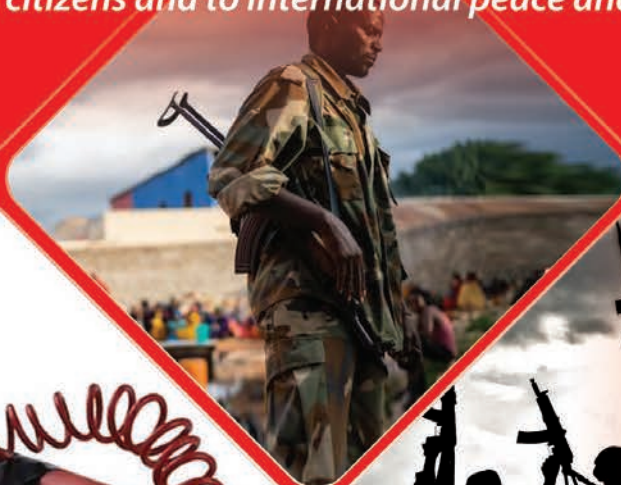# Defence Against Terrorism Analysis Quarterly (DATA-Q)

Terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, is the most asymmetric threat to the security of all citizens and to international peace and prosperity.

"Terrorism is an acute and global threat"

LETTER FROM THE DEPUTY

Dear Colleagues, distinguished academics, and readers from all walks of life,

COE-DAT proudly presents the second issue of our brand-new magazine, the *Defense Against Terrorism Analysis Quarterly* (DATA-Q). As our Director noted last quarter, our world is a world of rapid change, our age an age of liquid modernity…and this magazine is our humble effort to grapple with the fluid nature of the face of terrorism, both now and on the horizon.

In this issue, you'll be introduced to two thought pieces on what are essentially hybrid threats. The first, penned by our own Colonel Oğuzhan PEHLİVAN, is a novel consideration of what it means to face a "hybrid" threat – in this case, the twin (and irrevocably entwined) threats of terrorism and ecological degradation. "Where Should Our Focal Point Be" asks us to ponder the effects of food and water scarcity, rampant malnutrition, and ineffective governance in the Sahel, and, most especially, the effects those phenomena are having on both terrorism and counter-terrorism in the region. I hope that you will be as fascinated as I am to read that the author – a lifelong, dedicated, and decorated Army officer – believes fervently that hybrid regional threats require hybrid regional solutions. He urges us to consider paths beyond applications of hard power within national boundaries; I can't help but feel that Joseph Nye (author of *The Future of Power*) would wholeheartedly agree.

The second article, "Countermeasures Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats", by Professor Giray SADIK, is a condensed discussion of his much more in-depth research published in 2021. Here, the author gently returns us to a more traditional understanding of "hybrid threat", entreating his audience (and policymakers in NATO) to begin considering counter-terrorism policy *in concert with* hybrid warfare strategies. His work is timely, indeed…as the world gazes in horror at the destruction in Ukraine, national policy machines struggle to wrestle simultaneously with both peer and terrorist threats. If you would like to see a more detailed treatment of the data he presents here, I highly recommend checking out Volume 26, Issue 1 of the Turkish Center for Strategic Research's *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*.

As always, we owe special thanks to the staff of COE-DAT – and especially the Knowledge Department – for their tireless effort, patience, and constructive criticism. We hope these articles will whet your appetite for projects we are already planning for 2024…keep watching our site for lengthier publications on climate change, the Ukraine conflict, and the effects those events are having on terrorism and counter-terrorism both.

At COE-DAT, we very much believe that we will win the struggle against terrorism with collective cooperation and common sense. You, dear reader, are now one of us. Welcome.

Regards,

Shawn YOUNG
Colonel (OF-5), USAF
Deputy Director, COE-DAT

OĞUZHAN PEHLİVAN

Colonel Oğuzhan PEHLİVAN (PhD) is the Director and Turkish senior national representative at the NATO Centre of Excellence for the Defence Against Terrorism (COE-DAT) in Ankara, Turkey. As the Director, Colonel PEHLİVAN leads all aspects supporting the Supreme Allied Commander Transformation in his effort to transform NATO in the field of counterterrorism.

Colonel PEHLİVAN graduated from the Turkish Military Academy as an Infantry Officer in 1996 and from the Infantry School in 1997. He served as platoon leader; company, battalion and deputy brigade commander prior to his assignment at COE-DAT. He also got PhD in Sociology at Hacettepe University in 2017. His studies mainly focus on family sociology, culture, immigration, terrorism, counter terrorism, military decision models. Colonel PEHLİVAN is married to Serpil PEHLİVAN, with a son named Burak Kağan PEHLİVAN.

