

NATO STABILITY POLICING CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE



STABILITY POLICING

Written by
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Edited by
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PAST PRESENT FUTURE

STABILITY POLICING FUTURE







NATO Stability Policing

Beneficial tool in filling the security gap
and establishing the rule of law, and a safe and secure environment

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TABLE OF CONTENT

Foreword..... 7
by Lieutenant General David Julazadeh, USAF,
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NATO Allied Command Transformation

Preface 9
by Prof. Dr. Monica den Boer, Netherlands Defence Academy,
Professor of Police Studies at Leiden University, the Netherlands

Acknowledgements..... 13
by Dr. Joanna Siekiera, Editor of the Book, War Studies University, Poland
and Lieutenant Colonel Marti Grashof, Royal Marechaussee,
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Short overview of Stability Policing’s past and present,
filtered through a lessons learned lens: 17
by Colonel Dorin Luta, Romanian Jandarmeria, Lessons Learned Branch Head,
NATO SP CoE

Scenarios:

Chapter 1: Introduction 29

Chapter 2: Executive Summary 33

Chapter 3: The Future World 36

Chapter 4: Variable Future World I: Evolution..... 45

Chapter 5: Evolutionary Struggle 54

Chapter 6: Variable Future World II: A World of Change and Possibility 103

Chapter 7: What Wild Futures..... 113
by Mr. Luke Shabro, Writer and Futurist, U.S. Navy Veteran

References 177

Acronyms list 180

Authors



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Lieutenant General David Julazadeh, USAF

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Foreword

The trilogy on Stability Policing (SP) culminates with this book, aptly titled “Stability Policing in the Future.” The preceding volumes provided unprecedented insights into the past and present of this distinctive military tool imbued with police capabilities and employed by the Alliance across various domains, operational theaters, and forms of armed conflict. This final installment boldly ventures into forthcoming scenarios of both stability and instability in a not-so-distant future, showcasing SP as an indispensable instrument wielded by military commanders due to its exceptional attributes.

As a political-military alliance tasked with safeguarding peace, security and stability among its Member-States, NATO faces increasingly complex and diverse threats to our societies. The author of the envisioned future scenarios, Luke Shabro, a U.S. Navy veteran, writer, and futurist, skillfully constructs the world of 2035, seamlessly integrating emerging and disruptive technologies into the day-to-day duties of the fictional character, French Gendarmerie Colonel Isabelle Amélie Moreau-Girard. Through her challenges, Colonel Moreau-Girard navigates with enhanced support and unity, unfolding a compelling narrative.

Throughout my career, I have participated in many coalition operations and witnessed the pivotal role played by Gendarmerie-Type Forces (GFF). Consequently, I assert that NATO must adopt a more comprehensive “blue lens” approach in our military endeavours, particularly as the nature of warfare evolves, states and countries become increasingly interdependent,

and non-state actors, akin to authoritarian regimes, attack our cherished values of democracy, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights.

I firmly believe this book, along with the entire SP trilogy, will prove invaluable to numerous stakeholders within NATO headquarters, military training facilities, centres of excellence, military and police academies, and civilian research institutions and university departments. By delving into the unique characteristics of Stability Policing and its versatile application in both current and future conflicts, this trilogy contributes significantly to NATO doctrine. Its efficacy has been demonstrated in missions and conflicts, as evidenced by the authors of these three volumes, shared with a broad audience within the NATO family and beyond.

May the attentive perusal of this trilogy aid us in preparing for the challenges that lie ahead, empowering us to deploy all available tools, including Stability Policing, to safeguard the fundamental principles of freedom and democracy that unite us all.

Lieutenant General David Julazadeh



Prof. Dr. Monica den Boer

Netherlands Defence Academy,

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Preface

Over the past decade we have witnessed a dramatic evolution of the global security environment, which may have a deep and lasting impact on the way stability policing is developed and implemented. In this trilogy, the provision of stability policing has been brought to the fore as a bridging factor in the closure of imminent security gaps, often emerging in the turbulent aftermath of war and serious conflict. The critical moment for stability policing operations presents itself in the golden hour of a conflict, requiring immediate, concerted and harmonious effort of the international community to restore order from chaos. In the development of stability policing within the context of NATO, several steps have been made to codify, standardize and implement stability policing, particularly in the Allied Joint Doctrine AJP 3.22.

The capacity as well as capability to provide stability policing can be generated by different security actors, in particular gendarmerie-type organizations, military police as. The military structure of gendarmerie-type organizations facilitates the integration and interoperability with the military in delivering joint duties. The relevant security actors may be requested to perform their duties in highly challenging circumstances, such as high-level violence environments where improvised explosive devices may frequently be used. Moreover, stability policing is often performed in the context of “plural policing”, with a high number of national and international actors on the scene, from the public as well as the private sphere. Actors who perform stability policing may thus be required to perform their duties whilst being exposed to chaotic situations, as already happened in the past in South-Sudan, Kosovo, Iraq,

Timor-Leste and Afghanistan. Stability policing actors have to show an availability to their military chain of command, and need to shift gears, demonstrate adaptability as well as flexible responses. Hence, if there is one aspect that will be maintained in the future: stability policing is performed for people by people, with empathy and compassion, as well as with highly specialist (but scarce!) capabilities. The combination of heart and head, drill and communicative skills, creativity and innovation, stress-resistance and military competences makes sheer human professional power indispensable.

This reflection brings us to a few dilemmas for future stability policing:

- The need for capacity may soon outgrow the need for security provision. While the number of inter-state wars has been declining, despite the Russian invasion of Ukraine, numerous conflicts around the world are of a semi-perpetual nature and demand a long-term engagement of the international community. Are security actors around the world capable of dispensing personnel for a longer period of time whilst the demands at home are growing in terms of complexity, intensity and frequency?
- The threshold for the type of security threats addressed in stability policing operations may widen, demanding more specialist effort. Policing the grey zone may affect both military policing as well as stability policing, dealing with newly arising issues, such as the crime-terror nexus, cyber-related security issues, complex crises and disasters, as well as multi-domain issues. Is stability policing sufficiently prioritized to the extent that resources for training, education and professionalization are made available over a sustained period of time?
- Given the vast number of different stability policing functions, there is a need to reflect on whether it is realistic to assume that cohesion of thought can be fully established on intelligence, patrolling, surveillance, crowd and riot control, restoring order, temporarily replacing the local police forces, airport management, counter-insurgency, civil-military cooperation, reconstruction, security sector reform, rescue operations, extraction operations, capacity-building, investigating war crimes gender advisership, equipping and assisting local law enforcement police forces, establishing infrastructures for police recruitment, training and equipment? What is the overlap with the wide number of different functions of military policing and what pathways present themselves for the future development of these functions within the NATO-member states?
- Whose security gap is it that is to be closed? How can the needs and expectations of local communities be adequately addressed, given the

likelihood of trauma, the different languages, cultures and support? How can the international community avoid that the responsibility to protect becomes an intervention which is imposed from the top?

- What is the moral compass that guides us in stability policing? An acute case in this context might be presented by Kenyan police forces, that have at home been perceived as repressive and primarily acting in the interest of the state, but expected to act as a preventive force acting in the interest of the local community? Further international analysis may be required to reflect on the need for “good” and ethical stability policing, which means thorough attention for corruption, misconduct and weak accountability mechanisms.
- Critical questions that have been raised in this trilogy include whether stability policing operations have acquired the desired effect. In other words, have security gaps definitely been closed? In order to learn from previous experiences and applying these lessons in the future, there is a need for more systematic academic research that imposes a long-term monitoring on intentions, operations and outcomes of stability policing operations, even if they are performed in very different circumstances.
- In this final book within the trilogy, fundamental questions are raised about what the future holds on stability policing. First, there is an urgent need to stimulate an integrated assessment of the type of threats in the “grey zone” between war and conflict, and between peace and stability. This volume aptly addresses threats evolving from climate change, technological disruption, conflicts over resources, criminal organizations and non-state armed actors which will affect the threat environment in which stability policing missions will be staged. Second, in the assumption that the providers of stability policing will increasingly gain a wide skill set, the proof of the eating will be in the pudding. In other words, stability policing will have to be subjected to continuous monitoring and evaluation, in order to introduce improvements for next generation missions. Moreover, stability policing will be far more than delivering, and will have to include smart anticipation, high-level security leadership, diplomatic assets, new technologies, and strategic understanding.

This trilogy is a must-read for all security actors who engage in stability policing. The three volumes can either be read separately or in succession. It represents a major step in the further codification of stability policing as an indispensable doctrine within policing and security studies. The concessive essays are highly informative and can easily be devoured by

a wide audience of policing students, practitioners, security specialists as well as journalists and politicians who want to enrich their knowledge in this area. The books in this trilogy represent a wealth of collective wisdom, which supersedes the provision of information about state-of-the-art stability policing, but which demystifies, unravels and definitely shapes and sharpens the agenda on future challenges for stability policing in regard of the re-establishment of the Rule of Law. On that note, the future of stability policing is now.

