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FACING THE NEW REALITY: NATO ADAPTATION TO DETER RUSSIAN HYBRID OPERATIONAL METHODS IN EASTERN EUROPE

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Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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Maj M.J.D. Mallette

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I think that this debate between conventional and irregular is quite artificial. Most of the people that I talk to are now increasingly talking about, instead of one or the other, a spectrum of conflict in which you may face at the same time an insurgent with an AK-47 and his supporting element with a highly sophisticated ballistic missile, where you -- where you have what we have been calling in the last year or so complex hybrid warfare. And so you really need to be prepared across a spectrum to deal with these capabilities.

- US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates: *DoD News Briefing, 6 April 2009*

NATO's relevance, particularly in the eyes of Eastern European partners and allies, is being challenged. The Russian sponsored hybrid war in the Ukraine has led to criticism of NATO's ability to counter the operational methodology that Russia used to seize key military infrastructure in Crimea and incite a pro-Russian nationalist insurgency in areas of eastern Ukraine. Baltic state members of the Alliance have raised the question of what role NATO should play in the containment of Russian adventurism, concerned that Russian success in the Ukraine could be repeated in their own countries.¹ As a result NATO credibility in Eastern Europe relies heavily on protecting the sovereignty of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania by deterring aggressive Russian military action.² While collective defence arrangements provide a valid deterrence against widespread state-on-state conflict, in the context of hybrid war,³ the Alliance must adapt to reassure its Eastern European Allies and present a credible deterrent to aggressive

¹ Anne Applebaum. "The Victory of Ukraine." The New York Review of Books. Last modified April 7, 2016. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/04/07/the-victory-of-ukraine/>.

² Edward Lucas, "NATO's Baltic Dilemma." Centre for European Policy Analysis. Last modified February 8, 2016. <http://cepa.org/index/?id=4740fcb3becc721b7ac9723ecab727ea>.

³ Prolific writer on hybrid warfare Dr. Russell Glenn defines the hybrid threat as an, "Adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs some combination of political, military, economic, social, and information means, and conventional, irregular, catastrophic, terrorism, and disruptive/criminal conflict methods. It may include a combination of state and non-state actors." – see Russell W. Glenn, *All Glory is Fleeting: Insights from the Second Lebanon War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2008): 5.

use of hybrid methods.⁴ Framed in this context, this paper will illustrate that NATO has adapted to the Russian threat by realigning its forces, developing new capabilities and formalizing new doctrine that provides a relevant deterrent against hybrid threats in Eastern Europe.

This paper will examine the threat that Russia poses on stability in Eastern Europe and identify factors that NATO must consider in changing the Alliance's approach to resurgent Russian influence in Eastern Europe. Next it will illustrate how NATO has considered these factors and adapted conventional deterrence to meet the hybrid threat represented by Russian instigation and support of ethnic conflict in the Ukraine. Consideration will be given to the cyber dimension of the hybrid threat and NATO's initiatives in cyber-defence. Finally, it will examine the ability of the hybrid actor to create instability by leveraging existing social conditions. Based on recent experience in expeditionary humanitarian interventions NATO has focussed on the development of the comprehensive approach doctrine as a way to address the root causes of instability. This doctrine will be examined to illustrate its potential as a deterrent to the hybrid methodology.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Russia has used proxy soldiers, unmarked Special Forces, intimidation and propaganda, all to lay a thick fog of confusion; to obscure its true purpose in Ukraine; and to attempt deniability. So NATO must be ready to deal with every aspect of this new reality from wherever it comes. And that means we must look closely at how we prepare for; deter; and if necessary defend against hybrid warfare.

- NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, 25 March 2015

⁴ Robert Burns and Deb Reichmann. "Carter: NATO Ponders Rotational Ground Force in Baltic States - Europe - Stripes." Stars and Stripes. 2 May 2016. <http://www.stripes.com/news/europe/carter-nato-ponders-rotational-ground-force-in-baltic-states-1.407494>.

Deterring Russian military aggression demands an understanding of what Russia seeks to achieve through its policy in Eastern Europe. Russia's approach in the region emphasizes Russian influence as a central concern, with Moscow dominated economic integration and an eventual restoration of some measure of imperial control as the ultimate goal.⁵ In the context of the crisis in the Ukraine, Russian policy also seeks to dissuade NATO encroachment in Russia's near abroad and protect strategically valuable assets such as the naval base at Sevastopol. It is unlikely that Russia views its action in the Ukraine in isolation so it is useful to consider the hybrid conflict as a manifestation of a wider geostrategic plan which seeks to re-establish Russia's great power status.⁶

Considering the political and ethnic landscape among NATO's Baltic State members, Russia's hybrid threat is more than just a strategic nuisance to NATO.⁷ Although not an immediate direct threat to NATO, Russian sponsored hostility in the Ukraine challenges the security status quo in the region and reduces stability. Combined with suspicions that Russia is responsible for information operations and cyber-attacks targeting Latvia and Estonia, Russia has undermined the validity of NATO collective defence by proceeding with an operational method that does not rely on overt armed attack.⁸ The immediate risk is that Eastern Europe will continue to be destabilized by such threats and that NATO will increasingly be viewed as unable to provide a credible response to Russian aggressions. Through prosecution of a cheap hybrid

⁵ Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (Harper Collins : New York, 1997), 98-99.

