

NATO Defence Against Terrorism

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The terrorist phenomenon has evolved, adapting its narratives and strategies to the global context, especially during the global pandemic. Today, terrorism has no borders, nor geographical limitations, threatening citizens worldwide both in the online and offline space.



Photo: Pxhere

Among all the international organisations that have joined forces against the terrorist threat following the September 11, 2001 attacks, NATO is considered one of the most active and experienced actors in combating terrorism. The Alliance’s Defence Against Terrorism Programme of Work (DAT POW) reflects its commitment to counter-terrorism and defines, in broad terms, the evolving role played by the organisation in the fight against the complex terrorist threat.

The Evolution of the Terrorist Threat

In recent years, the globalisation of jihadi extremism and the growth in homegrown terrorism, motivated by right and left extremist ideologies, have reflected major developments in the terrorists’ strategy and modus operandi: the establishment of a strong connection between terrorist organisations, insurgent groups, and international organised crime; the emergence of homegrown terrorists and “lone wolves” motivated by various ideologies with duplicate tactics; the reliance on complex funding mechanisms; the use of sophisticated audience-oriented propaganda; and access to advanced technologies that can provide the means for unconventional high impact operations. Moreover, the so-called “trinity of terrorism” has made the lines between various group ideologies more blurred, facilitating the symbiotic relationship between the terrorist actors in terms of narrative, strategy and operational tactics. While the Salafi-jihadi terrorist threat has gained authenticity through an omnipresent chimera of a perpetuating virtual Caliphate, the long-ignored threat of homegrown terrorism has struck at the heart of our modern societies, motivated by several extremist ideologies. In this broader context, all the national and international actors involved in counter-terrorism have acknowledged the imperative of developing the capabilities needed to counter these threats.

NATO’s Role in Counter-Terrorism

NATO invoked its collective defence clause (Article 5) for the first and only time in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Since then, NATO’s work on counter-terrorism has focused on improving awareness of the threat, developing capabilities to prepare and respond, and enhancing engagement with partner countries and other international actors. These three main pillars have provided a more concrete image for the role played by NATO in the global fight against terrorism. While the awareness domain has pointed towards enhancing the exchange of information and intelligence between member countries and/with other international organisations, the engagement field was developed around the Partnership Action Plan on Terrorism, with the aim of contributing to regional stability through capacity-building in partner countries. Equally important at the strategic level, the most pragmatic steps were taken under the capabilities umbrella, aiming to develop innovative technology for the protection of vital assets – only possible through the Defence against Terrorism Programme. This consisted of research programmes for better protection against Man-Portable Air Defence Systems (MANPADs) and CBRN attacks, the detection and destruction of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), the development of biometric identification systems, and the promotion of cultural awareness in deployed troops. Moreover, training and education through a researcher/scholar-practitioner bridge and lessons learned were attributed to the NATO’s Centre of Excellence for the Defence against Terrorism in Ankara.

NATO Defence Against Terrorism

In order to pragmatically define and determine NATO’s role in the international community’s fight against terrorism, DAT

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POW was developed by the Conference of National Armaments Directors (CNAD) and endorsed by NATO Heads of State and Government at the Istanbul Summit in June 2004. According to official statements, the aim of DAT POW is to prevent non-conventional attacks, such as attacks with IEDs and unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), and mitigate other challenges, such as attacks on critical infrastructure.

As a unique programme built on the principle of common funding, DAT POW is the key-fast route to capability development in the field of counter-terrorism. Under the DAT POW initiative, individual NATO countries, with the support and contributions from other member countries and NATO bodies, lead projects to develop advanced technologies or counter-measures which meet the most urgent security needs in the face of terrorism and other asymmetric threats. Although its primary focus was on technological solutions to mitigate the effects of terrorist attacks, the programme has since widened its scope in line with the current global and regional threats, to support comprehensive capability development and includes prototypes and concepts, doctrine,



NATO cooperates with partners and international organisations to leverage the full potential of each stakeholder engaged in the global counter-terrorism effort.

policy, equipment, training and lessons learned, exercises, trials, and interoperability demonstrations. Based on an internal assessment, most projects under the programme focus on finding solutions that can be fielded in the short term and that respond to the military needs of the Alliance. The programme uses new or adapted technologies or methods to detect, disrupt and defeat asymmetric threats, covering a wide range of areas, including C-UAS, biometrics, technical

exploitation and C-IED. DAT POW is also an integral contributor to NATO Science & Technology activities and as such, contributes to the ongoing efforts in the field of emerging and disruptive technologies. NATO's DAT POW specifically addresses critical counter-terrorism capability deficiencies, focusing on the most critical terrorist threats through three capability umbrellas: incident management, force protection/survivability, and network engagement.

