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Suggestions are encouraged.

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To promote national defence and security issues through discussion and engagement

Newsletter of the Royal United Services Institute of Vancouver Island

The Royal United Services Institute of Vancouver Island is a member of the Conference of Defence Associations. The CDA is the oldest and most influential advocacy group in Canada's defence community, consisting of associations from all parts of the country.

The CDA expresses its ideas and opinions with a view to influencing government security and defence policy. It is a non-partisan, independent, and non-profit organization.

Aug/Sep 2021

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President's Message

Over this hot summer, our unstable world continues changing, with wildfires in the BC interior, a fourth wave of COVID, a federal election and the humbling of a superpower. Global change seems to be constant, forcing speculation on the future impacts.

The biggest surprise and disappointment is the Taliban's capture of an undefended Kabul on 15 August. Newspapers, blogs and magazines are now bursting with explanations and identifying the lessons of why Afghanistan collapsed so quickly. For America, the question of who lost Afghanistan will be passionate, but that may not be the right question, as any partisan debate always pre-supposes that America was in control. That may be the salient lesson worth learning.

With the US withdrawing from South-West Asia, regional powers like Russia, China and Pakistan will no longer have American and Afghan forces to fight terrorism for them. They are not afraid of the Taliban, but they are afraid of those the Taliban may harbour, or who can hide in the ungovernable spaces of Afghanistan. They would have been much happier if America had stayed for another 20 years.

And it is possible the Taliban have swallowed their own poison pill. It is no longer the 1990s, let alone the Middle Ages. Twenty years of raised expectations among a savvier Afghan public may foment yet another insurgency, with the Taliban coming to regret their victory.

Back home, RUSI-VI webinars continue to be viewed on our website by members and guests. Collectively (both webinars and Youtube) the website has tallied over 1,244 views. If you have friends who are interested in any of our webinars, access is available at http://rusiviccda.org

Finally, RUSI-VI starts the 2021-2022 year with annual membership fees of $40.00 for regular members and $50.00 for family members now due. Thank you everyone for supporting us through the pandemic over the last 18 months, it is much appreciated. I hope you continue to find value in being a RUSI-VI member, we will certainly strive to keep you informed about security issues of interest.

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Scott H. Usborne
President
Royal United Services Institute of Vancouver Island

Canadian Armed Forces Air Support to B.C. Wildfire Situation

By **Lookout** on Aug 09, 2021,

Air crew from 450 Tactical Helicopter Squadron and B.C. Wildfire Service members pose for a group photo at YKA Kamloops Airport, B.C., on July 15. Photo by S1 Victoria Ioganov, MARPAC Imaging Services, Canadian Armed Forces photo

Lt(N) Pamela Hogan
JTFP PAO

In response to a request for federal assistance from British Columbia, Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) assets deployed to the province on July 5, as part of an overall CAF response to wildfires across the country called Operation Lentus.

In anticipation of the request, multiple Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) assets were sent to Edmonton, AB, in preparation to be quickly expedited to B.C. An Airfield Activation Surge Team from 2 Wing Bagotville, QC, rapidly deployed to Kamloops to establish the airfield and initiate mission support services ahead of the Air Task Force's arrival.

A CH-146 Griffon helicopter from 417 Combat Support Squadron, Cold Lake, AB, specializing in contingency medical evacuation, was skids-down on the taxiway July 8, and within minutes was followed by the first CH-147F Chinook helicopter from 450 Tactical Helicopter Squadron, Petawawa, ON.

Later that day, a 436 Transport Squadron CC-130J Hercules aircraft from 8 Wing, Trenton, ON, arrived with supplies necessary to set up the airfield and has since accomplished many transports of military and B.C. Wildfire Service equipment.

A second CH-147F Chinook helicopter from 450 Squadron joined the Air Task Force on July 11 to share the workload of providing air mobility to fire support crews, conducting reconnaissance to determine the scope and scale of fires, and transporting mobile firefighting equipment.

An additional CH-146 Griffon helicopter from 408 Tactical Helicopter Squadron, Edmonton, AB, arrived July 8 to support the B.C. Wildfire Service with utility moves.

The abnormally harsh conditions of the 2021 wildfire season have led to approximately 448,952 hectares burned at this time – more than four times the 10-year average for this time of year.

With 3,375 properties on evacuation order in B.C., and 18,065 properties on evacuation alert as of July 27, the Air Task Force continues to launch community evacuation by air where resources are limited or restricted due to wildfire activity.

On July 15, approximately 6,000 hectares of combined blazes encroached on the Anahim Lake area forcing residents out of their homes. In response, a CH-147F Chinook supported a community evacuation of residents to Puntzi Mountain, B.C., with support from the 417 Squadron Griffon.

The domestic operation has yielded much-needed assistance to the province, which declared a state of emergency just 19 days after concluding the 16-month state of emergency for the COVID-19 pandemic.

A task force of approximately 350 land troops are currently deployed to Vernon to aid the B.C. Wildfire Service in suppression of hotspots, monitor fire lines, and work alongside B.C. Wildfire Service personnel in a support capacity.

Federal assistance to B.C. in its fight against wildfires will be periodically reassessed throughout the wildfire season to evaluate the needs of the province and determine whether an extension is required beyond the requested period of support.

RCN: Your Navy today Monthly Update

See link below for the July Update

http://www.navy-marine.forces.gc.ca/en/news-ynt/2021/07-your-navy-today.page?

Tokyo ties Japan's Security to Stability in Taiwan Strait

International Crisis Group - July 2021

In notable shift in public tone, several Japanese officials openly expressed support for Taiwan and tied Japan's security to stability in Taiwan Strait throughout month. After Japanese deputy defence minister late June called Taiwan "democratic country" during U.S. think-tank event, remarks which China (30 June) called "erroneous", Japanese Deputy PM Tarō Asō on (6 July) suggested Tokyo would join U.S. in defence of Taiwan in event of attack on Taiwan; China (6 July) called comments "extremely wrong and dangerous". In Defence White Paper, Japan (13 July) linked stability in Taiwan Strait to Japan's security for first time and emphasised concerns over China's actions in East China Sea; China called paper gross interference in internal affairs. Meanwhile, U.S. and Japanese military forces (1 July) conducted exercises on Japan's Amami Ōshima island. Chinese navy (17-21 July) conducted live-fire exercise in East China Sea, alongside exercises in Yellow Sea, Bohai Strait, and off coasts of China's Fujian and Guangdong provinces. As of 28 July, 80 Chinese vessels entered into contiguous zone around disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands and ten Chinese vessels entered into territorial Japan's waters during month.

You Thought This Was Just About Afghanistan? Think Again

As the Taliban take over the country, other jihadist groups are already carrying out attacks in the region. Chinese interests are the first in line.

By Ruth Pollard *August 13, 2021, Bloomberg Opinion 5:00 PM PDT* Updated on August 15, 2021, 1:58 AM PDT

Who wants to talk to the Taliban's Abdul Ghani Baradar next?
Photographer: Sefa Karacan/Anadolu Agency/Getty

The spillover began before the Taliban had even reached Kabul. City after city fell this past week, and now the Islamist insurgents have entered the capital. It will only get worse as the conflict expands beyond Afghanistan's borders.