⁶ Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: The Future of Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West* (New York, N.Y. : Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 120.

⁷ Brian P. Fleming, "The Hybrid Threat Concept: Contemporary War, Military Planning and the Advent of Unrestricted Operational Art." (School of Advanced Military Studies United States Army Command and General Staff College Fort Leavenworth : Kansas, 2011): 52. <http://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/2753.pdf>.

⁸ Jānis Bērziņš, "Russian New Generation Warfare: Implications for Europe" European Leadership Network. (2006): 8. http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/russian-new-generation-warfare-implications-for-europe_2006.html

war, fought primarily through proxy forces, Russia has effectively changed the political and security dynamics in Eastern Europe.⁹

While there remains a growing need to define the political objectives of the Western powers with respect to a resurgent Russia, Russia's activities in the Ukraine have reminded Allies of the core mission of NATO. Through collective security, NATO must discourage further military opportunism by providing credible conventional deterrence with the capability, capacity and readiness to persuade Russia that the costs of military action are not worth either the immediate or long term benefits.

CONVENTIONAL DETERRENCE

Hybrid warfare is a probe, a test of our resolve to resist and to defend ourselves. And it can be a prelude to a more serious attack; because behind every hybrid strategy, there are conventional forces, increasing the pressure and ready to exploit any opening. We need to demonstrate that we can and will act promptly whenever and wherever necessary.

- NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, 25 March 2015

The challenge NATO faces is determining what level of conventional deterrence is necessary and relevant to prevent a crisis similar to the Ukraine from emerging in the Baltics. Baltic Allies; Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, who are unable to counter Russia themselves, fear that the initial phase of Russian hybrid war has already begun inside their borders.¹⁰ Concerned that Russia has adapted and already conducted unrestricted asymmetric operations inside their sovereign territories, the Baltic Allies consistently champion deployment of large bodies of NATO troops, to be permanently based in the Baltics, as the primary method to realistically

⁹ Florin-Marian Barbu, "Considerations Concerning Hybrid War." *Strategic Impact*, No 2 (2015): 51. <http://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=296552>.

¹⁰ Bērziņš, *Russian New Generation Warfare*, 1.

counter the Russian hybrid threat.¹¹ In this way, the hybrid threat challenges NATO's ability to contribute to regional stability through traditional conventional military deterrence. As a result, the Alliance has had to adapt its conventional means to deter military aggression.

Readiness

The challenge of deterring the hybrid threat lies in facing the likelihood that military operations will begin at high intensity with irregular conflict supported by conventional and special forces operations. Through the initial phases of the offensive, state support will remain ambiguous enough to be plausibly denied by the aggressor. The attacker's aim will be to overwhelm the defender and strike a powerful, crippling blow before a credible intervention can be organized and deployed.¹² NATO's approach to deterrence of this sort of threat is the formation of rotational high readiness units such as the NATO Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARCC) along with NATO Response Force / Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). Combined with an additional nine Allied Corps and Divisions under operational command, NATO has built a crisis response framework focused on countering external threats to its member states,¹³ which also provides a response capability that could intervene in the event of a crisis similar to the situation that developed in Crimea in 2014.

Rapid deployment of NATO forces in the early days of a hybrid campaign would disrupt the operational tempo of the aggressor. NATO forces, if deployed to trouble spots early enough, could immediately neutralize the ability of lightly armed insurgent forces to exploit any

¹¹ Henry Foy, "Eastern Members Pressure NATO for Permanent Bases." *Financial Times*. Last modified August 17, 2015. www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/8595ae2a-44ea-11e5-b3b2-1672f710807b.html#axzz47in4AO00.

¹² S.G. Chekinov and S.A Bogdanov, "The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War" *Military Thought* (October–December 2013), 23.

http://www.eastviewpress.com/Files/MT_FROM%20THE%20CURRENT%20ISSUE_No.4_2013.pdf

¹³ Sascha-Dominik Bachmann, "Hybrid threats, cyber warfare and NATO's comprehensive approach for countering 21st century threats - mapping the new frontier of global risk and security management." *Amicus Curiae* 2011, no. 88 (January 2012): 25.

operational opportunities created by the confusion offered through the employment of hybrid tactics. This type of planned response has taken the lessons learned by the Israeli Defense Force to ensure that there is a conventional force ready to deploy on short notice in order to overwhelm irregulars who attempt to employ the mix of irregular and conventional tactics as was used by Hezbollah in 2006.¹⁴ Ideally these high readiness reaction forces would marry up with NATO elements already forward deployed in the region.

