

**Beatrice Heuser,  
Tormod Heier and  
Guillaume Lasconjarias  
Editors**

# **Military Exercises: Political Messaging and Strategic Impact**

**Foreword by**

**General Denis Mercier  
Supreme Allied Commander Transformation**



Founded in 1951, the **NATO Defense College (NDC)** was established to contribute to the effectiveness and cohesion of the Atlantic Alliance through its role as a major centre of education, study and research on Euro-Atlantic security issues. The **NDC Research Division** serves as a key forum for discussion and objective analysis of contemporary NATO policy challenges, as well as a central pillar of the College's outreach activities.

**Military Exercises:  
Political Messaging and Strategic Impact**





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*Edited by  
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## NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE

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## **Denis MERCIER**

General Denis Mercier was confirmed by the North Atlantic Council as Supreme Allied Commander Transformation on 23 March 2015.

He joined the French Air Force academy in 1979 where he completed a Master's degree of Science in 1981. Qualified as a fighter pilot in 1983, he acquired extensive experience both as an operational commander and as a fighter pilot, having flown a total of more than 3000 flying hours primarily on Mirage F1C and Mirage 2000C aircraft, including 182 hours in combat missions.

He commanded the 1/12 'Cambrésis' Fighter Squadron, and participated in numerous NATO exercises and operations, including Operation Deny Flight over Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1994. In 1999, he integrated the operational planning of French participation in NATO Operation Allied Force in Kosovo.

Posted from 1999 to 2002 as deputy head of the combined joint task force deputy branch at Regional Headquarters AFNORTH, in Brunssum (Netherlands), he contributed to the development of the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) concept. Back in France, he was appointed as the commander of Reims Air force base, integrating the Mirage F1CR squadrons under his command into ISAF in Afghanistan.

From 2004 to 2008 he was assigned to the French Air Force headquarters in Paris, as the head of the plans division and was nominated as a flag officer in 2007 as Acting Chief of Staff (ACOS) for budget and performance.

He then commanded the French Air Force Academy in Salon-de-Provence, where he was a transformative leader, fostering enduring partnerships with allies and prestigious universities.

Following his nomination as senior military advisor for the minister of Defence in 2010, General Mercier prepared and participated in all



NATO ministerial meetings between 2010 and 2012, as well as the NATO summits of Lisbon and Chicago. Moreover, he was the minister's special advisor for Operation Unified Protector over Libya. He became the French Air Force Chief of Staff on September 17th 2012, which formalized his contact with Air Chiefs throughout the Alliance. He has been awarded the rank of Grand Officer of the French Legion of Honor. He is also, among other distinctions, an officer of the National Order of Merit.

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## Foreword

NATO's defence and deterrence posture is the product of our 29 nations' capabilities, resolve, and messaging. While our forces are mostly developed and owned by the nations, our credibility lies in our collective ability to combine our efforts across different domains: in command and control, capability development, partnerships, sustainment, human capital, and in training and exercises. Exercises are indeed a critically important piece of this equation: they prepare our troops, allow us to experiment new concepts, doctrine, and capabilities, convey a strategic message to potential opponents, and contribute to our lessons learned process.

In a complex environment characterized by its complexity and unpredictability, where surprise is inevitable, failure always an option, and resilience a necessity, we must begin our reflection to change our mind-set on training: to put it bluntly, we ought to train to test our limits and for recovery rather than training for unquestioned success.

Today, the Alliance is at a turning point and undertaking a significant adaptation of its permanent command structure to stay relevant in today's and tomorrow's fight. But the enduring importance of training remains – perhaps even more than it was before. In the 21st century, one of the most important resources for any organization is human capital. Training and education are essential to get the right people, with the right preparedness, the right leadership skills, operating the right capabilities.

It is only befitting that our exercise programme has evolved through the years to match the evolutions of the security environment – ensuring that we prepare for the conflicts of the future, and not of the past. Nevertheless, we have learnt much from the past, and this volume in particular draws out valuable lessons that we bear in mind as we face the future. Over the last few years, our exercise programme has expanded to prepare forces for a wide range of scenarios, from projecting stability beyond our borders to an Article 5 conflict where the integrity of the Alliance would be at stake. We also have increased the participation from our Allied nations and from our partners – ensuring that we build interoperability from the bottom up.

And to achieve this, we have to look forward. The adaptation of the NATO Command Structure will give Allied Command Operations the responsibility for the planning and execution of exercises, based on the actual needs of our forces. But the individual training and education efforts, the scenario development, the integration of future trends in the exercises programme will remain ACT's responsibility. This will allow the Alliance to continue to integrate innovation, experimentation and developing concepts into our collective training, in order to be ready today, and prepared for tomorrow.

This new delineation of roles, responsibilities and authorities over exercises should provide coherence and clarity, but we also have to innovate in the way we actually conduct our training. Under constrained resources, our Alliance has to leverage the expertise and the resources of its nations and partners, to train more intelligently and more efficiently through the development of simulation, distance learning, or decentralized exercises.

Finally, training cannot be limited to our military forces. NATO is a political alliance relying on collective decision-making from our elected



leaders. In a complex world, where surprise is certain, we will have to rely on sound and reliable decision-making processes, which implies that our training efforts have to include the political leadership from our nations.

Deterrence is the product of our credibility, resolve, and messaging – all three equally important in the equation. A realistic exercise programme helps us demonstrate our credibility and resolve, but it must also include a strong, coherent and relevant messaging to reinforce our ability to deter, and if necessary, defeat any potential enemy, now, and in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

*Denis Mercier*  
*General, French Air Force*  
*Supreme Allied Commander Transformation*



## Preface

As NATO returns its focus to the core responsibilities of collective defense, deterrence, and protection of member state sovereignty in Europe, so too has the NATO Defense College and its Research Division adapted its emphases in education, research, and outreach since 2014. Issues of central concern for the past four years have included hybrid conflict and Russian foreign and military policy, especially their snap exercises and conventional and nuclear sabre rattling—with the potential that one of these training events could suddenly turn into offensive military action against a neighboring state. At the same time, the Alliance recognizes that challenges may arise from any direction, in areas as far-flung as the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Southwest Asia, Africa's coasts, the North Atlantic, Northeast Asia, and other locations where NATO forces are deployed for crisis management or cooperative security missions.

While the Alliance hopes to one day return to a more relaxed relationship with Russia, its former partner to the East, one involving regular dialogue and a spirit of friendly competition rather than potential conflict, so far there has been little evidence of a reciprocal desire coming out of Moscow. For this reason, as well as because NATO is committed to maintaining a 360 degree approach to security, the Alliance has increased the emphasis and the scope of its own exercises in recent years. This renewed effort reminds us how important exercises can be as methods of training one's own forces, signaling to other nations, and preparing for future military operations.

Military exercises, and command and control exercises involving civilian leaders, share an important and complex interrelationship with security and the political decision making that underlies security policy.

During the Cold War this was clearly the case. But during the generation after the end of the Cold War, the Alliance seemed to have lost sight of some of those linkages and benefits. This book seeks to rectify that memory loss by highlighting some of the more important exercises of the recent past, and how they served an important element of policy and preparedness.

The chapters in this book represent a two-year effort by some 20 experts in the field of military exercises to identify the purpose, benefits, and relevance of exercises over the past seven decades for today's military leaders, decision makers, and practitioners. Given the rise of new geopolitical risks and emerging multidimensional threats, these lessons do not solely focus on Russia or the South, but embrace a larger scope that make them relevant today for NATO, its member states, and its partners. As the Alliance develops future training and exercises to deal with new threats, it would be well-served to review those historical lessons which this volume provides.

The Research Division of the NATO Defense College is proud to have co-sponsored this study, and to publish its findings. The Division recognizes the serious political messaging that exercises can provide, and while it may seem like a rather mundane topic, its importance cannot be overstated. This book therefore meets the Division's mission of providing policy analyses for NATO and its strategic military commands, as well as for the political leadership of the member states of the Alliance. The Division was particularly pleased to have one of its own researchers serving as a co-editor of this volume.

We hope that you will find this book historically interesting, filled with valuable lessons for today's exercise planners and policy makers, and worth the time spent immersed in the fascinating world of military exercises.

*Jeffrey A. Larsen, PhD  
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Rome, February 2018*

## 1

## Introduction

*Beatrice Heuser and Diego Ruiz Palmer*

Military exercises are a subject that has been under-researched, even though for most military establishments world-wide they are an important activity and have sometimes been associated with important international events, as several chapters in this book underline. Besides their training aim and benefits, exercises can also have strategic implications, either, in a defensive sense, in expressing preparedness or a foreign policy commitment to another country or group of countries or, in an offensive sense, in exerting an unwelcome form of pressure or in preparing for aggression. By their nature, exercises take place in the grey area between peace and war, because they are a peacetime activity that, in one way or another, simulates war – ‘train as you fight.’ Their design and planning nearly always requires some form of strategic or foreign policy calculus. The planning and conduct of exercises also often require the commitment of important, sometimes vast, human and material resources, including directing staffs and umpires, as well as specialised infrastructure and logistics.

Exercises are often the overt face of military establishments, which in peacetime are generally ‘inert,’ with soldiers, sailors and airmen and their equipment resting in barracks, harbours and airfields when not deployed on operations. Exercises can thus be looked upon as a reflection of a country’s, an alliance’s or a coalition’s operational capacity and assessed for clues about what capabilities displayed and observed (or spied upon) might reveal about a potential adversary’s competence, as well as intentions. At the same time, exercise sponsors might well try

to conceal aspects of an exercise from the gaze of others, or even use exercises to mask preparations for offensive military action, a stratagem which the Soviet Union used in the summer of 1968 ahead of its invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Live exercises of varying scale, sometimes numbering up to 100,000 troops, were a regular feature in Europe during the Cold War. *Burja* in 1961 was the Warsaw Pact's first multinational exercise. Its goal was to strengthen the Pact's ability to operate as a coalition force in support of the Soviet objective to force a change to the status of Berlin upon the three Western Allies. In autumn 1963, the United States Army in Europe conducted large field manoeuvres in Hesse with West German and French troops, as part of the *Big Lift* exercise. That exercise practiced the transatlantic movement of an armoured division stationed in Texas, but whose equipment had been prepositioned previously at storage sites in West Germany. Its aim was to demonstrate the growing capacity of the United States to reinforce NATO rapidly in a crisis, using airlift, which had been found to be unsatisfactory during the 1961 Berlin crisis. *Big Lift* was followed by the REFORGER exercises series, starting in 1969 (see the chapter by Diego Ruiz Palmer on the *Autumn Forge* exercise series in this volume).

In the mid-1960s, the *Bundeswehr* started to hold corps-level exercises regularly (*Heeresübung*), once it had reached its full strength of 12 divisions. One such exercise was *Schwarzer Löwe* ('black lion') in 1968, which attracted attention because it took place just after the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. The exercise area was moved away from West Germany's border with Czechoslovakia because the West German government sought to avoid the Soviet Union using the pretext of an alleged, but non-existing, 'NATO threat of intervention' to justify the invasion and the subsequent stationing of the invading Soviet forces. From 1969 onwards, the USSR and the Warsaw Pact staged increasingly ambitious and threatening *Zapad* and *Soyuz* live and command post exercises designed to practice the execution of a fast-paced strategic offensive operation to defeat NATO and conquer Western

Europe. In 1975, NATO kicked off the *Autumn Forge* exercise series to enhance interoperability and the ability of allied forces to fight together. In the late 1970s, the United States initiated several new exercises to enhance the operational effectiveness of U.S. forces, while also conveying to the USSR a message of resolve that the United States would not be intimidated by growing Soviet military belligerence, reflected not least in its large-scale exercises. In the 1980s, the competition between NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organisation (WTO) expressed itself in exercises spelling out in virtual reality how both sides would have behaved in a Third World War.<sup>1</sup>

The end of the Cold War brought large-scale exercises in Europe to an end. NATO's *Autumn Forge* exercise series were terminated in the autumn of 1989. The large-scale FTXs conducted by the Belgian and Royal Netherlands armies in the autumn of 1988 in West Germany – exercises *Golden Crown* and *Free Lion*, respectively – were the last of their kind. The *Bundeswehr's* last *Heeresübung* of the Cold War was exercise *Offenes Visier* ('open visor') in northern West Germany, while the French Army's own last Cold War FTX was *Champagne 89* in eastern France; both were conducted in September 1989, two months before the fall of the Berlin Wall. The U.S. Army's last large-scale REFORGER exercise – FTX *Certain Challenge* – was staged in Bavaria in autumn 1988 and the series terminated in 1993, with exercises declining rapidly in scale between those two dates. NATO's last collective defence exercises for over a decade, *Cannon Cloud* and *Strong Resolve*, were held in 2002, the same year that NATO and Russia confirmed their partnership, initiated in 1997, and launched the NATO-Russia Council.

A few articles or books have written up the history of particular exercises, in particular historical contexts. Only one work, to our knowledge, has tackled the subject of military exercises throughout history, unsurprisingly written by one of the great strategic thinkers of

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1 Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, 'The NATO-Warsaw Pact competition in the 1970s and 1980s: A revolution in military affairs in the making or the end of a strategic age?', *Cold War History*, volume 4/2014, pp. 533-573.

our time, Martin van Creveld.<sup>2</sup> Another two have approached the subject in a general but more theoretical fashion, with valuable results and advice for those engaged in exercise design and planning.<sup>3</sup> But we have found that, by studying exercises that have taken place since the Second World War systematically, there is much more to be said about their purposes and benefits, with relevance to decision-makers, exercise planners and other practitioners now.

Our own interest in the subject dates back to the Cold War, when analysts tried to assess NATO's capacity to resist a potential assault by the WTO,<sup>4</sup> glean knowledge about its capabilities, standard operational procedures, assumptions and intentions,<sup>5</sup> and to the early years after its end, when German unification led to the opening of archives illustrating the conduct and aims of WTO exercises.<sup>6</sup> By then most strategists' attention had shifted to preparing and training forces for contingencies labelled euphemistically 'operations other than war.' These involved often smaller-scale operations and small-unit tactics, even if in support of important political objectives – a characteristic captured by the expression 'strategic corporal.'<sup>7</sup> Still, they often also involved high-intensity combat and required operational skill and resilience, even if against an asymmetric, non-mechanized, sometimes elusive adversary. Exercises focused on battalion-level and lower counter-insurgency tactics,

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2 Martin van Creveld, *Wargames: from Gladiators to Gigabytes*, Cambridge, CUP, 2013.

3 Peter Perla (with John Curry, ed), *The Art of Wargaming*, US Naval Institute 1990, new edn Lulu, 2012; Philip Sabin, *Simulating War: Studying Conflict through Simulation Games*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

4 Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, 'Between the Rhine and the Elbe: France and the Conventional Defense of Central Europe,' *Comparative Strategy*, Vol 6, No 4, autumn 1987, pp. 471-512.

5 See for example William Julian Lewis (ed.), *The Warsaw Pact: arms, doctrine, and strategy*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1982; John Caravelli, 'Soviet and Joint Warsaw Pact Exercises: Functions and Utility,' *Armed Forces and Society* Vol. 9 No. 3 (Spring 1983), pp. 393-426; Diego Ruiz Palmer, 'Paradigms lost: A Retrospective Assessment of the NATO-Warsaw Pact Competition in the Alliance's Southern Region,' *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Summer 1990), pp. 265-286.

6 Lothar Rühl: 'Offensive defence in the Warsaw pact,' *Survival* Vol. 33 No. 5 (1991), pp. 442-450; Beatrice Heuser, 'Warsaw Pact Military Doctrines in the 70s and 80s: Findings in the East German Archives,' *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 12 No. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1993), pp. 437-457; Vojtech Mastny & Malcolm Byrne (eds): *A Cardboard Castle? An Inside History of the Warsaw Pact*, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2005.

7 The expression 'strategic corporal' was coined by General Charles C. Krulak, nearly two decades ago, when he was the Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps. General Charles C. Krulak, 'The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War,' *Marines Magazine*, January 1999.



rather than on brigade-scale and larger combined-arms operations.

Many missed the tailgate signs when the post-Cold War exercise hiatus started to change as Russia held a one-off *Zapad* exercise in 1999 to practice its concept of nuclear escalation to de-escalate an escalating regional conflict. Following exercise *Kavkaz* in the summer of 2008, Russia has been conducting annually since 2009 a large-scale, theatre-level, combined-arms every autumn.<sup>8</sup> These exercises rotate among its four Military Districts (*Zapad*; *Vostok*; *Tsent*; and *Kavkaz*). Since 2013, Russia also stages regularly ‘no-notice’ snap-alert exercises to test the readiness and responsiveness of its forces on a large scale, often ahead of the theatre exercises. Because of their large scale and no-notice nature, these snap-alert exercises have raised concern that Russia has now developed a capacity which is unrivalled in Europe to generate and concentrate on its western periphery a large body of war-fighting forces on short notice (see Johan Norberg’s contribution to this volume). Coupled with Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea and support of separatists in eastern Ukraine, Russia’s growing exercise tempo has prompted Allies and NATO to give exercises a new priority, as part of an overall strengthening of its deterrence and defence posture in Europe, including a much greater focus on preparing NATO forces for high-end, collective defence operations. In 2015, NATO initiated with exercise *Trident Juncture 15* the practice of conducting the annual evaluation and certification of the NATO Response Force in a live exercise (LIVEX) configuration every three years. Conducted in Italy, Portugal and Spain, *Trident Juncture 15* evaluated the Alliance’s capacity to deploy, assemble upon arrival and engage a joint and combined force to deter and defend. In 2016, Poland, in cooperation with the United States, hosted the multinational exercise *Anakonda 16* to test its maturing capacity to receive external reinforcements and provide host nation support. In autumn 2018, Norway will host the next *Trident Juncture* exercise in the series, in another demonstration of NATO’s collective capacity to execute its deterrence and defence commitments

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8 Johan Norberg, *Training to Fight: Russia’s Major Military Exercises, 2011-2014*, FOI Research Paper FOI-R-4128—SE, Stockholm, FOI, 2015.

anywhere within the North Atlantic Treaty area. While larger than the exercises staged by NATO and by Allies between 1993 and 2013, these recent exercises are much smaller in scale than the larger, theatre-level exercises conducted every autumn by Russia over the last five years (for instance, exercises *Vostok 14* and *Kavkaz 16* are believed to have numbered 155,000 and 120,000 troops, respectively).<sup>9</sup> This is not to say, however, that collective defence is the only area where lessons drawn from the study of exercises can be applied advantageously in the present or future. A capacity to assemble and integrate multinational forces for expeditionary operations to distant theatres, to help prevent a regional crisis from escalating into a conflict or to contribute to international efforts to end a war, restore the peace and support local defence capacity-building efforts in support of longer-term stability, will remain an important training and exercising objective for NATO and Western forces.

The focus of this extensive international research project that we launched and carried through with the generous support of NATO's Public Diplomacy Division, the NATO Defense College and the Norwegian Defence Command and Staff College has been to assemble a wide-ranging set of perspectives on exercises contributed by practitioners, as well as academics, with a particular focus on NATO and on the wider Euro-Atlantic area. On NATO and NATO-member state exercises, we have contributions on the *Carte Blanche* exercise of 1955 (by Robert Davis), on the *Autumn Forge* exercise series from 1975-1989 (by Diego Ruiz Palmer), on the NATO WINTEX-CIMEX command post exercises in the 1970s and 1980s, as seen from a British perspective (by James Sheahan), on NATO's Crisis-Management Exercises (CMX) since the end of the Cold War (by one of their main designers, Ilay Ferrier), on national exercises (contributions by Spyros Plakoudas and Tormod Heier), and on recent and ongoing U.S.-led multinational Baltic Operations (*BALTOPS*) exercises in the Baltic Sea (by Peter Dombrowski and Ryan French). The link with NATO's Cold War opponent and strategic competitor , the

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9 Dave Johnson, "ZAPAD 2017 and Euro-Atlantic security", *NATO Review*, December 2017.

Warsaw Pact, is made in an article on political signalling and misreading in the early 1980s (by Beatrice Heuser), and on attempts to hedge against such misunderstandings that resulted in the provisions of the Vienna Document in its successive iterations (by Olivier Schmitt).

Lessons can also be learnt by drawing more broadly on case studies of exercises that have not taken place on NATO territory or directly affected NATO or individual Alliance members. Outside Europe, exercises in the Middle East precipitated crises or were the prelude to war. By contrast, since the end of the Cold War exercises in the Middle East have also played an important role in building multinational force interoperability between Western and Arab forces, among Arab forces, and between Israel and some European nations, such as Greece, Italy and Turkey, as documented in the chapter by Amr Yossef. In China, exercises are increasingly associated with the transformation of the People's Liberation Army into a modern, network-centric force that can project force across East Asia and possibly the Western Pacific, as assessed in the chapter by Chris Young.

A regrettable lacuna in our book concerns exercises staged by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, as well as exercises in the northern Pacific and North-East Asia conducted by Japan and by the Republic of Korea and by both with the United States. Clearly, in the current evolving circumstances in the region, they would deserve separate study. We have been able, however, to include illustrative case studies of exercises in other areas of the world. They include an in-depth analysis of the Indian *Brasstacks* exercise of 1987 (by John Gill), which had an important regional impact, and of an open-ended Austrian exercise in 1969 – *Bear Paw* – that had considerable military, but also domestic political implications (by Erwin Schmidl). Rounding up these empirical contributions, Jim Wirtz, Jeffrey Appleget and Jeffrey Kline have analysed the signals sent by 'war-gaming' as a dedicated and complementary activity to exercises.

This book thus provides a diverse set of perspectives on the design,

planning and conduct of exercises on a nearly global basis, drawing on historical evidence from the Cold War, as well as more recent patterns. Its aim is to inform exercise planners, intelligence analysts and policy-makers in NATO and like-minded nations, as well as academics and opinion-shapers, as exercises take again centre-stage in strategy and defence planning.<sup>10</sup> No lessons derived from studies of past cases can ever be applied blindly in conducting today's business, and none of the insights presented in this book can replace policy-makers' and planners' own analysis and judgment in designing exercises in the light of prevailing circumstances and future security risks and needs. Nevertheless, by presenting insights, lessons and challenges that arose in the execution of exercises in the past, practitioners should find in this book inspiration about how to think about the role of exercises in security policy and alliance relationships, in particular in relation to deterrence, assurance and defence.<sup>11</sup>

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10 In August 2017, Brigadier General John Healey, USAF, Director of exercises and assessments at Headquarters, U.S. European Command, in Stuttgart, Germany, drew attention to the desirability of conducting exercises on a larger scale and a more integrated basis, to reflect a changing, more complex security landscape. Andrea Shalal, 'Eyeing Russia, military shifts toward more global war games,' *Reuters*, 3 August 2017.

11 For practical advice for exercise designers, see Beatrice Heuser and Harold Simpson, 'The Missing Political Dimension of Military Exercises,' *RUSI Journal* Vol. 162 No. 3, June/July 2017, pp. 20-29.

## 2

## Reflections on the Purposes, Benefits and Pitfalls of Military Exercises

*Beatrice Heuser*

Typically, in the recent past, military exercises have performed a variety of roles. The most obvious ones are what might be called tactical-technical:

- (i) Training of staffs and forces, including aspects associated with communications and logistics;
- (ii) The preservation of old and the generation of new skills and competences;
- (iii) Experimentation with new technologies and weapons systems, operational concepts and force structures, and tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs), and even with new strategic approaches.

Others, however, have a distinctively political-strategic dimension or operational purpose. They include:

- (iv) Reassurance of friends and allies;
- (v) Exercises in support of defence reform and standardisation;
- (vi) Exercises as a tool of diplomacy;
- (vii) Deterrence of potential adversaries;
- (viii) Preparation of wartime operations, whether defensive or offensive, as this was the case for NATO and the Warsaw Pact, respectively, during the Cold War.

In many cases, some or all of the objectives set out above are pursued concurrently, although some might be mutually incompatible in the framework of individual exercises, for a variety of reasons (e.g., aim and scope of the exercise; its overt or covert nature; its geographic footprint and timetable; available resources; etc.).

The most obvious and immediate purpose of exercises has traditionally been to train staffs and forces, often through the use of command post exercises (CPX) for the former and field training exercises (FTX) for the latter. In many cases, CPXs and FTXs mirror intended wartime actions, under the motto 'train as you fight.'

However, the requirement to preserve some degree of operational flexibility, as well as secrecy and uncertainty in a potential adversary's mind, in relation to wartime tasks and plans, means that exercises cannot be looked upon as an entirely reliable guide to what a nation, a commander or an opponent might undertake, or how they might behave, in a conflict.

In some cases, FTXs and live exercises (LIVEXs) are conducted outside of military training areas and in that case without the employment of training ammunition. Exercises executed inside training areas and firing ranges and involving live firing are designated combined-arms, live-fire exercises (CALFEX) or, simply, live-fire exercises (LFX). Sometimes, CPXs and FTXs are combined in command post/field training exercises (CFXs) to permit staffs and forces to train concurrently and interactively, while allowing each to focus on its own training objectives within a common exercise architecture. With the advent of computers and simulators, as well as of high-debit communications, in the 1990s, CFXs have transitioned increasingly to computer-assisted exercises (CAX) in a distributed, multi-level mode, meaning staffs and forces training together from remote locations, including ships at sea and flying aircraft, across the strategic to tactical hierarchy. NATO adopted the 'ACE 89' exercise concept in 1989 as a means to explore the contribution that simulations could make to the training of Allied forces in the rapidly changing strategic circumstances in

Europe at the time, just before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Exercises can be wholly or partly pre-scripted, with or without an adversary actually being ‘played’ by real forces, with or without a pre-determined outcome. In table-top exercises, a ‘directing staff,’ which is independent from either of the two antagonistic players, may decide to introduce certain events into the exercise scenario to force either or both players to consider courses of action which they would not normally have wanted to take (see the contributions of Ilay Ferrier and of Wirtz, Appleget and Kline in this volume). Even with a pre-determined outcome, and even when the exercise is designed mainly to test procedures, it can take surprising turns, especially if coalitions are involved, as individual players or groups of players, especially when representing governments in a democratic context, may make unexpected moves and take unexpected positions. Even in exercises, these can have considerable political consequences, as highlighted in several chapters in this book.

## The Operational Dimensions of Military Exercises

Military exercises as preparations for war can be traced back to Antiquity. Leaving aside the individual’s training for the use of weapons, we can define military exercises as ranging from the training of small numbers of soldiers for joint action to large-scale, multi-force events that are conducted on a state or even an alliance-wide level; they may be staff rides for officers, or can include the dimension of top government decision-making. The most prosaic reason for conducting exercises is to ward off boredom and to keep soldiers’ (and sailors’, later also airmen’s) spirits up. Already in the 17th century, manuals were written detailing how troops should be kept busy with exercises and small operations in the winter months, when warfare normally ceased; indeed, an early example of this was published in Paris during the Thirty Years’ War.<sup>1</sup> This is a recurrent theme in instructions for the ‘perfect captain’ written in the

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1 Antoine de Ville, *De la charge des gouverneurs des places*, Paris, Matthieu Guillemot, 1639.

subsequent centuries.<sup>2</sup>

(i) *Training and rehearsal of procedures*

Military exercises became necessary when the first organised groups confronted other organised groups in violent conflicts; even hunting works better when hunters organise themselves and agree in advance on tactics to pursue. The Dutch medievalist Jan Huizinga drew important correlations between the practice of team sport on the one hand and warfare on the other, which he, in turn, traced back to Antiquity.<sup>3</sup> Modern military exercises in part stem from the medieval tournament. For the Middle Ages and early Modern times, existing literature usually discusses the individual physical training of knights, not team efforts.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, such team exercises for the Greek phalanx, the Roman tortoise, the Anglo-Saxon battle formation with locking shields, archers firing salvoes, and then the pikemen in the Scottish *schiltron*, the Central European *Haufen* or the Spanish *tercio*, must have taken place regularly, long before hand-held firearms made drill and rehearsed movements imperative. By the 18th century, military exercises were well prepared, well-regulated and recurrent events. In the 19th century, these were complemented by staff rides to reflect on how to marry operations to particular locations, an invention attributed to the elder Prussian General Helmuth von Moltke, which spread to other countries on account of the success of his campaigns.

Large-scale exercises and staff rides have at least in some notable cases been directly relatable to war plans, as the work of Terence Zuber on the Schlieffen Plan shows, which he demonstrated to be a series of exercise plans, rather than one single operational document.<sup>5</sup> Other analysts have

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2 On early military manuals, see Beatrice Heuser (ed, trs), *The Strategy Makers: Thoughts on War and Society from Machiavelli to Clausewitz*, Santa Barbara, CA, Praeger-ABC Clío, 2010.

3 Johann Huizinga, *Homo ludens, a study of the play-element in culture* (orig. in Dutch 1938, London, Routledge, Kegan & Paul, 1948).

4 Benjamin Deruelle, « Entre cavalerie et chevalerie, la formation du noble dans l'écurie du roi au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle » in Benjamin Deruelle, Bernard Gainot (dir.), *La construction du militaire. Savoirs et savoir-faire militaires à l'époque moderne*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013, pp. 27-54.

5 Terence Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan, German War Planning, 1871-1914*, Oxford, Oxford Univer-



used doctrine and exercises to reconstruct war plans and intentions from patterns of troop and equipment deployment. A famous case here is the controversial work of the Russian defector who published under the name of Victor Suvorov in the 1980s. He used what he had learned at the Soviet military academy and rehearsed in exercises about how to prepare and deploy for an offensive campaign to construct his interpretation of Soviet deployments in 1940/1941, namely that Stalin was planning an attack on German-held Polish territory (and perhaps even Germany itself) and was merely pre-empted by Hitler's Wehrmacht.<sup>6</sup> Suvorov's thesis has been much debated and dismissed by leading Sovietologists, but there seems to be growing consensus, to cite the historian of the Soviet military Alexander Hill, that available evidence suggests that 'in June 1941 the Red Army was undoubtedly mobilising for war against Germany, just not a war in 1941' but rather for late 1942 or even 1943.<sup>7</sup>

Either way, there is not always a correlation between exercise plans – even if they are clearly offensive – and intentions to implement them. They do not provide a simple key for the prediction of an adversary's actions. At the same time, the exercising of aggressive scenarios cannot be dismissed as unimportant. During the Cold War, many NATO command post exercises revolved mainly around rehearsing procedures and consultation mechanisms for a response to aggression by forces of the Warsaw Pact, up to and including restrained nuclear use to restore deterrence and bring hostilities to a halt.<sup>8</sup> They were definitely not indicators of a general Western desire to see such scenarios materialise. This is in all likelihood also true for Warsaw Pact plans, since there is compelling evidence that,

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sity Press, 2002. See also L.C.F. Turner, 'The Significance of the Schlieffen Plan,' in Paul M. Kennedy (editor), *The War Plans of the Great Powers, 1880-1914*, Boston, Allen and Unein, 1979, pp. 199-221.

<sup>6</sup> Victor Suvorov, *The Icebreaker, Who Started the Second World War?*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1990; Alexander Hill: *The Red Army and the Second World War*, Cambridge University Press, 2017, p.198.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. David M. Glantz, *Stumbling Colossus: The Red Army on the Eve of War*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998; Bianka Pietrow-Ennker, *Präventivkrieg? Der deutsche Angriff auf die Sowjetunion*, Berlin: Fischer, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> On NATO's policy regarding deterrence of, and defence against, Warsaw Pact conventional, chemical or nuclear attack in the 1980s, see two interviews with General Bernard W. Rogers, US Army, the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) between 1979 and 1987 in *Armed Forces Journal International*, September 1983, pages 74, 78 and 80; and in *International Defense Review*, issue 2/1986, pp. 149-152.

from the mid-1960s onwards, the Soviets' concept for war in Europe centred on a theatre-scale offensive *without* the use of nuclear weapons, even though Warsaw Pact exercises also included a nuclear variant to pre-empt NATO nuclear first use, with massive employment of nuclear weapons.<sup>9</sup>

(ii) *Preservation of old or generation of new skills and competences*

Exercises have also had the objective of introducing armed forces to new equipment or testing new tactics and new procedures, etc. A subject with considerable relevance today is whether some exercises should also be designed to keep alive competences which have fortunately not been drawn upon for quite some time – high intensity conflict operations in Europe up to the level of major war, perhaps with the hope that this could also have deterrent functions. In this context, it is worth recalling that exercises that took place on the eve of the First World War largely excluded any option of limited war or of using only few, professional forces in a European conflagration. All sides were ideologically committed to what the French called *l'offensive à outrance*, and only this was properly exercised, contributing significantly to making the Great War a bloodbath of unprecedented dimensions.<sup>10</sup>

Exercises can also serve the purpose of keeping alive old competences. After the First World War, the German *Reichswehr*, working under the limitations of the Versailles Peace Treaty which precluded it from the production or possession of aircraft, ships, and tanks, and which existed and exercised under the watchful eyes of distrustful neighbouring powers, can retrospectively be said to have done a great job in preserving World War I competences. In doing so, the *Reichswehr* prepared the way for the kind of manoeuvre warfare that was practised very successfully by its successor organisation, the *Wehrmacht*, in World War II.<sup>11</sup> It must also be

9 Beatrice Heuser, 'Warsaw Pact Military Doctrines in the 70s and 80s: Findings in the East German Archives', *Comparative Strategy* Vol. 12 No. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1993), pp. 437-457.

10 Douglas Porch, *The march to the Marne, the French Army 1871-1914*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

11 Albert Seaton, *The German Army, 1933-1945*, New York, St. Martin's press, 1982; and James S. Corum,

said, to the credit of the *Reichswehr* of the 1920s, that it did relatively little to scare neighbouring countries; it was the German government's military co-operation with the USSR (the famous Rapallo Treaty of 1922), not the exercises of the *Reichswehr* that, were a cause for concern to them.<sup>12</sup> There may be lessons here for the present and near future about how to exercise purely defensive operations in a military and politically credible, yet transparent and non-threatening, way.

(iii) *Exercises as experiments*

Besides exercises that could serve as indicators of actual or future operational plans, there have been exercises that were general tests or experiments of new equipment, operational concepts, or even grand strategies. Some such exercises were deliberately used by key officers in charge to bring home a lesson, which may have been successful to a point, but may also have unintended consequences. The NATO exercise *Carte Blanche* of 1955, analysed by Robert Davies in this volume, is one such example. *Carte Blanche* was part of a series of periodic exercises aimed at building up NATO's air strength. What set *Carte Blanche* apart, however, was its focus on evaluating the simulated use of hundreds of air-launched tactical nuclear weapons to thwart a Soviet offensive in West Germany a month after the FRG's entry into NATO. Given the exercise's theme, its name seemed hardly appropriate.

Some such exercises may have made the case for effecting serious changes, so that after their conclusion, important alterations were made to the way weapons systems or equipment would be used, and/or so that tactics or strategies would be modified significantly. Some exercises demonstrated that certain options would not work. One such example is the French exercise *Armor* of October 1964, held in Brittany. It set out to test whether France might again, in a future war, resist enemy occupation by having resistance forces take to the hills, in analogy to the famous

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*The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform*, Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992.

12 Karen Schaefer, *Die Militärstrategie Seeckts*, Berlin, Frank & Thimme, 2016.

*maquis* of the Second World War. Might the denial of Brittany to an invading enemy, partly with guerrilla tactics and with air-support from an aircraft carrier in the Channel, allow France to maintain ‘the sovereignty of the legitimate Government,’ without access to tactical nuclear weapons? The exercise made it blatantly clear that this was impossible, as the use of tactical nuclear weapons by the opponent, undeterred by French nuclear forces, would quickly lead to the destruction of that area and the surrender by any surviving citizens.<sup>13</sup> One suspects that the relative lack of success of this exercise was intended: France was just about to introduce its own independent nuclear force, and there was much interest in demonstrating that territorial defence of the sort planned and exercised by Sweden and Switzerland was not an option for France.

Another example of a truly experimental exercise, covered in detail in this volume by Erwin Schmidl, is *Bear’s Paw*, an exercise conducted by the Austrian military in 1969. It was a ‘free style’ exercise involving two sides, one playing the adversary, and not following any a prescribed design. The result was contrary to the expectations of those who had planned the exercise, as the opposing team (‘orange’) beat the ‘blue’ team representing the Austrian armed forces. Contrary to the participants’ expectations, the result was not an increase in defence spending, but increased governmental and public resistance to any temptation, in the context of the crushed ‘Prague Spring’, to abandon Austria’s neutral status. In short, attempts by individual officers or groups of officers to use exercises for particular purposes may misfire strategically, however much their short-term aims are achieved.

## Political-Strategic Purposes of Military Exercises

### (iv) *Reassuring Allies and one’s own population*

A military exercise is rarely only a ‘military maneuver or simulated wartime operation involving planning, preparation, and execution

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<sup>13</sup> This exercise series is still ongoing today and generally deals with irregular warfare.

that is carried out for the purpose of training and evaluation', in the definition of the U.S. Department of Defense.<sup>14</sup> During the Cold War, procedural exercises were designed to increase NATO's and individual Allied governments' ability to respond to Soviet aggression according to agreed plans. This, were intended to enhance deterrence and reassure Allies. However, they too, could have unexpected consequences.

For example, civil defence exercises confronted members of the public with the horrors of a nuclear war. British exercises of this sort included *Scrum Half* and *Square Leg* in 1978 and 1980, respectively. In the latter, local governments were asked to make provisions for coping with emergencies, including dealing with large-scale casualties and supply problems resulting from a nuclear war. The curtailment of civil freedoms became a big issue: the need, for example, to limit medical treatment only to a selection of injured people and to make provisions for the survival of the government itself, was described by critics as 'cynical,' as it would ensure the survival only of an 'elite.' Government advice to the population to 'stay put' in case of major war – with compliance enforced by traffic police – seemed to critics bound to ensure massive casualty figures among inhabitants of big cities, if hit by nuclear weapons. Subsequently, many local governments refused to participate in such exercises, and declared their area 'nuclear-free zones,' contributing to the polarisation of British politics in the years of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's first Conservative Government. The exercise *Hard Rock* scheduled for 1982 eventually had to be cancelled because too many local governments refused to take part.<sup>15</sup> (The fear of similar alienation led French governments never to opt for civil defence schemes and never to exercise them.) In short, as James Sheahan's chapter in this book shows, even civil defence exercises, designed not least to reassure one's population, pose many challenges domestically and have to be navigated around a multitude of political sensitivities.

On another level, some exercises such as WINTEX (short for Winter

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14 *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2017, p. 85.

15 Beatrice Heuser, *Nuclear Mentalities*, Chapter 2.

Exercise) served to take officers and officials on NATO's International Staff, subordinate NATO military commands, and in NATO member states through the procedure that would have to be followed to take and then implement key decisions with huge political implications in the simulated circumstances of a major war in Europe. Again this could have unexpected consequences. For example, in WINTEX 1989, against the scenario of a Warsaw Pact attack on NATO territory, the Royal Air Force assumed the task to execute a first use of nuclear weapons against Soviet territory, assigning it to a Tornado fighter-bomber aircraft. This was supposed to reassure NATO Allies, who might have been tempted to surrender in the face of a Warsaw Pact attack of NATO's determination, if the USA hesitated to resort to the use of nuclear weapons – thus the British reasoning.<sup>16</sup> It turned out that the thinking in London and in Bonn was at cross purposes, given that it was thought in London that the Germans would welcome this British engagement. Instead, anti-nuclear feelings had become so strong in Bonn that the West German government brought the exercise to a premature close as it found any NATO nuclear use in the particular context of the late 1980s politically unacceptable – to the great surprise and discomfort of the British 'players.'<sup>17</sup>

Previous NATO exercises had also created intra-alliance friction where they were supposed to show strength and result in deterrence. This was particularly true for the earliest nuclear exercises involving the West Germans once they had joined NATO: the live air exercise *Carte Blanche* in 1955<sup>18</sup> (see again Robert Davies' contribution to this volume) and the *Lion Noir* command post exercise in 1957 left the West Germans stunned by the high casualty rates which the exercises forecast; in turn this led to a long-term (and ultimately successful) campaign by West Germany to

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16 Ivo Daalder, *The Nature and Practice of Flexible Response*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991, p.92.

17 Interview with Sir Michael Quinlan, 15 March 1993. See also Melissa Healy, 'NATO Cancels War Games to Shift Scenarios,' *Los Angeles Times*, 20 May 1990.

18 *Carte Blanche* was a live air exercise planned and executed by HQ Allied Air Forces, Central Europe (AIRCENT) in June 1955 that assumed the large-scale, notional employment of NATO air-delivered tactical nuclear weapons. *Lion Noir* was the periodic command post exercise conducted by HQ Allied Forces Central Europe (AFCENT), from the early 1950s through the early 1970s, to test the execution of the AFCENT Joint Emergency Defence Plan (EDP) against a hypothetical attack into West Germany.

ensure that the first and follow-on use of nuclear weapons by NATO, if deterrence had failed, would be limited and controlled, designed to restore deterrence with as little devastation as possible, as set out in the Nuclear Planning Group's political guidelines of 1969 and 1986.

Later NATO exercises were again specifically intended to reassure allies. Thus the REFORGER (REturn of FORces to GERmany) exercises, which originated in the redeployment of some US forces from Europe to South East Asia in the context of the Vietnam War (see Diego Ruiz Palmer's chapter), were designed to demonstrate that U.S. forces stationed in the United States could be sent back to Europe in little time. Starting in 1969, the United States redeployed between 10,000 and 15,000 troops from the United States to West Germany annually, where they had their combat equipment stored in specialised warehouses, called POMCUS sites. Keeping the equipment in Europe shortened considerably the time necessary for these troops to be flown on U.S. Air Force wide-body transport aircraft. By the early 1980s, the United States had expanded its reinforcement commitment from two to six U.S. Army divisions that had their equipment prepositioned in peacetime at specially configured storage sites in West Germany and the three Benelux countries, and REFORGER grew in scale accordingly.<sup>19</sup>

In recent years, we have seen many different configurations of exercises, designed to reassure not only own populations and Allies, but also other friendly parties. There is great political significance in the fact that since the end of the Cold War exercises now include not only NATO members, but also like-minded countries, such as non-NATO Partnership for Peace nations, as illustrated by the BALTOPS exercise series conducted by the U.S. Navy in the Baltic Sea, which are discussed here by Peter Dombrowski and Ryan French. On the one hand, these outreach activities on the part of NATO do strengthen collective security regionally. On the other hand, they illustrate the challenges of reconciling in one exercise the collective

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19 See Walter Bohm and Diego Ruiz Palmer, *REFORGER 87 Certain Strike – The Cold War's Largest Transatlantic Bridge*, Erlangen, Germany: VerlagJochenVollert - Tankograd Publishing, 2017.

defence needs of Alliance members with those of partners that do not subscribe to mutual defence pledges.

(v) *Exercises in support of defence reform and standardisation*

A further very positive dimension of exercises carried out jointly with friends and allies needs to be added here: that of exercises as tools of 'defence conversion.' This term became popular after the end of the Cold War to describe the activities of a number of old NATO member states that worked with new members but also with friendly states elsewhere to improve their militaries' performance, but also to further best practice and a general adherence to standards of international law (especially *ius in bello*) and to ensure that this penetrated all operational procedures. It can be safely said that much good has been done in this context in recent years.<sup>20</sup>

(vi) *Exercises as tools of diplomacy*

Exercising jointly with another country can serve as a tool of diplomacy. Joint exercises can be an expression of mutual trust and friendship. This was the case of the U.S. Cold War REFORGER exercises with NATO Allies and the *Midlink* exercises of CENTO, up to the mid-1970s, between Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States, and continues to be the case of exercise *Foal Eagle* (which replaced *Team Spirit*) with the Republic of Korea. They can also be cancelled or reduced in scope as a sign of disapproval of some new governmental policy line. For instance, the scheduling or not of a *Bright Star* exercise with Egypt or the reduction in scope of a *Cobra Gold* exercise with Thailand has reflected, at times, the ups and downs in the United States' bilateral relationship with the one and the other (See Amr Yossef's contribution to this volume on the *Bright Star* exercise series).

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20 Harold Simpson, "UK-Sponsored Stabilisation and Reform in Sierra Leone 2002-2013: A Unique Case or a Template for Future Intervention(s)?" *Sandhurst Occasional Papers No. 19*, Camberley: Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, 2014; Beatrice Heuser and Harold Simpson, 'The Missing Political Dimension of Military Exercises,' *RUSI Journal* Vol. 162 No. 3, June/July 2017, pp.20-29.



(vii) *Deterring adversaries and exercise observers*

At least since the 18th century military exercises, when conducted with large numbers of forces involved, could become events watched with great interest by foreign observers. The principal objective here is that of impressing the adversary. This may serve to intimidate him and make him politically compliant, or it may serve a deterrent purpose, when there is at least an element of defensiveness in the disposition of the state conducting the exercises. Already Empress Maria Theresa and even King Frederick II, himself not averse to making conquests in foreign wars but well aware of the inherited weakness of his own kingdom, invited foreign observers to witness exercises held by their forces.<sup>21</sup>

What may happen, however, is that the security dilemma comes into play: the adversary may be so impressed that he is not deterred, but rather perceives the danger of aggression. This he may then seek to deflect with a preventive war.<sup>22</sup> This it would seem was a real danger in relations between NATO and the Warsaw Pact in the early 1980s (see my other chapter in this book), and in Indo-Pakistani relations in the late 1980s (see John Gill's contribution, both in this volume). Moreover, exercises can increase tensions in already fraught relationships, and create contexts in which accidents can have pernicious effects, as Spyros Plakoudas's contribution in this volume illustrates.

A crucial set of exercises we could not cover in this volume, namely the North Korean exercises on the one hand, and US-South Korean exercises on the other (the *Foal Eagle* and *Team Spirit* series), make the headlines every year, even though they have been held for decades with advance notifications to the media. Time will show whether, on balance, they contribute more to keep tensions high on the Korean peninsula, or whether their overall effect was deterrent.

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21 For the only comprehensive history of military exercises, see Martin van Creveld, *Wargames, from Gladiators to Gigabytes*, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

22 Dimitry Adamsky, 'The 1983 Nuclear Crisis – Lessons for Deterrence Theory and Practice' in *Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 36 No. 1 (2013), pp. 4-41.

Exercises also serve as visible means of projecting power, as demonstrated particularly by the USA, but also by Russia, and in July 2017, by China with its first joint naval exercises with Russia in the Baltic Sea.<sup>23</sup> Christopher Yung analyses China's handling of military exercises in this volume.

One might list here also the novel phenomenon which Tormod Heier is describing in his chapter, namely, attempts through exercises to signal to adversaries that one has ways and means to obviate attacks disguised as something that may not quite fit other Allies' view of what constitutes a collective defence case under the terms of the NATO Treaty's Article 5. Norway is adopting a defensive posture which would force infiltrations of unmarked personnel either to withdraw or to draw on reinforcements, so as either to repel such a low-intensity attack or to escalate quickly. In 2015, Russian responses to Norway's defence concept in the form of a denigrating press campaign and of a fairly large-scale (40 000 participants) snap-exercise near the Norwegian border, as well as other forms of chest-beating, show that this is indeed an irritation to Moscow.

On a more civilised level of relations with potential adversaries, admitting observers to one's exercises was and is not without risk, as it might well allow an adversary not only to understand better what one is doing, but to learn from it, and preventively to develop counter-measures.<sup>24</sup> It can, however, further transparency and prevent misunderstandings, for example when the build-up of armed forces might be misunderstood as preparations for an attack, as was argued by those who persuaded the states represented in the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) talks of the early 1970s and later the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to accept this principle.

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23 Andrew Higgins, 'China and Russia Hold First Joint Naval Drill in the Baltic Sea,' *New York Times*, 25 July 2017.

24 In 1773, for example, King Frederic II of Prussia allowed Count Guibert, a French military officer who had fought against Prussia in the recent Seven Years' War, and other foreign officers to observe Prussia's summer exercises. Guibert would later serve in France's war ministry, working on far-reaching reforms of the French Army. See G.A.H. [sic] Guibert, *Journal d'un Voyage en Allemagne fait en 1773* 2 vols, Paris, Treuttel et Würtz, 1803.

From the mid-1970s onwards, it became standard procedure between NATO and the Warsaw Pact to announce military exercises and their scope, and to invite observers from the other side to attend them – the *Bundeswehr's Standhafte Chatten* field training exercise in autumn 1977 was the first NATO exercise to be attended by Warsaw Pact observers.

This did not mean that all parties to such arrangement accepted them wholeheartedly; indeed, there is evidence that Russia has tried to circumvent this OSCE commitment by concealing the scale of large exercises such as *Zapad* in 2013 and 2017 by disaggregating them into multiple, smaller exercises, to keep below the threshold above which they had to be notified. Moreover, foreign observers of some of these exercises gained the impression that they were shown only parts of the exercise at hand and given a distorted picture of their aim and design. This was accomplished by revealing only partially or distorting the purpose and design of an exercise, as well as its operational phasing and tactical execution, or by restricting the observation period or access to the exercise area. As Johan Norberg's chapter illustrates, this pattern seems to be renewed by the Russian *Zapad* exercises of 2013 and 2017. James Sheahan's chapter in turn shows that NATO's members were initially also a little reluctant to play by the rules.

Today, however, it is the norm within the OSCE that exercises above a given threshold should be notified in advance, precisely in order to create transparency and avoid misunderstandings. This has its own political dimensions attached to it, as the chapter by Olivier Schmitt shows.<sup>25</sup>

(viii) *Offensive preparations and 'Maskirovka'*

The CSCE commitment to notify exercises ahead of time was welcomed by NATO member states as there were multiple examples of Soviet and

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25 It is not long ago that the US and NATO itself liked to underscore a dimension of its nuclear strategy which was designed to leave the enemy in doubt as to what exactly the US/NATO's reaction would be, with the result that Saddam Hussein, for one, counted on the West *not* reacting at all when he invaded Kuwait in August 1990. Uncertainty in the mind of the enemy does not necessarily work in one's favour, if uncertainty regarding the nature of a response is seen as reflecting a lack of resolve.

Warsaw Pact use of exercises to prepare military operations, indeed to serve as smokescreens for military operations. The WTO's *Šumava* exercise in July 1968 was intended, first, to intimidate the Dubček government in Prague, before becoming the preparatory stage for the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968.<sup>26</sup> Preparations were made for a (later abandoned) plan to occupy Poland during the Solidarność crisis in 1981.<sup>27</sup> In July 2008, *Kavkaz* 08 contained a scenario which was then put into practice with the short war on Georgia in August 2008. The Soviet Union's Middle Eastern client states imitated the Soviet method of using exercises as preparations and/or smokescreens for actual invasions, as Amr Youssef demonstrates in his chapter in this volume. Taking a slightly different approach, in March 2014 the Russian annexation of Crimea was organised while a military exercise to the East of Ukraine distracted attention away from the peninsula, leading to fears that a large-scale Russian invasion might be launched in the East.<sup>28</sup> Fittingly, during the late Cold War, as perfect examples of mirror-imaging, Warsaw Pact exercises included the scenario of NATO using an exercise to prepare an attack on the Warsaw Pact (see my chapter below in this volume.)

Indeed, a common feature of many large-scale exercises conducted by countries with no qualms about using military force to further their state interest has been that they practised a future aggressive military operation in an exercise. This was the case for Russia's *Kavkaz* exercise in July 2008, a month before it attacked Georgia. Also Saddam Hussein's military exercises in 1990 can be seen not only as masking preparations for his attack on Kuwait, but also as a straight-forward rehearsal.

To sum up then, exercises are an important military activity of nations, alliances and coalitions because they stand at the cross-roads

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26 Vojtech Mastny & Malcolm Byrne (eds), *A Cardboard Castle? An Inside History of the Warsaw Pact, 1955-1991*, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2005, Doc. 53, pp. 286-293.

27 The Polish General Jaruzelski took power in December 1981, under the cover of a declaration of martial law, insinuating that the USSR would otherwise have used an extended Warsaw Pact exercise – *Soyuz 81* -- to invade Poland; this claim is challenged by a record of a Soviet Politburo meeting indicating that there was a plan, but no political intention to invade, see Mastny & Byrne, *A Cardboard Castle?* Doc. 94, pp. 456-461.

28 Will Stewart and Tim Shipman, 'Red Army Masses on Ukraine Border,' *Mail Online*, 12 March 2014.

between strategy, operational art, diplomacy and politics. In most cases, their purpose is legitimate and benign: to train commanders and their forces; to practice procedures and test new tactics and technologies; or to demonstrate an intent and a capacity to execute national defence plans or mutual defence commitments, if required by circumstances. Less frequently, exercises can be instruments of overt or covert intimidation and coercion, or even a tool to prepare or carry-out aggression, sometimes behind the veil of deception. Nearly universally exercises bear watching carefully, to uncover the possible nefarious design of a potential adversary and understand his operational concept and capacity. The regular exercising of friendly forces deserves determined support and investment, to underpin credible deterrence and defence, but, as several chapters in this volume suggest, in a way that also helps elicit commitment by potential adversaries to the goals of greater transparency and strengthened crisis-stability. There is the danger that exercises become self-fulfilling prophecies, and inadvertently exacerbate a crisis. So far, no exercise has accidentally turned into war, but there is no guarantee that our luck will hold. These various aspects of exercises should encourage exercise planners, intelligence analysts and decision-makers, as well as academics, to read this book.



## 3

## Do Wargames Impact Deterrence?

*Jeffrey Appleget, Jeffrey Kline and James J. Wirtz*

Diplomats and senior officers generally assume that exercises conducted by both land and maritime forces can influence the behavior of potential adversaries in ways that bolster deterrent or compellent threats. Recent events support this assumption. In 2015, for instance, North Korean officials made a series of verbal threats toward the United States as Ulchi Freedom Guardian, a U.S.-South Korean exercise, unfolded. Pyongyang apparently interpreted the exercise to be a credible threat.<sup>1</sup> The communication that occurs via exercises can also be iterative. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) exercise Steadfast Jazz 2013, which tested NATO reaction forces, and an invigorated 'BALTOPS' (Baltic Operations) exercise in 2015 could be interpreted as responses to Russia's Zapad 2009 and 2013 exercises, which demonstrated Russia's ability to mobilize forces to attack the Baltic States. Although competing military exercises might fuel spirals of hostility, or lead to inadvertent escalation as troop movements and communications are interpreted as a real attack,<sup>2</sup> they are probably just as likely to produce a more stable international situation as competitors demonstrate military capability, coalition coordination, logistics capacity and preparedness to counter certain aggressive actions. Military exercises might even be a way to

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1 'North Korea threatens to attack U.S.,' Report by Kevin Conlon, CNN, 15 August 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/15/world/north-korea-threats/>

2 For *Able Archer*, see the chapters in this volume by Diego Ruiz Palmer and Beatrice Heuser, and also Raymond L. Garthoff, 'Soviet Leaders, Soviet Intelligence, and Changing Views of the United States, 1965-1991,' in Paul Maddess (ed), *Image of the Enemy: Intelligence Analysis of Adversaries Since 1945*, Washington, D.C., Georgetown University Press, 2015, pp. 44-45; and Nate Jones (editor), *Able Archer 83: The Secret History of the NATO Exercise that Almost Triggered Nuclear War*, New York, The New Press, 2016.

demonstrate the will to execute threats if deterrence should fail by working out the details necessary to turn ‘threats’ into the reality of military action. Military exercises involving actual forces serve as an important means of communication on the world stage.

It remains uncertain, however, whether wargaming – tabletop exercises, computer simulations, command and control evolutions involving human decisions but not the actual movement of forces – can have a similar effect as the movement of troops on the ground or ships at sea. In other words, can an overt wargame, or a secret wargame purposely leaked, or the details of a wargame revealed through espionage communicate potential capability or commitment to an adversary’s leadership?<sup>3</sup> Thus, the question we pose is if the contents of wargames are purposively made known, can they bolster deterrent or compellent threats? Wargames are an important part of defense planning around the world, but as far as we can tell, scholars and senior defense officials have never devoted much attention to estimating their impact on the behavior or planning efforts of likely opponents.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, virtually nothing has been written about if or how wargaming shapes world politics or the general strategic setting. Little effort has been devoted to determine if wargames can be used to strengthen deterrence or if they can play a role in strategic communication efforts.

To better assess if and how wargaming influences opponents, we shall first briefly trace the evolution of wargaming and identify relevant definitions of what constitutes a wargame. We shall then identify the theoretical basis for suggesting that wargames might in fact be able to shape the international environment and the behavior and expectations of

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<sup>3</sup> See Beatrice Heuser’s chapter in this book on the assumption of Western planners that due to wide-spread intelligence gathering, Moscow had full information about and could not misunderstand Western intentions, which were purely defensive.

<sup>4</sup> That estimating the impact of wargaming has attracted little scholarly attention might be a facet of a larger problem. According to Keren Yarhi-Milo, ‘... little scholarship exists to identify which indicators leaders and the state’s intelligence apparatus tasked with estimating threats use to assess intentions,’ see Keren Yarhi-Milo, ‘In the Eye of the Beholder: How Leaders and Intelligence Communities Assess the Intentions of Adversaries,’ *International Security*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Summer 2013), p. 7.



potential opponents. The paper then offers a brief survey of some notable instances in which wargames seemed to influence not only policymakers' perceptions, but also the course of subsequent international events.

## What is a Wargame?

The first use of inanimate objects like rocks and pebbles to represent men, animals and machines in conflict is lost in the mists of time, but it appears that gaming emerged alongside many activities associated with the rise of society and government. Miniature figures and playing boards, for instance, have been found in Egyptian tombs and other archeological excavations.<sup>5</sup> An early conflict game developed in China, *Wei Hai*, and its Japanese daughter *Go*, as well as the Indian game *Charturanga* and its daughter modern Chess, are thought to have been used for both entertainment and for introducing players to the role of maneuver and strategy in war.<sup>6</sup> In the 17th century, the Germans increased the complexity and movement in chess, creating the *Königsspiel*, or 'King's Game.' Over the next two hundred years, they refined the game in terms of modeling terrain, differentiating unit capabilities, and devising more precise and standardized adjudication methods. By the 19th century, wargaming became an accepted part of an officer's education as well as an instrument for assessing battle plans, new concepts and emerging technologies. With the development of computers and the emergence of modern operations research, wargames now offer increasingly sophisticated and detailed depictions of the tactical, operational and strategic components of battle and more mathematically rigorous methods to adjudicate game outcomes. Nevertheless, the most valuable contribution made by wargames to both education and analysis has changed little since the *Königsspiel*. Wargames allow humans to make real-time decisions within the confines of a specific and controlled scenario, decisions that can then be assessed in terms of

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5 Alfred H. Hausrath, *Venture Simulation in War, Business, and Politics*, New York, McGraw-Hill. 1971, p. 3; and Martin van Creveld, *Wargames from Gladiators to Gigabytes*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

6 Peter P. Perla, *The Art of Wargaming*, Annapolis, MD, United States Naval Institute Press, 1990, p. 16.

their ability to contribute to a desired end state.

Various definitions of the term ‘wargame’ have been suggested. James Dunnigan, for instance, defines a wargame as ‘a combination of game, history and science.’<sup>7</sup> In the most comprehensive use of the term, a wargame can be any simulative environment that represents conflict between two or more entities and involves real time human decision making. Defined in this manner, actual field exercises may be considered wargames, which makes these sort of broad definitions of wargame unsuited for use in this paper.<sup>8</sup> Thus, for our purposes, Peter Perla’s more restrictive definition of wargame makes a distinction that is key to assessing the impact of wargames on world politics. According to Perla, a wargame is ‘...a warfare model or simulation whose operation does not involve the activities of actual military forces, and whose sequence of events affects, and is, in turn, affected by the decisions made by players representing the opposing sides.’<sup>9</sup> One could also add that wargames differ from military exercises in that games, *ceteris paribus*, involve fewer resources and overt risks (increased risk of inadvertent escalation, operational accidents, reductions in future force readiness, etc.) when compared to the movement of actual forces. Additionally, wargames allow participants to manipulate notional weapons, units and operational methods that are under development or might be potentially developed. They can simulate forces and fighting methods that do not actually exist in an effort to test their responsiveness to estimated future threats.

When defined in this matter, wargaming, which is not necessarily bounded by today’s material or operational realities, could communicate a variety of accurate or *deceptive* messages to potential opponents. Wargaming could be used to signal interest in nascent technologies and operational concepts, while providing insight into the expectations behind these emerging systems and concepts. For instance, a wargame in

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<sup>7</sup> James F. Dunnigan, *The Complete Wargames Handbook: how to play, design and find them*, New York, William Morrow, 1992, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Hausrath, *ibid*, p8.

<sup>9</sup> Perla, *ibid*, p164.

which blue extensively relied upon notional precision-guided hypersonic lifting bodies targeted against red's notional present or future mobile missiles would not only suggest the emergence of this new technology, but would also offer insight into how blue intended to incorporate lifting bodies into existing operational concepts and war plans. The same game, however, could also be used to misdirect opponents onto unproductive paths: even if there were no hypersonic lifting bodies under development, news of such a game might cause red to divert resources into programs to counter this potential threat to its systems. Wargames also could reveal one's strengths or identify weaknesses in the opponent's forces or operational concepts, information that should serve to bolster deterrence. Alternatively, they might also reveal one's weaknesses, the opponent's strengths, poor intelligence collection and analysis or faulty strategic assumptions.

Today wargames are used by many militaries for training, plan assessment and evaluation of new concepts and technologies. Wargaming for training and evaluation of new concepts probably are the best candidates to 'signal' potential adversaries. For example, announcing that a series of wargames concerning countering Russian aggression in the Baltics will be conducted at the Naval War College will educate players on the Baltics' unique maritime environment, geo-political map and regional orders of battle. One might also reasonably expect, however, that this type of game would suggest to all concerned that the U.S. Navy is increasingly interested in the challenges of conducting operations in the Baltic. Likewise, publishing results of a wargame to assess a new undersea technology may convey to an emerging naval power that new technologies are being considered to counter their forces or operational concepts.

## Would Overt Games Communicate a Message?

The literature on how intelligence analysts, officer and officials perceive and assess adversaries' behavior is both vast and complex. Human cognition, organizational behavior and domestic politics combine in

myriad ways to shape what information people attend to and how they interpret this information. Further complicating matters is the fact that decision-makers are generally presented with conflicting information: some indicators signal benign intentions while others are profoundly disturbing, making it difficult to generate an overall assessment of an adversary's intentions or the dominant trends in a given situation. The potential for denial and deception also forces all concerned to question the validity of information volunteered by an adversary, while it is also safe to assume that opponents are withholding a good deal of information from scrutiny. Given the cacophony of important and extraneous event data, information and opinion that animates world politics, why would wargaming be interpreted by an opponent as a valid indicator of capabilities, interests or intentions?

Although predictions are mixed, on balance, wargaming should serve as an effective signaling tool towards adversaries. Three theories, which address how adversaries judge opponents' intentions, address this issue. First, observers judge the behavior or actions of others based on the costs incurred in conducting that behavior or action.<sup>10</sup> According to Thomas Schelling, 'words are cheap [and] not inherently credible when they emanate from an adversary ... Actions ... prove something; significant actions usually incur some cost or risk, and carry some evidence of their own credibility.'<sup>11</sup> The idea that 'cheap talk' should be ignored is not particularly controversial, but do wargames constitute 'cheap talk' or do they entail sufficient costs to actually be seen as a credible indicator of intentions and interests?

The notion of cost is relative. Admittedly, wargames can be undertaken at significantly reduced costs when compared to military alerts or exercises. Nevertheless, they can require the expenditure of resources that are actually in short supply. Significant wargaming activity – games

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10 Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1989; and James D. Fearon, 'Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 14, No. 1, February 1997, pp. 68-90.

11 Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1966, p. 150.

involving scores or even hundreds of individuals – do entail significant financial costs, but they also involve significant opportunity costs. In other words, wargaming facilities can only conduct a limited number of games; topic choices become critical because potential topics for investigation outnumber available resources. Wargaming might not cost much compared to a major weapons program, but they do cost a great deal when it comes to utilization of the specialized resources optimized for wargaming. Governments and militaries do indeed put their wargaming money where their mouth is when it comes to selecting one potential wargaming scenario over another.

The risks that accompany wargaming also can be seen as a potential cost that should be salient to observers. Wargamers run the risk of exposing weaknesses in their own organization or their failure to comprehend accurately an opponent's order of battle or operational concepts. Wargames actually pose the potential of revealing more about one's own intentions and capabilities than actually intended, including estimates of the intentions and capabilities of the opponent. In fact, the inherent risk (i.e., potential cost) entailed in a wargame is what makes it an especially effective tool when it comes to efforts at denial and deception. Additionally, gaming 'bogus' capabilities and scenarios to deceive opponents about future intentions is possible, but also creates the risk of communicating the same bogus message to one's own force, leading to the perception that deceptive plans and nascent capabilities are the real McCoy. These risks, however, are what make wargames salient in the minds of an opponent – they assume that these risks (costs) would only be assumed if the benefits to be gained by the gamer were important.

The second way that observers tend to judge intentions is by monitoring capabilities, which tend to be more stable than costs entailed in various foreign policy, operational or even 'gaming' initiatives. In other words, force structure gives a good indicator of intentions because it reflects sustained political and bureaucratic interests and foreign policy intentions. It reflects the willingness to sustain costs over time, i.e., commitment. Changes in capabilities also tend to be interpreted in rather obvious ways:

growth in force structure, especially in terms of systems deemed offensive in nature, is considered a negative development, while force reductions are seen as an indicator of more benign intent. According to Charles Glaser, a 'state's military buildup can change the adversary's beliefs about the state's motives, convincing the adversary that the state is inherently more dangerous than it had previously believed.'<sup>12</sup> The possibility of gaining insight into future capabilities, combined with the chance of gaining insight into an opponent's mindset, would be an important reason why opposing intelligence organizations would be interested in monitoring the subjects and contents of wargames.<sup>13</sup> In other words, wargames might just offer an insight into changes in current capabilities, or potential capabilities – factors that are often depicted as important indicators of an opponent's intentions.

A third reason why wargames might serve as an effective means of communication in world politics is because they might be able to cut through the noise of everyday events and appear quite vivid to observers. According to Keren Yarhi-Milo, vividness or the perception of heightened salience and relevance of information is a key factor when it comes to understanding why some types of information are deemed important and credible by observers. Vividness, in Yarhi-Milo's view, often is the product of direct personal experience: 'decisionmakers will be reluctant to rely on evidence that is abstract, colorless, objective, or less tangible. ... this kind of information is not nearly as engaging as the vivid, salient, and often emotionally laded personal responses that leaders take away from meeting with their opponents.'<sup>14</sup> Thus, a conversation with a foreign leader will be far more influential than the perusal of some spreadsheet. Yarhi-Milo's selective-attention thesis aligns well with the general thrust of contemporary cognitive psychology, but would news about wargames actually appear as vivid information to analysts and policy makers?

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12 Charles K. Glaser, 'The Security Dilemma Revisited,' *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No.1, October 1997, p. 178.

13 Yarhi-Milo has made the case that at least the U.S. intelligence community monitored opponent's capabilities as a way to divine opponent's intentions, see Yarhi-Milo, pp. 26-28.

14 Yarhi-Milo, p. 13.

Several aspects of wargames might actually increase their salience to analysts and officials. First, whether or not information is available in open sources or purloined through espionage, information about wargames is vivid because it potentially provides insights into an opponent's state of mind, insights that are not intentionally provided by the side conducting the wargame. In other words, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts when it comes to information about the scope and nature of a wargame – a fact that is likely to attract the attention of observers. A wargame can also synthesize in one event much information about new equipment, tactics or operations, information that would otherwise have to be pieced together by an opponent from a myriad of sources at great expense and with significant uncertainty. Second, wargames are inherently interesting because of the potential they have to reveal vulnerabilities or miscalculations of the side conducting the wargame. Indeed, if the gamers' vulnerabilities or miscalculations are revealed, they are likely to spark considerable attention among observers. Third, wargames that play on the sensitivities of observers are likely to be noticed regardless of the actual content of the game itself. In other words, if observers are concerned about a specific scenario, or geographic region, or emerging technology, games incorporating these factors are likely to be noticed.

## Survey of Wargames and their Impact

Although it would be gratifying to report that wargames consistently have an impact on opponents, especially opponents' perceptions of extant and potential deterrent threats, the historical record is ambiguous. On the one hand, the record supports the theoretical expectation that wargames should be salient to opponents. For instance, several of the wargames surveyed actually reveal significant shortcomings in the gaming side's defense planning and posture, findings that would be of significant interest to opponents observing the wargame. On the other hand, lessons offered by wargames are not only missed by opponents, but also by the side actually conducting the wargame. Wargames also produce second

and third order effects. Some of these effects bolster deterrence, while others undermine deterrence efforts. Nevertheless, there is no clear historical evidence that wargames have helped deter specific behavior. The following examples demonstrate how wargaming has influenced friendly and adversary planning and actions.

### *The U.S. Navy's Interwar Experience*

A frequently referenced example of how a series of wargames affected actual theater strategy and operations is the United States Naval War College gaming that occurred during the interwar years. The U.S. Navy's planning efforts for war in the Pacific against Japan was known as War Plan Orange (also Navy WPL-13, Fleet Plan 0-1, Rainbow plan, etc.). Various planning staffs had responsibility for developing and updating this plan over thirty years before the attack at Pearl Harbor.<sup>15</sup> In the early years, the Naval War College was directly involved in the planning effort, using students and faculty as a planning staff. Wargaming was extensively used to explore operations, communications, logistics, tactical engagements and new technologies during this period and continued to inform planning efforts when responsibility for the war plan moved to other staffs. After years of games played by students attending the War College, generations of naval officers became familiar with the geographic challenges, logistic distances, enemy capabilities and island topography which then influenced the operational planning efforts prior to and during World War Two. The strategic plan carried out by Admiral Nimitz (himself a Naval War College graduate) in the central Pacific paralleled the same strategies explored during the inter-war period. Admiral Nimitz credited the War College's gaming effort in this way: 'The war with Japan had been reenacted in the game rooms at the Naval War College by so many people, and in so many ways, that nothing that happened during the war was a surprise ... except the kamikaze tactics toward the end of

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<sup>15</sup> For a complete review of War Plan Orange's maturity see Edward Miller, *War Plan Orange: the Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897 – 1945*, Annapolis, Maryland, Naval Institute Press, 1991.



the war.<sup>16</sup> This comment has reverberated over the decades, supplying the U.S. Navy's current wargaming efforts in Newport, Rhode Island with an enviable cachet.

Did the Japanese notice these wargames? It would appear that the answer is yes, but the answer is not as clear cut as we would like because the gaming effort itself seems to have influenced the scope and nature of U.S. Navy exercises. During the United States' Grand Joint Army and Navy exercises in February of 1932, Admiral Harry E. Yarnell, an airpower proponent who took on the role the opposing air force commander, approached Oahu from the north with the aircraft carriers *Saratoga* and *Lexington*. His mission was to attack U.S. Army and Navy forces on and near the island in advance of a land assault. He selected his approach based on the poor weather north of the Hawaiian Islands to mask his task force's movement and the day to attack, Sunday, to catch the defending forces in a position when they would be least likely to detect and repel an air strike. After sailing this carrier task force towards Pearl Harbor through heavy seas, in radio silence and with no running lights, Yarnell reached his launch position 60 nautical miles northeast of Oahu. He then launched 152 planes, which attacked airfields, depots, headquarters and ships at anchor. Yarnell's success was hotly debated immediately after the exercise, but his tactics did not serve as a warning for future defenses.<sup>17</sup> The game influenced exercise thus served to reveal weaknesses in the U.S. ability to protect the Hawaiian islands from air assault, but the lessons from the game were not fully utilized by the defenders of Pearl Harbor.

The potential lessons offered by the 1932 exercise were not lost on Japanese observers who were invited to witness the evolution. Their reports are credited with influencing the 1936 Japanese War College's report *The Study of Strategy and Tactics in Operations against the United States*, which suggested that the Imperial Navy should open hostilities with the United

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16 U.S. Naval War College website, [https://www.usnwc.edu/Academics/Catalog/RightsideLinks-\(1\)/2009-2010.aspx](https://www.usnwc.edu/Academics/Catalog/RightsideLinks-(1)/2009-2010.aspx)

17 Thomas Fleming, 'February 7, 1932—A date that would live in....amnesia,' *American Heritage*, July/August 2001, Vol. 55, Issue 5.

States by launching a surprise air attack on Pearl Harbor.<sup>18</sup> Ironically, once the decision for war had been reached, the Imperial Navy conducted a series of wargames in the form of table top exercises to support the final plans for the attack on Pearl Harbor. Starting in mid-September 1941, these games included individuals from the actual commands that would eventually carry out those attacks. These games explored optimal force structure and damage estimates for Japanese and U.S. forces. The results of these games influenced the approach routes of attacking units and the decision to employ six aircraft carriers in the Pearl Harbor raid.<sup>19</sup> U.S. intelligence analysts and policymakers never became aware of these last minute Japanese gaming efforts because they were obviously subjected to the strictest security measures.

### *Star Wars & The Military Technical Revolution*

In recent literature related to the end of the Cold War, there appears to be a consensus among scholars that Soviet leaders became obsessed with a surge in U.S. information age technologies that were beginning to come on line in the 1980s, while Western observers became concerned about a ‘Military Technical Revolution’ underway inside the Warsaw Pact. For instance, the Strategic Defense Initiative introduced by the Ronald Reagan administration in 1983, often referred to as ‘Star Wars,’ was of great concern to Soviet officials.<sup>20</sup> What is especially significant, however, is that Star Wars always remained a ‘notional’ capability. Depictions of the concepts, operations and functioning of the system often took the form of simulations, artists’ renditions or thought experiments that illustrated

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18 Alan Armstrong, *Preemptive Strike: The Secret Plan that Would Have Prevented The Attack on Pearl Harbor*, Guilford Connecticut, The Lyons Press, 2006, p. 70.

19 Alan D. Zimm, *Attack on Pearl Harbor: Strategy, Combat, Myths, Deceptions*, Havertown, PA, Casemate Publishers, 2011, pp. 71 – 82.

20 Dima Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Revolution in Military Affairs in Russia, the US and Israel*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2010. As Raymond Garthoff notes, however, a NATO maritime exercise partially conducted in the Barents Sea in the early 1980s and the infamous 1983 *Able Archer* NATO Nuclear Command and Control exercise seemed to create a palpable fear in Moscow – see Beatrice Heuser’s chapter in this book

how the system might work; that is, if it was ever developed. In effect, what Soviet observers understood about this program was mostly gleaned from literature, simulations and games, not from battlefield exercises or actual use in combat. The message they took away from this ‘simulated’ American leap forward in the Cold War arms race was that the time had come to put an end to the arms competition with the United States.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, by the mid-1970s, the concept of a Military Technical Revolution was evident to Western observers because of intelligence reports supplied by Polish, Soviet and Afghan agents. According to Diego Ruiz Palmer, ‘the clandestine contribution of [Polish Colonel Ryzard] Kuklinski on Warsaw pact operational concepts, command structure, and exercises in particular, was of an unprecedented and unparalleled quality and duration.’<sup>22</sup> Classified reports concerning a series of Soviet command post and field training exercises beginning in 1977 through 1983 demonstrated that the Warsaw Pact was attempting to operationalize the ‘Military Technical Revolution.’ Indeed, a comment made about the problems uncovered by *Zapad 77* command exercise, held in 1977, by Marshal Dmitri Ustinov, the Soviet Defense Minister, highlighted the three elements that came to characterize the American concept of the Revolution in Military Affairs: ‘It is necessary to ponder well what else should be done from an *organizational*, *operational*, and *technical* standpoint to successfully resolve them [emphasis added].’<sup>23</sup> By 1980, the Office of Net Assessment (ONA) in the U.S. Department of Defense was aware that RMA-like developments were underway in both alliances. According to Palmer, ‘this ever deeper understanding of the interactive relationships between conceptual and technological

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21 Votech Mastny, ‘The Cold War Arms Race: Forces Beyond the Superpowers,’ in Thomas Mahnken, Joseph Maiolo, and David Stevenson (eds.) *Arms Races in International Politics: From the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 196-197.

22 Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, ‘The NATO-Warsaw Pact Competition in the 1970s and 1980s’ A Revolution in Military Affairs in the Making or the End of a Strategic Age?’ *Cold War History*, Vol. 14, No. 4 2014, p. 546.

23 Ustinov quoted in *Materials of the Critique of the Operational-Strategic Command-Staff Exercise ZAPAD-77*, TS #788301, 13 October 1978, classified Top Secret, Langley, VA, Central Intelligence Agency, CIA FOIA Electronic Library, declassified and released to the public on 18 June 2012; cited by Palmer, pp. 547-548.

developments . . . provided the indispensable intellectual background and impetus to ONA's path-breaking work in the late 1980s on the concept of the RMA.<sup>24</sup> In no small part, this impetus was created by purloined information concerning Warsaw Pact wargames.

### *The Baltic Game example*

In a series of games from 2014 to 2015, the RAND Corporation explored Russian aggression against the Baltic states and NATO. What was the outcome of these games? The Baltic states and NATO consistently and quickly lost to various Russian initiatives.<sup>25</sup> From these gaming efforts RAND concluded that stationing about seven brigades, three of them heavy armored brigades, in the Baltic area would probably be sufficient to deter a Russian quick grab. RAND estimated that these deployments would come at an annual cost of \$2.7 billion. Within weeks of the release of this report, U.S. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter requested \$3.4 billion with the 2017 defense budget for additional troops to counter Russian aggression and reinforce NATO allies.<sup>26</sup> The program, called the European Reassurance Initiative, represents a 400% increase over current funding levels and will support increase presence in Eastern Europe. Of course, strong calls from the Baltic states for increased American response to Russian aggression cannot be dismissed, but the RAND games also provided U.S. policy makers with an estimate of the level of response needed to deter Russian aggression and an alert about the acute need to take material steps to reinforce deterrence in the Baltic. Here, wargaming may not have provided deterrence by itself, but it certainly helped inspire a major deterrence action beyond the current exercises. It is hard to estimate if or how closely Russians were monitoring the progress and reporting from the RAND wargames, but it is apparent that they noticed

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24 Palmer, pp. 547-548.

25 David A. Shlapak and Michael, W. Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank*, 2016, RAND Corporation Arroyo Center, RR-1253-A.

26 'Pentagon Seeking \$3.4 Billion to Counter 'Russian Aggression,' Mike Eckel, RadioFreeEurope, 02 February 2016, <http://www.rferl.mobi/a/pentagon-bidjet-increase-russian-aggression/27528038.html>

the NATO decision to reinforce the Baltic states.<sup>27</sup>

### *Important Lessons Noticed by None*

Sometimes, wargaming will have no effect on adversaries or even those conducting the games, which underscores the requirement of purposely making games overt and public if messaging is an intended objective. For example, in 1999, Kosovo strike operations were in full swing and the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff's attention was on the European Command and NATO. There was little interest in conducting a game addressing post-combat operations in a future war in other theaters, especially one dealing with 'winning the peace.' Nevertheless, Marine General Anthony Zinni, head of Central Command at the time, decided to explore this very contingency. Zinni also took the unusual step of providing specific 'pacification and reconstruction' objectives to game players who were drawn from the actual civilian and defense agencies who would be involved in undertaking this type of operation. This 'Desert Crossing' game considered many political, security and economic issues that would emerge in the aftermath of regime collapse following U.S. ground action against a targeted government.

Several important lessons were gleaned from this game experience. For example, game observers noted that the United States needed to begin inter-agency planning and coordination to deal with war's aftermath before the start of actual ground operations. The game also revealed that regime change would not necessarily enhance political stability; instead, it created the distinct possibility that neighboring states would take advantage of internal instability in the targeted country by settling old scores or supporting ethnic groups or political movements who championed political goals at odds with American objectives. Additionally game play revealed that it was important to identify new leaders and officials who

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27 Jill Dougherty, 'In Europe and Russia, There's Talk of War,' *Newsweek* 7/19/16 <http://www.newsweek.com/europe-and-russia-theres-talk-war-481510>

could quickly move to reassert control of government agencies left adrift by regime collapse. In short, important and deliberate planning had to be undertaken to address important government functions before using force to replace an existing regime.

After the game, General Zunni directed Central Command to begin planning for an inter-agency effort to address these issues, but made little progress by the time he departed the command in 2000. Truth be told, the lessons gleaned from the game were completely lost by the time of Operation Iraqi Freedom and the destruction of Saddam Hussein's regime in April 2003. Although the United States was faced with many of the same post-conflict problems addressed in Desert Crossing, staff turnover created a situation in which virtually no one remaining in Central Command participated in the game. Like Yarnell's attack on Oahu in 1932, time diminished the wargame's effect on operations and planning. The result was that reality reflected game play – weak interagency pre-planning and an inability to anticipate or respond to challenging post-conflict issues.

## Conclusion: wargaming as part of a strategic communication plan

Integrating wargaming into a targeted strategic communication plan to bolster deterrent actions may be a useful tactic, especially if the adversary sees the wargame as a credible and serious effort. Wargames entail costs, serve as a sort of metric for current or future capabilities, and potentially are quite salient (vivid) to outside observers – qualities that should bring them to the attention to individuals not directly involved in the game. Moreover, it is no coincidence that the same conditions that increase a wargame's effectiveness when it comes to influencing the planning and operations of the side conducting the game also seem to influence the game's impact on outside observers. For example, if the games involve individuals who can actually influence policy, strategy or

operations, then observers will note that the game entails real costs and potential risks and thus merits careful scrutiny. Likewise, if serious people linked to the side conducting the wargame consider the game's findings to be important, then others are likely to take those findings seriously. If allies are invited to participate by demonstrating coordinated efforts and combined capabilities, then additional signals might be sent indicating that the game is testing concepts or operations that could be quickly put into practice.

If games are either timely or conducted as a series then they are also likely to entail costs and engage capabilities that are in short supply, qualities that should indicate to observers that something of importance is actually the subject of the game. Timely games are those that respond to recent provocative events. Games that unfold in a series signal a long-term commitment to educate policy makers and military officers about the complexities of the situation and environment. The way information about the game is revealed – intentionally, inadvertently, or through espionage – also has an impact on outside observers.

Our brief and admittedly incomplete survey of the impact of various wargames also suggests that that link between gaming and deterrence is not clear cut or inevitable. In theory, wargaming can reinforce deterrence; nevertheless, in practice wargaming produces uneven effects marred by all sorts of unintended consequences on friend and foe alike.<sup>28</sup> At the forefront of these concerns is the fundamental issue of secrecy surrounding wargames. Nevertheless, some observers suggest, *ceteris paribus*, that as the number of individuals participating in gaming efforts increase, the likelihood that information about the existence and contents of the evolution will reach interested outside parties also increases. Leaks also can occur unexpectedly as game participants become overly engaged in secret proceedings and take disputes about adjudication or conduct of the

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28 One recent study even make a convincing case that gaming, table-top exercises and various red-teaming efforts rarely produce intended positive effects, despite the constructive achievements of the exercise see Micah Zenko, *Red Team: How to Succeed by Thinking Like the Enemy*, New York, Basic Books 2015.

game outside the confines of the game itself.<sup>29</sup>

Wargaming alone may be considered a weak tool compared to other methods of sending signals to bolster deterrent threats. Nevertheless, wargames can have both subtle and significant effects on the perceptions of friend and foe alike. As the RAND Baltic games example demonstrates, games can send a signal that untoward events have not gone unnoticed, that countermeasures are being assessed and that stronger remedial actions to bolster deterrence are about to follow. Wargames can suggest that resource allocation, exercises, force deployment or actual hostilities are under serious consideration. We may never be able to prove wargaming has any actual deterrent effect on a real adversary, but the best way to assess the potential impact of a wargame on an adversary's assessment of deterrent threats might actually be to explore that very issue in a wargame.

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<sup>29</sup> The Millennium Challenge 2002 Wargame developed by the U.S. Joint Forces Command over a two-year period at the cost of over 250 million dollars deteriorated into acrimony over game play adjudication and fundamental disagreements over game objectives see Zenkio, pp. 52.63.



