



# Atlantic Council of the United Kingdom

## Research Division Issue - July 2015

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### Let's Talk About War, Even If We Don't Want To

Dr Andrew Stephen Campion

ACUK Head of Research



It is troubling that in a political climate where renewed aggression by Russia in Eastern Europe coincides with the growth of the IS and other extremist groups that issues of defence in foreign policy are losing their heft within Western discourse. Discussing war as a real possibility may be distasteful to us, but we are too often ready to dismiss questioning its role in geopolitical affairs and its impact upon our

societal wellbeing as increasingly irrelevant. We must always be aware that speaking of war or conflict does in no way mean we necessarily endorse it. That being said, however, we dismiss the question at our peril as it is essential to properly addressing issues of security in the contemporary context, including those which challenge norms and perceptions of the safety of, and our safety within the transatlantic community. For instance, championing ideas of universal human rights,

including religious freedoms, gay rights, and gender equality, or ideas of political liberty, necessarily means we need to confront possibly unpalatable notions of war because we now, more than ever, operate on a global level. We are now confronted with actors who are not only indifferent to our social norms but are actively opposed to them and work to undermine them. Thus, more than a mere academic self-indulgence, discussing the nature and place of conflict, and clearly articulating what we mean by it, is vital to our wellbeing. The best way to elucidate its place in a thoughtful and balanced perspective is to demonstrate how conflict has become intrinsically linked to our values.

There are two interrelated questions we have to address in order to proceed. First, what do we mean by 'threat'? The proliferation of threats has been a defining feature of the international system over the past several decades and we are, perhaps, still learning how to reconfigure our defensive capabilities, and indeed epistemologies, to



address them. The notion of 'threat', however, remains an ambiguous term because it can mean different things to different people. While the proliferation of threats includes a general widening of security agendas to include non-traditional factors such as environmental, societal, energy, and human security (among countless others) these concerns tend to remain marginalized in popular discourse. Stephen Walt explains our tendency to couch our understandings of security threats in realist language when he states that: "Given the military power is the central focus of the field and is subject to political control, this tendency is appropriate". Popular readings of 'threat', then, are arguably synonymous with 'violence' and could be substituted for 'war' in many contexts. It is a fascinating phenomenon that the notion of threat is so closely associated with war when the latter is increasingly absent from our political agendas. Going forward, however, it is important to note that the equation of threat to violence remains a defining idea.

The second question we have to confront is connected to the first and concerns the divergence between threat impact and threat proliferation. Essentially, when we discuss the violence which confronts our societies, do we emphasize the number of threats which face us or the ultimate impact of each threat? It is apparent that there is little consensus about this matter amongst the political elites who set national security agendas. Problems emerge when our leaders conflate the threat proliferation and threat severity, and it is worth addressing them both as they are intrinsically tied to our values.

Even when we work within the confines of threat-as-violence, the notion of threat proliferation can remain wide-ranging. While much of the world is affected by the civil wars which result from problematic governance, for clarity of analysis, we will concentrate on issues of global terrorism which, for the West, became a defining image of threat in the wake of 9/11.

Understanding these threat perceptions, and the responses to them, requires us to place them in context and see how they evolved. Recounting a discussion with a CIA colleague in the 1990s, Rolf Mowatt-Larssen, Senior Fellow of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, summed up his colleague's pre-9/11 attitude when he said "terrorism isn't a strategic problem. It won't affect our way of life, and it isn't a threat to our national security". Mowatt-Larssen's colleague understood the violence from terrorism to represent aberrations in an otherwise safe structure rather than a systematic affront to national and international security. This, however, changed on September 11th, 2001 as traditional assumptions of Western security narratives were upended. The democratization of violence resulted in a direct attack on the West by a movement devoted to combatting Western values. These threat perceptions were entrenched by other events such as the Madrid bombings and 7/7 in London.

The way 9/11 twinned proliferation with impact of threat – it was an enormous, and well-coordinated attack that targeted civilians and military personnel alike – served to confuse our responses to war going forward, and this, in turn, served to influence our conceptions of it. The only

apparent response available to the US, and other Western powers, was to react to an essentially non-state organization on a national level because the epistemic shift necessary to accommodate these new threat perceptions had not yet taken place. In the nearly fifteen years since 9/11 one could argue that our responses to the proliferation of extremist threats have not developed to any great degree. This is evidenced by our confusion as how best to deal with the IS.



