



# Cognitive Effects in Combined Arms: A Case Study of the Division 2025

Five keys to implement information activities more effectively in the German-Dutch Army structures

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### **Cognitive Effects in Combined Arms: A Case Study of the Division 2025:**

Five keys to implement information activities more effectively in the German-Dutch Army structures

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# Introduction

The use of information technology and how it connects people around the world is defining the 21st century. It not only changes the way people live and communicate but also how they fight. The digital revolution, paired with rapid urbanisation, has led to a military operating environment<sup>1</sup> best described as a highly digitalised war amongst the people.<sup>2</sup> This omnipresence of information technology makes it necessary to more effectively integrate so-called information activities<sup>3</sup>, which aim to change human behaviour, into military operations.

Traditionally, war is considered “an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will”<sup>4</sup>. It is ultimately a tool used to change human behaviour. Recent developments in NATO doctrine on Strategic Communication and Information Operations therefore highlight the need to influence human decision-making and behaviour; in other words, the need to create cognitive effects. Most notably, NATO is adapting its capstone doctrine, AJP-01 Allied Joint Doctrine, which serves as the foundation for all NATO doctrine and the national doctrines of its 30 member states. It describes the timeless nature of conflict and puts behavioural change at the centre of NATO operations.

In the light of technological and doctrinal changes, this paper aims to provide practical advice on how to adapt military command structures to use communication capabilities and specialised staff as a tool to achieve this behavioural change. Since it is designed to be a bridge between recent developments in NATO doctrine and their implementation, it uses doctrine as its primary source. The paper is led by the assumption that higher level commands (strategic, operational, and tactical up to corps formations) are currently generally equipped with specialised communication capabilities and staff (see Figure 1 for the levels of operations in the German-Dutch Army Structures).<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the focus lies instead on the lower tactical level (division and brigade staffs), where the ability to employ effective information activities is still considered to be underdeveloped.

To make this paper’s findings more tangible and of immediate use, the German-Dutch Division 2025 project is used as a case study for a tactical formation. Project Division 2025 combines the German 10 Armoured Division and Dutch 13 Light Brigade to a combined high readiness force for collective defence by 2025. This paper’s research question is thus: “Using Division 2025 as a case study, what actions should the Royal Netherlands Army and German Army take to implement information activities more effectively in their structures?” Although it aims to provide advice for Dutch and German land force military leaders, this paper’s foundation in NATO doctrine also renders its findings applicable to other Allied land forces. It is important to note that the findings of this paper are not meant to generally enhance the importance of the

- 1 Operating environment: A composite of the conditions, circumstances and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander.” (NATO, ‘AJP 3.10, Allied Joint Doctrine for Information Operations’ [Edition B Version 1], 2021, p. Lex-7).
- 2 Rupert Smith, ‘The Utility of Force’, *The Art of War in the Modern World*, 2006.
- 3 Information Activities: “Activities performed by any capability or means, focused on creating cognitive effects.” (NATO, ‘AAP-6, NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions’, 2021, p. 68).
- 4 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*. Volume I (Floating Press, 2010), p. 44.
- 5 The levels of operations are strategical, operational, and tactical. This paper defines a corps as a higher tactical level and brigade as a lower tactical level. For further information, refer to: NATO, ‘AJP-01, NATO Allied Joint Doctrine [Edition F Version 1]’, 2022, pp. 36-37.

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