# NATO IN THE COLD WAR



## 4

## Cold War Infamy: NATO Exercise *Carte Blanche* Robert T. Davis II

As we look back on NATO during the Cold War, especially its exercise program, those today with a memory of the period may well recall the REFORGER (REturn FORces to GERmany) exercises of the 1970s and 1980s, or perhaps *Able Archer*, which has enjoyed some historiographic notoriety in recent years. But NATO's most infamous exercise during the Cold War was not held in the 1980s, the 1970s, or the 1960s. Held in June 1955, it was called *Carte Blanche*. Most scholarship to date has analyzed *Carte Blanche* with respect to its undeniable negative impact on West German public opinion.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Arnold Wolfers, 'Could a War in Europe be Limited?' *The Yale Review*, v.45, n.2, December 1955, p. 216; Gordon A. Craig, 'NATO and the New German Army,' in *Military Policy and National Security*, ed. by William M. Kaufmann, et. al., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956, pp. 225-32; Henry A. Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, New York: Harper & Brothers for the Council on Foreign Relations, 1957, pp. 291-97; Hans Speier, *German Rearmament and Atomic War: The Views of German Military and Political Leaders*, Evanston, IL, Row, Peterson, 1957, pp. 182-93; Lawrence S. Kaplan, 'NATO and Adenauer's Germany: Uneasy Partnership' *International Organization*, 15, n.4 (Autumn 1961), p. 625; Robert E. Osgood, *NATO: The Entangling Alliance*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962, pp. 126-27; Helmut Schmidt, *Defense or Retaliation*, trans. by Edward Thomas, New York, Praeger, 1962, p. 101; Philip W. Dyer, 'Will Tactical Nuclear Weapons Ever be Used?' *Political Science Quarterly*, 88, n.2, June 1973, p. 218; Jeffrey Record, *U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Europe: Issues and Alternatives*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1974, pp. 10-11; Catherine M. Kelleher, *Germany and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1975, pp.34-42; Edward B. Atkenson, 'Precision Guided Munitions: Implications for D tente,' *Parameters*, v.5, n.2, 1976, pp. 76-77; Alfred Grosser, *The Western Alliance: European-American Relations Since 1945*, trans. by Michael Shaw, New York: Continuum, 1980, 167; David N. Schwartz, *NATO's Nuclear Dilemma*, Washington, DC, Brookings Institution, 1983, 41-44; John A. Reed, Jr., *Germany and NATO*, Washington, DC: NDU Press, 1987, pp. 61 & 86; Mark Cioc, *Pax Atomica: The Nuclear Defense Debate in West Germany during the Adenauer Era*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, pp. 29-32; Klaus A. Maier, 'The Federal Republic of Germany as a 'Battlefield' in American Nuclear Strategy, 1953-1955,' in *American Policy and the Reconstruction of West Germany, 1945-1955*, Jeffrey M. Diefendorf, Axel Frohn, and Hermann-Josef Rupieper, eds., Washington, DC and Cambridge: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 407-08; Ernest R. May, 'The Impact of Nuclear Weapons on European

In one of the earliest published assessments of the exercise, Gordon Craig set the tone for much of the subsequent historiography when he noted, ‘The only people intimidated by *Carte Blanche* were the Germans.’<sup>2</sup> In a 1973 article, Philip Dyer wrote, ‘In 1956 [sic] during a full-scale NATO war game simulating the use of nuclear weapons, tactical atomic weapons were ‘used’ only by the allied side. Even with this limitation, however, Operation *Carte Blanche* proved ‘devastating’ to the German people, because of fallout and excessive blast effects. Rather than intimidate the Russians, *as it was designed to do* [emphasis added], it succeeded in demonstrating to the German people that for them, at least, a tactical nuclear war fought over their territory might be essentially indistinguishable from a strategic nuclear war.’<sup>3</sup> John Reed, Jr., suggested it was ‘designed to test new military concepts and emphasize western strength before the Geneva Summit.’<sup>4</sup> Marc Cioc noted that *Carte Blanche* was ‘a military maneuver *designed to test the efficacy of massive retaliation* [emphasis added] doctrine with NATO tactical air forces.’ The noted historian Ernest May asserted in 1993 that: ‘The first, and nearly the last, attempt to stimulate ‘tactical’ use of nuclear weapons was exercise ‘*Carte Blanche*,’ concluded in West Germany in 1955. The result, as the German public quickly learned, was a theoretical 1.7 million dead and

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Security 1945-1957,’ in *The Quest for Stability*, ed. by R. Ahmann, A. M. Birke, and M. Howard, London, German Historical Institute and Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 527; Christoph Bluth, *Britain, Germany, and Western Nuclear Strategy*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995, pp. 33-35; David Clay Large, *Germans to the Front: West German Rearmament in the Adenauer Era*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996, pp. 257-58; and Beatrice Heuser, *NATO, Britain, France and the FRG: Nuclear Strategies and Forces for Europe, 1949-2000*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997, p. 127.

2 Craig, ‘NATO and the New German Army,’ in *Military Policy and National Security*, p. 226.

3 Philip W. Dyer, ‘Will Tactical Nuclear Weapons Ever be Used?’ *Political Science Quarterly*, v.88, n.2, June 1973, p. 218. Dyer’s 1970 University of Indiana dissertation is titled ‘The Decision to Make and Deploy Tactical Nuclear Weapons: A Case Study in the Foreign Policy Process.’ He asserted that *Carte Blanche* was designed to ‘intimidate the Russians.’ But note the absence of reference to *Carte Blanche* in Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, trans. and ed. by Strobe Talbot, Boston: Little, Brown, 1970; Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996; Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev’s Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2006; and Jonathan Haslam, *Russia’s Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011.

4 John A. Reed, Jr., *Germany and NATO*, Washington, DC: NDU Press, 1987, p. 86.

3.5 million casualties, with the whole North German plain levelled.<sup>5</sup> These grim statistics remain the most quoted aspects of *Carte Blanche* to this day. That the memory of *Carte Blanche* left a long lasting and utterly negative mark on the West German left's perception of nuclear weapons, which was revived in the late 1970s and 1980s during the 'dual track' debate cannot be denied. The purpose of the exercise, however, was not emphasizing NATO's strength or intimidating the Soviet Union, rather it was to demonstrate NATO's vulnerability to surprise attack. This was spelled out very clearly in the NATO military authorities' assessment of the 1954 exercise program, which concluded, 'there is no substitute for exercises to test command relations, proposed doctrines, publications, and tactics. Such exercises provide the means whereby NATO commands and national authorities can analyze their deficiencies and realize their material shortcomings.'<sup>6</sup>

One of the features of nearly all the references to *Carte Blanche* and the grim statistics of the projected casualties is that they are not compared or juxtaposed to the nation-wide US civil defense exercise Operation *Alert* of 14 June 1955. Like *Carte Blanche*, Operation *Alert* received widespread publicity and it too came with dire projections of death and destruction. In the wake of the exercise, *The New York Herald Tribune* carried the banner headline 'Air-Raid Test Is Success in City; 61 Key Points in Nation Bombed.'<sup>7</sup> Coverage of the simulated hydrogen bomb attack included a map of the blast damage, the caption read, 'New York City—how H-bombs would have wrecked the city: area marked 'A' would be obliterated; 'B,' nearly everything destroyed; 'C,' major damage; 'D,' severe damage. Every one would die within the 'C' area (seven miles)—if not immediately, then from radiation before medical aid could reach

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5 Ernest R. May, 'The Impact of Nuclear Weapons on European Security 1945-1957,' in *The Quest for Stability: Problems of West European Security 1918-1957*, edited by R. Ahmann, A. M. Birke, and M. Howard, London: The German Historical Institute London and Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 527.

6 MC 43/2, Report by the Standing Group to the North Atlantic Military Committee on NATO exercises, 1954, 2 December 1954, p. 8, NATO Archive.

7 *The New York Herald Tribune*, Thursday, 16 June 1955, p. 1.

them from outside the area.<sup>8</sup> Nationwide, sixty-one cities were ‘attacked’ in the exercise with weapons ranging from 20 kilotons (Hiroshima/Nagasaki level weapons) to 5 megatons. Projections of casualties for Operation *Alert* included ‘8.25 million dead, 12 million injured, [and] 25 million homeless.’<sup>9</sup> US President Dwight D. Eisenhower participated in the exercise, having been evacuated from Washington, DC to a remote recovery site. It is likely that the experience was on his mind when he addressed the 10th anniversary of the United Nations in San Francisco less than a week later. Eisenhower opened his address stating, ‘I am privileged to bring you a special message from the Congress of the United States. Last week the Congress unanimously adopted a resolution requesting me to express to all of you here, on behalf of the people of the United States, our deep desire for peace and our hope that all nations will join with us in a renewed effort for peace.’ Later in the address, Eisenhower enjoined his audience that ‘the summer of 1955, like that of 1945, is another season of high hope for the world. There again stirs in the hearts of men a renewed devotion to the work for the elimination of war.’ Returning to a frequent theme, Eisenhower emphasized that ‘the Charter is strong in the conviction that no nation has a right to employ force aggressively against any other. To do so, or to threaten to do so, is to defy every moral law that has guided man in his long journey from darkness toward the light. Those who wrote it clearly realized *that global war has come to pose for civilization a threat of shattering destruction and a sodden existence by the survivors in a dark and broken world* [emphasis added].’<sup>10</sup>

8 *The New York Herald Tribune*, Thursday, 16 June 1955, p. 16.

9 David F. Krugler, *This Is Only A Test: How Washington D.C. Prepared for a Nuclear War*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 126.

10 Dwight D. Eisenhower, ‘Address at the Tenth Anniversary Meeting of the United Nations, San Francisco, California,’ 20 June 1955. In a letter to Gruenther on 1 February, Eisenhower noted that, ‘we have a Europe that, speaking generally, is fearful of what some Europeans consider American recklessness, impulsiveness and immaturity in the foreign field.’ In the same letter, Eisenhower confided to Gruenther that, ‘whatever is now to happen, I know that nothing could be worse than global war,’ and went on to note that, ‘I do not believe that Russian wants war at this time.’ Eisenhower Correspondence Series, Box 1, Alfred M. Gruenther Papers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library [DDEL]. On Eisenhower’s thinking about the implications of thermonuclear weapons, see Campbell Craig, *Destroying the Village: Eisenhower and Thermonuclear War*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. Eisenhower’s comments echoed British Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s address to the House of Commons on the introduction of the 1955 Defence White Paper on 1 March 1955. On

In the early 1980s, as NATO was in the midst of the dual track debate and adjusting to the rhetoric of a new American president, *Carte Blanche* was frequently invoked in contemporary debates. In the summer of 1983, at the height of the Euromissile crisis, Professor Paolo Cotta Ramusino of the Institute of Physics of the University of Milan addressed an International Conference on the Dangers of Nuclear War. During his address, Professor Ramusino recalled *Carte Blanche* with its millions of (virtual) casualties.<sup>11</sup> On the other side of the Atlantic, a CIA briefer told an audience at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in the spring of 1984 that ‘leaked reports of the 1955 *Carte Blanche* exercise showing massive German civilian casualties’ was one of the two most important events that undermined the credibility that ‘tactical nuclear weapons would solve NATO’s deterrence problem.’<sup>12</sup>

We need to understand how the notoriety of *Carte Blanche* has obscured its purpose. Was the exercise designed to ‘intimidate the Russians?’ Was it a test of ‘the efficacy of massive retaliation?’ Was *Carte Blanche*’s notoriety based on ‘leaked reports?’ None of these assertions is accurate. Even for those who study Cold War NATO, exercise *Carte Blanche* is widely referenced though not so widely understood. *Carte Blanche* was not the first, and certainly not the last, NATO exercise to involve the simulated

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Churchill’s address and the Parliamentary debate that followed, see *The Times*, Wednesday, 2 March 1955, p. 8; *The Times*, Thursday, 3 March 1955, pp. 4, 8-9,12; Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, v.VIII: *Never Despair (1945-65)*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988, pp. 1097-1101; and Klaus Larres, *Churchill’s Cold War: The Politics of Personal Diplomacy*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2002, pp. 365-67. In the wake of the defense debate, Churchill sent Eisenhower a note, which read, ‘I was very glad to see from reports of your interviews with the Press that we are in such good agreement about the H Bomb and all that. All went very well in the House of Commons. Considering we only have a majority of sixteen, the fact the Opposition vote of censure was rejected by 107 votes was a remarkable event and entitles me to say that our policy of ‘Defence through deterrents’ commands support of the nation.’ Peter G. Boyle, *The Churchill-Eisenhower Correspondence*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990, p. 199.

11 Paolo Cotta Ramusino, ‘Euromissiles and Comprehensive Deterrent,’ International Conference on the Dangers of Nuclear War and Disarmament held at the University of Bologna, 16-18 June 1983, extracts translated in the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *West Europe Report* No. 2188, Washington, DC: JPRS 84095, 11 August 1983, p. 33.

12 [Redacted briefer], ‘The Future of Extended Nuclear Deterrence,’ Third Meeting of the European Policy Group, Center for Strategic and International Studies (3 April 1984), 7. This briefing is available through the CIA online library, CREST Database: <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/collection/crest-25-year-program-archive> (accessed on 3 March 2017).

use of atomic weapons. It was not even the only exercise to do so in 1955. Its place in the broader context of NATO's emerging exercise program has received less attention.<sup>13</sup> This chapter re-evaluates that context.

But what had NATO's military authorities actually hoped to accomplish through the design and play of the exercise? This paper briefly reviews the development of NATO exercises in the early years of the Alliance and what considerations affected the development and execution of *Carte Blanche*. It then addresses the implications revolving around publicity of *Carte Blanche* in the context of NATO's New Approach. Finally, it explores the theme of surprise attack and warning that were at the core of what the NATO planners were thinking about when they designed exercise *Carte Blanche*.

Then Chairman of the NATO Military Committee General Charles Foulkes of Canada, noted in late 1952 that NATO had 'reached a stage in our organization when major exercises can be carried out; and through these major exercises, we are able to test our military machinery.' Foulkes stressed that, 'It is only through these exercises that the weak links in the chain are brought to light.'<sup>14</sup> NATO Secretary General Lord Ismay reported that, 'In Allied Command Europe most of the manoeuvres were designed to integrate the forces of countries, unaccustomed to working together, into a co-ordinated fighting machine, and to practice headquarters and staffs in their wartime role.' His report included brief descriptions of five of the larger named exercises—still often called manoeuvres—of 1952 and 1953: *Mainbrace*, *Italic Weld*, *Weld Fast*, *Grand Repulse*, and *Monte*

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13 NATO Archive, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) History, *The New Approach 1953-1956* (1976). See also SANDIA Report, *The History of NATO TNF Policy: The Role of Studies, Analysis and Exercises Conference Proceedings*, Albuquerque, New Mexico, Sandia National Laboratories, February 1994; Donald A. Carter, 'War Games in Europe,' in *Blueprints for Battle: Planning for War in Central Europe, 1948-1968*, ed. by Jan Hoffenaar and Dieter Krüger, Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2012, 140-41; Donald A. Carter, *Forging the Shield: The U.S. Army in Europe, 1951-1962*, Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2015, pp. 240-41; and Simon J. Moody, 'Enhancing Political Cohesion in NATO during the 1950s or: How it Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the (Tactical) Bomb,' *Journal of Strategic Studies*, v.40, n.6 (2017), p. 831.

14 Record of Meeting of the North Atlantic Military Committee, 7<sup>th</sup> Session, 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting, Tuesday, 9 December 1952, 6, NATO Archives.



*Carlo*. Regarding the latter, Ismay noted,

‘Although atomic conditions had been stimulated in earlier exercises, Exercise ‘Monte Carlo,’ conducted by the Central Army Group during September [1953], was the first instance of a NATO air-ground exercise in which atomic weapons were simulated for manoeuvre purposes. The forces included United States, Belgian and French troops, and the area of manoeuvre was in Germany along the east bank of the Middle Rhine.’<sup>15</sup>

Thus *Carte Blanche* was not the first NATO exercise that simulated nuclear use.

In the summer of 1953, Eisenhower appointed SACEUR Matthew Ridgway to serve as Chief of Staff of the US Army, allowing Eisenhower to nominate General Alfred Gruenther, his friend and former Chief of Staff, as SACEUR. Gruenther had served as SACUER’s Chief of Staff under both Eisenhower and Ridgway, having been associated with SHAPE from its creation. Gruenther’s acquaintance with alliance politics and coalition operations began in August 1942 when he had arrived in London to serve as one of the lead American planners for Operation *Torch*. Gruenther ended the war highly regarded by the officers of all the nationalities with which he served. At NATO Gruenther was on good terms with Deputy SACEUR Bernard Montgomery, a feat not replicated by many who interacted with the headstrong Field Marshal, and newly installed SHAPE Air Deputy Lauris Norstad. He also enjoyed the confidence of many of the senior officials in the member states, including Marshal Alphonse Juin—whom he fought alongside in Italy—who served under Gruenther as Commander in Chief Allied Forces Central Europe.

The adaptation of NATO to the atomic age was a pressing challenge during the tenure of General Gruenther, who served as SACEUR from 1953 to 1956. In 1954, General Gruenther initiated a SHAPE planning

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15 Lord Ismay, *NATO: The First Five Years 1949-1954*, The Netherlands: Bosch-Utrecht, 1954, p. 105. On *Monte Carlo*, see Donald A. Carter, *Forging the Shield: The U.S. Army in Europe, 1951-1962*, Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2015, pp. 101-02.

reappraisal analogous to Eisenhower's New Look, which took on the name 'The New Approach.'<sup>16</sup> The result of considerable intra-alliance diplomacy and the New Approach group's efforts was the adoption by NATO of a new strategic concept in late 1954, MC 48. This report noted that 'the advent of atomic weapons systems will drastically change the conditions of modern war.' While air defense was to be the subject of a separate report, MC 48 recognized that, 'there does not exist in Europe today an air defense system which would be effective against a determined air attack.' In these conditions, 'At this time the counter-air offensive is the most important factor in the overall air defense. The only presently feasible way of stopping an enemy from delivering atomic weapons against selected targets is to destroy his means of delivery at source.'<sup>17</sup> With the adoption of MC 48, NATO's military authorities were authorized to conduct exercises to test NATO's ability to carry out this mission. Nonetheless, NATO's military exercises were guided by a number of considerations outlined below.

The NATO Standing Group had issued instructions in early 1954 for the development of future NATO exercises. This guidance indicated that 'in order to assure that NATO Exercise plans are developed in sufficient detail and promulgated sufficiently in advance to facilitate coordination and budgeting by National Authorities and major NATO Commanders concerned, major NATO Commanders will:

(1) By 31 October each year at the latest and, if possible, by 1 July, promulgate to the Standing Group, all NATO National Authorities, and other major NATO commanders, and to the Standing Group Liaison Officer for the information of the Council, their NATO Exercise Schedules for the succeeding calendar year. The foregoing authorities will also be notified of any subsequent significant

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16 Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) History, *The New Approach 1953-1956* (1976, declassified 2012), pp. 15-82, NATO Archive. See also Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999, pp. 156-88.

17 MC 48, The Most Effective Pattern of NATO Military Strength for the Next Few Years, 22 November 1954, available at: [www.nato.int/docu/stratdoc/eng/a541122a.pdf](http://www.nato.int/docu/stratdoc/eng/a541122a.pdf)

changes in the Exercise Schedule.

(2) Preferably sixty (60) days prior to the commencement of the exercises but in no case less than thirty (30) days prior to proposed public release forward to the foregoing authorities the following information of any large scale exercise as defined in Enclosure hereto, and of any small exercise the political aspects of which the Commanders consider should be examined:

- (a) A general outline of the exercise in sufficient detail to permit screening for political implications.
- (b) Dates
- (c) Specific geographic area.
- (d) Number and composition of forces.
- (e) Date and details of any proposed press release.
- (f) Any political implications anticipated.<sup>18</sup>

During the summer of 1954, the Standing Group apparently saw fit to re-emphasize its exercise guidance from earlier in the year. This amplification of guidance stressed that '(Supreme) Commanders should coordinate political considerations with national authorities involved in the initial planning stages. This responsibility cannot be delegated to subordinate commanders.' Further, 'A clear statement should be made of any possible political implication. This should include reasons for proceeding with an exercise in the face of possible political danger.'<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, it has not been possible to date to ascertain what, if any, political implications anticipated were identified for the 1955 exercise program.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the positive picture Lord Ismay provided in *NATO: The First Five Years*, more confidential studies indicated that NATO's exercise program was very much a work in progress in the early 1950s. NATO's Standing Group recognized in MC 43/2 (the end of 1954 report on

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18 SGM-176-54, NATO Exercises, 11 February 1954, NATO Archive.

19 SGM-541-54, NATO Exercises, 4 August 1954, NATO Archive.

20 This is particularly problematic because it is not known whether the exercise planners anticipated future West German membership in NATO prior to the play of the exercise.

annual NATO exercises) that ‘adequate basic training, which is a national responsibility, is a prerequisite to employment of national forces in combined exercises,’ but went on to note with concern that:

‘however, the full benefit of NATO forces can only be developed through smooth inter-allied action and while Command Post exercises play an essential part in Headquarters training, it is only when forces are actually deployed in manoeuvres that problems of integration are revealed and inter-allied cooperation truly tested. The present policy of scheduling NATO exercises so as not to interfere with national exercises results in severe restrictions on forces available to NATO Commanders and seriously curtails their exercise programs.’<sup>21</sup>

The problem of inter-allied cooperation, especially in the field of air defense, was becoming an increasingly worrisome proposition in 1954. SACEUR’s Capabilities Study 1957, approved by the Military Committee in late 1954, assumed that a potential Soviet attack would *not* be preceded by a build-up phase, but would instead be premised on the attainment of surprise, ‘giving highest priority to the destruction of the Allied atomic capability.’<sup>22</sup> The exercises held in 1954 demonstrated limited improvement in air defense capability, ‘but this aspect of defence is still critical. The operational capability of national control and reporting systems is unsatisfactory and will continue to handicap air operations.’<sup>23</sup> The exercises program of 1955 appears to have been especially geared towards testing NATO’s capabilities for blunting a Soviet attack and investigating problems in the coordination and control of air defenses that had been alluded to in MC 48.<sup>24</sup>

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21 MC 43/2, Report by the Standing Group to the North Atlantic Military Committee on NATO Exercises, 1954, 2 December 1954, pp. 1-2, NATO Archive.

22 MC 49, Capabilities Study Allied Command Europe (ACE) 1957, 18 November 1954, p. 4, NATO Archive.

23 MC 43/2, NATO Exercises, 1954, 2 December 1954, p. 3, NATO Archive.

24 David Alan Rosenberg, ‘The Origins of Overkill: Nuclear Weapons and American Strategy, 1945-1960,’ *International Security*, v.7, n.4 (Spring 1983), pp. 16-17; and Edward Kaplan, *To Kill Nations: American Strategy in the Air-Atomic Age and the Rise of Mutually Assured Destruction*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015, pp. 89-92.

Gruenther consistently worked to inform the member nations and their public about the implications of the SHAPE New Approach Study during his tenure as SACEUR.<sup>25</sup> In his first address to the North Atlantic Committee as SACEUR, before the New Approach Study had been completed, Gruenther stated, ‘another of our major problems is the creation of adequate air forces. Curiously enough, the greatest progress that has been made in NATO in the three years since General Eisenhower came here, has been in the development of air power, and it is still one of our most critical weaknesses.’<sup>26</sup> Gruenther maintained a spirited schedule of public engagements throughout his tenure as SACEUR, working assiduously to inform the public on SHAPE’s views of the security challenges to NATO.<sup>27</sup> In the spring of 1955, three months before *Carte Blanche* was held, Gruenther addressed the SHAPE correspondents’ luncheon. Gruenther spelled out SHAPE’s priorities to the assembled correspondents and very specifically tried to head off concern that the advent of NATO’s atomic capability would lead to any diminution of the proposed contributions of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Gruenther made clear without the contributions of German forces—air and sea, as well as land—NATO would be incapable of undertaking a ‘forward strategy.’ As Gruenther’s stated, ‘without West Germany, it is not possible to defend far enough to the East in Central Europe. This is an unsatisfactory strategy ... The 12 German divisions, along with the German air and naval contribution, make the difference between a second choice strategy and a much more desirable forward strategy.’<sup>28</sup>

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25 During Matthew Ridgway’s time at SHAPE, the emphasis of SACEUR had been on the buildup of NATO’s conventional forces, largely in line with the Lisbon force goals the Truman administration had pressured its NATO allies to adopt at the North Atlantic Council meeting in February 1952.

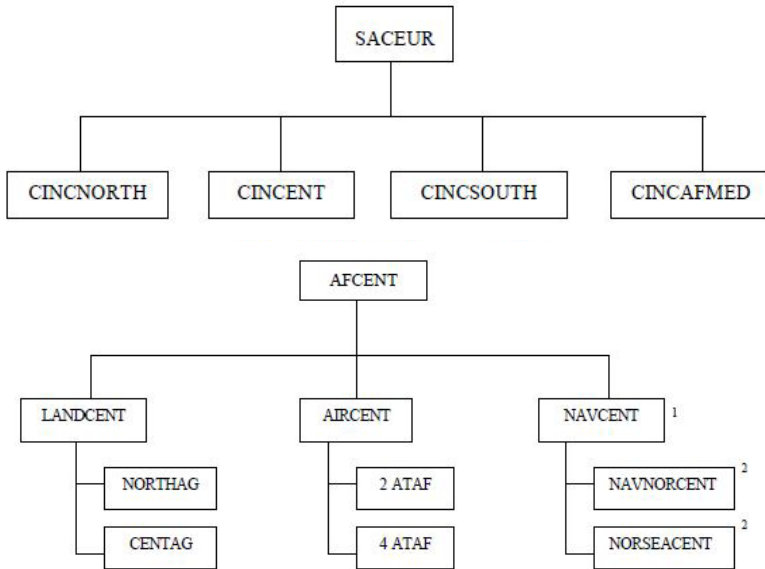
26 C-VR(53)55, Verbatim Record of the Fifty-Fifth Meeting of the Council, 15 December 1953, p. 5, NATO Archive.

27 For example, Gruenther spoke to parliamentarians in Copenhagen (January), addressed a joint session of the North Dakota State Assembly (February), addressed the SHAPE Correspondents (below), the Advertising Council in Washington, DC, testified to the US Senate’s Committee on Foreign Relations, and addressed the European-Atlantic Group of the UK’s House of Commons (all in March), and then delivered addresses in Rome and Bonn (May), before returning to the US again in June to testify to the House Foreign Affairs Committee in favor of Mutual Security legislation.

28 General Alfred M. Gruenther at SHAPE Correspondents’ Luncheon, 15 March 1955, 12, Alfred M. Gruenther Papers, NATO Series, Box 11, DDEL.

A considerable portion of the remainder of the briefing, held as a backgrounder, focused on Soviet capabilities for air attack and the NATO air defense problem. Gruenther concluded his address by stressing that NATO's 'greatest progress must be made in the next few years' in the field of public opinion. The Soviet Union's leadership recognized 'the democracies are fairly brittle in that respect,' all too apt to falter in the assurance of their collective security. He closed, 'It would be nothing short of a catastrophe if we should weary and falter in this last mile.'<sup>29</sup>

### Major Subordinate Commanders in ACE, 1953-1967



<sup>1</sup> Disestablished in 1962.

<sup>2</sup> Established in 1956; disestablished in 1962.

29 Remarks by General Alfred M. Gruenther at SHAPE Correspondents' Luncheon, 15 March 1955, Alfred M. Gruenther Papers, NATO Series, Box 11, DDEL. Gruenther's four key points on the 1) Future Use of Anti-Aircraft Guns, 2) Air Defense Planning, 3) The Organization of Land Forces, and 4) The West German Contribution were also distributed as SHAPE Press Release 2-55 to the assembled correspondents. The press release was printed in *Department of Defense Appropriations for 1956, Hearings before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate, 84<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session on H.R. 6042*, Washington, DC, US Government Printing Office, 1955, pp. 221-23.

During the remainder of the spring and early summer, Gruenther and SHAPE had to balance monitoring important international events, SACEUR's robust speaking schedule, and oversight of subordinate commands which pressed ahead with planning tasks, infrastructure improvements, and preparing for the year's exercise schedule.<sup>30</sup> General Gruenther's guidance for the 1955 exercise schedule placed emphasis on 'the study and development of atomic procedures, new doctrines, organisations and training methods to meet the new conditions of battle.' No major NATO land exercises above corps level were held in 1955.<sup>31</sup> The last major NATO exercises prior to *Carte Blanche* were *Battle Royal* and *Indian Summer*, both held in September 1954. Planning for *Carte Blanche* had absorbed the energies of many of NATO air component commands, not least Allied Air Forces Central Europe (AAFCE), for much of the preceding year.

In preparation for *Carte Blanche*, the headquarters Allied Air Forces Central Europe (AIRCENT), commanded by Air Chief Marshal Sir Basil Embry, issued a revealing press release in May 1955, timed to be in press before the highly popular Paris air show at Le Bourget airport (10-19 June), the 21st *Salon International de l'Aéronautique*.<sup>32</sup> The air show was anticipated to draw crowds numbering upwards of half a million. Perhaps more importantly, over 600 members of the international press would be on hand. AIRCENT's press release laid out a rationale for preparing primarily for an all-out war with the Soviet Union, premised on the utilization by NATO air forces of 'tactical atomic bomb[s].' The task of

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30 Internationally, the Formosa/Taiwan Straits Crisis, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's retirement, the Bandung Conference, the establishment of the Warsaw Pact, the signing of the Austrian State Treaty, and the Federal Republic of Germany's admission to NATO made for a rather busy first half of 1955.

31 SHAPE/70/56, Report on NATO Exercises 1955, 28 February 1956, enclosure 'A' to MC 43/3, Report by the Standing Group to the North Atlantic Military Committee on NATO Exercises, 1955, 28 May 1956, NATO Archive.

32 It is not clear if this press release was given exclusively to *Flight* magazine (see below), or was a wider press release. Nonetheless, *Flight* had published the entire release in the public domain *prior* to the beginning of *Carte Blanche*. Though he does not comment on *Carte Blanche* specifically, Sir Basil Embry's memoir is insightful on the frustrations of attaining meaningful unity of command among the disparate national air forces assigned to Allied Air Forces Central Europe. Basil Embry, *Mission Completed*, London: Methuen, 1957, pp. 299-331.

NATO's air forces were 'that of offensively defending our territory and destroying the forces opposing us while we simultaneously attempt to preserve as much of Europe as possible from destruction by the Red air force.' This task came with the critical responsibility of

'the air defence of the forward tactical areas and of the civil populations and military installations therein. Though this problem is still in the course of resolution, the Supreme Commander has agreed with AIRCENT opinion that the present division of air defence areas between nations and forces is unsatisfactory, and must be bettered. *If this problem is to be properly solved nations will have to yield some of their defence prerogatives to NATO, but they are rapidly becoming convinced of AIRCENT's opinion that with the speeds and heights used by modern aircraft one country is too small an area to be a self-contained air defence unit* [emphasis added].'<sup>33</sup>

The theme of establishing an integrated NATO air defense command was emphasized to NATO authorities and to the press before, during, and in the aftermath of *Carte Blanche*.<sup>34</sup>

Exercise *Carte Blanche* was held from 23 to 28 June 1955 over the areas of NATO's Central Region, which included the 2nd (2 ATAF) and 4th Allied Tactical Air Forces (4 ATAF). Additional NATO forces were drawn in from AIRNORTH, AIRSOUTH, COMSTRIKFORSOUTH, the United Kingdom's Bomber and Fighter Commands, and the 49th Air Division (a component of the US Tactical Air Command. It was most like timed to build on the public enthusiasm surrounding the annual Paris air show.

In the immediate aftermath of the exercise, however, the press reports of millions of casualties marred the picture of a 'successful' exercise. A

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33 'The World's Air Forces: Their Composition, Duties and Aircraft,' *Flight* (13 May 1955), pp. 615-16. The article stated, 'The following is an official NATO account of the operational tasks and commitments of AAFE, prepared especially for this issue of *FLIGHT* and touching on some weighty matters with notable candour.' *Flight* is available online at: <https://www.flightglobal.com/pdfarchive/>

34 Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) History, *The New Approach 1953-1956* (1976, declassified 2012), pp. 205-74, NATO Archive.



number of other events increased West European sensitivities about this exercise. The signing of the Austrian State Treaty in May opened the way for the Geneva Summit in July 1955, the first summit of the heads of state and government of the Soviet Union and the 'big three' in the West since Potsdam in 1945. Naturally enough, this summit conference raised expectations of the peaceful resolution of Cold War issues in many of the Western, and perhaps the Soviet, publics. The shooting down of an US plane in the Bering Strait by a Soviet aircraft on 24 June captured front line headlines in the United States on Saturday and Sunday, 25-26 June, which probably crowded out the type of 'successful exercise' stories the exercise designers would have preferred.<sup>35</sup> And finally, debates about the Federal Republic of Germany's rearmament after its accession to NATO were ongoing in the German *Bundestag* and in public. In this context, *Carte Blanche* could not have come at a worse time.

While *Carte Blanche* did complicate FRG Chancellor Konrad Adenauer government's presentation of its defense budget requests to the *Bundestag* in 1955, air defense integration, not hand wringing about the execution of a particular exercise, was the priority item on NATO's agenda from the fall of 1955 forward. Following the October 1955 NATO Defense Minister's meeting, Canadian Permanent Representative L. D. Wilgress reported that the Standing Group had presented as NATO's most pressing problem, 'The need for a co-ordinated Air Defence Command System. While NATO Military authorities recognize the concern of national governments on this point, they consider that there is really no alternative to some co-ordinated system. They suggested that initially four commands might be set up, suitably linked with each other, and delineated so as to recognize existing command problems in the NATO area (i.e. commands would be: Northern, United Kingdom, Central and South-Mediterranean).'<sup>36</sup> Perhaps to reinforce the message being

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35 For instance, the front page banner headline in the *New York Herald Tribune* read 'Soviet MiGs Down U.S. Plane Off Alaska,' Saturday, 25 June 1955, p. 1.

36 Docs. 217 & 218: Meeting of NATO Defence Ministers, Paris, October 10-12, 1955, *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, v.21: 1955, ed. by Greg Donaghy. Available online at: <http://www.international.gc.ca/history-histoire/documents-documents.aspx?lang=eng> (accessed on 30 September 2017). At the 262<sup>nd</sup>

briefed to the NATO Defense Ministers, Deputy SACEUR Montgomery delivered an address to the Royal United Service Institution in London on 12 October. An article in *The Times* the following day carried the potentially undiplomatic heading, 'Montgomery Calls Set-Up Of West for War Outdated: Urges Single Air Force and Political Control From North America.' For Montgomery, it was clear that NATO's first objective in war was command of the air. To achieve this, NATO's air forces must be 'one single mighty weapon of airpower.'<sup>37</sup>

The final communiqué issued at the December 1955 North Atlantic Council meeting noted that, 'The Council devoted major attention to improving the arrangements for air defense and warning in Europe.' This included accepting recommendations 'for the re-organization and closer co-ordination of the air defense in NATO European countries, so as to integrate further NATO activities in this vital field.'<sup>38</sup> In February 1956, NATO Secretary General Lord Ismay and SACEUR General Alfred Gruenther coordinated a special ten-day conference on defense issues with the North Atlantic Council. In his opening remarks to the conference, General Gruenther laid out the following prioritized tasks for Allied Command Europe:

1. To maintain an atomic counter-offensive force.
2. To insure effective early warning and alert.
3. To provide air defense.

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NSC Meeting, US Secretary of Defense Charlie Wilson, 'said that all of the Defense Ministers were in agreement on the serious weakness of the early warning and radar system for Western Europe. The early warning system, such as it was, was based on individual national states and there was no significant integration.' <sup>262<sup>nd</sup></sup> NSC Meeting, Minute 3, p. 16, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Papers as President (Whitman File), NSC Series, Box, 7, DDEL. Minute 3 of the meeting is printed as Doc. 9, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1955-1957*, IV: *Western European Security and Integration*, Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1986, pp. 23-26.

<sup>37</sup> *The Times*, 13 October 1955. In public statements at this meeting, Gruenther publicly characterized NATO's air defense command system as 'archaic.' 'NATO Urged to Merge AFs,' *The Stars and Stripes* [European edition], v.14, n.177 (Wednesday, 12 October 1955), p. 1. See also 'Delays in European Integration—Weakness in Air Defence,' *Interavia*, 11, February 1956, p. 103.

<sup>38</sup> North Atlantic Council, Final Communiqué, 16 December 1955.

4. To maintain a shield for our land and sea areas.
5. To be prepared for subsequent operations.’

Gruenther emphasized to his audience that, ‘we all know that our greatest weakness today is in air defense. We cannot hold the [NATO] area if we lose the air battle. We are far behind in this field, and that is the reason we are giving the air battle this great emphasis.’<sup>39</sup>

On the 15th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Gruenther, after thirty-seven years on active duty, addressed the Congress of American Industry at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City. Repeating patiently many of the points that he had made to countless audiences over the preceding years of his service to NATO, Gruenther painted a picture of cautious optimism. If his fellow citizens would remain committed to NATO over the long haul, remain steadfast to their European and Canadian allies, and always keep in mind the necessity of a viable and demonstrable deterrent, then NATO could indeed provide ‘assurance against Pearl Harbors.’<sup>40</sup> Historians will long continue to debate whether or not this concern over surprise attack merited the attention it received; nonetheless, for the generation of that fought World War II, it was an analogue that they could not easily set aside. As Sir Basil Embry put it, ‘after 1953, the most dangerous threat to Western Europe in the event of war was the combination of the air-delivered nuclear weapon and surprise attack.’ Further, ‘this new threat made it imperative to change our policy towards air defence, because failure to deal effectively with a surprise nuclear offensive would bring down the whole edifice of defense which S.H.A.P.E. had attempted to build up over the years.’<sup>41</sup> This concern over surprise attack translated itself to a striking concern over integrated air defense in both NATO Europe and North America.<sup>42</sup> *Carte Blanche*, for

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39 AC/100-VR/1, Defense Planning—Multilateral Discussions, 20 February 1956, 4. AC/100 Series, NATO Archives.

40 ‘NATO—Assurance Against Pearl Harbors,’ Address to the Dinner of the 61<sup>st</sup> Congress of American Industry, 7 December 1956, Alfred M. Gruenther Papers, NATO Series, Box 11, DDEL [there is also a copy in the Red Cross Series, Box 11].

41 Embry, *Mission Completed*, p. 326.

42 On 8 April 1954, the Canadian and US governments issued a simultaneous press release on ‘U.S.-Cana-

all its notoriety, was part of a sustained campaign by NATO authorities to build a viable deterrent to all-out war in the midst of difficult realities of the Cold War.

*Carte Blanche* was an important exercise, designed to test NATO's capabilities and draw out consequences from it. Gruenther and his planners achieved what they set out to do with this exercise, namely to effect the improvement of NATO's air defense capabilities and strategic posture, stimulated by the demonstration of weakness in the exercise. But the very demonstration of NATO's weakness respective air defense had the unintended secondary effect of weakening the public's faith in NATO's nuclear deterrence posture. This case study illustrates the classic dilemma of the multiple audiences of large-scale military exercises: while *Carte Blanche* had the desired effect on policy makers, it had thoroughly adverse effects on the Western publics in general. And it is the latter for which it would be remembered.

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dian Arrangements for Continental Air Defense.' The concluding paragraph noted that, 'the defense of North America is part of the defense of the North Atlantic Region to which both Canada and the United States are pledged as signatories of the North Atlantic Treaty. Thus, the cooperative arrangement for the participation of Canadian and United States Forces in the defense of Europe are simply two sides of the same coin, two parts of a worldwide objective, to preserve peace and to defend freedom.' *The Department of State Bulletin*, v.30, n.774, 26 April 1954, pp. 639-40.

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# Military exercises and strategic intent through the prism of NATO's Autumn Forge exercise series, 1975-1989

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During the Cold War, military exercises were an important indicator of operational capacity and political intent. In the 1970s and 1980s, Soviet-led *Zapad* (West) and *Soyuz* (Alliance) exercises practiced the Warsaw Pact's ability to wage war against NATO in the so-called Western and Southwestern theaters of military operations, corresponding to the area of Western Europe that extends from the Danish Straits to the Black and Aegean Seas.<sup>2</sup> The scale, content and regularity of those exercises conformed to Soviet doctrinal views that deterrence of NATO rested on a demonstrable capacity to invade and occupy Western Europe and, by so doing, intimidate the Allies. That capacity rested on a combination of overwhelming conventional capabilities and offensive-oriented operational concepts, backed up with a growing nuclear arsenal. Warsaw Pact exercises also helped enforce stringent Soviet control over the East European militaries and over their employment in wartime.<sup>3</sup>

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2 *Planning, Preparation, Operation and Evaluation of Warsaw Pact Exercises*, Intelligence Information Report, classified Secret and dated 1981, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Freedom Of Information Act (FOIA) Electronic Library, declassified and released to the public on 18 June 2012.

3 *Warsaw Pact Wartime Statutes: Instruments of Soviet Control*, Historical Collections, CIA, May 2013.

In 1975, NATO initiated the *Autumn Forge* exercise series. These ran annually, as a means to strengthen the Alliance's deterrence and defense posture against the backdrop of growing concern on both sides of the Atlantic over a weakened NATO conventional defence capability and, as a result, an excessive reliance on the prospect of an early first use of nuclear weapons, if deterrence failed. *Autumn Forge* exercises emphasized mutual reinforcement among the Allies, multinational interoperability and doctrinal innovation. They quickly became the outer face of a wider and deeper process of post-Vietnam political revitalization and military transformation of the Alliance, spear-headed by the United States, but with the growing involvement of the European Allies, which culminated in NATO's London and Washington summit meetings in 1977 and 1978, respectively.<sup>4</sup>

In the context of a quickening NATO-Warsaw Pact strategic competition in the mid-to-late 1970s, exercises took center stage as an instrument for pursuing higher levels of multinational force integration, as well as an indicator of strategic intent.<sup>5</sup> This process was accelerated by the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act of August 1975, which required prior notification and mutual observation of exercises above defined thresholds.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, exercises also assumed a distinct role in triggering mutual apprehension that the 'other side' was rehearsing an unprovoked surprise attack, a development that was not fully appreciated at that time by either alliance. Exercises were seen as 'bringing to life' what otherwise were 'inert' military capabilities and strategies. Their execution seemed to portend what a devastating war in Europe would have looked like. The quest for increased transparency under the Helsinki Final Act was itself revelatory of the ambiguity concerning intentions that

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4 Bernard E. Trainor, 'A Triumph in Strategic Thinking,' *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, Vol. 134, Issue 2, February 2008, p. 41.

5 For a wider perspective on the strategic situation in Europe in the second half of the Cold War, see Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, 'The NATO-Warsaw Pact strategic competition in the 1970s and 1980s: a Revolution in Military Affairs in the making or the end of a strategic age?', *Cold War History*, Volume 14, No. 4, autumn 2014, pp. 533-573.

6 See Olivier Schmitt's chapter in this volume.

exercises could generate and of the ambivalence towards exercising that such uncertainty created. This paradoxical outcome illustrates the point that exercises' *content* could not be divorced from the wider *context* of the Cold War in which they were planned and executed. They sat at the sharp end of military capacity and, accordingly, could be a reliable indicator of a nation or an alliance's strategic intent.

Against this background, this chapter addresses exercise activity in and around Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, with a special focus on NATO's *Autumn Forge* exercise series. Examining exercise patterns and assessing their significance in the wider strategic setting of the time, aims to fulfill the following three objectives:

- (i) 'Document the contribution of the *Autumn Forge* exercise series to NATO's post-1975 strategic 'renaissance', on which little has been written to date;
- (ii) Contribute to the widening scholarship on the so-called 'Soviet war scare' of the early 1980s. This aim is pursued by examining how contemporaneous U.S. and NATO exercises that were prompted by an *earlier U.S. war scare in the late 1970s* may have contributed, in ways which were not anticipated and of which awareness was limited at the time, to growing anxiety in the Soviet leadership regarding Western intentions. These two war scares were different in nature and timing. However, by all indications, they were both genuine, even if largely misplaced, triggered by faulty assumptions or interpretations that each side made regarding the opponents' intentions<sup>7</sup>; and

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7 Much debt is owed to Beatrice Heuser for having lifted the veil on the relationship between exercises and wider strategic aims in Soviet Cold War planning through her early research into declassified and publicly disclosed East German files following the end of the Cold War. See Beatrice Heuser, 'Warsaw Pact Military Doctrines in the 1970s and 1980s: Findings in the East German Archives,' *Comparative Strategy*, Volume 42, 1993, pp. 437-457; as well as her chapter in this volume. This chapter's author is also indebted to Benjamin F. Fisher for his scholarship in assessing and documenting the mutual dynamic of fear between the USSR and the United States, from the mid-1970 onwards, that did much to instill mutual anxiety and distrust. See Benjamin F. Fisher, 'The Soviet-American War Scare of the 1980s,' *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence*, Volume 19, No. 3, autumn 2006, pp. 481-483. See also Nicholas Thompson, 'Nuclear War and Nuclear Fear in the 1970s and 1980s,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 46, N°1, January

- (iii) Uncovering deeper insights regarding the relationship between exercises, strategic intent, mistaken assessment, and unintended consequences in the peculiar context of the Cold War's strategic competition between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, including those resulting from a deliberate effort to enhance the contribution of conventional forces to deterrence.'

The chapter will address the aims set out above in the form of three building-blocks. The first part sets the stage for the remainder of the chapter by examining the related issues of how exercises reflect strategic intent; the relationship between exercises and intelligence; and the influence of crisis-avoidance concerns on the scheduling of exercises. In a second step, the chapter explores the role that exercises played in conveying strategic intent, as well as, seemingly, in shaping mutual, adversarial perceptions between East and West in the 1970s and 1980s that were rooted in notions of acute vulnerability. The article concludes with reflections that are aimed at illuminating the Cold War relationship between exercises and wider strategic considerations.

## Exercises and Strategic Intent

Better understanding the aim, content and context of a potential adversary's exercises, as well as reflecting more deeply on the design of one's own, can help make educated judgments on the relative balance of capabilities, capacity and resolve between potential adversaries, and its potential implications for strategic and crisis stability – in effect, a net assessment through the lens of exercises.<sup>8</sup> This enhanced awareness, in turn, can help unlock the underlying strategic intent that drove exercise

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2011, pp. 136-149.

<sup>8</sup> The notion of 'strategic stability' refers to a construct where military capabilities between potential adversaries are balanced in such a way as to prevent strategic competitions from leading to war. For an assessment of the concept of strategic stability, see David S. Yost, *Strategic Stability in the Cold War: Lessons for Continuing Challenges*, Paris: Institut Français des Relations Internationales, winter 2011. Crisis stability is a narrower concept that focuses on the prevention of behavior in an escalating crisis that could trigger further escalation and defeat war-avoidance measures.



planning and conduct during the Cold War, and determine how, and the extent to which, exercise *content* reflected the broader strategic setting in Europe at that time.

In this context, the U.S. *Big Lift* exercise of autumn 1963 and the REFORGER (REturn of FORces to GERmany) transatlantic reinforcement exercises that extended from 1969 through 1993 come to mind.<sup>9</sup> The holding of a REFORGER exercise every year, through the ebbs and flows of domestic politics in West Germany and ever-present budgetary constraints at home<sup>10</sup>, reflected the resolve of the United States to demonstrate visibly its commitment and its capacity to reinforce rapidly its forces stationed in West Germany<sup>11</sup> and, thereafter, to conduct defense operations with Allies. The large British reinforcement exercises *Crusader* and *Lionheart* staged in 1980 and 1984, aimed at rehearsing the augmentation of the British Army in West Germany in simulated wartime conditions, had the same aim. French participation in the *Bundeswehr* exercises *Fränkischer Schild* and *Kecker Spatz* in 1986 and 1987, respectively, aimed at demonstrating France's commitment to the collective defense of West Germany, despite France's status at that time as a non-integrated member of NATO.<sup>12</sup> Lastly, in 1986, with exercise *Brave Lion*, Canada demonstrated its capacity to reinforce Norway from

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9 Exercise *Big Lift* was conducted in the autumn 1963 to demonstrate visibly the rapidly growing capacity of the U.S. Air Force to airlift U.S. Army units across the Atlantic Ocean, whose equipment had been prepositioned at storage sites located in the Federal Republic of Germany. *Big Lift* built upon the lessons learned from the 1961 Berlin crisis, when the capacity of the United States to reinforce Europe rapidly had been found to be unsatisfactory. Diego Ruiz Palmer, 'Big Lift': premier grand pont transatlantique de la guerre froide,' *Air Fan*, No. 419, October 2013, pp. 40-45 ; and Walter Bohm, *Operation Big Lift 63*, Erlangen, Germany: Verlag Jochen Vollert - Tankograd Publishing, 2016.

10 'Bonn seeks low NATO profile,' *Detroit Free Press*, 15 November 1978. Walter Pincus, 'War Games Raise Havoc in West Germany,' *The Washington Post*, 24 September 1984.

11v The rationale for sustaining the U.S. commitment to executing the strategic mobility exercises REFORGER and *Crested Cap* is set out in a letter addressed by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, classified Secret and dated 9 March 1976, declassified on 31 December 1984. By the mid-1980s, the U.S. commitment to NATO for the defense of Central Europe had expanded to 10 U.S. Army divisions. These – a combination of forward-stationed and prepositioned divisions – would have been expected to be deployed in West Germany in a crisis situation within 10 days of a reinforcement decision or '10-in-10'. Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger, *Annual Report to the Congress*, Fiscal Year 1985, page 2017.

12 Walter Bohm and Diego Ruiz Palmer, *Übung Kecker Spatz 87: Panzerschlacht in Süddeutschland*, Erlangen, Germany: Verlag Jochen Vollert - Tankograd Publishing, 2012.

## North America.

On the Warsaw Pact side, the field training exercises *Druzhiba po Oruzhiyu* (Brotherhood-in-Arms) held in the German Democratic Republic in 1970 and 1980 and *Druzhiba* (Friendship) staged periodically in other East European countries in the 1970s and 1980s extolled the virtues of socialist solidarity and aimed at strengthening ties between the Soviet and other Warsaw Pact armies.<sup>13</sup>

Exercises have also been relied upon to demonstrate ‘deterrence in action’, particularly in geographically remote areas deemed to be vulnerable to limited attack. NATO’s highly publicized Allied Mobile Force exercises, held three times a year in Norway, Denmark, Italy, Greece or Turkey, from the early 1960s onwards, were meant to convey to the USSR that an attack on any of these Allies, aimed at isolating them geographically from the rest of the Alliance, would be met with a determined multinational NATO response.<sup>14</sup> Whatever the strategic direction of a Soviet attack against one or several Allies, exercises served the purpose of placing the USSR on notice that NATO was prepared to thwart it.

Each in its own way, these exercises reflected a strategic intent that was broader than their immediate design and that encompassed important political commitments, military assets and financial resources. They took upon that expansive role because their *content* – offensive operations by the Warsaw Pact, defensive operations by NATO – conformed to the wider *context* of the intensifying competition between the two alliances. Exercises did *not* trigger that competition, however they became an important vehicle for conveying a message of growing Warsaw Pact offensive capacity and of determined NATO resolve to confront it.

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13 Jeffrey Simon, *Warsaw Pact Forces: Problems of Command and Control*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Special Studies in Military Affairs, 1985, p. 141; and *The Combined Armed Forces Exercise Brotherhood in Arms*, Intelligence Information Special Report, classified Top Secret, dated 31 March 1975, CIA, FOIA Electronic Library, declassified and released to the public on 16 January 2006.

14 Bernd Lemke, ‘Abschreckung oder Provokation? Die Allied Mobile Force (AMF) und ihre Übungen 1960-1989’, *Military Power Review der Schweizer Armee*, Nr. 2/2010, pp. 49-63.

## Exercises and Intelligence

The conduct of exercises has typically been followed closely by the intelligence staffs of potential adversaries looking for clues in relation to an opponent's strategic intent and operational capacity. The former East German military archives preserved at Germany's Federal and Military Archives establishment in Freiburg- im -Breisgau include countless reports on a variety of Allied and NATO exercises over a period of nearly four decades.<sup>15</sup>

The Soviet Union's deep-seated perception of the United States and other NATO member nations as inherently aggressive, predatory and dangerous informed a strategic view that they could not be trusted and that, in any East-West confrontation, they would act in devious ways and try to deceive and surprise the Warsaw Pact. Accordingly, the Soviets viewed exercises as a primary candidate for the conduct by NATO of a surprise attack.<sup>16</sup> These views were so ingrained ideologically that the scenario of most Soviet and Warsaw Pact exercises postulated an opening phase involving a NATO invasion of Eastern Europe, followed by a counter-offensive to defeat NATO and occupy Western Europe, preferably, after the mid-1960s, without the use of nuclear weapons by either alliance.<sup>17</sup>

Soviet and Warsaw Pact field training and command post exercises would have remained largely enigmatic for NATO, even if tracked closely using various intelligence means, had it not been for the fortuitous

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15 *Nationale Volksarmee, Band: Verwaltung Aufklärung*, Bestand DVW 1, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg-am-Breisgau, 2004. East German intelligence reporting was so systematic that, somewhat paradoxically, the East German Ministry of National Defense archives at the BA-MA in Freiburg constitute a notable source and provide a reliable guide to the history of NATO and Allied exercises during nearly the entire Cold War.

16 The Soviet view of exercises as a cover for NATO war preparations is alluded to in *Warsaw Pact Commentary on NATO Concepts for War in Central Europe*, Intelligence Assessment SR 77-10102C, classified Top Secret, dated October 1977, CIA, FOIA, declassified and released to the public on 18 July 2012, page 5. Although this assessment raised the hypothesis that 'Soviet military leaders do not exclude the possibility of a NATO offensive,' it assigned such a putative view to a deliberate effort to present a distorted picture of NATO as aggressive to Soviet and other Warsaw Pact officers, op. cit., page 7.

17 Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, 'The NATO-Warsaw Pact strategic competition in the 1970s and 1980s,' op. cit., pp. 541-543.

cooperation of Colonel Ryszard Kuklinski of Poland.<sup>18</sup> Kuklinski's reporting on the inner workings of the Warsaw Pact, notably exercises *Zapad 77* and *Soyuz 78*, as well as the Pact's wartime statutes, confirmed, adding considerable operational detail, what had been known about the Soviet Union's preference for offensive strategies and the conduct of deep operations against NATO, thanks to the doctrinal documents passed on by Colonel Oleg Penkovski<sup>19</sup> and General Dmitri Polyakov of the Soviet Union<sup>20</sup> and by Afghan Army Colonel Ghulam Wardak.<sup>21</sup>

While each alliance tracked closely the military planning and activities of the other, institutional compartmentalization between intelligence activities and operations often prevented intelligence analysts from drawing conclusions regarding whether the design and conduct of a particular exercise could be interpreted as responding to the content of an exercise by 'the other side'. For instance, U.S. intelligence analysts tracking the patterns of Soviet and Warsaw Pact operational activities could detect anomalies and oddities, but could not attribute them to behavior and measures that responded to U.S. 'psychological operations' (PSYOPS) initiated by the Reagan Administration in the early 1980s that were aimed at creating a mood of strategic uncertainty and operational vulnerability in the Soviet leadership, because they had not been made aware of these U.S. operations.<sup>22</sup> (Some earlier PSYOPS against Soviet

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18 Benjamin Weiser, *A Secret Life: The Polish Officer, His Covert Mission, and the Price He Paid to Save His Country*, New York: Public Affairs, 2004.

19 Jeremy Duns, *Dead Drop: The true story of Oleg Penkovsky and the Cold War's most dangerous operation*, London and New York, Simon & Schuster, 2013.

20 On Polyakov's contributions, see Sandra Grimes and Jeanne Vertefeuille, *Circle of Treason: A CIA account of traitor Aldrich Ames and the men he betrayed*, Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2012, pp. 26-79.

21 Wardak was a student at the Soviet General Staff Academy. He passed on copies of lectures on operational subjects given at the academy in the 1970s. These were edited and published, as a three-volume set, by the National Defense University Press. Graham H. Turbiville, Jr., *The Voroshilov Lectures: Materials from the Soviet General Staff Academy*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1989.

22 These psychological operations (PSYOPS) were aimed at instilling uncertainty in the minds of Soviet political and military leaders regarding the operational survivability and capacity of their forces in an East-West conflict, thereby diminishing their confidence in their own military capabilities and bolstering Western deterrence. To that end, the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy were instructed to conduct peacetime activities and exercises that aimed at demonstrating their capacity to operate at will and survive in high-threat areas close to the USSR without Soviet forces being able to track them or interfere with their movements. See Peter Schweitzer, *Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy that Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, New

ballistic missile submarines had reportedly been ordered by President Carter with a similar intent.<sup>23)</sup>

## Exercises and Crisis-Avoidance

At the same time, there are various Cold War instances of Western decisions on whether and where to hold a particular exercise that were made out of a concern that its execution might be misinterpreted by intelligence analysts or leaders of the opposing alliance and trigger unintended consequences. During the Cold War, Norway had a policy of not authorizing NATO to stage field training exercises in Finnmark, along Norway's border with the USSR.<sup>24</sup> In 1968, the West German government relocated the exercise area for the *Bundeswehr* field training exercise (FTX) *Schwarzer Löwe* ('black lion') that was scheduled for mid-September of that year, and that also included the participation of American and French forces, from near West Germany's border with Czechoslovakia to a location in western Bavaria and in Baden-Württemberg, over a hundred kilometers to the west. That decision was taken to prevent any potential Soviet misinterpretation of the exercise's training objective as preparations for a NATO operation to respond to the Warsaw Pact's occupation of Czechoslovakia a month earlier.<sup>25</sup>

In 1969, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) recommended to the U.S. Secretary of Defense that a forthcoming, periodic command post exercise, named *High Heels 69* and designed to evaluate procedures for the execution of the United States' strategic nuclear war plan – the Single

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York, New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994, pp. 8-9; Nigel West, *The Third Secret*, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001, pp. 220-223; and David E. Hoffman, *Dead Hand*, New York, New York: Random House, 2009, pp. 64-65. On the gap between these PSYOPS and the intelligence community, see Benjamin Fischer, 'Anglo-American Intelligence and the Soviet War Scare: The Untold Story,' *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 27, No. 1, February 2012, pp. 88-90.

23 Paul Bracken, *The Second Nuclear Age*, New York, New York, Times Books, 2012, pp. 69-70.

24 John Lund, *Don't Rock the Boat: Reinforcing Norway in Crisis and War*, AD-A231 546, Santa Monica, California: The RAND Corporation, July 1989, pp. 13-14.

25 'Weiter harte Gefechte in Bonn um Manöver 'Schwarzer Löwe', *Die Welt*, 24 July 1968; and 'Rückzug des Löwen,' *Der Spiegel*, 29 July 1968.

Integrated Operations Plan (SIOP) – be either terminated prematurely in its early phase or scaled-back. This recommendation aimed at avoiding an overlap with a one-time, world-wide test of the readiness of U.S. forces.<sup>26</sup> The JCS request was motivated by the concern that the concurrence of the two activities might make it nearly impossible for the USSR to discern the intended message of resolve embedded in the readiness test from the routine clutter associated with a periodic procedural exercise. They also called attention to the fact that the foreseen overlap between the test and the exercise might induce the Soviet leadership to think that the United States was deliberately concealing an unprecedented worldwide readiness test of its forces under the cover of a relatively routine exercise. Such a coincidence in timing between the two activities might raise alarm in Moscow and possibly trigger unwelcome consequences.<sup>27</sup>

The examples referred to above illustrate a variety of instances where there was a manifest degree of awareness of how exercises' operational *content* and their wider strategic *context* could interface, including the risk of accidental or unintended interaction between the two. They provide the backdrop to the U.S. and Soviet 'war scares' of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and to the contributing role that exercises seemingly played in their generation.

## The Gathering Storm

The Soviet 'war scare' of the early 1980s has been described by many

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26 On the origins of the U.S. Air Force's Strategic Air Command (SAC) command post exercise series *High Heels*, see *History of the Headquarters, Strategic Air Command 1961*, SAC Historical Study No. 89, no date, classified Top Secret, Strategic Air Command, Offutt Air Force Base, Omaha, Nebraska, declassified and released to the public on 26 August 1992, pp. 41-44. On the one-time readiness test, see 'The Joint Chiefs of Staff Readiness Tests' (Documents 58-93), Editor: M. Todd Bennett, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976*, Volume XXXIV, *National Security Policy, 1969-1972*, Office of the Historian, Department of State, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 2011.

27 *Concept Plan to Physically Test US Military Readiness Worldwide*, TS-0136:AP-3, classified Top Secret, dated 11 October 1969, Defense Intelligence Agency, Washington, D.C., declassified and released to the public on 16 August 2006. In the end, the two activities went ahead concurrently, although each with restrictions, but no conclusive evidence of Soviet alarm was detected. *Possible Communist Reactions to US Military Readiness Tests*, classified Top Secret, dated 27 October 1969, declassified and released to the public on 24 July 2009.

observers as a genuine, if misplaced, reaction to military activities and exercises conducted by the United States and by NATO since the second half of the 1970s that, in Soviet eyes, reflected heightened aggressiveness and represented a threat to the USSR.<sup>28</sup> That war scare, however, cannot be explained compellingly without reference to an earlier U.S. war scare in the mid-1970s that had been fueled by rising apprehension concerning the USSR's intentions and growing military capabilities for strategic nuclear warfare, as well as for nuclear and non-nuclear theater-scale operations against NATO in Europe.<sup>29</sup> And the rationale for, and growing strategic significance of, the *Autumn Forge* exercise series in the mid-to-late 1970s, and of other, U.S.-led exercises that took place concurrently, cannot be grasped without reference to that earlier U.S. war scare.

(i) The U.S. war scare of the mid-to-late 1970s

In the mid-1970s, the public mood in the United States soured, reflecting the toll taken by the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. American views of the U.S.-Soviet relationship and of the value of the process of *détente* with the Soviet Union also darkened markedly. Partly, this more distrustful view could be attributed to the passing of the Nixon Administration and the waning influence of Henry Kissinger's legacy. More fundamentally, specialist opinion in both political parties began to challenge the cardinal assumption that had driven U.S. strategic force planning and strategic arms control policies since the mid-1960s, namely that the USSR shared with the United States the fundamental mutual deterrence goal of an 'assured destruction' capacity bound by the notion of 'sufficiency'<sup>30</sup>.

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28 A bibliography of the most authoritative and significant articles on the Soviet 'war scare' appears at footnote 163 in Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, 'The NATO-Warsaw Pact competition of the 1970s and 1980s,' op. cit., page 569. For a more recent, authoritative assessment, see Gordon Barrass, 'Able Archer 83: What Were the Soviets Thinking?', *Survival*, volume 58, issue 6, December 2016-January 2017, pp. 7-30.

29 For a compelling assessment of the East-West competition during the four decades of the Cold War, from a strategic standpoint, see Gordon Barrass, *The Great Cold War: A Journey through the Hall of Mirrors*, Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 2009.

30 For an authoritative assessment of evolving U.S. views of Soviet strategic force developments into the early 1970s, see Ernest R. May, John D. Steinbruner and Thomas W. Wolfe, *History of the Strategic Arms Competition 1945-1972*, Volume II, classified Top Secret, dated March 1981, Office of the Secretary of Defense,

Evidence on testing and deployments of Soviet third-generation intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) through the early 1970s, if not fully satisfactory, seemed to support that benign view of Soviet intentions. Furthermore, the SALT I and Vladivostok agreements of 1972 and 1974 provided an additional measure of reassurance against a faulty interpretation of Soviet strategic force developments or a hypothetical 'break-out' capacity. National Intelligence Estimates prepared by the U.S. intelligence community accorded with that view.<sup>31</sup>

The testing and fielding of a new generation of Soviet ICBMs with expanded throw-weight, explosive yield, range and accuracy began to change the American calculus. These new metrics seemed to indicate that the USSR was seeking resolutely to acquire a land-based ICBM force with a capacity to destroy, in a preemptive nuclear strike, much of the U.S. land-based strategic force, as well as critical command, control and communications C3 nodes.<sup>32</sup> This concern was compounded by evidence (which proved to be exaggerated) that the Soviet Union was hardening the silos housing this new generation of 'silo-busting' missiles, which would give the USSR an asymmetrical advantage in most American metrics of the land-based missile component of the overall strategic balance.<sup>33</sup> A new generation of Soviet submarine-launched ballistic missiles seemed to compound the asymmetry by giving the Soviet Union an increasingly invulnerable sea-based, 'second strike' capability aimed at deterring a U.S. nuclear response against Soviet cities and industrial centers, following

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History Office, Washington, D.C., declassified and posted on the Department of Defense's FOIA site in November 2011, particularly pp. 630-634; 654-669; 681-701; and 810-834.

31 Benjamin F. Fischer, 'We May Not Always Be Right, but We're Never Wrong': US Intelligence Assessments of the Soviet Union, 1972-1991,' in Paul Maddrell (editor) *The Image of the Enemy* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2015), page 101.

32 *The Soviet Land-Based Ballistic Missile Program, 1945-1972: An Historical Overview*, no date, classified Top Secret, National Security Agency, Fort Meade, Maryland, declassified and released to the public in September 2011, page 14.

33 Concern was driven by calculations that any Soviet ICBMs kept in strategic reserve, as a withhold force for follow-on nuclear strikes on the United States, would be able to withstand any U.S. counter-force nuclear response to Soviet first use because of their hardened silos. Following the end of the Cold War, assessments of Soviet silo hardening seemed to show that those concerns had been excessive. See Pavel Podvig, 'The Window of Vulnerability That Wasn't,' *International Security*, Volume 33, No. 1, summer 2008, pp.118-138.



a successful Soviet preemptive, counter-force attack. Lastly, there was growing circumstantial evidence of a sustained Soviet effort to develop a robust and survivable C3 infrastructure, combining deeply buried bunkers and mobile command posts, suggesting a readiness and a growing capacity to fight a protracted nuclear war.<sup>34</sup> These worrying developments seemed to open a rapidly expanding ‘window of vulnerability’ for the United States that became the subject of the 1980 presidential campaign and contributed to Ronald Reagan’s victory.<sup>35</sup>

American concern was not triggered solely by these capability developments. There was a deepening anxiety regarding Soviet intentions, including the possibility that, all along, the Soviet Union might have been seeking a position of strategic superiority vis-a-vis the United States, by combining a forceful pursuit of new strategic offensive capabilities and arms control agreements designed to constrain the United States. It was not necessary to subscribe to the extreme opinion that the USSR believed that a nuclear war could be fought and won<sup>36</sup> to be genuinely alarmed by the growing body of evidence that it was undertaking a range of costly preparations to survive a nuclear exchange. The scale of those preparations seemed to reflect a complex, and not easily disassembled, combination of limited confidence in the reliability of mutual deterrence in deteriorating crisis circumstances, awe regarding American strategic force capabilities, pre-disposition towards strategic postures aimed at instilling fear and at intimidating adversaries, and a deep distrust of U.S. motives.<sup>37</sup> The

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34 *A Historical Study of Strategic Connectivity, 1950-1981*, Joint Chiefs of Staff Special Historical Study, classified Top Secret, dated July 1982, declassified and released on 21 September 2012, p. 25; and David E. Hoffman, *The Dead Hand*, op. cit., pp. 150-152.

35 Gerald K. Haines and Robert E. Leggett, *Watching the Bear: Essays on CIA’s Analysis of the Soviet Union*, Historical Collections, CIA, dated 16 March 2007, p. 165.

36 See Richard Pipes, ‘Why the Soviet Union Thinks It Could Fight and Win a Nuclear War,’ *Commentary*, 1 July 1977, pp. 21-35; and Fritz Esmarh, ‘Contrasts in Soviet and American Strategic Thought,’ *International Security*, Volume 3, Number 2, Fall 1978, pp. 138-155.

37 Interviewed immediately prior to the dissolution of the USSR, retired General Andrian A. Danilevich stated that Soviet military policy vis-à-vis the United States was driven by the aim of the USSR wanting ‘(...) to deter you [*sderzhat*] by frightening [*ispugat*] you (...),’ John G. Hines, Ellis M. Mishulovich and John F. Shull, *Soviet Intentions 1965-1985 in Volume II – Soviet Post-Cold War Testimonial Evidence*, McLean, Virginia: BDM Federal, 22 September 1995), page 42, The National Security Archive, George Washington University, accessed on 14 April 2017.

unprecedented live nuclear exercise conducted by the USSR in June 1982, which included multiple, coordinated launches of satellites, land-based and submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and anti-ballistic interceptor missiles, confirmed in an alarming way concerns expressed half-a-decade earlier that the USSR had acquired a well-rounded capacity for strategic nuclear warfare that was aimed at deterring, and possibly coercing, the United States through nuclear intimidation.<sup>38</sup>

Growing anxiety at the scope and pace of Soviet force developments was not limited to the United States or to the bilateral U.S.-Soviet strategic balance. In 1977, West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt had warned in a memorable speech of the potentially adverse implications of the deployment of the Soviet SS-20 intermediate-range ballistic missile for the credibility of NATO's policy of relying on the threat of nuclear escalation to deter a Warsaw Pact conventional attack.<sup>39</sup> In the meantime, various authoritative studies had called into question NATO's capacity to generate even a limited conventional defense of West Germany.<sup>40</sup> Together, these developments pointed to a deliberate and sustained Soviet

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38 Nicholas L. Johnson, 'Soviet Strides in Space,' *Air Force Magazine*, Volume 66, n°3, March 1983, pp. 48-51; and Peter Schweizer, *Reagan's War: The Epic Story of His Forty-Year Struggle and Final triumph over Communism*, New York, Random House, 2002, pp. 216-217. The nuclear exercise executed on 18 June 1982 seems to have been a part, and, possibly, the concluding phase, of a wider command post exercise (CPX) that took place between 10 and 20 June, to test the capacity of the USSR to fight a global conflict against multiple adversaries concurrently. See 'Document No. 95: Memorandum of Conversation with Marshals Ustinov and Kulikov concerning a Soviet War Game, June 14, 1982,' Vojtech Mastny and Malcolm Byrne (editors), *A Cardboard Castle? An Inside History of the Warsaw Pact*, Budapest and New York, Central European University Press, 2005, pp. 462-465.

39 Alastair Buchan Memorial Lecture by Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt delivered at The International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, United Kingdom, on 28 October 1977. By the end of 1983, when the United States started to deploy 108 *Pershing II* single-warhead missiles in West Germany, as part of NATO's wider Long-Range Theater Nuclear Force (LRTNF) program, the USSR reportedly already had 360 SS-20 three-warhead missiles targeted at Western Europe, for a total of 1,080 warheads. Oleg Grinevsky, 'The Crisis that Didn't Erupt: The Soviet-American Relationship, 1980-1983,' in Kרון K. Skinner (editor), *Turning Points in Ending the Cold War*, Stanford, California, Hoover Institution Press, 2008, p. 77. See also Walter Pincus, 'Soviets' Posture Shifts as SS-20s Deployed,' *The Washington Post*, 25 October 1983.

40 Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, 'The NATO-Warsaw competition in the 1970s and 1980s,' op. cit., pp. 553-556. Growing alarm over the momentum of Warsaw Pact's force improvements and NATO's conventional weaknesses made its way into the newspapers. See, for instance, Drew Middleton, 'Anxieties About NATO : Military Unsure of Readiness as Soviet Builds Its Nuclear Strength and Emphasizes Surprise,' *The New York Times*, 10 December 1976 ; and Pierre Darcourt, 'Grandes manœuvres soviétiques en Allemagne de l'Est,' *Le Figaro*, 7 July 1978.

enterprise to neutralize the two pillars of NATO's strategy – Forward Defense and Flexible Response. Concerns resulted from a confluence of factors: (a) Lessons learned from the unexpectedly strong operational performance of the Soviet-equipped Egyptian Army against Israel during the early stages of the October 1973 *Yom Kippur* War; (b) The steady modernization of the Soviet formations stationed in Eastern Europe with a new generation of weapon systems optimized for employment in fast-moving, offensive operations; and (c) High-grade intelligence information from sources located deeply in the Soviet/Warsaw Pact structure.<sup>41</sup>

Explanations of Soviet belligerent behavior pointed at Russia's historically-founded fear of encirclement, invasion and occupation, as well as the excessive bureaucratic influence exercised by the defense industrial establishment, but they were insufficient in addressing rising Western strategic anxiety.<sup>42</sup> Emblematic defense policy decisions by the Carter Administration – approval of an updated nuclear weapons employment policy in the form of Presidential Decision (PD) 59 of July 1980; development of the Ground-Launched Cruise Missile and the *Pershing* II ballistic missile; and endorsement of NATO's Long Term Defense Program – can only be explained in the context of a 'war scare' that had been provoked by belligerent Soviet behavior and large-scale force developments and that had gripped Western elites.

(ii) The United States leads a NATO 'renaissance'

The first clearly recognizable NATO step that can be traced back to rising concern in the United States over the scale and momentum of the Soviet Union's military build-up is the initiation in 1975 by General Alexander Haig, Jr., upon his assumption of the position of Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR), of a vast set of measures to enhance the Allied forces' operational capacity. Haig's initiative took

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41 On the importance and impact of intelligence sources deeply buried inside the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, see Christopher Ford and David Rosenberg, *The Admirals' Advantage: U.S. Navy Operational Intelligence in World War II and the Cold War*, Annapolis, Maryland, Naval Institute Press, 2005 pp. 80-81.

42 Michael MacGwire, Ken Booth and John McDonnell (eds.) *Soviet Naval Policy: Objectives and Constraints*, New York, NY, Praeger, 1975.

the form of a so-called ‘SACEUR’s 3Rs’ program (the 3Rs stood for Readiness, Reinforcement and Rationalization). Without doubt, Haig’s background as Deputy National Security Advisor in the White House prior to his appointment as SACEUR and exposure in that position to the intensifying debate in Washington, D.C. over a deteriorating East-West balance helps explain his activist behavior during his NATO tenure (1974-1979).<sup>43</sup>

Adoption of the 3Rs program led to the initiation of the *Autumn Forge* exercise series in 1975, as a means to enhance the ability of Allied forces to fight together.<sup>44</sup> *Autumn Forge* brought, every autumn, under a NATO umbrella, some 25-30 exercises conducted by various NATO commands and national headquarters.

*Autumn Forge*’s overall format remained constant over time, although the number, location and characteristics of individual exercises did change, in several instances, from year to year.<sup>45</sup> Nearly uniformly, the series featured the exercises displayed on the map at **Figure 1**, including the command post exercise *Able Archer* as the final exercise of the series. *Autumn Forge* was *not* one large exercise, but its scheduling by SACEUR sought, where possible, to enhance linkages between individual exercises and harmonize their objectives and timetables. On the occasion of *Autumn Forge 76*, Haig stated: ‘All of these exercises are to get maximum training. What we have done is to merge them into multinational configurations and placed them all under a common, if you will, situation scenario [sic]

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43 On Haig’s tenure as SACEUR, see Morris Honick, ‘Haig: The Diplomacy of Allied Command,’ in Robert S. Jordan (editor), *Generals in International Politics*, Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1987, pp. 151-174.

44 General Alexander M. Haig, Jr., ‘NATO – an agenda for the future,’ *NATO Review*, Volume 27, n°3, June 1979, p. 3.

45 Regrettably, there is no single, authoritative source to track the evolution of the *Autumn Forge* exercise series between 1975 and 1989. Accordingly, research for this chapter had to rely on a variety of disparate sources to attempt to reconstruct the series’ main features. These sources include, for some years, ‘press guide’ booklets published by SHAPE’s Public Information Office ahead of the *Autumn Forge* exercise series and addressed to the media – for instance the Press Guides for the Autumn Forge 1984, 1985 and 1987 series, published by SHAPE on 1 August 1984, 15 August 1985 and 22 July 1987, respectively; as well as articles published in the following military journals: *Armed Forces* (UK); *Osterreich Militär Zeitschrift* (Austria) and *Truppendienst* (Austria).

that is designated to exercise the integrated allied staff.<sup>46</sup>

*Autumn Forge* supported SACEUR's 3Rs program in several ways. In relation to *readiness*, *Autumn Forge* subjected Alliance forces to the challenge of meeting increasingly demanding operational standards.<sup>47</sup> The adoption in the 1970s of the army corps-level as the higher level of ambition for exercising allied land forces stationed in West Germany aimed at ensuring that exercises would practice multinational command in simulated wartime conditions resembling, as far as possible, those that would be encountered in a conflict with the Warsaw Pact. In West Germany, the *Autumn Forge* concept envisaged that, once every four years, the series would include the conduct of as many as four, corps-level, FTXs – two each in the areas of responsibility of NATO's Central and Northern Army Groups. This goal was achieved in autumn 1976, 1984 and 1988. In 1980, however, Belgium postponed the conduct of its corps-level exercise – *Cross Country* – by a year, to autumn 1981, as a result of a lack of sufficient budgetary resources. Hence, only three exercises – *Sankt Georg* by West Germany, *Spearpoint* by the United Kingdom and *Certain Rampart* by the United States – were staged that year.

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46 Jim Taylor, 'USAFE and AAFCE: Central Europe's Airpower,' *Air Force Magazine*, February 1977.

47 See Drew Middleton, 'NATO, After 26 Years, Is Again Studying Ways to Improve Readiness,' *The New York Times*, 16 May 1977, p. 8.



**Figure 1. Principal, recurrent exercises in the *Autumn Forge* exercise series, 1975 – 1989.**

*France was not a participant in NATO's integrated military structure between 1966 and 2009. Spain joined NATO in 1982 but, initially, not its military structure. Accordingly, neither French, nor Spanish, forces took part in the Autumn Forge exercise series.*

*Autumn Forge* also contributed to strengthening NATO's *reinforcement* capacity by helping ensure that forward defense forces deployed along the Iron Curtain, from northern Norway to eastern Turkey, would be backed up by external reinforcements promptly in case of attack. Attaining this goal, in turn, was predicated on using *Autumn Forge* as a demonstration of the commitment and capacity of the off-shore 'reinforcing nations' (essentially, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States) to reinforce the continental Allies in all circumstances. To help meet that

goal, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic (SACLANT) also scheduled his command's annual maritime exercise in the autumn to coincide with *Autumn Forge*. Every four years – 1976, 1980, etc. – the exercise, nick-named *Team Work*, was larger in scale.<sup>48</sup>

Lastly, *Autumn Forge* helped *rationalize* defense plans and reinforcement arrangements by emphasizing multinational cooperation among the broadest segment of Allies and across the widest number of individual exercises as possible. Exercises such as *Bold Guard* and *Display Determination*, for instance, rehearsed the capacity of British and Portuguese forces to reinforce Denmark and Italy, respectively, and to integrate their operations with those of the host nations.

In pursuing a bolder approach to exercises, Haig, and his successor in 1979, General Bernard Rogers, turned to the United States for support, leveraging their dual-hatted position of Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. European Command (USCINCEUR), to better align REFORGER exercises and U.S. reinforcement planning with NATO. Starting in 1975, on the occasion of the first edition of the *Autumn Forge* exercise series, REFORGER ventured for the first time into West Germany's northern half, which was the area of responsibility of NATO's Northern Army Group, to train with British and German units stationed there. The following year, U.S. Army forces trained with Belgian forces and in autumn 1978, much further into the northern part of West Germany, with Dutch forces, in the latter case on the occasion of the Royal Netherlands Army's large exercise *Saxon Drive*. In 1980, REFORGER involved the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division crossing the Atlantic non-stop and performing a battalion-scale airborne jump directly onto the exercise area of the British Army's *Spearpoint* exercise. In 1983, part of that year's REFORGER exercise was scheduled to coincide with another large Dutch exercise,

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48 David Fouquet, 'NATO Soldiers March into Autumn, Testing Tactics, Equipment Systems,' *Defense News*, 15 September 1986; Eric Grove, *Battle for the Fjords: NATO's Forward Maritime Strategy in Action*, Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1991; and Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, 'A Maritime Renaissance: Naval power in NATO's future,' Joachim Krause and Sebastian Bruns (editors), *Routledge Handbook of Naval Strategy and Security*, London and New York, Routledge, 2016, pp. 367-369.

*Atlantic Lion*, and in 1984 and 1986, with the large Belgian exercises *Roaring Lion* and *Crossed Swords*, each time within the framework of *Autumn Forge*.

By the time, the United States conducted the largest transatlantic movement of troops since World War II (31,000 troops), on the occasion of REFORGER 87 and in support of the large exercise *Certain Strike* with Belgian, British, Dutch and German forces, the U.S. Army had been exercising in northern West Germany, away from its garrisons further south, in Hesse and Bavaria, for over a decade. With *Certain Strike*, the United States was able to demonstrate that it could airlift three divisions from their barracks in Texas and Colorado within 10 days of a reinforcement decision. *Autumn Forge* also became the conduit for refining U.S. Army and Marine Corps' plans to reinforce Denmark, Greece, Italy, Norway and Turkey. Lastly, the U.S. Air Force scheduled its annual transatlantic reinforcement exercises *Crested Cap* and *Salty Bee*, involving the deployment of fighter and reconnaissance squadrons to air bases in Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, to also coincide with *Autumn Forge*.

By the mid-to-late 1980s, *Autumn Forge* had demonstrated visibly that NATO had acquired and refined a combined conventional capacity to reinforce and, if necessary, defend the four 'hinge' areas on which the cohesion and effectiveness of an overall defense of Western Europe would depend – northern Norway; the Danish Straits; West Germany; and Greek and Turkish Thrace. That enhancement improved the prospect of not having to rely on an excessively early first use of nuclear weapons to buttress deterrence. By the end of the Cold War, the *Autumn Forge* exercise series had achieved their strategic purpose. They were discontinued, following the completion of the 1989 edition, in the light of accelerating political developments in Eastern Europe that summer and autumn.



## The Soviet Reaction to *Autumn Forge* and Other Exercises

There was little in the growing momentum of *Autumn Forge* that would have escaped the attention of the Soviet and other Warsaw Pact intelligence services, given the scale of their collection efforts and the predictability and transparency of NATO/Allied exercise cycles.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, the regularity with which Soviet military journals, such as *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Red Star) and *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* (Foreign Military Review), provided coverage of the exercise series in the late 1970s and into the 1980s is revelatory of the concern, verging on anxiety, which the scale and sophistication of the manoeuvres generated.<sup>50</sup> Undoubtedly, NATO's growing capacity to move reinforcements across the Atlantic Ocean and the English Channel, to combine contingents from a variety of Allies in dynamic exercise settings, and to rehearse the conduct of complex, high-end operations across Europe had a lasting impact on the Soviet military. While the *Autumn Forge* exercise series fulfilled their aim, their ambition and scale probably contributed to a rising Soviet fear that, through *Autumn Forge*, NATO was rehearsing the sequence and components of a large-scale, concerted attack.<sup>51</sup>

There is little evidence of an offensive intent on the part of NATO, however, that the USSR could have uncovered from assessing the exercises. They followed uniformly a pattern of attack by 'Orange' forces (Warsaw Pact) and phased, delay and defense operations by 'Blue' forces (NATO), leading to a series of Blue counter-attacks to regain lost Allied territory or re-establish sea control, and restore the *status quo ante*. Until

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49 Benjamin B. Fischer, 'One of the Biggest Ears in the World:' East German SIGINT Operations,' *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, Volume 11, No. 2, January-February 2008, pp. 142-153.

50 See, for instance, Captain 2<sup>nd</sup> rank V. Kuzar, 'Policy of Realism Against Nuclear Madness,' *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 2 August 1986, JPRS Report, *Soviet Union, Military Affairs*, JPRS-UMA-86-055, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), Washington, D.C., 17 October 1986, pp. 36-38; Lt Col V. Stroganov, Lt Col V. Kulikov, 'Exercise AUTUMN FORGE-85,' *Zarubezhnoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 11 May 1968, JPRS Report, *Soviet Union, Military Affairs*, JPRS-UMA-86-065, FBIS, 18 November 1986, pp. 7-15; and Colonel L. Levadov, 'Yet Another Rehearsal,' *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 19 November 1987, JPRS Report, *Soviet Union, Military Affairs*, JPRS-UMA-88-003, FBIS, 23 February 1988, pp. 45-47.

51 See Beatrice Heuser's contribution to this volume.

exercise *Certain Strike*, staged in West Germany's northern half on the occasion of exercise REFORGER 87 in the autumn of 1987, none of the field training exercises conducted under the umbrella of *Autumn Forge* since 1975 had reached an operational scale involving the forces of several corps together.<sup>52</sup> And yet the combination of up to 30 distinct, live exercises every autumn, even if most were planned and conducted separately, at different times over a period of two months and at dispersed locations across Western Europe, seems to have produced an intimidating impression of growing NATO military capacity and reinforced an ingrained Soviet perception of inherent NATO malevolent intent. In the Soviets' adversarial view, the content of *Autumn Forge* matched the wider context of growing East-West antagonism.

This impression was probably reinforced by the fact that, starting in the second half of the 1970s, the United States initiated, on a national basis, several new exercises aimed at regaining the ground lost during the Vietnam War, by subjecting U.S. forces and command and control arrangements to demanding operational performance standards. These new exercises included:

- (i) Command and control exercises directed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff aimed at testing the capacity of the United States to manage the transition to war. The first of these exercises was conducted in 1978 under the name *Nifty Nugget*.<sup>53</sup> It revealed gross deficiencies. Exercises *Proud Spirit* and *Proud Saber* followed in 1980 and 1982, respectively, which also exposed

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52 The fact that exercise *Certain Strike* was conducted 10 years and six years after exercises *Zapad 77* and *Zapad 81*, respectively, supports the hypothesis that NATO was *not* attempting to match the belligerent operational capability that the USSR was aiming for and had displayed during those two exercises, and, furthermore, that NATO did *not* have, until the mid-1980s, the reinforcement and onward movement capacity to deploy and exercise forces in West Germany on a multi-corps basis.

