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NATO – Operations

Introduction

The strategic context posed by a globalised world has become increasingly complex, occasionally chaotic, or even erratic since the end of the Bipolar World Order. In this strategic context NATO, which is the most powerful political-military alliance of the world, must operate in an environment that continuously evolves and shows signs of constant deterioration. NATO's military capabilities, its strategic approach and posture, together with various planning activities reflect a constant adaptation to meet the challenges posed by accelerating strategic changes. The revival of great power competition and the resulting multi-polarity means that the road ahead is bumpy and often obscured (Vuving 2020: 13). The unfolding 21st century has featured volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA). The strategic near- and medium-term future will be extremely conflict-laden since it yields various possibilities of different magnitude and consequence. As a result, NATO must conduct various campaigns, operations and activities on global scale in the operational level to fulfil its three core tasks such as collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security. Although each campaign, operation or activity is unique, the principles that guide NATO's approach to campaigns, operations and activities must root in a sound doctrinal system.

Forces and megatrends

The volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment features certain and huge macroeconomic and geostrategic forces, called megatrends that shape the world on a global scale. Rapid urbanisation, demographic and social change, altering climatic conditions and resource scarcity, the shift in global economic power, and technological breakthroughs are the forces at play. They have the potential to change the current geo-strategic status quo and definitely influence the world's collective future in a profound way. The implications of these forces are broad as megatrends stand for tremendous risks that require mitigation. The depth and the complexity of the forces involved indicate that security challenges reach deep into the very fabric of the societies on global, regional and local scale. Meaningful approaches must ease the confluence of the defence and security challenges posed by these forces and trends on mega scale (PWC 2016). A very wide variety of military and non-military risks come from multiple sources and point into multiple directions thus influencing the security of NATO member states. These risks contain uncertainty and instability, and are difficult to predict. They have the potential to cause regional problems at the periphery of the Alliance as they originate in ethnic

rivalries, religious tensions, disputed territories, conflicts over resources, especially water scarcity, inadequate income, failed reforms, human rights abuses, collapse of governments and dissolution of states. These risks can affect regional stability, cause human suffering, and ignite armed conflicts that can spill over into neighbouring countries, including NATO member states. Acts of terrorism, various forms of sabotage, organised crime, the disruption of the flow of vital resources, uncontrolled movement of large numbers of people profoundly affect the perception of security and stability on various scales (NATO 2017: 2-6 – 2-10).

According to a recent UN report (EINSIEDEL 2014), the number of conflicts has sharply increased since 2010. For example in 2015, the number of ongoing conflicts increased to 50 compared to 41 a year before with battle related deaths largely concentrating in the Middle East. Conflicts increasingly affect civilians' living in densely populated areas with the consequence that the number of forced displacements since the end of World War II is on an all-time high. Despite the relatively high number of battle related deaths, it seemed so that until the eruption of the Russo–Ukrainian War in 2022 interpersonal and gang violence killed much more people than wars. Political violence tends to be increasingly interrelated in countries where institutions are weak and social norms tolerate violence. This tendency does not affect all regions the same way; many countries and subnational areas face cycles of repeated violence, weak governance and instability. Conflict and violence also have the tendency to cross borders and can affect life in multiple ways. One result is that the poor are increasingly concentrated in countries suffering from prolonged conflicts that keep the countries themselves poor (MARC 2021). Risks on regional and global scale demand a vast range of different responses with the consequence that NATO is required to execute a variety of operations concurrently. Non-state actors attempt to achieve their goals through different forms of destabilisation by taking advantage of the VUCA attributes of the operating environment. Boundaries between state and non-state actors are increasingly blurry resulting that NATO forces may confront an enemy which blends elements of conventional and unconventional warfare; and the recent academic discussion on hybrid warfare well reflects this new reality (BILAL 2021; BACHMANN 2020). Hybrid wars arise when a compound of coincidental or uncoordinated state or non-state actors successfully mix conventional and unconventional threats in a simultaneous and coordinated manner. Their activity can gain momentum by the application of a broad range of non-military measures to exploit NATO vulnerabilities wherever they see it possible (NATO 2017: 2-10 – 2-13). State or non-state actors who wage hybrid war do not necessarily follow those legal or ethical standards that are accepted by NATO member states. The spread of nuclear capabilities, the proliferation of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) weapons and devices, and the easy availability of innovative delivery remains a matter of serious concern. Despite the existence of international non-proliferation regimes, weapons technology proliferation increases access to sophisticated military capabilities. Non-state actors definitely possess the ability to acquire offensive and defensive air-, land- and sea-borne systems, various theatre missiles, and other advanced weaponry. The hallmark of the unfolding 21st century is the growing reliance on information technology and the pervasive reliance on such

