CTX

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From the Editor

Have you ever noticed that the autumnal and vernal equinoxes bring far deeper changes than the winter and summer solstices? When winter officially arrives, it's already been cold for some time; when the calendar declares summer, we're already feeling the heat. But when the sun reaches its tipping points in autumn and spring, we feel the changes on our skin and in our bones. There's a change in the quality of the light. Depending on the season, the local birds have either gone quiet or become raucous; deer are roaming mindlessly in rut or hiding in quiet places waiting for their fawns to drop. We watch the positions of the sunrise and sunset change on the horizon and begin preparing, even if only in our minds, for the season that is to come. I know I always become restless at these times, especially in the fall, as if I should be getting ready to migrate. I especially crave the mountains, high places, vistas, the feel of granite and pine duff under my boots.

Change is constant at any time, of course, and although I'm not going to get away to the mountains this year, I will spend the next few months helping the Global ECCO team to make some major changes to *CTX*. In response to a mandate from our sponsor, the Regional Defense Fellowship Program, the *Combating Terrorism Exchange* is now the *Combating Threats Exchange*. We are expanding the journal's scope beyond counterterrorism to encompass the new security environment of irregular warfare, cyber operations, all-of-government/all-of-society defense, Women in Peace and Security, climate security, and information operations. *CTX* was founded twelve years ago, at the height of the Global War on Terror, and counterterrorism will still be an important part of what we cover, but it's no longer enough to talk about this one area of national and international security when so many other things are happening all around us. Many of you are already deeply involved in one or more of these intertwined activities. You're the source of *CTX*'s unique character and value, and I hope all of you reading this now will take a little time to think about the story you have to tell, the lessons you learned on deployment and through study, the contribution

you can make to the knowledge base of everyone who serves in national and international security and defense. Our goal remains the same: to offer you a place to share your knowledge and learn from one another.

Another big change is my retirement as editor of *CTX*, after twelve years of doing one of the most challenging and exciting—and fun—jobs I've ever had. This will be the last issue to have my name at the top of the masthead. It has been my privilege to be part of an outstanding team of colleagues, editors, designers, and web gurus over the years. I've also had the honor to work with an amazing array of contributors, from well-known ones like John Arquilla and Maria Ressa to the many, many boots-on-the-ground operators who've shared their stories and lessons learned with the rest of us. Thank you for making my job so rewarding. I'll miss working with and hearing from all of you, but I'm going to enjoy watching *CTX* grow and change under fresh and energetic new guidance.

This issue of *CTX* is a rather eclectic mix of topics and ideas that showcase the journal's broadening scope. Our first feature article, by Major Cédric Craninx, takes a deep look at the ways in which a small nation's special forces and its intelligence community could work together to improve intelligence collection in regions of interest or potential conflict. Modern operations depend on accurate, timely information and preparation, but SOF too often lack the legal authority to engage in pre-conflict activities. MAJ Craninx examines three possible structures for information sharing and discusses the changes in law needed to ensure accountability and remove barriers to cooperation between the services.

Next, Major Adam Steinwachs describes an initiative the US Naval Postgraduate School is developing with partners in Mongolia to establish a physical education program and curriculum for Mongolian children and youth. As Mongolia modernizes and its population becomes increasingly urbanized, young people are not getting access to the kinds of physical activity they need to stay physically and emotionally healthy and resilient. This cooperative pilot endeavor shows promise for improving health outcomes and developing a stronger society.

The *CTX* Interview features a discussion between Major Mareks Runts of the Latvian Special Forces and *CTX* board member Ian Rice about the creation of the Latvian National Armed Forces after independence in 1991, and the subsequent development of the Latvian SOF. As MAJ Runts notes, Latvia has adapted and synthesized models from its allies to develop its own doctrine and laws

governing the armed forces, thus maintaining flexibility in the face of increasing geostrategic threats.

In the Ethics and Insights column, Dr. Marcus Hedahl tells us why Stoicism, as practiced by both ancient Romans and modern proponents, is the best philosophy. Through the examples of such famous Stoics as Marcus Aurelius and US Navy Admiral James Stockdale, Dr. Hedahl demonstrates that the Stoic ideals of virtue, personal excellence, and a firm acceptance of the reality of our human condition will enable us to embrace whatever life throws at us without losing our moral integrity.

CTX is excited to introduce a new regular column, Social Capital, which invites authors from a broad spectrum of disciplines to explore the evolving nature of defense and security around the world. This includes the changing roles of women in national defense; the effects of generational changes; innovations in technology, planning, strategy, and tactics; and new ways of cooperating for security purposes. In this introductory essay, authors Dr. Deborah Gibbons and Kathleen Bailey draw on their research and experience to describe how women's participation in peace and security operations and planning can shift perspectives, foster needed change, and improve outcomes in unforeseen ways.

Finally, be sure to read about Dr. Tristan A. Volpe's new book, *Leveraging Latency: How the Weak Compel the Strong with Nuclear Technology*, in the Publication Announcements section.

You can let us know how much you appreciate *CTX* by sending your essay, review, story, and photos for peer review and possible publication to CTXeditor@GlobalEcco.org. We welcome your ideas and opinions. Let us know what you think about what you've read in *CTX*, or anything else in the CT and IW worlds that's on your mind. You can also keep up on global CT/IW news and comment on articles by "liking" Global ECCO on Facebook. As the seasons change, we look forward to hearing from you.

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Inside

About the Contributors

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Major Cédric Craninx, is an Army Special Operations officer in the Belgian Defense Forces. He holds an MS degree in Social and Military Sciences from the Belgian Royal Military Academy and an MS degree in Defense Analysis from NPS. He has held command and staff appointments in the Belgian SOF community and has been deployed multiple times in the Middle East and in Africa.

Dr. Marcus Hedahl is an associate professor of philosophy at the US Naval Academy. His research focuses on the relational and collective aspects of ethics, including just war theory, environmental ethics, and Stoic philosophy. He previously served as a Dahrendorf postdoctoral research fellow at the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and as the Environmental Justice Fellow at the Kennedy Institute of Ethics at Georgetown University. Dr. Hedahl served as an officer in the US Air Force for 11 years.

Dr. Deborah E. Gibbons teaches in the Defense Management department at NPS. Her research applies social psychological principles to real-world problems, including motivation and behavior; collaboration and knowledge-sharing; humanitarian aid and disaster response; group and crowd behavior; and diffusion of information, attitudes, and innovations. She has researched the integration of men and women in military environments and has partnered with peacekeeper-training facilities in Latin America and Jordan since 2013. She holds a PhD in organizational behavior and theory from Carnegie Mellon University.

Ian Rice is a retired US military officer who served in a variety of overseas assignments at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels in Afghanistan, Iraq, Germany, Japan, and Korea. Most notably, in 2016-2017, he served with the US Diplomatic Mission to Iraq, where he was the director of the Tribal Engagement Coordination Cell during Operation Inherent Resolve. He is currently a senior lecturer at NPS and is a member of the *CTX* editorial review board.

Major Mareks Runts joined the Latvian National Guard SOF in 1997 and the National Armed Forces (NAF) of Latvia in 2000. He joined the Latvian Special Operations Forces in 2004, where he has held several leadership positions, including company commander and unit chief of staff. He completed US Airborne School and Special Forces Qualification course (18A), and the NATO Special Operations Headquarters' Leadership/Catalyst for Change course, among other international courses. MAJ Runts served in multiple combat deployments in Afghanistan and train-the-trainer deployments in Ukraine. He developed the first Unconventional Warfare and Recovery Operations courses in Latvia, and lectures on those topics at the Latvian NAF Academy and NCO school.

Major Adam Steinwachs is a Civil Affairs officer in the US Army. While in Mongolia between 2018 and 2019, he participated in Khaan Quest, a Joint Combined Exchange Training with Mongolian Armed Forces Civil-Military Cooperation, and was the Civil Military Support Element Team Leader. Prior to joining the Army, MAJ Steinwachs was a successful National Collegiate Athletic Association track and field coach. He holds a level II coaching certification with USA Track & Field and has taught physical education. MAJ Steinwachs is currently a student in the Defense Analysis department at NPS.

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A MUTUALLY **REINFORCING** RELATIONSHIP

MAJ Cédric Craninx, Belgian Defense Forces

In order to better assess risks to the force and the mission from the tactical to the strategic level, and to improve their operational effectiveness, Special Operations Forces require more access to intelligence—both quantitatively and qualitatively—than they currently have. Moreover, special operations rely on a synergy between operations and intelligence more than other intelligence consumers, because for SOF, "operations is intelligence and intelligence is operations."[1] Each enhances the other; hence, the level of intelligence support that SOF receive should reflect their unique needs.

However, the collaboration level between SOF and their national intelligence services varies significantly from country to country. The United States and other Five Eyes nations[2] made significant progress regarding their internal collaboration protocols after 9/11.[3] By contrast, few European countries, especially smaller ones, have followed the "need to share" trend; many appear to be stuck in the "need to know" mentality. Also, SOF are often not covered by a country's laws allowing intelligence gathering; in these cases, they will not have the legal authority to gather intelligence in all situations, such as in a pre-conflict phase.

These hindrances are becoming increasingly important given the changing nature of warfare. The Ukraine war has reminded us that conventional warfare "does not eliminate the reality that all warfare is now population-centric warfare."[4] This population-centric characteristic imposes greater intelligence requirements. Small NATO countries' decision makers might think that they can fulfill these requirements via intelligence sharing between NATO members, but, depending on the priorities that these smaller countries' governments assign to some regions of the world, the intelligence inputs from NATO partners may not satisfy their national requirements. NATO cannot focus equally on all regions of the world, and small NATO member countries may have regional focuses that are different from those of NATO as a whole. National intelligence collectors must therefore stay connected to and monitor their government's regions of interest. The same goes for these countries' SOF: they must be able to gather sufficient intelligence on areas of national security concern that may become their operational theater. SOF must also be able to provide viable options to their governments quickly enough to allow the governments to intervene proactively and keep the initiative.

To fulfill this requirement, small European countries need to formulate an intranational solution. Two options exist to fill this gap. One would be to modify the legal frameworks under which the SOF of small European states operate, so that they can gather the necessary intelligence independently. Another way would be to implement a structural collaboration between those small states' SOF and their own intelligence services, in which the latter would support SOF operational objectives.

Governments face similar issues: they also need more intelligence to better design security policies and strategies. Some small European states have acknowledged this need.[5] Europe

Geospatial intelligence analyst studies unclassified intelligence slides at Camp Murray, WA, 8 August 2023

has seen an increase in threats on its eastern and southern flanks and growing regional instability, which have led to the need for more intelligence.[6] Insufficient intelligence leads to ill-informed policies and inefficient resource allocation, which might erode public trust in government institutions. Domestic and foreign security concerns are interrelated, and decision makers need more intel on the dynamics of international security. The options to fill that gap are identical to the ones that apply to SOF. On the one hand, modifications to a state's legal framework could allow SOF to become an independent strategic collection asset under the umbrella of either the intelligence service or an intelligence oversight committee. On the other hand, structural collaborations would allow SOF to support intelligence services' strategic objectives.

Both actors could benefit from an assessment of the relative merits of these two potential solutions. Drawing conclusions on this matter will require confronting legacy perspectives on siloing. Old guards and skeptics may claim that there is no need for a structural collaboration between SOF and the intelligence services because the collaboration will succeed if the situation or environment compels it. Furthermore, democratic governments have concerns regarding the potential for security agencies, particularly militaries and intelligence organizations, to cause unwanted side effects that can lead to political complications. Some individuals may contend that the public disclosure of intelligence documents and related breaches, as demonstrated by the Snowden and Teixeira cases, highlight the risks associated with the principle of "need to share."[7] This article will show that the benefits exceed the costs, and will advocate for structural, strategic methods as part of the solution for intelligence collaboration, including a substantial increase in collaborative SOF and intelligence-collecting activities.

Because each European SOF has a different relationship with its government and intelligence apparatus, it is impossible to cover internal specificities in this article. Instead, it will discuss general solutions for smaller states. To address their intelligence gaps, European small-state SOF can be given new capabilities within a modified legal framework, or these SOF can work together with their domestic intelligence services. This article will argue that the best approach is to pursue both options. The combined efforts will result in more comprehensive and flexible intelligence capabilities. The article will address why it is important to adapt the legal framework for SOF, how SOF collaboration with intelligence services might fill SOF intel gaps and contribute to national security objectives, and finally, why opting for both solutions is necessary today. The analysis indicates that combining these approaches

would allow smaller countries to improve operational risk appraisal and operational effectiveness, reinforce their national intelligence systems, and stay flexible with the assets that are already available.

Enhancing Intelligence Collection in SOF Operations

Small European countries' SOF intelligence requirements call for adapting the legal framework such that it allows SOF to collect information during pre-conflict periods or population-centric conflicts, and for closer cooperation with intelligence services so they can support SOF operational objectives. Special operations have unique objectives, tactics, methods, procedures, and equipment, and are characterized by light footprints.[8] Accordingly, they have unique intelligence requirements, including a detailed grasp of the operating environment, and especially its people, in order to identify, understand, and impact essential populations.[9]

Information is always critical, but it is especially so in a population-centric conflict, because opening information channels with the population brings success when the enemy is embedded in communities.[10] In the context of insurgent-counterinsurgent competitions, studies demonstrate that an increase in force has a limited impact on any form of clandestine organization (insurgents, terrorists,

Insufficient intelligence leads to ill-informed policies and inefficient resource allocation, which might erode public trust in government institutions.

Partner nation training scenario at a Pakistan military range during Operation Falcon Talon 2022, 1 March 2022

etc.) if it is not supported by additional intelligence capabilities.[11] Operational research has also demonstrated the vast role intelligence plays in reducing insurgencies.[12]

In conflicts driven by insurgencies, and in population-centric conflicts more generally, traditional methods of intelligence gathering and analysis are inadequate, because they do not allow the right collections and data management and, consequently, the right analysis and fusion with other collection methods. These types of conflict require adaptations in choosing, organizing, and reporting the intelligence, and in how personnel are trained and the collected data is managed.[13] Rather than focusing solely on hostile forces, this broader intelligence collection, data management, and analysis method focuses on the population and non-state actors and on possible points of influence with the population.

In addition to the activities that they conduct during conflicts, SOF also conduct pre-conflict activities, which further necessitate expanded intelligence collection. These pre-conflict activities, which include identifying social networks, influencers, and local perceptions of legitimacy, look similar to intelligence service intel-gathering activities. The necessary tradecraft also looks similar. The differences lie in the purpose and the legal framework.[14] Like every military organization, SOF may only execute military activities. Through collaboration, intelligence services could support SOF operational objectives and

enhance their operational effectiveness by, for example, providing them with human intelligence and helping them to identify key points of influence in a theater. During the pre-conflict phase, SOF may collaborate with various information providers such as non-governmental organizations and businesses to fulfill their intelligence requirements. However, the information these organizations share is typically insufficient for SOF to plan operations and assess risks because their information collection apparatus has an entirely different purpose, i.e., force protection for their employees.