53 On exercise *Nifty Nugget*, see William K. Brehm and Ernst Volgeneau, *Evaluation Plan: Exercise Nifty Nugget 78*, Logistics Management Institute, Washington, D.C., 23 October 1978; Fred S. Hoffman, 'Pentagon winds up 'Nifty Nugget': Exercise reveals problems,' *Stars & Stripes* (European Edition), 4 November 1978; and James K. Matthews and Cora J. Holt, *So Many, So Much, So Far, So Fast*, no date, Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Research Center, U.S. Transportation Command, page 1.

severe shortfalls in capacity.<sup>54</sup> These command post exercises seemingly migrated gradually from testing the transition to war process to rehearsing how the United States, as part of NATO, would fight a general war with the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, if deterrence had failed. Exercises *Ivy League* in 1982 and *Proud Prophet* in 1983 reportedly conformed to that latter objective.<sup>55</sup>

- (ii) Live flying exercises by the U.S. Air Force's Strategic Air Command (SAC), nick-named *Global Shield*, aimed at evaluating the capacity of SAC bomber and tanker units to execute their wartime mission. The first such exercise was conducted in 1979, and this practice continued until *Global Shield* exercises were terminated at the end of the Cold War.<sup>56</sup>
- (iii) A one-time, large-scale, readiness exercise – *Condor Redoubt* – staged in the United States and at overseas locations in August 1981 by the U.S. Air Force Reserve wings and squadrons, to evaluate their capacity to meet expected wartime readiness levels responsively;<sup>57</sup> and

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54 On exercises *Proud Spirit* and *Proud Saber*, see James W. Canan, 'Up From Nifty Nugget,' *Air Force Magazine*, September 1983. Specifically, on exercise *Proud Spirit*, see John Fialka, 'The Pentagon's exercise 'Proud Spirit': Little Cause for Pride,' *Parameters*, March 1981, pp. 38-41. On exercise *Proud Saber* (conducted in October-November 1982 but within the Fiscal Year 1983 that started on 1 October 1982), see *Exercise Proud Saber 83 Detailed Analysis Report*, classified Secret, dated 28 April 1983, The Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington, D.C., declassified and released to the public on 31 July 2014.

55 On exercise *Ivy League* 82, see Charles Mohr, 'Preserving U.S. command after a nuclear attack,' *The New York Times*, 29 June 1982; Thomas B. Allen, *The Secret World of the Creators, Players, and Policy-Makers Rehearsing World War III Today*, McGraw-Hill, 1987. On exercise *Proud Prophet* 83, see Paul Bracken, *The Second Nuclear Age*, op. cit., pp. 84-90; and *Proud Prophet* 83, 13-24 June 1983, classified Secret, National Defense University, Washington, D.C., declassified on 20 December 2012.

56 'U.S. defends SAC exercise that has Kremlin concerned,' *Stars & Stripes* (European Edition), 22 April 1979; 'Largest exercise in 20 years: SAC staging 'Global Shield 79',' *Stars & Stripes* (European Edition), 10 July 1979; 'SAC group staging its biggest test of reaction to A-strike,' *Stars & Stripes* (European Edition), 29 January 1981; *Alert Operations and the Strategic Air Command 1957-1991*, Office of the Historian, Headquarters, Strategic Air Command, Offut Air Force Base, Nebraska, 7 December 1991, page 34; and Bruce Eickhoff, 'SAC Trains the Way It Would Fight,' *Air Force Magazine*, Volume 65, n°2, February 1982, pp.62-66

57 'Biggest for Air Force in peacetime: Aircraft gather for reserve exercise,' *Stars & Stripes* (European Edition), 17 August 1981; '59,000 weekend warriors take part, Air Reserve conducting wargames,' *Stars & Stripes* (European Edition), 24 August 1981.

- (iv) A large-scale maritime exercise, nick-named *Ocean Venture*, initiated in autumn 1981, to evaluate the capacity of the U.S. Navy's 2<sup>nd</sup> Fleet, home-ported in Norfolk, Virginia, to deny to the USSR the ability to interdict NATO's transatlantic sea lines of communication and to protect the Soviet Navy's ballistic missile submarines inside well-defended, 'bastions' in the Barents Sea.<sup>58</sup> Exercise *Ocean Venture* 81 was, at the time, more ambitious and daring than comparable NATO maritime exercises, such as *Ocean Safari* and *Team Work*, by reportedly demonstrating the U.S. Navy's high-end operational and technological capacity to enter undetected into the Soviet Union's most heavily protected waters around the Kola Peninsula and to threaten at will the USSR's supposedly most invulnerable component of its nuclear deterrent.<sup>59</sup>

The U.S. exercises listed above came into being after the start of the *Autumn Forge* series in 1975. They were *not* part of *Autumn Forge* and were planned separately from NATO, although they coincided, on occasion, with NATO exercises. They reflected, however, a similar strategic intent of conveying to the USSR that the United States, no less than the NATO Allies at large, would contest, sometimes forcefully, the Soviet drive to assert its growing military position through intimidation. That aim was achieved by using exercises of unprecedented nature and scale, such as *Global Shield* and *Ocean Venture*, to impress upon the Soviets that the United States enjoyed technological and operational advantages that the Soviet Union could not hope to match. But that

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58 On the initiation of exercise *Ocean Venture* 81, see Drew Middleton, 'U.S. and Allied Navies starting Major Test Today,' *The New York Times*, 1 August 1981. The article did not hint that during this exercise U.S. Navy surface combatants would venture as far as the Barents Sea and challenge the USSR's control of its most protected home waters. Benjamin B. Fischer, 'The Soviet-American War Scare of the 1980s,' *op. cit.*, pages 480-518.

59 A focus during the exercise on 'emissions' control' reflected reportedly the U.S. Navy's suspicion that U.S. naval communications were being intercepted routinely by the Soviets, although it was not until 1985 that the compromise of U.S. naval codes by the Walker spy ring was uncovered. Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Leaders and Intelligence: Assessing the American Adversary during the Cold War*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2015, footnote 16, page 125.

outcome did not come to pass without the Soviets pushing back strongly. As noted earlier, in June 1982 the USSR conducted an unprecedented and apocalyptic nuclear war game. It was followed in 1983-1985 with daring *Zapad* and *Soyuz* exercises that practiced a fast-paced invasion of Western Europe combining an accelerated reinforcement of forward-stationed forces prior to the start of hostilities<sup>60</sup> and the engagement of Operational Maneuver Groups, to breach NATO's forward defenses, from the outset of a conflict.<sup>61</sup> In his book on the role of intelligence in Soviet decision-making, Raymond Garthoff also reveals an instance where the Soviet military intelligence service, the GRU, misrepresented the threat allegedly posed by a *Global Shield* exercise.<sup>62</sup>

## What did exercises reveal about Cold War conditions and mindsets?

Looking back, Warsaw Pact and NATO/Allied exercises can be seen as the outgrowth of deliberate policies in both alliances to move away from the early employment of nuclear weapons in any major European conflict, a movement triggered by the growing realization of the potentially boundless destructiveness of such use. Conventional forces regained their preeminence and both alliances looked upon them as the surest insurance against a failure of deterrence and, if deterrence failed, against the risk of defeat. The initiation of the *Autumn Forge* exercise series reflected the judgment at the time that only NATO provided the geographical scope and, through its command structure, the span of control necessary to leverage usefully a variety of exercises for the higher purposes of enhanced multinational interoperability and strengthened deterrence.

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60 *Soviet Readiness in the Western Theater and its Impact on Operations*, DDB-1100-476-85, classified Secret, dated February 1985, Defense Intelligence Agency, FOIA electronic library, declassified and released to the public, no date, page 23.

61 *The Soviet Operational Maneuver Group*, SOV-83-10034, classified Secret, dated February 1983, CIA, FOIA Electronic Library, declassified and released to the public in 1999.

62 Garthoff, op. cit., page 63.

An inherent consequence of the great expectations placed on conventional forces, as an alternative to nuclear use 'by default', was the need to make them highly capable operationally, which implied increasing the tempo, as well as the scale, of exercises. This happened in both alliances after 1975 and that trend endured through the mid-to-late 1980s, with NATO playing catch-up to the Warsaw Pact until 1988, when the United States staged the last large REFORGER exercise of the Cold War, as part of *Autumn Forge*. REFORGER 88 involved over a 100,000 allied troops deployed in Bavaria (the USSR had conducted *Zapad 81* with 100,000 troops in the western USSR in autumn 1981, seven years earlier). Nuclear weapons never left the scene, however, because neither alliance wished to renounce the deterrence benefits associated with the uncertainty that even limited nuclear use introduced into calculations regarding the trajectory and outcome of a hypothetical conflict.

The successive U.S. and Soviet war scares of the mid- to late 1970s and of the early-to-mid 1980s illustrate, inter alia, how the intent and content of individual, linked, or consecutive exercises could be misread by potential adversaries, particularly in circumstances that could possibly facilitate such misinterpretation. This was seemingly the case then, because exercises were seen as fitting into a longer-term pattern of developing competition between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, or conforming to the wider strategic context of latent Cold War confrontation that made exercises by each side appear inherently nefarious in intent.

Part of this misinterpretation reflected deep-seated cultural differences between the USSR and the Western democracies that were rooted in disparate geography, history and institutional arrangements, including a Soviet self-generated paranoia. That paranoia was itself the product of the warped ideological mindset of the Brezhnev-era Politburo, which postulated that 'the world was going our way' and saw the Carter and Reagan Administrations and their defense policies as frustrating that historical trend. Another factor was, seemingly, an insufficient awareness of the relationship between exercises and the wider strategic setting of the Cold War in which they were taking place. Greater attention to

that relationship would probably have revealed that an already tense security environment would likely contribute to misinterpretations and potentially dangerous dramatizations of exercises by an opponent, to the extent that, at times, exercises in the late 1970s and early 1980s became the focal point of all fears.





## 6

# NATO Command Post Exercises in the 1970s and 1980s

*James Sheahan*

## Introduction

Command post exercises are military exercises which use scenarios to test, practice and improve command functions and procedures without requiring physical units in the real world, although sometimes physical deployments are run simultaneously. It is imperative to rehearse and improve on these critical military operational procedures and political decision making processes, but they can have unintended political consequences. This contribution explores some of the problems that command post exercises face and the impact these can have, using examples from NATO, Warsaw Pact and UK exercises during the 1960s-1980s, focussing primarily on problems connected to realism of exercises and their perception so as to allow room for some detail. (For ease of reading, this essay will use the term 'exercises' to mean 'command post exercises'.)

## The Problems of Command Post Exercises

Exercises require a scenario to be designed beforehand specifically to test procedures and systems in a realistic way. If the scenario is not realistic then the experience and any learnings from an exercise are of limited value at best. Nonetheless, this can be required so that procedures are rehearsed that are designed for scenarios which everybody hopes will

never occur, but the non-occurrence of which might depend on their credible and competent management if they did occur, and the deterrence effect this would have. The most important example of this during the Cold War was the escalation of a crisis to war and nuclear use by NATO. The purpose was both to reassure NATO allies that NATO would know how to handle such a scenario and to signal to the Warsaw Pact that NATO would not surrender due to a break-down of decision-making on nuclear escalation. (It was assumed that the Warsaw Pact's leadership had inside information on the NATO exercises – see Beatrice Heuser's chapter in this volume.)

## I. Lack of Realism

### *Illogical Opponents*

One of the greatest threats to scenario realism is if scenarios are based on unrealistic behaviours or stereotypes of the opponents. Both NATO and the Warsaw Pact have been guilty of using unrealistic scenarios over decades of exercises by making, or expecting, their opponents to act stupidly and/or be inferior. During the 1970s, the Warsaw Pact's exercises assumed NATO would strike with a weak attack which Warsaw Pact forces would repulse with a strong counter-attack. Vojtech Mastny explains that:

‘all [Soviet] planning rested on the artificial assumption that the enemy would foolishly start war without having the numerical superiority that the military common sense dictated was indispensable for successful attack, thus making the success of the Warsaw Pact's well-rehearsed ‘counter-attack’ a foregone conclusion.’<sup>1</sup>

Also, some Warsaw Pact exercises assumed NATO would (conveniently)

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1 Vojtech Mastny: ‘The Warsaw Pact as History,’ in Mastny, Vojtech and Byrne, Malcolm (eds.): *A Card-board Castle: An Inside History of the Warsaw Pact 1955-1991*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005, p. 46.

not conceal their preparations competently, allowing Warsaw Pact forces to ‘detect them in time to achieve full combat readiness.’<sup>2</sup> Below we shall give further examples of exercise scenarios being made unrealistic deliberately in order to assuage politic opinion.

However, NATO’s scenarios were no less susceptible to these issues and portrayed the Warsaw Pact as self-destructively unreasoning. Michael Warner at the UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) reported that the scenario for *WINTEREX 71* – NATO’s then new series of biennial WINTER EXERCISES – portrayed an escalation between NATO and a Warsaw Pact who were ‘not deterred by either NATO’s actions or world opinion from pursuing its chosen objectives’ by starting hostilities and escalating to ‘all-out nuclear war with little, if any, thought of retreat.’<sup>3</sup> This premise was made despite the documented thinking within NATO at the time, as echoed in the same UK report on *WINTEREX 71* which noted that ‘a recent draft paper from NATO HQ considering circumstances in which the Warsaw Pact might initiate the tactical use of nuclear weapons did not mention the kind of scenario on which major NATO exercises are based.’<sup>4</sup> Instead, the paper cited argued Warsaw Pact action was likely be an all-out nuclear assault, or just enough to gain a limited objective without causing war.<sup>5</sup>

NATO were not alone in their unrealistic and/or biased expectations of the Warsaw Pact. Many governments of NATO member states ran their own exercises to test their internal processes during such crises – such as the integration with civil functions – sometimes alongside the NATO exercises and sometimes independently. Duncan Campbell, the British Defence Secretary, commented disapprovingly on UK exercise *Square Leg* in 1980 that it ‘assumed that Soviet Leaders may be so loony

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2 Vojtech Mastny: ‘Imagining War in Europe: Soviet Strategic Planning,’ in Mastny, Vojtech, Holtsmark, Sven G. and Wenger, Andreas (eds.): *War Plans and Alliances in the Cold War: Threat Perceptions in the East and West*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2006, p. 26.

3 The National Archives, Kew (henceforth TNA), CAB 164/358, doc. 13 (D/DS 12/56/6), M.H.C. Warner (UK Ministry of Defence (henceforth MoD)): ‘NATO Major Exercises’ (14 April 1969), p. 5.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

that nothing stops them.<sup>6</sup>

In 1968, the UK Foreign Office hoped the new *WINTEX* series would be an opportunity to break with the old scenario style and ‘stop short of major aggression and all-out nuclear war.’<sup>7</sup> The scenarios used in the previous series of NATO autumn exercises (*FALLEX*) during the 1960s were criticised as being ‘unrealistic and, in effect, unrelated to any conceivable set of circumstances.’<sup>8</sup> As a result, it was suggested that *WINTEX 71* be based on a scenario of limited aggression which would lead NATO to use selective nuclear strikes for purposes of demonstration or defence, so the exercise would still test nuclear procedures.

### *Unrealistic Opponents*

Casting opponents as the aggressors in exercises was reinforced by current thinking on both sides. The Soviets assumed NATO would launch a first-strike nuclear attack (meaning that it would target Soviet nuclear weapons) because they saw no other way NATO could believe they could win a limited war with their currently inferior conventional forces.<sup>9</sup> Even the exercises themselves reinforced aggressor expectations: according to Mastny, Soviet thinking in the early 1980s was that ‘huge NATO manoeuvres conducted annually in West Germany could be a ruse for surprise attack.’<sup>10</sup> Similarly within NATO, a CIA document describing the different series of Warsaw Pact exercises mentions that in exceptional circumstances the *Soyuz* series might serve ‘to camouflage [the] introduction of Warsaw Pact forces into the territory of an allied state and ... very likely to conceal a strategic deployment of armed forces for war.’<sup>11</sup> The USSR had of course actually applied a variation of this at

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6 Quoted in Philip A. G. Sabin: *The Third World War Scare in Britain: A Critical Analysis*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1986, p. 91.

7 TNA, CAB 164/358, doc. 3M, A.W.G. LeHardy: ‘NATO Exercise - WINTEX 71’ (30 July 1968).

8 *Ibid.*

9 Mastny: ‘Imagining War in Europe,’ p. 28.

10 Mastny: ‘The Warsaw Pact as History,’ p. 47.

11 CIA Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room (henceforth CIAFOIA), doc. 5166d4f-

its invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and was toying with this idea in the context of the Solidarność crisis in Poland against the background of which the CIA document was written.

Over time, Warsaw Pact leaders did update their thinking, and consequently their exercises, and during the 1970s the Soviets started to view NATO defences as more robust. Vojtech Mastny mentions that, for the Soviets, ‘gone was the vision of rolling to the English Channel in six days or to Lyon in nine.’<sup>12</sup> Mastny states that, by 1983, the Warsaw Pact’s respect for NATO’s offensive capabilities had grown as

‘the main Warsaw Pact exercise, “Soiuz-83,” now presumed that NATO had become so strong that it could strike in Central Europe in several directions with little advance notice – a remarkable reversal of what used to be NATO’s nightmare about the Soviet Union in the early years of the Cold War.’<sup>13</sup>

One of the understandable problems that makes it so difficult to portray an opponent realistically is mirror imaging, where the projected actions of the opponent are based on our own perspective, culture, stereotypes, etc. and not on how an opponent with a different culture, background and mindset will think, or how they will view our own actions. A good example is shown by Mastny who writes that ‘there is little in the [Soviet] documents about the role of nuclear deterrence that figured so prominently in Western, especially American, strategic thinking and planning.’<sup>14</sup> At worst, we distil the situation down simplistically to good guys versus bad guys and cast the opponents as aggressors who will fire/strike first without reason or limit. NATO’s *WINTEX 79* included *ORANGE*’s (i.e. NATO’s adversary’s) use of extensive chemical attacks.<sup>15</sup>

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999326091c6a607ec, CIA: ‘Planning, Preparations, Operation and Evaluation of Warsaw Pact Exercises’ (1 January 1981), p. 18, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/document/5166d4f99326091c6a607ec> (accessed 26 August 2015).

12 Mastny: ‘The Warsaw Pact as History,’ p. 47.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 73.

15 TNA, AIR 8/2855, doc. 25/1 (DOP 704/79), MoD: ‘WINTEX/CIMEX 79 Final Report’ (26 July 1979), p. 3

It is reasonable that these worst cases must be considered, just in case – in the case of WINTEX 79, the ‘extensive C[hemical] W[eapon] attacks by ORANGE in the exercise demonstrated the fact that NATO ha[d] no effective response’<sup>16</sup> – however, they must also be balanced with realism in order for exercises to deliver the best value and positive learnings.

### *Wrong Lessons Learnt*

The issue of realism in a scenario also goes beyond how the opponent is portrayed. If any aspect of a scenario is unrealistic, the processes will not be tested correctly leading to potentially flawed, and even counter-productive, lessons, experience and revisions. One example is shown in the MoD’s final report on *WINTEX 79* which criticised that ORANGE play exceeded the capabilities of their real-life equipment,<sup>17</sup> which ‘complicated the problem of drawing correct lessons from the exercise.’<sup>18</sup> Vojtech Mastny states that Warsaw Pact exercises show similar issues regarding realism with improbable scenario expectations as they ‘assumed that enemy nuclear bombs would be falling on East Europe, but not on the Soviet Union itself’ – either so their allies would not see the effects, or because the fighting would not reach Soviet territory.<sup>19</sup> The reasons Mastny proposes for this misrepresentation of reality may not be justified as the Warsaw Pact’s assumption of the nuclear strike targets may actually have been based on the discussions within NATO from 1960-89 about the USA not targeting the USSR due to the USA’s concern about being targeted in return. Even if based on the USA not targeting the USSR, the Warsaw Pact’s target expectations were still unrealistic because it was unlikely these targets would have remained the same once war had broken out.

A lack of realism in one process can affect whole areas of an exercise

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16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*, p.A-4.

18 *Ibid.*, p. A-5.

19 Mastny: ‘Imagining War in Europe,’ p. 26.

too, as evidenced during NATO's *FALLEX 68* when a breakdown of the simulated NATO council consultation for selective nuclear weapons resulted in 'a complete loss of realism in one of the most important periods of the exercise.'<sup>20</sup> Also, a scenario's design may not cause processes to be activated that should have been, such as there not being enough reason to go to alert,<sup>21</sup> or how limited chemical warfare did not warrant Nuclear Biological Chemical reporting (whose only opportunity to be practiced was during such exercises).<sup>22</sup>

Assuming the incorrect amount of time for procedures can cause problems too, such as in *FALLEX 66* which demonstrated how the use of nuclear weapons would differ between exercise and reality because matters would move too quickly for the NATO Council to secure guidance from ambassadors.<sup>23</sup> In *WINTEX 79*, the time for the nuclear consultation process was unrealistically long which meant, as the MoD stated, 'there is a danger that false lessons could be drawn if players believe that, in the situation portrayed, conventional forces could have held during this long, drawn out nuclear debate: they could not.'<sup>24</sup>

### *Unrealistic Free Play*

Whilst exercises designed above all to test procedures have a fixed narrative, others include periods of 'free play' where the script is not pre-determined and players' decisions can affect the outcome. Bernard Burrows, the UK's Permanent Representative to the NATO council in 1968, stated that, despite the artificiality, realistic free-play was 'one of

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20 TNA, FCO 41/392, doc. 30 (DOP 549/69), UK Defence Operations Staff: 'REPORT ON NATO EXERCISE FALLEX 68 (GOLDEN ROD)' (23 December 1968), p. A-14.

21 TNA, DEFE 5/135/80, doc. COS 80/63, Chiefs of Staff Committee: 'Memorandum 80: Final Report - FALLEX 1962' (15 February 1963), p. 2.

22 TNA, AIR 8/2855, doc. 25/1 (DOP 704/79), MoD: 'WINTEX/CIMEX 79 Final Report' (26 July 1979), p. A-5.

23 TNA, FO 371/190827, B/9/23/G, A. Brooke-Turner (Defence Department, Foreign Office): 'Fallex 66 - Request for the use of Nuclear Weapons' (5 September 1966), p. 1.

24 TNA, AIR 8/2855, doc. 24 (421/A/3), MoD: 'Exercise WINTEX/CIMEX 79 First Impression Report' (2 April 1979), p. 1.

[the] most valuable features' of exercises.<sup>25</sup> The time for free-play decision-making in *HILEXs* (HHigh Level command-post EXercises) after *FALLEX 68* was going to be reduced to keep the exercises moving, but an objection was raised because realistic timing of decision-making (often outside of normal office hours) was seen as an important 'indication of the time it would be likely to take to deal with them in the [NATO] capitals.'<sup>26</sup>

### *Realism itself an Obstacle Barrier to Testing*

However, too much realism can also cause its own problems. On a practical level, realism can eliminate items from play that need testing – *FALLEX 62* used a UK Intelligence estimate of Soviet bomb patterns, but this realism resulted in large parts of the UK being unable to take part in the post-attack phase of the exercise because they had been destroyed by the nuclear strikes.<sup>27</sup>

Predetermining the outcome of free play to make it realistic (and ensure the scripted scenario plays out) can result in removing its value. The prescribed free play in *WINTEX 81*, where political initiatives were scripted to ultimately fail, meant the preventive measures to be deliberated were not given proper consideration.<sup>28</sup>

## II. Perceptions

### 1. *Interpretations of Real-Life Intentions*

Whilst problems with realism can reduce the value of an exercise, problems with how an exercised is perceived can cause further-reaching

25 TNA, FCO 41/392, doc. 21 (WDN 12/2), B. Burrows (UK Permanent Representative on the NATO Council): 'Letter regarding FALLEX 68' (26 November 1968), p. 1.

26 TNA, FCO 41/392, doc. 21 (WDN 12/2), B. Burrows (UK Permanent Representative on the NATO Council): 'Letter regarding FALLEX 68' (26 November 1968), p. 2.

27 TNA, DEFE 5/135/80, doc. COS 80/63, Chiefs of Staff Committee: 'Memorandum 80: Final Report - FALLEX 1962' (15 February 1963), p. 5.

28 TNA, FCO 46/2839, doc. 84, Stephen Band (Defence Department): 'WINTEX/CIMEX 81' (10 April 1981), p. 2.



issues. After *FALLEX 68*, a letter to the UK Prime Minister quotes NATO's SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe) stressing that 'special care must be taken to ensure that no false political or strategic conclusions are drawn from the setting or the play of the exercise.'<sup>29</sup> The issue that exercises are purely to test procedures and should not be interpreted by the adversary as intentions or likely outcomes is so great that this type of statement is seen repeatedly in governmental documents on exercises throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s. NATO strategic concepts repeatedly warned of World War Three arising from accident, miscalculation or misinterpretation.

However, it is understandable why people might think exercises might also have a political signalling function in real life, when some exercises are used specifically to do exactly that. When NATO's *HILEX 9* was cancelled in 1980, Norman Tebbit (the UK's Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade) commented that the exercise could be reinstated with a week's notice 'if a situation developed in relation to Yugoslavia where a mild warning shot to the Russians might be useful.'<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the CIA's description of Warsaw Pact exercises explains that, in exceptional circumstances, the *Soyuz* series 'serve as a show of force',<sup>31</sup> and physical exercise *Soyuz 81* 'intended to frighten the Polish population and to support the Polish national authorities.'<sup>32</sup>

Whether exercises are to test procedures and not communicate intentions, or are to send a message on an international level, steps must be taken to limit unintended misunderstandings – one way is to adjust the narrative of a scenario to avoid sensitive political issues. The UK Chiefs of Staff Committee draft feedback to NATO about the proposed plans for *WINTEX 71* mentions how having the confrontation develop

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29 TNA, CAB 164/355, doc. 12N (A a6878), Burke Trend: 'Free Play in NATO Exercises' (27 January 1969), p. 1.

30 TNA, FCO 46/2406, doc. 16, K.B.A. Scott: 'YUGOSLAVIA AND HILEX' (24 January 1980).

31 CIA Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room (henceforth CIAFOIA), doc. 5166d4f-999326091c6a607ec, CIA: 'Planning, Preparations, Operation and Evaluation of Warsaw Pact Exercises' (1 January 1981), p. 20, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/document/5166d4f999326091c6a607ec> (accessed 26 August 2015).

32 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

from the Middle East, with only indirect involvement by ORANGE and NATO, was ‘considered likely to have political implications unsuitable for consideration in a procedural exercise.’<sup>33</sup> They stated that there was ‘a danger that a real life hypothesis might be drawn leading to false conclusions’ and the scenario should develop as a direct threat to NATO’s flanks and centre instead.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, scenarios can be created which deliberately do not test items due to their sensitivity even though testing is desired. Not allowing full nuclear play resulted in the UK’s nuclear release procedures not being tested fully in any *FALLEX* exercise (1962-68).<sup>35</sup> In 1962, the Inspector General of the Bundeswehr asked that the *FALLEX 62* exercise should not finish with a mass nuclear exchange ‘as this was dispiriting, particularly for the civilians who took part in this exercise.’<sup>36</sup>

The scripted timing of actions is another area for potential miscommunications – for the first time in the series, *FALLEX 68* contained a NATO R-hour (nuclear release) which preceded ORANGE R-hour, which had not previously been NATO exercise practice.<sup>37</sup> During preparations for *WINTEX 71*, there was concern that the draft scenario appeared to include ORANGE land attacks using biological and chemical weapons, but no nuclear weapons, which meant NATO’s declaration of R-hour represented a NATO pre-emptive first strike.<sup>38</sup>

The problems of misperceptions are usually heightened during ‘free play’ periods because of the unscripted decisions being made which are sensitive to being misinterpreted as political intentions. Not only might foreign powers interpret the human decisions taken during free play incorrectly, but internal issues can arise too as ‘despite all protestations to

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33 TNA, CAB 164/358, doc. 47, Secretary (Chiefs of Staff Committee): ‘WINTEX 71 (EXERCISE GOOD HEART)’ (19 September 1969), p. A-1.

34 *Ibid.*

35 TNA, FCO 41/392, doc. 30, p. A-15.

36 Beatrice Heuser: *NATO, Britain and the FRG: Nuclear Strategists and Forces for Europe, 1949-2000*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997, p. 143.

37 TNA, CAB 164/355, doc. 11 (DOP 549/68), Defence Operations Staff: ‘REPORT ON NATO EXERCISE FALLEX 68 (GOLDEN ROD)’ (24 January 1969), p. A-2.

38 TNA, CAB 164/358, doc. 12, A.W.G. LeHardy: ‘NATO Major Exercises’ (14 April 1969), p. 2.

the contrary, NATO Governments will try to interpret from the decisions made by senior officials or ministers what their national policy would be in real life.<sup>39</sup> However, despite the increased risk, free play tests processes (and people) more realistically. Maybe more importantly, it can also make Governments 'realise how early unpalatable decisions have to be taken.'<sup>40</sup> This is evident from the outcome of a period of free play during *WINTEX 89* when a NATO decision launched a limited nuclear attack on East Germany, and then West Germany, in order to affect ORANGE conventional forces. West Germany's response was not to participate in further exercises until a more acceptable scenario was set, but 'officials tried unsuccessfully to find an alternative simulation that would not offend the [participating] 14 NATO countries.'<sup>41</sup>

Misperceptions (or even correct perceptions) of exercises can potentially cause offense and create serious real-world issues. Parties cast as the opposition in a scenario could be offended and/or aggravated by the way they are cast in a scenario, such as ORANGE's extensive illegal use chemical weapons in *WINTEX 79* (as mentioned earlier),<sup>42</sup> or ORANGE invading Italy from Yugoslavia (although this was felt less sensitive than portraying ORANGE as violating neutrality treaties and invading Italy via Austria instead) in *WINTEX 81*.<sup>43</sup>

Care is required not to offend allies – when planning *WINTEX 83*, the UK's Middle East Department declined the inclusion of a South West Asian element because, if it became publicly known, 'relations between NATO and Middle East countries could be seriously complicated, and anti-Western forces would score an easy propaganda victory.'<sup>44</sup> Even allies'

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39 TNA, FCO 41/392, doc. 38 (WDN 12/2), K. Prendergast: 'Free Play in NATO Exercises' (25 March 1969), p. 1.

40 *Ibid.*

41 Melissa Healy, 'NATO Cancels War Games to Shift Scenarios,' [http://articles.latimes.com/1990-05-20/news/mn-179\\_1\\_war-games](http://articles.latimes.com/1990-05-20/news/mn-179_1_war-games), 20 May 1990 (accessed 18 September 2015).

42 TNA, AIR 8/2855, doc. 25/1 (DOP 704/79), MoD: 'WINTEX/CIMEX 79 Final Report' (26 July 1979), p. 3.

43 TNA, FCO 46/2407, doc. 21 (CM 075/5), W.R.C. Briant (UK Delegation to NATO): 'WINTEX 81: YUGOSLAVIA SENSITIVITIES' (24 April 1980), p. 2.

44 TNA, FCO 46/2843, doc. 19 (CM 075/5), P.J. Roberts (UK Defence Department): 'WINTEX 83:

trade relationships need considering, as shown during preparations for *WINTEX 81* when the Turks insisted that a code name be used for Libya, rather than their real name, to ensure ‘not jeopardising [their] supply of cheap oil from Libya.’<sup>45</sup>

## 2. *Mistaking Exercises for Real War Preparations*

In the worst case, an exercise may be misperceived as preparation of a real attack which occurred during NATO’s *Able Archer* in 1983 during heightened East-West tensions. As Eric Schlosser writes, ‘the KGB thought that *Able Archer 83* might be a cover for a surprise attack on the Soviet Union’ which moved the Soviets to consider running exercises too as their own cover for a strike on Western Europe.<sup>46</sup> Real-life Soviet air units were put on high alert and readying nuclear strike forces.<sup>47</sup> (Beatrice Heuser’s chapter in this book covers these types of problems in detail.)

## 3. *Issues with Declarations*

To try and avoid exercises being perceived as possible mobilisation, part of the Helsinki Accords introduced at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in 1975 agreed that ‘notification [would] be given of major military manoeuvres exceeding a total of 25,000 troops, independently or combined with any possible air or naval components.’<sup>48</sup> The agreement that intended to reduce tension also proved to be a stick with which to beat others and, thus, increased tension too in a tit-for-tat cycle of accusation when one party did not inform the other. Russia did

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OUT-OF-AREA PLAY’ (27 May 1981), p. 1.

45 TNA, FCO 46/2407, doc. 23 (CM 075/7), W.R.C. Briant (UK Delegation to NATO): ‘COEC MEETING 29 APRIL’ (29 April 1980), p. 1.

46 Eric Schlosser: *Command and Control*, London: Allen Lane, 2013, p. 448.

47 Beatrice Heuser: ‘The Soviet response to the Euromissile crisis, 1982-83,’ in Leopoldo Nuti (ed): *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: From Helsinki to Gorbachev 1975-1985*, London: Routledge, 2008, p. 140.

48 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe web site, OSCE: ‘Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe: Final Act’ (Helsinki: 1975), p. 11, <http://www.osce.org/helsinki-final-act?download=true> (accessed 13 March 2017).

not declare *Zapad* 81, which was reported to consist of 100,000 troops, and did not declare what types of forces were involved. Russia justified their non-declaration because no more than 25,000 troops were in any one location, and their forces were not within 250 km of a European state (which was also part of the agreement). However, whilst detailing the magnitude of the USSR's *Zapad* exercises, and the lack of detail provided beforehand, the UK's MoD admitted that the US/Spanish *CRISEX 81* notification gave 'little better idea of what units [were] involved' in that exercise.<sup>49</sup> The use of exercises as a political tool can be clearly seen when the same letter prepared for NATO's *Autumn Forge* exercise to be seen as distinct from *Zapad* 81 (because it consisted of six separate exercises), especially because it had been announced by *The Times* as an exercise consisting of 250,000 troops.<sup>50</sup>

The invitation of observers to exercises laid out in the 1975 Helsinki Accords was not always adhered to either. A UK Foreign Office list of Warsaw Pact exercises shows four consecutive Warsaw Pact exercises from March 1978 to February 1979 where notification of the exercise was given but observers were not invited.<sup>51</sup> Not that NATO and its allies were blame free either, as a handwritten postscript note (on a letter by the MoD about *Zapad* 81 and the Helsinki Agreement requirements) advises that the Norwegians did not invite observers to their *Cold Winter* or *Bar Frost* exercises in 1981.<sup>52</sup>

The difficulties of exercise notification are further evidenced by the Soviets who stated that it had not been necessary to declare *Soyuz* 81 because it was a staff exercise, not a field exercise; however, the Americans felt this was a new distinction and a 'pretty limp excuse' as they could

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49 TNA, FCO 46/2652, doc. 45, David Arnold-Forster (Ministry of Defence): 'ZAPAD 81; CSCE ASPECTS,' (23 October 1981), p. 2

50 *Ibid.*

51 TNA, FO 972/47, UK Foreign Office: 'The Warsaw Pact – Meetings and Exercises – A Reference List 1955-1980,' (February 1980), pp. 60-1.

52 TNA, FCO 46/2652, doc. 45, David Arnold-Forster (Ministry of Defence): 'ZAPAD 81; CSCE ASPECTS,' (23 October 1981), p. 2

not imagine staff exercises involving 25,000 troops or more.<sup>53</sup> In 1994, the CSCE countries adopted the Vienna document which, among other things, revised the quantity of forces involved in an exercise which would warrant notification of other states to ‘at least 9,000 troops, including support, or at least 250 battle tanks, or at least 500 armoured combat vehicles, or at least 250 self-propelled and towed artillery pieces, mortars and multiple rocket-launchers.’<sup>54</sup> The same document also revised the quantity of forces at which observers need to be invited to similar levels, but with at least 13,000 troops or at least 300 battle tanks instead – which makes it possible to execute an exercise that requires notification but not observers.<sup>55</sup>

To further reduce issues of exercises being mistaken as real mobilisations by both sides, pseudonyms are used for participants, and items such as missiles and airplanes are given fictitious names, so that communications about them are not mistaken for real-world items if the recipient does not realise it is for an exercise. Giving pseudonyms to the opponent in the exercise gives a fragment of plausible distance from implying the opponent is any specific real-life nation, although that effect is lost when the exercise instructions specifically state who they are, such as in the *WINTEX 79* when instructions stated ORANGE was used ‘to designate the USSR and its satellites.’<sup>56</sup>

#### 4. *The Impact of Politics on Exercises*

Whilst exercises can cause real-world sensitivities, it is possible for existing real-world sensitivities to de-rail exercises too. In 1980, *HILEX 9* was cancelled because, as the UK Defence Department wrote, ‘the scenario relates to Balkan instability and would thus alarm the Yugoslavs

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53 TNA, FCO 46/2652, doc. 7, Clive Rose (UK Delegation to NATO): ‘SOYUZ 81,’ (17 March 1981).

54 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe web site, OSCE: ‘Vienna Document 1994’ (Vienna: 28 November 1994), p. 20, <http://www.osce.org/fsc/41270?download=true> (accessed 16 April 2017).

55 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

56 TNA, AIR 8/2856, D/AF Ops/9/2, ‘WINTEX/CIMEX 79: EXERCISE INSTRUCTION’ (27 October 1978), p. 1.

and give the Russians a propaganda bonus.<sup>57</sup> It was thought that the subject matter of *HILEX 9* would be known to the Russians because it was known to Ursel Lorenzen, a NATO employee who had defected to East Germany the previous year.<sup>58</sup> This incident also showed that not all allies agree on exercises as some nations wanted to continue and some wanted to cancel. A Reuter telex mentioned that West Germany was particularly opposed to going ahead with *HILEX 9* due to the current tension between East and West.<sup>59</sup> The telex also mentioned that Alliance sources said the exercise was cancelled because ‘Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan provide(d) the best possible scenario,’ although this seems like a rather weak attempt to sound positive about the cancellation of the exercise.<sup>60</sup>

## 5. *Public Opinion*

Accidental, or willing, misperceptions of exercises by external audiences can also cause problems. Public opinion about exercises is often fuelled by the media and/or political organisations that can easily sensationalise the stereotypes that the public believe in and/or fear. One example of this is the *Carte Blanche* exercise of 1955 which Robert Davis discusses in this volume. This leveraging of public anti-nuclear sentiment can be seen in Britain in the 1960s and 1980s when TV programmes such as *The War Game* and later *Threads* portrayed the shocking, harsh effects following a nuclear blast, with considerable impact on public opinion.<sup>61</sup> Many people saw the problems created as much by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan worsening the Cold War as by the Soviets. Normally ministers are not involved in exercises, as they are used to procedures rather than people; however, when Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher

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57 TNA, FCO 46/2406, doc. 24, P J Goulden (UK Defence Department): ‘HILEX 9,’ (9 February 1980), p. 1.

58 *Ibid.*

59 TNA, FCO 46/2406, Reuter: ‘NATO - HILEX’ (10 February 1980).

60 *Ibid.*

61 Philip Sabin: *The Third World War Scare in Britain: A Critical Analysis* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986)

was potentially going to attend part of the *WINTEX 81* exercise, *The Times* printed a story alarmingly titled: ‘Thatcher interest in ‘doomsday’ role.’<sup>62</sup> A hand-written note on a photocopy of *The Times* article in the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s files reads: ‘So much for any hope of keeping the PM’s involvement in *WINTEX* out of the press. And it is still 12 months away!’<sup>63</sup>

Greater public awareness means the information released about exercises must also be carefully considered. In 1981, an article in *The Times* examined an exercise document from 1950 (which had recently been released): this showed a table of responses to various types of warfare, including how the exercise considered using biological, chemical and nuclear weapons.<sup>64</sup> As a result of the article, an almost identical (and just as easily misperceived) table proposed for inclusion in the Defensive Press Briefing for *WINTEX 81* – which mentioned a nuclear consultation phase, and that defensive biological and chemical warfare measures would be considered if appropriate – was removed.<sup>65</sup> In an attempt to keep press interest in the forthcoming *WINTEX 81* limited, the MoD noted they had ‘no intention to publicise high-level play’ because ‘we do not wish to encourage domestic interest following adverse media over [the civil defence exercise] *Square Leg*’ in 1980.<sup>66</sup>

As well as limiting public information, an exercise’s scenario can also be used to try to limit public misinterpretation and/or assuage public alarm; however, these more palatable visions of a possible future are often at the expense of realism. In the eventually cancelled civil defence exercise *Hard Rock* (1982), the British Home Office planners ‘adopted a deliberately unrealistic attack scenario, avoiding massive casualty levels or

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62 Peter Hennessy: ‘Ministers must act in ‘war games,’ *The Times*, 26 February 1980, p. 4.

63 TNA, FCO 46/2407, doc. 12 (CM 075/7), W.R.C. Briant (UK Delegation to NATO): ‘FUTURE WINTEX/MILEX EXERCISES’ (27 February 1980), p. 2.

64 Peter Hennessy: ‘Insight into transition from peace to war,’ *The Times*, 9 February 1981.

65 TNA, FCO 46/2838, doc. 35, J.H. Spiers (MoD): ‘WINTEX-CIMEX 81: DEFENSIVE PRESS BRIEFING’ (11 February 1981), p. 4.

66 TNA, FCO 46/2838, doc. 43 (UKMilrep A2C 111045Z), T.E. Daniels (MoD): ‘PUBLIC INFORMATION POLICY - WINTEX-CIMEX 81’ (13 February 1981), p. 2.



the targeting of American bases, in order to deprive CND of campaigning ammunition.<sup>67</sup> Also, the *Square Leg* (1980) scenario contained no nuclear attacks on any inner London targets, and few UK cities were even hit by nuclear weapons in exercise *Hard Rock*.<sup>68</sup>

But even changing an exercise's scenario to address perception issues has its own problems too. NATO's Secretary General expressed concerns that the inclusion of nuclear play in *WINTEX 83* 'would become publicly known and might have the effect of weakening the position of Allied governments in the current state of public opinion on nuclear matters',<sup>69</sup> however, some NATO ambassadors felt it better to cancel the exercise as removing nuclear play from it would 'send entirely the wrong signal both to Western public opinion and to the Soviet Union.'<sup>70</sup> Even cancelling an exercise, as in the case of *HILEX 9*, carried concerns that opponents might interpret it as nervousness or, in a slightly far-reaching piece of double-thinking, might make the Soviets think that the UK/NATO had cancelled to engage in 'real-life contingency planning.'<sup>71</sup>

## 6. *Agendas*

As with most systems that work in principle, issues invariably arise when humans are involved due to personal agendas. In the early 1980s, civil defence exercises in the UK were planned and executed during a period of polarisation of British society regarding nuclear weapons. In November 1980, Manchester City Council declared Greater Manchester a nuclear-free zone, resolving that no nuclear weapons would be

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67 Philip A. G. Sabin: *The Third World War Scare in Britain: A Critical Analysis*, Basingstoke, Macmillan Press, 1986), p. 91.

68 Stan Openshaw, Philip Steadman and Owen Greene: *Doomsday: Britain After Nuclear Attack*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983, p. 105.

69 TNA, FCO 46/2839, doc. 73, Clive Rose (UK Delegation to NATO): 'WINTEX/CIMEX 81: NUCLEAR CONSULTATION' (20 March 1981), p. 1.

70 *Ibid.*

71 TNA, FCO 46/2406, doc. 13, Clive Rose (UK Delegation to NATO): 'EXERCISE HILEX 9' (28 January 1980), p. 1.

transported or manufactured in their area.<sup>72</sup> By 1982, around 170 local authorities – mostly controlled by the anti-nuclear Labour Party – had also become nuclear-free zones.<sup>73</sup> As a result, UK exercise *Hard Rock* was derailed because, regardless that nuclear-free status would make no difference to whether they would be affected by a nuclear attack, these anti-nuclear local authorities had only done the absolute legal minimum exercise preparation which critically limited local authority involvement.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, Labour scored points with the public for their anti-nuclear stance and made the Conservative Government look inept. The Conservative Party blamed the Labour Party for the cancellation of *Hard Rock*, although a file shows they admitted in a meeting that ‘it was also necessary to recognise privately that some Conservative County Councils had done no more than the statutory minimum required of them.’<sup>75</sup> To avoid such issues in the future, civil authorities’ statutory minimum preparations were increased, and civil authority exercise involvement was much reduced, such as in *Brave Defender* (1984) which deliberately excluded local authorities.<sup>76</sup>

Concern over public image can affect exercises: NATO Secretary General Joseph Luns considered that public knowledge of including nuclear play ‘might have the effect of weakening the position of Allied governments in the current state of public opinion on nuclear matters.’<sup>77</sup> Also, Governments which are new into their office are prone to act cautiously compared to how they would actually act. An example of this can be seen in *WINTEX 81*, when the US maintained a low profile and the newness of the Reagan administration was the suspected reason

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72 Clive Rose: *Campaigns Against Western Defence: NATO's Adversaries and Critics*, Basingstoke: Macmillian Press, 1985, p. 148.

73 *Ibid.*

74 Labour Party National Executive Committee: ‘Advice Note: Civil Defence, Home Defence and Emergency Planning,’ no. 6, June 1981, p. 3.

75 TNA, HO 322/1000, doc. ‘Note of meeting 5.30pm 8 July 1982,’ C.J. Walters (UK Home Office): ‘EXERCISE HARD ROCK AND CIVIL DEFENCE POLICY’ (9 July 1982), p. 1.

76 TNA, HO 322/1038, doc. 44, Secretary of State (MoD): ‘HOME DEFENCE: EXERCISE BRAVE DEFENDER’ (9 August 1984).

77 TNA, FCO 46/2839, doc. 73, Clive Rose (UK Delegation to NATO): ‘WINTEX/CIMEX 81: NUCLEAR CONSULTATION’ (20 March 1981), p. 1.

why they would not accept secure line equipment from the UK so that a communication hot line between 10 Downing Street and the US White House could be used and tested during the exercise.<sup>78</sup>

## Conclusion

Command post exercises are enormously complex operations – beyond the logistical challenges, compromises must be found to balance many factors like the issue of the degree of realism of the scenario, usefulness and perception which can affect an exercise's value and impact. In each exercise, its multiple purposes – testing, reassurance, deterrence, alliance, solidarity – have to be weighed and choices have to be made when these clash. This is exemplified by Charles Gray in the UK's Eastern European and Soviet Department, who remarked that 'we cannot afford to be unduly careful of 'orange' sensibilities if *WINTEX* is to be as realistic as possible.'<sup>79</sup>

As exercises are artificial, their benefits and findings must be tempered with this knowledge to realise that any resultant perceived learnings may be distorted. Even suggested improvements need considering to ensure they have real-world value – so much so that the Chief of the Defence Staff wanted to check that revisions being made to procedures following *WINTEX 79* did not result in their 'becoming more orientated towards the handling of an exercise than a real crisis.'<sup>80</sup>

However, despite the potential risks and flaws, it is important to test and practice such potentially vital and critical procedures and responses, even if only occasionally, especially as 'realistic exercises provide the only effective means of testing whether the shortcomings have been put

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78 TNA, FCO 46/2839, doc. 88, B Watkins (Defence Department): 'SECURE TELEPHONE LINK WITH US EXERCISE STAFF' (15 April 1981).

79 TNA, FCO 46/2407, doc. 16, J.C.R. Gray: 'WINTEX-CIMEX 81' (21 March 1980).

80 TNA, AIR 8/2855, doc. 27/1, Chief of the Defence Staff, UK: 'EXERCISE WINTEX/CIMEX 79' (3 August 1979), p. 2.

right.’<sup>81</sup> When discussing the processes to be used in *FALLEX 66* for the use of nuclear weapons, William St. Clair in the Foreign Office’s Western Organisations Department hit the nail on the head when he wrote: ‘It is very difficult to imagine any of these procedures working in a real emergency but if we must have something on which to plan, these are perhaps as good as any.’<sup>82</sup>

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81 TNA, FCO 41/392, doc. 21 (WDN 12/2), B. Burrows (UK Permanent Representative on the NATO Council): ‘Letter regarding FALLEX 68’ (26 November 1968), p. 2

82 TNA, FO 371/190827, B/9/23/G, W L St. Clair (W.O.C.D., Foreign Office): ‘Fallex 66 - Request for the use of Nuclear Weapons’ (5 September 1966), p. 2.

# Military Exercises and the Dangers of Misunderstandings: the East-West Crisis of the Early 1980s

*Beatrice Heuser*

‘Never, perhaps, in the post-war decades, has the situation in the world been as explosive and hence, more difficult and unfavourable as in the first half of the 1980s.

(Mikhail Gorbachev, February 1986)<sup>1</sup>

The study of International Relations revolves around ‘disaster studies,’ in the words of the late Donald Cameron Watt during his inaugural lecture at the London School of Economics in 1983 - a year that we shall dwell upon at some length in this article.<sup>2</sup> One important notion in International Relations is the ‘security dilemma,’ which we owe to the work of the scholar John Herz:

‘The heart breaking plight in which a bipolarized and atom bomb-blessed world finds itself today is but the extreme manifestation of a dilemma with which human societies have had to grapple since the dawn of history. ... Wherever [an] anarchic society has existed ... ‘security dilemmas’ for people, groups, or their leaders have arisen. Groups or individuals living together must be, and usually are, concerned about their security, their safety from attack

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1 George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, The President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board: ‘The Soviet War Scare Report,’ 15 Feb. 1990, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb533-The-Able-Archer-War-Scare-Declassified-PFIAB-Report-Released/> accessed on 31 III 16.

2 Donald Cameron Watt, *What about the People? Abstraction and Reality in History and the Social Sciences*, London, London School of Economics, 1983.

and domination, or their extermination by other groups and individuals. Striving to secure themselves from such an attack, they are driven to acquire ever-growing power in order to escape the impact of the power of others. This, in turn, renders the others more insecure and compels them to prepare for the worst. Since no-one can ever feel entirely secure in such a world of competing units, power competition ensues, and the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on.<sup>3</sup>

This pattern of insecurity and distrust underlay East-West relations especially in the early 1980s, as we shall see; Western assumptions that unmistakable signals could be sent to their Warsaw Pact adversaries were to prove dangerously over-optimistic. However rational Western reasoning may have been, it turns out that there was plenty of scope for misunderstanding.

## Military Exercises

Serious problems, it seems, arose from mutual misunderstandings particularly in two contexts: first, in interpreting the motivations whenever new (especially nuclear) weapons systems were deployed; and second, in the contexts of military exercises. Both were intimately connected.

As we noted in our introduction, military exercises serve a variety of purposes, most importantly in our context, to deter an enemy attack by signalling to an adversary that one is not a push-over and that an attack might well not succeed; to reassure one's own side in the same way; to train in the use of equipment and rehearse standard operational procedures. Such exercises were held in many formats and variations both by the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) and by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Of considerable political importance were command post exercises

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<sup>3</sup> John Herz: 'Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma,' *World Politics* Vol. 2, No. 2 (1950), p. 157.

that might involve civilian staff officers and personnel at the highest levels and sometimes even practising politicians, without necessarily involving large numbers of servicemen and women. For example, NATO's *Autumn Forge* series comprised an annual small command-post exercise named *Able Archer*. This was designed to rehearse procedures, testing associated command and control arrangements, in case nuclear release was contemplated in an escalating war resulting from a WTO attack that could not be contained by conventional forces. Arguably more important from the point of view of intra-alliance politics was NATO's biennial *WINTEX* series, in which select local governments in NATO member states were involved and parts of government up to the highest national level, and beyond, to the North Atlantic Council.<sup>4</sup> Again, through the involvement of large numbers of people, despite the ubiquitous labels marking out these NATO exercises as Top Secret, the assumption was that the scenario (*always* involving an attack *by* the WTO and *always* ending with nuclear use and an armistice, and never involving incursions by NATO forces onto WTO member state territory) and sequence of the exercise was communicated to Moscow. Western planners felt confident that Moscow could not misunderstand Western intentions, which, simply put, were to deter any attack, by signalling that the West would defend itself, and if necessary use nuclear weapons rather than surrender.

## Soviet Intelligence on NATO Exercises

During the Cold War, a good proportion of the diplomatic and intelligence resources of member states of both the WTO and NATO were devoted to tracking, analysing and interpreting the opposite side. It is an educated guess to suppose that many resources had never before been devoted to understanding each other. Several groups of analysts were involved in this endeavour (from intelligence gathering at its most secret, to journalists at its most public) largely working in stove-pipes, with little

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<sup>4</sup> The British documentation on these exercises, for example *WINTEX* [19]83 is now freely available for anybody to consult, under the 30-years' rule, in the British National Archives, see e.g. CAB 130/1249.

communication between the groups (even within one country).

There were spies in both camps, but as the Western camp was to a very large extent an open society. The West German government's defence sector especially, and through it, NATO itself, were penetrated to a particularly large extent, despite 'security vettings.' This is, to this day, an area difficult to research, but enough evidence has come into the public domain to give examples of what was going on. In 1974, West German Chancellor Willy Brandt had to resign from office after it was established that one of his closest aides, Günter Guillaume, was a GDR agent. Such spies also included staff working in and around NATO, such as Ingrid Garbe, a secretary in the German NATO delegation, who was arrested in 1979, and the German 'Michelle' (Ursel Lorenzen), who worked in NATO's International Staff from 1967 until 1979 and fell prey to the charms of an East German 'romeo' agent, who then defecting to the GDR. According to the East German intelligence officer Heinz Busch, 'Michelle' obtained 'the entire documentation on NATO's strategic command-staff exercise *'HILEX 7'* [of 1977], ... all proposals and concepts for the defence ministers' meeting[s] (DPC and NPG<sup>5</sup>), ... [and] extensive correspondence between NATO entities and national leaderships about the strategic staff exercise *WINTEX-Cimec* [sic] 79, ... extensive, almost complete documentation on the strategic staff exercises *WINTEX 77* and *HILEX 8*....'<sup>6</sup>

While Garbe was arrested in 1979 and Lorenzen was brought in from the cold by her GDR handlers, another East German spy working at NATO headquarters, Rainer Rupp (code name Topas) was left in place throughout the 1980s. He was able to transmit Top Secret NATO documents to East German intelligence (and, presumably, via East Berlin to Moscow).<sup>7</sup> Then there was Elke Falk in Bonn, whose work

5 Defence Planning Committee and Nuclear Planning Group.

6 Excerpts of Busch's testimony in Mastny & Byrne: *A Cardboard Castle?*, Doc. 80, p. 404f.

7 When I worked at NATO HQ in 1997/98, I had access to a MC 161 report of the early 1980s, and the last person who had consulted ('signed for') this secret document before me was Rainer Rupp. On the role of East German intelligence in this context, see also Bernd Schaefer, Nate Jones, Benjamin B. Fischer: 'Forecasting Nuclear War: Stasi/KGB Intelligence Cooperation under Project RYaN' online at the Nuclear



in the German Federal Chancery gave her access to further *WINTEX* documents.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the Luxembourg diplomat Guy de Muysers, ambassador to Moscow from 1981 to 1983 and Luxembourg's permanent representative to NATO from 1986, was in 1990 relieved of his post and deprived of his security clearance after being accused of having passed classified NATO information to a Soviet contact.<sup>9</sup>

Other leaks existed. Articles appeared, for example, in the German political magazine *der Spiegel*, stating that nuclear use had been 'played' and sometimes giving even more details, usually accurate.<sup>10</sup> In an interview with *der Spiegel* after her defection to the East in 1979, Ursel Lorenzen described the scenario of *WINTEX 79*.<sup>11</sup> So in fact, anything worth knowing about NATO exercises was available to the intelligence services of the Warsaw Pact, and one might therefore have assumed that nobody in Moscow or East Berlin could be misled about NATO's entirely defensive posture and intentions.<sup>12</sup>

## Controlled and Uncontrolled Messaging

By the early 1980s, there was growing consensus not only among Western defence experts but also in NATO government circles that Confidence and Security Building Measures – an outcome of the Helsinki Process, or the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe – were vital to prevent accidents or miscalculations which might

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Proliferation International History Project, Wilson Center (November, 2014), see <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/forecasting-nuclear-war> (accessed on 24 IX 2016).

8 Marianne Quoirin: 'Romeo und Elke - Codewort 'Liebe': Die klassische Arbeitsweise der Geheimdienste,' *Die Zeit*, 2 June 1989.

9 <http://www.upi.com/Archives/1990/05/09/NATO-ambassador-from-Luxembourg-dismissed-for-security-breach/6963642225600/> accessed on 21 Feb 2016.

10 See for example: 'Bedingt Abwehrbereit' (re. FALLEX 62), *Der Spiegel* Nr. 41 (1962); 'Wenn die Atomschläge ins Leere Fallen' (re. SPEARPOINT 61), *Der Spiegel* Nr. 47 (1962); 'Auf Breiter Front' (re. *WINTEX* 85), *Der Spiegel* Nr. 26 (1985).

11 'Dann wird man von großer Unruhe ergriffen,' interview with Ursel Lorenzen, *Der Spiegel* Nr.12 (1979) – this issue was devoted to spies in the West German government and in NATO.

12 Benjamin B. Fischer: 'The 1980s Soviet War Scare: New Evidence from East German Archives,' *Intelligence and National Security* Vol. 14, No. 3 (1999), pp. 186–197.

quite unintentionally lead to war with the Warsaw Pact.<sup>13</sup>

At least some Western intelligence services were well aware of the Eastern spies in NATO and in some member states' governments. As one former senior British civil servant with a career in the defence and intelligence sector put it: 'We assumed they [leaders of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact] had almost real-time intelligence of what we were doing.'<sup>14</sup> But instead of arresting Eastern spies, the governments of NATO member states left some of them in place to allow the East to see that the West was not a military threat and was indeed preparing only its own defence against attacks. If Top Secret NATO documents were leaked to the Warsaw Pact through such spies, the logic ran, they would have more credence in the East than public communiqués. This, it was thought in the West, would avoid any misunderstanding of Western intentions; surely, Moscow must know that these ruled out any attack on WTO territory, and anything that might risk initiating World War III. Indeed, presumably to enhance their credibility and avoid suspicion in the WTO leadership that it was just a matter of posturing, the phase of nuclear use in NATO's command post and military exercises tended to be played as 'Top Secret' and in the UK, for 'UK eyes only.'

The problem was that Western counter-intelligence organizations did not necessarily know about all Eastern agents working in the West. Nor did they did know all the material that was passed to the East, or with what additional interpretation it might be presented either by the agents, or by the analysts in East Berlin or Moscow. Perhaps only parts of documents were passed on, out of context. Or documents were interpreted in ways Westerners did not imagine, notwithstanding the extensive knowledge they thought they had of how the Soviet (and East German) minds worked.<sup>15</sup>

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13 Vojtech Mastny, Sven G. Holtsmark, Andreas Wenger (eds): *War plans and alliances in the Cold War: threat perceptions in the East and West*, London, Routledge, 2006.

14 Interview with Sir David Oman, former defence official, London, 1 June 2015.

15 Len Scott: 'Intelligence and the Risk of Nuclear War: Able Archer-83 Revisited,' *Intelligence and National Security* Vol. 26 No. 6 (2011), pp. 759–777.

## The last Peak of the Cold War

We now know that leading WTO military figures were genuinely concerned about Western intentions, and their concerns focused on two issues. One was the modernization<sup>16</sup> of NATO's nuclear weapons that were stationed in Europe in late 1983. Ironically, the deployment of 'Euromissiles'<sup>17</sup> was seen by NATO leaders partly as an attempt to offset Soviet SS-20 («Пионер») missiles that had been deployed from 1980, with a view to persuading the USSR to agree either unilaterally to withdraw the SS20s in return for NATO ministers cancelling the Euromissile deployment, or for both sides to remove their respective missiles once deployed (the so-called 'dual' or 'double track decision' taken by NATO ministers on 13 December 1979).<sup>18</sup> Also ironically, between 1979 and 1983, while agreeing to deploy the new. 572 Euromissiles (with one warhead each), NATO ministers also decided to scrap 1400 other nuclear warheads, and agreed on overall net reductions of what was referred to as (European) Theatre Nuclear Forces (i.e. nuclear weapons that would be launched from Europe).

The story of the last peak of the Cold War, covering the period from December 1979 until Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachëv came to power in 1985, is sufficiently well known for us not to go through it in detail here.<sup>19</sup> The period of détente which had enabled the conclusion of the second Strategic Arms Limitation Talks by the SALT II agreement had come to an end with the disappointing non-ratification of the agreement. The West was highly concerned by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan which began about a fortnight after NATO's dual track decision was

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16 i.e. replacement by technically superior weapons, in this case: more reliably accurate missiles.

17 These consisted of Cruise Missiles and Pershing II ballistic missiles.

18 See the NATO communiqués of December 1979 [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_27042.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_27042.htm?selectedLocale=en) and December 1980 [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_23047.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23047.htm?selectedLocale=en) accessed on 18 IX 2016.

19 For studies of this period from several angles, see Leopoldo Nuti (ed): *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: From Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985*, London, Routledge, 2008.

announced, which to some Western observers seemed like a first step of Soviet expansionism in the Middle East, coming within less than a year after the Islamic Revolution in Iran which had destabilized the region. Would the USSR intervene in Iran, and more successfully than the US? Would the USSR try to seize control of Middle Eastern oil-rich states?

The following year, Ronald Reagan was elected President of the USA, taking office in January 1981. His personal style made Moscow very uneasy – he spoke of the USSR as ‘an evil force’ and in his first State of the Union speech announced a programme for a military build-up. Relations between East and West became increasingly tense.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, it seems that Soviet (and East German) military leaders seriously viewed the possibility that NATO might use the new Euromissiles to stage a surprise attack against the WTO. And this, they feared, might happen in the context of an exercise, as we shall see.

Initially, as NATO had hoped it would, the dual track decision’s effect was to reboot arms control negotiations between NATO and the USSR, to stop the Euromissile deployment and to withdraw the Soviet SS20s. But East-West relations continued to deteriorate, and both sides vilified each other in public statements. Reagan called the USSR an ‘empire of evil,’ Soviet spokesmen talked about the ‘madness’ and ‘criminality’ of Reagan and his advisers. After a lull during the period of détente (mid-1960s to mid-1970s), the peace movements that had sprung up in several West European countries in the 1950s became very active again in the late 1970s. They opposed, first, the development of the neutron bomb, and then, the deployment of the Euromissiles. For a variety of reasons including naïveté but also Eastern funding, the protest movements in the West showed less concern about Soviet missiles stationed in Eastern Europe.<sup>21</sup> Either way, from 1981 until well into 1984, there was an incessant chorus of condemnation of NATO’s Euromissile deployment

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20 Beth A. Fischer: *The Reagan Reversal of Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War*, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1997.

21 Michael Ploetz: *Ferngelenkte Friedensbewegung? DDR und UdSSR im Kampf gegen den NATO-Doppelbeschluss*, Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2004.

plans emanating from all East European media and many West European journals and newspapers. This was dismissed by Western governments as routine propaganda consistent with the long-standing struggle between Communism and Western Liberal Democracy to win over international public opinion, and as attempts at deflecting attention away from Soviet and WTO activities, such as the occupation of Afghanistan, and the struggle in Poland with Solidarność. Arms control talks to eliminate the missiles on both sides broke down in 1983, and the Euromissiles were eventually deployed from December that year.

It was only from March 1984, when British intelligence officers picked up on the possibility that there was more to Eastern protests than just conscious propaganda manipulation, that they alerted the British government to this. The British government in turn took up the matter with the US Administration where a similar discovery had apparently also been made in intelligence circles. Only thereafter did the British and American governments begin to take the possibility seriously that some Soviet leaders – mainly the military – were genuinely worried about a surprise attack by NATO.<sup>22</sup>

In the previous autumn, East-West relations had deteriorated sharply. The publicly visible tip of the iceberg was the shooting down by the Soviet military of a Korean civilian airliner, KAL 007, in the night of 31 August to 1 September 1983, a classic mistake due to suspicions about Western intentions. Soon thereafter, the world probably came close to nuclear war twice: first, on 26 September 1983 when technical failure indicated a massive missile attack against the USSR. It looks as though humanity owes its continued existence to the decision of one man, Stanislav Yevgrafovich Petrov, a Soviet officer on duty that night, who decided to disregard the (false, as it turned out) alarm and go against his orders,

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22 <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb533-The-Able-Archer-War-Scare-Declassified-PFIAB-Report-Released/> accessed on 18 IX 2016. For studies of intelligence failure during this period, see also Don Oberdorfer: *The Turn: from the Cold War to a New Era – the US and the Soviet Union, 1983-1990*, New York, Poseidon Press, 1991; Peter Vincent: *War Scare: Russia and America on the Nuclear Brink*, Westport, Ct.: Praeger, 1999; John Prados: 'The War Scare of 1983,' in: Robert Cowley (ed.): *The Cold War: A Military History*, New York: Random House, 2005, pp. 438-454.

refusing to launch a large-scale counterattack with Soviet nuclear forces. (Having been reprimanded and demoted for this cavalier disregard for standard operational procedures, thirty years on, Petrov was awarded the Dresden Prize for ‘trusting his own judgement as a human being.’<sup>23</sup>) But this event only became known in the West much later.

Secondly, certain men in the Soviet military command chain seem to have wondered, in November 1983, whether the command-post exercise *Able Archer*, - a small part of the larger *Autumn Forge* exercise as in previous years - actually constituted a disguise for a surprise nuclear attack by NATO on the Warsaw Pact.<sup>24</sup> The evidence for this is that parts of the WTO’s military apparatus went on alert, but in the end actual war through misunderstanding was averted.<sup>25</sup> This event became known to Western intelligence over the following months, and was the trigger, it seems, for the soul-searching reports produced by British and US intelligence the following spring. In any case, even if war was averted in the autumn of 1983, the shocking fact remains – and this is the central point made in this article – that misunderstandings could ever allow misperceptions to arise that *might* have led to war, despite all the mutual knowledge, analysis, espionage and other forms of communication.

One can never sufficiently stress how much of a surprise the information on Moscow’s reactions to the *Able Archer* exercise was to the British and American security communities, for nothing could have been further from their own intentions. Already in 1949 the governments represented in NATO had agreed that the only purpose of a NATO strategy would be to *deter* an attack by the Soviet Union and its satellite states, or to *defend* NATO, should such an attack occur after all, never

23 <http://dresdner-friedenspreis.de/laureates/?lang=en>, accessed on 1 VIII 2017.

24 See *Able Archer* Sourcebook, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ablearcher/>. For perhaps the best summary of the state of research on this issue, see KlaasVoß: ‘Die Enden derParabel Die Nuklearwaffenübung »Able Archer« im Krisenjahr 1983,’ Special Issue of *Mittelweg* No. 36 (HIS, Dec. 2014/Jan. 2015), pp. 73-92.

25 Jonathan M. DiCicco: ‘Fear, Loathing, and Cracks in Reagan’s Mirror Images: Able Archer 83 and an American First Step toward Rapprochement in the Cold War,’ *Foreign Policy Analysis* Vol. 7 (2011), pp. 253–274.

aggression.<sup>26</sup> The peace movements if anything testified to the fact that the very idea of a NATO attack on the WTO was utterly incompatible with Western values, and indeed with Western fears of nuclear war.<sup>27</sup> It seems that the West- and America-experts in the USSR and leading Soviet diplomats understood this, but that they were not believed by leading military figures.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, unlike *WINTEX*, *Able Archer* was not an exercise that left any room for play-acting. A chain of prescribed decisions had to be made. It was a mere procedural exercise in which participants (re-)acquainted themselves with NATO procedures for consultation and decision-making, ultimately for the readying and release of nuclear weapons.

Indeed, East German military intelligence was quite aware of the inoffensive nature of *Able Archer*, and reported calmly on 7 November 1983:

‘Today is the beginning of the strategic C[ommand] P[ost] E[xercise] of NATO Supreme Command Europe *Able Archer* 83. ... The CPE constitutes the end of the NATO autumn exercise series *Autumn Forge* 83 and serves to train the leading commanders and staffs in matters of planning, organisation, and execution of operations with selective and massive nuclear use.’

While East German military intelligence did remark that the launch of Euromissiles was integrated into the exercise, the tenor of the reporting throughout the exercise shows no sign that German observers spotted anything unusual or worrying.<sup>29</sup> At most, some new patterns of communication were trained and exercised for the first time during *Able Archer* 83.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, given that the Euromissile deployment only began

26 <http://www.nato.int/docu/stratdoc/eng/a491019a.pdf>, accessed on 18 IX 2016.

27 Philip Sabin: *The Third World War Scare in Britain: A Critical Analysis*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1986.

28 On the hawks and doves in Moscow, see Beatrice Heuser: ‘The Soviet response to the Euromissile crisis, 1982-83,’ in Nuti (ed): *The Crisis of Détente in Europe*, pp. 137-149.

29 Germany, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg (henceforth BAMA), DVW 1/32672/b Aufklärungsmeldungen der NVA (Vertrauliche Verschlusssachen VVS)

30 Nate Jones: ‘The Vicious Circle of Intelligence,’ in Schaefer, Jones & Fischer: ‘Forecasting Nuclear War,’ [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/forecasting-nuclear-war#\\_ftn29](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/forecasting-nuclear-war#_ftn29) (accessed on 24 IX 2016).

after the *Able Archer* exercise of November 1983, it made no sense to fear that the exercise could involve the launching of these missiles.

So, what happened?

## Reality seen through the lens of past traumas

In the following part, we shall see how important exercises were in this dangerous period, for it seems that it was not only *Able Archer* that lent itself to misunderstanding, despite the confidence both sides had in knowing so much about one another. The following examples are drawn from Top Secret speeches made at meetings of various bodies of the WTO at the time, all of which point to NATO's exercises as having been extremely worrying to WTO military leaders. The particular quality of the documents – which were *not* made for a wide audience or for propaganda purposes – suggests that these were sincerely held beliefs, at the highest level of WTO military, and must therefore be taken more seriously than anything designed for public consumption in the propaganda battles of the Cold War. Indeed, as we shall see, public speeches if anything were *less* alarmist than the Top Secret speeches made between Warsaw Pact leaders, behind closed doors.

Shortly after Ronald Reagan had taken up the US Presidency, in February 1981, the head of the KGB's foreign operations, Vladimir Kryuchkov, in a secret speech told his KGB underlings that things were going from bad to worse, and that it was their duty 'to prevent the US and its allies from deciding to make a first-strike against the Soviet Union.'<sup>31</sup> In May 1981, Yuri Andropov, then still Chairman of the KGB, launched the famous RYAN intelligence operation designed to give early warning of US/NATO war preparations or even of a surprise attack against the Warsaw Pact countries.

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<sup>31</sup> President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board: "The Soviet 'War Scare' (15 Feb. 1990), p.53. <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb533-The-Able-Archer-War-Scare-Declassified-PFIAB-Report-Released/2012-0238-MR.pdf> accessed on 11 VI 2017.



Shortly before this, Army General Anatoly Ivanovich Gribkov, Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command of the Warsaw Pact Combined Armed Forces, told his colleagues on the Military Council of the WTO ‘that the military political situation in the world is characterized by increasing aggressiveness of the political course set by the new US government and the NATO leadership.’ Gribkov spoke of an ‘increase in the preparations for war and especially in the arms race’ on the part of the ‘American and NATO leaderships.’<sup>32</sup> He pointed particularly to the NATO exercises *WINTEX* and *Autumn Forge* as evidence for this. At the same meeting, Marshal Viktor Georgiyevich Kulikov, Commander-in-Chief of the WTO (1977-1989) spoke particularly about

‘[T]he growing aggressiveness of the Bundeswehr, the main striking force of NATO. Marshal of the Soviet Union Moskalenko underlined that the USSR had been taken by surprise in 1941 by the Fascist Army, because it had not estimated the enemy correctly. Therefore it was necessary to intensify intelligence efforts and not to admit an underestimation of the Bundeswehr.’<sup>33</sup>

This is one of many references we find to the Soviet trauma of 1941, the surprise attack by the USSR’s ally of 1939, Germany. The trauma was thus strongly felt in these key Soviet military leaders’ interpretation of their NATO adversaries’ actions, but had nothing to do with what NATO actually did or said. In September 1982, the Chiefs of the General Staffs of the Armed Forces of the members of the WTO met in Minsk under the chairmanship of the Chief of Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces, and First Deputy Minister of Defence of the USSR, Marshall Nikolai Vasilyevich Ogarkov.<sup>34</sup> Ogarkov again echoed the trauma of 1941:

‘The international situation is currently very serious and extremely complicated. It is only comparable with the situation in the 1930s, shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. The beginning

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32 BAMA, DVW 1/71086, 23rd meeting of the Military Council of the WTO in Sofia, 21-23 April 1981, p. 18f.

33 BAMA, DVW 1/71086, 23rd Meeting of the Military Council, Sofia, 21-23 April 1981, pp. 40-45.

34 BAMA, DVW 1/114494.

of the Reagan Presidency calls to mind the Fascist seizure of power. ... The Reagan Administration has openly started to prepare for war. ... Figuratively spoken, the USA have already declared war on us, the Soviet Union and some other states of the Warsaw Treaty. In different areas, we are already fighting. ... One must not overlook the currently existing danger of war. ... The current danger of war is as great as never before because the leading circles of Imperialism are unpredictable. Many do not want to understand this. In 1941, too, there were not a few who warned of the war, and many who did not believe in a war. Because the danger of war was not realistically estimated, we had to make many sacrifices.<sup>35</sup>

We find repeated echoes of this over the following months. For instance, in early 1982 the scenario of the command-post exercise YUG 82 '*rightly* [my emphasis] assumed that the danger of war in Europe and the world had never since the Second World War been as serious as presently.'<sup>36</sup> And in September 1982, when the Chiefs of the General Staffs of the Armed Forces of the members of the WTO met in Minsk under the chairmanship of the First Deputy Minister of Defence of the USSR, Marshall Ogarkov, he reminded them:

'The current danger of war is as great as never before because the leading circles of Imperialism are unpredictable. Many do not want to understand this. In 1941, too, there were not a few who warned of the war, and many who did not believe in a war. Because the danger of war was not realistically estimated, we had to make many sacrifices.'<sup>37</sup>

Thus one critical reason was the trauma of the past that still dominated Soviet thinking— just as Western leaders continued to see any tyrant or dictator with whom they had a quarrel as a possible reincarnation of Hitler, Soviet leaders (military leaders in particular) cast Reagan, NATO,

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35 BAMA, DVW 1/114494, pp. 119f, 122.

36 BAMA, DVH 7/45651, formerly AZN 29371, Part 4, p. 255.

37 BAMA, AZN 32643, pp. 199f, 122.

and the Bonn government in the same role. Both sides were thus greatly haunted by history, and saw the present through the lens of past traumas.<sup>38</sup>

A second reason for this unfounded fear of a NATO surprise attack among key Soviet and WTO military leaders can be described as mirror-imaging. The use of military exercises as cover for military operations was something that the USSR practised and taught the militaries of its client states. Examples on the Soviet side include the exercise held jointly by Soviet and Czech forces prior to the USSR crushing the Prague Spring in 1968, and the possible threat of an invasion of Poland in 1981 for which an extended WTO exercise might have been used. Examples of Soviet client states putting such a scheme into practice include the 1973 Yom Kippur War (started by Egypt with a supposed exercise), the 1980 Iraq-Iran War and later the 1990 invasion of Kuwait by Iraq (both started by Iraq with supposed exercises).<sup>39</sup>

Such thoughts were clearly present in the minds of Soviet leaders, and were projected onto NATO leaders' intentions. On 11-13 January 1983, the Defence Ministers of the WTO met in Prague; Kulikov, addressing the meeting, sounded shriller still. He concluded from NATO's military measures

‘that the state of NATO’s armed forces, their education, the extension of the theatres of war will allow the leaders of the [NATO] Bloc to initiate an attack against the member states of the Warsaw Treaty practically without carrying out major preparatory measures, *under the cloak of large-scale exercises which are conducted annually to work through different variants of the initiation and conduct of war* [my Italics].

The war strength of NATO will increase in the coming years. This

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38 Beatrice Heuser: ‘Stalin as Hitler’s Successor: Western Interpretations of the Soviet threat’ in Beatrice Heuser & Robert O’Neill (eds.): *Securing Peace in Europe, 1945-62: Thoughts for the Post-Cold War Era*, London: Macmillan, 1992, pp. 17-40; see also Beatrice Heuser & Cyril Buffet (eds): *Haunted by History: Myths in International Relations*, Oxford, Berghahn, 1998.

39 See the chapter by Amr Youssef in this volume.

is witnessed by the increase in military budgets and the extent of preparations for war.<sup>40</sup>

The ministers concluded that counter-measures were required to restore the military balance, such as further deployments of new Soviet missiles.<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile, events in the West pushed WTO leaders into ever darker assessments of the situation. From December 1979 until March 1983, the deployment of the Euromissiles, at least to West Germany, NATO's most forward-based potential launch-pad for these missiles against the WTO, was in limbo. While the Federal Chancellor of West Germany, Helmut Schmidt, supported the deployment, his party split into two over the issue, resulting in a crisis of government in October 1982 that led to his government's replacement by a conservative government (even more strongly committed to the Euromissile deployment) under Helmut Kohl. The latter was confirmed by general elections in March 1983, which finally unblocked the deadlock over deployment. Also in March 1983, President Ronald Reagan publicized plans for a Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), dubbed 'Star Wars,' which conveyed the impression to the Moscow hawks that this, again, was a measure which would facilitate a surprise attack on the USSR.

American-led naval and air exercises in the Pacific and Far East in the spring and summer of 1983 (*Fleetex 83*, and *Global Shield 83*) were designed to signal US strength to the Soviet leaders, and clearly made some extremely nervous, especially as they came hand in hand with preparations for the Euromissile deployment and rejections of Soviet initiatives to deflect the Star Wars programme. One senses that it is with nervousness rather than with glee that *Kraznaya Zvezda* took up an article that had appeared in an American newspaper, reporting 151 false nuclear alarms and 3700 lesser misreading occurrences of signals made by military computers since they first came into use, emphasizing the idea

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40 BAMA, DVW 1/71040, Kulikov Speech Jan. 1983, p.242.

41 BAMA, DVW 1/71040, conclusions.

that nuclear war could happen by accident.<sup>42</sup>

The military leaders of the USSR and WTO responded symmetrically: they, too, held exercises with the intention to deter an attack. From 30 May to 9 June 1983, the joint WTO *Soyuz-83* exercise took place with a scenario of a NATO surprise attack on the WTO under the cover of an exercise.<sup>43</sup> *Soyuz-83* then unfolded to include the occupation of Denmark, the FRG, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France by Warsaw Pact forces by the 35th–40th day of the war. Unlike NATO, where the restoration of the status quo ante and the establishment of an armistice was the only agreed exercise aim, the WTO had no qualms about stating its war aims to be the occupation of the territory of the opposing camp. In this context, Marshal Kulikov stressed the need for a standing-start capacity to answer NATO aggression, without a period of mobilization, as had previously been planned.<sup>44</sup> In a public speech a month later, on 9 July 1983, the Soviet Defence Minister, Marshal Ustinov said that in response to the USA and NATO ‘stubbornly stepping up armed preparations in the hope to achieve military superiority over the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Treaty countries,’ it was the task of the WTO to tirelessly build up

‘USSR defences of the nation and raising the combat readiness of its armed forces. In other words, the task is doing everything necessary so that the enemy will not take us by surprise. In any case, as in any adventure, Marshal Ustinov added, the enemy should be given a fitting and crushing rebuff. The military exercises, just held in the western regions of the USSR, show that the Soviet people and its army are ready for such a rebuff.’<sup>45</sup>

The KAL 007 incident of 31 August/1 September 1983 must be seen

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42 BBC Archives, transcripts of Soviet broadcasts and translations of newspaper articles [henceforth SWB], SWB SU/7474/A1/1 of 20 Oct 1983: *Krasnaya Zvezda* article: ‘Computer Error and Nuclear Catastrophe.’

43 BAMA, VA-01, 39528, pp. 76-77, Information given on 1 July 1983 to the GDR’s National Defence Council about the exercise.

44 BAMA, DVH 7/45650, pp. 109-148 ‘Auswertung der gemeinsamen operativ-strategischen KSÜ SO-JUS-83’ of 30 May-9 June 1983.

45 SWB SU/7379/A1/6 of 7 July 1983, Moscow World Service in English: ‘End of Baltic Military Exercises: Ustinov on Need to Defend USSR.’

in this context of extreme nervousness in the Soviet military.<sup>46</sup> (Even a month later, when no doubt remained that a civilian airliner had been shot down, Moscow radio still described this as a 'spying mission.'<sup>47</sup>)

On 8 September, the US Secretary of State met his Soviet counterpart, Andrei Andreyevich Gromyko, in Madrid, a tense, unfriendly meeting, in which both sides threatened to walk out on each other. Gromyko, who had occupied the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs in the USSR since 1957, and had lived through the ups and downs of East-West relations, told Schultz that the global situation was 'now slipping toward a very dangerous precipice' and warned of a nuclear catastrophe, which both countries should work together to avoid.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, NATO, insensitive to the hysteria which was spreading among Soviet military leaders, went ahead routinely with its large-scale autumn exercise series *Autumn Forge 83*. Unusually, the East German military intelligence noted, this was preceded by an alert exercise *Active Edge 2/83* on 30 August 1983 which normally, they said, took place during *Autumn Forge*. The whole package of *Autumn Forge* exercises would end, routinely, with a nuclear release exercise, the now infamous *Able Archer*, in early November 1983, all carefully monitored by WTO military intelligence.<sup>49</sup>

What was said behind closed doors in confidential, secret and top secret meetings corresponded with public perceptions. We can point here to a very interesting and important role played by the media, by public debate, and also by the film industry. The political effect of military exercises must always be seen in a larger context. While the NATO exercises were unfolding according to plan, in October and November, two films made a huge contribution to the awareness of both the publics in East and West, but also of key decision-makers of the dangers inherent in

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46 Seymour M. Hersh: *The Target Is Destroyed: What Really Happened to Flight 007 and What America Knew About It*, New York, Random House, 1986.

47 SWB SU/7381/A1/1 of 9 July 1983, TASS report on article in *Kraznaya Zvezda*: 'French tests revive fears of Neutron Weapon in Europe.'

48 Quoted in Oberdorfer: *The Turn*, p.61.

49 BAMA, DVW 1/32672 Aufklärungsmeldungen der NVA (Vertrauliche Verschlusssachen VVS), p.14 No. 203/83 of 31 Aug. 1983

the nuclear deterrence posture which both alliances had *de facto* assumed. In the West, it was famously the screening in the USA of *The Day After* on 20 November 1983, reaching an American audience, it is thought of 75 million (which in turn was reported on Soviet TV<sup>50</sup>), but a month earlier, on 27 October 1983 a documentary was screened at the Novorossiysk Cinema in Moscow, followed by a nation-wide TV broadcasting on the following day. It was called ‘Who Threatens Peace?’<sup>51</sup>, and on television was introduced by the historian Dmitri Volkogonov, Director of the Soviet Institute of Military History, who told his Soviet spectators:

‘Never before has the struggle to preserve peace been so acute and tense. The people at the pinnacle of power in Washington, viewing the world through the sights of a gun, incessantly nudge mankind to the brink, past which a world nuclear war could begin. The people who today perform on the political stage of the west are essentially running the enormous and immense risk of nuclear cataclysm.’<sup>52</sup>

Then, on 31 October and 1 November 1983, leading scientists from the USA and the USSR felt sufficiently worried to talk to each other, on a satellite-transmitted TV show, to express to a larger public on both continents their fears of nuclear war and its consequences.<sup>53</sup>

Unsurprisingly, fear of nuclear war among the general public surged. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty conducted a survey among Soviet citizens travelling to the West, with the question: ‘There has been a lot written recently in both East and West on the danger of nuclear war. Do you feel that the danger of war is greater now than a few years ago?’, to which the replies of 1,928 respondents broke down as follows for 1983

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50 SWB SU/7498/A1/3 Soviet TV on 21 Nov 1983

51 ‘Kto ugrozhayet miru?’ Script: Victor Grekov; dir.: Aleksandr Tychkov.

52 SWB SU/7481/A1/8 of 28 Oct 1983.

53 Spacebridge: ‘World after Nuclear War, 1983,’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVU0dpoDOb8> (accessed on 24 IX 2016). A transcript of the speeches is published by Paul R. Ehrlich (Author), Carl Sagan (Author), Donald Kennedy (Author), Walter Orr Roberts (eds): *The Cold and the Dark: The World After Nuclear War*, New York: W.W.Norton, 1985. See also SU/7497/A1/13, Pravda of 16 Nov 1983, Commentary by G. Vasilyev, correspondent in Washington.

overall:

Greater danger now: 56 %

No greater danger: 20 %

Don't know: 24 %

During September to November 1983, the percentage of replies professing greater fear of nuclear war (with 522 respondents) rose to 66 per cent.<sup>54</sup>

A special meeting of the Military council of the WTO was summoned by Kulikov in Berlin for 20 October 1983 to discuss the imminent Euromissile deployment further. There the decision was taken, 'in the interest of peace and security, to use all available means to prevent the [achievement] of military superiority by NATO.' This decision was endorsed by the regular Military Council meeting at Lvov, between 26-29 October 1983.<sup>55</sup> Again, Kulikov drew attention to the growing threat of war emanating from NATO. At this meeting the GDR representative, General F. Streletz, said:

'It is becoming ever more apparent that the most aggressive imperialist circles of the USA and NATO are escalating their peace-endangering course ever more dangerously. They are pushing up the spiral of armament up and up, are beginning the planned deployment of the nuclear first-strike weapons agreed by NATO in Brussels, ... This ever-sharper course of aggression *is particularly apparent in the large-scale exercises of NATO's armed forces* [my Italics] in this year's *Autumn Forge* exercise series, which includes the practice of a limited nuclear war in Europe. It is apparent to all the world that the Reagan Administration is clinging to the policy of changing the near-equilibrium of the militaries [of East and

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54 Elizabeth Tague: 'Soviet War Propaganda Generates Fear among the Population,' *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Paper* 61/84 (6 Feb. 1984), p.7.

