



NATO Soldier Systems Overview

Lieutenant Colonel Mike Bodner, Chairman NATO Land Capability Group 1 and Directorate of Land Requirements – Soldier Systems for Canada, provides an overview of soldier modernisation issues and activities

NATO's Land Capability Group 1 continues to be the hub around which soldier modernisation programmes are built providing both an intellectual focus, lessons learned forum and collaborative structure to its members, currently standing at 21 full members, six partners and Australia.

The Soldier Systems realm continues to be defined by the same five capability areas, which are NATO driven. Colonel Bodner explained, "These five capability areas have been around for about 15 years. As ways of describing a soldier system, these five words were argued over, haggled over and fought over but you will find those words in every major soldier system the world over."

Together, they define the design landscape in which tradeoffs can be determined. Col. Bodner said, "Some countries think that the rifle is the most important item the soldier carries and will be happy with more on the lethality side. Others would suggest that in a Three Block War, perhaps a having a radio on the soldier to enable them to be moved around from block to block is the most important. Other countries would suggest it's keeping that guy alive; providing him with the best protection they possibly can. There are trade-offs and analysis going on in every country today to determine the best path."

Within this common matrix, there is a common overarching theme; platform integration. "Like many other armies, [Canada] are realising that we can't keep hanging stuff off soldiers just because we can," commented Col Bodner. "We really need to get away from the Christmas Tree effect, where separate organisations hang kit on soldiers."

COMBAT AND NON-COMBAT ENVIRONMENT

Soldiers operate in a very complex environment, something Col. Bodner emphasises. "The US Marine

Corps General Krulak described the Three Block War. Every country describes this a little differently, often calling it full spectrum operations, but it is where soldiers on operations can be in high intensity combat in one block, the next block can be humanitarian aid, the next block can be security operations."

The complex future security environment has a number of causes. Colonel Bodner said, "Certainly Canada and other nations find conflict is on the moral physical and informational planes. Our forces have to be structured to be able to act along those planes. Canada calls this Adaptive Dispersed Operations. Every NATO nation has a similar name for it but most people perceive an all encompassing network that will underpin the future of soldier operations."

"In the Canadian reality, we are decisively engaged in Afghanistan, we have clever, adaptive foes. Clearly Combined Arms Teams are essential to winning operations today. We typically assign a full range of kinetic and non-kinetic effects and there are operational imperatives which we are learning and relearning now on operations."

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It is part of NATO's deliberations to provide guidance on how to this might be done. Colonel Bodner said, "One of the reasons NATO meets every six months is to keep track of each others programmes to get visibility on where other programmes are going."

At recent NATO meetings, Col. Bodner explained, presentations by the US, UK and Germany on their fielded systems had started to show where the potential problems may be. He cites the example of the number of different batteries in the Infanterie der Zukunft ensemble. He commented, "That type of information, benefits all the other groups. It is a tremendous advantage."

NATO's Army Armaments Group is reviewing how it does business with a view to becoming more capability based. Within its activities in the soldier domain several capability areas are becoming increasingly important to Alliance members. Col. Bodner, "Clearly from a NATO perspective, integrated personal protection is a big one as is the networked enabled soldier, which broadens the network enough to get down to every soldier." Focus on non- and less lethal forces is growing too. He continued, "Soldiers today need more than just lethal force. That is becoming a bigger issue in NATO. You want to limit collateral damage when you are fighting for hearts and minds."

Within the LCG/1, the Soldier Capability Analysis Group is looking at capabilities generally, focusing on scenarios and identifying where there need to be changes. The Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre (JALLC) in Lisbon is changing too. The organisation is responsible for capturing the lessons learned from all NATO operations. Until recently it has never collected information on soldier systems and soldier interaction in a coalition. Two of the major foci for the JALLC are the integration of Special Forces and fratricide prevention.

There remains lots of debate as to whether or not soldiers from different countries talk to each other on the battlefield. Col. Bodner addressed this at a practical level, "That argument is pretty much over, as soldiers already talk to each other all the time. Most countries have gone out and bought PRRs. They can talk to each other if they want to but we haven't got all the protocols in place. Commanders on the ground will in future decide will decide whether or not they will actually let Sergeant X talk to Sergeant Y but we will enable that to happen so that commanders have the choice." ■

Colonel Bodner was speaking at Soldier Technology Global.