Jihadist groups based in the country, some with transnational agendas like al-Qaeda, now have a template for defeating governments backed by major powers and have been emboldened by the Taliban's lightning-fast advance. This is happening as the jihadi ecosystem is experiencing the lowest counter-terrorism pressure in the last two decades, effectively getting free rein. Asfandyar Mir, South Asia security analyst for the U.S. Institute for Peace, says it's a dangerous combination when threats go up at the same time efforts to combat them go down.

"Central Asian jihadists have been flexing their muscle, anti-China jihadists have attacked Chinese personal in Pakistan, more regional violence is extremely plausible — the threat is ongoing, and we are just talking about an escalation from this point onwards," Mir said. The collapse of the Afghan republic following the U.S. departure would have regional significance like the post-9/11 invasion, or the withdrawal of Soviet troops and fall of the communist regime they'd backed. "This is a seismic shift that will change politics in this part of the world in ways hard to foresee."

Expect the immediate danger to be regional — in South and Central Asia — as geography and capability limit the initial damage. Chinese interests in Pakistan have already taken a hit. In April, a car bomb exploded at a luxury hotel hosting Beijing's ambassador in Quetta, not far from Taliban strongholds in southern Afghanistan. The attack was claimed by the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, or the Pakistani Taliban, a loosely organized terrorist group with ties to al-Qaeda, based along the vast Afghan-Pakistan border.

Last month, a bomb blast on a bus traveling to a dam and hydro-electric project in Dasu, near the Pakistan border with China, killed 12 people, including nine Chinese citizens. No one has claimed responsibility, but Beijing was so concerned that it hosted Taliban representatives for a meeting with Foreign Minister Wang Yi. At stake is $60 billion in projects in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a crucial part of President Xi Jinping's wider Belt and Road Initiative, along with significant Chinese mining interests inside Afghanistan.

While this wasn't the Taliban's first visit to China, the seniority of the Chinese representatives was unprecedented, as was the very public message that Beijing recognizes the group as a legitimate political force, Yun Sun, the Stimson Center think tank's China program director, noted last week in an essay on the national security platform, War on the Rocks. After posing for photographs with the group's co-founder and deputy leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Wang described the Taliban as "a crucial military and political force in Afghanistan that is expected to play an important role in the peace, reconciliation, and reconstruction process of the country."

What Beijing wants in return is for the Taliban to live up to a commitment to sever all ties with terrorist organizations, including the TTP and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (an outfit Beijing blames for unrest in its Xinjiang region that Washington removed from its list of terror groups in October after finding there was no credible evidence it continues to exist.) Any further attacks on Chinese nationals working in South Asia, whether claimed by the Taliban or others operating with its blessing, will no doubt impact future ties, though it's unclear what China would do in retaliation.

With no major political or diplomatic push to blunt the Taliban's advance or rein in the groups operating in its shadow, including al-Qaeda — much diminished 20 years after the U.S. invaded Afghanistan to destroy them and their Taliban hosts — it's a matter of when, not if, there's an upsurge in terror attacks. The danger is particularly acute for the six countries bordering Afghanistan. Beyond China, they include Iran and Pakistan — as well as nearby India, which will be closely watching its only Muslim-majority province of Kashmir, the object in two of its wars with Pakistan, for resurgent violence. Russia will be concerned about the impact on Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan and any terrorist blowback onto its territory.

There's the possibility that the major powers — the U.S., Russia and China — might step in and convince their allies and friends to end hostilities. But analysts think that's unlikely. The situation has festered since the U.S. and the Taliban reached their agreement in February last year and will continue to do so.

Extended international inertia is more probable. Look at Syria. After a decade of war and some significant U.S. investment in money, military involvement and political capital, Bashar al-Assad is still president. The country has the world's largest population of internally displaced people (6.7 million), while 6.6 million refugees subsist mostly in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan. The threat posed by terror groups operating in and around Syria, as well as the use and proliferation of chemical weapons, remains a real concern. So does the conflict's tendency to be a flashpoint for external players like Russia, Turkey, Israel and Iran.

For Afghanistan, the next worry would be that foreign fighters again start pouring in from around the world. Insurgents from other nations are there now, but mostly from neighboring countries. Once they come from further afield, it increases the probability of attacks spreading much more widely.

We All Lost Afghanistan

Two Decades of Mistakes, Misjudgments, and Collective Failure

By P. Michael McKinley FOREIGN AFFAIRS

August 16, 2021

Watching U.S. airstrikes against the Taliban in the Tora Bora mountains, Afghanistan, December 2001 Erik de Castro / Reuters

As Afghanistan tumbles into Taliban hands, the avalanche of recrimination and outright condemnation of the Biden administration's withdrawal of U.S. troops in Afghanistan has become unrelenting. Former National Security Adviser General H. R. McMaster echoed the sentiments of many when he declared that Afghanistan is a "humanity problem on a modern-day frontier between barbarism and civilization" and that the United States lacks the will "to continue the effort in the interest of all humanity."

What is happening is a terrible tragedy, but the blame cannot be laid at any one door. The Biden administration's short timetable for withdrawal, tied to the 20th anniversary of 9/11, and in the middle of the fighting season, was a mistake. But the situation on the ground is the result of two decades of miscalculations and failed policies pursued by three prior U.S. administrations and of the failure of Afghanistan's leaders to govern for the good of their people. Many of the critics speaking out now were architects of those policies.

The broader questions about why Afghanistan finds itself at this juncture undermine attempts to justify the "war on terror" as it was waged in the country over two decades. During my more than three years in Kabul, between 2013 and 2016 (including as U.S. ambassador from 2014 to 2016), it became evident to me just how steep the challenges to U.S. strategy were. Although we were largely successful in eliminating al Qaeda in the country and reducing the threat of terrorist attacks in the United States, we failed in our approach to counterinsurgency, to Afghan politics, and to "nation building." We underestimated the resiliency of the Taliban. And we misread the geopolitical realities of the region.

It is time to face the facts: a decision to delay the withdrawal of U.S. forces for another year or two would ultimately have made no difference to the unbearably sad consequences on the ground in Afghanistan. The United States would have had to commit to Afghanistan indefinitely, at a cost of tens of billions a year, with little hope of building on fragile gains inside a country with weak governance, with battlefield conditions eroding, and with the certainty that many more American lives would be lost as the Taliban again targeted U.S. forces and diplomats.

As the blame games and lessons-learned exercises begin, therefore, it is also time for critics of the withdrawal to address squarely the misjudgments and shortcomings of the Afghanistan intervention that led us to this point—and for them to recognize that responsibility for what went wrong should be widely shared.

THE MILITARY COLLAPSE

In light of the Taliban's rapid takeover of Afghan city after Afghan city in recent days, perhaps the most striking American misjudgment is our ongoing overestimation of the capabilities of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. Even without tactical American military support, the ANDSF should have been in a position to defend major cities and critical military installations. As numerous observers have pointed out, the ANDSF on paper was significantly larger and far better equipped and organized than the Taliban. The Afghan Special Forces were compared with the best in the region. As late as March 2021, U.S. intelligence briefings for Biden administration officials were reportedly warning that the Taliban could take over most of the country in two to three years—not in a few weeks.

