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Professional resistance forces as a defence framework for small countries

Introduction

After decades of expeditionary counterinsurgency operations alongside their American allies, Eastern and Northern European countries were suddenly forced to refocus their attention to their own front yards following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its follow-on aggression against Ukraine. Just like after the end of Cold War, these countries were once again incentivised to take a hard look at their defence enterprise and assess whether their existing defence strategies and military organisations are ready to meet the threat they are facing. After numerous simulations, wargames, and tabletop exercises,[1] these countries have realised that their defence capabilities have significant gaps, and they need to implement major changes in their current system to protect their sovereignty and ensure their national survival. However, instead of developing strategies and designing defence organisations that reflect their available resources and fit the challenges they are facing, Eastern and Northern European states once again implemented solutions that reflect the dominant western conventional military norms more than their actual necessities. Although through the implementation of the so-called "Total

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[1]   D.A. Shlapak, M.W. Johnson , *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics*, RAND Report, 2016, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1200/RR1253/RAND_RR1253.pdf [accessed: 10 February 2022].

Defence Strategies"[2] some of these countries have augmented their conventional approach with some paramilitary, unconventional formations such as home guards or territorial defence forces, their solutions still reflect how the West thinks professional military organisations should act and be organised.

This article argues that given the significant asymmetry between the conventional military capabilities of Russia and these countries, such approaches can only lead to suboptimal results and ultimately to the loss of national sovereignty. Furthermore, this analysis suggest that the maintenance of national sovereignty requires Eastern and Northern European countries to completely abandon traditional military norms, dismantle their existing military formations, and redesign their national defence approaches. It suggests that these new solutions should rather reflect a professional, state-controlled combination of the principles, characteristics, and organisational features of modern insurgents, terrorist groups, and organised crime organisations than conventional military formations.

The article is divided into six parts. First, it reviews the origins of the conventional warfare norm and how it became universally accepted over time. Second, the article discusses how such a norm is still reflected in small countries' defence approaches even with all recent changes towards total defence concepts. Third, the paper argues that the primacy of the conventional warfare norm prevents total defence concepts to achieve best outcome, and recommends the introduction of a new professional resistance force-based defence framework. Next, to identify necessary and sufficient principles and characteristics of such organisations, the paper uses case study methodology and presents an in-depth analysis of the First Russo-Chechen War and the Second Lebanese War. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary of the findings and discussion of possible implications.

The norm of conventional warfare

Norms are beliefs about both the natural and social world that define the situation and behaviour of actors. They are produced and reproduced through social interactions.[3] Norms also define what is acceptable and what is effective in social interactions.[4] Conventional warfare can be defined as warfare that is prosecuted by standing, standardised, state owned and directed military organisations.

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2   M. Kepe, J. Osburg, "Total Defence: How the Baltic States Are Integrating Citizenry into Their National Security Strategies", *Small Wars Journal*, 24 September 2017, https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/total-defense-how-the-baltic-states-are-integrating-citizenry-into-their-national-security- [accessed: 30 May 2022].

3   A. Wendt, "Constructing International Politics", *International Security*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1995, pp. 71–81.

4   J. Golinski, *Making Natural Knowledge: Constructivism and the History of Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 11–13.

Conventional warfare is capital-intensive and technologically dependent. The norm of conventional warfare refers to the shared beliefs of military professionals, codified in military doctrine, taught in military educational institutions, and embodied in military practices about how modern militaries should be organised and how they should operate.[5] The existence of such a norm is obvious, based on the fact that today most countries maintain a standing, technologically dependent capital-intensive military structure, while the alternative labour-intensive defence approaches are almost none-existent.[6] The current norm of conventional warfare was devised over several centuries, starting with the introduction of the first standing militaries in the 17th century, the professionalisation of war, and long-term capital investment from the state.[7] Over the upcoming centuries, the Western military model diffused and expanded around the world – either imposed or imported – and was even codified in international law.[8] First, following the 1863 Lieber Code, international law prohibited the conduct of unconventional warfare by state organisations,[9] while the 1907 Hague Regulations of Land Warfare required militaries to wear uniforms and carry their weapons openly.[10] These laws institutionalised already existing universal conventional military norms defining military identity and possible actions.

