



# Tacit Expertise:

## How the NATO Defense College nurtures an international hub of security knowledge through education

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Expertise “...is the ability to act naturally and appropriately in new and unexpected settings.”<sup>2</sup>

It relies on a network of people, places and things, and on the accumulation of experience which over time gradually builds a strong knowledge base. However intangible that might seem, this is extremely important for understanding the NATO Defense College (NDC). Over time, the NDC has provided and stabilized a prism of security knowledge for hundreds of recipients. This paper addresses how it does so by focusing on its main educational activity, the *Senior Course* (SC).<sup>3</sup> It argues that, if security knowledge is considered as a specific form of expertise, the central strengths and potential weaknesses of the NDC stand out and avenues for strengthening the College in the future can be found.

### ***Introduction: Expertise at the NDC***

The NDC educational pillar is responsible for the strategic training of a large number of military and civilian officials in charge of security or security related tasks within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), national capacities of Allied countries, and among Partner countries in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia.<sup>4</sup> In this way, the NDC contributes to NATO’s cohesion and effectiveness, and assists in defusing tensions by reaching out to the conflict-ridden strategic environment of NATO. On any given day of the academic year, more than 50 nationalities are present at the College. As it is the only institution of its kind in the world, a better understanding of what features are responsible for its success is important. This will make for a solid basis from which to evaluate the College and its future potential.<sup>5</sup>

This paper builds on a two-year participant ob-

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Evans, “The Sociology of Expertise: The Distribution of Social Fluency,” *Sociology Compass* 2(1): 281-298, 2008, p. 283.

<sup>3</sup> The NDC consists of three pillars: education, research and outreach. I focus on the educational pillar in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> The geographical area covered is thus wider than the Alliance - including for example Switzerland, Austria, Finland, Nigeria, and other countries involved in various partnership programmes with NATO: Partnership for Peace (PfP), Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), and Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) countries, as well as Partners across the Globe (PatG) with a partnership programme with NATO.

<sup>5</sup> This paper is not part of the official review process which was undertaken in 2013-2014 at the NDC. It is a separate, independent project with no stakes in the future of the NDC.

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servation study of the NDC, focused on the expertise and knowledge of the College.<sup>6</sup> As a visiting researcher, I have participated in the same activities as other staff and Course Members at the College, and have tried to pinpoint how they perceive their tasks and the world they are in. The perspective of my research is that *expertise constitutes a lens through which actors see the world*. Following from this, expertise forms the basis of how actors act. The initial research questions, therefore, were: 1) What kinds of knowledge are deemed important in the activities of the College? 2) What types of expertise underpin its activities? Based on recent discussions in the academic debate on the sociology of expertise, the project complemented these questions with a third: To what extent was the expertise and knowledge valued at NDC primarily based on complex academic knowledge, or on more practical knowledge and/or experience acquired in the field?

In this paper I report the findings of my research<sup>7</sup> and point to a central feature of the College's activities which has not been properly appreciated: its historical role in providing a large group of practitioners and potential security leaders with a prism through which to view and practice security, and the possibility of making this role more active in the future. Through education, the NDC has placed itself at the centre of an international hub of security knowledge by creating an expert community of practice.<sup>8</sup> As such, it can function as a 'switch-

board' for future security decisions. By providing a specific prism for understanding security and by teaching human interoperability skills,<sup>9</sup> it ensures that its graduates – the so-called *Anciens* – can be mobilized in situations where speedy decision-making and a common understanding are needed in NATO as a whole. Spanning not only Allies across the civilian/military divide, but also Partners and NATO officials, the Anciens' network has threads in every corner of NATO's sphere of interest and is therefore a potentially very powerful resource.

In this paper, I describe current academic practices at the NDC, specifically those tied to running the Senior Course. I then argue for downplaying the theoretical, academic orientation of the College in order to safeguard the specific kind of NDC expertise that NATO needs. I conclude with a recommendation for the future direction of the College, and a warning that expertise can turn into tunnel vision if not nurtured cautiously.

### *What is the NDC?*

The NDC is situated in the military compound of Cecchignola, on the southern outskirts of the city of Rome, with military guards, high fences, and strict ID card verification for every person who enters. It is the highest-level educational institution in the Trans-Atlantic Alliance, and

<sup>6</sup> The academic activities of the Research Division and the Middle East Faculty are left out of the discussion in this paper. For a discussion of the research division, please see Berling, Trine Villumsen & Brooke Smith-Windsor (forthcoming) "NATO Defense College: Navigating between Critical Analysis, Strategic Education and Partnerships" in Thomas Juneau & Jean-François Morel, *The Pursuit of Relevance: Strategic analysis in support of international policy-making*, Rowman & Littlefield.

