 participating countries, organized into 6 permanent members forming the Strategic Board, 14 associate members whose national representatives make up the Steering Committee, and 3 observer members. It operates across three broad capability areas: the first focuses on individual *Professional Military Education* (PME) for leaders and Training of units; the second addresses the material aspects of *Procurement and Facility Renovation*; and the third area – in supporting role – includes *CIMIC and humanitarian aid* (HUMAID) initiatives.

PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONS

In accordance with the ongoing Terms of Reference, the MTC4L operates at three levels.

The first level – the tactical level – consists of three functional sub-committees (also known as sub-working groups or SWGs): *SWG Human Resources, Training and Operations*; *SWG STRATCOM and CIMIC*; and *SWG Acquisition, Management & Infrastructure*. These SWGs (currently undergoing revision and expansion to align with the various operational functions) are composed of delegates and subject matter experts (SMEs) from each participating country, working either in person in Beirut or virtually via reach-back (synchronously or asynchronously). They are co-chaired by a LAF General and a representative from one of the participating countries, and are coordinated by the *Supervision & Coordination Committee*, which is managed by the DCOS J5 and reports directly to the Head of the LAF. The SWGs are tasked with gathering capability requirements from LAF units and departments, structuring them holistically, establishing priority levels and desired procurement timelines based on the campaign plan and general planning approved by the Lebanese leadership, and formulating proposals for

submission to the Beirut Executive Committee (BEC).

The BEC represents the operational level of the MTC4L; it is composed of the Defence Attachés from all participating countries (or their designated delegates) and it is indeed the Committee's "beating heart" for three reasons: the continuity it ensures through the tenure of its members; the expertise guaranteed by the Attachés, who are highly qualified and experienced senior officers; and their direct link to their home nations, where proposals formulated by the SWGs are sent for analysis. Based on responses from national Capitals, the BEC coordinates and synchronizes the distribution of efforts across the three aforementioned capability macro-areas, in accordance with the "train and equip" principle.



Figure 3. Steering Committee in Beirut, December 2025 (PAO MTC4L)

ITALY'S ROLE

As previously mentioned, Italy not only chairs the MTC4L but also possesses the human and material resources to pledge a significant contribution to the three aforementioned macro-areas of capability development. Under a bilateral cooperation Agreement and a series of related Technical Arrangements, the Italian Armed Forces operate through three operational arms coordinated by the National Representative (dual-hatted as the MTC4L Chairman):

- the Italian Bilateral Military Mission in Lebanon (MIBIL), responsible for assist-

ing the LAF in the capability areas of PME and Training, as well as CIMIC and HUMAID;

- the Office of the Defence Military Attaché, who is primarily responsible for the Procurement and Facilities Renovation macro-area;
- the Forward Task Force (FTF), which – in addition to providing staff support – has executive responsibilities for conducting specific PME and Training activities (particularly basic recruit training), Procurement and Facilities Renovation, and Humanitarian assistance projects funded by private national donors.

In addition to those of the three above mentioned elements, the activities of the Italian Contingent within UNIFIL – ITALFOR “Leonte”, which operates with a higher degree of autonomy given its priority of fulfilling the international mandate in the SLS – are to be included. To carry out the MTC4L mandate, MIBIL and the FTF are deployed along the Lebanese coast, ranging from Shama in the south to Saadiyat (near Sidon), Aamchit (north of Beirut), and Deir Aamar (near Tripoli). Various Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) also operate in locations such as Beirut, Kfarchima, Jounieh, and Kfardebian, adhering to the Italian military cooperation model with the LAF; this model entails distributing personnel across the territory and embedding them within Lebanese military bases alongside LAF units.



Figure 4. MTC4L instructor support training of LAF personnel (PAO MTC4L)

The economic value of the Italian military commitment in Lebanon during 2026 across the three aforementioned capability macro-areas amounts to approximately €80 million: around €60 million is allocated to the Procurement and Facilities Renovation macro-area, over €13 million to CIMIC and HUMAID, and €6 million to PME and Training.

ACHIEVED OBJECTIVES

Regardless the events over the recent months and the current very fluid situation – where, despite memoranda of understanding, discussions, negotiations, and good intentions, there is no certainty regarding the holding of the ceasefire established last June – so far MTC4L's efforts have yielded a series of results meant to strengthen LAF's role and operational capabilities, to include:

- the establishment and the consolidation of an atmosphere of mutual understanding, trust, and multilateral cooperation;
- structured information exchange, leading to streamlined efforts and enhanced coordination to avoid duplication and waste;
- a shared understanding of the issues facing Lebanon;
- MTC4L's role as a stabilizing and confidence-building factor;
- the improvement and increased efficiency of the various bodies comprising MTC4L and their respective procedures;
- contributions to the development of key operational capabilities for the LAF;
- an increase in personnel to be primarily deployed for the SLS;
- immediate support for LAF families - including both medical and humanitarian aid - benefiting 54,000 displaced persons following the resumption of clashes between the IDF and Hezbollah on March 2nd.

