

## **Forward Resilience: Protecting Society in an Interconnected World Working Paper Series**

### **The Arguments for a Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats**

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#### **Changes in the European Security Environment, Hybrid Threats and the Need for Enhanced Resilience**

The European security environment has been greatly influenced by two events in which the hybrid nature of non-linear warfare has come to the fore, mainly the Russian intervention in Ukraine and the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Russian action in the Ukraine has destabilized the security of the eastern neighborhood of Europe, sending ripple effects all through the Continent. ISIL has equally given rise to instability in the southern areas of Europe, increasing radicalization and terrorism outside and within the borders of Europe. Security has thus become intrinsically both an internal and external issue for states and must be met with a new sense of resilience and societal preparedness. The link between hybrid threats and terrorism is acknowledged but is, as of yet, in need of closer inspection and analysis.

The sense of threat has changed in international relations and so has the notion of actors creating and countering them. The EU strongly recognized these changes in its guiding document “A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy, in which it is stated that “The EU will pursue a multifaceted approach to resilience in its surrounding regions”, pursuing “tailor-made policies to support inclusive and accountable governance, critical for the fight against terrorism, corruption and organized crime, and for the protection of human rights.”<sup>2</sup>

Hybrid or non-linear threats refer to actions whereby military and non-military means are combined to achieve specific objectives, with the aim of exploiting vital vulnerabilities of the target (state) and giving rise to uncertainty and ambiguity. The aim of the actions is to undermine the ability of the state to perform crucial decision-making processes within its society or neighboring countries. Due to their complicated nature, hybrid threats and actions are best countered through a network-based approach involving nation-states supported by international actors such as the EU and NATO with specific means and instruments. Hybrid threats should be countered with a comprehensive, conceptual, balanced and multidimensional approach strengthening the overall resilience of the state. Nationally, Finland applies the concept of societal security – a whole-of-government approach. Preparedness requires networking with civil society and the business community. Societal preparedness is part of a holistic approach to deterrence.

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<sup>1</sup> The opinions expressed in this piece only reflect those of the author, not the Ministry of Defence of Finland.

<sup>2</sup> [https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/eugs\\_review\\_web.pdf](https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/eugs_review_web.pdf)

## Whole-of-Government Preparedness<sup>3</sup>

Countering hybrid threats and building resilience requires comprehensive actions by all stakeholders in security both on the national and international level. The EU has the ability to deal with security threats in a comprehensive manner making use of its different instruments in sequence or simultaneously. The Finnish model of societal security and whole of government preparedness could be an appropriate model to transfer to the EU and NATO level. Hybrid threats require governments to adapt to security issues in a dynamic way transcending inter-agency boundaries. A comprehensive or holistic way of dealing with hybrid threats can help direct scarce resources and strategic capabilities to where they are most needed. As a consequence, new expertise will emerge that is better equipped to deal with systemic, transboundary threats. The EU and NATO can help develop and disseminate good practices in this regard, but in order for these practices to emerge, a great deal of analysis and research followed by training and education is needed. This is where a Center of Excellence is called for.

### Resilience

Resilience is defined here as the state's ability to withstand pressure directed at its vital functions and decision-making ability in times of disruption, crisis and conflict. Strong resilience requires good governance, which the multitude of instruments and expertise within the EU and NATO should be able to uphold and strengthen. Resilience requires a sufficient level of situational awareness, strategic communication and decision-making ability. Growing interdependencies between states make threats to neighboring countries or indeed their fragility pose transboundary threats to all societies. Natural disasters, whether man-made or non-man-made, and aggressions by state and non-state actors pose threats to increasingly large areas of states, groups of states and populations. This will entail closer cooperation between and within states to prevent and counter hybrid, conventional and non-conventional threats. A common threat assessment benefits both NATO and the EU and their respective member states. The research agenda of the Center for Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats could focus on drafting strategies in countering hybrid threats, improving societal preparedness and resilience to that end. Capability-based planning should build on strong evidence and research.

