

## How to efficiently share counterterrorism knowledge? Lessons learned, best practices and NATO DEEP eAcademy recommendations

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Experience in recent years, including intense technological development and the COVID-19 pandemic, has led to an increased interest in web-based training. E-learning allows learners to absorb knowledge at a pace that is tailored to their abilities and teachers to be more flexible in their delivery. The same circumstances that have created new forms of learning and working in a technologically developed society have triggered the rise of hybrid threats and given terrorists modern tools. In response to this trend the North Atlantic Alliance established, among others, NATO DEEP eAcademy – an entity from the sphere of education and training, whose task is to develop optimal solutions for implementing the assumptions of NATO Defence Education Enhancement Programme, i.e. a programme supporting the transformation of the military education systems of NATO partner countries. The director of this institution, Prof. **PIOTR GAWLICZEK**, talks about what NATO DEEP eAcademy offers these countries and the Polish contribution to this project.

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*Teachers will not be and should not be replaced by e-learning platforms. But those who don't use e-learning platforms will be driven out by those who are creatively using them.*

P. Gawliczek

**Damian Szlachter: NATO Defence Education Enhancement Programme is a programme and institution at NATO Headquarters from which the Alliance's partner countries can benefit. Since when has NATO DEEP been in operation and why was it established?**

**Piotr Gawliczek:** To explain the purpose of NATO DEEP, it is necessary to go back to its establishment in 2007. Until then, NATO lacked a dedicated entity responsible for training and education at the partner nation level, as well as for creating a unified approach to the organisation of such institutions, the development of their staff, both civilian and military, and their curricula. The launch of NATO DEEP aimed to address these needs by delivering essential knowledge, skills, and experiences within partner nations' environments. After several years, the results of the work of NATO DEEP can already be seen, which today promotes NATO values in 15 partner countries and shares best practices within Higher Military Education Systems.

**What is the security significance of NATO DEEP? What does the implementation of this programme look like in practice?**

NATO DEEP is an investment in the security of individual countries that contributes to the security of the Alliance. This programme is a vehicle for reform, offering practical, tailored support to its participants in the development and reorganisation of their military educational institutions at both officer and non-commissioned officer levels. Collaboration with partner countries takes place on peer-to-peer basis. We start by identifying the needs and gaps in their military education, then by supporting staff development

and curriculum development NATO DEEP enables partners to modernize and professionalise their education structure and build quality assurance processes. We have eight reference curricula. These cover topics such as defence institution building, professional military education for officers and non-commissioned officers, cybersecurity, counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and others. DEEP also emphasises pedagogy, providing the latest teaching methods and fostering critical thinking in the classroom. An extension of our areas of cooperation is the annual Clearing House on Defence Education (its tenth edition, in 2021, was held in Kraków – editor’s note), which is a forum for the exchange of experiences and needs for Allies and partners as well as experts within the Partnership for Peace Consortium and NATO DEEP.

**You are the director of NATO DEEP eAcademy. Please tell us what this unit does.**

NATO DEEP eAcademy plays a crucial role in NATO DEEP mission. Its main goal is to foster a common understanding of NATO values among the research and teaching personnel of military universities, both civilian and military. The academy identifies and disseminates best practices in military education and training, complementing national efforts in this field. NATO DEEP eAcademy has introduced several solutions to support NATO DEEP and facilitate our events. Firstly, **NATO DEEP ADL Portal**, which is a comprehensive platform for exchanging knowledge and generating ideas related to distance learning. This portal, based on the LMS ILIAS<sup>1</sup> installation, aims to enhance cooperation within the program, increase the program’s reach as well as popularize and disseminate ideas. It also serves as a compendium of expertise in the use and implementation of new technologies for distance-learning education and training courses. We developed a strategy for distance learning support. One of the tools designed for this is **BigBlueButton** (BBB). It is an open-source web conferencing system. This tool, supported by individual developers and commercial companies worldwide, has been customized for our use within NATO DEEP Programme. It offers various functionalities to facilitate interaction between teachers and students, such as audio

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<sup>1</sup> IlIAS is a free, open-source learning management system (LMS) – editor’s note.

sharing, break-out rooms, chatting, emojis, hand gestures, multi-use whiteboards, polling, screen sharing, video sharing, and webcams.