Furthermore, from a strictly national per-

spective, participation in MTC4L has made it possible to:

- actively contribute to defending vital national interests in the Middle East region;
- boost and consolidate Italy's credibility on the multinational stage;
- develop effective working methods that are fostering - in an unprecedented way - successful collaboration among the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the procurement agency "Agenzie Industrie Difesa" (AID), and the Ministry of Defence regarding Procurement and Facilities Renovation projects.

FUTURE CHALLENGES AND THE WAY AHEAD

In light of the objectives achieved by the MTC4L over its two years of existence, certain challenges that the Committee will be facing in the short term, both from the multilateral and the strictly national perspectives, should not be overlooked.



Figure 5. Recruits training conducted by MTC4L (PAO MTC4L)

Regarding the former, it is to bear in mind that the MTC4L is a technical-military Committee; as such, it possesses neither political nor even politico-military authority, nor is it a traditional operational unit. In a complex environment like Lebanon – where sectarian aspects intertwine with traditional political dynamics, to put it mildly – activities related to SSR, DCB, and SFA need a structured “whole-of-government” strategy.



Figure 6. A moment of Planning Course for Junior Leaders (PAO MTC4L)

Within this framework in mind, once the political end-state is established and the necessary means to achieve it are defined, there must be a clear orchestration of all instruments of power – indeed starting with the economic and the financial instruments – to unfold the strategy. It is in fact blatant that HEZ foothold in the SLS is linked to factors such as the economic and financial crisis, rampant inflation, and the progressive erosion of wages – including those of LAF soldiers, who are forced to take second jobs to feed their families – as well as the HEZ greater ideological and financial appeal. Furthermore, regarding the disarmament of HEZ, this is a mission the LAF would be capable of undertaking themselves, by requiring little more than logistical and combat support. However, given the inter-sectarian nature of Lebanese institutions – the LAF included – such a scenario would trigger a civil confrontation deemed to tearing apart not only the armed forces but also other institutions and civil society itself. Thus, once again, the challenge demands a political response and a comprehensive approach in which the military's role, while a fundamental one, cannot be exclusive. Finally, precisely because the MTC4L is not a traditional military unit but a committee led by a chairperson – a “primus inter pares” rather than a commanding officer – its decision-making processes do not yield to concrete results in the short term. In other words, given a fluid and constantly evolving situation, the



Figure 7. A donation of Humanitarian aids managed by MTC4L in Lebanon (PAO MTC4L)

initiatives requested, analysed, approved, and developed within any of the three aforementioned macro-areas (PME and Training; Procurement and Facilities Renewal;

CIMIC and Humanitarian Aid) typically require at least a year to come into light – with the sole exception of emergency humanitarian interventions.

Consequently, while the MTC4L framework is suitable for medium to long-term capability development, it is ill-suited for managing operational emergencies.



Figure 8. A distribution of Humanitarian aids to local population (PAO MTC4L)

From a national perspective, and in compliance with current ministerial guidelines, the Italian mere presence in Lebanon does not suffice any longer; we must be relevant. Militarily speaking, this level of ambition is achieved by fo-

cusing on two lines of action.

The first concerns the selection and the preparation of key personnel assigned to MIBIL and the FTF, given that SSR, DCB, and SFA entail planning and conducting military activities that differ from traditional operations (such as peacekeeping, counter-terrorism, or warfighting).

As a consequence, key personnel should undergo a training cycle that involves deep-dives and stages at the SFA CoE in Cesano (Rome), at the Defence General Staff, AID, and ITALUE, specifically regarding projects to be funded through instruments such as the EPF, NDICI, and other FPI mechanisms. The second line of action concerns the development of the Procurement and Facilities Renovation sector – an area of paramount importance for the LAF at this juncture.

To this end, greater synergy should be fostered among the Defence General Staff, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' funding streams for cooperation and development, and AID's execution capabilities, with the aim of exporting best practices to other Regions of national strategic interest.

Major General Enrico FONTANA
(Chairman of the Military Technical
Committee for Lebanon)

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE – AN SFA ENABLER



The experience gained in recent Security Force Assistance (SFA) missions has highlighted how essential it is for NATO or coalition forces which are deployed under an international mandate to resolve a local or interstate crisis to gain and maintain the “consent” of the local population. Achieving such consent is a challenging objective, especially for a foreign military force that arrives fully armed and has to interact with the local population by using verbal and non-verbal communication that is often incomprehensible to them. However, this objective becomes more attainable when military personnel are adequately trained to enhance their cultural and linguistic knowledge and to develop, based on experience and an openness to interacting with cultures different from their own, a level of integrated and specific competence known in the social sciences as “Intercultural Competence.” This competence is crucial in breaking down the wall of distrust and bridging the inevitable cultural gaps with the local realities in which military personnel are increasingly called to operate. In light of future operational challenges, Intercultural Competence plays a vital role in ensuring the military’s adaptability and effectiveness in managing multiple crisis situations.

CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND PERSUASION

Today’s operational environments require military forces to synergistically integrate high-intensity warfighting capabilities (HIW) with non-combat activities - known as Non-Kinetic Activities - which are essential for reinforcing the capacity of non-NATO nations within the broader framework of defense and security capacity-building.

To be effective, military forces must prioritize persuasion over coercion, even

when dealing with factions opposing the legitimate government of the Host Nation. Coercion, which primarily targets the emotional and symbolic sphere (e.g., fear of death), can be effective in altering hostile behaviour, inducing surrender or desertion. However, it tends to be short-lived, as it does not fully eliminate the opponent’s determination or desire for revenge. Persuasion, on the other hand, acts on the cognitive-rational dimension of the adversary by using arguments that are relevant to their lived experience, values, and frames of reference. This fosters the internalization of new ideas, resulting in long-term behavioural change.

The most challenging task for a military force in an SFA mission abroad is to foster a shared perception of the force’s legitimacy and neutrality. Only in this way will the local population fully accept the intervention force’s initiatives to restore the rule of law, civil coexistence, and public order. Persuasion proves particularly effective during “Stabilization and Reconstruction” (S&R) missions, where the goal is to encourage behaviour that prevents the resurgence of hostilities between opposing factions. These tensions often stem from unresolved grievances or perceived injustices that can linger for decades after a conflict ends. Within this framework, cultural and linguistic knowledge becomes a common and indispensable founda-

tion for the success of various operational functions aimed at gaining local support, specifically: Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC), Public Affairs (PA) and Psychological Operations (PSYOPS).

In addition to the above-mentioned functions, the following elements significantly contribute to shaping a positive perception of military forces among the local population:

- **Presence-Posture-Profile (PPP):** This refers to the image a military contingent projects through its physical presence in the area, its force composition, and the attitude and behaviour of its troops.
- **Key Leader Engagement (KLE):** These are formal and informal meetings aimed at establishing relationships of trust and mutual support between the force commander and the Key Decision Makers in the Area of Responsibility (AOR).

Once the military force presents a coherent and credible image, it becomes considerably easier to build trust with local leaders. Based on the SFA activities carried out, the force commander, through KLE meetings with local authorities, will be in a better position to support reconciliation between rival factions or to restore order and legality disrupted by previous conflicts.



Figure 1. @Iraq NATO – KLE activity led by NATO Mission IRAQ

¹ Awareness of the political beliefs, religious and social aspects, customs and taboos, and gestures that characterize the inhabitants of a specific area of intervention.

CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE

The consolidation of trust and consensus largely depends on the system of relationships (Intercultural Communication) implemented by the intervention force at every level. The most successful approach consists not only in respecting and understanding the socio-cultural structure (Cultural Awareness¹), but also in ensuring the effectiveness of the communication flow, which could be compromised by poor translation into the local language. In certain areas of operation, military contingents must resort to recruiting local interpreters for both operational and logistical activities in support of the force (e.g., purchasing goods and services on the local market). However, the low level of education in crisis areas often means that the preparation of such professional figures is not always adequate. The success of communication often depends on the skills of the “improvised” interpreter and the comprehension efforts of the military personnel. Both interlocutors may be unable to translate words or concepts that exist in one language but are absent in the other. This runs the risk of altering or exaggerating meanings, omitting information due to a lack of linguistic skills, or for reasons related to the interpreter’s social status or direct involvement in the conflict.

When intervening in a new operational theater - especially in the initial phases - it would be advisable to support the local interpreter, who is often too emotionally involved in the events that have affected their people, with a cultural mediator. This mediator would ensure both the quality and impartiality of the content translated into the local language and the correction of inevitable interpretive misunderstandings. A mediator does not only provide interpretation services between military personnel and the local population, but is also able to identify potential areas of intercultural conflict and offer their expertise in ad-

addressing and resolving them, acting as a bridge between the needs of conflict victims and the support activities carried out by peacekeeping forces.

The knowledge of one or more local languages does not necessarily identify the best mediator or the most suitable SFA specialist. While everyone has the ability to learn a foreign language, it is considered more valuable to select and train SFA personnel who are predisposed to intercultural sensitivity, which they can develop further through study and experience into an adequate level of Intercultural Competence. From this perspective, the study of a foreign language together with its related culture helps to modify the natural ethnocentric attitude - which involves rejecting what is different and feeling superior about one's own culture - towards a gradual acceptance of others' differences and a reciprocal interaction.