<sup>7</sup> The paper is based on interviews, informal talks, observations of College activities and reading of material about the College. I have remained open about my research interests and have guaranteed anonymity to all the individuals I have talked to.

<sup>8</sup> Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> While Afghanistan is taken as a prime example of defence cooperation between 51 NATO and Partner nations, interoperability goes beyond that as it means "being able to take part in a very complex decision-making process, with already prepared and capable units and HQs" which requires "a change of mindset" (Guillaume Lasconjarias, 2015): "Enhanced Interoperability through Connected Defence Education," *Report on the 44<sup>th</sup> Conference of Commandants*, National Defence College, Vienna 29 June-1 July, 2015, 1 and 3.

is appreciated and supported by the Allies.<sup>10</sup> The College is organizationally placed under the military arm of NATO, and therefore falls under the responsibility of the Military Committee. Twice a year the College organizes its flagship course, the SC, which runs for approximately six months. The course offers training for both civilian and military personnel, who will be able to carry out tasks related to NATO in NATO's structure, in Allied countries, and in many Partner countries once they have completed it. The Course Members come not only from the 28 Allied countries, but also from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA area) and as far away as the Asia-Pacific, including a small number from the private sector. Some 70-80 participants reside in Rome during the course and are presented with a varied program of relevance to NATO security. Topics range from energy security, to the EU and the WTO, Ukraine and Russia, and cyber security and globalization. The choice of topics is based on the main NATO documents, especially the Strategic Concept.<sup>11</sup> In addition to the SC, the NDC organizes a number of shorter courses for ambassadors and high-ranking military personnel, and hosts visits by other defense colleges

from around the world.<sup>12</sup>

The NDC does not grant academic degrees.<sup>13</sup> It issues course certificates, but these are not recognized as equivalent to those awarded for other academic programs.<sup>14</sup> Although work is underway to secure the option of using parts of the SC curriculum as credits for obtaining a master's degree in outside universities or changing the NDC curriculum in order to obtain a master's degree from the College,<sup>15</sup> support amongst the people interviewed for this paper has been meagre. As one person interviewed for the present paper put it, "The NDC is of a different kind than universities and is not geared towards accreditation."<sup>16</sup> A process led by the Dean is currently exploring multiple different options for introducing partial accreditation at the College and has begun a dialogue with a number of relevant Universities and Defence Colleges.<sup>17</sup>

According to the current NDC mission statement and mandate (MC123/8), the NDC is NATO's premier academic institution<sup>18</sup> and should, inter alia, "conduct academic studies and research in support of the Alliance's wider goals"<sup>19</sup> and include activities such as

<sup>10</sup> NATO Defense College Review Taskforce, Enclosure to NATO Defense College (NDC) Review, MCM-0133-2014, Brussels, 2 July, 2014: II-6.

<sup>11</sup> NATO (2010) "Active Engagement, Modern Defence," Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Lisbon 19-20 November 2010.

<sup>12</sup> In addition to the Senior Course and the NATO Regional Cooperation Course (NRCC), the College also hosts the Modular Short Course (MSC), the Senior Executive Regional Conference (SERC), the Generals, Flag Officers and Ambassadors' Course (GFOAC), and the Integrated Partners Orientation Course (IPOC). It also co-organizes the annual "Kyiv Week," and the annual Conference of (Defense College) Commandants. For further details, see: <http://www.ndc.nato.int/education/courses.php?icode=9>, accessed August 7, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Some nations have already acknowledged a level of equivalency of the Senior Course as credits towards a Master's degree in defence studies.

<sup>14</sup> In fact, the recent review report finds that "In reality, most of the Allies do not recognize the NDC as an academic institution" (Enclosure to MCM-0133-2014, p. III-18).

<sup>15</sup> This is part of the recommended Courses of Action (COA) which came out of a review process in 2013-2014. NATO Defense College (NDC) Review, MCM-0133-2014, NATO unclassified, 12 August 2014, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> NDC Official 1, July 2015, supported by NDC Official 2, June 2015. See also Lasconjarias, Guillaume (2015) "Enhanced Interoperability through Connected Defence Education," *Report on the 44<sup>th</sup> Conference of Commandants*, National Defence College, Vienna 29 June-1 July, 2015, p. 5 in which it is reported that participants at the Conference of Commandants expressed concerns about the current push towards seeking accreditation.

<sup>17</sup> "Senior Course Academic Accreditation and study towards a masters, Project Report 2," p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> SG(2002)0396, Strategic Guidance for the NATO Defense College, 22 April 02 (NATO RESTRICTED), referenced in NATO Defense College (NDC) Review, MCM-0133-2014, NATO Unclassified, 12 August, 2014, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Enclosure to MCM-0133-2014, p. II-3.