While ‘threat’ may not actually mean ‘war’, our policy to threat response has served to create a shorthand between the two. In response to the abhorrent Tunisia attacks late last month, Prime Minister David Cameron stated that “there is no doubt we face a very severe threat in our country”.

Cameron’s response to the Tunisia attacks highlights the increasingly blurred divisions between domestic and foreign violence and their impact on our perceptions of war. The proliferation of threats means that we need to tackle the issue on several fronts and the Atlantic Alliance’s response(s) to the rise of the IS is indicative of this.

While Cameron argues that the UK needs to address “the failures of integration” in order to solve the “poison” of extremism at home, the relationship between ‘threat’ and ‘war’ means that substantive responses largely remain military in nature, and thus focused outwardly. Lord Richards, Britain’s ex-defence chief, draws a clear line between extremism at home and the role of the IS and stated: “If you really want to get rid of them we effectively need to get on a war footing.” A significant consequence of our increasingly interconnected world is the increasing link between domestic and foreign security and the proliferation of threats. For instance, with an increasing exodus of young Britons to Syria and Iraq, success for the IS has direct effects on the domestic security of members of the Atlantic Alliance. Foregoing intervention abroad increasingly means

risking security at home as an attack on one's values is increasingly akin to an attack on one's sovereignty. In the mitigation of the proliferation of threats, war is clearly not obsolete.

This, then, brings us to confront the idea of impact of threats, the most visible of which in the contemporary context is the looming possibility of Western conflict with Russia. Confronting notions of high-impact threats entails we confront existential threats to our fellow Alliance members. Russia's belligerence is a direct threat to the very survival of our allies in the Baltic, and Russia's annexation of Crimea has prompted Lithuania to



reintroduce conscription. The hope in the Alliance's Eastern states is that "enhance[d] and accelerate[d] army recruitment", in the words of Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė, coupled with the deployment of NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) along with other Alliance forces might be enough to avoid war with Russia. Clearly, to our allies who share a border with Russia, war must not seem obsolete and is very much on the agenda. War in this sense, however, not only threatens the territorial integrity and existence of our allies, but, as do threats from extremism, it also has a very significant impact on our values.

Because values are always in flux, pinpointing a definitive account of 'Western values' is difficult at best. However, for the sake of pragmatism, this article argues that the looming impact of the threat from Russia is directly threatening a set of shared values we have with our Eastern allies, even if a relatively large gulf still exists in some areas. Going against stereotypes, Canada has been one of the most vocal members of NATO opposed to the impact of Russian actions on the West. In June Prime Minister Stephen Harper stated that "I don't think Russia under Vladimir Putin belongs in the G7. Period." He further distanced Russia from the West by stating "Russia is more often than not trying to deliberately be a strategic rival, to deliberately counter the good things we're trying to achieve in the world". Applauding the strong stance taken against his rival, Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy

Yatsenyuk simply said “this is about the values”, clearly suggesting that there is no longer any overlap between those values shared amongst members of the transatlantic community and those of Russia.

With a few exceptions, for the past few decades there has been a growing sense in popular Western discourse that we have evolved beyond the point where we need to pay much heed to our security. Other, more immediate issues have appeared to be more pressing and because of this have come to define our political agendas. However, because we now face a duality of threats, that is low-impact but high-frequency threats (global terrorism) as well as the possibility of a high-impact but low-frequency threat (Russian aggression), it is irresponsible for us to suggest that issues of defence matter less than more ‘constructive’ goals which are more in-line with progressive, Western values. What this article suggests is that the emphasis on progressive issues is essential for our wellbeing, but so is an emphasis on matters of defence. In order to safeguard our values at home, we must secure our interests abroad.

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## **An Unequal Partnership: Divergences within the Atlantic Alliance**

Tom Morgan (University of Aberdeen)

ACUK Junior Research Fellow



Since the end of the Cold War and the break-up of the Soviet Union, most of Europe has enjoyed two decades of peace, with the carnage in the Balkans during the 1990s and the ongoing crisis in Ukraine serving as unwelcome exceptions to the general rule. Europe has used this time to focus its efforts primarily on

economic integration, with the assumption that political integration will follow. As the Soviet threat receded military cooperation became less of a priority for European powers. Moreover, NATO

remained in place to ensure European security. In fact, during those years NATO expanded to incorporate states in Central and Eastern Europe who had previously been adversaries of the West. Western security seemed assured, protected as it was by the US led NATO Alliance in a world that no longer felt as dangerous as it was only a few years prior.