- “Functional Intercultural Communication” (good cultural knowledge, but poor linguistic knowledge), where a positive attitude toward dialogue and exchange, supported by in-depth cultural knowledge, succeeds in overcoming inevitable language barriers through simplified forms of communication which, although grammatically incorrect, are culturally understandable and appreciated by the local population;
- “Poor Intercultural Communication” (good linguistic knowledge, but poor cultural knowledge), where syntactically and grammatically correct language is used in ways or with content that are not appropriate to the context, potentially resulting in communication that is offensive or inappropriate.

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

Multiple definitions have been attributed over time to the concept of culture. These stem from a wide range of study approaches - etymological, humanistic, classical, or metaphorical. However, experts do identify certain common characteristics related to culture. First, culture is changeable across time and space. Second, it is explicit (visible culture), following manifest procedures and intentionally shared patterns, but also submerged (the Iceberg metaphor), operating through dynamics that are not taught but acquired through osmosis from the environment and daily experience. Third, it is both objective and subjective - where the former is collectively shared and materially observable within a group, and the latter refers to the individual's internalization process, which filters and interprets reality using each person's own frame of reference. Furthermore, globalization and new means of communication have made the boundaries of culture more flexible, making it less tied to a specific territory and increasingly subject to influences, cross-contamination, and regeneration.

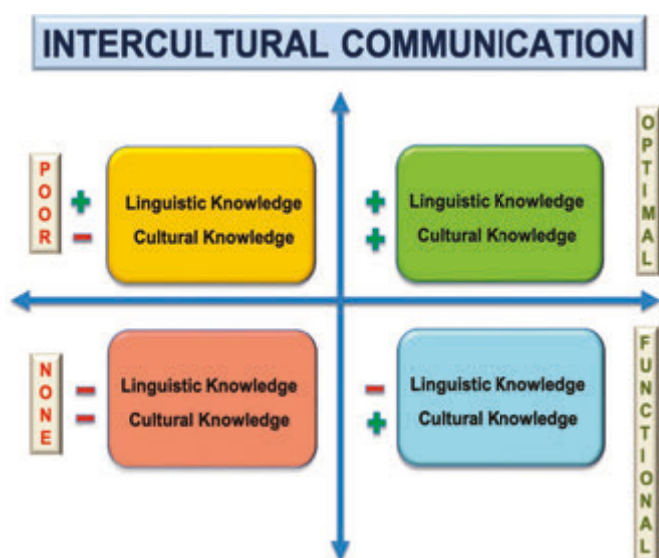


Figure 2. Simplified Cartesian quadrant for Intercultural Communication

The knowledge of a language alone does not guarantee the acquisition of the cultural dimension it derives from, but it is essential in order to understand and assimilate it. Excluding the extreme cases of excellent or poor cultural-linguistic knowledge - which would lead, in the first case, to “Optimal Intercultural Communication” and, in the second, to non-communication - two intermediate situations may occur:

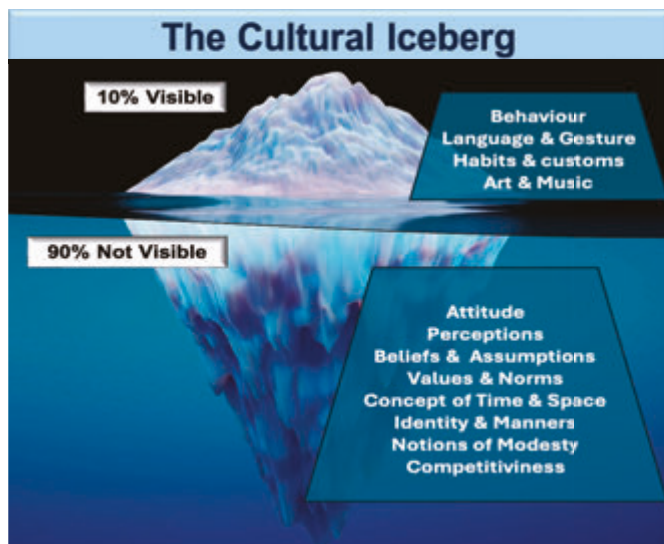


Figure 3. The Iceberg metaphor

In light of this, SFA personnel, who often operate in small units and far from higher command centers, must be capable of acting effectively and autonomously. The effectiveness and potential impact of their actions - which may have strategic consequences (the role of the "Strategic Corporal") - inevitably also depend on acquiring the aforementioned Intercultural Competence. Possessing Intercultural Competence means being able to overcome personal and professional barriers, enriching one's perception and interpretation of reality with new frameworks and symbolic references, in order to interact with diverse and multifaceted socio-cultural contexts.

The added value of the intercultural approach lies in its dynamic dimension, developed through interaction and mutual exchange with foreign counterparts, and for this reason, it surpasses the effectiveness of the multicultural approach, whose static dimension is limited to merely highlighting and describing cultural differences.

