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THESIS

**COUNTERING THE HYBRID THREAT:
THE ROLE OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES
IN NATO'S STRATEGY**

by

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OPERATIONS FORCES IN NATO'S STRATEGY**

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requirements for the degrees of

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ABSTRACT

Russia's aggressive and unconventional actions over the past decade have reinforced NATO's fear of the threat Russia represents to European and global security. Special Operations Forces would seem to have unique applicability when defending against such hybrid tactics, but it has proven difficult for NATO and the academic community to determine the appropriate role of NATO SOF in countering hybrid threats. This is due to a combination of factors: the difficulty of clearly defining the hybrid threat, legal and organizational checks on the use of military internal to national borders, atrophy of useful capabilities due to decreased interoperability and lack of exercise, and a disconnect between developed SOF capabilities and those necessary to be effective in this arena.

This thesis lays out a categorized description of observed Russian hybrid tactics. It then identifies NATO SOF's current capabilities that can be matched as counters to elements of the Russian hybrid threat. This includes inherent capabilities as well as those gained by NATO SOF through participation in the ISAF SOF mission in Afghanistan and combat operations in Iraq. Finally, it recommends the NSHQ-assisted formation of Counter Hybrid Threat Joint Interagency Task Forces within NATO member countries, with NSHQ facilitating NATO-wide connectivity and cooperation, along with additional recommendations for research and focus for organizational planning to counter the Russian hybrid threat.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACO	Allied Command Operations
BICES	Battlefield Information Collection and Exploitation system
CHT	Counter hybrid threat
CSOTF	Combined Special Operations Task Force
DDOS	Distributed Denial of Service
DIME	Diplomatic, Information, Military and Economy
EDL	Estonian Defense League
ESTSOF	Estonian Special Operations Forces
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISR	Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance
JIATF	Joint Interagency Task Force
JSOC	Joint Special Operations Center
LIP	Law Enforcement Professionals
MOD	Ministry of Defense
MOI	Ministry of Interior
NAC	NATO Atlantic Council
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NESO	National Emergency Supply Organization
NSCC	NATO Special Operations Coordination Center
NSHQ	NATO Special Operations Forces Headquarters
NSOCC-A	NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan
NSOS	NATO Special Operations School
NSTI	NATO Special Operations Transformations Initiative
PDP	Partner Development Program
PRC	Provincial Response Companies
PSU	Police Special Units
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander Europe
SOF	Special Operations Forces

SOFFC	Special Operations Forces Fusion Center
SOTU	Special Operations Task Unit
TTP	Tactics, Techniques and Procedures
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
VJTF	Very High Readiness Joint Task Force
WTO	World Trade Organization

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I. INTRODUCTION

Russia's aggressive and unconventional actions over the past decade have reinforced the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) fear of the threat Russia represents to European and global security. Special Operations Forces (SOF) seem to have unique applicability when defending against such hybrid tactics, but it has proven difficult for NATO and the academic community to determine the appropriate role of NATO SOF in countering hybrid threats. This is due to a combination of factors: the difficulty of clearly defining the hybrid threat, legal and organizational checks on the use of military forces internal to national borders, atrophy of useful capabilities due to decreased interoperability and lack of appropriate training exercises, and a disconnect between developed SOF capabilities and those capabilities necessary to be effective in this arena.

Since 1989 NATO has conducted counter-piracy operations, peace and stability operations in Europe, and expeditionary operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.¹ After the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and subsequent reduction in the perceived threat to Europe from Russia, NATO began conducting a varied array of missions. After recognizing the importance of the role of SOF in the execution of these emerging missions and in modern warfare, the leaders of NATO endorsed the Special Operations Transformation Initiative (NSTI) at the Riga Summit in 2006.² Since this time many of the NATO member states, guided and coordinated in their efforts by the NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ), have worked to develop and mature SOF programs. Through their participation in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan, and other NATO expeditionary operations, many of these newer SOF organizations gained valuable experience, developed an impressive array of capabilities, and built interoperability within the greater NATO framework.

¹ "Operations and Missions: Past and Present," NATO, December 21, 2016, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_52060.htm.

² "Riga Summit Declaration," NATO, November 29, 2006, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_37920.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 10 February 2016).

Russia's war with Georgia in 2008, the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, and ongoing operations in Eastern Ukraine reminded NATO of the significant threat Russia represents to the established European order. Making NATO's response more difficult, Russian strategy has evolved in its subtlety since the Cold War era. Over the past decade Russia has used various combinations of manufactured political and societal unrest, information (and disinformation) warfare, criminal activities, economic and financial warfare, cyber warfare, election meddling and other such tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP), practiced and honed in Georgia, Crimea, and Ukraine, to strike at the very fabric of European society.³ This strategy, known variously as the Gerasimov doctrine, hybrid warfare, or political warfare, among other terms, has proven difficult for the NATO Alliance to combat.

A. RESEARCH QUESTION

The threat environment in Europe changed after the Cold War. A period in which the Russian threat appeared low was followed by a gradual increase in Russian military capabilities over the last decade, leading to the threat the Russians pose today. NATO is expected to be capable of countering Russian hybrid threat and Special Operations Forces are expected to be well postured to fight in this conflict environment. However, an analysis is needed to diagnose if this is currently the case. Are NATO SOF capable of countering Russian hybrid threat? What can and should SOF focus on in this conflict environment? To what degree are NATO SOF interoperable, and what should be done to increase interoperability? Answers to these and related questions may give NATO SOF, NSHQ and policy and decision makers a better foundation to make decisions and priorities for Alliance-wide SOF capabilities and organization in the future.

B. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this thesis is to identify which portions of the Russian hybrid threat NATO SOF has the capability, capacity, and positioning to counter. It will analyze to what

³ Reid Standish, "Russia's Neighbors Respond to Putin's 'Hybrid War,'" *Foreign Policy*, October 12, 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/10/12/russias-neighbors-respond-to-putins-hybrid-warlatvia-estonia-lithuania-finland/>.

extent NATO SOF is postured to conduct operations in the hybrid warfare environment, how well they are equipped and organized to interoperate within the NATO SOF community in this arena, what the main shortfalls are, if any, and make recommendations for improvement. The analysis will look at what type of operations SOF can and should conduct to counter the hybrid threat, and how they should best organize across NATO to meet its objectives. Although the thesis will focus primarily on NATO SOF, its analysis and findings will also apply to NATO partner nations. Finally, the thesis will identify useful areas for future research.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. NATO SOF in the Expeditionary Era 2006–2014

At NATO’s 19th summit meeting of NATO Heads of State and Government, held in Riga, Latvia in November of 2006, the North Atlantic Council, NATO’s highest decision making body, endorsed the NATO Special Operations Transformation Initiative “aimed at increasing their ability to train and operate together, including through improving equipment capabilities.”⁴ The timing of the NSTI was likely driven by several factors, including an increased need for interoperable forces to deploy to Afghanistan and pressure from the United States to evolve in a post-Soviet Union world. At a NATO summit just two years prior, Donald Rumsfeld had bluntly stated that without considerable transformation “[NATO] will not have much to offer the world in the 21st century.”⁵

As a result of the 2006 NATO Special Operations Transformation Initiative, NATO formed the NATO Special Operations Coordination Center (NSCC), which was then reconfigured in 2010 as the NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ). Since its formation, NSHQ has overseen various Special Operations educational programs, training opportunities, and combined exercises. But the most significant accomplishment of the new SOF Headquarters over this period was its contribution of SOF forces to the

⁴ NATO, “Riga Summit Declaration.”

⁵ Elaine Sciolino, “Drifting NATO Finds New Purpose With Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, February 23, 2004, A.6. <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/23/world/drifting-nato-finds-new-purpose-with-afghanistan-and-iraq.html>.

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) SOF mission in Afghanistan. Initially limited in scope, the NATO commitment to ISAF SOF grew quickly according to Jim Dorschner and Andrew White in *Jane's Defence Weekly*, “expanding from some 250 SOF personnel in two national task forces to about 2200 NATO allied and partner SOF operating in support of the ISAF campaign plan.”⁶ Additionally, Dorschner and White argue that not only have NATO SOF provided significant value in the Afghan conflict, they reaped significant dividends through their participation as well. They assert that “today’s NATO SOF community grew up and established a professional identity on International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) operations in Afghanistan,” and point out that “Afghanistan provided an unprecedented catalyst for intelligence sharing, multisource fusion, and cross-domain secure communication.”⁷

Ian Kemp, news editor for *Jane's Intelligence Weekly*, has reported on additional benefits gained by NATO SOF in the logistical realm, chronicling how various NATO SOF programs used their Afghan involvement to test various weapons and pieces of equipment being considered for national and/or Alliance use.⁸ Austin Long, Assistant Professor of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University and Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute points to the NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (NSOCC-A), which unified NATO and U.S. SOF under a single commander, as evidence “that NATO SOF have made major progress in integration and can potentially be a major part of alliance capability.”⁹ But he also adds a voice of caution, noting continuing problems as NATO works to develop systems to quickly share sensitive classified intelligence between NATO partners.¹⁰

⁶ Jim Dorschner and Andrew White, “Quiet Professionals: NATO Special Operations Comes of Age,” *Janes Defence Weekly* 52, no. 28 (May 27, 2015), 3, http://www.janes360.com/images/assets/968/51968/NATO_special_operations_comes_of_age.pdf.

⁷ Dorschner and White, “Quiet Professionals: NATO Special Operations Comes of Age,” 3.

⁸ Ian Kemp, “The Transition Force,” *Armada International* 29, no. 6 (December 2005–January 2006).

⁹ Austin Long, “NATO Special Operations: Promise and Problem,” *Orbis* 58, no. 4 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2014.08.006>.

¹⁰ Long, “NATO Special Operations: Promise and Problem,” 546–548.

While NSHQ and NATO SOF have undoubtedly taken advantage of this opportunity to develop interoperability and mature some of the newer national SOF programs through the ISAF mission, it remains to be seen if these conditions can be maintained in the post-Afghanistan era. In response to the attacks of September 11th, 2001, the United States' invocation of Article 5 of the NATO Charter to conduct expeditionary operations in Afghanistan, provided direction for NATO SOF organization in a post-Soviet Union world. NATO SOF must now be refocused and re-evaluated as a resurgent Russia, domestic terrorism, and national and regional threats supersede expeditionary requirements.

2. A New Mode of War

While the United States, NATO and its partners were focused on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, Russia was developing and operationalizing a new mode of warfare. This led to the destabilization of Ukraine and the subsequent annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Unlike prior Russian campaigns in Chechnya and Georgia, which were characterized by rather blunt tactics and excessive conventional force, Russia's unconventional campaign in Ukraine highlighted "a new art of war," taking the international community by surprise.¹¹ In recent years, analysts have sought to define and label this new manner of warfare in an effort to distinguish Russia's tactics in Crimea and Ukraine from previous generations of warfare such as those theorized by Lind.¹² While some defense leaders and scholars have voiced doubts over the "originality" of this supposedly new type of warfare, others maintain that Russia's effective and extensive use of non-military tools, most notably in the information domain, has clearly resulted in a

¹¹ Bettina Renz, "Russian Military Capabilities After 20 Years of Reform," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 56, no. 3 (2014), 61–82.; Sam Jones, "Ukraine: Russia's new art of war," *Financial Times*, August 28, 2014, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/ea5e82fa-2e0c-11e4-b76000144feabdc0.html#axzz3uV96FMNx>.

¹² William S. Lind, Colonel Keith Nightengale, Captain John F. Schmitt, Colonel Joseph W. Sutton, and Lieutenant Colonel Gary I. Wilson, "The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation," *Marine Corps Gazette* 73, no. 10 (1989): 22–26, <https://www.mca-marines.org/gazette/2001/11/changing-face-war-fourth-generation>.

substantially distinct new way of conflict from previous patterns of warfare.¹³ The names put forth in an attempt to label Russia's recent actions have been numerous, including but not limited to: "New Generation Warfare," "Hybrid Warfare/Threats," and "the Gerasimov Doctrine." The latter designation was based on an article published by General Valery Vasilyevich Gerasimov, chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, in which he suggests that "the role of non-military means (political, economic, information, humanitarian) of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and in many cases, they have exceeded the power of weapons in their effectiveness."¹⁴ While these terms have often been used interchangeably in various publications, the term "hybrid threats," perhaps the most widely accepted label by the United States and NATO, will be used from this point on to define the full range of tactics that Russia is using to destabilize and influence the nations of Europe.¹⁵ While this also falls short of a comprehensive definition of the term, it does focus this conversation strictly on observed Russian tactics up to this point, providing boundaries for analysis.

3. Defining Hybrid Threats

Dr. Damien Van Puyvelde, a lecturer in Intelligence and International Security at Glasgow University, states "in practice, any threat can be hybrid as long as it is not limited to a single form and dimension of warfare," however, the term 'hybrid threats' does aptly capture the significant ambiguity inherent to an analysis of the various aspects of statecraft which Russia employed in its annexation of Crimea in 2014.¹⁶ It is this very ambiguity

¹³ Michael Kofman, "Russian Hybrid Warfare and Other Dark Arts," War on the Rocks (March 11, 2016), <http://warontherocks.com/2016/03/russian-hybrid-warfare-and-other-dark-arts/>; Mats Berdal, "The 'New Wars' Thesis Revisited," in *The Changing Character of War*, ed. Hew Strachan and Sibylle Scheipers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 109–110.

¹⁴ Mark Galeotti, "The 'Gerasimov doctrine' and Russian non-linear war," In *Moscow's Shadows* 6, no. 7 (2014), <https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/>.

¹⁵ "Hybrid Warfare: NATO's New Strategic Challenge?" NATO Parliamentary Assembly Defense and Security Committee, April 7, 2015, <https://www.nato-pa.int/sites/default/files/documents/2015%20-%20166%20DSC%2015%20E%20BIS%20-%20HYBRID%20WARFARE%20-%20CALHA%20REPORT.docx>.

¹⁶ Damien Van Puyvelde, "Hybrid War—Does it Even Exist?" *NATO Review* (2015), <http://www.nato.int/docu/Review/2015/Also-in-2015/hybrid-modern-future-warfare-russia-ukraine/EN/index.htm>.

about the nature of hybrid threats, that has made it so difficult for the military, political, and academic communities to decide on a universal term by which to describe them. It is likely accurate to point out, as indeed several scholars and soldiers have, that the lack of a coherent and effective strategy to counter hybrid threats can be traced to this failure of the Western military community to authoritatively define the term ‘hybrid threat.’ A RAND Corporation study published in 2017, almost ten years after Russia’s hybrid threat ‘coming out party’ in Georgia, pointed out that “the term hybrid warfare has no consistent definition and is used by Western analysts and officials in different ways. Some use the term to refer just to irregular tactics, others use hybrid to describe a range of irregular and conventional tactics used in the same battlespace, and others use the term to describe the New Generation Warfare doctrine articulated by the senior leadership in the Russian General Staff.”¹⁷

Scholars such as Frank Hoffman, widely considered the originator of the term, describe a hybrid threat as “Any adversary that simultaneously employs a tailored mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal behavior in the same time and battlespace to obtain their political objectives.”¹⁸ Nadia Schadlow supports the view expressed by Hoffman, writing “Hybrid warfare is a term that sought to capture the blurring and blending of previously separate categories of conflict. It uses a blend of military, economic, diplomatic, criminal, and informational means to achieve desired political goals.”¹⁹ These definitions can be clearly seen in the genealogy of the official NATO definition. According to NATO, “Hybrid threats are those posed by adversaries, with the ability to simultaneously employ conventional and non-conventional means adaptively in pursuit of their objectives.”²⁰ While there is an extensive agreement that hybrid threats are in essence a combination of both conventional and unconventional forms of warfare, this

¹⁷ Andrew Radin, *Hybrid Warfare in the Baltics: Threats and Potential Responses*, RR 1577 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2017): 5, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1577.html.