Considering recent demands from NATO's Baltic Allies who fear that the conditions within their own states mirror the conditions that Russia has exploited for hybrid war in the Ukraine, NATO has also chosen to forward deploy military forces from Western members of the Alliance to Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.¹⁵ Discussions are ongoing to determine how large a force may be required on a permanent rotational basis¹⁶ as NATO allies work to find a comfortable middle-ground that eases the concerns of Baltic state members and provides a flexible and cost effective means to counter the conventional aspects of the hybrid threat. These deployments, combined with NATO deployments in Poland and the Ukraine, provide conventional deterrence that seeks to break the operational linkages between conventional and unconventional forces in the hybrid threat environment. To better understand the logic behind deploying relatively small unit and sub-unit sized multipurpose combat forces into the Baltics, it is important to recognize that hybrid warfare is not simply regular and irregular forces working

¹⁴ David E Johnson, "Preparing for 'Hybrid' Opponents: Israeli Experiences in Lebanon and Gaza," RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA (2013): 1. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_briefs/RB9600/RB9620/RAND_RB9620.pdf

¹⁵ Frances Perraudin, "Britain to Station Troops in Baltic Region 'to Deter Russian Aggression'" The Guardian. Last modified October 8, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/oct/08/britain-station-troops-poland-latvia-lithuania-estonia-russian-aggression>.

¹⁶ "NATO Weighs Stationing Four Battalions in Member States Bordering Russia." EurActiv.com. Last modified May 3, 2016. <http://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/nato-weighs-stationing-four-battalions-in-member-states-bordering-russia/>.

in the same battlespace with different approaches.¹⁷ Instead, the hybrid threat combines conventional support with irregular forces into a cohesive aggressor that is able to use all forms of war and tactics simultaneously to achieve operational advantage.¹⁸ NATO deterrence therefore must focus on breaking minimizing the potential for synchronization of efforts between irregular and conventional forces.

The concern remains that since Russia's Crimean operation was not a direct armed attack it exploited gaps in NATO's existing legal framework that have not yet been fully reconsidered in order to adapt collective defence to counter hybrid forms of warfare.¹⁹ Unfairly branded as 'suicide battalions' whose sole purpose is to stand in the way of a hypothetical Russian advance to ensure the attack satisfies the legal requirements of NATO's Article 5,²⁰ these units and sub-units are more than traditional conventional deterrence. The combat enablers that reside in these combined arms teams represent a way to counter Moscow's adept use of electronic warfare and deployment of special forces "little green men" to train local insurgents or control indirect fire.²¹ With conventional forces on the ground that have access to unmanned aerial systems, encrypted digital communications, direction finding equipment and strategic reach back to other Alliance intelligence gathering capabilities, the ability for Russia to conceal involvement in another attempt at hybrid conflict would be significantly reduced.

Capability Demonstrations

¹⁷ Frank G Hoffman, "Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars." Potomac Institute for Policy Studies Arlington, (Virginia, 2007): 20.

http://www.potomac institute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac_hybridwar_0108.pdf

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 35.

¹⁹ Bērziņš, *Russian New Generation Warfare*, 8.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 12.

²¹ Bret Perry, "How NATO Can Disrupt Russia's New Way of War." Defense One. Last modified March 3, 2016. <http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2016/03/nato-russia-sof-ew-hybrid-war/126401/?oref=d-river>.

Countering the hybrid threat in Eastern Europe also requires scalable and responsive full spectrum capability. Conventional warfighting essentials such as lethal targeting, delegation of target engagement authorities and battlespace management must be perfected and combined with non-lethal targeting, influence activities, media awareness and stability operations. In order to demonstrate these capabilities, NATO has conducted a series of high-profile exercises, including Exercise TRIDENT JUNCTURE and Exercise ALLIED SHIELD.

Ex TRIDENT JUNCTURE 15 was billed as NATO's "most complex military drills in decades."²² The exercise included NATO Allies along with seven partner nations including Eastern European partners Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Macedonia and the Ukraine. Cognizant of the complex multi-modal effects that the hybrid operational method seeks to coordinate within the battlespace,²³ the exercise included a range of threat models to test alliance military response to conventional attack, insurgency, cyber-attack, ballistic missile defense and humanitarian crisis. As a deterrent to Russia's hybrid methods, NATO deliberately planned and executed the exercise with the hybrid approach in mind.²⁴ As part of an ongoing campaign to test and adjust response capabilities, the TRIDENT JUNCTURE series of exercises will be repeated every three years. The next exercise, which envisions a complex Article 5 scenario where the alliance must respond to an attack on a NATO country, is unsurprisingly scheduled to take place in Northern Europe's Baltic region.²⁵

In addition to large scale exercises, the smaller and more agile NATO VJTF has been exercised as part of the Exercise ALLIED SHIELD series. Part of the development of the VJTF

²² Marcus Weisgerber, "Now NATO's Prepping for Hybrid War." Defense One. Last modified August 27, 2015. http://www.defenseone.com/management/2015/08/now-natos-prepping-hybrid-war/119687/?oref=search_hybrid%20war.