Intercultural Competence ultimately results from the combination of cultural and linguistic knowledge² (*skillset*), which provides the theoretical and practical models needed to interpret and interact with

other cultural systems, and a mentally open (*mindset*) and positive disposition toward diversity, which is strengthened through experience and empathy.

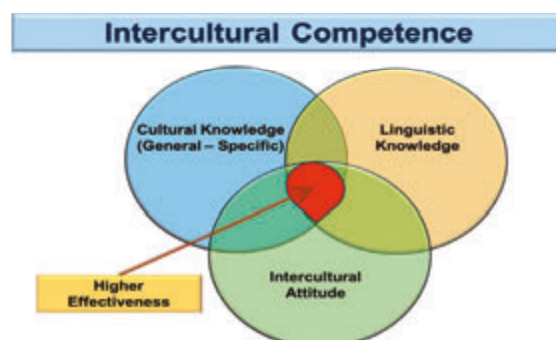


Figure 4. Area of effectiveness for Intercultural Competence

CONCLUSIONS

The valuable teachings of anthropology and sociology are also of great assistance to military forces in the planning and conduct of operations.

With regard to planning, the principles and basic concepts inherent to Intercultural Competence can serve as an excellent reference for studying the Information Operation Environment³, defining the desired effects, the commander's intent, and even selecting the most appropriate SFA activities.

At the tactical level, applying an intercultural approach goes beyond merely listing behaviours to adopt or avoid, or describing the main local values and symbolic references. It involves developing in military personnel - already during the pre-deployment training of SFA staff - a tolerant, flexible attitude, easily adaptable to the changing situations they will encounter on the ground. Similarly, to what has already occurred with communication and marketing disciplines which have been adapted for military purposes under "Information Operations", the intercultural dimension also offers the prospect of an added value for SFA missions.

Col. Massimo DI PIETRO
(Former Director of NATO SFA COE)

² Cultural knowledge can be either "general" (applicable to all cultural systems) or "specific" (adapted to regional and local socio-cultural realities). In the military field, the former is useful for strategic and operational planning, while the latter is used for conducting activities at the tactical level. ³ That is, for the analysis of operational variables (PEMSII - Political, Economic, Military, Social, Infrastructure, and Information), both individually and collectively.

THE ADDED VALUE OF ACADEMIA IN NATO'S EVOLVING SECURITY PARADIGM: MY EXPERIENCE AT THE SFA COE

Since April, I have been involved in an internship with the NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence (NATO SFA COE), within the Concept Development and Experimentation Branch. As part of the team, I am assisting in a research paper on Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) to expand the range of Security Force Assistance (SFA) beyond conventional land-based operations to the maritime, air, space, and cyber domains.



these domains in turn: the land domain, traditionally committed to stability operations and counterinsurgency; the maritime domain, focused on piracy and regional security threats; the air domain, where air defence and surveillance are ramped up; the space domain, with a focus on building partner nation satellite capacity; and the cyber domain, which is dedicated to building cyber resiliency. The paper also addresses integration and interoperability across all domains, highlights the necessity of collaboration with non-military agencies and actors in the context of SFA, and finishes with discussion of challenges, limitations, and avenues for the future of SFA in Multi-Domain Operations.

Active participation by a number of significant organizations and stakeholders is integrated into writing this research paper, in accordance with the multidisciplinary as well as multinational nature of MDO and SFA. Among the contributors are the Joint Air Power Competence Centre (JAPCC), the Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence (CIMIC COE), the Maritime Security Centre of Excellence (MARSEC), the Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE), Deloitte, a civilian partner contributing to the effort with strategic and analytical skills. As part of my role, I was also assigned the task of establishing contact with one or more of



The research paper seeks to provide an integrative summary and review of SFA in such multi-domain environment. It begins with a foreword and chapter one that touches upon major definitions, context information, and operating environment, including comparison of the traditional Joint approach and the new concept of Multi-Domain Operations. Subsequent chapters address each of

these contributors, coordinating with them to gather inputs and ensure that their perspectives and expertise were effectively integrated into the development of the paper.



To better understand the rationale behind this approach, it is worth exploring what exactly Multi-Domain Operations are, and why NATO is investing so heavily in this concept. MDO are an essential step forward for NATO's way of operating. In contrast to the classic "Joint" idea, grounded on collaboration between military forces — for example, the army, navy, and air force — fighting in parallel, MDO go further. They seek to align and coordinate military and non-military action across all operational spaces at the same time, continuously, and in unison, to create real strategic impacts.

For the Alliance, this shift is crucial. The Alliance is facing increasingly demanding challenges, where speed of information, integration of data, and enemy capabilities demand a response that is extensible, fast, and integrated. Against this background, transforming the Military Instrument of Power (MIoP) into a multi-domain-capable force is critical to successful deterrence, collective defence, and sustainable operational credibility.