This overestimation of ANDSF capabilities was a constant after the end of the "surge" of American forces between 2009 and 2011. The semiannual U.S. Defense Department presentations to Congress regularly underscored the growing professionalization and fighting capability of the Afghan military. The December 2012 "Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan" was typical, highlighting that Afghan forces were carrying out 80 percent of operations and had successfully recruited enough Afghans to meet the authorized ceiling of 352,000 troops and police. The November 2013 "Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan" went further: "Afghan security forces are now successfully providing security for their own people, fighting their own battles," and could hold the gains "made by a coalition of 50 nations with the best trained and equipped forces in the world." By 2014, Afghan forces reportedly "led 99 percent of conventional operations and 99 percent of special operations" and remained "at just under the full authorized level of 352,000 personnel." Even as the situation on the ground deteriorated, a 2017 report described the ANDSF as "generally capable of protecting major population centers . . . and responding to Taliban attacks."

Only in the last few years did reports begin to reflect a more concerning reality. In 2017 and again in 2019, there were reports that tens of thousands of "ghost" soldiers were being removed from the rolls—suggesting that there were never close to 330,000 troops available to fight the Taliban, let alone 352,000. The Defense Department's December 2020 report to Congress noted that only "approximately 298,000 ANDSF personnel were eligible for pay," hinting at the recurring problem with "ghost" soldiers and desertions.

The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) also regularly highlighted problems tracking equipment and salaries. Waste, fraud, and mismanagement of resources meant to transform the Afghan military further undermined the fighting capability of the ANDSF. The measure of waste and fraud runs into the billions of dollars with corruption often involving senior Afghan government officials. SIGAR did manage to expose much of this, but more should have been done to stop it.

THE ERODING STALEMATE

On the battlefield from 2013 onward, the Taliban seemed to gain ground every year in what came to be called an "eroding stalemate" in Washington parlance—even with the 2013 death of Taliban founder Mullah Omar, his successor's assassination in 2016, and the heaviest coalition bombardments of the war in 2018–19.

The seeds for that eroding stalemate were sown early on. The failure to invest in Afghanistan's police and military in the first years after 2001 meant a loss of valuable time to build a capable fighting force when the Taliban were on the defensive. The building of an air force was not prioritized for more than a decade; the training of a new generation of Afghan pilots began only in 2009 and was slower than necessary because of a decision to transition the Afghan fleet from Russian craft to Black Hawks. And while the Afghan air force had more recently come to be seen as relatively effective, any success was undermined by the decision this year to withdraw the thousands of contractors who provided maintenance and support for operations as U.S. advisers began to leave in 2019.

Indeed, the failure to transfer the services of the 18,000 contractors who worked with the Afghan military—or to provide the financial guarantees to cover the costs—proved damaging to the government in Kabul, although it is now unclear whether the ANDSF would have fought even with that support. These services may have sustained the logistics flow to the ANDSF in the field and the maintenance of the Afghan air force despite the withdrawal of U.S. forces. Instead, July nighttime U.S. departure from Bagram Air Base, a key logistics fulcrum, will become an enduring symbol of our military failure in Afghanistan. (The failure to maintain a logistics capability had another consequence: hampering the evacuation of embassy personnel and tens of thousands of Afghans, beyond just interpreters, who worked with the U.S. military, diplomatic mission, and assistance programs.)

Meanwhile, the counterinsurgency strategy embraced by the United States never demonstrated an ability to bring sustained gains. As former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen told an interviewer this week, he opposed the extension of the U.S. surge past 2011 because "if we did not have significant progress or show significant progress over the course of 18 months or so, then we had the wrong strategy and we really needed to recalibrate." Yet until the decision to withdraw, such a recalibration never came.

The United States misread a fragmented Afghan political reality.

Year after year, Afghan soldiers went months without pay and without the necessary supplies to defend themselves. More recently, provincial capitals do not appear to have been adequately reinforced, even though it was clear 18 months ago that the United States intended to withdraw troops within a year of the Doha agreement that the Trump administration struck with the Taliban in February 2020. As the Taliban advance intensified in the past weeks, Afghan soldiers were also let down by their commanders and political leaders, who over 20 years have failed abysmally to earn national allegiance. It is striking how incapable Afghanistan's government was of issuing any rallying cry for the nation as its defenses collapsed. This context helps explain why the ANDSF did not fight in recent days.

Another misjudgment relates to the weakness of regional warlords. Since 2001, there has been a broad assumption that these warlords commanded thousands of armed followers who could be mobilized quickly against the Taliban. Both the United States and the national Afghan government believed this to be the case and accommodated often brutal local leaders as a result. The fall of Sheberghan, stronghold of former Vice President (and human rights violator) Abdul Rashid Dostum; of Herat, previously under the sway of former mujahideen leader Ismail Khan; and of Mazar-e Sharif, formerly run by Atta Nur, reveal how deeply flawed that assumption was. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani appealed for assistance from these warlords, only to find they had no forces to rally—a sorry commentary on the state of the national government, the army, and the U.S. reading of a fragmented Afghan political reality.

The United States also overestimated its ability to address another factor that fundamentally undermined the war effort: Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan. For years, U.S. leaders sought the support of Islamabad for a peaceful resolution of the war in Afghanistan. They failed; Islamabad was more interested in keeping its options open on Afghanistan. Yet even after 9/11 mastermind al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was found hiding in Abbottabad, the United States retained close ties to Pakistan given the country's broader regional importance.

It is extraordinarily difficult to defeat an insurgency that has a cross-border sanctuary. The Taliban leadership in Quetta and Peshawar raised funds, planned attacks, and recruited without hindrance. The Afghan government asked repeatedly for Pakistan's assistance in closing Taliban bases. Yet Pakistan's minister of the interior admitted in July 2021 that Taliban families lived in Islamabad suburbs.

MISREADING AFGHAN REALITIES

Why did an effective Afghan government fail to emerge over 20 years? The United States certainly tried to help produce one. Our efforts to impose a Western democratic model on Afghanistan, first at the Bonn conference in 2001 and through the writing of the national constitution, continued over two decades.

Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai complained often about overbearing U.S. political influence. Such "interference" often seemed to keep Afghan politics on track—but with unexpected consequences. When Richard Holbrooke, then the U.S. special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, sought to influence the 2009 election, he succeeded not in stopping a Karzai victory but only in turning the Afghan president into an enemy. In 2014, when U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry brokered a government of national unity as the threat of civil conflict loomed, the result was an uneasy political compromise, between President Ghani and challenger Abdullah Abdullah, that never settled. In the next presidential election, in 2019, fewer than two million Afghans voted, down from eight million just five years before. The contested result hardly suggested Afghanistan's democracy was consolidating at a time when the Taliban threat was increasing.

By the time the unity government leaders visited Washington to meet President Joe Biden in June 2021, unity was nonexistent except in name, and Ghani's presidential palace was increasingly isolated. Yet many in Washington continued to assume a semblance of common purpose regarding the looming Taliban threat.

Afghanistan's national political leadership never fully cohered on how best to fight the Taliban. There were tensions between regional power brokers and Kabul, and between Pashtuns and the minority Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks. Both Karzai and Ghani managed ethnic representation through a spoils system rather than the promotion of a common national vision. And U.S. efforts to identify, even select, leaders in ministries succeeded only in undermining the independence and legitimacy of the Afghan government.

The Taliban, by contrast, proved resilient not just as a military and terrorist organization but as a political movement as well. After 2001, the Taliban continued to enjoy popular support in parts of Afghanistan and retained the ability to field tens of thousands of new generations of young Afghan adherents. Even during the "surge" of U.S. troops in 2009–11, the Taliban proved able to evolve. The Afghan government's efforts to reconcile with the Taliban from 2010 onward represented an implicit acceptance of their political and military salience inside Afghanistan. The decision by the United States to negotiate formally with the Taliban in 2018, and of foreign governments to welcome Taliban emissaries after the Doha agreement of February 2020, reflected that reality.