Getting the Legal Foundation Right

A revised legal framework is therefore necessary to allow SOF to operate proactively instead of reactively. Once a legal framework is in place and SOF are in the intelligence capability development phase, they may want to adopt a broader spectrum of activities and add a pre-conflict role similar to the Operational Preparation of the Environment concept of the US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). This concept meets critical requirements for disrupting and eliminating clandestine organizations, denying them safe haven, sustaining an intelligence edge, and posturing for strategic uncertainty.[15] Preparing the environment can be very productive with regard to information gathering. It provides a strategic initiative, especially in the pre-crisis phase of an emerging conflict, and improves SOF's situational awareness, operational response,

Without enlarging the national intelligence system, political leaders risk **more intelligence gaps.**

and find-to-finish time.[16] This process of shaping the environment must be planned and synchronized in time and space to create a denied environment for clandestine organizations by preempting or mitigating conditions that facilitate their activities.[17] In that context, SOF need to be able to operate independently during intelligence gathering and shaping activities in order to create or incorporate a forward network. Thus, limited resources and personnel within small European states' defense and intelligence agencies, multiple regional focuses, the need for early presence before conflicts start, and the population-centricity of conflicts all call for increasing the quantity and the flexibility of collection assets.

The legal debate over such matters is outside the scope of this article; however, it must be noted that small European countries have different laws covering military activities and intelligence activities. Source operations or human intelligence data storage is illegal for some of these small states' SOF, as are the planning, direction, and execution of intelligence operations. Having laws on SOF intelligence activities means having an oversight committee to supervise those operations and activities to make sure they stay within the legal boundaries; such oversight will also help to mitigate concerns about unintended consequences that could lead to political complications.[18]

The legal framework must therefore be transformed by senior military leaders and policy makers to recognize SOF as a national asset for the strategic collection of intelligence, providing them the authority to gather more intelligence during pre-conflict operations. This would allow SOF to be self-sufficient when their countries' intelligence service resources are unable to support SOF risk appraisal and operational objectives. Small European countries' SOF could learn from General Michael Hayden, who made this statement during his hearing to become Director of the

US National Security Agency: "as the national HUMINT manager, the Director of CIA should strap on the responsibility to make sure that this thing down here that walks and quacks and talks like human intelligence is conducted to the same standards as human intelligence."[19] Small European countries may use this idea, requiring their intelligence services to take the lead and ensure that these SOF pre-conflict activities are conducted up to the service's standards and within the proper legal framework.

Enhancing Intelligence Collection in Intelligence Operations

Due to the increased instability in and around Europe, small countries are seeking to develop integrated strategies among their different ministries. To do this, they need more self-generated national intelligence, such as information about the activities and locations of state and non-state actors' militaries. They also need information regarding causes of instability, and domestic and foreign actors' efforts to influence internal public perceptions. This information greatly contributes to better foresight and analysis. Without enlarging the national intelligence system, political leaders risk more intelligence gaps. However, the defense establishments of many countries are facing recruiting difficulties,[20] and many struggle to attract, promote, and retain talent.[21] Adding SOF to the "intelligence gathering pool" would increase collection capacity without waiting the years necessary to recruit and educate sufficient intelligence officers to fill SOF and governments' intelligence gaps. Based on their Special Reconnaissance experience and low-visibility modus operandi, SOF have baseline skills, knowledge, and abilities that would expedite the education and training process.

SOF support to intelligence services in denied areas is also beneficial.[22] Their experience with tactical intelligence during Special Reconnaissance missions,[23] their lower signature and low-visibility modus operandi, and their operational security discipline make them a perfect strategic collection asset.[24] SOF have the medical skills and the experience with air-ground coordination, small-unit tactics, and weapons handling that are mandatory for operations in denied areas. SOF are also best suited to place intel-collecting technical devices and to help find and set up safe houses for partnered assets.[25] The SOF skill set in support of an intelligence service can enhance that service's reach in denied areas by mitigating the risk to the force, which can help the intelligence service reach its strategic objectives. When operating as an independent actor, through a permanent presence in areas of national interest (strategic forward presence), SOF can be distinctively well placed to gain human intelligence and discover the intentions of key actors while building networks as part of the national intelligence system.

Here again, the main issue preventing SOF from playing this valuable role is that they generally lack the legal authority to collect information from a foreign area that is not in a declared war with their own country. Therefore, the legal framework needs adaptation to accommodate current operational needs.

Militaries use different command relationships to provide more or less control of a deployed detachment. In the context of intelligence operations, a structural collaboration between a country's national intelligence service and its SOF should indicate whether the intelligence service may only assign intelligence-gathering tasks to SOF to achieve a purpose, whether they may also assign missions, or if they may even reorganize the SOF task structure. Depending on their organizational sensitivities, different countries may settle on very different collaboration protocols between the services.

Since SOF's operational objectives are nested with national security objectives, both actors would contribute to those national security objectives. A collaboration would provide additional bandwidth in terms of personnel working towards the same objectives. It would also improve the quality of the intelligence gathered by SOF: by allowing them to work more closely with the intelligence service, it would enable them to take advantage of the intelligence service's greater levels of experience and knowledge in intelligence matters.

One might argue that incorporating SOF into the national intelligence apparatus would place an additional burden on operators. That would be true only if that extra burden were added on top of a task list that was left unchanged. If some of SOF's existing tasks could be transferred to SOF support units or enablers, then the burden would be minimal. When prioritizing for relevance and operational effectiveness, SOF communities are used to adapting.

Whether SOF support intelligence operations or execute intelligence operations independently, they would be a strategic collection asset in support of national decision-making. Their ability to deliver contextual understanding of situations within a region of interest and develop a capacity to detect early warning signals would provide strategic and political leaders with decision space and strategic options.
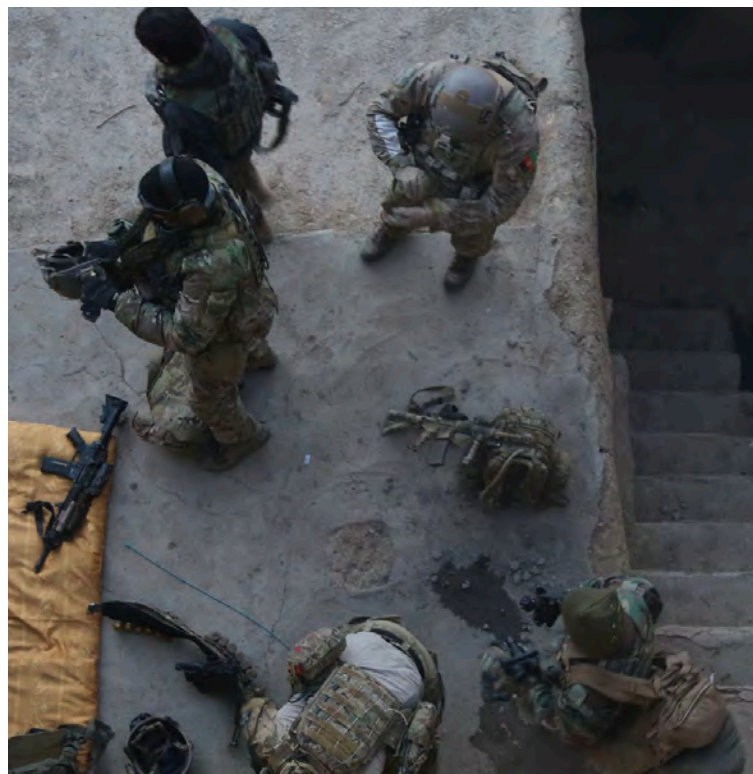
Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan, Parwan Province, Afghanistan, 15 January 2014

Options Come Together

Taking both paths—adapting the SOF intelligence-gathering legal framework and creating a structural collaboration—would make the most sense for small European states because this would benefit both SOF and the intelligences services by filling intelligence gaps. The option to operate independently and to support each other according to a structural protocol offers the most

flexible option because the two communities would cover each other's deficiencies when they cooperate. SOF, for example, could fill an intel gap independently when the intelligence service is stretched thin and unable to fill it. After the raw data is gathered, the assessment and refinement process could occur within SOF or the intelligence service, or in a joint manner. The types of operations (i.e., SOF or intel ops) and the types of agreements between the two entities would determine the repartition of responsibilities throughout the intelligence process. Given its position as the highest national authority in the intel field, the intelligence service would have to have the last word in any disagreement.

For the same reasons, combining the two options offers a third benefit, which is to provide smaller countries with multi-source fusion through synergy and thereby augment their collection efforts. According to Mark Lowenthal, synergy refers to the situation where one system or discipline can provide useful information or signals that can be utilized by other systems to guide their data collection efforts.[26] He also states that multiple collection methods should be employed for major intelligence requirements—those that are linked to national security threats or counterterrorism—and that these collectors are expected to work together in a coordinated manner. The goal of this approach is to develop all-source intelligence, also referred to as fusion intelligence, which involves combining intelligence data from as many collection sources as possible in order to overcome the limitations of each individual source and take advantage of their combined strength. Due to limited resources, this is difficult for small European countries to achieve, but intel fusion of at least two or three sources should be their goal.
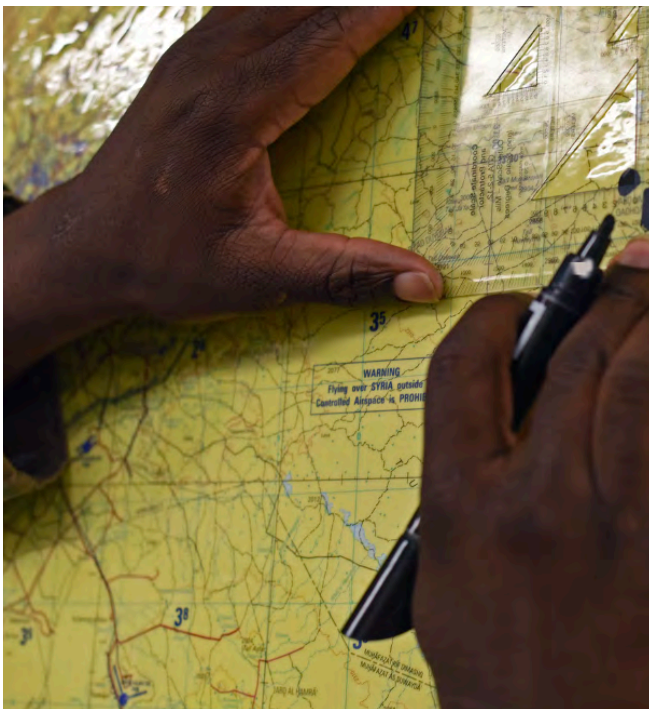
While major powers have the luxury of running such a multi-source intel fusion apparatus exclusively within SOF or the intelligence service, they also continue to seek ways to integrate the two. To overcome the limits of their resources and realize multi-source intel fusion, this interservice approach is necessary for smaller states. The least expensive way to produce multi-source intel today is likely by combining three types of intelligence: human intelligence (HUMINT); geospatial intelligence (GEOINT), which includes imagery and videos from manned and unmanned aircraft; and open-source intelligence (OSINT).[27] This multi-source fusion uses the latest technology and is possible at the lowest tactical level. It is a desirable approach that can be implemented for SOF operations and intelligence operations. Intelligence services are familiar with these three intelligence types and, were the proposed interservice approach to be adopted, smaller European countries' SOF would become familiar with them, too.

Recommendations, Counterarguments, and Rebuttals

As cooperation between SOF and intel agencies becomes more common among the major Western powers, smaller European countries should follow suit. Countries willing to do so should also advocate for a synchronized oversight that stimulates interagency integration to promote national security interests. Increased location access, augmented personnel numbers, shared resources, and increased mission success were among the benefits of a structural collaboration identified by a survey of USSOF and CIA operatives.[28] After 20 years of the Global War on Terror, it is surprising that small European states have not moved towards this type of improved cooperation between SOF and the intelligence community. However, for multiple reasons, restrictions persist on SOF's access to HUMINT and other information about a country's citizens. A few of these barriers relate to civil liberties, national security issues, and the dangers of the "need to share" principle.

Civil liberties and privacy rights are significant concerns, and many democratically governed states prioritize their protection. In cases where their citizens would become unintended targets of military intelligence operations abroad, this might become a problem. Democratically elected authorities try to maintain a balance between national security and the rights and freedoms of their people, because people's perception of how security providers handle civil rights is just as important as reaching national security objectives. In fact, public perception and trust play

Operation Falcon Talon, 1 March 2022

a significant role in shaping political decisions in democracies. If a state's citizens are concerned about privacy or are afraid of excessive state surveillance, enhancing the intelligence apparatus by increasing the number of assets may further hamper public trust in government institutions.

The strategic culture of each state also influences its relationship with the intelligence apparatus and the restrictions that the state places on data gathering. Each country perceives different threats and, consequently, prioritizes security policies differently. Historical experiences, risk tolerance, and transparency also play a role. All these factors are essential when asking why a country has not moved forward with closer collaboration between its SOF and its intelligence community.

Thus, on the one hand, adding SOF to the intelligence community increases the number of assets and the amount of intelligence available to decision makers. On the other hand, it also increases the chances of political problems for the government. Striking a balance between intelligence gaps and political blowback requires careful consideration of national security priorities, democratic values, and public sentiment, a process familiar to intelligence services that require adaptive policies and continuous assessment.

A comprehensive legal framework should therefore be established to maximize SOF's accountability and minimize the chances of blowback. Such a framework should define the scope of SOF's intelligence activities, including the limitations and safeguards in place. It should also balance a country's national security needs against domestic and foreign citizens' individual rights, ensuring that intelligence operations are conducted lawfully and with proper oversight. SOF would be bound by robust oversight mechanisms to ensure that intelligence activities are conducted within legal boundaries and with respect for civil liberties. These kinds of SOF operations could either fall under the intelligence service's operational command or be subject to an independent oversight body, such as a parliamentary committee or judicial review, to ensure accountability and minimize the risk of abuses.

European countries also have different regulations and laws regarding intelligence activities. Generally, the personnel under the intelligence services are covered by intel laws and may conduct intelligence activities in foreign areas in peacetime, whereas regular defense personnel may not. Also, in small European countries like Belgium, Denmark, and the Netherlands, intelligence services fall under the Ministry of Defense. These countries, like most democracies, have special oversight committees established by law that are meant to supervise the intelligence services. Thus, the same oversight committee might place constraints on SOF pre-conflict activities by providing policy guidance and reporting requirements; reviewing and approving intel-related operations; and conducting investigations and audits. Most countries' defense headquarters already place

similar constraints on SOF operations, but in the case of intelligence operations, the echelon for oversight is at the parliamentary level. In the end, a comprehensive legal framework could finally allow SOF the necessary spectrum of activities to build a situational understanding of the environment.