A NATO enabled by MDO will be able to plan, prepare, and execute synchronized activities not only within the military but also in close concert with civilian players, institutions, and other

power instruments. Pay attention to the fact that MDO is not for the military to take command of other players but to cooperate and collaborate, utilizing capabilities — wherever they may come from — in order to reduce operating risk and maximize mission success.

This position highlights a fundamental difference between the Joint conception and MDO. While "Joint" describes cooperation between different military services operating in separate domains, MDO seek to deliver joined-up effects across multiple domains simultaneously, engaging non-military dimensions in a meaningful way. This is a real cultural and operational shift, and arguably the most challenging aspect in the journey of NATO to embracing MDO.

It is no coincidence that realms of space and cyberspace, once marginal or non-existent in planning operations, now occupy centre stage. Most Allied countries still structure their forces in a domain-segmented framework. But with the current and future security environment, such segregation is becoming a drawback.

Within the scope of my activities in the NATO SFA COE, I was specifically tasked to develop the chapter on Security Force Assistance in space. This environment, while relatively new, is rapidly becoming a strategic necessity.

In our research study, we are therefore looking at how Security Force Assistance can be used in the multi-domain environment, in order to enable cooperation and stabilization not only on the ground, but in the sea, in the air, in space, and the digital domain. MDO are therefore not so much a technology breakthrough, but a new strategic vision - a way of making the Alliance more cohesive, responsive, and capable of meeting the challenges of the future.

Finally, adopting an MDO strategy goes to understanding that modern conflict — and lasting peace — are designed on numerous, simultaneous fronts. It is



SFA Operators Course 2025-2

22nd-26th SEPTEMBER 2025

also understanding that mission success rests not simply on military strength, but on a capacity to generate synergy, to transform rapidly, and to innovate purposefully. And this is precisely where NATO is moving.

As part of my broader involvement in NATO SFA COE activities, I also took part in the initiative “A Talk with the Authors – Behind the Scenes of the Latest Editorial Project on a Comprehensive Approach to Human Security,” which gave me the opportunity to engage directly with contributors to the Centre’s recent publication on human security.

I had the opportunity to attend discussions with Dr. Yasmine Abdel Moneim and Ms. Yael Vias Gvirsman, both contributors to the publication. Dr. Abdel Moneim, an academic director and associate professor with expertise in cultural policy and international development, addressed the importance of cultural heritage protection as part of post-conflict recovery. Building on the broader theme of human security, Ms. Vias Gvirsman - a seasoned practitioner in international criminal and humanitarian law - focused on the evolving legal response to gender-based violence in conflict, drawing on her extensive experience in international justice and victim advocacy.

These sessions offered valuable insights into the interdisciplinary and human-foc-

cused dimensions of NATO’s comprehensive approach to security.



To complement my involvement in research and institutional engagement, I also had the opportunity to participate in two high-level training activities organized by the Centre: the SFA Enhancement Advisor Seminar 2025 and the SFA Operators Course 2025-2.

These experiences allowed me to gain a more operational perspective on the practical application of SFA. The Operators Course, in particular, focused on strengthening the competencies of SFA practitioners engaged in defence and related security capacity-building missions. It emphasized the importance of advising, mentoring, and training partner forces within a comprehensive and integrated approach-core elements of NATO’s evolving strategic vision.

Ms. Francesca Bajardi
(NATO SFA COE Intern)

CONTRIBUTING TO QUALITY ASSURANCE: INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE AT THE NATO SFA COE

NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence is committing to abide to the NATO Quality Assurance (QA) Process, a formalized and structured approach made to facilitate the quality of education and individual training across the Alliance. The QA process aims at aligning training with operational effectiveness, supporting continuous improvement, and maintaining adherence to NATO's standards of education.

As part of this effort the Centre obtained ISO 9001 certification. This marked the beginning of the QA Process, an extensive internal review, including revising Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), database systems, planning tools, and course evaluation forms.

This process is based on core standards, set by the Bi-Strategic Command Directive 075-007 on Education and Individual Training. Standards include institutional procedures and policies, staff and instructor development, knowledge management systems, student assessment, and instructional design and delivery.

The accreditation process involves five critical steps: application, self-assessment report (SAR), on-site visit, evaluation report, and final decision.



Figure 1. NATO SFA COE 5-Step Process of Institutional Accreditation



In the NATO SFA COE, the drafting of the SAR involved contributions from all Centre branches by adopting a RACI Matrix (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) that has made role clarification and coordination effective. One of the most important pillars of the QA framework is the Continuous Improvement Process (CIP), wherein systematic review is conducted of training efficacy, internal processes, and adherence to evolving operational requirements. For the SFA COE, this has resulted in tangible improvements such as new common folders and more efficient planning tools. Lastly, the QA system of NATO not only supports internal capacities but also helps build confidence in the Alliance's ability to provide high-quality mission-oriented education.