“academic research and expert evaluation and discussions of security issues.”<sup>20</sup> Surely these goals can be seen as geared towards accreditation. But in recent recommendations for changing the mission of the NDC, it is clearly stated that: “To reorient the NDC to an academic institution [is] considered unaffordable,”<sup>21</sup> and: “Changes to the NDC mission should not focus on ‘academic orientation’”.<sup>22</sup> These statements are seemingly unlikely to strengthen the position of the NDC in a knowledge-based society at large, and are contrary to previous descriptions of the College’s mandate. However, this might actually prove to be the biggest strength of the major review of the College and its mission conducted by NATO HQ in 2014: In recognizing that the NDC is different from other academic institutions and defence colleges, it allows the College to focus on bolstering its own particular form of expertise.<sup>23</sup> If we accept that experts are formed over a “prolonged period of interaction with the relevant community”<sup>24</sup> and that “individuals come to embody expertise by virtue of their extended participation in a social group,”<sup>25</sup> then the NDC can be viewed as forming an expert community in its own right – irrespective of how academic it is in orientation.

### *A military machine*

The organizational structure of the College bears witness to its being a military institution, with a command group consisting of a Com-

mandant and a Dean, who are responsible for the overall performance of the College, supported by four division heads and a Director of Management. Activities are based on three main pillars: Education, Research and Outreach. This paper is primarily concerned with the education pillar.

The education pillar comprises two Divisions,<sup>26</sup> both headed by generals: Academic Policy Planning Division (APPD) and Academic Operations Division (AOD). The Director of the APPD (DAPPD) is primarily responsible for managing the Library and Knowledge Centre, setting up the curriculum and the academic program for the SC, and inviting the approximately 200 lecturers who are flown in to conduct a lecture each year. In addition, he leads a group of *Faculty Advisors* (FAs) who are responsible for various academic-related tasks such as running a *distance learning* program. The Director of the AOD (DAOD), on the other hand, is responsible for managing a team of FAs who work directly with the SC committees (working groups), as well as all the employees who are in daily contact with current Course Members and *Anciens*.

The first point that stands out clearly is that there is virtually no *in-house* expertise at the NDC, in the form of people who have specialized in a particular area and stay at the NDC for extended periods of time. Only the *Research Division* is an exception to that rule. The Division has three civilian academics on NATO contracts, two civilian academics in the Middle

<sup>20</sup> Enclosure to MCM-0133-2014, p. II-4.

<sup>21</sup> NATO Defense College(NDC) Review, MCM-0133-2014, NATO unclassified, 12 August, 2014, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> NATO Defense College(NDC) Review, MCM-0133-2014, NATO unclassified, 12 August, 2014, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> While similar to defence and war colleges in the western world, the NDC is at the same time particular. Being an international defence college it does not compare easily with either defence colleges or civilian universities.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Evans, “The Distribution of Social Fluency,” *Sociological Compass* 2(1), 2008, 281-298, p. 288.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Evans, “What is expertise? Technical knowledge and political judgment,” in Berling, TV & C. Bueger, 2015, *Security Expertise. Practice, Power, Responsibility*, PRIO NEW Security Studies, Oxon & New York, Routledge, 19-37, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> The Middle East Faculty contributes to both research and education.

East Faculty<sup>27</sup> on NATO contracts, and a small group of Voluntary National Contributions (VNCs) who work on research-related issues.<sup>28</sup> A civilian academic director runs the Research Division, while a military director runs the Middle East Faculty.

The typical employee at the NDC is a man employed by one of the three services<sup>29</sup> in a NATO country, impeccably dressed in the national uniform of the country of origin, and on rotation at the NDC for a period of three years. The so-called Faculty Advisors – an NDC variant of the university term ‘faculty’ – are in principle expected to be qualified to operate in an environment of higher learning and to deal with such tasks as setting the curriculum, evaluating Course Members, or mentoring individual or group work. However, few of them hold doctorates. There is a culture of “we work with what the nations send us,”<sup>30</sup> which means that once the new people on rotation come in, the heads of division shuffle people around to make the best fit.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, the College is far from a Western university, which bases its recruitment on competitive evaluation of skills, research and teaching performance.

In addition, there is also the NATO staff, typically made up of women who are academi-

cally trained, civilian and on (semi)permanent contracts. Also here, the military culture of the NDC is evident: In general, women tend to perform support functions, while the men carry out the “battle.”<sup>32</sup> One notable exception was the appointment of the first female Dean in 2013.

### *Flying in experts: The lecturers*

While in-house expertise is virtually non-existent (except for the Research Division),<sup>33</sup> the College has made it its trademark to invite around 80 lecturers per SC to come to the NDC and teach for one day each.<sup>34</sup> They are respected scholars or serving senior officials specialized in the ‘topic of the day.’<sup>35</sup> The lecturers are asked to provide a basis from which to discuss the historical roots of a problem, its current manifestations, and possible future implications or developments. All with a clear sense of “So what for NATO?,”<sup>36</sup> meaning that the role of – and implications for – NATO need to be clearly addressed in the presentation.