²³ Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century*, 36.

²⁴ Weisgerber, *NATO Prepping for Hybrid War*.

²⁵ NATO, "TRIDENT JUNCTURE 2015." Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum. Accessed 6 May 2016. <http://www.jfcbs.nato.int/trident-juncture>

included a rapidly planned and executed exercise in Poland called Exercise NOBLE JUMP.²⁶ This represented the first time that high-readiness units were deployed and conducted joint combined multinational tactical manoeuvres under the VJTF framework. Exercise NOBLE JUMP displays the NATO Alliance's ability to quickly deploy its forces, along with the combat enablers that close the technology gap with Russia, to any of its member countries. Where gaps exist in forward deployment of small units due to lack of availability or commitment from Alliance members, NATO has proven capable of rapidly deploying vanguard forces to counter an immediate threat and hold until a more robust follow on force can be deployed.

Through increasingly complex exercises and evaluations NATO is demonstrating both the capability and the readiness levels required to deter potential Russian aggression. Due to political pressure and lack of equal commitment among NATO Allies, these NATO capabilities represent an imperfect but evolving deterrent. There are challenges to implementation of a truly high-readiness deployment framework that some allies are unwilling to confront. Unequal division of responsibilities observed in Afghanistan, which saw a few nations do most of the fighting while others avoided kinetic operations in favor of the softer sides of nation-building and capacity development will also need to be addressed²⁷ for the full value of conventional deterrence to be realized.

Yet, from the Russian perspective, part of the appeal of the hybrid conflict in the Ukraine was that Moscow could conceal involvement at least long enough for immediate objectives to be achieved. By the time there was sufficient proof of external involvement to warrant intervention, the operation had largely run its course. Forward deployed soldiers from Western allies make

²⁶ NATO, "NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence." CCDCOE. Accessed May 6, 2016. <https://ccdcoe.org/index.html>.

²⁷ Michael Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation Building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan*. (London: Vintage, 2003): 94.

the prospect of obscuring covert Russian support to irregular forces unlikely. Adapting to the threat by demonstrating the ability to rapidly deploy forces from the west into Eastern Europe removes covert or unattributable conventional support from the hybrid threat scenario. The skills sets that are being tested and demonstrated as part of TRIDENT JUNCTURE and ALLIED SHIELD include the decentralized decision making and tactical initiative that form the basis of the organizational learning required to defeat irregular opponents.²⁸ NATO has stepped up conventional force deployments and has continued to adapt readiness levels toward countering the hybrid tactics that Russia may seek to employ against an Eastern European neighbor. Considering the multi-modal nature of the threat, a holistic NATO effort to deter the hybrid threat must also include a cyber-defence initiative.

CYBER-DETERRENCE

Cyber is now a central part of virtually all crises and conflicts. NATO has made it clear that cyber-attacks can potentially trigger an Article 5 response.

- NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, 25 March 2015

Estonia experienced a wave of distributed denial-of-service attacks that lasted for two weeks in the spring of 2007. Although NATO reacted to aid in the Estonian defense by sending several cyberterrorism experts, NATO did not have a comprehensive cyber-defense framework at that time. After measures had been developed to mitigate the risk of further attacks, NATO assisted Estonia to examine the incident and determine who was responsible for the attacks.²⁹ Initial accusations by the Estonian government that the Russian government was responsible

²⁸ Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century*, 38.

²⁹ Jason Richardson, "Denial-of-Service: The Estonian Cyberwar and Its Implications for U.S. National Security." *International Affairs Review*, The Elliot School of International Affairs at George Washington University. Accessed May 6, 2016. www.iar-gwu.org/node/65.

came amid fears that the cyber-attack³⁰ was part of the first phases of a wider Russian operational concept.³¹ Although the allegations against Russia have never been clearly proven, there are lingering suspicions that the independent “hacktivists” who were eventually implicated had Russian backing³² and the importance of the cyber domain in Russian operational methodology seems to have been proven, at least in part, during the Russian-Georgian War of 2008.³³

The Estonia incident and the Russian invasion of Georgia have become watershed events in the development of NATO cyber security policy. In response to mounting evidence that Russia has formalized offensive cyber operations as part of their operational methodology, research and development measures have been put into place by NATO to address cyber vulnerabilities and develop safeguards for information infrastructure.³⁴ NATO began in January 2008 by issuing a cyber-policy that added cyber-defence to NATO’s core tasks of collective defence.³⁵ Shortly thereafter, NATO supported the creation of the Cooperative Cyber Defence Center of Excellence in Tallinn.³⁶ Commonly referred to as The Centre, the NATO facility focusses on cyber-terrorism response research and establishing protocols for responding to a cyber-attack on an Alliance member. Cyber-forensic techniques are also being refined with a

³⁰ NATO defines a cyber-attack as a cyber-operation, whether offensive or defensive, that is reasonably expected to cause injury or death to persons or damage or destruction to objects, see Michael N Schmitt, *Tallinn Manual on the International Law Applicable to Cyber Warfare: Prepared by the International Group of Experts at the Invitation of the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence*. (2013): 91. https://archive.org/stream/TallinnManual/TallinnManual_djvu.txt

³¹ Bērziņš, *Russian New Generation Warfare*, 5.