Small countries and the norm of conventional warfare

International relations literature has paid much attention to the explanation of states' military behaviour over the years. Related literature has been mostly dominated by rationalist and neorealist arguments suggesting that all countries' primary goal is survival, which requires them to balance power both externally, through alliances,[11] and internally, through standing militaries and national mobilisation.[12] Neorealist arguments suggest that in the competitive international environment,

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5   T. Farrell, "Transnational norms and military development: Constructing Ireland's professional army", *European Journal of International Relations*", vol. 7, no. 1, 2001, pp. 63–102.

6   A. Wendt, M. Barnett, "Dependent State Formation and Third World Militarization", *Review of International Studies*, vol. 19, no. 4, 1993, pp. 321–347.

7   G. Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500–1800*, 2nd edn., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 163–169.

8   D.B. Ralston, *Importing the European Army: The Introduction of European Military Techniques and Institutions in the Extra-European World, 1600–1914*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 25–27.

9   R.S. Hartigan, *Lieber's Code and the Law of War*, Chicago: Precedent, 1983, pp. 38–41.

10   G. Best, *Humanity in warfare*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, pp. 101–113.

11   S.M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987, pp. 28–31.

12   T.J. Christensen, *Useful adversaries: Grand strategy, domestic mobilization, and Sino-American conflict, 1947–1958* (Princeton Studies in International History and Politics series, vol. 179), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, pp. 5–17.

the primary goal of all states is survival, which requires them to organise for war in the most effective way possible.

Small countries' historical solutions to such a problem have been the emulation of major powers' military norms and practices, in this case – the norms and related organisations of conventional warfare.[13] However, other arguments suggest that such emulation happens not because these norms best serve the survival needs of small countries or their impeccable successes, but rather for their historical familiarity, international recognition, and pressure from major allies.[14] Additionally, small countries lack both the time and expertise to develop their own defence approaches.[15] All these factors lead to a situation where small countries are not at all efficiently organised for war, ultimately jeopardising their own survival.

The fear of a potential war with Russia forced both political and military leaders in several Eastern and Northern European countries to take a critical look at their defence approaches. These countries have seemingly realised that they need a different approach to ensure their survival in case of Russian aggression but have not been able to free themselves from the trap of the conventional warfare norm. While these countries have started to develop a force multiplier, an asymmetric defence component consisting of unconventional warfare formations such as home guards or territorial defence forces, this component is only designed to support the conventional military formations' operations. The overall strategic approaches of these countries still overwhelmingly reflect the norms and practices of traditional conventional warfare, and with that, they cannot achieve the most ideal outcomes. This article argues that if small states want to organise for war most efficiently, they need to redesign their defence enterprise and create a purpose built organisation for their new strategic approach.[16]

Small countries' professional resistance forces

Several studies argue that existential level external shocks are needed for fundamental changes to take place.[17] The fear of an impending war finally might just created such a shock for many European countries, and it might undermine the existing military orthodoxy and generate new, more appropriate orthodoxy in these countries. Since none of the Eastern and Northern European countries can contend

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[13]   T. Farrell, *op. cit.*

[14]   E.O. Goldman, The Spread of Western Military Models to Ottoman Turkey and Meiji Japan, [in:] *The Sources of Military Change: Culture, Politics, Technology*, eds. T. Farrell, T. Terriff, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001, pp. 36–47.

[15]   T. Farrell, *op. cit.*

[16]   Unconventional warfare refers to non-traditional ways of conducting military operations.