The ability to confront hybrid threats and enhance resilience is thus enhanced through four principles:

***Social preparedness:*** We must understand where institutional vulnerabilities lie. Besides that, we should also define the critical functions of society that need to be sustained and secured under all circumstances.

***Enhanced early recognition and situational awareness:*** The ability to identify threats starts with shared perceptions of what kind of threats we face and may face in the future. Situational awareness is a crucial precondition for successful threat analysis.

***Developed procedures and policies:*** Sometimes there is no need for new capabilities, just more effective procedures. Clear analysis and decision-making processes are an important part of the response.

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<sup>3</sup> Please refer to the chapter in this book by Axel Hagelstam for further discussion on the whole-of-government approach to resilience in Finland.

**Coordination:** We should coordinate all instruments that may be needed to counter hybrid threats. The EU has a particular role in promoting coordination as it is able to connect many policy areas that should be engaged simultaneously when countering hybrid threats.

## **European Union**

A Joint Communication on Countering Hybrid Threats<sup>4</sup> by the Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Policy was issued on April 6, 2016. The Communication addresses five issues areas of concern: 1) situational awareness; 2) enhancing resilience; 3) counter-measures; 4) strategic communication and 5) cooperation with partners, NATO in particular. On April 19,<sup>5</sup> the Foreign Affairs Council and the Defense Ministers called for implementation of the Communication.

Along with the recommendations outlined in the Communication, an EU Hybrid Fusion Cell is established alongside the EU Intelligence Center (IntCen). The main task of the Fusion Cell is to enable the exchange of classified and non-classified information amongst member states, EU institutions and third parties. The Fusion Cell is to produce analysis and reports on hybrid activities focusing in particular on third countries. The analysis will be based on information provided by member states, EU delegations and the Commission. The Joint Communication expresses interest in establishing a separate Center for Excellence as the Fusion Cell is not envisaged to provide any policy recommendations or to conduct any long-term capacity-building in countering hybrid threats. The Fusion Cell is furthermore not tasked to provide strategic level research, exercise or training in countering hybrid threats, as this is envisioned in the Communication to be the main objective of the future Center of Excellence. The exchange of information between the Fusion Cell and the Center of Excellence will require a Security Agreement and protected lines of communication.

## **EU and NATO in Resilience and Societal Preparedness**

Comprehensive preparedness and resilience is of great importance to NATO.<sup>6</sup> NATO's responses to hybrid threats are based on three key actions: to prepare, deter and defend. In order for these actions to succeed NATO will have to develop the ability to support partner countries in developing good governance and reliable institutions in order to strengthen their resilience and ability to respond to hybrid threats. The Center of Excellence can be of great help to NATO in this regard. Seating a liaison officer from NATO to the Center may provide for even closer cooperation and should therefore be considered an option. Non-EU members of NATO should also be kept updated on the developments of the Center of Excellence as they are equally entitled to the services it is envisaged to provide.

Hybrid threats are significant to NATO, EU and European countries at large. A closer cooperation in this matter between EU and NATO is important as these threats are best met with the resources of both organizations inevitably bringing them two closer together. Countering hybrid threats entails many actions outside the remit of traditional force projection. The EU completes NATO capabilities in countering hybrid threats especially regarding situational awareness, strategic communication, cyber defense and civilian-military cooperation. NATO subsequently recommends closer ties with the EU on a staff-to-staff basis, strengthening coordination and mutual assistance to the country experiencing hybrid threats or attacks. NATO and EU have developed separate but complementary play books on countering hybrid threats. In order to best support this cooperation the Center for

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<sup>4</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016JC0018&from=FI>, accessed 12.7.2016.

<sup>5</sup> <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8022-2016-INIT/en/pdf>, accessed 12.7.2016

<sup>6</sup> NATO Warsaw Summit Communiqué, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw 8-9 July 2016, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm).

Excellence would benefit from being independent of EU structures. Any duplication with the existing NATO Centers of Excellence can be mitigated with pertinent planning.