Continuous evaluation and adaptation would best fit the threat landscape and each state's norms and regulations. This adaptation process means regularly reviewing and evaluating the closer collaboration between SOF and the intelligence community for its effectiveness—and deficiencies—at bridging intelligence gaps and addressing national security concerns. Adapting and refining intelligence policies and interservice cooperation is crucial as the threat landscape evolves and societal norms change.

The temptation for either service to sequester intel it has gathered, whatever the source of collection, is to be avoided. Incomplete information risks not only suboptimal decision-making, but also the erosion of trust and willingness to collaborate between the two partners. Establishing a joint oversight body or liaison team that monitors information sharing and collaboration can facilitate continuous communication and prevent issues from escalating. Any legal structure for collaboration should include mechanisms, such as resort to higher-level authority or a formal mediation process, to resolve disputes and ensure adherence to the information-sharing arrangement. Joint training and education to raise awareness about each service's roles and expertise would help increase mutual respect and understanding of the consequences of intel siloing.

Within this framework, three key areas are recommended to decrease collaborative frictions: understand each other's organizational missions and authorities; improve communications efforts through interservice training, liaisons, and intelligence sharing; and finally, resolve "mission overlap issues through deconfliction and transparent mission planning efforts."[29] Whether for SOF operations or for intelligence operations, no senior leader wants his organization to replicate work that has already been done in a theater, nor wants one entity to interfere with any existing network of the other. Avoiding the unnecessary expenditure of organizational energy is also an added value to a structural collaboration.

Opponents might argue that revising legislation or attempting to persuade the political and military strategic levels of the need for a structural interservice collaboration is a substantial effort for a minimal return on investment. However, considering criteria such as future operational

trends, increased knowledge of risk due to better risk appraisal, and the potential to optimize a state's operational impacts, the return on investment may not be so minimal. One may also argue that SOF in some nations have become proportionally too large to allow these partnerships or credibly maintain the necessary secrecy and adequate intelligence processes. Looking at major powers is the best response to this: they may have large SOF, but only a few operators and intelligence professionals participate in interagency operations.

Another possible argument is that an intelligence service is meant to produce strategic intel and, consequently, should operate exclusively at the strategic level. First, no matter the level at which they operate, SOF are also theoretically meant to work toward strategic objectives. Second, these arguments about levels are often brought by people who do not recognize the intertwining between tactical activities, operational effectiveness, and strategic outcomes. Maintaining a strict separation between various levels is a recipe for ineffectiveness in today's complex operational environment. The Joint Publication on Joint Operations is clear in distinguishing theory from reality: "Actions can be defined as strategic, operational, or tactical based on their

Joint training and education to raise awareness about each service's roles and expertise would help increase mutual respect and understanding of the consequences of intel siloing.

effect or contribution to achieving strategic, operational, or tactical objectives, but many times the accuracy of these labels can only be determined during historical studies."[30] Whether in pre-conflict or during population-centric conflicts, SOF actions often help to achieve objectives at multiple levels. The time when a military's assets or capacities were dedicated principally to a strategic context has ended. Those assets and capabilities have become a crucial addition to the tactical level.

Conclusion

To accomplish national security objectives, the relationships between small European countries' SOF and intelligence services are mutually reinforcing, and there is a need for interoperability and interagency support. While the military and intelligence services have distinct roles and functions, they frequently need to work together, demonstrating that there is indeed a useful synergy between their activities and refuting the idea that their activities are mutually exclusive. More than a decade ago, Andru Wall argued that "insistence that military and intelligence activities inhabit separate worlds casts a pall of illegitimacy over interagency support."[31] The reality of limited personnel in small European countries' defense and intelligence agencies, the need for an early presence in many regions of interest, and the trend toward population-centric conflicts put pressure on small European countries to make this collaboration work.

SOF need to keep investing in knowledge. Most important, they must invest in the proper collection assets and the right people to process, exploit, analyze, produce, and disseminate special operations intelligence. The importance of building the experience and the right capabilities to create a detailed concept of intelligence support for special operations should not be underestimated.

Whether the intelligence services and SOF cooperate to fill the gap, or whether SOF create new capabilities under an adapted legal framework and fill the gap on their own, these paths will offer suitable solutions. The optimal solution, in terms of quality, quantity, and flexibility, would be to do both. Both actors should enable each other, cover each other's deficiencies, and support each other's efforts when one is stretched out. Taking both paths is also the best way to guarantee the multi-intelligence fusion benefits in support of SOF and intelligence operations. Avoiding the collaboration that this article advocates will only increase the risks that SOF will be forced to fill their own intelligence gaps in order to meet their operational requirements, resulting in mission creep. If neither of these paths is taken, the relative loss of information and lack of situational awareness will impact operational outcomes. Except for fear of change, there is today no sound argument for not making this collaboration work. If a country's political level is unaware of the possible solutions, it is the responsibility of that country's defense forces to make the politicians see sense.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MAJ Cédric Craninx serves in the Belgian Special Forces.

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DEVELOPING MONGOLIA'S RESILIENCY THROUGH **SPORTS, GAMES, AND PLAY**

MAJ Adam Steinwachs, US Army Civil Affairs

As the 2023 school year begins in Mongolia, thousands of children in early childhood education (ECE) programs and primary and secondary schools have only limited access to physical education classes. Across the country, there is a need for more and better physical education programs, including for children with disabilities. Currently, Mongolian children spend inadequate time participating in physical education classes, and thereby miss vital education and development activities through play and the peer socialization that ensues. This limited emphasis on physical education can also have a negative effect on children's academic performance.[1] Further, overlooking the physical activity needs of Mongolia's youth may diminish focus and mood in the classroom while also negatively impacting children's sense of well-being.[2] The long-term consequences can lead to fewer opportunities and poorer mental health, which together act to weaken the societal resiliency needed for Mongolia's democracy to thrive in the twenty-first century.

In this context, societal resiliency refers broadly to the ability of a society to cope with internal and external stresses and pressure. Sports, play, and daily physical activity are critical elements in early childhood development, and these elements play a direct role in the advancement of physically and psychologically resilient individuals. A healthy, educated, and resilient population is vital to the long-term maintenance of Mongolia's national sovereignty and continued democratic development. Despite pressure from authoritarian neighbors, Mongolia is still committed to democratization.[3] The leaders of this young democracy are actively pursuing innovative approaches to fostering resiliency within their society. In May 2020, the Parliament of Mongolia took a crucial step toward this end when it approved a long-term development policy for Mongolia titled "Vision-2050." Tellingly, the first priority of this policy focuses on strengthening shared values among the Mongolian people.[4] It proposes to do so by educating the populace through language, history, and tradition, which it describes as the foundations for building a resilient nation.[5]

The achievement of this objective starts at the individual level and in the formative years. To assist Mongolia in addressing this issue, the US Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in Monterey, California, has developed the Mongolian Sports and Education Program, which is designed to be a supplemental physical education resource for the Mongolian Ministry of Education and other education-based organizations, in support of Mongolia's long-term policy objectives.

This article first describes the current situation for children and education in Mongolia. It then discusses the steps that the government could take to improve the quality of and access to physical education as a means to improve mental and physical health, as well as social cohesion among Mongolia's youth. Finally, it will provide an overview of NPS's cooperative endeavor with the US Embassy in Ulaanbaatar and Mongolia's government, schools, and non-governmental organizations to improve mental and

physical health outcomes among youth through sports, games, and play.

The Mongolian Education Experience: Shortcomings and Effects

In an attempt to provide their children with all of the opportunities education can provide, many rural Mongolian families must leave their children in the local township, where they will live for extended periods of time in dormitories that are often outdated and poorly maintained. There are over 500 such dormitories across the country, which house roughly 35,000 young Mongolians; 15 percent of these buildings do not meet state housing standards.[6] Too often, these children are learning and living in buildings that lack heat, indoor plumbing, or access to clean water.[7] Of the nearly 800 schools spread throughout the country, almost 70 percent are located in rural townships.[8] The remaining 30 percent of schools are concentrated in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, where nearly half of Mongolia's approximately 3.3 million citizens live. Rapid urbanization and too few schools mean that the city's classrooms are overcrowded and kids must vie for the attention of their overextended teachers.

Collectively, these challenges are exacerbating mental health problems among Mongolia's youth. Mongolia has a higher suicide rate than other regions of Asia.[9] Between 2012 and 2016, 2,055 Mongolians committed suicide, with 30 percent of them between the ages of 10 and 29.[10] The impact is devastating to families and communities, and the strain simultaneously erodes the legitimacy of Mongolian institutions that are perceived as failing to adequately address mental health issues.

Delivering consistent educational opportunities and equal access to resources for its citizens remains a serious challenge for the Mongolian government. Outdated infrastructure and low population density contribute to difficulties in the country's rural areas, while generally inadequate facilities and investment deny all children full access to the opportunities its democracy promises.[11] Rural nomadic families and children with disabilities suffer most. According to UNICEF, "one in every 4-5 children do not access early childhood education services. Seven out of 10 children from the poorest families do not go to kindergarten."[12] The strain on children, their families, and the teachers attempting to provide for them is negatively impacting the mental health and resiliency of young Mongolians, and has become one of the most pressing challenges for Mongolia's youth to overcome.[13]

A Practical Approach to Mongolian Resiliency

A key but undervalued component of Mongolia's stated policy goals is in the area of physical education. The love of athletics and competition, both traditional and modern, is evident across Mongolia, where the Olympic rings are prominently displayed in gymnasiums throughout the country. These cultural bonds are especially emphasized during the annual national Naadam Festival, which celebrates traditional athletic competition, music, and arts. Mongolian wrestling is the sporting centerpiece of the Naadam competitions, and its practice thrives throughout the country.[14] Naadam connects modern Mongolians to nomadic traditions, and the power of this cultural celebration, combined with Mongolians' natural love for sports, provides a natural opening for the integration of a holistic physical education program into the school system.

Today, however, the Mongolian Ministry of Education curricula allow for physical education classes only twice a week, which translates to minimal physical activity of any kind. This is far short of recommended guidelines in the United States that call for at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity for children 6 to 17 years old.[15] This physical education gap stands to negatively affect

> Delivering consistent educational opportunities and equal access to resources for its citizens **remains a serious challenge for the Mongolian government.**

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, April 2018

Mongolia's school-aged population and undermine the government's policy objectives. Vision-2050 acknowledges the important role physical fitness will play in helping Mongolia to become the resilient nation envisioned in this policy document. Within the "Healthy and Active Lifestyle" section of Vision-2050, objective 3.5 states that Mongolia will "encourage citizens and families with an active lifestyle and create an enabling environment for physical culture and sports."[16] Further, objective 3.5.1 seeks to promote active lifestyles among the population and make physical fitness into a national movement. [17]Mongolia's policymakers understand the importance of physical fitness, but the current curriculum design and resource disparities limit school-aged children's access to the daily physical activity needed to improve individual health and resiliency.

There are many health advantages associated with sports, games, and play, and Mongolia's education system offers an ideal space for leveraging these benefits to build physical and psychological resiliency within its school-aged population. Physical activity is universally understood to carry both tangible and intangible essential benefits,

from prevention of life-threatening diseases to feeling better about oneself and simply enjoying the excitement of competition.[18] These benefits, according to one British study, include "less depression, less suppressed anger, less cynical distrust, stronger sense of coherence and less perceived stress in comparison to those who exercised less frequently."[19] Further, the same study found that participating in physical activities, sports, and games is foundational to social interactions that develop trust and bonds within a society.

Given the challenges Mongolian institutions face in curbing rising suicide rates and mental health issues among their youth, harnessing the benefits that sports and physical activity provide is a simple way to combat adolescent mental-health problems and build resilient young citizens. Mongolian children could benefit from a program that promotes daily physical activity and team building as a means of reducing susceptibility to mental health difficulties. Moreover, daily exposure to sports, games, team-building activities, and exercises that build self-confidence and classroom cohesion could offer a bright spot in the lives of young Mongolians to offset the difficult

The Mongolian Sports and Education Program, Ulaanbaatar, June 2023

conditions surrounding them. There is ample evidence that people who participate in organized physical activities benefit from better mental health and are less susceptible to depression and stress.[20] Harnessing these forces through the adoption of a custom-made physical education program into Mongolian educational curricula is a simple but effective way to counter the persistent mental and physical health problems that stand to undermine Mongolia's long-term human development objectives.

The Way Forward: Adoption of the NPS Program

The Mongolian Sports and Education Program, which is being developed by researchers at NPS, was piloted in Ulaanbaatar in June 2023 to great success. The program offers a range of age-appropriate sports, games, trivia, core and body-weight exercises, and team building activities that are designed to encourage daily participation and have been proven to improve focus, mood, and health. Gains in these areas could lead to better performance in school and simultaneously foster shared values and identity among children that would contribute to intrapersonal resiliency. A resilient child is more confident and better able to cope with internal and external stresses, and is

more likely to thrive as she or he grows into adulthood. The pilot program received vital support from the US Embassy and Rebel Grappling Gym, and included children from both School #130 and the Bilguunzul Foundation in Ulaanbaatar.[21] The one-day pilot provided 32 children, their parents, and teachers from School #130 and the Bilguunzul Foundation an opportunity to preview games designed to improve physical fitness and simultaneously foster trust through cooperation and communication. Following execution of the pilot, feedback was elicited from participants to ensure that Mongolian viewpoints are informing the program's development. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and key takeaways were derived from it through a questionnaire. The most important perceived program benefits were improvements in mood, well-being, and sense of community in the classroom. The biggest perceived challenges to the program's adoption were access to facilities, levels of student interest and family buy-in, and community support.

The pilot program was an important first step to begin socializing the program with Mongolian stakeholders and generate vital feedback that will help guide completion of the final version of the program. The Mongolian Sports and Education Program was completed in the fall of

2023 and is ready for use during the 2023-2024 academic year. The final version of the program will have multiple sections centered around Mongolian-themed sports, games, and team-building activities that are designed for use in both rural and urban settings to enable educators to systematically engage their students in daily physical education activities. The program is available in both Mongolian and English language versions, and includes a section for children with disabilities. Finally, it contains an age-based comprehensive physical fitness test that supports the Vision-2050 objective aimed at creating a physical capabilities test for Mongolian youth and adults.[22]

Conclusion

The fastest way to leverage the benefits associated with daily physical activity and simultaneously help to garner local family and community support would be for the Mongolian Ministry of Education, with US Embassy support, to adopt the Mongolian Sports and Education Program. If the ministry fully embraces this program, it could quickly foster widespread use that would allow access for schools and education-based organizations across Mongolia. Expansive access to the program would provide a broad menu of activities that includes instructions for educators on how to utilize the program on a daily basis. Importantly, access to the program would provide overtaxed teachers and parents with a resource to help improve their children's physical fitness, focus, and

sense of well-being; support better academic performance; and encourage the development of shared identity and intra-personal resiliency. These benefits are in line with Mongolia's policy aims and the basic rights of children as outlined by the United Nations.[23] This program offers a comprehensive and easy-to-use supplemental resource designed to strengthen the physical and mental health of Mongolia's youngest citizens, and contribute to the individual fortitude and resiliency future generations of Mongolians will need to carry their young democracy far beyond 2050.