[17]   J.W. Legro, "Whence American Internationalism", *International Organization*, vol. 54, no. 2, 2000, pp. 253–289.

in war with Russia on anything like equal terms, their only chance is to develop and implement a strategy and military formations that take away the advantages of Russia's military or make them irrelevant.[18] The foundations of such an unorthodox approach can be found in many historical examples, both at the state and non-state level. China, Algeria, Vietnam, and Cuba successfully implemented unconventional warfare at the state level, while non-state actors like the Afghan insurgents, Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups, and Yugoslav partisans, just to name a few, also fought successfully against numerically and technologically superior conventional militaries. If European countries want to successfully meet the challenges posed by the Russian aggression, they need to completely redesign their defence approaches based on unconventional warfare foundations and build a new version of state-owned, standardised, and professional military that is organised, equipped, and trained to fight based on norms that are different from our current ones.[19]

New defence establishments must be created for new types of conflict, and they should be radically different from military organisations as we understand them today. Universally accepted principles that have long shaped conventional militaries should be fundamentally reimagined, if not abandoned entirely.[20] European countries should be ready to abandon traditional services, formations, unit designs, training and education structures, and military rank systems, and replace them with purpose-built solutions that specifically address the requirements of unconventional warfare. To help identifying such ground-breaking changes, these countries must conduct a rigorous study of historical cases of unconventional warfare, especially resistance[21] examples. While they can find some useful examples within their own history, it is important that the Eastern and Northern European countries do not only draw lessons from their own romanticised Western models from the World War II and Cold War eras, but to also study contemporary examples such as the Chechen resistance against Russia, Hezbollah's operations against Israel during the 2006 War, and the Iraqi, Afghan, and Syrian insurgencies. To support the overall argument of this article and to help the initial development of new military orthodoxy – given the space limitations of this publication – this article explores only two such examples. Next, using in-depth case study research methodology this

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18 S. Fabian, *Professional Irregular Defence Forces: The Other Side of COIN*, master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 2012, https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/7338/12Jun_Fabian.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [accessed: 30 May 2022].

19 *Ibidem*.

20 M. van Creveld, *Transformation of war*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009, p. 234.

21 Resistance is "the natural response of a sovereign government and its people when faced with a threat to their sovereignty and independence. In its objective of seeking the restoration of the pre conflict status quo, resistance (unarmed or armed, nonviolent, or violent) is distinguishable from terrorism, insurgency, or revolution". O.C. Fiala, *Resistance Operating Concept (ROC)*, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL: Joint Special Operations University Press, 2020, p. 5.

article explores the First Russo-Chechen War and the Second Lebanese War. These cases were selected as the subjects of this analysis due to their relevance to the topic, their timeliness (quite recent cases), the availability of detailed information about the organisations and activities of all participants, the conflicts' different geographical locations, and the fact that in these cases there are four different parties, which helps mitigating some potential biases.

The First Russo-Chechen War

Although "Russia had fallen from superpower status and however much Russian military power was degraded, the Russian forces that invaded Chechnya still exhibited the military strategic preferences of a great power."[22] Russia sent a numerically and technologically superior conventional force into the small Chechen republic in December 1994, but after almost two years of fierce fighting this force was defeated and forced to withdraw. This remarkable success was the result of the Chechens understanding that no conventional strategy would have given them any chance of success against the Russians and choosing to follow an unorthodox, unconventional strategy. Several key factors led to the success of this approach.

First, the Chechen leadership was successful in creating a strong, single, and sustained national will to resist the Russian invasion.[23] Such a will ensured continuous popular support for the resistance forces, information superiority over the enemy, and human and material resupply to the resistance forces.

Second, the Chechens used non-traditional, network-type organisations designed to best fit the requirements of resistance operations. Chechen forces were organised into hundreds of small units which had the ability to conduct operations individually or as part of a larger, joint formation. Their organisational flexibility, swarming tactics,[24] the combined use of different weapon systems, and their careful target selection made these units extremely effective against predictable and slow conventional Russian formations.[25] While the Chechen force frequently used traditional guerrilla hit-and-run tactics, they also further developed their concepts through the integration (in time and space) of psychological operations, improvised

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[22] R.M. Cassidy, *Russia in Afghanistan and Chechnya: military strategic culture and the paradoxes of asymmetric conflict*, Diane Publishing, 2003, p. 37.