systems. This creates vulnerability to cyberspace attacks that can even reduce or cancel NATO forces' superiority (NATO 2017: 2-13 – 2-17).

Strategic environment

The Russian aggression against Ukraine that started in February 2014 with the occupation and subsequent annexation of Crimea and the subsequent invasion in February 2022 resulted in an all-out, traditional war between two European countries. The unfortunate events since then have made it clear that despite all assumptions the Euro-Atlantic area is far from peaceful. It became clear that norms and principles that have long contributed to a stable and predictable European security architecture are vulnerable. This new and broader security reality features strategic competition, pervasive instability and recurrent shocks of various kind. The grim reality is that states, authoritarian actors and strategic competitors can challenge and test the resilience of the member states and try to put their interests, values and way of life under pressure. Their preferred means are of hybrid nature as these actors take advantage of the opportunities posed by the cyber, space and information domains. The aggression made it clear that the Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic area. It applies various forms of coercion, subversion, aggression and annexation. Its military posture, rhetoric and willingness to use force to pursue certain political goals undermine the international order. This requires the significant strengthening of deterrence and defence capabilities, the enhancing of resilience against any type of coercion, and the supporting of NATO's member states to counter any form of malign interference and aggression (NATO 2022a). Over decades NATO had a primary focus on non-article five crisis response operations, which fed from many sources. The first was the steady increase of the number of non-state actors who constantly challenged the status quo. Unlike in the traditional international arena in which state actors primarily interact with other state actors, the last three decades witnessed state actors increasingly interacting with various non-state actors. The second is the proverbial complexity of the international arena that provided non-state actors with an abundance of opportunity to become successful even over a long period (Porkoláb 2013: 5–21). The third is that contrary to the optimistic assumptions, various forms of state versus non-state actor interaction have come to the fore. Globalisation offers a limitless terrain for these interactions that can erupt anytime and anywhere. State versus non-state actor interactions very often feature violence fed by the endless cycle of terror and counter-terror, and occasionally display an unprecedented level of lethality (Hardt–Negri 2004: 26–27).

State actor versus non-state actor interaction is also a strong actor versus weak actor contest and can result in hybrid wars waged in all domains. The consequence of this special type of war is serious as an examination of the outcome of such wars in the last two hundred years reveals. A comparative analysis of the *Correlates of War* data set from the Correlates of War (COW) project homepage reveals that weak actors tend to win increasingly as the percental outcome of strong actor versus weak actor conflicts of the last