Despite reliance on a cohesive notion of NATO, when it comes to delivering security, strong divergences can be identified within the Atlantic Alliance. The United States is by far the world's most powerful nation and has access to unparalleled military might or 'hard power' which is a product of by far and away the world's highest defence expenditure. Whilst some of the larger European states do still possess significant military power, notably France and the United Kingdom, European states for the most part prefer to wield 'soft power' such as diplomacy and international aid, placing a lower priority on military force than their American allies.

European states are now faced with the challenge of trying to raise their military capabilities in order to balance the US's strategic shift to the Asia-Pacific. The deteriorating security situation developing around Europe's periphery is occurring at a time when European nations have not got the financial means or the public mandate to reverse the deterioration. Making matters worse, European nations have been scrapping some of their military capabilities in an uncoordinated manner and this has led to the emergence of a number of capability gaps amongst European states while also increasing the wide gaps between Europe and the United States.



These gaps became all too apparent during Operation Unified Protector, the 2011 aerial campaign against Gaddafi's Libya. In an operation where the US was supposedly taking the back seat, the Pentagon provided three quarters of the coalition's aerial refuelling needs and, most embarrassingly,

from fairly early on in the campaign also had to quietly supply some of its allies with precision guided munitions as the allies' stockpiles were found to be woefully inadequate.

This gap in military capabilities between the United States and its European counterparts is one of the clearest examples of divergence within the Atlantic Alliance whilst perhaps also being the most difficult to overcome. The capabilities gap between the US and Europe has been notable for some time. Former US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates has voiced concern that NATO is becoming a two-tiered alliance between members who were willing to bear the costs and make sacrifices and those who wanted to enjoy the benefits of membership. He went on to predict a dismal future for the NATO alliance if the lack of defence spending by European countries was allowed to continue. Almost all European states now lack the means to independently conduct large scale operations, and this becomes particularly pronounced when operations take place outside of their immediate geographic area. Most European militaries are now restricted to territorial based capabilities so that only five percent of the EU's manpower is available for overseas operations. Once again, France and the UK provide exceptions although even their respective military power is in decline as manpower and capabilities are slashed and it is a trend that looks set to continue.



Moreover, a growing proportion of defence expenditure is being spent on personnel costs so that there is less available for research and development, the purchase of new equipment or even the maintenance of current stocks. This means that as well as decreasing in size, European militaries will lose some of the

technological and qualitative edge that they have traditionally enjoyed. This, in turn, will leave European militaries in a worse condition both in real terms as capabilities are scrapped but also in relative terms compared with other world powers. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), NATO-Europe went down from average 3% of GDP on military expenditure

in 1990, to 1.9% in 2000 to 1.5% in 2013 while in the same period, the US spent 5.3%, 3.0% and 3.8%.

European military capabilities are not only constrained by a lack of adequate funding however. All too often, European states have shown that they are less willing than their American allies to deploy military force abroad. Even the more dependable allies (from the US perspective) such as the UK are showing reluctance as was witnessed when the British Parliament voted against military action against Syria in 2013. Due to the influence of domestic politics, even when European powers do deploy military forces abroad, they often find themselves operating under restricted conditions. This situation arose several times in Afghanistan and was the source of some trans-Atlantic tension.

Both sides in the Atlantic relationship have become aware of Europe's military shortcomings as Europe's Southern and Eastern periphery continue to become more unstable than they were even a decade ago. Several initiatives have been implemented in order to address the situation such as the EU's concept of 'Pooling and Sharing' (P&S) and NATO's concept of 'Smart Defence'. The general idea behind both initiatives is that member states of both organisations will be able to save money while also retaining their military capabilities through cooperation. Cooperation on the procurement and maintenance of weapons and the sharing of training facilities would also save members money while also increasing the efficiency and interoperability of their military forces.

Aware too that military weakness could undermine Europe's ability to play a leading role in global affairs, the EU has deployed military forces both in and outside of Europe. The deployment of military assets by a regional organisation outside of any of its member states' territory is unprecedented. It indicates that the EU is serious about protecting its interests, even far from home.