GİRAY SADIK

Dr. Giray Sadık is the 2019 Eisenhower Defense Fellow at the NATO Defense College focusing on Bridging the Gap: How to Improve NATO's Role in Countering Terrorism and Hybrid Threats? He is also Associate Professor and Vice Chair in the Department of International Relations, Faculty of Political Science, Ankara Yildirim Beyazit University (AYBU). Dr Sadik received his PhD in Political Science from the University of Georgia, USA, specializing in International Relations and Comparative Politics.

WHERE SHOULD OUR FOCAL POINT BE IN TERMS OF TERRORISM: SAHEL REGION OR COUNTRIES

Oğuzhan PEHLİVAN[1]

In academic literature, the Sahel is defined differently. The Sahel region, which includes portions of ten (or in some sources eleven with the addition of South Sudan) countries, is the semiarid region of western and north-central Africa used in this analysis as depicted in Figure 1. In terms of terrorism, Sahel is an uploaded puzzle. Violence in the region is currently on the rise and shows no signs of stopping. The underlying causes are multifaceted and systemic, and they include inadequate water use, a shortage of food, malnutrition, rapid population expansion, and ineffective governance. Therefore, terrorist organizations seek to target infrastructure and/or services related to food and water in non-conflict areas.[2]

Figure 1. Sahel Region Countries
Source: Created by author in www.paintmap.com

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1 PhD, Director of Center of Excellence-Defense Against Terrorism (COE-DAT), ORCID: 0000-0002-6779-4699, ozipehlivan@yahoo.com.
2 Harmon, S. A. (2016). *Terror and insurgency in the Sahara-Sahel region: corruption, contraband, jihad and the Mali war of 2012-2013.* Routledge.

Another challenge in the region is the surplus of terrorist organizations. Even though their ideological, motivational, and historical backgrounds are not correlated with each other, it is clear that most of them have been in progress in the last two decades. Indeed, in the Sahel, the terrorism landscape has changed significantly over the past few years as new groups have formed, some have merged, and others have adjusted to the local, regional, and global environments. Nearly all of them have used religion as a cover to defend their crimes, and abuse the holy values of innocent people to radicalize and recruit. The decision by some of the groups to affiliate with Daesh (ISIS) or the al-Qaeda branch may possibly account for the rise in bloodshed. The most deadly organization operating in the Sahel is Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA). It was responsible for 23 attacks in Niger, with each attack killing an average of 15.2 persons. Additionally, recent reports reveal the fact that over the past 15 years, the Sahel has become more violent, with a 1,000% increase in mortality between 2007 and 2021 (Figure 2)[3].
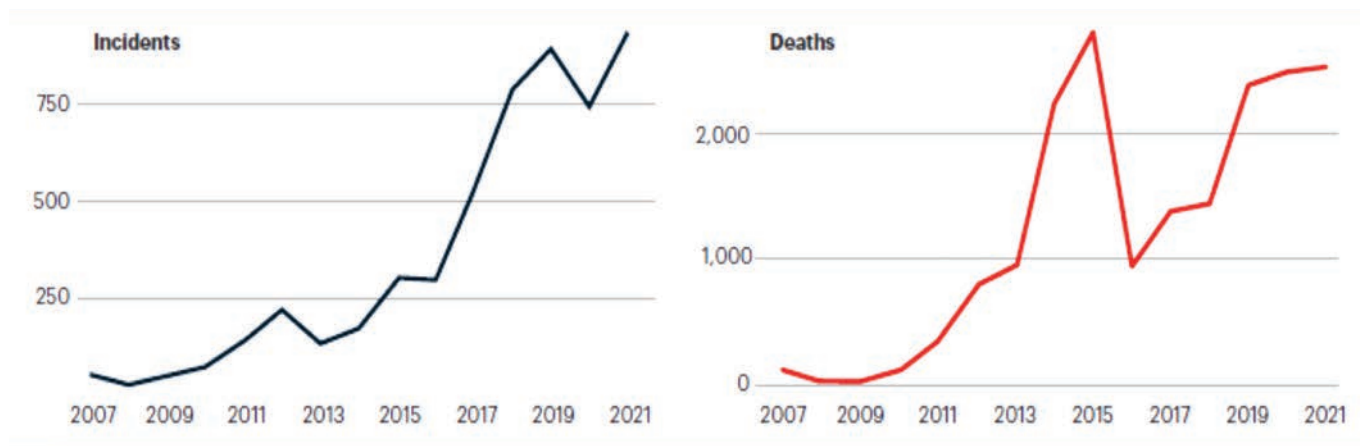

Figure 2. Incidents and Deaths from Terrorism in the Sahel, 2007-2021
Source: Global Terrorism Index Report, 2022.