200 years displays. Strong actor dominance dropped from initial 88.2 : 11.8 in the period between 1800–1849, to 79.5 : 20.5 in the period between 1850–1899, to 55.1 : 44.9 in the period between 1900–1949, and to 45 : 55 in the period between 1950–1998 (Arreguín-Toft 2001: 93–128). In a classic article published in Foreign Affairs half a century ago, Henry Kissinger lamented on what went wrong during the war in Vietnam. He concluded that the strong actor wanted to fight a military war, but the weak actor fought a political one. The strong actor sought physical attrition, whereas the weak actor preferred psychological exhaustion. In this process, the strong actor lost sight of one of the cardinal maxims of this special type of war: the weak actor wins if he does not lose, and the strong actor loses if he does not win (Kissinger 1969: 211–234). Things just have become worse for the strong actor since then. The dramatic increase in the number of non-state actors, the accelerating trend of technology development, the explosion in the number of information exchanges led to the result that the strong actor has to cope with a broad range of simultaneous threats and challenges (Porkoláb–Zweibelson 2018: 196–212). Terrorism, regardless in what form and manifestation it comes, appears to be the most enduring challenge posed by non-state entities. It is direct, asymmetric, and fundamentally affects the internal security of member states, international peace and prosperity. Terrorist organisations in recent years have expanded their networks, enhanced their capabilities and invested in new technologies. They possess increased reach and lethality, and continue to exploit conflict and weak governance to recruit, mobilise and expand their influence. Terrorist organisations take advantage of conflicts, fragility and instability in the immediate neighbourhood, mostly South of the Euro-Atlantic area where security, demographic, economic and political challenges are aggravated by climate change, fragile institutions, health emergencies and food insecurity that go hand in hand with forced displacement, human trafficking and irregular migration. Emerging and disruptive technologies add to the hybrid nature of conflict, acquire greater strategic importance and become key arenas of global competition. Cyberspace activities of strategic competitors and potential adversaries can restrict NATO's access and freedom to operate in space, degrade existing space capabilities, target friendly civilian and military infrastructure, and impair the Member States' defence and harm their security (NATO 2022a).

Allied Joint Doctrine

The forces and megatrends that shape the strategic environment in a globalised world make it clear that even the strongest NATO member states are less likely to be in the position to conduct operations unilaterally in the future. Rather, they will form part of a coalition created by allied nations and coalition partners to achieve internationally agreed end-states and various comprehensive objectives. A close cooperation is necessary to be able to work effectively when unilateral action would be impractical, impossible or undesirable. Sound doctrinal principles are of utmost importance when conducting operations. A catalogue of clearly and thoroughly understood operational level doctrines is detrimental for the execution of multinational operations in an effective, integrated

and synchronised manner by all domains (Pearce 2012: 111–112). The latest version of the Allied Joint Publication (AJP-01), the Allied Joint Doctrine issued in December 2022 is NATO's capstone doctrine for campaigns, operations and activities conducted in a joint way. The document explains the strategic context and focuses on the fundamentals of such operations. It provides commanders and their staff with a common framework for employing the military instrument of power based on a comprehensive approach by explaining the fundamentals and principles. It describes both the strategic context and provides a guidance on how NATO forces and partners operate to cause synergy and disproportionate effects. It also provides a reference for NATO civilians and non-NATO civilians operating with the Alliance (NATO 2022g).

The doctrine feeds from a diverse mix of various influences as it reflects a broader cultural, political, social and environmental context. It is a composition of an evolving relationship between militaries, states, populations, intellectual trends and scientific results, all reflecting an ultimately intangible belief system. This context is influential for its content even if doctrine developers, who are often subject matter experts themselves, are not necessarily aware of it. The latest version of the Allied Joint Publication (AJP-01), the Allied Joint Doctrine makes it clear that no doctrine stays unchanged for over a long period of time as publishing it in a written form can only capture a snapshot of a certain belief system at the time of publication. As a result, no doctrine can fully show the entirety of the situation, nor can it fully capture the state of affairs. This is because a doctrine cannot give context to itself, as various cultural, political, social and environmental factors are necessary to its creation, and understanding doctrine requires an understanding of the attributes of the underlying context (Jackson 2017). The Allied Joint Publication (AJP-01), the Allied Joint Doctrine introduces and explains the continuum of competition, updates deterrence and lists its principles together with ways and types, and contextualises NATO's core policies with a focus on projecting stability and the fight against terrorism. It reintroduces campaign themes and describes their relationship with the aforementioned continuum of competition, as well as updates and extends the comprehensive approach. As a new element, the doctrine introduces and describes the behaviour-centric approach, the manoeuvrist approach, mission command, and the comprehensive approach as basic tenets of joint operations. It also describes the components and orchestration of fighting power, develops interoperability, and explains the operational domains by introducing the concept of multi-domain operations. The doctrine describes the operations framework alongside with its analytical, functional and geographic attributes. As a new element it changes the joint action framework to the joint function framework, and updates the command and control architecture, and the command relationships. It introduces the notion of human security by including and expanding on cross-cutting topics such as the protection of civilians, children and armed conflict, cultural property protection, women, peace and security, conflict-related sexual violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, combating trafficking in human beings, and building integrity (NATO 2022g: iii).