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The Mongolian Sports and Education Program, Ulaanbaatar, June 2023

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Major Mareks Runts, Latvian Special Operations Forces

Interviewed by Ian Rice,
CTX Editorial Review Board

On 3 June 2022, Ian Rice of *CTX* spoke with Major Mareks Runts, who serves in the Latvian Special Operations Forces, about the origins of the Latvian SOF, the development of their training and doctrine, and their responses to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.[1] At the time of the interview, Major Runts was a student in the Irregular Warfare curriculum in the Defense Analysis department at the US Naval Postgraduate School. He has since graduated with a master of science degree.

IAN RICE: To start with, tell us about the development of the Latvian SOF and their role in the Latvian Armed Forces.

MAREKS RUNTS: Compared with other countries, the Latvian SOF are a relatively young entity. The Latvian Armed Forces are themselves a young entity. As you know, Latvia regained its independence from the USSR in 1991. At that time, the first defense forces and also the first SOF unit, a special operations battalion, were established, but the SOF battalion was under the state security service rather than the defense forces. It was transferred to the armed forces in 1994 and reorganized as a Special Operations Unit (SOU). Initially, the Latvian National Armed Forces (NAF) also had a Special Tasks Unit within the national guard, but in 2003, a decision was made to combine it with the SOU. During its existence, the SOU has experienced several changes of command. In the beginning, the unit was under the navy and later under the land forces. Finally, in 2007, the SOU was designated as a separate unit under the direct command of the NAF chief of defense rather than under one of the regular services. Both the NATO and US SOF leadership played an important role in implementing these changes. A significant milestone in the Latvian SOF's history occurred in 2018, when our Special Operations Command was established.

RICE: When Latvia won back its independence in 1991, you had a special operations battalion. Was it developed under the Soviet model in the early days? How did it evolve?

RUNTS: It's hard to judge from my point of view because I wasn't in the unit at the time. Our first commander had been an officer in the Soviet army's *spetsnaz* [special forces] with combat experience in Afghanistan. I assume there was at least some part of this legacy in the founding of our unit. But very early, we started cooperating with the United States [US Navy SEALs] and with France's GIGN [*Groupe d'intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale*]. We mixed the spetsnaz legacy with a Western SOF experience.

RICE: It seems that when Latvia regained its independence, the Special Forces had almost a blank slate to choose the mix of best practices that worked best for Latvia.

RUNTS: Not only the SOF, but all the armed forces. It was a time for exploration, and we were looking for the best solutions. There were a lot of different directions to explore, such as Denmark's system, the US system, and the Swedish system. We sent out our soldiers to different schools, and they brought back this knowledge. Then we tried to mix their experiences and mold them into a unified system and standards. It was a challenging time, because our armed forces didn't have unified standards and procedures. We went through a kind of growing-up period. Now it is a totally different story, and we have our own standards that we follow.

RICE: It is also very interesting that you talk about all these leaders who went to all these great schools across Europe. We talk about "mirror imaging"; it seems like you took these experiences and now they're creating an image in these different units. Did you see this in the SOF unit, too?

RUNTS: Partially, yes.

RICE: With the French and Americans, predominantly?

RUNTS: In the initial stages of forming the SOU, yes, the influence was predominantly French and American.

RICE: Another very interesting thing you mention is the period from 2006 to 2007, when the Special Operations fell directly under the chief of defense. The Special Operations Forces were kept out of the chain of command of the regular forces, essentially off to the side under the direct control of the chief of defense. So, it was very close to national power and not buried in the command structure of the regular military. How has that helped or hindered your unit with regard to things like resources, training opportunities, and operational readiness?

RUNTS: I think it has helped a lot. I joined the unit in 2004 and, as I remember, there was a lot of uncertainty at that time. We didn't know how the unit would be developed in the future, because there were different attempts to put the SOU under the land forces and transform it into some kind of reconnaissance unit. The positioning of the unit under the direct command of the chief of defense gave us stability. At last we had a certain place in the defense structure and a clear chain of command. Otherwise, the unit's direction becomes very dependent on the commanders above it. But commanders change, and new commanders have different perspectives. If you are under direct command, you have your own resources; you have more possibility to self-determine your way ahead.

US Army Sgt. Shawn Beaver, left, with the Joint Multinational Training Command, installs a Deployable Instrumentation System Europe on a Latvian National Armed Forces soldier's G36 rifle, Ādaži, Latvia

Then in 2014, what happened? Russia annexed Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine. That's when we started to refocus on one more task, which in our doctrine is unconventional warfare.

RICE: Is the Latvian SOF's status as a direct reporting unit under the chief of defense now written into Latvian law, or is it just an accepted policy that is handed down?

RUNTS: It is in our armed forces law and our structure.

RICE: The other interesting point you made is that there were two special units: national guard and active.

RUNTS: The national guard Special Operations Unit was also active. They weren't part-time soldiers. The first element that was stood up after we got our independence was the national guard, which was organized purely from volunteers. Its SOU stood up against the Russian forces that were in Latvia and fought against organized crime groups, which were an issue in all of the former Soviet states. When the Soviet structure collapsed, there was a very strong rise in organized crime. The police were incapable of dealing with this alone, so the national guard was perceived as the main force that could provide law and order for citizens. The borders weren't very well protected, so it was easy, for example, for the criminals to move across into Latvia, commit crimes there, and then escape back into Russia.

RICE: The Latvian national guard in 1991–92 that you've described were the true Latvian patriots, correct? There was not going to be any question of their political reliability for an independent Latvia, where there may have been questions about former Soviet officers. Is that right?

RUNTS: I think that is correct. I don't want to say by any means that those defense forces that were stood up were not loyal. That was not the case. Back then, the national guard was a larger element than the defense forces, and even now it is the biggest element in our armed forces. The national guard falls under the armed forces and is commanded by the chief of defense. So, the national guard is one element of the Latvian National Armed Forces.

RICE: For the special unit that you've been a part of, what are the different kinds of missions that you have trained for and also executed?

RUNTS: Our core tasks are special reconnaissance (SR), direct action (DA), and military assistance (MA), which accords with NATO doctrine. But according to Latvian doctrine, we have some additional specified tasks. At the same level as SR, DA, and MA, we have CT, Counterterrorism Tasks, which is a legacy from when the SOU was under the state security service, which was formed in 1991. We started performing those tasks by providing security for VIP visits. Today, we continue to work closely with the security service.

The other task is hostage rescue operations. Because Latvia is a small country, we don't have the resources to be able to afford such compartmentalization; we cannot afford to have the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) alone responsible for one thing and the Ministry of Defense (MOD) responsible for something else. In most cases, we have this kind of joint effort. This is true for hostage rescue operations. We have standing plans that define our tasks. The primary force, of course, is the MOI CT unit, but we are working closely and training together with them. If, for example, an event is happening on a maritime platform in our territorial waters, then we are in the lead with MOI supporting.

As for the CT portion, we were very focused on this task until 2014. It was one of the primary tasks for which we were training and preparing. Then in 2014, what happened? Russia annexed Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine. That's when we started to refocus on one more task, which in our doctrine is unconventional warfare [UW]. Until then, it was kind of on the shelf, I would say. We already had a UW role, but there wasn't serious preparation for it. 2014 changed that. Our unit was actually the element that started building up this UW capability, and then we began to expand the capability in our regular armed forces. And the same goes with our plans for such a scenario in state defense planning. I should mention that the US SOCEUR [Special Operations Command Europe] also helped us with this initial effort to push the UW concept at the level of our MOD and armed forces leadership.

Before 2014, there was heavy reluctance to talk about such topics even among our higher leadership. I don't know what the exact reason was, but it was probably the historical experience of what happened with the NATO stay-behind networks during the Cold War.[2] I think these attitudes are still dragging on to this day. That's also a reason why NATO doesn't recognize unconventional warfare or resistance as a NATO role. It's seen more as a national business for each individual country. I don't know about recent developments because I haven't been in those circles since I came here, but that was the case at least until last year.

RICE: To recap that, DA, SR, and MA have been the main missions of the unit. And then, for tasks that you undertake with your MOI counterterrorism partner, you focus on eliminating terrorist activities inside Latvia or its maritime possessions, and on rescuing hostages, potentially.

RUNTS: Hostage rescue is also a primary task.

RICE: The unconventional warfare task is interesting. You said the Special Operations Command Europe, under the US structure, was advising and guiding Latvia to work on these newer tasks.

RUNTS: They were helping us at the operational level to develop this plan for all the armed forces, and also at the national level: the operational-strategic level.

RICE: So the plan helps create an unconventional warfare framework to do both offensive and defensive operations?

RUNTS: At the national level, we should talk about resistance; the plan is directed toward national resistance.

RICE: That would be Latvia's ability to resist against an aggressor?

RUNTS: Yes, an occupying power.

RICE: That kind of UW is less about exporting such a capability to help another actor overthrow a state. That's not really the kind of unconventional warfare you're focused on.

RUNTS: We can do that, but for SOF the primary focus is about UW inside our country. Because, as you know, Latvia is a small country and our geopolitical ambitions are not like those of, for example, the United States. We are not trying to establish our sphere of influence by overthrowing neighboring governments such as Lithuania or Estonia. We don't have interests in Asia or Africa, for

> It's not just, "Oh, here is the doctrine from the US for this concept," but now, "We will take the parts that are most important to us and use them." And it also seems that, by doing so, you're developing your own doctrine. It's no longer just American doctrine; **it's Latvian doctrine.**

example, so that's why it's not the case. But still, we have this capability to support a US effort, for example, if needed.

RICE: That's why I asked, because sometimes we see countries as essentially unitary actors, interchangeable, almost the same. We don't think about them in terms of their size or their interests.

RUNTS: That was actually a big challenge when we began to develop our UW theory and training, because it was clear that we could not just take US doctrine, the Field Manual, and adopt it for ourselves. The initial stage was about how to develop those elements such as theory and training specifically for our interests. Primarily, as I said, it's to fight within our country, to defend our country, to overthrow some potential occupying power.

RICE: It's very interesting that you sometimes hear about countries that are advised [by the United States or others] and they just adopt the doctrine completely. It sounds like in Latvia, this was not the case. You receive the advice, and now you take that advice and specifically shape it to meet national objectives. It's not just, "Oh, here is the doctrine from the US for this concept," but now, "We will take the parts that are most important to us and use them." And it also seems that, by doing so, you're developing your own doctrine. It's no longer just American doctrine; it's Latvian doctrine.

RUNTS: We already have our own doctrine. There are also specified tasks that fall under those core roles that I think are very important because we are tasked—we can put this under MA—to provide specific training for our armed forces and other entities. Actually, in peacetime, when we are based back home, such training takes a lot of our time because we are providing training for other SOF entities, from MOI units, for example. We also have been using our experience to help create such units from the beginning: how to select, how to provide basic training, and basically

National Guard Special Operations Unit, Latvia

going through all of the train-advise-assist-accompany cycle.

One more task of ours is to support the police and our security agencies and intel agencies in peacetime. Not many countries have such tasks because of legal issues. It has been a task for Latvian SOF since 1991, so what we can bring to the table in NATO and when working with other countries is this domestic experience in conducting operations in peacetime to support police and other security agencies. That becomes very handy when we talk about gray-zone or hybrid conflict.

Our main partner has been the United States, since we started this cooperation in 1991. We have good cooperation with the Norwegians, mostly the *Forsvarets Spesialkommando* [Norwegian Army SOF unit]. We also deployed with them to Afghanistan. Then, of course, it's the "3-Bs," the three Baltic countries. With the Lithuanians, we had a combined task force in Afghanistan. We also have a joint combined effort with Estonia and Lithuania, a 3-B special operations task group that we are providing to NATO response forces every year.

RICE: So the three Baltic countries are combining to form a NATO task group for SOF. That's also interesting to learn about. This is a natural segue to talk about how you integrate into NATO and other coalitions that deploy in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other places, like Mali. But before we get there, one quick question. Have you advised other NATO countries based on the Latvian model of SOF working in the domestic capacity? I ask because your SOF force is so small. You have a good relationship with your MOI forces. Could you help other countries develop similar capabilities through your military assistance plan?

Specifically, for instance, how a military's SOF unit and the Ministry of the Interior could work better together?

RUNTS: Not as I recall. Direct coordination is needed between some nations because usually there is a legal issue. They should first solve this issue, and then there could be some kind of cooperation. For some countries such as Germany, for example, it's even impossible. Germany has strict rules regarding military forces operating domestically, and I believe the same type of rule applies for the United States. What you can and cannot do is very compartmentalized.

RICE: This is why I asked, because if a country is small and it has limited resources, it may look to Latvia for advice on how to integrate military capabilities into domestic security activities the way that Latvia does. That country's military may be educated by you.

RUNTS: It has been done under the NSHQ [NATO Special Operations Headquarters] umbrella in some working groups, and yes, the question of how to do it has been brought up. And even some countries that are not now able to do that integration are exploring ways in peacetime to enable cooperation between MOI and MOD units when some hybrid issues or hybrid threats arise. Those countries that are developing this capability are interested in both the lessons identified and those lessons learned.

RICE: So it sounds like this close relationship between MOI and SOF has made you well-postured for hybrid, gray-zone activities inside Latvia, for things that are hard to see and that don't fall into a nice compartment of war or peace. Where resources are short, Latvian law and policy have created operational flexibility for you.

RUNTS: As you said, for a small country, it's a matter of survival. We should integrate and use all of our available resources. It also helps that we don't have an unhealthy competition between units, so we understand that for this task, you [MOI] are primary, we [SOF] will support you with everything we can, and when we need support, you will support us. So yes, it helps to build those relationships. Compared to some other NATO countries, I think we are very advanced in this specific area.

RICE: I can tell just by listening to you that, because of Latvia's need to ensure national survival, you are more advanced in this area than the United States. The United States doesn't have units that will work well together in this particular way, and maybe it is because we are too big.

Please give us your perspectives on how Latvian SOF have integrated in NATO operations and other coalition operations, such as the larger coalitions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, and so forth.

RUNTS: The most significant deployment for Latvian SOF was in support of the operations in Afghanistan, the ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] mission and RSM [Resolute Support Mission] in particular, because we spent the longest time in those operations and they heavily contributed to our unit's development, starting with combat experience and working with the coalition, and so on. In other operations, such as in Iraq, we deployed some elements but it was for a very short period. The same goes for Africa: we're not participating in any operation that is ongoing right now. We are sending some individuals for specific positions; the same was true for the Kosovo mission back in the 1990s. The main coalition mission or operation for us was Afghanistan.

