

Key Issues and Trends 2026

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In this factsheet you can read about the JALLC's annual Key Issues and Trends report covering 2025 (and early 2026). This report is intended to provide NATO senior leadership with an overview of the most significant issues and trends currently in Lessons Learned. Download a full copy of the report from the classified version of the NATO Lessons Learned Portal, or contact the JALLC to obtain a copy.*



Introduction

Lessons Learned generate insights that should enable NATO to adapt quickly and transform in line with conditions on the ground. However, while there is evidence that NATO captures and shares Lessons Learned effectively, there is less evidence that these insights are consistently translated into concrete actions that drive organisational change. In some cases, follow-on action appears limited or absent, and the necessary improvements have not materialised. In this report, the JALLC frames these recurring shortfalls as Key Issues and Trends (KIT).

Overview



- Source base: 141 issues and trends extracted from selected LL reports.
- Down-selection: Prioritized and refined to 12 candidate KITs; deeper analysis conducted on nine.
- Method: For each KIT, the team mapped relevant initiatives, examined gaps, and explored root causes.
- Outputs: Nine final KITs (not listed in this fact sheet), plus broader systemic considerations and insights to support a more positive learning culture aligned with NATO's Audacious Learning.



NATO's learning system is intended to ensure the Alliance can apply Lessons Learned and adapt at the speed of relevance. The persistence of the KITs indicates that, despite extensive activity and investment, NATO is not consistently converting learning into enterprise-level change at the pace required for warfighting readiness. The KITs point to recurring, Alliance-relevant shortfalls that endure across commands, domains, and reporting cycles—suggesting systemic friction in turning insights into implemented improvements.



NATO's Strategic Context

In 2025, NATO's strategic context for learning was shaped by the following themes:

- High operational demand alongside major adaptation efforts: NATO advanced deterrence and defence through readiness and capability initiatives, including air and missile defence developments, accelerated counter-unmanned aircraft system efforts, and multi-domain enabling capabilities—especially command and control and decision advantage—supported by Digital Transformation initiatives and advances in space-based ISR integration. NATO also pursued industrial scaling and innovation transition, and stress-tested readiness through large-scale exercises.
- An expanding and more complex threat environment: The Alliance faced challenges ranging from small drones to advanced missile threats (including hypersonic), persistent hybrid pressure, and a growing requirement for resilience and civil preparedness. Simultaneously, NATO emphasised the need to enable and sustain large-scale operations through improved multi-domain command and control, logistics, transportation, and medical support—against the backdrop of industrial constraints and supply-chain vulnerabilities.
- A more contested future operating environment: Persistent cyber confrontation, increasing threats to undersea infrastructure, and a congested/contested space domain are driving requirements for faster integration of emerging technologies and uncrewed systems, improved situational awareness, and stronger interoperability—particularly in sensitive regions such as the High North.
- From milestone-setting to delivery: NATO is positioned to move from capability milestones to outcomes via defence planning and demand aggregation, while scaling rapid adoption mechanisms and improving the realism of training, trials, and experimentation by linking testing activities with operational experimentation.

Integrating the intent of the KIT report

Despite multiple transformational programmes aimed at delivering future capability solutions, the KITs show that urgent operational gaps continue to persist and that the translation of LL into action is not reliably producing near-term effects. The report therefore underscores the need for:

1. Stronger mechanisms that connect learning to decisions and resourcing (so insights generate accountable follow-through),
2. A deliberate balance between long-term transformation and near-term interim measures that close today's readiness shortfalls, and
3. Coordinated roadmaps and governance in priority areas to align currently independent initiatives, create structured opportunities to test and learn, and reduce duplication while accelerating delivery.



You can download a copy of the report from the JALLC Analysis Community of Interest in the classified version of the NLLP subject to access and appropriate security clearances.