In any given week there will typically be both military and civilian academic lecturers on the program. The majority of the lectures are

<sup>27</sup> The Middle East Faculty is responsible for the NATO Regional Cooperation Course and for conducting research on issues pertaining to NATO’s southern flank. For discussion, see Jean-Loup Samaan & Roman de Stefanis, “The Ties that Bind? A History of NATO’s Academic Adventure with the Middle East,” *Eisenhower Paper n. 1*, Research Division, NATO Defense College, Rome, 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Currently the College hosts only one VNC.

<sup>29</sup> Some countries also send representatives from law enforcement or equivalent services.

<sup>30</sup> This practice is also found in e.g. American war colleges. See George E. Reed (2011): “What’s Wrong and What’s Right With the War Colleges,” *Defense Policy. Org* at <http://www.defensepolicy.org/george-reed/what%E2%80%99s-wrong-and-right-with-the-war-colleges>, accessed 18 November 2015.

<sup>31</sup> This view has unanimously been supported in all my interviews.

<sup>32</sup> Exceptions are the maintenance crew (technicians). These are mostly men.

<sup>33</sup> Please see Trine Villumsen Berling & Brooke Smith-Windsor (forthcoming) “NATO Defense College: Navigating between Critical Analysis, Strategic Education and Partnerships” in Thomas Juneau & Jean-François Morel *The Pursuit of Relevance: Strategic analysis in support of international policy-making*, Rowman & Littlefield.

<sup>34</sup> Compare with the discussion of military versus civilian faculty in the American war colleges in Johnson-Freese, Joan “The Reform of Military Education: Twenty-five years later,” *Orbis*, Winter 2012, p. 142ff. By flying in the experts, the NDC avoids some of the problems related to the short-term contracts offered in American war colleges. See also Reed, George E. (2011) “Whats Wrong and What’s Right With the War Colleges,” *Defense Policy.org* at <http://www.defensepolicy.org/george-reed/what%E2%80%99s-wrong-and-right-with-the-war-colleges>, accessed 18 November 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Each day is elaborately described in the Course Curriculum, which is shared with the lecturers and the Course Members.

<sup>36</sup> NDC Official 3, 10 July, 2015.

presented in English. Overall, the balance between academic vs. practitioner lecturers has been 60/40 over the past 10 courses, with some variation from year to year.<sup>37</sup> The valued type of knowledge at the NDC is thus varied, and includes both complex academic knowledge and practical experience acquired in the field. In recent years, the female/male ratio of lecturers has been roughly 1/9.<sup>38</sup> The Annual Report 2014 Follow-up on ‘Strategy’ emphasized the desirability of making member state Military Representatives from HQ a ‘fixed and permanent part of the programme’ in the capacity of lecturers.<sup>39</sup> If implemented, this might shift the academic/practitioner balance.

Some of the lecturers are invited together to provide alternative perspectives on an issue. Others come alone. Virtually none appear twice during the same course. And they all clearly know what they are talking about – some because they are in charge of a specialized area in NATO Headquarters in Brussels, others because they have held top positions during recent operations. Some have an academic specialization, while others are simply good at knowing what the NDC and NATO want: a *prism* that raises the discussion above all the differences that the course members represent, and which makes it possible to establish a *common language* spanning Allies/non-Allies, civilian/military and, especially, the cultural differences between Course Members.

The lecturers are selected in a number of ways: suggestions by previous lecturers, friends of the NDC, or recommendations by the Research

Division; a search by the FA in charge of a *study period* (see below); or, in some cases, the reason for inviting them is that they have authored a publication which has proved of interest. Repeat invitations from year to year account for around 70-75% of lecturers.<sup>40</sup> Specialization is a prerequisite. Providing the history, the present, and the future of a topic is pivotal. And the NATO angle needs to be covered in order for a lecture to be successful. But, while provocation is considered good and “bias is a no-go,”<sup>41</sup> there is no requirement for being an eloquent speaker or a good entertainer as long as the ‘objectives of the day’<sup>42</sup> have been met.<sup>43</sup> The curriculum is formulated and updated by the staff on rotation and always includes a general introduction to a topic and the possible implications for NATO.

The lecturers are the target of an elaborate evaluation system. The Course Members, the FA responsible for the Study Period, the Flag Officer in the lecture room (one has to be present every day), and the course committees all evaluate the lecturers on a daily basis. If a lecturer performs below a certain score, he or she will not be invited back. Above a certain score, he or she can be.<sup>44</sup> Some require assistance in order to meet the objectives.<sup>45</sup> This assistance is given by the FA responsible for the study period concerned. The *standard operating procedure* recommends inviting lecturers again if their performance has been satisfactory, but as one person interviewed stated “Flag Officers’ and FAs’ opinions weigh more than those of Course Members in this process.”<sup>46</sup> Eventually,

<sup>37</sup> Trends in categories of speakers SC 116-124, balance provided by the NDC, 15 July 2014, Annex D.

