



Multinational Interoperability Council and Coalition Building

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INTRODUCTION

Since the cold war concluded in the early 1990s, multinational/coalition operations have shaped the military's involvement in activities and engagements around the globe. These military involvements cover the full spectrum of operations, from humanitarian/disaster relief, to peacekeeping/peace enforcement, to major theatre war. The most important variable in coalition operations is "unified action," the synergistic application of all instruments of national and multinational power involving non-military and international organizations, governmental as well as military forces. In order to achieve unified action, interoperability between multinational forces is characterized by the seamless exchange and sharing of information at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. Interoperability means more than simply connecting systems together to exchange data, but also involves "the ability of coalition partners to share information, create a shared understanding of the situation, collaborate on the development and selection of courses of action, communicate these to all forces or units, and allow forces to work together effectively."¹ Aside from communication and information technology networks, interoperability includes all aspects of doctrine, logistics, intelligence and policy. When assessing the current state of multinational interoperability, it is easy to identify gaps, which hinder strategic and operational planning between national military and planning staffs. The realization that these gaps exist was a key factor in forming the Multinational Interoperability Council (MIC), a deliberative, non-binding multinational forum.

THE MULTINATIONAL INTEROPERABILITY COUNCIL

MIC is a senior operator-led, seven-nation forum that identifies and addresses strategic and high-level operational interoperability issues, challenges and gaps. This forum has existed since 1996 and consists of representatives from the Ministries/Departments of Defence of Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States.

MIC identifies interoperability issues and articulates actions which, if nationally implemented by member nations, contribute to more effective multinational/coalition operations.² Its overall goal is to facilitate the exchange of relevant information across national boundaries to support multinational/coalition operations and to encourage national actions to resolve interoperability issues. Its vision is to become a premier, operator-led forum that promotes interoperability among lead nations' militaries and is supported by collaboration with and between government and relevant non-government entities, thus enabling more effective and successful multinational/coalition operations.³ MIC is an excellent collaborative forum for senior operators and their staffs to candidly and objectively discuss the multitude of interoperability issues that face their nations—individually and collectively—in supporting multinational/coalition operations.



Membership in MIC is selective but not exclusive. To be a MIC member, a nation must have the desire, capability, competence and resources to lead a coalition operation and be willing to commit sufficient personnel and resources to fully participate in all MIC meetings. The small number of member nations allows MIC to adroitly balance the benefits of broader perspective and regional coverage while still being responsive and flexible. Nations not meeting MIC's membership requirements can petition for "observer" status and participate in MIC meetings, while organizations can petition for "associate" status. Currently, New Zealand is an observer while the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) Allied Command Transformation and the European Union's Military Staff are associates in MIC.





MIC is led by senior flag or general officers from either the operations or plans branches of each member nation's defence staff who are designated as the "MIC Principals". The US Joint Staff Director of Operations (J3) acts as the Chairman of MIC. The MIC Principals meet annually, or more frequently, if needed, to provide oversight and leadership in managing, responding to and approving MIC's work. This work is performed by the functional and Capstone Multinational Interoperability Working Groups (MIWGs), which review and assess issues related to coalition interoperability, identify solutions and prepare prioritized recommendations for approval by the MIC Principals.

There are six functional MIWGs with members from each of the MIC nation's national staffs who are O-5/O-6 (NATO OF-4/OF-5) level military officers or their civilian equivalent. The functional MIWGs are: Communications & Information Systems (CIS), Concept Development & Experimentation (CD&E), Logistics, Medical, Operations, and Policy & Doctrine (P&D). The MIWGs meet every six months for five days to conduct their business activities.



The Capstone MIWG is composed of the senior O-6 representatives from each MIC member nation. They execute tasks assigned by the MIC Principals and serve as the senior oversight group for MIC during MIWG meetings. The US Joint Staff Deputy Director for Global Operations / Multinational Operations Division Chief serves as the Capstone MIWG Chairman. This officer

also serves as the senior member of the MIC Executive Secretariat (ES) staff which, in addition to managing MIC's day to day business, coordinates and communicates with other multinational organizations and MIC national / MIWG appointed representatives.

The MIC Principals and other national representatives to MIC and the MIWGs express their nation's coordinated national positions on multinational/coalition issues to the extent practical, in accordance with their national laws. Formal approval and implementation of measures agreed to and endorsed by MIC are the responsibility of the member nations and their national staffs.

THE COALITION OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

The overarching context for MIC's work is based upon an understanding of the nature and environment of operations involving multinational and coalition operations. Multinational and coalition operations are diverse entities, where members have divergent national interests, *modi operandi* and equipment. Despite these complexities, multinational and coalition operations are increasingly relevant for international military intervention operations.

The diversity of a coalition strengthens an operation in terms of international legitimacy, sharing the equipment/manpower burden, political/diplomatic advice and national economic resources. The assets brought to a coalition operation by diverse nations provide a range of resources, skills and experience that enhance the chance of success while concurrently demonstrating buy-in and commitment from the international community.

The benefits of multinational diversity are counterbalanced by its difficulties, which include differences in language, equipment, understanding, goals, rules of engagement, national interests, technology, foreign disclosure policies and budgets. Though the nations may want to share information, national policies may prevent them from doing so, particularly when dealing with intelligence information.