Generating forces

As a result of the Russo–Ukrainian War, NATO has entered the fourth period of its strategic thinking in its long existence. Both member states and the Alliance itself had to adapt rapidly in order to operate more effectively. The unfolding period of strategic competition means that emphasis must be placed on deterrence and countering of adversaries who pursue objectives below the threshold of armed conflict. This requires a better preparedness to fight and defeat adversaries if deterrence fails. NATO has responded to this change in the strategic context by producing a new *NATO Military Strategy,* the first *Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area* in 50 years, and a new *NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept.* These documents lay down the foundation on how the Alliance will operate and fight over the next decades (NATO 2022g: 1). During its history, NATO has been an active and leading contributor to peace and security. Democratic values and the commitment to a peaceful resolution of disputes resulted that the Euro-Atlantic area has not seen the outbreak of interstate wars over decades. The combined military power of the member states was a guarantee that should diplomatic efforts fail, NATO possesses the necessary military capacity to undertake crisis management operations on its own or with coalition partners and various international organisations (NATO 2022d). The changes in the strategic environment means that NATO's military organisation and the underlying structures have to extend to all military actors, and formations are involved in and used to implement political strategic level decisions with clear military implications. Thus, key elements of NATO's military organisation are the Military Committee (MC), composed of the Chiefs of Defence of the member states, its executive body the International Military Staff (IMS) and the NATO Command Structure (NCS) that is distinct from the NATO Force Structure (NFS). The NATO Command Structure is composed of two strategic level commands such as the Allied Command Operations (ACO) and the Allied Command Transformation (ACT). Whereas the first is headed by the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), the second by the Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (SACT). The NCS is composed of permanent multinational headquarters at the strategic, operational and component levels of command. These headquarters are distributed geographically on both sides of the Atlantic. They are commonly funded, and offer the opportunity to all Allies to participate in, and contribute to, the command and control of all NATO operations, missions and activities through all services and across all domains. The NFS stands for a distinct pool of national and multinational forces and headquarters placed at the Alliance's disposal on a permanent or temporary basis. These forces are in accordance with predetermined readiness criteria, with rules of deployment and transfer of authority to NATO command that varies from country to country (NATO 2018; NATO 2021a).

When an operation or certain mission is deemed necessary, member states and partner countries alike volunteer personnel, equipment and resources. National contributions of an expanding number of member states is needed to carry out operations or missions because NATO does not possess own military forces. Forces labelled as "NATO forces" are actually multinational forces from NATO member states and other troop-contributing