The blame for this terrible tragedy cannot be laid at any one door.

We misread the Taliban when we were fighting them; we also misread their more recent pledge to negotiate peace as they shadow-boxed in Doha with the Ghani government after reaching agreement with the United States on the withdrawal timetable. They never had any intention of reaching a settlement. (The notion that the Taliban have changed seems even more naïve now, given the disturbing

images emerging from the current takeover.) Yet that intention was in some ways mirrored by the United States: the ultimate goal of American negotiators was to create the conditions for an orderly U.S. withdrawal. The Taliban always knew that.

Now, threats to withhold international recognition as the Taliban capture Kabul by force mean little. Taliban leaders are not concerned about whether the United States recognizes them as a government; other international actors probably will no matter what Washington does.

Another series of misjudgments and mistakes related to American ambitions when it came to "nation building." To American officials, much of what was being done seemed to work. The United States worked to support a representative government, strengthen the legislature, and provide for both a degree of security and the delivery of social services. Its efforts transformed Afghan education, with an exponential growth in the number of girls in school and of women at university and in the workplace. Civil rights were codified, and a free press and judiciary came into being. Millions of refugees returned to Afghanistan in the years after 2001.

Yet even with these successes, we oversold the gains. And we did less than we could have about corruption, knowingly working with senior government and military figures that ordinary Afghans saw as responsible for graft and political and human rights abuses. Our counter-narcotics program was an abject failure: poppy production continued to increase for most of the past decade, with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimating a 37 percent increase in acres under cultivation in 2020. The hope that Afghanistan's economic growth would eventually allow the government to cover its own expenditures was advanced year after year at donors' conferences, even though that clearly would not be the case for the foreseeable future. Grandiose projects languished: it took 15 years to install a new turbine on Kajaki Dam, a symbol of American largess toward Afghanistan in the 1950s.

WHO LOST AFGHANISTAN?

In February 2021, the congressionally mandated Afghanistan Study Group came out with its recommendations for the way forward. It highlighted the importance of continued support for the Afghan state and people; of continued diplomacy in support of a peace process; of working with regional allies; and of extending the U.S. troop presence to allow for the Doha peace negotiations to conclude. All but one of these policies were in effect before and after the report was issued, but they did nothing to stem the collapse we are witnessing now. The survival of the Afghan state should not have been solely dependent on the continuation of an American troop presence.

There is one seductive argument made by critics of the withdrawal: that a Taliban-ruled Afghanistan will again become a haven for terrorist groups threatening the security of the United States. This argument is a backhanded acknowledgment that we succeeded in reducing the threat from Afghanistan to minimal levels—the original rationale for U.S. intervention. The sacrifice, however, was significant: more than $1 trillion, the deaths of 2,400 U.S. service members (and thousands of contractors), more than 20,000 wounded Americans.

Perhaps the resurgence of a terrorist threat will develop more quickly under a future Taliban government than it would have otherwise. But to conclude that this outcome demands an indefinite U.S. troop presence would imply that U.S. troops should also be deployed indefinitely in the many other parts of the world where Islamic State (also known as ISIS) and al Qaeda offshoots are active in greater numbers than they are in Afghanistan and pose a greater threat to the United States. Moreover, U.S. capabilities to monitor and strike at terrorist groups have grown exponentially since 2001.

Ultimately, Washington's decision to withdraw U.S. troops is not the sole or even most important explanation for what is unfolding in Afghanistan today. The explanation lies in 20 years of failed policies and the shortcomings of Afghanistan's political leadership. We can still hope that we in the United States do not end up in a poisonous debate about "who lost Afghanistan." But if we do, let's acknowledge that it was all of us.

US to Share Military's Secret Data with Allies

Nick Allen - National Post 30 July 2021

America's allies would be given access to classified U.S. data under Pentagon plans to revolutionize the way it fights in any future war with China. The Pentagon currently has an "over-classification problem" that is not allowing it to take enough advantage of its allies' capabilities, and their access to real-time U.S. intelligence would be expanded, said Gen. John Hyten, vice-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Under the plan, allied soldiers would be able to use their personal biometrics to log into a U.S. information "combat cloud" system during a conflict. It follows a disastrous classified Pentagon war game, involving hundreds of senior U.S. military personnel, in which America was crushed in a hypothetical battle with China over Taiwan.

Hyten revealed that U.S. information systems were knocked out at the start of the war game, and also that its strategy of massing forces in one place left them a sitting target. He said: "Without overstating the issue, it failed miserably. An aggressive 'red team' that had been studying the U.S. for the last 20 years just ran rings around us. They knew exactly what we were going to do before we did it.

"What happens if right from the beginning information is not available? That's the big problem we faced."

As a result of the defeat in the classified war game in October, the U.S. is changing guiding principles that have governed how it has conducted conflicts for decades. The overhaul is called "Expanded Maneuver" and the aim is to have it in place by 2030, Hyten told the National Defense Industry Association's Emerging Technologies Institute.

A key element to fighting the next war will be achieving "information advantage" and there should be a focus on better incorporating allies, he said.

The "combat cloud" system would share data across land, sea, air and cyber forces and be safe against hacking.

Hyten said the Pentagon had a "terrible time" trying to war-game the role of allies in future conflicts, and it was essential they be given more access to classified U.S. information.

He said: "We have to address a classification problem because we are way over-classified. Even if we do that, we still have a problem because we like to label things 'SECRET NOFORN [No Foreign Nationals]'. Then, even our closest allies can't get on to our basic secret system SIPRNET."

SIPRNET is the computer system the Pentagon uses to distribute classified information.

With the combat cloud, "young soldiers" in a war would be able to "hook in" and access the latest data and plans.

"That applies to allies and partners too," said Hyten. "Friends are our biggest advantage

... The data has to flow everywhere."

Is NATO Land Operations Doctrine Aiming Too High?

JEROEN VERHAEGHE AUGUST 6, 2021 'WAR ON THE ROCKS"

As a mechanized infantry platoon leader more than 20 years ago, I practiced conducting a fighting retreat following a hypothetical invasion of Western Europe. We used NATO Standardization Agreements to ensure that any allied infantry unit could take over the prepared demolition charges any allied combat engineer unit had prepared in order to slow the enemy's advance. I never had to use this training, but I have subsequently witnessed the value of NATO standardized procedures in exercises and operations all over the globe. As a result, I appreciate their importance in the planning and execution of NATO operations.

Unfortunately, it is harder to say the same about NATO's efforts to standardize abstract concepts involving strategic thinking and leadership philosophy. A series of NATO doctrinal documents — specifically *Allied Joint Doctrine for Land Operations*, *Allied Land Tactics*, and *Command and Control of Allied Land Forces* — seek to codify alliance thinking for all tactical land operations. Yet, the concepts they try to define vary too widely for standardization, both across space and time, as well as between the culturally and historically distinct states in the alliance.

The shortfalls of NATO's current approach to codifying doctrine have become obvious in my own experience trying to teach and implement concepts like "the manoeuvrist approach" and "mission command." Based on these two examples, I argue NATO doctrine should "aim lower." Establishing common language and procedures across the alliance is a sufficiently lofty goal. When it comes to doctrine, though, the alliance would do better to acknowledge the different doctrinal cultures that will inevitably persist instead of trying to standardize them. We can expect everyone to agree on the layout of a form for prepared demolitions. But we cannot expect every military in NATO to think the same way.