¹⁸ Frank Hoffman, “On Not-So-New Warfare: Political Warfare vs. Hybrid Threats,” *War on the Rocks* (July 28, 2014), <https://warontherocks.com/2014/07/on-not-so-new-warfare-political-warfare-vs-hybrid-threats/>.

¹⁹ Nadia Schadlow, “The Problem with Hybrid Warfare,” *War on the Rocks* (April 2, 2015), <http://warontherocks.com/2015/04/the-problem-with-hybrid-warfare/>.

²⁰ “NATO Countering the Hybrid Threat,” NATO Allied Command Transformation, September 23, 2011, <https://www.act.nato.int/nato-countering-the-hybrid-threat>.

definition describes a potential state of affairs so broad as to potentially lose its usefulness. Regardless of the definition, it is the unconventional or irregular aspects of Russian hybrid threats which complicate the modern Western construct of warfare, causing disagreement and indecision among policy makers regarding how and with what NATO and the West should attempt to counter hybrid threats.²¹

Russia's employment of Special Operations Forces in ambiguous uniforms, mercenary forces, criminal elements, and a plethora of other asymmetric means, represent a major problem for NATO. With organizational and decision making procedures designed during the Cold War, NATO relies upon consensus to act and activates full collective defense measures only when Article 5 has been invoked by common agreement that a member state has been attacked by a foreign power. Russia's irregular tactics, techniques and procedures when operationalizing hybrid threats make it difficult for NATO to act as a unified body, due to the absence of any obvious and attributable attack by Russian flagged elements. In a 2016 article written in the aftermath of Russia's recent hybrid actions, General Joseph Votel, Lieutenant General Charles Cleveland, Colonel Charles Connett and Lieutenant Colonel Will Irwin highlighted the growing threat of these 'gray zone' conflicts which take place between peace and wartime boundaries.²² Hybrid threat sponsors exploit these gray zones, taking advantage of areas in which no government actor has clear jurisdiction. Limited by design and capability, NATO's approach to countering Russian hybrid threats in this 'gray zone,' while evolving, remains far from a complete deterrent.

4. NATO's Approach to Russian Hybrid Threats

Countering the Russian hybrid threat has proved to be difficult for NATO for a variety of reasons, not least of which because, as General Joseph L. Votel and others argue, "the center of gravity of hybrid warfare is a target population."²³ This presents a much

²¹ Max Boot, *War Made New: Technology, Warfare, and the Course of History, 1500 to Today* (New York: Random House, 2006), 472.

²² Joseph L. Votel, Charles T. Cleveland, Charles T. Connett, and Will Irwin. "Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (2016).

²³ Peter Pindják, "Deterring Hybrid Warfare: A Chance for NATO and the EU to Work Together?" *Romanian Military Thinking* 1 (2015).

different situation from the more Clausewitzian centers of gravity present in the largely conventional conflicts for which NATO was created. The hybrid threat strategy seeks to use a variety of information mediums and themes to influence populations. These often include direct disinformation operations against policy-makers, combined with subversive or unconventional destabilization operations. By seeking to destroy a country's legitimacy and democratic structure from within, through non-attributable means, Russia attempts to achieve its political objectives without providing NATO with a clear justification to invoke Article 5 of its charter. Combatting this strategy may require NATO as a whole to make some sort of institutional change in order to meet the challenges of Russian hybrid threats, however such analysis and recommendations are largely beyond the scope of this study.

NATO's inability to counter Russia is highlighted by scholars such as Leo Blanken who maintains NATO is not currently able to counter hybrid threats due to its "habit" of being a conventional military alliance rather than a flexible military tool.²⁴ Others have argued the need for a European Union-NATO relationship in order to build "complementary and mutual supporting strategies."²⁵ A closer relationship between the EU and NATO, with the majority of participating countries being a member of both organizations, could help provide a "unity of government" approach to Russian hybrid threats. It has been noted that the lack of an official framework between the two organizations is "a threat to European security, particularly in the face of hybrid threats."²⁶ In the absence of an EU-NATO comprehensive approach to hybrid warfare, many nations have taken it upon themselves to defend their nations unilaterally or multilaterally, outside of the NATO framework. In fact, this has been actively encouraged as at the Warsaw Summit in 2016, when NATO declared that "the primary responsibility for building a more

²⁴ Leo Blanken, "Is It All Just a Bad Habit? Explaining NATO's Difficulty in Deterring Russian Aggression," *CTX* 6, no. 4 (2016): 54.

²⁵ "Countering Hybrid Threats," European External Action Service (Crisis Management and Planning Directorate), 2015, <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2015/may/eeas-csdp-hybrid-threats-8887-15.pdf>.

²⁶ Witold Waszczykowski, "The Today and Tomorrow of European Integration: Warsaw's Perspective," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Poland, April 4, 2016, https://www.msz.gov.pl/en/news/minister_witold_waszczykowski_for_faz_the_today_and_tomorrow_of_european_integration_warsaw_s_perspective_.

resilient Alliance rests with national authorities.”²⁷ Partially in response to this, many of the Baltic and Nordic countries have emphasized the need for “Societal Resilience.”²⁸

In an effort to counter Russian tactics observed in Ukraine and Donbas, countries such as Estonia have placed a heavy importance on “psychological defense to enhance national will power as protection against subversive, “anti-Estonian” influence.”²⁹ As many of the countries in vulnerable positions similar to Estonia’s wait for a NATO-EU strategy to be implemented, they will begin to look inward for the best national and international strategy to counter current and future hybrid threats. Since Russia’s irregular TTPs occur under the threshold necessary for an Article 5 declaration, and SOF are one of the few forces designed and equipped to operate in ambiguous environments short of overt conflict, it seems essential that Special Operations Forces “in combination with diplomatic tools and conventional resources” be a central piece of the overall NATO strategy to counter Russian hybrid threats.³⁰

Following the relatively recent emergence of Russia’s hybrid threat strategy in Western consciousness in the last decade, numerous scholars and military professionals have identified Special Operations Forces as an ideal tool to counter Russian tactics. Votel et al. discuss SOF’s unique applicability to operate in this ‘gray zone,’ citing the “synergistic effect” achievable through application of SOF’s “FID and UW core tasks.”³¹ Elizabeth Oren, a specialist in cultural analysis and frequent contributor to SOF research, has opined that “Part of the [NATO] strategy includes ushering the kinetic and non-kinetic

²⁷ Lorenz Meyer-Minnemann, “Resilience and Alliance Security: The Warsaw Commitment to Enhance Resilience,” in *Forward Resilience: Protecting Society in an Interconnected World*, ed. Daniel S. Hamilton (Washington, D.C.: Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, 2017), 112.

²⁸ Tomas Jermalavičius, and Merle Parmak, “Societal Resilience: A Basis for Whole-of-Society Approach to National Security,” in *Resistance Views: Tartu Resistance Seminar Essays on Unconventional Warfare and Small State Resistance, 2014*, ed. Kevin D. Stringer and Glennis F. Napier (MacDill Air Force Base, Florida: JSOU Press, 2018), 23.

²⁹ Jermalavičius, and Parmak, “Societal Resilience: A Basis for Whole-of-Society Approach to National Security,” 24.

³⁰ Frank Brundtland Steder, “Introduction: The Theory, History, and Current State of Hybrid Warfare,” *CTX* Vol. 6, No. 4 (2016).

³¹ Votel et al. “Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone.”

capabilities of NATO SOF to the forefront.”³² Heather Moxon, a consultant in special operations, wrote that “SOF provide NATO an inherently agile instrument ideally suited to this ambiguous and dynamic operational environment.”³³ Referring to SOF, General (retired) James L. Jones, former Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) identified in 2007 that “today’s convergence of multiple unconventional threats across the strategic continuum requires a new focus on transforming the unconventional aspects of Alliance military capability.”³⁴ And, most recently, at a conference on NATO SOF Operations and Law, RADM John Hannink, Deputy Judge Advocate General to the United States Navy, declared that in the realm of the hybrid threat, “NATO SOF is the thing that will play a role.”³⁵ Yet with all that has been written recommending SOF as an ideal instrument in the hybrid struggle, little research has addressed the specific nature of NATO SOF’s role in countering the Russian hybrid threat.

5. Proposed Roles for NATO SOF in Countering Hybrid Threats

When analyzing roles for NATO SOF in the hybrid realm, strategic thinker and professor Colin Gray provides a good starting point with his questions on the general value of Special Operations Forces:

- What are the tasks that only SOF can do?
- What are the tasks that SOF can do well?
- What are the tasks that SOF tend to do poorly?
- What are the tasks that SOF cannot do at all?³⁶

³² Elizabeth Oren, “A Dilemma of Principles: The Challenges of Hybrid Warfare from a NATO Perspective,” *Special Operations Journal* 2, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23296151.2016.1174522>.

³³ Heather Moxon, “NATO Special Operations Contribution to a Comprehensive Approach,” *Resistance Views: Tartu Resistance Seminar Essays on Unconventional Warfare and Small State Resistance*, ed. Kevin D. Stringer and Glennis F. Napier (Macdill Air Force Base, Florida: JSOU Press, 2018), 73.

³⁴ General (Ret.) James L. Jones, “A Blueprint for Change: Transforming NATO Special Operations,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 2, no. 45 (April 2007), 37.

³⁵ RADM John Hannink, “Opening Remarks” (NATO SOF Operations and Law Symposium, Oslo, Norway, June 12, 2018).

³⁶ Colin S. Gray, *Explorations in Strategy* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998), 153.

These questions can serve as a helpful tool to determine the right use of resources, and how to identify and prioritize the future role of NATO SOF. SOF forces are designed to perform tasks and in areas outside conventional forces' areas of responsibility or where their capability falls short. When taking into consideration the enemy's preferred areas of operation in a hybrid conflict we start seeing an outline of the arenas in which a counter hybrid threat force must be capable of operating. As noted, while it is generally understood that SOF is the force most likely to be able to operate throughout the spectrum of hybrid conflict, this analysis must be scoped down to more specific focus areas in order to be useful. One notable area of potential SOF employment is in the seams between governmental sectors. Here national law will often fall between the responsibilities of different government agencies and ministries, thus presenting opportunities for targeting by a hybrid focused adversary. In most nations the responsibility to cover these seams starts and ends with national law enforcement, but as earlier discussed, the nature of the hybrid threat and the fact that the attack comes from a foreign actor, suggest the need for an inter-agency approach where military forces have a role. To achieve this will require strong relationships and a high degree of trust between the military Special Operations Forces and national governmental and law enforcement agencies.

This research indicates that NSHQ and NATO SOF organizations can be effective in the fight against hybrid threats. This thesis will conduct the analysis necessary to determine their most effective application, allowing for efficient allocation of training, materiel, and resources as NATO adapts to face the hybrid foe.

D. METHODOLOGY

This thesis will use a qualitative approach to examine the current capabilities and posture of NATO SOF units following the 2014 completion of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan as they apply to countering the Russian hybrid threat to NATO. It seeks to qualitatively answer whether NATO SOF units are correctly postured with the applicable authorities, skills, equipment, training, and capabilities to counter Russian hybrid tactics within their countries. By necessity in order to do this the thesis will answer a series of subordinate questions, including: What is the nature of the Russian hybrid threat? What

SOF capabilities in general are applicable to portions of this threat? What capabilities have been developed by NATO SOF units over the course of their growth and participation in the NATO ISAF mission which could be applied to the hybrid threat?

The thesis will initially define the nature of the hybrid threat by examining Russian actions in Georgia in 2008, and in the Crimea and Eastern Ukraine in 2014. These incidents are selected as they are the most current examples of large-scale hybrid actions by Russia and the most indicative of their current doctrine and capability in this arena. Each of these case studies will include a brief history of the conflict, a description of the known forces employed by Russia, and a description of the known tactics employed by these forces in the period of competition leading up to the armed conflict. The thesis then categorizes the specific tactics, techniques, and procedures used in the Russian conduct of these hybrid actions.

The thesis then defines the capabilities and skills of the current NATO SOF headquarters organization, and examines the varied capabilities of its constituent SOF units. This thesis addresses the capabilities and skills contained within the current NATO SOF structure, including technical expertise, knowledge of specific counter-insurgency and law enforcement methodology, a dedicated NATO Special Operations School (NSOS), effective intelligence sharing practices, and access to the NATO repository of lessons learned regarding hybrid threats. Additionally, the thesis examines the NATO ISAF mission to illuminate the skills and interoperability developed by NATO SOF units through combined operations in Afghanistan, national level training and exercises, dedicated NATO exercises, NSHQ training and education programs, and Partner Development Program (PDP) events with U.S. SOF counterparts in preparation for deployment to Afghanistan. Coincidental to this list, the thesis also addresses the legal challenges and adaptation require to allow for SOF to be employed within a nation's borders against Russian hybrid threats.

Thus, armed with categorized characteristics of the Russian hybrid threat and a list of SOF capabilities and the authorities which could allow them to be brought to bear on the threat, the thesis juxtaposes these two lists, examining the points at which they intersect.

It thus identifies aspects of the Russian hybrid threat against which NATO SOF could be effectively employed.

The thesis then presents a series of recommendations, both for individual national SOF programs within NATO countries and for NSHQ in its role as the organizer, educator, and synchronizer of the NATO SOF capabilities as a whole. These recommendations will include ideas on preventing the atrophy of important skills developed in Afghanistan, ideas for sharing discrete capability and knowledge across NATO SOF programs, and concepts for creating organizations that can effectively counter hybrid threats.

II. THE RUSSIAN HYBRID THREAT

“Simplicity is complexity resolved.”

Constatine Brâncusi (1928)

Determining the role of NATO SOF in countering Russian hybrid threats has been rendered difficult in part due to Russia’s use of TTP’s that lie outside of NATO SOF’s normal mission sets. Although SOF organizations are generally somewhat unique among Ministry of Defense organizations in that they can more easily be altered or expanded to meet new mission requirements, there is no consensus among NATO members on the new mission SOF should assume as part of an organizational response to Russian hybrid threats. The geopolitical uniqueness of each NATO member also contributes to this inability to agree on a comprehensive plan for the use of NATO SOF. Capitalizing on these natural differences, Russia employs TTP’s that are not uniform across NATO members, tailoring its approach to the specific weaknesses of the targeted nation. This results in differences of opinion among different Alliance members when defining the exact nature of the Russian hybrid threat.

Due to these factors, NATO members are often divided on what and who they consider to be the principal threat to NATO cohesion and their individual national security. One example of this can be seen in the divide between the Baltic states and many southern NATO members. While the Baltic Republics continually prepare themselves for the possibility of a swift Russian invasion, NATO members such as Spain or Portugal, lacking the same geographical and historical proximity to Russian aggression, tend to hold a view of Russian hybrid threats that includes opportunistic influence campaigns via cyber operations, political meddling, and economic leverage.³⁷ They largely discount physical

³⁷ David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO’s Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics*, RR 1253 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2016), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html.

Robin Emmott, “Spain Sees Russian Interference in Catalonia Separatist Vote.” Reuters, last modified November 13, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-spain-politics-catalonia-russia/spain-sees-russian-interference-in-catalonia-separatist-vote-idUSKBN1DD20Y>.

invasion as a realistic threat to NATO, and tailor their counter hybrid threat (CHT) efforts accordingly. This divide is also evident in the ongoing dichotomy in perceived threat by Eastern and Southern NATO members since the Warsaw Summit in 2016.³⁸ While many southern members such as Greece, Italy and France were calling upon the Alliance to develop a strategy in response to the growing terrorist threat and mass migration flow from the ongoing war in Syria, Eastern members such as Poland and the Baltic Republics emphasized that the principle threat to NATO continued to be a revanchist Russia.³⁹ While the threats to NATO's southern flank are no doubt genuine and significant, any NATO response to Russian hybrid threats, including the use of SOF as a component of that response, requires a unified and "clear perception of Russia" and its intentions among NATO members.⁴⁰ Only after establishing this unified perception of the Russian threat can NSHQ and NATO at large begin the process of implementing a coherent policy aimed at deterring Russian hybrid threats.