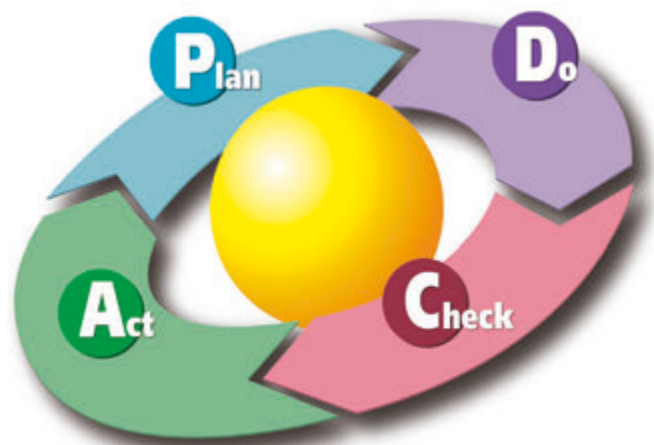


Figure 2. NATO SFA COE Deming Cycle

The NATO SFA COE is a living example of how quality assurance can drive innovation, encourage excellence, and sustain credibility in advancing international security education. Active participation by third parties (such as interns, students from international universities) has supported this process, highlighting the value of integrating diverse competencies in institutional development.

During my six-month internship at the Education and Training Branch of the NATO SFA COE, I worked under the supervision of the Officer in Charge of

improving the whole reporting system. In addition to this, I helped my Supervisor to prepare the Quality Assurance Policy into its definitive stage, ensuring that it was fully in line with the Centre's goals and NATO education standards. This experience allowed me to develop a more comprehensive understanding of Quality Assurance principles and their practical implementation in the military education environment.

To be part of the Education and Training Branch also gave me experience in NATO SFA courses and seminars planning



Figure 3. NATO SFA COE <https://www.instagram.com/natosfacoe/?hl=en>

Quality Assurance. My main responsibility was directly related to the preparation of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR). I assisted in editing and refining the SAR by revising its content through editing and structuring, including attachments such as the R.A.C.I. Matrix and participant and lecturer databases, which I helped to provide structure and update. Databases accompanying this report facilitated traceability and data accuracy of participants and instructors, furtherly

and coordination, where I contributed to various phases of preparations, such as the preparation of administrative paperwork and assisting with organizational tasks. Upon completion of each course, I participated in the harvesting and analysing of evaluation feedback, an important element that supports the Centre's continuous improvement.

I was also able to join several courses conducted by the Centre, which not only contributed to my professional ex-



Figure 5. NATO SFA COE <https://www.instagram.com/natosfacoe/?hl=en>

perience but also gave me a clearer understanding of how NATO's educational objectives were translated into practice.

As part of my internship, I was able to see and learn more about the initial steps in course development, that was conducted accordingly to the Systems Approach to Training (SAT), a structured framework adopted across NATO to ensure that training is systematic, performance-oriented, and aligned with operational outcomes.

In particular, the SAT process has five major phases:

- Analysis
- Design
- Development
- Implementation
- Evaluation.

In this context, I was able to participate in the Training Needs Analysis (TNA) phase, which is the first step of the entire training process. This phase deals with the identification of performance gaps and operational requirements so that training activities are specific, pertinent, and mission oriented. Although my contribution was primarily observational, this experience provided me with great insight into the way in which NATO training programs are planned strategically, as

well as the analysis tools and decision processes are used in transforming needs of the operational environment into effective training solutions. Finally, I also had the opportunity to attend the Centre's initiative "Talk with the Authors: Behind the Scenes of the Latest Editorial Project on Human Security."

This activity offered interns a privileged opportunity to explore the conceptual and operational foundations of human security, a key pillar of NATO's comprehensive approach.

Through a series of discussions with the authors and experts involved in the project, I gained valuable insights into the research methodologies, interdisciplinary perspectives, and practical challenges that shaped the publication "Enhancing Stabilization and Strategic Partnership in a Post-Conflict Environment".

I am particularly grateful for the collaborative and inclusive working environment. This experience has deepened both my technical skills, and my ambition to continue my career in international organisations, with specific reference to education, capacity development, and security cooperation.

Ms. Miriam Richiusa
(NATO SFA COE Intern)

MAIN EVENTS

“A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO DEFENCE AND SECURITY CAPACITY-BUILDING ASSISTANCE” PILOT COURSE

From 23 to 25 June 2026, NATO SFA COE, in close collaboration with the Italian Army Post Conflict Operations Study Centre (PCOSC) and the European Security and Defence College (ESDC), organized the first pilot course entitled “A Comprehensive Approach to Defence and Security Capacity-Building Assistance” at the Italian Armed Forces Officers' Club (CUFA) in Rome.