<sup>38</sup> Percentage female speakers, SC 114-124, balance provided to author by the NDC, 15 July 2014, Annex H.

<sup>39</sup> Annual Report 2014 – Follow-up on ‘Strategy’, NDC/0792, 20 March 2015, NATO Unclassified, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> NDC Official 3, 10 July 2015.

<sup>41</sup> NDC Official 3, 10 July 2015.

<sup>42</sup> The objectives of the day are also elaborately laid out in the Course Curriculum.

<sup>43</sup> NDC Official 4, 3 July 2015.

<sup>44</sup> NDC Official 5, 14 February 2014.

<sup>45</sup> NDC Official 3, 10 July 2015.

<sup>46</sup> NDC Official 4, 3 July 2015.

however, the final decision is part of the internally developed “Curriculum Planning Evaluation” (CPE) process, involving the Head of the Curriculum Planning Branch (part of the APPD), the DAO, the Head of the Library and Knowledge Centre, and the relevant FAs. A document is prepared and sent to the *Academic Council*.<sup>47</sup> Subsequently, recommendations are sent through the Dean for the approval of the Commandant. The process does not feature “a lot of pushback from management,” said one person interviewed for this study.<sup>48</sup> But it is systematically carried out after every study period.

### *Readings*

The SC is divided up into six so-called *study periods*. Each study period covers a specific theme. To take an example, the first study period concerns the ‘Global Security Environment’ and includes discussions about globalization, the changing nature of conflict and strategy, different international schools of thought, and international law and ethics.<sup>49</sup> This study period runs over two weeks. Each topic is described in detail on an electronic platform, which all Course Members have access to. This *Academic Portal* also includes the readings for each of the topics within every study period. The readings have to be topical, current and accessible to Course Members, many of whom have

limited knowledge of the English language.<sup>50</sup> Twenty pages is the maximum length of the required readings per lecture.<sup>51</sup> In addition, all topics are presented with a short video, a so-called ‘TED talk’ or equivalent, which brings out essential aspects of the topic of the day.<sup>52</sup> A longer list of recommended readings is also available for each topic, for those course members who may be interested in further study.

During the study period on the ‘Global Security Environment’, Course Members are asked to prepare a paper entitled “Vision of the World in 2035,” which considers “the key issues outlined ... and [envisages] a future world environment within which NATO must act.”<sup>53</sup> The focus is on making the Course Members build or fine-tune a strategic-level mind-set, rather than learning different theories or perspectives by heart.

The readings are put together by FAs in the Academic Planning and Policy Division, with support from the Library Knowledge Centre and sometimes also the speakers. As mentioned, the FAs are on rotation for three years at the NDC, and many of them switch jobs during the three-year period. The readings therefore tend to be reused from course to course where feasible, with the caveat that they need to be current.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>47</sup> The Academic Council is chaired by the Dean. All four academic divisions are present with branch chiefs.

<sup>48</sup> NDC Official 3, 10 July 2015.

<sup>49</sup> The other study periods are: International Organizations; NATO Present and Future; Technology-Related Trends; Global Security Challenges; and Regional Issues (Course Calendar Senior Course 126, 23 Feb to 31 July, 2015).

<sup>50</sup> Publications include articles such as *Foreign Affairs* and *International Security* with a clear interest in formulating academic perspectives in language accessible to practitioners. But the readings generally do not follow impact factors or other academic ranking procedures. They just have to be relevant to the topic, recent and accessible.

<sup>51</sup> NDC Official 3, 10 July 2015.

<sup>52</sup> NDC Official 5, 14 February 2014.

<sup>53</sup> Study Period A, Global Security Environment, description of objectives and readings, Academic Portal, NDC intranet, accessed July 17, 2015.

<sup>54</sup> The readings are evaluated through the CPE (see above). The College does not receive many comments on the literature, but when they do the main complaint from Course Members is that a publication is outdated if it is more than about two years old (NDC Official 3, 10 July 2015).

### *Training at consensus-building: The study format*

The SC is divided into seven or eight different committees. As the core working unit for the course the “battle rhythm”<sup>55</sup> of the day is structured around the committee. Course Members meet at 8 a.m. for language training. They then have a committee meeting, at which one of them performs the role of ‘expert of the day’ and briefs the committee on the lecturers’ backgrounds and the topic of the day. At 10 a.m. the whole SC convenes in the main lecture hall for the lecture of the day. Nobody is late and everybody rises for the entrance of the Flag Officer and the lecturer<sup>56</sup> of the day.