55 BAMA, DVW 1/71091, Protocol of the 28th Meeting of the Military Council of the WTO at Lvov, 26-29 Oct. 1983, p.2.



West].<sup>56</sup>

In keeping with this assessment, *Autumn Forge* and its component exercises were watched with great trepidation and nervousness by the Soviet leadership and its intelligence gatherers. As noted previously, *Able Archer*, running from 7 to 12 November 1983, concluded the *Autumn Forge* exercises series. And as we have seen, despite the calm and factual reporting on this exercise by East German military intelligence, some parts of the Soviet military leadership came close to putting their own country on a war footing in response, in what might have become World War III by misunderstanding.<sup>57</sup>

On the last day of *Able Archer*, and thus also of *Autumn Forge*, Soviet Defence Minister Ustinov addressed senior military officers, as reported in *Krasnaya Zvezda*. He pointed to the ‘aggressiveness’ of the USA (which had just invaded Grenada without previously even consulting its allies) and NATO, their ‘crusade’ against the USSR and the WTO, the stalling of arms control talks, and the deployment of

‘new nuclear weapons systems, both strategic and medium-range, which are perceived as the means for a “disarming” first strike. These primarily include the MX intercontinental ballistic missiles, the first and second versions of the Trident sea-based systems, the B-1B and stealth strategic bombers, and ground-, air-, and sea-launched long-range cruise missiles. The American Pershing II ballistic and cruise missiles being deployed in Europe are also designed for the achievement of superiority over the countries of the Warsaw Treaty and for a first nuclear strike against them.’

Against this background,

‘simultaneously with the arms build-up, the USA and NATO are *increasing the scale of their military exercises from year to year* [my

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56 BAMA, DVW 1/71091, esp. pp. 51, 70, 73f.

57 For some interviews with eyewitnesses on the Soviet side, see the TV documentary ‘The Brink of Apocalypse’ (Discovery Channel/Channel 4, 2007/2008).

Italics]. They are carried out over a vast expanse: from the Arctic Ocean to the Med, from deep inside US territory to the borders of the countries of the socialist community. Hundreds of thousands of people and a large quantity of military hardware are involved in them.’<sup>58</sup>

This statement from Head of State Yuri Andropov may well have been scheduled to coincide with the end of the NATO exercises. In any event, it is clear from both speeches that the Soviet leadership did not reckon that the time of danger had passed, let alone that it connected it, in some way, exclusively to *Able Archer*. The Soviet military leaders’ hysteria did not abate in the following months. When WTO Defence Ministers met in Sofia on 5-7 December 1983, they were told by Kulikov that ‘the USA and its NATO Allies’ were moving towards ‘open preparations for war,’ which forced the united armed forces of the WTO to ‘take additional measures for the strengthening of its fighting potential and for the increase of readiness to fight.’<sup>59</sup> Ustinov spoke after him, also insisting that the USA was making preparations for war, pointing to the Euromissile deployment, but in conclusion he spoke of the need to improve WTO armaments over the next years, indicating that he was no longer fearful of a surprise attack as he had been a few months earlier.<sup>60</sup> Yet fear increased further in Moscow. The Kremlin decreed that January 1984 should be a ‘civil defence month’ throughout the Soviet Union, which entailed military and civil defence exercise training and public talks on what to do in case of war.<sup>61</sup>

In March 1984, TASS – in a nice case of mirror-imaging – reported ‘Western Europe enveloped in fever of NATO exercises.’ The year had begun with NATO naval exercises in the Atlantic, near the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap through which NATO forces expected Soviet nuclear submarines to pass if they sought to break out of the Baltic and gain access

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58 SWB SU/7490/C2/1 of 12 Nov 1983, *Krasnaya Zvezda* of 12 Nov [1983].

59 BAMA, DVW 1/71041, 16th Meeting of Defence Ministers of WTO in Sofia, 5-7 Dec. 1983, p. 2.

60 BAMA, DVW 1/71041, pp. 88-97.

61 Tague: ‘Soviet War Propaganda,’ p. 6.

to open seas. Then, there were major exercises in Northern Norway. Air exercises over the UK ensued, and TASS commented on this series of exercises:

“The show of ”muscles” and sabre-rattling cannot fail to be seen in direct connection with the sharp activation of policy of the most aggressive forces of American imperialism, with the policy of open militarism and claims to world domination by the present US administration. The NATO rulers are staking on increasing military confrontation and spiralling war hysteria and psychosis in order to justify the transformation of Western Europe, despite the will of its people, into a launch-pad for American Pershings and cruise missiles targeted on the USSR and its allies.”<sup>62</sup>

Even in 1985, WTO leaders were obsessed with the nightmare scenario of a NATO attack under the guise of the *Autumn Forge* exercises. The scenario of WTO Exercise *Druzhba-85* had NATO using *Autumn Forge* from early August 1985 to put its armed forces on a war footing, and on 5 September to attack WTO territory, using 200-330 nuclear weapons along the front.<sup>63</sup> This was again the scenario used in *Druzhba-86*<sup>64</sup> and in *Druzhba-87*.<sup>65</sup> Even in 1988, *Sever-88*, held in East Germany jointly by Soviet and GRD forces, used the scenario of NATO mobilizing secretly under the cover of military exercises.<sup>66</sup>

## Conclusions

Quoting these comments gleaned from Top Secret WTO documents and matching them with only slightly less alarmist statements from their public speeches (and in the Soviet media) is *not* to suggest that the

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62 SWB SU/7587/A1/10 Tass in Russian for abroad 5 March 1984 15:30 GMT

63 BAMA, DVH 17/57504, DRUZHBA-85, p.6.

64 BAMA, DVH 17/57507 DRUZHBA-86, 16 June-3 August 1986, operational-tactical exercise under Soviet General Kovtunov, p.6.

65 BAMA, DVH 17/57513, DRUZHBA -87, p. 5.

66 BAMA, DVH 7/45664 SEVER-88 of February 1988, p.10.

exercises conducted by both sides were *the* most important or the only or main cause for the deterioration of East-West relations in the early 1980s, after a better period of *détente*. Clearly, the deployment of the Euromissiles with their specific characteristics (the cruise missiles could fly under the Soviet radar and remain undetected until shortly before reaching their targets), the collective traumas of the past (the shock of 1941), and particular suspicion of the Western leaders in the early 1980s all played their part.

Nevertheless, this case study illustrates the importance of exercises in the context of tense inter-state relations, and their ability to lend themselves to misinterpretations, with effects that are the total opposite of those intended. This was clearly the case in the early 1980s, even though NATO and the WTO largely played by the rules that had wisely been established by the Conference of Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which included notifying each other in advance of planned exercises and their scope, if more than 9,000 service personnel were to participate.<sup>67</sup>

Indeed, Dima Adamsky has shown very convincingly that while NATO's exercises aimed at deterrence, there comes a point when measures adopted to deter an adversary assume so threatening a guise that they can be seen as threatening. He has thus transposed the classic 'security dilemma' into the subject area of military exercises, and talks about a 'tipping point' that may be difficult to pinpoint, but that should be kept in mind by exercise planners.<sup>68</sup>

We noted above that leading Western officials assumed that the USSR/WTO had 'virtually real time intelligence' on NATO exercises, and that this can largely be confirmed from the documents. Nevertheless, the information passed to the East was still thoroughly misunderstood at higher levels, especially by key Soviet/WTO military leaders.<sup>69</sup> Whether

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67 See Olivier Schmitt's contribution in this volume.

68 Dimitry Adamsky: 'The 1983 Nuclear Crisis – Lessons for Deterrence Theory and Practice' in *Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 36 No. 1 (2013), pp. 4-41.

69 Gordon Brass: 'Able Archer 83: What Were the Soviets Thinking?', *Survival* Vol. 58 No. 6 (2016), pp.

or not the NATO Command Staff Exercise *Able Archer* 83 or any other event in these years<sup>70</sup> nearly led to nuclear war, it is clear that the years 1983-1984 were years of extreme tension. This is a dramatic lesson in communication failure which should make us very much less optimistic about our ability to communicate with adversaries. It is a warning – not only to NATO member states, but also to Russia and other countries today – that we should be careful not to turn deterrent measures – including military exercises – into something that might result in grave misperceptions and accidents.

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70 Such as the false alarm of 26 September 1983, which was identified as such by the duty officer Stanislav Petrov, see the documentary Peter Anthony: 'The Man who Saved the World' (2014).



# NATO AFTER THE COLD WAR





## 8

# NATO strategic level political military crisis management exercising – history and challenges

*Ilay A. D. Ferrier*

## Introduction

1. **Historical Summary** This paper will provide an historical summary of NATO's development of high-level exercising from the Cold War (CW) transition into the 1990s with the widespread perception of peace dividends which were offset by the realities of the break-up of the Balkan States and then, as the 21st century started, the spill-over threats stemming from failed and failing states, the emergence of global terrorism, cyber activities and residual threats of ballistic missiles as well as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), in particular by rogue states and terror groups. As indicated below in the three Strategic Concepts of 1991, 1999 and 2010, throughout much of this period the previous allied focus on CW-style Alliance-wide collective defence diminished as the perception of a direct threat receded and, as a consequence, the confrontational CW risk of miscalculation and misunderstanding by potential opposing countries and states was replaced by the Allies' wish to geographically extend NATO's post-CW security role and to face the challenge and sensitivities of confronting emerging asymmetric and hybrid security risks. However, at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the Alliance once again faces the re-emergence of potential collective defence threats with the necessity to exercise Article 5 concepts, procedures and arrangements while

simultaneously conducting successive non-Article 5 crisis response operations (NA5CRO).

2. **Why Exercise at the highest NATO Level?** NATO is a political but also an operational organization and Allies recognise that high-level, multinational political-military consultations and decision-making is complex. Given the high turnover of personnel at NATO HQ, the NATO Military Authorities (NMA)<sup>1</sup>, national Ministries and military headquarters, there is continuous erosion of NATO-wide crisis management experience and misperceptions of Alliance structures and relationships. Moreover, there is an increasing lack of militarily-experienced political decision-makers and staffs. So, while exercising is part of military DNA, if NATO is to maintain its ability for holistic, coherent and robust management of crises, there is a necessity for regular and collective practise of existing and evolving CM concepts, procedures and arrangements through the conduct of high-level exercises. Such exercising, together with operational experience, is a prerequisite for improving and updating NATO's crisis management architecture and to consolidate lessons learned from real crises and operations. NATO's CMX series is the only type of exercise that is designed specifically to achieve the validation or testing of current and evolving strategic-level crisis management procedures, arrangements and concepts in a time-sensitive environment using the consultation and decision-making machinery of the Alliance in a realistic, though generic, setting. It also provides the only opportunity to exercise at this level with NATO partners and with other international actors.

3. **Exercising and Reality** This historical summary will highlight how the Alliance adapted its high-level exercising requirements and, in so doing, reflected the realities of an ever changing security environment as Allies agreed to become involved outside the original Alliance area, to significantly enhance NATO's relationship with other international

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<sup>1</sup> NMA consists of the Military Committee, representing each allied Chief of Defence (CHOD) and the 3 'Major NATO Commanders,' now 2 'Strategic Commanders,' all supported by the International Military Staff (IMS) at NATO HQ.

organisations and to widen NATO cooperation with a range of partner countries, a number of which have since become Allies. This adaptation also applied to exercise planning, as indicated in the outline description of the planning process provided at the end of this summary.

4. **Origins of High-level Political-Military Exercising** Modern versions of high level exercising were initiated by NATO at the beginning of the CW in the 1950s with exercises such as FALLEX and, subsequently, the biennial WINTEX (Winter EX)-CIMEX (CIV-Mil EX) held in odd years between the mid-1960s to the late 1980s, as well as the High Level Exercise (HILEX) which was held in even years during the 1980s.

- a. NATO exercising in this period was based on the strategic defence requirements embodied in Articles 4, 5 and 6 of the Washington Treaty. The primary aim was always to practise the deterrence and defence of allied territory against any aggression – which then, by implication, meant by the Soviet Union and, from 1955, the Warsaw Pact (WP) – within the NATO area. These exercises were designed to meet the primary commitment to collective defence under Article 5 of the Treaty, itself underpinned by Article 51 of the UN Charter.
- b. The Western European Union (WEU), created by Europe in September 1948 and prior to the Washington Treaty, had only a limited, and solely European, security role during the CW. However, it started conducting high-level political-military exercises during the 1990s following the adoption of the so-called ‘Petersberg’ tasks<sup>2</sup> in 1992. Later in 1996, the NATO Allies agreed at their Berlin Ministerial meeting that the WEU would oversee the creation of a European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) within NATO structures which would provide a European ‘pillar’ within NATO. Subsequently, the EU adopted the ‘Petersberg’ tasks in 1996, and then the whole WEU ESDI role in 1999. In 2003 the EU and NATO agreed to expand this

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2 Peacekeeping, crisis management and humanitarian missions.

initiative through the mutual agreement of the ‘Berlin Plus’ arrangements that allowed the EU, with NATO agreement, to make use of NATO assets and capabilities to carry out military operations if NATO, again as a whole, declined to act. Around this time, the EU started to plan and conduct their own high-level political-military exercises that included joint exercises with NATO. The first, and to date only, joint exercise was planned and conducted in 2003. In 2009, at the EU Lisbon Summit, ESDP was re-named the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

- c. The primary aim of NATO’s high level political-military exercising is to practise Alliance consultation and consensus-driven crisis management procedures and arrangements in order to maintain and improve the ability of the Alliance to manage crises. Exercise conduct is always designed to be held in real-time, which necessitated that widely differing time zones must be taken into account.

## Transition from the Cold War to the 1st and 2nd Strategic Concepts 1991 & 1999, including the first NATO military missions

5. **WINTEX-CIMEX (W-C) 1989.** The last biennial W-C exercise was conducted in 1989 over the standard period of 14 days. It involved 14 Allies<sup>3/4</sup>, NATO strategic<sup>5</sup> and subordinate command structures, a host of so-called NATO Civil Wartime Agencies (NCWA) and the NATO HQ

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3 Membership grew during the 1950s to 1980s, but France had withdrawn from NATO in 1966 and Greece decided not to be involved in this exercise – so 14 Allies participated in WINTEX-CIMEX 89.

4 Allied involvement includes ministries in capitals & Ambassadors in NAC(DPC)/Committees at NATO HQ.

5 3x Major NATO Commands: Supreme HQ Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE); Supreme HQ Atlantic (SACLANT), CinC Channel (CINCHAN). These were replaced in the late 1990s with 2x Strategic Commands: SHAPE & SACLANT, the latter re-designated Supreme Allied Command Transformation (SACT) early in the 21st century.

organisation and staffs. It included daily meetings by the Defence Planning Committee (DPC)<sup>6</sup>, Military Committee (MC), Alerts Committee<sup>7</sup> and Senior Civil Emergency Planning Committees (SCEPC).

- a. W-C 89 continued the standing exercise series aim and objectives to exercise procedures and communications in order to improve NATO's ability to function in crisis and war in the sense of Article 5 across the whole NATO area.
- b. The exercise scenario was more or less a standard portrayal for these exercises: starting at the 'mid-high' crisis threat level with simultaneous WP land, sea and air conventional attacks on allied territory and lines of communication across the whole NATO area, resulting in the 'loss of cohesion' in the allied central region (primarily then West Germany) and finally military actions to restore territorial cohesion.
- c. This final exercise in February 1989, itself affected by the emerging political changes in Europe, was followed by the collapse of the WP in 1989-90. Initial planning preparations for a W-C in 1991 were then started at SHAPE but were terminated in Spring 1989.
- d. The W-C series was complemented in even years by HILEX, which practiced the same procedures but in the earlier stages of crisis, the later stages and outbreak of hostilities being covered by the WINTEX series. Their duration was 5 - 7 days. Participants were the allied capitals, the DPC and Committees at NATO HQ and the Major NATO Commanders (MNCs). The final HILEX was scheduled for early February 1989 but was cancelled prior to W-C 89.

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<sup>6</sup> While the North Atlantic Council (NAC) was, and still is, the primary Alliance authority, provision for collective decision-making without France had had to be organised through a DPC – i.e. the NAC with 15 not 16 Allies.

<sup>7</sup> Alerts Committee considered: force generation, Transfer of Authority (TOA), Status of Negotiations.

6. **Post-CW High-level Exercising.** Following the end of the CW, NATO MNCs considered it necessary:

- a. To review all military exercising.
- b. That regular high-level political-military exercising be continued in order to practise crisis management procedures and to maintain sufficient staff experience across the Alliance.
- c. That such exercising needed to adapt to a future evolving political-military environment.

Later in 1989 the DPC approved a MNCs' proposal for the conduct of a political-military strategic exercise in February 1992 and that, subsequently, a high-level seminar was to be held to discuss and agree on the way forward for such exercising.

#### *Strategic Concept 1991 (Rome)*

*The first, post-CW Strategic Concept was approved in Rome in 1991 which acknowledged that:*

- *East-West relations were improving;*
- *Various arms control, confidence and transparency measures had been put in place;*
- *The threat of a simultaneous multi-faceted and multi-directional threats remained ... which could directly or indirectly affect European stability;*
- *The commitment to consult (Article 4), deterrence and collective defence (Article 5) remained central to the Alliance's security, full-scale attack against NATO had been removed.*

*However, the Concept also highlighted that:*

- *CW threats had been replaced by a degree of uncertainty;*
- *Unpredictable, multi-faceted and multi-directional threats remained ... which could directly or indirectly affect European stability;*
- *The commitment to consult (Article 4), deterrence and collective defence (Article 5) remained central to the Alliance's security objectives.*

*Key to the new environment was the determination to adopt:*

- *A coherent approach determined by Alliance political authorities choosing and coordinating appropriate political and military crisis management measures under their close control from the outset, and at all stages;*
- *Appropriate consultation and decision-making procedures ... essential to meet this end;*
- *A new force posture, aligned to a reduced forward defence and a reduced reliance on nuclear weapons, while being able to meet three criteria: contribute to protecting peace, managing crises and preventing war, while retaining at all times the ability to defend all allied territory and restore peace.*

7. **Tri-MNC CMX 92.** As proposed by the MNCs and approved by the DPC, the primary aim of the first ‘CMX’ was to practise crisis management procedures and arrangements at command and staff levels in order to maintain and improve the Alliance’s ability to manage crises. The parameters did not essentially deviate from an Article 5 collective defence situation, although the portrayed opposition was no longer defined as the USSR/WP. The scenario was designed as a fictitious, existential, external threat to the Alliance but did not include any conflict. Exercise geography was fictitious, but situated within real contiguous allied geographical boundaries. In the event, allied participation was limited to the DPC and the MC and the main activities were driven by the 3 MNCs, hence the exercise name.

8. **Crisis Management Exercise Seminar 1992.** As directed by the DPC, and following the conduct of the Tri-MNC CMX 92, a High Level Working Group (HLWG) comprising of all 16 allied Ambassadors, Military Representatives, MNCs and senior staffs at NATO HQ convened to consider and agree direction on the form and content of future high-level political-military exercising. The resultant guidance effectively provided the first CMX policy and directed the conduct of a CMX in 1993 and annually thereafter. The Seminar agreed that this future exercise series be named as Crisis Management Exercise (CMX) and acknowledged that the Council Operations & Exercise Committee (COEC)<sup>8</sup> should continue to oversee the new exercise series on behalf of NAC/DPC. The HLWG agreed to some particular terminology related to exercise ‘players’<sup>9</sup> and further agreed to specific crisis management exercising parameters, including that:

- a. CMXs would involve all capitals, NATO HQ, MNCs and, as appropriate, Major Subordinate Commands (MSC) – the ‘target

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8 COEC: A Council committee with representatives from Allies and Commands/IMS, chaired by the IS: advised NAC (DPC) on scheduling, specifications, planning, conduct and post reporting on WINTEX-CIMEX and later the CMX series & responsible to NAC (DPC) for drafting and maintaining the NATO crisis management architecture.

9 ‘Players’ are often referred to as the ‘training audience’ for military exercises and, more appropriately for high-level political-military exercising, the ‘target audience’ since training is not the primary CMX focus.

audience.’

- b. Each exercise would last 7 days.
- c. Future scenarios should be logical, plausible and to the extent possible, de-politicised with the creation of a generic political back-drop with some form of political geography for the portrayed ‘opposing’ states.
- d. Exercises should not adversely affect the foreign and security policy of individual Allies.
- e. In principle, an active, positive public information policy should be adopted in order to inform publics of the purpose of Alliance exercising, to support transparency and to avoid misinterpretation.

9. **Exercise Patterns 1992 to 1999** Initial guidance and assumptions ensured that first CMXs from 1993 to 1995 still held to the requirement to handle collective defence scenarios strictly within the NATO area, albeit ones with generic potential opponents and no conflict, and avoiding any indications that the USSR, and later, Russia might still be considered a threat. However, the involvement of the Alliance in stabilising the Balkans<sup>10</sup> provided a catalyst to consider widening the scope of CMXs to address non-Article 5 peace support operations (PSO) designed to stabilise a generic crisis situation within the NATO area.

- a. Aims & Objectives The aims and objectives of the first exercises during the 1990s were generally based on the practise of existing and agreed procedures in order to improve the ability of the Alliance to manage crises.
- b. Procedures During the early 1990s CMXs used a newly created post-CW Alliance crisis management procedural architecture,

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<sup>10</sup> These exercise scenario trends were affected by the experience of NATO’s Implementation Force (IFOR) to stabilize the Balkans in December 1995. SFOR followed and, after negotiations in Feb-Mar 1999 failed, Operation Allied Force was conducted from 23 March-10 June, following which KFOR deployed into Kosovo under UNSCR 1244(99).



the NATO Precautionary System. But this System proved inadequate and by 1999 it had become clear that a new crisis management procedural architecture was necessary. This led to the creation of the NATO Crisis Response System (NCRS) early in the 21st century.

- c. Scenarios Real world operations and the evolving threat environment of the 1990s had their effect on scenario construction.
  - i. The 1992 Seminar had laid down guidance for the CMX 93 with the creation of generic, non-sensitive but primarily Article 5-style scenario that was to be portrayed within the Alliance area of interest.
  - ii. Allies adopted a more open minded approach when creating the next CMXs. The experiences of the early Balkan missions provided a catalyst to create the first dual-scenario exercise for CMX 95 with both an Article 5-oriented maritime crisis and a simultaneous non-Article 5 situation that focused on support to a UN mission.
  - iii. From 1996<sup>11</sup> onwards the new form of CMX exercises drew their scenarios from emerging multi-faceted threat perceptions, including conventional, missile and WMD risks, and from real, evolving crisis situations. For the CMX 97 design the duality trend continued with a maritime non-Article 5 crisis response operation (NA5CRO) and a technical civil emergency disaster in an allied country. This trend then changed as CMX 98 did not include an Article 5 scenario at all, but focused instead on strategic guidance and planning for a NATO-led<sup>12</sup> Peace Support Operation (PSO) to be conducted under a UN mandate. This scenario design was then expanded for CMX

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11 CMX 96 was cancelled prior to the completion of planning due to the pending IFOR deployment.

12 NATO-led means that non-NATO countries, primarily but not exclusively Partners, would be involved.

99<sup>13</sup>.

- iv. However, of interest was the fact that, during the mid- to late-1990s, actual NATO operations in the Balkans were nearly always running ahead of the evolution of crisis management arrangements and that, paradoxically, Allies appeared more willing to execute militarily in the Balkans things that they were unwilling to accept politically in the development of their post-CW crisis management procedural architecture.
- d. Participation Participation in the CMX series grew rapidly from the limited involvement of the DPC, the MC, national delegations, SHAPE and NATO HQ IS/IMS staffs in 1992 to the full range of NATO structures<sup>14</sup> and capitals by the late 1990s.
  - i. This period also saw the rapid enhancement of non-NATO Partner involvement in Alliance crisis management business, based on the Partnership for Peace initiative. Interested Partners were provided general briefings on CMX crisis scenarios and, in CMX 97, some role-play in a civil emergency disaster. Subsequently for CMX 98, 21 Partners were invited to engage in direct consultations with Allies in meetings of both the NAC (+) and crisis management committees on their possible engagement in a potential NATO-led PSO. CMXs were thus identified as useful platforms for introducing potential new Allies to the complexities of NATO crisis management consultations and decision-making<sup>15</sup>.

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13 CMX 99 was cancelled shortly after the completion of planning due to the (likely) Alliance involvement in Kosovo.

14 The MC, PCG (later OPC), PC and SCEPC form the primary crisis management committees. During ongoing operations, the main functions are carried out just by the MC and PCG (OPC), with some SCEPC involvement as necessary, in support of the NAC.

15 In particular, three Partners, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland who would join the Alliance in 1999, found their full involvement in 'NAC +3' meetings during CMX 98 an 'extraordinarily valuable experience.'

- ii. Alliance engagement with other international organisations during the CMX program also reflected changing relationships. Again the Balkan crisis influenced Allies to invite the UN to observe the conduct of CMX 97 and 98 and Allies then periodically invited staffs from the UN (DPKO), WEU, EU, OSCE and ICRC, among others, to observe most CMXs thereafter.

## EVOLUTION FROM STRATEGIC CONCEPTS 1999 TO 2010 - CONTINUING OPERATIONS, ENGAGEMENT WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND RUSSIA, AND 9/11

### *Second Strategic Concept 1999 (Washington):*

*The Second Strategic Concept was adopted in Washington in 1999. It defined 3 core tasks:*

- Collective defence ;
- Crisis management, and
- Co-operative security.

*It underpinned the commitment to consult (Article 4) but acknowledged that the:*

- Threat of conventional attack against Allies was low, but that such attack could not be ignored, therefore deterrence, based upon an appropriate mix of conventional and nuclear defence capabilities, remains a core element of Alliance strategy.
- Proliferation of ballistic missiles, including WMD, the terrorism threat, continued instability or conflict, extremism, terrorism, trans-national illegal activities and cyber-attacks posed a damaging threat to national and trans-Atlantic prosperity, security and stability.

*Lessons from operations in the Balkans made it clear that:*

- A comprehensive political, civil and military approach is necessary for effective crisis management, and that collaboration with international actors is critical.
- The Alliance will enhance intelligence sharing, develop doctrine and military capabilities for expeditionary operations, form a modest civilian crisis management capability and enhance civil-military planning, and broaden and intensify consultation among Allies and with partners to handle crises, before, during and after.

*The Concept also foresaw enhanced cooperation with UN, EU and through the EAPC, and the further development of a strategic partnership with Russia, with an expectation of reciprocity.*

**10. Exercise Patterns 1999 to 2010** In this period, CMXs came of age. On two occasions, in 2000 and 2003, NATO jointly worked cooperatively with the WEU and EU respectively to plan and conduct joint exercises. Improvements in NATO-Russia relations also provided an opportunity to exercise on an equal basis with Russia in 2004, and a wider range of partners was invited to participate in the exercise series with, on occasion, the UN and other international organisations. Moreover, adaptations and improvements to the Alliance's crisis management procedural architecture together with a growing allied confidence to explore new concepts and *modi operandi* provided the catalyst for Allies to use the CMX series to test new, evolving concepts and procedures that were sufficiently developed, but not yet fully approved, albeit with the caveat that any use of them by Allies in such exercises did not necessarily indicate acceptance.

- a. Aims and Objectives During this period, the main CMX focus remained on exercising in a NATO-led PSO role and, in so doing, testing the evolution of non-Article 5 procedures drawing on the lessons and ongoing experiences from the Balkans and Afghanistan.
  - i. Objectives related to the invited involvement of partners became a key aspect of exercise design, and PSO-related political and military concepts and direct liaison with other international organisations, in particular the UN (DPKO, OCHA, HCR) and the ICRC, became important collaborative exercise components.
  - ii. As set out above, on two occasions in this period joint exercises with the WEU and EU incorporated mutually agreed objectives related to the (WEU) Berlin and (EU) Berlin Plus arrangements when addressing the requirements of the European 'Petersberg' tasks.
  - iii. This period also saw the creation of the Political Aspects of a Generic Concept for Joint Combined NATO-Russia

Peacekeeping Operations. This concept provided the basis for a high-level NATO-Russia Council Procedural Exercise (NRC (PX)) in 2004 which was designed by NATO and Russian exercise planners.

- iv. Finally, and in light of the terrorist attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001 (“9/11”), and the subsequent Mediterranean maritime operations and the ISAF deployment in Afghanistan, efforts were made to focus objectives on the handling of some of the emerging asymmetric threats that stemmed from international terrorism, non-nuclear WMD and the potential use of ballistic missiles and to apply these to CMX scenarios. However, at this time, the modern cyber threat had yet to materialize in a significant manner, and was not really embedded in any scenarios until later.
- b. Procedures As directed at the Washington Summit 1999 a new crisis management architecture and response system, NCRS, was approved by the NAC which was designed to provide the Alliance with an overarching procedural architecture for all types of crisis management against which military and non-military crisis response planning should be conducted. Associated with the development of this new architecture and the experience of real operations as well as CMXs, Allies also created the Pol/Mil Framework (PMF) to provide consultation procedures for the participation of Partners in NATO-led operations, the essential elements of which were also incorporated within the NCRS so as to ensure continued compatibility. Designed around the NCRS, and as appropriate to the PMF, the CMX series was therefore able to play a significant role in exercising the NCRS and enabling lessons to be rapidly tested and drawn to improve the System.
- c. Scenarios During this period, scenarios continued to primarily focus on NA5CROs although some limited potential Article 5 objectives and scenario events were included in CMXs 02 and 04.

- i. CMX 01 provided the basis to test the PMF with partners in a deteriorating non-Article 5 PSO situation.
  - ii. However, CMX 02, in conformity with the 1999 Washington Summit WMD Initiative, portrayed a deploying NATO force facing potential asymmetric threats. It was the focus of this exercise that was misinterpreted by the press at the Prague Summit later in 2002 as being a precursor to a possible NATO deployment into Iraq.
  - iii. The two joint exercises with the WEU in 2000 and the EU in 2003 drew on adapted 'Petersberg' (NA5CRO) scenarios that these two Institutions had already created for their own purposes. Both exercises were generally successful, but a further two attempts to hold such joint exercises in 2007 and 2010 failed.
  - iv. The scenario for the NRC(PX) in 2004 was created by NATO and Russian planners, the main components of which drew on parameters from previous CMX NA5CRO scenarios.
  - v. CMX 04, which was also designed to familiarize the then 7 potential new Allies with a wider range of crisis management procedures, contained an enhanced asymmetric terrorism threat against a deployed NATO-led force.
  - vi. CMX 05, the first exercise with 26 Allies, and CMXs 06, 08 and 09 reverted to creating an UN-mandated non-Article 5 PSO in which deploying or deployed forces, including with some partners, faced conventional and asymmetric threats in a fictitious country.
- d. Participation All Allies, the NAC and all crisis management committees <sup>(18)</sup> as well as the two Strategic Commands <sup>(4)</sup> and the international staffs at NATO HQ participated in all exercises during this period.
- i. As for Partners, 12 countries became Allies during this period

and of the remaining partners, Finland and Sweden, became regular participants under the terms of the PMF.

- ii. International Organisations' staffs such as from the UN were invited to observe the joint WEU and EU exercises, as well as NATO CMXs. For CMX 09, for the first time, UN-HCR, -OCHA, -DPKO and the ICRC were invited to participate both in exercise planning during 2008, as well as during exercise conduct in 2009 for which direct liaison was maintained with the NATO Liaison Office(r) to the UN in New York.
- e. CMX Policy Finally, it was during this period that key elements of the NAC's CMX policy had evolved. This policy continues to include that:
- i. CMX is a NAC-directed high-level exercise platform for the testing and validation of existing and, as Allies agree, evolving policies, concepts and procedures and to facilitate the familiarisation of NATO crisis management architecture for the primary target audience, as set out above, as well as, when invited, NATO partners and relevant International Organisations.
  - ii. CMXs are normally to be conducted annually.
  - iii. CMXs are to be planned by consensus through the direct involvement of national planners, supported by the IS, IMS and ACO and supervised by the COEC.
  - iv. Scenarios should be generic, but realistic and constructed with sufficient detail, rationale and credibility to support the achievement of agreed objectives.

### 3RD STRATEGIC CONCEPT 2010 AND THE RE-EMERGENCE OF COLLECTIVE DEFENCE EXERCISING 2011 and 2012

#### *Third Strategic Concept 2010 (Lisbon):*

*The third Strategic Concept was adopted in Lisbon in 2010. It identified that the modern security environment contains a broad and evolving set of challenges to the security of NATO. Thus, NATO will continue to fulfil 3 essential core tasks ... and always in accordance with international law:*

- (1) Collective defence;
- (2) Crisis management, and
- (3) Cooperative security.

*The .... threat of conventional attack against NATO is low, however, the conventional threat cannot be ignored. Many regions and countries are witnessing the acquisition of substantial modern military capabilities including the proliferation of ballistic missiles, nuclear weapons and other WMD and their means of delivery, which poses a threat to the Euro-Atlantic area ... and will be most acute in the some of the world's most volatile regions.*

*Terrorism ... and cyber attacks, including by foreign militaries and intelligence services, criminals, terrorist and/or extremist groups .... can reach a threshold that threatens national and Euro-Atlantic prosperity, security and stability.*

*The protection and defence of its territory and populations remains the greatest Alliance responsibility as set out in Article 5.*

*Deterrence will continue to be based on an appropriate mix of conventional and nuclear capabilities, the ability to maintain robust, mobile and deployable conventional forces to carry out both Article 5 and expeditionary operations and to carry out the necessary training, exercises, contingency planning and information exchange for assuring defence against the full range of conventional and emerging security challenges and to provide visible assurance and reinforcement for all Allies.*



11. **Exercise Patterns 2011-2012** Exercise design at the start of this period took into account the key parameters of the 2010 Strategic Concept, notably that, while the three essential core tasks remained paramount, the threat of conventional attack against NATO, while low, should not be ignored and that emerging security challenges had raised the spectre of threats that might threaten national and Euro-Atlantic prosperity. Moreover, a NAC tasking related to ‘Visible Assurance’ had also been adopted early in this period and given that newer Allies had never done a high-level collective defence exercise, and had varying interpretations as to the practical implications of Article 5 procedures, Allies decided to hold two potential Article 5 exercises in 2011 and 2012, one essentially conventional and the second based on hybrid threats.

- a. **Aims and Objectives** Drawing on the NCRS, the CMX 11’s aims and objectives were entirely focused on exercising agreed procedures including those for operations planning that are specifically designed to handle conventional Article 5 collective defence. In the case of the CMX 12, the aim was to exercise consultation and collective decision-making when faced with asymmetric threats, and to simultaneously handle a crisis stemming from un-attributable cyber actions using existing and, when agreed, evolving procedures and concepts.
- b. **Procedures** The CMX 11 exercise focused entirely on those aspects of the NCRS related to collective defence. As for the CMX 12 cyber threat, this was derived from the parallel Cyber Coalition scenario that was designed to test NATO capabilities for identifying cyber actions against some Allies’ infrastructure and information systems, to assess the threat and provide assistance, while alerting NAC and allied capitals’ high level engagement using procedures specifically designed for this purpose.
- c. **Scenarios** For the CMX 11 the framework design and scenario portrayed an emerging Article 5 situation that required allied collective deterrence in the face of a ‘rogue’ generic state that had

been threatening one Ally. Regarding CMX 12, a dual scenario portrayed firstly a pattern of chemical and radiological events that threatened two Allies' infrastructure and shipping assets that generated requests for support and reactions by other Allies and, secondly, and in parallel, a technical cyber defence scenario that sought to raise cyber defence issues for strategic-level consideration. For this exercise, and in order to benefit from a realistic, practical cyber scenario, the CMX exercise was planned and conducted concurrently with Exercise Cyber Coalition 2012.

- d. Participation The NAC, OPC, MC and PC, with some SCEPC involvement as well as SHAPE, participated in both exercises. For the CMX 11, a JFC element was also employed to provide dynamic reporting from the 'theatre of operations.' Notwithstanding the Article 5 focus, Allies also invited Finland and Sweden to participate during the CMX 11, but limited to consultations on the crisis situation and, through the PMF process. These two partners also participated in the CMX 12.

12. **Conclusions** The transition from the Cold War provided an opportunity for a major review of how NATO should consider its exercising posture, both militarily and, as importantly, in the strategic political-military domain. As highlighted in the three successive Strategic Concepts, the Alliance was no longer primarily facing an existential confrontational threat to its survival. But while Article 5 threats remained, risks and threats of a different asymmetric nature now posed particular challenges:

- a. Failing and failed states requiring peacekeeping and stabilisation operations.
- b. WMD proliferation and ballistic missiles threats.
- c. Hybrid threats of terrorism and later cyber.

The evolving global situation challenged the Alliance to widen its

cooperation with non-NATO countries, including with a number of erstwhile opponents many of which subsequently and voluntarily became Allies. The Alliance also decided to extend its influence and political-military competence well beyond its area of interest, as defined in Article 6 of the Washington Treaty, in cooperation with the UN, EU and other international organisations with which the Alliance had paid little attention during the Cold War. Moreover, from the mid-1990s the Alliance became involved in operational missions in the Balkans, Afghanistan and off the Horn of Africa as well as reacting to 9/11. All this required a process of evolution that necessitated a change in strategic political and military conceptual thinking in order to address three essential core tasks: collective defence; crisis management and cooperative security. This evolution required structural re-organisation and re-orientation, including with regard to exercising the Organisation and its procedural architecture, to meet these challenges and ensure its capacity and capability to do so while simultaneously reducing military budgets. In addition to operational experiences, strategic-level exercising in the form of CMX became a key aspect of this evolution and the series played a significant role in identifying which changes and adaptations were necessary, and how they should be implemented. CMXs also provided a platform for rotational staffs in capitals and the NATO political and military structures to become familiar with, and to practise, revise and adjust their roles so as to enable the Alliance to continue functioning in a rapidly changing environment and to facilitate the maintenance of crisis management capabilities Alliance-wide and with partners. It is for all these reasons that the CMX series continues and evolves to take account of the emerging security challenges that face the Alliance.

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## HOW CMXs ARE PLANNED

**Exercise Planning** The process of CMX planning is complex not least because it involves all Allies and, therefore, there is room for direction, influence and sensitivities from multiple sources and in different forums.

1. CMXs are scheduled, planned and conducted by all Allies and are therefore subject to the NATO consensus decision-making process. In order to provide direct political oversight, the Council directed that the COEC provide recommendations on exercise policy and scheduling as well as supervising planning, conduct and post-exercise reporting.
2. From the late 1990s, Allies periodically invited the involvement of international organisations (e.g. UN, OSCE and ICRC) and the participation by interested non-NATO partner countries in a given CMX under specific conditions. By 1999, the Alliance also started cooperating with the WEU and, subsequently, the EU in the scheduling, planning and conduct of joint CMX-style exercises.
3. The aim of CMX exercise planning is to create and harmonise a political, civil and military framework design for the active phase of the exercise, based upon the NCRS, in order to engage the NAC and the target audience in consultations and decision-making to achieve the directed aims and objectives.
4. CMX exercise planners need to:
  - i. Tailor the exercise design and scenario to facilitate achievement of the objectives.

- ii. Based on the objectives, identify issues for consultation and decision-making that are likely, or should be engineered by events, to arise.
  - iii. Produce an anticipated framework of consultation and decision points to meet the exercise design and objectives.
  - iv. Match the timing of events with anticipated Council decision cycles, which may include partner consultations.
  - v. Establish a DISTAFF organisation able to adjust scenario proceedings dynamically and in consultation with Allies, to accommodate player-driven changes.
  - vi. Accommodate the fact that actual reactions to the evolving scenario situation by capitals (NAC + Committees) and SACEUR (SHAPE) should remain open to as much 'free-play' as possible.
5. In order to conduct the detailed CMX planning process the IS, the IMS and SC staffs establish a Core Planning Team (CPT) to draft proposals for allied consideration at every stage of the process.
6. While the W-C exercise planning process normally required around 11 main planning conferences and spanned 18-20 months to meet a biennial cycle, a detailed CMX planning cycle normally requires 4 planning conferences: Initial, Main, Events-Coordination and Final in a cycle that spans 9-10 months in order to meet each annual cycle. Each conference is chaired by the IS, supported by the CPT, and includes plenary sessions and up to 14 separate working syndicates covering a wide variety of detailed crisis management and operational disciplines<sup>16</sup>, all chaired and synchronised by the CPT. Allies are invited to agree the exercise product at the end of the final conference.

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<sup>16</sup> Syndicates can include: political; intelligence; WMD; cyber; operations, public information, communications, NCRS, civil emergency planning and others.

7. Immediately prior to the exercise, the CPT provides briefings to the NAC, relevant committees, staffs and the SHAPE Command Group, and establishes a Directing Staff (DISTAFF) at primary HQs to monitor, advise and choreograph exercise play, again led by the IS at NATO HQ. Part of the HQ DISTAFF comprises a Media Simulation Centre and a Political Response Cell which may be directly supported by 'observing' international organisations' staff.
8. Post-exercise reporting and evaluation by the COEC identifies lessons and recommends follow-up actions in a post exercise report for the NAC.

## 9

## Towards a New Robust Defence? Norway's Exercises on NATO's Northern Flank, 2008–2017 *Tormod Heier*

This chapter analyses the contemporary context of military exercises on NATO's northern flank. Using Norway as a case study, motives and calculations that can explain the gradual slide from restraint to resolve during exercises are scrutinised. The starting point is the gradual resurrection of the Norwegian *Threshold Defence Concept* since 2008, which builds on the idea of strategic deterrence.<sup>1</sup> The concept builds on the *Anti-Invasion Concept*, which throughout the Cold War and into the 1990s was a defensively oriented concept balancing deterrence with self-imposed restraints.<sup>2</sup> To avoid tension and provocation, Norway put much effort into confidence building measures that implicitly recognised Soviet interests.<sup>3</sup> Reintroduced in 2008, however, the new 'body language' from the *Threshold Concept* echoes new sentiments. Self-imposed restraints seem to be less pronounced than a more robust course of action.<sup>4</sup> Motives and calculations seem to underscore core functions of deterrence and defence, closer to the Russian border.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Ministry of Defence, 'Et forsvar til vern om Norges sikkerhet, interesser og verdier,' *St.prp.nr. 48 (2007–2008)*, Oslo, 23 March 2008, p. 56.

2 Kjell Inge Bjerga & Kjetil Skogrand, 'Securing small-state interests: Norway in NATO,' in Vojtech Mastny, Sven G. Holtmark & Andreas Wenger (eds.), *War Plans and Alliances in the Cold War*, London, Routledge, 2006, pp. 321-2.

3 Johan Jørgen Holst, *Norsk sikkerhetspolitikk i strategisk perspektiv, Bind I: Analyse*, Oslo, NUPI, 1967, p. 34.

4 Ministry of Defence, 'Et forsvar til vern...', 2008, pp. 31, 34, 47-49.

5 Hanne H. Bragstad, 'Avskrekking og beroligelse i norsk sikkerhetspolitikk overfor Russland,' *Master Thesis*, Oslo, Norwegian Defence University College, 2016; Olav Bogen & Magnus Håkenstad, *Balansegang*:

Despite periods of flux during the Cold War (1949-1953, 1975-1985), NATO's northern flank has been a relatively calm area. Mutual respect for Soviet and Western 'spheres of interest' provided an atmosphere of predictability and 'crisis stability' on both sides of the Iron Curtain. This 'tacit agreement' continued after the Soviet Union's demise. Albeit less frequently and with a smaller scope, exercises in both Norway and Russia continued, but with implicit avoidance of provocation. Sensitivity towards Russia's unilateral demand for a long strategic warning-time for its second strike capability in the Northern Fleet was also in Norway's interest.

Situated between Russia and the United States, Norwegian exercises nevertheless remain a contentious issue. Russia's Northern Fleet, with its nuclear forces, is situated close to Norwegian territory, and the shortest ballistic cruise missile range between Russia and the United States passes over the region. The exercise area is thus a natural corridor for potential allied air and sea operations into Russia, and a similar corridor for Russian interception of transatlantic lines of communication in the North-Atlantic.<sup>6</sup> Hence, the strategic sensitivity fluctuates with the US-Russian relationship. In periods of mutual trust, such as during the 1960s, the 1990s, and well into the 2000s, exercises were more easily tolerated, or even welcomed as a token of confidence.<sup>7</sup> In periods of flux however, like after Russia's 2008-war against Georgia and the 2014 annexation of Crimea, exercises became more rapidly 'securitised' or even perceived as dangerous brinkmanship.<sup>8</sup> Situated on the outskirts of the European

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*Forsvarets omstilling etter den kalde krigen*, Oslo, Dreyer, 2015, pp. 293, 349, 352; Tormod Heier, 'Mellom beroligelse og avskrekking: Forsvarets krisehåndtering,' in Tormod Heier & Anders Kjølborg (eds.), *Mellom fred og krig. Norsk militær krisehåndtering*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, 2013, pp. 82-85.

6 Rolf Tamnes, 'Norway's Struggle for the Northern Flank, 1950-1952,' in Olav Riste (ed.), *Western Security. The Formative Years*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, 1985, p. 216; Mats Berdal, 'Forging a maritime alliance. Norway and the evolution of American Maritime Strategy 1945-1960,' *Forsvarsstudier* no. 4, Oslo, Institute for Defence Studies, 1993, pp. 37-46.

7 Ministry of Defence, 'Hovedretningslinjer for Forsvarets virksomhet og utvikling i tiden 1999-2002,' *St.meld. nr. 22 (1997-1998)*, Oslo, 26 February, 1998, p. 20; Ministry of Defence (2001), 'Omlaggingen av Forsvaret i perioden 2002-2005,' *St.prp.nr.45 (2000-2001)*, Oslo, 16 February 2001, p. 25.

8 Thomas Frear, Lukaz Kulesa & Ian Kearns, 'Dangerous Brinkmanship: Close Military Encounters Between Russia and the West in 2014,' *Policy Brief*, European Leadership Network, November 2014.



continent, outside the EU, and occasionally isolated on NATO's northern flank, Norwegian exercises may therefore be seen as an indicator of the East-West relationship.

A key question is, therefore, what motives and calculations inspire Norway's contemporary exercises. By scrutinising trends in Norwegian exercises between 2008 and 2017, we may gain more insight into how small member states on NATO's flanks perceive their strategic context and their military vulnerabilities. How Norway plans to compensate for military shortcomings by getting a 'hook in the nose' of the United States, or a firmer grip on NATO's Article 5 clause, is central. Trying to sustain a shrinking force, inside an increasingly fragmented alliance, which more than ever depends upon US capabilities, to counter a more assertive Russia, describes much of the context in Norwegian exercises.

First, Norwegian exercises from the 1980s are *described* with regard to motives and calculation, and *compared* with contemporary motives and calculations. Thereafter, characteristics between 'now' and 'then' are *contrasted* through the explanatory lenses of Realism and Institutionalism. Finally, two conclusions are deduced. The key finding is that Norwegian exercises have changed significantly since 2008. A combination of military weaknesses and fear of allied abandonment has rebalanced Norway's strategy. The military 'body language,' as communicated through exercises, has changed. This means that the Norwegian case may hence indicate a broader trend among smaller member states that are next to Russia: military vulnerabilities and inferiorities in the local theatres are compensated by more resolve and less restraint. This trend may, on the one hand, make for more credible deterrence. But it may also exacerbate tensions and produce unexpected countermeasures from the Russian side.

## Cold War and Contemporary Exercises: Between Deterrence and Restraint

Having gradually eroded after the Cold War, the Norwegian *Threshold*

*Defence Concept* builds on the logic of classic deterrence. Here, deterrence is defined as efforts to

“(1) prevent undesired behaviour that has not yet occurred (2) by persuading those who might contemplate such behaviour that its probable costs will exceed its anticipated gains *vis-à-vis* their current situation (3) because the actor who desires that the action not take place is willing to take action itself to increase the costs of that undesired behaviour.”<sup>9</sup>

This calculation has become increasingly prevalent in Norwegian exercises. While White Papers on defence expenditures emphasised deterrence averagely twice a year between 2008 and 2013, their number skyrocketed tenfold in 2016.<sup>10</sup> In three successive White Papers (2008, 2012, 2016), as well as in one high profile Expert Panel, and Chief of Defence Review, resolve through deterrence rather than self-imposed restraint seems to have become the dominant strategy and operational course of action.<sup>11</sup>

The slide from restraint to resolve can be operationalised along NATO's three indicators *Presence*, *Posture*, and *Profile*.<sup>12</sup> *Presence*, as defined by the exercises' geographic proximity to Russia's territorial border, may indicate the following: Close proximity, i.e. in Norway's most northern county (*Finnmark County*), implies shorter strategic warning-time, and hence a higher score on the deterrence scale. Exercises further off the Russian border, such as in Troms or Nordland County, signify sensitivity through self-imposed restraints. *Posture*, defined as operative methods employed by the training audience, may indicate the following: Doctrinal principles of Manoeuvre Warfare, i.e. surprise, tempo and initiative, suggests a high

9 Gary Schaub, Jr. 'Compellence: Resuscitating the Concept,' in Lawrence Freedman (ed.), *Strategic Coercion. Concepts and Cases*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 40.

10 Bragstad, 'Avskrekking og beroligelse...', p. 31.

11 Ministry of Defence, 'Et forsvar til vern ...,' 2008; Ministry of Defence, 'Et forsvar for vår tid,' *Prop. 72 S (2012–2013)*, Oslo, 23 March 2012; Ministry of Defence 'Kampkraft og bærekraft,' *Prp. 151 S.* (2016 – 2017), Oslo, 17 June 2016. See also Ministry of Defence, 'Et felles løft. Ekspertgruppen for forsvaret av Norge,' Oslo, 28 April, 2015, and Chief of Defence, 'Et forsvar i endring. Forsvarssjefens fagmilitære råd,' Oslo, 1 October 2015.

12 NATO, 'Allied Joint Doctrine for Psychological Operations,' *AJP 3-10*, Edition A, Version 1, Brussels, December 2015, pp. 1-13 and pp. 4-1.

score on deterrence. Principles of attrition, i.e. by static and defensive delaying operations behind prearranged fortifications, indicate restraint. *Profile*, defined as the signature of the training audiences suggests the following: a small professional force with combat experience from high intensity operations abroad communicates resolve. A larger mobilisation force with conscripts is normally less agile, and hence better designed to communicate sensitivity towards Russia's demand for a long strategic warning-time.

## Presence – From Rear to Forward

During the 1980s, large scale exercises like *Northern Express*, *Northern Wedding* and *Team Work* took place more than 1000 kilometres from the Soviet border. As the Soviet Union's Northern Fleet was situated at Murmansk, only 120 kilometres from Norway's northern county Finnmark, exercises too close to the border were assumed to be provocative in the eyes of the Soviets. As Norway's geographical proximity could serve as a potential spring-board for allied operations into the Soviet Union, sensitivity through self-imposed restraints and unilateral assurances characterised the exercises. Restrictions on allied presence east of the 24th longitude in the Barents Sea and Finnmark County were firmly anchored in Parliamentary injunctions and exercise directives. In particular, the sensitive Finnmark borderland, with its harsh arctic climate and open slopes (the size of Denmark), were to be abandoned. Instead, Norway's borderland should be defended from fortified positions further south, in Troms County.<sup>13</sup> By concentrating exercises to operational rear areas, in the mountainous Troms and Nordland Counties, the country's strategic depth could be used to rehearse the transfer of allied reinforcements into the middle of Norway. By hosting pre-stocked material for the *Norway Air-Landed Marine Expeditionary Brigade* (NALMEB) in Trøndelag, 1500 kilometres from the Northern Fleet, exercises could

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13 Gullow Gjeseth, *Landforsvarets krigsplaner under den kalde krigen*, Bergen, Fagbokforlaget, 2011.

more easily communicate Norway's role inside a frequently trimmed allied command structure, without invoking unnecessary tension or provocation along the border. Abstaining from large scale exercises and allied activities in Finnmark, Norway managed a delicate balance between restraint and resolve. Rather than rehearsing coercive campaigns in a strategically sensitive borderland, exercises rehearsed protection of critical infrastructure further south, such as air- and seaports for allied embarkation in the counties of Troms, Nordland and Trøndelag.<sup>14</sup>

The Cold War *Northern Express*, *Northern Wedding* and *Teamwork* exercises thereby communicated the 'tacit agreement' between two neighbours: on the one hand, the Soviet Northern Fleet benefitted from a longer strategic warning-time of any NATO activity. Norway, on the other hand, could lower its guard and sustain a rather formal but constructive relationship with the Soviet Union, despite its NATO membership. At the same time, the exercises would also convince the Soviets that coercion towards Norway would have consequences beyond the bilateral level – if Norway wanted it. Annual large-scale exercises with earmarked allies, prearranged stocks, and co-located operational bases confirmed the inseparable link between Norwegian and allied security. The exercises signalled that a potential crisis in the High North<sup>15</sup> would not end up as a bilateral dispute *with* Norway, but rather escalate into a major war *about* Norway.<sup>16</sup>

From 2008, however, a more assertive Russia increasingly preoccupied NATO members on the northern and eastern flanks. Guidelines for Norwegian war-preparations claimed that *Realpolitik* once again had returned to Europe. NATO's 'return to its roots' was more crucial than

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> The High North is a contentious concept with both political and geographical connotations. It is mainly a Norwegian concept, and is here defined, according to the Stoltenberg-II Government (2006), as the geographical area '... stretching northwards from the southern boundary of Nordland county in Norway and eastwards from the Greenland Sea to the Barents Sea and the Pechora Sea. In political terms, it includes the administrative entities in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia that are part of the Barents Cooperation' (Gunnar Skagestad, *The High North' – an Elastic Concept in Norwegian Arctic Policy, FNI Report 10/2010*, Oslo, Fridtjof Nansen Institute, 2010, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Holst, *Norsk sikkerhetspolitikk ...*, p. 68.

ever. Hence, ‘any potential adversary should know that coercive efforts towards Norway would entail potentially high risks and costs.’<sup>17</sup> Core tasks of deterrence and territorial defence were increasingly emphasised by centre-left (2005–2013) as well as conservative-liberal governments (2013–2017). The importance of increasing the threshold for Russian coercion ‘in all corners under Norwegian jurisdiction’<sup>18</sup> was underscored. On the first page of the 2012 strategy, it was claimed that even ‘minor incidents would be met with utmost resolve and dedication.’<sup>19</sup> Four years later, strategic deterrence had become a key message; it rested on ‘... the seamless escalation between Norwegian and allied capabilities’ and should be frequently trained through peacetime exercises in the High North.<sup>20</sup> Contrary to the 1980s, self-imposed restraints aiming to keep a low profile in proximity to Russia were implicitly downplayed.<sup>21</sup> In 2015 and 2017, between 8,000 and 10,000 allied troops joined exercise *Joint Wiking*, to rehearse high intensity combat operations in Finnmark. These exercises were the largest in more than 50 years, possibly also the largest ever.<sup>22</sup>

The political injunctions were moreover accompanied by military preferences for a more forward positioning in Finnmark. According to the Chief of Defence, the operational necessity for a permanently based Combined Army Battlegroup closer to Russia had increased, and should be given high priority.<sup>23</sup> Rather than exercising behind defensive lines 1000 kilometres from the Russian border, or a perimeter defence around air- and seaports of allied embarkation in Mid-Norway, requirements for rapid engagements of even minor provocations along the border seemed

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17 Ministry of Defence, ‘Et forsvar til vern ...’, 2008, p. 56.

18 Ministry of Defence, ‘Kampkraft og bærekraft,’ 2016, p. 23.

19 Ministry of Defence 2012, ‘Et forsvar for vår tid,’ 2012, pp. 7, 48.

20 Ministry of Defence, ‘Kampkraft og bærekraft,’ 2016, p. 18.

21 Tormod Heier, ‘Mellom beroligelse og avskrekking ...’; Olav Bogen & Magnus Håkenstad, *Balansegang*, p. 293; Bragstad, ‘Norsk sikkerhetspolitikk ...’

22 Jan Harald Tommassen and Geir Samuelson, ‘10.000 mann skal krige seg gjennom Finnmark,’ *NRK Finnmark* (12 December 2016).

23 Chief of Defence, ‘Et forsvar i endring...’, p. 40; Kjetil Stormark og Erik Hattrem, ‘Hæren vender tilbake til Finnmark,’ *Aldrimer.no* (1 July 2015).

more acute.<sup>24</sup>

Consequently, the *Cold Response* exercises between 2010 and 2015 became more focused on coercive manoeuvres and close combat between states, rather than low intensity combat inside failed states.<sup>25</sup> According to the Prime Minister, the whole point of *Cold Response 2016* was ‘to signify deterrence.’<sup>26</sup> This trend was moreover underscored by annual Command Post Exercises – *Gram* – between 2011 and 2015. Here, a bilateral crisis along state borders rapidly escalated to war in order to prevent a bargaining process with Russia that easily could lead to concessions.<sup>27</sup> Rather than balancing the ‘carrot and the stick’ in accordance with the Cold War’s logic of rehearsing ‘warfare as a process of violent bargaining,’<sup>28</sup> the exercises skipped the bargaining phase and started the exercise scenario ‘when deterrence failed’ and war was inevitable. Instead of rehearsing ways to resolve tension peacefully through the intimate relationship between diplomatic and military efforts, exercises seem to have become synonymous with the escalation of even minor disputes.<sup>29</sup> ‘Softer’ measures of restraint, i.e. dialogue, mediation, civil-military cooperation, crisis management, diplomacy, or a more defensive reassurance, were by and large ignored. As pointed out by the militaries, ‘conventional warfighting is the primary objective’ to ensure that exercise are deemed relevant by the participating units.<sup>30</sup>

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24 Sverre Diesen, ‘Det militære instrument i norsk krisehåndtering,’ in Tormod Heier & Anders Kjølberg (eds.), *Mellom fred og krig. Norsk militær krisehåndtering*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, 2014, pp. 45–53; Gullou Gjeseth, ‘Forsvaret av Finnmark – i går og i dag,’ i Tormod Heier & Anders Kjølberg (eds.), *Norge og Russland – sikkerhetspolitiske utfordringer i nordområdene*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, 2015, pp. 150–161.

25 Interviews with Lieutenant Colonel (ret.) Stein Fredrik Kynø (scenario scriptwriter for Norway’s Joint Operational Headquarters), 15 September 2016; Lieutenant Colonel Stein Grongstad, (Commanding Officer, Section for Operational Lessons Learned at the Joint Operational Headquarters), 25 August 2016; Lieutenant Colonel Ole Roger Wågan, (Senior Staff Officer at the Operational Lessons Learned section), 25 August 2016; Colonel Atle Stai (former Chief J7 at the Joint Operative Headquarter), 13 September 2016. All interviews conducted at the Norwegian Defence University, Oslo.

26 Sissel Lynum, ‘Skal være avskrekkende,’ *Adresseavisen* (6 March 2016), <http://www.adressa.no/nyheter/nordtrondelag/2016/03/05/Skal-vare-avskrekkende-12242777.ece>, accessed on 6 September 2017.

27 Interviews Wågan and Grongstad.

28 Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1966, p. 33.

29 Tormod Heier, ‘Mellom beroligelse og avskrekking ....’

30 Geir Pettersen, ‘Sivil-militær samordning. Forsvarets støtte til politiet – alltid beredt?,’ *Master Thesis*, Oslo, Norwegian Defence University College, 2014, p. 61; Rune Larsen, «Hæren i sikkerhetspolitiske kriser –

Despite Parliamentary injunctions from the 1990s, admonishing sensitivity to ‘prevent any provocation of neighbouring states,’<sup>31</sup> the exercises seem to increase the threshold for how much force Russia must use in case of a possible assault. The exercises thereby seem to have entered a slippery slope, where *deterrence by punishment* has become more important than the Cold War’s *deterrence by denial*.<sup>32</sup>

## Posture – From Attrition to Manoeuvre

During the 1980s, the art of avoiding decisive battles close to the Russian border was a key imperative in Norwegian exercises. Rather than delivering strategic blows towards an opponent’s flanks or rear echelons, a defensive war of attrition further south – in Troms County – was the preferred method.<sup>33</sup> By exploiting the strategic depth in Finnmark County, it was assumed that Soviet forces would be spread thin along lines of communication that stretched from Murmansk to Bodø, possibly also through Finland and northern parts of Sweden. Although Norwegian exercises gained certain offensive connotations at the tactical level during the last period of the 1980s, the imperative of ‘exchanging terrain for time’ made delaying operations a central element in the sensitive border areas.<sup>34</sup> Further south, the training audience had the privilege of choosing the time and place for their next encounter while earmarked reinforcements from the United States, Canada, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Germany were *en route*.

Exercises therefore emphasised numerous minor battles, often in

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hvor relevant?’, *Master’s Thesis*, Oslo, Forsvarets høyskole, 2014, p. 70. Interviews with Kynø, Wågan and Stai.

31 Parliament (1996), ‘Norges selvpålagte begrensninger i sikkerhetspolitikken,’ *Innst. S. nr. 151*, (Oslo 23 March, 1996), <https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Publikasjoner/Innstillinger/Stortinget/1995-1996/inns-199596-151/?lvl=0#a4>, accessed 6 September 2017.

32 Rolf Tamnes, ‘Amerikanerne ute, russerne inne og tyskerne oppe?’, *Kungl. Krigsvetenskapsakademiens Handlingar och Tidskrift*, nr. 3, 2014, p. 30; Tormod Heier, ‘Drømmen om Amerika’ – en selvpøpfyllende profeti, *Internasjonal politikk*, nr. 1, 2017, p. 20.

33 Gjeseth, *Hæren i omveltning*, pp. 40, 54.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 17. See also Jacob Børresen, Gullow Gjeseth & Rolf Tamnes, *Norsk forsvarshistorie, Bind 5: Allianseforsvar i endring 1970–2000*, Bergen, Eide forlag, 2004, pp. 52–53.

easily defendable terrain that was neatly pre-arranged, reconnoitred, and analysed. Towards a rather predictable and familiar Soviet *Order-of-Battle*, exercises were conducted in accordance with a linear but defensive posture; predefined drills and *Standard Operation Procedures* were rehearsed in accordance with a strategy of attrition. Within a rigid but frequently trained chain of command, exercises rehearsed operational methods with all the hallmarks of an orderly, structured, clearly defined and defensively oriented campaign.<sup>35</sup>

After the Cold War, however, the defensive posture became increasingly questioned.<sup>36</sup> Being too focused on principles of pre-arranged linearity and delayment operations, attrition gradually lost its relevance. Originating in the transformation from a large conscript force to a small professional force, manpower reductions made it difficult to control critical terrain. Numerous indecisive battles thereby became an operational impossibility. Heavily influenced by the *US Air-Land Battle Doctrine* from 1982, as well as Soviet and German concepts of manoeuvre warfare from the 1920s,<sup>37</sup> new operational methods were rehearsed. Aiming to reinvigorate a posture that throughout the Cold War had become too static and too defensive, regaining the initiative towards a numerically superior opponent became more important. Rehearsing decisive battles with the utmost force and intensity, on short notice, but for a short period of time only, became the dominant doctrine. Rather than waiting for detailed orders down a tardy chain of command, the training audience was required to grasp the initiative and exploit 'windows of opportunity' throughout the theatre.<sup>38</sup> By not only accepting, but also embracing the chaos of increasingly non-linear battlefields, calculated risks and potential failures became more acceptable, and were even encouraged. As long as tactical manoeuvres

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35 Olav Bogen & Magnus Håkenstad, *Balansegang*, pp. 29-31.

36 Forsvaret, 'Forsvarsjefens grunnsyn for utvikling og bruk av norske styrker i fred, krise og krig,' Oslo, Forsvarets overkommando, 1995; Ministry of Defence, 'Hovedretningslinjer for Forsvarets virksomhet ...,' 2008, p. 47.

37 Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 181-188.

38 Torgeir E. Sæveraas & Dag Henriksen, 'Et militært universalmiddel? Amerikansk 'maneuver warfare' og norsk doktrineutvikling,' *Oslo Files* no. 1, 2007, pp. 137-140; Gjeseth, *Hæren i omveltning* ..., pp. 79-81.



served the commander's overall intent, the lower ranks' personal intuition and experience were endorsed.

Within the broader context of 'mission-oriented leadership,' the new posture aimed to energise and revitalise a Norwegian force that had become more experienced, professional and agile in its performance. But which had been dramatically down-sized to a level where the force structure suffered from serious deficiencies, in readiness, sustainability and logistics.<sup>39</sup> Even the Army '... hardly could defend a smaller part of Oslo.'<sup>40</sup> Within a limited time and space, a posture embracing the doctrinal principles of tempo, surprise and local superiority became the new hallmark for conducting military exercises. A more assertive strategy, conducted by a smaller but more professional force, could only prevail against a larger opponent unless the operational posture changed towards a more robust course of action. How did the new posture impact the training audiences' profile?

## Profile – From Resilience to Agility

During the 1980s, Norwegian forces participating in the *Clockwork*, *Team Work* and *Cold Response* exercises were mainly conscripts and reserves. Drawing from local regiments across the nation, Norway was the NATO member that mobilised the largest percentage of their populace into the Armed Forces.<sup>41</sup> As a consequence, exercises were characterised by numerous army brigades led by a small core of professionals. The bulk of the exercise participants were reservists from local communities. Mass recruitment thereby paved the way for exercises that underscored

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39 Ine Marie Eriksen Søreide, 'Et åpnere forsvar: En mer bærekraftig og forsvarspolitikk,' speech at Oslo Militære Samfund, Oslo, 6 January 2014, <http://www.oslomilsamfund.no/archive/2014/289/2014-01-06->, accessed 6 September 2016; Håkon Bruun-Hanssen, 'Forsvaret ved inngangen 2014 – status og utfordringer,' speech at Oslo Militære Samfund, Oslo 13. januar 2014, <https://www.oslomilsamfund.no/foredrag-forsvaret-ved-inngangen-i-2014-status-og-utfordringer/>, accessed 6 September 2017.

40 Robert Mood, 'Hæren er for liten,' *Nettavisen*, 28 January 2008, <http://www.nettavisen.no/1565552.html>, accessed 6 September 20127.

41 Bogen & Håkenstad, *Balansegang*, pp. 29, 32.

the strategic imperative of ‘buying time’ – even for more than four weeks.<sup>42</sup> Within the framework of a broader *Total Defence Concept*, Norwegian exercises communicated credible prospects for protracted war. In accordance with an *Anti-Invasion Concept* that was meant to last until NATO reinforcements arrived, the ‘civic touch’ enabled the Armed Forces to pursue large-scale exercises with a defensive and presumably non-provocative profile. Only through large-scale participation of the population could a small state’s *Anti-Invasion Concept* succeed while transatlantic reinforcements were *en route* to pre-stocked equipment and pre-arranged positions in Mid-Norway and up to Troms County.<sup>43</sup>

Combined with a strategic context where a relatively long strategic warning time was assured, the *Clockwork*, *Team Work* and *Cold Response* exercises could afford a rather time-consuming mobilisation of troops.<sup>44</sup> The exercises could also allow for refreshment of basic operative skills in the initial weeks preceding the allied disembarkment. Military deterrence was thereby not so much related to the exercise participants’ operative agility, combat experience or high readiness. Even though many reserves could be mobilised within 24 to 48 hours,<sup>45</sup> the exercises signalled that Soviet forces would have to spend considerable time and resources to reach their goals.<sup>46</sup> By displaying military volume and stamina through a frequently trained force of approximately 400,000 personnel, deterrence rested on credible prospects for protracted war.<sup>47</sup> Within the framework of total defence, national resilience and military sustainability were more important than combat agility.

As the same troops were requested to share allied risks and burden in the 1991 Gulf War, the profile of a citizens’ army for self-defence was challenged. The Norwegian Minister of Defence feared that Norwegian troops were neither mentally nor physically agile enough to survive on a

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42 Gjeseth, *Hæren i omveltning*, pp. 17, 40, 54, 298.

43 Børresen et al., *Norsk forsvarshistorie...*, pp. 51-53.

44 Gjeseth, *Hæren i omveltning*, p. 187.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 119.

46 Børresen et al., *Norsk forsvarshistorie...* pp. 52-53.

47 Bogen & Håkenstad, *Balansegang*, p. 29.

modern battlefield.<sup>48</sup>

The profile of the Norwegian exercises changed accordingly. Throughout the 1990s, it became increasingly clear that the exercise participants had to address new threats with a much shorter warning time. NATO and Norwegian war games assumed that Russian troops could deploy forces for coercive operations within hours and days rather than weeks and months. The exercise participants also became more exposed to ill-defined conflicts abroad. New assignments in the Balkans and in Afghanistan indicated that military missions were neither proper 'war' nor proper 'peacekeeping.' Based on the US Army inspired slogan 'Train as you fight,' exercises gradually reflected the new complexity: there were '... wars of *persuasion*, where arguments and incentives complemented limited use of force.'<sup>49</sup> Throughout the early 2000s therefore, the exercise participants gradually altered their profile towards a more professional corps of military experts. Enhanced by combat experience from missions abroad, i.e. on the Balkans, in Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, the element of mobilised reserves, territorial regiments, and contributions from the civilian sector of the Norwegian society, dwindled.<sup>50</sup> From being a conscript force with the image of a defensive posture of 'homeland defenders,' exercise participants became increasingly associated with a new institutional 'warrior culture.'<sup>51</sup>

## How Can the Changes be Explained?

Based upon NATO's three indicators *Presence*, *Posture* and *Profile*, the balance between robustness and sensitivity seems to have found a new

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48 Johan Jørgen Holst, 'Aktuelle forsvars- og sikkerhetspolitiske utfordringer,' *Norsk Militært Tidsskrift*, no. 2, 1991, pp. 1-8; Bård Idås and John Harbo, 'Får ikke flytte feltsykehus,' *Aftenposten* (28 February 1991).

49 Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy*, p. 459.

50 Bogen & Håkenstad, *Balansegang*, pp. 281-285.

51 See among others Ole Martin Brunborg, 'På sporet av en norsk krigerkultur,' *Master's Thesis*, Oslo, Norwegian Defence University College, 2008; Torunn Laugen Haaland, 'Small Forces with Global Outreach. Role perceptions in the Norwegian Armed Forces After the Cold War,' *PhD Thesis*, Unipub, Oslo, 2008; Håkan Edström, Janne Haaland Matlary & Nils Terje Lunde (eds.), *Krigerkultur i en fredsnasjon*, Oslo, Abstrakt forlag, 2009.

equilibrium in Norwegian exercises. What motives and calculations may explain this change? To comprehend the exercises on NATO's northern flank, plausible explanations may be interpreted through the lenses of Realism and Institutionalism.

## A Realist Perspective – Robust Signalling

Realists would argue that military exercises indicate deep-rooted uncertainties about the future. This context may also explain Norwegian perceptions, which since 2008 have become increasingly apprehensive. Of particular concern is the gradual erosion of norms, principles and rules in European and international politics. In Realist terms, such developments are often followed by increased unpredictability; partly so with regard to how larger states may harm smaller ones in a world of 'constant uncertainty,' but also with regard to whether friends and allies may come to your aid or not. Even though the High North is one of the world's most institutionalised regions, with numerous overlapping regimes, conventions and institutions, a *Threshold* Defence Concept of strategic deterrence nevertheless mirrors the Realist's logic of a 'zero-sum game': one's own gains (or losses) are increasingly seen in relation to the opponent's relative losses (or gains). How can the return of *Realism* on NATO's northern flank explain the dominant role of deterrence in Norwegian exercises?

Since 2008, speeches, White Papers and Parliamentary statements issued by the Norwegian Defence Ministry provide compelling evidence for an atmosphere of increased unpredictability in the High North.<sup>52</sup> Even though Russia is not officially described as a threat, Norwegian perceptions may nevertheless indicate that exercises are designed more out of fear and military vulnerability than out of self-confidence and national assertiveness. As Norway has been one of the staunchest

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52 See, among others, Ine Eriksen Søreide, 'Et åpnere forsvar: En mer bærekraftig forsvarspolitik,' speech at Oslo Militære Samfund, Oslo, 6 January 2014; Ine Eriksen Søreide, 'Tale ved overrekkelse av rammeskriv til forsvarsjefen – ber om fagmilitære råd,' Oslo 1 September 2014.

advocates of several US-led transformation programmes in NATO, the aspect of military vulnerability stands out. Aiming to increase the European NATO members' combat effectiveness, the US-led *Defence Capability Initiative* (1999), the *Prague Capability Commitments* (2002) and the *Smart Defence Initiative* (2009) provided useful guidance for smaller allies trying to improve their military usefulness in NATO. Norway's transformation effort nevertheless illustrates a paradox. While the loyal ally 'punched above its weight' in fulfilling US-transformation criteria,<sup>53</sup> accelerating costs attached to improved deployability, mobility and survivability deprived the exercise participants of sustainability. The gradual erosion of a force that may communicate a credible bargaining power *vis-à-vis* an increasingly authoritarian Russian regime, which twice violated its neighbours' sovereignty in 2008 and 2014, is therefore likely to have stirred a more proactive strategy in Oslo. Why is this so?

As sufficient manpower, spare parts, ammunition and reserves are absent in the logistical chain,<sup>54</sup> Norway's ability to put its force on high alert in a protracted crisis is dramatically reduced. Even small changes in the strategic environment, such as increased presence and readiness in the High North following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, had immediate repercussions elsewhere in the force structure.<sup>55</sup> Protracted disputes therefore, are likely to trigger an immediate demand for allied consultations and possible reinforcements. If not, the lack of operative sustainability may imply a collapse inside the Norwegian 'tripwire' before invading forces are repelled, or before NATO reinforcements arrive. Compared to the 1980s, the absence of a sustainable force that can be used

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53 Tormod Heier 'Influence and Marginalization. Norway's Adaptation to US Transformation Efforts in NATO, 1998–2004,' *PhD Thesis*, Oslo, Unipub, 2006.

54 See among others Norwegian Defence Staff, 'Forsvarets årsrapport 2015,' [https://forsvaret.no/fakta/\\_Forsvaret/Documents/Forsvarets%20%C3%A5rsrapport%202015%20%E2%80%93%20A0utskriftsvennlig.pdf](https://forsvaret.no/fakta/_Forsvaret/Documents/Forsvarets%20%C3%A5rsrapport%202015%20%E2%80%93%20A0utskriftsvennlig.pdf), accessed 20 May 2017; Nils Holme, 'Forsvarspolitikken ved et veiskille,' *Civita-Rapport* (Oslo, 27 May 2013) accessible at: [file:///brukere/brukere\\$/theier/Downloads/Forsvarspolitikken-ved-et-veiskille.pdf](file:///brukere/brukere$/theier/Downloads/Forsvarspolitikken-ved-et-veiskille.pdf), accessed 20 May 2017; Ine Marie Eriksen Søreide, 'Et åpner forsvaret ...'; Simen Tallaksen and Kjetil Magne Sørenes, 'Kan ikke forsvare Norge,' *Klassekampen* (10 July 2017), <http://www.klassekampen.no/article/20170710/ARTICLE/170719998>, accessed 20 May 2017.

55 Norwegian Defence Staff, 'Forsvarets årsrapport 2015,' p. 6; Holme, 'Forsvarspolitikken ved et veiskille.'

as a resilient bargaining tool has thereby increased Norway's dependency on NATO at a much earlier stage in the event of a potential crisis. Balancing between robustness and sensitivity in crisis that may last for weeks is therefore a risky endeavour. Rather than assuring Russia through self-imposed restraints further off its border, operative disintegration, military collapse or fear of allied abandonment may provide a stronger incentive for taking larger operational risks.

Increased robustness through resolute and decisive action closer to the border, to prevent a possible *fait accompli*, is a plausible interpretation.

Underscored by the Realist assumption that friends and allies only come to your aid if it serves their interests, military weakness and fear of abandonment seem to be the primary motives for increasingly robust signalling. Being a consensus-oriented alliance, NATO is not likely to activate readiness and reinforcement plans unless a real conflict unites the members. The need to contain minor conflicts that may become 'too large for Norway, but too small for NATO' has therefore become increasingly prevalent in Norwegian exercises. If the Russian Northern Fleet is allowed to extend its 'zone of protection' into areas of Norwegian jurisdiction without the slightest resistance, allied indecisiveness could easily result in a Norwegian defeat due to lack of a resilient force. In a world of increased uncertainty, therefore, robust rehearsals of combat situations large enough to trigger an Article 5 operation are therefore a rational exercise objective.<sup>56</sup> The change from sensitivity, as displayed through exercises in Troms and Nordland, towards a more robust encounter in Finnmark, closer to Russia, may therefore be explained as a symptom of national vulnerability, military inferiority, and allied dependency – at a much earlier stage in a crisis' life cycle.

By rehearsing the training audience closer to strategic sites in Finnmark, i.e. in the city of Alta, Tana Bridge or Porsanger Garrison, Norwegian authorities may more easily deter Russian coercion through a posture that builds on rapid deployments and decisive manoeuvres.

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<sup>56</sup> Diesen, 'Det militære instrument...', p. 52.

Even though ‘filling the military vacuum in Finnmark’<sup>57</sup> may entail risks for more peacetime provocations or tension, the imperative of gaining an early and decisive engagement with Russian forces seems to be more important than ‘buying time for terrain’ as during the 1980s. Avoiding a protracted crisis can also be seen within the context of how exercises become more ‘militarised.’ Rather than blending civilian and military instruments of power, i.e. the ‘softer’ components from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (diplomacy) or the Ministry of Justice and Public Security (police forces), into a more comprehensive game of bargaining,<sup>58</sup> military deterrence and a ‘show of force’ seem to dominate.<sup>59</sup> This is a strategy that by default may turn into *deterrence by punishment* rather than *deterrence by denial*.<sup>60</sup> Within the Army in particular, escalation of a crisis that ends in a decisive battle seems more important than exercises aiming to communicate restraint and maintain a sort of ‘crisis stability.’<sup>61</sup>

The gradual erosion of a sustainable force that may be used in a bilateral bargaining process *vis-à-vis* Russia can explain why Norwegian exercises communicate increased robustness. By rapidly bringing combat-ready forces closer to the border, a potential invader is faced with the prospect of a short but decisive high intensity battle. Military exercises rehearsing in Finnmark, such as the *Joint Viking* exercises in 2015 and 2017, are thereby a form of political signalling to Russia: either to abstain from coercion or risk a rapid escalation that may easily escalate into an Article 5 operation. Military weakness thereby seems to accelerate a more robust defence strategy on NATO’s Northern flank.

## An Institutional Perspective – Bringing the Battle to NATO

Liberal institutionalists claim that rules and regulations – both formal

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57 Gjeseth, *Hæren i omveltning*, p. 150.

58 Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, pp. 92–126.

59 Pettersen, ‘Sivil-militær samordning...’ p. 72; Larsen, ‘Hæren i sikkerhetspolitiske kriser...’ pp. 70-73; interviews with Wågan and Stai.

60 Tamnes, ‘Amerikanerne ute, ...’

61 Larsen, ‘Hæren i sikkerhetspolitiske kriser...’ pp. 70-73.

and informal – play a crucial role in states' calculations. Institutional arrangements, such as NATO's formal consultancy mechanisms, are thereby not ends in themselves. Rather, for Norway as for any other NATO member, the collective arrangements are means to secure their interests. According to this perspective, institutions like NATO cannot make the anarchical 'self-help system' free from fear and uncertainty, only more predictable. Even though Norway, Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania aim for collective security gains *vis-à-vis* Russia, the same allies also compete with each other. US forces are scarce; Pentagon priorities may easily change from one theatre to another, and attention may vary from one administration to another. To Norway, this uncertainty has intensified over the past years. This is partly because 'the Russian factor' is more pronounced in the East than in the North. But it is also because NATO readiness and reinforcement plans are less developed in the Baltic region, a theatre that operationally is less accessible than the High North. For a small ally on NATO's northern flank, it means the unpleasant experience of competing with Poland and the Baltic states for US attention and assurance.<sup>62</sup> This so-called 'beauty contest' *vis-à-vis* the Pentagon and US State Department does not, however, follow transparent or formal lines of institutional cooperation.

On the contrary, the competition takes place within an increasingly fluctuating, fragmented and 'multi-layered' alliance.<sup>63</sup> This is an alliance where decisions are made informally, often without the transparent and collective participation from smaller members. According to Norway's Senior Military Representative in NATO's Military Committee, NATO has become little more than a political meeting point with limited military relevance.<sup>64</sup>

The desire to avoid a possible *fait accompli* in the event of protracted

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62 Heier, 'Influence and marginalization...', pp. 129–145.

63 Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe Since 1945*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 281–293.

64 Robert Mood, 'Skal vi fortsette med hodet i sanden?', *Aftenposten* (23 August 2016) <http://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/debatt/Kronikk-Skal-vi-fortsette-med-hodet-i-sanden--Robert-Mood-602672b.html>, accessed 20 May 2017.



or indecisive consultations in NATO may therefore explain the slide towards more robust deterrence and less restraint in the High North. Rehearsing a rapid increase in the level of violence may more easily convince hesitant allies that immediate action is required in order to sustain NATO credibility. Exercises aiming to trigger NATO's Article 5 thereby reflect a paradox: Norwegian forces depend increasingly on assistance from allies who will not necessarily come to Norway's aid – unless there is a conflict large enough to impact own interests. As pointed out by the Norwegian MoD, therefore, 'more than ever we depend upon NATO and the seamless integration between national defence efforts and allied reinforcements'; large-scale exercises are key to make this transition credible.<sup>65</sup> The gradual erosion of a sovereign force, which increasingly depends upon effective consultancy mechanisms, has therefore led to exercises seeking to overcome collective indecisiveness. By lowering the threshold for how much force Russia must use to trigger allied confrontation, NATO's institutional credibility is tied more explicitly to increasingly small – or, in the eyes of sceptical allies in the South, insignificant – disputes in the High North.

Preparing for allied indecisiveness through a strategy of rapid escalation may have increased even more in light of Russia's increased capacity to mix hard and soft power tools. Even though the so-called 'hybrid warfare concept' (Hoffman 2007) is too vague to explain Russian intentions and capabilities,<sup>66</sup> it nevertheless aggregates and exploits collective ambiguity within NATO's chain of command. Targeting one of NATO's weakest spots, effective decision-making processes among 29 member states is particularly exposed. By downplaying the role of overt conventional force, Russia's bargaining power *vis-à-vis* Norway is strengthened through the coherent use of 'little green men,' deception, subversion, Cable Network

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65 Ine Marie Søreide Eriksen, 'Norway, NATO and the Crisis in Ukraine,' speech at Chatham House, London, 2 May 2014, <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/Speech-at-Chatham-House-London-Norway-NATO-and-the-Crisis-in-Ukraine/id758246/>, accessed 5 September 2017; John Andreas Olsen (red.), 'NATO and the North Atlantic. Revitalising Collective Defence,' *Whitehall Paper* No. 87, London, RUSI, 2017.

66 Bettina Renz & Hannah Smith, 'Russia and Hybrid Warfare – Going Beyond the Label,' *Aleksanteri Papers*, no. 1, 2016, p. 1.

Attacks and psychological operations.<sup>67</sup> As allied threat perceptions may become blurred in London, Paris, Rome and Washington DC, prospects for highly different interpretations of Russian manoeuvres increase accordingly.

When will a national crisis finally be defined as a NATO responsibility?<sup>68</sup> Throughout the period, therefore, Norwegian exercises have, albeit rather unconsciously, reflected this apprehension. Imperative in Norwegian exercises has been the effort to test and clarify the nature of the threat, deploy a ‘tripwire’ near the critical area, and rapidly escalate the dispute into a war-like situation to activate Article IV (*consultation*) or Article 5 (*collective military assistance*) in the Washington Treaty.

Underscored by more agile forces and offensive manoeuvres closer to the Russian border, Norway’s reinigorated *Threshold Defence Concept* can therefore be interpreted within the liberal context of institutional uncertainty. It can be claimed that the friction arising within a consensus-based alliance of 29 members has made Norwegian exercises more robust. Lowering the threshold for how much force Russia must employ before Norway gets ‘a hook in the nose of the US’ may easily lead to a spiral of increased mistrust and tension. This may, from a small state perspective, be crucial in order to avoid, or preclude, ambiguous situations where subtle threats or minor incidents between Russia and Norway end up in a vacuum. For a small force that cannot afford effective operations for more than a few days, a rapid and decisive outcome before the force collapses is highly critical.