The next one of strategic importance was JMTG–U, the Joint Multinational Training Group–Ukraine, led by the United States, where we participated almost from the beginning to develop a kind of Westernized Ukrainian SOF. Our unit was involved in the Ukrainian SOF training center. To achieve this task, we started from the beginning, with selection and a qualification course. This was in about 2015.

RICE: What kinds of Afghan units did you work with in Afghanistan during the previous operations with ISAF and then later supporting RSM?

RUNTS: The Afghan National Army (ANA) and ANA SOF units, and we also worked with the MOI Police Special Units and National Mission Unit.

RICE: When you worked with these units, was it from the start, a model to "create the unit from the beginning?" Or did you arrive at a unit that was already developed and then you just ensured they had some very minor advances?

RUNTS: We developed a schoolhouse for ANA SOF from scratch in 2018. No, it was earlier. We withdrew almost all our forces from Afghanistan in 2014 and then we went back because of a request from our strategic partner, the United States.

RICE: That's quite a compliment, that the US made that request for Latvian SOF to establish the ANA SOF school.

RUNTS: We were tasked with establishing and then providing mentorship for the Cobra Strike Maneuver Course. This was the Afghan National Army Special Operations Command School of Excellence training venue for developing the fighting skills of all Commando Special Operations Kandaks [SOKs; a *kandak* is a 600-member battalion]. It was a new project in Afghanistan. They merged ANA Commando SOKs with the mobile strike force kandaks to increase their firepower and survivability. We were basically putting commando battalions on armed platforms. That's what we did until the end of that mission in Afghanistan.

RICE: Do you have any insights into how Latvian SOF assist a country like Afghanistan compared with how, say, the United States or another NATO member does it? Are there differences, or does everybody do it in about the same way? Do the Afghans respond to Latvians differently from how they respond to Americans, or Germans, or Norwegians?

RUNTS: I think sometimes yes, because we share some common history. We both can refer back to the Russian occupation, which became handy when we first established contact. We already had some common experiences to share. One more thing that differentiates us from the United States or other Western countries is that we had a similar experience establishing our armed forces from scratch, the same as the Afghans did. We can better understand situations related to the lack of resources and other difficulties. During those missions, this gave us another perspective, which helped us better understand our partners.

RICE: It's very interesting that Latvians were not only involved in the occupation of Afghanistan during the Soviet period, but you and Afghanistan also share being occupied by the same country.[3] Beyond helping build

rapter, how about the development of skills? Is there another area where you saw a difference between the way Latvians performed compared to Norwegians or Americans in developing essential skills for Afghan commando formations?

RUNTS: I think for basic skills, like shooting, for example, there is no big difference. If you want to be a good shooter, there are some basic principles to learn. But I think our main investment in the development of the forces was that we tried to teach them how to improvise from the available resources, to build up or combine something. Because that is also our experience, and maybe countries with richer resources don't have this experience.

RICE: This is something I've thought a lot about. The US solution for a lot of these problems is just to buy more things, and give more things to partners. When Afghanistan fell to the Taliban, the US secretary of defense said something like, "You can't purchase loyalty to the state." He was speaking of the Afghan military. But that's the American perspective, versus a smaller state that says, "We have less, so we have to do more with what we have."

RUNTS: I think it's especially true when you're speaking about SOF. My belief is that the value the SOF soldier can deliver is not dependent on high tech or the right tech or whatever tech. The main weapon for the SOF soldier is located between his ears: his brains. His value is that he can fight even if he has no resources or limited resources. He can improvise. That is the value of the SOF soldier and the philosophy of SOF, I think. It was instilled in our unit by our first commander. These were his words: "It's nice to be able to fight when you have all this great gear, but you should be able to fight if you have only the assault rifle and that's it."

RICE: Do you think this was well-received by the Afghans? The fact that you were encouraging them to stand up on their own rather than relying on another country's good will to provide resources? How did that go over?

RUNTS: It depends. If they were closely located with, for example, the US forces, and were previously mentored with another unit, then it was challenging to switch their mindset because they were already spoiled; they were used to receiving most of their resources from a partner unit. We actually had some challenges with this.

RICE: So it sounds like bigger countries with more resources may have created a dependency problem with partner forces in order for them to be able to advance more

quickly in their training and their capability to do more operations.

RUNTS: From personal experience, when we tried to push them to work through their own supply system, I was almost kicked out of the company commander's office. I was told that he didn't need such mentors because he was used to receiving everything he asked for. He did not want to do the work of going through his system because there was an easier way.

RICE: An easier and more efficient way for him.

RUNTS: But in the long term, it's not the right way.

RICE: Well, it's no way, because in the end, the resources disappear when the mentors disappear. You were trying to help them build institutions and systems to support themselves and make do with what they had available. That company commander was conditioned to receiving gifts from mentors to allow him to do the operations.

RUNTS: In a lot of cases in Afghanistan, those mentors were perceived by Afghans as just a way to plug into some resources and get some stuff: equipment, money, food. They didn't want to be mentored or trained; they didn't care about training; they just looked to those Western mentors to get some resources.

RICE: What kinds of resources did you notice were the most popular, and why do you think they were the most popular?

RUNTS: Fuel and food, because of corruption. Higher commanders took the money for these into their own hands and it never went down to their subordinates.

RICE: So it seems that military materiel that had a dual use and could be sold on civilian markets was the most popular. That's why I'm asking. Your firsthand knowledge of it is very enlightening.

Let's transition to a different topic. You're here at school, and you're watching Ukraine be torn apart. You spent significant time working with the Ukrainians. What are some of the things you see going on—from a distance, of course—that show that the work you did is paying off? And what are the things you wish you'd been able to do more of?

RUNTS: It's hard to judge from afar about specific details, but at least from some information that I know, SOF are playing their role in this combined joint environment. It's

hard to say more that's unclassified. From the information I have, Ukrainian SOF are heavily involved in the battle for Kyiv, the defense of Kyiv. They were the ones also conducting the small-unit raids and attacks on Russian columns and so on.

But what I think may have started too late was SOF's role in UW and with the resistance. When we started to work with the Ukrainians, it was purely an old Soviet system. The initial period was just to reorganize these Ukrainian Soviet-type spetsnaz units. I also think the standard training level was slightly less than even former Soviet standards for all those years until 2014. The initial training we provided was focused just on basic skills: individual skills and basic collective training. As for the UW and resistance tasks, by the time the allies were able to start focusing on them, it was already late in the resistance development process. I think the resistance system was not developed at the appropriate level before the invasion occurred. So, what the Ukrainians are doing now is trying to build this plane on the fly. We'll see how it works out.

RICE: What you are saying is that, in order for a people to resist effectively, they have to be well prepared ahead of time, and it involves a lot more than just military elements. It involves civilian elements, local governments, commercial infrastructure—all the different facets of normal life. Each of these has to be included in a resistance plan, especially in a free society, and this will likely take a while. Especially since not everybody may be interested at first.

RUNTS: I think it was very recently that the Ukrainian SOF were assigned the task to lead and develop this resistance effort. The legal aspect for these territorial defense forces was already approved, but I think it was just a couple of months before the invasion. I don't remember the exact time, but it was very late. Also in open sources—you probably saw from following the news— there was no system. These territorial defense forces were ad hoc. It caused a lot of issues, of course, like blue-on-blue attacks because of the lack of coordination and insufficient training.

RICE: One of the things I'm still shocked about is how well people can differentiate between Russians and Ukrainians based off of simple armbands, because I'm sure the uniforms are very similar, and they have similar weapons on both sides.

RUNTS: In the SOF, every unit is now like a clone of the other, because the uniforms are all the same. Russians are using MultiCam, Ukrainians are using MultiCam, US, Latvians—now almost every SOF unit is using MultiCam.

RICE: I was thinking about when I see Ukrainian soldiers on the news. Everybody seems to have an armband to identify themselves.

RUNTS: The same with Russians.

RICE: Yes. That's what I meant, because the uniforms look so similar. Especially with all the urban fighting. It seems dangerous, or an area that could lead to a lot of fratricide.

So, again, watching from afar, what surprised you about the Russians' abilities, and what didn't surprise you about the Russians? Not just SOF, but the whole campaign and how you saw it unfolding?

RUNTS: The Russian performance surprised me—but not only me. I think almost everybody in the Western hemisphere was surprised by how they performed. Even intel analysts were surprised because, before the invasion, the assessment was that the Russians were capable of much more coordinated and joint efforts. There were some suspicions about their logistical capabilities that proved to be true. But overall, I would say the assessment was that the Russian forces could perform pretty well in conducting these kinds of operations. But this initial effort, this shock-and-awe, when they tried to quickly overthrow the regime in Kyiv, showed that they actually can't do it. Right now, the situation has changed, and they're trying to use the same techniques and tactics they used in the second Chechen war, basically leveling the cities and pushing forward with heavy artillery, air support, and indirect fire support.

RICE: It seems like they're starting to adapt their tactics as they've taken heavy casualties. In a separate conversation, you mentioned that the initial Russian forces weren't military forces; they were more police units and national guard units.

RUNTS: It was a kind of mix, but they were sending those *Rosgvardiya* [National Guard of the Russian Federation] units to the front lines, specifically Rosgvardiya spetsnaz SOF units, which is not according to their doctrine. These units had specific tasks and they were sent in like initial advance forces, which, again, is not according to their doctrine. But this was probably because their assessment of the Ukrainians was inaccurate. They were trying to do it more as they labeled it, as a "special operation." It was supposed to be a quick and victorious special operation with a regime change.

RICE: A *coup de main*.

RUNTS: Yes. Maybe that is why the Russians chose to lead with those Rosgvardiya units in front. They weren't expecting such fierce resistance.

RICE: You've been in your unit for a little less than 20 years now. How do you see Latvian SOF and the SOF mission evolving as part of Latvia's defense and as part of NATO? Is it going to change much, especially with leaving the Middle East and focusing more on potential European adversaries?

RUNTS: We already shifted our focus from deployments to domestic operations and defense of the country. The trigger point was the 2014 activities in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. This shift was not only for SOF, but for our entire national strategy and the armed forces' tasks and priorities. Back when Latvia decided to join NATO, our defense strategy shifted from total defense toward NATO collective defense. The perception in Latvia was that we only needed to participate in collective defense and provide our share for this collective effort in places such as Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Africa. So all our armed forces were built to deploy and participate in operations abroad. In 2008, after the Russian incursion into Georgia, the collective defense mindset started to shift toward national defense capabilities. After the 2014 crisis in Ukraine, it became evident that it was very good that Latvia was integrated into NATO's collective defense strategy but, at the same time, we still needed to focus on our own capabilities; we should be able to defend our own country with our own resources, at least for some time. Of course, we can't compare with or overcome, for example, Russia's armed forces or their capabilities and resources. Latvia's defense strategy today is comprehensive defense, the main pillars of which include whole-of-society involvement in the defense of the country and collective defense provided by NATO.

Before this, we had NATO force goals and we were developing specific capabilities that we could offer to NATO. We were focused mainly on NATO's Article V; we weren't thinking about comprehensive defense for our country. Latvia still relies heavily on collective defense provided by NATO, but now we're also focusing on our national comprehensive defense capabilities.

RICE: Do you develop these capabilities unilaterally?

RUNTS: Unilaterally or maybe as part of a smaller alliance. It's not NATO. It's bilateral or multilateral coalitions, like with our Baltic neighbors: Lithuanians, Estonians, Norwegians. We have an effort with the UK going on already and with Denmark. So, it's not just NATO;

that's part of it, but it's also bilateral and multilateral relationships.

RICE: I ask because NATO may be too slow to respond, or some alliance members may vote that a specific incident does not meet the threshold of Article V. So if you have a strong bilateral or multilateral relationship with regional partners, they can move more quickly without NATO authority.

One final question. I assume that Latvian SOF have received a lot of advice from American Special Forces over the years. I imagine you trained, partnered, and went on numerous operations together. How did those relationships with US Special Forces make you a better mentor when you worked with the forces from other countries? For example, perhaps you have worked with multiple Americans who basically had the same script, so maybe you were thinking to yourself, "Oh, this is the same as the last guy." And then you end up training an American how to be a good partner when he is supposed to be training you. How did these kinds of relationships help make you a better mentor when you had to do it with other countries?

RUNTS: If we are talking specifically about our cooperation with US SOF, the relationship until 2014 was primarily through Joint Combined Exchange Training exercises.[4] We basically trained together and conducted some exercises together for a short period of time. But since 2014, when Operation Atlantic Resolve was initiated by the United States, one US SOF ODA [Operational Detachment Alpha] team has been permanently deployed to Latvia. These SOF ODAs have been doing four- to six-month rotations since then, depending on the mission requirements. Of course, strategically it's very important and we appreciate this presence. It's also been an interesting time, because it has allowed me to experience that feeling when you're on the receiving end of this partnership and assistance. We are the host nation and they are coming to help us, to work with us.

The first rotations were especially challenging, because every new ODA commander wanted to train our soldiers in basic skills, and it always took time to reach some common understanding of how we would operate together. The most frustrating thing is when there is no continuity. Every now and then, a new ODA captain came in without this background knowledge, and we were forced to start the discussions and planning all over again from the beginning, even though the SOF ODAs had already been deploying to Latvia for nearly 10 years. There was a lack of continuity across the different deployments.

And I agree, we sometimes—not always—did the same in Afghanistan. Sometimes when we deployed, we didn't have knowledge about the unit we were working with, or we didn't transfer this knowledge to the next unit that was coming after us. At times it becomes kind of tiring for the host nation. My experience working with US SOF ODAs visiting Latvia made me better understand how the Afghans felt when we came every four months. We were very eager to work and tried to start everything again from zero to make them do things the *right* way, which meant *our* way.

In our case, in the end we had established very good relationships with the ODAs. It was clear to them that we did not need some of the basic training, and eventually we were working mostly to improve our interoperability, in case there was operational need. The main value we see in the US presence in Latvia is that we can develop combined plans, increase our interoperability, and contribute to deterrence against Russia.