³² Gregg Keizer, "Estonia Blamed Russia for Backing 2007 Cyberattacks, Says Leaked Cable." Computerworld. Last modified December 9, 2010. <http://www.computerworld.com/article/2511704/vertical-it/estonia-blamed-russia-for-backing-2007-cyberattacks--says-leaked-cable.html>.

³³ David Hollis, "Cyberwar Case Study: Georgia 2008." *Small Wars Journal*, January 2011. <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/cyberwar-case-study-georgia-2008>.

³⁴ Richardson, *Denial-of-Service*.

³⁵ NATO, "Topic: Cyber Security." NATO Topics, Accessed 6 May 2016. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_78170.htm

³⁶ NATO, "NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence." CCDCOE. Accessed May 6, 2016. <https://ccdcoe.org/index.html>.

view to improving the Alliance's ability to identify the source of cyber-attacks. Formalizing cyber-defence as part of the NATO mandate to collective defence and opening a NATO facility dedicated to cyber-defence research and development came quickly after Russia's operational adaptation of the hybrid model.

In cooperation with academia, The Centre has also produced The Tallinn Manual.³⁷ This international cyber-law research initiative examines cyber-activities as they are related to both international law governing the use of force and international law regulating the conduct of armed conflict. Combined with other international initiatives, such as the International Cyber Developments Review (INCYDER),³⁸ NATO is seeking to shape the strategic policies that will govern international organisations active in cyber-security.

Illustrative of the Alliance commitment to information sharing and mutual assistance in the cyber-domain, the deterrence and crisis response framework that NATO has adapted is not limited to formalizing policy on cyber-defence. NATO's initiative includes periodic international cyber-defence exercises. While individual Alliance members remain responsible for the security of their own networks, due to the NATO requirement for compatibility in military systems, collective network defence techniques have been exercised and refined. In the annual Exercise LOCKED SHIELD series of exercises and the 2008/2010 Baltic Cyber Shield exercises, alliance participants are provided with practical experience defending the Alliance's computer networks.³⁹

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ NATO. "About INCYDER." NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence. Accessed 6 May 2016. <https://ccdcoe.org/incyder.html>

³⁹ NATO, "Cyber Defence Exercises." NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence. Accessed 6 May 2016. <https://ccdcoe.org/event/cyber-defence-exercises.html>

Since 2007 there has been a consistent thread in NATO adaptation that seeks to ensure cyber-security oversights are corrected. Through policy, international cooperation and training initiatives, NATO seeks to eliminate the operational advantages that could be gained in a hybrid attack against a NATO ally similar to the tactics employed against Estonia in 2007, in Georgia in 2008-2009 and in the Ukraine during the 2014 Crimea crisis. The impact of these adaptations remains classified as NATO allies are understandably unwilling to release details of cyber-defence successes and failures. Through adaptation to ensure there is a relevant deterrent to Russian aggression, NATO has set the stage for a wider role in Eastern European affairs.

DOCTRINAL ADAPTATIONS IN PRACTICE

Hybrid is the dark reflection of our comprehensive approach. We use a combination of military and non-military means to stabilize countries. Others use it to destabilize them.

- NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, 25 March 2015

Toward countering the impact of external actors aggravating ethnic divisions and inciting insurrection, NATO has developed the comprehensive approach doctrine as an expeditionary means to address the prevailing conditions that lead to insurrection. The evolved Russian operational method has exploited ethnic loyalties prevalent among Russians living outside Russia along its borders. Russia has successfully leveraged the sensibilities of ethnic-Russians living in neighbouring states to generate pro-Russian insurgencies which are then supported by conventional Russian forces. NATO's counter strategy is to continue to invest in operational methods that address the root causes of internal security problems. Based largely on lessons learned through NATO operations in Afghanistan, NATO's answer to the problem has been the

development of the Comprehensive Approach⁴⁰ doctrine as a method of formalizing how stabilization will proceed as part of a multilateral intervention or following decisive military action.

NATO recognizes that the hybrid threat exploits the reality that “peace, security and development are more interconnected than ever.”⁴¹ NATO’s *Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive* seeks to address the complexity of the modern operating environment and synchronize military and civilian planning within the comprehensive approach.⁴² Russia has shown that a belligerent may be able to leverage the prevailing conditions among the disenfranchised portion of a community and apply hybrid methods to achieve limited operational objectives before international mechanisms can be applied against it. In response NATO has developed an approach designed to be exportable for limited wars of intervention but that may also be used as a preventative measure if successfully applied within allied and partner nations that share a border with Russia.