The "Manoeuvrist Approach"

Allied Joint Doctrine for Land Operations explains that the "manoeuvrist approach" is "an indirect and sophisticated" one that "focuses on applying strength against vulnerability and recognises the importance of cohesion and will."

As an instructor at the Belgian Defence College, I would often cover the "manoeuvrist approach" by dividing my class into two groups, then asking one to define the term and the other to identify the necessary conditions for its successful application. After that, I would have them switch whiteboards and would give them a shot at correcting or completing the other group's work. In a class of 20 to 25 students from roughly 10 nations, we often ended up with as many definitions of the "manoeuvrist approach" as there were officers in the room. In the ensuing discussion, we inevitably came away with the realization that there was much more to the concept than what our official doctrine provided.

The history and current debate surrounding the "manoeuvrist approach" helps explain this confusion. Many people situate its historical origins in the German blitzkrieg of World War II and contrast it with the supposedly mindless attrition of World War I. But this narrative is too simple. Maneuver warfare really originated at the end of World War I and was further developed during the interbellum period. Moreover, the reduction of the conflict to the Western Front very much colors the popular view of World War I as the paragon of attrition by ignoring the doctrinal innovation that occurred on the Eastern Front.

Matters only become more complicated in applying the concept today. First, there is the ongoing transition to Multi-Domain Operations or, in NATO's parlance, Joint All Domain Operations. As a concept, maneuver warfare originated in the land domain, and redefining it for joint operations remains a challenge. But this pales in comparison to the confusion the addition of non-physical domains creates

today. Concepts like "cross-domain maneuver" or "cross-domain deterrence" abound and do not seem to be stabilized just yet.

Secondly, even in the original land domain, recent practice has shown that maneuver warfare at the tactical level is not as universal as some may think or like it to be. Debate over the relative merits of the "manoeuvrist approach" is alive and well. Recent battles, such as those in Mosul and Marawi, have generated books and articles questioning the unquestionable — the absolute merit of maneuver and decisive battle, as compared with attrition or even positional warfare. Even Desert Storm, whose well-known flanking move is often touted as a textbook example of maneuver warfare, involved more pure attrition of the enemy than most of us care to remember.

In short, as my students regularly discover in class, the "manoeuvrist approach" advocated in NATO doctrine is neither universally applicable nor universally understood.

Mission Command

The first paragraph of *Allied Joint Doctrine for Land Operations* on the topic of mission command explains that, in contrast to "detailed command", mission command is "based on the principle of centralized planning and decentralized execution that promotes maximum freedom of action and initiative." But, just like the perceived dichotomy between maneuver and attrition, this contrast between mission command and detailed command is an extreme simplification of reality. Moreover, the fact that NATO doctrine does not provide a definition of the concept but only long and indirect descriptions is not helpful to readers' understanding.

The concept of mission command also has its origins in the success of German doctrine at the start of World War II. Subsequently, the U.S. military sought to apply this concept in the context of AirLand Battle, and it was subsequently transferred to NATO doctrine. In short, this concept has been "borrowed" twice and, in both cases, the need for doctrine to be culturally embedded was given short shrift.

Adding to the confusion, the U.S. Army decided in 2012 that its command and control warfighting function was to be renamed "mission command", which means there are now no fewer than three definitions of mission command: the warfighting function, formerly known as "command and control"; the philosophy historically derived from the German *auftragstaktik*; and finally the command and control system(s), those procedures and technological tools that facilitate the command and control of operations. When even a member of the writing team for the 2019 U.S. Army doctrine publication *Mission Command* struggles to succinctly describe what it is and what it isn't, there seems to be a problem.

Confusion in Action

Despite the best efforts of NATO doctrinal documents, the understanding and implementation of the concept of mission command still differs widely across NATO forces. So much so, in fact, that it would be better to recognize these differences rather than pursue the chimera of standardization. An example from my own experience illustrates what this confusion can look like in practice.

During one of my deployments, my company was part of a battalion made up of three nationalities that took part in an action involving participants from a total of six countries. Our battalion was put on alert in the middle of the night, and I was told to be ready with two of my platoons to move into a city on foot. I was not, however, told what the mission was. Eventually news trickled down that we were to participate as a cordon force in a time-sensitive search operation in order to avert an imminent terrorist attack. We were not given an exact location or target, and I am not even sure the battalion had that information at the time of departure.

As we moved into the city, one of my soldiers waved a passing car away from our battalion-sized force. In slapstick fashion, the driver was then identified as our target, and an entire platoon of the theater reserve rushed the car with my bewildered soldier still standing next to it.

The trouble in this case came from the interaction between units from different countries with different command approaches. My platoons were used to receiving a mission and then having the freedom to figure out how to achieve the objective. As a result, they were frustrated when they were treated in a very restrictive way and did not even receive a complete mission. Suffice it to say, had we been told the target of our operation, my soldier clearly would have done something else instead of just wave him away.

The point is not simply that mission command is always the right approach. If commanders used this approach with subordinate units used to being told what to do in minute detail, the results would be equally counterproductive and potentially more dangerous.

Conclusion

The problem with concepts like the "manoeuvrist approach" or mission command is that they are not universally applicable, nor universally understood. This leads to vague definition in NATO documents, which, in turn, creates the kind of confusion I observed.

The cultural and historical diversity of the 30 different NATO nations makes it unfeasible to do away with this conceptual confusion through standardization. Diversity is a given and, if there is any truth to Peter Drucker's quote that culture eats strategy for breakfast, I am sure that it would treat NATO doctrine as a late evening snack. Alliance members don't even approach NATO doctrine in the same way. Some, mainly smaller, NATO members treat the alliance's doctrine as capstone documents for their national doctrine, while others seem to ignore it completely when working nationally. That, in itself, guarantees that its loftier concepts will not receive the same attention everywhere.

It would be useful for NATO to accept that all its operations so far have been multinational ones, and that all the participating nations have their own backgrounds and organizational cultures. NATO doctrine should account for the impact this has on collaboration — a tactical commander who assumes that everyone will think and act like him is in for a nasty surprise. NATO can minimize these surprises by writing doctrinal documents that acknowledge and discuss these differences rather than trying to simply standardize them away.

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Why Does Canada Need an Indo-Pacific Strategy as Part of Its Foreign Policy?

By Dr. Stephen R. Nagy, / Published August 11, 2021

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From North Korea's nuclear and missile program to China's expansive claims in the South China Sea (SCS) and East China Sea (ECS), to brawls in the Himalayan plateau and threats to unify Taiwan by force, the Indo-Pacific region is home to a cauldron of geopolitical challenges and rapid transformation.

Many Canadians see the plethora of problems in the Indo-Pacific region through the NIMBY lens—*Not in My Back Yard* so it is not our problem. In reality though, what happens in the Indo-Pacific matters for Canada. This is especially the case if China is successful in creating and shaping "an ideological environment conducive to its rise and counter Western values."[1] If successful, Canada will be less secure, less prosperous, and more vulnerable to a might-is-right approach to regional and international affairs.

North Korea and Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation

Take for example nuclear and missile development in North Korea. While not targeted at Canada, the flight paths of missiles aimed at the United States fly over Canadian territory. Intercepting the intercontinental ballistic missiles or an accident over Canadian airspace could lead to collateral damage on Canadian territory. Significantly, North Korea's missiles not only target the United States, Canada's biggest and most important trading partner, but also like-minded allies like Japan.