Prof. Monica den Boer



Dr. Joanna Siekiera, Editor of the Book

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Acknowledgements

In mid-2021, we approached a defining momentum of the lack of comprehension of what Stability Policing is and how it can be deployed by our Alliance Member States. We posed a startling scenario: in the case of a conflict – a conflict in Europe or its territories – would NATO, as an intergovernmental organization itself, as well as all its Members use the beneficial, yet not well-known tool of Stability Policing?

We concluded that we could not answer those questions on our own, but that they had so much both practical importance and intellectual interest that they warranted publishing three books on Stability Policing: Past, Present, and Future – the latter you are now carrying in your hands. We invited gendarmes, soldiers, sailors, marines, aviators, currently on duty and veterans, humanitarian advisors, consultants, politicians, scholars, from various nationalities, organizations, training and educational background,

academic and practical expertise, and approach to the usage of SP. Those women and men had one denominator in common – they all believe that winning a war does not end a conflict, while providing human security and empowering the Rule of Law combined with local law enforcement agencies is the key in building strong, safe, and prosperous communities. To accomplish this ambitious, yet life-depending task, SP is essential.

Many came to our aid in preparing this trilogy. First and foremost, among them are the hundreds of people that we have had the pleasure to meet and learn from over these 3 years of working on the project, most of whom we hope will appreciate our intentions and help us to spread the analysis provided in the SP Books. We would like to thank our brilliant contributors – representing 12 different countries – who told us their stories, which we could then deliver to the readers across the whole spectrum of military and civilian decision-making, military and police academies, universities, think-tanks, analytical institutes, and beyond. We enjoyed every moment working with them. This work could not have been accomplished without our liaison contacts all over the world, within the NATO family and like-minded partners, like the United Nations. Administrative, financial and logistics coordinators must be enlisted here, as just like at war, they are neglected, yet their vital role decides who wins or loses.

A big thanks to those colleagues at the Stability Policing Centre of Excellence who helped realize this trilogy, and a special thanks to Edoardo Bortoli. Without his creative design skills, the books would not have been completed.

We hope this trilogy of SP Book will educate future generations.

Vicenza, September 2024

Dr. Joanna Siekiera & Lt. Col. Marti Grashof

BIO:

Doctor Joanna Siekiera is an Assistant Professor of International Humanitarian Law of Armed Conflict at the Faculty of Law and Administration, War Studies University in Warsaw, Poland and a Fellow at the U.S. Marine Corps University in Quantico. She supports various military institutions, primarily NATO, as a legal advisor, consultant, course facilitator and book editor. Dr. Siekiera has been cooperating with the NATO

Stability Policing Center of Excellence since 2021. She did her postdoctoral research at the Faculty of Law, University of Bergen, Norway, and Ph.D. studies at the Faculty of Law, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Dr. Siekiera is an author of many scientific publications in several languages, legal opinions, and international monographs on international law, international relations, and security. Her areas of expertise are the law of armed conflict (lawfare, legal culture in armed conflict, NATO legal framework) and the Indo-Pacific region, Pacific law, maritime security.

Lieutenant Colonel Marti Grashof is an officer at the Royal Marechaussee in the Netherlands. Over the course of his service, he assumed several positions in command and staff positions at operational, tactical, and strategic level. Lt Col. Grashof served twice in Afghanistan (2006 and 2010) and one tour in Kosovo from 2015 to 2016. From 2017 until 2020 he worked within the NLD national police as head of the NLD Police and Marechaussee attachés at NLD embassies. He is an experienced military and police officer, his subject matter expertise lies in the field of border control, public order management and (stability) policing. From 2020 Lt Col. Grashof holds the position of Chief of Staff at the NATO Stability Policing Centre of Excellence.



Colonel Dorin Luta

Romanian Jandarmeria Lessons Learned Branch Head NATO Stability Policing Centre of Excellence¹

Short overview of Stability Policing's past and present, filtered through a *lessons learned* lens

Introduction

The aim of this essay is to open the third (and last) book of the “Stability Policing Potential” trilogy, by offering the reader an appropriate summary of the stories portrayed in the previous two books, focused on the evolution of Stability Policing.

By no means I intend to create a shortcut to by-pass the content of the first two books, which I fully recommend reading. I will try more to highlight the circumstances or the events that were pivotal for the establishment and evolution of Stability Policing and, by using specific analysis and lessons learned techniques, to explain their root causes.

After being assigned to the NATO Stability Policing Centre of Excellence, I discovered the world of lessons learned and I started to look at the things around me from this new perspective. NATO considers itself a learning organisation, which developed a dedicated policy on lessons learned and put in place a system to increase the efficiency of its actions through this process.

¹ The views and opinions expressed in this essay are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the NATO Stability Policing Centre of Excellence or represent the NATO Stability Policing Centre of Excellence in any way.

The term lessons learned (LL) is based on the principle of learning from past experiences to achieve future improvements. Typically, LL can reduce the risk of repeating mistakes (negative to positive effect – turning a minus into a plus, which is also the most commonly used) and increase the chance that successes are repeated (positive to positive effect – turning a random plus into a permanent plus). LL derives from any activity and will be effective only with a proper mindset of sharing from experience and proper leadership to embrace it.

Stability Policing in the past

The first book illustrates the past of stability policing, starting with the 19th century up to the present times. It is composed of 13 essays, capturing the personal experiences of the authors about what they lived and felt during their missions.

From my point of view, the 13 essays could be divided into 2 main categories: on one side is the paper of Dr. Michiel J. de Weger on the historical perspective – which should be seen as an independent part, while the other 12 essays could be unified around the term “modern stability policing” – touching more recent times (roughly the last 30 years).

Inside this book, the authors speak about situations that happened in all corners of the world: Germany (after the Second World War), Kosovo (3 stories), Afghanistan (2 stories), Iraq (2 stories), Mali, South Sudan, East Timor, Saint Martin / Sint Maarten, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Liberia. After reading all of them, I captured some initial observations (in lessons learned everything starts with an observation!) on stability policing, that I will share with you below.

Even from the introduction, General Sir James Rupert Everard (ret) concluded very briefly that stability policing “is about how best to fill the security gap in ungoverned, under-governed and ungovernable parts of the world”.

Dr. Michiel J. de Weger stated in his essay on stability policing from a historical perspective that when performing this mission, the actors should be “prepared to fill a security gap or cover a part of the security threats spectre between war and full law obedience”. Furthermore, “successful stability policing requires having the right specialised (wo)men, in sufficient numbers, at the time and place they are needed”.

Brigadier General Paolo Pelosi (ret), while speaking on his experience as a police actor in military operations in Afghanistan and Kosovo, drew the following conclusion: stability policing's "essence is precisely to connect and transition between military and civilian action".

When sharing his experience from Kosovo, Lieutenant Israel Lázaro considered that "during the planning of any military operation of this nature, authorities in charge need to bear in mind the need of integrating police units within the military forces so to facilitate a future development when it comes the proper time for the transition from the military to the civilian control".

Senior Warrant-Officer José A. Lorenzo, referring to the International Policing in Timor-Leste, highlighted that "without the presence of the international policing capability..., the country would have been in a complete state of lawlessness [...], breeding ground for organised crime, serious personal and property crimes, and would have left exposed those most vulnerable to risk".

Lieutenant Colonel João Duque Martinho pointed out that during a stability policing operation, "a gendarmerie-type force has the added value of being able to naturally embed itself into a conventional military force, enhancing the interoperability with military capacities and making use of the common doctrinal background. Concurrently, it has the capacity to develop police work in destabilised environments where the military forces are operating".

A very interesting story was shared by PhD Candidate Welmoet Wels, about security responses to the Protection of Civilians at the outbreak of civil war in South Sudan. She just ended with this sentence "A Stability Policing team would have made a discernible positive difference". To understand better, she emphasized that "a Stability Policing unit, with an executive mandate and the expertise to take over the police function in the absence of the local police could have been instrumental in creating and maintaining public order in the compound. Bridging between the military realm of security and the need for civilian policing functions, a Stability Policing unit would have contributed to safety and stability, giving confidence to the women, men and families seeking shelter within our compound".

When recalling his experience from Iraq, Lieutenant Colonel Kurtis Kjobech concluded that "The end state for every military action is the eventual transition from military back to civil authorities and local security. No society can exist indefinitely under martial law."

Chief Warrant Officer Stefano Bergonzini spoke about how evaluation and training activities were carried out by the United Nations (UN) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Liberia. To be honest, reading this story revealed to me how big is the difference between what the international community expects from an international mission and the reality on the ground. I understood this just by looking at the picture of the policeman wearing his crowd and riot control protection helmet backwards (please read the essay for more details!).

Returning to Kosovo, Colonel Philippe Cholous (ret) referred to the specific contribution of the Gendarmerie-Type Forces, which successfully paved the way for the European Union Mission EULEX. He considers that “the stabilization of a situation of conflict or violence in a theatre, and consequently the stability policy implemented by a military force in operation, is one of the imperative conditions for the success of a peacekeeping operation and the sine qua non of a real way out of a crisis”.