The Comprehensive Approach

Realignment to achieve a credible deterrence and find a place in the international arena that goes beyond collective defense has forced NATO to accept that the conventional forces of the alliance cannot be everywhere a potential threat exists.⁴³ As a result, NATO has accepted the need to develop a stabilization framework that can be exported if NATO intervention is required in a conflict that does not represent a collective defence threat. The *Comprehensive Operations*

⁴⁰ NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept underlines that lessons learned from NATO operations show that effective crisis management calls for a comprehensive approach involving political, civilian and military instruments. Military means, although essential, are not enough on their own to meet the many complex challenges to Euro-Atlantic and international security. See NATO, “A Comprehensive Approach to Crises.” NATO Topics, Accessed 6 May 2016. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_51633.htm

⁴¹ NATO, “Allied Command Operations Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive COPD Interim V1.0” NATO, (17 December 2010): 1-1.

⁴² *Ibid*, 3-83.

⁴³ NATO, *A Comprehensive Approach to Crises*.

Planning Directive emphasizes that crises in failed or failing states and regional conflicts are fueled by availability of sophisticated conventional weaponry and misuse of emerging technologies.⁴⁴ These negative influences combine with absent governance, unstable economies, humanitarian disaster, and lack of infrastructure that threatens social well-being.⁴⁵ These shortfalls give terrorists, insurgents and other hybrid threat actors manoeuvre space to gain control of the population by either threat of violence or by establishing shadow governance.⁴⁶

By taking advantage of this manoeuvre space and prevailing social conditions among a Russian diaspora living east of the Ukraine's Dnieper River, Russia's hybrid offensive in the Ukraine serves as an example of what Russia could conceivably do against any former Soviet satellite. Russia's operational methodology illustrates that the hybrid threat is more than simply irregular and conventional forces synchronizing their efforts across multiple lines of operation. Russia uses the hybrid threat in a much wider struggle to influence the strategic environment and shape future conditions in Moscow's favor.⁴⁷ Moreover, it is an example that others could emulate to synchronize low-level tactical action in achieving operational effects.⁴⁸ Out of necessity, state and non-state actors who would challenge the geopolitical status quo have created alternative paths to conventional warfare where they have little chance of success against combined might the United States and western allies.⁴⁹

The comprehensive approach doctrine recognizes this and counters by planning to reshape environmental conditions, in an attempt to eliminate causes of instability such as poor

⁴⁴ NATO, *COPD Interim VI.0*, 1-1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 3-12 – 3-13.

⁴⁶ David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*. (New York : Oxford University Press, 2013): 102-105.

⁴⁷ NATO, "Keynote Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the opening of the NATO Transformation Seminar." NATO, 25 March 2015, Accessed 7 May 2016. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_118435.htm

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 33.

⁴⁹ Fleming, *The Hybrid Threat*, 61-62.

governance, fragile economic systems and exploitation by criminal terrorist enterprise. Within the comprehensive approach, the aim of governance and development initiatives is never purely altruistic, rather there are clear motives to synchronize tactical effort to save lives and achieve operational ends that lead to strategic success.⁵⁰ Successfully employed as a post-conflict strategy, the comprehensive approach eliminates opportunities for the hybrid opponent by addressing the root causes of instability. Addressing lack of governance and providing security removes both psychological and physical space for the insurgent to manoeuvre. Providing development and economic opportunity eliminates financial motivators that irregulars and insurgents exploit to recruit fighters. Combined with the presence of NATO conventional forces that break the conventional-irregular linkages that hybrid actors rely upon to generate tactical success, the comprehensive approach doctrine is a broad based effort to eliminate the multiple avenues required to generate offensive action using multi-modal hybrid techniques. The strategic ends translated from successful application of the comprehensive approach efforts are social conditions that make a prolonged hybrid effort too costly for the adversary and increasingly unlikely to succeed. This is precisely the approach that NATO members have taken in a wider regional plan throughout eastern Europe in an effort to deter aggressive action on the part of Russia.

Pre-emptive Employment of the Comprehensive Approach

The comprehensive approach doctrine in post-intervention stabilization has yet to be successfully proven. The comprehensive approach is less about making the world a better place and more precisely motivated by the need to sustain security and stability as envisioned by the

⁵⁰ Wilton Park. "Operationalising the Comprehensive Approach." Conference Report, (April 2012): 1. <https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/wp1092-report.pdf>

western allies.⁵¹ Although the effort began well before the formal articulation of the comprehensive approach, NATO's regional strategy toward security in Eastern Europe can be seen as a wider effort to pre-emptively employ these same principles.