WARMATE

Loitering Munitions System

Critical intelligence and high precision strike
with low collateral effect

- Multiple safety levels
- Mission abort capability
- Silent propulsion
- Ruggedised, mobile ground control station
- SWARM attack capability
- Interchangeable warheads
- EO/IR vision for day and night operations
- Multiple flight modes
- User-friendly
- Flight readiness in under 5 minutes
- Statistically confirmed accuracy of targeting - 1.5 m CEP
- Flight duration 70 min.



WB GROUP 



Photo: US Army

Biometrics uses physiological features, such as fingerprints or iris scanning, as a method of.

The Incident Management Umbrella

The incident management umbrella comprises initiatives to improve organisation and coordination in dealing with a terrorist incident, namely protection of harbours and ports and critical infrastructure protection.

Based on the programme of work developed by the Alliance, the safe and uninterrupted functioning of harbours and ports is critical to the global economy; it is essential for maritime assets to be made as secure as possible. So far, various technologies have been explored to enhance

maritime protection, such as sensor nets, electro-optical detectors, rapid-reaction capabilities, underwater magnetic barriers and unmanned underwater vehicles. In 2018 and 2020, under the leadership of France, the DAT POW supported "Cut Away", a multi-national harbour exploration and clearance exercise. Additionally, under the lead of the NATO Centre for Maritime Research and Experimentation (CMRE) located in La Spezia, Italy, the DAT POW is assessing the use of underwater autonomous systems to detect maritime IEDs and of virtual reality for situational awareness.

The Force Protection/ Survivability Umbrella

The force protection/survivability umbrella covers initiatives to improve "all measures and means to minimise the vulnerability of personnel, facilities, equipment and operations to any threat and in all situations, to preserve freedom of action and the operational effectiveness of the force": Large Aircraft Survivability against MANPADS; Countering Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs); Detection, Protection and Defeat of Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Weapons; Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) and Consequence Management; and Non-Lethal Capabilities (NLC).

In terms of Large Aircraft Survivability against MANPADS, exercises and tests are organised annually to improve systems and equipment. Among the member countries, the UK is the lead nation for this initiative and the NATO Air Force Armaments Group (NAFAG) has provided critical expertise and support to the an-

nual field trials. As a supporting nation, France is conducting trials to complement the work carried out by UK and NAFAG. NATO's effort in countering IEDs is led by several bodies including the Counter Improvised Explosive Devices (C-IED) Centre of Excellence in Madrid. Various technologies to defeat IEDs have been explored, in particular stand-off detection. The biennial "Thor's Hammer" electronic counter-measures trial series and the radio-controlled IED database are two innovative approaches supported by the DAT POW, which are now also being leveraged to support efforts at countering unmanned aircraft systems.

DAT POW supports the Alliance's overall ability to meet these commitments through projects covering detection, identification and monitoring of CBRN substances, CBRN information management, physical protection, hazard management and CBRN medical counter-measures. DAT POW also supports training and exercises, including those conducted with live agents. DAT POW has also supported the Joint CBRN Defence Centre of Excellence in Vyskov, Czech Republic, in establishing and enhancing its CBRN Reach Back capability, such as ensuring CBRN expertise is available to the NATO Command Structure and Allied forces in theatres of operations.

The Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) and Consequence Management domain aims to improve NATO's capabilities through the training of explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) teams and optimised management of the consequences of an explosion. DAT POW supports NATO EOD demonstrations and trials, led by the NATO EOD Centre of Excellence in Trenčín, Slovakia. With DAT POW support, the demining community has also tested integrated exoskeletons.

The Alliance has stressed the need for better response capabilities to minimise collateral damage. If forces can only respond in a lethal manner, civilians and military alike are endangered, and mission failure or political fallout may result. Under the lead of Belgium, Canada and the United States, DAT POW sponsored the demonstration of the use of non-lethal weapons in different environments.