A. BUILDING A CLEAR PERCEPTION OF RUSSIA

As there already exist many definitions for the term 'hybrid threats', this chapter will not add to the complexity of the problem by creating a new definition or altering an existing definition. Instead, this chapter will ask fundamental questions concerning hybrid threats in order to develop a clearer perception of Russian policy in the 21st century. The questions analyzed in this chapter are:

- What are the objectives of Russian hybrid threats?
- Why does Russia resort to using a hybrid threat Strategy?
- How does Russia employ hybrid threats?

³⁸ Patrick Keller, "Divided by Geography? NATO's Internal Debate about the Eastern and Southern Flanks," in *NATO and Collective Defence in the 21st Century: An Assessment of the Warsaw Summit*, ed. Karsten Friis (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 11.

³⁹ Keller, "Divided by Geography? NATO's Internal Debate about the Eastern and Southern Flanks," 11.

⁴⁰ Kęstutis Paulauskas, "The Alliance's Evolving Posture: Towards a Theory of Everything," *NATO Review*, June 6, 2018, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2018/Also-in-2018/the-alliances-evolving-posture-towards-a-theory-of-everything-nato/EN/index.htm>.

The analysis of these questions, especially the third, will be used in a subsequent chapter to examine potential roles for NATO SOF in countering Russian hybrid threats. The purpose of this approach for Chapter Two is not to pay homage to Lykke's method of ends, means and ways, but to simplify the complex and in some cases divisive conversation surrounding Russian hybrid threats.⁴¹ Though simplification can be risky as it necessarily excludes certain aspects of a complex problem, it is an essential step to illuminate a way forward in defining the role for NATO SOF in a comprehensive NATO strategy to counter hybrid threats. Creating a common understanding and agreement among NATO members on Russian foreign policy objectives and the nature of the Hybrid Threat, will allow NATO to achieve the consensus necessary to craft a useful response. Though this solution may by necessity be regionally oriented, as opposed to a NATO wide, standardized use of SOF, the analysis outlined below will move the conversation towards a solution rather than adding to the near continuous admiration of a complex problem.

B. WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES PURSUED BY RUSSIAN HYBRID THREATS?

To understand the purpose of Russia's hybrid threat strategy, it is necessary to understand the current objectives of Russian foreign policy writ large. Under President Vladimir Putin, the foundational principles of Russian foreign policy have been altered little from previous regimes. Thus, current Russian foreign policy continues to support Russia's historical imperative of maintaining a strong state.⁴² This is manifested through Russia's pursuit of the three recurring goals in Russian grand strategy: political and state survivability, maintaining a buffer zone/sphere of influence, and upholding Russia's position as a world power within a multipolar world order. While these objectives have fluctuated somewhat during times when the Russian state was geopolitically weak (i.e.,

⁴¹ Arthur F. Jr. Lykke, "Defining Military Strategy." *Military Review* 77, no. 1 (January/February 1997): 183, <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/utills/getdownloaditem/collection/p124201coll1/id/425/filename/426.pdf/mapsto/pdf/type/singleitem>.

⁴² Andrei P. Tsygankov, *The Strong State in Russia: Development and Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

during the Yeltsin Period), they have remained largely constant through modern Russian history and do not represent significant deviation from pre-Putin Russian foreign policy.

Since the early 1990s, however, President Putin has perceived growing threats on Russia's borders and aboard, which impede Russia's ability to maintain a strong state. From Moscow's point of view, these threats from the West have presented themselves in past years through events such as the "color revolutions," which Russia sees as a U.S. and NATO sponsored attack on its historic sphere of influence, along with NATO/EU enlargement, and the expansion and increased codification of a U.S. led international order. By recognizing Putin's continuation of historical Russian foreign policy combined with recent events that Russia has viewed as threatening to core foreign policy interests, the reasons behind Russia's initiation of a hybrid threat strategy begin to become clear.

1. Political and State Survivability

Since Ivan the Terrible, the first "Tsar of all the Russias," in the 16th Century, Russia's centralized government has succeeded in guaranteeing the state's survival against external threats by keeping both the society and its resources under tight control. This firm control enabled Russian leaders to quickly mobilize both its military and its economy in the face of external and internal threats. Russia's autocratic nature also greatly benefits its rulers by enabling political survivability. By using mechanisms of control over society, rulers have been able to eliminate any internal political opposition in order to maintain domestic stability. This maintenance of a strong, centralized state is of great importance to Putin, a fact which can be seen in his rhetoric, such as when he stated "for Russians, a strong state is not an anomaly that should be gotten rid of. Quite the contrary, they see it as a source and guarantor of order and the initiator and main driving force of any change."⁴³ In the early years of the 21st century, however, Moscow began to perceive a hostile trend taking place across Russia's periphery, threatening to end Russia's long history as an autocratic regime.

⁴³ Vladimir Putin, "Rossiya Na Rubehe Tsyacheletiy," *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 1999.

In the first decade of the 21st century, a series of pro-West and pro-democracy movements took place on Russia's periphery. Called "color revolutions" by Russian military officers, these mass and sometimes violent protests called for democratic regime change in many countries previously under Russian control. After observing the Ukrainian "Orange Revolution" in 2004 and similar events taking place in Kyrgyzstan and Georgia in 2005 and 2012 respectively, the Kremlin began to tie these "color revolutions" to "attempts by the United States and the European Union to impose homemade recipes for internal changes on other nations, without taking into account their own traditions and national characteristics."⁴⁴ Simply put, Moscow claimed that "color revolutions" were a tool used by the West to destabilize international security and the balance of power by attempting to export democracy to nation-states historically inside Russia's sphere of influence.⁴⁵ Russia feared these revolutions would not only diminish its control and influence within the affected states, but also push them further into the arms of the West by opening them to the possibility of NATO or EU membership. Russian leaders feared that these actions could provide a model for similar movements within Russia. This raised the specter of a challenge to the power of the autocratic order. Simultaneously, they threatened Russia's historical objective of maintaining buffer zones on their borders.

2. Buffer Zones and Spheres of Influence

Along with the concept of a highly centralized state, buffer zones and spheres of influence also have deep roots in Russian history and national identity. Unlike most countries, Russia's borders are not defined by clear natural features such as mountains or forests.⁴⁶ Lacking such natural protections, Russian leaders have constantly sought to extend borders in order to rectify their relative indefensibility. Ivan IV and Peter the Great did so by practicing the "attack as a defense" method in order to regain lands previously

⁴⁴ "Color Revolutions' Cause Apparent Damage to International Stability- Lavrov," Sputnik News, May 23, 2014, <https://sputniknews.com/world/20140523190067813-Color-Revolutions-Cause-Apparent-Damage-to-International/>.

⁴⁵ "Putin Vows to Prevent 'Color Revolutions' for Russia and its Eurasian allies," RT News, April 12, 2017, <https://www.rt.com/politics/384451-putin-vows-to-prevent-color/>.

⁴⁶ Tim Marshall, "Russia and the Curse of Geography," *Atlantic*, October 31, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/russia-geography-ukraine-syria/413248/>.

lost during the Mongol invasion.⁴⁷ By the 18th Century, Russian territory had expanded across Ukraine in the West and to the Carpathians in the South, to the Arctic in the North and to the Pacific in the East. During the 20th Century, Stalin extended Russia's sphere of influence even further, by coercing peripheral states into forming a de facto buffer zone through their forcible inclusion in the Soviet Union. From the Kremlin's perspective, being surrounded by politically-controlled Soviet Republics protected Russia against any future Napoleons or Hitlers with intentions to possess Russian territory. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union the geopolitical and security positioning of Russia began to change as NATO and EU encroachment began to diminish Russia's buffer zones and shrink its sphere of influence over Central and Eastern Europe.

Since 1990, NATO has added thirteen countries with ten of these being previous members of the Warsaw Pact. While the memberships of countries like Montenegro or Slovenia are of relatively little consequence to President Putin, the accession to NATO of countries like the Baltic Republics, to the Russian mind at least, put the enemy at Russia's front door. President Putin's estimation of the threat posed by NATO's proximity can be seen in his initiation of the ongoing conflicts in Georgia and the Ukraine, countries which had been aspiring to join NATO before Russia's military interventions.⁴⁸ Additionally, while Putin perceives NATO as the main threat to Russia's traditional security buffer zones, the enlargement of the European Union threatens Russia's sphere of influence by subsuming the markets and occupying the financial interests of Russia's previous economic partners. One example of this is the Third Energy Package, an EU mandated policy which threatens Russia's oil and gas revenues by investing in infrastructure in order to increase and diversify the energy market of EU members.⁴⁹ From Putin's point of view, policies which are often seen by NATO and the EU as simple steps towards economic or energy

⁴⁷ Marshall, "Russia and the Curse of Geography."

⁴⁸ Andrew Osborn, "Putin Warns NATO against Closer Ties with Ukraine and Georgia," Reuters, last modified July 19, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-nato-putin/putin-warns-nato-against-closer-ties-with-ukraine-and-georgia-idUSKBN1K92KA>.

⁴⁹ "Russia Sues EU over 'Third Energy Package' -Report," RT News, April 30, 2014, <https://www.rt.com/business/156028-russia-sues-eu-energy/>.

independence in former Soviet areas of interest, threaten Russia's buffer zones and sphere of influence while strengthening Western power in an increasingly unbalanced world order.

3. Russia's Position as a World Power

At the end of World War II, the Soviet Union had one of the largest military forces in the world, despite having lost around 31 million soldiers and civilians.⁵⁰ The massive military, vast resources and industrial infrastructure mobilized during the war transformed the Soviet Union into a world power. Its status as one of the victors of World War II also guaranteed its position along the other world powers as a permanent member of the newly formed United Nations Security Council (UNSC). During the decades following World War II, Russia heavily influenced international affairs as a power player competing with the United States and its allies. After the fall of the Soviet Union, however, the global dynamic changed. During the early years of the post-Cold War period, President Yeltsin sought to open cooperation with the West in an attempt to integrate Russia into Western institutions such as NATO, the EU and the World Trade Organization (WTO). It was Yeltsin's desire that during this period, a "new world order would emerge through the integration of the East and the West on a completely equal basis."⁵¹

Yeltsin's attempts to transfer the Soviet Union's global power status to the newly formed Russian Federation ultimately failed due to various complications Russia faced in reforming its political and financial sectors. President Putin, however, attributes the source of Russia's weakened positioning in the new world order to the United States' failure to take appropriate action when Yeltsin called upon the West for open cooperation and assistance in the early 1990s.⁵² Moreover, the U.S.-led military interventions in Kosovo and the Middle East, conducted without UN approval, signaled to Russia that an

⁵⁰ John Ellis, *World War II: A Statistical Survey: The Essential Facts and Figures for All the Combatants* (New York: Facts on File, 1993).

⁵¹ Roland Dannreuther, *Russian Perception of the Atlantic Alliance* (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University, 1997), <https://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/95-97/dannreut.pdf>.

⁵² Leonid Bershidsky, "Commentary: Putin Spins a Tale of Russian Humiliation," *Chicago Tribune*, October 22, 2017, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/commentary/ct-perspec-putin-russia-humiliation-bershidsky-1023-20171020-story.html>.

increasingly Western-polar world was muting Russia's voice in international affairs and no longer respecting Russia's security interests and status as a world power. Although Putin made ostensible attempts to cooperate with the West at the beginning of this millennium, growing skepticism of U.S. policies and statements in support of color revolutions combined with U.S. initiated regime change in Iraq and Afghanistan exacerbated the worsening of relations between Russia and the West.⁵³ This has brought us to the current Russian perception of the world order as a largely unipolar system, dominated by the United States. From his recent actions, it appears to be Putin's desire to rebalance this world order towards a multi-polar system, which would recognize Russia's interests in international affairs and legitimize its historical status as a world power.

4. Summary of Foreign Policy

President Putin appears to be applying a strategy in the former Soviet states which serves several purposes. First, it allows him retain control and influence over Russian society, ensuring the long-term survival of his own regime. Additionally, this strategy pursues objectives including the preservation of historic security buffer zones and spheres of influence. These areas are instrumental to Putin geographically and politically in keeping foreign political pressures at a comfortable distance in order to avoid further 'color revolutions' and NATO or EU encroachment. Finally, this strategy seeks to undermine the current perceived unipolar world order led by the U.S. and its allies with the objective of creating a new multipolar system in which Russia has a seat at the table. The next section will analyze why Russia has resorted to using hybrid threats as its preferred strategy in order to achieve the aforementioned objectives.

C. WHY DOES RUSSIA EMPLOY A HYBRID THREAT STRATEGY?

Russia employs a hybrid threat strategy in large part due to internal perceptions of its own strengths and weaknesses. The decade following the fall of Soviet Union left Russia in a weakened state both financially and militarily. The economic reforms under President

⁵³ Andrew Radin et al., "*Russian Views of the International Order*," RR 1826 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2017), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1826.html.

Yeltsin failed to resolve Russia's widening budget deficit as well as its downward spiraling GDP. This in turn led to a deterioration of Russia's military forces and capabilities. This decline in military power was most visible during Russia's intervention in Chechnya in 1994 in which Russian forces struggled to subdue and restore order to the breakaway republic.⁵⁴ Since his rise to power near the turn of the century, President Putin has emphasized the modernization and restructuring of the Russian military as a means to confront Russia's increasing insecurity and to restore Russia to its former greatness. While the Russian military is still generally considered to be inferior to the forces NATO can muster, reforms under President Putin have been quite successful. Evidence of this can be seen in the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 in which Russian forces quickly and efficiently invaded Georgia, in part to prevent its accession to NATO membership.⁵⁵ In this action, Russian forces displayed an improved level of sophistication and utilization of irregular tactics when compared to its actions in Chechnya a decade earlier. A further example of Russia's increasing military capability has been on display recently in Syria as Russia has shown an ability to successfully conduct expeditionary air and ground operations outside its normal operating area. Yet despite these advancements in military power and capability, President Putin acknowledges that he lacks the overwhelming conventional capability required to win a conventional war with NATO. Recognizing this reality, he has increasingly relied on hybrid threats as an asymmetric means to achieve his objectives.

While the modernization of Russia's conventional military was made necessary due to the post-Soviet period of deterioration, Russia's ability to execute 'active measures' was not degraded by the dark times of the 1990s. Developed under Soviet and later Russian security services, these 'active measures' are actions of political warfare, below the level of conventional violence, which seek to influence the course and narrative of world events.⁵⁶ Historically, these actions have included disinformation operations, propaganda,

⁵⁴ MAJ Raymond C. Finch III, *Why the Russian Military Failed in Chechnya* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office, 1998), <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a435005.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Dave Majumdar, "Russia's Military is a Paper Tiger," *National Interest*, October 20, 2015, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/not-so-scary-why-russias-military-paper-tiger-14136>.

⁵⁶ Christopher Andrew, "The Mitrokhin Archive," *RUSI Journal* 145, no. 1 (2000): 52–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071840008446488>.

assassinations, political repression and the support of political and revolutionary groups abroad in order to promote the ideology of communism and the spread of Russian influence.⁵⁷

But the goal of modern “active measures” under President Putin, himself a former KGB officer, is no longer to promote an alternative political model, but instead to weaken Western democracies and institutions who pose an existential threat to Putin’s regime.⁵⁸ Advancements in modern technology and communications have allowed Putin to increase the reach of ‘active measures’ by expanding the range of feasible targets. This capability is especially relevant in Western democratic nations which are inherently vulnerable due to unfettered access to information and a political commitment to personal freedoms. Russia also holds advantages over the West when comparing the processes and levels of political decision-making. Unlike the West, Putin has the power to carry out decisions quickly and opportunistically as a result of Russia’s streamlined and highly centralized decision-making process. This is obviously not the case in western systems of government, in which the passing of policy often requires a lengthy process which involves the overcoming of numerous bureaucratic limitations. This allows Russia to employ these active measures with a level of agility and responsiveness to opportunity which is impossible for its Western adversaries to match.