Returning to Afghanistan, Lieutenant Rafael Obrero Madueño focused his story on training efforts for the Afghan Police Units. Without being a repetition of what was already illustrated above, he also pointed out that “after the military operation, it was essential to deploy a stability police force to ensure that the population could return to normal life”. While speaking of his institution, the Spanish Guardia Civil, he proudly stated that “we integrate into the military force with total naturalness due to our military nature, our ranks, and our uniforms, but with the added bonus that our work consists of solving police problems, which requires us to be very flexible and empathetic with the citizen”.

Captain Menno Bakker explained his experience while performing stability policing in the Island of Saint Martin / Sint Maarten, after the impact of a class 5 hurricane in 2017. This is a totally new perspective, when a country is facing a crisis caused not by a conflict, but by a natural disaster. But it is the same crisis that generates the requirement for stability policing. People that once shared the same living space were now competing for survival, they are not enemies. Handling this security gap requires special skills, softer than pure military ones but more powerful than regular police patrolling.

Lieutenant Colonel Christophe Nied emphasized his personal experience of working as senior adviser for the European Union non-military mission in Mali. He presented the added value of stability policing as the “only way to capitalize on the results of military operations, to guarantee the

stabilization of a State in all its sovereign functions, to give the populations, who are suffering directly from all the damage caused by their adversaries, peace, access to basic social services, economic development and therefore a future in their own country”.

Last but not the least, Captain Emre Oğur introduced another perspective of the use of stability policing in a crisis situation, namely during the last days of the NATO mission in Afghanistan. He identified the high security risk caused by the “influx of people attempting to seize the opportunity to enter the [Kabul airport] base”, which could be mitigated only with effective public order management skills. He considered that comparing *“the mindsets of police and military forces, it is easy to see that police officers are more experienced in dealing with situations that require interaction with the public”*.

Putting together these initial observations, I propose the following conclusions (another key element of the lessons learned process) that might have significant implications on both the modern state (Book II) and the future of stability policing (Book III):

- Transition to Civilian Policing is essential: the end goal of military operations should be the transition back to civil authorities and local security forces. This transition is critical for the long-term stability and governance of a society.
- Building Local Capacity: there is a significant emphasis on developing host nation security force capacity to meet challenges from hostile forces. This includes not only military capabilities but also law enforcement to address hybrid threats from adversaries.
- Challenges in stability policing: stability policing operations, as highlighted by NATO member states’ experiences, require specialized forces that can fill security gaps and address a spectrum of threats. Success in these operations demands specialized personnel in sufficient numbers who are deployed timely and effectively.
- Integration of military and civilian efforts: there is an imperative need to integrate police units with military forces during operations to facilitate a smoother transition to civilian control.
- International policing capabilities: the presence of international policing capabilities from the outset of missions is crucial to prevent lawlessness and address serious crimes, thereby protecting vulnerable populations and supporting the restoration of order.
- Training and interoperability: the training of forces and interoperability among military, police, and gendarmerie units is essential for effective

stability policing. This includes preparing regular military units for policing roles to ensure a comprehensive security approach.

- The role of Gendarmerie-Type Forces (GTF): they are particularly effective in stability policing roles due to their dual military and police capabilities. They can operate in both combat and civilian policing contexts, making them versatile assets in stabilizing environments.
- Challenges of the “security gap”: the concept of the “security gap” - the inadequacy of local law enforcement forces to fulfil their primary duties - is a recurring theme. Addressing this gap through stability policing is critical for maintaining public order and upholding the rule of law in post-conflict regions.
- Lessons from specific missions: experiences from Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other regions underscore the complexities of stability policing and the varied approaches needed to address local conditions and threats effectively.
- Importance of doctrine and training: the need for thoughtfully developed and standardized doctrine and training programs that can guide future stability policing operations is evident. NATO and its member states must ensure forces are well-prepared for the unique challenges of stability policing.

Stability Policing in the present

The second book in this trilogy explored what Stability Policing looks like in the modern world and what implications that has for stability policing forces in today’s highly challenging and dynamic security environment. It is composed of 9 essays and is based on the personal experiences of the authors related to Afghanistan, Kosovo, Poland, Ukraine, South Sudan, but also to new concepts like grey zones, hybrid threats, cyber space and multi-domain operations.

Book two is opened by Captain Marco Codispoti, who speaks about Afghanistan and the failure to establish a police primacy in this country after the long-lasting international efforts of the last two decades. He pointed out that this was triggered by the decision of the International Community to adopt the lead nation system instead of a more comprehensive approach. To explain this, he referred to a SIGAR² conclusion saying that “the lack of an expeditionary police assistance capability, resourced with sufficient numbers of qualified and trained police assistance experts, represented

2 Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

the main obstacle to create an effective police force in Afghanistan". On the other hand, "with the adoption of a comprehensive approach, that would have required financial commitment and careful planning from the early stages of military operations, it might have been essential for the Alliance to rely on military instrument with police capabilities to be deployed since the beginning of stabilization and reconstruction missions in unstable countries suffering from high levels of violence".

By going through the essay of Ms. Hosna Jalil, Former Deputy Minister of Interior Affairs in Afghanistan, we can understand better the circumstances that led to the fall of Afghanistan in summer of 2021. One important factor was the police approach (as shown also by Marco Codispoti), focused more to fight terrorists than to protect the Afghans. She mentions that *"law enforcement units underwent militarization to enhance the ground presence for counter-terrorism missions, inadvertently neglecting the importance of civilian policing. [...] state-driven counter-terror efforts, with their repercussions on human rights, including civilian casualties, coupled with constrained counter-crime capabilities, posed challenges to the state's capacity in safeguarding its citizens"*.

A similar conclusion, but from a different perspective, was presented by former MSU³ Commander Ruggiero Capodivento, who spoke about his mission in Kosovo under NATO aegis. By reading his conclusion *"we know very well what people expect from us. They want us out there, to reassure them, comfort them and to show them that, against all difficulties, they can still count on us"* is enough to realize that understanding local customs, societal structures, and the specific needs of the society (the so-called *community policing*) is essential for the success of any stability policing mission.

Analyst Steve McNally brought into discussion the added value of stability policing for the Intelligence community. While going back to the causes of the 9/11 terrorist attack⁴, he pointed out that even if "terrorist groups posing a military threat were also being funded by criminal activities, the criminal activities themselves first and foremost fall under the purview of law enforcement authorities". Moving to the present, he described how a successful arrest operation (conducted by police forces, but not shared with relevant national authorities) of members of a Russian-backed network

3 Multinational Specialized Unit

4 The September 11 attacks, commonly known as 9/11 are four coordinated suicide terrorist attacks carried out by Al-Qaeda, a pan-Islamist terrorist organization, against the United States on September 11, 2001 – editor's note.

performing surveillance and planning acts of sabotage against military assets went unnoticed by military analysts for more than 5 months, thus creating a risk of similar threats to occur in other places. He righteously considered that “there was clearly a natural fit for the capabilities and experience of stability policing experts and practitioners working alongside the military, actualising, or operationalising cooperation between the military and civilian intelligence organisations on the one hand, and law enforcement on the other”.

Captain Ankie Petersen, while also recalling her memories from Afghanistan, underlined the importance of culture and cultural heritage, as factors that can affect not only personal safety and the security situation of military forces but also the success of a mission in general. She reflects that “from the vandalization of statues and monuments in areas of ethnic tension and conflict to the looting and illegal trade of cultural artefacts, culture has become not only a victim of war but a political tool that needs to be understood in order for Armed Forces to be able to operate in complex conflict environments” and concludes that “Stability Policing, as a community-focused military practice, can be a good and versatile tool to prevent or deescalate tensions in conflict-affected societies”.

Colonel Nathan M. Colvin introduced how Stability Policing could counter hybrid threats and be a relevant contributor to Multi-Domain Operations, mainly from a US perspective. His essay clearly illustrates that “below the threshold of armed conflict, traditional military forces remain limited to preparing for combat, setting the theater for future operations, and conducting security assistance missions”, “[military] forces lack the authority to operate during peacetime due to national laws or norms”, and Stability Police “have broad authorities and training for investigation, search, seizure, arrest, and incarceration, even during periods outside martial law [...], provide specialized counter-terrorism, counter-organized crime, counter-drug, and counter-human trafficking operations. [...] When combined with disciplined crime scene management, forensic activities, weapons intelligence teams, surveillance, police investigations, and other tasks, Stability Police can create situational awareness to overcome cognitive and narrative campaigns against governments”.

Moving to the East while still being strongly anchored in the present, M.A. Paweł Pieniążek described the situation that occurred in 2021 at the border between Belarus and Poland, extending to Latvia and Lithuania, where a huge number of migrants coming from Middle East and Asia tried to illegally

cross the border. This situation is portrayed as a hybrid manoeuvre from Russia to put pressure on the European countries' internal security systems. The conclusion of the author is that in a localised crisis "the first responder is always the state which is directly affected. The second responder can be one of or several international organisations such as the UN, EU, or members of the civil society. NATO should always be seen as a "third responder". From this posture, he believes the future when local police forces "could be supported by dedicated forces from within NATO" is not that far away.