The Network Engagement Umbrella

The network engagement umbrella covers initiatives to improve identification and targeting of key nodes of Threat Networks: Technology for Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance and Target

Photo: NATO



In June 2020, NATO launched its first ever Counter-Terrorism Reference Curriculum (CTRC). It supports interested allies and partner countries in enhancing their capacities to develop national skills and improve counter-terrorism strategies.

Acquisition (ISRTA); improving standardisation among the Human Intelligence (HUMINT) community; and biometrics. The ISRTA initiative focuses on the development of improved tools for early warning and identification of terrorists and their activities. To build on the improved intelligence/information sharing achieved over the past decade in common operations and to capture these developments for the future, DAT POW supported Unified Vision Trials (2012-2014), organised by the joint capability development group ISR. Simulating a real-world operational environment, the trial sought to determine how well participants could analyse threat information and identify and track threats to form a cohesive intelligence picture and how easily this could be shared.

DAT POW also supports improving technical interoperability within the NATO HUMINT community and the ability to analyse human aspects of the operational environment where NATO forces operate under the lead of the HUMINT Centre of Excellence (COE) in Oradea, Romania. Key milestones include the delivery of human aspects of the Operational Environment Study and the development of the HUMINT Operator Toolset (NHOTS).

Last, but not least, biometric data are essential to protect forces in theatre, allowing them to identify known or suspected insurgents. NATO's Strategic Commands have recognised that developing and improving this area is a military requirement. NATO's biometrics programme of work and action plan cover all the areas required for a full capability (doctrine, concept, standards, equipment, etc.). In recent months, NATO's work on biometrics hit two important milestones. In September 2020, the NCI Agency hosted a pilot of a new exercise focused on biometrics – NORTHERN SPIRIT 20. Shortly after, the Agency hosted a two-day workshop on biometrics in The Hague. NATO's Emerging Security Challenges Division, through its Defence against Terrorism Programme of Work, sponsored both events. During both the exercise and workshop, the participating nations used a system developed by the NATO Communications and Information Agency: the NATO Automated Biometrics Identification System, or NABIS. Based on official information, the NABIS system has a concept called "ping and ring" in place to allow nations to share data only when necessary, while protecting the sources of that data. If a nation collects biometric data and needs more information to identify that

person, they can "ping" the system to see if nations have a match. Nations can then "ring" the nation asking for data if they have something that could help them. The NABIS system allows them to share this data in a secure manner. Nevertheless, the DAT POW community also supported an initiative to develop a biometrics capability in a maritime environment.

Counter-Terrorism Education and Training

Throughout the Alliance's counter-terrorism struggle, the vital importance of education and training in the field has been acknowledged and promoted within NA-

on personal professional experience as a lecturer and course academic adviser at COE-DAT, I am honoured to have had the chance to share my expertise, and must emphasise the relevance of the centre in building a bridge between scholars and practitioners in CT, and enlarging the knowledge in the field in a multi-disciplinary manner, based both on theoretical and ground experience. The evolution of terrorism and its diverse forms pushes the CT actors to reach beyond the traditional boundaries of their domain and find strong allies among the academic field. While no one side possesses the whole truth, the scholar-practitioner cooperation can provide both short- and long-term solutions for the counter-terrorism



Photo: NATO

With the "Northern Spirit 20" exercise, NATO sought to practice sharing biometrics and identity information in a scenario that would simulate several NATO-led operations taking place at the same time at sea, and on land.

TO's DAT POW. So far, NATO has offered a range of training and education opportunities in the field of counter-terrorism to both Allies and partner countries, through a wide network that includes the NATO School in Oberammergau, Germany, mobile training courses run out of Joint Force Commands at Naples and Brunssum and the Centres of Excellence (COEs) that support the NATO Command Structure. There are more than 20 COEs accredited by NATO of which several have a link to the fight against terrorism. As a vital component in this fight, the Centre of Excellence for Defence Against Terrorism (COE-DAT) in Ankara, serves both as a location for meetings and as a catalyst for international dialogue and discussion on terrorism and counter-terrorism. Based

strategy, while developing a spherical understanding of the subject. Moreover, COE-DAT can and should serve as a great platform for developing a common understanding of terrorism as a concept, fully accepted by all the member nations.