The Lake Chad Basin, which includes sections of Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, as well as the Central Sahel region near the borders of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, has seen most of the terrorist activity. Additionally, there is an indication that the violence is spreading to the coastline states, with certain incidents taking place in Benin and Togo. A closer examination of the data reveals that the majority of attacks took place in border regions, where governmental control is typically minimal and the military frequently uses reinforced locations (Figure 3).[4]
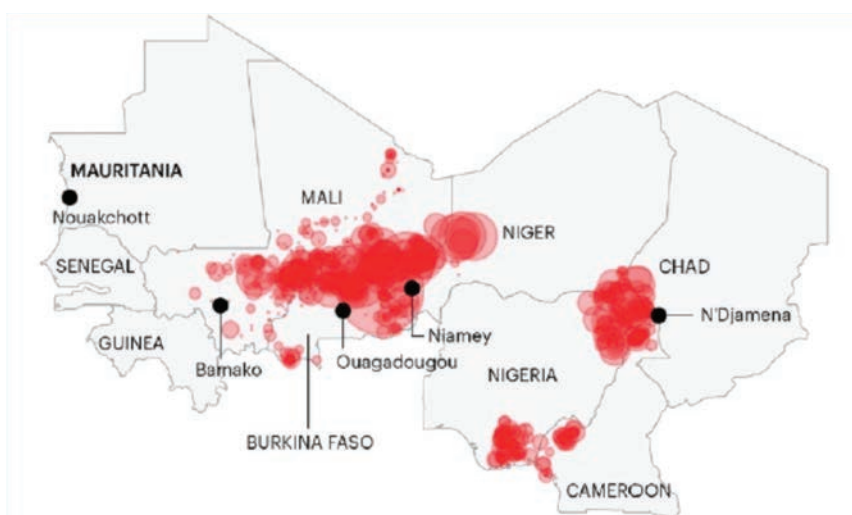

Figure 3. Terrorist Attacks in Sahel, 2007-2021
Source: Global Terrorism Index Report, 2022.

3 GTI (2022). Global Terrorism Index, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web-09062022.pdf (Accessed 15 February 2023).
4 GTI (2022). Global Terrorism Index, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web-09062022.pdf (Accessed 15 February 2023).

The existence of organizations like al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which sought to use the conflict to advance a larger ideological, theological, political, social, economic, and cultural movement is the first reason that triggers terrorism in the region.[5] Furthermore, the rise of Daesh and Boko Haram, and ecological degradation that is exploited by terrorist organizations can be enumerated as the other factors enhancing terrorism in the Sahel. Due to the strategic relevance of water, it is the most frequent threat in the region, with all ten countries scoring extremely high or high in this category. As a result, the conflict has been sparked by water scarcity.[6] Except, food security and rapid population growth make it increasingly difficult to access natural resources, which are already in limited numbers in the region.[7]

When I evaluate the counterterrorism measures, I witness mostly the usage of hard power. The riots and demonstrations against the international force used in the region have been augmenting lately. The presence of state-sponsored private companies in the region, as well as effective government administrations that have decreased with military interventions, continue to feed terrorism.[8] Additionally, positive peace, which includes not only the existence of balanced social and economic order but also political instability and ecological harmony[9], is lower than the world average. The ongoing conflict has had a significant negative impact on civilian life, resulting in large-scale displacement, interruption of agricultural output, livelihoods, and cross-border trade, as well as limiting access to basic services for affected populations.

It is all true with undeniable references and scientific data. However, the main question is whether these impacts and responses should be evaluated in the whole region or whether different case studies focusing on each country should submit us different conclusions. In order to scrutinize the national discrepancies, I think the best methodological option is to compare countries according to global terrorism scores, which regard terror incidents, hostages, and injuries. When I examine the last decade's scores of the Sahel countries, I detected that there are three main groups in terms of terrorism: increasing, mitigating, and fluctuating (Figure 4).