The Norwegian case is illustrative of the post-Cold War security environment on NATO’s Northern and Eastern flanks; smaller allies become increasingly apprehensive as own forces disintegrate due to rising

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67 Julian Lindley-French, ‘Could Britain Respond Strategically To Russian Aggression?’ in Janne Haaland Matlary and Tormod Heier (eds), *Ukraine and Beyond: Russia’s Security Challenge to Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2016), pp. 101-127.

68 Tormod Heier, ‘The Logic of Asymmetry: Russia’s Approach Towards NATO,’ in Janne Haaland Matlary & Tormod Heier (eds.), *Ukraine and Beyond. Russia’s Strategic Security Challenge to Europe*, London, Palgrave, 2016, pp. 265-287.

military expenditure. Stirred by fear of Russian assertiveness along its borders, the quest for rapid access to US forces is thereby increasing. This again, it may be argued, stirs a 'cult of the offensive' among smaller allies, because institutional uncertainty generates incentives for making more 'noise' early on in a crisis life-cycle.

## Conclusion

Using Norway as a case study, this paper has analysed changes in military exercises on NATO's Northern flank between 2008 and 2016. Based on empirical evidence, which conclusions can be drawn more generally?

Norway's 'body language' – as scrutinised through *Presence, Posture* and *Profile* – suggests that war planning and exercises have changed. The key finding is that Norway has fewer military options available that can be used in a calibrated and discriminate manner to achieve limited political objectives on its own territory. As a consequence, the strategy has changed and so have the exercises. From pursuing a defensive strategy during the Cold War, contemporary motives and calculations indicate a change towards a more robust and direct course of action. Rather than waiting for a Russian attack as during the Cold War,<sup>69</sup> exercises signify a more proactive attitude earlier on in a crisis.

The military 'body language' thereby communicates a gradual slide towards more resolve and less restraint – from *deterrence by denial* to *deterrence of punishment*. Even though they started to change during the late 1990s, Russia's assertiveness in the High North, and hence its willingness to use force against Georgia and Ukraine, accelerated the trend. The 'Russian factor' is nevertheless inadequate to explain the entire reorientation. Realist explanations have emphasised military shortcomings inside the Norwegian Armed Forces; lack of sustainability urges the training audience to reach for decisive outcomes earlier on in a

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69 Gjeseth, *Hæren i omveltning*, p. 18; Bogen & Håkenstad, *Balansegang*, pp. 29-31.

potential crisis. The combination and integration of both diplomatic and military considerations thereby seem to have become more separated. Rather than solving crises peacefully in a discriminating manner where many options are available, a vulnerable force is more likely to escalate minor disputes to deter Russia from further coercion.

Moreover, by emphasising the institutional fragmentation in NATO, liberal explanations have reinforced the Realist interpretation. Reaching a decisive outcome is due not only to military vulnerabilities at home, but also to fear of allied abandonment abroad. Tardy and indecisive decision-making processes in NATO, as well as poorly trained command structures,<sup>70</sup> may easily lead to a Norwegian *fait accompli* in the High North.

Throughout the 2000s, many NATO members have experienced the same situation as Norway. For NATO members on the eastern and northern flank, therefore, it may be claimed that this is not a typical High North phenomenon. The combined impact of military vulnerability at home and institutional uncertainty inside a rather fragmented NATO command structure may underpin robust courses of action. This is particularly so among dependent NATO member states situated on Russia's rim. As NATO-Europe's military bargaining power has declined domestically and institutionally, displaying resolve has become more important than showing restraint *vis-à-vis* Russia. Unable to forge a credible force even for a short period of time, the slide from restraint to resolve can be seen as a paradox. Thus, while small states with limited capabilities might be expected to choose restraint to avoid tension and prospects for defeat, they chose the opposite: a more assertive strategy of deterrence in sensitive borderlands closer to the main opponent.

'Lessons learned' for NATO's future exercises may therefore be of a double nature. Firstly, exercises should put more effort into reinvigorating NATO's integrated command structure. More expertise on the seamless integration between national and allied responsibilities is likely to have

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70 Svein Efstad, 'Norway and the North Atlantic: Defence of the Northern Flank,' in Olsen, (ed.), 'NATO and the North Atlantic...', pp. 67, 70-71.

a reassuring effect. This is particularly so among smaller member states, which suffer from military inferiority, and occasionally feel exposed to Russian pressure along their borders. Secondly, exercises should also contain a more complex set of scenarios that goes beyond the rather one-dimensional effort of escalating a minor crisis as ‘deterrence fails.’ The ability to exercise a calibrated and discriminate response in accordance with political and diplomatic efforts, up and down the chain of command, is crucial to preclude unnecessary tension and provocation along NATO’s flanks.



## 10

Exercise *BALTOPS*:  
Reassurance and Deterrence  
in a Contested Littoral<sup>1</sup>

*Ryan W. French and Peter Dombrowski*

In June 2016, ships and aircraft from the United States and 16 NATO allies and partners converged on the Baltic Sea for two weeks of naval warfare drills. Colloquially known as *BALTOPS*—short for ‘BALtic OPERATIONs’—the exercise has been held annually since the early 1970s. The *BALTOPS* naval exercises are U.S.-led and involve a shifting collection of Baltic nations and NATO members (see table below). *BALTOPS* 16, like its predecessors, was a long-planned and well-publicized event. Nevertheless, Russia condemned the maneuvers of June 2016 as provocative while dispatching aircraft and a pair of spy ships to keep a watchful eye.<sup>2</sup> For the next two weeks, tensions ran high for the sailors and commanding officers on both sides. After all, in April of the previous year, Russia had conducted two dangerous overflights of the USS *Donald Cook* while it was sailing in international waters off Kaliningrad in the Baltic Sea. Moscow had also shown a tendency to order retaliatory ‘snap exercises’ in response to perceived instances of NATO muscle-flexing.<sup>3</sup> Some thought that *BALTOPS* 16 might provoke a similar reaction by

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1 The authors would like to thank those who commented on earlier drafts of this chapter, particularly Peter Swartz, Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, Beatrice Heuser, and all project participants.

2 David Larter, ‘NATO Runs Massive Baltic Exercise with Little Russian Meddling,’ *Navy Times*, June 15, 2016, <https://www.navytimes.com/story/military/2016/06/15/russians-muted-baltops-2016-navy-james-foggio/85928398>.

3 Jörgen Elfving, ‘Russia’s June 2016 Snap Exercise: Same Old Story, but With a New Touch,’ *Jamestown Foundation: Eurasia Daily Monitor* vol. 13, no. 117 (29 June 2016).

the Russian military. The potential for a miscalculation or incident at sea could not be ruled out.

Ironically, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and up until 2013, Russia had been a frequent participant in *BALTOPS*. Since then, however, relations between NATO and Russia have degraded steadily. Moscow's ongoing support for the insurgency in eastern Ukraine, its efforts to prop up the regime of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, and its alleged violations of the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty are among many points of contention. And in recent years, security scholars and defense analysts have worried that Russia—emboldened by its successful annexation of Crimea in 2014—might set its sights on the vulnerable Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Pundits have labeled the new state of East-West affairs as 'Cold War 2.0.'<sup>4</sup>

Against this backdrop, the *BALTOPS* of 2016 served multiple functions. As one would expect, it served a routine training purpose for the participating sailors, submariners, and aviators. Further, it promoted interoperability among the participating navies. Perhaps most important, the exercise served an important political function closely related to the deepening crisis in U.S.-Russian relations and, in a wider context, Europe's growing awareness of an emerging Russian threat. It helped demonstrate the U.S. commitment to the defense of its Baltic allies and its commitment to the NATO as a whole, while also signaling Alliance solidarity to Russia.

This chapter analyzes *BALTOPS* to help understand the strategic importance of multilateral naval exercises. We begin with an overview of the geopolitical context in the Baltic Sea region to help explain the present-day tensions and demonstrate why the Baltic is seen as a potential flashpoint for conflict. We then provide a historical review of *BALTOPS*

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Evan Osnos, David Remnick, and Joshua Yaffa, 'Trump, Putin, and the New Cold War,' *The New Yorker*, 6 March, 2017, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/03/06/trump-putin-and-the-new-cold-war>; Michael Crowley, 'Putin's Revenge,' *Politico Magazine*, 16 December 2016, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/12/russia-putin-hack-dnc-clinton-election-2016-cold-war-214532>. For a scholarly account, see Robert Legvold, *Return to Cold War*, London: Polity Press, 2016.



and close with a conceptual discussion of *BALTOPS*' value for reassuring allies, building partnerships, and deterring adversaries.

## NATO-Russia Rivalry and the Baltic Sea: A Brief Introduction

After an extended period of calm following the collapse of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact, the Baltic Sea and its littoral have returned to their traditional position as a flashpoint between the East and the West.<sup>5</sup> The Baltic Sea has long been a strategic transit point for maritime commerce between western and eastern Europe, ranging from finished goods to raw materials such as timber, minerals, and herring. Across the ebbs and flows of European military history—from the Middle Ages to World Wars I and II—states have long competed for dominance of the Baltic Sea as a means for access and resupply of their deployed land forces. As such, Russia, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, and the United Kingdom have all waged war in the Baltic Sea and its surrounding littoral.

The proximate cause for the re-emergence of the Baltic Sea as a potential arena of conflict was the Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea in 2014, coupled with Moscow's ongoing support for the insurgency in eastern Ukraine. Russia's unwillingness to respect Ukrainian sovereignty and its subsequent truculence in the face of U.S and European sanctions sent shockwaves across the Russian rimlands, from Central Asia to the Nordic region. National leaders and security analysts alike wondered where and when the next incident of Russian territorial aggression would occur. Nowhere were these fears felt more intensely than in the small Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Estonia, after all, had been the subject of Russian cyber attacks in 2007—and although these attacks fell short of contemporary definitions of an act of war, they crashed several websites belonging to Estonian banks, universities, newspapers, and government ministries.

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5 Toivo Miljan, 'East vs. West: Political and Military Strategy and the Baltic Littoral,' *Journal of Baltic Studies* vol. 12, no. 1 (Fall 1981), p. 209.

In the United States, a vigorous debate emerged as to whether it was possible for NATO to deter Russia from seizing one or more of the Baltic states. Complicating the discourse were questions over whether a Russian land-grab would come in the form of an overt invasion or a more sophisticated form of hybrid warfare, which ‘relies on proxies and surrogates to prevent attribution and intent, and to maximize confusion and uncertainty.’<sup>6</sup> In the maritime domain, especially in a closed sea like the Baltic, hybrid warfare could prove difficult to counter because Russia could use a combination of geography and anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities to isolate the region.<sup>7</sup> A team from the RAND Corporation, for example, analyzed the possibility of a conventional land attack and found that U.S. and NATO forces were inadequate to either deter or prevail if Russia chose to invade the former Soviet republics.<sup>8</sup>

Navalists have also assumed, self-servingly, that it would be virtually impossible to defend the Baltic states on land. Russia could marshal too much land and air power, too quickly for the states themselves to resist or for NATO reinforcements to arrive—assuming, of course, that NATO possessed the political will to invoke Article 5.<sup>9</sup> The role of the Russian Navy in any Baltic offensive, however, remains a question mark. Officially, the U.S. Navy has been relatively cautious in interpreting what Russia’s naval modernization means, although top-end strategy documents now identify Russia as a threat to peace and good order at sea.<sup>10</sup> Analysts are aware that the Russian Navy is in the midst of a renaissance from its post-

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6 Andrew Monaghan, ‘Putin’s Way of War: The ‘War’ in Russia’s ‘Hybrid Warfare,’ *Parameters* vol. 45, no. 4 (Winter 2015-16), p. 66.

7 Gary Schaub, Jr., Martin Murphy, and Frank G. Hoffman, ‘Hybrid Maritime Warfare: Building Baltic Resilience,’ *RUSI Journal* vol. 162, no. 1 (February/March 2017), pp. 32-40.

8 David A. Shlapak and Michael Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO’s Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics*, document no. RR-1253-A, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016.

9 Alexander Alden, Michael Kofman, and Joshua Tallis, *CNA Series on Seapower: The Baltic Case*, Arlington, VA: CNA Corporation, November 2016.

10 Peter Dombrowski, ‘Peer Competition: USN Views on Russian Naval Activity Evolve,’ *Jane’s Navy International*, August 18, 2016, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1781655>; ‘A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower,’ Department of the Navy and U.S. Coast Guard, March 2015, <http://www.navy.mil/local/maritime/150227-CS21R-Final.pdf>; John M. Richardson, ‘A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority: Version 1.0,’ Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, January 2016, [http://www.navy.mil/cno/docs/cno\\_stg.pdf](http://www.navy.mil/cno/docs/cno_stg.pdf).

Cold War atrophy, but they are careful not to overestimate the potential threat, especially outside Russia's coastal waters and inland seas.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, many analysts recognize that the combination of revived naval capabilities and land-based threats to the maritime domain (including aircraft and missiles) amount to an A2/AD threat.<sup>12</sup> As Thomas Fedyszyn concludes, 'Today's Russian Navy is neither midget nor monster, but increasingly acts as a reflection of President Vladimir Putin's character and bolsters his more outrageous gambits. Thus, it is threatening beyond the bounds of its own capability.'<sup>13</sup> The Russian Navy's shifting posture is evidenced by an increased willingness to deploy aggressively throughout its near seas—for instance, the May 2017 deployment of three warships 12 nautical miles off the Latvian coast.<sup>14</sup> Notably, this incident occurred less than one month before the kickoff of *BALTOPS 17*.

Predictably, Russia's theoretical threat to the Baltic region has increased the pace of defense preparations in the West. The United States and NATO have reached agreements to station more ground troops in the region (largely symbolic numbers), increase the rotational presence of U.S. forces, and conduct more exercises and training to improve readiness. These efforts, known collectively as Operation Atlantic Resolve, have been funded by the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI), launched by President Barack Obama in 2014 as a 'powerful demonstration of

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11 Dmitry Gorenburg, 'No, the Russian Navy Isn't Going to Collapse,' *War on the Rocks*, 2 February 2015, <https://warontherocks.com/2015/02/no-the-russian-navy-isnt-going-to-collapse>. Gorenburg's post is largely a response to an article arguing that the Russian Navy was and is in deep trouble. See David Axe, 'The Russian Navy Is on the Verge of Collapse: Big Ships Age Out and Moscow Can't Replace Them,' *War is Boring*, 18 January 2015, <https://medium.com/war-is-boring/the-russian-navy-is-on-the-verge-of-collapse-b0ce344ebf96>

12 The growing literature includes, from a variety of perspectives, Alexander Lanoszka and Michael A. Hunzeker, 'Confronting the Anti-Access/Area Denial and Precision Strike Challenge in the Baltic Region,' *RUSI Journal* vol. 161, no. 5 (October/November 2016): 12-8; Martin Zapfe and Michael Carl Haas, 'Access for Allies? NATO, Russia and the Baltics,' *RUSI Journal* vol. 161, no. 3 (June/July 2016): 34-41; and Stephan Frühling and Guillaume Lasconjarias, 'NATO, A2/AD and the Kaliningrad Challenge,' *Survival* vol. 58, no. 2, April/May 2016. p. 95-116.

13 Thomas Fedyszyn, 'Putin's 'Potemkin-Plus' Navy,' *Proceedings* vol. 142, no. 5, May 2016, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2016-05/putins-potemkin-plus-navy>.

14 Doug G. Ware, 'Russian Warships Spotted in Baltic NATO Waters, Latvia Says,' UPI, May 8, 2017, [http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/World-News/2017/05/08/Russian-warships-spotted-in-Baltic-NATO-waters-Latvia-says/9341494285894](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2017/05/08/Russian-warships-spotted-in-Baltic-NATO-waters-Latvia-says/9341494285894).

America's unshakable commitment to our NATO allies.<sup>15</sup> In subsequent years, the United States increased funding for ERI, including \$3.42 billion in 2017 through the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) account.<sup>16</sup>

Despite American and NATO efforts to project a unified front, analysts remain wary given the extent of Russia's military modernization program and the apparent willingness of the Putin regime to provoke the West.<sup>17</sup> As John Deni observed relative to the ground components of ERI, the 'expansion plan suffers from several shortcomings, including its relatively small size in comparison to the conventional threat presented by Russia across the border, and the intention to disperse it across six countries in northeastern and southeastern Europe.'<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the Obama administration did not rule out further withdrawals of American troops, platforms, and equipment stationed in Europe in the future. The outlook for ERI is particularly uncertain under the Trump administration, which has called for NATO countries to spend more on their own defense.<sup>19</sup>

Despite its shortcomings, the ERI has yielded tangible benefits. In the maritime domain, Operation Atlantic Resolve has resulted in increased

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15 'Barack Obama Earmarks \$1bn to Boost U.S. Military Presence in Europe,' *The Telegraph* (United Kingdom), 3 June 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/barackobama/10873636/Barack-Obama-earmarks-1bn-to-boost-US-military-presence-in-Europe.html>; 'European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) Fact Sheet,' U.S. European Command Public Affairs Office, 5 January 2017, <http://www.eucom.mil/media-library/document/35544/eri-fact-sheet>.

16 ERI funding included OCO to avoid triggering offsetting cuts required under current budget rules, despite the fact that, by the Obama administration's own rules, ERI should not have been eligible for OCO. Mark F. Cancian and Lisa Sawyer Samp, 'The European Reassurance Initiative,' Center for Strategic and International Studies, 9 February 2016, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/european-reassurance-initiative-0>.

17 Dmitri Trenin, 'The Revival of the Russian Military: How Moscow Reloaded,' *Foreign Affairs* vol. 95, no. 3, May/June 2016, pp. 23-9.

18 John R. Deni, 'Modifying America's Forward Presence in Eastern Europe,' *Parameters* vol. 46, no. 1, Spring 2016, p. 48.

19 U.S. Department of State, 'NATO Foreign Ministerial Intervention Remarks,' Secretary of State's Remarks, 31 March 2017, <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2017/03/269339.htm>. The 'Wales Pledge' refers to a September 2014 declaration issued by the participants of a North Atlantic Council meeting in Wales. The declaration states, 'Allies whose current proportion of GDP spent on defence is below [two percent] will: halt any decline in defence expenditure; aim to increase defence expenditure in real terms as GDP grows; [and] aim to move towards the 2% guideline within a decade with a view to meeting their NATO Capability Targets and filling NATO's capability shortfalls.' See 'Wales Summit Declaration,' North Atlantic Treaty Organization (news release), 5 September 2014, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm)

‘participation by the U.S. Navy in NATO naval force deployments, including more persistent deployments to the Black and Baltic seas.’<sup>20</sup> Moreover, military exercises designed to improve operational readiness have grown in number and intensity. According to an ERI fact sheet published by U.S. European Command, ‘The 2017 budget expands the scope of 28 joint and multi-national exercises, which annually trains more than 18,000 U.S. personnel alongside 45,000 NATO allies and Partnership for Peace personnel across 40 countries.’ In addition to exercise scope, the ERI has fostered ‘increased participation of allied and partner nation’s Navies in multinational exercises’ and improved ‘infrastructure to support P-8A [maritime patrol aircraft] operations.’<sup>21</sup> One exercise that has benefited from this expansion is *BALTOPS*, the annual, multilateral naval drill with origins dating to the Cold War.

### *BALTOPS* in Focus

The *BALTOPS* series originated during the Cold War as part of a U.S. effort to demonstrate its commitment to Europe’s northern tier and—at least potentially—an ability to strike Soviet territory. Mindful of the Soviet Baltic Fleet headquartered in Kaliningrad, the United States assumed that ‘in any general war in Europe, Warsaw Pact powers would attempt to seize the islands in the straits leading into the Baltic ... to ensure their ships could break out into the Atlantic.’<sup>22</sup> U.S. and NATO forces, therefore, would have a vested interest in immediately ‘bottling up’ the Baltic Sea if conflict broke out. Accordingly, some scholars have characterized the Baltic Sea as one of the Cold War’s ‘main geostrategic “battlegrounds” between NATO and the Warsaw Pact’<sup>23</sup>—perhaps not as

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20 ‘Operation Atlantic Resolve (2014),’ U.S. European Command, Communication and Engagement Directorate, January 29, 2015, <https://goo.gl/opuhzB>.

21 ‘European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) Fact Sheet.’ The capabilities of the P-8 *Poseidon* maritime patrol aircraft include anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare, shipping interdiction, and electronic support measures.

22 Alan Dooley, ‘Into the Bear’s Backyard,’ *All Hands*, May 1986, p. 29.

23 Luis Simón, ‘Assessing NATO’s Eastern European ‘Flank,’ *Parameters* vol. 44, no. 3, Autumn 2014, p. 71.

strategically paramount as the Fulda gap or the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap, but significant nonetheless.<sup>24</sup>

*BALTOPS* traces its proximate origins to May 1971, when the anti-submarine warfare carrier USS *Intrepid*—escorted by three destroyers—steamed into the Baltic Sea and conducted flight operations for training and demonstration purposes against the Soviet Union. Surveillance by Soviet air and naval platforms was heavy, and according to the website Nukestrat, the *Intrepid* ‘reportedly sailed within 20 miles of the Soviet coast.’<sup>25</sup> The operation seems to have been authorized at the highest levels of the U.S. government, according to a declassified April 1971 teleconference in which Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger discussed an imminent ‘movement into the Baltic.’<sup>26</sup>

During this period, the U.S.-Soviet naval rivalry was heating up. In 1961, the Soviet Navy had begun a doctrinal shift to forward deployment under the direction of Admiral Sergey Gorshkov. The intent of this new deployment pattern was to insulate the homeland from seaborne attack by situating any future East-West naval confrontation as far from the Soviet shoreline as possible.<sup>27</sup> Implementation of the new ‘forward policy’ began in the mid- to late-1960s, and by 1971, a ‘[new] pattern of deployment was clearly established,’ with Soviet naval visits to shore facilities in Cuba, Guinea, and Somalia, as well as increased presence in the Norwegian Sea and Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, up until the early 1970s the Soviet Union had enjoyed a ‘progressive improvement in terms of

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24 During the Cold War, the Fulda gap was the region along the inner-German border that NATO hypothesized would be the focal point of any Warsaw Pact ground invasion. The Greenland-Iceland-UK gap (also known as the GIUK gap) is a naval chokepoint and doorway between the Norwegian Sea and the northern Atlantic Ocean. It is a likely transit vector for Russian submarines in an East-West conflict scenario.

25 Hans M. Kristensen, ‘The Visit by USS *Intrepid* (CVS-11) to Copenhagen, 1971,’ The Nuclear Information Project, <http://www.nukestrat.com/dk/intrepid.htm>, accessed on 26 II 2018.

26 David C. Geyer and Edward C. Keefer, eds., ‘Soviet Union, October 1970–October 1971,’ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, vol. XXIII, Washington, DC, Department of State, 2011, p. 529.

27 Bryan Ranft and Geoffrey Till, *The Sea in Soviet Strategy*, 2nd ed., London: Macmillan Press, 1989, p. 184.

28 Michael McCgwire, ‘The Rationale for the Development of Soviet Seapower,’ *Journal of the Australian Naval Institute* vol. 5, no. 2, May 1979, p. 15.

numbers and combat effectiveness.<sup>29</sup> In keeping with the forward policy, in April-May 1970, the Soviet Navy held exercise *OKEAN-70*, which involved 200 surface and sub-surface vessels, hundreds of land-based aircraft, and simulated anti-submarine warfare, anti-carrier warfare, and amphibious assault operations.<sup>30</sup> The exercise took place simultaneously in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans, as well as the Mediterranean Sea, and served as a 'vivid demonstration of the Soviet Union's naval capacity for global reach.'<sup>31</sup>

Despite the hostile intent that the West divined from Soviet activities such as *OKEAN-70*, Moscow viewed the Baltic region as more of a defensive arena rather than an offensive launch pad. Although the Baltic Fleet was traditionally one of the premier fighting arms of the Russian Navy, its relative importance had decreased following the development of nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) and the establishment of a bastion strategy in the North and Arctic Seas. Russia's Baltic naval, air, and land forces were intended to prevent NATO from holding East Germany, Poland, and the Baltic Soviet republics at risk from the sea.<sup>32</sup> To the west of the Baltic, the Warsaw Pact armed forces exercised amphibious and air operations to seize and hold the Jutland Peninsula, and from there to control the straits that provide the only exit to the North Sea from the Baltic.<sup>33</sup>

Soviet intentions notwithstanding, from 1972 onward, the United States institutionalized *BALTOPS* as an annual multilateral naval exercise. The core participants during the 1970s and 1980s were the United States, Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and (West) Germany, and the scope during this period was naval warfare. A

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29 *Ibid.*

30 Norman Polmar, *The Naval Institute Guide to the Soviet Navy*, 5th ed., Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 1991, p. 40.

31 John B. Hattendorf, ed., 'U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1970s: Selected Documents,' *Newport Papers* vol. 30, Newport, RI, Naval War College, 2007, ix.

32 Ola Tunander, *Cold War Politics: The Maritime Strategy and Geopolitics of the Northern Front* London, Sage Publications, 1989, pp. 27-30.

33 Beatrice Heuser, 'Warsaw Pact Military Doctrines in the 1970s and 1980s: Findings in the East German Archives,' *Comparative Strategy* vol. 12, no. 4, October/December 1993, pp.437-57.

declassified State Department cable, for example, noted that *BALTOPS 75* was focused on anti-air, anti-submarine, and electronic warfare, as well as anti-fast patrol boat (FPB) operations.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, the final report for *BALTOPS 77* identified the exercise's objectives as (1) training, (2) intelligence collection on observing Warsaw Pact naval forces, (3) crosstell information, (4) communications tests, (5) low flyer detection, and (6) surface gunnery.<sup>35</sup> The typical format for the exercise involved simulated allied naval operations against an 'opposing force' comprised of Danish or German FPBs, submarines, and aircraft.<sup>36</sup>

At the same time, *BALTOPS* served key political objectives, particularly the reassurance of treaty allies. As the *BALTOPS 77* operations order states, the drills were meant to 'exercise the right of innocent passage of international straits and to reaffirm the U.S. commitment to Northern Europe.'<sup>37</sup> This duality of routine military training and political signaling is a common feature of multilateral exercises in the modern era. Yet care was also taken to avoid provoking a miscalculation with the Soviet Union. During *BALTOPS 75*, participating ships were directed to maintain a 25 nautical mile operating buffer from the Soviet coastline, and live-fire gunnery exercises were forbidden in the Baltic Sea itself. Furthermore, many maneuvers were held in the western extremes of the Baltic—the Skagerrak strait and Kattegat.<sup>38</sup>

Across *BALTOPS'* forty-plus-year history, the exercise has consistently focused on honing allied readiness, interoperability, and warfighting skills. To this day, the curriculum features anti-surface, anti-submarine, and anti-air warfare; naval gunnery; mine counter-measures; and related

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34 Secretary of State, 'Naval Exercise in Baltic,' declassified cable 1975STATE250032 (U.S. National Archives), 21 October 1975.

35 Commander, Destroyer Squadron Four, *BALTOPS-77: Final Report*, Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 1977, pp. 2-4.

36 Michael T. Johnson, *BALTOPS: Exercising Regional Engagement in the Baltic Sea*, Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 1996, p. 2. This document is a quick-response report and states that its data, analysis, and findings are subject to change.

37 Commander, Destroyer Squadron Four, *BALTOPS Operations Order 1-77*, Washington, DC, Department of the Navy, 1977, pp. 2-4.

38 Secretary of State, 'Naval Exercise in Baltic.'



competencies. Nevertheless, many facets of the exercise have changed over the decades as U.S.-Russian tensions and global geopolitical dynamics have ebbed and flowed. We identify three main inflection points in the exercise's history—the end of the Cold War, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea.

Following the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, *BALTOPS* transformed from a strict warfighting exercise into a tool for political engagement with former Soviet republics on the Baltic rim. In 1993, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Russia participated in *BALTOPS* for the first time, at the invitation of NATO. A particular highlight of *BALTOPS* 93 was an at-sea transfer of American sailors to the Russian *Krivak*-class ship *Bditel'niy*.<sup>39</sup> *BALTOPS* 93 was also a watershed moment for the exercise's overall design, as the addition of new, non-NATO participants necessitated dividing the maneuvers into two phases. The first phase was open to all participants and involved 'communications, [search and rescue] procedures, and other peacetime activities.' The second phase, which was restricted to U.S., Danish, and German forces only, continued to underscore warfighting, namely 'anti-air, anti-submarine, anti-surface warfare and mine countermeasures training.'<sup>40</sup>

The following year, the *BALTOPS* newcomers (including Russia) joined NATO's 'Partnership for Peace' (PfP)—a program seeking to build trust between NATO members and the countries of the former Soviet Union. Throughout the remainder of the 1990s, *BALTOPS*' curriculum expanded to include 'soft' (i.e., non-traditional) security skills such as disaster relief, search and rescue, and peacekeeping, and the number of participating ships grew from three dozen to approximately 50. Partnership building was achieved, in part, through ship-to-ship personnel exchanges.<sup>41</sup> Commenting on the occasion of *BALTOPS* 94, a Dutch Navy participant remarked, 'Exercises like *BALTOPS* help us

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39 Denny Banister, 'Russians, Americans Speak the Same Language in Baltic,' *All Hands*, November 1993, pp. 30-1.

40 'Baltic States Will Take Part in U.S. Exercise,' *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 12 June 1993.

41 Norris Jones, 'Friendships in the Baltic Sea,' *All Hands*, November 1995, 34-5.

understand each other better, increasing the chances that one day we will be able to share the burden of UN-flagged operations with our former opponents.<sup>42</sup> In 2001, the series marked a high point in East-West relations when Russia participated in the traditionally NATO-only second phase.<sup>43</sup>

*BALTOPS*' drift toward non-traditional security continued after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. A sea-based counterterrorism module was added to *BALTOPS* 02,<sup>44</sup> and in 2003, a simulated non-combatant evacuation order (NEO) was included. The NEO module incorporated a mock insurgency, which became a recurring feature of the exercise throughout the 2000s.<sup>45</sup> However, due in part to the financial and logistical strain of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the average number of participating ships during this decade fell to approximately 30, down from the 50-ship highs seen in the late 1990s. By the mid-2010s *BALTOPS* also suffered as the U.S. Navy had difficulty finding ships to contribute; one reason for the difficulty was the diminished number of ships assigned to the U.S. 6th Fleet. Another was the increasing workload for those ships assigned to the European theater. Finally, the demand for ships in other theaters, especially the Greater Middle East and the western Pacific, meant that the availability of American ships for short-term deployments was limited, even when transiting through European waters.<sup>46</sup> Of note, Russia participated regularly in *BALTOPS* during this period, up until 2013 (with the exception of 2009 due to tensions with the West over the 2008 Russo-Georgian War).

*BALTOPS* underwent three major changes following Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea. First, the exercise reemphasized naval warfighting. *BALTOPS* 15, for instance, included an amphibious landing and low-

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42 'East Joins West to Test Naval Co-operation,' *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 25 June 1994.

43 'Baltic Operations (*BALTOPS*),' GlobalSecurity.org, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/baltops.htm>. Of note, Russian participation took a brief hiatus between 1998 and 2000.

44 'In Brief – '*BALTOPS* 2002' Begins,' *Jane's Defence Weekly*, June 12, 2002.

45 Commander, Carrier Group Eight Public Affairs, 'Exercising for the Future in the Baltic,' Navy.mil (news release), July 1, 2003, [http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story\\_id=8306](http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=8306).

46 Author interviews, Naples, Italy (October 2016).

altitude B-52 flyovers for sea mine deployment practice.<sup>47</sup> The 2016 iteration reportedly added an extra amphibious landing, as well as two additional submarines.<sup>48</sup> Second, as illustrated in Figure 1 below, the number of participating countries has grown drastically. *BALTOPS* expanded from 10 countries in 2013 to 17 in 2015—among which were a handful of non-Baltic nations such as Belgium, Canada, and Turkey. Third, in a throwback to Cold War tensions, recent U.S. statements on *BALTOPS* have emphasized America's Baltic security commitments, presumably in an effort to reassure regional allies and partners against Russian aggression. For instance, a 2014 U.S. Navy press release noted the exercise 'demonstrates the [U.S.] commitment to the security of northern Europe and the Baltic region.'<sup>49</sup> Similarly, in 2015 Vice Adm. James Foggo, then-commander of 6th Fleet, remarked that *BALTOPS* is 'an important opportunity for our forces, as allies and partners, to enhance our ability to work together and strengthen capabilities required to maintain regional security.'<sup>50</sup> Such coded statements were noticeably absent in years prior, particularly during President Obama's vaunted 'Russian reset.'

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47 Magnus Nordenman, 'Analysis: *BALTOPS* 2015 Highlights New Friction between West, Russia,' USNI News, June 11, 2015, <https://news.usni.org/2015/06/11/analysis-baltops-2015-highlights-new-friction-between-west-russia>.

48 Megan Eckstein, 'Foggo: *BALTOPS* 2016 Includes More Anti-Sub, More Challenging Amphibious Operations,' USNI News, 15 June 2016, [https://news.usni.org/2016/06/15/baltops\\_amphibious\\_challenges](https://news.usni.org/2016/06/15/baltops_amphibious_challenges).

49 U.S. 6th Fleet Public Affairs, '13 Nations to Participate in 42nd Annual Exercise *BALTOPS* 2014,' Navy. mil (news release), June 4, 2014, [http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story\\_id=81410](http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=81410).

50 Megan Eckstein, 'U.S. Led *BALTOPS* 2015 Begins with Heftier Presence than Last Year's Exercise,' USNI News, June 5, 2015, <https://news.usni.org/2015/06/05/u-s-led-baltops-2015-begins-with-heftier-presence-than-last-years-exercise>.

**Figure 1*****BALTOPS: Participating Countries (2010-2016)***

<b>Country</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
Belgium	✓*	✓				✓	✓
Canada						✓	
Denmark	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Estonia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Finland	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
France	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Georgia		✓*	✓		✓	✓	
Germany	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Italy							✓*
Latvia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lithuania	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Netherlands		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Norway						✓	✓
Poland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Portugal							✓*
Russia	✓	✓	✓				
Spain							✓*
Sweden	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Turkey						✓*	
United Kingdom					✓	✓	✓
United States	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Total participants</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>

\* Denotes the first year that country participated in *BALTOPS*

Amid the breakdown in U.S.-Russian relations over the Crimea episode and the Russian-backed insurgency in eastern Ukraine, *BALTOPS* has become a *bête noire* for Moscow. In 2015, Russia signaled

its displeasure with the exercise by overflying NATO ship formations and shadowing them with its own vessels.<sup>51</sup> In 2016, Russia's Ambassador to NATO, Alexander Grushko, slammed *BALTOPS* as evidence of NATO's 'hostile policy' toward Moscow. He went on to warn the exercise 'creates serious risks as we see an absolutely new military reality forming along our border.'<sup>52</sup> Grushko's rhetoric was again supplemented with action, as Russia sent spy ships and aircraft to monitor *BALTOPS* 16.<sup>53</sup> Of course, this rhetoric ignores the fact that Russia had been a frequent participant in *BALTOPS* since the end of the Cold War and well into the Obama administration.

### *BALTOPS*: An Assessment

Exercises are the heart of military life during peacetime. Exercises are especially important for maritime forces, as reflected in the number they conduct annually. The U.S. Navy alone participates in approximately 175 unit exercises per year.<sup>54</sup> The majority of these exercises are *joint* (involving other U.S. military services) and/or *combined* (involving multinational forces). Combined maritime exercises—typically held with allies and partner nations—fall under the rubric of 'theater security cooperation' and are designed to serve a mix of military and political ends (see Figure 2, below).<sup>55</sup>

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51 Kris Osborn, 'Russian Fighter Jets Fly over U.S. Ships during NATO Baltic Exercise,' *Military.com*, 9 June 2015, <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2015/06/09/russian-fighter-jets-fly-over-us-ships-during-nato-baltic.html>

52 'Diplomat Says Russian Threat to NATO Myth,' Russian News Agency TASS, June 6, 2016, <http://tass.com/politics/880404>

53 David Larter, 'NATO Runs Massive Baltic Exercise with Little Russian Meddling,' *Navy Times*, 15 June 2016, <https://www.navytimes.com/story/military/2016/06/15/russians-muted-baltops-2016-navy-james-foggo/85928398>

54 'Exercises – Navy,' *GlobalSecurity.org*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/ex-navy.htm>.

55 According to the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, security cooperation includes 'those activities conducted with allies and friendly nations to build relationships that promote specified U.S. interests; build allied and friendly nation capabilities for self-defense and coalition operations; [and] provide U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access.' Security cooperation might take the form of 'training, combined exercises, operational meetings, contacts and exchanges, security assistance, medical and engineering team engagements, cooperative development, acquisition and technical interchanges, and scientific and technol-

**Figure 2*****Selected Objectives of Combined Maritime Exercises***

<b>Military</b>	<b>Political</b>
Training	Relationship-building  Reassurance  Deterrence
Readiness	
Interoperability	
Capacity-building	

The military aims of combined maritime exercises include training and enhanced readiness. Operating at sea, especially in a confined water space such as the Baltic, requires attention to a complex minuet of practical activities to maximize safety and efficiency. These minuets work best if they occur regularly, and annual exercises provide a useful tool in this respect. Another goal is enhanced interoperability, so as to prepare partner nations for coalition operations. An exercise's curriculum is heavily influenced by the type of interoperability sought by the participants. Whereas *BALTOPS* focuses on traditional warfighting competencies such as naval gunnery, anti-submarine warfare, and mine counter-measures, other exercises focus on command and control requirements or testing new concepts of operations. With certain partners, exercises focus instead on non-traditional security skills, for instance humanitarian assistance,

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ogy collaboration.' Other activities include 'multinational education for U.S. personnel and personnel from other nations,' and 'arms control and treaty monitoring activities.' See Catherine Dale, *In Brief: Clarifying the Concept of 'Partnership' in National Security*, report no. R42516 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 1; Jennifer D. P. Moroney, et al., *A Framework to Assess Programs for Building Partnerships*, report no. MG-863 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009), 3-4; and Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 5-0: Joint Operation Planning* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2006), I-3. For additional background, see Michael Hartmayer and John Hansen, 'Security Cooperation in Support of Theater Strategy,' *Military Review* vol. 93, no. 1 (January/February 2013), 24-9.

disaster relief, maritime search and rescue, and counter-terrorism, depending on regional threat vectors and partner domestic sensitivities.<sup>56</sup> Another reason for exercising with friendly navies is to ‘build partner capacity.’ In the Baltic, this strengthens the region’s ability to fend for itself in future crisis or natural disaster (at least until other European and U.S. military assistance arrives).

As concerns over ‘great power’ conflict—namely, high-end combat at sea—have returned to prominence, non-traditional security missions are being edged out of many U.S.-led naval exercises. This shift is reflected in Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson’s warning that ‘for the first time in twenty-five years, the Navy is engaged in competition for maritime superiority.’<sup>57</sup> Since the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea, for example, *BALTOPS* has reemphasized naval warfare, amphibious landings, and air integration.<sup>58</sup> Contrast that with *BALTOPS* 09, which stressed ‘disaster relief efforts, humanitarian assistance, and peacekeeping.’<sup>59</sup>

On the political front, one important use of exercises is reassurance; sometimes showing up and operating together heartens allies that, if a crisis or war erupts, security commitments will be honored. Here, the case of *BALTOPS* is instructive. Three days after the conclusion of *BALTOPS* 15, one of the participating ships—the amphibious transport USS *San Antonio*—arrived in Tallinn, Estonia for a port visit. That same day, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter held a joint press conference with his Baltic counterparts. The symbolism of the event was palpable. Estonian Minister of Defense Sven Mikser began his remarks with a warning that

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56 Mely Cabellero-Anthony, ‘Understanding Non-Traditional Security,’ in Mely Cabellero-Anthony, ed., *An Introduction to Non-Traditional Security Studies: A Transnational Approach* (London: Sage Publications, 2016).

57 Adm. John Richardson, ‘CNO: U.S. Navy Needs Foreign Help against Russia, China, ISIS, Iran,’ *Defense One*, May 15, 2016, <http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2016/05/cno-navy-russia-china-isis-iran/128313>.

58 Magnus Nordenman, ‘Analysis: Larger NATO Baltic Sea Exercise Sends Important Message to Russia,’ *USNI News*, June 1, 2016, [https://news.usni.org/2016/06/01/highend\\_baltic\\_ex\\_message\\_to\\_russia](https://news.usni.org/2016/06/01/highend_baltic_ex_message_to_russia); Megan Eckstein, ‘*BALTOPS* 2017 Focuses on Air Integration to Support Realistic Coalition Warfighting Scenarios,’ *USNI News*, June 5, 2017, <https://news.usni.org/2017/06/05/baltops-2017-focuses-air-integration-support-realistic-coalition-warfighting-scenarios>.

59 ‘U.S. Navy Admiral Discusses *BALTOPS* 09,’ *DoD Live*, 19 June 2009, <http://www.dodlive.mil/2009/06/19/us-navy-admiral-discusses-baltops-09>.

‘Russia views the Baltic region as one of NATO’s most vulnerable areas, a place where NATO’s resolve and commitment could be tested.’ Latvian Secretary of Defense Janis Sarts stressed the importance of ‘train[ing] together and exercis[ing] together with our U.S. colleagues.’ Meanwhile, Secretary Carter referenced the USS *San Antonio*’s visit three times during his remarks and noted that ‘no fewer than 20. . . military exercises involving the United States [are] going on in Europe just this week, of which *BALTOPS* is one.’<sup>60</sup> The Tallinn press conference demonstrates how the United States uses combined exercises (and associated port visits) as a tool for reassuring beleaguered allies.

The simple fact that *BALTOPS* is led by the United States—as opposed to NATO—has a complementary effect on reassurance. A 1996 report by the Center for Naval Analyses observed that NATO participants ‘were unanimous in believing that it is important for [*BALTOPS*] to remain under U.S. control and include U.S. participation.’<sup>61</sup> American sponsorship was appreciated for its flexibility and streamlined decision-making, whereas NATO sponsorship threatened to inject collective action problems into the exercise planning process. In addition, U.S. sponsorship was seen as an indicator of continued American interest in the region.<sup>62</sup> Although command responsibility for *BALTOPS* shifted in 2015 to Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO (STRIKFORNATO), it remains a U.S.-led exercise, as STRIKFORNATO is headed by Commander, U.S. 6th Fleet.

In any case, recent years have sorely tested the United States’ ability to lead *BALTOPS*.<sup>63</sup> The 6th Fleet boasts only five ships: its command ship (the USS *Mount Whitney*) and four guided-missile destroyers, largely devoted to missile defense in the eastern Mediterranean but also

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60 ‘Joint Press Conference with Secretary Carter, Lithuanian Minister of Defense Oleskas, Latvian State Secretary of Defense Sarts, and Estonian Minister of Defense Mikser in Tallinn, Estonia,’ U.S. Department of Defense (news release), 23 June 2015, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/607062/joint-press-conference-with-secretary-carter-lithuanian-minister-of-defense-ole>.

61 Johnson, *BALTOPS: Exercising Regional Engagement*, 22.

62 *Ibid.*

63 Author interviews, Naples, Italy (October 2016).



responsible for a range of missions throughout the region.<sup>64</sup> When these vessels have been unavailable due repairs or higher-priority missions, the U.S. Navy has scrambled to provide a flagship for BALTOPs or even a significant surface presence.

Related to reassurance, exercises aim to build deeper relationships with the military and political leaders of the participating countries, with a view to maintaining (or obtaining) basing access, intelligence sharing, and related support in the event of a regional crisis.<sup>65</sup> In *BALTOPs*, officers from participating navies make professional connections that may last their entire careers. As these officers ascend in rank to more senior positions, these enduring connections can promote understanding and alliance cohesion during periods of crisis. In some cases, the United States uses exercises to build more generalized goodwill with the partner or allied nation's population. Many U.S.-led exercises held with developing-world countries, for instance, feature goodwill aid projects such as the construction of clinics, schools, and latrines, as well as medical, dental, and even veterinarian civic action programs.<sup>66</sup> So the thinking goes, these activities should bolster local public opinion in favor of the United States, thereby strengthening the bilateral political relationship.

Just as important, exercises often play a deterrence signaling role to prospective adversaries. Of all the tools of statecraft used by political leaders and military brass, holding exercises is one of the most effective. Operating in unison during peacetime conveys solidarity among exercise partners; it implies that if deterrence fails, allies and partners will fight together and do so more effectively given better interoperability and command and control relationships. In a similar vein, *BALTOPs* demonstrates NATO's

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64 U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa / U.S. 6th Fleet, 'Our Ships,' <http://www.c6f.navy.mil/organization/ships>.

65 Joel E. Williamson and Jennifer D. P. Moroney, 'Security Cooperation Pays Off: A Lesson from the Afghan War,' *The DISAM Journal of International Security Assistance Management* vol. 24, no. 3 (Spring 2002), 79-82.

66 Balinda O'Neal, 'Building Partnerships, Projects through Humanitarian Civic Action,' Army.mil (news release), 2 July 2014, <https://goo.gl/WWSqHd>; Abigail M. Brown, 'Philippine, U.S. Forces Team up for Medical, Dental Assistance,' Army.mil (news release), 29 March 2011, <https://goo.gl/mn96fr>; Cashmere Jefferson, 'Pets Receive Vaccinations during Balikpapan 2012,' Army.mil (news release), 17 April 2012, <https://goo.gl/ksGY8L>.

ability to orchestrate naval combat operations with a growing cohort of allies and partners. The decision in 2016 to invite new participants (Italy, Portugal, and Spain) while adding submarines and an extra amphibious landing not only showcased NATO's military capability, but also its resolve—essential ingredients to deterrence stability amid the ongoing spike in East-West tensions.

The geographic location of the maneuvers—the Baltic Sea—also carries its own deterrence value. Exercising in the Baltic makes for a more complex and realistic operating environment due Russia's A2/AD 'bubble' of land-based aircraft, air defenses, missile forces, and electronic warfare capabilities. Adding to the complexity are the Baltic Sea's unique acoustic conditions. Its shallow depth, rocky floor, and variable salinity makes submarine tracking particularly difficult.<sup>67</sup> Taken together, the operating challenges are so steep that, according to Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, '[Russia] could make it very difficult for any of us to get up into the Baltic Sea if we needed to in a contingency.'<sup>68</sup> However, continuing to exercise in Russia's backyard demonstrates a willingness to confront and surmount these challenges. This deterrence signal might be lost if *BALTOPS* were relocated to a more permissive environment—for instance, the open waters of the Norwegian Sea. Moreover, the Baltic Sea remains a strategically significant body of water. In an acute crisis or conflict with Russia, it is a potential conduit for flowing NATO ground forces to the front lines. Indeed, recent *BALTOPS* have emphasized amphibious landings, and there have been calls for NATO to expand its amphibious capability and interoperability.<sup>69</sup>

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67 Grzegorz Lyko, 'From Confrontation to Cooperation: The History of *BALTOPS* Exercise,' in Krzysztof Kubiak and Piotr Mickiewicz, eds., *Between Rivalry and Cooperation: The Baltic Region, 1000-2000* (Gdynia, Poland: Polish Naval Academy, 2004), 90; James Stavridis, 'How NATO Can Respond to Swedish Mystery,' CNN, October 22, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/21/opinion/stavridis-swedes-undersea-vessel-nato/index.html>; Robert L. Martin, *SACLANT Undersea Research Centre Research & Accomplishments: 1975-1989*, report no. M-107 (San Bartolomeo, Italy: SACLANT Undersea Research Centre, 1992), 24.

68 Marcus Weisgerber, 'Russia Could Block Access to Baltic Sea, U.S. General Says,' *Defense One*, December 9, 2015, <http://www.defenseone.com/threats/2015/12/russia-could-block-access-baltic-sea-us-general-says/124361>.

69 Gregory DeMarco and Gene Germanovich, 'The Hidden Potential of NATO's Gator Navies,' *Defense One*, 17 March 2017, <http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2017/03/hidden-potential-natos-gator-nav>

As *BALTOPS* approaches its 50-year anniversary in 2021, the reassurance and deterrence aims of the exercise are strikingly similar to its early days. During the Cold War, *BALTOPS* was a warfighting exercise designed to ‘demonstrate U.S. interest in the security of Northern Europe through NATO solidarity.’<sup>70</sup> Although the collapse of the Soviet Union and advent of the Global War on Terrorism temporarily altered the curriculum, since 2014, warfighting has retaken the spotlight. The 2017 iteration reportedly included ‘a larger aviation component and a larger adversary “red force.”’<sup>71</sup> It is clear that the participating nations believe that *BALTOPS* remains a tool for signaling alliance cohesion and warfighting prowess to Russia. Of course, Moscow’s keen interest is another enduring trait of *BALTOPS*. Russia’s tendency in recent years to shadow and fly over the participating vessels hearkens back to the 1970s and 1980s.

Just as exercises can send deterrence signals to an adversary, they can also be used as an engagement tool, akin to a confidence-building measure. Russia’s on-again, off-again participation in *BALTOPS* is a case in point. In the wake of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, the United States and NATO temporarily halted military engagement with Russia. Planning for *BALTOPS* 09 began only weeks later, which may explain Russia’s absence that year, breaking eight years of successive participation.<sup>72</sup> However, the Obama administration was also pursuing a ‘reset’ with Russia at the time—a concerted U.S. government effort to identify common ground with Russia and promote cooperation. Aspirations ran high. As incoming NATO Supreme Commander Adm. James Stavridis remarked, ‘I’m extremely hopeful that we can help develop a constructive relationship with Russia.’<sup>73</sup> Meanwhile, Rear Adm. John Christensen was careful to

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70 Commander, Destroyer Squadron Twenty-Four, *BALTOPS Operations Order 1-80* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 1980), 1.

71 Eckstein, ‘*BALTOPS* 2017 Focuses on Air Integration.’

72 David Axe, ‘NATO Targeting Russia in Baltic War Game?’ *Wired*, 18 June 2009, <https://www.wired.com/2009/06/nato-targeting-russia-in-baltic-war-game>

73 Timothy Gibbons, ‘Adm. Stavridis Reflects on Past, Future,’ *The Florida Times-Union*, 15 June 2009, [http://jacksonville.com/interact/blog/timothy\\_gibbons/2009-06-15/adm\\_stavridis\\_reflects\\_on\\_past\\_future](http://jacksonville.com/interact/blog/timothy_gibbons/2009-06-15/adm_stavridis_reflects_on_past_future)

not portray *BALTOPS* 09 as Russia-centric: ‘It’s not our job to decide who is a threat. It’s our job to be ready to face a [military] capability.’<sup>74</sup> It is against this ‘reset’ backdrop that Russia returned to *BALTOPS* from 2010-2012, though only contributing a single landing ship each time.<sup>75</sup> Bilateral relations steadily deteriorated during this period, and Russia passed on its invitation in 2013. The United States tried again in 2014, but retracted the invite after the Crimea incursion.<sup>76</sup> Since then, the United States has stopped inviting Russia altogether.<sup>77</sup>

Despite their strategic utility and wide-ranging benefits, few defense analysts—and even fewer scholars—have systematically studied military exercises. Many of these analysts recognize only the military payoff of exercises, portraying them as ‘a source of information on tactics, force capabilities, scenario outcomes, and hardware systems,’ while failing to acknowledge their political import.<sup>78</sup> But within the ranks of the Armed Forces, officers recognize the significance of exercises—not only for their individual professional advancement, but for their collective significance as a tool of military diplomacy and U.S. foreign policy. As a longstanding annual event with robust multinational involvement, *BALTOPS* provides a useful case study of the strategic benefits of combined maritime exercises in a contested littoral.

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74 Axe, ‘NATO Targeting Russia?’

75 RIA Novosti, ‘Russian Warship to Join NATO Baltic Exercises,’ Atlantic Council, 1 June 2010, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/russian-warship-to-join-nato-baltic-exercises>; REGNUM News Agency, ‘Landing Ship Minsk to Represent Russia at *BALTOPS*-2011,’ RusNavy.com, 11 April 2011, [http://rusnavy.com/news/newsofday/index.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=11986](http://rusnavy.com/news/newsofday/index.php?ELEMENT_ID=11986); ‘Russian Warship Sails to Baltic Sea for NATO Naval Drills,’ Sputnik News, June 1, 2012, <https://sputniknews.com/world/20120601173783440>

76 ‘NATO Leaves Russia Frozen Out in Baltic Sea Exercise,’ *The Telegraph* (United Kingdom), 19 June 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10910567/Nato-leaves-Russia-frozen-out-in-Baltic-Sea-exercise.html>

77 Eckstein, ‘*BALTOPS* 2017 Focuses on Air Integration.’

78 Frederick Thompson, ‘Did We Learn Anything from that Exercise? Could We?’ *Naval War College Review*, 35, no. 4 (July-August 1982), 25. For a counter-point that acknowledges the political utility of exercises, see John F. Farrell, ‘Team Spirit: A Case Study on the Value of Military Exercises as a Show of Force in the Aftermath of Combat Operations,’ *Air & Space Power Journal* vol. 23, no. 3 (Fall 2009), pp. 95-106.

## Conclusions

The objectives of combined exercises can be imagined as lying on a politico-military spectrum. Amid the ongoing spike in tensions with Moscow, outside observers believe that the *BALTOPS* series has been retooled to focus on specific warfighting missions including anti-submarine warfare and amphibious operations. Yet, Navy leaders have been loath to explicitly link the exercise to a particular adversary. In 2016, responding to remarks by German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Vice Adm. James Foggo emphasized that BALTOPs was not a vehicle for ‘sabre-rattling.’<sup>79</sup> At the same time, combined exercises are tools for deterring adversaries and reassuring allies and partners. The point is that most, if not all, combined exercises perform essential functions at multiple levels.

Combined exercises have significant limitations, however.<sup>80</sup> For one, the belief that the goodwill generated from exercising with foreign partners will translate into political influence or contingency basing access is dubious; the outcome depends on the nature of the crisis and the actors involved. A request for basing access to hold joint maneuvers and training is one thing, but a country’s leadership would certainly hesitate to grant access if it risked embroiling itself in hostilities with a great power. It is therefore imprudent to over-interpret a combined exercise like *BALTOPS*. The commitment of the United States to security in the Baltic region—much less the willingness of other NATO members and neighboring countries to confront an increasingly revanchist Russia—is the product of a complex set of geopolitical calculations. Surely the fact that BALTOPs has survived and evolved from its origins in the maritime rivalry of the early 1970s to the present day is a tribute to the political bonds between northern Europe, the rest of NATO, and the United States.

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79 Andrea Shalal, ‘U.S. Navy Officials Say European Exercises Not ‘Sabre-Rattling,’’ Reuters, 20 June 2016, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-usa-navy-russia-idUKKCN0Z6286>

80 Peter Munson, ‘The Limits of Security Cooperation,’ *War on the Rocks*, 10 September 2013, <https://warontherocks.com/2013/09/the-limits-of-security-cooperation>

Moreover, the degree to which exercises enhance partner nation capacity for coalition operations is unclear. There are no well-understood, agreed-upon metrics for evaluating the ‘return on investment’ of exercises. Although a 2013 RAND report discusses preconditions for successful capacity building in counter-terrorism, intelligence, and constabulary functions, interoperability was outside the scope of the study.<sup>81</sup> It is therefore difficult for planners and strategists to measure and track the interoperability and readiness benefits of exercises. In an era of resource constraints, high operational tempos for U.S. Navy vessels, and fears of accidents or provocations leading to political crises, *BALTOPS* and other exercises may come under scrutiny.

In the future, understanding the inherent limitations of combined exercises may help ease the anxiety and finger-pointing that *BALTOPS* often provokes between NATO and Russia. It is in nobody’s interest to allow bilateral or multilateral exercises to become yet another source of friction in an already-fraught international security environment. Militaries, and especially navies, conduct exercises regularly. They have done so throughout the modern era. In fact, the U.S. Navy is no stranger to occasional exercises with its Russian and Chinese counterparts. Exercises are a clearly legitimate tool of national and alliance statecraft, but they should neither be overestimated nor used as a pretext for inflaming political tensions. Nevertheless, on the outside chance that an acute regional crisis requires a collective military response, exercises help prepare key partners and allies to work together effectively in a wide range of operations.

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81 Christopher Paul et al., *What Works Best When Building Partner Capacity and under What Circumstances?*, report no. MG-1253, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013.

NATIONAL APPROACHES  
IN AND BEYOND EUROPE





## 11

The Austrian Exercise *Bear's Paw* of 1969

*Erwin A. Schmidl*

This paper deals with an Austrian military exercise from late 1969.<sup>1</sup> Austria had regained its sovereignty in 1955 and always considered itself a Western country. At the same time, the Soviet Union had insisted on Austrian neutrality as a condition for its agreement to end the post-1945 four-power occupation of Austria. Consequently, Austria neither joined NATO nor did it enter any other defence arrangements. Bilateral military cooperation existed with Switzerland and Sweden as well as with other countries, however, with the majority of military equipment coming from Western sources.

In the case of a war in Europe, Austrian planners feared that Austria might be included in an attack by Warsaw Pact forces. A major thrust was expected from Hungary, either westwards through the Danube Valley into southern Germany, or in a south-westerly direction, via the Graz area into Italy. Alternatively, the possibility existed that NATO troops would enter Austrian territory, most likely in the Tyrol where neutral Austria barred the direct route between Italy and Germany.<sup>2</sup>

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1 A more extensive version of this article was published in German: 'Der Schlag der Bärenpatze: Manöverkritik und ihre Folgen,' in: Robert Kriechbaumer – Wolfgang Mueller – Erwin A. Schmidl (eds.), *Politik und Militär im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Österreichische und europäische Aspekte, Festschrift für Manfred Rauchensteiner*, Wien – Köln – Weimar: Böhlau, 2017, pp. 441-453. I am indebted to a number of participants for sharing their recollections. In particular, I would like to mention retired Generals Heinz Danzmayr, Viktor Fortunat, Siegbert Kreuter, Karl Liko, Udo Rumerskirch, as well as former Minister of Finance Hannes Androsch. My thanks also go to Colonel Dr. Andreas Steiger of the Military Academy in Wiener Neustadt who worked intensively on the Austrian Army of the 1960s and 1970s himself.

2 For more information about Austria in the 'Cold War,' cf. Manfred Rauchensteiner (ed.), *Zwischen den Blöcken: NATO, Warschauer Pakt und Österreich* (= Schriftenreihe des Forschungsinstitutes für politisch-historische Studien der Dr.-Wilfried-Haslauer-Bibliothek, Salzburg, Bd. 36; Wien – Köln – Weimar: Böhlau, 2010).

In view of the terrain and the weakness of the Austrian Army, the political leadership always hoped that Austria would not have to fight at all, but could stay out of a future war. This line of thinking was based on the examples of neutral Switzerland and Sweden which had managed to avoid participation in both world wars. Other, less encouraging, examples (like neutral Belgium in both wars, and the Netherlands and Denmark in World War Two) were ignored. Austria's foreign policy, shaped for three decades by Foreign Minister (and later Chancellor) Bruno Kreisky, emphasized active participation in the United Nations rather than substantial military expenditure at home.

With less than adequate defence budgets, and deficits especially in the fields of air defence and anti-tank weapons (anti-tank or anti-air missiles as well as interceptor aircraft arrived only at the very end of the 'Cold War' or even later), the Austrian Army always had a difficult task to maintain a credible defence capacity. Military service of (at the time) nine months (plus later refresher exercises) was (and still is) compulsory for all young men. (The possibility to opt for 'alternative' service with the Red Cross or other civilian organizations was only initiated in 1975. Before, conscious objectors had to serve in non-combat capacities in the army.) In the 1960s, complaints increased about the military in general, and about periods of 'idleness' for the young soldiers in particular. Some critics tried to initiate a plebiscite for abolishing the armed forces altogether, and the Social Democratic Party<sup>3</sup> – in opposition since 1966 – in 1970 campaigned for shortening military service to six months ('Six months are enough!'). The worldwide 'Spirit of 1968' – 'Make Love, not War!' – did not bypass Austria.

During the 'Czechoslovak Crisis' of 1968 – the intervention of Warsaw Pact forces in August 1968, crushing the short-lived 'Prague Spring' – the Austrian Army was put on alert. The government, however, in order to avoid any incidents, decided to deploy the armed forces not at the

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<sup>3</sup> The official name was 'Socialist Party' (Sozialistische Partei Österreichs – SPÖ), the name was changed to 'Social Democratic' in 1991.

border, but ordered them to withdraw to a distance of thirty kilometres. This decision was hard to comprehend and undermined the credibility of the Army even further – why pay for an army that is not ready at the border when it is needed?<sup>4</sup> General Siegbert Kreuter, then a young major of the general staff with the 1<sup>st</sup> *Jäger* Brigade, in his memoirs described the ‘feeling of insecurity’ that prevailed in the Austrian Army at the end of the 1960s.<sup>5</sup>

## Defending a Key Zone

When the Ministry of Defence announced a major military exercise for late 1969 – the first big exercise since 1965 – this was more than ‘just’ a military manoeuvre. Rather, many observers hoped that this exercise, in the wake of the disillusioned 1968 mood, would demonstrate the Austrian armed forces’ prowess, taking the wind out of the critics’ sails. Right from the beginning, this exercise had strong political implications. It was called *Bärenatze* (*Bear’s Paw*), which could only be understood as referring to the ‘Russian Bear,’ of course – a remarkable name from a neutral point of view, where the general line was not to take sides at all. Moreover, the exercise was to take place in a strategically important area of the Danube Valley, exactly where planners hoped to delay a Soviet/Warsaw Pact attack (most other Austrian exercises tried to avoid too obvious ‘real’ implications). Colonel (later General) August Ségur-Cabanac, who was the officer responsible for the preparation and implementation of this exercise, stressed that ‘the most important lines of communications north of the Alps go through the Amstetten region. It is therefore a particularly important section of the Austrian state.’ He added that a different scenario (such as an attack in an eastern direction) would have required more extensive (and therefore more expensive) transport and deployment

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4 See Erwin A. Schmidl, ‘Österreich und die ČSSR-Krise 1968,’ in: *Der Donauraum* 48/1-2 (Wien: 2008), pp. 109-127.

5 Siegbert Kreuter, *Erlebtes Bundesheer... Teil 2: Vom S 3 im Brigadestab in den Generalstabdienst, 1963 bis 1973*, Schriften zur Geschichte des Österreichischen Bundesheeres 6/2, Wien: 2007, pp. 378 and 384.

arrangements.<sup>6</sup> Later, within the framework of the ‘Raumverteidigung’ (‘defence of the [whole] territory’) concept of the 1970s and 1980s, this region was known as ‘Key Zone 35,’ a centre of preparations for defence that was massively strengthened with pill boxes and other obstacles.

*Bärentatze* took place in November 1969, in an area some 120 kilometres west of Vienna, near Amstetten and just south of the River Danube. Some 12,500 soldiers took part (of whom 2,500 were reservists), with 300 tracked and 1,000 wheeled vehicles.<sup>7</sup> The purpose of the exercise was ‘attack in predominantly armour-favourable terrain against an enemy with strong anti-tank defence,’ including overcoming river obstacles and practising tactical air landings, as general staff Captain (later General) Peter Corrieri summarized.<sup>8</sup>

The assumption was that increasing tensions between the ‘Blue’ and the ‘Orange’ states eventually led to an armed attack by the latter. The political background story – a pre-emptive ‘Orange’ attack in the face of an aggressive attitude of the ‘Blue’ State – mirrored contemporary Warsaw Pact plans to counter an attack by NATO by a (preventive) counterattack.<sup>9</sup> ‘Orange’ planners duly based their operations on contemporary Warsaw Pact doctrine for mechanized forces.

The Austrian Army at the time was organized in three territorial division-level *Gruppen*, and *Gruppe* (Group) I (Major General Ignaz Reichel, with Colonel Ségur-Cabanac as his chief of staff) was responsible for this exercise. The defending party (‘Blue’) consisted essentially of the

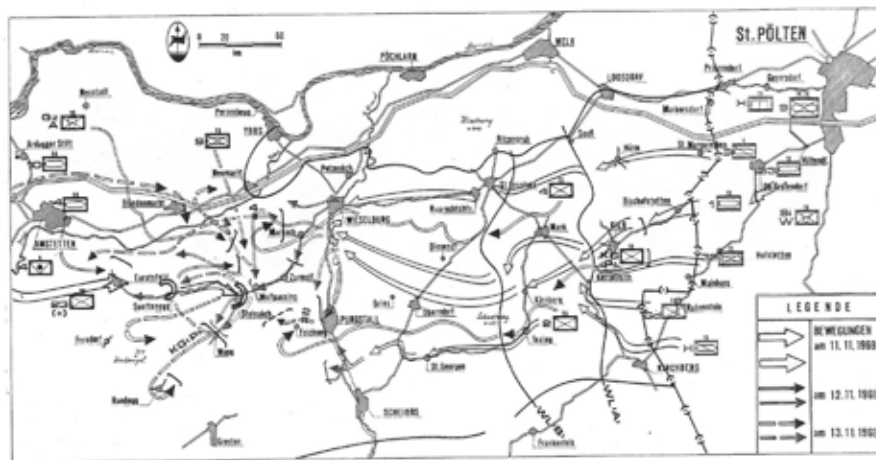
6 August Ségur-Cabanac, ‘Lage BÄRENTATZE,’ in: *Truppendienst* 9/1, February 1970, pp. 5-16, here p. 5.

7 Kreuter, *Erlebtes Bundesheer* 2, pp. 380 and S. 389. Cf. Horst Pleiner, ‘Großübungen des österreichischen Bundesheeres 1955 bis 1985 (I),’ in: *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift* 24/1 (January/February 1986), pp. 21-32, here p. 27. The best overall description of the exercise BEAR’S PAW is Franz Freistetter, ‘BÄRENTATZE – Gefechtsübungen der Gruppe I,’ in: *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift* 8/1, January/February 1970, pp. 8-17. Altogether, although a major military exercise, BEAR’S PAW had significantly fewer participants than the 1965 manoeuvres, which had 30,000 men, 2,800 wheeled and 240 tracked vehicles.

8 ‘Bärentatze’ – Herbstmanöver 1969,’ in: *Der Soldat* Nr. 22 (23.11.1969), pp. 1f.

9 In the course of the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact (later called Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security), interesting documents came to light, including the Czecho-Slovak part of the 1964 War Plan as well as a 1965 staff exercise in Hungary (see <http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/collections/colltopic647e.html?lng=en&id=14944>, accessed on 4 VII 2017). Cf. also Wolfgang Mueller, ‘Der Warschauer Pakt und Österreich 1955–1991,’ in: Rauchensteiner (ed.), *Zwischen den Blöcken*, pp. 135-191.

1<sup>st</sup> *Jäger* Brigade (Colonel Paul Haydvoegel), while the attacking party was assembled around the 9<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade (Colonel Karl Liko). Both parties had additional units attached to them. Interestingly, the attackers were not called ‘Red’ – the traditional term for an opponent in Austria – but ‘Orange,’ as was customary in NATO at the time!



*Die Manöver „Bärenstätze“ 1969*

**Source:** Sketch by Friedrich Schunko; from: Horst Pleiner, ‘Großübungen des österreichischen Bundesheeres 1955 bis 1985 (I)’, in: *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift* 24/1 (January/February 1986), pp. 21-32, here p. 30.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade had to establish a defence between the Traisen and Ybbs rivers, covering an area of some twenty kilometres from north to south. It was expected to slowly retreat to the west, eventually successfully defending the Erlauf Valley. The conditions to succeed were not too promising, however. While the southern part of the manoeuvre area, already in the hilly *Voralpen* (‘pre-Alpine’) terrain, was ‘classic’ infantry territory, the north was excellent tank terrain with few natural obstacles. Due to the dry weather of the preceding weeks, it was also possible to cross

rivers rather easily. To make matters worse, the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade had essentially only two weak infantry battalions (Nos. 2 and 4) at its disposal, with two companies each. On the positive side, these units had previously trained in the area and knew the terrain. Attached was Engineer Battalion No. 1 to reinforce the terrain.<sup>10</sup> Additional troops for 'Blue' came from Groups II (Graz) and III (Salzburg), including – for the first time ever – reserve units.

The core element of the attacking party 'Orange' was the 9<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade. This was considered the elite of the Austrian Army. It had originally been commanded by Colonel Count Emil Spannocchi, who was to become Austrian Army Commander in the 1970s, and in 1969 was ably led by Colonel Karl Liko (who would later play an important role as military adviser in the CSCE process). Liko tried to get to know personally all units assigned to him for the exercise, and even published a 'manoeuvre newspaper,' aptly called *The Orange*. The 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade tried to counter; their motto: 'We will peel the orange!'

## The Exercise

Both parties had prepared themselves intensively for this exercise and had explored the area – also in the context of private excursions on weekends. Deployment to the exercise area started from 8 November 1969, and operations began on Tuesday, 11 November at 00:00.

On the very first day, the attackers swept forwards. Retired generals and colonels, who were then young lieutenants or captains, still recall this swift advance with relish. Helicopters landed infantry in the back of the defenders. 'Orange' advanced some twenty-four kilometres on the first day and quickly succeeded in establishing two bridgeheads west of the river Erlauf. There, at the 'Holy River' of Austrian Army planners, as one officer recalls, the manoeuvre plans had expected 'Blue' to stop the attackers successfully at the end of the exercise. One bridgehead was

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<sup>10</sup> Kreuter, *Erlebtes Bundesheer 2*, pp. 380-383.

south of Mühliling, further to the south. There the defenders had not expected tanks to operate at all in the heavily wooded hilly terrain, and had left a small wooden bridge unguarded. Pre-manoeuvre reconnaissance by 'Orange' had shown, however, that this bridge could easily be strengthened to allow light AMX-13 tanks to cross. Young officers like Heinz Danzmayr (then on the staff of the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which he later was to command himself) were not only motivated by the common wish to excel in an exercise: when he and his superiors had, by chance, got hold of a concept paper for the exercise, he had been shocked that the general idea was to prove the dated concept of 'linear defence'. He and his comrades therefore identified ways to thwart this intention and prove that, quite to the contrary, the old concepts would not work.

Even though the manoeuvre command interfered several times, ordering 'Orange' troops to halt for a few hours in order to allow 'Blue' forces to move to new positions, the outcome was soon clear. Around noon on 12 November, the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade had to move its command post west from Wang to St. Leonhard am Forst.<sup>11</sup> As Colonel Franz Freistetter, himself a World War Two veteran, summarized the result, 'in this terrain it is almost impossible for infantry forces to defend successfully against mechanized forces and to keep up with them in time and space.'<sup>12</sup>

At this point, the Inspectorate-General intervened in the exercise. The defenders were strengthened by a third battalion (*Jäger* Battalion No. 23 from Vorarlberg), whose insertion into an unknown territory succeeded very well. In addition, Tank Battalion No. 4 was deployed, and on 13 November, the last day of the exercise, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mechanized Brigade was moved in from its own training exercise further north to support the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade. This, and increasingly foggy weather, strengthened the defenders, but came too late to change the general impression: that it was almost impossible to defend the Danube Valley successfully against an armoured attack. The exercise ended in the late afternoon of 13 November. On

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11 *Ibid.*, pp. 391 and 393.

12 Freistetter, 'Bärentatze,' p. 12.

Friday, 14 November, participating units paraded through Amstetten before returning to their barracks.

## Positive and Negative Impressions

As a military exercise, *Bear's Paw* was certainly not without merits. When Colonel Ségur-Cabanac, the mastermind behind the manoeuvre, stressed that 'in both defence and attack ... adaptation to the terrain must be the foremost principle in the training of all troops,' this lesson was certainly reinforced by this exercise.<sup>13</sup> Colonel Franz Freistetter, researcher at the Defence Academy in addition to his job as editor-in-chief of the *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift*, noted 'the agile leadership of the brigades and battalions' which he attributed to the fact that most senior officers still had (like himself) 'practical war experience'.<sup>14</sup> Another positive aspect referred to the logistics. In total, vehicles drove 93,741 kilometres, consuming more than 350 cubic meters of various fuels. There were fourteen traffic accidents (fortunately, none was fatal). To bring the troops to the exercise area, the Federal Railways had organized thirteen trains with nearly 300 carriages. The troops fired 685,000 small arms practice cartridges and 800 artillery and tank shells.<sup>15</sup>

The exercise was designed by Colonel August (Count) Ségur-Cabanac, Group I's G 3 (i.e., the staff officer responsible for planning and operations of Group I), a well-respected officer of French noble ancestry. He clearly dominated the management of the exercise, leading both parties at the same time. Kreuter was 'particularly impressed' by his leadership and later said that '90 percent of the telephone discussions with the exercise command' had been with him, an impression that other participants, such as General Liko, confirmed.<sup>16</sup>

Later, General Kreuter recalled that, already in the preparatory phase,

<sup>13</sup> Ségur-Cabanac: 'Lage BÄRENTATZE,' p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Freistetter, 'Bärentatze,' p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7f.

<sup>16</sup> Kreuter, *Erlebtes Bundesheer 2*, p. 394.



he had had ‘serious doubts as to how the public in Austria and abroad, intensively sensitized by the press, will react when the defenders are beaten so quickly’ as was to be expected from the basic concept of using strong mechanized forces in suitable terrain against a defender who had to rely predominantly on infantry. Kreuter therefore suggested to his brigade commander, Colonel Haydvoegel, asking for additional armoured units before the exercise, as only these could mount a successful defence against an armoured attacker. Haydvoegel refused, however: ‘Soldiers cannot choose their orders.’<sup>17</sup>

The official report praised the early end of the exercise on the third day: ‘The goal of the exercise is reached, [and] the moment [was] also psychologically well chosen: There is neither ‘victor’ nor ‘vanquished’.’<sup>18</sup> But the general impression remained that ‘Orange’ was more successful than ‘Blue’, and for most observers this translated into the feeling that the Austrian Army could not hope to defend the Danube Valley against a Warsaw Pact onslaught. The exercise management attempted to compensate for this with interruptions and ‘assumed bad weather’ conditions hampering the attacker, without too much success. Apparently, the last-minute effort of the higher leadership to introduce additional forces for ‘Blue’ stemmed from an attempt to change these impressions. The director of the Operations Department in the Ministry of Defence, Brigadier Johann Freihösl, later briefly Minister of Defence, sounded rather hollow when he insisted at the official press conference that the exercise had ‘proved that it [= the 1st *Jäger* Brigade] was able to conduct temporarily successful delaying operations against a far superior armoured opponent’.<sup>19</sup> In retrospect, Brigadier Walter Mayer, a general staff officer from the then younger generation, stated that the exercise had actually

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17 Kreuter, *Erlebtes Bundesheer* 2, pp. 382f.

18 ‘Bärentatze’ – Herbstmanöver 1969,’ in: *Der Soldat* Nr. 22 (23.11.1969), p. 2. Interestingly, Colonel Ségur used almost the same wording in his article (‘Lage BÄRENTATZE,’ p. 16), so he might have authored also this *Soldat* article.

19 Quoted from Kreuter, *Erlebtes Bundesheer* 2, p. 398. Cf. Manfred Rauchensteiner, ‘Sandkästen und Übungsräume: Operative Annahmen und Manöver des Bundesheers 1955-1979,’ in: Rauchensteiner (ed.), *Zwischen den Blöcken*, pp. 253-323, here pp. 298f.

‘proven’ that an infantry brigade was hopelessly inferior to an attacking mechanized division.<sup>20</sup> Another retrospective account went even further, claiming that ‘the result of the manoeuvre [was] just the opposite’ of what had been intended: This ‘tactical disaster’ only ‘reinforced the crisis of credibility of the army both within the army and in the public’.<sup>21</sup>

The fact that ‘Orange’, the party that had so successfully attacked, was also part of the Austrian Army and had thus proved its excellent capabilities, was overlooked. Correctly, but in vain, Ségur claimed ‘that modern combat is not decided when a mechanized enemy breaks through, because the sensitive parts of the armoured attacker still have to arrive’. Against the supply echelons, guerrillas or special forces might stage attacks in the rear of the enemy, and ‘success or failure is determined only by the struggle against these [supply] units’.<sup>22</sup> Due to the limited time frame and the small size of the exercise area, all this could not be included in this exercise (the ‘Orange’ supply units would have been further to the East).

Foreign press reports praised the ‘unusually high fighting morale’ of the Austrian soldiers, but at the same time criticized the dated equipment or the tendency to locate command posts in inns and other highly visible buildings, with ‘the staff personnel crowded together in the streets and gardens’. A Swiss observer noted that ‘strict adherence to orders to avoid damage to the agricultural fields’ led to unrealistic behaviour in ‘combat’.<sup>23</sup> The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* added that ‘the lack of a powerful air force seems to lead many [Austrian] leaders to forget the danger from the air’.<sup>24</sup> Such comments, of course, confused specific appraisal of the exercise with more general criticism about the inadequate equipment of the Austrian Army. This also applied to Austrian papers which – again –

20 Walter Mayer, ‘Das neue Konzept,’ in: Manfred Rauchensteiner – Josef Rausch – Wolfgang Etschmann (eds.), *Tausend Nadelschiffe: Das österreichische Bundesheer in der Reformzeit 1970–1978* (= Forschungen zur Militärgeschichte 3, Graz – Wien – Köln: Styria, 1994), pp. 105–123, here p. 106.

21 Roland Vogel – Karl Semlitsch, *Im Sturm der Reform: Der 7. Generalstabskurs* (= Schriften zur Geschichte des Bundesheeres 22, Vienna: , 2015), pp. 16f and 158.

22 Ségur-Cabanac, ‘Lage BÄRENTATZE,’ p. 16.

23 H. A., ‘Die ‚Bärentatze‘ schlug zu,’ in: *Der Soldat* Nr. 22 (23.11.1969), p. 9. At the time, the autumn crops were already sowed, and the fields were very moist after heavy rains.

24 *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 19 November 1969, quoted from Kreuter, *Erlebtes Bundesheer* 2, p. 397.

mixed critical assessment of the exercise with negative comments on the Austrian military in general. The *Kleine Zeitung* (Styria) concluded that the chances of the defenders were ‘not too rosy’ if ‘someone had the idea to force a breakthrough through the Danube Valley with strong tanks and airborne forces (no matter in which direction).’<sup>25</sup> This quite harsh criticism, partly from ‘armchair strategists’ without too much understanding of the realities, was not entirely merited.<sup>26</sup> But it contributed to the basically negative impressions.

There were critical voices in the military itself, too. General Albert Bach, Commander of Group II and present at the exercise only as an observer, violently criticized the ‘unsuitable arrangements of the exercise’ that hampered the troops’ ability to show their capabilities. Although there had been ‘good bold moves’ on the first day, these were later interrupted by the ‘un-warlike interventions’ by the management of the exercise’. Bach also stressed that the available terrain was ‘much too small.’<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

Was the Swiss *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* correct when it mused that this exercise obviously was intended to ‘make the vulnerability of this area visible to the public’?<sup>28</sup> Or had the mastermind of the exercise, Colonel Ségur-Cabanac – certainly among the more talented officers of his time – specifically designed the manoeuvre to demonstrate to the politicians responsible where the army’s shrinking budgets would lead to?<sup>29</sup> After all, he had refused all proposals of reinforcing the defenders with tanks before the exercise.<sup>30</sup>

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25 Herbert Weißenberger, ‘Bärenatze’ – leicht versalzen,’ in: *Kleine Zeitung*, 14.11.1969, pp. 3f.

26 Kreuter, *Erlebtes Bundesheer 2*, pp. 401-411.

27 Bach sent this critique to several higher commands. Eventually, the Inspector-General, General Erwin Fussenegger, asked him to withdraw his comments because they could be counter-productive if falling into the wrong hands. See Bach’s Papers (private collection), folder XIX/B19/185ff.

28 *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (19 November 1969), quoted from Kreuter, *Erlebtes Bundesheer 2*, p. 400.

29 As was the case in Carte Blanche, see Robert Davis’ chapter in this volume.

30 Kreuter, *Erlebtes Bundesheer 2*, pp. 382f.

In retrospect, it almost appears as though the design of the exercise was to ensure the success of the ‘Orange’ attackers. This is surprising, as Ségur was well aware of the public attention this exercise would receive. He expressly stated the intention of ‘demonstrating the army in the context of a large-scale exercise to the Austrian population ...and thus prove its usability for war.’<sup>31</sup> Well before *Bear’s Paw*, the Ministry of Defence through its Press and Information Service tried to raise public interest in the exercise.<sup>32</sup> During the manoeuvre, a special press centre operated in nearby Melk. High-ranking politicians (from Chancellor Josef Klaus downwards) and foreign visitors came to watch the exercise, including the military attachés and other observers in Vienna. From Romania, no lesser than the Minister of Defence, General Ioan Ioniă, came to Austria, as did the Swiss two-star General James Thiébaud.<sup>33</sup>

If the intention of the exercise was indeed to convey the message to the political leadership and the public that the defence efforts needed improvement, the attempt failed. The already prevailing neutralist mood increased both in the general public and within the army. The Social Democrats (in opposition since 1966) continued to attract support with the slogan ‘Six months [of national service] are enough!’, and beat the ruling (Christian-Social/Conservative) People’s Party<sup>34</sup> in the elections of 1 March 1970, not quite four months after the *Bear’s Paw* exercise. The Social Democrats won with 48.42 against 44.69 percent of the votes for the Conservatives, and became the leading party in government for the next three decades.

The consequences of the *Bear’s Paw* exercise were felt beyond Austria. The Munich-based newspaper *Bayern-Kurier* wrote after the exercise that the deficiencies shown were of importance ‘even [for] the overall European strategy,’ showing that ‘Austria would be in danger if attacked

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31 Ségur-Cabanac, ‘Lage BÄRENTATZE,’ p. 5.

32 Kreuter, *Erlebtes Bundesheer 2*, p. 380.

33 Ségur-Cabanac, ‘Lage BÄRENTATZE,’ p. 8.

34 The Christian-Social party in Austria is known as ‘People’s Party’ (Österreichische Volkspartei – ÖVP) since 1945.

by the Warsaw Pact armies'. That Austria would be able to withstand an onslaught was an 'illusion', and French General André Beaufre – undoubtedly one of the more important strategic thinkers of the Twentieth Century – was quoted as claiming that 'Austria is inviting an attack.'<sup>35</sup> Kreuter interpreted this article as an appeal from NATO that Austria should adapt its defence capabilities in line with reality.<sup>36</sup>

If this was really the case, it remained wishful thinking. Austria did not increase its meagre military spending. But the reforms of the 1970s eventually made it possible to counter the post-*Bear's Paw* negative mood in the Austrian Army, even leading to a new positive up-beat spirit in the mid-seventies. This was largely due to charismatic Count Spannocchi, Commandant of the Defence Academy since 1963, and Army Commander from 1973 to 1981. Already in 1970, Spannocchi authored a critical essay on 'the defence of a small state.'<sup>37</sup> Facing a hugely superior opponent, the small state under attack should not try to 'take up the counter-game with a mini-military force broken down to its proportions' but should rather try 'to undermine the superior technique with tactics deviating from conventional rules'.<sup>38</sup> As Brigadier Mayer summarized in retrospect, 'the new concept, the defence of the [whole] territory, developed in the 1970s, should bring a definite departure from the thinking of the Second World War'.<sup>39</sup> One might question whether old and new concepts could really be defined as 'World War Two' versus 'new' concepts. But the army spirit was revived when the new defence concept was implemented in the seventies. Ten years after *Bear's Paw*, Spannocchi in November 1979 staged the big *Raumverteidigungs-Übung* 1979 (RVÜ 79) in exactly the same area where *Bear's Paw* had gone wrong in 1969. This exercise should demonstrate the efficiency of the 'new army'. 32,000 soldiers (among them many reservists), 480 tracked and 4,200 wheeled vehicles took part.

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35 *Bayern-Kurier*, 2 November 1969, quoted in Kreuter, *Erlebtes Bundesheer* 2, pp. 399f.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 400.

37 Emil Spannocchi, 'Die Verteidigung des Kleinstaates,' in: *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift* 8/5 (September/October 1970), pp. 349-354, and 8/6, November/December 1970, pp. 431-437.

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 350 and 433.

39 Mayer, 'Das neue Konzept,' p. 105.

The budgetary restraints remained, preventing the acquisition of modern communication equipment, anti-tank and air defence missiles, not to mention a proper air force. As the long-serving Finance Minister Hannes Androsch recalled later, he was ready to give the army the necessary means to have the soldiers properly uniformed – but the army should spare him exotic (and expensive) wishes such as interceptor planes. The political understanding of proper defence requirements remained limited. Franz Freistetter's appeal to the political leadership after *Bear's Paw* to exercise its 'responsibility' by 'providing the necessary means for the armed forces to fulfil its tasks,' went largely unheeded.<sup>40</sup>

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40 Freistetter, 'Bärentatze,' p. 17.