Thus, it appears that Putin’s modernized version of ‘active measures’ is a combination of Soviet-era tactics upgraded with advancements in technology which can be quickly executed under Russia’s streamlined decision-making process. In essence, these enhancements to Russian ‘active measures’ have evolved into the concept the West identifies as hybrid threats. President Putin employs a hybrid threat strategy because it allows Russia to accomplish its strategic objectives by targeting vulnerabilities of western democracies, while maximizing Russia’s advantages and minimizing its risk and

⁵⁷ Andrew, “The Mitrokhin Archive,” 52–56.

⁵⁸“The Motherland Calls: Russia Propaganda is State-of-the-Art Again,” *Economist*, December 8, 2016, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2016/12/08/russian-propaganda-is-state-of-the-art-again>.

disadvantages.⁵⁹ The next section will further examine the concept of hybrid threats by analyzing the tools Russia employs in its attempts to undermine the West.

D. HOW DOES RUSSIA EMPLOY HYBRID THREATS?

Generally speaking, the tactics and techniques of Russian hybrid threats can be divided into five separate categories. While each category encompasses tactics representing a specific function within the larger Russian hybrid threat strategy, they work in combination to undermine the West by “creating instability within Western governments, opening rifts among European states, weakening trans-Atlantic solidarity and stalling countries’ integration with the West.”⁶⁰ As mentioned in the previous section, many of these subversive instruments are not new, but are modernized versions of Tsarist and Soviet tradecraft.

1. Covert Actions

While the umbrella term ‘covert actions’ can include a vast range of deniable and non-attributable actions, it generally defines activities which are conducted for a specific purpose, with the intent to conceal the identity of the sponsor. For example, the use of Special Operations Forces or ‘little green men’ were vital in the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. These forces, wearing unmarked uniforms and not overtly linkable to Russian leadership, were used to seize strategic locations on the Crimea Peninsula. This fulfilled a critical portion of Russia’s plan, while the deniability slowed and confused the international response.⁶¹ Another example of covert action can be seen in Russia’s use of cyberattacks. Russian cyber capability continues to grow, and has been used in effective Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDOS) attacks against Estonia in 2007 and in the hacking

⁵⁹ “Russia Finds a New Way to Wage an Age-Old War,” Stratfor Worldwide, August 7, 2017, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/russia-finds-new-way-wage-age-old-war>.

⁶⁰ Stratfor Worldwide, “Russia Finds a New Way to Wage an Age-Old War.”

⁶¹ Vitaly Shevchenko, “‘Little Green Men’ or ‘Russian Invaders,’” BBC, last modified March 11, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26532154>.

of Georgian conventional forces a year later.⁶² Recent days have presented an even more obvious example of Russian covert action as the world witnessed the recent assassination attempt on a former Soviet Spy in England. This illustrates Russia's continuing use of its security services to carry out covert acts of violence abroad.⁶³

2. Information Operations

According to Jolanta Darczewska, Deputy Director at the Centre of European Studies in Poland, the weaponized use of information is an integral component of Russian hybrid threats because "it is cheap, it is a universal weapon, it has unlimited range, it is easily accessible and permeates all state borders without restrictions."⁶⁴ Russian Information Operations (IO), perhaps more accurately referred to as disinformation operations, use online media, state-run outlets such as Russia Today (RT) or Sputnik and Twitter troll farms to promote the agendas and policies of the Russian government. Russian disinformation campaigns also seek to distort the truth and shape the narrative of world events in order to cause domestic instability or to incite violence and unrest in Western Democracies. This tactic was on display in the 'Lisa Case' in Germany in which Russian foreign and domestic media campaigns sought to incite anti-immigration sentiments among the German citizens by reporting on a fabricated story of a Russian-German girl who was allegedly abducted and raped by Arab immigrants.⁶⁵ Russian disinformation will continue to be a vital component of Russian hybrid threats as the number of connected users across the world increases. It will also become more difficult for the West to counter as newer,

⁶² Emily Tamkin, "10 Years After the Landmark Attack on Estonia, Is the World Better Prepared for Cyber Threats?" *Foreign Policy*, April 27, 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/04/27/10-years-after-the-landmark-attack-on-estonia-is-the-world-better-prepared-for-cyber-threats/>.

⁶³ Elias Groll, "A Brief History of Attempted Russian Assassinations by Poison," *Foreign Policy*, March 9, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/09/a-brief-history-of-attempted-russian-assassinations-by-poison/>.

⁶⁴ Jolanta Darczewska, "The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare: The Crimean Operation, a Case Study," *Point of View*, no. 42 (May 2014), https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/the_anatomy_of_russian_information_warfare.pdf.

⁶⁵ Stefan Meister, "The 'Lisa Case': Germany as a Target of Russian Disinformation," *NATO Review*, July 27, 2016, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2016/Also-in-2016/lisa-case-germany-target-russian-disinformation/EN/index.htm>.

sophisticated technologies such as digital impersonation or ‘deepfakes’ make their way into the Russian IO toolbox.⁶⁶

3. Proxy Sponsorship

The Kremlin has shown a pattern of reliance on the use of proxy groups, ranging from anti-West biker clubs, soccer hooligans, and cyber-criminal elements, to Russian-funded non-governmental organizations and businesses, in order to advance its foreign policy goals and interests abroad.⁶⁷ Recently, Russia has mimicked existing organizations and used social media to leverage social and environmental movements to create polarization and sow discord among citizens of Western societies.⁶⁸ This can be seen in Russia’s funding to and support of ‘anti-fracking’ activists during violent protests in Romania and Bulgaria in 2012.⁶⁹ It is also evident in Russian curatorship of prominent social media sites supporting the “Black Lives Matter” movement in recent years in the United States. Another curious initiative from Moscow is the ‘Compatriot Policy,’ which seeks to unite the ethnic Russian diaspora in NATO and EU member states into a collective *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) by appealing to common cultural and linguistic identity markers. This policy aims to create a fertile pool of potential proxies for Russian recruitment and use.⁷⁰ The application of the aforementioned proxy policies will continue

⁶⁶ Chris Meserole and Alina Polyakova, “The West is Ill-Prepared for the Wave of “Deep Fakes” that Artificial Intelligence Could Unleash,” *Brookings Institute*, May 25, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/05/25/the-west-is-ill-prepared-for-the-wave-of-deep-fakes-that-artificial-intelligence-could-unleash/>.

⁶⁷ Christopher S. Chivvis, *Understanding Russian “Hybrid Warfare” and What Can be Done About It*, CT 468 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2017), https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/CT400/CT468/RAND_CT468.pdf.

⁶⁸ Dimitar Bechev, *Rival Power: Russia’s Influence in Southeast Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

⁶⁹ Andrew Higgins, “Russian Money Suspected behind Fracking Protests,” *New York Times*, November 30, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/01/world/russian-money-suspected-behind-fracking-protests.html>.

⁷⁰ Kristina Kallas, “Claiming the Diaspora: Russia’s Compatriot Policy and Its Reception by Estonian-Russian Population,” *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 15, no. 3 (November 2016), <https://www.ecmi.de/fileadmin/downloads/publications/JEMIE/2016/Kallas.pdf>.

to be a tool Russia utilizes in order to polarize Western societies on socio-economic issues and accomplish strategic objectives, while avoiding obvious attribution.⁷¹

4. Economic Influence

President Putin uses Russia's rich energy resources not only as a means of revenue but also as a mechanism to gain foreign policy leverage. Indeed, Russia's principal lever of economic influence is the use of its state-owned oil and natural gas industry and subsidiaries such as Gazprom.⁷² With national imports of natural gas from Russia approaching 75% in over 10 EU member states, it is clear why Russia uses these means to advance its interests across Europe.⁷³ According to a recent study by the EU Policy Department of External Relations, Russia uses the following methods to exert political pressure and influence abroad:

- manipulating the pricing policy of energy supplies to third countries;
- controlling energy assets such as pipelines and gas operators in key countries;
- cutting or disrupting gas supplies;
- agreeing to restrictive supply contracts;
- developing alternative supply routes to divert gas flows.⁷⁴

Although the EU has begun to enforce European energy laws to deter Russia's monopoly on energy exports, Russia will likely attempt to bypass EU policies by seeking to establish and leverage bilateral relationships with NATO and EU members. It will

⁷¹ Orysia Lutsevych, *Agents of the Russian World: Proxy Groups in the Contested Neighborhood* (London, UK: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2016), <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-04-14-agents-russian-world-lutsevych.pdf>.

⁷² Chivvis, Understanding Russian "Hybrid Warfare" and What Can Be Done about It.

⁷³ "EU Imports of Energy Products - Recent Developments," Eurostat, April 7, 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/EU_imports_of_energy_products_-_recent_developments#Share_of_energy_products_in_total_EU_imports.

⁷⁴ Rem Korteweg, *Energy as a Tool of Foreign Policy of Authoritarian States, in Particular Russia* (Brussels, BE: European Parliament Policy Department for External Relations, 2018), [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603868/EXPO_STU\(2018\)603868_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603868/EXPO_STU(2018)603868_EN.pdf).

accomplish this by providing them with strategic energy discounts and arranging for future energy infrastructure development.⁷⁵

5. Traditional Diplomacy

Although Russian hybrid threats are predominantly comprised of a variety of deceptive and concealed tactics, traditional diplomacy still plays an important role in Russia's overall strategy. Russia has a long history of supporting and promoting political parties and candidates who are sympathetic to Russian objectives. In recent years, Russia has also publicly supported both far right and far left political parties who seek to diminish their nation's collaboration with the EU and NATO or who act to polarize society along ideological lines.⁷⁶ Russian traditional diplomacy today aims to build a network of political allies in order to "infiltrate politics, influence policy, and inculcate an alternative, pro-Russian view of the international order."⁷⁷

E. CONCLUSION

Building an understandable, common perception of Russia's strategic objectives and the means and ways in which it pursues them is a necessary step towards identifying a role for NATO SOF. Although each NATO member may perceive the severity and nature of the Russian threat differently, maintaining and strengthening cohesion within NATO remains supremely important to the retention NATO's primary function as a collective defense body. The analysis and characterization of the components of Russian hybrid threats presented here will be used in a subsequent chapter to identify the role NATO SOF should optimally play as a component of NATO's overarching strategy to counter hybrid threats.

⁷⁵ Korteweg, Energy as a Tool of Foreign Policy of Authoritarian States, in Particular Russia.

⁷⁶ Alina Polyakova et al., *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses* (Washington, D.C.: The Atlantic Council, 2016), http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/The_Kremlins_Trojan_Horses_web_0228_third_edition.pdf.

⁷⁷ Polyakova et al., *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses*.

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III. THE CAPABILITIES OF NATO SOF

A. INTRODUCTION

The lack of academic research into the exact role of SOF in countering the Russian hybrid threats discussed in chapter 1, leads us to the question: What makes NATO SOF a well-suited instrument for use in the hybrid fight? In answering this question, this thesis will not focus on the general attributes of SOF which have been identified by previous researchers as making them uniquely applicable to this problem set. Instead, this chapter will examine current NATO SOF capability in the same way this thesis has previously defined the hybrid threat, through an examination of historical actions. It will catalogue NSHQ current efforts and capabilities in the hybrid realm, examine the desired effects of these efforts, and discuss how they fit in with NATO's overall strategy. This chapter will then address several individual NATO nations and the actions their SOF units are taking to address the hybrid threat. We will discuss the potential for wider use of these techniques across NATO. We will then examine the specific capabilities acquired by NATO SOF organizations due to their participation in the NATO ISAF SOF mission in Afghanistan. we will address the question of the applicability of these skills to the hybrid arena and the sustainability of these skills post-completion of the ISAF mission at the end of 2014.

B. NATO SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES HEADQUARTERS

As an organization created and run strictly through a memorandum of agreement, signed by participating nations, and owning virtually no organic forces, NATO Special Operations Headquarters is limited in its operational options to combat hybrid threats to the Alliance. As such, most of its efforts are directed into two realms: education and coordination.

1. NATO Special Operations School

One obvious weapon that the NSHQ currently employs in preparing to face the hybrid threat is its schoolhouse, the NATO Special Operations School (NSOS), at which it instructs NATO SOF operators and personnel from law enforcement, domestic intelligence

services, and other governmental stakeholders, in a variety of topics. Problematically however, the curriculum currently contains only one course devoted to education on the hybrid threat, the creatively named “Countering Hybrid Threats Course.” This course is designed for SOF operators with “Operational experience above the tactical level,”⁷⁸ to include government and academic personnel with “similar level of experience to SOF,”⁷⁹ and its stated aim is to “educate attendees on the nature and components of hybrid threats and defeat deterrence options; foster a community of defence professionals prepared to address hybrid-threat challenges and their environment.”⁸⁰ Taught 3–4 times a year, this two-week course provides an forum for interested professionals from all corners of the government and academia to share their experience and develop a common understanding of the threat. NSHQ’s mix of personnel from the SOF programs of different NATO nations ensures that the latest knowledge on manifestations of the hybrid threat and various tactics utilized across Europe to counter those threats can be incorporated into the course plan in near real-time. NSOS’s insistence on incorporating students from all areas of society illustrates NATO SOF’s collaborative mindset, and highlights its ability to provide connective tissue between government and non-governmental organizations in the effort to counter hybrid threats.

2. NATO Special Operations Forces Headquarters Counter Hybrid Threat Seminars

Recognizing that catalyzing regional coordination will require more than a resident course, NATO Special Operations School (NSOS) in Mons, Belgium also facilitates Regional CHT Seminars, each focused on a specific region and the NATO nations therein. The NSOS leverages NATO SOF organizations in each participating country to establish contact with members of other governmental departments to ensure that in addition to examining military power, each seminar also effectively incorporates aspects of the

⁷⁸ NATO Special Operations School, *September 2017 Course Catalogue* (Mons, BE: NATO Special Operations School, 2017), 11, <https://www.nshq.nato.int/nsos/library/?TrainingPortalaction=public:document.downloadFile&contentid=35D0E81A-5056-8B63-EFC70EAFD1683A87>.

⁷⁹ NATO Special Operations School, *September 2017 Course Catalogue*, 11.

⁸⁰ NATO Special Operations School, *September 2017 Course Catalogue*, 11.

Diplomatic, Informational, and Economic elements of national power. Through the seminar scenarios the participants are given the opportunity to wargame possible hybrid threat situations to better understand what could occur, who and what infrastructure enemies might target, how they could attack, possible countermeasures to those attacks, and ideally identify the element of national power best suited to implement those countermeasures. It is valuable for the military attendees to identify what tasks they will likely be called upon to perform in a hybrid threat scenario, thus allowing for more focused training and preparations in the future. It is equally important for the various non-military entities represented at the seminar to identify the vast array of tasks that do not fall within the military's capabilities or knowledge base. In this way, other non-military representatives become more aware of the scope of the hybrid threat. This provides organizations and departments beyond the military with the opportunity to take ownership for portions of their nation's hybrid defense. To date, seminars have been conducted in the Baltics region and the Nordic "High North" region, and plans are in place for a seminar for NATO's South Eastern Flank in the near future.⁸¹ These seminars, each one specifically tailored to the regional manifestation of the hybrid threat, illustrate NSHQ and NATO SOF's ability to address the problem in a manner unique within the Alliance structure.

3. NATO Article 4 Consultations

As codified in Article 4 of the Washington Treaty of 1949, NATO maintains the responsibility and ability to "consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened."⁸² As established in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the hybrid threat from Russia directly threatens the political independence and security of numerous NATO nations, thus enabling recourse to consultation regardless of the presence or absence of an established threat to territorial integrity. NATO has retained a large degree of flexibility in determining the form and

⁸¹ "Counter Hybrid Threat Seminar in Helsinki," European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, September 15, 2017, <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/news/counter-hybrid-threat-seminar-in-helsinki/>.