Additionally, we recently introduced IACUBUS, a mobile app inspired by the ILIAS Pegasus project. IACUBUS was developed by NATO DEEP eAcademy developers' team in cooperation with the Polish Association for Security. The key features of IACUBUS include providing access to files, folders, courses, and groups while offline, automatic synchronization when new materials are uploaded, a 'WLAN-only' mode to save data volume by downloading only in WiFi, and a maximum quota setting to save storage space on smartphones. The application is available for download in the App Store and will soon be available on the Google Play Store, compatible with the Android system.

**We talk about supporting military education and personnel. But is it only about conventional warfare issues? Is there also a place in NATO DEEP eAcademy for topics related to terrorist prevention and the fight against this threat?**

There are several key projects at eAcademy that focus on counterterrorism awareness. Let me highlight four of them. The first one is **Counterterrorism Reference Curriculum (CTRC)**. This is a comprehensive reference document designed to provide guidelines and best practices for counterterrorism education. The second one is **e-Counterterrorism Reference Curriculum (e-CTRC)** is an e-learning course based on the CTRC. This is an accessible training on counterterrorism principles and practices. We have also developed **DEEP Dive Podcast Series in which experts share their insights and discuss various** counterterrorism topics. **Copernicus Forum conference series**, on the other hand, facilitates discussions, exchanges, and collaborations on counterterrorism among professionals and experts in the field. These initiatives are designed to enhance knowledge, share best practices and foster collaboration among NATO members and partner nations, ultimately strengthening our collective counterterrorism capabilities.

**I understand that the CTRC is the base document in NATO in relation to counterterrorism topics. What was the basis for the guidelines contained therein?**

The CTRC is a comprehensive document. It offers an overview of terrorist ideologies, motivations, and methods, along with contemporary counterterrorism practices and potential future projections. It draws on historical examples to provide a well-rounded perspective. This project is the result of close cooperation between NATO DEEP and NATO's Counterterrorism Section, as well as the Partnership for Peace Consortium.

In June 2020, NATO launched its first-ever CTRC. This intention was to support interested Allies and partner countries in enhancing their capabilities to develop national skills and improve counterterrorism strategies adequately to the risks arising from internal circumstances.

This programme was created by 100 experts from nations across five continents, including Tunisia, Jordan, and Mauritania, as well as multiple international organisations. It is worth to note that it was being created during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, the threat of terrorism and the resulting security challenges, have not diminished. This was pointed out by Dr. Antonio Missiroli, NATO's Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges, who stated that the CTRC fits perfectly with the objectives of (...) *supporting improved awareness, strengthening resilience, and building counterterrorism capacity of both Allies and partners.*

**What benefits can partner countries achieve by using NATO DEEP and CTRC?**

They can use NATO DEEP to implement professional education in their military institutions and CTRC to develop their own counterterrorism courses, tailored to specific needs. Implementing CTRC provides a robust, holistic and nuanced understanding of terrorism and enhances counterterrorism effectiveness. The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and other longer-term trends led NATO to work on introducing the CTRC as an Advanced Distributed Learning (ADL) course. This is how the e-CTRC came into being.

**NATO DEEP has its own eAcademy. I understand that its equivalent for the CTRC is e-CTRC. What does this course consist of?**

NATO officially launched its standardized counter-terrorism curriculum in 2020. This was the first such initiative within international organisations. Since then, experts have been refining its formula, converting it into a comprehensive online course, known as the e-CTRC, which is being made available in further language versions, including Polish since November 2023. The course is designed to help participants understand the challenges posed by international terrorism and develop effective policies to deal with such incidents.

**The e-CTRC course has been running for several years now. Can you share your first summaries?**

The course development involved two dedicated teams and 17 experts working on content creation. We also had 13 beta-testers involved in the process. The course features over 350 graphics, including diagrams, pictures, and images, and around 160 interactive elements such as flashcards, timelines, sorting activities, case studies, accordions<sup>2</sup>, and hotspots.

The learning is based on the analysis of more than 20 case studies and more than 40 references for further reading. Within four modules, there are 182 knowledge check questions (21 questions in module one, 53 questions in module two, 33 questions in module three and 75 questions in module four, respectively), which helps maintain concentration and reinforces learning. There are 47 detailed questions in the final tests, summarizing each theme, with around 10 to 13 questions per theme. These include multiple choice, multiple answer, type-in, and matching activities. Additionally, there is a 15-question feedback survey at the end of the course. The estimated time to complete the entire course is around 8 hours. Upon finishing the final test and the satisfaction survey, participants

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<sup>2</sup> Accordion is a type of menu on a website that displays a list of headings stacked on top of each other. When clicked on (or an interaction with keyboard or screen reader is triggered), these headings will either reveal or hide the associated content (editor's note).

will automatically receive a certificate of completion. The course is available to users with active accounts on NATO DEEP ADL Portal.