RICE: That was an excellent discussion. Thank you.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER

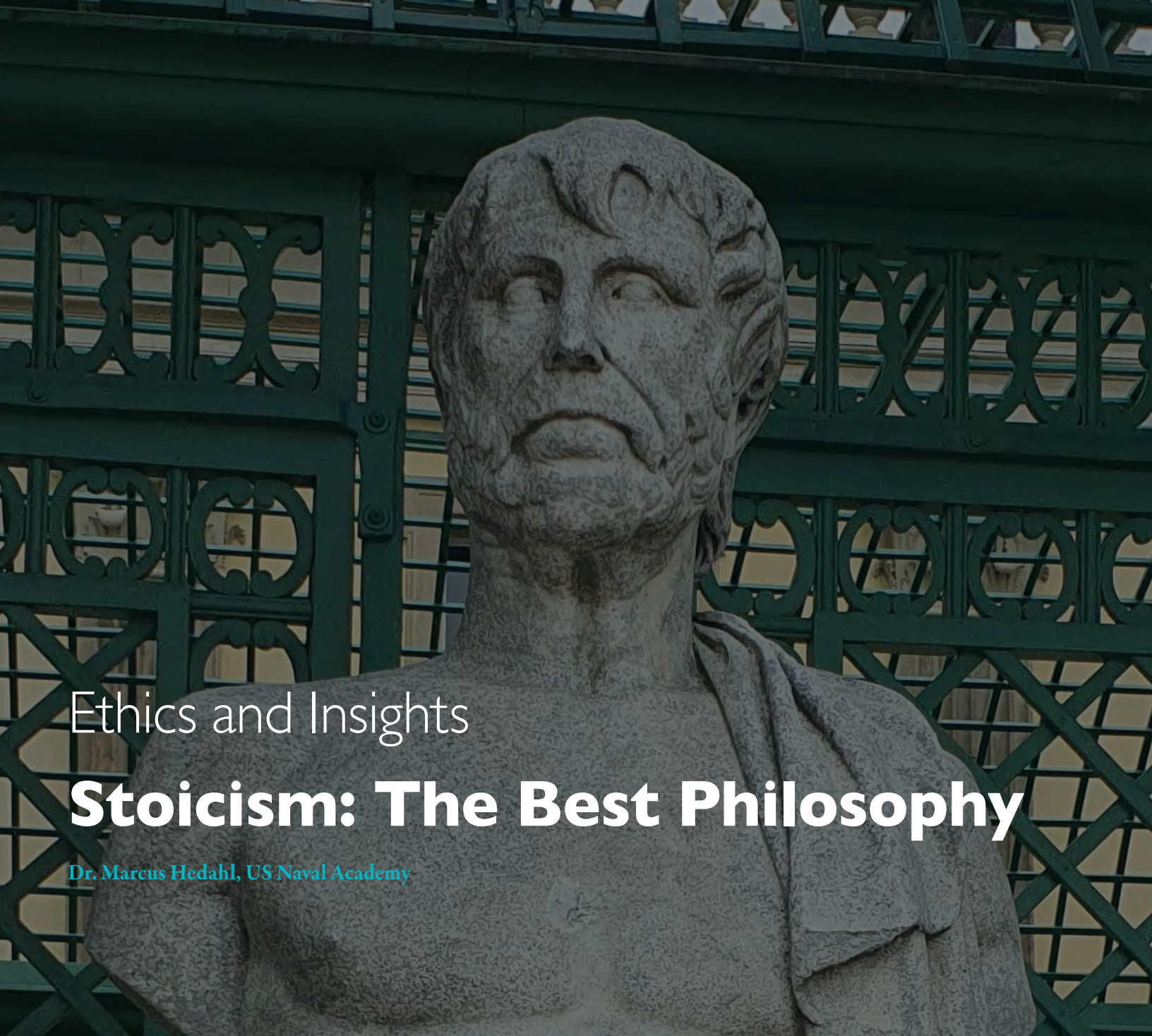**Ian Rice** is a member of the *CTX* Editorial Review Board.

NOTES

[1] This interview was edited for length and clarity. Every effort was made to ensure that the meaning and intention of the participants were not altered in any way. The ideas and opinions of all participants are theirs alone and do not represent the official positions of the US Naval Postgraduate School, the US Department of Defense, the US government, or any other official entity.

[2] Stay-behind networks are groups of resistance fighters organized to remain in place when an enemy advances into and occupies their home areas. The stay-behind networks are designed to conduct operations to disrupt the enemy forces from behind enemy lines. For a recent study on this concept during the Cold War, see Tamir Sinai, "Eyes on Target: 'Stay-Behind' Forces during the Cold War," *War in History* 28, no. 3 (2021): 681–700. "The secret stay-behind armies of NATO, however, were also a source of terror, as the evidence available now shows. It has been this second feature of the secret war that has attracted a lot of attention and criticism in the last decade, and which in the future will need more investigation and research. As of now the evidence indicates that the governments of the United States and Great Britain after the end of the Second World War feared not only a Soviet invasion, but also the Communist Parties, and to a lesser degree the Socialist Parties. The White House and Downing Street feared that in several countries of Western Europe, and above all in Italy, France, Belgium, Finland and Greece, the Communists might reach positions of influence in the executive and destroy the military alliance NATO from within by betraying military secrets to the Soviet Union. It was in this sense that the Pentagon in Washington together with the CIA, MI6 and NATO in a secret war set up and operated the stay-behind armies as an instrument to manipulate and control the democracies of Western Europe from within, unknown to both European populations and parliaments. This strategy lead to terror and fear, as well as to 'humiliation and maltreatment of democratic institutions,' as the European press correctly criticized." Daniele Ganser, *NATO's Secret Armies: Operation GLADIO and Terrorism in Western Europe* (New York: Frank Cass, 2005), 245–246.

[3] For further information about Latvian soldiers who participated in the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, see Ina Strazdina, "Not Their Battle to Fight: Latvian Veterans Remember Trials of Soviet-Afghan War," Latvian Public Broadcasting English Service, 18 February 2019: https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/not-their-battle-to-fight-latvian-veterans-remember-trials-of-soviet-afghan-war.a309933/

[4] Joint Combined Exchange Training exercises are designed to provide training opportunities for American Special Forces by holding the training exercises in countries that the forces may one day have to operate in, as well as providing training opportunities for the armed forces of the host countries.

Ethics and Insights

Stoicism: The Best Philosophy

Dr. Marcus Hedahl, US Naval Academy

You recently gave a talk at NPS entitled "What is the Best Philosophy?" I wonder whether asking that question isn't contrary to the spirit of philosophy. Isn't the goal of philosophy not to profess, but to investigate, analyze, and consider?

I think there's definitely something to be said for that line of thinking. After all, as Plato teaches us in *The Symposium*, philosophy is literally a longing, a seeking, a yearning for a wisdom that we lack.[1] Any philosophy worth reading, any philosophy worth considering, will have something to tell us about a life well lived. Yet there's another line of thinking worth considering as well. I've found that when people discover that I am a professor of philosophy,

they either want to avoid the subject altogether or they want to know my personal opinion about what's worth studying. A lot of people maintain that spark of curiosity that propelled so many of us, as undergraduates, to stay up late and wonder together about the significance of it all, and to continue to wonder even well into our professional lives. When those inquisitive souls ask me, "So, what's the best philosophy?", I don't take it as an invitation to engage in the Socratic method, but rather as genuine curiosity about one person's opinion, to help guide them on their own journey toward wisdom. So, I just say what I think, which is that the answer is clearly Roman Stoicism. This is a philosophy for people who believe that virtue is good, vice is evil, and all else is indifferent; it's a philosophy best

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exemplified by thinkers like Seneca, Epictetus, and my namesake and beard guru, Marcus Aurelius.

That's a rather surprising answer for a professional philosopher, given how Stoicism seems to be going through something of a renaissance among people we might consider to be philosophical popularizers.

I think it's important to put that modern popularity into historical context. Stoicism was one of more than a dozen schools in ancient Athens. It was the predominant philosophy during the height of the Roman Empire, in the first four centuries of the Common Era. The Stoics were the primary influence on Emmanuel Kant, who was probably the greatest moral philosopher of the last 500 years, and they had a huge influence throughout the Renaissance. They also had an outsized influence on the founders of the United States. Thomas Jefferson's collection at the Library of Congress is filled with all the outstanding Stoic texts. George Washington famously said that his greatest dream was to be the American Cato.[2]

But then something happened. Because of the influence of Romanticism, Utilitarianism, Marxism, and Fabianism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, interest in Stoicism simply vanished for over 150 years.

And now, if you look, Stoicism once again is almost everywhere. Ryan Holiday, author of *The Daily Stoic*, has literally tens of millions of followers on social media; he's quoted by NFL and college football coaches.[3] I think many people are familiar with the story of Admiral James B. Stockdale, the most senior American POW in the Vietnam prison camps, who famously quoted Stoicism as the influence that helped him to get through his ordeal.[4] The popular book, *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck*, is about as Stoic as it gets.[5] General James Mattis, echoing Frederick the Great, famously said he didn't go anywhere without a copy of Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*.[6] There's even "Live Like a Stoic Week," held every year by Wesleyan University.[7] So yes, Stoicism is incredibly popular right now, but I tend to view that more as a return from the wilderness than a mere fad.

Why do you think Stoicism is so popular right now?

Well, that's the part that ought to worry us a bit: Stoicism generally flourishes when the world is in rather dramatic turmoil. In Athens, it flourished when the Macedonian emperor came to power and Athenian democracy was on the wane. In Rome, it began to flourish during the fall of the Republic, in the first century BCE. And the Renaissance was, for all its glory, one of the greatest social

> So when we see the way the world is now, it shouldn't surprise us that Stoicism is being embraced. It is, after all, a philosophy that forces us to look internally, to ask **what we can do when the world around us is in turmoil.**

changes in human history. So when we see the way the world is now, it shouldn't surprise us that Stoicism is being embraced. It is, after all, a philosophy that forces us to look internally, to ask what we can do when the world around us is in turmoil.

Another important point is that, because Stoicism wasn't embraced by either philosophers or the population writ large for that hiatus of 150 years, people generally mischaracterize what Stoicism is. When most people think about "stoicism," they often have in mind something like the guard who stands all day at Buckingham Palace without moving, or they think about the bearing tests in army basic training. They don't think about one of the greatest Stoic heroes of the twentieth century, Nelson Mandela, a man who unjustly spent over 30 years in prison, a man who was literally urinated on by his captors, and yet, a man whom we often recall as a smiling and compassionate person.[8] For these reasons, I encourage people to think about how we can be more Stoic with a capital S: how we can align ourselves more with this ancient school of philosophy than with the kind of caricature that people often think of when they think of Stoicism.

So what brought you to Stoicism? What do you find so compelling about it as a philosophy?

There's a story, likely apocryphal, that at the entrance to Plato's Academy were inscribed the words, Let no one ignorant of geometry enter here, a legend that makes more sense if we pause to consider the nature of geometry and what Plato thought about the world. When learning geometry, we don't study actual triangles or actual circles encountered in this dusty world of things; we study the ideal. That's what Plato thought we should always be doing: studying the ideal and the perfect, rather than the world we encounter.

The Stoics, in contrast, were much more engaged with the world in which they lived. The name of their school, the Stoa, comes from the porch of the great market of Athens. And, according to legend, the Stoics had a much more basic requirement than mere knowledge: to study at the

Stoa, you had to be sentenced to death. Now, when my students hear this, they get very excited, thinking that they can go back to their rooms, spared from learning about another ancient philosophy. But then I call on one of them and ask them how old their mother is and how old their grandmother is, how old their great-grandmother is, and how old their great-great-grandmother is, and so on. Pretty quickly, they get the point. They realize the fundamental truth of the human condition. As Epictetus said, "You should let death, exile, and everything horrible be in front of your mind all the time, but chiefly death."[9] Seneca goes even further and says, "Let us thank God that no man can be kept in life. We may spurn the very constraints that hold us."[10]

I can see why that kind of focus on a readiness for death would be appealing to those in the military, but don't many of those outside of the military find it dispiriting?

This notion that we ought, first and foremost, to recognize that we're beings that have been sentenced to death is one of the primary things that I think people misunderstand about Stoicism. People who hear this assume that the Stoics must believe that life is a burden, that it's something you have to escape. I think the cause of that misunderstanding is an assumption that's far too common in American society: if something is good, then more of it must be better. McDonald's french fries are good, surely, but we all know that more of them is not always better.

The thing that comes to my mind when I think about the Stoic view of death, both the capital D Death that occurs at the end of our lives and the thousands of more minor deaths we suffer whenever a stage of our lives comes to its natural conclusion, is ski boots. When I was a young officer stationed in Colorado, I did a lot of skiing. When I put on my ski boots at the beginning of the day, that was an awesome feeling. I was excited. I was ready for the beginning of an amazing day on the slopes. But here's the thing: when I took *off* the ski boots at the end of the day, that was also an awesome feeling. I was done. I was ready for skiing to be finished. It was time for some food, a beer, and a few minutes in the hot tub, and then off to bed, so I could get up early in the morning and do it again.

When I used to wear the uniform, most days I was excited to put it on in the morning. I thought the work we were doing was important, meaningful, and useful. But Lord knows, at the end of the day, I loved taking *off* the uniform. Now, when company comes to visit—especially after the COVID years—dear God, I look forward to that! I am joyous when these friends and family members are at my house. But here's the thing: I also love when it's time for

them to *go*. That's what the Stoics are saying when they say we ought to focus on death. We need more days on which we are excited to get up in the morning and get going, and more days on which we feel, as the sun goes down, that we're ready for it to be over, that it's time for that day to be done. We need more things in our lives like house guests, ski boots, and wearing the uniform. Then, when it comes time to die, we need to be ready for that, too, and to realize that our time on earth was so valuable in part because it had always been limited. As Seneca puts the point, too many of us have lived "as if you were destined to live forever. No thought of your own human frailty ever enters your head, no consideration of how much time has already gone by. You squander time as if you had a full and abundant supply."[11]

The Stoics clearly focus on the present, but what about the future? What about the past? How do they view our relationship with time?

In modern society, many of us have this notion—one that the Stoics also find problematic—that the future is meant to be kept pristine and pure. In the present, we might be stuck in the muck and the mire; the past might haunt us. But the future . . . well, the future is supposed to be pristine and clear, free of disappointment and suffering. The Stoics believe we have become greyhounds, chasing a future happiness that is forever somewhere up ahead of us, forever out in the distance, forever just out of reach. The Stoics were some of the first philosophers to point out the difficulty with that line of thought. We are constantly yearning for the next break, the next vacation, the next tour, perhaps even retirement. As Seneca says, "How tragic it is to seek to live only at the margins. What foolishness to intend to begin life only near its end."[12]

Lieutenant Brad Snyder used to have the office next to mine at the Naval Academy. He was an EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) officer in the Navy and lost his eyesight to an IED in Afghanistan. A year to the day later, he won his first of seven gold medals at the Paralympics in London. Brad has a very Stoic notion about his injury, which he calls the "delta." He says it's not events in themselves that upset us, but the change we see when we make a comparison between the new circumstance and something else. That something else might be the way we wanted things to be, the way we expected them to be, the way we

thought we deserved them to be, or even, in Brad's case, the way things used to be. That's something that I think has resonated a lot more for many of us since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic: frustration comes not from the world itself, but from the comparison between the world as it is and some expectation about how the world ought to be. It's that delta that causes us perturbation and pain. If people know anything about Stoicism, it's probably this: Stoicism gives us an analgesic. It gives us a way to deal with the times when we're on the rack, when someone we love dies, when, as we say in the military, the fecal matter hits the proverbial oscillating device, as it always will. That's when Stoicism can help us out.

We talked earlier about how Stoicism is becoming increasingly popular today. What's something that the modern popularization of Stoicism misses about the philosophy?