After a coffee break in which a committee joins the lecturer for informal talks, the lecturer stays with the whole group in a Q&A session in the main auditorium. All questions have to be registered during the coffee break. After the Q&A session the lecturer joins a ‘Top Table Lunch’, where at least one Flag Officer is present. After lunch, the lecturer works with one of the committees on the topic of the day.

In the interest of training consensus-building skills, the academic activities are complemented by other initiatives and assignments. Thus, the different study periods require the committees to produce common papers and to work together in a week-long crisis management exercise at the end of the course. Apart from that, a social and cultural program assists in building a group identity and breaking down barriers between nationalities, cultures and different

services. A major part of this consists of three *field studies*. One of these takes in the North American Allies, the United Nations and Allied Command Transformation (ACT), while the other two focus on European and (Regional) visiting Partner countries along with NATO Headquarters and Allied Command Operations. Course Members are presented with different views on issues important to the different countries being visited and get a glimpse of NATO security from a range of perspectives. One person interviewed for this study stated that the field trips were an opportunity to test the strategic-level thinking which the course is seeking to nurture.<sup>57</sup>

The College emphasizes that its ‘educational philosophy’ is based on an adult learning model.<sup>58</sup> This means that the level of teaching is consistent with the expectation that all Course Members have valid experience from the field which they can mobilize during the SC. The focus is hence on the NATO dimension of the different academic debates, and not on basic facts or theories.<sup>59</sup>

### *Experts and amateurs: The grading system*

The College does not issue degrees and does not have a grading system equivalent to civilian universities. All Course Members are, however, evaluated on a scale from ‘not suited’<sup>60</sup> to ‘exceptionally well suited’ for NATO or NATO-related appointments, both in the middle of the course (interim evaluation) and on comple-

<sup>55</sup> A phrase used by NDC Official 5, 14 February 2014.

<sup>56</sup> The lecture can also have a panel format with several lecturers expressing different standpoints.

<sup>57</sup> Course Member 1, informal talk with author, 17 July, 2015.

<sup>58</sup> This has been emphasized in several of my interviews and is also stated in the Academic Curriculum, which is prepared before each SC. E.g. Academic Curriculum SC 126, February 2015-July 2015, Academic Portal, Accessed 17 July 2015.

<sup>59</sup> Civilian, academic university programmes focus on theoretical discussions within disciplines – not specifically on tackling policy problems (See e.g. Johnson-Freese, Joan (2013): *Educating America's Military*, Abingdon, Oxon & New York, Routledge, p. 114). The NDC tries to strike a balance between the two by combining the academic and the practical types of knowledge.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Suited’ generally means that the Course Member did not perform adequately (NDC Official 3, 10 July 2015).



tion of the course.<sup>61</sup>

The grade is based on a report written on each SC member by the FA assigned to the committee to which the Course Member belongs. The report includes several aspects: a review of the Course Member's contribution to the course, a comment on his or her suitability for NATO or NATO-related appointments, and an evaluation of (inter)personal skills. An important part of the grade consists in an evaluation of consensus-building skills. This includes "ability to work in a multi-national environment [...] the ability to debate constructively and effectively, tact and cooperation, ability to communicate effectively, particularly the ability to produce clear and concise written work," and "leadership ability."<sup>62</sup>

The report is supplemented with the Commandant's comments, which focus on the Course Member's suitability for various NATO positions, including as a potential NDC FA. As mentioned, in principle, a precondition for being invited/considered as a future FA at the NDC "is that the CM<sup>63</sup> must have been rated very well or exceptionally well suited."<sup>64</sup>

Following the most recent review of the College, a process has been set in motion to analyze the possibilities of seeking accreditation for parts of the SC. The process is underway, but has met with doubts from most of the individuals I have talked to.<sup>65</sup> Results will be presented to the MC in March with the NDC Annual brief. At the time of writing, a number of models were being investigated. Parts of the SC may be translated into credits with

an "academic provider," or a parallel Master's programme may be inserted and run parallel to the SC at the NDC. Another solution, which some countries have already been practicing for some time, is that the individual nations will opt for reviewing the SC curriculum on a case by case basis in order to decide on the possibility of awarding credits with national defense colleges. In my view, the solution chosen should respect the specific value of the NDC and prevent an 'academization' of the College, which might prove detrimental to its future output.

### *The output: A community of expert practice*

The mission of the College has changed over the years, from initially being about the conduct of war to being about defense measures and, later, about values and academic training.<sup>66</sup> But when asked about the main objective of the SC and the NDC in general, those I spoke to gave slightly different, but complementary answers. One NDC official told me that the objective of the SC is to "teach the Course Members how to think about complex problems"<sup>67</sup> He drew a circle in the air and explained how all the different study periods and activities would add to the understanding of the circle (the problem) from different angles. Another NDC official stated that the NDC provides "a deeper understanding of NATO and the world in which it operates [and] an appreciation for a multicultural work environment."<sup>68</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Standard Operating Procedure No 21: 'Reports on senior Course Members'. May 2012, published by the NATO Defense College.