⁸² "The North Atlantic Treaty," NATO, accessed August 15, 2018, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm.

process of each individual consultation. As NATO states in official publication, “the principal forum for political consultation is the North Atlantic Council.... Consultation also takes place on a regular basis in other fora, including NATO committees and working groups.”⁸³ Unfortunately, these NATO committees tend to exhibit a level of institutional sluggishness due to organizational and political factors, making them imperfect responders to a crisis of the hybrid variety.

As an alternative to these standing committees, NATO has often created working groups on a temporary basis and for a specific purpose. Past examples include the numerous Civil Defence Committees established by NATO during through the Cold War era, which focused on examining weaknesses and opportunities in various aspects of civil society.⁸⁴ These working groups exist to support the committees and provide a more responsive consultation and examination of specific issues. In the case of a hybrid threat, and after the NAC has determined that action should be taken, a working group seems the logical tool to use in investigating and recommending the form that NATO’s response should take. NATO SOF, specifically NSHQ, should be heavily represented in any such working groups, as connective tissue to other public and private sector stakeholders.

4. Ad Hoc Crisis Response Teams

In the 2010 NATO Strategic Concept, NATO pledged to “identify and train civilian specialists from member states, made available for rapid deployment by Allies for selected missions, able to work alongside our military personnel and civilian specialists from partner countries and institutions.”⁸⁵ This capability, to be employed in a crisis response situation, theoretically allows for tailored response teams to be identified, organized, and deployed to crisis areas with relative quickness. However, the mechanism by which this would be carried out is largely unestablished. Additionally, NATO has not developed a

⁸³ “The Consultation Process and Article 4,” NATO, accessed August 20, 2018, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49187.htm.

⁸⁴ “NATO Civilian Series,” NATO, accessed August 20, 2018, https://www.nato.int/archives/committees_is_v3.pdf.

⁸⁵ “Active Engagement, Modern Defence,” NATO, accessed August 20, 2018, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_publications/20120214_strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf.

ready database of national experts in different hybrid defense fields to fit the varied needs of different situations. NSHQ and NATO SOF, with their flexibility, rapid deployability, and joint mindset would be optimal participants on these response teams. However, while NATO has made recent moves toward operationalizing this capability, its efficacy remains to be seen.

5. Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF)

The VJTF was created following the NATO summit of 2014, to “create a ‘Spearhead Force’” as a part of the overall NATO Response Force structure.⁸⁶ While this element contains a SOF contingent,⁸⁷ of which the Spanish Special Operations Command is currently the framework organization,⁸⁸ its mission is generally limited to conventional “deterrence and collective defence.”⁸⁹ There is little to no provision for the employment of this VJTF, or the SOF contingent thereof, in a hybrid scenario short of armed conflict. In fact, regardless of the readiness level of the force, NATO leaders attempting to employ the VJTF in such a scenario would be forced to overcome the issues presented by the need for full consensus from Alliance members combined with the ambiguity surrounding any hybrid action.

C. NATO AND PARTNER SOF ORGANIZATIONS’ HYBRID DEFENSE EFFORTS

Many NATO and partner SOF units are leading or participating in various CHT programs within their own national structures. While some of these are of necessity regionally or organizationally specific, many of the TTPs they are using could and should

⁸⁶ “NATO Response Force,” NATO, accessed August 20, 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49755.htm.

⁸⁷ “Spearhead Force Very High Readiness Joint Task Force,” GlobalSecurity accessed August 20, 2018, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/int/vjtf.htm>.

⁸⁸ “NRDC ITALY Takes over Responsibility as the NRF18 Land Component Command,” NATO, accessed August 20, 2018, <https://jfcbs.nato.int/page5964943/2018/nrdc-italy-takes-over-responsibility-as-the-nrf18-land-component-command>.

⁸⁹ “Wales Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales,” NATO, accessed August 20, 2018, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

be disseminated across NATO for the adaptation and use of all NATO SOF organizations. NSHQ provides the current best forum for the transmission of these ideas across the NATO SOF network. The following are several examples of such programs which could prove of value to the NATO community at large.

1. Finnish National Emergency Supply Organization (NESO)

While not officially part of the NATO umbrella, Finnish SOF routinely conduct partnership engagements with NATO members and share knowledge and TTPs regarding CHT efforts. Finland's close ties to NATO in the CHT arena are demonstrated by the makeup of the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, located in Helsinki. Only two (Finland and Sweden) of the 16 nations partnering in the Centre come from outside of NATO, and both enjoy close ties and a history of cooperation with NATO and its member states.⁹⁰ Finland's efforts at integrating their public and private sectors in planning and preparation to counter the hybrid threat can also prove instructive to NATO and its member states. They provide a possible template for NATO nations working towards greater integration of their military, political, and private sectors in countering hybrid threats.

Coordinated by the NESO, Finnish industries are separated organizationally into "Sectors and Pools"⁹¹ and hold annual conferences. These rotate between sectors of industry, and include Finnish governmental authorities, to include Ministry of Defence (MOD) representatives and SOF representatives. At these conferences, all attending stakeholders make response plans to defeat hybrid threats targeting critical infrastructure and industry. MOD and SOF representatives gain a greater understanding of the defense requirements of industries such as shipping and transportation, energy generation, public health, water, information, and others. These industries gain a clearer understanding of military defense capabilities and their own responsibilities to ensure security of their assets

⁹⁰ "Czech Republic Becomes a Member of Hybrid CoE" European Hybrid Centre of Excellence, accessed August 20, 2018, <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/news/czech-republic-becomes-member-hybrid-coe/>.

⁹¹ "Security of Supply," European Defence Agency, accessed August 20, 2018, <https://sos.eda.europa.eu/project/finland/>.

in the event of a hybrid attack. The cyclically iterative nature of these conferences keeps leaders on the forefront of changes to hybrid tactics and defensive strategies from across the spectrum of industry. It allows for the SOF organizations, who in the Finnish case can access internal policing authorities in the case of a crisis, to provide additional forces to local and national internal security forces, to build rapid response plans to defend critical infrastructure nodes in the case of artificially fomented unrest or other enemy action.⁹² Finland's NESO provides a model which other NATO nations could use in integrating their public and private sector CHT preparations.

2. Estonian Special Operations Forces (ESTSOF) Efforts with the Estonian Defence League (EDL)

Driven by their proximity to Russia and the hybrid threat and the relative imbalance in available forces, Estonia has developed a robust voluntary national guard-like entity known as the Estonian Defence League. ESTSOF work directly with elements of the Estonian Defence League, preparing them to conduct partisan warfare in response to a Russian invasion. At a recent exercise of this capability, Col. Riho Ühtegi, Estonian Special Operations Commander, stated that "ESTSOF together with specific EDL units has a very important role as a main facilitator of unconventional warfare in Estonia."⁹³ Coincidental to their preparations to wage partisan guerilla warfare, the ESTSOF is exploring possibilities to leverage their deep connections with the EDL civilians in a counter hybrid threat context. ESTSOF will surely learn lessons as they work to leverage their close ties to community leaders and other local citizens in the EDL, to identify and attribute Russian hybrid activities. While in 2017, this was still in the relatively nascent stages of development, such TTPs could prove useful to a variety of NATO nations, many of which have similar national guard-type organizations.

⁹² "Security of Supply," Finnish Shipowners' Association, accessed August 20, 2018, <https://shipowners.fi/en/responsibility/security-of-supply/>.

⁹³ "2,000 NATO, Partner SOF Rapidly Deploy to Baltics for Trojan Footprint 18," ShadowSpear Special Operations, accessed August 20, 2018, <https://www.shadowsppear.com/2018/06/2000-nato-partner-sof-rapidly-deploy-to-baltics-for-trojan-footprint-18/>.

D. NATO SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES EXPERIENCE

1. The Role of Afghanistan in the Growth of NATO SOF

Prior to the NATO mission in Afghanistan, most NATO SOF organizations had relatively little experience working together. Many of these organizations were still in their nascent stages and lacked sufficient resources and support from national governments. The aftermath of the conflict in the Balkans provided an opportunity for several NATO SOF elements to gain initial experience working together. In the words of Austin Long, an Assistant Professor at Columbia University, “The hunt for those individuals indicted for war crimes.... laid the foundation for interoperability and a certain shared understanding of how such SOF operations should be conducted.”⁹⁴ Yet the true flowering of NATO SOF did not occur until a series of linked events. First was the expansion of NATO SOF at the 2006 Riga Summit, which called for “the launch of a Special Operations Forces transformation initiative aimed at increasing their ability to train and operate together.”⁹⁵ This initiative led to the creation of the NATO SOF Coordination Center which was subsequently redesignated as the NATO Special Operations Headquarters in 2009, tasked “to provide common standards and shared understanding of the nature and purpose of SOF throughout the NATO SOF community.”⁹⁶ Finally, following the establishment and growth of SOF organizations in a growing number of NATO member states, and concurrent increases in their participation in the Afghan mission, the NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (NSOCC-A) was established in 2012.⁹⁷

Put simply, the NATO SOF Transformation Initiative created the demand signal which catalyzed the formation or expansion of SOF programs across NATO. The newly formed NSHQ focused “on ensuring Allied Joint SOF personnel possess a multinational

⁹⁴ Austin Long, “A New Wary Titan: U.S. Defence Policy in an Era of Military Change, Asian Growth and European Austerity,” in *Security, Strategy and Military Change in the 21st Century: Cross-regional Perspectives*, ed. Jo Inge Bekkevold, Ian Bowers, and Michael Raska (New York: Routledge, 2015), 259.

⁹⁵ “Riga Summit Declaration - Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Riga on 29 November 2006,” NATO, accessed June 11, 2018, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_37920.htm.

⁹⁶ Long, “A New Wary Titan,” 259.

⁹⁷ Long, “A New Wary Titan,” 259.

foundation to allow them to operate as effectively, efficiently and coherently as possible in support of the Alliance's objectives from the strategic to the tactical level."⁹⁸ NSHQ coordinated standardized capability development across NATO SOF, preparing these SOF organizations to interoperate in the expeditionary NATO ISAF SOF mission. Finally, participation in the NATO ISAF SOF mission provided an unparalleled opportunity for newly created NATO SOF organizations to develop capabilities, learn from other Alliance members, share their own unique skills and perspective across the Alliance, and employ these skills operationally.

But the formal completion of the ISAF mission to Afghanistan in 2014 has created a situation which contains significant potential pitfalls for the NATO SOF community. Dr. John R. Deni, a research professor of Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Multinational Security Studies at the Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute, described these dangers. He writes that "The end of NATO's involvement in this war... will mean that NATO, and specifically the ground forces of alliance member states, will face greater difficulty in maintaining this unprecedented level of operational and tactical interoperability.... risk gradually losing their ability to work as closely together as they have in ISAF."⁹⁹ He points out that the end of the ISAF mission, combined with a reduction in U.S. forces in Europe, "have led to a reduced American ability to partner, exercise, and train with allied forces."¹⁰⁰ Consequentially, he claims that this "will make coalition operations with NATO allies both harder and riskier by increasing friction at the operational and tactical levels, leading to inequitable burden- and risk-sharing, higher casualty rates, and increased delays in achieving mission objectives."¹⁰¹ While Deni was referring to coalition ground forces in general, and American involvement specifically, the same dangers apply perhaps even more acutely, to the NATO SOF community. Those

⁹⁸ "Special Operations Forces," NATO, Feb 24, 2015, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_105950.htm.

⁹⁹ John R. Deni, "End of ISAF, End of NATO?" *War on the Rocks* (May 29, 2014), <https://warontherocks.com/2014/05/end-of-isaf-end-of-nato/>.

¹⁰⁰ Deni, "End of ISAF, End of NATO?"

¹⁰¹ Deni, "End of ISAF, End of NATO?"

things which are generally thought of as strengths of SOF in general, namely speed of innovation in tactics, equipment, and capability combined with responsiveness to national security needs, could now have a detrimental effect on their interoperability with other alliance SOF organizations. This effect will be seen as national SOF programs shift their focus from joint alliance operations in Afghanistan, and the requisite interoperability required therefor, to national and regional security issues and capability requirements which may or may not be shared across the Alliance.

Some of the specific capabilities developed during the International Security Assistance Force SOF period in Afghanistan have obvious crossover application to the current counter-hybrid threats mission. But these essential skills risk degradation as a result of the current lack of opportunity for comparable joint operational cooperation. These include, among others, intelligence collection and sharing, communication infrastructure and procedures, international interagency cooperation, and conduct of evidentiary operations with law enforcement and judicial agencies. Each of these capabilities is not naturally exercised between alliance members, and runs the risk of atrophy as the national SOF organizations within the Alliance return home from Afghanistan and resume their national “battle rhythms” or focus on threats specific to their own nations.

2. Intelligence Collection and Sharing

Throughout the ISAF SOF mission to Afghanistan, various nations’ SOF elements came together, forming Combined Special Operations Task Forces (CSOTF). At perhaps its peak in 2012, ISAF SOF included SOF operators (those actively participating in the combat mission) from 17 nations, with staff representation in the ISAF SOF headquarters from 5 additional nations.¹⁰² These included NATO and non-NATO partner nations such as Finland, Australia, and Austria. These operators were faced with the challenge of quickly and effectively sharing intelligence with each other to facilitate force protection and targeted operations. Here they ran into a problem which is likely to extend its reach

¹⁰² Mark Smethurst, “ISAF SOF,” (presentation, National Defense Industrial Association Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict Symposium, Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, Washington, D.C., January 29, 2013), <https://ndia.dtic.mil/2013/SOLIC/2013SOLIC.html>.

into the current counter-hybrid threat environment. Those nations which are included in the so-called “Five Eyes” intelligence sharing agreement were able to very quickly pass information via purpose designed networks, with relatively few bureaucratic hurdles. But those nations who fell outside of this privileged arrangement were disadvantaged in their ability to receive and pass real time information to their allies. An innovative fix was needed to allow for mission accomplishment.

Austin Long describes the ISAF SOF solution as “the creation of the Special Operations Forces Fusion Center (SOFFC). The SOFFC was established to fuse intelligence from a variety of sources and, where possible, produce a sanitized version that could be released to allied partners not part of the Five Eyes.”¹⁰³ While this represented an imperfect solution, with the speed of sharing limited by the necessity to obtain a decision by a Five Eye Foreign Disclosure Officer prior to dissemination, it served to adequately bridge the gap between the various NATO and non-NATO countries represented and integrated in these Task Forces.

This type of solution must be found in a European context if NATO is to contribute to each individual nation’s struggle against the hybrid threat. There is little provision within the ‘domestic’ (as opposed to expeditionary) NATO framework for real-time intelligence sharing. Yet considering the global reach of hybrid capabilities, and the varied nature of their employment against Alliance members, the ability to quickly share intelligence on the hybrid threat within the Alliance is critical to crafting a unified response. In testimony on the hybrid threat given before the United States House of Representatives Armed Services Committee, Christopher Chivvis, a researcher at the RAND Corporation, declared that “The United States must also continue to develop close intelligence sharing relationships with key allies—both to obtain information about Russian activities and to share it when it serves U.S. interests.”¹⁰⁴ While the statement is understandably U.S.-centric, and fails to identify whom Mr. Chivvis considers to be “key allies,” one can assume that the various

¹⁰³ Austin Long, “NATO Special Operations: Promise and Problem,” *Orbis* 58, no. 4 (August 2014): doi: 10.1016/j/orbis.2014.08.006.

¹⁰⁴ Chivvis, “Understanding Russian “Hybrid Warfare” and What Can Be Done About It.”

nations of NATO should be included under this appellation. NATO SOF, with its operational experience implementing intelligence sharing apparatuses and methods, should be leveraged to attack the problem of intelligence sharing in the hybrid threat context. Perhaps a fusion center, co-located with the joint European Union/NATO Counter Hybrid Threat Center of Excellence in Helsinki, could be established. Here, at a facility designed to be a “multinational, multidisciplinary centre for analysis and studies”¹⁰⁵ each nation could maintain intelligence analysts with links back to their national systems to quickly access and get approval to share intelligence relating to hybrid threats against NATO states.