The importance of the creation of the e-CTRC was emphasised by, among others, James Appathurai, Deputy Assistant Secretary General of NATO's Emerging Security Challenges Division, who stated: *The launch of the e-CTRC demonstrates NATO's determination to fight terrorism.* Burcu San, Deputy Assistant Secretary General of NATO's Operations Division, added: *Through the CTRC, the Alliance has helped Ukraine and Jordan to develop their own tailored counter-terrorism strategies and courses. Since then, there has been growing interest from other NATO partners to utilize the curriculum (...).* Finally, Dr. Sajjan Gohel, editor of the CTRC, pointed out that: *e-CTRC reflects NATO's innovative capabilities by providing a hands-on learning tool (...) and (...) serves as a platform for integrated, in-depth, and critical understanding of terrorism.*

### **You also mentioned the DEEP Dive project. What is it about?**

DEEP Dive is a platform for podcasts and webinars that offers commentary on a wide range of topics, including international security and defence, counterterrorism, and geopolitical current events. The main goal of this project is to inform about prevailing global challenges and provide knowledge to facilitate their understanding. DEEP Dive works with academics and presents the results of their research, as well as the viewpoints of journalists and politicians. The entire project is overseen by Dr. Sajjan Gohel and members of his research team - Victoria Jones and Marcus Andreopoulos.

The goal of the DEEP Dive is not only to discuss these global issues but also to learn more about the individuals being interviewed. This provides a unique perspective on what has shaped their careers and their current as well as future research. It is important to note that the opinions expressed in the DEEP Dive series are solely those of the individuals involved and do not necessarily represent those of NATO or more precisely - DEEP.

We are about to launch a series of books containing transcripts from DEEP Dive episodes. The first volume will consist of 20 episodes released between November 2021 and July 2022, the second will cover episodes 21-40, while the third will cover episodes 41-60.

**The Copernicus Forum, in turn, is a project aimed at experts. Poles took part in its creation. Please introduce it to our readers.**

The Copernicus Forum is a project of NATO DEEP eAcademy, introduced jointly with the Polish Association for Security. Online education is the education of the future, its potential is efficiency and fewer restrictions. We launched the Copernicus Forum to make online education more accessible and professional. It is a meeting place for educators, experts and learners to exchange ideas, explore innovative solutions, both in the field of online education and security, and support the digital learning environment. The Copernicus Forum features lectures by renowned professors and experts on trends, best practices and challenges in military and safety education and other related topics. The events are recorded. In the future, they will be translated and become a repository of knowledge for a broader audience. We are also planning an interactive part in the form of sessions, Q&A panels with networking opportunities. We believe that this project can positively change online education and have a beneficial impact on security, both external and internal.

The Copernicus Forum was officially launched on 22 November 2023 at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. The Forum was inaugurated with a lecture by aforementioned Dr. Sajjan Gohel. The second edition, which took place on 25 April 2024 and, like the first, took place in Olsztyn, was entitled ‘NATO and the New Learning Ecosystem – Towards Intellectual Interoperability. NATO Mission Iraq and Iraqi e-Learning Portal as Modus Operandi’. Our guest speakers were Col Firas Al-Bawi from the Iraqi Defense University for Military Studies (DUfMS) and OF-3 Mervin Munnecom from NATO Mission Iraq. The forum is supported by the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn and the National Defence University of Ukraine in Kyiv.

Interviewed by: Damian Szlachter



Assoc. Prof. Piotr Gawliczek,  
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NATO DEEP eAcademy Director (since 2020). He has implemented e-learning/ADL system solutions, based on the LMS ILIAS and the BigBlueButton platforms, in many military and civilian educational entities. His research activities are focused on Advanced Distributed Learning (ADL), information and communications technologies (ICT), mobile learning and AI/VR/AR/MR solutions within education and training ecosystem. He has written numerous publications on questions of e-learning, Bologna Process, asymmetric threats, and leadership. Doctor Honoris Causa (2020) of the National Defence University of Ukraine in Kyiv, Honorary Professor (2023) of the National Defence University of Ukraine in Kyiv, and Professor Honoris Causa (2023) of the Korolov Zhytomyr Military Institute – ZMI.