countries that come together after a force generation process with well-established steps. These forces are placed under the command of ACO that is subordinated to SACEUR, who is responsible for executing all operations and missions (NATO 2023d). The well-established, permanent and integrated command structure with military and civilian personnel in its ranks come from the member states. This staff collectively works for the achievement of the same end-goals and objectives. The 30 member states of NATO means that the Alliance can count on and benefit from the military capabilities and expertise of 30 armed forces with different weight, influence and specialisation. This diversity makes clear that every nation brings something to the table by offering personnel and military technology including big-ticket items such as tanks, airplanes and ships. Currently NATO has about 3.5-million personnel, troops and civilians combined. Each member state contributes with different strategic weight and influence. ACO, led by SACEUR, is responsible for executing all NATO operations and missions. Deputy SACEUR coordinates troop contributions. When the North Atlantic Council (NAC) decides to carry out an operation, the military authorities propose a draft concept of operations (CONOPS). This concept presents the minimum request of forces including equipment, work force and resources. All activities pointing into establishing, preparing and deploying these forces is called force generation. The force generation process follows a standard procedure in which member states allocate personnel and equipment necessary to carry out the operations and missions approved by the NAC. National funding is the final deciding factor on whether a nation will contribute or not. As a result, the member states can make direct and indirect contributions to the implementation of NATO's policies and activities. They can cover the costs involved whenever they volunteer forces or in accordance with an agreed cost-sharing formula they make direct contributions to NATO's common budgets to finance the costs of NATO's integrated structures and collectively owned equipment (SHAPE s. a.).

Past operations

NATO was established in 1949 shortly after the end of World War II with the aim to act as a powerful deterrent against military aggression coming mainly from the Soviet Union. In this role, NATO was successful as during the entire Cold War, it was not involved in military campaigns and operations. For much of the latter half of the 20th century, NATO remained vigilant and prepared. After the end of the Cold War, however, in the early 1990s great changes occurred in the international security environment. The emergence of new challenges and the resurgence of old threats resulted in conditions demanding new responsibilities. From being an exclusively defensive alliance for about half a century, NATO became increasingly proactive and offensive in the good meaning of the term. Although NATO conducted its first major crisis response operation in the Balkans, there were some minor operations starting with the 1990s. The following short listing provides a chronological overview of operations NATO conducted and terminated in the last couple of decades. The diverse array of operations started with *Operation Anchor*

Guard (1990–1991) in which NATO Airborne Early Warning aircraft deployed to Turkey to monitor the unfolding crisis in Kuwait and provide coverage of the Southeastern part of Turkey. *Operation Ace Guard* (1991) was based on a Turkish request to assist to meet the threat posed by Iraq during the first Gulf Crisis/War. In response to that request NATO deployed the ACE Mobile Force air and air defence packages to Turkey (NATO 2022d; Freedom aNATOmy s. a.d.). Following the break-up of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and the collapse of its centrally-controlled economic system, during *Operation Allied Goodwill I and II* (1992) NATO assisted an international relief effort by flying teams of humanitarian assistance experts and medical advisors to Russia and other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). During a period of growing Western tension with Libya after the UN Security Council imposed sanctions, NATO provided in *Operation Agile Genie* (1992) increased Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) coverage of the Central Mediterranean to monitor air approach routes from the North African littoral (NATO 2022d; Freedom aNATOmy s. a.c.).

