



INSIGHTS

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Resilience and Resistance in NATO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Irregular Warfare Annex to the United States' National Defense Strategy prescribes the requirement to institutionalize irregular warfare (IW) as a core competency of the U.S. Department of Defense. Per the Annex, one of the necessary conditions of successful IW campaigning is sustained unified action with interagency partners, key allies, and partners. The first step to achieving such unified action is to ensure all stakeholders understand the fundamental concepts associated with IW and other related non-military aspects of irregular competition. The Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) strives to promote a shared understanding of irregular threats and the use of irregular methods of imparting costs on competitors across a wide range of interagency professionals, global partners, and members of civil society in order to increase awareness and knowledge of IW. This enables their collaboration toward developing comprehensive, holistic approaches to counter present and future national security challenges effectively. For such purposes, this IWC *Insights* paper discusses the background and fundamentals of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) resilience and resistance concepts.

The end of the Cold War brought major changes to all European countries' defense establishments. With the loss of intellectual and material support from their sponsors, small European countries' militaries faced continuous budget cuts, reductions in force size, and large-scale retirement of conventional capabilities.¹ Defense capabilities decayed alongside institutional knowledge in the art and science of conventional warfare. In turn, homeland defense capabilities withered. Post-9/11 U.S. and NATO pressures and incentives to join the Global War on Terrorism exacerbated the process, with small European countries developing and fielding expeditionary and special operations capabilities to conduct counterterrorism and counterinsurgency far from home.² Organizational tables, weapons development, and equipment acquisition processes adapted to such operations. Military training and educational institutions overhauled curricula to develop the leaders prepared specifically

IWC MISSION: The IWC serves as the central mechanism for developing the Department of Defense's (DOD) irregular warfare knowledge and advancing the Department's understanding of irregular warfare concepts and doctrine in collaboration with key allies and partners.

SANDOR FABIAN PH.D.
IWC Chair, Integration and Engagements



GABRIELLE KENNEDY
IWC Analyst

for these missions. Doctrine writers and tacticians redesigned tactics, techniques, and procedures. Training facilities morphed to accommodate effective pre-deployment training of these expeditionary formations. These changes created highly specialized military establishments with limited utility in homeland defense.³

At the same time, Russia underwent major changes as well. Facing significant resource constraints that impinged Russia's ability to maintain its military research and development competition with the U.S. and the West, Russian military experts spent significant time and effort on developing alternative concepts to the Western theory of warfare. As a result, three distinct waves of Russian military literature emerged, detailing its approach to conflict. The first wave of emerging Russian military thought in the mid-1990s was based on the American literature on low-intensity conflicts. This literature shaped the Russian view of how to conduct operations below the threshold of conventional armed conflict.⁴ From the mid-1990s through the early 2000s, the principles and lessons of Operation DESERT STORM and NATO's air campaign in Yugoslavia inspired Russian military strategists, notably General-Major Vladimir Slipchenko's theory of Sixth Generation Warfare or "Contactless War."⁵ Ultimately, Russian strategists realized that it would be extremely difficult to overcome such advantages through conventional means after observing Western conventional forces' technological overmatch and their ability to destroy enemy targets from great distances with highly precise weapons. Consequently, Russian strategists' attention was redirected toward unconventional thinking and concepts. In the late 2000s, American Network Centric Warfare doctrine inspired similar developments in Russian military thinking.⁶ Starting in 2008, Russian military experts, most notably Sergey Chekinov and Sergey Bogdanov, amalgamated these concepts into a single approach: New Generation Warfare (NGW), called hybrid warfare by many Western practitioners and scholars.⁷ As a concept, NGW approaches conflict as a continuum with varying intensity and changing centers of gravity. The shaping of the operational environment, the creation of favorable conditions, and preparations for conventional war are viewed as forever ongoing efforts. According to this theory, continuous activities are executed to weaken, isolate, subvert, and destabilize target societies followed by more conventional military actions if necessary.⁸

As a result of such changes in Russia's approach to conflict, more and more European countries became targets of malicious Russian activities below the threshold of open military confrontation. Such activities included intimidation through large-scale conventional military exercises close to European countries' borders, subversion, coercive diplomatic and economic actions, propaganda, bribing politicians, cyberattacks, airspace violations, providing financial support to national extremist organizations, intelligence activities, and even targeted killings.⁹ The skillful and combined application of such activities across all sectors of the target countries' societies led to the realization in small European countries that these challenges can only be successfully addressed by a resilient society and a comprehensive, whole-of-society approach.¹⁰ However, the development of such an approach seems to have posed a major challenge for both individual nations and NATO.