<sup>62</sup> Standard Operating Procedure No 21, 'Reports on senior Course Members', May 2012, page 6, point e (3-4).

<sup>63</sup> Course Member.

<sup>64</sup> Standard Operating Procedure No. 21, 'Reports on Senior Course Members', NATO unclassified, May 2012, p. 6 point 2(4).

<sup>65</sup> e.g. NDC official 6 (22 May, 2015); NDC official 7 (June 2015); NDC official 8 informal talk, (July 2015).

<sup>66</sup> Enclosure to MCM-0133-2014, NATO Unclassified, Brussels, 02 Jul 2014, p. II-1-II-4 and III-2, point 7.

<sup>67</sup> NDC Official 4, 3 July, 2015. This description comes close to the recommendations made in Johnson-Freese, Joan (2013): *Educating America's Military*, Abingdon, Oxon & New York: Routledge, p. 115.

<sup>68</sup> NDC Official 3, 10 July, 2015.

While both statements fall within the mandate of the NDC, there is more to the output than meets the eye. Based on my observation, I would say that the NDC gives its Course Members a *prism* for understanding security. It is not based on academic accreditation, and is not a degree that could simply replace that awarded for a typical academic Master's program. Instead, it is a subtle training in human interoperability and consensus-building, based on academic and practical knowledge which enables Course Members to strategically assess a complex problem and advise political leadership accordingly.<sup>69</sup> As such, the NDC follows the same path as a scientific paradigm, by establishing a "time-tested and group-licensed way of seeing."<sup>70</sup> By acquiring the tacit cultural and social knowledge that comprise the NDC prism, Course Members develop from amateurs to experts with "the ability to act naturally and appropriately" in the new and unexpected settings that will inevitably characterize the future international security environment.<sup>71</sup> In short, after entering the doors of the NDC, Course Members (and faculty) become (aspiring) experts in consensus-building in a multicultural environment.<sup>72</sup> In the words of one individual I interviewed, Course Members "will be different after this course ends."<sup>73</sup> Their outlook will have changed forever.

Allies may "not send individuals to the NDC for academic reasons,"<sup>74</sup> but this does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the NDC does not produce expertise, because "*the boundaries of the expert and non-expert do not map neatly on to those of science and non-science.*"<sup>75</sup> All too often expertise is seen as having a 1:1 correspondence with scientific, academic knowledge.<sup>76</sup> But studies of expertise have concluded that it is better understood as "social fluency within a form-of-life."<sup>77</sup> This "form-of-life" can be a scientific community, but it can also be a community of practice.

The NDC Review stressed the importance of highlighting an important advantage of the NDC over other military education and academic institutions: "The NDC needs to distinguish itself for multinational networking, building cross-cultural understanding, and the process of building a consensus in a multicultural setting ..."<sup>78</sup> In other words, the NATO needs to understand the importance of the specific expertise which NDC is currently nurturing and disseminating. It is tacit and hence easy to overlook. But it is important and it adds to the comparative advantage of the human capital of NATO militaries vis-à-vis its opponents.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>69</sup> NDC Official 4, 3 July 2015.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 189.

<sup>71</sup> Compare with Bruno Latour, *Science in Action. How to follow scientists and engineers through society*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 157.

<sup>72</sup> Enclosure to MCM-0133-2014, "The NATO Defense College (NDC) Review MCM-0133-2014" suggests reformulating the mission of the College in this direction: "an education focused on international, multi-polar issues that are of interest or could become of interest to NATO Allies" and "to develop capacities (how) for senior-level Officers and Officials to support their own nations and NATO interests in the context of its changes/transformation (why) through multi-polar networking, mutual cooperation/consensus building strategic leadership..." (p. 4).

<sup>73</sup> NDC Official 9, February 14, 2014.

<sup>74</sup> Enclosure to MCM-0133-2014, p. III-18.

<sup>75</sup> Robert Evans, "The Sociology of Expertise: The Distribution of Social Fluency," *Sociology Compass* 2(1): 281-298, 2008, p. 282.

<sup>76</sup> Robert Evans, "The Sociology of Expertise: The Distribution of Social Fluency," *Sociology Compass* 2(1): 281-298, 2008, p. 283.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Enclosure to MCM-0133-2014, p. II6-II-7.

<sup>79</sup> Julian Lindley-French, "Connected Forces through Connected Education. Harnessing NATO's & Partner Nations Strategic Educational Resources," *Eisenhower Paper no. 2*, July 2014, NATO Defense College Research Division, p. 4.