3. Communication Infrastructure and Procedures

In 2007, GEN (Ret.) James L. Jones, then recently retired from his position as the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe and the commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) Allied Command Operations (ACO), identified that “one essential element of effective interoperability is communications.”¹⁰⁶ Given that one defining aspect of hybrid warfare is its ability to exploit natural seams in nations or the NATO Alliance, the ability to quickly and effectively communicate secure information between NATO organizations and nations is crucial to any strategy to counter-hybrid threats.

Addressing this problem, one of the most valuable tools that NSHQ and NATO SOF can bring to the hybrid fight is this secure communications ability. NSHQ “maintains an ever-expanding NATO secure communications network to ensure connectivity and intelligence sharing across all of NATO SOF.”¹⁰⁷ Used by NATO SOF across Afghanistan to pass intelligence and operational information, the Battlefield Information Collection and Exploitation System (BICES) allowed NATO SOF to securely communicate on an exclusive and secure network. Here, deployed down to the operational and tactical level, this secure communications infrastructure proved invaluable at linking the various NATO

¹⁰⁵ Shaun Waterman, “Finns Plan NATO-EU Hybrid Warfare Center,” *Cyberscoop*, November 29, 2016, <https://www.cyberscoop.com/finns-plan-nato-eu-hybrid-warfare-center/>.

¹⁰⁶ GEN (Ret.) James L. Jones, “A Blueprint for Change: Transforming NATO Special Operations,” 37.

¹⁰⁷ Col. Arthur Davis, “The Regional Special Operations Headquarters: Franchising the NATO Model as a Hedge in Lean Times,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2012): 71–76.

SOF elements and creating a common operating picture in a complex environment. Yet BICES has yet to gain a similar level of respect and use outside of the ISAF framework. Some NATO SOF organizations have BICES access limited to a single terminal, located at the strategic level of government. Likewise, propagation of the system remains slow, with some organizations failing to appreciate the potential of a connecting, secure, communications infrastructure for the Alliance. NATO SOF, having witnessed the realization of this system's use in Afghanistan, should be instrumental in its spread and use.

4. International Interagency Cooperation

As a part of the ISAF SOF mission to Afghanistan, Combined Special Operations Task Force 10 (CSOTF-10) trained “Provincial Response Companies, little-known, high-end police units belonging to the Afghan Ministry of the Interior.”¹⁰⁸ To enable this mission, not a natural fit for most NATO SOF which generally work under their nation's Ministry of Defense, the Special Operations Task Units (SOTU) within CSOTF-10 were provided with accompanying Law Enforcement Professionals (LEP). These LEPs were professional police, contracted to assist the SOTUs in their role to train and advise the Provincial Response Companies (PRC), later known as Police Special Units (PSU). Coincidental and complimentary to their role as advisors to the PSUs, these LEPs served a secondary purpose training the NATO SOF operators in the principles of law enforcement operations. They illustrated the nuanced differences between forces designed to operate internally (e.g., police forces) and those primarily tasked with countering external threats (military/SOF). In addition to these LEPs, the SOTUs at times worked with and were exposed to counter-narcotics specialists, border control agents, and internal intelligence service agents from various countries.¹⁰⁹ The SOTUs gained invaluable experience working with a variety of interagency partners, observing their methods, strengths and

¹⁰⁸ David Axe, “A Glimpse Inside Special Forces Training of Top Afghan Cops; Rule of Law Vs. Corruption,” *Breaking Defense*, February 12, 2012, <https://breakingdefense.com/2012/02/special-forces-leader-in-afghanistan-details-top-cop-training-r/>.

¹⁰⁹ Information from the author, CPT Benjamin Bringham's experience deploying to Afghanistan as a part of a NATO ISAF SOF SOTU from July 2014–December 2014.

shortcomings. Additionally, they became aware of the various caveats and authorities of each organization, often finding ways to cover each other's gaps.

This experience conducting operations within a domestic legal context with Afghan police forces and judicial representatives has application in the counter-hybrid threat arena. In a 2015 report on a conference entitled "NATO and the New Ways of Warfare: Defeating Hybrid Threats," the Research Division of the NATO Defense College advocated for "the strengthening of the societal cohesion within NATO nations, with the forging of close links between the civilian and military aspects of security and defense."¹¹⁰ ISAF SOF successfully combined SOF with these other players in the domestic security fabric. They learned to work together and augment each other's capabilities. But, if not exercised regularly, these relationships and this knowledge will be lost.

5. Evidentiary Operations

As they worked with Afghan MOI police forces, ISAF SOF elements developed an intimate understanding of the conduct of evidentiary operations. COL Isaac Peltier, then Commander of CSOTF-10, explained the PSU's mission. "This is a police force under the MOI, not commandos or an army force. Rather than getting intel and doing raids to capture or kill somebody, these guys' goal is to make arrests....facilitating, being connected, getting the provincial chief of police and the government talking, getting the prosecutor and judge talking...getting a warrant before making an arrest."¹¹¹ Thus, by necessity, the NATO SOF operators of ISAF SOF became subject matter experts in the requirements to arrest, bring to trial, and convict individuals under the Afghan legal system. As it is highly likely that NATO SOF would be called upon to augment law enforcement forces in the event of a large-scale hybrid campaign, this body of knowledge is important for NATO SOF organizations to retain.

¹¹⁰ Julian Lindley-French, "NATO and New Ways of Warfare: Defeating Hybrid Threats," (Presentation, NATO Conference, NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy, April 29–30, 2015).

¹¹¹ David Axe, "A Glimpse Inside Special Forces Training of Top Afghan Cops; Rule of Law vs. Corruption."

E. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the International Security Assistance Force mission in Afghanistan, the difficult operational conditions compelled NATO SOF organizations to develop capabilities, systems, TTPs, and knowledge which are uniquely applicable to the counter-hybrid threats mission. But without a comprehensive and codified plan to exercise and retain these capabilities, they will degrade over time. NSHQ should immediately look to incorporate advanced levels of SOF cooperation with local law enforcement and intelligence agencies into its exercises. It should continue to advocate for the expansion of the Battlefield Information Collection and Exploitation System, using the current hybrid threat as (valid) justification. It should push for the creation of a hybrid threat intel fusion center to allow for synthesis and sharing of national intel to the full Alliance. Through these measures NATO can ensure that the hard-won lessons of the ISAF SOF mission in Afghanistan do not go to waste.

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IV. A WAY FORWARD

A. INTRODUCTION

This thesis has provided a greater understanding of Russian hybrid threats and of the capabilities developed by NATO Special Operations Forces through participation in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. This chapter will examine the current employment of SOF in countering hybrid threats demonstrating how NATO, generally working through NSHQ, can more fully utilize the unique skillsets of NATO SOF organizations, along with the informal NATO SOF network, as a force multiplier and enabling component of the overarching NATO CHT Strategy. This chapter will then recommend that NSHQ facilitate the adoption by NATO members of Joint Interagency Task Force-like constructs, leveraging SOF's distinct capabilities with an emphasis on continued interoperability in the post-ISAF security environment. The final portion of this chapter will be dedicated to discussing and examining future considerations and areas of research NSHQ and member nations must consider as NATO SOF's role continues to evolve to meet the hybrid threats of the 21st century.

1. The Current Role of SOF

The current role of SOF in NATO's CHT plan is largely unarticulated. In crafting such a role, NATO leadership must not fall prey to an exaggerated belief in, and lack of understanding of, SOF's actual capabilities and applicability to countering hybrid threats. As discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis, NSHQ's operational focus in support of the Counter Hybrid Threat strategy has been largely limited to two categories: education and coordination. Despite NSHQ's success in educating SOF on the Hybrid Threat and in coordinating various regional seminars to bring all elements of national power under one roof to examine and plan for the hybrid threat, NSHQ can do more to shepherd NATO members towards a unified understanding of how SOF should be employed. NATO's current *laissez faire* approach to national CHT preparations does have some benefits, as it allows individual nations to tailor the role of Special Operations Forces to align with a particular nation's perception of the hybrid threat. However, without specific guidance

from NSHQ, the role of SOF across various NATO members may become increasingly diverse, eventually hindering interoperability and future integration. While nations should certainly be free to determine how best to employ their SOF elements, NSHQ is capable of going beyond its role as an educator and counselor to assist NATO nations in developing a unified role for SOF which not only enables further interoperability, but fully utilizes the capabilities, and the joint TTPs SOF has gained throughout years of ISAF operations.

2. It Takes a Network

Before NSHQ can make recommendations to NATO members on the best uses and organization of National SOF elements, it is imperative to analyze how the existing SOF capabilities developed during the ISAF era can be applied to address the various techniques of Russian Hybrid Threats today. Although NATO's primary motivation behind the development of the SOF capabilities listed above was to "build professional, independent and sustainable forces for the security of the Afghan people," these capabilities also enabled NATO SOF to effectively disrupt terrorist networks throughout Afghanistan by becoming a network themselves.¹¹²

In an article titled "It Takes a Network," former ISAF Commander Gen. Stanley McChrystal writes about the early difficulties the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) confronted while battling the Taliban in the early years of the ISAF mission.¹¹³ He explains many of these problems developed from the inability to effectively disseminate information about the enemy due to the hierarchy-type structure of the JSOTF; leading to compartmentalized campaigns with little to no collaboration to tackle and disrupt the overall terrorist network. He states that in order for his forces to counter the Taliban, the JSOTF had to evolve in order to match the fluidity of the terrorist network which existed as "a constellation of fighters organized not by rank but on the basis of relationships and acquaintances, reputation and fame."¹¹⁴ Ultimately recognizing it was going to take "a

¹¹² ISAF's Mission in Afghanistan (2001–2014)," NATO, September 1, 2015, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_69366.htm.

¹¹³ Stanley A. McChrystal, "It Takes a Network: The New Front Line of Modern Warfare," *Foreign Policy*, February 21, 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/02/21/it-takes-a-network/>.

¹¹⁴ McChrystal, "It Takes a Network: The New Front Line of Modern Warfare."

network to defeat a network, Gen. McChrystal focused on leveling the communication architecture and on building relationships with key actors not only within the military, but from all entities which had a role in the campaign.

The need for the robust and interoperable networks envisioned by McChrystal during the ISAF mission is comparable in the face of Russian hybrid threats today. President Putin's streamlined decision-making process allows to him quickly and efficiently execute a hybrid threat strategy via his vast network of agents embedded throughout the societies of NATO members, many of whom work directly under Putin or a member of Putin's inner circle. Furthermore, President Putin is able to target NATO members individually which allows him to compartmentalize his hybrid threat strategy. This compartmentalization conceals the overall nature of his strategy and prevents a unified NATO response by keeping overall effects of the strategy below the threshold of overt attribution and armed conflict. Through this tailored approach, Russian actors are able to present the façade of a domestic threat, as opposed to one of international origination.

In addition to compartmentalization, Russian hybrid threats also maintain a low profile nature by targeting 'brown' or 'gray' zones of national societies. Brown zones can be defined as areas in which multiple national or international agencies claim jurisdiction, while gray zones represent areas in which no agency has clear jurisdiction.¹¹⁵ Russia's tendency to operate within these spaces creates confusion as to who is responsible for responding to such threats. Additionally, in many cases, the intended target of Russian hybrid threats is the human domain of democratic societies which differs from past occurrences of warfare in which militaries have been the main focus. This combination of Russian compartmentalization, utilization of gray and brown zones in society, and targeting of NATO domestic institutions creates a situation in which the responsibility of responding to hybrid threats is seen to lie predominately with law enforcement and domestic security services. Most NATO SOF are unable to effectively bring their unique capabilities and advantages to bear in this environment due to legal and political constraints on domestic use of military forces.

¹¹⁵ Votel et al. "Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone."

In order to counter the Russian Hybrid Threat network, NATO itself must encourage the creation of a true network. A true network, as Gen. McChrystal defines it, “starts with robust communications connectivity, but also leverages physical and cultural proximity, shared purpose, established decision-making processes, personal relationships, and trust.”¹¹⁶ Although the initial process of building a true network can be extremely difficult, NSHQ and national SOF elements have a considerable head start due to the pre-existing relationships and networks they have developed through ISAF and through initiatives like the Global SOF Foundation. Using SOF’s network as a backbone, NSHQ should assist nations in creating nodes of operation and intelligence fusion; combining representatives of government, NGO’s and relevant international organizations in one location. This close proximity and robust connectivity will allow NATO members to quickly share information with the relevant authorities or countries who can then craft a timely response. The next section will discuss why NSHQ should consider the Joint Interagency Task Force as its initial blueprint as they assist national SOF elements in developing a true NATO network.

B. ADAPTING NATO TO MEET THE HYBRID THREAT

As NATO has worked to build a strategy to combat hybrid threats, it has quickly become clear that its conventional military structure is ill-suited to combat a hybrid adversary. The dilemma presented by this realization is summarized by Dr. Edward Luttwak, a Professor at Georgetown University and consultant to the Departments of Defense and State, who described this organizational challenge as the choice a military organization must make to be successful at either attritional or relational conflict. The very attributes that make an organization good at one, largely preclude it from having much success at the other.¹¹⁷ Elizabeth Oren, an analyst who frequently supports the Special Operations Forces community, reinforced this concept in a 2016 article, stating that “if

¹¹⁶ McChrystal, Stanley A. “It takes a network: the new front line of modern warfare.” *Foreign Policy* 21 (2011).

¹¹⁷ Edward N. Luttwak, “Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare” (paper presented at the conference “Defense Planning for the 1990s and the Changing International Environment,” Fort McNair, Washington, D.C., October 1983)

NATO solely maintains the status quo, then its ability to engage in hybrid warfare is inhibited. If NATO changes its structure to adapt to evolving threats, then its founding purpose is at risk and it must renegotiate a massive multinational, bureaucratic political-military organization. Choosing one option or the other is neither optimal nor practical.”¹¹⁸ As Oren points out, in order to fulfill its primary mandate of collective defense in the case of Russian aggression, NATO must maintain its emphasis on developing and maintaining the capabilities needed to win a large-scale conventional conflict. Yet the threat presented by Russian hybrid actions requires a coordinated response as well. In recognition of this fact, this thesis will present a third option: a NSHQ initiative to assist NATO nations in the creation of counter-hybrid threat Joint Interagency Task Forces.

1. The Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF) Concept

Joint Interagency Task Forces are purpose built organizations that are designed to incorporate representatives from all organizations with a stake in the target problem into their organizational and leadership structure. They are led by the representative from the organization with the most stake in the problem, or the broadest authority to combat the problem. Thus JIATFs have the flexibility to fit within differing national military organizations while scaling in scope and focus to address the hybrid threat as manifested in each specific country. Importantly, each such organization can also be structured to accommodate restrictions from different political systems, overlapping and sharing authorities and capabilities as needed. For successful examples, NATO can look to several U.S. JIATFs, which have been established and function effectively to combat illicit drug trafficking, organized crime, and terrorism. These threats share many characteristics with the Russian Hybrid Threat. Due to this, historic and current JIATF operations provide a valuable template to guide CHT efforts in Europe.

¹¹⁸ Elizabeth Oren, “A Dilemma of Principles: The Challenges of Hybrid Warfare From a NATO Perspective,” *Special Operations* 2, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 58–69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23296151.2016.1174522>.

2. U.S. Joint Interagency Task Force SOUTH Organization

Formed in the 1980s and tasked to combat the growing flow of illicit drugs pouring across the southern border of the United States, JIATF South quickly became recognized at the highest levels of the U.S. Government as “a model for joint and interagency coordination.”¹¹⁹ Formed from an amalgamation of U.S. Governmental Departments and pertinent Branches of the Armed Forces, JIATF South is currently led by a U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Rear Admiral, with a U.S. Navy Rear Admiral as his deputy director. His two vice directors hail from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency (CBP) and the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).¹²⁰ Various other parties from the U.S. Government have at times been represented throughout the staff, to include the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).¹²¹ This somewhat unorthodox organizational structure, mindfully built in this case to counter illicit drug flow, combines the unique authorities, assets, relationships, and capabilities of each organization represented. Information can be quickly and efficiently shared between organizations and interdiction performed by the organizational asset with the proper legal authorities and capability for the task.