The current geopolitical situation in Eastern Europe has at its roots the NATO military interventions in the former Yugoslavia following the collapse of the Soviet Union. These offered the first challenge to Russian influence in former satellite states. Security programs to disarm and absorb the forces of German Democratic Republic and expand NATO into Eastern Europe were combined with political initiatives to democratize former Soviet satellites and private industry to deregulate state-controlled economies and open potentially lucrative markets. This is the same civil-military fusion that was eventually articulated in the comprehensive approach. Today's conventional force positioning, ballistic missile defense and cyber-defence combined with ongoing governance and trade initiatives that include inclusion of Eastern European states into the European Union are an example of the comprehensive approach being employed at a macro-level across the region. In many ways, this fuels the tension with Russia.⁵²

While NATO sees itself ensuring stability and security in a region where volatile ethnic tensions could erupt in conflict by addressing the "upstream factors" behind violence,⁵³ Russia in turn accuses members of the NATO Alliance of using the comprehensive approach to conduct a hybrid war to impede Russian competition. Understanding the strategic culture of potential threat nation-states and regional groups will help to determine how each makes decisions in order to forecast their future strategic behavior.⁵⁴ In Russian political and military discourse,

⁵¹Christian Leuprecht, "Conclusion." In *Security Operations in the 21st Century: Canadian Perspectives on the Comprehensive Approach*, edited by Michael Rostek and Peter Gizewski, 237-247. (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011): 256.

⁵²Samuel Charap, "The Ghost of Hybrid War." *Survival* 57, no. 6 (2015): 51.

⁵³Sebastian Gorka, "The Age of Irregular Warfare: So What?" *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 58 (3rd quarter 2010): 32. www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a528133.pdf.

⁵⁴Fleming, *The Hybrid Threat*, 5.

hybrid war is often used to describe “alleged US efforts to weaken and ultimately overthrow unfriendly governments, particularly, but not exclusively, the Russian government.”⁵⁵ By extension comes the accusation that, by supporting protests and calls for democratic reform, it was in fact a US-initiated hybrid war, supported by NATO allies, which overthrew the unfriendly Ukrainian government and precipitated Russia’s intervention in the Ukraine.⁵⁶

Whether reality or rhetoric, it is clear that Russia is willing to challenge the West through aggressive policy toward its neighbors. Through a wider social-political approach combined with military resolve displayed through NATO’s adaptations, the West has shown the resolve to prevent Russia from continuing to menace its Eastern European neighbors with military aggression. NATO’s approach cannot undo what has been done in the Ukraine, but it can remove opportunities for Russia to make another attempt at using the hybrid operational methodology against a much weaker neighbor.

SUCSESSES AND FAILURES IN NATO’S APPROACH

Evaluation of NATO’s approach to deter further aggressive military action on the part of Russia reveals how the Alliance has adapted from a Cold War conventional deterrence mindset. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO has provided military support to wider initiatives to address the threat of Russian aggression. The 2014 offensive in the Ukraine was preceded by signals that Russia was developing a new operational methodology. Although NATO was unable to predict an attack on the Ukraine, the combined efforts of conventional deterrence, cyber-defense and development of an intervention strategy based on the comprehensive approach have thus far deterred an armed attack against NATO’s Eastern European allies. In this way, the

⁵⁵ Charap, *Ghost of Hybrid War*, 51.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Alliance has adapted to continue to serve its purpose in collective defence. In the face of these challenges both positive and negative aspects of the NATO approach have been revealed.

The principles of the comprehensive approach are reflected in the western approach to Eastern Europe over the past twenty five years. Meanwhile Russian rhetoric accuses the West of a protracted subversive campaign meant to challenge Russian influence in the Baltics and Balkans.⁵⁷ As the military arm of the western alliance, NATO seeks not only to counter the prevailing conditions that could lead to violence or those which Russia could potentially exploit to gain advantage, but also to develop regional conditions in favour of the west. Russian challenges to this model should not come as a great surprise.⁵⁸ In response, NATO has proven that military capabilities and readiness are not all that needs to adapt to achieve successful deterrence. Continued integration of the instruments of power through the comprehensive approach provides a potentially successful model for intervention and thereby deters attack against NATO allies on the periphery with Russia. Continued relevance demands that NATO is ready to deal with all aspects of such a threat.

While the Comprehensive Approach is not without its flaws, this adaptation recognizes that winning battles while important, does not ensure success in the modern complex battlespace. Shaping the civil environment is of great importance to enduring success.⁵⁹ The challenge that remains for NATO is proving the comprehensive approach will work. Comprehensive approach must evolve from “ephemeral government buzzword into a strategy and a method with its

⁵⁷ Charap, *Ghost of Hybrid War*, 56.