## 12

# Nikiforos-Toxotis: The Rise and Fall of the Greek Doctrine of Extended Deterrence (1994-2000)

*Spyridon Plakoudas*

## A Tale of Peace and War (1821 – Present)

Ever since its independence from the Ottoman Empire nearly 200 years ago, Greece has witnessed intermittent periods of savage war and precarious peace with the Turks. From 1830 until World War I, the Greek Kingdom struggled to wrestle more territory from the Sick Man of Europe in the context of the Great Idea (Μεγάλη Ιδέα)<sup>1</sup> – the incorporation of all Greeks under the authority of the ‘Piedmont of the Eastern Mediterranean’: when the two states did not conflict directly, the Greek Kingdom instigated and supported various irredentist Greek rebellions within the Ottoman Empire.<sup>2</sup>

The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1919 was succeeded by yet another Greco-Turkish War in 1920 – this time between the Greek Kingdom and the National Turkish Movement under Kemal Atatürk who rejected the onerous Treaty of Sèvres. This war was terminated in 1923 at the expense of the over-extended Greece and marked the downfall of the Great Idea. The Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 (and the accompanying population exchange) sealed a century of war between Greece and Turkey (the successor state to the Ottoman Empire). Despite the recent vicious conflict, the two countries readily promoted the normalisation of the

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1 The Great Idea (Μεγάλη Ιδέα) constituted irrefutably the ‘raison d’être’ of the cachectic Greek kingdom: Greece should strive to unite the Greeks under the rule of the Sublime Porte under a single roof.

2 In fact, every 15 years an irredentist insurgency in Ottoman-ruled territory or a conventional war between Greece and the Ottoman Empire erupted between 1831 and 1919.

bilateral relations and the apex of this rapprochement was reached in 1930 when they signed a Treaty of Friendship. However, relations between the two countries (allies in NATO against the common Communist threat) soured in the 1960s and 1970s due to the Cyprus Issue<sup>3</sup> and almost collapsed after the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974.

Turkey and Greece did not directly confront each other in Cyprus and, as a result, the crisis in 1974 cannot be regarded as a new Greco-Turkish war.<sup>4</sup> A precarious peace ensued which was interrupted by frequent military tensions in the Aegean Sea. Indeed, further crises in 1976 and 1987 threatened to trigger a war between the two countries and weaken NATO's Southern Flank even further<sup>5</sup> – especially after the withdrawal of Greece from NATO's military wing between 1974 and 1980 in protest to NATO's apathy towards the Turkish invasion and illegal occupation of northern Cyprus.<sup>6</sup> In January 1996, Turkey openly questioned the sovereignty of Imia (or Kardak in Turkish) – a cluster of two uninhabited islands in the eastern Aegean Sea within a stone's throw from the opposite Turkish coast. This crisis, by far the worst since 1974, spiralled out of control and only the intervention of the USA prevented a war.<sup>7</sup> The Greek doctrine of extended deterrence from 1994 until 1999, i.e. the declared intention of Greece to defend against any Turkish security threat both in the Aegean Sea and Cyprus at the same time, exacerbated bilateral

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3 Greece and Turkey overtly supported the Greek and Turkish Cypriots respectively during the violent inter-communal clashes in 1963-1964 and the tensions between Ankara and Athens rose sharply. The USA repeatedly intervened to stave off a war between the two guarantors. Stefan Brenner: 'Military Coalitions in War and Peace: NATO and the Greek-Turkish Conflict, 1952-1989,' *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3-4 (2012), pp. 8-12.

4 The military junta only sent a minor expeditionary force to Cyprus during the initial phase of the invasion (Attila I). Christos Cassimeris: 'Greek Response to the Cyprus Invasion,' *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2008), pp. 256-173.

5 In 1976 (just two years after the invasion and occupation of Cyprus) the tensions between Athens and Ankara skyrocketed when a Turkish oceanographic vessel sailed into the Aegean Sea in search for oil in the sea zones adjacent to the eastern Greek islands. In 1987, an incident with the same Turkish oceanographic vessel caused a similar crisis. Haralampos Athanasopoulos: *Greece, Turkey and the Aegean Sea: A Case Study in International Law*, Jefferson, NC; London, McFarland, 2001, pp. 46-82, 99-101.

6 Fotios Moustakis: *The Greek-Turkish Relationship and NATO*, London, Frank Cass, 2003, pp. 41-43.

7 Stergios Arapoglou: 'Dispute in the Aegean Sea: The Imia/Kardak Crisis,' Maxwell, Alabama, Air Command and Staff College, 2002.



tensions, and détente occurred after 1999 with the so-called ‘earthquake diplomacy.’<sup>8</sup>

## The Apple of Discord (the Aegean Sea and Cyprus)

Since 1974, the two primary security disputes between Greece and Turkey have concerned the Cyprus Issue and the Aegean Dispute. In effect, the two disputes represent communicating vessels since neither one can be resolved independently of the other. After all, Turkey had not raised any claims to the Aegean Sea prior to the invasion of Cyprus in 1974.<sup>9</sup>

Although Greece insists that only one dispute exists between the two countries (i.e. the delimitation of the continental shelf of the Aegean),<sup>10</sup> the security disputes between Turkey and Greece over the archipelago include the following security-related issues:

- i) the demarcation of territorial waters;<sup>11</sup>
- ii) the use of the continental shelf and the demarcation of the exclusive economic zone;<sup>12</sup>

8 Erik Siegl: ‘Greek-Turkish Relations – Continuity or Change?’, *Perspectives*, No. 18 (2002), pp. 40-52.

9 Dimitris Salapatas: *The Aegean Sea Dispute between Greece and Turkey: The Consequences for NATO and the EU*, London, Akakia Publications, 2014.

10 Jon A. M. Van Dyke: ‘An Analysis of the Aegean Disputes under International Law,’ *Ocean Development and International Law*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2005), pp. 63-117.

11 After acceding to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982, Athens declared its intention to extend its territorial waters from 6 to 12 nautical miles. Turkey, however, strongly objected to an initiative which would effectively convert the archipelago into a ‘Greek Lake’ and, in 1995, declared that the extension of the Greek territorial waters amounted to a *casus belli*. Yücel Acer: *The Aegean Maritime Disputes and International Law* (Aldershot: Ashgate Dartmouth, 2002), pp. 4-5.

12 Greece argues that the islands of the archipelago are entitled *ipso facto* to continental shelf as enshrined by international maritime law and, accordingly, the continental shelf between the two countries should be demarcated on the basis of the median line between the Greek islands and the Turkish coast. Turkey, however, upholds that the Greek islands represent special cases in international maritime law since the Aegean Sea’s seabed effectively constitutes a natural geographical extension of the Anatolia landmass and, by extension, the islands do not possess rights to the continental shelf. For the Turkish viewpoint, see: Deniz Bölükbaşı: *Greece and Turkey: The Aegean Disputes: A Unique Case in International Law*, London, Cavendish Publications, 2004. For the Greek viewpoint, see: Christos L. Rozakis: ‘The Greek Continental Shelf’ in Theodore C. Kariotis (ed.): *Greece and the Law of the Sea*, The Hague; London, Kluwer Law International, 1997, pp. 67-114.

- iii) the delimitation of the national airspace and the Flight Information Region (FIR);<sup>13</sup>
- iv) the demilitarization of several Greek islands.<sup>14</sup>

With the peace treaties of Lausanne in 1923 and Paris in 1947,<sup>15</sup> Greece acquired control of the entire archipelago (with the only exception of the islands of Imvros and Tenedos which were awarded to Turkey in 1923<sup>16</sup>). Ever since 1974, Ankara has consistently striven to revise the status quo in the Aegean Sea in its favour and, consequently, prevent what a former Turkish official called the ‘strategic asphyxiation of Turkey.’<sup>17</sup> After all, the western Turkish coast remains vulnerable in military terms as long as Greece possesses the islands opposite to it and vice versa.<sup>18</sup>

In Cyprus, Turkey retains a 40,000-strong occupation army in the territory of the ‘Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus’ – an entity unrecognised and isolated by the international community. In the early 1990s, this occupation army outgunned the National Guard of Cyprus (the military of the internationally recognised state in the island) by a ratio of 1:3 in tanks and 1:4 in artillery and, in addition, possessed the

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13 Since the Cyprus Crisis in 1974, Turkey no longer recognises Greek national airspace beyond 6 nautical miles (i.e. the breadth of the Greek territorial waters according to its position) as valid and Turkish warplanes constantly violate the outer 4-nautical mile zone. Consequently, Greek warplanes routinely intercept Turkish ones in, sometimes deadly, dogfights. In addition, Turkey argues that the FIR of Athens, despite an earlier agreement in 1952 under the aegis of NATO, does not extend beyond the 25<sup>th</sup> meridian (i.e. the centre of the archipelago). Moustakis: *The Greek-Turkish Relationship*, pp. 39-40.

14 Since 1974, Turkey contends that Greece has violated the peace treaties of Lausanne in 1923 and Paris in 1947 which provided for the partial or complete demilitarization of the islands of the eastern Aegean Sea. Greece, in turn, argues that the Treaty of Montreux in 1936 allowed the remilitarisation of certain islands, and the invasion of Cyprus by Turkey in 1974 dictated the remilitarisation of the other eastern islands. Athanasopoulos: *Greece, Turkey and the Aegean Sea*, pp. 77-81.

15 This peace treaty, inter alia, ceded control of the Dodecanese, an Italian colony since 1912, to Greece after the end of World War II.

16 The Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 stipulated that the two islands (almost entirely Greek) would retain a ‘special administrative regime.’

17 According to Ahmet Davutoğlu, former foreign and prime minister of Turkey under the AKP, the control of the outlet of the Straits of Dardanelles by Greece in effect neutralizes the strategic advantage of their possession by Turkey; similarly, the control of the outlet of the Bay of Izmir, Turkey’s second most important city Istanbul, threatens the maritime and financial flows to this port-city. Ahmet Davutoğlu: *The Strategic Depth of Turkey*, translated by Nikolaos Raptopoulos (Athens: Poyitita Publications, 2010), p. 274.

18 Michael N. Schmitt: ‘Aegean Angst: A Historical and Legal Analysis of the Greek-Turkish Dispute,’ *Roger Williams University Law Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1996), pp. 15-56.

only air force in the island.<sup>19</sup> Greece retained a small army contingent (the Hellenic Force in Cyprus – or ΕΛΔΥΚ) to offset the overwhelming military superiority of Turkey in the island. However, this force could by no means deter Turkey or defend Cyprus in the event of new hostilities.

## The Doctrine of Joint Operational Theatre (1994 – 2000)

In 1993, the socialist ΠΑΣΟΚ won the early elections in Greece and, from the outset, implemented a new policy on the Cyprus Issue. Since its rise to power for the first time in 1981, the ΠΑΣΟΚ adopted a foreign policy that included an opening to the Arab World and the Third World to isolate Turkey and, by extension, prevent the recognition of the ‘Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.’<sup>20</sup> And most notably, the socialists even clandestinely approached the PKK, a communist militant group of Turkey’s Kurds that initiated in 1984 a separatist insurgency in south-east Turkey, to further debilitate Turkey.<sup>21</sup> In 1994, the ΠΑΣΟΚ voted a new law that recognized the genocide of the Greeks of Asia Minor by the Young Turks during World War I – an act that triggered a diplomatic crisis with Turkey.<sup>22</sup>

True to its offensive anti-Turkish policy, the ΠΑΣΟΚ in 1993 unveiled a new military doctrine – the so-called ‘doctrine of the joint operational theatre’ («δόγμα ενιαίου αμυντικού χώρου»): Greece would perceive any

19 «Ισοζύγιο Στρατιωτικής Ισχύος Ελλάδας – Τουρκίας 1974-2014’ [‘Military Balance of Power, Greece-Turkey 1974-2014’] *Ε-Αμυνα*, 2/9/2014.

20 Sotiris Roussos: «Η Ελληνική Πολιτική στη Μέση Ανατολή: Μεταξύ ‘Επιχειρησιακής Νοοτροπίας,’ ‘Εσωτερικής Πολιτικής’ και Νέων Προκλήσεων» [‘The Greek Policy in the Middle East: Between ‘Operational Mentality,’ ‘Domestic Policy’ and New Challenges’] in Constantinos Arvanitopoulos and Marilena Koppa (eds.): *30 Χρόνια Ελληνικής Εξωτερικής Πολιτικής [30 Years of Greek Foreign Policy]* (Αθήνα: Λιβάνης, 2005), pp. 79-98.

21 Indicatively, in October 1988 the retired Lieutenant General Dimitris Matafias and retired Admiral Antonis Naxakis visited the PKK’s Mahsun Korkmaz Academy in northern Lebanon along with deputies from the ΠΑΣΟΚ. Michael M. Gunter: *The Kurds and the Future of Turkey* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1997), p. 110.

22 Until the early 1990s, Greece had not called the ethnic-cleansing of Ottoman Greeks in Asia Minor (or Anadolu) ‘genocide’ for specific political reasons: in the interwar years, Bulgaria and not Turkey constituted the only threat to Greece’s national interests and, in the post-war years until 1974, the communist Balkan countries again and not Turkey (an ally in NATO since 1952) represented the major threat to Athens.

offensive action by Turkey in Cyprus as a *casus belli* between the two NATO allies and, by extension, undertake military operations on two fronts, Cyprus and the Aegean Sea.<sup>23</sup> In effect, Greece re-affirmed its prior role as the guarantor of Cyprus under the London-Zürich Agreements in 1959<sup>24</sup> – a role that Greece unilaterally relinquished in 1974.

The new security doctrine included the following inter-linked acts:

- a) the improvement of the quality of the Cypriot National Guard with the acquisition of modern anti-aircraft and anti-tank weaponry (to neutralize the tactical superiority of the Turkish occupying army in weapons and aircraft) and new tanks and helicopters (to develop a defensive capability vis-à-vis the Turkish occupying army);
- b) the construction of the required infrastructure for the accommodation of Greek Navy and Air Force units (i.e. the air base in Pafos<sup>25</sup> and the naval base in Larnaka);
- c) the conducting of joint war games in order to standardize defence procedures between Greece and Cyprus and to deter further Turkish aggression.

The general staffs in Nikosia and Athens decided that the military exercise *Nikiforos* ('victory-bearer') of the Cypriot National Guard would be conducted simultaneously with the military exercise *Toxotis* ('archer') of the Greek Armed Forces and jointly with units of the Greek Navy and Air Force. The exercise of the Cypriot National Guard was codenamed *Nikiforos* for two reasons: first, as a sign of the roused war spirit of the Greek Cypriots and, secondly, as a tribute to Nikephoros Phocas II, Byzantine emperor (963-969) who recaptured Crete, Cyprus

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23 Constantine Arvanitopoulos: 'Greek Defence Policy and the *Doctrine of Extended Deterrence*' in Andreas Theophanous and Van Coufoudakis (eds.): *Security and Co-operation in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Nicosia, InterCollege Press, 1997, pp. 12-14.

24 The London-Zürich Agreements in 1959 established the Republic of Cyprus with three powers (Greece, Turkey and Britain) as guarantors.

25 The air base in Pafos was symbolically codenamed 'Andreas Papandreou' as a gesture of gratitude to the Prime Minister of Greece and architect of the doctrine of the joint operational theatre.

and (northern) Syria and restored the naval dominance of the Greeks in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea.

Greece effectively adopted a doctrine of ‘extended deterrence’ to defend Cyprus and apply pressure on Turkey with regards to the inter-connected Aegean and Cyprus Disputes.<sup>26</sup> The exercise *Nikiforos* was organized in such a way as to convey a strong signal of deterrence.

In October 1994, six war jets (four bombers and two interceptors) of the Greek Air Force, and marines from a frigate belonging to the Greek Navy participated in *Nikiforos*. According to the exercise’s operational plan, the armour of the Cypriot National Guard would conduct an offensive operation while Greek war jets would provide close air support (CAS) and the Greek frigate would undertake a surprise amphibious assault deep behind enemy lines. In effect, the Greek Navy and Air Force would compensate for the lack of naval and aerial units in the National Guard.<sup>27</sup>

In September 1995, six war jets (three bombers and three interceptors) of the Greek Air Force and three naval vessels (a frigate, a submarine and a destroyer) participated in *Nikiforos* according to the operational plan of the previous year’s exercise. On Independence Day a few days later in October, the war jets of the Greek Air Force overflew the military parade in Larnaka – in which contingents of the Greek Navy participated. The Prime Minister of Cyprus, Glafkos Klyridis, subsequently inspected the personnel of the Greek Air Force at the air base at Pafos.<sup>28</sup>

The following year, in October 1996, Greece drastically increased its participation in the yearly exercise. Apart from the six war jets and the five naval vessels (two torpedoes, a frigate, a submarine and a destroyer),

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26 Yannis A. Stivachtis: ‘Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean Region: Security Considerations, the Cyprus Imperative and the EU Option’ in Thomas Diez (ed.): *The European Union and the Cyprus Conflict: Modern Conflict and Postmodern Union* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 46-49

27 Evangelos Theodoridis: «Θεωρία Αποτροπής: Συγκριτική Ανάλυση της Στρατηγικής της Ελλάδος, Ταϊβάν και Σιγκαπούρης» [‘Deterrence Theory: Comparative Analysis of the Strategy of Greece, Taiwan and Singapore’] (MA Thesis, University of Macedonia, 2015), p. 72.

28 Theodoridis: «Θεωρία Αποτροπής» [‘Deterrence Theory’], p. 73.

a unit of paratroopers (an elite military force) participated in the exercise for the first time. And on Independence Day a few days later, the ΕΛΔΥΚ and the participating Greek military forces paraded in front of the Prime Minister of Cyprus and the Minister of National Defence of Greece.<sup>29</sup>

This drastic increase in Greek military involvement was due to the Imia / Kardak Crisis only a few months earlier in January 1996. The crisis was the most severe between Greece and Turkey since 1974 and a war was averted only owing to the dynamic intervention of the USA. The downing of a Greek navy helicopter under suspicious circumstances in the early hours of 31 January threatened to trigger a new war between the two countries. However, the US Special Envoy for the Balkans, Richard Holbrooke, intervened and convinced the two sides to accept a diplomatic formula. The ensuing agreement ('no ships, no troops, no flags')<sup>30</sup> created the widespread impression of a national defeat in Greece. Far worse, in the wake of this severe crisis, Turkey published a list of what it considered to be all the islands and islets of the archipelago with a supposedly undetermined sovereignty status (the so-called 'grey zones'). Ankara insisted that certain islands not explicitly named in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 (e.g. Antipsara or Pontikos) and the Treaty of Paris in 1947 (e.g. Agathonisi) should not be considered the sovereign territory of Greece. In turn, Greece counter-argued that the two peace treaties ceded control of the islands of the north-western Aegean (in 1923) and the Dodecanese (in 1947) as a whole to Greece.<sup>31</sup> By contributing additional units to the exercise in Cyprus, ΠΑΣΟΚ signalled to Turkey and to public opinion in Greece (still in shock) that the 'doctrine of the joint operational theatre' would be upheld. Unbeknownst to public opinion in Greece, Nikosia had stood beside Athens during the Imia / Kardak Crisis and ordered the mobilization of the National Guard in accordance with

29 Theodoridis: «Θεωρία Αποτροπής» ['Deterrence Theory], p. 73.

30 Michalis Ignatiou and Athanasios Ellis: IMIA: Τα Απόρρητα Τηλεγραφήματα των Αμερικανών [IMIA: The Classified Telegrams of the Americans (Athens: Livanis, 2009)], pp. 174-193.

31 Turkish Republic: 'The Legal Framework Concerning the Kardak Issue' Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 30/7/2009; Dimitris Salapatas: *The Aegean Sea Dispute between Greece and Turkey: The Consequences for NATO and the EU* (London: Akakia Publications, 2014), pp. 41-45.

the provisions of the joint defence doctrine.<sup>32</sup>

*Nikiiforos* continued with the same vigour for the next two years (1997, 1998) as Greece and Cyprus strengthened their military co-operation in the aftermath of the Imia / Kardak Crisis. Quite predictably, Turkey reacted aggressively to the doctrine of extended deterrence in two ways: first, in November 1994 Turkey unveiled a new security doctrine<sup>33</sup> and, secondly, Ankara increased its provocations vis-à-vis Greece and Cyprus in an effort to undermine the credibility of the doctrine of extended deterrence.

### The Turkish Doctrine of the 2.5 Wars (1995-1999)

In the 1990s, Turkey experienced a dire crisis at every level. As one weak multi-party government replaced another in quick succession<sup>34</sup>, the economy deteriorated sharply and the internal political polarisation (Islamists vs non-Islamists, Kurds vs Turks) increased alarmingly.<sup>35</sup> Far worse, the conflict against the separatist PKK insurgents in south-eastern and eastern Turkey escalated dramatically at the expense of democracy and human rights.

In 1994, the Turkish Armed Forces suffered the hitherto highest casualties in the war against the PKK (1,145 dead) as Ankara intensified its counter-insurgency campaign in the south-east.<sup>36</sup> Since the PKK was

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32 Michael R. Hickock: 'Falling Toward War in the Aegean: A Case Study of the Imia/Kardak Affair,' Maxwell, Alabama: Air War College, 2001, p. 47.

33 'İki Buçuk Savaş Stratejisi' ['Strategy of Two-and-a-Half Wars'] *Milliyet*, 27/11/1994

34 Between 1990 and 2002 (the year of the AKP's election triumph) a total of 9 prime ministers ruled the country. Erik J. Zürcher: *Turkey: A Modern History*, London: IB Tauris, 2010, pp. 300-330.

35 Ziya Öniş: Crises and Transformations in Turkish Political Economy,' *Turkish Policy*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2010), pp. 53-57.

36 Nedim Şener: '26 Yılın Kanlı Bilançosu' ['26 Years of Bloody Balance'], *Milliyet*, 24/6/2011; Berkay Mandiraci: 'Turkey's PKK Conflict: The Death Toll,' *International Crisis Group*, 20/7/2016.

openly aided by Syria<sup>37</sup> and clandestinely by Greece,<sup>38</sup> and Hafez al-Assad and Papandreou had established close ties with an obvious anti-Turkish leanings,<sup>39</sup> Turkey adopted the doctrine of the ‘2.5 Wars’ (*ikibuçuk savaş stratejisi*). In other words, the Turkish Armed Forces prepared to wage two wars against Syria and Greece and a half war against the PKK – all at the same time.<sup>40</sup> In fact, Ankara believed (mistakenly) that Athens and Damascus were negotiating a defensive pact in 1995.<sup>41</sup>

In 1995, one year after the official announcement of the doctrine of extended deterrence by Athens and Nikosia, the relations between Greece and Turkey deteriorated further. The Greek Minister of Defence, himself a leading figure in the nationalist wing of ΠΑΣΟΚ, characterized Turkey as the principal threat to Greek national security in May.<sup>42</sup> As mentioned above, the previous year, ΠΑΣΟΚ had voted a new law which recognized the genocide of the Greeks of Asia Minor by the Young Turks during World War I – an act that triggered a diplomatic crisis with Turkey.<sup>43</sup> Under pressure from the nationalist hard-liners within ΠΑΣΟΚ, in June 1995 the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was ratified by the parliament in Greece. Turkey, quite predictably, responded with hostility. Ankara officially declared that the extension of the territorial waters of Greece from 6 to 12 nautical miles would

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37 Öcalan resided in Damascus and the PKK trained in the Bekaa Valley in northern Lebanon – then under Syrian military occupation. Daniel Byman: *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 150-152.

38 Indicatively, Öcalan requested political asylum in Greece in 1999 after his expulsion from Syria; in fact, he was captured in Nairobi, Kenya the same year after residing for several days within the Greek embassy.

39 Papandreou approached Syria and Armenia, two countries with unresolved differences with Turkey, in an effort to further isolate Ankara. Idris Bal: *Turkish Foreign Policy in Post-Cold War Era*, Florida, BrownWalker Press, 2004, pp. 274-275.

40 Philip Robins: *Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War*, London: C. Hurst, 2003, pp. 171-172.

41 Stephen Larrabee and Ian O. Lesser: *Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty*, Santa Monica, California, RAND, 2003, pp. 83-84.

42 «Ο Εξ Ανατολών Εχθρός» [‘The Enemy from the East’], *Kathimerini*, 7/5/1995.

43 Until the early 1990s, Greece had not recognized the ethnic-cleansing of Ottoman Greeks in Asia Minor (or Anadolu) as genocide for specific political reasons: in the interwar years, Bulgaria and not Turkey constituted the only threat to Greece’s national interests and, in the post-war years until 1974, the communist Balkan countries again and not Turkey (an ally in NATO since 1952) represented the major threat to Athens.



constitute a *casus belli*.<sup>44</sup> Until now, Greece has not extended its territorial waters to 12 nautical miles.

Turkey not only provoked a further crisis with Greece in January 1996 but also publicized a few weeks later the theory of ‘grey zones’ in the Aegean Sea. In June, Turkey for the first time organized the (now annual) exercise *Efes* – from the name of the Ancient Greek city Ephesus (now an archaeological site) in the proximity of which the exercise was conducted. The 4<sup>th</sup> Army of Turkey (or Army of the Aegean Sea – *Ege Ordusu*) was committed to *Efes*. The 4<sup>th</sup> Army had been established in 1975 with the claim that Greece was violating the Treaties of Lausanne and Paris by re-militarizing the islands in the eastern Aegean Sea. This claim ignores the ‘Turkish Peace-Keeping Force’ (*Türk Barış Kuvvetleri*) in occupied Cyprus as well as the ‘Command of the Special Aegean Mission Group’ (Ege Müşterek Özel Görev Kuvveti or the EMÖGK) in western Turkey.<sup>45</sup> In effect, the new Army of the Aegean consisted of two large military formations (with more than 40,000 soldiers each) with an offensive orientation in the Aegean and Cypriot theatres of war.

Tansu Çiller, the first woman prime minister of Turkey, oversaw the exercise of 1996; the operational scenario involved an amphibious attack on an island<sup>46</sup> – a rather lucid message to Greece in the wake of the Imia / Kardak Crisis. *Efes*, Turkey’s largest military exercise, signalled the intention and capability of Ankara to challenge the sovereignty of the eastern Aegean Sea. The more Greece increased its participation in *Nikiforos*, the more Turkey expanded the scale and scope of *Efes*. In 1997, the operational scenario for *Efes* included both an amphibious and an

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44 For an extensive analysis of the territorial waters issue, see: Par Didier Ortoland: ‘The Greco-Turkish Dispute over the Aegean Sea: A Possible Solution?’, *Défense nationale et sécurité collective*, No. 716 (February 2009), pp. 74-87.

45 Apart from the *Türk Barış Kuvvetleri*, these units are subordinated to the 4<sup>th</sup> Army: the 11<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Motorized Infantry Brigades, the 57<sup>th</sup> Artillery Brigade and the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigades. In addition, the Army of the Aegean is supported by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army Aviation Regiment and the Special Brigade of Amphibian Forces.

46 Interview with Lieutenant General Andreas Iliopoulos, former Commander of the Supreme Military Command of the Interior and the Islands [Ανώτατη Στρατιωτική Διοίκηση Εσωτερικού και Νήσων or ΑΣΣΔΕΝ], Greece.

airborne assault on an island, while the numbers of participating units augmented drastically; indicatively, 1/3 of all amphibious vessels were used.<sup>47</sup>

In addition, Turkey increased its military provocations in the Aegean Sea. Although Turkish war jets had routinely been violating the airspace of Greece in the eastern archipelago since 1974, the military skirmishes witnessed a quantitative and qualitative escalation. While in 1995 less than 100 violations were recorded, in 1996 they rose steeply to 550. In addition, few of the Turkish war jets were armed in 1995, whereas in 1996 almost all of them were.<sup>48</sup> Worse, the ensuing dogfights resulted in the downing of several Turkish fighter planes. In February 1995, December 1995 and October 1996 three Turkish fighter planes crashed into the sea.<sup>49</sup> In October 1997, Turkish fighter planes harassed the air convoy which transported the Greek Minister of National Defence to Cyprus on the occasion of the annual exercise *Nikiforos*. Quite predictably, this provocation sparked the worst dogfights (to date) in the Aegean Sea.<sup>50</sup>

## An End to Illusions (1999-2000)

Due to rising tensions in the Aegean Sea, Greece and Turkey sought a way to diffuse them and NATO acted as a mediator. In the sidelines of the NATO summit in Madrid in June 1997, Greece and Turkey signed an agreement which recognized the 'legal and vital interests' of

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47 Interview with Lieutenant General Andreas Iliopoulos, former Commander of the Supreme Military Command of the Interior and the Islands [Ανώτατη Στρατιωτική Διοίκηση Εσωτερικού και Νήσων or ΑΣΔΕΝ], Greece.

48 Vangelis Triantis: «Όλες οι Τουρκικές Παραβιάσεις στο Αιγίο από το 1995: Τι Δείχνουν και Πώς Εξηγούνται» [‘All the Turkish Violations in the Aegean since 1995: What They Show and How They Are Explained’], *Huffington Post* (Greece), 20/5/2016.

49 An F-16C crashed in February 1995 and an F-4H crashed in December 1995; an F-16D crashed into the sea in October 1996. In the two last incidents, two Turkish pilots lost their lives. Αιέν Υψικρατεί» [‘Always Rule the Skies’], *E-Amyna*, 2/9/2014.

50 Interview with Theodoros Christophilopoulos, former Head of the School of Weapons and Tactics (Σχολείο Όπλων και Τακτικής) at the air base in Andravida (Greece).

Turkey in the Aegean.<sup>51</sup> One year after the Imia / Kardak Crisis, Greece backed down once again in the face of increased Turkish assertiveness. In December 1998, a new crisis erupted which ended in humiliation for Greece and Cyprus. In 1998, Cyprus purchased S-300 surface-to-air anti-aircraft systems from Russia to shield the island from Turkey's air superiority. Ankara threatened Nikosia with war and the latter turned to Athens for support in the context of the 'doctrine of the joint operational theatre.' Greece did not want to risk war with Turkey and declined to offer military or diplomatic support to Cyprus. Abandoned by Greece, Cyprus was forced, humiliatingly, to sell the S-300 to Greece.<sup>52</sup>

After 1998, Greece drastically reduced its participation in *Nikiforos* – although the exercise was continued until 2000. Greece had progressively adopted a new policy towards Turkey: appeasement. In February 1999, Greece allowed Turkey's secret services to capture Öcalan (leader of the PKK); initially, Greece provided temporary refuge to Öcalan in the Greek embassy in Nairobi but yielded to Turkish and, most importantly, US pressure.<sup>53</sup> At the summit of the EU at Helsinki in December 1999, Greece agreed that Turkey be awarded the status of an EU-candidate country.<sup>54</sup> In October 2000, *Nikiforos-Toxotis* was conducted for the last time. Greece had already initiated the 'earthquake diplomacy' with Turkey in the wake of the deadly earthquakes in western Turkey in August 1999 and simultaneously abandoned the doctrine of extended deterrence.<sup>55</sup> Ironically, the ΠΑΣΟΚ both launched and terminated this doctrine – oddly without suffering any substantial injury to its popularity. In the April 2000 elections, the ΠΑΣΟΚ won – though by a narrow margin.

51 Ekavi Athenassopoulou: 'Blessing in Disguise? The Imia-Kardak Crisis and Greek-Turkish Relations,' *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1997), p. 97.

52 «Πως ο Σημίτης Εξόρισε τους S-300 στην Κρήτη» ['How Simitis Exiled the S-300 in Crete'], *Sigma Live*, 22/12/2015; Theodoridis: «Θεωρία Αποτροπής» ['Deterrence Theory], pp. 73-74.

53 For an extensive analysis of this issue, see the monograph of the agent of the Greek secret services involved in the affair. Savvas Kalenderidis: *Παράδοση Οτζαλάν: Η Ωρα της Αλήθειας* [*Surrender of Öcalan: The Hour of Truth*], Athens: InfoGnomon Publications, 2007.

54 «Οι Αποφάσεις του Ελσίνκι και το Κυπριακό» ['The Decisions of Helsinki and the Cyprus Issue'], *Rizospastis*, 17/11/2002.

55 Theodoridis: «Θεωρία Αποτροπής» ['Deterrence Theory], p. 73.

In conclusion, the Greek 'doctrine of the joint operational theatre' proved over-ambitious as the pugnacious reaction of Turkey eventually compelled Greece to abandon it. After 1999, Turkey did not subscribe to the 'doctrine of 2.5 wars': the PKK was defeated and its leader captured, while Syria was neutralized thanks to the alliance with Israel.<sup>56</sup> However, Turkey did not cancel the annual exercise *Efes*. Instead, this exercise is upgraded year after year despite the fact that the Greek doctrine of extended deterrence no longer exists. Just like the 4<sup>th</sup> Army, *Efes* reminds Greece of the capability of Turkey to conduct an amphibious and airborne attack in the eastern Aegean Sea at will.

In the late 1990s, NATO was deeply concerned about the possibility of a war on the Alliance's southern flank – although the Alliance adopted a neutral stance over the two countries' disputes. The USA, after all, narrowly averted a war between these two countries in 1996. In the aftermath of the Imia / Kardak Crisis, the USA increasingly assumed initiatives to diffuse bilateral tensions – which ended in the Madrid and Helsinki Agreements in 1997 and 1999 respectively. In 2004, the USA supported the Annan Plan, a detailed proposal by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan for the reunification of Cyprus, which was never implemented. The two countries' disputes still cause critical problems within NATO (e.g. conflicts over the command structure or military drills in the Eastern Mediterranean)<sup>57</sup> and, yet, the Alliance has not devised a formal mechanism for the resolution of such intra-Alliance disputes. Intra-Alliance crisis management cannot always depend on the intervention of 'Uncle Sam'; a special body should be created within NATO to deal with such issues.

In any case, Greek and Turkish exercises were both indicators of their respective policies towards each other and exacerbated tensions when these mounted. To hedge against open conflict arising from military

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56 Amikam Nachmani: 'The Remarkable Turkish-Israeli Tie,' *Middle East Forum*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1995), pp. 19-29.

57 Stephen Mann: 'The Greek-Turkish Dispute in the Aegean Sea: Its Ramifications for NATO and the Prospects for Resolution' (MA Thesis: US Naval Postgraduate School, 2001), pp. 46-48.

exercises, it would be extremely helpful if the OSCE's Vienna rules about military exercises could be revised to include the commitment not to use exercises for the purpose of intimidation.



## 13

# Military exercises and Russian fighting power 2009-2016

*Johan Norberg*

## Introduction

The performance of Russia's Armed Forces in the war against Georgia in 2008 was by most accounts lacklustre. In 2014, the audacity and speed of the Russian military operation in Crimea surprised observers, although the operation arguably had several unique features that favoured Russian forces.<sup>1</sup> In 2009, the Russian Ministry of Defence (MoD) began a major reorganization of the Armed Forces accompanied by higher defence spending, which doubled between 2005 and 2015.<sup>2</sup> That alone, however, hardly explains improved operational performance. Military exercises between 2011 and 2014 prepared the Russian Armed Forces for fighting large-scale joint inter-service high-intensity combat operations. Since 2014, Russia has used military power by launching operations to seize Crimea, start war against Ukraine in Donbass in 2014 and intervene in the Syrian Civil War in 2015.

The Russian notion of military power (*voennaia moshch*) includes a state's ability to influence other states, indirectly by showing force or directly by military intervention. It also includes a state's assets that can be turned into military force such as population, economy, industrial and

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1 Johan Norberg, Fredrik Westerlund and Ulrik Franke, 'The Crimea Operation: Implications for Future Russian Military Interventions' in *A Rude Awakening: Ramifications of Russian Aggression Towards Ukraine*, Niklas Granholm, Johannes Malminen and Gudrun Persson (ed), (p. 41-49), Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2014.

2 Susanne Oxenstierna, Susanne (2016) 'Russian Defence Expenditure' in Gudrun Persson, *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2016*, Swedish Defence Research Agency, December, 2016, pp. 133 – 150.

scientific development and, crucially, policies to mobilise these assets for military needs.<sup>3</sup> The embodiment of military power includes the totality of a state's military organization, i.e. all ministries and government agencies related to national defence.<sup>4</sup> A country's military power is thus more than its armed forces.

## Defining and Analysing Fighting Power

The key part of the military power of a state is the fighting power of its armed forces.<sup>5</sup> The Russian notion of fighting power (*boevaia moshch*) pertains to a state's armed forces. It depends, among other things, on a force's ability to carry out assigned missions, b) the quantity and quality of personnel and equipment and c) the quality of commanders and command and control systems. The definition also includes units' combat capability<sup>6</sup> and combat readiness.<sup>7</sup>

Combat readiness has its own category of exercises and combat readiness inspections (CRI), also called snap exercises. Designed to improve and verify readiness, these come in two forms. Partial CRIs pertain to a single unit, formation or service. Comprehensive CRIs include several services, sometimes in an entire Military District. The MoD reintroduced these Soviet-era methods in 2013. If the annual strategic exercises are about the ability to wage war, readiness inspections are about the ability to go

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3 MoD Encyclopaedia, 'Voennaia Moshch,' <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details.htm?id=4337@morfDictionary> (accessed 25 II 2017). 'MoD' in references here denotes the Russian Ministry of Defence, if not stated otherwise.

4 MoD Encyclopaedia, 'Voennaia organizatsia gosudarstva,' <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details.htm?id=4341@morfDictionary> (accessed 9 IV 2017).

5 MoD Encyclopaedia, 'Voennaia Moshch'.

6 The Russian notion of combat capability stipulates that a unit is combat capable if 75 per cent of its organization is intact, probably in terms of stipulated servicemen and equipment. MoD Encyclopaedia, 'Boevaia Sposobnost,' <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details.htm?id=3465@morfDictionary> (accessed 30 III 2017).

7 MoD Encyclopaedia, 'BOEVAIA MOSHCH,' <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details.htm?id=3456@morfDictionary>, (accessed 25 II 2017) and 'Boevaia Moshch,' <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details.htm?id=12671@morfDictionary> (accessed 25 II 2017).



to war.<sup>8</sup> Neither combat readiness nor combat capabilities are dealt with further here.<sup>9</sup>

Operations are how military power is transformed into action that affects both state and non-state actors. The Russian notion of *operatsia* describes an interconnected chain of battles under a single plan. It also defines four different operational levels. First, strategic-level operations involve all types of a nation's forces in a war theatre.<sup>10</sup> Second, operational/strategic-level operations include appropriately large formations for that level (army fronts, navy fleets, air armies). Third, operational-level activities involve formations such as combined-arms armies and flotillas. Finally, the operational/tactical level includes formations such as an army corps.<sup>11</sup> Here, the term strategic level includes both strategic and operational/strategic-level operations.

### *Key Observation Factors in Exercises*

Why study exercises to describe the fighting power of a country's armed forces? Military professionals see obvious value in training and exercises. Stephen Biddle notes that the complexity of the modern battle's many simultaneous moving parts requires well-trained soldiers and officers. Furthermore, offensive tactics using modern systems are complex and demand high levels of training and skill to be implemented properly.<sup>12</sup> The assumption here is that what forces train to do in exercises indicates their capabilities and behaviour in actual combat operations.

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8 Johan Norberg, *Training to Fight – Russian Military Exercises 2011–2014*, Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2015, pp. 23–24.

9 Both annual strategic exercises and combat readiness are included in a wider study about Russian military exercises from the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) in 2017/18.

10 The Russian notion of *teatr voennykh deistvii* refers to a whole, or large parts of a, continent, with surrounding seas, including the air and space above these areas. MoD Encyclopaedia, 'Teatr voennykh deistvii (TVD),' <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details.htm?id=14091@morfDictionary> (accessed 27 II 2017).

11 *Ibid.* and MoD Encyclopaedia, 'OPERATIVNOE ISKUSSTVO,' <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details.htm?id=13724@morfDictionary> (accessed 27 II 2017) and MoD Encyclopaedia, 'Operativnoe Iskusstvo,' <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details.htm?id=7644@morfDictionary> (accessed 27 II 2017).

12 Stephen Biddle, *Military Power – Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle*, Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 38 and 49).

The three factors noted above, reflecting the Russian definition of fighting power, can be ascertained from reports on the Russian Armed Forces' annual strategic exercises. The first two are qualitative. First, the ability to carry out assigned missions: this means looking for the classification of an exercise (strategic, operational, tactical), assuming that it strives to attain that stated ambition. Second, clues about abilities referring to command and control can be found in the complex terms used for combined-arms and inter-service coordination, i.e. which services and arms are involved. It also means looking for either the label 'combined-arms' (*obshchvoiskovoi*) or 'inter-service' (*mezhdovoi*), or mentions of 'command and control' as a part of the exercise. The third factor is quantitative: the stated number of personnel and equipment. Indications for this can be found in the stated size of the exercise, in terms of the number of servicemen and equipment. Russian official sources rarely include the number of conscripts, contract soldiers, officers or modern or old equipment, so these will be left out.

So, how did exercises contribute to the Russian Armed Forces' fighting power between 2009 and 2016? Answering this question requires outlining the stated size of annual strategic exercises, specifying which services, arms and formations were involved to provide a basis to discuss Russia's potential for strategic-level operations.

## Sources

But before starting this analysis, a note on the material on which this study is based. Two reports from the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) are the main sources for the period 2009-2014. The first covers Russian operational/strategic exercises in 2009-2010.<sup>13</sup> The second covers the same exercises from 2011-2014.<sup>14</sup> For 2015 and 2016, the primary source is press statements from the Russian MoD and the secondary source

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13 Markus Ekström, *Rysk operativ-strategisk övningsverksamhet under 2009 och 2010*, Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2010 (in Swedish).

14 Johan Norberg, *Training to Fight – Russian Military Exercises 2011–2014*.

is articles from the Russian military press. An FOI report about Russia's military capability in a ten-year perspective<sup>15</sup> provided a background assessment. The unofficial website [www.milkavkaz.net](http://www.milkavkaz.net), as of April 2017, was used to identify units. Internet and social media provide plenty of information on these issues.

## The Russian Armed Forces' strategic exercises 2009–2016



*Map 1 - Russia's Military Districts and Joint Strategic Commands in 2017.*

Russia's annual strategic exercises rotate between Military Districts. In 2010, the number of Military Districts was reduced from six to four: the Eastern, Central, Southern, and Western Districts. In December

<sup>15</sup> Gudrun Persson, *Russian Military Capability* ..., pp.25-27.

2014, the Western Military District was divided into two new entities, named the Western Military District and the Northern Fleet. The latter essentially took over responsibility for the Kola Peninsula and surrounding territories, as well as for most of Russia's military activities in the Arctic. The Military Districts are mainly used for generating forces. Operations are commanded by Joint Strategic Commands (JSC), one in each Military District.<sup>16</sup>

The annual strategic exercises encompass a Joint Inter-Service Combat Operation (JISCO) in a war theatre, often with elements of inter-agency coordination and civil-military cooperation, which reflects the Russian notion of a state's military organization (*voennaia organizatsia*), i.e. all actors involved in defence. These exercises are the culmination of the Armed Forces' annual training cycle.<sup>17</sup> The overview is divided into two periods: 2009-2012 and 2013-2016. The emphasis is on the years 2009-2010 and 2015 -2016.

### Table 1. Russia's annual strategic military exercises 2009 -2016

\* - with allies **Abbreviations:** *a-c* - aircraft; *AIFV* - Armoured Infantry Fighting Vehicle (incl. armoured personnel carriers); *Arty* - Artillery; *helo* - helicopter; *MBT* - Main Battle Tank; *MD* - [Russian] Military District; *pcs* - pieces of primarily ground forces equipment such as arty pcs, AIFV; *Op.* - operational [level]; *strat.* - strategic [level]; *sub* - submarines; **Sources:** Ekström, 2010 and Norberg, 2015 for the period 2009-2014; the Russian MoD and Krasnaia Zvezda for 2015-2016.

16 For more about command and control of operations, see Gudrun Persson, *Russian Military Capability* ..., pp. 25 – 27.

17 Aleksandr Tikhonov, 'Na iugo-zapadnom napraavlennii,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 13 September 2016, <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/pavlyutkina/item/30426-na-yugo-zapadnom-napraavlennii> (accessed 12 V 2017) and MoD, 'Ha iuge Rossii startovalo strategicheskoe komandno-shtabnoe uchenie «Kavkaz-2016»,' 5 September 2016, on the internet: [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12094734@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12094734@egNews) (accessed 10 V 2017).

	<i>Name of exercise</i>	Stated level	Location	Russian Personnel	Equipment
	<i>Osen</i> series	Strategic	Western war theatre North Caucasus MD	<b>29 000</b>	- 450 AIFV; 250 arty pcs; 30 a-c/ helo
	- <i>Kavkaz</i>	- Op. Strat (Jul)		8 500	
	- <i>Zapad</i> *	- Op. Strat (Sep)		6 000	- 63 a-c; 40 helo; 228 MBT; 470 AIFV; 234 arty pcs.
<b>20</b>	- <i>Ladoga</i>	- Op. Strat. (Sep)	Belarus, Western Russia, Barents/Baltic Seas,	14 500	- 1400 pcs; 16 ships; 6 sub; 1 landing ship; 12 transport a-c; 10 a-c/helo.
<b>09</b>			Baltic Sea and Kola/Barents Sea		
<b>20</b>	<i>Vostok</i>	- Op. Strat.	Eastern MD	20 000	- 5 000 pcs; 75 a-c and helo; 40 ships
<b>10</b>					
<b>20</b>	<i>Tsentri</i>	Strategic**	Central MD & Central Asia; Caspian Sea	12 000	- "1000s" of pcs incl 100 MBT, 50 a-c, 10 ships;
<b>11</b>	<i>Shchit Soiuza</i> *	Operational	Western MD & Belarus	7 000	-200 pcs, 100 MBT, 100 AIFV/arty pcs

20 12	<i>Kavkaz</i>  NN	Strategic  Joint inter-service	Southern MD, Black & Cas- pian Seas  Kola region	8 000  7 000	- 200 AIFV; 20 MBT; 100 arty pcs; 30 a-c/helo; 10 ships;  - 20 ships/submarines, 30 a-c, 150 pcs
20 13	<i>Zapad*</i>  NN	Strategic  Operational	Western MD  Kola region	< 90 000  2 500	- 180 pcs incl. 10 MBT; 40 a-c, 10 ships  - 50 pcs, 30 ships, 20 a-c/helo
20 14	<i>Vostok</i>	Strat. Staff EX	Eastern MD	<155 000	- 8 000 (incl. 1 500 MBT; 4 000 AIFV); 632 a-c/helo; 84 ships
20 15	<i>Tsentr*</i>  <i>Sbchit Soiuza*</i>	Strat. Staff EX  Operational	Central MD/ Central Asia; Caspian Sea; Southern MD Western MD & Belarus	95 000  8 800	- 7 000 pcs, 170 a-c and helo, 20 ships  - 80 a-c/helo, 270 pcs, 100 MBT
20 16	<i>Kavkaz</i>  NN	Strat. Staff EX  Navy Comb Arms	Southern MD  White/Barents/ Laptev seas	120 000	- 12 500 men, 400 pcs (incl 90 MBT), 60 a-c/helo; 15 ships (South MD)  - 35 ships/subs; 15 a-c/ helo; 11 pcs;

## Annual Strategic Exercises 2009-2012

Table 1 shows that Russia conducted three operational/strategic exercises in 2009: *Kavkaz* (Caucasus), *Zapad* (West) and *Ladoga* in Russia's potential Western and South-Western war theatres. *Zapad* and *Ladoga* took place in parallel under a single operational thought and plan. All three exercises included air, sea and ground forces, and together constituted the strategic exercise series *Osen* (autumn).<sup>18</sup> In 2010, Russia carried out one operational/strategic exercise, *Vostok-2010* in the Far East. The Armed Forces mainly exercised tactical capabilities. One possible reason was a need to improve military capability after the 2008 Georgia war, another that the still mainly Soviet era equipment limited possible operational novelties. A key aim was to test and evaluate new command and control structures and new brigade formations being introduced.<sup>19</sup>

### *Kavkaz-2009*

The operational-strategic exercise *Kavkaz-2009* (Caucasus-2009) took place 29 June-6 July in the North Caucasus Military District and on the Black and Caspian Seas. This first part of the *Osen* strategic exercise series involved 8,500 servicemen, 200 tanks, 450 armoured vehicles, 250 artillery pieces and forces from the Interior Troops, the FSB and the Emergencies Ministry (MChS).<sup>20</sup> The stated aim was to train counter-terrorism operations and evaluate the new brigade structure as well as command and communication systems.<sup>21</sup> *Kavkaz-2009* enabled the Russian Armed Forces to exercise a JISCO with elements of combined-arms battles in the ground forces as well as inter-agency operations.

### *Zapad-2009*

The second part of *Osen* was *Zapad-2009* took place 18-29 September

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18 Ekström (2010:4) and Andrei Danko, '«Zapad-2009»: pervye itogi,' *Krasnaia Zvezda* (15 September 2009), [http://old.redstar.ru/2009/09/15\\_09/1\\_03.html](http://old.redstar.ru/2009/09/15_09/1_03.html) (accessed 05 IV 2017).

19 Ekström 2010:4 and 9.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50 and Leonid Khairemdinov, 'Bolshie manevry: «Ladoga-2009»,' *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 7 October 2009, [http://old.redstar.ru/2009/10/07\\_10/2\\_02.html](http://old.redstar.ru/2009/10/07_10/2_02.html), accessed 23 II 2017.

21 Ekström 2010: p. 53.

in Russia and Belarus. In its Western war theatre Russia probably expected to face NATO, a technologically advanced adversary. Electronic warfare, air defence as well as mobility of units were key elements of Zapad-2009. The stated aim of this exercise involving 12,500 servicemen was to train and evaluate command and control and the ability of Russian forces to deploy to Belarus. The first phase was three days of planning, staff work and transporting forces to exercise areas in the region. The second phase was six days of tactical exercises for air defence and ground forces brigades in defensive combat and evaluating command and control. Air force units carried out both ground attack and air defence missions, the latter in support of airborne forces carrying out a landing with 700 soldiers and nine armoured vehicles.<sup>22</sup>

The Russian Armed Forces displayed little ability for stand-off warfare, but indicated an ability to resist a stand-off warfare capable adversary. Another challenge was rail transport, a key operational/strategic means of mobility, especially for the ground forces. The key challenge was lack of relevant skills in ground forces units. The then chief of the General Staff, General Nikolai Makarov, noted two key challenges: outdated equipment and a rigid approach to operations among officers.<sup>23</sup>

### *Ladoga-2009*

At the same time as *Zapad-2009*, *Ladoga-2009* took place separately with 7,400 servicemen in nine land and sea exercise areas in north-western Russia, from Kaliningrad to St Petersburg to the Kola Peninsula. There were two phases. The first was planning, staff work and amassing forces (18-24 September), including transporting a battalion of the 28th Motor Rifle Brigade from Yekaterinburg, some 2,000 kilometres away. The ensuing five days of tactical-level manoeuvres included live-fire exercises, airborne landings of some 1,000 soldiers and 20 vehicles, also at night, ground forces counter-attacks supported by attack helicopters, and air defence (including fighter aircraft). On the Kola Peninsula, a naval

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22 *Ibid.*, pp. 24 – 30.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 34 – 35.



infantry hovercraft landing was supported by Su-24 fighter-bombers. In addition, units from the Interior Troops, the FSB and MChS participated in the final tactical phase.<sup>24</sup>

The exercise area for *Ladoga* was 1,500 km wide and 300 km deep.<sup>25</sup> *Zapad* took place mainly in Belarus. Together, these are enormous territories. The total stated number of servicemen, some 20,000, thus seems low. One reason could have been that the Russian Armed Forces in 2009-2010 re-organized its structure. It would thus have made sense to test new structures, equipment and methods in exercises. It may be costly to bring a large force into an exercise if it is unclear it has the basic capabilities needed.

*Zapad* and *Ladoga* were carried out in a common framework<sup>26</sup> that enabled commanders, staffs and support units to train and improve planning and commanding core elements of a JISCO such as inter-service coordination and combined-arms tactics in a theatre-level operation. It also enabled the General Staff to train to handle operational/strategic-level missions with two operational directions across a huge area.

### *Vostok-2010*

The operational/strategic exercise *Vostok-2010* took place in Russia's Far East from 29 June-8 July. The perceived adversary was probably China. Compared to previous exercises, the reported amount of equipment was much larger: 5,000 armoured vehicles and 40 ships. The stated number of participants was some 20,000,<sup>27</sup> meaning an average of only about four people per armoured vehicle and ship. If the figure for vehicles is true, the real number of participants was probably higher, or the participating units hollow.

Ground forces trained combined-arms combat with support from engineers for crossing rivers and from fighter-bombers striking enemy

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24 *Ibid.*, pp. 41 – 46.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

positions. Air force and air defence units deployed A-50 and An-12 airborne radars as well as S-300 and S-400 theatre air defence missiles. The navy deployed the heavy missile cruisers *Petr Veliki* from the Northern Fleet and *Moskva* from the Black Sea Fleet to the Far East. One exercise scenario episode was that advancing enemy formations detonated a nuclear mine.<sup>28</sup>

A large-scale Russian operation in its Far East war theatre probably needs reinforcements from other parts of Russia. Five Su-34 and nineteen Su-24 flew across Russia, re-fuelling in mid-air along the way. Personnel from a battalion tactical group was airlifted from Yekaterinburg and got its heavy equipment from the Eastern Military District brigade equipment stores.<sup>29</sup> Functioning railways are key for strategic operations in Russia's Far East war theatre. The railway troops exercised repairing railways, protected by air defence units.<sup>30</sup> In *Vostok-2010*, the Russian Armed Forces trained a theatre-level JISCO against sizeable enemy forces with nuclear weapons in the operation.

The operational/strategic exercises 2009-2010 enable five capability-related observations. First, Russian commanders accepted a tactical posture indicating high acceptance for own losses. Second, another risk for high losses was the inability of many air force units to strike enemy positions from outside the range of enemy air defences. Third, armour-heavy ground combat in close contact with the enemy was a key part of all exercises. This was what the still largely Soviet-style ground forces were designed and trained to do. It made sense to train and maintain old capabilities whilst evaluating new approaches. Fourth, exercise sizes indicated that Russia was more concerned with large-scale JISCO in the Far East than in its West. Finally, Russian military exercises grew in size and scope in 2009-2010.<sup>31</sup> That trend was to continue.

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28 *Ibid.*, pp. 57 – 63 and Aleksandr Khramchikhin, 'Neadekvatnye uchenie 'Vostok'', *Armeiskii Vestnik*, 24 July 2010, <http://army-news.ru/2010/07/neadekvatnye-ucheniya-vostok-2010/> (accessed 6 IV 2017).

29 Ekström 2010:57, 62 and Khramchikhin (2010).

30 Ekström 2010:59.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 64 – 66.

### *Tsentr-2011 and Shchit Soiuz*<sup>32</sup>

As seen in Table 1, the strategic exercise *Tsentr-2011* took place over nine days in September, in the Central Military District and in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The stated aim was to train to deploy CSTO<sup>33</sup> force groups, to plan and command a joint inter-service operation during the transition from peace to war. *Tsentr-2011* encompassed 12,000 participants, ‘thousands’ of pieces of equipment and 50 aircraft, and enabled participants to train ground forces combined-arms operations, inter-service operations between the ground forces and the air force, as well as inter-agency operations with, for example, the FSB, MVD, the MChS and the Federal Drug Control Service (FKSN). CSTO allies contributed some forces, and Ukraine and Belarus some staff officers. The Russian-Belarusian operational exercise *Shchit Soiuz-2011* (Union Shield-2011) in Russia’s Western Military District overlapped in time with *Tsentr-2011*, and included 7,000 Russian servicemen and 5,000 from Belarus, 100 tanks and 100 armoured infantry fighting vehicles and artillery pieces, as well as 50 aircraft and helicopters. The label ‘operational’ indicates an ambition to exercise more than one service.

Russia thus in 2011 carried out two parallel exercises with joint inter-service operations. In addition to training effects in the forces, this also enabled the General Staff and the MoD to practice commanding two simultaneous operations in separate directions.

### *Kavkaz-2012 and Unnamed Northern Fleet exercise*<sup>34</sup>

*Kavkaz-2012* was labelled a strategic/staff exercise and took place, over six days in September, in Russia’s Southern Military District. The MoD saw it as the ‘fundamental and concluding phase’ in the command and control training cycle. The exercise included 8,000 participants, 200 armoured vehicles, 20 tanks, 100 artillery pieces, 30 aircraft and helicopters and 10 ships. The ground forces took centre stage, with a

<sup>32</sup> Norberg 2015: pp. 27 – 30.

<sup>33</sup> Collective Security Treaty Organization, a Russian-dominated alliance/security organization.

<sup>34</sup> Norberg 2015: pp. 30 – 34.

modest navy and air force participation. The stated size was smaller compared to the years before and after.

As *Kavkaz-2012* ended, a joint inter-service staff exercise began around the Kola Peninsula. The Northern Fleet-led exercise also included the 1st Air Force and Air Defence Command and a motor rifle brigade from the Western Military District. The stated size of the exercise was 7,000 men, 20 ships and submarines, 30 aircraft and 150 pieces of ground forces equipment. The navy deployed nuclear and diesel submarines, cruisers, anti-submarine ships, minesweepers, small missile ships and landing ships. This enabled both the navy and the ground forces to train command of combined arms operations. Higher command levels could train joint inter-service operations. The Northern Fleet's nuclear missile submarines are a key part of Russia's nuclear second-strike capability. This exercise took place right after *Kavkaz-2012*, indicating a possible overall scenario with a conflict in Russia's south escalating to nuclear confrontation.

As seen in Table 1, exercises in 2009-2012 were small compared to subsequent years, but featured command and control complexity in terms of involved services and arms. Participants could thus train for combined-arms operations, primarily in the ground forces, as well as, to an extent, joint inter-service operations. In 2009, 2011 and 2012 two operational-level exercises took place simultaneously, enabling the General Staff to practice commanding two operations at the same time in the same region, in 2009, or in separate regions, in 2010 and 2011.

## Annual Strategic Exercises 2013-2016

### *Zapad-2013 and an Unnamed Operational-level Exercise in the Kola-region*<sup>35</sup>

The week-long Russian-Belarusian combined strategic exercise *Zapad-2013* in Western Russia started on 20 September. The commander

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<sup>35</sup> Norberg 2015:34 – 38.

in chief, President Putin, said that it covered the transition from peace to war. The aim was to improve interoperability of staffs, test advanced command and control systems and new service regulations, as well as train staffs to plan and support of command operations. The exercise included 9,400 Russian soldiers and 2,520 in Belarus, 180 pieces of equipment, including 10 MBTs, 40 aircraft and 10 ships. Some claimed that the actual number of participants was between 70,000 and 90,000, which better reflects a strategic-level operation, especially if including other participants such as 20,000 Interior Troops, probably primarily tasked with territorial defence.

*Zapad-2013* saw more reports about matters pertaining to the state's military organization involving actors such as the Transport Ministry, *Rosaviatsia*, the Federal Air, Sea and River Transport Authorities and companies such as Russian Railways. The Smolensk and Nizhegorod regional administrations participated, with the latter adopting wartime work routines. A stated aim was to test and improve regulations. One key concern was forces' strategic mobility in terms of transportation assets and routes, another was mobilisation of personnel and other resources. Units deployed from central Russia westwards using railway, river and road transport and civil aviation. Lessons learned indicated that existing plans needed revision.

Northern Fleet naval and coastal defence formations started an exercise on 21 September with 2,500 servicemen, some 30 ships, 50 pieces of equipment, 20 aircraft and helicopters, and Russia's only aircraft carrier. The exercise covered air defence with naval aviation and missile units, coastal defence and anti-submarine ships, minesweepers and missile ships. In all it enabled participating staffs and commanders to train command and control in an all-arms coastal defence and naval operation. This exercise was probably a part of *Zapad-2013*, but not reported as such, and hence counted separately here. The Northern Fleet's nuclear missile submarines are a key part of Russia's nuclear second-strike capability. *Zapad-2013* was about training for a major war. Simultaneously activating the Northern Fleet enabled the General Staff to train how to handle an

escalation from conventional war to nuclear.

### *Vostok-2014*<sup>36</sup>

The strategic staff exercise *Vostok-2014* took place on 19–25 September in 20 land and sea exercise areas in the Eastern Military District. The Russian MoD stated three aims, namely to check: *de facto* combat readiness of first-tier forces, the infrastructure for deploying forces to distant regions, and the effectiveness of command and control systems for joint groups of forces, especially naval components. *Vostok-2014* was the biggest exercise studied here with 155,000 servicemen, 8,000 pieces of equipment, 4,000 armoured vehicles, 632 aircraft and 84 ships. Some 5,000–6,000 reservists were called up to signal, artillery, naval infantry and rocket units or as specialists in motor rifle, engineering, rear services and bridge-pontoon units. In *Vostok-2010*, 300 reservists were called up.

The vastness of the Eastern Military District made transport a natural key exercise component. *Vostok-2014* included strategic transport by air from western Russia over distances between 5,000 and 6,000 kilometres. Transport also took place by rail, road, river and sea. A Railway Troops brigade supported mobility *inter alia* by building a 500-metre-long bridge across a river that could carry vehicles on both tracks and wheels. As with *Zapad-2013*, there were elements of the state's military organization activated in the exercise, but with comparatively less reporting.

*Vostok-2014* enabled the Ground Forces to train all-arms operations involving motor rifle, tank, artillery and air defence units. Units from the all four Military Districts participated together with all the Eastern Military District's four all-arms armies. The Military Transport Aviation airlifted around 3,000 servicemen, probably from the airborne forces, and 60 pieces of equipment into the exercise as well as an unknown number of servicemen from Western Military District tank and motor rifle units without their vehicles and equipment. They probably used pre-stored equipment in one of eight brigade equipment stores in the Eastern

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36 Norberg 2015: pp. 44 – 48.

## Military District.

The Air Force deployed several types of military aircraft: fighter-bombers, ground attack aircraft, heavy fighters and multi-role aircraft. Long range aviation carried out stand-off attacks with cruise missiles. Airborne surveillance, and command and control aircraft supported heavy fighters covering naval units at sea. Tanker aircraft performed mid-air refuelling. Attack helicopters and ground attack aircraft and bombers with fighter cover supported ground forces. Ground attack aircraft practiced operating from highways. The Air Force moved some 30 aircraft and helicopters over distances varying from 900 to 7,000 km for aircraft and 500 km for helicopters. Coastal defence forces S-300 surface-to-air missiles units exercised, presumably in coordination with the Air Force's air defence efforts.

The Russian Pacific Fleet exercised surface, underwater, air defence, coastal defence, naval infantry and support units. The 3,000-strong exercise for the coastal defence troops included 30 ships and 50 pieces of equipment, 20 aircraft and helicopters involved in landing forces in unprepared areas, reconnaissance and defending coastal areas against enemy landing operations. Some 30 anti-submarine ships and minesweepers cooperated with anti-submarine aircraft and helicopters to train to hunt and destroy enemy submarines, including live fire with anti-submarine, anti-ship and cruise missiles. Four nuclear submarines supported forces on land and at sea in coastal defence operations in four different regions along Russia's Pacific rim.

*Vostok-2014* underlined several needs: to store more equipment and supplies in the region, to develop infrastructure, to strengthen air defences, as well as to adapt the training system for called-up reservists. The exercise design enabled planners to test the stated aim of trying command and control systems for joint inter-service groups of forces. Ground, air and naval combined-arms operations were exercised simultaneously. The Eastern Joint Strategic Command trained to handle the complexity of several simultaneous operational directions within a war theatre.

There was no parallel inter-service exercise in 2014, although Russia's Armed Forces fought simultaneously in eastern Ukraine. A Strategic Missile Forces exercise in September in the Altai region involved 4,000 servicemen, 400 pieces of equipment as well as units from the Air Force and the Central Military District. It took place in the same month as *Vostok-2014*, and probably enabled command and control structures to exercise an escalation from conventional war to nuclear.

### *Tsentr-2015*

The strategic staff exercise *Tsentr-2015* took place from 14 to 20 September in Russia's Central Military District and in Central Asia. It included 95,000 servicemen, 7,000 pieces of equipment, 170 aircraft and 20 ships. The aim was to test CSTO command and control of operations with coalition forces.<sup>37</sup> The exercise was preceded by a month of preparations, ending with surprise readiness inspections activating forces to be brought into theatre.<sup>38</sup> The size, scope and time revealed an ambition to bring forces from several Military Districts to higher readiness, re-deploy them from their permanent bases and subordinate to the operational command in theatre abroad, and launch a JISCO within a month.

*Tsentr-2015* also activated the state's military organization, such as the participation of forces from the MVD, FSB and MChS. Checks of readiness and the ability to work under wartime conditions took place at the Ministries of Health, Agriculture and Industry and Commerce as well as in the Federal Medical-Biological Agency, the Federal Fisheries Agency, the Federal Agency of State Reserves and regional administrations in Bashkortostan, Novosibirsk, Samara and Cheliabinsk.<sup>39</sup> *Tsentr-2015* illustrated Russia's approach to warfighting operations requiring structural support from the whole of the Russian state machinery in a nationwide war effort.

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37 MoD, 'Nachalos cstrategicheskoe komandno-shtabnoe uchenie «Tsentr-2015»,' 14 September 2015, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12055863@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12055863@egNews) (accessed 12 IV 2017).

38 MoD, 'Strategicheskoe komandno-shtabnoe Uchenie «Tsentr-2015»,' 14 September 2015, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12055124@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12055124@egNews) (accessed 14 IV 2017).

39 *Ibid.*



## *Shchit Soiuz-a-2015*

As in 2011, Russia and Belarus conducted the *Shchit Soiuz-a* (Union Shield) operational exercise in parallel to Russia's annual strategic *Tsentr* in Central Asia. The exercise, with 9,000 servicemen (7,500 from Russia), took place in Russia's Western Military District.<sup>40</sup> The Russian and Belarusian armed forces have conducted operational-level exercises every two years since 2009, alternating between the operational-level *Shchit Soiuz-a* in a smaller format (2011, 2015) and as part of Russia's annual strategic exercise *Zapad* (2009, 2013). *Shchit Soiuz-a* makes a marginal contribution to the Russian Armed Forces' fighting power. The key is its stated operational-level ambition and timing, simultaneous with *Tsentr-2015* (and in 2011), which enables the Russian General Staff to train to plan and execute two simultaneous operations at this level.

## *Kavkaz-2016 and unnamed Arctic exercise with the Northern and Pacific Fleets*

The strategic/staff exercise *Kavkaz-2016* took place from 5-10 September in the Southern Military District and in the Black and Caspian Seas. Supporting forces from the Central and Western Military Districts deployed by air, road, river and rail transport.<sup>41</sup> Defence Minister Shoigu noted that *Kavkaz-2016* and the preceding comprehensive CRIs and other month-long preparations in the Southern Military District took place under 'according to one thought',<sup>42</sup> *po edinomu zamyslu*, which reflects the Russian MoD website's definition of an operation.<sup>43</sup> The

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40 Aleksandr Tikhonov, 'V interesakh operativnoi sovместimosti,' *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 13 September 2015, <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/syria/item/25715-v-interesakh-operativnoj-sovместimosti> (accessed 12 V 2017).

41 MoD, 'Ha iuge Rossii startovalo strategicheskoe komandno-shtabnoe uchenie «Kavkaz-2016»,' and MoD, 'Bolee 120 tys. chelovek po vsej Rossii zadeistvovany v SKShU «Kavkaz-2016»,' 9 September 2016, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12095266@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12095266@egNews) (accessed 10 V 2017) and MoD, 'Nachalnik Generalnogo shtaba VS RF rasskazal zhurnalistam o predvaritelnykh itogakh SKShU «Kavkaz-2016»,' 14 September 2016, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12096033@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12096033@egNews) (accessed 10 V 2017).

42 MoD, 'Bolee 120 tys. chelovek po vsej Rossii ...'

43 MoD Encyclopaedia, 'Operatsia,' <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/dictionary/details.htm?id=7674@morfDictionary> (accessed 27 II 2017).

Armed Forces Combat Support Service's preparations included twelve separate exercises for comprehensive supplies for forces starting three weeks in advance.<sup>44</sup> All this illustrates how the Russian Armed Forces may prepare to launch and conduct a war theatre-level operation.

The overall exercise design reflected two inter-service force groups, possibly in a war theatre-level operation. Ground forces in two-sided brigade-level tactical exercises, one in Crimea and one in Rostov Oblast, were supported by air force units, theatre air-defence units, artillery and rocket forces and the navy.<sup>45</sup> The MoD initially said *Kavkaz-2016* included 12,500 servicemen,<sup>46</sup> much less than the previous three years' annual strategic exercises – and modest, given the stated strategic-level ambition. The MoD later said that 120,000 men took part at various stages,<sup>47</sup> also from other ministries and agencies, which better reflects the stated ambition. The Chief of the General staff stressed that the 60 aircraft and helicopters, 400 pieces of ground forces equipment, including 90 tanks, and 15 ships involved did not violate the Vienna Document.<sup>48</sup>

Three features stand out. First, command and control: the MoD wanted to test commanders' and staffs' ability to plan, prepare and execute combat operations. The exercise enabled the training audience to practice command and control, practical mobilization readiness measures, territorial defence, extensive use of aerospace and navy forces and tactical exercises with a 'practical designation of the nominal adversary's actions',<sup>49</sup> probably referring to dynamic two-sided force-to-force manoeuvres in contrast to tightly pre-planned, scripted ones.

Second, the MoD called up 6,000 contracted reservists<sup>50</sup> to augment

44 MoD, 'Bolee 120 tys. chelovek po vsej Rossii ...'

45 MoD, 'V khode SKShU «Kavkaz-2016» otrabotany vse vidy boevykh deistvii po otrazheniu voennoi agressii,' 9 September 2016, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12095244@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12095244@egNews) (accessed 10 V 2017) and MoD, 'Bolee 120 tys. chelovek po vsej Rossii ...'.

46 MoD, 'Ha iuge Rossii startovalo strategicheskoe komandno-shtabnoe uchenie ...'.

47 MoD, '«Kavkaz-2016» – ekzamen na voinskoe masterstvo,' 16 September 2016, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12096233@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12096233@egNews) (accessed 10 V 2017).

48 MoD, 'Nachalnik Generalnogo shtaba VS RF rasskazal zhurnalistam ...'.

49 MoD, 'Ha iuge Rossii startovalo strategicheskoe komandno-shtabnoe uchenie ...'.

50 MoD, 'Nachalnik Generalnogo shtaba VS RF rasskazal zhurnalistam ...'.

existing units as in preceding years. More importantly, in *Kavkaz-2016*, reservists also formed four separate territorial defence units, one motor rifle battalion, two motor rifle companies and one reconnaissance platoon, based on standing units in the Southern and Central Military Districts and the Northern Fleet.<sup>51</sup> These units could probably also augment standing formations once a contract-based mobilisation system is fully implemented. Some reservists were called up during the comprehensive CRI before *Kavkaz-2016* for a month-long refresher training.<sup>52</sup> Reservists from Murmansk and Novosibirsk were sent to the Southern Military District,<sup>53</sup> indicating that they are not necessarily tied to their home unit areas.

Thirdly, *Kavkaz-2016* involved the state's military organization, this time also explicitly referring to Russia's classified Defence Plan for all actors involved in national defence. It involved the Bank of Russia, the Ministry for Industry and Trade, the Rostov Oblast administration and defence industry companies as well as Russian Railways, and the federal agencies for sea, river, railway and road transport and for state reserves.<sup>54</sup> Units from MVD, FSB and MChS also took part,<sup>55</sup> showing that many ministries with armed units can contribute to an operation of the Russian Armed Forces.

Ten days after *Kavkaz-2016* the Northern Fleet began a naval all-arms exercise with units from the navy's coastal defence forces, naval aviation, 12 surface ships and submarines as well as 10 supply ships. Fifteen aircraft and helicopters from the Aerospace Forces participated.<sup>56</sup> Reinforcements

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51 MoD, 'V meropriyatiakh SKShU «Kavkaz-2016» v IuVO primimaiut uchastie chetyre podrazdelnia terrotorialnoi oborony, ukomplektovannie rezervistami,' 6 September 2016, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12094815@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12094815@egNews) (accessed 10 V 2017).

52 MoD, 'V Novosibirskoi oblasti sformirovan pervy motostrelkovy batalion rezervistov,' 27 August 2016, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12094193@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12094193@egNews) (accessed 29 IV 2017).

53 MoD, 'Nachalnik Generalnogo shtaba VS RF rasskazal zhurnalistam ... '.

54 MoD (2016fz) 'Ministr Oborony Rossii provel soveshchanie s predstaviteliami organov ispolnitelnoi vlasti po povedeniyu itogov SKShU «Kavkaz-2016», 12 September, on the internet: [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12099446@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12099446@egNews) (accessed 10 May 2017).

55 MoD, 'Nachalnik Generalnogo shtaba VS RF rasskazal zhurnalistam ... '.

56 MoD, 'Na Severnom flote nachalos uchenie raznorodnykh sil,' 20 September 2016, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12096526@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12096526@egNews) (accessed 13 V 2017).

from Russia's Pacific Fleet moved with icebreaker support to the exercise region around the New Siberian Islands, i.e. closer to the Bering Strait than to Murmansk.<sup>57</sup> Seven launches of sea-based cruise missiles took place in the Laptev Sea.<sup>58</sup> A company-size unit from the Northern Fleet's Naval Infantry brigade landed on an island in the Franz Josef Land archipelago,<sup>59</sup> which hosts Russia's northernmost airbase and a border guard detachment.<sup>60</sup>

The Northern Fleet's strategic nuclear missile submarines are part of Russia's nuclear second-strike capability. Protecting this capability is arguably the key mission for all Russian Forces in the Kola region. Large exercises in that region thus implicitly pertain to Russia's nuclear weapons. Exercises in the Kola region soon after an annual strategic exercise enable the General Staff to train to handle an escalation from conventional war to nuclear. Another indication of activity in Russia's nuclear forces at that time was unverified Ukrainian press reports quoting unnamed Ukrainian intelligence sources about a staff exercise in the 33rd Missile Army in Omsk from 19-22 September. The aim was reportedly to check the formation's readiness to carry out its missions within the framework of a large-scale war.<sup>61</sup>

Table 1 shows that Russia continued carrying out annual strategic exercises from 2013-2016, but also that the reported size and scope of exercises increased dramatically. In 2011-2012 it was roughly in line with 2009 and 2010, up to some 20,000 servicemen. From 2013 onwards, and

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57 MoD, 'V Arktike provedeno sovместnoe taktichskoe uchenie s otriadom korabli Severnogo i Tikhookeanskogo flotov,' 23 September 2016, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12096711@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12096711@egNews) (accessed 13 V 2017).

58 MoD, 'Korabli Severnogo flota vozvrashchaitsa v mesta bazirovaniya posle uchenie v Arktike,' 27 September 2016, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12097160@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12097160@egNews) (accessed 13 V 2017).

59 MoD, 'Podrazdeleniya arkticheskoi brigady Severnogo flota v khode uchenie v pervye vysadilis na poberezhie ostrova Zemlia Aleksandry,' 30 September 2016, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12098051@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12098051@egNews) (accessed 13 V 2017).

60 Vladislav Kulikov, 'Polius chistoty,' *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, 15 April 2016, <https://rg.ru/2014/04/15/arktika.html> (accessed 28 V 2017).

61 Segodnia, 'Rossia gotovitsia k iadernoi voine – razvedka,' *Segodnia*, 21 September 2016, <http://www.segodnya.ua/world/rossiya-gotovitsya-k-yadernoy-voyne-razvedka-753614.html> (accessed 28 V 2017).

also in 2015 and 2016, the size of annual exercises increased to between 70,000 and 150,000 servicemen, probably more realistic for war theatre-level JISCOs.

## Conclusions

How did Russian annual strategic exercises from 2009–2016 affect the Russian Armed Forces' fighting power? Based on all three key factors selected from the Russian definition (size, in terms of servicemen and equipment involved; command and control; and the ability to carry out assigned missions), fighting power arguably increased significantly.

The key development of annual strategic exercises from 2009–2016 is the dramatically increased size before and after 2013: from up to 20,000 servicemen to around 155,000; from hundreds of pieces of ground forces equipment to 5,000–8,000; and from a few dozen aircraft to more than hundred. Russian annual strategic exercises in the period 2009–2016 pertained to a capability for waging large-scale long-lasting inter-state wars, requiring state- and society-wide efforts. No wonder Russia's current political and military leadership often invoke the Great Patriotic War (the Second World War).

Reservists played an increasingly important role. Some 1,800 were called up for *Zapad-2009*, and some 300 in *Vostok-2010*. In 2016, a whole comprehensive CRI dealt with mobilisation of reserves.<sup>62</sup> 4,000 reservists were called up for *Kavkaz-2016*, to augment existing units and to form entire units based on reservists only. A contract-based system for recruiting, calling up and training reservists also seems to make structural

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62 MoD, 'V Vooruzhennykh Silakh Rossii nachalas ocherednaia vnezapnaia proverka boegotovnosti voisk,' 14 June 2016, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12087147@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12087147@egNews) (accessed 27 IV 2017), MoD, 'V khode vypolnenia uchebykh zadach uzlami sviazi podvizhnykh punktov upravleniia obespechivaetsia ustoiichivoe i nepreryvnoe prokhozhdenie signalov upravleniia,' 15 June 2016, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12087225@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12087225@egNews), (accessed 27 IV 2017) and MoD, 'V ramkakh vnezapnoi proverki boevoi gotovnosti tekhniku snimaiut s khraneniia,' 16 June 2016, [http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12087323@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12087323@egNews) (accessed 27 IV 2017).

contributions to operations in terms of additional units deployed to the operational area, not just augmenting standing units. Contours of a possible three-tier force are visible. The first tier would be highly mobile rapid reaction forces (e.g. airborne forces) that would be deployable in, say, a few days. The second tier would be standing ground forces divisions and brigades, with core units manned by contract soldiers that, if needed, could be augmented to full strength by contracted reservists and deploy within 1-2 weeks. The third tier would be units with contracted reservists only, deployable within a month.

The MoD repeatedly stressed that annual strategic exercises aimed to improve command and control. The president as commander-in-chief often ordered and visited the exercises. The chain of command from political level to the field involved deploying staffs, headquarters and support units such as communications into the field. How well it all worked remains unclear, but the annual strategic exercises from 2009-2016 clearly provided ample opportunities to simultaneously train and test all levels of the chain of command. On the military side, the MoD stated that all annual strategic exercise throughout the period were at the operational/strategic or strategic level, involving forces from all services and arms, ensuring that command and control systems in the exercise had to deal with that complexity. After 2013, two features add to the complexity for military command in control.

First, the above-mentioned increased size of the exercises meant that the friction of using real forces added to the inter-service and combined-arms complexity. Second, the increasing interaction with the state's military organization added civilian-military cooperation to the complexities military command and control. Ministries and agencies with armed units have long supported the Armed Forces' operations, for example with special forces or units for territorial defence, enabling the Armed Forces to focus on fighting. Ministries and agencies without forces support the Armed Forces' mobility and sustainability. The National Defence Management Centre (NDMC) in Moscow enables inter-agency coordination. Its regional equivalent, the Regional Defence Staff, is

subordinated to a Military District.<sup>63</sup> The approach reveals an ambition that the state's entire Military Organization must actually work, not just on paper in Moscow, but also in military operations.

And what about the ability to carry out assigned missions? All annual strategic exercises during the period 2009-2016 were labelled strategic or operational/strategic, often with parallel smaller inter-service or combined-arms exercises such as in 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2015. The annual strategic exercises in 2009-2012 had the command and control complexity of operations on an operational/strategic or strategic level. From 2013, the same two factors that made command and control more complex – increased size and involving the state's military organization – probably helped to consolidate the Armed Forces' ability to handle assigned strategic-level tasks from Russia's political leadership. The exercises show that 'strategic-level operations' is not merely a label in Russia: it is, increasingly, a real capability.

The focus of the annual strategic exercise is conventional forces. Nuclear forces have no direct role, but they often have exercises just after the annual strategic exercises. This enables the General Staff level to train escalating from conventional war to nuclear. Strikingly often, parallel exercises alongside the annual strategic exercise took place in the Kola region, where the Northern Fleet holds large parts of Russia's nuclear second-strike capability.

Slight defence spending cuts in 2015-2016 are unlikely to be a decisive obstacle to continued large-scale exercises. This approach to military operations gives Russia a strategic asymmetric advantage, compared to countries with smaller forces and dormant structures, in mobilising society's resources for protracted wars. Technological advances such as high-precision munitions and UAVs have not fundamentally changed Russia's approach. The Russian Armed Forces have pragmatically used technology to improve their capabilities needed for JISCOs.

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63 'Gubernatorov, FSB i politsiu v sluchae voyny podchinit voennym,' *Izvestia*, 11 October 2016, <http://izvestia.ru/news/637442> (accessed 29 V 2017).

The exercises reveal little about intentions as to where and when the Russian political leadership would use military force. Given Russia's willingness to use military force in recent years, the worry for other countries should be about Russia systematically building and maintaining the capability to launch and wage large-scale long-term inter-state wars. It is not about political intent, it is about *capability* intent.



## 14

# The Vienna Document and the Russian challenge to the European Security Architecture

*Olivier Schmitt*

## Introduction

In 2016, Russia refused to re-issue an updated version of the so-called Vienna Document (VD), an arms control agreement designed to increase transparency on military activities in Europe. Russia also withdrew the four proposals it had circulated to modernize the Vienna Document, arguing that the political climate was not appropriate for such negotiations, and has since then declined to engage on any update of the VD. These decisions occurred against the backdrop of increased Western concerns following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and a rise of military incidents involving Russian and Western forces (more than 60 between 2014 and 2016)<sup>1</sup>. This paper traces the origins of the Vienna Document, its place in the European security architecture, and shows that the current crisis is the crystallization of both weaknesses in the implementation of the VD and a long-standing Russian dissatisfaction with most conventional arms control agreements in Europe.

## The Vienna Document in the European Security Architecture

*The Vienna Document on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures*

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1 Lukasz Kulesa, Thomas Frear and Denitsa Raynova, 'Managing Hazardous Incidents in the Euro-Atlantic Area: A New Plan of Action,' *European Leadership Network*, November 2016.

(usually referred to as the ‘Vienna document’) was initially adopted in 1990, and reissued in 1992, 1994, 1999 and 2011. It is originally a major result of the Cold-War era Helsinki process, which also enabled the transformation of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) into the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 1995. The VD is still handled within the OSCE framework, by a special body called the Forum of Security and Cooperation (FSC). The core philosophy of the Vienna document is that increases in military transparency (especially military exercises) reduces the element of surprise, thus leading to improved trust in relationships, diminishing the risks of miscalculation and misperception, and benefiting the security of all parties to the document.

The Vienna document is part of the European security architecture, which is a complex entanglement of military alliances (such as NATO and the CSTO) and bilateral (or minilateral) military partnerships, economic-political organizations (such as the EU), as well as nuclear and conventional arms control mechanisms. As such, the Vienna document cannot be considered in isolation from other pillars of the European security architecture, and specifically other conventional arms control mechanisms.

Jozef Goldblat defines arms control as:

‘a wide range of measures [...] intended to: (a) freeze, limit, reduce or abolish certain categories of weapons; (b) ban the testing of certain weapons; (c) prevent certain military activities; (d) regulate the deployment of armed forces; (e) proscribe transfers of some militarily important items; (f) reduce the risk of accidental war; (g) constrain or prohibit the use of certain weapons or methods of war; and (h) build up confidence among states through greater openness in military matters’<sup>2</sup>

In Europe, the three pillars of conventional arms control are,

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2 Jozef Goldblat, ‘Arms Control – Basic Concepts,’ *Fichas Marra* (February 2011). Available at <https://fichasmarra.wordpress.com/2011/02/01/arms-control-basic-concepts/> (last access, 11 April 2017).

respectively, the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (also called CFE treaty), the Open Skies treaty and the Vienna document. Those three mechanisms are distinct evolutions from original initiatives, and were not initially conceived of as part of a coordinated agreement<sup>3</sup>. Yet, in combination, they provide an overarching arms control framework with the CFE Treaty establishing a balance of conventional forces; the Open Skies treaty providing mechanisms of transparency (through aerial observation) and the Vienna document instituting confidence and security-building measures (CSBMs) related to military activities. In particular, the Vienna Document establishes CSBM concerning specific military activities conducted within its zone of application<sup>4</sup>. The mechanism is a 'global exchange' of military information, area inspections, notification of force structure and disposition, military-to-military contacts and observation visits. Overall, the intent is to 'foster transparency and trust through purposely designed cooperative measures. They help clarify states' military intentions, reduce uncertainties about potentially threatening military activities and constrain opportunities for surprise attack or coercion'<sup>5</sup>. This is particularly important since Russia decided to suspend its participation to the CFE Treaty in 2007, denouncing the treaty's 'divorce from reality.' While analyzing the motivations and consequences of this decision is outside the scope of this paper, this move weakens the European security architecture, but also results in reinforcing the importance of the Vienna document as a mechanism to reduce uncertainty on the status of military forces in Europe.