Another benefit offered by this joint organizational structure is the easy sharing of authorities. When necessary, arrangements can be made to use the superior assets from one agency, under the superior authorities of another. For example, as the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard pointed out in a joint press release following the 9–11 attacks, “U.S. Navy personnel, as members of the Department of Defense, are normally prohibited by law (Posse Comitatus Act) from participating directly in law enforcement activities. Coast Guard personnel, on the other hand, are authorized under 14 USC 89 to board vessels to enforce

¹¹⁹ “President Donald J. Trump visits Joint Interagency Task Force South,” The White House, April 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-visits-joint-interagency-task-force-south/>.

¹²⁰ “Leadership,” Joint Interagency Task Force South, accessed October 8, 2018, <http://www.jiatfs.southcom.mil/About-Us/Leadership/>.

¹²¹ “Joint Interagency Task Force-South (JIATF-S),” French Ministry of Defense, January 2, 2011, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/marine/operations/zoom-sur-la-marine-en-oultre-mer/la-lutte-contre-le-narcotrafic-aux-antilles/le-joint-interagency-task-force-south-jiatf-s>.

U.S. law.”¹²²¹²³ JIATF South has leveraged this marriage of capability and authority since the 1980s, regularly placing Coast Guard boarding teams on Navy ships. These teams allow for the legal boarding and searching of ships suspected of participation in the drug trade after they have been interdicted by a U.S. naval vessel using its impressive suite of sensors and superior speed. Along with this U.S. interagency cooperation, JIATF South includes representatives from 17 different nations, providing coordination to international efforts to bring drug traffickers to justice.¹²⁴ JIATF South represents an effective and functioning model of the kind of interagency and international cooperation that is so often cited as necessary in NATO efforts to counter hybrid threats.

3. The Joint Interagency Task Force Concept within NATO

Before putting forth a course of action we must be clear about what this thesis is *not* proposing. We make no recommendations regarding the establishment of a new NATO JIATF organization to address the hybrid threat. As a voluntary treaty body, the strength and capability of NATO exists solely in the sum of its national parts. Thus NATO should have the self-restraint to realize that rather than growing its own organization and bureaucracy, to truly add capability it must grow the power of its members. In deference to this, NATO has clearly emphasized the responsibility of individual member nations to develop resilience internally as the primary counter to the hybrid threat. Indeed, as stated by Lorenz Meyer-Minneman Head of NATO’s Civil Preparedness Section, “because resilience is first and foremost a national responsibility, nations must each develop and build systems that suit their own national circumstances and risk profiles, as well as their commitments *vis-à-vis* other bodies such as the European Union.”¹²⁵ The challenge for

¹²² “Navy, Coast Guard Join Forces for Homeland Security,” U.S. Atlantic Fleet and Coast Guard Public Affairs, November 5, 2001, <http://c21.maxwell.af.mil/maritime/navyusecg.htm>.

¹²³ Law Enforcement, 14 U.S.C. 89, (1994), <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/granule/USCODE-1994-title14/USCODE-1994-title14-partI-chap5-sec89>.

¹²⁴ “How Key West Task Force Tracks “Tsunami of Cocaine” About to Hit U.S. and Global Markets,” CBS News, August 15, 2017, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tracking-cocaine-coast-guard-operations-center-florida/>.

¹²⁵ Lorenz Meyer-Minnemann, “Resilience and Alliance Security: The Warsaw Commitment to Enhance Resilience,” in *Forward Resilience: Protecting Society in an Interconnected World*, ed. Daniel S. Hamilton (Washington, D.C.: Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, 2017), 112.

NATO then becomes: how can the NATO organization assist in building counter hybrid threat capabilities in individual member countries? In answer to this, NATO, specifically NSHQ, should assist NATO nations in designing, establishing, and properly manning purpose-built JIATF-like organizations to counter the hybrid threat as it manifests in each country.

The wide spectrum of capabilities, authorities, and governmental structures across NATO members, combined with the differing manifestations of the hybrid threat across the globe-spanning alliance, are the key challenges NATO must address when crafting its CHT strategy. As previously discussed, the JIATF concept ably addresses these challenges, allowing each nation to design a unique JIATF structure from the ground up, with the specific personnel and linkages needed to fulfill its purpose within that nation. As an example, U.S. JIATF West was established in 1989 to counter drug-related activities in the Pacific, and grew from the same parent organization as the previously discussed U.S. JIATF South. Yet while both ostensibly address the same threat, differences in their area of operations, authorities, forces available, capability of allies, and other factors necessitate significant differences in each JIATF's organizational structure. In the case of NATO, a hypothetical CHT JIATF in Estonia would necessarily look very different from a CHT JIATF established by Italy. In order to address the specific facets of the hybrid threat present in each country, the government, military, and law enforcement agencies represented in these different JIATFs would differ. Similarly, representatives from different areas of the private sector, energy sector, and business should be added in advisory roles as appropriate. With individually fitted JIATF's addressing the hybrid threat in each nation, NATO could then focus on functioning as the connective tissue between nations, a role for which it is well suited.

4. NATO SOF Organizations Must Lay the Foundation

NATO SOF is organized and tasked to excel in the sorts of relational conflicts defined by Edward Luttwak.¹²⁶ They are experienced in adapting to “gray zone” and

¹²⁶ Luttwak, “Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare.”

“brown zone” areas, designators which could apply to the whole of Afghanistan. These abilities are crucial in a hybrid conflict in which attacks take place domestically but originate from a foreign government. The domestic veneer on hybrid threats causes domestic law enforcement and national judiciaries to claim primacy, while the international origination of the threat calls for military involvement in national defense. SOF organizations possess the flexibility to adapt and respond to immediate threats, combined with the relational skills to work with other governmental organizations, even in a subordinate role if necessary. NATO SOF organizations across the alliance must build strong relationships with their domestic intelligence gathering and law enforcement organizations. This will set the conditions necessary for successful JIATF formation.

5. The Role of NATO Special Operations Forces Headquarters

NATO Special Operations Forces Headquarters is currently putting considerable effort into a CHT educational program which focuses not only on NATO SOF organizations, but on the spectrum of varied governmental and non-governmental players in the hybrid arena. Its CHT seminars, previously discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, have attempted to reach players from all levels of government and the private sector which can affect or are affected by the hybrid fight. These seminars, currently complete in the Baltics and High North and planned for NATO’s South-Eastern flank, would serve as a natural introduction and catalyst towards the formation of CHT JIATFs. It would be a natural extension for NSHQ to advocate for the formation of permanent CHT bodies, incorporating these identified players, allowing them to collectively address the threat of hybrid action. NSHQ could follow up these seminars in several ways: first, at the NSOS, NSHQ should develop and instruct a course on JIATF purpose and formation, targeted at high level officials within each NATO nation’s military structure. This would provide them with initial exposure to the JIATF concept. Second, NSHQ could leverage NATO’s newly announced capability to organize and dispatch “Counter Hybrid Support Teams” which have as their stated purpose the mission to “provide tailored, targeted assistance to Allies,

upon their request, in preparing for and responding to hybrid activities.”¹²⁷ Such teams, formed from field grade SOF operators well-versed in joint and intergovernmental organizations and operations from deployments with ISAF SOF and participation in operations across Europe, would provide the expertise needed to advise nations in the JIATF formation process.

As JIATFs are created across NATO, NSHQ could then provide the forum and opportunity for coordination and collaboration, providing either a physical location for a conclave of representatives pulled from each JIATF, or at the very least, a regular digital gathering of JIATFs to discuss emerging issues, changing TTPs, and lessons learned. Once NATO JIATFs were established, NATO could offer similar advisory support to non-NATO partners and other EU states in building similar CHT JIATFs.

6. A Blueprint for Success

It is important to note that for these JIATF-like entities to add value for each participating member state, NATO must be willing to break from its tendency toward standardization and uniformity. This may seem difficult for an organization containing an entire office with the stated aim to “coordinate, support and administer standardization activities,”¹²⁸ but any NATO Standardization Agreements (STANAG) governing the JIATF formation process must be left general enough to allow for broad customization. While this may represent a challenge, there are precedents for success in similar processes to which NATO should look for a blueprint.

One such example can be found in a recent article in the *Special Warfare* journal, written by Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Charles Black and Lieutenant Colonel Michael Csicsila, the latter of which has served for multiple years as the Special Operations Liaison Officer (SOLO) to the Romanian Ministry of Defense. In the article they describe the process through which they assisted in the establishment of the first Romanian Special

¹²⁷ “Brussels Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, 11–12 July 2018,” NATO, accessed October 9, 2018, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm.

¹²⁸ “NSO Mission,” NATO Standardization Office, accessed October 15, 2018, <https://nso.nato.int/nso/>.

Operations Forces Command (SOCOM). As the authors point out, the process began many years before any movement started on actual planning for this institution, with “years of fighting alongside U.S. SOF in Iraq and Afghanistan” building a “strong bond between SOF operators.”¹²⁹ When conversations began and assistance was requested from the United States military with regards to the establishment of a codified Romanian SOF headquarters, a relationship of trust and mutual respect already existed, allowing for effective collaboration immediately.

Recognizing the pitfalls inherent to applying any organizational model developed by another country to the unique Romanian system, General Ciuka, the Romanian Chief of Defense (CHOD), “agreed to form a series of working groups, comprised of mid-level Romanian SOF officers and NCOs, and some Romanian and U.S. subject-matter experts, supported by Joint Special Operations University and the SOLO.”¹³⁰ These working groups were tasked to “come up with the ‘Romanian Solution’”¹³¹ a unique organization to fit the needs of the Romanian military while maintaining connectivity to the greater NATO and global SOF communities. Through a process which took several years, Romanian operators with U.S. support, systematically identified the opportunities, situations, and threats unique to Romania and designed an organization that made sense within this context.¹³²

There are several important lessons that NATO can take from this case study to apply to the formation of CHT JIATFs within its member states. First, as NATO SOF units fought, bled, and died alongside their NATO SOF brothers, the unique nature of their missions and role combined with their absolute integration with other NATO SOF units, created a bond which is perhaps unique to the NATO SOF community. This trust built through shared experience was instrumental to the success of the Romanian SOCOM initiative. This same trust and understanding makes NATO SOF the ideal proponent to

¹²⁹ Charlie Black and Michael Csicsila, “USSOCOMs ‘Lawrence of Anywhere’: Romanian SOF Transformation,” *Special Warfare* 31, no. 1 (January–March 2018): 5. http://www.soc.mil/swcs/SWmag/archive/SW3101/31-1_JAN_MAR_2018_web.pdf.

¹³⁰ Black and Csicsila, “USSOCOMs ‘Lawrence of Anywhere,’” 6.

¹³¹ Black and Csicsila, “USSOCOMs ‘Lawrence of Anywhere,’” 6.

¹³² Black and Csicsila, “USSOCOMs ‘Lawrence of Anywhere,’” 5–6.

propagate the CHT JIATF concept across NATO. This is critical as the sensitive nature of the CHT mission, combined with a general reluctance among NATO nations to disclose details of honest self-assessment (as was conducted in the Romania case) require a high level of foundational trust as a prerequisite to NATO involvement in JIATF creation.

Second, while led by Romanians, the Romanian SOCOM planning process was conducted holistically, and included representatives from Romanian and U.S. militaries, representatives from academia, and other subject-matter experts. Ideally, any NATO supported JIATF creation program would incorporate a similar mix of perspectives and expertise. With representatives of the requesting nation leading the planning effort, NSHQ should provide academic support from its NSOS, while simultaneously coordinating support from Joint Special Operations University, the European Union's Hybrid Center of Excellence, the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, and other military and civilian subject matter experts. Representatives from pertinent non-governmental organizations and from industry should be included as well.

Finally, as with the Romanian SOCOM creation process, sufficient time should be allowed for the planning team to fully analyze the specific political issues, organizational structure, and hybrid threats within the requesting nation. This is essential to the creation of the correct JIATF structure in each individual nation. Care must be taken throughout this process to ensure that each individual JIATF, while organizationally distinct from every other, retains the ability to liaise, coordinate, and communicate with the other NATO CHT JIATFs. In this effort, NSHQ can leverage its experience with the existing lines of communication between NATO SOF units, who are well practiced in coordination amongst themselves.

C. CONSIDERATIONS FOR NATO SOF'S FUTURE ROLE IN CHT

NATO SOF must continue to focus on enhancing interoperability to enable effective cooperation within the Alliance, and to facilitate interagency cooperation within and between NATO member states. To be effective in this or any CHT role it is paramount for SOF that future possible CHT missions are clarified. At the same time, it is important to be open to the possibility that SOF may actually have less of a direct role in countering

hybrid threats than the general consensus seems to indicate today. The following are some important factors which must be considered when planning for the successful utilization of SOF in countering hybrid threats.

1. The Two-fold Security Dilemma

Most NATO countries, and in particular its smaller member countries, will experience some version of a two-fold security dilemma. This will encompass the difficulties surrounding the relationship with its adversaries on one hand, and its relationship with its allies on the other. A contemporaneous relationship with an ally and an adversary can be difficult, complicated and constraining.¹³³ This dilemma represents one of the weaknesses of the alliance system. Each country must evaluate and prioritize the direct and indirect effects of this dilemma when creating their National Security Strategy and when organizing its SOF to operate effectively both domestically and internationally. Costs and gains of alliance cooperation and non-cooperation, and each country's expectance of cooperation from the Alliance when needed, are all considerations that play a part when NATO, and partnering countries, are prioritizing SOF capabilities, capacities and NATO interoperability.¹³⁴

2. NATO SOF Framework for Phase 0 and Shaping Operations

Hybrid threats emerge gradually by nature and encompass the entire range of national elements of power. Hybrid actors avoid actions that are likely to trigger a firm response. Thus the subject of the hybrid attack might not even be aware of deliberate actions taken by the adversary to set the conditions for the desired end state. As a result, the targeted country will likely postpone initiating a reaction until a trigger of some sort is detected. But once an enemy action has taken place that is visible enough to trigger a response from the targeted nation, it is generally too late to prevent the negative effect of the hybrid action. By this measure, many nations are likely experiencing phase zero at this

¹³³ Glenn H. Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics* 36, no. 4 (July 1984): 461–495, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010183>.

¹³⁴ Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 167–214, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009958>.

moment. In deference to this realization, individual nations and the NATO Alliance are discussing how to best be postured to counter hybrid threats. But lacking a methodology to clearly identify or address hybrid actions, it is impossible to develop effective countermeasures. Taking this into account it seems clear that NATO and NATO SOF need a framework for defining Phase 0 and shaping operations. As a part of this framework, NATO needs to establish clear definitions describing the hybrid threat environment to ensure a mutual understanding across the Alliance. To be able to achieve coherence across the alliance NATO must also clearly define the hybrid triggers for different states of emergency, combined with the prescribed response for each. Defining these states of emergency will allow NATO to react quickly in a threat situation that might otherwise be unclear to be acted upon.

3. Additional SOF Capability Development

Without a clear mission for SOF in the CHT fight, it has been difficult to articulate the capabilities that SOF should focus on developing. The broad range of possible adversary tactics also highlights that it is not possible for one nation's SOF program to develop all needed capabilities. One example of this can be seen in the development by SOF of national and regional subject matter expertise, which maintains the ability of NATO SOF to operate globally despite limited size and resources in each individual state.¹³⁵ Sharing and dividing the burden of developing subject matter expertise throughout the Alliance allows for the development of a wide range of capability, from categories of equipment, to specializing in tasks and mission sets, to establishing centers of excellence such as the European Countering Hybrid Warfare Center of Excellence in Finland.¹³⁶

In more general terms it seems clear that the focus of SOF development must be on unconventional capabilities and skills, following the theory of how smaller, weaker actors

¹³⁵ Gunilla Eriksson and Ulrica Pettersson, *Special Operations from a Small State Perspective: Future Security Challenges*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 181.