THE NEED FOR RESILIENCE

During the Cold War resilience¹¹ (then known as civil emergency planning) was organized and appropriately resourced in most countries and was also reflected in NATO's organization and command structure. By the mid-1990s, many of the plans, structures, and capabilities needed for effective resilience were significantly reduced both at the national and NATO levels.¹² Initial steps to rebuild and modernize society-wide resilience started to be implemented in individual European nations after the 2008 Russian attack against Georgia, with those closest to Russia leading the way. New national security approaches, such as total or comprehensive defenses, were introduced in the Scandinavian and the Baltic states.¹³ While these efforts were (and still remain) primarily at the national

level, the NATO heads of state committed to increasing resilience across the alliance by supporting individual members' efforts at the 2016 Warsaw Summit. They pledged to improve resilience by achieving the following seven baseline requirements:

- 1) assured continuity of government and critical government services;
- 2) resilient energy supplies;
- 3) ability to deal effectively with uncontrolled movement of people;
- 4) resilient food and water resources;
- 5) ability to deal with mass casualties;
- 6) resilient civil communications systems;
- 7) resilient civil transportation systems.¹⁴

The idea behind these baseline requirements and resilience is twofold. First, they aim to create resilient societies that have fewer vulnerabilities that a malicious actor can exploit, therefore persuading aggressors to abandon their aggressive intentions because they will not achieve their intended objectives. Second, they improve societies' ability to recover from a crisis and return more quickly to pre-crisis functions and activities. However, when it comes to the actual implementation achieving such requirements seems to be easier said than done.¹⁵

Unlike detailed standards, manuals, handbooks, standard operating procedures, and plans for war, NATO does not have detailed and "user friendly" blueprints for resilient societies. Although NATO is indeed providing ad hoc support to its members and partners, building resilience is a national-level responsibility. With that, the effectiveness of national resilience efforts greatly varies between countries. National challenges such as gaps in national legislation, lack of unified terminology, organizational stove piping and competition for resources, and lack of authority and infrastructure for information sharing between the different sectors of society impede national efforts to develop and implement effective resilience-building measures. These challenges are further complicated when it comes to regional and international cooperation.

THE NEED FOR RESISTANCE

European nations and NATO's troubles were further exacerbated by Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, which demonstrated that Russia had not given up the idea of conventional military intervention despite its perceived focus on NGW. While already struggling with the challenges of building resilience, European countries were forced to take an honest look at their military capabilities and realize that neither individual countries nor NATO were appropriately positioned to defend against a potential Russian attack.¹⁶ Simulations and wargames in the Baltic countries and Poland demonstrated that existing military capabilities were inadequate to pose any meaningful defense and revealed a pressing need to develop alternative solutions, ultimately leading to resistance-based approaches.¹⁷

Similar to resilience, the development of resistance-based national defense concepts remains at the national level with limited NATO and international support. While some European countries have historical experiences in resistance¹⁸, all of these are coming from World War II examples with limited relevance to the operational environment of the 21st century, leaving these countries with the need to develop new and innovative approaches. To date, there have only been two initiatives supporting national efforts. One was spearheaded by the U.S. Special Operation Command Europe (SOCEUR) and the Swedish Defense University, resulting in an open-access concept paper titled "Resistance Operating

Concept (ROC).¹⁹ Its stated purpose is “to identify resistance principles, requirements, and potential challenges that may inform doctrine, plans, capabilities, and force development.” Another effort has been led by the NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ) which led to the publication of their NATO-version of the ROC, titled “Comprehensive Defense Handbook” and the establishment of a course called Comprehensive Defense and Counter Hybrid Threat – Resilience and Resistance - Course.²⁰ The stated aim of the handbook is to “practically assist in the development of a national program designed to enable all members of society to contribute to comprehensive deterrence and defense.”²¹ The course’s objective is to “offer best practices and practical implementation of methods, strategies, and procedures for ‘Whole-of-Society’ Countering Hybrid Threats and Comprehensive Defense efforts, to include enhancing resilience, deterring threats, defending a nation and if necessary, resisting an invading power.”²²