It is important to mention that the Vienna Document, unlike the CFE and Open Skies, is not an international treaty. It is a political agreement

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3 On the history of those mechanisms, see Richard A. Falkenrath, *Shaping Europe's Military Order. The Origins and Consequences of the CFE Treaty*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995, and Peter Jones, *Open Skies. Transparency, Confidence-Building and the End of the Cold War*, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2014.

4 See the text of the Vienna document for specifics. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/fsc/86597?download=true> (last access: 11 April 2017).

5 Jeffrey A. Larsen, 'Strategic Arms Control Since World War II,' in Robert E. Williams and Paul R. Viotti (eds.), *Arms Control: History, Theory and Policy*, Santa Barbara, Praeger Security International, 2013, p. 230.

which, in itself, is not subject to international law per se. Therefore, non-compliance, non-conformity or violations of the provisions of the document do not constitute breaches in international law. As a Western diplomat put it: ‘the potential cost of breaching the document is political: it is about publicly calling on a country and expose it as non-cooperative and non-transparent’<sup>6</sup>. This is related to the nature of arms control itself: one must never forget that arms control takes place in the context of an adversarial relationship. Countries carefully calibrate agreements by assessing the security benefits of limiting their own and their adversaries’ military resources: arms control agreements are a way to freeze the ‘race-to-the bottom’ logic of security dilemmas, but they do not solve those dilemmas. Therefore, arms control agreements are not an end in themselves, but a means to facilitate a cooperative relationship. Inversely, those agreements are very sensitive to changes in the political climate between signatories, and their implementation is subject to fluctuations: ‘when it comes to the Vienna document, success is measured in enthusiasm. If states willingly exchange information, we can consider it a success; otherwise, it is a sign of increased political tensions’<sup>7</sup>. As such, enthusiasm for the Vienna document has been fluctuating since its initial adoption, mirroring the evolution of the political climate in the euro-Atlantic area.

## First Steps of the Vienna Document

Just after the end of the Cold War, the Vienna document was quickly and significantly reinforced in several ways compared to the original 1990 iteration. The 1992 revision decreased the thresholds of personnel (13.000 to 9.000) and main battle tanks (300 to 250) requiring prior notification before conducting a military activity and the zone of application was expanded to include former members of the USSR. The 1994 re-issuance created the Global Exchange of Military Information (GEMI)

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6 Interview, March 2017.

7 Interview, OSCE official, March 2017.

as a transparency measure, expanding the obligatory data provided by member states to include command structure, major weapons systems (and associated technical data), and strength and location of forces. Some problems of circumvention, violation and non-compliance were already emerging, specifically from countries actively or recently engaged in armed conflicts (notably Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Georgia and Uzbekistan). Yet support for the new regime was still high, overshadowing what was perceived as minor, and largely technical, issues. The 1994 CSCE annual report stated:

‘The Fourth Annual Implementation Assessment Meeting (12-14 April 1994) once again called the attention of participating States to the problems of compliance with all obligations stemming from the Vienna Document 1992, in particular with regard to information exchange. Those problems were essentially attributed to technical difficulties and inadequate knowledge of the relevant provisions’<sup>8</sup>

The first major test for the Vienna document occurred during the first Chechen War (1994-1996), with Russia initiating major troop deployments, allegedly in contradiction to the provisions laid out in the VD. At the time, Russia justified withholding notifications of these movements, arguing that the Chechen operation was an internal Russian issue and that the military moves were of no consequence for other states. This interpretation was rejected by other signatories, and Moscow grudgingly acknowledged that the CSBMs were still applicable to internal security situations. The outcome was a testimony of the flexibility and utility of the CSCE/OSCE’s consultative mechanisms and conciliatory approach, but it must also be noted that the Chechnya operation initiated a Russian pattern of violating the provisions of the document when deemed suitable, with few consequences. Therefore, despite what could be considered a favourable outcome, an observer noted in 1997 that, ‘Russia displayed an utter disregard for its commitments under the Vienna regime in its Chechnya operation. The full implications of this

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8 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Annual Report 1994*, p. 19.

incident for the regime remain to be played out<sup>9</sup>.

The interpretative disagreement regarding the universal application of CSBM provisions in case of domestic employment of military force also played out during the second Chechen War (1999-2009). NATO members continued to press Moscow for full disclosure of its military activities, which led Russia to host two inspection visits (albeit with a number of constraints). Moscow considered that it had demonstrated 'exceptional goodwill and transparency' but, despite several observations of Moscow's non-compliance with the Vienna document and the *Code of Conduct on Political-Military Aspects of Security* (notably protection of civilians and proportionate use of force), there were no formal consequences, the OSCE and the member states accepting Moscow's 'good faith' argument. This pattern of violation/acceptance of goodwill/no consequences was repeated many times during the second Chechen War, which led the OSCE to 'at least allowing, if not excusing, Russian behavior in Chechnya,' thus weakening the Vienna document because of those 'egregious and hypocritical contradictions'<sup>10</sup>. The 1999 NATO intervention in Kosovo created further challenges for the Vienna document. NATO countries initially failed to notify their military activities, leading Belarus to request clarification for the conduct of the operation. Russia also conducted specific area inspections in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Albania, later complaining that its inspection teams had been denied access to areas where NATO troops were stationed, in contravention of the Vienna document, specifically accusing the United States of blocking such inspections. NATO members justified their refusals by invoking safety and force protection measures (as well as intelligence concerns considering Moscow's closeness to Serbia) and the 'areas or sensitive points' provided under paragraph 78 of the VD 1994. However, NATO countries were forced to acknowledge their lack

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9 Allan S. Kraas, *The United States and Arms Control: The Challenge of Leadership*, Westport, Praeger Publishers, 1997, p. 181.

10 Rick Fawn, *International Organizations and Internal Conditionality: Making Norms Matter*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, p. 135.

of compliance with the VD provisions, which led to a 2002 update of NATO military guidance (MC 453), specifically taking into account the VD in the operational planning and into command post and field training exercises<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, despite NATO's goodwill in updating its procedures and Russia's begrudging acceptance of the VD's provisions, the regime was already facing its most important dilemma: how to ensure adherence to the VD's fundamental provisions while at the same time keeping a 'flexible approach' towards violations in order to prevent states' defection?

## Challenges of Compliance and Implementation

Even so, international support for the VD was still high, as demonstrated by its 1999 re-issuing, which included a number of important updates including increased site visits, inspections and observations, and containing new chapters on defence planning and regional security. However, the new version of the VD failed to take into account the transformation of armed forces that followed the end of the Cold War, to the extent that the thresholds for notification were considered increasingly inadequate to tackle the new military realities:

'While the general trend of force reductions in Europe has persisted, there has been a sharp increase of major weapon holdings in the Caucasus area. At force levels which would have been assessed 'minor' in Cold War Times, a war was fought. One might legitimately ask why the Vienna Document and other CSBMs have not played their expected role in early warning and conflict prevention during recent conflicts'<sup>12</sup>.

Furthermore, between 2000 and 2007, the OSCE expanded its activities in numerous security-related issues, which strained resources and diverted attention from arms control instruments such as the CFE treaty and the VD. In that period, several instances of non-compliance

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11 Interviews, NATO HQ, February 2017.

12 Wolfgang Richter, 'A New Start for the Vienna Document,' *OSCE Magazine*, Number 4 (2010), 17-18.

with the VD, particularly from Russia and Soviet successor states were reported, without further consequences. Such violations included several denials of access and entry, claims of ‘national procedures’ superseding VD provisions or extensive use of the notion of *force majeure* to deny visits and inspections<sup>13</sup>. Russia’s suspension of its CFE treaty compliance in December 2007 and the conflict between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 compelled the OSCE to be more attentive to the implementation of the Vienna Document. Results were disappointing as many arms control practitioners noted the OSCE’s diplomatic tendency to inflate positive results and downplay observed violations. The 2009 Annual Implementation Assessment Meeting (AIAM) final report stated that 95% of the inspections and 96% of the evaluations conducted in 2008 ‘took place in full compliance with the provisions and often in spirit of the VD99’<sup>14</sup>. This assessment was criticized by many practitioners as misguided and downplaying real issues of violations of VD provisions. It also seems that verification of non-compliance findings were on occasion challenged, and even overruled within some national chains of command owing to political decisions not to ‘name and shame’ specific countries for fear of their negative reactions. In the context of the aftermath of the Georgia crisis and the US-initiated ‘reset’ with Moscow, it seems that Russia’s violations were particularly overlooked out of concern that it would suspend its application of the VD as it had done with the CFE<sup>15</sup>.

The 2011 re-issuance of the Vienna Document was perceived as a necessity, considering the evolution of the European security landscape since the previous 1999 iteration. The new version updated a number of technical issues related to timing, types, and format of visits and inspections. In addition, a new mechanism for the continuous update of the VD was adopted in 2010. Dubbed ‘Vienna Document Plus,’ this mechanism was supposed to grant greater flexibility to the document

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13 Interviews with multiple arms control practitioners, March 2017.

14 OSCE, *Nineteenth Annual Implementation Assessment Meeting. Vienna, 3 and 4 March 2009. Consolidated Summary*, 26.

15 Interviews with multiple arms control practitioners, March 2017.



with decisions being implemented immediately, unless decided otherwise. Yet the VD 2011 failed to reach consensus on substantial issues, notably reductions in thresholds for prior notifications of certain military activities, or increases in inspection and evaluation quotas. Notably, despite an attempt to address the issue of non-compliance, major topics were left unaddressed and unresolved by the re-issuance and following meetings. Those issues include:

- Uzbekistan's de facto abrogation of its participation to the VD;
- Russia's repeated manipulation of information and other forms of deception (including the exhaustion of inspection quotas through 'self-inspection,' e.g. Belarus inspecting Russia, and fake declarations);
- Russia's over-declarations of 'areas of sensitive points' to deny inspection;
- The abuse of *force majeure* provisions as a means of denying or delaying inspection.

Overall, Russia's refusal to re-issue the document in 2016 must be placed in a larger context of the evolution of the VD since 1990. Most notable has been the tendency to overlook violations of the VD provisions in the name of good cooperation, especially with Russia. 'The VD can only work if Western countries and Russia support it, and we must keep Russia in'<sup>16</sup> was the dominating policy line in Western capitals and the OSCE secretariat for a long time, which led to many sanitized AIAM reports. This policy can certainly be placed in the context of a post-Cold War Western attempt to 'socialize' Russia within international institutions. Yet this policy also led to a relative weakening of the regime by circulating toothless assessments giving the (false) impression that violations were exceptional while at the same time signaling that such violations were inconsequential.

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16 Interview with a Western diplomat, February 2017.

## The Russian View

Russia has its own history of disappointments with the Vienna document. The Russian MFA considers that the 1992 and 1994 versions of the VD were ‘real effective,’ but that from the 1999 version onwards, changes and improvements were mostly cosmetic<sup>17</sup>. Yet, Russia was active in promoting changes and circulating proposals to revise the VD. For example, in 2004, Russia proposed ‘holding a high-level seminar on military doctrines and defense policy in the OSCE area’<sup>18</sup>. Over the years, Russia pushed forward several proposals, the most significant being:

- A suggestion that countries conducting large-scale trans-border redeployments of manpower and equipment should be obliged to notify other states prior to deployment;
- A simplification of the procedure regarding unusual military activities (chapter III of the VD);
- Exchanging information regarding multinational rapid reaction forces;
- An expansion of CSBMs to include naval forces<sup>19</sup>.

Those proposals were usually declined by Western states for two main reasons. First, they were perceived as a way for Moscow to acquire information about Western armed forces which could not be reciprocated. For example, the proposal regarding multinational rapid reaction forces is clearly targeted at NATO, since Russia does not have comparable forces: Moscow would then have gathered military information on NATO forces without providing any information on its own military activities. Similarly, trans-border redeployments were interpreted as a means to monitor and constrain NATO activities. The second criticism was the lack of precision of the proposals, notably including naval forces

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17 Valerie A. Pacer, *Russian Foreign Policy under Dmitry Medvedev, 2008-2012*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2016, p. 86.

18 OSCE, ‘Statement by Mr. Sergei V. Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, at the 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council,’ 7 December 2004.

19 Interviews, OSCE, March 2017.

in the CSBMs. For example, the proposed zone of application included northern Africa (although no OSCE member-state is in the region), and it was unclear whether coast guards would be included in the proposal<sup>20</sup>. A Western diplomat noted that this proposal was ‘similar to the Soviet style of diplomacy: proposing ambiguous and/or half-cooked ideas and letting us fill the blanks, so that they see how far we go and if they can obtain even more’<sup>21</sup>. By 2011, the Russian position on the VD has changed ‘due to the country’s on-going military reform efforts and because the military did not wish to see additional CSBMs’<sup>22</sup>. There is also a sense that Western countries use the VD and other arms control agreements as a means to constrain Russia. This interpretation is confirmed by a Western diplomat, who explains that ‘Russian delegates regularly accuse us of duplicity and of becoming more aggressive over time’<sup>23</sup>. These statements are consistent with evolutions in Russian military doctrine, presenting NATO as a threat; and of the Russian national security strategy, concerned with Western countries creating and encouraging ‘flash points’ of tension in Eurasia, at the expense of Moscow’s interests<sup>24</sup>.

As previously mentioned, arms control agreements are heavily dependent on the evolution of the political climate. As such, current tensions regarding the VD do not come out of nowhere: they can be understood as crystallizing long-standing challenges in its implementation, coupled with renewed security competition with Russia which is intrinsically challenging for arms control agreements<sup>25</sup>.

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20 Interviews with Western diplomats, February-April 2017.

21 Interview with a Western diplomat, March 2017.

22 Pacer, *Russian Foreign Policy under Dmitry Medvedev*, p. 91.

23 Interview with a Western diplomat, March 2017.

24 Margarete Klein, ‘Russia’s New Military Doctrine,’ *SWP Comments*, February 2015; Olga Oliker, ‘Unpacking Russia’s New National Security Strategy,’ *CSIS Commentary*, January 2016.

25 Lionel P. Fatton, ‘The Impotence of Conventional Arms Control: Why do International Regimes Fail When They are Most Needed?,’ *Contemporary Security Policy*, 37/2, 2016, pp. 200-222.

## The Ukraine Crisis and the Current Challenges to the VD

With Russia's suspension of its application of the CFE treaty, the VD and the Open Skies treaty have become the main instruments to gather information about Russia's military activities. In March 2014, an observation team was gathered by the OSCE to monitor military developments in Ukraine following Russia's occupation of Crimea, conducting inspections along the Ukrainian border, but being denied access into Crimea. Moreover, Russia did not provide advanced notification of the estimated 40,000 Russian troops deployed near Ukraine's eastern border. Yet, so far, according to the interviewees, the provisions of the Document are still (largely) being observed<sup>26</sup>. The main issue is related to the re-issuance of the document, which was scheduled for 2016 but blocked by Moscow. The official Russian justification for blocking the re-issuance is worth quoting in full:

'the fate of the Vienna Document is *inseparable from the general situation regarding European Security*. Today the view was expressed that the consensus rule implies the responsibility of each participating State for its actions. We agree with this and should like to recall that over a period of many years *Russia proposed to its partners the modernization of the Vienna Document*. However, our Western partners invariably told us that it "should not be opened up" (today for some reason it is not thought fit to remember this).

Our Western partners also frequently say that in the current politico-military situation 'business as usual' with Russia is no longer possible. We are also in agreement with this – we have no need for the kind of "business" in which ever more demands are made of Russia. However, for some reason, our distinguished colleagues are not bothered that the *adoption of a new version of the Vienna Document would send a false political signal* that everything is rosy in this area and that we are harmoniously implementing optimistic plans from five or six years ago as if nothing

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26 Interviews, February-April 2017.

happened.

The anchoring in NATO documents of a policy of military containment of Russia and the Alliance's concrete steps in the military sphere rule out the possibility of reaching agreements on confidence-building measures. We can envisage prospects for the modernization of the Vienna Document 2011 *only if the North Atlantic Alliance abandons its policy of containment of Russia, recognizes and respects Russian interests, and restores normal relations with the Russian federation, including in the military sphere.*<sup>27</sup>

This statement perfectly encapsulates Russia's grievances and the reasons for the current deadlock, and they are worth discussing in detail. First, Russia acknowledges the current tensions in the European security architecture. There is no need to try to hide it: the conflict is there and even if it has not spiraled into armed hostilities between Western countries and Russia, the climate does not favour cooperation. As such, the Russian position is opposite to the approach favoured by Western countries. While the latter emphasize that because tensions are high, there is a need to develop CSBMs to manage the risks of misperceptions and escalation, Russia claims the opposite: because tensions are high, there can be no possibility of developing and implementing CSBMs. This also reveals the competing understanding of CSBMs measures: Western countries seem to conceive them as a technical step to manage tensions; Russia considers them as a political indicator of the quality of the relationship.

The second important element is the issue of linkage that Russia introduces by making future developments on CSBMs conditional to a general discussion of the European security architecture, most notably NATO. The language chosen by the Russian delegation is perfectly consistent with the narrative of an ever-expanding NATO slowly strangling Russia, an understanding of the evolution of European security which is the polar opposite of NATO members' perception of an

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27 OSCE, 'Statement by the Delegation of the Russian Federation,' 834<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting, FSC Journal No. 840, 9 November 2016. Emphasis added.

increasingly aggressive Russia<sup>28</sup>. Russia's constant messaging at the OSCE can be summarized as 'we haven't changed, you [Western countries] have'<sup>29</sup>, while most Western countries are increasingly wary of Moscow's renewed military ambitions. The language is also consistent with the idea initially presented by Dmitry Medvedev in 2009 of a 'European Security Treaty' which would encompass existing institutions but was resisted by Western countries on the grounds that it would duplicate the OSCE and give Russia the power of veto over NATO activities. Several Western diplomats were also hoping that the resumption of the NATO-Russia Council would be considered by Moscow as 'normal relations in the military sphere,' but that hasn't been the case, and Russia has not explicitly described what is meant by 'normal relations'<sup>30</sup>. The current Russian refusal to engage with the VD is further demonstrated by Russian diplomats' disinterest in the informal meetings organized by the FSC chair in order to voice concerns and discuss security issues in a more direct manner: they simply don't attend such meetings<sup>31</sup>.

Because of this tense situation, a number of important proposals which could help decrease tensions are not moving forward. In particular, a proposal to reduce the threshold of personnel (from 9000 to 5000) and material requiring prior notification has gathered wide-ranging support (with more than 40 countries in agreement), but is blocked by Moscow and allied Central Asian nations. This proposal is considered important among Western countries, since it is supposed to take into account the transformation of armed forces and military activities (towards force reduction and increase of firepower) since the end of the Cold War, when current thresholds were adopted. Other important proposals currently exist, notably regarding Chapter III of the VD: risk reduction. Specifically, there are efforts to update §16 (unusual military activities) and §17 (military incidents) in light of the military practices observed

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28 Richard Sokolosky, 'The New NATO-Russia Military Balance: Implications for European Security,' *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 13 March 2017.

29 Interviews with Western diplomats, February-April 2017.

30 Interviews with Western diplomats, February-April 2017.

31 Interviews, OSCE, March 2017.

during the Ukraine crisis. Here again, Russia's refusal to engage blocks any development in those directions.

As previously stated, the VD cannot be considered in isolation from other arms control agreements. Therefore, Russian efforts to block any engagement with the VD (thus limiting to a maximum outside oversight of their military activities), coupled with a disengagement from the CFE (permitting a military build-up) but a maintenance of the Open Skies Treaty (which may allow Russia to gather intelligence on NATO countries), may be seen as a concerning signal. As a Western diplomat put it: 'it is as if they were trying to make us completely blind on their military activities. The only question is why?'<sup>32</sup>. Indeed, assessing Russia's intention is, in arms control as in other areas, the key challenge precluding any form of engagement. In a nutshell, the difficulty is to know whether Russia is an insecure state (acting in reaction to an intense perceived threat which could be mitigated through skillful diplomacy), or a 'greedy' state looking for material and/or symbolic satisfaction through a transformation of the current international system which can only be stopped through effective deterrence.<sup>33</sup> In the first hypothesis, the current deadlock is only temporary until Western countries and Russia manage to find some common ground to mitigate their mutual concerns and stop the race to the end of the security dilemma. In the second hypothesis, Russia has in fact already given up on arms control, its military considers it an unnecessary constraint, and Russian diplomats are only paying lip service to the OSCE until Moscow feels confident enough to completely shake off the current security architecture.

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32 Interview with a Western diplomat, February 2017.

33 For a discussion of 'insecure' or 'greedy' states, see Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010.

## Conclusion

This paper has traced the evolutions of the Vienna Document, and provided some context to the current deadlock. It has argued that arms control agreements are particularly sensitive to the evolutions of political contexts, and the VD is no exception. As such, it is unsurprising that the current tensions between Western countries and Russia have affected it. But it has also illustrated that current difficulties are to some degree the result of a regime that was already weakened by permissive implementation measures and a culture of political consensus which overlooked past violations. The irreconcilable Western and Russian approaches to the VD (necessary because of the lack of trust versus unnecessary because it would signal 'normal' relations) make it impossible to foresee any rapid progression in the situation, despite the urgent need better to control the present volatile military situation in Europe.



## 15

Military Exercises in the Middle East:  
from Cover for War to Alliance Reassurance  
*Amr Yossef*

Before the 1973 War, Egypt conducted a series of military exercises that served as smokescreen for the actual attack on Israeli forces in Sinai. Iraq conducted similar exercises to cover its surprise attacks on Iran in 1980 and on Kuwait in 1990. Nevertheless, this pattern of conducting military exercises as trial runs for offensive action in the 1970s until the late 1980s has receded in recent decades in the Middle East in favour of another pattern of conducting joint, multi-national exercises, for the purposes of alliance reassurance and joint force operability such as *Bright Star*, *North Thunder*, and other Turkish-Israeli, Israeli-Greek, Egyptian-Russian exercises. This is puzzling; there is no shortage of war in the conflict-torn Middle East and conducting military exercises has not failed its mission in preparing troops to fight.

This chapter examines these past and current military exercises in the Middle East and accounts for the observed patterns by the change in the threat environment and international alliances in the region. The Cold War alliances and threats under which the old pattern took hold, particularly the adoption in Arab armies of Soviet military doctrine and the Arab-Israeli wars, declined. These were replaced by different alliances, operationalised through another pattern of exercises-as-reassurance, and different threats, from regional 'rogue' states to terrorist organizations.

## Exercises as Cover for an offensive

As noted in the introduction to this volume, exercises can serve several different or multiple purposes. In the absence of real combat, military commanders usually insert into their training plans large-scale exercises, for their usefulness in maintaining readiness and in preparing their forces for war.

States have also on occasion used the holding of military exercises as a smokescreen for war, i.e., as part of a larger strategic deception to camouflage an actual, surprise attack. In this, states take advantage of some central elements common to both exercises and real operations – large-scale reserve mobilization, high state of alert and readiness, forward deployment of forces and taking offensive positions – to cover their intentions as innocent, regular activities and seize the enemy unprepared. A notable example is the 1939 German surprise attack in the invasion of Poland, in which the Wehrmacht mobilization and eastward deployments were declared as part of the annual autumn manoeuvres, and therefore Polish leaders failed to recognize the immediate threat and decided to delay mobilization until late August when it was already too late.

In his book on sudden attacks in the Second World War and in the post-war era, Richard Betts identified nine cases that included the use of military manoeuvres to mask troop movements in successful surprise attacks: the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the North Korean invasion of the South in 1950, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the Egyptian-Syrian attack on Israel in 1973. Remarkably, these cases show that when states use exercises as cover, the standard purpose of preparation does not disappear, but reinforces the final aim of the cover – attack – in that exercising to fight a designated enemy at a chosen time enhances the ability of the attacking forces to perform their assigned mission.

Writing in 1982 during the last peak of the Cold War, Betts noted that the role of military exercises before the invasions ‘illustrates several classic elements of the surprise attack problem: the cry-wolf syndrome,

deception, ambiguity that permits less threatening interpretations than turn out to be warranted, and the resultant disagreements in intelligence assessments that inhibit speed in reaction,<sup>1</sup> before adding that ‘of all the hypothetical ruses to cover a future attack on the FRG [Federal Republic of Germany], troop exercises are the ones that first leap to many strategists’ minds.’<sup>2</sup> More specifically, repetition or prolongation of exercises turns tension into a routine that desensitizes the defender’s observers to the danger of imminent attack. Making an offensive resemble an established profile of manoeuvre exercises, including movement and concentration of forces necessary to launch an attack, stunts the defender’s ability to detect changes in the normal behaviour of the attacker’s forces.<sup>3</sup>

As noted above, the Middle East also knew several examples of this phenomenon. They warrant a short discussion.

### *Egyptian Exercises before the October 1973 Attack*

On 1 October 1973, the Egyptian Armed Forces began large-scale, multi-branch exercises, dubbed *Tahrir* (‘Liberation’) 41, which were due to end on 7 October. Egyptian newspapers reported five days earlier on the exercises in a story about the visit of the Minister of War, Gen. Ahmed Ismail Ali, to the training troops on the front lines.<sup>4</sup> In the words of the then Egyptian Chief of Operations, Major General Mohamed el-Gamasy:

The first step [in the countdown to war] was to conduct a training exercise in which all the branches of the Armed Forces, field armies and military commands would participate, and under whose guise the last moves in preparing the attack would be implemented, so that the training exercise would turn into real war according to the plan of operations.<sup>5</sup>

These exercises were similar to those held before in April of the same

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1 Richard K. Betts, *Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defence Planning*, Washington D.C. The Brookings Institution, 1982, p. 82.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96 and 109-110.

4 *Al-Abram*, ‘Wazir al- arbiyya fi al-Jabha,’ [Minister of War in the Front] (25 Sept. 1973).

5 Mohamed Abdel-Ghany El-Gamasy, *Mudhakkirat El-Gamasy: arb October 1973* [El-Gamasy’s Memoirs: October 1973 War] (Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization 2012), p. 297.

year. The Israelis had feared that the April exercises might be a preparation for an attack and had partly mobilized the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). Chances were that Israel would interpret the next Egyptian exercise in October as more of the same – i.e. a mere exercise – which is indeed what happened.<sup>6</sup>

In particular, Israeli military intelligence (AMAN), under the command of Major General Eli Zeira, continued to believe in the so-called ‘concept,’ i.e., that Egypt would not attack until it received advanced weapon systems to neutralize the superior Israel Air Force (IAF). Until the eve of the war, Zeira disregarded other information that indicated otherwise, particularly that Egypt was ready to launch an attack for the limited aim of occupying a strip of the east bank of the Suez Canal.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, reports by a junior military intelligence officer in the Southern Command, on 1 and 3 October respectively, evaluating that the exercises camouflaged the final phases of an all-out war preparation, were disregarded by his superiors.<sup>8</sup>

Manoeuvres as cover were central to the Egyptian deception plan for several reasons. First, such a large array of troops required to launch the operation was impossible to hide from AMAN, so the effort was focused on giving an innocent explanation for it: regular manoeuvres. Secondly, *Tahrir 41* was itself one in a series of *Tahrir* Canal-crossing exercises conducted since 1968. Thirdly, the high level of alert was routine in large manoeuvres, whereas the use of live ammunition, further troop concentrations, and other irregular activities were viewed as precautionary measures against a possible Israeli attack during the course of the exercises.<sup>9</sup>

But this was not the only Middle Eastern case where an offensive was

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6 *Ibid.*, p. 297-8.

7 Amr Yossef, ‘The Fallacy of Democratic Victory: Decision-Making and Arab-Israeli Wars, 1967-2006,’ (PhD dissertation, University of Trento, 2009), pp. 213-215.

8 Avi Shlaim, ‘Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Yom Kippur War,’ *World Politics* Vol. 28, No. 3 (1976), pp. 353-4.

9 Michael I. Handel, ‘The Yom Kippur War and the Inevitability of Surprise,’ *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 21, No. 3 (1977), p. 496.

prepared under the very eyes of the victims to be attacked.

### *Iraqi Exercises before the September 1980 Attack*

Before launching its surprise attack on Iran on 22 September 1980, the Iraqi Armed Forces had been conducting large-scale exercises. Ground and naval forces held exercises similar to the subsequent war effort, while the aerial attack was disguised as training with Oman. In the words of Major General 'Alwan al-Abousi, then commander of a wing squadron, 'it was not supposed to be war, but a cooperation and partnership building exercise between the Iraqi Air Force and Omani Air Force.'<sup>10</sup> The aerial attack took place on 21 September, the ground invasion followed the next day. The length of time of the Iraqi exercises suggests that these were equally used to train and prepare forces for the invasion.<sup>11</sup> According to Major General Wafiq al-Samara'i, then head of the Iran desk at the Iraqi General Intelligence Service, close to the D-Day, Iraqi ground troops had completed exercises at the brigade level.<sup>12</sup> Throughout, Iraqi newspapers, however, there was complete silence about such exercises.<sup>13</sup>

Since the summer of 1979, evidence appeared that Iraq was preparing for an invasion by moving large armoured units to its south eastern border. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the U.S. State Department detected and analysed this information and reported on it in due time. In April 1980, the U.S. National Intelligence Council's Strategic Warning Staff wrote a memo stating 'evidence indicates that Iraq has probably planned to initiate a major military move against Iran.' However, U.S. officials did not get to see these reports and did not believe that Iraq was about to attack until very shortly before it happened.<sup>14</sup>

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10 Kevin M. Woods, Williamson Murray, Elizabeth A. Nathan, Laila Sabara, Ana M. Venegas, *Saddam's Generals: Perspectives of the Iran-Iraq War* (Alexandria, Virginia: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2011) p. 195.

11 Pesach Malovany, *Milhamot Bavel ha-Hadasha* [The Wars of Modern Babylon] Tel Aviv: Maarachot Publishing, 2009, p. 101.

12 Wafiq al-Samara'i, *Hutam al-Bawaba al-Sharqiyya* [Debris of the Eastern Gate] Kuwait: Dar al-Qabas, 1997, pp. 46-47.

13 See *Al-Thaura* and *Al-Jumburiyya* newspapers, Sept. 1979-Sept. 1980.

14 Mark Gasiorowski, 'US Intelligence Assistance to Iran, May-October 1979,' *Middle East Journal* Vol. 66, No. 4 (2012), p. 623.

In mid-October 1979, CIA officer George Cave met in Stockholm with Iranian officials and told them that there was concrete evidence that Iraq was carrying out exercises 'that could only be explained as preparations for a possible invasion of Iran,' citing training to send large units quickly across the Shatt al-Arab river, while timing these exercises to increase their effectiveness.<sup>15</sup> Other U.S. government agencies did not share the CIA officer's pessimism. According to Bureau of Intelligence and Research's analyst Wayne White: 'The Iraqi army was doing little more than continuing its well-known annual schedule of primarily battalion and brigade-level training exercises ... Very little of the Iraqi military was anywhere near the Iraqi-Iranian frontier.'<sup>16</sup>

Little is known about how exactly the Iranian leadership dealt with Cave's warning. Nevertheless, available evidence suggests the Iranian leadership did not get this information or decided to disregard it. Cave's interlocutor, Abbas Amir-Entezam, head of the political office of the Liberation Movement of Iran, apparently briefed the Prime Minister, Mehdi Bazargan, but the latter was more interested in the U.S. estimates of the then Kurdish uprising.<sup>17</sup> After the resignation of the Bazargan government in November 1979, its members did not pass on the reports on Iraq's war preparations to their successors and revolutionary Iran continued to purge its armed forces until the Iraqi invasion.<sup>18</sup>

### *Iraqi Exercises before the August 1990 Attack*

Much like its invasion of Iran in 1980, the Iraqi Armed Forces, particularly the Republican Guard units, conducted exercises in advance of their surprise attack on Kuwait on 2 August 1990. According to Lieutenant General Ra'ad Majid al-Hamadani, then commander of the 17th Brigade of the Republican Guard, the mobilization on the Kuwaiti borders started on 15 July under the cover of a training exercise called

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15 *Ibid.*

16 Chris Emery, 'Reappraising the Carter Administration's response to the Iran-Iraq war' in *The Iran-Iraq War: New International Perspectives*, New York and London, Routledge, 2013.

17 Gasiorowski, 'US Intelligence Assistance to Iran,' p. 623.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 626.

‘Arab Cooperation,’ though earlier exercises were conducted under the pretext of preparing for war against Israel.<sup>19</sup> The Kuwaiti government was aware of the Iraqi exercises. On 22 July, it received a report from its Ambassador in Baghdad, Ibrahim al-Bahu, about the Iraqi mobilization on the Kuwaiti borders, indicating that ‘he did not want to ask [the Iraqis] because he knew in advance the response he would receive, i.e., that these movements are meant for Iran because the final agreement with them [the Iranians] has not been reached yet.’<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, the Kuwaiti leadership was apparently reassured by Arab leaders who also misread the Iraqi movements. Former Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak, met with Saddam Hussein on 25 July offering his good offices to deescalate the crisis. When he asked about the Iraqi troop mobilization close to the Kuwaiti border, Saddam replied that this was only a regular, multi-division exercise and that the troops themselves were on the southern border beforehand to deter Iran. Mubarak came out of his meeting with Saddam with the impression that Iraq had no intention of attacking Kuwait.<sup>21</sup> U.S. intelligence agencies also learned about these several-week-long exercises, but failed to recognize their significance, and realized belatedly that the exercises were held in preparation for the occupation of Kuwait, and probably the Saudi oil fields.<sup>22</sup> Among the many Iraqi trial-run exercises was a mid-July rehearsal in central Iraq in which special forces practiced for the helicopter-borne assault on Kuwait city.<sup>23</sup>

It is instructive to note how the Iraqi leadership accused other states of holding military exercises to disguise an invasion – just as it was doing itself. Iraq’s newspapers did not mention the Iraqi exercises, though

19 Ra’ad Majid al-Hamadani, *Qabl an Yughaderuna al-Tareekh* [Before History Turns its Back to Us] Beirut: Al-Dar al-‘Arabyyia lel-‘Aloum, 2007, pp. 189-190 and p. 195.

20 Mohamed Heikal, *Harb al-Khaleej: Awham al-Quwa wa al-Nasr* [The Gulf War: Illusions of Power and Victory] Cairo: Al-Ahram Center for Translation and Publication, 1992, p. 326.

21 Mohamed el-Shimy, *Tanfeedh al-Siyasa al-Kharijiyya al-Misriyaa fi Azmat al-Khaleej al-Thaniya* [Implementation of Egyptian Foreign Policy in the Second Gulf Crisis] Cairo: al-Maktab al-Arabi le al-Ma’aref, 2014, p. 414.

22 *Los Angeles Times*, ‘Iraq Has Trained For Kuwait Attack More Than 2 Years: U.S. Intelligence Finds Detailed Plan to Capture Saudi Oil’ (24 Sept. 1990).

23 *Ibid.*

they did criticize those conducted by other states. On 25 July, 1990, an Iraqi official spokesperson accused the United Arab Emirates (UAE) of conspiring against Iraq by conducting joint military exercises with the U.S.<sup>24</sup> After his capture, Saddam told his FBI investigators that one piece of evidence he had for his perceived U.S.-Kuwaiti ‘conspiracy’ to invade Iraq in 1990 was the joint exercises they held. In particular, ‘when noted to Saddam that the US military visits many countries throughout the world conducting exercises which are not indicators of a ‘conspiracy,’ Saddam asked, ‘In what other country did Schwarzkopf do sand planning like Kuwait?’<sup>25</sup>

### *Sources of Exercises-as-Cover*

As the discussion above shows, there is a pattern in the Middle East of conducting military exercises as cover for a surprise attack. This pattern probably originates from two factors.

The first is the adoption by Arab armies of Soviet military doctrine and methods, as part of the alliance relationship established between the Soviet Union and several Arab countries, especially Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria and Libya, from the mid-1950s until the late 1980s. While Arab militaries did not adopt the Soviet military doctrine wholesale, they assimilated particular methods identical to the Soviet way of war.<sup>26</sup> In his analysis of the Egyptian use of exercises as cover in 1973, Uri Bar-Joseph has recognized this possibility. In particular, he noted that conducting large-scale exercises as cover for preparing an actual operation turned into an accepted method in the Warsaw Pact militaries after 1961 and was indeed used as such in the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and that this doctrine was assimilated in the Egyptian military after the

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24 *Al-Thawra*, ‘Inkashaf al-Mut’ameroun le T’aamurehem ‘ala al-‘Iraq wa al-Umma al-‘Arabiyya,’ [The Conspirators are publicly exposed for their conspiracy against Iraq and the Arab nation] (25 July 1990).

25 Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) Interviews of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein Interview Session 9, February 24, 2004, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB279/10.pdf>

26 Michael Eisenstadt and Kenneth M. Pollack, ‘Armies of Snow and Armies of Sand: The impact of Soviet Military doctrine on Arab Militaries,’ *Middle East Journal* Vol. 55, No. 4 (2001).



1960s.<sup>27</sup>

The second factor is imitation of practices of the IDF, against which the Arabs had fought most frequently, in conventional inter-state wars. Imitation of successful military organizations is not a new phenomenon. As John Lynn states in his explanation of the evolution of modern Western militaries, ‘more than any other institution, militaries tend to copy one another across state borders ... When an army confronts new or different weaponry or practices, it must adapt to them, and often adaptation takes the form of imitation.’<sup>28</sup> Likewise, João Resende-Santos has also found that South American states have aggressively imitated the successful military organizations of France and Germany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>29</sup>

In 1956 and 1967, Israel achieved victory by successful surprise attacks. While Israel itself did not use exercises-as-cover, in both cases the mobilization of the IDF was disguised as intended to attack targets other than the real ones. Prior to the Israeli attack on Egypt in October 1956, Israeli deception included that ‘military preparations be explained as hedges against Iraqi intervention in Jordan,’<sup>30</sup> whereas prior to the surprise attack in June 1967, Israel managed to inspire an Egyptian assessment that the IDF would attack Sharm el Sheikh by sea, by ‘sending four Israeli landing craft south to Eilat, removing them later under cover of darkness, then bringing them down a second time in daylight.’<sup>31</sup> This imitation of the IDF’s own *modus operandi* can be inferred from former President Mubarak (Egyptian Air Force Commander in 1973) who claims that the intention in 1973 was to make a decapitating aerial attack similar to the one Israel carried out in 1967,<sup>32</sup> as well as from Major General Alaadin

27 Bar-Joseph, *Ha-Tsofeh she-Nirdam*, p. 201.

28 John A. Lynn, ‘The Evolution of Army Style in the Modern West, 800–2000,’ *The International History Review* Vol. 18, No. 3 (1996), p. 509.

29 João Resende-Santos, ‘Anarchy and the emulation of military systems: Military organization and technology in South America, 1870–1930,’ *Security Studies* Vol. 5, No. 3 (1996).

30 Betts, *Surprise Attack*, p. 63.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 66–7.

32 Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, *Kalamat as-Ser: Mudhakkirat Mohamed Hosni Mubarak: Yuniu 1967–October 1973* [The Password: Memoirs of Mohamed Hosni Mubarak: June 1967–October 1973], eds., Mohamed

Makki Khamas (Chief of Staff of the III Corps during the Iraq-Iran war) who asserts that 'logically, if Iraq fought a war against Iran it needed to be short, such as when Israel fought the Six-Day War. Judging from the pre-emptive air strike and attack, this was the intention of Iraq's command.'<sup>33</sup>

Tradition might also have played a role. Military deception, including using movements of forces, is as old as war itself. According to the wealth of Arab military history, especially during Islamic conquests, Arab strategists have often used deception. Explaining victory in war, the great Arab scholar Ibn-Khaldun (d. 1406) stated in his treatise *al-Muqaddimah* (or Prolegomena):

[Victory] may be the result of human ruse and trickery, such as spreading alarming news and rumours to cause defections [in the ranks of the enemy], occupying high points, so that one is able to attack from above, which surprises those below and causes them to abandon each other, hiding in thickets or depressions and concealing oneself from the enemy in rocky terrain, so that the armies [of one's own side] suddenly appear when they [the enemy] are in a precarious situation and they must then flee to safety [instead of defending themselves] ... Therefore, [Prophet Muhammad] Peace be Upon Him said: 'War is deception,' and an Arab proverb says: 'Many a trick is worth more than a tribe.'<sup>34</sup>

Arab scholars have also emphasized deceiving the enemy through spreading false information about one's troops and readiness. For example, al-Herawi (d. 1215), emphasized in his book *al-Tadbkerah al-Herawiyya* that '[the Sultan] should make plots, design traps for them [the enemy] and falsify information and make it visible to [the enemy's] soldiers so that [people's] tongues would pronounce it and spread the word, and therefore it would certainly reach the enemy.'<sup>35</sup> There is no concrete

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al-Shinawi and Abdullah Kamal, Cairo: Nahdet Misr Publishing Group, 2013, p. 43.

<sup>33</sup> Woods, Murray, Nathan, Sabara and Venegas, *Saddam's Generals*, p. 129. See also al-Samara'i, *Hutam al-Bawaba al-Sharqiyya*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>34</sup> Abdul-Rahman Ibn-Khaldun, *al-Muqaddimah* [The Introduction] Beirut: Maktabat Lebanon, 1970 reprint of the 1858 Paris edition, ed., E.M. Quatremère, Part II, p. 76.

<sup>35</sup> Ali al-Herawi, *al-Tadbkerah al-Herawiyya fi al-Hiyal al-Harbiyya* [al-Herawi Memento in Military Trickery] (Damascus: Ministry of Culture, 1972), p. 88.

evidence for a direct link between this advice and Arab exercises-as-cover in the twentieth century, but it is not unreasonable to assume that the Arab military tradition has generally influenced the ways in which Arab war planners have designed their surprise attacks.

## Exercises as Alliance Reassurance

As military exercises were used as a smokescreen for war, they have also been used for other purposes. Particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, with the emergence of large peacetime military alliances, notably NATO and the Warsaw Pact, allied states started to use displays of power, in the form of joint exercises, both to communicate messages of reassurance to each other and to demonstrate political and military resolve to their common adversaries; in other words, preparing jointly for war makes going to war together a real option. As John Farrell put it, 'just as Carl von Clausewitz postulated that opponents wage war for political purposes, so can the preparation for war have value in the political realm.'<sup>36</sup> Multinational exercises fall into this pattern, such as NATO's, as well as bilateral exercises, such as the U.S.-Republic of Korea *Team Spirit*, the U.S.-India *Malabar* naval exercise, and many others around the world, including in the Middle East.

Obviously, Middle Eastern states continued, throughout the 1990s to date, conducting national-level exercises. Nevertheless, rather than being trial runs for long-planned attacks, these are usually conducted as part of the training plans, normal to any military organization, either to fulfil the standard purpose of preparing troops for battle, or to make a show of force in the face of hostile behaviour by other regional powers. Examples include the Egyptian *Badr* exercises in 1996 and 2014, Saudi *Gulf Shield* exercises, the Iranian *Great Prophet* annual exercises in 2006-2016, and Israel's frequent exercises using potential war scenarios. In 2008, Israel

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<sup>36</sup> John F. Farrell, 'Team spirit: a case study on the value of military exercises as a show of force in the aftermath of combat operations,' *Air & Space Power Journal* Vol. 23, No. 3 (2009), p. 96.

held a large air drill over the Mediterranean Sea that apparently exercised a complex operation understood as a rehearsal for a potential bombing of Iran's nuclear installations.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, Middle East exercises in recent decades appear to be more joint, serving the purpose of alliance reassurance. Within the limited space of this chapter we shall confine ourselves to discussing only three prominent cases.

### *Bright Star Exercises*

*Bright Star* was first conducted in 1980 as a single-service, annual bilateral U.S.-Egyptian exercise. In 1982, *Bright Star* turned multi-national and included countries other than Egypt and the U.S.: Sudan, Somalia, and Oman. In 1983, due to the increasing number of participating troops and logistical demands, it was decided to make the exercises a biennial event, conducted in 1985, 1987, 1989 and 1994 (the delay of four years was due to the U.S. and Egyptian participation in the 1991 Gulf War). In 1996, the exercises included France, the United Kingdom, Germany and the UAE, and in 1998 also Kuwait. The largest was in 1999/2000, when eleven countries took part with over 70,000 troops.<sup>38</sup> The exercises were held in 2001, 2005 (*Bright Star 2003* was cancelled due to military commitments in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq), 2007 and 2009. The latter was the latest so far as *Bright Star 2011* was postponed due to the Egyptian Revolution, while the exercise scheduled in 2013 was cancelled by the U.S. to protest against Egyptian domestic policies. At the time of writing (2017) it has not been resumed.

The time period in which the exercises were held can be divided into three periods: the 1980s, the 1990s and the 2000s. In the first, which came directly after the Egyptian-Israeli peace in 1979 and Egypt's alliance shift away from the Soviet Union to the U.S., *Bright Star* was mainly bilateral and held as part of the newly established alliance: Egypt and

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37 Michael R. Gordon and Eric Schmitt, 'U.S. Says Israeli Exercise Seemed Directed at Iran,' *New York Times* (20 June 2008).

38 Paula Jones, 'BRIGHT STAR Exercise in Egypt: Improving Readiness among Coalition Forces,' *U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda* Vol. 4, No. 3 (1999), pp. 34-6.

other U.S. allies in the region. It should come as no surprise, then, to understand how the Soviet Union perceived them: ‘Moscow denounced *Bright Star* as a rehearsal for the invasion of both Libya and the Middle East oil fields ... as a device for intimidating ‘progressive’ governments in the Middle East, such as Libya, Ethiopia and South Yemen, and as a technique for strengthening pro-US regimes in the region.’<sup>39</sup> No *Bright Star* scenario was acted out in real conflict, though in retrospect, a 2005 Congressional review emphasized that ‘cooperation between U.S. and Egyptian armed forces in joint military exercises over the previous decade (the *Bright Star* exercises) prepared the way for the 1990-1991 defence of the Arabian Peninsula (*Operation Desert Storm*).’<sup>40</sup>

In the 1990s, *Bright Star* proved its utility in providing joint force operability among coalition partners. Given the fact that the threat posed by Saddam’s Iraq did not entirely disappear even after the defeat of 1991, the exercises became deeper and more multilateral to include the Gulf states, with a view to scenarios similar to the invasion of Kuwait in the future. In a press conference following the completion of *Bright Star* 1999/2000, U.S. Secretary of Defence William Cohen declared: ‘one country that is not represented here today should pay close attention to what *Bright Star* represents. Saddam Hussein remains an outlaw in his own neighbourhood.’<sup>41</sup> As such, calls were made for the U.S. to consider restructuring *Bright Star* to deploy an Egyptian force using U.S. or allied lift in the case of a regional crisis within a security framework for the Gulf.<sup>42</sup> In the 2000s, as Saddam’s threat disappeared following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, *Bright Star* was flexible enough to reflect the participants’ view on possible coalition or national war scenarios, changing in scope from inter-state toward intra-state scenarios (terrorism

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39 Robert O. Freedman, *Moscow and the Middle East: Soviet Policy since the Invasion of Afghanistan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 122.

40 Clyde R. Mark, ‘Egypt-United States Relations,’ *CRS Issue Brief for Congress* (13 April 2005).

41 Jim Garamone, ‘BRIGHT STAR Shines in Egypt,’ *American Forces Press Service* (26 Oct. 1999).

42 Mohamed Kadyr Said, ‘Potential Egyptian Contribution to a Security Framework in the Gulf,’ *Middle East Policy* Vol. 11, No. 3 (2004), p. 63.

and insurgencies).<sup>43</sup> At the same time, both the U.S. and Egypt still shared an interest in conducting *Bright Star* as it is 'designed to increase regional involvement in pursuit of improved security and defence capabilities ... It is the centrepiece in the military-to-military relations between the U.S. and Egypt.'<sup>44</sup> Egyptian and American views on the primacy of political over military objectives in conducting *Bright Star* seem to have coincided. In the view of the retired Egyptian Major General Tal'at Musallam, the resumption of *Bright Star* after the 2003 invasion of Iraq signalled a recognition from the U.S. that it cannot make do in the Middle East without its traditional allies.<sup>45</sup> Also, according to the U.S. Government Accounting Office in 2006, 'the strategic and political objectives appear more central to the U.S. than the military objectives like modernization and interoperability.'<sup>46</sup>

Only with this background on *Bright Star* in the 2000s in mind can the U.S. cancellation of the 2013 exercises be understood. President Obama decided to cancel *Bright Star* scheduled in September 2013, signalling a withdrawal of support for the Egyptian government, in protest at the dispersion by Egyptian security forces of two large encampments in Cairo in support of the former Islamist president, which resulted in several hundred deaths. But it also came as part of a wider decision to downsize the U.S. role in the Middle East.<sup>47</sup> Proponents of resuming *Bright Star* precisely cite these two arguments: maintaining deterrence in the Gulf and restoring U.S. leverage with the Egyptian government as a committed ally.<sup>48</sup>

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43 Richard Goldenberg, 'Return to the Middle East; Rainbow Division headquarters partners with Egyptian Army for BRIGHT STAR 07,' *National Guard* (10 April 2007).

44 Arcent Wiley, 'Exercise Bright Star 2009,' U.S. Army (22 Oct. 2009).

45 Tal'at Musallam, 'Awdat Munawarat al-Najm al-Sa'e,' [The Return of BRIGHT STAR Maneuvers] *Al-jazeera* (12 Nov. 2009).

46 Susan S. Vogelsang, *U.S.-Egypt Security Cooperation after Egypt's January 2011 Revolution*, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2011, pp. 30-31.

47 Sergio Fabbrini and Amr Yossef, 'Obama's Wavering: US Foreign Policy on the Egyptian Crisis, 2011-2013,' *Contemporary Arab Affairs* Vol. 8, No. 1 (2015), 65-80.

48 Gilan Wenig and Eric Trager, 'Bring Back BRIGHT STAR,' *The Hill*, 21 Aug. 2015.

### *North Thunder Exercises*

Saudi-led, multi-national *North Thunder* exercises were held in February-March 2016. At the time, a number of factors raised speculation that the exercises were covering a surprise attack: the location of the exercise in northern Saudi Arabia, as well as its large size, especially as it came 19 months after the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) started its aerial bombing operation in Yemen, and a few days after the adviser to the Saudi Minister of Defence, Brigadier General Ahmed Asiri, said that KSA is 'prepared for a land war in Syria.'<sup>49</sup> Some believed that Riyadh was using these exercises either as a 'warming up for a possible future battle with Iran,'<sup>50</sup> or as 'covering a Saudi-led military intervention in Syria.'<sup>51</sup>

Instead, *North Thunder* served a triple-aim of alliance reassurance, joint force operability and show of force. The main motivation was the rising Iranian threat that has escalated to alarming levels over the last decade, especially since the Obama administration has decided to downsize the U.S. role in the Middle East. From a Saudi perspective, Iran strikes at the heart of the Arab regional system by employing sectarianism, supporting non-state armed militia, and, finally in 2015, bargaining with the international community to freeze Tehran's nuclear programme in exchange for accepting its hegemony and the expansion of its regional influence.<sup>52</sup>

The Saudi fear, understandable under expanding Iranian influence in Syria and Iraq and the chaotic Arab Spring regional situation, is that the House of Saud might have to face a similar fate, involving popular protests, evolving into a civil war with Iranian-backed militias, all with U.S. reluctance to intervene for its allies, as it did with Egypt's Mubarak.

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49 *Asharq al-Awsat*, 'Assiri: al-Sa'udia Musta'eda le al-harb al-Barriyaa fi Suriya,' [Assiri: Saudi Arabia is Prepared for War on the Ground in Syria], 9 Feb 2016.

50 Abbas Qaidaari, 'Iran unfazed by Saudi flexing in Persian Gulf,' *Al-Monitor*, 26 Oct. 2016.

51 Jeremy Binnie, 'Saudi 'Raad al-Shamal' exercise looks smaller than billed,' *Janes Defense Review*, 26 Feb. 2016.

52 Gamal Abul Hassan, 'al-Defa' 'an al-Nizam al-Iqleemi 'Fard 'Ayn' Siyasi,' [Defending the Regional System is a Political Must] *Asharq al-Awsat*, 27 Feb. 2016.

The 1990/1991 war has also shown that despite the massive Saudi armament, the KSA needs stronger allies to take part in its defence. It was against this background that Riyadh decided in December 2015 to establish the Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism (IMAFT), with 34 countries, all members of the Organization of Islamic Conference (excluding Syria, Iraq and Iran) and particularly those with military power, in troop numbers and battle experience, that could add significantly to the defence of KSA in time of need such as Egypt, Turkey and Pakistan.

*North Thunder* exercises were seen as the first step in putting IMAFT into practice in terms of state participation (all members of IMAFT), timing, only two months after the announcement on establishing IMAFT, and location, in the northern part of KSA facing Iraq and Iran. According to Brigadier General Asiri, the exercises have focused specifically on fighting irregular forces and terrorist organizations.<sup>53</sup> *North Thunder* was reportedly the largest in the history of the Middle East, including 350,000 troops from 20 nations (in addition to KSA and Gulf states), demonstrating how well the KSA would be able to mobilize allies, much more than it did with the 11-state Arab coalition conducting military operations against the rebels in Yemen. The exercises have also enhanced the Saudi role in the Gulf Cooperation Council, as all its members, including Qatar whose policies have caused crises with KSA in the recent past, participated collectively through the GCC Al-Jazeera Shield Force. Judging by the reaction of Iran – which announced just before the start of the exercises that it would conduct large naval exercises in the Arabian Gulf aiming at stabilizing security in the region and facing threats from foreign powers<sup>54</sup> – one could argue that *North Thunder* represented a potent show of force.

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53 *Sky News Arabia*, 'Assiri: Amn al-Sa'udia wa al-Khaleej wa al-Mantqa Khaṭ Aḥmar,' [Assiri: The Security of Saudi Arabia, the gulf and the region is a red line], 7 March 2016.

54 *Russia Today*, 'Rasa'el al-Tadreebat al-Askariyya fi al-Khaleej Turbek al-Sharq al-Awsat,' [Messages of Military Exercises in the Gulf Confuses the Middle East], 28 Jan. 2016.



## *Other Exercises*

### 1) Egypt, the U.S. and Russia

For more than three decades, the U.S. has been Egypt's largest military ally. Despite the fact that U.S.-Egyptian relations have successfully passed several hard tests, it was not until 2013 that they witnessed their most difficult challenge. For the first time, the American administration decided to use the military aid as a tool to pressure Cairo into making domestic political changes. Protesting the Egyptian military's decision to side with the popular demand to remove the Islamist president Morsi and disperse two large pro-Morsi encampments in Cairo, the U.S. first delayed delivery of F-16 plans, and then cancelled *Bright Star* exercises scheduled for September 2013 and suspended the bulk of military aid to Egypt.

Although most of the U.S. military aid has gradually returned, the point was made. In a serious break from its traditional relations with the U.S., Egypt shifted to diversify weapons sources significantly, especially procuring from Russia (and France). In February 2014, the Minister of Defence (and soon-to-be president) el-Sisi visited Moscow, meeting with president Putin who returned the visit to Cairo in 2015. Reportedly, the two sides agreed on a major arms deal including fighter jets, air defence systems, and naval frigates.<sup>55</sup> They also signed a protocol on military cooperation in March 2015. In June 2015, Egypt and Russia conducted their first-ever joint naval exercises, *Bridge of Friendship*, in the Mediterranean, focusing on the protection of sea routes from different threats. In October 2016, the two countries conducted their first joint anti-terrorism paratrooper exercise, *Defenders of Friendship*, in Egypt's north western desert.

The introduction of Egyptian-Russian exercises could not be separated from regional developments. As the Obama administration was determined

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55 Yiftah S. Shapir and Kashish Parpiani, 'Egypt Rearms,' *Strategic Assessment* Vol. 19, No. 3 (2016), pp. 60-1.

to extricate the U.S. from the Middle East, alienating its traditional allies, and against the backdrop of strained ties with Washington, Egypt sought to strengthen its ties with Moscow. Putin's Russia responded eagerly, filling the space left by the U.S. retreat.<sup>56</sup> Combined with the Russian military intervention in the Syrian civil war – which sent a strong message in the region that Moscow does not abandon its allies – and the growing Russian engagement in the Libyan conflict, including talks on a possible naval base there, this could mean that Russian influence in the Middle East is back. In addition, as one analyst put it, 'the rise in joint exercises can be explained in light of the increasing intensity of terror threats faced by those countries.'<sup>57</sup>

## 2) Israel, Turkey and Greece

Israeli-Turkish relations have grown since the early 1990s because of Turkey's interest in having Israel bolster its strategic deterrent, after the faltering role of NATO and rising tensions with Turkey's southern neighbours, and Israel's interest in seeking a strategic depth in return.<sup>58</sup> The improvement in relations reached its peak in 1996 when the two countries signed an agreement on military cooperation, including joint military training and exercises, the temporary stationing of forces on each other's territory, the exchange of intelligence and upgrading Turkey's border control with Syria, Iran and Iraq. Soon thereafter, the two countries signed a number of contracts to upgrade the Turkish air, air-defence, and armoured weapon systems by Israeli firms.

Starting in 1996, the two air forces held eight annual exercises, and the two navies also held annual exercises.<sup>59</sup> In 1998, the naval exercises became trilateral (with U.S. participation), dubbed Operation *Reliant Mermaid*, a rescue exercise also intended to enhance interoperability.<sup>60</sup>

56 Joseph V. Micallef, 'A Legacy of Failure: Obama's Mideast Foreign Policy,' *Huffington Post* (18 Oct. 2016).

57 Shaul Shai, *Exercise DEFENDERS OF FRIENDSHIP 2016* (Institute for Policy and Strategy, 2016), p. 3.

58 Mustafa Kibaroglu, 'Turkey and Israel Strategize,' *Middle East Quarterly* Vol. 9, No. 1 (2002), pp. 61-65.

59 Amikam Nachmani, 'The Remarkable Turkish Israeli Tie,' *Middle East Quarterly* Vol. 5, No. 2 (1998), pp. 19-29.

60 Orhan Babaoglu, 'RELIANT MERMAID Naval Exercise,' *Policy Watch 943*, The Washington Institute for

In 2001, Turkey initiated the annual, multi-national air-force exercise *Anatolian Eagle*, to which Israel and the U.S. were invited to simulate combat operations. Arab countries, worried that these might underpin a Turkish-Israeli military alliance against them, criticized the exercises. In 1998, Syria's Information Minister described the naval exercise as a show of force, bringing back the atmosphere of war in the region, while Egyptian president Mubarak condemned the naval exercise, since it meant 'that an Arab party would be targeted.'<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, all these were stopped abruptly following the deterioration in Turkish-Israeli relations over the 2008/2009 Israeli war in Gaza and the 2010 Israeli navy seizure of the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla, in which nine Turkish citizens were killed and many wounded, resulting in the downgrading of diplomatic relations and the freezing of all political ties. The last time *Reliant Mermaid* was held was in 2009; it was cancelled by Turkey in 2010, and afterwards it was conducted as a bilateral U.S.-Israeli exercise. The last Israeli participation in *Anatolian Eagle* was in 2008; in 2009, Turkey decided to cancel the international part of it, and in 2010 it took place with different participants other than the U.S. and Israel, including China.

The new rivalry brought each side to forge stronger ties, essentially military exercises, with the other's adversary. In April 2009, Turkey and Syria conducted their first-ever joint exercises. In October 2009, when Turkey cancelled Israeli participation in *Anatolian Eagle*, it announced instead that it would conduct another exercise with Syria, which was held in April 2010.<sup>62</sup> Israeli concerns grew that the Turkish-Syrian exercises 'will lead to full-fledged defence ties between the countries and to the possible transfer of Israeli technology from Turkey to Syria.'<sup>63</sup> Turkey's policy change soon brought Israel and Greece closer. The two countries

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Near East Policy, 18 Jan. 2005.

61 Efraim Inbar, 'Regional Implications of the Israeli-Turkish Strategic Partnership,' *Middle East Review of International Affairs* Vol. 5, No.2 (2001), p. 54.

62 David Schenker, 'Syria and Turkey: Walking Arm in Arm Down the Same Road?,' *Jerusalem Issue Briefs* Vol. 9, No. 13 (2009).

63 Yaakov Katz, 'Israel eyes Syria-Turkey military drill,' *Israel Hayom* (28 April 2010).

engaged in a series of joint exercises, starting with air-force exercises *Glorious Spartan* in 2008 (within the framework of the mostly dormant 1994 bilateral defence cooperation agreement), and exercise *Minos* 2010. In 2011, Israel hosted the Hellenic Air Force in a joint exercise, and in 2012 Greece hosted the IAF in another. In 2013, Israel hosted the large-scale, air-force exercises *Blue Flag* with Greek, U.S. and Italian participation. Israel, Greece and the U.S. initiated the naval exercise *Noble Dina* in 2011 which has been conducted annually ever since.<sup>64</sup>

Notably, the joint exercises held by the U.S. and Israel, particularly those with European participation, including Greece and other countries such as Italy and Poland, appear not only as one way for the U.S. to demonstrate the strength of its commitment to Israel, but also as another way to leverage that commitment to deter Israel from initiating an operation against Iran. A month before exercise *Blue Flag* was held in 2013, as talks over Iran's nuclear programme started in Geneva, the IAF 'conducted several large exercises over the northern border and the Mediterranean Sea, with fighter aircraft practicing a simulated strike on a distant target,' part of which were over the territorial waters of Greece.<sup>65</sup> In 2015, there were reports of a secret large-scale exercise the IAF held over Greek airspace, with the help of the Greek military, to train on targeting the Russian S-300 air-defence missile system that is located in Greece, which Russia also intended to sell to Iran to protect its nuclear facilities.<sup>66</sup>

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64 Efraim Inbar, 'Israel's Challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean,' *Middle East Quarterly* Vol. 21, No. 4 (2014).

65 Elie Leshem, 'Israel preps for massive air drill with US, Greece, Italy,' *The Times of Israel*, 6 Nov. 2013.

66 Dan Williams and Karolina Tagaris, 'Israel trained against Russian-made air defence system in Greece,' *Reuters*, 4 Dec. 2015.

## Sources of Exercises-as-Reassurance

The exercises discussed above illustrate a shift in the aims of military exercises in the Middle East from a cover for surprise attack to alliance reassurance. The fading of the old pattern is attributable to the change in the threat environment and international alliances in the region. The factors that helped to use exercises as cover for actual military operations were reversed. Not only did the Soviet Union collapse, along with the alliance relationships it established with Arab countries, but the latest Arab-Israeli war took place in 1982. Also the phenomenon of conventional, inter-state war – for which exercises-as-cover had been conducted – by either the Arab states, Israel and Iran has receded in the region, at least for the time being. Instead, alliances and threats in the Middle East have been reconfigured.

On the one hand, Egypt's alliance shift to the U.S. in the late 1970s, including making peace with Israel and having the U.S. as the largest arms supplier to Egypt, imposed a new situation in which the new ally required recurrent reassurance. Therefore *Bright Star* exercises evolved and expanded to include more U.S. and Egyptian allies in the region. Under the deterioration of U.S.-Egyptian relations in 2013, among the first tools used by Washington to pressure Cairo was the cancellation of *Bright Star*. As Egypt started looking for other allies, particularly Russia; closer relations with Moscow soon evolved into arms deals and joint military exercises.

In the 1990s, Turkey and Israel sought each other's support vis-a-vis common rivals, Syria, Iraq and Iran. They developed what was called a 'strategic partnership,' including Israeli arms sales to Turkey and joint exercises. As Turkey started to break away from Israel in 2008-2009, Ankara moved closer to Damascus and also started holding joint military exercises with the Syrian army. Israel apparently retaliated by getting closer to Greece, also including joint exercises. As the KSA sought to compensate for the U.S. withdrawal from the Middle East, it looked for other partners with whom to hold exercises. Building on decades of

nurturing allies in the Sunni Islamic world, it turned especially to other users of U.S. weaponry (such as Egypt, Turkey and Pakistan) to conduct *North Thunder* exercises with them to reassure itself and show strength. A notable part of the latter is that, unlike exercises-as-cover on which local newspapers either reported in passing (as in the case of Egypt in 1973) or remained completely silent (as in the case of Iraq in 1980 and 1990), exercises-as-alliance-reassurance receive wide publicity from local media coverage.

On the other hand, jointness in exercising presupposed a common threat perception, as exercises generally reflect the participants' view on possible coalitions in real war scenarios. Therefore, is not unreasonable to suggest that potential threats of conventional, inter-state wars, especially ones launched by regional 'rogue' states (such as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the Libyan invasion of Chad, the eight-year-long Iraq-Iran war) underpinned the scenarios exercised in early *Bright Star* and Turkish-Israeli exercises. More recently, with the fading of conventional threats and the rising terror/insurgency organizations supported by external actors, especially the collapse of states following the Arab Spring, states adapted their joint exercises accordingly. This was the case with the late *Bright Star* and *North Thunder*. Inter-state war scenarios have not disappeared entirely, however, and Israeli-Turkish and Israeli-Greek joint air exercises were reported to have been rehearsing an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear installations.

In this, the important function of the exercises became that of reassurance between the alliance members. The repeated example of alliance shift leading to military exercises demonstrates the importance states give to such activities, probably representing the highest degree of close relations. This is especially true when the joint exercises are preceded by arms sales of common weapon systems, as the exercises could also show the joint operability of forces having not only friendly relations but also the same weaponry. At the same time, much like using exercises-as-cover, the standard purpose of preparation does not disappear, but rather reinforces the final aim – alliance reassurance – in that exercising to face

a particular threat with the same partners enhances the ability of the coalition forces to perform their assigned mission together.

## Conclusion

This chapter has outlined two distinct patterns in conducting military exercises in the Middle East; in one, exercises as cover for surprise attack (Egyptian exercises before the 1973 war, and Iraqi exercises before attacking Iran in 1980 and Kuwait in 1990), in the other, they serve as alliance reassurance (*Bright Star*, *North Thunder*, and other Turkish-Israel, Israeli-Greek, Egyptian-Russian exercises). The observed patterns are explained by the change in threat environment and international alliances in the region.

The adoption of Soviet military doctrine and methods by Arab armies, as part of the alliance relationships established between the Soviet Union and several Arab countries, and the imitation of practices in the IDF, against which the Arabs fought most frequently, in conventional, inter-state wars, played a key role in the development of exercises-as-cover. Gradually, these were reversed; the Soviet Union collapsed, along with its Arab alliances, the phenomenon of conventional, inter-state war – for which exercises-as-cover were conducted – by either the Arab states, Israel and Iran is all but disappeared, at least for the time being.

The Middle East moved into different alliances and different threats where exercises are more joint and serve the purposes of alliance reassurance and joint force operability. Shifting alliances or the fear that the senior ally would not stand up to defend its junior partner, led to changes in the participants to the exercises by Egypt, Israel, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Jointness in exercising war envisages a common threat, and exercises proved to be flexible enough to reflect the participants' view on possible coalitions or national war scenarios, ranging from facing regional 'rogue' states to terrorist organizations. Examples of joint military exercises demonstrate the importance that states attribute to such activities: they

are probably the greatest sign of close relations short of an actual alliance in war.

This does not mean, however, that such alliances do not shift, nor that a return to exercises-as-cover for surprise attacks can be ruled out indefinitely. Exercises conducted for the purpose of alliance reassurance are still suspected of covering a surprise attack, such as the 2016 *North Thunder* exercises, and it was also the case in 2017 for *Eager Lion* (the two-week multinational military exercises held annually in Jordan since 2010), raising suspicions in Damascus that they were meant to cover a Jordanian military intervention in Syrian territory.<sup>67</sup> These two examples illustrate only one part of the current regional dynamics following the Arab Spring, including Russia's re-emergence as a major military power and an influential player in the Middle East, and the escalation of Saudi-Iranian rivalry, including through their involvement in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Thus while the phenomenon of conventional, inter-state war has receded in the Middle East in almost the last three decades, the region-wide strategic uncertainty created by these dynamics could pave the way to the re-use of military exercises, among other tools, not only for deception, but also for intimidation and coercion.

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67 Ali Younes, 'Jordanians 'won't support ground intervention in Syria,' *Aljazeera*, 11 May 2017.



## 16

India, Pakistan and *Brasstacks*:  
Exercise and Crisis on the Edge of War  
*John H. Gill*<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

This paper will address a major Indian military exercise conducted in late 1986 and early 1987. Named *Brasstacks*, this exercise, the largest military training exercise ever conducted by either country, created a significant war scare in its latter stages and thus serves as a useful laboratory for analysis of the role military affairs and nuclear deterrence play in the conflict-burdened India-Pakistan rivalry.<sup>2</sup> It also offers insights into exercise design, confidence building and tension mitigation that have relevance for NATO today.

The border between India and Pakistan is one of the few places outside of Central Europe where major military forces faced each other during the Cold War period and thus where military exercises could be both a manifestation of bilateral tensions and cause for crises. Then, as now, the two countries maintained large ground, air and naval forces primarily postured against one another. In the period under discussion here, 1986–87, India had an army of 1,100,000, an air force of 728 combat aircraft and a navy with 29 major surface combatants and ten submarines. The Pakistan Army, in contrast, numbered some 450,000, supplemented by an air force of 373 combat aircraft and a relatively small navy with six major

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1 The views expressed in this chapter are solely those of the author and do not represent the policy or position of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense, or the United States government.

2 This paper is based John H. Gill, 'Brasstacks: Prudently Pessimistic' in Sumit Gangly and S. Paul Kapur, eds., *Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia: Crisis Behaviour and the Bomb*, Abingdon, 2009, pp. 36–58.

surface combatants and six submarines.<sup>3</sup> Then, as now, however, the disparity in gross numbers was deceptive as India had to keep substantial ground forces along its China border more than 2,000 kilometers east of the most likely areas of confrontation with Pakistan. While Pakistan in the mid-1980's was concerned about the Soviet presence in Afghanistan on its western border, the distances involved were considerably less (approx. 500 km) and the likelihood of a serious Soviet ground incursion was small.

The armies were decidedly dominant in both countries (and remain so today) and this analysis will therefore focus on ground forces. Several points are important as background for our purposes, especially in highlighting similarities and differences with the NATO/Warsaw Pact situation. First, in terms of size and organization, it is important to reiterate the large scale on which these countries operated, with India having at least 26 of its 34 full combat divisions (seven corps) committed to the Pakistan front opposed by 19 Pakistani divisions also in seven corps. Compared to Central Europe, however, both armies were decidedly deficient in mobility; only three Indian divisions and two Pakistani could be considered fully armored/mechanized formations. Indeed, beyond a few independent armored brigades on each side, only about ten per cent of each army was mechanized. All other ground troops were largely foot-mobile unless supplemented by drafted civilian transport. Each armored/mechanized division served as the foundation for what was known as a 'strike corps.'<sup>4</sup> These were the core offensive formations for each army: three in India, two in Pakistan. Second, the sizes of the armies notwithstanding, the length of the border (some 3,000 km  $\pm$ ) meant that vulnerabilities could exist for either side if its adversary could concentrate sufficient force rapidly against a thinly-held sector. Third, both sides had to consider what we might call a 'mobilization' challenge. This was not

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3 International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1986-1987*, London, 1986, pp. 153-5, 164-6; Ravi Rikhye, *The War that Never Was: The Story of India's Strategic Failures*, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 48-130. See also International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey 1986-1987*, London, 1987, pp. 142-3.

4 As an introduction, see Maj. Gurmeet Kanwal, 'Strike Corps Offensive Operations—Imperative for Success', *Indian Defence Review*, January 1988.

a matter of calling up reservists *à la* 1914 (both armies were comprised of full-time volunteer regulars), rather it was a question of moving units from peacetime garrisons to wartime positions on the border. This problem was especially acute for India. Where most Pakistani formations could count on being in place within a few days, some Indian divisions, especially its armored divisions, were distributed in cantonments 800 km from their likely employment areas. Several infantry divisions were two to three times as far away. Fourth, owing largely to financial constraints, there was little history of routine major military exercises in the subcontinent. India's exercise *Brasstacks* would thus have attracted extraordinary attention under any circumstances; being conducted in a tense bilateral context by a flamboyant Indian Army chief heightened the level of scrutiny and eventually provoked the crisis.

*Brasstacks*, of course, did not occur in isolation and several aspects of the regional context are important to understanding how the crisis arose and evolved. First, both countries had to contend with frictions on other borders. Pakistan was heavily involved in supporting the war against the USSR in Afghanistan and India had been distracted by serious border incidents with China in the Himalayas since the summer of 1986. Concerns about the Soviets in the west would not have had a major impact on Pakistan had the confrontation turned to conflict, but tensions with China might have diverted Indian reinforcements to its western border in an actual war. Second, both countries were coping with internal unrest. Pakistan, deeply fearful of separatist movements after the loss of East Pakistan in 1971, had experienced serious internal violence in its restive Sindh Province during the mid-1980s. India faced a far more tenacious and bloody insurrection in the state of Punjab where Sikh separatists were trying to create an independent state. Pakistani support to the violent Sikh groups was a constant source of India-Pakistan discord. Finally, it is useful to keep in mind that both countries were on the cusp of weaponized nuclear capability. India had tested a nuclear device in 1974, but its deterrent was 'recessed' in 1986-87, assumed rather than declared. Pakistan was clearly working towards a nuclear weapon but its

public statements were ambiguous and it was not evident that it had a useable capability.

### Brasstacks from Concept to Crisis<sup>5</sup>

Exercise *Brasstacks* sprang from the mind of India's new chief of army staff, the energetic and ambitious General Krishnaswamy Sundarji. Taking over in February 1986, Sundarji came into office with a lengthy agenda of reforms he wanted to implement to modernize the Indian Army. Among other things, he was intent on building a larger army with dramatic enhancements in mobility, doctrine, and command/control. In terms of strength and force structure, he envisaged a force of 45 divisions, including 12 armored/mechanized and seven Reorganized Army Plains Infantry Divisions or RAPIDs. In other words, he proposed to quadruple the total number of armored/mechanized formations as part of a thirty per cent increase in the overall number of divisions. The RAPIDs, hybrid partly-mechanized infantry divisions, were a particular favorite of Sundarji's whose validity he was eager to test in a major training event.<sup>6</sup> In addition, perhaps influenced by his course at the U.S. Army Command and Staff College, he planned to create two air assault divisions more-or-less along U.S. lines. Sundarji had been able to lay the foundations for his vision during some of his previous assignments, but his time frame for setting his ideas in motion as army chief was short, two years at most, so one of his early decisions was to use India's triennial large-scale exercise to test his concepts in the field with a full complement of troops. Although general planning for a major maneuver had been ongoing since the conclusion of the previous exercise in 1983, when it came to detailed guidance, Sundarji impressed his notions of direction and scope on *Brasstacks*. Furthermore, a large exercise on the scale of the major NATO

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5 The seminal source on this crisis is Kanti Bajpai, P. R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, Stephen P. Cohen, and Sumit Ganguly, *Brasstacks and Beyond: Perception and Management of Crisis in South Asia*, Urbana, 1995.

6 The RAPID is a very problematic concept. For a detailed early assessment, see Lt. Gen. Mathew Thomas, 'The RAPID: An Appraisal of India's New-Look Infantry Division for Warfare in the Plains', *Indian Defence Review*, January 1989.

and Warsaw Pact maneuvers reflected broader Indian desires to portray its military as a world-class force moving into the high-tech arena under the guidance of an innovative strategic thinker. This was the era when the Soviet Union was experimenting with 'operational maneuver groups' and the U.S. was introducing its 'air-land battle' doctrine; elements of the latter were clearly evident in Sundarji's concepts.<sup>7</sup> Exercise *Brasstacks* was the result, designed as a four phase series of events beginning with map exercises, war games, and seminar studies starting in the summer and autumn of 1986, followed by relatively small ground exercises during November/December, and culminating in a massive field maneuver in January 1987.<sup>8</sup> In scale, *Brasstacks* would exceed any exercise conducted by independent India. Initial planning seems to have foreseen a total of more than 150,000 troops and possibly as many as 2,400 armored vehicles from at least eight divisions and two independent armored brigades operating in an area of approximately 150 by 250 kilometers under the control of two corps headquarters.<sup>9</sup> Indian Air Force (IAF) participation was an essential element of Sundarji's concept and an amphibious exercise on the coast was to be integrated into the overall scenario.

In addition to these professional military motivations, a major exercise like *Brasstacks* could also serve several political ends. Chief among these was a desire in New Delhi to warn Pakistan about support to Sikh insurgents in the India's Punjab state. Roiled by violence since the early 1980s, by the latter half of the decade, militancy in the Punjab had erupted

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7 On Sundarji, see Inderjit Badhwar and Dilip Bobb, 'General K. Sundarji: Disputed Legacy', *India Today*, 15 May 1988; Col. Ali Ahmed, 'In Tribute: Recalling the 'Sundarji Doctrine'', *USI Journal*, CXXXVIII, 571, January-March 2008; Adm. (retd) Vergese Koithara, *Managing India's Nuclear Forces* (Washington DC, 2012), 20; Ali Ahmed, *India's Doctrinal Puzzle*, New Delhi, 2014, 92.

8 It is important to keep in mind that the concept of a large exercise had been raised with the prime minister in late 1985 when Sundarji was vice chief of the army staff. An event of this magnitude could not have been orchestrated during the first year of Sundarji's tenure as chief had not extensive preparatory work begun much earlier.

9 Calculating troop numbers in an exercise is always a challenge, but most sources agree that *Brasstacks* included at least 150,000 and possibly at some points as many as 200,000. Over and above these forces were those deployed to the border for precautionary purposes. See Inderjit Badhwar and Dilip Bobb, 'Game of Brinkmanship', *India Today*, 15 February 1987; Badhwar/Bobb, 'Sundarji: Disputed Legacy'; *The Hindu*, 7 March 1987; Manoj Joshi, 'From Maps to the Field', *The Hindu*, 29 March 1987; *The Muslim*, 5 January 1990.

into a vicious separatist movement to create a Sikh homeland. As would later occur in Kashmir, the insurgents benefited from a degree of covert assistance from Pakistan. *Brasstacks* would therefore provide a vehicle for New Delhi to display its military might as a caution to Islamabad while simultaneously reminding the Sikh militants of the power of the Indian state.<sup>10</sup> The region chosen for the exercise—the deserts of Rajasthan—would contribute to Pakistan’s unease. While practical from a domestic standpoint, as the location would minimize disruption of farming and other civilian economic activity, the maneuver box placed Indian strike forces in a position from which they could threaten Pakistan’s vital north–south line of communications in the Indus River valley, only 80 kilometers across the border. Pakistan was acutely aware of this geographic vulnerability, especially if the training was to be oriented east–to–west. Moreover, Islamabad’s anxieties were heightened because violent unrest in Sindh province during the late 1980s presented the specter, albeit exaggerated, of India repeating the searing 1971 debacle: conducting military operations in conjunction with local rebels to tear away part of the Pakistani state.

Bureaucratic-political circumstances in India were also conducive to conducting a splashy major maneuver. Rajiv Gandhi, the relatively new prime minister, was technologically savvy, but politically and militarily naïve. The idea of a grand exercise with computer support and advanced communications appealed to him, especially as the initial concept included steps to test mobilization procedures at the national level, something India had never done.<sup>11</sup> He was not, however, necessarily in a position to judge the details of execution or ask penetrating questions about consequences in advance of the event. Moreover, Rajiv personally

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10 Sumit Ganguly, ‘India and Pakistan: Getting Down to Brasstacks’, *The World & I*, May 1987; International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey 1986–1987* (London, 1987), p. 142; Praveen Swami, ‘Failed Threats and Flawed Fences: India’s Military Responses to Pakistan’s Proxy War’, *India Review*, April 2004; Badhwar/Bobb, ‘Sundarji: Disputed Legacy’; and Lt. Gen. (retd) Satish Nambiar, ‘His Many Frontlines’, *Outlook*, 22 February 1999. Some have speculated that perhaps the training also provided an excuse to induct large numbers of regular troops into the Punjab without undertaking the politically sensitive process of declaring a domestic state of emergency (Badhwar/Bobb, ‘Brinkmanship’, 32).

11 Nardendra Reddy, ‘Computers Conduct Indian War Games’, *Indian Express*, 7 March 1987.

retained the defense portfolio in 1986–87, so the senior–most civil servant with oversight of *Brasstacks* was his protégé, Arun Singh, the Minister of State for Defense. Singh was knowledgeable on defense issues and wanted to promote the adoption of new strategies and new weapons; he lacked, however, the bureaucratic standing and independent political clout that would have appertained to a true minister, someone who might have ‘had the authority to conduct a more thorough assessment of the exercise and the administrative time to monitor its progress.’<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, several former Indian officials and officers allege that Arun Singh and Sundarji deliberately kept the prime minister and other civilians in the dark as the exercise unfolded.<sup>13</sup> These domestic bureaucratic–political considerations are important because they created an environment in which senior civilian leaders may have had little knowledge of *Brasstacks* and, in any case, were not inclined to devote sufficient detailed policy attention to the exercise before it reached crisis proportions.<sup>14</sup>

The particular constellation of personalities—an aggressive, ambitious army chief and a modernizing but politically inexperienced prime minister—within this bureaucratic arrangement also established a situation that lends credence to subsequent speculation concerning a ‘hidden agenda’ in the *Brasstacks* concept. Although it cannot be proven, one of the major questions around the exercise is whether Sundarji, and possibly Singh, intended it to be ‘open-ended’. In other words, it is possible that *Brasstacks* was purposefully designed to provoke a Pakistani military response, a response that would then allow India to strike back with its forces already mobilized and in wartime positions. The argument is that Sundarji arranged the exercise to achieve the

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12 Bajpai, et al, 52, 98-99.

13 Lt. Gen. (ret'd) P. N. Hoon, ‘War Games or War Operations Brass Tacks (the Plot Behind)’, at <http://www.hoonslegacy.com/brass-tacks/> [accessed 23 February 2016]; ‘Operation Brasstacks Happened without PM Rajiv’s Approval: Book’, *Times of India*, 2 August 2014; ‘Now Mani Shankar Aiyar Says Rajiv Gandhi Was in Dark about Operation Brasstacks’, *Times of India*, 3 August 2014.

14 Rear Admiral (ret'd) Raja Menon laments ‘The complete isolation of the military from the defence ministry and the government...here was a joint exercise being planned involving almost 400,000 men, and yet the Ministry of External Affairs and the Prime Minister’s Office were totally uninvolved’, in his *A Nuclear Strategy for India*, New Delhi, 2000, p. 98.

military and political goals outlined above, but that he secretly hoped for an incautious Pakistani military move that would open the door for an Indian invasion of Pakistan. The aims of this presumed attack would have been to end Pakistani support for Sikh insurgents and possibly to snuff out the Pakistani nuclear program before Pakistan had developed a useable weapon and delivery systems. The evidence for this 'hidden agenda' is inconclusive, but it remains one of the persistent questions surrounding *Brasstacks*.<sup>15</sup>

By early autumn of 1986, before the first Indian troops had even deployed, *Brasstacks* had attracted Pakistan's attention and anxiety. Although a telephonic hot line connected the army operations directorates in New Delhi and Rawalpindi, there was only a vague 'unwritten understanding' concerning the type of information each side was to provide the other on upcoming exercises. In the Pakistan army's view, its attempts to elicit information from the Indian Army during September and October met with delay and equivocation.<sup>16</sup> Dissatisfied and suspicious, the Pakistan Army elevated the issue to the highest governmental level and Prime Minister Mohammad Khan Junejo raised the upcoming maneuvers with Rajiv Gandhi during a summit meeting in November. The conversation seems to have been brief and Rajiv's exact reply to Junejo's request for clarification is not known, but he seems to

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15 In addition to those cited in Note 11 above, key sources for the idea that Sundarji had a hidden agenda include Raj Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace*, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 322-24; Lt. Gen. P. N. Hoon, *Unmasking the Secrets of Turbulence*, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 102-12; George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, Berkeley, 1999, p. 280; Ravi Rikhye, *The War that Never Was*, New Delhi, 1988; author's interview, New Delhi, October 1992. Note that both Sundarji and Arun Singh denied that there was any intention to provoke a conflict. In a 1999 article, three senior Pakistani officials claimed that 'exercise documents obtained by Pakistani intelligence' suggested India's plan was to 'cut off southern Pakistan from the north', but these materials have never been presented in public; moreover 'exercise documents' are not war plans, and more substantive evidence would have to be unearthed to prove this contention (Agha Shahi, Zulfiqar Ali Khan, and Abdul Sattar, 'Securing Nuclear Peace', *The News*, 5 October 1999).