Over three days, military personnel, civilian experts, and representatives from NATO, the European Union, and partner institutions explored key topics including stakeholder mapping, the EU Common Security and Defence Policy crisis management framework, NATO-EU cooperation in Defence Sector Reform and Capacity Building, the role of Political Advisors, and communication with Partner Forces in multicultural environments.

Interactive case studies based on NATO Mission Iraq, the European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) Ukraine, and the European Union Capacity Building Mission in Mali enabled participants to exchange experiences and apply the concepts discussed throughout the course.

The pilot course concluded with a constructive discussion on current challenges in Defence and Security Capacity-Building Assistance, reaffirming the importance of closer NATO-EU cooperation and a shared commitment to developing effective and sustainable capacity-building solutions.



NATO SFA COE RENEWS PARTNERSHIP WITH CANADA NATO FIELD SCHOOL

As part of its ongoing commitment to education and international outreach, the NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence (NATO SFA COE) once again welcomed the Canada NATO Field School and Simulation Program, organized by Simon Fraser University.

The visit, conducted in close cooperation with the Italian Army Infantry School — through its Training Regiment and Combat Training Centre — brought together students from more than 25 universities, reinforcing the Centre's role in promoting international knowledge-sharing.

Participants observed live infantry training and demonstrations of small-unit tactics, techniques, and operational capabilities. They also engaged in discussions with senior officers from the Italian and U.S. Armies, gaining valuable insights into Security Force Assistance (SFA), multinational operations, and the practical challenges of today's security environment through the experience of operational Subject Matter Experts (SMEs).

This annual initiative highlights the NATO SFA COE's role in bridging academia and the military by providing future leaders with practical exposure to defence and security issues. By fostering dialogue, professional development, and international cooperation, the Centre continues to expand its community of interest and contribute to a shared understanding of contemporary security challenges.





1ST STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING 2026

On 19 May, the first 2026 Steering Committee Meeting of the NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence (NATO SFA COE) was held in Tirana, Albania.

The meeting brought together delegates from the Sponsoring and Contributing Nations, together with observers from Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, and Kosovo. Following the Chairman's opening remarks and approval of the agenda, the Director of the Centre, Col. Massimo Moncada, thanked the Host Nation and participants before presenting the Centre's vision, mission, and recent achievements.

Staff representatives provided updates on key projects, ongoing activities, and branch developments, including legal and financial matters. Particular attention was given to the SFA AI Agent, an innovative training capability that uses artificial intelligence to enhance the education, training, and operational readiness of NATO SFA personnel through scenario-based exercises.

Participants expressed strong appreciation for the Centre's progress and reaffirmed their support for ongoing initiatives and future development. The meeting concluded with the traditional signing of the decision paper and the announcement that the next Steering Committee Meeting will take place in Rome in November 2026.

7TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATO SFA COE FOUNDATION

The NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence (NATO SFA COE) marked its 7th anniversary with an internal ceremony, bringing together current and former personnel. The event was opened by the Director, Colonel Massimo Moncada, followed by remarks from Colonel Merlino, the Centre's first Director, who presided over the ceremony. The occasion commemorated the establishment of the Centre and its progressive development into a recognized hub of expertise in Security Force Assistance within NATO. The celebration recalled a key milestone in the Centre's history: the Opening Ceremony held on 26 March 2019, which marked its official presence in the NATO Centres of Excellence Community. On that occasion, the Sponsoring Nations, Albania, Italy and Slovenia, formalized their commitment, enabling the Centre to achieve full accreditation and recognition within NATO. The internal ceremony provided an excellent opportunity to reunite with former members of the Centre, exchange ideas on the evolution of Security Force Assistance activities, highlight key milestones, and acknowledge the valuable contributions of its personnel.



ADVANCED SEMINAR IN SFA FOR STRATEGIC ADVISING WITHIN SSR

From 2 to 4 December 2025, the NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence (NATO SFA COE) hosted the Advanced Seminar for SFA Strategic Advising within SSR at the Italian Air Force General Staff. The seminar aimed to enhance civilian and military participants' ability to provide strategic-level guidance in Security Force Assistance (SFA), with particular attention to NATO's Strategic Military Guidance and cooperation with political stakeholders.

The programme focused on three main themes: Warfighting, Resilience, and Transition. Participants explored SFA activities across the continuum of competition, addressing planning considerations, stakeholder mapping, legal frameworks, Security Sector Reform, force management, Human Security, and lessons from NATO missions and support to Ukraine.

A key activity was an SFA wargame led by ITA Gen. (rtd.) Errico De Gaetano from SHAPE, marking an important step in developing the Centre's wargaming capabilities and future SFA learning methodologies. The seminar was enriched by senior military leaders and experts, whose contributions encouraged discussion and the exchange of experiences and best practices.

Bringing together the SFA Community of Interest at senior level, the seminar provided a valuable opportunity to strengthen cooperation, share expertise, and generate insights supporting the continued evolution of the SFA concept.



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