Looking South, Mr. Ronald Mayanja spoke about his experience while being deployed in UNMISS - South Sudan. One of his observations from this situation was that "policing, unlike military actions, offers a more civilian approach to crime mitigation and prevention because the tactics employed are less inclined to generate human rights abuses. While military activities intend to achieve a short-term objective, policing action reduces crime and improves human security owing to the fact that police are perceived as the appropriate entity responsible for crime preventions". This is totally in line with similar conclusions reached by other writers of the two books.

Finally, Commander Jacob P. Galbreath explored how using Cyber will help close the Security Gap. Going from his experience in Afghanistan and Ukraine, he believed that "the use of Cyber to enhance and exponentially implement policing capability in an austere and primitive environment would have greatly increased stability in Afghanistan". Moreover, in Ukraine, "we can see that digitization and Cyber are coming into their prime on the battlefield, policing, and legitimizing and stabilizing governments in the area as well as the global stage".

The second book revealed multiple insights that help framing some of the significant challenges and opportunities for the future of Stability Policing:

- **Undervaluation of Stability Policing:** the failure to deploy a robust Stability Policing (SP) force in Afghanistan, as was done in Kosovo, highlights a significant undervaluation of SP's role within Security Sector Reform (SSR). This underutilization contributed to ineffective police training and coordination, leaving only a fraction of the force capable of countering organized crime effectively.
- **Coordination and Training Deficiencies:** the fragmented approach to SSR, exacerbated by the lead nation system, created operational inefficiencies, and hindered the development of a competent and unified

police force. Lack of common training standards and literacy among police forces further compromised the quality of law enforcement.

- **Militarization vs. Civilian Policing:** the tendency to prioritize militaristic approaches over traditional policing methods has been counterproductive. This approach has undermined the police's ability to connect with the community and perform essential law enforcement duties, consequently affecting public trust and safety.
- **Corruption and Accountability:** corruption within the police forces and the broader security sector has significantly eroded public confidence and hampered effective governance. The absence of a reliable and accountable police force has been exploited by armed non-state actors and criminal networks, further destabilizing the region.
- **Cultural and Community Engagement:** a lack of cultural awareness and community engagement has impeded SP efforts. Understanding local customs, societal structures, and the specific needs of communities is crucial for effective stability policing and fostering public trust.
- **Integration with Multi-Domain Operations (MDO):** Stability Policing's compatibility with MDO presents an opportunity to enhance military operations by providing unique capabilities for peacekeeping, law enforcement, and bridging the gap between military and civilian efforts in conflict zones.
- **Community Policing and Rule of Law:** emphasizing community policing strategies and the rule of law can rebuild public trust and support for governance structures. This approach requires a long-term commitment to training, education, and engagement with local communities.
- **Cyber Technology and Intelligence:** leveraging Cyber technology and enhancing law enforcement intelligence capabilities can significantly improve stability policing efforts. Cyber tools can aid in crime prevention, enhance communication, and support the operational effectiveness of SP units in complex environments.
- **Cultural Awareness and Engagement:** developing strategic awareness about the impact of cultural heritage and engaging with communities at a grassroots level can prevent or de-escalate conflicts. Training in cultural awareness is essential for personnel involved in stability policing to navigate the complexities of local dynamics effectively.
- **Addressing Hybrid and Cyber Threats:** recognizing and preparing for hybrid warfare and cyber threats are critical for modern SP missions. Developing capabilities to counter these threats, including through intelligence and cyber operations, is essential for the stability and security of societies.

- Institutional and International Collaboration: strengthening collaboration between military, police, and civilian actors at both the national and international levels is crucial. This includes integrating SP doctrine and training into broader security and defense planning processes.

Addressing the challenges outlined requires a multifaceted strategy that combines traditional policing with modern technological and operational capabilities, underpinned by a deep understanding of the socio-political contexts within which Stability Policing units operate.

BIO:

Colonel Dorin Luta is a Romanian Gendarmerie officer, serving since 2021 as Lessons Learned Branch Head at the NATO Stability Policing Centre of Excellence, Vicenza, Italy. He holds a bachelor's degree in "Law" (2005), a master's degree in "Management of operational training of gendarmerie units" (2011) and a post-graduate degree in "Weapons, explosives and hazardous substances" (2006). Furthermore, he is a qualified NATO Lessons Learned Manager (2022) and Staff Officer (2022), a NATO Alternative Analyst (2021), an UN Senior Planner for Peacekeeping Missions (2018) and an EU Common Security and Defence Policy Planner (2017). His career started in 2001, when he joined the Police Academy of the Romanian Ministry of Interior, to become a Gendarmerie officer. After graduating in 2005, he served as mobile gendarmerie platoon commander (2005-2007), junior staff officer at regional HQ level (2007-2008) and senior specialist at national HQ level (2008-2016). Before holding the current position, he was head of the International Cooperation and Missions Department within the General Inspectorate of Romanian Gendarmerie in Bucharest (2016-2021). From this position, he was responsible, among others, of all Romanian Gendarmerie's engagements in crisis management operations, under the aegis of NATO (Afghanistan), EU (Kosovo, Georgia, Ukraine, Niger, Mali, Somalia), UN (Kosovo, Mali, Central African Republic, South Sudan, East Timor, Haiti) or ad-hoc coalitions (Iraq). He attended an EU crisis management international exercise (Saint Astier, 2006), graduated the UN Middle Management Level Course (CoESPU, Vicenza, 2007) and was deployed for short term missions in Iraq (anti-DAESH coalition, 2018) and Afghanistan (NATO RSM, 2019).

He is fluent in English and French and an independent user of Italian.



Mr. Luke Shabro

Writer and Futurist, U.S. Navy Veteran

1. Introduction

NATO defines stability policing as a concept that involves “the range of tasks which contribute to establishing and maintaining a secure and stable environment.”¹ This includes activities such as supporting the host nation’s law enforcement agencies, providing security for key infrastructure, assisting in the protection of civilians, and helping to build local capacity for security and governance.

Stability Policing forces play critical roles throughout competition, crisis, conflict, and post-conflict periods:

- **Prevention of Conflict Escalation:** Stability policing can help in preventing the escalation of conflict by tending to issues of insecurity, law and order, and security of the population, since this could diminish existing tensions and the likelihood of an outbreak or the spread of violence.
- **Protection of Civilians:** In situations that require stabilization, key many times can be to protect civilians from harm, whether by armed groups or criminal elements or from human rights abuses. In so doing, human rights standards are upheld, and other suffering is prevented from worsening in the areas affected by conflict.
- **Supporting Peace Processes:** Stability policing, and NATO forces in general, have a significant role in supporting peace processes and reconciliation efforts through providing an enabling environment for dialogue and negotiation. Political processes cannot flourish in the absence of an environment of security and stability provision.

¹ NATO Stability Policing Centre of Excellence, About Stability Policing: <https://www.nspcoe.org/about-us/about-stability-policing> (access 4.10.2024).

- **Fostering Stability and Development:** Stability policing supports long-term stability and development, as it facilitates humanitarian assistance, efforts to reconstruct, and all initiatives that revolve around economic developments in a secure environment. This is vital for helping to rebuild the societies affected by conflict and adversity.

Considering the unique role and responsibilities of NATO throughout competition, crisis, conflict, and post-conflict, NATO Stability Policing Forces are critical to a multitude of actions and objectives within that construct:

- **Adapting to Dynamic Threat Environments:** In an extremely dynamic modern and future security environment, threats are diverse and constantly evolving. This means NATO SP forces must be prepared to adapt their approach to include a range of challenges including, among others, hybrid warfare, sophisticated and transnational organized crime, terrorism, and instability from failed states or fragile regions. Stability policing provides a flexible toolset in an effective response to such challenges.
- **Comprehensive Approach to Security:** Most NATO operations require a comprehensive approach that is beyond traditional military measures. Simply put, stability policing allows NATO to deal with security challenges comprehensively, integrating military forces, law enforcement, diplomacy, and development initiatives to support stabilization efforts in conflict-affected areas from further escalation.
- **Supporting Partner Nations:** NATO often works alongside non-treaty nations, its partners and allies, or other international organizations in addressing security challenges. Stability policing enables NATO to assist other partner nations in building their capacity for security and governance in order to develop stronger resilience to both internal and external threats.
- **Public Legitimacy and Public Support:** Participation in activities of stability policing facilitates NATO to maintain public legitimacy and public support for its operations in member states at domestic and international levels. NATO ensures that the promotion of core values such as security, stability, and respect for human rights takes the center stage in the pursuit of global peace and security.

While stability policing has been practiced in various forms throughout modern history, it has grown in importance and recognition over the last eighty years. One of the most prominent examples of stability policing operations was in Germany in the post-World War II period. Military

forces were involved in maintaining order, rebuilding infrastructure, and facilitating the transition to stable governance in these countries.²

To approach Stability Policing holistically it is critically important to connect its past, present, and future. The previous two books in this trilogy laid a solid foundation for what stability policing in the past has been and meant and how it is transforming and its criticality in the modern world. This book explores what two distinct futures could look like and what possibilities exist in those futures to either maintain an evolutionary process or embrace a future of change and potential. This last book of the trilogy will connect all three timeframes.

