

IN STRATEGY AND DEFENCE TIME IS THE KILLER

Very recently Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon, General Sir Alexander (Richard) Shirreff, General The Lord Dannatt and, Dr Julian Lewis, the Chairman of the House of Commons Defence Committee, raised serious concerns at the potential for a Russia v North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) military confrontation. This is partly in response to the recent United States of America (USA) election where Mr Donald Trump was elected to the Presidency inducing questions over future USA commitment to NATO. This in turn has rightly focused attention on the parlous state of European defence spending should the, previously mentioned, unimaginable happen and the USA downgrade its military support for NATO.

In matters of European NATO defence there is a quantitative and qualitative difference between the ability and will to rapidly dispatch and sustain battalion sized units (up to 800) to reinforce against potential Russian aggression and the will and ability to dispatch brigades (5000+) or divisions (40,000+). The danger that has been ignored until now, but which is becoming all too clear, is that without the USA at its heart, European NATO is a 'paper tiger'; head quarters proposals abound but the troops for them to command are elusive. Moreover the simple truth is that US forces presently provide the 'hub' on which other nations' forces integrate their capabilities under, normally, US command. If the hub is removed, contributor nations, now lacking a natural lead force integrator, will be little more than a collection of uncoordinated 'spokes'.

In the case of the UK, the second largest contributor to NATO, the fact remains, that with the rump of UK forces being based on home soil, combat deployments to mainland Europe will always be impacted by **TIME**. Time to assemble and transit to embarkation ports or railheads and time to transit by sea/rail/road into theatre. All the latter being affected by whether secure lines of communication can be guaranteed in an anti-access area denial (A2/AD) environment. The 'trip wire' level of force in the Baltic States that Sir Michael Fallon and European NATO colleagues refer to is mere political posturing because without divisional level armoured support these forces will be 'rolled over' by vastly superior Russian forces that are able to concentrate well before NATO reinforcing heavy units can realistically be expected to arrive.

Without the USA in the picture the time factor to concentrate European NATO forces is even more acute. NATO may spend ten times more on defence than Russia combined, but NATO forces are widely spread – from Norway to Turkey – with multi-spectrum capabilities concentrated in just 3 NATO partners – USA,

UK and France. The complacency of European NATO Defence Ministers and their governments in this respect is breathtaking.

Reference is often made to High Readiness Force structures in relation to NATO force generation. But of what use are these structures if they have no utility because the forces assigned do not exist or are at too low readiness with few, if any, logistic enablers to rapidly move them? How many of the promised very high readiness reinforcements can reasonably be expected to be available and over what time frame can they be mobilised, assembled and transported into theatre? Using who's logistic assets?

The more complex the weapons system that has to be activated and moved the more complex is the problem. For example, ships, fast jets, helicopters and armour, and the troops to fight them, must be fully combat ready (CR) before they deploy; what provision - money, training, maintenance and sustainment has been allocated to bringing these assets to CR status? At what readiness? If the USA is not present, how can the UK and France fill the gap when the rest of NATO is not pulling its weight? Even as late as the late 1990s it might have been possible for either UK or France to act as a substitute hub for an absent US. Unfortunately, now - unlike the US - neither nation has a full scope of military capabilities or numerical capacity to take on the essential 'integration' roles required of a hub.

The maxim '**we fight with what we have one day one**' is ostensibly true and there is little capacity for the generation of extra complex forces in the short to medium term. This is why it is crucial that the in-service regular order of battle (ORBAT), across NATO - personnel, equipment, training and testing - must reflect this reality. Having little ability to rapidly concentrate force is the Achilles heel of NATO - the US concept of NATO rapid reinforcement relies to a degree upon USA based 'Stryker' brigades that are dependent upon USAF strategic C17 and C5 air lift. This takes **Time**.

The latter being the crux of the issue. Whether Navy, Army or Air Force, training, testing, assembling and transporting forces takes time. Therefore, it can be argued that readiness and the concentration of force in a 21st century NATO context are synonymous - especially in response to a 'Counter Surprise' operation.

We fight with what we have on day one. And what we have to confront the enemy is dependent on the TIME to mobilise, the TIME to transit and the TIME to concentrate. So TIME is the Killer. European NATO may boast much in the way of weapons systems and manpower but to what end if the resources they offer cannot concentrate force in the correct theatre of operations without calling upon the USA to provide the operational and logistic brunt?