[23] O. Oliker, *Russia's Chechen wars 1994–2000: lessons from urban combat*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001, p. 18.

[24] Swarming is the systematic pulsing of force and/or fire by dispersed units so as to strike the adversary from all directions simultaneously. J. Arquilla, D. Ronfeldt, *Swarming and the Future of Conflict*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2000, p. 24.

[25] T. Karasik, "Chechen Clan Military Tactics and Russian Warfare", *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 2000, https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/7250-analytical-articles-caci-analyst-2000-3-15-art-7250.html [accessed: 30 May 2022].

explosive devices, and terrorist acts. Such combinations created complex challenges with which the conventional Russian military were not able to deal effectively.

Additionally, since the success of the Chechen approach was mostly based on the effective actions of small units, capable leadership at this level was also a critical element of it. Chechen leaders could take the initiative, make quick decisions, adapt and tailor their activities to the changing operational situation, and coordinate among themselves even without a centralised command structure.[26]

Next, the Chechen side had a much deeper understanding of how physical features of the battlespace can be utilised in support of their own strategy than the Russian. While the Chechens exploited all supporting features of their country's natural terrain features, they also utilised the advantages of man-made urban area. They even conducted large-scale pre-conflict infrastructural preparations in urban areas to turn their towns and villages into "man-made jungles" to enhance the effectiveness of their own operations while mitigating the effectiveness of conventional Russian formations and weapon-systems. "The Chechens simply applied their mastery at the art of forest warfare, so evident in the 18th and 19th centuries, to the urban forests in Grozny and other cities."[27]

Finally, the Chechen fighters had extensive pre-conflict military training and many of them also had combat experience. The majority of the Chechen soldiers received their training in the Russian military which provided them with intimate knowledge of the enemy's organisations, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, procedures, and the strength and weaknesses of the Russian weapon system. In addition, most of the Chechen fighters spoke Russian, which allowed them to understand intercepted Russian communications and to broadcast conflicting orders, thus creating confusion and chaos among Russian units and often leading them into prepared Chechen ambushes.

The Second Lebanese War

After driving Israel out of Lebanon in 2000, Hezbollah slowly became a state within a state in Southern Lebanon. By the start of the Second Lebanese War in 2006, Hezbollah functioned as a political, social, and most importantly, a military entity. It had spent years preparing for a potential Israeli invasion, and when it finally came, Hezbollah was much more prepared than anyone would have thought. Over the years, Hezbollah carefully designed a unique strategy that did not emulate contemporary western military norms, but best fitted the realities of Hezbollah and its enemy the Israeli military ultimately leading to success. Just like the Chechen

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[26]   S. Knezys, R. Sedlickas, *The war in Chechnya*, College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1999, pp. 127–131.

[27]   O. Oliker, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

strategy, Hezbollah`s strategy had several key elements that were arguably critical to the favourable outcome.

First, Hezbollah's strategy was based on the idea that modern, post-military societies cannot endure wars anymore due to their intolerance of a large number of casualties.[28] Based on this assumption, Hezbollah aimed to quickly raise the cost of an Israeli invasion to an unacceptable level through tactics that resulted in mass casualties. To augment these tactics, Hezbollah also used extensive information operations to exaggerate their own battlefield successes, show the casualties suffered by the Israeli forces, blame the Israeli forces for collateral damage and suffering of the Lebanese civilians, and try to sway international support away from Israel.