The first book delivered analyses on the history and origins of stability policing. While many of the challenges we face in 2024 and beyond feel novel and daunting, our first book truly showed that none of these challenges are new. The question is how we contextualize and work to meet said challenges. What did history teach us about the need for stability policing and the opportunities and pitfalls associated with SP. How did Gendarmerie-Type Forces (GFTs) cope with and integrate emerging and disruptive technologies in increasingly complex and urbanized worlds populated with ever more diverse peoples.

Book I and II in this series brought out insights and takeaways from the history and present of Stability Policing that have significant implications on the future of Stability Policing (Book III).

Addressing the challenges outlined in the preface from Colonel Dorin Luta requires a multifaceted strategy that combines traditional policing with modern technological and operational capabilities, underpinned by a deep understanding of the socio-political contexts within which SP units operate.

The third book in this trilogy, on the future of Stability Policing, is a critical component of a comprehensive approach that will ensure NATO stability policing forces are best trained, equipped, and integrated to help stabilize chaotic environments in the modern and future world. This book will describe two divergent future worlds and through fictional vignettes – a storytelling – will show what is possible in each of those futures.

2 R.A. Millen, Stability Operations in WW II: Insights and Lessons, "U.S. Army War College Quarterly": <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2687&context=parameters> (access 4.10.2024).

In the first chapter that follows this introduction is an executive summary that briefly showcases the most impactful insights for senior leaders and Stability Policing practitioners alike.

In the next chapter, we will look at a more universal view of what the future operational environment will look like in both divergent future worlds. We will note the crosscutting trends and characteristics that will be common between both worlds.

Next, in the third chapter, “Evolution”, we will describe the first future world. Evolution is the result of what the circumstances dictate. In this world, priorities, budgets, strategic decisions, and technological adaptation and integration slowly persist along the same linear path. This is the way we’ve always done it.

Subsequently, in the 4th chapter, the associated fictional vignette (FICINT) for the “Evolutionary” world will feature a French Gendarmerie Colonel working to plan and execute stability policing operations in a scenario where Russia invades the Baltics.³ Through personal memoirs, interactions with seniors and subordinates alike, and various messaging and communiques, readers will see the daily and overarching challenges the Colonel and her stability policing battalion will have to deal with, in an increasingly complex environment with limited capabilities and capacity.

In the 5th chapter, we will show readers the next future world, “A World of Change and Possibility”. In this future world there is increased emphasis in NATO for stability policing. Stability policing forces are better integrated in NATO’s Force Structures and embrace advanced and creative SP force structuring, uniformity, standardization, doctrine, concepts, and tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs). Additionally, SP forces, their higher command & senior leaders, supporting elements, and training organizations rapidly and efficiently advance and integrate emerging and disruptive technologies – artificial intelligence, high-powered computing, modeling and simulations, augmented and virtual reality, quantum information sciences, and even biotechnologies – into their organization, communications, and training, professional education, and personnel development.

3 P. Singer and A. Cole, Thinking the Unthinkable With Useful Fiction, Queen’s University Canada: https://www.queensu.ca/psychology/sites/psycwww/files/uploaded_files/Graduate/OnlineJournal/Issue_2-Singer.pdf (access 4.10.2024).

After setting the scene in “A World of Change and Possibility” we will once again, through the eyes of the French Gendarmerie Colonel, give the audience the experience of operating and leading in a highly complex environment in Chapter 6, “What Wild Futures”. However, in this world, our Colonel, her forces and subordinates, and all the associated SP forces will have the benefit of integrated emerging and disruptive technologies – across the entire DOTMLPF [Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership and Education, Personnel, Facilities] spectrum – along with a bevy of highly capable enabling organizations and forces.⁴

Finally, in the concluding chapter, we will highlight – through the past, present, and future – what has evolved as well as what has changed, or may change, significantly. We will also showcase and emphasize the disparities between the two worlds. In this chapter, we will plainly lay out the associated risk of remaining mired in the status quo vs. the exciting opportunities, possibilities, and benefits of pursuing a more proactive and adaptive future for stability policing.

The objective of this book – in concert with the previous two books in the NATO Stability Policing trilogy – is to inform readers on what future worlds may await NATO forces and, in turn, the possible futures of NATO Stability Policing forces. Additionally, this trilogy of books will not only inform but will showcase Stability Policing as a highly capable NATO tool, making NATO forces and leadership familiar with SP and eager to utilize its full potential. With the ability to change the future in our hands, it is incumbent upon all of us in the international stability policing community to aggressively and relentlessly pursue the steps and actions necessary to shape the future security environment and the stability policing forces that will have to operate in it.

2. Executive Summary

The future of Stability Policing– through the lens of NATO – stands at a crossroads, faced with the rapidly evolving nature of global conflict and security. This book offers a comprehensive analysis of these challenges and the strategic pathways forward. In an environment marked by a pronounced focus on kinetic forces, SP forces are poised to navigate through an increasingly complex landscape, tasked with expanding

4 Joint Publication 1-02: Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, Defense Management Library: <https://dml.armywarcollege.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/JP-1-02-DoD-Dictionary-of-Mil-Terms-2009-update.pdf> (access 4.10.2024).

responsibilities and opportunities. The integration of cutting-edge technologies emerges as a crucial lever to enhance SP capabilities in predictive analytics, intelligence, and support functions, addressing the critical challenges of personnel shortages and the expanding scope of operations. Policing, at its core, is – and will always be – people-centric and oriented. Through exploration of divergent futures and respective NATO SP capabilities and approaches to those futures, this book aims to redefine the strategic outlook for NATO’s Stability Policing, advocating for a transformative approach that aligns with the complex realities of contemporary and future conflict environments.

In researching and writing this book, a multi-disciplinary approach was used featuring a variety of tools and methodologies:

- Literature review of foundational Stability Policing doctrine, policy, and research publications;
- A futures workshop with leading Stability Policing experts and practitioners;
- Scenario planning;
- Trends analysis (including technological, economic, social, environmental, and informational trends).

The following insights provide a summary of the exploration and “future lessons learned” from this book to highlight what is most critical for Stability Policing leaders and practitioners going into the future:

Major demands for GTFs in NATO member nations’ homelands means Stability Policing forces in the future will be asked to do more with less in ever increasingly complex environments.

Rapid, precise, and inclusive adaptation and integration of emerging technologies – AI/ML, robotics, high-powered computing, quantum, VR/AR, etc. – would rapidly advance Stability Policing forces’ capabilities and capacity in predictive analytics, policing intelligence, stability diagnostics, and governmental support, thereby mitigating increasing challenges in personnel shortages, growing demand signals, expanded geographical and mission areas of responsibility, and countering or containing nefarious actors benefiting from the democratization of technology.

Climate change, threats to and conflicts over resources, and migration patterns will have a severe impact on not only the environment SP forces will be operating in, but what they will be required to do in those environments.

Great powers competition and conflict will be a primary driver of demand signal for SP forces but the activities of transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), violent extremist organizations (VEOs), organized criminal groups, domestic and international political & special interest movements, and even super-empowered individuals will also be catalysts from conflict and various levels of instability where SP support will be needed.

Increasing growth, evolution, and membership of virtual diasporas, constructed virtual environments, and digital-nation states coupled with blurring lines of identity, citizenship, and sovereignty will exacerbate the legal, judicial [jurisdictional], human, cognitive, intelligence, and operational challenges and constraints facing SP forces and leadership.

Questions and concerns over the command and control (and regulation) of Stability Policing forces among their originating nations will lead to likely friction and complications for force design, planning, and employment, as well as forming necessary standardization.

Novel approaches in Stability Policing operational concepts, doctrine, and force design and structuring could lead to significant improvements in SP forces' capability and capacity in a future operational environment. They could also lead to true transformation in how senior NATO leadership and NATO member states view and employ the unique abilities and benefits Stability Policing forces bring throughout competition, crisis, and conflict.

Emerging and disruptive technologies can be incredibly impactful, and their successful adoption and integration could lead to outsized positive change to future Stability Policing units, but people are still at the heart of policing operations. World-class training and development of, and the relationships between, stability policing forces personnel and leaders are the biggest difference makers that will lead to the success or failure of NATO-led stability policing in a future operational environment where people are still the center of gravity.

The future of stability policing is set to evolve amidst a complex interplay of technological advances, societal shifts, and global security challenges. The insights gathered suggest a future where policy, community engagement,

and technological innovation converge to enhance public safety and trust. As we look ahead, it is imperative that stability policing adapts to the changing landscape, fostering collaboration and embracing innovation to meet the needs of diverse communities. This journey requires a committed effort to understand the nuances of an ever-changing operational environment, ensuring stability policing remains a dynamic and responsive pillar in the quest for peace and security.

3. The Future World

The year is 2035 and the future operational environment is volatile yet largely stays on the linear path seen in 2024.