While a strong argument exists that cooperation is the best solution for addressing Europe's defensive shortcomings, states often appear to be dragging their heels when it comes to actually implementing the initiatives when the political incentive to cooperate is weak. Adding to the difficulties is the fact that states are also protective of their own

national sovereignty. The initiatives and projects that are currently running are regarded by critics as 'light'. These critics claim these exercises avoid the development of necessary and expensive military capabilities in favour of training and maintenance.

The Atlantic Alliance, then, is clearly separated by more than an ocean. Vast differences in capabilities, political will and diverging mind-sets are causing unnecessary tensions at a time when the Alliance faces new challenges and needs to present a united front. There is evident American frustration with the seeming inability of European states to pay their share of the costs and accept more of the responsibilities of defending their own continent. However, so long as the US plays the dominant role within the Alliance, there is little incentive for the European members to step up and increase their efforts. Is it possible that if American patience with Europe's feet dragging runs out completely, the Atlantic Alliance could be brought to a close?

## Companies, Nations and Organizations: NATO and PMSCs

Chiara Cori

ACUK Junior Research Analyst



The proliferation of private military and security companies (PMSCs) means that an increasing number of players are emerging on the security scene, altering the relationships among the actors involved in contemporary conflicts. The regulation of such relationships requires extreme delicacy. This article supports

the idea that NATO and the NATO Support Agency may represent bodies and schemes which have taken steps towards addressing these issues. However, before looking into any specific case, it is worth taking into account some of the difficulties at the heart of the matter. These include the vagueness of the terminology and the legal frameworks in which these companies operate.

No matter if the discussions take place within the media, academia, or by the political elite, the issues which surround PMSCs are contentious. One does not need to look very far to realize how slippery the issue can be. First of all, there are divergences on the very terminology and dissent about the nature of such actors, with multiple sources using a multitude of terms. For instance, authors like D. Avant use 'Private Security Companies' whilst P.W Singer uses 'Private Military Firms' and others prefer a distinction between private military and private security companies on the basis that the latter provide only defensive operations, whilst the first category is said to include only those firms that operate on the frontline alongside or in place of national forces. Moreover, the Montreux Document, a document from 2008 which sets out the international legal obligations regarding the use of such companies by states, uses private military and security companies, whilst for others no international institution-given acronym could erase the foot print left by the 'dogs of war', the small mercenaries groups of the '50s' and '60s', which still lingers on.

However, the phenomenon has significantly changed over time, evolving from the dispersed units into a globalised industry mainly formed by companies that are able to offer a wide range of services spanning the military and security categories and are part of the wide portfolio of larger corporate networks.

But why does all this matter? Why is it necessary to undertake the analysis at all? It matters because the presence of these companies has expanded in many theatres, including multilateral military interventions, and there is a very important, but ill-defined relationship which is developing between international organizations, states, and PMSCs. To avoid unwanted consequences, this relationship needs to be less vague. While different international organizations have turned to the private industry for assistance, including the EU, UN and NATO, the focus of this article will be on the latter.

When discussing the issue at the Bratislava Security Conference in 2009, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen commented “I do believe that NATO operations should be conducted by what we might call official military units... Having said that, I will not exclude the possibility that private security companies as such can be used for specific security tasks...but of course, we have to strike the right balance...”. This last point may be useful to the importance of a pondered contracting mechanism, which we will examine shortly.

So far, NATO has not directly contracted any PMSCs in its operations. Security-related services that have been outsourced are carefully addressed in several documents. Outsourcing security services is a sensitive issue with a large number of potential repercussions. Contracting privatised security therefore requires careful scrutiny of the qualifications and of the services that the companies will provide. Hence a directive that focuses on the steps that a contracting officer has to take into account when contracting



external actors is certainly a step in the right direction of maintaining control over the function that has been outsourced. This mechanism also enables regulation not only of the relationship between NATO and the private industry, but also the nature and extent of the package that a company is called to provide. This point is particularly important as security rests in the type of service rather than in the company itself. A careful dictation of the terms of the contract can thus provide an effective control from the beginning of the outsourcing process, which could have avoided the scandals that brought to the headlines companies like the defunct Blackwater.