Country	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Mean
Burkina Faso	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	3.477	5.620	6.226	6.861	7.895	8.122	8.270	2.000
Chad	3.518	1.201	0.793	0.407	6.746	6.286	5.823	5.845	6.243	6.659	6.379	2.000
Eritrea	3.734	3.146	2.531	1.976	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	1.000
Ethiopia	4.738	5.050	4.608	4.538	4.307	3.706	5.739	5.158	4.624	4.354	3.759	3.000
Mali	4.348	5.505	5.862	5.971	6.891	7.036	7.509	7.711	7.832	7.922	8.152	2.000
Mauritania	3.898	3.255	2.653	1.985	1.411	0.000	0.000	1.733	1.243	0.827	0.509	1.000
Niger	3.829	3.190	3.836	4.390	6.656	6.684	6.602	6.528	7.230	7.415	7.856	2.000
Nigeria	7.479	8.103	8.342	8.927	9.118	8.761	8.645	8.482	8.380	8.421	8.233	2.000
Senegal	2.815	2.221	1.685	0.509	0.000	0.000	0.000	3.249	2.669	2.107	1.580	3.000
Sudan	5.669	5.389	4.975	4.399	4.440	3.790	3.220	2.454	1.843	0.509	0.291	1.000

Mitigating
Increasing
Fluctuating

Figure 4. Global Terrorism Scores in Sahel
Source: Created by author

5   Alda, E., & Sala, J. (2014). Links between terrorism, organized crime and crime: The case of the Sahel region. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, *3*(1).
6   Blanco, M. M. (2020). The implications of water as a strategic resource: Water stress and conflict in the Sahel region. https://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2020/DIEEEO35_2020MARMON_agua-ENG.pdf (Accessed 15 February 2023).
7   GTI (2022). Global Terrorism Index, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web-09062022.pdf (Accessed 15 February 2023).
8   Dentice, G. (2018). Terrorism in the Sahel region: an evolving threat on Europe's doorstep. *Euromesco: policy brief*, *80*, 1-14.
9   Barash, D. P., & Webel, C. P. (2021). *Peace and conflict studies*. Sage Publications.

Also perusing the case studies reveal that there are numerous issues that Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have in common, such as corrupt officials, poor infrastructure, and difficulty in maintaining control of their extensive borders. On the other side, Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria face with multiple ecological problems, such as water scarcity, rapid population increase, drought, desertification, land degradation, and food insecurity, which exacerbate conflicts in the region.

In a nutshell, systemic failures, violent conflict, resource degradation, and persistent insecurity are all connected in the Sahel region due to a lack of fundamental security. The region with the worst ecological deterioration is also exposed to the most violent environment. It is clear that local and regional terrorist groups are altering their strategies, stepping up their activities, and making their campaigns more lethal as they seek to take advantage of political vacuums. While constructing more robust governance strategies, establishing cooperative critical infrastructure resilience against terrorist attacks provides the region more balanced source distribution. Last but not least, taking into account the differences between countries and developing similar counter-terrorism strategies for similar countries will be a more valuable endeavor for the future of the region.

COUNTERMEASURES AGAINST TERRORISM AND HYBRID THREATS: ANALYSING THE PROS-AND-CONS OF EMERGING TRENDS AND THE RESILIENCE OF NATO

Giray SADIK[*]

Recent NATO summits have illustrated how Allies can keep talking about issues of substantial relevance with each other without adequately contemplating on the potential of their interrelationship. Since 2014, "all NATO Summit Declarations have pointed to *terrorism and hybrid warfare* as the main and most immediate threats to the security of the North Atlantic Alliance and its members. Surprisingly, the two threats are largely addressed separately – the fact that terrorism happens to be an important element of hybrid warfare is not mentioned at all".[1] Additionally,

Most of the research carried out on NATO's counter-terrorism efforts focus on theoretical debates such as the divergent views among the Allies on how to respond the terrorist threat or on whether NATO has become a collective security organization in the Transatlantic area or remains committed to collective defence. However, little, if any, research has been carried out which examines to what extent can NATO provide practical content to its vision on countering terrorism in addition to the Transatlantic counter-terrorism cooperation.[2]

When it comes to hybrid threats there are several areas to be addressed to keep NATO strategically relevant for the Allies' security. Above all "despite the potential of terrorist violence as part of hybrid warfare, counter-terrorism as a response or preventive measure has an unexpectedly low profile in NATO's policy on hybrid threats".[3] This critical point remains relevant today in terms of NATO's doctrines and practices. This article addresses the core question of: Should NATO tackle terrorism and hybrid threats together? Analysing relevant NATO strategies and operations in countering terrorism and hybrid threats will help to identify the critical common characteristics and constraints posed for the Transatlantic political and military communities. Building on this analysis, the article explores the venues for cooperation and strategic learning when developing effective countermeasures against terrorism and hybrid threats. Finally, the article examines the policy implications of hybrid security environment for NATO resilience and strategy development.