The United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) continue to compete globally for economic, technological, political/diplomatic, informational, and military primacy. The PRC has not invaded Taiwan to force reunification, but tensions are high and continued Chinese pressure campaigns – using military power, dis/misinformation campaigns, cyber attacks and espionage, and diplomatic and economic coercion actions – against Taiwan have drawn enormous amounts of the U.S.' and its Indo-Pacific allies' resources and focus.⁵

The Russia-Ukraine war has become a frozen conflict with Russia unable to make further gains towards Kyiv and suffering major losses in the Black Sea while the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) are unable to regain Crimea or even Donbass, Donetsk, and Luhansk.⁶ Continued precision strikes with long-range fires and uncrewed systems, artillery exchanges, and WWI-reminiscent trench warfare continues but neither side launches major offensives due to stalled offensive operational energy and various international diplomatic interventions.

The Israel – Hamas conflict in the Middle East proliferates and Israel's Western allies have grown weary of supporting Israel. Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and other violent extremist

⁵ United States Institute of Peace, After Taiwan's election, China is now Ratcheting up the pressure: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/03/after-taiwans-election-china-now-ratcheting-pressure> (access 4.10.2024).

⁶ M. Burrows, Ending the war in Ukraine: Harder than it seems, Stimson Center: <https://www.stimson.org/2024/ending-the-war-in-ukraine-harder-than-it-seems/> (access 4.10.2024).

organizations (VEOs) continue to launch asymmetric attacks against Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and Israeli civilians in major population centers like Jerusalem and Haifa but also in the West Bank, Gaza, and against maritime targets in the Mediterranean Sea.⁷

The African and South American continents have both gained from economic investment and competition between the U.S., China, Russia, and even India but conversely suffered from intense great power competition between those nations that has featured massive yet highly targeted – using artificial intelligence, machine learning, and hyperconnectivity – information and influence campaigns as well as proxy wars or “brushfire conflicts”.⁸

Several emerging and disruptive technologies – artificial intelligence/machine learning (AI/ML), quantum information sciences [computing, sensing, and encryption], biotechnology [human augmentation and gene-editing], autonomous robotics and vehicles, and the Internet of Things (IoT) – have advanced rapidly but not reached full maturity. Distribution and integration of the highest-end capabilities of these technologies has been uneven between developed and undeveloped/underdeveloped nations. However, over the last ten years, violent non-state actors (VNSAs) have gained significant advantage and capabilities from dual-use technologies for nefarious threat actions.⁹

The 2035 operational environment will not be completely foreign to the humans of today, but there are significant changes, technologically and societally, that will transform much of the global population’s day-to-day lives and how nations and nation-states interact with each other. Here we explore the future operational environment in further depth through the PMESII lens (“Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, Infrastructure, Physical environment, and Time” analysis tool)¹⁰:

7 A. Smith, J. Carman, and J. Wu, See how the Israel-Hamas war spread along the Middle East from Gaza to Pakistan, NBC News: <https://www.nbcnews.com/specials/israel-hamas-war-spread-gaza-pakistan-middle-east-region/index.html> (access 4.10.2024).

8 T. F. Lynch III, The Future of Great Power Competition: Trajectories, Transitions, and Prospects for Catastrophic War. National Defense University. <https://digitalcommons.ndu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1046&context=joint-force-quarterly> (access 4.10.2024).

9 NATO, Emerging and Disruptive Technologies: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_184303.Ahtm (access 4.10.2024).

10 U.S. Army Maneuver Center of Excellence, Operational Environment: https://www.moore.army.mil/Infantry/DoctrineSupplement/ATP3-21.8/chapter_03/OperationalOverview/OperationalEnvironment/index.html (access 4.10.2024).

Political

The global world order remains largely the same as 2024 with authoritarian states – the PRC and the Russian Federation especially – gaining further global hard and soft power through global economic influence, aggressive information and influence operations, continued military build-up, and further erosion of public trust – domestically and internationally – in national governments and established international organizations and institutions.¹¹ The PRC and Russia have continued to chip away at global political institutions in a rules-based world order – the United Nations, as well as regional organizations like the European Union (EU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and NATO – including its allies and like-minded partners – attempting to make the world safe from authoritarianism.¹²

European nations continue to struggle with the balance between dependence on provisional security through alliances – with the U.S., “Five Eyes” [U.S., United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand], NATO, and even the EU – and very real economic entanglement with Russia and China due to energy and rare earth material reliance, trade deals, and domestic pressure regarding economic stability and energy security.¹³

Cyclical vacillations between globalism and nationalism – and often associated isolationism – cause friction and instability between European and North American allies. This continued misalignment and tension undermines the allies’ cohesion and persistent dedication to stability policing, among other efforts.

While nation-state actors continue to be the most powerful players in the global environment, a host of non-state actors – violent extremist organizations, international corporations and conglomerates, transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have a significant impact on global power distribution and political dynamics.

11 E. J. Wilson, *Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power*, “The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science”, 616(1), p. 110-124.

12 C. Walker, *The World Has Become Flatter for Authoritarian Regimes*, “Journal of Democracy”: <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/the-world-has-become-flatter-for-authoritarian-regimes> (access 4.10.2024).

13 A. Brinza, et al., *EU-China relations: De-risking or de-coupling – The Future of the EU Strategy towards China*, European Parliament: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2024/754446/EXPO_STU\(2024\)754446_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2024/754446/EXPO_STU(2024)754446_EN.pdf) (access 4.10.2024).

Key Assumption: the global rules-based order persists – albeit undermined by authoritarian states, Russia and China especially – with international organizations such as the United Nations and European Union still functioning.

Military

The United States and China continue rapid and large-scale military build-up and innovation. Russia has been technologically surpassed by both the U.S., India, and China but continues to excel in particular technologies and partners with both China and India on some military capabilities. NATO countries – besides the U.S. – develop some emerging and disruptive technologies on their own and sometimes in partnership together, with adoption and integration largely focused on niche expert areas or domains for each nation.

The U.S. military continues to suffer from recruiting shortfalls, slightly lessened retention issues, and tough competition from industry for top technology talent but has mitigated some of these issues with unique talent acquisition and retention programs. After experiencing major shortfalls in munitions and other materiel from aid provided to the Ukrainian Armed Forces and Israeli Defense Forces, the U.S. Defense Industrial Base (DIB) has revitalized both its capability to produce a variety of platforms and weapons that are able to be utilized by allies and its capacity to produce them at scale rapidly.¹⁴ The U.S. Joint Force has reached a relative level of maturity in its concepts – and capabilities and capacity to execute those concepts – of all-domain warfare with machine-speed synchronicity and actions.¹⁵ The most exponential growth and positive impact U.S. forces – along with their “Five Eyes” and NATO allies – have experienced is from revolutions in the human dimension – training, development of warfighters and leaders, building of cognitive and emotional resilience, biological augmentation, etc. – emphasizing the fact that in spite of major technological breakthroughs, people remain the center of gravity in societies, militaries, and our world as a whole.

14 J. Detsch, The U.S. military is running short on ammunition—and so is Ukraine, “Foreign Policy”: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/03/13/united-states-military-aid-ukraine-congress> (access 4.10.2024).

15 S. Carberry, SPECIAL REPORT: Joint All-Domain Command, Control A Journey, Not a Destination, “National Defense”: <https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2023/7/10/joint-all-domain-command-control-a-journey-not-a-destination> (access 4.10.2024).

China continued to build platforms, capabilities, and an obscene magazine depth for the world's largest standing force but suffered heavily from personnel shortages.¹⁶¹⁷ The People's Liberation Army (PLA) attempted to mitigate these shortfalls with a heavy emphasis on AI, robotics, and autonomy. The PLA achieved moderate success through that approach but learned harsh lessons about the need for "boots on the ground" in a smaller-scale conflict in 2029 in Myanmar. The PLA served as an ally, advisor, and force multiplier for the Myanmar Military Junta's (Tatmadaw) forces that were fighting on two fronts against the People's Defense Force (National Unity Government) and the Kachin Independence Army. PLA forces experienced significant failures in command and control, communications, logistics and sustainment, operational art, and strategy in the "Tri-Party War". However, the PRC gained valuable experience and achieved moderate success in its own approach to stability policing with the employment of the People's Armed Police (PAP). Two PAP Divisions deployed to Myanmar executing crowd and riot control, law enforcement support, countering "terrorist groups", and enforcing governance.

India is on the fringe of becoming a military superpower. While the United States and other ostensible "Quad" members the United Kingdom and Australia attempt to gain increased ties and multilateral security assurances with India as a bulwark against Chinese aims and aggressions, NATO nations do not feel secure in India's potential defense assistance or overall commitment as Indian national leadership maintains very close ties with the Kremlin and directs the Indian military to continue developing a plethora of jointly-built weapons systems with the Russian Ministry of Defense.¹⁸

Türkiye, a NATO member country, has emerged as a "drone superpower" offering an alternative to the U.S., Russia, China, and Iran for highly capable yet affordable uncrewed systems across multiple domains – Sea, Air, and Land. Purchasing nations often seek Turkish assistance similar to the holistic reformation in materiel, training, leadership, and operational concepts and employment that the armed forces of Azerbaijan experienced before the

16 D. Vergun, General highlights China's military advantages, disadvantages, U.S. Department of Defense: <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3553901> (access 4.10.2024).