## ***Conclusion: The NDC as a hub of international security knowledge***

By focusing on consensus building and human interoperability in its courses, the NDC differs markedly from Western university systems in general, where critical questions are the *raison d'être* at all levels. In NATO, all decisions are based on consensus.<sup>80</sup> It is not possible to act if there is no agreement about missions and goals. At the NDC, this culture is built into the very way the SC is conducted. Through group work the participants are asked to reach consensus on substantial security issues, not least by presenting a common product – a research paper – just before graduation. The best argument carries weight. But consensus is the objective. This means that *multicultural conversation* is pivotal at the NDC, notably with countries outside the Alliance, but also amongst the Allies themselves. “Through conversation and consensus-building the security situation of NATO can be altered,” seems to be the unspoken College mantra. The ability to carry out this conversation makes for a special kind of expertise, which the NDC excels in and which should be recognized.

What does this mean in more general terms? First, when the Course Members and Faculty arrive at the NDC they are equal to the typical senior officer or diplomat working on security issues inside, and with, the Alliance. But after they leave, they become part of a network which regards security knowledge and practice through a certain prism.<sup>81</sup> In that sense, they become part of the reason for the asymmetry between the NDC *Anciens* and the ordinary ‘securocrat’. This asymmetry comes from the *Anciens* having shared an experience with the

other Course Members in their own course, but also from their belonging to the NDC family and knowing how to act ‘NDCish’: that means building consensus across cultures and religions, between Allies and non-Allies, while informing decisions-makers with a wide spectrum of security knowledge.

“*[I]f expert status is the outcome of successful boundary work, then the expert is the one who is able to build a social network within which he or she is recognized as having relevant expertise and the non-experts are the ones who are marginalized by this process*”<sup>82</sup> Looked at in this way, the NDC serves as the accumulation center for a network of security knowledge that reaches far beyond the geographical limits of the Alliance. This carries unrecognized potential. But, as with all knowledge and expertise, it also carries the potential risk that: “*...becoming an expert means [...] becoming blinkered in one’s outlook.*”<sup>83</sup> It is therefore of the utmost importance that teaching the NDC prism continues to rely on the inclusion of as many different types of expertise as possible, whether academic or practical in nature. Only if the prism remains flexible will it be powerful.

The NDC might not be an academic institution of the typical kind. But it is without a doubt a knowledge-based institution. So the lack of academic in-house expertise is only a deficiency when looked at from the perspective of the traditional university as the benchmark. If looked at as a knowledge institution which develops and consolidates a network of security expertise, the replacement of the standard university term ‘faculty’ with NDC’s ‘faculty advisors’ makes perfect sense. The NDC Review

<sup>80</sup> NDC Official 4, 3 July 2015.

<sup>81</sup> Compare Bruno Latour, *Science in Action. How to follow scientists and engineers through society*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 218.

<sup>82</sup> Robert Evans, Robert, “What is expertise? Technical knowledge and political judgment,” in Berling, T.V., 2015, and C. Bueger, *Security Expertise. Practice, Power, Responsibility*, PRIO New Security Studies, Oxon & New York, Routledge, 19-37, 2015, p. 22.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Evans, “The Distribution of Social Fluency,” *Sociology Compass* 2(1), 2008, 281-298, p. 286

captured this concept when talking about shifting the focus of the NDC from a “major centre of education, study and research” to a “major centre of shared knowledge.”<sup>84</sup> Not only outsiders would benefit from understanding this. The College too needs to understand that this is actually a central component in making the NDC prism work.

The College therefore represents an expanding platform for molding the strategic outlook of the increasingly diverse participants who walk through its doors. Activating the *Anciens* would be a key factor in further strengthening this. A survey amongst the *Anciens*, carried out in connection with the NDC Review in 2014, indicated that the potential is there: 44% used their *Anciens*’ network for professional purposes, 76% made use of the NDC research capa-

bilities, and 78% agreed that the NDC had prepared them well for a NATO job.<sup>85</sup> If activated correctly, the *Anciens*’ network could become a central component in future security decisions in the interest of NATO in general. This is a long-term task and it is not easily measurable. But it is this molding of minds, and the creation and maintenance of a truly multinational, global network with a shared perspective – the tacit expertise of the NDC - that might prove to be the main contribution of the College to Euro-Atlantic security in the future. With growing numbers of international alumni and the continuing spread of the NDC methodology to a larger worldwide target group of practitioners, NATO stands to gain the upper hand in a notoriously changing and unpredictable security environment.

<sup>84</sup> Enclosure to MCM-0133-2014, p. II-7, table 3

<sup>85</sup> Enclosure to MCM-0133-2014, p III-4 point 12.



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