North Korean missile and nuclear weapon development is also problematic because of the proliferation risk to both state and nonstate actors. In fact, Pyongyang has previously attempted to earn hard currency by selling nuclear technologies to Syria and Libya and possibly other nonstate actors in the Middle East.[2]

Canada has a vested interest in defending our allies in the region and preventing proliferation. Since October 2017, Canada has engaged in maritime surveillance operations as part of Operation NEON to enforce UN-mandated sanctions on North Korea.[3] Ottawa also spearheaded middle-power diplomacy, such as the January 2018 Vancouver foreign ministers' meeting on security and stability on the Korean Peninsula.[4]

South China Sea, Trade, and Sovereignty

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD),[5] an estimated 60 percent of maritime trade travels through the SCS with an estimated value of at least USD 5.3 trillion dollars.[6] Hand in hand with large volumes of trade, more than 30 percent of global maritime crude oil moves through the SCS a year.[7] Canada's trade value through the SCS was USD 21.8 billion in 2016—or 2.76 percent of all goods.[8]

The SCS is the most important sea line of communication (SLOC), serving the most dynamic economies in the world. This critical role in the regional and global economy is currently at risk, as Beijing has labeled the SCS part of China's core interests, claiming this expansive body of water as part of China's sovereign territory.[9] Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam contest Beijing's claims. Moreover, Canada, the United States, Japan, and other countries consider the SCS as international waters and subject to international law. With China's building and militarization of artificial islands in the SCS[10] and Beijing's growing track record of gray-zone operations against other claimants in the SCS,[11] the chances for an accidental escalation into a regionalized or larger-scale kinetic conflict increases day-by-day.

As Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia are all destinations for Canada agriculture products and natural resources, what happens in the SCS matters and Canada has a deeply vested interest in guaranteeing that it is governed by in a common set of rules. This determination to realize and re-enforce a rules-based order in the SCS and broader Indo-Pacific region ensures that a transparent set of rules, not power as the adjudicator or states' behavior, govern Canadian interests in the region.

The East China Sea and Taiwan on the Frontlines of Regional Revisionism

The territorial issues in the SCS should not be seen in isolation. The strait between Taiwan and China and the ECS is also part of the broader SLOC puzzle that Canada has a vested interest in solving to ensure the region's stability and security.

In the ECS, China continues to challenge Japan's sovereignty over the Senkaku islands, using lawfare and gray-zone operations. In the case of the former, the adoption of a new Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) Law allows for the use of force by constabulary units in regions Beijing considers Chinese territory.[12] This extension of China's domestic law into Japan's waters greatly complicates Tokyo's ability to respond appropriately to Chinese pressure without being seen as escalating an altercation. With China's Active Defense strategy stressing reciprocation to actions against China,[13] one could easily see how an incident in Japan's sovereign territory could escalate into a conflict that would not remain confined to Japan and China.

Article 5 of the US–Japan alliance would be triggered bringing in the United States.[14] With the United States involved, Australia and other US allies would be compelled to defend the United States and Japan, prompting a multilateral conflict. The associated cascade of negative consequences would have global economic repercussions.

China's lawfare tactics in the ECS are not confined to the new CCG Law. In 2013 China declared an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) over the region, which includes the Senkaku islands,[15] and China regularly sends merchant vessels into the waters in and around the Senkaku islands to test and tire Japan's defense forces and to delegitimize Japan's sovereignty claims by eroding Japan's administrative claims.[16]

After Russia's annexation of the Crimea peninsula by stealth, Beijing has been actively conceiving ways to achieve China's strategic objectives to dominate the first and second island chains without the use of force. Japan is at the front lines of these efforts, but it is not alone. Taiwan also faces daily pressure by the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF).[17] Fighter jets regularly circumnavigate Taiwan, first through the Miyako strait and then alongside the east coast of Taiwan to return to mainland China. The constant testing of Taiwanese defense degrades Taiwan's long-term ability to deter China from forcefully reunifying the island with China by wearing down its equipment, preventing additional training, and through identifying defense weaknesses to China's probing.

Japan and Taiwan are important trading partners for Canada. They are fellow democracies, and their success in ensuring that China does not use "a might is right" approach to reshape the region cannot be divorced from Canada's long-standing interests in international institutions, international law as the final arbiter of interactions between states, and multilateralism. When Canada, along with like-minded

countries, does not stand up to states that are provocatively reshaping regional and global institutions, it may one day face the same kind of tactics in its backyard. Consider the Canadian Arctic. Russia is already expanding its sovereignty claims in the region by planting Russian flags at the bottom of Arctic seabed.[18]

Hong Kong: The Canary in the Coal Mine?

China's implementation of the 2020 National Security Law (NSL)[19] in Hong Kong has eroded the guarantees of the 1984 Sino-British Declaration, which states the "rights and freedoms, including those of the person, of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of travel, of movement, of correspondence, of strike, of choice of occupation, of academic research and of religious belief will be ensured by law in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region."[20] Just one year after the adoption of the NSL, Hong Kong's press freedom ranking dropped from 18th to 80th,[21] its independent judiciary and rule of law is compromised,[22] and its free society is being dismantled, according to Human Rights Watch.[23]

This matters for Canada not just because more than 300,000 Canadian passport holders live and work in Hong Kong.[24] It matters for Canada and the region as it represents the abrogation of an international agreement, namely the 1984 Sino-British Declaration. Seen alongside China's rejection of the July 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration's decision dismissing all China's claims in the SCS, such behavior raises serious questions about China's commitment to international law and agreements.

Toward an Indo-Pacific Strategy in our Foreign Policy?

The contours of an Indo-Pacific strategy have already been laid out in the Canadian International Council's virtual deliberation of the kind of foreign policy Canadians want.[25] The results resonated closely with the 2021 Shared Canada-Japan Priorities Contributing to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, which focused on: (1) the rule of law; (2) peacekeeping operations, peacebuilding, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief; (3) health security and responding to COVID-19; (4) energy security; (5) free trade promotion and trade agreement implementation; and (6) environment and climate change.[26]

To get buy-in from Canadians, knowledge about the region and the impact of its developments on Canada is critical. China's efforts to transform the region and international institutions, such as the NSL in Hong Kong, the future of Taiwan, events in the ECS and SCS, and North Korea's nuclear program, are illustrative and important examples of issues and developments of which Canada needs to be mindful. Ottawa's foreign policy needs to inculcate an Indo-Pacific strategy to maximize the opportunities that exist in the region and navigate the challenges and changes that are occurring. Doing so will require an independent Canadian brand so Ottawa is not just seen as a junior partner of Washington. Absent Ottawa's own approach and priorities to the region, Canada will not be seen as an honest, independent stakeholder in the region.

(Footnotes and References available at this link to the Article.)

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Russia's 2021 National Security Strategy: Cool Change Forecasted for the Polar Regions

By Elizabeth Buchanan - 14 July 2021

RUSI -UK

The latest national security document from Moscow signals a shift in Russia's strategic priorities, with an intention to 'go it alone' in the international system. This could spell trouble for the future of the polar regions.