What are the benefits for NATO to deal with terrorism and hybrid threats together?

The current strategic landscape has become increasingly fluid, and thus needs to be analysed beyond fixations on hybrid threats only from the East (i.e. Russia) and terrorism only from the South (i.e. MENA). Although, NATO's recent 360-degree approach to security acknowledges that threats can emerge from all directions, the more focused we are on the East-South divide the more strategically blind we become to threats from other areas. As Lasconjarias and Jacobs point out:

> NATO has started to adapt to the hybrid challenge, particularly in reaction to Russia's hybrid war in Ukraine. But the Alliance is still far from a comprehensive strategy against hybrid threats, with regard to those emerging in the south. In order to develop such a comprehensive strategy, NATO needs to balance the course it is following to the East and South, as well as further develop its instruments, resources and approaches.[4]

This observation remains increasingly relevant today. Now, the real question has become 'how' rather than 'if'. To this end, the below merits highlight the key benefits for NATO to address terrorism and hybrid threats together.

a) Avoid stove-piping, duplication of Allies' efforts.

b) Similar threats require corresponding joint NATO capabilities & countermeasures

c) Strategic learning & inter-departmental cooperation between Transatlantic communities countering terrorism and hybrid threats

What are the constraints for joining efforts in countering terrorism and hybrid threats?

Although, as discussed above, there are numerous key merits for joining Allied efforts in countering terrorism and hybrid threats, the fact that they have been addressed independently from each other raises questions about the potential obstacles. What are the political and military constraints that hamper the fusion of the efforts in NATO policy-making and implementation? Are some reasons better than others and what can be learned to overcome these obstacles? In response, this article identifies two sets of interrelated constraints: the first is coined POLITICAL: referring to the constraints in policy-making, and the second is coined MILITARY: referring to the constraints related to the implementation of Alliance strategies.

a) POLITICAL: Allies' Divergences and risk of intra-Alliance rivalry among NATO-agencies

b) MILITARY response-related challenges emanating from the difficulty of attribution!

Implications for NATO Resilience and Strategy Development

Threats in the grey-zone are designed to have asymmetrical political impact, therefore by definition any research on terrorism and hybrid threats is bound to address common policy implications. The strategic landscape will only become more 'hybrid', where even so-called 'domestic terrorism' will have a *global footprint* with cross-cutting physical, informational (i.e., cyber), and transnational domains. Therefore, assuming that terrorists only come from the South and hybrid threats only from the East is a dangerous form of strategic blindness. From Breivik in Norway to Russia in Syria, there are various instances where assumptions have been wrong. In the current strategic landscape of global terrorism and hybrid threats, challenging mind-sets of fixed conceptualizations is a good first step for policymakers. As Braun points out:

> Developing an integrated strategy for countering both threats would have two main advantages. First, the Alliance could widen its deterrence and defence posture by addressing a broader range of often interrelated threats. Second, at the same time, such an approach could help to overcome current differences regarding threat perceptions in the eastern and southern member states. These

efforts would contribute to strengthening unity among Allies and hence protecting the Alliance's centre of gravity.[5]

In light of the benefits and constraints for joining efforts in countering terrorism and hybrid threats, this article recommends the following steps to develop effective NATO countermeasures:

*Allies' improved **inter-agency** collaboration, CIMIC, and resilience lead to a stronger NATO*

Many experts highlight the need for member states to have effective functioning inter-agency cooperation among the related agencies to counter these threats, such as military, police, intelligence, and other public and private agencies contributing to civilian emergencies. These assessments are also in line with NATO's 360-degree approach to security and related declarations that it is primarily national governments' responsibility to counter these threats at home. Here, NATO's self-proclaimed role of support does not make it less important, but rather conditional on the preparedness and resilience of the Allied member states.

***De-conflict** Allied differences to improve Alliance cohesion against concurrent threats*

Terrorism and hybrid threats are likely to remain concurrent challenges for NATO in the foreseeable future. Therefore, NATO could benefit from countering them simultaneously. In this regard, many experts expressed political divergences as the most critical constraint for joining efforts in countering hybrid threats and terrorism. Even with the current sectional divisions there is a role NATO can play to de-conflict Allied differences and assure that Alliance cohesion remains intact. Recently, the creation of Joint Strategic Direction South Hub based at Joint Forces Command in Naples, Italy can serve as an important example for how Allied cooperation on Southern flank can lead for improved coordination of efforts in hybrid security.