The most important distinction in Stoicism that people just don't talk about enough, either in philosophy or in popular culture, is the difference between a Sage and a Progressor. A Sage is a person who is perfect, who would do the right thing in all situations, while those of us who are trying to get better, trying every day to live more joyously, trying to care less about things outside of our control, are Progressors. There's a difference between Socrates and Cato, both of whom the Stoics hold up as examples of Sages, and Admiral Stockdale, a Progressor who recognized his own failures

> **When the Stoics tell us that we should not get angry** about things outside of our control, we should recognize that their advice is about the ideal.

and faults while still trying to do his best. When the Stoics tell us that we should not get angry about things outside of our control, we should recognize that their advice is about the ideal. Most of us are going to be frustrated when we don't get that better job, when our reputation is maligned, or when someone gets an award that we think we deserve. The question is, what then? In the much more popular Aristotelian theory of virtue, we are meant to emulate what the virtuous person does; we have to get in our reps, we have to build good habits, we have to do the same virtuous thing again and again and again to develop our moral virtue.

But the Stoic Sage is someone who *always* does the right thing. By definition, that person would never have a moral failing or fall short, and would always live up to the ideal. Even for virtue theorists whose moral exemplars aren't perfect, those exemplars often don't struggle with the kind

Invictus
by William Ernest Henley

Out of the night that covers me,
      Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
      For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
      I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
      My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
      Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
      Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
      How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
      I am the captain of my soul.

of shortcomings the rest of us face—that's *why* they're exemplars. If the goal is to move closer to—to progress toward—being more truly virtuous, we need to recognize that, at least at times, the way to do that is to act in a way that the virtuous don't act.

In other virtue theories, the central model is emulation. We need to act as the virtuous person would in our situation. We seek to do the things the virtuous person does. That's how we develop habits, we get in our moral reps. We do virtuous things in order to become more virtuous, and in becoming more virtuous, we become more likely to do virtuous things, and eventually our dispositions and desires change such that we now *want* to do what virtue requires.

The Stoics believe, in contrast, that what's much more important than habits, what's much more important than our moral reps, is *first* getting our desires right, first getting our big picture "why" right, and always working toward that asymptotic ideal of someone who doesn't get upset when things don't go the way he or she assumes they should. While acting as the virtuous person may help us recognize our duties to one another, it will be of little help in changing our emotional reactions to the world around us. This is because the truly virtuous person often simply lacks the inappropriate reaction to the world—that's precisely what makes her or him virtuous. Such a person is of little help as an exemplar for those of us who are trying to remove our own problematic reactions to the world around us.

When I was a second lieutenant, for example, I had a list of things I wanted to remind myself of at the beginning and the end of every day. The first and last was always "Don't take it personally." I wanted to become someone who didn't take things so personally, but to become that person I had to do something that I hoped one day to be able to leave behind: to constantly remind myself not to assume that others were attacking me. That's why the Progressor is so important in Stoic philosophy.

Failing to recognize this distinction between the Progressor and the Sage leads to radical misunderstandings of Stoicism. Consider, for example, the Stoic prescription not to grieve when those we love die. When someone I care about dies, I want to be able to regard the fact that this person was in my life as a gift, rather than seeing the fact that they're no longer in my life as a harm. But, of course, the chances that any of us can have that kind of perspective immediately after the death of a loved one are near zero, and we have to recognize that fact. But we also have to recognize that such a change of perspective is the goal of our mourning rituals. The question then becomes,

how do we get there? For any trauma, we need to get to the point where we can talk about the event without reliving it. That's something the role of the Progressor helps us to realize: the significance not only of recognizing the goal we are striving to achieve, but also of undertaking an honest assessment of where we are now. That's the only way we can move closer to that ideal.

Consider as well the role of anger. Some may think that they *need* to be angry when there's injustice in the world, that they *ought* to be angry whenever people don't live up to a certain standard of behavior. But once again, the distinction between the Progressor and the Sage can help us here. If one can see injustice *only* if one gets angry, if one can only be motivated to fight injustice by being angry, then becoming angry is preferable to doing nothing. But the goal remains to be able to fight injustice *without* anger. In fact, the Stoics would say that justice itself requires us to do so. If you look at places like the military, or nongovernmental organizations, nonprofits, and schools,

Nelson Mandela

they're frequently filled with young people who come in full of piss and vinegar, trying to blaze a new path, trying to instantly make the world a better place. And that's great. But all these organizations have a huge issue with burnout, in no small part because the fight for justice will often run up against a world that will frustrate those ideals,

> The things that ought to keep us up at night are our own mistakes, our own moral mistakes, not those things outside our control. **That's the radical freedom the Stoics offer us.**

and that demands we nonetheless keep fighting for them time and time again. This is the biggest aspect that people get wrong about Stoicism: they think it involves pushing your emotions down. If you're upset, if you're frustrated, if you're angry, you're just supposed to act like that's not the case. But that's not the point at all. What the Stoics are saying is that there is an ideal out there: a person who doesn't require an emotional fire to do what is right. So the question the Progressor leads us to always ask is, how do we move closer to that ideal?

Is there anything else that you think doesn't get enough emphasis in the popular conception of Stoicism?

There are two points, actually. The first is the very distinctive Stoic conception of freedom. It is helpful to remember that Epictetus—one of the most prominent Roman Stoics—was a *literal* slave. The nineteenth-century poem "Invictus" is popular with a lot of modern people who are drawn to Stoic philosophy. It was written by William Earnest Henley, who suffered from tuberculosis and had to have his leg amputated. The word "invictus" literally means "unconquerable," not "unconquered." It was a favorite poem of Stockdale's, who was a prisoner of war in Vietnam for eight years, kept in solitary confinement for four years, and confined in leg irons for two. The Stoics were people who believed that through it all—through loss of limb, through imprisonment, through actual slavery—we can maintain genuine freedom. One of my favorite stories about Stockdale was when his men came to him in the prison camp and said that they couldn't disobey each and every order of their captors. But they felt that they could not, in good conscience, follow them all, either. They couldn't, for instance, give information on their fellow prisoners, or make public statements against their country. So they asked Stockdale to help them develop a distinct demarcation, from which they could say to the guards, "Past this line, torture would be required." That's the only way they felt they could truly be free, by determining themselves what they were unwilling to do—even if doing so threatened their very lives. The Stoics would say that

that's the freedom we all have, always. We can always affirm that losing our possessions—even losing those we care about—are things that cannot taint us, that cannot harm us. The things that ought to keep us up at night are our own mistakes, our own moral mistakes, not those things outside our control. That's the radical freedom the Stoics offer us.

The second aspect of Stoicism that isn't appreciated enough is one of the most powerful ways of exercising that freedom: to perpetually express gratitude. We should be grateful for the opportunities we're given. We should always be able to frame our current perspective in terms of gratitude. As Epictetus tell us, "One must have within one-self two qualities: the ability to see a particular event in the context of the whole, and a sense of gratitude. Without the first, one cannot understand what has happened; without the second, one cannot appreciate it."[13] Marcus Aurelius constantly tells us that adversity is what you make of it. The impediment to one action becomes part of another. The obstacle becomes the way forward.

So the Stoics can help us see why gratitude in response to tragedy can be so powerful. Nelson Mandela, for example, famously said that, although he wouldn't want to be in prison again for 27 years, he couldn't have become the leader he was without that experience; he could not have unified the country if he wasn't able to use his prison experience as an opportunity to learn and to grow. He said that he was *grateful* for his time on Robben Island, because it helped him become the leader his nation needed him to become. Having the ability to change our focus towards gratitude, even in the face of great tragedy, is precisely the kind of freedom we always possess, regardless of the circumstances. If we choose well, if we can react well to tragedy, our people will act differently—not just the people under our command, but the people we work with, the people we interact with on a daily basis, our families—all will be changed for the better.

What do you think the Stoics would say in those cases in which what's at risk is not just property or reputation, but something more meaningful? What do the Stoics say when something we participated in, something that we didn't have complete control over but considered to be a significant part of our own excellence, falls apart despite our best efforts? For example, many military service members feel this way about the recent withdrawal from Afghanistan. How would the Stoics say we can move forward after the thing we valued has failed?

This might be unsatisfactory to some, but what the Stoics are going to say is, what's next? How do you use that experience and become better as a person? And how do you also help *us* become better? How do you help *us* do the right thing in the future? Stoics believe that the kind of lament you feel, similar to the way you might criticize yourself for something you personally did, can be really useful, as long as it helps *you* to be better and helps you help *us* to be better, too. But the lament for the lament's sake isn't useful. If you're just beating yourself up over a personal decision or something that you were a part of that was a larger tragedy, that would be a wasted lament, wasted grief.

What, then, do the Stoics believe we should treat as if it has genuine value?

Excellence and Virtue. Excellence and Virtue. That's it. Everything else is instrumental. Epictetus had an analogy that Stockdale loved. If you tried to explain any ball sport to someone who's never seen anything like it—if, for instance, you wanted to explain soccer or American football to an alien from outer space—what he's going to realize very quickly is that the ball seems to have great value. And the

Excellence and virtue were the only things the Stoics believed had value. Everything else was instrumental.

alien is going to be shocked when, at the end of the game, one team just puts the ball in a bag and no one cares about it anymore. The alien is going to say, "Wait: I thought the ball was so important! I thought it was *all* important," and you'd say, "Well, no, it's not *actually* important of itself. But acting as if the ball has value provides a way for us to demonstrate a particular kind of excellence: athletic excellence."

The Stoics would tell us that all of these external things, from the obvious ones such as property and reputation to the more meaningful things like our careers and our relationships, provide the means by which we can display a different kind of excellence, a more fundamental human excellence. Because we can't exemplify excellence on our own; we need a community, we need relationships, in which to display that quality. And to do that, we have to

realize that all those things we care about—our projects, our careers, our possessions, our relationships—are going to end. For the Stoics, all these things are like the ball in sports: we act as if they have value, but the real value lies in the kinds of choices we make. Whatever situation we're in, we can act with excellence.

What would you say to those who find something valuable in Stoic philosophy and want to embrace it? What can they do in their lives to better embody the Stoic philosophy?

There are several things, but here I will briefly highlight four. First, we can better know what the target is, what we are aiming at, what kind of person we want to be. As Cicero says, "Above all we must decide what sort of people we want to be, and what kind of life we want to lead. This turns out to be the most difficult question of all."[14] Marcus Aurelius gives us a practical activity to help us with that task: consider what words you would want to describe your life. We should know what things we want to be remembered for when we leave this tour, this career, this life. For Marcus Aurelius, it was to be upright, modest, straightforward, fair-minded, co-operative, and disinterested. Each of us might have a different list, but we should know what those words are; we might even want to write them down. I have a colleague who has them laminated on a card, and he takes that card out of his wallet to read every day. What do we want to be remembered for? That's what Marcus Aurelius would tell us.

Second, we can make it a habit to review each day, to consider how we are progressing toward our ideal and how we are falling short. Seneca said that when we reflect on the day, we should be ready to say about ourselves exactly what people are far too quick to say about others: the harshest assessment of the facts. He says we should get used to speaking the truth to ourselves *and* be willing to hear it. We should concentrate on those areas where our character is weakest. Epictetus's teacher, Musonius Rufus, said that this kind of reflection ought to feel like a trip to the doctor's office, for we do not come in healthy, but diseased: literally not at ease with ourselves. Much like cures in medicine, the cures for character will often be uncomfortable—even painful.

Third, the Stoics say you should sometimes go without. The Stoics trace their lineage from the Cynics, a famous school of philosophy that believed that all these externals, things like honor, wealth, and reputation, were actually *detrimental* to our virtue and our happiness. We have to renounce all these things because they are corrosive to our virtue, to our happiness. The Stoics are a distinct school of

philosophy because they altered that assessment, holding that these externals, everything that was beyond a person's control, lacked any value at all, either positive or negative. Excellence and virtue were the only things the Stoics believed had value. Everything else was instrumental. So all these externals—our possessions, our reputations, our power—don't have positive value, the way many believe they do. But they don't have negative value either, the way the Cynics believed. Since such externals are neither good nor bad according to the Stoics, we don't need to forsake them entirely, but we should be ready when we don't have them. We should occasionally go without the luxuries that the Cynics disdained, the things Stoics warn distract us from what really matters.

So what, then, does matter? What, then, do we ultimately control? We control the decisions we make today, here and now. Epictetus famously said that we should always remind ourselves that the Olympic Games have arrived. Today is the day when we can perform at our best and make progress . . . or not. This is what we have control over. Don't worry about the future: that will come. Seneca famously said that the future will come and you'll face it with the same character that you have today or, one hopes, a slightly better one. So let go of worrying about the future. Then— and unsurprisingly, this is the part of ancient Stoicism that is least represented on the internet version of Stoicism— we're also supposed to go without judging others. One of my favorite quotes is from Marcus Aurelius, who says you can either help others become better or endure them as they are. Those are your options. If you're focusing on what you can control, those are your options. We should go without: without luxuries, without worrying about the future, and without judgement.

Last, and most important, we should change our perspectives by preparing ourselves for what is to come. In one of the most quoted bits of Epictetus's *Enchiridion,* he says that if you're fond of a cup, you have to remind yourself of the kind of thing a cup is. Now, a lot of people may think that Stoics aren't supposed to have a favorite cup, but that is absolutely not the case. I have a favorite cup, a mug from one of the most glorious places on earth: Waffle House. Every major event in my life until I was 30 was celebrated in a Waffle House, including the day of my wedding. So I take great joy from my Waffle House mug. But here's the thing about mugs: they break. Does this mean I don't or shouldn't care about this cup, and all it reminds me of? On the contrary, I actually enjoy it more because I realize its finite nature.

What's more important, as Epictetus tells us, is that what's true for cups is even more true for our fellow human beings. The Stoics say that if you're going to love someone or something, you need to love them as they are, not as you want them to be. There is perhaps no greater way to *fail* to love someone as they are than by wishing for them to live forever. That is not the way life works; that's not the kind of being we are. So we should recognize that fact and nonetheless be able to feel gratitude. At the end of a relationship, of a loved one's life, or of an opportunity, we can always ask ourselves, would I have invested my time in this person, this relationship, this opportunity, if I knew from the beginning that this is all we would have? Could we be grateful for that time we did have, for that relationship? The way to prepare ourselves, the Stoics would say, is to think about those things: to recognize and accept the nature of things as they are.

To put it another way, if you knew you were going to die today, how would you wish to live the rest of your life if given a second chance? Marcus Aurelius said, "Think of yourself as dead, as if you have already lived your life to its predetermined length. Now, take whatever extra time you may be given and live it properly."[15] Look at the rest of your time as an unexpected opportunity. How are you going to live it? How are you going to prepare yourself to be the person you want to be in five years, in ten years, at the end of your career, at the end of your time in the military, at the end of your life? How would you have to live?