After the breakup of Yugoslavia NATO was involved in many operations in *Bosnia and Herzegovina* where a violent conflict started in April 1992. NATO first enforced the United Nations (UN) arms embargo on weapons in the Adriatic Sea and a no-fly-zone during which NATO aircraft shot down four Bosnian Serb fighter-bombers. In August 1995 UN peacekeepers requested NATO airstrikes. *Operation Deadeye* began in the same month against Bosnian Serb air forces, but failed to result in Bosnian Serb compliance with the UN's demands. This led to *Operation Deliberate Force* (1995), which targeted Bosnian Serb command and control installations and facilities to bring the Serbs to the negotiating table and end the war. After the signing of the Dayton Peace Accord NATO immediately deployed the Implementation Force (IFOR) comprising some 60,000 troops. The subsequent *Operation Joint Endeavour* (1996–2004) meant the deployment of a 32,000-strong Stabilisation Force (SFOR). In January 2005 the EU took over responsibility with *Operation Althea.* Nevertheless, NATO maintains a military headquarters in Sarajevo to carry out a number of specific tasks related to assisting the government in reforming its defence structures (NATO 2022d; Mulchinock 2017: 45–94). *Operation Eagle Assist* (2001–2002) was NATO's first counterterrorism operation. After the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, NATO agreed on eight measures to support the United States and on request it launched its first-ever counterterrorism operation. Seven NATO AWACS radar aircraft helped patrol the skies deployed in support of an Article 5 operation (NATO 2022d; AFPC s. a.). In response to the request from the Government in Skopje, NATO implemented three successive operations in North Macedonia (2001–2003). *Operation Essential Harvest* disarmed ethnic Albanian groups, *Operation Amber Fox* provided protection for international monitors, *Operation Allied Harmony* provided advisory elements to assist the government. The operations demonstrated the strong inter-institutional cooperation between NATO, the EU and the OSCE. During the second Gulf War in *Operation Display Deterrence* (2003) NATO deployed AWACS radar aircraft and air defence batteries to enhance the defence of Turkey. During that mission AWACS aircraft flew 100 missions with 950 flying hours (NATO 2022d; NATO 2022e).

Operation Distinguished Games (2004) responded to the request of the Greek Government to assist to the Olympic and Paralympic Games held in Athens. In the framework of this non-Article 4 or 5 operation NATO provided intelligence support, provision of Chemical, Biological Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) defence assets and AWACS radar aircraft within the borders of a member country. Although not formally named as an operation, NATO assisted the U.S. after Hurricane Katrina (2005), Pakistan after the huge earthquake (2005) and the African Union in Sudan (2005–2007). These activities focused on providing food, medical and logistics support, humanitarian relief and air transport. Following the popular uprising against the Gadhafi regime, NATO conducted *Operation Unified Protector* (2011) also to provide a no-fly zone over Libya. After the second Gulf war NATO conducted a small support operation called *NATO Training Mission in Iraq* (2004–2011) in order to train, mentor and assist the Iraqi Security Forces. The aim of NATO was to help establish effective and accountable security forces. Member states, without exception, all contributed to the training effort either in or outside of Iraq, through financial contributions or donations of equipment (NATO 2022b; NATO 2022d). NATO launched *Operation Active Endeavour* (2001–2016) to deter, defend, disrupt and protect against terrorist activity in the Mediterranean to secure one of the busiest trade routes in the world. The operation was an Article 5 operation that only involved NATO member countries until it started accepting non-NATO countries in 2004. In 2010 the operation shifted to on-call units and surge operations instead of deployed forces to provide a picture of maritime activity in the Mediterranean. *Operation Allied Provider* (2008) aimed to counter piracy activities off the coast of Somalia. NATO naval forces provided escorts to various UN vessels transiting through the Gulf of Aden, where piracy threatened to undermine international humanitarian efforts in Africa. *Operation Allied Protector* (2009) as a successor operation was also a counter-piracy operation with the aim to improve the safety of commercial maritime routes and international navigation off the Horn of Africa. NATO naval forces conducted surveillance tasks, provided protection, deterred and suppressed piracy, and armed robbery. *Operation Ocean Shield* (2009–2016) focused on at-sea counter-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa to directly combat piracy. It offered useful assistance to the requesting states to develop own capacity to combat piracy activities. The most famous involvement of NATO overseas was its participation in *International Security Assistance Force* (2001–2014) in Afghanistan. ISAF had three main objectives such as to develop the new Afghan security forces, to enable Afghan authorities to provide effective security across the country, and to contribute to reconstruction and development in Afghanistan. This mission was one of the largest international crisis management operations ever. At its peak, ISAF brought together up to 51 different contributing nations. ISAF was succeeded by *Resolute Support Mission* (2015–2021), which was much more modest, both in size and scope. This mission aimed at supporting planning, programming and budgeting, and assuring transparency, accountability and oversight. Another important aim was to support adherence to the rule of law and promote good governance (NATO 2022d; NATO 2022f; NATO 2022h; NATO 2022i).

