

SHORT COMMUNICATION

CONFERENCE REPORT: FUTURE FORCES FORUM PRAGUE, WORLD MEDICAL CONGRESS (CEBIRAM) 2018

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Abstract

The Future Forces Forum in Prague occurs biennially and offers a premier venue to exchange best practices, ideas, academic and technical debate with key military decision makers on the future of military medicine. In the over 13 events in modern times, all sectors of military and defense forces have shared experiences, strategies of deterrence, common defense structures and modalities to mitigate human suffering and reduce the morbidity and mortality associated with conflict, war and disaster. Czech Republic Ministry of Defense Brigadier General Bubenik has taken the lead with this event to drive future innovation and all things battlefield medicine, to include chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats, with overall emphasis on emerging global health security threats. Under his tutelage, Brig. Gen. Bubenik has ushered in a marque venue for such debate at the Future Forces Forum, Prague 2018 (FFF 2018). The expert event took place from October 17th to the 19th, 2018 in Prague. This short conference report should serve as a synopsis of the key takeaways, in addition to highlighting some core conclusions to support all medical operations across NATO and at the civilian-military interface.

Key words: Military Medicine; NATO; battlefield Medicine; health security; Lessons Learned; Hybrid war; Asymmetric war; CBRN Threats; NATO key priorities; Interoperability

The Event

The threats today to defense and security-related interventions are significant and in some sectors, unprecedented. Environmental degradation and climate change, infectious diseases, hybrid and asymmetric war, a NATO Article 5 scenario conflict, near-peer adversaries, multi-domain battle, mass migration and people flow, in addition to many other are increasing in a growing multipolar world. NATO and NATO partner nations may have to respond in mutual cooperation aid to mitigate disaster and catastrophe aftermath, requiring interoperability effectiveness

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until now, unanticipated and underprepared. Never before has the civil-military cooperation and crisis preparedness space been more prescient to these global health security threats. The Forum was split into a Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) and Medical events respectively. This short review will attempt to join these two separate events under one synopsis as it relates to health security and NATO key priorities.

Indeed, NATO and NATO partner states face a wide range of events involving Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in several countries in the Middle East, Africa and Europe; and chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) materials deployed worldwide against civil and military targets at an alarming pace (Clark, 2015, Blackwell, 2017). Threats and risks emanating from WMD and CBRN materials should not be underestimated. Effective responses to CBRN events require both offensive and defensive measures to prevent and, if prevention fails, to mitigate effects caused by consequences of such an event; thus, the access to timely, accurate and relevant information is a critical component of any CBRN response, heavily supported by the diverse, multipurpose capabilities necessary to provide the operational flexibility for a wide range of future CBRN response efforts (Clark, et al, 2015, Dokos, 2014 and Mesterhazy, 2017). In addition, it is vital to maximize effectiveness with civil-military cooperation to counter CBRN related risks, most notably to be prepared, equipped and have capability to respond to a CBRN multi-hazard emergency situation.

Topics Discussed

The civil-military interface and enhancement of interoperability to prevent and response to crisis are of great need, and this congress gathering did a great job at addressing the issues with subject matter experts and leadership input. The kick-off event included Czech Deputy Minister of Health Professor Roman Prymula, MD, DrSc.; Mrs. Dana Drabova, the Chair of the Office, Czech State Office for Nuclear Safety; Mr. William Alberque, the Director of the NATO Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Arms Control, Disarmament, and Non-Proliferation Centre (ACDC); and NATO Brigadier General Zoltán Bubenik, Chairman CEBIRAM Congress and Surgeon General, Director of Military Medical Agency of Armed Forces of the Czech Republic. This highly specialized panel discussed impending threats and challenges for NATO medical structures in current and future war and conflict. The panel also commented about a NATO Article 5 scenario, leadership and strategic challenges in a changing global landscape and global health security threats for NATO in the future.

Throughout the medical event and on subsequent panels, some key topics discussed and echoed by all participants and exchanges included forms of Medical Support during War and Humanitarian Crises, the need for a robust Lessons Learned (LL) from process from medical operations, missions, response to terrorist attacks, crisis situations and civil-military exercises. With this, force health support and protection were highlighted with best practices and best next steps to enhance interoperability for future forces. One of the main outcomes of this great event was the process of Medical Concept Development and Experimentation, in exercises and through research and development. Indeed, medical Innovation and Technology Implementation is an area that will be of great focus under Brig. General Bubenik at COMEDS to provide force health support for all NATO and NATO nations. More concepts reviewed also included prevention from, protection against and response to hybrid, asymmetric and CBRN threats from near-peer adversaries and rogue armed groups.