MIC PRODUCTS

MIC has completed a variety of products to assist national staffs or coalition task force staffs in building coalitions that are more effective.⁴

MIC published the *Future Coalition Operating Environment* (FCOE) document, which provides a shared vision of the future multinational/coalition environment nations are likely to operate in. The future envisioned in the FCOE document supports the activities associated with the guiding strategic- and operational-level interoperability development. The document identifies the key functions and capabilities that will likely be required to operate effectively within a future coalition.

The *Rapid Reconnaissance Handbook for Humanitarian/Disaster Response* document is a compilation of best practices on humanitarian/disaster reconnaissance fundamentals, methods, approaches, teams, planning, information management and lessons learned. It serves both as a strategic and a high-level operational reference tool for contingency reconnaissance planning in the event of, or as a result of, a humanitarian or disaster situation.

The *Coalition Building Guide* (CBG) addresses the coalition building process with respect to military operations. The CBG introduces the “lead nation” concept, defined as the nation selected by mutual consent of the participating nations in a multinational effort to lead the coalition in operations. The CBG specifically identifies the essential factors that the lead nation’s coalition commander and staff should consider for the effectiveness and efficiency of a coalition.

COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH: A WAY AHEAD FOR MULTINATIONAL INTEROPERABILITY

The majority of intervention operations for the foreseeable future are likely to involve coalitions where nations share the burdens and resources of supporting an operation, while at the same time providing legitimacy for the operation. These benefits, however, are offset by the complex nature of coalitions. MIC

nations working together have the opportunity to address and resolve these complexities, or at least reduce their impact, while maximizing the benefits of coalition operations. MIC nations understand that forming, building, executing and sustaining future coalition operations is only going to become more complex as resources become more limited and dynamic security threats continue to evolve around the globe.

One significant aspect of coalition/multinational operations that MIC has begun to address is the comprehensive approach (CA). Recent operational experiences have indicated that military actions alone cannot resolve a crisis and that close cooperation and interaction between all actors within an area of interest is necessary. Since many of these actors act independently with no hierarchical relationships with other actors, a set of comprehensive procedures is needed to facilitate effective and efficient cooperation between all actors.

This comprehensive approach to operations, the collaboration of military and non-military forces and organizations in crisis management, is currently being discussed in a wide variety of national, international and supranational organizations and fora. However, due to the large number of actors, each focusing on different, partly incompatible objectives, neither an internationally agreed conceptual basis, nor an established set of terms and definitions is yet available. Promising developments in the MIC nations and some of the NATO and European Union nations are all aiming in similar directions. MIC intends to capitalize on these existing efforts by focusing on the military contributions to CA and by examining the friction points between military forces and all other actors in crisis management operations. Eventually, MIC hopes to use this analysis to create new CA products that will be useful to strategic and operational planners in preparing for and executing coalition/multinational operations using the CA across the wide spectrum of crisis management scenarios.





The bridging of doctrine, communications, logistics and planning—coupled with a full understanding of each potential partner’s capabilities and limitations—will enhance the success of future coalition operations and promote a safer world environment. To this end, MIC’s main work efforts for 2009 are focused on the following areas:

- The CIS MIWG is continuing the development and implementation of a secure MIC wide area network that facilitates the sharing of classified information between MIC member nations.
- The CD&E MIWG is developing a common CA framework that establishes a common understanding of CA.
- The Logistics MIWG is finalizing and publishing bilateral mutual logistics support agreements between MIC nations that allow nations to support one another logistically during coalition operations.
- The Medical MIWG is finalizing and publishing bilateral mutual medical support agreements amongst the MIC nations that will allow nations to share medical support and resources as needed.
- The Operations MIWG, under the CA umbrella, is investigating the integration

of post-conflict activities into a “best practices” stabilization handbook.

- The P&D MIWG is exploring the requirements, strategies and procedures to transition from a coalition end state under military control to a “follow-on” civilian authority (United Nations, host nation, etc.).

MIC is working diligently on interoperability issues to ensure future coalitions are stronger and more effective. MIC’s efforts are assisting potential coalition lead nations in working more effectively together before, during and after a crisis.

For more information about MIC, navigate to <http://jcs.dtic.mil/j3/mic/> ■

List of Abbreviations

| | |
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| CA | comprehensive approach |
| CBG | Coalition Building Guide |
| CD&E | Concept Development & Experimentation |
| CIS | Communications & Information Systems |
| ES | Executive Secretariat |
| FCOE | Future Coalition Operating Environment |
| MIC | Multinational Interoperability Council |
| MIWG | Multinational Interoperability Working Groups |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| P&D | Policy & Doctrine |

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NOTES

1. *Coalition Military Operations: The Way Ahead Through Cooperability* (Arlington, VA: U.S.-Center for Research and Education on Strategy and Technology, 2000), 30. Available online at <http://www.uscrest.org/CMOfinalReport.pdf> (accessed February 25, 2009).

2. *Charter of the Multinational Interoperability Council* (Washington: Multinational Interoperability Council, 2008). To request a copy, contact the MIC ES at mic.es@js.pentagon.mil.

3. *Strategic Guidance Document* (Washington: Multinational Interoperability Council, 2008). To request a copy, contact the MIC ES at mic.es@js.pentagon.mil.

4. Information on these MIC documents as well as other MIC products is available at <http://jcs.dtic.mil/j3/mic/doc.html> (accessed February 25, 2009).