So Stoicism is not about analgesics; it's about seeing the world differently. The Stoics will tell us that any philosophy that doesn't recognize that this world of ours is full of piss and shit, death and suffering, is woefully insufficient when we are forced to endure the fire of the kiln ourselves, or when those who are near and dear to us suffer and die. But any philosophy that denies the second part of life's proposition—that through it all, this world of ours is also rich and lush, sexy and beautiful—will prove woefully insufficient when we are free to live and not merely to endure.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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NOTES

1 Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

2 Cato the Younger was a prominent Stoic hero. For more on Cato, see the chapter entitled "Cato the Younger, Rome's Iron Man," in Ryan Holiday and Stephen Hanselman, *Lives of the Stoics: The Art of Living from Zeno to Marcus Aurelius* (New York: Portfolio, 2020), 135–152.

3 Ryan Holiday and Stephen Hanselman, *The Daily Stoic: 366 Meditations on Wisdom, Perseverance, and the Art of Living* (New York: Portfolio, 2016). For more on Ryan Holiday and his work, see https://ryanholiday.net/

4 For more on Stockdale, see James Bond Stockdale, "Courage Under Fire: Testing Epictetus's Doctrines in a Laboratory of Human Behavior," Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University, 1993: https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/StockdaleCourage.pdf

5 Mark Manson, *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck: A Counterintuitive Approach to Living a Good Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016).

6 See Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Gregory Hays (New York: The Modern Library, 2003).

7 For more on Wesleyan University's "Live Like a Stoic Week," see https://livingagoodlife.com/fall2021/live-like-a-stoic-week/

8 Although Nelson Mandela was not formally an adherrent of Stoic philosophy, he embodied Stoic ideals in his own life, which is why I refer to him as a Stoic hero. His favorite poem was "Invictus." https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51642/invictus

9 Epictetus, "The Enchiridion 21," in *A New Handbook for the Modern Stoic: Selections from Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, Epictetus, and Others*, Marcus Hedahl and Don Koomar, eds. (unpublished manuscript): https://usna.edu/CoreEthics/Essays/stoic_handbook.pdf

10 Seneca, "Letter to Lucilius 12.10," The Stoic Letters, 12 March 2020: https://thestoicletters.com/letter-xii-on-old-age-stoic-seneca/

11 Seneca, "On the Shortness of Life 3.3-3.4," in Hedahl and Koomar, *A New Handbook for the Modern Stoic*.

12 Seneca, "On the Shortness of Life 3," translated by Marcus Hedahl.

13 Epictetus, "The Discourses 1.6.2," in Hedahl and Don Koomar, *A New Handbook for the Modern Stoic*.

14 Cicero, "On Duties 1.107," in ibid.

15 Marcus Aurelius, "Meditations 7.56," in ibid.

Marcus Aurelius

Social Capital

Women, Peace, and Security
in the International Community

*Dr. Deborah E. Gibbons, US Naval Postgraduate School, and
Kathleen S. Bailey, US Naval Postgraduate School*

W omen increasingly contribute to peace and security efforts as members of armed forces, police, and government agencies. As they assume a wider range of military and decision-making roles, questions arise regarding the impact of women's participation on functional, social, and political change. Answers to these questions, which tend to rely on personal observations, political rhetoric, and limited available data, vary widely. However, consideration of gender differences can be important for the success of any operation.

For example, one military officer in a South American country explained how the addition of women to his boat crew enabled them to establish positive relations with people in a remote area along a river system where drug cartels control the farming, harvesting, refining, and transportation of cocaine. Indigenous people in the region tend to cooperate with the traffickers to obtain financial support and avoid the risks associated with opposition. These locals engage in activities such as cultivating and harvesting coca, which is then processed and transported via the river to neighboring countries for distribution to North America and Europe. Military teams patrol the river system periodically, observing the situation and striving to connect with the local population. However, suspicions toward outsiders, particularly government and military personnel, have impeded their efforts. Local residents generally avoid conversing with the military teams, but a recent mission that included female medical personnel to provide healthcare services along the river proved transformative. The women's presence aboard the boat and their interactions with local women and children fostered a warmer reception and more positive attitudes toward the team. In many villages along the river, locals welcomed the female healthcare personnel, thus facilitating meaningful interactions between the military contingents and the communities in the region. The military units working in the area took note of these gender effects and expressed their intent to continue building on the relationships with local women.[1]

As women participate in a broader variety of security operations, leaders would be prudent to strategize opportunities to take advantage of their presence and skills in order to add value to the teams and missions. By considering the distinct experiences, needs, and perspectives of both men and women, security operations can be more effective and inclusive. This helps to ensure that the operation is responsive to the needs of the local population and can thus increase trust and support.

Debate continues about whether women and men should be regarded as interchangeable personnel, or whether their distinct attributes and roles should be considered in security assignments and planning. Considerable evidence indicates that men and women differ in their tendency to trust outgroup members (for example, people from other cultures), and women tend to invest more in relationships than men.[2] As a result, women may be more trusting and, in some cases, more trusted than men. This distinction could impact a unit's ability to elicit cooperation with local people and affect the operation's success. Strategists must, at a minimum, integrate the social and cultural expectations associated with gender into their plans when teams operate in diverse cultural and ethnic contexts.

US Navy sailors help an elderly woman on the Amazon River, Brazil, 22 November 2017

History of Women, Peace, and Security Policies and Implementation

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR1325), passed in October 2000, recognizes the crucial role of women in peace processes and the maintenance of global peace and security. It calls for the inclusion and meaningful participation of women in decision making, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution, while also emphasizing the importance of gender equality and the protection of women and girls in conflict-affected areas.[3] Since the UN Security Council passed UNSCR1325, the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) policy framework has spread globally. Subsequent Security Council resolutions and national action plans have similarly emphasized the importance of a gendered approach to security processes and planning. In 2021, the Biden-Harris administration released the United States' first National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality, which outlines a set of goals related to gender equity and equality in domestic and foreign policy.[4] Following the trend in governments worldwide, the document recommends an intersectional analytical approach that considers the barriers faced by

individuals experiencing discrimination based on gender, race, and other factors.

Women can participate in every type of military job in many countries, including Canada, New Zealand, the United States, and several European countries. The United Nations promotes the participation of women in peace-keeping operations, and while the number of women in these operations lags UN targets, many have participated in UN missions around the world. Emphasis on women's participation in military operations and in peace processes is increasing, and the percentage of UN Security Council sanction resolutions that contained references to women or gender increased from 15.8 percent in 2010 to over 29 percent in 2015.[5] In 2021, references to women, peace, and security appeared in 63.16 percent of UN Security Council resolutions and 69 percent of Security Council decisions.[6]

Women's participation in previously closed jobs in the US Department of Defense is also increasing. On 3 December 2015, Defense Secretary Ash Carter issued a memorandum that required US military organizations to allow women into all types of jobs beginning in January 2016.[7] Prior to 2016, women in the US military were not officially allowed into combat roles, although they had worked in combat environments. Since those restrictions were lifted, women have moved into most military jobs, including special operations teams. As of March 2020, 42 women had graduated from the US Army's Ranger School; of these, five were subsequently assigned to the Ranger Regiment.[8] The US Army assigned a female Green Beret to a team in July 2020,[9] and the first woman to earn her Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewman (SWCC) pin graduated with 16 male classmates in July 2021 and became eligible to serve in a Navy special forces boat team.[10]

Supporting WPS Values While Respecting Local Culture and Norms

Attitudes and expectations about women in security roles differ across countries and among ethnic or religious groups within countries. Some of these differences are deeply rooted in shared values, beliefs, and traditions. Insights gathered from interviews with both WPS practitioners and experts reveal a common theme: before we can begin to implement WPS policies in an effective manner,

Indigenous people in Maynas, Loreto, Peru, 1980

If we understand and respect differences between nations and cultures, we can build a dialogue to influence a more progressive view of women.

we must understand the local norms and culture. Not only does interpersonal communication differ across societies, so too does the perception of women as members of society. Understanding how distinct social groups perceive women, what local women value, and other aspects of the cultural context is crucial for successful WPS implementation. If we understand and respect differences between nations and cultures, we can build a dialogue to influence a more progressive view of women.

Along these same lines, efforts to increase the uptake of WPS principles must be interactive, not prescriptive. UN goals are unlikely to be met, especially in areas where women's rights are not adequately protected, if international representatives try to impose policies or require specific methods for WPS implementation. Such an approach is likely to meet resistance in many nations; even if their governments strive to comply, official compliance does not equal grassroots agreement. What works in one country or culture may or may not be successful in another, and policymakers cannot force changes in culture and perception on other countries.

While many countries are making progress in implementing WPS principles, it's important to remember that progress is incremental, and it will look different from country to country. Along the way, we can acknowledge each country's accomplishments, and encourage con-

> **When women participate actively in partner-nation meetings**, performing their regular duties and receiving equal respect from their male colleagues, it serves as a model for other countries of what could be.

tinuing efforts toward inclusion of women in security professions and the protection of women and girls in conflict situations. By understanding a country's politics and culture, what its people value, and what is important to them in their society, we can design messages that will resonate with them and build lasting connections. Similarly, the countries that already include women as leaders and decision makers can set a powerful example by improving their own WPS implementation efforts. When women participate actively in partner-nation meetings, performing their regular duties and receiving equal respect from their male colleagues, it serves as a model for other countries of what could be.

The importance of understanding local customs and culture is not easily overstated. Cultural understanding is indispensable for the successful implementation of WPS principles. It enables members of the international community to acknowledge and understand the diverse interests and experiences of women and men within their respective contexts. By establishing a solid cultural foundation for the WPS agenda, we can more easily identify barriers that limit women's agency. This, in turn, enables more effective and sustainable interventions to empower women as agents of change in security and peace processes.

WPS in the Future

Many countries have made strides in implementing the WPS agenda. While some nations may, at first glance, appear more advanced than others, it is important to evaluate national progress in light of cultural differences and initial starting points. The international community can and should respect local values and traditions without losing sight of the overall WPS agenda. Culturally sensitive communication, then, may open discussions and encourage decisions that increase women's equal participation in all societies.

Looking ahead, organizations are focusing on technology and future development in addition to addressing current gender-related issues. The 67th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women emphasized the importance of technology, education, and innovation in advancing gender equality. It expressed concern over the persistent gender gap in technology access, connectivity, digital literacy, and education in some regions of the world. The participants adopted a series of agreed conclusions that would "provide a blueprint for all stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, civil society and youth to promote the full and equal participation and leadership of women and girls in the design, transformation and integration of digital technologies and innovation processes that fulfill the human rights and needs of women and girls."[11]

As women increasingly participate in military and civilian security roles, questions about the potential benefits of women's involvement will persist. What does the international community gain from the participation of women in security operations and peacebuilding? What challenges must be overcome to increase the protection of women and girls during conflict? How can gender analysis help security forces to become more effective? This column will delve into these inquiries in future issues, exploring the implementation, challenges, and advantages of integrating a gender perspective in security forces, and analyzing the impacts of women's participation on social and political change.

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NOTES

[1] This example was communicated to one of the authors during a WPS workshop in South America in the summer of 2021. Names and locations are not identified here in order to protect the program.

[2] William W. Maddux and Marilynn B. Brewer, "Gender Differences in the Relational and Collective Bases for Trust," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 8, no. 2 (2005): 159-171.

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[6] United Nations Security Council, *Women and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary-General*, United Nations Security Council S/2022/740 (New York: United Nations, 5 October 2022) 28, paragraph 100 and footnote 61: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3990874

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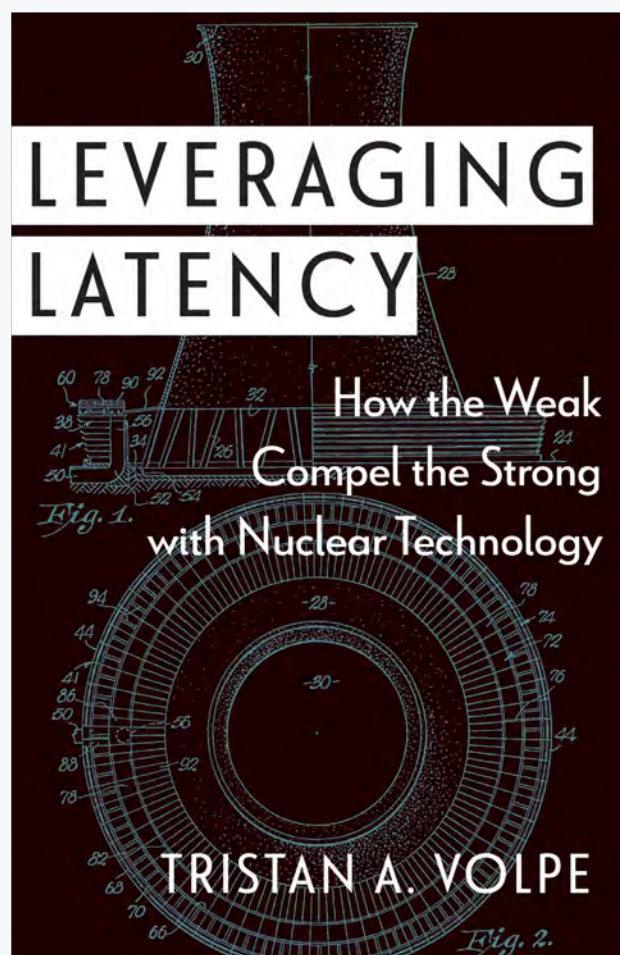## *Leveraging Latency: How the Weak Compel the Strong with Nuclear Technology*

Over the last seven decades, some states successfully leveraged the threat of acquiring atomic weapons to compel concessions from superpowers. For many others, however, this coercive gambit failed to work. When does nuclear latency—the technical capacity to build the bomb—enable states to pursue effective coercion?

In *Leveraging Latency*, Tristan A. Volpe argues that having greater capacity to build weaponry doesn't translate to greater coercive advantage. Volpe finds that there is a trade-off between threatening proliferation and promising nuclear restraint. States need just enough bomb-making capacity to threaten proliferation, but not so much that it becomes too difficult for them to offer nonproliferation assurances. The boundaries of this sweet spot align with the capacity to produce the fissile material at the heart of an atomic weapon.

To test this argument, Volpe includes comparative case studies of four countries that leveraged latency against superpowers: Japan, West Germany, North Korea, and Iran. In doing so, Volpe identifies a generalizable mechanism—the threat-assurance trade-off—that explains why more power often makes compellence less likely to work. This framework illuminates how technology shapes broader bargaining dynamics and helps to refine policy options for inhibiting the spread of nuclear weapons. As nuclear technology continues to cast a shadow over the global landscape, *Leveraging Latency* provides a systematic assessment of its coercive utility.

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Dr. Tristan A. Volpe is an assistant professor in the Defense Analysis department at the Naval Postgraduate School and a nonresident fellow in the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. His work has been published in academic and general policy journals such as *International Organization*, *Security Studies*, the *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *Foreign Affairs*, and the *Washington Quarterly*. Prior to NPS and Carnegie, Dr. Volpe was a predoctoral fellow at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

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