¹³⁶ Reid Standish, "Inside a European Center to Combat Russia's Hybrid Warfare," *Foreign Policy*, January 18, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/01/18/inside-a-european-center-to-combat-russias-hybrid-warfare/>.

defeat bigger, stronger actors.¹³⁷ As long as the threat is irregular, the response must contain capabilities in line with that threat. But just stating that NATO SOF needs to master asymmetric, irregular, and hybrid capabilities adds little real value to the conversation. For NATO SOF to develop into an effective CHT force, the recommendations and guidance need to be more specific. One such suggestion comes from Espen Berg-Knudsen, who argues that, in addition to being linked directly to the national-level decision makers to accommodate the needed speed and coordination, SOF should prioritize the inclusion of more strategic-thinking operators.¹³⁸ In other words, he suggests that NATO change the core focus of NATO SOF operators to one better suited for the hybrid environment. This should be done through focus on academic training perhaps even more so than physical training. In addition, he recommends the inclusion into SOF organizations of personnel with complementary skills who, while not fitting the typical SOF operator mold, are capable of mastering a wider array of disciplines. This flies in the face of the almost pathological aversion of SOF towards altering or reducing historical physical endurance focused selection standards, but will likely be necessary to meet future CHT requirements.

4. A Proactive Approach

The NATO organization is reactive by design and this is clearly visible in the way it plans to address hybrid threats. But the very nature of hybrid threats dictates that if NATO waits to react until the results of enemy hybrid action become apparent, it will likely be too late. NATO and NATO SOF must consider a proactive approach to the problem. One extreme option could be to generate unrest affecting Russia's "soft underbelly" in central Asia in order to draw Russian focus and resources from other areas of interest such as Eastern Europe or NATO territory in general. Examples of this could be indirect actions to destabilize Siberia, Kazakhstan, or the Chinese/Russian border. Russia is an extremely large country, which the Russian government must control with limited resources, yet NATO generally focuses on the much more limited part of Russia that shares a border with

¹³⁷ Ivan Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 219–222.

¹³⁸ Espen Berg-Knutson, "From Tactical Champions to Grand Strategy Enablers: The Future of Small-Nation SOF in Counter-Hybrid Warfare," *CTX* 6, no. 4 (November 2016): 65.

Europe. If Russia's stance toward NATO deteriorates to the point that extreme options are considered, NATO could employ its SOF in such destabilizing efforts.

Sabotage operations form another extreme measure which would well utilize SOF's unique skillset. This could also be used aggressively in a preventive way, with Russian military equipment produced outside Russia being covertly sabotaged before it is delivered to Russian Military Forces.¹³⁹ Examples of clandestine operations outside Russia, such as sinking Russian ordered Navy vessels, is risky and far outside the box in which most NATO Special Operation Forces are thinking today. But perhaps NATO countries must get comfortable with more creative options to find an adequate countermeasure to future Russian Hybrid Threats. Proactive measures like this would, of course, be extremely difficult to conduct through NATO, with its need for consensus and aversion to escalatory risk. As a result, proactive measures like this would likely need to be conducted through regional, bilateral, or national initiatives, and not as sanctioned NATO SOF operations.

The efforts by many NATO nations to develop national resistance forces and operational plans, provide opportunities for proactive preparation by SOF to counter hybrid threats. One example of this can be seen in the home defense forces established in the three Baltic States. The SOF units in each of these countries enjoy some level of special relationship with these volunteer, civilian defense forces, ranging from direct control to regular combined training. This close cooperation between SOF and the civilian leaders participating in such civil defense organizations can be leveraged into unofficial early warning networks, capable of reporting signs of malign foreign activity in local communities, long before the authorities might be able to detect the same. Additionally, the legitimacy afforded these civil defense units as sanctioned arms of the national armed forces, combined with the civilian law enforcement officers who often fill their ranks, allows for the possibility of a quick and effective local response to hybrid threats.

¹³⁹ Stephen M. Dayspring, "Countering Russian Hybrid Warfare: Acknowledging the Character of Modern Conflict," *CTX* 6, no. 4 (2016): 27–28.

5. Identify Irrelevant Hybrid Threat Tasks

This thesis has attempted to demonstrate that SOF cannot be considered a panacea for hybrid threats. Lacking the capacity, and legal and political authorities to respond comprehensively, NATO SOF must do all it can to educate the public on the shared responsibility to counter hybrid threats. To prevent a situation where society at large becomes more passive than it should due to an exaggerated expectation that the hybrid threat will be handled by military forces, the military should actively determine tasks within the hybrid threat spectrum that cannot be affectively addressed by the military. SOF, with its credibility and ties to other governmental agencies, can be used to identify these hybrid threats to which they are ill-suited to respond, and assist in making other governmental departments better aware of what they will be expected to combat themselves or find other means to counter. In this way SOF can help non-military parts of society and government become more aware and active participants in CHT efforts.

6. NATO's Narrative

When discussing NATO SOF's role in countering Russian hybrid threat one must also consider the wider NATO approach, perspective, and communicated narrative regarding Russian hybrid threat. From the messages coming from the array of official and open-source media outlets combined with professional and academic discussions and literature, one is left with the impression that a significant number of leaders, commanders, and key personnel within NATO and NATO SOF would likely agree that much of the Alliance's stated and communicated plans and strategies are either not sufficient, effective, or credible enough, or simply will not work as described. This raises the immediate question of why there seems to be an equally strong consensus within NATO that the best course of action is to continue pushing on in the same general direction. For instance, why does NATO keep using money, time, and resources on a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) that most agree is neither fast enough nor strong enough to be relevant in the scenarios it is intended for? If the best NATO can hope for is that the VJTF's existence works as a deterrent that prevents it from ever being needed, and the general assumption is that an actual incident calling for the use of the VJTF can only display its failure, why does

NATO want it in the first place? Hybrid strategy is about using any available means across all elements of national power to achieve effects on your target. This is done by exploiting vulnerabilities and asymmetry to your advantage. This being the case, it is unlikely that NATO could detect and effectively counter the majority of hybrid threats against its member states with its current SOF capability. If this is the general view with key personnel within NATO, it must be assumed that Russian leadership recognize this weakness as well, which leads back to the same question again: why does NATO advocate plans and strategies that are not sufficient, effective, or credible in countering the current Russian threat? Is it possible that the target audience for NATO's communicated narrative is not first and foremost its potential adversaries, but the general population within NATO itself?

7. The Future of Cohesion and Reassurance

If, as some have postulated, NATO's reliance on consensus and the general cohesion needed throughout the Alliance is one of its greatest vulnerabilities, one of its most important priorities must be to maintain popular support. If the general population in a country starts doubting NATO's relevance, strategy, and decisions, that country is more likely to disagree or communicate doubt about NATO strategy. As soon as this happens, cohesion within the Alliance is potentially broken. Any adversary action that leads to broken cohesion with NATO's strategy, is an adversary victory, as it will effectively paralyze NATO's consensus-based decision making process. To prevent this, it is of paramount importance that NATO maintain the popular support of its constituents. This implies that it becomes equally important for NATO to communicate a strategic concept that gains popular support as to implement strategies and measures that actually work.

One example of this line of thinking is the way in which NATO does not include resistance as a part of its overall strategy. While the consensus, supported by extensive wargaming results, is that NATO would be unable immediately to repulse a determined Russian incursion into the territory of a member nation, it has no official plan to build or support resistance operations in the territory thus captured until a conventional response can restore NATO's territorial integrity. Resistance appears to be left out of the strategy because it concedes the unpopular assumption that NATO would likely lose territory at the

beginning of any major conflict with Russia. Despite the fact that NATO's strategy has a credible plan for regaining territory and re-establishing sovereignty, unpopular realities are omitted to maintain the moral and popular support of all concerned. From a realist standpoint one can argue that a credible but imperfect strategy is far better than an unrealistic strategy that communicates results it is unlikely to achieve. However, this also becomes irrelevant if such a credible strategy leads to loss of popular support in the general population, ultimately leading to the breaking of the NATO Alliance. This aspect of NATO planning must be considered in any plan for SOF utilization to counter hybrid threats.

8. Conclusion: A New Paradigm for SOF

As discussed, NSHQ-supported JIATFs represent a proven concept for countering asymmetric threats. Additionally, they provide an opportunity for SOF to drive the evolution of NATO's CHT efforts. When implemented, while taking into account the aforementioned considerations, the JIATF concept will unite the various national stakeholders into cohesive, proactive organizations. These JIATFs can then be linked into an international network, brokered by the NATO alliance, building integration and cooperation in the struggle against hybrid threats. Through past conflicts and changes in global strategic trends, SOF has proven capable of adaptation to counter evolving threats. The emergence of hybrid threats represent another paradigm shift for SOF, requiring innovation and exploration of new methods of warfare in the 21st century.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH CONSIDERATION

1. Bilateral Support vs. NATO Support

Regardless of NATO SOF's future role in countering hybrid threats, the initial responsibility will remain with the forces of each individual country. Yet the small size and resource limitations of many NATO countries will likely result in considerable reliance on some degree of external support. External support can be provided quicker and more efficiently through bilateral agreements, than from an alliance such as NATO. Different countries also have different national considerations to address when developing a national security strategy. These considerations must also reflect the priorities and commitments of each nation concerning external support. Bilateral support and NATO Alliance support can

potentially offer very different advantages and disadvantages in areas such as reaction time, size, strength, legitimacy, short term versus long term effects, and historical and political considerations. Even though NATO countries will usually have access to both types of external support for their defense, they should be aware of the difference between them, and make sure they clearly distinguish between the two when planning for CHT support. Research should be done on a case by case basis examining the need for bilateral and multilateral agreements with other NATO nations or with outside allied nations to support CHT efforts.

2. Law Enforcement vs. Military in Countering National and Regional Threats

There are significant differences between countries regarding the actions military forces can perform domestically and the extent to which they can cooperate and collaborate with national law enforcement. The various policy permutations differ in the degree of flexibility afforded to the military domestically. On one end of the spectrum are countries like the U.S., who's military is prohibited by law against participating in law enforcement actions against its nation's citizens.¹⁴⁰ Leaning toward the other are countries like Norway, where law enforcement can make a request for support from the military, and military personnel can be granted limited police authority.¹⁴¹ In the U.K., military forces are on short notice stand-by and are automatically called when a criminal incident includes certain types of weapons.¹⁴² Other countries use paramilitary components who have jurisdiction to perform civilian law enforcement. These include the French National Gendarmerie and the Italian Carabinieri. The various solutions practiced across NATO should be studied,

¹⁴⁰ Posse Comitatus Act of 1878, 18 U.S.C. § 1385 (1878). <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2011-title18/pdf/USCODE-2011-title18-partI-chap67-sec1385.pdf>.

¹⁴¹ Instruks Om Forsvarets Bistand Til Politiet, Pub. L. No. FOR-2017-06-16-789 § 1–13 (2017). <https://lovdata.no/dokument/INS/forskrift/2017-06-16-789?q=Forsvarets%20bistand%20til%20politiet>.

¹⁴² “2015 to 2020 Government Policy: Military Aid to the Civil Authorities for Activities in the UK,” UK Ministry of Defence, accessed November 2, 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2015-to-2020-government-policy-military-aid-to-the-civil-authorities-for-activities-in-the-uk/2015-to-2020-government-policy-military-aid-to-the-civil-authorities-for-activities-in-the-uk>.; UK Ministry of Defence, Joint Doctrine Publication 02, UK Operations: The Defence Contribution to Resilience and Security, JDP 02 (Chiefs of Staff, February 2017), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591639/20170207_JDP02_Resilience_web.pdf.

and recommendations made to policy makers regarding appropriate military authorities in the law enforcement realm to support CHT activities.

3. SOF Participation in the Development of Regional Cross Border Operation Agreements

By design hybrid threats attack the seams within and between societies. With this in mind, national borders provide one such seam, both natural and obvious. These are gray and brown zones that fall between responsibilities of nations, and are claimed by multiple nations, rendering them vulnerable to hybrid exploitation. To mitigate this, NATO SOF should be active in assisting in the development of agreements facilitating regional cross border operations that allow for the support and cooperation of national law enforcement and military forces across national borders. Initiatives like this exist between multiple nations today and are likely to become ever more necessary in the future. Research should be directed at determining appropriate ways to share responsibility and authorities across national boundaries.

4. Wargaming with SOF-Led Opposing Force (OPFOR) Teams

NSHQ's regional hybrid threat seminars have been successful in informing both military and civilian leaders on the nature of hybrid threats and the measures that can be taken to counter them. NSHQ could continue this educational effort by providing SOF-led opposing force teams to interested NATO nations. These teams, with experts from a variety of fields, would simulate an enemy planning to conduct hybrid actions against the friendly nation, assessing weak points in that nation's infrastructure, economy, policy, military, and industry. The team, along with representatives from the requesting nation, could then conduct wargames, informed by the preceding investigation and analysis, on potential hybrid threat scenarios at the regional or national level. These wargames would help nations to identify weaknesses and strengths within their societal systems and encourage them to adopt policies and procedures that could help counter any future hybrid threat attack. NATO SOF, with pre-established international bonds of trust, is the ideal entity to provide confidential evaluation reports to member nations, detailing the results of their assessments and the wargaming.

5. Establishment of SOF/IO Departments

Fairly uniquely within NATO, United States Special Operations Command is comprised of various forces with capabilities falling outside of the traditional NATO SOF mission sets. Forces focusing on Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations, integrate directly with other SOF elements in targeting enemies indirectly. They are capable of conducting a wide range of Information Operations within the human domain to counter adversary narratives and gain the popular support of local populations. It would be useful for NSHQ to examine this construct and determine the potential usefulness of the integration of IO into current NATO SOF formations, especially in a CHT context. This should be done with sensitivity to political factors and legal issues.

6. SOF Intel Collection Support

NATO SOF generally possess unique capabilities to support the collection of intelligence. However, their participation in such activities within national borders is, of necessity, generally highly restricted due to the legal ramifications and precedents it would set. Although the collection of sensitive intelligence such as human intelligence (HUMINT) and signals intelligence (SIGINT) domestically should absolutely remain a function of law enforcement and similar homeland security services, SOF should be able to support the collection of intelligence in the areas in which they have unique and specialized capabilities, such as the use of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets. SOF elements could also be embedded into domestic law enforcement agencies as SOF intelligence integrators in order to provide law enforcement with reach back and support from military intelligence gathering elements as needed. SOF's unique insight into the structure of foreign networks and their tactics, techniques, and procedures can assist domestic security services in formulating a common operating picture that connects the network of hybrid threats both inside and external to national borders.

7. Competing NATO Responsibilities for SOF

When examining SOF's role in NATO's CHT strategy, especially the training, equipping, and preparation which would be necessary, one must remember that SOF continues to have a role in NATO's conventional plans. In planning for CHT, SOF must

continue to maintain the capabilities necessary to accomplish its core tasks: direct action, special reconnaissance, and military assistance. It must also weigh and prioritize national requirements that may include hostage rescue, counter-terrorism, and assistance with border security. Manning shortfalls in many nations, combined with multiple internal and external requirements, will necessitate prudence when incorporating NATO SOF into additional CHT plans.

8. Training SOF and Other Forces for the CHT Mission

NATO, despite running a variety of exercises throughout the year, remains ill-equipped to adequately simulate a hybrid threat environment. The complexity of simulating both sides of a hybrid conflict represents a huge challenge when constructing any CHT exercise. Yet NATO, and especially NATO SOF, must continue to expand its incorporation of many governmental agencies, local industry leaders, and multi-national coalitions into its exercise design. RAND, Joint Special Operations University, Norwegian Forsvarets forskningsinstitutt (FFI) and other such bodies, should be leveraged to provide academic muscle behind NATO exercise construction. They are already examining the hybrid problem set and should be commissioned to study exercise design and construction.

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