While these efforts deserve credit for recognizing the importance of resistance in small NATO countries’ defense approaches and providing an initial, strategic-level blueprint for national concept developments, they both leave some room for further improvement. Though efforts to build resistance in small NATO countries are hindered by the challenges related to societal resilience building discussed above, they are also being impeded by the institutional resistance of conventionally minded military cultures. The supremacy of conventional military thought, the Clausewitzian approach to the theory of war, and NATO’s fundamental principles of standardization and interoperability seem to limit the effective utilization of resistance in national defense strategies.²³ Although NSHQ took the initiative to socialize and institutionalize the idea of resistance within NATO, the alliance’s focus on conventional war and lack of political appetite for a national defense approach that is mostly based on post-occupation activities have prevented resistance from becoming the core of the concept of national defense strategies.

ROLE OF THE IWC

Resilience and resistance are the foundations for successful deterrence and, if needed, the defeat of any aggressor in the European context. For these concepts to be successful, both alliance-wide common understanding and domestic and whole-of-society awareness of the fundamental characteristics of these concepts is paramount. The IWC can help develop such understanding and knowledge in a multi-pronged approach: research, developing topic-relevant educational and training materials, and facilitating cooperation and information sharing.

Key to further developing and uncovering the fundamental characteristics and practicalities of effective resilience and resistance is rigorous research. The IWC recognizes the importance of innovative ideas for successfully addressing 21st-century challenges and will incentivize, support, and execute scholarly exploration of such topics to support the development of national and regional resilience and resilience capabilities. The IWC will encourage the exploration of generally neglected topics, such as adversary occupation doctrine, and will incentivize researchers to experiment with new research methodologies. In addition to this, the IWC will develop processes and platforms for effectively disseminating findings to both U.S. and international stakeholders to ensure common and aligned understanding enabling unity of effort across allies and partners.

Furthermore, the IWC has the access, authority, and means necessary to aid in the development of topical education, training, and exercise programs at the national, regional, and NATO levels. The IWC can provide support to curriculum design, scenario development, exercise control, simulation, and wargaming. The IWC will help allies and partners to move from theory-based education to application-based education by providing subject matter experts who can help to translate the theory into action. To deliver such support, the IWC is already developing an expeditionary education solution, called the

National Resistance Application Course (NRAC). The IWC will also advocate for and help facilitate greater integration of resilience and resistance into conventional military education, training, exercises, and campaign planning. Furthermore, through the utilization of its extensive network of practitioners, scholars, and private sector experts the IWC can support the development and publication of resilience and resistance-related standards, manuals, handbooks, and standard operating procedures.

Lastly, though research and education are crucial to building more resilient societies and designing effective resistance plans, whole-of-society collaboration as well as regional and global cooperation are also crucial to successfully meet modern challenges. The IWC will facilitate workshops, seminars, and roundtables with a variety of national, cross-sectoral, regional, and international partners and stakeholders to promote collaboration among the many stakeholders involved in resilience and resistance capacity building. The IWC can provide resources and platforms to strengthen and if needed, transform security and defense cooperations among allied and partner countries.

CONCLUSION

With the changes in the strategic environment and the thought surrounding warfare after the end of the cold war and the post-9/11 era, adapting the conceptualization of effective deterrence is crucial. As more and more European countries with limited homeland defense capabilities become targets of Russian malign activities, the need for societal resilience in these countries increases tenfold. Though there have been concrete steps taken toward increasing resilience capabilities and capacities in these in European countries, national and NATO measures seem to lack specificity, adaptability, and consistency in results between countries. Similarly, attempts have been made to introduce resistance in small NATO countries' defense approaches, but current measures lack unity across the NATO alliance and have been most dominantly formed at the national level.

With the threat of Russian aggression looming in Europe, more fully conceptualizing resilience and resistance as deterrents is crucial. The IWC has an important and obvious role to play in the further development and more effective implementation of these concepts. Efforts on the part of the IWC will not erase the work already done nationally and internationally to codify the concepts of resilience and resistance but will add new platforms and an innovative voice to these efforts.

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