## **The Tasks and Objectives of the Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats**

### ***Objectives and tasks***

The hybrid Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, focusing on strategic level analysis, research and training, is envisaged to support NATO, EU and member states, NGOs and private sector actors in countering hybrid threats and strengthening societal resilience. In the interest of creating a flexible and open source of expertise for the international community, the Center of Excellence is thought to function outside formal EU and NATO structures as a multi-national, cross-disciplinary network.

The Center of Excellence has at the moment of its inception attracted the interest of twelve countries,<sup>7</sup> the EU's External Action Service and NATO. Complementarity with existing institutions and instruments, including the newly established EU Hybrid Fusion Cell, is seen as essential.

The tasks of the center are envisaged to include strategic level dialogue on protecting societal vulnerabilities from hybrid threats, academic analysis of hybrid threats and inherent vulnerabilities, collecting best practices and lessons learned, and educating, training and exercising, all with the aim of strengthening capabilities to counter hybrid threats.

The aim could be to tackle hybrid threats through a comprehensive approach focusing on three baskets: 1) hybrid influence, 2) hybrid terrorism and 3) responding to hybrid threats and strengthening resilience. Hybrid influence is manifold, making use of military, political, information, economic, and cultural resources, and it can be connected with critical infrastructure, cyber security and migration flows. Hybrid terrorism is thought to include actions of multiple kinds in order to enhance a particular goal, by for instance combining cyber-attacks with ideological rhetoric. Strengthening the ability of a society in countering hybrid threats emanates from strong efforts to strengthen societal resilience through early warning, situational awareness, codes of conduct and developing of procedures and processes.

### ***Composition and Working Methods***

Initially the Center could provide all interested parties with relevant networks of experts, both governmental and non-governmental. The working method of the Center could be network based so as to align interested parties into communities of interest, focusing on certain forms of hybrid threats and analyzing ways (in terms of governance structures and methodologies) to counter this particular hybrid threat or form of hybrid action. The Secretariat, to be established in Helsinki, would coordinate the flows of information between the communities of interest, in addition to keeping close ties with identified points of contacts in the member states. These points of contact would in turn coordinate networks of experts in their respective countries, giving the member states engaging in the work of the Center of Excellence freedom of initiative with regards to participation and agenda setting. The headquarters would in its own right lead work on research, training and exercises, in addition to preparing the steering board meetings and coordinating work with partner organizations such as the EU and NATO.

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<sup>7</sup> Spain, the UK, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, France, Sweden, Germany, Finland, Estonia and the United States.

### ***Research and Strategic Analysis***

The aim of the research activities of the Center of Excellence could include analysis of the phenomenon of hybrid threats and the interdependencies it creates between societal functions including the underlying strategies and logics of disruption. The research could make use of open source data and a network-based cooperation between experts and organizations. The research framework should be firmly anchored in evidence based decision-making producing analysis, doctrines, scenarios, and training methods in helping to identify and counter hybrid threats.

### ***Training and Exercising***

The training activities of the Center should be based on information gathered through research and strategic assessments. In addition, the Center should produce training modules and material for different forms of exercises, which would then be utilized in net based course portals helping participants to understand the basics of hybrid actions. In addition, one important task would be to enhance the ability of political decision-makers to take appropriate actions to counter threats by providing table-top exercises of various kinds.

### ***Developing Preparedness and Resilience***

State resilience is founded on societal preparedness in all spheres of life, with a special focus on protecting critical infrastructure against hybrid threats through inter-agency coordination. The model of upholding and strengthening societal preparedness is based on the Finnish view of a whole-of-government approach to societal security. In order for societal preparedness to work efficiently in a complex environment, responses and skills need to be developed so as to accommodate prudent action against any form of hybrid threats. The Center should therefore along with its partners evaluate different working-methods and tools with which to best counter these threats. The aim is to establish a Center of Excellence which brings together the best possible knowledge Europe has to offer in the pursuit of countering hybrid threats.