17 M. Clay, D. Blasko, R. Lee, People win wars: A 2022 reality check on PLA enlisted force and related matters, "War on the Rocks": <https://warontherocks.com/2022/08/people-win-wars-a-2022-reality-check-on-pla-enlisted-force-and-related-matters> (access 4.10.2024).

18 A. Malhotra, India's relationship with the Quad, "Georgetown Journal of International Affairs" <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2023/05/01/engagement-not-entanglement-indias-relationship-with-the-quad> (access 4.10.2024).

Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, giving Türkiye significant influence across numerous militaries in the Middle East, Global South, and beyond.¹⁹

European NATO member countries maintain standing armies – and highly competent military forces in general – but are still struggling to build capabilities at capacities large enough to handle the myriad challenges they face – large-scale combat operations, counterterrorism, homeland defense, global stability activities, and more – simultaneously. While the United States has diverted much of its focus to China, European NATO countries remain largely focused on Russia and the threat it poses to NATO's eastern flank, particularly the Baltic states, much of Europe has revitalized its defense industrial base after the wake-up call of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Israel's war in Gaza but most nations on the continent are still working to catch up production to meet demand after exporting mass quantities of platforms and munitions for those conflicts.²⁰

Economic

The global economy has maintained relative stability over the last ten years but is largely void of any significant or rapid strides in growth. However, economic growth in technology has outpaced almost every other sector with manufacturing close behind. The U.S. and China sit as the two major economic superpowers in a bipolar world. China remains a manufacturing and information technology powerhouse but suffers setbacks from having an aging population that it must haphazardly create a social safety net for and a burgeoning middle class with inflated expectations for their quality of life that the Chinese Communist Party is often incapable of satisfying.²¹

The U.S. is hampered by significant national debt, but its economic diversity, open markets, and reshoring of many critical manufacturing capabilities and capabilities coupled with high immigration rates – especially compared to China that is highly insular and focused on Han ethnicity and culture

19 K. Kaya, Turkey as a Drone Superpower: A case study of a mid-size power driving the operational environment, U.S. Army Foreign Military Studies Office: <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/2023/2023-03-28-turkey-as-a-drone-superpower-a-case-study-of-a-mid-size-power-driving-the-operational-environment-karen-kaya-update> (access 4.10.2024).

20 P. Fernandez, Europe at a Strategic Disadvantage: A fragmented defense industry, "War on the Rocks": <https://warontherocks.com/2023/04/europe-at-a-strategic-disadvantage-a-fragmented-defense-industry> (access 4.10.2024).

21 L. Bicker, China's ageing population: A demographic crisis is unfolding for Xi, BBC: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-68595450> (access 4.10.2024).

– mitigate the effects of an aging American population. Russia still has a middling economy but benefits heavily from its oil and gas resources and trade deals, though Kremlin leadership continues to divert any significant economic gains to military modernization and build-up. India has grown in economic might but is caught between developed industrialization and its historical caste system. African nations – especially Nigeria, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) – benefited from a combination of youth bulges, highly valued natural resources – oil, gold, cobalt, copper, etc. – and exponential technological growth to emerge as significant economic powers globally. Southeast Asia has become a major global manufacturing hub as many Western nations sought to move away from Chinese manufacturing and the associated influence that came with it. Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia made significant gains in manufacturing automotives, semiconductors, and other electronics.²²

Social

In 2035, there is significant social upheaval across the world, in developed and underdeveloped nations alike. Persistent economic inequality between the richest individuals and groups in the world and the rest of the global population is increasingly evident and highlighted for the world to see from nearly ubiquitous media – traditional and newer – coverage. In addition to economic inequality, access to cutting-edge human augmentation in cognition, physical abilities, and overall health, besides in specific cases in military forces, is exponentially more available to the wealthiest and most powerful people in the world. This created whole new classes of “haves” and “have-nots”.²³

Humans are experiencing the highest ever levels of global hyperconnectivity, but this is mostly limited to virtual environments. Domestic populations across the globe grow increasingly isolated from one another physically. Online virtual communities and emerging digital sovereignties and citizenships further dampen assimilation and solidarity in the West and bring about significant challenges – jurisdiction, authorities, intelligence, etc. – in stability policing.

22 European Parliamentary Research Service, Global Trends to 2035: Economy and Society, European Parliament: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/627126/EPRS_STU\(2018\)627126_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/627126/EPRS_STU(2018)627126_EN.pdf) (access 4.10.2024).

23 U.K. Ministry of Defense, Human Augmentation - The Dawn of New Paradigm: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/609d23c6e90e07357baa8388/Human_Augmentation_SIP_access2.pdf (access 4.10.2024).

The U.S. and much of Europe experiences significant domestic political strife that is fueled and exacerbated by nefarious information and influence campaigns from Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea as well as other authoritarian regimes and malicious non-state actors (NSAs). The employment of generative AI tools – i.e. ChatGPT, Dall-E – enables dubious actors to mass manufacture dis- and misinformation leading to further erosion of domestic populations' trust in their own governments and institutions.²⁴ Localized civil unrest and political violence draw away critical policing and security resources that are vitally needed in other areas.

Information

The information environment continues to experience exponential growth. Disruptive and emerging tech makes populations more virtually connected but more physically disconnected than ever before. The information environment features constant narrative battles, amygdala hijacking, and influence operations where advantage for nations is only fleeting. With extraordinary levels of digital connectivity and minute-by-minute coverage of conflicts and unrest, the imperative to win the information battle in conflicts is more critical than ever.

After enjoying a near monopoly on mass media influence for much of modern history, nation-states that are not inherently authoritarian struggle to keep up in this machine-speed information fight. For these nations, there is constant friction between working to support a free and open society and defending against disinformation and corrosive, and usually false, narratives propagated by adversaries.

Infrastructure

Global urbanization has increased over the last ten years, in both developed and underdeveloped nations, straining natural resources, governmental capacities, and infrastructure. Much of the increased global urban population increase has been concentrated in the littorals making global maritime commons and seaports even more critical and regularly overused.²⁵

24 A. Rancy, Manufacturing deceit: How generative AI supercharges information manipulation, National Endowment For Democracy: <https://www.ned.org/manufacturing-deceit-how-generative-ai-supercharges-information-manipulation/> (access 4.10.2024).

25 World Bank Group, Urban Development Overview: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview#:~:text=Today%2C%20some%2056%25%20of%20the,people%20will%20live%20in%20cities> (access 4.10.2024).

Many dense urban population centers have engaged in “smart city” initiatives and ventures with varying degrees of success. These smart cities are hosts not only to billions of sensors, nano sensors, and emitters – making them “electronically noisy” – but also are replete with autonomous/semi-autonomous robotics vehicles and entities in dense urban environments that are often not designed to be the robotic enclaves they have become.²⁶

The Lead-Up

In the year 2035, the geopolitical landscape of the world teetered on the precipice of a new kind of confrontation, where the echoes of traditional warfare merged with the silent advance of technological evolution. At the heart of this looming storm were the Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – caught in the crosshairs of a resurgent Russia’s ambitions and the collective resolve of NATO.

Over the previous ten years, Kremlin leadership, emboldened by Russia’s selfish perspective in Ukraine, observed a build-up of NATO forces across Western Europe but also, to their collective ire, the introduction of more and more exquisite and high-threat weapons systems in the Baltic states. The Kremlin grew increasingly paranoid about the possibility of a tipping point being reached in Russia’s “near abroad” and sphere of influence in the Baltics wherein those NATO members would have enough asymmetric advantage in weaponry to truly threaten Moscow. Under the usual guise of “protecting Russian-speaking minorities” in those nations and revanchist proclamations about Russia’s historical claim to the region, Russia increases hostilities, semi-covert operations, cyber-attacks and espionage, and various economic, diplomatic, and military pressure campaigns against Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Russian leadership leverages its connections with the Russian Orthodox churches in these countries to assert cultural heritage and further divide Baltic populations with religious and cultural ties to Russia from their central governments. Meanwhile, under the auspices of reinforcing stability in Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, and Donbass, Russia mobilizes over 200,000 troops through 2034 and early 2035. The situation was dangerously close to boiling over.

26 I. Heine, Lessons from the pandemic: The future of ‘Smart cities’, Center for Strategic and International Studies: <https://www.csis.org/blogs/strategic-technologies-blog/lessons-pandemic-future-smart-cities> (access 4.10.2024).

4. Variable Future World I: Evolution

In this chapter we will explore the first variable world of 2035 – noting the key differences that will distinguish the variable worlds from the baseline operational environment described in the previous chapter – through a DIME (Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic) lens.²⁷ While there are critical and sometimes nuanced differences in this possible future – “Evolution” – at its crux, this world is mired in a gradual development, the habits and cognitive traits that helped to survive in the past have passed down between NATO nations. These concern priorities in DIME, uniformity and approaches in Stability Policing, and uneven adoption and integration of technology, a system where negotiations, appeasement, and consensus are dominant. These difficulties will have major implications for our protagonist, Colonel Isabelle Amélie Moreau-Girard, in the associated fictional story.