*Join efforts to **streamline** NATO decision-making and policy implementation*

Given the ongoing political differences among Allies, some experts expressed that although the merger of the existing NATO structures is unlikely to be beneficial, the sections on counter-terrorism and countering hybrid threats can benefit from each other's complementary capabilities. If steps are taken in coordination, they can also contribute to avoiding duplication and stove-piping of the Allied efforts. In this regard, as a result of the January 2019 functional review, NATO put the Counter-terrorism and Hybrid Threats sections under Emerging Security Challenges Division (ESCD). This is a step in the right direction that is also in line with the recommendations of this article.

*Improve CT/HT **synergies** by sharing intelligence, lessons learned; enhanced personnel mobility*

When it comes to implementation, the joining of efforts to counter hybrid threats and terrorism have become more a question of 'how' rather than 'if'. Several experts referred to the same key term when elaborating on the answers to this question, which was: **SYNERGY**. Thus, despite the fact that the counter-terrorism and hybrid threats sections are likely to remain separate, there are still a number of critical synergies that can be improved through sharing intelligence and lessons learned, while encouraging personnel mobility between the two sections.

*Foster **strategic learning** between CT/HT communities at NATO and among Allies*

Building on these synergies, NATO international staff can contribute to strategic learning between these sections, and eventually to their respective communities at Allied and partner nations. As these concurrent threats are likely to become even more hybrid in nature, our responses as Allies can benefit from each other by strategic learning of best practices and related countermeasures.

***Special operations** mind-set and **CHST** to identify vulnerabilities and to support targeted Allies*

There is a growing consensus among experts that hybrid threats can better be understood and countered through a special operations mind-set. Many experts expressed strong support for the Allied development of such a special operations mind-set for identifying vulnerabilities against hybrid threats and terrorism. In this respect, it is important to note that the recent addition of ***Counter Hybrid Support Teams (CHST)*** to NATO's tool-box to support preparation, deterrence, and defence against hybrid threats is a critical step in the right direction.

Another feature that terrorist and hybrid threats have in common is their ***elusive character*** making attribution of responsibility an intelligence challenge that can complicate the implementation of countermeasures. One can even argue that the camouflage of the attacker is an important part of hybrid strategy aiming to paralyze national and Allied defenders. As General Breedlove warned after Ukraine, "Russian adventurism and terrorists to the South seek to exploit gaps when they arise".[6] Difficulties in attribution delaying timely military responses remain among the critical gaps to be addressed when countering hybrid threats, and consequently this has been pushing Allies to make tough trade-offs:

> The concurrency, having to deal with complex instability in the East and the South simultaneously, means that NATO governments are not always well aligned when it comes to priorities. The RAP agreed in Wales prioritizes the East over the South and *collective defence* over *NATO's other core tasks*, but this set of choices has already been challenged.[7]

These hard choices are likely to be growing especially after the ongoing war in Ukraine. The more the Allies broaden their divergences the easier the adversaries – state and non-state – can exploit these cracks and render NATO strategically irrelevant for its members. Therefore, despite all the constraints – some more critical than others – there are compelling reasons for NATO to focus joining efforts against the two interrelated challenges emanating from terrorism and hybrid threats. Coherently and timely addressing these challenges will remain among the most critical tests for NATO ***resilience*** in times of devastating wars and global crises.

Endnotes

1   Peter Braun, "Fighting 'Men in Jeans' in the grey zone between peace and war*", NDC Policy Brief*, No: 18 (August 2019), p.1.

2   Giray Sadık and Eda Bekçi-Arı, "NATO Capacity Building in Counter-terrorism and Transatlantic Cooperation", *Defence Against Terrorism Review*, Vol. 11 (November 2019), p.74.

3   Andrew Mumford, "The Role of Counter Terrorism in Hybrid Warfare", Report prepared for *NATO Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism* (CEO-DAT), November 2016.

4   Guillaume Lasconjarias and Jeffrey A. Larsen eds., *NATO's Response to Hybrid Threats*, NDC Forum Article Series, 2015, p.273.

5   Braun, "Fighting 'Men in Jeans' in the grey zone between peace and war".

6   Bastian Giegerich, "Hybrid Warfare and the Changing Character of Conflict", *Connections: The Quarterly Journal*, Vol.15, No.2, (2016), pp. 65-72.

7   Ibid.