16 Suzanne Goldberg, 'Indian Maneuvers Provoke New Fears', UPI, 13 December 1986; Abdul Sattar, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy 1947-2005*, Karachi, 2007, p. 194; Brig. (ret'd) Tughral Yamin, *The Evolution of Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia*, Islamabad, 2014, p. 156; Sanjay Badri-Maharaj, *The Armageddon Factor*, New Delhi, 2000, p. 38. Many Indian writers claim that appropriate information was provided, for example, L. K. Sharma, 'General Sundarji Interviewed', *Times of India*, 7 March 1987; and, more recently, Gen. (ret'd) V. K. Singh, *Courage and Conviction* (New Delhi, 2013), p. 154.



have treated the subject lightly and Junejo left the conference with the impression that the exercise would be scaled back in some significant way. Some very limited army-to-army contacts also took place, but the Pakistanis came away from these with a perception of Indian obfuscation that only reinforced their own institutional proclivity towards worst-case analysis where possibilities became certainties. Among other concerns, some observers believed the exercise was oriented to flow east to west, that is, towards the Pakistan border.<sup>17</sup> Pakistan Army headquarters, having devoted a great deal of time and energy to assessing Indian actions and possible counter-moves, decided to 'take the minimum precautionary steps to prevent being surprised' and kept Pakistani ground forces in the field after their own smaller-scale exercises concluded in mid-December.<sup>18</sup> The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) also remained at a heightened readiness status, keeping dispersal airfields operational beyond the end of its annual major exercise. Furthermore, villages along the border were evacuated, live ammunition was issued, some mines were laid, wartime munitions were shifted to forward defensive areas, leaves were cancelled and reserves received activation orders.

On the Indian side, preparatory training for the coming field exercises proceeded through December 1986. New Delhi detected the Pakistani measures, but saw them as unexceptional defensive steps at first. Tensions thus simmered without boiling over until mid-January 1987, when Indian intelligence noted that Pakistan had moved its two offensive or 'strike' corps into new positions from which they could threaten the heartland of Indian Punjab.<sup>19</sup> It is unclear whether Pakistan Army headquarters intended these moves as a clever threat to vital Indian territory (Punjab), or whether they were simply shifting to traditional positions occupied in

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17 P. R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema and Stephen P. Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, Washington DC, 2007, pp. 63–4.

18 Gen. Khalid Mahmud Arif, *Khaki Shadows*, Karachi, 2001, p. 260.

19 The so-called 'Army Reserve North' (ARN or I Corps) deployed east into the Shakargarh area north of Amritsar, while 'Army Reserve South' (ARS or II Corps) occupied assembly areas opposite Fazilka and Firozpur. India viewed the latter as particularly menacing.

previous wars.<sup>20</sup> In either case, the transfer of Pakistan's limited armored reserves to locations north and south of the Punjab created alarm in New Delhi. 'Indian intelligence put together all the bits and pieces somewhere around the 10th to 15th of January', wrote a respected Indian journalist, 'Defense planners then found that they had been caught totally on the wrong foot'.<sup>21</sup> Indian troops rushed to deploy into wartime positions along the border and press briefings by Sundarji and Arun Singh on 18 January—an almost unprecedented occurrence in India—resulted in dire headlines the following day.<sup>22</sup> On the ground, India temporarily suspended exercise activity and hastily shifted many units from *Brasstacks* to wartime locations. The drama accelerated over the next several days, the two sides bombarding one another with accusations and stern warnings, while their forces deployed, issued ammunition, planted mines and reviewed war plans. By 23 January, the situation had reached what the Indian foreign secretary called a 'crescendo of tension'.<sup>23</sup> 'It's all very scary', commented a Western diplomat, 'and it's a measure of how far India and Pakistan have to go to learn to live with one another'.<sup>24</sup>

As troops from both sides continued their movements to the border, however, an urgent flurry of diplomatic moves was building the foundations for a resolution of the crisis. The atmosphere during the latter half of January was thus characterized by a complex mixture of conciliatory gestures and bellicose rhetoric. Both governments continued to release pugnacious, nationalistic press statements, but both also sought to convey their desire to talk. The Indian government, for example, not only called in the Pakistani High Commissioner, but also communicated with the American and Soviet ambassadors in New Delhi. The armies also revived regular contact via their hotline, a crucial link that had been

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20 Bajpai et al, 57-59; Arif, 265-68; Maj. A. H. Amin, 'The Pakistani Political Scene', *The Nation*, 23 June 2001.

21 Prem Shankar Jha, 'Clues To A Riddle', *Hindustan Times*, 3 February 1987.

22 S. S. Gill, *The Dynasty: A Political Biography of the Premier Ruling Family of Modern India*, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 476-80.

23 Rone Tempest, 'India, Pakistan to Cut Forces on Border', *Los Angeles Times*, 5 February 1987.

24 Steven R. Weisman, 'India-Pakistan Troop Tensions Ease', *New York Times*, 5 February 1987.

allowed to lie dormant for several critical weeks in late December and early January. In retrospect the crisis seems to have peaked on 23 January, and the 26th saw the announcement that a Pakistani delegation would travel to New Delhi to discuss de-escalation.<sup>25</sup> Forces remained deployed and a spark could have ignited further confrontation or conflict, but ‘the crisis had definitely passed by this date’.<sup>26</sup> Talks held between 31 January and 4 February produced an agreement for sector-by-sector military withdrawal and an invitation for Pakistan’s President General Zia ul-Haq to attend a cricket match in India. Tough negotiations over the details of the mutual pullback came later in February, but the two armies, once equipped with the requisite political will, conducted their redeployments with thorough professionalism. Sundarji’s *Brasstacks* resumed in early March 1987 as an enormous, and now well-publicized, military training event featuring unprecedented visits by international journalists and foreign attachés, including those from Pakistan.<sup>27</sup> Sundarji, briefing the guests in the maneuver area, stressed that the exercise, though delayed, would adhere to its original size and concepts.<sup>28</sup>

## Stepping Back From Confrontation

The rather sudden abatement of this ‘dangerous brinkmanship’ in the space of ten days to two weeks requires some explanation.<sup>29</sup> The weight of analytic attention necessarily falls on the Indian side of the equation as its actions and obfuscations initiated the confrontation. Pakistan, faced with an active war across its western border in Afghanistan and violent unrest in its Sindh province, had no interest in an expanded crisis with India, let

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25 Bajpai et al, p. 35.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

27 Steven R. Weisman, ‘On India’s Border, a Huge Mock War’, *New York Times*, 6 March 1987; Richard M. Weintraub, ‘Modern Indian Army on Display in Desert Exercise’, *Washington Post*, 6 March 1987; ‘Public Relations’, *India Today*, 31 March 1987.

28 BBC, ‘Army Chief on Recent Military Exercise at Borders’, 6 March 1987.

29 Pushpinder Singh, ‘The Indian Army Today’, *Asian Defence Journal*, April 1987. An experienced and respected analyst, Pushpinder Singh worried about the ‘gross misperception of intentions, capabilities, and potential resources on the part of the belligerent nations’, and termed relations between New Delhi and Islamabad as ‘a near breakdown of communications between the two governments, continued paranoia and overreaction’.

alone actual conflict. Islamabad's exaggerated efforts to draw international attention to *Brasstacks* well in advance of actual Indian deployment, on the other hand, leads to the reasonable conclusion that some Pakistani leaders hoped to curtail or constrain the exercise before it even began (as many Indians believed). Furthermore, Pakistan certainly attempted to use the situation to score diplomatic points against its rival in general and it is logical to assume that some in Army headquarters sought to embarrass the Indian Army in particular. However, these cosmetic concerns and attempts at international point-scoring are a far cry from any interest in generating or sustaining a dangerous crisis.

On the Indian side, several factors contributed to the turn away from confrontation. In the first place, it is extremely unlikely that there was ever any intention on the part of the political leadership to *create* a crisis through the *Brasstacks* series. It seems quite probable that senior Indian political leaders viewed *Brasstacks* as a convenient and rather harmless way to remind Pakistan of India's military power, especially as the maneuvers were to take place opposite the volatile Sindh province, an obvious counterpoint to Pakistan's support for Sikh separatists in India's Punjab.<sup>30</sup> The much greater problem was an apparent paucity of policy attention to the details of the exercise and the potential Pakistani perceptions of such a massive gathering of forces in a sensitive region. Rather than an intentional provocation or carefully strategized scheme to pressure Pakistan, the foreign policy establishment and prime minister's office, to the extent that they thought about it at all, seem to have regarded *Brasstacks* as a slightly more than routine military event that could have beneficial side effects. Indeed, Indian and Pakistani diplomats were in the process of exploring ways to improve bilateral relations during late 1986 even as Islamabad's suspicions about *Brasstacks* were growing.<sup>31</sup> For its part, the Indian military seems to have given no serious thought to the repercussions of the exercise

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30 This was certainly the view among many in Islamabad, as a retired Pakistani general stated at the time: 'Frankly, in our view, it's a kind of political and diplomatic arm-twisting', Suzanne Goldenberg, 'Indian Maneuvers Provoke New Fears', UPI, 13 December 1986. See Bajpai et al, 23.

31 'India and Pakistan Resume Talks On Improving Relations', *New York Times*, 28 December 1986; Eliza Van Hollen, 'Pakistan in 1986: Trials of Transition', *Asian Survey*, February 1987.

in the context of bilateral relations or international diplomacy beyond applying some degree of pressure on Pakistan regarding support for Sikh militants.<sup>32</sup> This dissonance between Indian foreign and military policy reflected a near total collapse of institutional decision-making in New Delhi. Each branch of government thus seemed content to limit itself to its own narrow purview and no overarching body or individual sought to ensure a comprehensive approach. The Ministry of External Affairs, for example, was not appraised in advance of the Singh/Sundarji press briefing and found itself unable to answer subsequent queries. The result of this breakdown was, as the authors of *Brasstacks and Beyond* state, that ‘the economic-financial implications of Exercise *Brasstacks* or, for that matter, its political repercussions were not fully considered.’<sup>33</sup> ‘The whole thing has obviously gone out of control’, commented a retired Indian diplomat in early February as tensions were subsiding, ‘This should never have happened.’<sup>34</sup>

Secondly, it was clear from a simple calculation of costs, risks, and benefits that war with Pakistan would be detrimental to Indian interests, regardless of which side initiated hostilities. Economic costs had already led to reductions in the scope of the national mobilization envisaged for *Brasstacks* after senior ministers expressed their concerns during the early planning stages. Similarly, New Delhi was deeply conscious of the financial costs of war at a time when improving the economy was a high priority for the prime minister personally and for the government at large.<sup>35</sup> The political costs of an offensive war, especially one where India was seen as the aggressor, would also have been enormous. In parallel with his emphasis on the economy, Rajiv had undertaken to improve India’s standing in the international community with particular attention

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32 ‘Indian military sources admit it was at least partly designed to impress the Pakistanis’, in Hugh Paine, ‘India, Pakistan Seek Peace But Are Taking No Chances’, Reuters, 25 January 1987; Ramindar Singh, ‘A Fragile Frontier’, *India Today*, 15 February 1987.

33 Bajpai et al, 27; Shirin Tahir-Kheli, *India, Pakistan and the United States: Breaking with the Past*, New York, 1997, pp. 55–7.

34 Weisman, *New York Times*, 5 February 1987.

35 Badhwar/Bobb, ‘Game of Brinkmanship’, 31; Manoj Joshi, ‘The Complex Task’, *Frontline*, 7–20 July 1990.

to bilateral relations with the United States. A conflict with Pakistan, America's crucial ally in the struggle with the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, would have devastated Indian hopes of constructing a new relationship with Washington. Nor was there any obvious benefit to offset these daunting costs. Although India certainly wanted to end or at least reduce Pakistani support for Sikh militants, this was insufficient cause for a full-scale invasion and it was not at all clear that conventional military action would provide the desired outcome in any event. Likewise, there is no solid indication that India intended *Brasstacks* as a means to emasculate Pakistan's nascent nuclear program and a massive ground offensive would hardly have been the apposite strategy had this been considered. Indeed, it is difficult to see what India's war aims might have been had New Delhi converted *Brasstacks* from an *exercise* into an *operation*. Under the conditions prevailing in early 1987, there was nothing to justify such a radical, costly, and risky approach to the disagreements and tensions in the India-Pakistan bilateral dynamic.

Thirdly, India was constrained by the limitations of its military forces. India enjoyed significant numerical advantages in manpower and material in 1987 as it does today, but its quantitative advantages were deceptive.<sup>36</sup> When the relative force capabilities are assessed in terms of 'outputs' or outcomes, as Ashley Tellis suggests, the Indian superiority was potentially insufficient to deliver the results required for a rapid, decisive victory.<sup>37</sup> 'Rapid' in this context may be defined as 'achieving a clear battlefield decision within about two to three weeks', the approximate length of time Indians and Pakistanis expected they could fight before international intervention would bring a halt to the conflict as had been the case in 1965 and 1971.<sup>38</sup> 'Decisive victory' would have required accomplishing some combination of the following three objectives: making important

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36 All of these figures for 1986–87 are drawn from the International Institute of Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, London, 1986, supplemented by Rikhye, *War That Never Was*; and Jerold F. Elkin and W. Andrew Ritzel, 'The Indo-Pakistani Military Balance', *Asian Survey*, May 1986.

37 Ashley J. Tellis, *Stability in South Asia*, RAND Documented briefing, Santa Monica, 1997, p. 13.

38 Maj. Gen. Sukhwant Singh, *India's Wars Since Independence*, III, *General Trends*, New Delhi, 1982, p. 81.

territorial gains, severing critical communications axes, or rendering ineffective some key enemy military capability (such as the capacity to conduct mobile offensive operations).<sup>39</sup> The Indian military's ability to execute this sort of rapid, decisive warfare in the *Brasstacks* period, however, was severely limited by lack of mobility, logistical deficiencies, weak inter-service co-operation and a conservative military culture, as well as other factors.<sup>40</sup>

## No Nuclear Angle?

While these various factors contributed to New Delhi's decision not to press the confrontation in January 1987, the nuclear angle is conspicuous by its absence.<sup>41</sup> Discussion of nuclear weapons had been a favorite topic among the small circle of Indian and Pakistani strategic thinkers since the late 1970s. Sundarji himself had written extensively on deterrence and other related issues during his stint as the commandant of the College of Combat during the early 1980s. Nuclear questions achieved increasing prominence beyond narrow capital city elites following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as U.S. nonproliferation law came into conflict with the desires of the Reagan Administration to support the Afghan mujahideen through the agency of Pakistan at the same time that Pakistan was pursuing a nuclear weapons program directed against India. Reports in major American and European papers, debates in the U.S. Congress, the arrest of several Pakistanis attempting to smuggle nuclear-related equipment, and occasional leading statements by Pakistani metallurgist Abdul Qadeer Khan made Pakistan's evolving nuclear program and the issue of nuclear proliferation in South Asia relatively common subjects of

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39 Tellis, *Stability in South Asia*, 13-16; Lt. Gen. V. R. Raghavan, 'Arms and the Men in Power', *Telegraph* Calcutta, 25 February 2002.

40 Intangibles such as training, morale, and leadership may be set aside, as both armies, professional, all-volunteer forces, were and are largely equal in these aspects of readiness.

41 Gen. Arif writes: 'The nuclear factor remained conspicuously absent throughout the crisis', *Khaki Shadows*, p. 276.

debate.<sup>42</sup> Even as the *Brasstacks* crisis was approaching detonation in late 1986, therefore, much of the media's attention remained focused on the nuclear question and Pakistan.<sup>43</sup>

Despite this general atmosphere of nuclear discourse in public media, government, and scholarly publications, the *Brasstacks* crisis simmered, exploded, and subsided *without* reference to nuclear weapons. Sundarji, in an interview years later, [rather wistfully] noted that 1987 was 'the last all-conventional crisis in which India could have used its conventional superiority to destroy Pakistan's conventional and nuclear capabilities', but there is almost no evidence from the height of the crisis (18–26 January) to suggest that nuclear weapons played any role in the key Indian and Pakistani decisions.

There are two exceptions. The first and more credible is the claim that the Pakistani foreign secretary, Zain Noorani, told India's High Commissioner in Islamabad that Pakistan was 'capable of inflicting unacceptable damage' on India. In response to a request for clarification, Noorani archly implied that this might mean an attack on Indian civilian nuclear facilities near Bombay (now Mumbai).<sup>44</sup> In retrospect, this appears to have been a bluff playing on Indian concerns about the safety of its civilian reactors in the wake of the Israeli attack on the Osiraq reactor in 1981 and an India-Pakistan mini-crisis in 1984.<sup>45</sup> A PAF attack on an Indian reactor was almost certainly impractical, beyond the capabilities of the PAF at the time and thus an unrealistic suggestion, but one that might have set off alarms in New Delhi. Still, there is no hint of

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42 Bob Woodward, 'Pakistani Atom Weapon Reported Near', *Washington Post*, 4 November 1986; Devin T. Hagerty, *The Consequences of Nuclear Proliferation: Lessons from South Asia*, Cambridge, 1998, p. 55.

43 See the extensive compilation of press summaries in Bajpai et al, Appendix 2.

44 The Indian High Commissioner, S. K. Singh, recalled that this occurred 'one midnight in January' 1987; see Government of India, National Security Council Secretariat, *From Surprise to Reckoning: The Kargil Review Committee Report*, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 191 and 239. Chengappa reports that the head of India's Joint Intelligence Committee told Rajiv that Pakistan was modifying its F-16s to carry nuclear weapons, but it is not clear when this was supposed to have been reported (technical feasibility and intelligence collection capability are other dubious aspects of this anecdote), *Weapons of Peace*, pp. 326–27.

45 See Sumit Ganguly and Devin Hagerty for discussion of the 1984 crisis: *Fearful Symmetry*, Seattle, 2005, pp. 57–61.



this in any of the previous research on *Brasstacks*.

The second and far more famous, but more dubious, nuclear claim involves A.Q.Khan. In a now well-known ‘interview’, conducted by a veteran Indian journalist on 28 January 1987 in Khan’s Islamabad home, the Pakistani scientist is reported to have stated ‘we shall use the bomb if our existence is threatened’.<sup>46</sup> The ‘interview’, however, is surrounded by controversy, including denials from Khan, and it was not published until 1 March 1987, well after the crisis had passed.<sup>47</sup> While it remains possible that the journalist communicated the essence of this discussion to the Indian government immediately afterwards, there is no trace of evidence that this interview had any influence on the bilateral negotiations that began in New Delhi in late January and progressed through two iterations to produce a workable schedule of mutual withdrawal from the border by the time the interview actually made headlines.<sup>48</sup> If this was an attempt at ‘nuclear signaling’, therefore, it was belated, muddled and likely ineffectual.

The nuclear dimension of *Brasstacks* is thus to be found in its legacy. The crisis may have prompted an acceleration of Pakistan’s nuclear program, for example, but it was already nearing fruition, Pakistani leaders were already convinced that a nuclear option was vital to national security, and Islamabad may have already had the necessary components to assemble a ‘very small number of weapons for aircraft delivery against India’.<sup>49</sup> The crisis—especially the A.Q. Khan interview—certainly spurred public pressure on New Delhi to push its weapons development more rapidly and publicly. Rajiv, however, was personally uncomfortable with the dramatic expansion of India’s nuclear weapons program and the

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46 As quoted in Perkovich, p. 281.

47 Among other things, much of the text was apparently cobbled together from previous public statements Khan had made; see Leonard Spector cited in Arpit Rajain, *Nuclear Deterrence in Southern Asia*, New Delhi, 2005, p. 215.

48 The best summation of the ‘nuclear signaling’ question is P. R. Chari, ‘Nuclear Signaling in South Asia: Revisiting A. Q. Khan’s 1987 Threat’, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 13 November 2013; Hagerty also investigates this issue in detail; see *Consequences of Nuclear Proliferation*, pp. 111-13.

49 Perkovich, p. 281.

crisis did not lead to any sudden enhancement of its posture.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, the *Brasstacks* confrontation has certainly become a fixture in the lore of crisis and deterrence in South Asia, at least from the Pakistani perspective. The premise that Pakistan's 'recessed capability was credible enough to induce restraints against escalation' in 1987 (as well as 1984 and 1990) has become a standard part of the many Pakistani nuclear narratives even though the evidence for the role of nuclear weapons in the case of *Brasstacks* seems to point in the opposite direction.<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusion

As is evident from the foregoing, several dimensions of the India–Pakistan *Brasstacks* exercise and confrontation relate directly NATO's situation today.

Signaling. On the *conventional* side, it seems quite clear that India hoped *Brasstacks* would signal both resolve and capability as part of its efforts to reduce or eliminate Pakistani support for Sikh separatists. It is also possible that New Delhi expected a salutary effect among the restive elements of the Sikh population. It is important to stress, however, that both of these would have been secondary benefits, as the primary purposes of the exercise were associated with testing new army concepts and general military preparedness as discussed below. With respect to *nuclear* signaling the *Brasstacks* experience is decidedly ambiguous even though nuclear weapons 'tinged' the atmosphere in 1987.<sup>52</sup> It highlights the urgency of clear communications between nuclear–armed rivals, but offers little in this area besides a cautionary tale.

War plans and cover for actual operations. Given the dearth of primary source material on both sides and the probability that some aspects of *Brasstacks* may not have been recorded in writing, it is unlikely that we

50 *Ibid.*, pp. 282–92.

51 Among many such assertions, see Shahi et al, 'Securing Nuclear Peace', *The News*, 5 October 1999; Abdul Sattar, 'Reducing Nuclear Dangers in South Asia: A Pakistani Perspective', *Nonproliferation Review*, Winter 1995; Usman Ghani, 'Nuclear Weapons in India–Pakistan Crisis', *IPRI Journal*, XII/2, Summer 2012; and Air Commodore Adil Sultan, 'Nuclear Weapons and National Security', *Express Tribune*, 27 May 2012.

52 Bajpai et al, p. 90.

will ever been able to answer questions on intent with a very high degree of confidence. It seems reasonable to speculate, however, that the exercise did reflect Indian war plans in a general sense even if it did not actually place units in their wartime locations.<sup>53</sup> We must approach the question of whether Sundarji intended the exercise as an open-ended incitement to Pakistan with caution, but must not neglect the possibility that he and some of his collaborators entertained or even planned for such an outcome.

Political/military interface in exercise planning. India scores poorly in this area as far as *Brasstacks* is concerned. The army, the defense ministry and probably other elements of the defense establishment seem to have conducted much of their planning in a vacuum, neither seeking nor receiving informed guidance from the top political leadership. As far as we can tell, co-ordination across key ministries seems to have been weak or nonexistent in the lead-up to the crisis, a dangerous combination of disinterest on the part of the Ministry of External Affairs and lack of initiative from the defense ministry and the uniformed services. Interaction improved once the crisis broke into public view, but the situation could have slipped out of control had calmer councils not prevailed on both sides.

Experimenting with new equipment, organizations and doctrine. *Brasstacks* was very much a vehicle for testing various reforms General Sundarji hoped to implement within the Indian Army. New organizations, especially the RAPID, new communications gear, new command/control procedures and other innovations were all to be run through their paces in the desert during January and February 1987. In addition to proof of concept for revised force structure and new hardware, Sundarji likely hoped that the exercise would inject greater verve, imagination and initiative into India's staid military culture.<sup>54</sup> *Brasstacks* seems to have achieved some of these objectives, but at what was likely an unacceptable

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53 Lt. Gen. (retd) V. K. Nayar, *From Fatigues to Civvies*, New Delhi, 2013, p. 233.

54 Brig. (retd) Kuldip S. Brar, *Through Wars and Insurgency*, New Delhi, 2012, p. 215.

cost in rupees as well as international friction.

Exercise design and transparency. Although initially clouded by obfuscation during its planning phases, *Brasstacks as executed* became an opportunity for transparency and tension reduction. India accomplished this shift by inviting the attaché corps from New Delhi to visit the exercise area and by hosting briefings for large numbers of Indian and foreign journalists. Most notable was the inclusion of the Pakistani Defense Advisor (i.e., defense attaché) in the list of invitees. Additionally, it seems that Sundarji changed the orientation of the exercise box from east–west (that is, *towards the border with Pakistan*) to north–south, *parallel* to the border. Even if the Indians had changed nothing, they made clear publically that the exercise would be run north to south. These fairly subtle confidence–building measures are not unlike those witnessed in Central Europe during the latter years of the Cold War. Unfortunately, the notion of inviting each other’s observers to exercises is an idea that did not take root and seems to have withered since 1990. This would be a thorny, but potentially fruitful area for direct military–to–military contact in the future.

Broadening our aperture, three other points are worth mentioning:

First, conventional deterrence, in a sense, worked. There was no war and the crisis was resolved once India’s political leadership involved itself in an earnest, attentive fashion. The costs for New Delhi were too high, the risks too great, and the potential benefits too marginal and likely transitory to make continuance of the confrontation, let alone actual conflict, worthwhile in terms of Indian interests.

Secondly, the crisis boosted interest in confidence-building measures (CBMs).<sup>55</sup> Although one may question the ability of governmental institutions to learn, it seems clear in this case that *Brasstacks* pushed India and Pakistan, with international assistance, to begin exploring CBMs as

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55 Sumit Ganguly and Ted Greenwood, eds., *Mending Fences: Confidence and Security Building Measures in South Asia*, Boulder, 1997.

tools to avert and contain future crises. Informal understandings and a telephonic hotline between the two armies prior to 1986 had proven far too loose and subject to abuse and neglect.<sup>56</sup> As early as December 1988, Indian and Pakistani diplomats signed an agreement on the 'Prohibition of Attacks against Nuclear Installations and Facilities', based on talks that were underway while *Brasstacks* was brewing. At the same time, *Brasstacks* alone was *not sufficient* to bring the two sides to institute concrete CBMs. Despite the gravity of the *Brasstacks* scare, it took another crisis in the near-term policy window, that of 1990, to promote more serious negotiations and the signature of an agreement on a comprehensive set of military CBMs in April 1991.<sup>57</sup> These measures, though certainly beneficial are dangerously imprecise in comparison to those established between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. They thus leave considerable latitude for prevarication and equivocation if either party is so inclined. Nevertheless, the CBMs enacted in 1991 and a number of subsequent agreements, all deriving to a large degree from the *Brasstacks* experience, have been useful instruments in building bilateral contacts and creating some regional familiarity with these options as a starting point for future development.<sup>58</sup>

Thirdly, both sides seem to have gained an appreciation for less provocative exercise design. As early as 1989 (i.e., *before* the CBM agreement, albeit in part to outshine the Indians), Pakistan went out of its way to conduct its large *Zarb-i-Momen* ('strike of the Believers') exercise with close attention to international transparency, distance from the border, and maneuver orientation. Subsequent Indian exercises,

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56 General Arif bitterly castigates the Indian Army for what he perceives as violations of understandings he had reached with Sundarji's predecessor, General Vaidya (see his Chapter 6). Even if one has to pare away a lot of exaggeration in Arif's account, the frailty of this understanding and the opportunity for violation, intentional or unintentional, is eminently clear.

57 The website of the Henry L. Stimson Center's South Asia Program includes a helpful timeline of India-Pakistan CBMs and the full text of most of the bilateral agreements, as well as numerous analytic studies: <http://www.stimson.org/content/confidence-building-and-nuclear-risk-reduction-measures-south-asia>.

58 There is an extensive literature on South Asian CBMs. In addition to the publications available through the Stimson Center, the following are useful entry points to this field: Ganguly/Greenwood, *Mending Fences*; Sumit Ganguly and Kent Biringier, 'Nuclear Crisis Stability in South Asia,' *Asian Survey*, November/December 2001, 911-12.

though smaller than *Brasstacks*, have also accomplished training objectives without stirring crises. On the other hand, ground force exercises continue to feed regional tensions. Pakistanis, for example, routinely cite Indian Army exercises conducted since 2004 as evidence for what they see as an aggressive, hair-trigger Indian military doctrine popularly known as ‘Cold Start’; they specifically tout their *Azm-e-Nau* (‘new resolve’) exercises of 2010 to 2013 as a counter to India’s presumed strategy.<sup>59</sup>

Unfortunately, the negative aspects of the relationship persist, outweighing these relatively favorable developments since *Brasstacks*. Structural weaknesses in both governments, weak intelligence compounded by a decided predilection for worst-case analysis<sup>60</sup> and the presence of a much more potent spark in the viscerally anti-Indian militant groups openly hosted in and by Pakistan all contribute to making the relationship accident-prone under the hideous overhang of potential nuclear escalation. Military exercises are a component of the tense present as they tend to confirm each side’s preconceived images of the other. At the same time, the good news is that exercises have not been the spark for crisis since 1987 or 1990. Indeed, if the two governments could find a way to take some bold and difficult decisions, exercises might provide a venue for bringing together the armed forces of each side and perhaps reducing some of the suspicion inherent in their relationship.

For NATO in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the most important aspects of this India–Pakistan experience lie in the areas of exercise design, transparency, confidence-building regimes and political–military interface. First, just as NATO intentionally oriented the maneuver box for the last full-scale REFORGER (Certain Challenge in 1988) to a north–south axis as a confidence-building measure, future exercises should be structured to signify unquestioned resolve without creating an aggressive impression in exercise orientation or scenario narrative. Second, as the Indians

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59 Arif Jamal, ‘Pakistan’s Ongoing Azm-e-Nau-3 Military Exercises Define Strategic Priorities’, *Terrorism Monitor*, VIII/18, 6 May 2010; Rahul Bhonsle, ‘Pakistan Exercise Azm-e-Nau 4: Checkmating India’s Cold Start?’, 9 June 2013 at Security-Risks.com [accessed 16 February 2016].

60 Tanvir Ahmad Khan, ‘A Hard Road to Trust’, *Daily Times*, 19 August 2005.

and Pakistanis learned, transparency, especially the presence of foreign observers (Russians or perhaps Belarusians in NATO's case), can mitigate suspicions while demonstrating Allied determination, cooperation and competence. Third, adherence to a codified, detailed, mutually-agreed regime of confidence-building measures and associated communications channels may also help reduce mistrust, especially when coupled with exercise observation on the ground. Finally, one of the major sources of the *Brasstacks* crisis was the apparent lack of coordination between India's political leadership and its army chief of staff. Although NATO's situation is vastly different in many respects (particularly the need for multi-national consensus), the principal of ensuring that military activities are closely aligned with political intentions applies as strongly in Europe today as it did in South Asia in 1987. The need for clear political guidance to avoid unintended 'signals' to the Russian audience remains as cogent as the challenge of implementing such guidance without draining training exercises of realistic military content.

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## 17

‘Politics in Command’<sup>1</sup>:  
The Political Dimensions of  
Chinese Military Exercises

*Christopher D. Yung*

## Introduction

Any discussion of the political aspects of Chinese military exercises is confronted with the fact that China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is a Party-Army and not a national army. The expected role of the PLA is to be a guardian and guarantor of the survival and viability of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and not necessarily the guarantor of the national security of the People’s Republic of China. The very *raison d’être* of the PLA, then, is filled with political purpose. The PLA is indeed charged with national security but only if it has been directed by the Party to do so. At the same time, like other militaries the PLA has a role in supporting the policies set down by the political leadership and if these policies have a military dimension, the PLA has a responsibility to develop its military capabilities for the purposes of achieving those political objectives.

This essay will identify the political objectives of the Chinese Communist Party, will discuss how the CCP translates these political objectives into identifiable military missions, and then assess how the PLA’s extensive exercise program may be calculated to meet these political

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1 The phrase ‘Politics in Command’ was originally coined by Mao Zedong during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) to characterize the primacy of politics and ideology in governing the affairs of the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese People.

objectives. It finds that the training and modernization goals of the PLA are ambitious and that the exercises designed to support the development of the PLA are increasingly complex. Additionally, this essay concludes that the CCP is motivated to use exercises not only to develop the Chinese military for the purposes of accomplishing military tasks in support of the Party's objectives, but is also motivated to use exercises as strategic signaling tools both to external and internal political actors.

## The Political Objectives of the Chinese Communist Party — and the Implications for PLA Missions and Training

At the turn of the new century China finds itself in a curious geo-strategic and political position: Its economy is the second largest on the planet and is trending toward overtaking that of the United States within two decades; its potential to match the U.S. militarily creates the possibility of a security dilemma between the two great powers; the Chinese leadership still fears the possibility that Taiwan and other territorial issues will not be resolved in China's favor; China's main rival to leadership in the region—Japan—is closely allied with the United States; China has internal security and stability problems that its political leadership must contend with; China has increasing economic interests (and consequently security interests) abroad, particularly in the Middle East, South and Central Asia, and the Indian Ocean; and finally, the United States continues to pose significant political, strategic and security challenges to China through its military presence in the region, its possession of a massive nuclear arsenal, its significant allied network in Asia, and its possession of advanced capabilities in emerging security domains (e.g., cyber and space).

The single best concept which summarizes the Chinese Communist Party's political objectives in facing these geo-strategic and political problems is the New Historic Missions.<sup>2</sup> As a number of China analysts

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2 Daniel Hartnett, 'The 'New Historic Missions': Reflections on Hu Jintao's Military Legacy' in Kamphau-

have noted, the Chinese Communist Party, and the People's Liberation Army have an approach to examine their security and strategic requirements.<sup>3</sup> That process involves identifying China's most likely adversary (the United States and its allies), the most likely geographical location that conflict is likely to take place in (along the East Coast of the PRC), the most likely scenario sparking the conflict (a Taiwan scenario), and the type of military conflict the PLA is likely to have to fight (a local war under conditions of 'informatization'). The Party periodically reviews the security environment confronting China and will on occasion issue updates to the assessment discussed above. The New Historic Missions is one such update issued by General Secretary Hu Jintao in 2007 to an enlarged meeting of the Central Military Commission.

The New Historic Missions noted threats to the internal stability of the country based on an increase in discontent from China's local population, the increasing restlessness of China's ethnic minorities, and the increasing threat of ethnic Uighurs re-entering the country after being radicalized in Central and South Asia and the Middle East. That re-assessment noted China's increasing interests abroad, and observed the increasing threats in non-traditional domains such as cyber and space. When elaborated in specific security objectives, the New Historic Missions' are designed: (1) to guarantee the protection and survival of the Chinese Communist Party; (2) to protect the territorial integrity and national borders of the People's Republic of China; (3) to provide the necessary conditions to ensure continued growth of the Chinese economy; and (4) to make contributions to global security for the purposes of maintaining a stable global security environment.

When interpreted as military missions or tasks the New Historic Missions translate into specific guidance to the PLA as follows:<sup>4</sup> (1) be

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sen, Lai and Tanner, eds., *Assessing the People's Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era*, Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, Carlisle, PA, 2014, pp. 33-4.

3 David Finkelstein, 'China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the 'Military Strategic Guidelines'' in Kamphausen and Scobell, eds., *Rightsizing the People's Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Military*, U.S. Army War College Press, Carlisle, PA, September 2007, pp. 69-140.

4 Hartnett, pp. 40-57.

prepared to take on a domestic internal security role which addresses internal security threats such as terrorists, insurgents, ethnic minority separatists, riots, protests, and other mass incidents; (2) develop military capabilities which ensure the security of China's national territorial integrity including China's land and maritime borders; (3) develop military capabilities which are designed to address China's expanding economic interests abroad (Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations or NEOs, HA/DR, Counterpiracy operations and other 'out of area operations')<sup>5</sup>; (4) be prepared to defend China's interests in non-traditional domains (e.g., cyber and space); and (5) develop military capabilities which are designed to show that China is not only a consumer of global public goods but is also a contributor (e.g., UN Peacekeepers).

## The Political Role of Military Exercises

Military exercises, then, can directly support China's political objectives by doing the following: (1) enhance the military effectiveness of the PLA so that it can fully execute the military missions assigned to it by the Party; (2) generate political effects to influence the decision-making of targeted leaders or groups (both inside the country and out), and (3) improve operational procedures to the extent that the act of rehearsing, experimenting, and training strengthens the control the Party enjoys over its external and internal security and political environment.

## The Nature and Character of PLA Training

Before describing the specifics of how the CCP uses military exercises to accomplish its political objectives, a brief discussion on the Chinese military training process is in order. In 1996 Dennis Blasko, Philip

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<sup>5</sup> Although the CCP recognizes that it has interests in such outer areas as the Middle East, it is unlikely to be proactive in such conflict zones as Syria. China has displayed a conservative and cautious foreign policy in the Middle East, offering to serve as a neutral power and to lend assistance in Syria, but unwilling to directly intervene in such a hot zone of geo-political conflict.

Klapakis and John Corbett, three former U.S. Army attachés with experience in China, wrote a ground breaking article describing the PLA's training cycle. In it they pointed out that:

'[b]ecause of its annual conscription and demobilization cycle (both of which take place in the late autumn) and method of providing basic training at the unit level (division or below during December and the first months of the calendar year), the PLA is confronted with a situation in which one-quarter to one-third of the troops in its units are always first-year soldiers. As such, small unit leaders must spend large blocks of a training year on basic, individual soldier tasks. Until they master these tasks, soldiers can only partially contribute to and learn from larger collective or unit training.'<sup>6</sup>

Although written in the late 1990s, this description of the Chinese military training cycle still applies today; a large proportion of the entire People's Liberation Army is constantly engaged in basic and individual unit training. In 2008 Blasko updated his essay on the character of PLA training noting that '[t]raining begins around mid-December and lasts for up to 3 months until approximately February/March and/or around the Chinese New Year. Induction training is divided among military skill, political and physical training.'<sup>7</sup>

Blasko, additionally, observes that the PLA training and education has been confronted with the problem of taking a large conscription force, largely uneducated youth from the rural countryside, and turning them into modern warriors; and that the Chinese military training system still has not figured out a way to give greater roles and responsibilities to non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and is still overly reliant on junior officers

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6 Dennis Blasko, Philip Klapakis and John Corbett, 'Training Tomorrow's PLA: A Mixed Bag of Tricks' in *The China Quarterly*, June 1996, #146, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, p. 493.

7 Dennis Blasko, 'PLA Consript and Non-Commissioned Officer Individual Training' in Kamphausen, Scobell, Tanner, eds., *The 'People' in the PLA: Recruitment, Training, and Education in China's Military*, U.S. Army War College Press, Carlisle, PA, 2008, p. 107.

to do tasks that ‘non-comms’ should be doing.<sup>8</sup> The ultimate take away from this description of the nature and character of PLA training is that the Chinese military still confronts an enormous task of modernizing its military and providing adequate training to all of its units, and a great deal of ‘spade work’ lies ahead for the Chinese military as it attempts to bring its training process into the twenty first century. In so far as military exercises can serve as a political tool to support political objectives of the CCP, these can only be done within the limitations of China’s training and exercise system as a whole.

## PLA Exercises and Chinese Political Objectives

### *Military effectiveness and developing capabilities to execute military missions:*

The PLA has been directed to plan for, train for, and execute missions in support of the New Historic Missions. The Party leadership has directed the Chinese military to be prepared to fight ‘Local Wars Under Modern, Hi-Tech and “Informatized” Conditions.’ PLA assessments of the scenario most likely to involve a conflict between the PLA and its most dangerous adversary, is a Taiwan scenario. PLA warfighting development and preparation must therefore be geared to ultimately address some aspect of the Taiwan operational problem (even if PLA force development is confronted with competing mission requirements). Ultimately that means that PLA training is geared to develop the Chinese military into a modern fighting force. PLA doctrinal writings, primarily the 1999 ‘Principles of Joint Operations’ and the three PLA National Defense University publications ‘The Science of Strategy,’ ‘The Science of Campaigns’ and a Course of Study in Combined Arms Tactics’ collectively known as the ‘Trilogy,’ describe how the PLA defines modern military effectiveness.<sup>9</sup> The PLA has stated that it must develop the

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8 *Ibid.*, pp. 100-1.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 18-21.

doctrine and the force structure to do the following: (1) Effective joint operations; (2) seamless command and control of operations across the services; (3) to operate in a restrictive Information Environment; (4) to initiate lethal, pre-emptive strikes to paralyze an opponent's high value targets (asymmetric strikes); (5) develop a sustainable logistics system which permits a high degree of mobility for the operating forces; and (6) deter the main adversary's ability to use nuclear weapons as a form of coercion against China (counter deterrence).<sup>10</sup> It needs to be noted that the Chinese concept of counter deterrence, as opposed to the Western concept of deterrence, is designed to prevent the West (read the United States) from preventing Beijing from asserting China's influence within the region. In blunter terms, it is designed to prevent the United States from deterring China from coercing the other countries of the region. As a security concept counter-deterrence is meant to display survivability and nuclear warfighting effectiveness in order to affect the behavior of the United States, it is not designed to fully execute a Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP).

The recently enacted PLA military reforms of 2016 is a direct reflection of these military effectiveness goals. By ridding itself of the General Headquarters structure (e.g., General Staff Department, General Political Department, General Logistics Department) and by eliminating the Military Regions (MRs) and replacing them with five joint operational commands, the PLA has eliminated some of the most significant obstacles to joint operations management.<sup>11</sup> The military exercise program that the PLA has been utilizing since the 1990s has been attempting to enhance its military effectiveness as defined above. American China analysts observing and assessing Chinese military exercises since the middle of the 2000s have noted exercises (Kuayue or Stride Exercises) involving

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10 The 'Trilogy' is summarized nicely by Professor Jianxiang Bi. See Jianxiang Bi, 'Joint Operations: Developing a New Paradigm' in Mulvenon and Finkelstein, eds., *China's Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs: Emerging Trends in the Operational Art of the Chinese People's Liberation Army*, CNA Corporation and RAND Joint Publication, 2002, pp. 38-78.

11 Phillip Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, 'China's Goldwater-Nichols?: Assessing PLA Organizational Reforms,' *Strategic Forum*, No. 294, NDU Press, Washington, DC, April 2016, pp. 2-3.

trans-regional mobility, flexible command and control procedures and structures, extensive national defense mobilization, integrated civil-military joint exercises, sophisticated logistical management and large scale military mobilization, and ever increasing jointness (e.g., the Lianhe or Joint exercise series involved all of the services, Army, Navy, Air Force, and Strategic Rocket forces).<sup>12</sup>

Mark Cozad of RAND offers a comprehensive update on the status of joint operational development through the PLA exercise program. He writes:

‘PLA joint operations training entered a “standardized development phase” as the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan ended in 2010, presumably to experiment and test the joint operations concepts and practices that emerged from the *Sharp Sword* exercises. In 2009, PLA claimed a total of 18 large-scale exercises that explored a wide range of joint operations subject matter, including civil-military Integration, naval and air force power projection, “systemic operations”, joint training methods and war zone level command and control. Three key exercises during 2009 and 2010—*Firepower 2009*, *Stride 2009*, and *Mission Action 2010*—demonstrated PLA’s progress in joint operations during the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan.’<sup>13</sup>

Finally, the PLA is responsible for developing its conventional and nuclear strike capabilities in support of larger CCP strategic and political goals. This has meant the development and procurement of a not insignificant number of conventional and nuclear armed ballistic

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12 Roy Kamphausen, ‘China’s Land Forces: New Priorities and Capabilities’ in Ashley Tellis and Travis Tanner, eds., *China’s Military Challenge*, National Bureau of Asian Research, Seattle, Wa, 2012, p. 43; Marcellyn Thomsson, ‘PLA Observations of U.S. Contingency Planning: What Has It Learned?’ in Scobell, Ding, Saunders, and Harold, eds., *The People’s Liberation Army and Contingency Planning in China*, NDU Press, Washington, D.C., 2015, p. 41; Mark Cozad, ‘PLA Joint Training and Implications for Future Expeditionary Capabilities,’ *Testimony Before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, January 21, 2016, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, 2016, pp. 9-10; and Dennis Blasko, ‘Clarity of Intention: People’s Liberation Army’s Transregional Exercises to Defend China’s Borders’ in Kamphausen, Lai and Tanner, eds., *Learning by Doing: The PLA Trains at Home and Abroad*, Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, Carlisle, PA, November 2012, p. 184.

13 Cozad, p. 4.



missiles of all ranges. In addition to firing exercises of these missiles, the PLA has emphasized survivability for these forces since PLA doctrine has enunciated a 'No First Use' nuclear doctrine. This means that the PLA strategic rocket forces must constantly refine its capability to hide, move, absorb a strike and then counterstrike. This military mission is indeed practiced, developed and refined in Strategic Rocket Force exercises involving drills in which PLA forces absorb a nuclear attack, remain in protected underground areas for an extended period of time, and then conduct a retaliatory nuclear counter-strike.<sup>14</sup> One would think that if the larger Chinese strategic objective is to influence the strategic nuclear calculus of the United States, then the PLA would most likely coordinate the training and exercise objectives of both Strategic Rocket Forces and the PLA's conventional military forces. To date, such coordination has been scattered and infrequent at best. There is no solid evidence that the Strategic Rocket Forces and the Joint Theater Commands (previously the Military Regions) conducted extensive coordinated joint exercises.

The bottom line from Western analyses of Chinese military exercises over the past two decades is that PLA exercises have increased in size and complexity, are increasingly joint in nature, are less scripted (although some degree of formal scripting persists for some exercises), involves an opposing force (OPFOR), increasingly reflects realism in combat such as the absence of access to information, and reflects a 'Lessons Learned' process in which the PLA documents shortfalls of PLA unit and command performance and improves upon the process in subsequent training events.

### *Generating political effects and influencing decisions:*

Whether arising out of a Chinese Strategic tradition illustrated by Sunzi's maxim 'To Win Without Fighting is the Acme of Skill' or originating from a Leninist organization structure which calls for the military to plan for and engage in 'political warfare', the Chinese

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 21.

military has a long history of using military exercises to send signals to other parties, whether they be potential adversaries, likely international partners or its own people. Before discussing the strategic signaling aspect of Chinese military exercises, it is necessary first to discuss the political-military environment of the Asia-Pacific in which Chinese signaling would be received. Unlike other regions of the world, most notably the European theater, the Asia-Pacific lacks the multilateral security architecture and the multinational confidence building measures which shape, constrain, and define the security environment of other regions. There is, for example, no OSCE Vienna Document necessitating the powers of the region to inform one another that a major exercise is about to be undertaken. In fact, the countries of the region may rely on the lack of transparency of exercises to keep their potential adversaries guessing, off balance, and to maximize the political effect of their military exercise. The U.S. and China have recently agreed to inform one another of major military exercises, but this is the result of recent agreements coming out of bilateral military-to-military engagements, and are entirely voluntary.

With regard to how China specifically uses military exercises to send political signals to the countries of the region, the best known of these is the Dongshan exercise series which date back at least to the 1990s. These exercises, large scale in scope, and amphibious in character were designed to send the not so subtle message to the population of Taiwan that Taiwan's independence and even autonomy is unacceptable to the CCP leadership. Geographically the exercises have tended to take place in Fujian Province, adjacent to Taiwan. The PLA has consistently rolled out the newest military equipment invariably centered around the theme of gradually improving amphibious and airborne capability. The ultimate message is that at some point the Chinese will have developed the military capability to settle the Taiwan issue permanently; therefore, Taipei's political leadership had best negotiate a gradual integration of Taiwan into China's sphere sooner rather than later.

Similarly, through another set of naval exercises undertaken by the PLA Navy since 2007, the Chinese have attempted to deter U.S.,

Japanese and other country involvement in a Taiwan scenario by showing that China is improving its capability to meet the challenge of U.S. Navy and Japanese Self-Defense Force (SDF) intervention. According to a U.S. National Defense University report on Chinese naval exercises, '[d]uring the period 2007-2009, the PLAN continued to train and exercise in areas supporting future contingency operations, particularly expanding operations into the Philippines Sea beyond the First Island Chain as part of the evolution of [the doctrine of] "Near Seas Active Defense"'.<sup>15</sup> The NDU report states that:

'The November 2007 exercise east of Taiwan followed the other noteworthy North Sea Fleet PLAN deployments to the Philippines Sea in 2007. The first deployment started on April 28 when a flotilla of five frigates and destroyers and a supply ship departed Qingdao ... Two destroyers and a supply ship passed through the Miyako Channel, passing east of Taiwan and then back west through the Bashi Channel, where they joined the two frigates west of Taiwan ... Japanese and Russian Commentators described the deployments as training for Taiwan contingencies. Primary objectives were disrupting the U.S. dispatched forces stationed in Okinawa and Guam in support of Taiwan, and for the PLAN to become more familiar with Taiwan's major east coast naval and air bases. By transiting along strategic approaches the U.S. Navy might use to intervene in a Taiwan contingency, the PLAN expanded its operating areas and familiarized itself with locations that could be used to deny or delay the ability of the U.S. Navy to intervene.'<sup>16</sup>

A small number of China defense analysts have argued that some of these exercises could be precursors to an actual initiation of conflict in Taiwan or other parts of the Asia Pacific.<sup>17</sup> This is not beyond the

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15 Christopher Sharman, 'China Moves Out: Stepping Stones Toward a New Maritime Strategy, *China Strategic Perspectives No. 9*, NDU Press, Washington, DC, April 2015, p. 13.

16 *Ibid*, p. 15.

17 Bill Geertz, 'Navy Intel Officer Warns of Future China Conflict' in Washington Free Beacon, February 02, 2015, as found in <http://freebeacon.com/national-security/navy-intel-officer-warns-of-future-china-conflict/>

realm of the possible. A large scale naval exercise off of the East Coast of Taiwan or in the vicinity of the Spratlys could indeed be a disguised effort to put forces in place for a surprise maritime offensive; however, given China's larger strategic interests in preserving a stable, peaceful periphery; maintaining stable relations with the U.S.; and a larger strategy of easing the U.S. out of the region over time strongly suggests that the Chinese are more likely to use exercises as a signaling tool than as a precursor to an attack.

A third type of military exercise designed to send signals to potential rivals and possible adversaries is a series of naval exercises that the People's Liberation Army (Navy) or PLAN has undertaken since the beginning of the second decade of the 2000s. Joint China-Russia naval drills beginning in 2012 are specifically designed to signal to both the United States, to Japan, and their allies in the region, that China too can form military alignments, is improving its naval capabilities through cooperation with Russia—a major naval power—and is evolving its military force to be able to defend China's maritime sovereignty rights in the East China Sea, and ultimately to rival Japan's maritime capabilities in the long run.<sup>18</sup>

A fourth type of signaling military exercise is designed to shape the perceptions of China's potential international partners. Beginning in 2003 the PLA began exercising with Russia and the countries of Central Asia. Under the umbrella of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the *Great Wall Exercises* have focused on the organization of the international response to large scale unrest caused by a major terrorist attack or incident taking place in a friendly country adjacent to China.<sup>19</sup> The diplomatic implications of the *Great Wall Exercise* series are that they promote security cooperation between China, Russia and the Central Asian countries. As one commentator has noted, the lack of realism of

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18 Richard Weitz, 'Parsing Chinese-Russian Military Exercises,' Letort Paper Series, U.S. Army War College Press, Carlisle, PA April 2015, pp. 15-8.

19 Daniel Hartnett, 'Looking Good on Paper: PLA Participation in the Peace Mission 2010 Multilateral Military Exercise in Kamphausen, Lai and Tanner, eds., *Learning by Doing: The PLA Trains at Home and Abroad*, Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, Carlisle, PA, November 2012, p. 220.

some of these exercises, their highly scripted nature, and the lack of in-depth coordination amongst the exercise players, strongly suggests that this is an exercise not meant to enhance interoperability between China and potential allies significantly, but more likely, the purpose of the exercise is largely diplomatic and political:<sup>20</sup> to entice the Central Asian countries and Russia to be aligned with China's interests rather than with those of the West.

A fifth type of signaling exercise is designed to send signals of reassurance to the established hegemonic power—the United States. China has since 2014 participated in the Rim of the Pacific Exercises (RIMPAC) and has dispatched surface combatants to participate in this annual multinational maritime exercise led by the United States.<sup>21</sup> China's participation in RIMPAC is reflective of its ambiguous attitude with the United States and its allies in the region. China is neither friend nor enemy to the U.S. and the U.S.-led international order. That 'frenemy' status is illustrated in the way the PLAN participates in the exercise. Its participation is strictly restricted by PACOM planners to operations which do not improve Chinese naval capabilities and the Chinese have repaid this 'frenemy' status by dispatching surveillance and intelligence gathering ships to monitor and collect data on the participating naval forces. Nonetheless, both China and the U.S. consider PLAN participation in RIMPAC to be an important display of China's willingness to cooperate and work with the U.S. on security related matters. Related to China's participation in RIMPAC is its participation in counterpiracy exercises with the United States Navy and other Western navies in the Indian Ocean<sup>22</sup> for the purposes not only of improving the PLAN's capabilities to perform these types of operations, but also to signal to other countries that China is acting as a 'responsible global stakeholder'. China uses these exercises to demonstrate that it too is a contributor of international public good.

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20 *Ibid.*

21 'Chinese Navy to Join 2014 RIMPAC Naval Drill with the U.S.' in *The Economic Times*, 9 June 2014.

22 'U.S., China Conduct Anti-Piracy Exercise' by Sam LeGrone in *USNI News*, 12 December 2014.

*Ensuring the survival of the Party and addressing internal stability threats:*

As a Party-Army, the paramount mission of the People's Liberation Army is its role as a guarantor of CCP survival. This has meant that the PLA has the responsibility to meet internal security/stability threats emerging from a number of diverse quarters. These include both homegrown and foreign terrorists, mass protests, ethnic minority uprisings and large scale disorder contingencies, and other groups seeking to separate parts of China proper from the People's Republic (a.k.a. 'Splittists'). Given the messy historical record of the PLA getting directly involved in helping the Party brutally suppress the Tiananmen Square protestors, both the Party and the PLA have tended to give the day-to-day management of internal order within China to the People's Armed Police (PAP). Ultimately, however, the PLA is the final guarantor of internal stability, and law and order in China. That means that if the PAP cannot handle a 'mass incident', the PLA must be able to do so. Additionally, the Chinese Communist Party defines internal stability broadly to include contingencies which extend beyond mass protests or security incidents. These include natural disasters, manmade disasters or large scale accidents, and mass public health incidents. In these cases, the PLA does have a direct responsibility to respond to these types of incidents as well.

Politically the CCP is most interested in the following as it relates to internal stability. First, it is intent on deterring would-be terrorists, insurgents and separatists from launching terrorist attacks in the first place. Second, it is intent on smothering ethnic minority aspirations to create mass protest movements. Third, it wants to give the citizens of China as well as other law abiding ethnic minorities of the provinces and ethnic minority autonomous regions the reassurance that the Party is in full control not only of public security threats but of all types of contingencies including disasters and public health crises. Fourth, if a stabilization incident does take place the Party wants the PAP or PLA to handle the crisis quickly with as little subsequent disorder as possible.

Finally, the Party wants to firm up actual control of the provinces, municipalities, and counties, and cement the coordination of all local governments, and security forces under the Party's guidance.

In support of these political objectives, exercises play both a signaling and mission effectiveness role similar to those discussed above for the PLA's external defense missions. By displaying the PLA/PAP responsiveness and effectiveness to potential internal security contingencies the CCP is sending a signal to both potential adversaries and to law abiding ethnic minorities and Han Chinese citizens alike. By demonstrating firm control over all of the local provincial ministries and the security agencies involved, the CCP is signaling to all local government and security agencies that its authority is beyond questioning. Finally, by rehearsing, experimenting and practicing procedures which cement Party control over local ministry and security agency functions, the Party is effectively reinforcing its control over these locals. In theory this is what the Party believes are the political effects of these exercises. In practice have we witnessed the PAP engaged in these kinds of exercises?

Given the priority the Party places on stability, it should not be surprising that Counter-Terrorist exercises comprise one of the most numerous types of these internal stability exercises. Between mid-2006 and mid-2011 the People's Armed Police took part in 55 major PAP counterterrorism exercises.<sup>23</sup> According to Cortez Cooper who frequently researches and writes on this subject '[t]he frequencies of these exercises is increasing from 9 in 2007 to 15 in 2010. Four of these were international exercises, three of which were conducted under the auspices of the SCO [Shanghai Cooperation Organization]. All of these involved the *Snow Leopard* Commando unit. The 2008 Defense White Paper notes that PAP units participated in *Great Wall 2003* and *Great Wall II* counterterrorism exercises; deployed for the SCO-sponsored *Joint-2003*

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23 Cortez Cooper, 'Controlling the Four Quarters': China Trains, Equips, and Deploys a Modern, Mobile People's Armed Police Force' in Kamphausen, Lai and Tanner, eds., *Learning by Doing: The PLA Trains at Home and Abroad*, Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, Carlisle, PA, November 2012, p. 152.

exercise; and hosted Guard 04 and Guard 06 exercises focused on large-scale emergency response operations.<sup>24</sup> Each of these exercises has been described as involving displays of the PAP's latest tactical equipment for the local population to mull over—a blatant effort at sending signals to would-be insurgents, terrorists and/or law abiding Chinese citizens alike.

A large part of what Western analysts know of Chinese PAP and PLA counterterrorism exercises are the result of the open source reporting related to the large scale Counterterrorism exercises associated with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or SCO. These annual exercises began in 2001 and have continued to the present. In fact, the PLA's first participation in an international exercise was an SCO sponsored Counter-Terrorist exercise with Kyrgyzstan involving a total of 300 troops. The first multilateral counterterrorism exercise on Chinese soil *Joint Coalition 2003* involved Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Russia. By 2010 the size of the exercises had grown significantly with the number of troops involved exceeding 10,000. The *Peace Mission 2010* was designed to test the interoperability of SCO armed forces assisting a member involved in internal armed conflict, or which just suffered a mass terrorist attack.<sup>25</sup> As Daniel Hartnett commented on the character of the exercise, the highly scripted nature of the exercise, the lack of realism and the lack of in-depth coordination amongst the multinational forces suggests that the main purpose of this exercise was not to actually develop inter-operability amongst the participants but to foster political solidarity and to provide the Central Asian countries a political alternative to the West.<sup>26</sup>

PAP and PLA exercises conducted in conjunction with local ministries within China proper address the Party's objective: that its military, security agencies and local governments can effectively manage a large scale mass incident. These types of exercises have also had a civil-military integration

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24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Daniel Hartnett, 'Looking Good on Paper: PLA participation in the Peace Mission 2010 Multilateral Military Exercise in Kamphausen, Lai and Tanner, eds., *Learning by Doing: The PLA Trains at Home and Abroad*, Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, Carlisle, PA, November 2012, p. 220.

26 *Ibid.*



function. That is, such exercises serve as a means to foster inter-agency coordination between civilian and military organizations normally not in each other's respective chains of command. Cortez Cooper notes that in preparation for the 2008 Olympics, the PAP participated in a number of 'simulated and live fire training activities focused on counterterrorism and emergency response while providing security at pre-Olympic events, creating a realistic training environment corresponding to ethnic unrest deployments. This training environment also provided significant joint training opportunities for the PAP, as they participated in emergency response scenarios with PSB [Public Security Bureau], militia, People's Air Defense, and other PLA units.'<sup>27</sup> As has been the experience in the West, the interagency aspect of counterterrorism is a crucial element of addressing the terrorist threat. Cortez Cooper adds:

'In an attempt to break down administrative barriers and improve coordination, the Chengdu Military Region (MR) and its sub-districts have instituted joint training and exercise programs focused on civil-military integration under leadership groups. Composed of prefecture and county-level border defense committees, the training program focuses on three missions: defensive operations, counterterrorism, and disaster response.'<sup>28</sup>

Beyond internal security issues, the PAP and the PLA are also expected to directly support the local administrative organs in facing other types of disturbance to internal stability. As noted above by Cortez Cooper, civil-military integration exercises are conducted at the provincial level not only to train for border defense and counterterrorism contingencies, they are also designed to meet natural disasters and other non-security related contingencies. He adds that in 'Wenshan subdistrict of the Chengdu MR, additionally, all prefectural and township military and police units

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<sup>27</sup> Cortez Cooper, 'Controlling the Four Quarters': China Trains, Equips, and Deploys a Modern, Mobile People's Armed Police Force' in Kamphausen, Lai and Tanner, eds., *Learning by Doing: The PLA Trains at Home and Abroad*, Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, Carlisle, PA, November 2012, p. 153.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 156.

are required to form ‘one unit’ for joint training for at least 20 days per year. The training includes command control, intelligence gathering and sharing, communications testing, emergency rescue procedures, and counterterrorism.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

Since the People’s Liberation Army is a Party-Army and not a National Army, its sole function is to serve as the military wing of the Chinese Communist Party. Hypothetically, if the Party places its survival and viability over that of the defense of China’s borders, then the PLA would shift resources to reflect that strategic guidance. If the Chinese Communist Party declared that growing the economy was paramount and that strategic and security issues were less urgent, as did happen in the late 1970s and early 1980s under Deng Xiaoping, then the PLA would have to adjust its role in this case as well. This isn’t to say that the PLA has no role in framing national security issues before the Party leadership or cannot significantly influence the national security decision making process in China, in fact the opposite is the case; however, when it comes to the final say on strategic direction the Party enjoys an unchallenged monopoly.

As it turns out the ‘New Period’ under Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and now Xi Jinping<sup>30</sup> is marked by the CCP concern over a diverse array of security challenges. There is a potential conflict with the United States over Taiwan to worry about, terrorist attacks and other mass incidents occurring within China primarily in the country’s northwestern provinces, and other smaller but still intense local conflicts around China’s periphery.

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29 Cortez Cooper, ‘Controlling the Four Quarters’: China Trains, Equips, and Deploys a Modern, Mobile People’s Armed Police Force’ in Kamphausen, Lai and Tanner, eds., *Learning by Doing: The PLA Trains at Home and Abroad*, Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, Carlisle, PA, November 2012, p. 156.

30 The ‘New Period’ in China is considered to have begun in that period following Deng Xiaoping’s relinquishment of his formal titles of power and the passing of political power to Jiang Zemin. The entire period at present encompasses the administration of Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping.

The CCP has also identified emerging challenges to China's security related to its increased interests abroad, non-traditional security threats originating in new domains (cyber and space), and challenges to China's maritime sovereignty in the South and East China Sea. All of these latter security concerns fall under the rubric of the New Historic Missions.

The Party's preoccupation with this wide range of security concerns has had a significant impact on the People's Liberation Army, how it views military preparedness and its role in providing military support to the Party and by extension, the State. As this essay has argued these specific security concerns have found their way into the wide range of military exercises in which the PLA takes part. The PLA views as its responsibility the development of capabilities to address these security challenges firmly. At the same time, military exercises have a diplomatic function in that they can be used by the Party to convey to foreign and domestic audiences and to the international community as a whole, a wide range of messages that the CCP leadership wishes to convey for political purposes.

Military and internal security exercises can directly cement or firm up control the Party may have over local provincial, municipal or county-level governments. By rehearsing the coercive and security-oriented aspects of the state, the CCP reinforces its control over local government processes that it has in place to ensure not only stability but Party political control. To some degree one might make an argument that China's leadership in the SCO counter-terrorism exercises with the Central Asian countries might enjoy a similar reinforcement when the *Great Wall* or other SCO-led exercises take place. However, such an argument is beyond the scope of this conclusion and this paper.

Finally, while it appears to be the case that the CCP uses the military to accomplish political and strategic objectives of the Party, and makes use of military exercises to accomplish those ends specifically, the Party's freedom to do so is limited by the enormous challenge the People's Liberation Army faces in attempting to modernize its force and provide

adequate training for all units within the PLA. The obstacles mentioned earlier in this chapter on the seasonal aspects of China's overall training cycle, the significant challenge of taking personnel from the relatively backward countryside and turning them into 21<sup>st</sup> century warriors, the persistent difficulty of transforming China's NCO corps into a more proactive and capable group, will all serve as brakes to the Party's belief that it has unfettered ability to use the PLA as an instrument of the Party's political objectives.

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## Conclusions

*Tormod Heier, Guillaume Lasconjarias*

The contributions to this volume, although deliberately varied in focus and content, share several themes that are relevant to any reflection on the role of military and political-military exercises in Europe's more tense security environment and in the strengthening of the Alliance's deterrence and defence posture. More generally, this research project demonstrates the overall importance of exercises, which, as a field of study, deserve greater academic attention, alongside inputs from practitioners. Moving from the field of International Relations to ground-truth is no easy task but allows everyone to identify key lessons.

The purpose of this concluding chapter is to highlight key findings and present important insights that shed light on the complex linkages between security policy and exercises. Greater awareness of these linkages will help decision-makers and exercise planners alike to identify the most satisfactory combination of military requirements and political judgments in designing and conducting exercises, while remaining mindful of lessons learned from the Cold War era in relation to an opponents' strategic calculus and concerns over crisis stability.

## Considerations for NATO

*The Cold War is Over – Yet Some Lessons Remain Intact*

For NATO, and its members and partners, military exercises – combined, joint and multinational – are part of the essential readiness

that ensures that commanders and forces will maintain their warfighting skills, practice standard operating procedures and enhance multinational interoperability, while experimenting with new concepts, doctrine, tactics and technologies. This was the case throughout the Cold War and reached a peak during the 1970s and 1980s, in a period that witnessed the maturing of concepts and capabilities for coalition warfare in Europe. NATO responded to the challenge of an increasingly offensively-oriented and capable Warsaw Pact by emphasizing those areas of operational capacity and competence that would make the greatest contribution to strengthening deterrence and, if deterrence failed, to an effective defence: these were an enhanced readiness of forces; an expanded reinforcement capacity; and the rationalization of mutual support arrangements and training programmes among the Allies. In this context, the *Autumn Forge* exercise series of the 1970s and 1980s were a key enabler for achieving these goals. The exercises offered a broad framework for rehearsing regularly how NATO 'would go to war'. Thus, they provided a vehicle for identifying shortfalls and to measure progress. The higher levels of operational ambition and effectiveness pursued by both the Warsaw Pact and NATO also helped trigger a mutual apprehension that exercises could be used as a cover to prepare and launch surprise attacks. This anxiety illustrated the sometimes unpredictable interaction between the content of exercises and the wider strategic setting, something that was overwhelmingly felt during the war scare of the early 1980s.<sup>1</sup>

This experience suggests that NATO should embrace a higher level of ambition for its exercise programme, building on the lessons learned from exercise *Trident Juncture 2015* held in Italy, Portugal and Spain, while pursuing the objective of seeking greater transparency from Russia on its own exercise activities. The quest for greater efficiency, as well as a recognition that NATO has a unique capacity to integrate multinational

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<sup>1</sup> See Nate Jones, 'War Scare,' *Foreign Policy*, 21 May 2013 (<http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/05/21/war-scare/>) and *Able Archer 83: The Secret History of the NATO Exercise That Almost Triggered Nuclear War*, New York, The New Press, 2016; Gordon Barrass, 'Able Archer 83: What Were the Soviets Thinking?,' *Survival*, Volume 58, issue 6, December 2016-January 2017, pp. 7-30.

forces, should also lead Allies to grant the Alliance a wider mandate and greater resources for exercising their forces together. A strengthened Alliance deterrence and defence posture relies critically on the readiness of the Allies to act in concert and that collective capacity can be pursued and achieved only if it is underpinned by a robust NATO-led exercise programme.

### *Look Out for the Strategic Intent!*

Another important lesson from past experience is to ensure that the design of exercises conforms well to their strategic intent. Consistency between strategic intent and the design of military exercises also helps to ensure proper ‘signalling’. Military forces are, after all, the most dramatic instrument in a state’s political toolbox. Therefore, the risk of misinterpretation or misreading is always a possibility, especially when a country stages military exercises amidst rising tensions. Whatever their format—live exercises in the field or command post exercises or ‘wargames’—military exercises are powerful means of strategic communication, even if the latter does not transpire in the designed objectives to be reached.<sup>2</sup> This was already the case in the past, for instance at the time of the *Carte Blanche* air exercise in 1955.<sup>3</sup> What started as a regular training exercise soon encapsulated an additional task, in communicating deterrence. Yet, this happened more as a consequence or as an inference than as a result of a pre-planned intention. The key issue was to target the primary audience properly: should the then-adversary – the Soviets – be the primary audience? Or, perhaps, the goal was to reassure national authorities, as well as the populations of then-NATO Europe? At that time, NATO’s national authorities were the primary audience of the exercise, with an obvious secondary benefit of signalling to the Soviets. One of the problems, however, were the unintended consequences of how the exercise was perceived by the population of a new member

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2 See the chapter in this volume by Jeffrey Appleget, Jeffrey Kline, and James J. Wirtz

3 See Robert Davis’ chapter in this volume.

nation – West Germany – that had joined NATO just a month before the exercise took place in its airspace. Yesterday as today, the enduring effort to include a public relations campaign in advance of exercises, to ‘harmonise’ the exercise concept with the preoccupations of civil society may help mitigate negative sentiments and create support.

### *Exercising is Also a Politically-Oriented Activity*

This kind of political signaling takes place not only among members of an alliance, as in the case of the Polish-sponsored multinational exercise *Anakonda* in 2016. Depending on how much becomes known about such exercises outside the conference room, it also sends messages to other observers, and – especially if there is espionage, as happened during the Cold War – to potential adversaries. Exercises in particular can signal the resolve to work out credible command and control arrangements. Exercises may also convey operational and logistical details to outside observers and analysts. In sum, the totality of exercising communicates a specific ‘body language’ that makes deterrence more credible, politically as well as militarily. Exercising also explores prospective operations, which is helpful in determining reinforcement, sustainment and host nation support requirements. This is particularly so with regard to operational systems that might be deployed into a future theatre, not least to demonstrate a readiness to try out approaches to nascent threats. However, because they entail costs and potential risks, exercises should always be assessed by planners with an eye on estimating how they might be perceived by all stake holders. This is what George Tsebelis calls ‘nested games’: Various actors in different arenas interpret war games differently; outcomes may therefore often end up as compromises, which from a military perspective may be unsatisfactory.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> George Tsebelis, *Nested Games: Rational Choice in Corporate Politics*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990.



*Not Exercising Doesn't Make You Safer – On the Contrary!*

However, the absence of exercises and war gaming may not necessarily be interpreted as a symbol of restraint or appeasement. On the contrary, it may also communicate to a potential adversary a lack of resolve. Within NATO therefore, consideration on whether the NATO Command Structure (NCS) is adequately trained to command and control large scale operations reflects a concern that it might not be. After all, the NCS has not exercised command and control of large combined-arms formations inside Europe in any traditional sense since the end of the Cold War. On the contrary, in a time of review, the shortcomings of the NCS increase smaller NATO member states' sense of vulnerability. This is particularly so when compared with potential adversaries and neighbouring states of much greater strength. Smaller member states may therefore be inclined to pursue more robust exercises than otherwise necessary. Not necessarily because they fear an imminent attack, but to make sure that minor disputes or crises along the border do not end up creating a running sore, as a result of indecisiveness due to a withering, or even disintegration, of basic operational skills and competence inside the NCS. That would make it difficult to have a decisive transfer of authority from national to allied command in a crisis.

For smaller Allies situated along Russia's rim, the delicate balance between resolve and restraint may therefore be hard to sustain. This is particularly so among members whose security depends upon rapid NATO decisions and pre-planned arrangements. To preclude unnecessary provocation or tension therefore, military exercises should reinvigorate the transfer of authority from national to allied command. Exercises that rehearse the seamless integration between national and allied commands will make it easier for smaller Allies to pursue a policy of restraint, and thereby avoid potentially destabilizing effects along their own borders.<sup>5</sup> Eventually, at another level, one can never be too careful about making sure the exercise programme and legislative hearings are either de-

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5 See Peter Dombrowski's and Ryan French's chapter in this volume.

conflicted or closely coordinated with the national authorities. In the wake of exercise *Carte Blanche*, for instance, the Military Committee re-emphasized that NATO's exercise programme needed to be reviewed and approved by SHAPE, even when the exercises were being conducted by component commands at lower levels. When exercise *Carte Blanche* was conducted in June 1955, the NATO Command Structure had been in existence for only four years and it already included more than 20 different headquarters below SHAPE. Experience in controlling exercises at lower levels was limited, communications means were essentially by courier, and SHAPE was challenged in its capacity to oversee every subordinate HQ, at every level of the command structure (HQ AIRCENT, which planned and executed *Carte Blanche*, was two levels below SHAPE). Today, by contrast, there are only 5 headquarters below SHAPE, NATO has more than 65 years of experience with exercises, and communications means, through email, are quasi instantaneous. Accordingly, the recurrence of an exercise such as *Carte Blanche*, with the misgivings it generated, is today unthinkable.

### *Firm Political Control of Exercises*

The beauty of military exercises running smoothly is as always 'in the eyes of the beholder'. Drawing a lesson from the Cold War, even though in the 1970s and 1980s there were spies amongst NATO's staff, and key officials knew that the Warsaw Pact intelligence agencies had 'virtually real time intelligence' of just about anything going on in NATO, the Soviet and other Warsaw Pact leaders worked themselves into a lather of suspicions.<sup>6</sup> This was particularly so with regard to a postulated assumption that NATO was planning a surprise attack on the Warsaw Pact, possibly by using a military exercise as preparation. The lesson for NATO and its member states is that one should not trust one's signalling – however well-intentioned – to be interpreted by the other side as one

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<sup>6</sup> See Beatrice Heuser, "Military Exercises and the Dangers of Misunderstandings: the East-West Crisis of the Early 1980s," in this volume.

would imagine or intend. Exercises aiming to rehearse national and allied command structures can thus exacerbate tensions, rather than safely strengthen deterrence, even if the latter is their exclusive purpose. Hence, an introspective assessment of possible misplaced or nefarious interpretation of one's exercises by foreign powers should be part of any prudent exercise planning process.

### *Rehearsing Scenarios Below the Triggering of Article 5*

A perennial lesson in strategy is to avoid the opponent's strength, while concealing and reducing one's own vulnerabilities. Russia's conventional inferiority vis-à-vis NATO make Russia vulnerable to direct confrontation, as seen from a conventional military perspective. The ability to pursue political objectives below NATO's threshold for Article 5 operations is, therefore, a crucial characteristic of Russia's *modus operandi*. The lesson from this is that war is more than brute combat; war is also – in the words of George Kennan (1948) – a 'perpetual rhythm of struggle, in and out of war.'<sup>7</sup> The blurring between peace and war in NATO's security environment should therefore incentivize exercises that rehearse scenarios below Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Rather than focusing only on conventional and nuclear deterrence in the military domain, efforts to combine the entire spectrum of civilian and military means on the lower levels of conflict (particularly, deterring and countering intimidation and coercion) are fruitful, not least to counter more comprehensively the Russian effort of systematically aligning the mutually reinforcing instruments in the diplomatic, economic, military and information domains. Admittedly, already both the WINTEX-CIMEX (Civil-Military Exercise) exercises of the Cold War and the post-Cold War CMXs (Crisis-Management Exercises) included non-military play, although probably not to the degree and on a scale sufficient to identify and defeat an opponent's complex interplay of military and

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7 George Kennan, 'Policy Planning Staff Memorandum,' Washington D.C., 4 May 1948, <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/history/johnson/65ciafounding3.htm>

non-military tools that must be expected today. Exercises that include a broader civilian component, including contributions from the EU, may be as relevant as those that are limited to the participation of military forces, to address the ‘hybrid’ challenges from the Russian side.<sup>8</sup>

### *Lessons From Past Cases of Confidence Building and ‘Signaling’*

Competitor states and possible adversaries are presently developing military capabilities with more robust signalling, as a sort of political communication function. Since Asia is the centre of an intense and worrisome process of rearmament, Western powers have a strong interest in monitoring closely how the respective countries consider military exercises – and in the case of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea vs. the Republic of Korea, thinking about how these could trigger escalation pressures<sup>9</sup>.

In that highly militarized part of the world, the requirement for clear political guidance to avoid unintended ‘signals’ remains therefore, and developing agreed criteria is as much a challenge as implementing such guidance – without draining exercises of their realistic military content. Thus, military exercises can include potential adversaries, but need to be designed carefully to avoid unintended political and strategic repercussions. [For NATO] in the 21st century, therefore, an interesting ‘lessons learned’ from the Cold War-era can be found in the India–Pakistan experience from 1987. This is particularly so with regard to exercise design, transparency, confidence-building regimes, and the often troubled political-military interface. As the Indians and Pakistanis learned during the Indian *Brasstacks* exercise in 1987, the presence of foreign

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8 Tormod Heier, ‘The Logic of Asymmetry: Russia’s Approach Towards NATO,’ in Janne Haaland Matlary and Tormod Heier (eds.), *Ukraine and Beyond. Russia’s Strategic Security Challenge to Europe*, London, Palgrave Macmillan 2016.

9 See for instance, ‘North Korea warns that US military drills could ‘evolve into actual fighting’,’ *The Telegraph*, 21 August 2017 (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/08/20/north-korea-tensions-dangerous-timing-us-south-korea-prepare/>).

observers was crucial to increase transparency and mitigate suspicions, while the training audience demonstrated determination, cooperation and competence. Also, adherence to a codified, detailed, mutually-agreed regime of confidence-building measures and associated communications channels can also help to reduce mistrust. This is especially so when coupled with exercise observation on the ground. Thus, one of the major sources of unintended tension during the *Brasstacks* exercise was the apparent lack of coordination between India's political leadership and its army chief of staff – meaning that sometimes, tension arose from where nobody expected it.<sup>10</sup>

In East Asia, one of the biggest security challenges is the absence of a regional arms control regime involving multilateral institutional and legal requirements, which are crucial for confidence building before and during military exercises. This deficiency may also explain large scale Russian exercises in this part of Asia, and may not necessarily reflect a significant Russian concern over a Chinese military threat. Indeed, China and Russia view each other as convenient strategic partners and are aligning their strategic actions to keep the US and NATO off balance. A growing number of China-Russia military exercises in the Pacific Region, and recently in the Baltic Sea, reflects this emerging reality.

### *Confidence-Building Measures Required, But Not Too Much*

Using exercises as a means to build confidence may seem rather counter-intuitive; it is far from easy to reassure potential opponents with forces that are actually designed to defend against and defeat their own forces. In any exercise that rehearses crisis management, a credible deterrent component is always required, but at the same time, exercises should also rehearse situations which '... leave the opponent a way out of the crisis that is compatible with his fundamental interest'.<sup>11</sup> To increase

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10 See John Gill's chapter in this volume.

11 Alexander George, *Avoiding War*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1991, p. 25.

transparency therefore, international regimes such as the CFE Treaty, the Vienna Document and the Open Skies Treaty have been key pillars in Europe's post-Cold War security environment. However, Russian efforts to block any engagement with the Vienna Document (thus limiting to the utmost any external oversight of their military activities), coupled with a disengagement from the CFE treaty (permitting a military build-up) but a maintenance of the Open Skies Treaty (which may allow Russia to gather intelligence on NATO countries), are reasons for concern. Arms control agreements are particularly sensitive to the evolution of political contexts, and the Vienna Document is no exception. As such, it is unsurprising that the current tensions between Western countries and Russia have affected the implementation and the usefulness of these regimes as instruments of strategic stability, crisis stability, and confidence-building. But the current difficulties are to some degree the result of a system that was already weakened by a permissive implementation regime and a culture of political consensus which overlooked past Russian violations.<sup>12</sup> In the context of a renewed security competition with Russia, and a gradual weakening of the guarantees provided by the Vienna Document, NATO member states should, therefore, not walk away from the Vienna Document, yet not hesitate to enhance their military readiness and capacities: NATO should communicate unambiguously that it is prepared to trust Russia's declarations regarding Russian exercise activity, as long as Russia is demonstrably transparent and truthful, yet also continue to undertake all necessary precautionary measures if Russia is not.

### *Trust Your Ally... and do the Maximum to Avoid Tension*

To induce a positive change in any competitor's behaviour, for instance the Soviet Union in the past, a credible deterrent component rests on intra-alliance cohesion. Within an Alliance of 29 sovereign states, which often perceive risks and threats in distinctive ways, this is a very complex

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12 See Olivier Schmitt's chapter in this volume.

task especially when, some of the members from the same organization have had bilateral disputes. Intra-alliance disputes, such as those which occurred between Greece and Turkey in the past, are not a new problem, and there have on occasion been other instances of bilateral tension inside the Alliance.<sup>13</sup> Such disputes can seriously undermine the credibility of the Alliance's deterrence posture overall. Exercises are one important way to bring Allies together, particularly if there are concerns over the Alliance's political cohesion because of bilateral tensions and, in this case, might help resolve intra-alliance disputes.

### *Exercises as a Politically Stabilizing Instrument on the Alliance's Southern Flank*

Military exercises in the Middle East have moved away from being used as 'cover-for-attack', and from their anti-Israel focus, since the USA became the external, de facto, guarantor of a regional truce between the Arab states and Israel with the peace treaties with Egypt and with Jordan. The focus of exercises could thenceforth shift to multinational coalition-building under US auspices, notably through the *Bright Star* exercise series. This set the stage for Arab contributions to the *Desert Storm* operation in 1991. The purpose of exercises in the Middle East is now more generally the improvement of military effectiveness, and more importantly, to communicate political reassurance to partners who face a common threat. This could come from either 'rogue' states, or even international terrorist organizations operating in the Middle East region. Against the background of widespread instability in the wider Middle East and attempts by Russia to restore its former political influence in the region, NATO should boost its cooperation with its partners in the Middle East and North Africa. The effort to plan joint military exercises that are increasingly seen in the Middle East region as an important sign of close relations and mutual trust, would be a good investment by the

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13 See Spyros Plakoudas' chapter in this volume.

Alliance in the enduring effort to stabilise NATO's southern periphery

### *Careful Observation of Exercises Hedge Against 'Immunization'*

Exercises have, in the past, been used to provide a smokescreen for an aggressive operation. The best studied case here is that of the Egyptian attack on Israel that became known as the Yom Kippur War, but Amr Yossef's contribution to this book discusses a number of other cases. The Yom Kippur attack was disguised as an exercise, and followed a very similar exercise that had been held by Egypt earlier that year. Exercises can 'immunize' observers to the observation of actual preparations for a surprise military operation.<sup>14</sup> This case should be a warning not to espouse convenient interpretations of exercises conducted by other parties, and to watch out particularly for a change in patterns. Indeed, responses to surprise attacks disguised as exercises should become part of a training cycle, to include the intelligence services of NATO countries.

### General Conclusion

One cannot judge military exercises solely on the basis of their estimated training value, nor their audience, not even their setting – whether practiced in the field with thousands of soldiers and vehicles or given a 'simple' table-top exercise gathering staffs behind complex computer scenarios. Because of the timing, the threat perception and, more generally-speaking, the environment, any exercise can potentially deviate from a planned tactical-operational and strategic training role into a political conundrum and escalate. If there is one crucial lesson to be drawn from this research project, it is the need to find the right balance between military requirements for realistic exercises and political intentions. At the centre of this equilibrium is the potential for misinterpretations of

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<sup>14</sup> Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep: The Surprise of Yom Kippur and its Sources*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2005.



signals. In addition, as defence budgets rise worldwide and more states (including potential adversaries) devote resources to strengthening their military, NATO's importance as a source of collective assurance for its members and of stability for its immediate neighbours to the Alliance's East and South, can only grow.

Being a very unique organization, it is in the Alliance's DNA to safeguard and protect its population without being provocative, while, at the same time, refraining in its policies, posture and exercises from considering any foreign power as a potential adversary. Nonetheless, respecting Vegetius' adage *Si vis pacem, para bellum*, NATO's history proves that it has been able to calibrate its exercises in such a way that military manoeuvres could not be mistaken for aggressive plans. For instance, in 1988, NATO intentionally re-oriented the manoeuvre box for the last full-scale REFORGER of the Cold War to a north-south axis – as a confidence-building measure towards the Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup> For the first time, the opposing party in exercise REFORGER 88 was designated 'Gold forces', rather than 'Orange forces', to demonstrate the moving away from a confrontation with the Warsaw Pact less than a year and a half before the fall of the Berlin Wall. This flexibility and political sensitivity suggest that future exercises should be structured to signify unquestioned resolve, without, at the same time, causing unnecessary tensions in exercise orientation or scenario narrative.

Nevertheless, this requires going beyond current routine and carefully analysing what NATO lacks. Current reviews of NATO's Command Structure emphasize that the problem has been understood and taken into account. The capacity to command and control major military exercises will ultimately help NATO respond more effectively up and down the chain-of-command in a measured and calibrated manner. This is key to encapsulating the delicate balance between resolve and restraint at a time of considerable strategic uncertainty.

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15 See Diego Ruiz Palmer's chapter in this volume.



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Military exercises are the part-virtual realm in which real war is rehearsed, either to deter and prevent conflict or to prepare offensively for it. Exercises serve to promote good practices and improve performance by fighting formations and staffs, and to harmonize training and procedures among allies and friends. They are, thus, an indispensable training tool for any military, as well as an important instrument of deterrence and assurance. While deterrent measures can rarely be proven to have had the intended effect, it is plausible that exercises have often bolstered deterrence by signaling commitment, competence and capability. To this end, persistence in reflecting a defensive intent in successive exercises can add considerable credibility. Some past exercises, however, have been the prelude to actual war, the smokescreen behind which an offensive operation is prepared. Because of the inherent ambiguity that links capability and intent, unless peaceful intentions are demonstrated transparently and credibly, exercises can exacerbate the security dilemma and make potential adversaries apprehensive. Exercises, therefore, can help anchor enemy images more deeply and increase tensions, rather than enhance stability. This is why the design, planning and conduct of exercises have to take into account a wide range of military and non-military factors, and balance training requirements with wider security policy concerns.

This volume, providing general analysis and a wide array of case studies, has been prepared by practitioners and academics: the aim is to shed light, and afford relevant perspectives, on a military activity that is often practiced but little studied. It will make particularly useful reading, both for exercise planners and for policy-makers.