Ongoing operations

Current NATO operations such as *NATO Air Policing* (2004–) and *Enhanced Air Policing* (2014–) are conducted by one of three NATO standing forces on active duty that contribute to NATO's collective defence efforts on a permanent basis. NATO's standing maritime forces, the integrated air defence system and the ballistic missile defence system belong to the collective defence efforts, too. In response to the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, together with the unprovoked Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022, NATO reassures security measures for its member states. Under normal circumstance, NATO's air policing missions are normally collective peacetime missions to detect, track and identify violations and infringements of airspace, and to take subsequent action. Fighter jets of those member states who possess certain air capabilities patrol the airspace of those who do not have fighter jets of their own. Starting with 2022 NATO has deployed additional aircraft to reinforce its air policing missions over the Baltic States, along the borders of Bulgaria, Poland and Romania, and in the Eastern Adriatic and the Western Balkans. Air policing missions over Iceland and Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands are boosted, too (NATO 2022d; NTO 2023b). To provide assistance beyond the Euro-Atlantic region, NATO is committed to support the African Union (AU) in its peacekeeping missions. NATO has assisted the AU mission in Somalia since June 2007, by providing air and sealift support for AU peacekeepers. NATO also provides capacity-building support, as well as training support to the African Standby Force (ASF) Concept (NATO 2022d; NATO 2023a).

NATO Mission Iraq (2018–present) was launched at the Brussels Summit. The Iraqi Government requested it in coordination with the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. This mission is a non-combat advisory and capacity-building mission to strengthen Iraqi security institutions and forces to prevent the return of ISIS, fight any form of terrorism and stabilise their country on their own. The mission integrates available civil and military personnel, and works closely with various international actors on the ground. It represents a broad international effort to help Iraq eradicate terrorism and promote stability. NATO advises Iraqi defence and security officials and professional military education institutions in specific areas of focus such as policy and strategy, force generation and development, resource management, women, peace and security issues, leadership development; and good governance (NATO 2022d; NATO 2023c). *Operation Sea Guardian* (2016–present) is a flexible maritime operation that performs the full range of tasks related to maritime security operations. It is currently performing maritime situational awareness, counterterrorism at sea and support to capacity-building. The operation helps to maintain a secure and safe maritime environment while supporting NATO's three core tasks such as collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security (NATO 2021b; NATO 2022d). NATO's *Kosovo Force* (1999–present) had the task to end widespread violence and halt the ongoing humanitarian disaster. Troops continue to maintain a strong presence throughout the territory. After Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in 2008 NATO agreed to continue to maintain its presence. It has since helped to create a lightly armed multi-ethnic professional Kosovo Security

Force to carry out security tasks not appropriate for the police. NATO strongly supports the Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina as normalisation of relations is key to solving the political deadlock (NATO 2022c; NATO 2022d).

Conclusions

Over the years it became clear that NATO has the willingness, the necessary structure and procedure together with the means to conduct operations even over a long period of time. Relevant strategic documents augmented by a sound doctrinal system enables the Alliance to have the right strategic-level posture, the appropriate operational-level response, and the necessary tactical-level forces to fulfil its three core tasks. Past and present operations have shown that the existing command structure and force structure of NATO is flexible enough to properly respond to the unfolding forces and trends of this war-prone century. Regardless of the underlying dynamics of the international security environment, NATO has always rightly identified and addressed the main threats and challenges. The unfolding 21st century displays interstate threats and great power competition, which is in sharp contrast with the various forms of transnational challenges and non-peer competitors. In an increasingly competitive world featuring interstate threats and indirect and hybrid forms of warfare, the emergence of disruptive technologies, the strengthening of societal resilience at home, and technological innovation is written large. Whatever the future will be, one can be certain that NATO will still be able to conduct operations when and where they will be needed.

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