However, another aspect needs to be taken into consideration when looking at the relationship between PMSCs and NATO, and that is the unique structure of the Alliance. NATO member states are ultimately responsible for their forces and retain important aspects of the operational command throughout the lifespan of a NATO operation. Many companies that have been active in NATO operational theatres are present not because of a contract with the organisation itself, but due to a contract between a member state and the private security provider. A notable example of this was the use of the American firm KBR, Inc. (formerly Brown and Root Services, or BRS), a former business unit of the larger Halliburton Corporation, which provided services to the US Army since 1992, including engineering and logistics services. As BRS, KBR operated in Bosnia, Croatia and Hungary as well as under the NATO IFOR and KFOR peacekeeping missions in Bosnia in 1995 and Kosovo in 1999, with the contracts amounting to \$546 million and almost \$1billion, respectively. Although the logistical support was designed to help US troops, the shortages among the other participants led BRS to often extend its services with similar functions to the other nations which were part of the IFOR mission (and in some cases, NGOs and aid groups such as the Red Cross also figured on the client list).

With different countries requesting the services of different companies for different missions, confusion might abound. To mitigate this, in the 2012 Logistic Handbook NATO approaches the issue of multinational cooperation pointing out that while troop contributing nations "...may have their own deployable contracting staffs and may be prepared to act independently in theatre, there are considerable advantages to be gained from utilising a collective approach." Thus, if member states

wanted to opt for a shared approach, the Theatre Allied Contracting Office (TACO) and the NATO Support Agency (NSPA) are ready to help.

The NATO Support Agency (NSPA) in particular professes to be able to provide integrated logistic support solutions to NATO and its allies. Amongst its extensive portfolio of capabilities it claims to provide, upon request, responsive, effective and cost-efficient logistics to the allies, NATO Military Authorities and partner nations, individually and collectively.

The NSPA is particularly interesting as it brings together in a single organisation NATO's logistics and procurement support activities. Thanks to its ability to make and coordinate contract activities, the agency also consolidates requirements from nations or other customers. As publicised in its products and service brochure, the agency works with the international industry to provide logistics solutions through "tailored, managed and monitored contracts", including stipulating various contracts with KBR to provide a variety of services at Kabul and Kandahar airfields.



In the private military and security industry, almost any capability can be supplied, from logistics to intelligence gathering and analysis. The effects that the privatisation of services will have on the next interventions remain unclear, but the future may well see a modularization of forces. If this occurs, coalitions may be composed from a multiplicity of military actors,

potentially both public and private.

Considering how such companies can span a wide range of services and in certain high risk contexts often even defensive natured services can have serious impacts, defining tasks and modalities is

increasingly important. The clearer the contract, the better. The NSPA's procurement function, which manages contracts on behalf of NATO, has so far acted as a bridge between customer requirements and industry capabilities. Through this mechanism, the existing contracting mechanisms could be significantly improved and perhaps even represent an example for best practice. However, in a world of different policy standards and perceptions towards the use of PMSCs on behalf of different countries, developing Alliance standards and procedures will not be easy. One of the few certainties is that privatised security is here to stay.

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## **Event: NATO And The Resurgence Of Ideology**

**Date:** Tuesday, 10th November 2015, 09:00-17:00

*Luncheon and evening drinks reception (dress: lounge suits/ladies' equivalent)*

**Venue:** The Honourable Artillery Company, Armoury House, City Road, London, EC1Y 2BQ

### **Speakers:**

- Prof Brian Holden Reid, Dept. of War Studies, King's College London
- Prof John Louth, Director: Defence, Industries & Societies, RUSI
- Stephen Covington, Strategic Intl. Affairs Adviser to SACEUR
- H. E. Sir Adam Thompson KCMG, UK Perm. Rep. to NATO
- The Rt. Hon. James Gray MP, House of Commons Defence Committee

**Website:** [www.atlanticcounciluk.org](http://www.atlanticcounciluk.org)

**Contact:** [andreas.stradis@atlanticcounciluk.org](mailto:andreas.stradis@atlanticcounciluk.org)

**Conference Director:** Dr Andreas Stradis, Senior Research Fellow, ACUK

**Cost:** Please note that the registration fee for the event is £50 (£30 for students) which includes luncheon and drinks and is Payable via Paypal, Cheque or Bank Transfer

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