⁵⁸ Michael McFaul, Stephen Sestanovich, and John J. Mearsheimer. "Faulty Powers: Who Started the Ukraine Crisis?" *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 6 (Nov, 2014): 167-178.
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1618198684?accountid=9867>

⁵⁹ United States Army. US Army Posture Statement 2008, The Official Home Page of the United States Army, The United States Army. Accessed April 28, 2016.
http://www.army.mil/aps/08/information_papers/transform/Full_Spectrum_Operations.html

requisite operational and tactical components.”⁶⁰ The foundation has been built by the militaries of the alliance, but what remains is the development of capabilities of civilian partners.⁶¹ The increasing relevance of application of all instruments of power through comprehensive approach is displayed in the hybrid war Russia has undertaken in the Ukraine. The best way to counter a similar threat is to reverse the trend of post-intervention failure.

Continued adaptation requires NATO members to correct the disconnect between doctrine and practice within the Alliance. This requires closer civil-military cooperation and the acceptance that operational timelines will be calculated not in years but in decades.⁶² NATO has recognized that conventional deterrence is no longer sufficient. What remains is recognition by members of the alliance that there is no short timeline to this approach and that the NATO strategy has no end when non-linear threats manifest in hybrid operations.⁶³ Furthermore, continuing to ignore the ethnic and religious aspects of modern conflict presents a significant barrier to successful implementation of any western strategy.⁶⁴ Success in the future also demands that the members of the Alliance redefine victory. As a military alliance NATO cannot adapt to change all aspects of strategy but can better inform decision makers at the political level. NATO Alliance members must recognize the strategic imperatives of potential adversaries when trying to pre-emptively shape the strategic environment or neutralize conditions that lead to violence. Strategic confrontations cannot be viewed as a zero-sum game and trade-off in

⁶⁰ Leuprecht, in *Security Operations in the 21st Century*, 237.

⁶¹ Wilton Park. *Comprehensive Approach*, 11-12.

⁶² "After Smart Weapons, Smart Soldiers." *The Economist*. Last modified October 25, 2007. <http://www.economist.com/node/10015844>.

⁶³ Fleming, *The Hybrid Threat*, 54.

⁶⁴ Peters, Ralph. *Wars of Blood and Faith The Conflicts That Will Shape the Twenty-First Century*. (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2009): 38-45.

regional objectives with other strategic competitors must be accepted.⁶⁵ Russia and other potential competitors who would employ hybrid warfare are able to generate unity of purpose and translate strategic vision into action. This means that political masters in NATO's member states must recognize that the alliance can no longer accept any "uncertainty induced by unclear political and strategic guidance."⁶⁶

CONCLUSION

What we need now is the political will and the resources from nations to improve our capabilities; to keep our edge now and in the future. The Alliance needs an innovation strategy for the coming decades. NATO can make a real difference by connecting national capabilities, making our Alliance greater than the sum of its parts. But NATO cannot substitute for a lack of national investments.

- NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, 25 March 2015

This paper set out to illustrate that criticism of NATO as a Cold War relic⁶⁷ is largely unfounded and that the Alliance has adapted to face emerging threats, particularly in Eastern Europe. It argued that through a combination of conventional deterrence, cyber-defence and doctrinal adaptation represented by the comprehensive approach, NATO deterrence remains relevant. To demonstrate this, examples of increased readiness among conventional forces and defensive cyber initiatives were highlighted. To give a better understanding of the comprehensive approach the model for post-conflict stabilization and the macro employment of its principles were analyzed. By realigning its forces, developing network defence capabilities

⁶⁵ Samuel Charap and Mikhail Troitskiy, "U.S.-Russia Relations in Post-Soviet Eurasia Transcending the Zero-Sum Game," *Working Group on the Future of U.S.-Russia Relations*, (September 2011), <http://us-russiafuture.org/publications>.

⁶⁶ Adam Elkus and Crispin Burke. "Operational Design: Promise and Problems." *Small Wars Journal* (February 2010). <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/362-elkus.pdf>

⁶⁷ Paul Koring, "Fractured NATO Risks Remaining a Cold War Relic." *The Globe and Mail*. Last modified March 13, 2009. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/fractured-nato-risks-remaining-a-cold-war-relic/article17982864/>.

and formalizing the comprehensive approach doctrine, NATO continues to provide a relevant deterrent against unchecked Russian aggression in Eastern Europe.

Although this analysis focuses on Russia, clearly there are parallels that could be drawn with other state actors such as China or Iran, pseudo states such as Daesh and non-state actors such as Hezbollah. The situation in the Ukraine and Russian activity in the Baltics has changed the battlespace but so have insurgent tactics employed by Hezbollah and ISIS in the Middle East and Chinese ‘unrestricted’ military thinking.⁶⁸ Understanding these adversaries’ strategic aims along with the ways and means they may seek to meet those aims is of critical importance to military planners. The ongoing debate regarding whether hybrid threats are the contemporary manifestation of insurgency or an entirely new threat is far less relevant at the operational level.

⁶⁸ Qiao Liang and Xiangsui Wang. *Unrestricted Warfare: China's Master Plan to Destroy America*. (Panama City, Panama: Pan American Pub, 2000).

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