In its new national security strategy, Moscow acknowledges the international system has thrown up a 'new architecture' which has been 'accompanied by an increase in geopolitical instability'. This 2021 iteration unveils Russia's plans to standardize its strategic engagement in the international system based on 'mutually beneficial' cooperation. The new security strategy signals that Moscow firmly sees itself as an independent stake holder (and actor) focused on shoring up its nation al interests. While still committed to the existing international order – indeed, Russia remains a stalwart supporter of the UN Security Council and of principles of non-interference – Moscow's engagement within the system will be shaped by its newly articulated strategic independence.

Russia's 2021 national security strategy seeks to 'improve predictability in relations between states' but moves away from previous iterations which outlined how it would strengthen trust and with whom Russia would work. Dropping clear goal posts and interests in its relationships with Europe and the US from the strategic document signals the rebirth of an independent Russia. The problem is that – as the coronavirus pandemic continues to illustrate – states cannot go it alone in the global system. This becomes a stark challenge when we consider Russia's strategic interests in the Arctic and Antarctica – two zones in which international cooperation and collaboration are considered crucial. In recent years, and certainly in the past few months as Chair of the Arctic Council, Russia has touted its strength through cooperation in polar affairs.

In contrast to the 2015 strategy which framed climate change in terms of 'consequences', the 2021 version reframes it as a security threat requiring 'prevention' and 'adaptation'. There is also a clear departure from the 2015 iteration's treatment of the Arctic, with sentiments shifting from 'mutually beneficial international cooperation' to 'ensuring the interests of the Russian Federation' in the region. Evidently, six years have allowed Moscow to grow more confident in its inalienable majority stake in the Arctic zone.

It is likely this confidence, now underscored by the national security strategy, will see Russia double-down on Arctic region leadership efforts.

The 2021 framing of Russia's Arctic stake is particularly interesting. This version speaks of 'ensuring' Russia's interests related to 'the development' of the Arctic. Previous iterations viewed the Russian Arctic as a frontier to be managed, a sovereignty challenge on the horizon. Today, the economic potential and Moscow's efforts to securitize the resource base of the Russian Arctic zone are paramount. Evidently, geoeconomics is the new strategic language of the Kremlin, with the 2021 strategy also unveiling new interest in the 'development' of 'outer space, the world ocean' and Antarctica. These global commons – particularly space and Antarctica – had not featured in previous national security strategies in development contexts. Indeed, this is the first ever mention of Antarctica in a Putin-era Russian national security strategy. The fact that Russia's revised Antarctic strategy was approved by Putin in late 2020, and has yet to be made public, is also a somewhat ominous marker for Antarctic futures. Indeed, the recent Antarctic development plan signals heavy investments in Russian Antarctic capabilities and planned presence on the unclaimed continent.

People as Putin's Priority

The 2015 strategy prioritised defence and security concerns when it came to the question of Russian national interests. Back then, fortress Russia had only just marked 12 months of war in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, and Moscow was looking over its shoulder for a Western response which arguably never came. The revised strategy has taken some comfort in the past six years of Russia's position vis-à-vis the West – a period of chilled relations in which every passing year manages to find yet another 'new' low in tensions. Having adequately tested Western resolve to fight for Ukraine, it would seem Moscow is exploiting the public relations opportunity it now has to sell Russia's perceived victory in external security affairs to the masses. Here, the narrative put forward by the security strategy appears to be one in which Russia's frontiers have been bolstered, and this in turn has afforded the Kremlin latitude to now look after its citizens.

When it comes to national strategic priorities, Russia now cites the 'quality of life' and 'wellbeing of Russian nationals' as the top national interest. Indeed, Moscow's success in delivering on Arctic region development goals will rely upon Russia's ability to improve living standards in the High North.

Attracting the intensive work force required for energy projects and the development of the Russian Arctic will remain a priority and ultimately the prerequisite to realizing ambitious economic goals in the Arctic (including shipping 80 million tons of goods via the Northern Sea Route). Often intertwined in the Arctic, Russia's security, defence and economic interests are strategic priori ties *after* its social, demographic, and human security interests. The revival of the Russian nation state and a focus on its historical identity further indicate an interesting departure from previous security strategies. This disconnect may however pose serious problems for realizing national development goals – equally demographic, economic and military in nature – in the Arctic zone.

In reorientating human security to the prime position among Russia's strategic priorities, Moscow is also throwing down the gauntlet of a new culture war. The 2021 iteration of Russia's national security strategy clearly facilitates the securitization of Russian culture – a 'manifesto for cultural conservatism', if you will. In doing so, Russia clearly crafts its identity as an independent pole in the international system. References to 'Westernization' and the unscrupulous principles and immorality of Western culture throughout the 2021 strategy serve to ultimately carve new divisions between Russia and the rest. The strategy underscores the threat posed by the West to Russia's 'cultural sovereignty' – namely attempts to 'falsify Russian and world history' – and in doing so highlights the potential for Moscow to turn further inwards on itself. Of course, this injection of 'spiritual and moral values' into Russia's national security strategy is not a new phenomenon. The 2015 iteration also under scored the threat posed to national security in the sphere of culture by the 'erosion' of traditional Russian values.

The 2015 iteration underscored the significance of crafting strategic partnerships. Specifically, strategic partnerships with other states were to be built around concepts of respect and *equality.* The re vised strategy has done away with 'equality' and now frames international engagement in terms of 'mutually beneficial' cooperation. This is a shift to wards transactional statecraft from the Kremlin, a clear signal that Russia rejects 'bloc-thinking' and ideological alliances.

Connotations of an emerging Sino-Russian alliance have gained popularity since the last iteration of Russia's national security strategy. However, the 2021 strategy throws cold water on suggestions of an alliance. The new strategy simply states Russia's interest in 'developing a comprehensive partnership' based on 'strategic interaction' with China – whereas in 2015, Russia outlined plans for an 'all-embracing' partnership due to Beijing's key role in the 'maintenance of global and regional stability'. It would seem that in six years Moscow has figured out that 'little brother to China' is not a role it wishes to play.

As with China, India is again elevated to direct reference level in Russia's security strategy. While in 2015 Russia simply assigned the 'privileged strategic partnership' with India an 'important role', the 2021 iteration sees the relationship unlock the status of a 'particularly' privileged strategic partnership. Russia plans to be an independent actor in a multipolar system, constrained by no external force and not acting at the whim of alliances and bloc thinking. The problem for the West, of course, is that Russia will not fit 'neatly' into a box nor be any easier to compartmentalize in the international arena. Crafting a strategy to engage with such an ac tor will potentially become an even more challenging task.

Missing: The 'Reset' Window

This is a confident – somewhere between Galeotti's 'paranoid'' and Trenin's 'remarkable' – document that spells troubled waters ahead for the West in navigating its relationship with Moscow. While the revised strategy does fall short of saber rattling, this iteration is void of the 2015 strategy's 'olive branch' sentiments, in which Moscow sought to work with others to build a mutually beneficial international system. Indeed, with regards to the geopolitical landscape of the 'modern world', in 2015 Russia had its sights set on a 'shaping role' in the emerging 'polycentric order'. In 2021, this order may have well and truly arrived, but Moscow no longer intends to shape the system, instead planning to carry out a strengthening role as an 'influential centre'.