NATO Centre of Excellence for Military Medicine, COMEDS and Lessons Learned

One of the main challenges facing the military medical system in NATO doctrine "Principles and Policies of Medical Support" (MC 326-3) is that the public expectation of high quality medical support is increasing while risks are growing across all sectors (Gubás, 2015 and Ruzicka, Humlicek. And Witt, 2012). The highest medical decision-making body in NATO, the Committee of the Chiefs of Military Medical Services (COMEDS), supported the establishment of the NATO Centre of Excellence for Military Medicine (MILMED COE) to coordinate efforts to advance Military Medicine across the alliance. Hungary as the Framework Nation, along with the Sponsoring Nations have created MILMED COE which remains the marquee venue for academics, researchers, warfighters, command staff and all those voices related in support of medical best practices to exchange ideas and incubate medical innovation and lessons learned to save life on the battlefield. The North Atlantic Council accredited and activated the NATO MILMED COE in Budapest in 2009, which delegated many subject matter experts (SMEs) to FFF 2018 who shared their activities and lessons learned.

The position of Director of MILMED COE rotates between Hungary and Germany, and currently it is Director Col. Dr. László Fazekas, the Deputy Director is Col. Dr. Salvatore Schmidt (DEU) and the Chief of Interoperability Branch is Col. (GS) Petr Kral of the Czech Ministry of Defense. This leadership change came as Col. Peter Majovsky had redeployed back to the Czech Republic after 3 years of excellent service and guidance.

Under the direction of Col. Fazekas, the MILMED COE has ushered in a Lessons Learned (LL) process where SMEs can share the clinical and medical command across disciplines to help mitigate mortality and morbidity from war and disaster where NATO forces respond and deploy. The civil-military interface is led by US Navy Capt. John Taylor who was not in attendance at FFF 2018 but has made multiple processes to encourage information sharing and overall enhancement of NATO medical structures through the Lessons Learned process. And what better way to implement and test these best practices than a comprehensive medical exercise, presented at FFF 2018: the “Vigorous Warrior 2019 (VW’19) NATO Joint Medical Exercise.” This medical event will be conducted by MILMED COE in cooperation with the Romanian Medical Directorate in April 2019 and hosted by NATO member state, Romania. The outcomes and overall lessons learned will be shared and made available for all NATO structures to learn from. Such medical exercise are a great venue to test systems, interoperability, command and control structures in the medical domain and highlight gaps associated with multi-domain battle and overall medical readiness. MILMED COE is driving the way to prepare NATO with the best tools for medical best practices and processes with evidence-based medical practices.

Summary

Future Forces Forum in Prague offers a premier venue to exchange best practices, ideas, academic and technical debate with key military decision makers on the future. All sectors of military and defense forces share experiences, strategies of deterrence, common defense structures and modalities to mitigate human suffering and reduce the morbidity and mortality associated with conflict, war and disaster. Czech Ministry of Defense Brigadier General Bubenik’s leadership drives medical innovation for battlefield medicine. The emphasis on emerging global health security threats requires the interdisciplinary approach and lessons learned process from not only the FFF, but also MILMED COE. This short conference report serves as a brief synopsis of the highlights and takeaways, in addition to highlighting conclusions to support all medical operations across NATO and at the civilian-military interface.

Abbreviations

CBRN: Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear threats
CEBIRAM: CBRN Conference as a part of World CBRN & Medical Congress
COMEDS: Committee of the Chiefs of Military Medical Services
FFF: Future Forces Forum
GS: General Staff
LL: Lessons Learned
MILMED COE: NATO Centre of Excellence for Military Medicine
NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
SME: Subject Matter Expert
WMD/ACDC: Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Arms Control, Disarmament, and Non-Proliferation Centre
WMD: Weapons of Mass Destruction

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors state they have no conflicts of interest. No outside funds or human subjects were used in the methodology or analysis of the drafting of this short conference report.

Useful Links

Military Medicine COE: <https://www.coemed.org/>

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