The next critical factor in Hezbollah`s success was its organisational design. "Hezbollah acted as a 'distributed network' of small cells and units acting with considerable independence, and capable of rapidly adapting to local conditions rather than having to react faster than the IDF's decision cycle, they could largely ignore it, waiting out Israeli attacks, staying in positions, reinfiltrating or re-emerging from cover, and choosing the time to attack or ambush."[29] Hezbollah fighters' high level of pre-conflict training and combat experience in unconventional warfare was another critical part of Hezbollah's success. Such training included day and night small unit operations, placement of mines, construction and placement of improvised explosive devices, and integration of the effects of different weapon systems both in rural and urban environment.[30]

Furthermore, similarly to the Chechens, Hezbollah conducted major infrastructural preparations before the war, and extensively and effectively used well-concealed strong points, fortified defensive positions, and a sophisticated tunnel system. Hezbollah also used deception through dummy fighting positions and fake bunkers. The usefulness of such infrastructure was further supported by extreme operational security measures. No single Hezbollah commander knew the location of other bunkers beyond his assigned three bunkers (one primary and two reserve), and almost nobody had knowledge about the entire bunker structure.[31]

Finally, extensive knowledge of the Israeli military doctrine, the organisation of the Israeli Defence Forces and their way of fighting also contributed to the success of Hezbollah`s unconventional strategy.

[28]   S.C. Farquhar, *Back to basics: a study of the second Lebanon war and operation Cast Lead*, Diane Publishing, 2010, pp. 78–81.

[29]   *Ibidem*, p. 66.

[30]   R. Bergman, *The Secret War with Iran: The 30-year Clandestine Struggle Against the World's Most Dangerous Terrorist Power*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008, pp. 173–191.

[31]   A. Crooke, M. Perry, „How Hezbollah Defeated Israel, Part 2: Winning the Ground War", *Asia Times Online*, 2006, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/HJ13Ak01.html [accessed: 30 May 2022].

Conclusion

Eastern and Northern European countries are at a historical turning point. The re-emergence of an aggressive Russia and the fear of a potential war have sent shock waves through the capitals of these countries and galvanised them to take a critical look at their defence capabilities. Recognising the shortcomings of their current approaches, most of these countries have augmented their conventional military organisations with some unconventional formations, such as home guards or territorial defence forces, but the foundations of these solutions still mostly reflect how the West thinks about war and the military. This is a mistake. If these countries want to maintain their sovereignty and independence, they should abandon their military orthodoxy and completely redesign their defence strategy and military formations. They should develop concepts that reflect their own realities and are designed to mitigate (or make irrelevant) the capabilities of the numerically and technologically superior Russian military. History suggests that there is only one approach that these countries can take and that is to build a new version of state-owned, standardised, and professional military that is organised, equipped, and trained to fight resistance warfare. It cannot be done without the rigorous study of history, especially recent unconventional wars. Undoubtedly, the suggestions put forward in this analysis require seismic changes in the Eastern and Northern European countries' defence enterprise, but without such ground-breaking changes these countries will never stand a chance when the worst happens.

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Professional resistance forces as a defence framework for small countries
Abstract

Due to Russia's aggressive actions in their neighbourhood, Eastern and Northern European countries were forced to take a critical look at their homeland defence capabilities and realised that their defence capabilities have significant gaps. However, instead of developing strategies and designing defence organisations that reflect their available resources and fit the challenges they are facing, these countries once again implemented solutions that reflect the dominant Western conventional military norms. Although through the implementation of the so-called "total defence" strategies some of these countries have augmented their conventional approach with some paramilitary, unconventional formations, their solutions still reflect how the West thinks wars should be waged and professional military organisations should act and be organised. This article suggests that these countries need to abandon their military orthodoxy and completely redesign their defence approaches based on unconventional warfare foundations and build a new version of state-owned, standardised, and professional military that is organised, equipped, and trained to fight based on different norms than our current ones. To propose some ideas to such changes, the article draws lessons from the case studies of the First Russo-Chechen War and the Second Lebanese War.

Key words: strategy, norm of conventional warfare, Russia, asymmetry, unconventional warfare, total defence, resistance