The 2021 strategy is bad news for Washington. The 2015 iteration underlined Russia's interest in 'establishing a fully-fledged partnership with the United States, based on coincident interests.' Russia also once signaled an interest in working with the US on arms control treaties, confidence building mechanisms and fighting global terrorism. Fast forward to 2021, and 'important areas of this partnership' between Russia and the US have been scrapped from the strategy. The only references to Russia's relationship with Washington are a throw away line or two jabbing at the US for 'abandoning international arms control commitments' and up ping its global missile defence capabilities. The 2021 version also introduces plans to undertake a marked effort to 'reduce the use of the US dollar in foreign economic activity'.

Furthermore, in the 2015 strategy, Russia as signed a lengthy paragraph to its relationship with NATO and the latter's unacceptable 'increased military activity', as well as the approach of its 'military infrastructure toward Russia's borders'. The 2015 strategy also included reference to Moscow's interest in working on 'the development of relations with NATO'. The 2021 iteration does repeat the denouncement of NATO kit near Russian borders, but no longer includes interest in dialogue with Brussels. Europe is also a casualty of the revised strategy. While the 2015 version advocated 'mutually beneficial cooperation' with European states and the EU, and 'the harmonization of integration processes' on post-Soviet territory, the re vised strategy makes no effort to substantiate plans for Russia's relationship with Europe. Aspirations of the past were not realized, so

Moscow's strategy now is to wait for Europe to come knocking. It would appear the Germans and the French are leading the pack in this respect.

The key takeaway of this new national security strategy is that it is no simple 'update'. It is a considered 'offramp' Russia has taken to go it alone in the international environment. This spells trouble for the polar zones – which rely on the collaborative and cohesive policies which have shaped the regions since the Cold War and kept them free of conflict.

Russia has now cemented its intention for the next five years to 'go it alone' (unless it sees mutual benefit in collaborating). In practice, however, this raises a concerning point. The specific spheres of Russia's 2021 national interest – space, the Arctic and Antarctica – are zones in which international collaboration is *expected,* if not required. In this new national security strategy, Russia promotes international law and underscores throughout the document the primacy of the UN system in place, so an interesting test will no doubt become whether Moscow plays by the rules in the global commons. A clear takeaway from the document is there will be no normalisation or reset, let alone integration between Russia and the West (or East – an uncomfortable truth for Beijing) in the coming years. At best, we should expect continued competition, with managed frontiers of confrontation and selective cooperation from Moscow.

Of course, we now await the updated Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation to get a clearer sense of the policies through which Moscow will navigate strategic competition 'alone'

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Navy's Top Admiral Defends Ship Cuts in Proposed 2022 Budget, Explains Strategy

(June 28, 2021) – Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Mike Gilday visits with Sailors during a trip to Naval Station Newport, Rhode Island. (U.S. Navy photo by Cmdr. Nate Christensen/Released)

Caitlin Doornbos, Stars and Stripes

Adm. Mike Gilday on Tuesday said there is no plan in the works to reach a 355- ship Navy, but the fleet of the future will be more capable — and lethal — as a result of the service's investment strategy.

Speaking at a virtual Sea-Air-Space event, Gilday defended the service's proposed ship cuts in 2022 while arguing the service should focus on quality — not quantity. "We do have an investment strategy that incrementally gets us to a more capable or a more lethal fleet, but not necessarily a bigger fleet, unless we saw a rise in the top line [of the 2022 budget]," said Gilday, the chief of naval operations.

In the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act, which sets defense priorities and funding for the Pentagon each year, Congress called for the Navy to reach a 355-ship fleet as soon as possible. But the service has taken few steps to begin that process. "I still think that 355 is a good target, but the reality is that we can't really afford to have a Navy bigger than one that we can sustain," Gilday said. "Based on our current budget, I believe the analysis shows that we can afford a fleet of about 300 ships."

The Navy's proposed 2022 budget would cut 12 ships — four littoral combat ships, seven guided-missile cruisers and an amphibious transport dock ship — next year and build just eight. The Navy now has about 296 ships. Gilday said the "most controversial" decision was cutting the cruisers, though doing so would save about $5 billion in the next 5 years.

He also said cutting the aging cruisers is important to the service's reliability, as new issues such as the ships' analog radar systems are "approaching obsolescence" as missiles soar at speeds that evade detection. "They have difficulty actually seeing the threat based on the speed," Gilday said. Another issue is the unpredictability of the aging parts aboard the three-decade-old cruisers, the admiral said, referencing a recent incident when the Navy attempted to deploy a ship "and had to bring it back twice because of because of fuel-tank cracks."

"It does have an impact on reliability, and we need to be able to provide the secretary of defense and the president reliable assets out there that they can count on to do the nation's business," Gilday said.

But he said he has hope for the Navy's near future. Within the next five years, the service should have more Virginia-class submarines and be "on the cusp of delivering" the first Constellation-class frigate and new Flight III guided-missile destroyers. The Navy is also focusing on weapons development, Gilday said, working on hypersonic missiles that fly five times the speed of sound and "investing in a longer-range weapon, the maritime strike Tomahawk, which gives us range and speed to reach out and touch an adversary."

"By 2025, we believe if we stay on path that we'll be delivering the Zumwalt class destroyers with a hypersonic missile capability," Gilday said. "In the air, half of our air wings will have a fourth- and fifth generation [fighter jet] mix, which analysis has shown to be quite effective against our adversaries."

But while the Navy works to make the most of its nearly $163.9 billion budget, Gilday warned if the service is not allotted more money in the future, it could have consequences for national security. "It's going to be a challenge if our top line stays the same or if it decreases," he said. "If it decreases, I think that we're likely going to see a declining fleet in terms of capacity."

Interesting Articles

(Ctrl – click to follow link)

A Not So Frozen 2035: The Future of NATO in the European Arctic

This paper aims to examine the possible future of the Arctic in the next fifteen years and its implications for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Arctic Council, and Arctic States. Through a pre-mortem foresight examination, this paper envisions an Arctic in 2035 where economic activity is soaring, state and corporate interests have merged, and arenas of multilateral cooperation are deadlocked. Informed by an analysis of the Arctic strategies and interests of Russia and NATO, and of the Arctic Council's governance, this work identifies tools that different actors can leverage in order to respond to ongoing developments that will transform the Arctic into a highly militarized region within a few years. The considerations and tools outlined in this paper are intended to prevent systems of collective defence from remaining on the sideline of these changes. This paper argues that NATO, Arctic States, and the Arctic Council should adopt a more proactive stance in addressing the multitude of security concerns threatening the stability of the High North without alienating actors with seemingly competing interests. The Arctic can remain a zone for peace and cooperation if the stakeholders adopt a strategic mindset and posture supplemented with heightened dialogue and governance efforts.

NORAD Renewal: Strategic Shifts, Technological progress, and Political Constraints (PDF)

This briefing note will explore what the changing Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD) challenge and the allied response to that change means for Canada, strategically (e.g. in terms of implications for deterrence), operationally (e.g. in terms of NORAD and domestic defence requirements), and in terms of public support (e.g. for ballistic missile defence, the CAF role in defence of critical infrastructure, etc.).

Learning Afghanistan's Lessons

Afghanistan is swiftly returning to the Middle Ages. It has done so many times before. King Amanullah allowed women to remove their veils in the 1920s, a crime for which he was forced into exile in Italy while his country was plunged by Habibullah Kalakani into barbarism. With the last American soldier now slated to leave Afghanistan by the end of August, the Taliban are already re-instituting their Saudi-style rules.

China Expanding its Nuclear Capabilities, scientists say

China is expanding its capacity to store and launch nuclear missiles, US scientists say.