NATO's 2020 Counter-Terrorism Reference Curriculum

Speaking of terms and concepts, in June 2020, NATO launched its first standardised Counter-Terrorism Reference Curriculum. A result of a scholar-researcher-practitioner team, the reference curriculum provides a multi-disciplinary approach that helps learners develop the knowledge and skills needed to understand terrorism and counter-terrorism



Photo: NATO

Vehicle-borne IEDs are one of the main causes of casualties among troops and exact a heavy toll on local populations.

in order to successfully anticipate and mitigate potential threats. The 2020 Reference Curriculum addresses current challenges at the theoretical, operational and technical levels. While the curriculum does not claim to provide all the answers, its aim has been to highlight foundational and informative material and structures through which ideas and strategies can be developed.

The Reference Curriculum acknowledges that the study of terrorism and counter-terrorism is a methodologically diverse field, replete with debate, extending even to fundamental definitional discussions. In this regard, the curriculum admits that disagreements persist concerning an accepted legal definition of terrorism, due to the fact that different countries have different experiences with terrorism that have shaped their separate understandings. Still, the curriculum makes an important theoretical distinction between ‘terrorism’ and ‘terrorists’; while the features of terrorists change according to circumstance, the features of ‘terrorism’, such as the importance of ideology, remain constant. At the operational level, further challenges persist, as states are forced to essentially calculate the degree of risk with which they are comfortable, juxtaposed against the potential impact of a successful attack. The international community has recognised that establishing a common definition of terrorism

is required. A standard definition allows an effective coordinated international response to terrorism that adopts pragmatic approaches and marshals all instruments of government and society in order to combat it.

Pitfalls and Recommendations

Acknowledging the active role played by NATO in the global fight against terrorism since 2001 and recognising the progress achieved by the Alliance in transforming its role and capabilities according to the needs of the global counter-terrorism struggle, there is still place for improvement in order to enhance NATO’s DAT POW potential.

Firstly, due to its nature, NATO is mainly focused on the fight against terrorism from a military perspective. It is important to emphasise that the fight against global terrorism can only be successful if comprehensive, international, multi-lateral action is taken, which includes military operations, in addition to political, economic, legal, diplomatic and social tools. Although DAT POW reflects the Alliance’s commitment to develop counter-terrorism capabilities beyond the military aspect, the evolution of the terrorist threat creates the need to adapt and develop the CT strategy to be one step ahead of the terrorist groups.

Secondly, both the Alliance and the international cooperation between NATO and the European Union in the field of counter-terrorism will benefit from the development of a common definition for terrorism that can set the stage for a common CT defence policy understanding. Whether within the EU or NATO, the ambiguity of the term ‘terrorism’, the corresponding limits of these organisations’ strategies, the minimal political will of member states, and numerous horizontal non-institutional arrangements, all make counter-terrorism policies less consistent and hamper the development of a more strategic approach. Subsequently, these factors need to be addressed in future policymaking.

Thirdly, the particular focus on jihadist terrorism and the Middle East hinders the potential for a global, inclusive counter-terrorism strategy. In this regard, the Alliance should equally focus on home-grown terrorist threats, while remaining vigilant to the threat outside of national borders. Therefore, NATO should further establish and develop the direct link between its broader efforts and homeland security.

Since 2001, NATO has rebranded its defence role, adapting it to the current terrorist threat. Later on, in order to enhance its role in counter-terrorism, NATO’s DAT POW should develop prevention capabilities, while it continues to support the current capabilities and technologies. Nevertheless, NATO should enhance education and training to build more effective local security forces in a crisis like Iraq, Afghanistan or Libya in order to prevent a security vacuum after the troops’ withdrawal. At the cooperation level, NATO should focus on dialogue and cooperation with its partners – EU and UN – for complementary capabilities that can increase the overall potential of the global counter-terrorism action. Also, bearing in mind the current threats, NATO should rethink Article 5 in order to determine how NATO could defeat and respond to the cyber and hybrid attacks in Collective Defence relations according to the actual Treaty.

Counter-terrorism is undoubtedly a complex task and NATO has proved its potential as an experienced actor in the field. NATO DAT POW has been developed as the key-fast route to capability development in the fight against terrorism. Still, as terrorism is continuously evolving, becoming more dispersed, decentralised, and multi-faceted, NATO is also forced to change and adapt its strategy, capabilities and tactics accordingly. ■