Diplomatic

In the tapestry of international security, the United States has long been the cornerstone upon which NATO’s collective defense and strategic initiatives rest. Its military prowess, characterized by a strong focus on lethal capabilities and a comprehensive approach to warfare spanning every conceivable domain – from the depths of cyberspace to the vast expanse of outer space – has solidified its status as the preeminent power within the alliance. This relentless pursuit of military superiority, aimed at ensuring the U.S.’s strategic interests and safeguarding the future of warfare, inadvertently creates a rift within the very fabric of NATO, particularly in the realm of stability operations and policing.

The essence of stability policing, often overshadowed by the dazzling spectacle of technological warfare, lies in the meticulous work of building peace and preventing conflict in areas where turmoil is but a spark away from igniting. These operations demand a nuanced understanding of complex social dynamics, cultural sensitivities, and the patience to engage with communities on the ground – a stark contrast to the high-intensity combat scenarios that dominate U.S. strategic planning.

Europe, with its rich tapestry of cultures and histories, becomes the crucible where the future of stability policing within NATO is forged. The

²⁷ U.S. Army Foreign Military Studies Office, Military DIME (M-DIME) research project, TRADOC: <https://fmso.tradoc.army.mil/military-dime-research-project> (access 4.10.2024).

shift in responsibility towards European nations is not merely a matter of logistics or capabilities but a profound transformation in the leadership dynamics within the alliance. European countries, with their varied experiences and perspectives on conflict resolution and peacebuilding, step into the void left by the U.S.'s strategic pivot.²⁸ This evolution in roles and responsibilities, however, opens a Pandora's box of geopolitical maneuvering for adversaries like Russia and China, and other authoritarian regimes, both states and non-state actors.

These global rivals, ever vigilant for opportunities to expand their influence and challenge the Western-led, rules-based order, work to exploit the nuanced shift within NATO. They perceive the divergence in focus between the U.S. and its European partners as a chink in the Alliance's armor – a vulnerability to be probed and widened. Through a combination of soft power initiatives, strategic partnerships, and the careful cultivation of alternative security narratives, Russia and China aim to erode NATO's cohesion from within, sowing doubt and discord among its members.²⁹

One of the most formidable obstacles to unified stability policing approaches and ventures within NATO is the varying degrees of political will among member nations. The U.S. 's pivot towards countering high-tech threats and focus on large-scale combat operations left a vacuum in leadership and commitment towards stability operations and policing, traditionally seen as a lower-tier priority. European nations, each with their distinct political landscapes and security concerns, find themselves at a crossroads. The EU nations with extensive histories of international peacekeeping, were more inclined towards taking on a leadership role in global stability policing efforts. In contrast, other members prioritized regional security threats or domestic issues, leading to a patchwork of commitment levels across the alliance.

The effectiveness of stability policing is often contingent upon a deep understanding of local cultures, customs, and the social dynamics of conflict-affected regions. NATO's diverse membership brings a wealth of cultural insight and experience to the table. However, this diversity can also lead to differing operational philosophies and approaches to stability

28 J. Knopp, The Eastward Shift: NATO's new centre of gravity, Royal United Services Institute: <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/rusi-newsbrief/eastward-shift-natos-new-centre-gravity> (access 4.10.2024).

29 A. Gabuev, Putin and Xi's Unholy Alliance, "Foreign Affairs": <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/putin-and-xis-unholy-alliance> (access 4.10.2024).

operations. For instance, the more consensual, negotiation-focused approach of some European nations may clash with the more direct, sometimes militaristic, strategies favored by others.

European leadership in stability policing also highlights disparities in resources and capabilities among NATO members. The uneven distribution of military and civil assets necessary for effective stability operations – ranging from trained personnel to logistical support – poses significant challenges. Some European nations may have advanced technological tools and well-equipped forces ready for deployment, while others may struggle with outdated equipment and limited budgets. This discrepancy complicates the process of planning and executing joint operations, necessitating a more coordinated approach to resource sharing and capability development within the alliance.

Information

In the contemporary geopolitical landscape, the information dimension has emerged as a critical battlefield where perceptions, narratives, and ideologies clash with the tangible realities of military might and economic power. Against the backdrop of NATO's evolving strategic focus and the varying degrees of commitment among its member nations to stability operations, China and Russia have adeptly positioned themselves as champions of an alternative world order.³⁰ Their strategy capitalizes on the dissemination of narratives – and counternarratives – that promise greater stability and security than what they portray as the inherently chaotic and unpredictable nature of Western democracies and, by extension, NATO itself.

At the heart of Russia and China's information warfare tactics is the deliberate exploitation of the differing levels of commitment and the diverse diplomatic approaches among NATO member nations. These differences, often a reflection of the complex political, economic, and cultural landscapes within which each member operates, provide fertile ground for adversaries to sow discord and undermine the alliance's unity. By amplifying these internal divergences through sophisticated disinformation campaigns, social media manipulation, and state-controlled media outlets, China and Russia aim to erode trust within the alliance and among its global partners.

30 E. Economy, China's Alternative Order, "Foreign Affairs": <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/chinas-alternative-order-xi-jinping-elizabeth-economy> (access 4.10.2024).

The narratives crafted by China and Russia are meticulously designed to appeal to a broad audience, ranging from government officials and policymakers to the general public across various regions. These narratives often emphasize the efficiency, decisiveness, and stability of authoritarian regimes compared to the perceived inefficiencies and divisiveness of democratic institutions. By highlighting instances of political deadlock, social unrest, or policy inconsistencies within NATO countries, they bolster their argument that their model of governance ensures a more stable and secure world order.

China and Russia's information operations are not random broadsides, but targeted strikes aimed at vulnerable audiences within and beyond NATO member states. By identifying and exploiting existing grievances – economic disparities, cultural and religious tensions, political disillusionment, etc. – these adversaries deepen existing fractures. They tailor their messaging to resonate with local contexts, sometimes portraying NATO's collective defense mechanisms and its emphasis on democratic values as inadequate responses to the pressing security concerns of today's world.

The digital realm serves as the accelerator for Russia and China's information warfare, allowing them to amplify dissent and discord at an unprecedented scale and speed. Social media platforms, online forums, and digital news outlets become vectors for disinformation, enabling these narratives to circumnavigate the globe instantaneously. The digital amplification of these alternative narratives complicates NATO's efforts to maintain a cohesive and unified front, as member nations grapple with the domestic repercussions of this external meddling.

Military

By 2035, the strategic and operational fabric of NATO exhibits both strengths and vulnerabilities, shaped by a complex interplay of defense spending trends, technological adaptation, and the shifting focus of its leading member, the United States. While Western defense spending has maintained a stable and linear trajectory, the landscape of military technology adaptation within the alliance is a patchwork of capabilities and priorities. This uneven technological terrain, predominantly focused on enhancing lethality and mastering all-domain warfare, has significant implications for NATO's operational cohesion, particularly in the realm of stability policing.

The stark differences in the level of technological adaptation among European NATO allies have introduced a multifaceted challenge to operational cohesion and jointness. Advanced member states, equipped with cutting-edge military technologies, push the envelope in cyber warfare, space capabilities, and artificial intelligence applications. In contrast, other member nations lag, their police capabilities organized in different ways, as a result of historical events. Some forces equipped with systems that struggled with integration into joint operations. This technological divide not only impacts the effectiveness of combined operations but also raises questions about interoperability and the alliance's ability to execute unified strategies across the spectrum of competition, crisis, conflict, and post-conflict periods.³¹

Amidst this backdrop, the challenge of achieving solidarity and uniformity in stability policing policy, doctrine, training, and approaches becomes more daunting. The United States' strategic pivot towards supporting key geopolitical flashpoints – such as Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan – further complicates the landscape, as European nations find themselves shouldering a greater burden of stability policing needs – both globally and within their own borders – without a unified framework.

This lack of a cohesive approach to stability policing reflects operational inefficiency and deeper fractures within the alliance. Divergent national security policies, competing domestic demands, and varying levels of commitment to stability operations across member states create a mosaic of approaches that often lack synergy and common direction.

NATO members face the dual challenge of balancing their commitments to collective security with pressing domestic concerns and demands. Economic constraints, political pressures, and the growing demand signal for GTFs within their own borders necessitate a careful allocation of resources, often at the expense of investing in the capabilities and reforms needed for highly effective joint stability policing. The tension between these domestic imperatives and the requirements of alliance solidarity poses a significant obstacle to achieving a coherent and robust posture on stability policing.

31 J. Foggo, et al. Elevating Our Edge: A Path to Integrating Emerging and Disruptive Technologies, Center for European Policy Analysis: <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/elevating-our-edge-a-path-to-integrating-emerging-and-disruptive-technologies> (access 4.10.2024).

As NATO navigates the complexities of the 2035 strategic landscape, the alliance is forced to confront the internal divisions and operational challenges that threaten its cohesion. Operational NATO stability policing forces are equipped and trained unevenly as well as deployed mainly as a national asset for internal stability and law and order.

Economic

By the year 2035, the global economic environment presents an environment of stability punctuated by dynamic shifts in power and influence. At the center of these transformations are Russia and China, each leveraging their economic strengths to carve out spheres of influence that extend into the heart of Europe and beyond. Russia, revitalized by its strategic exploitation of energy resources, asserts itself as a formidable economic player, wielding influence across Europe and Central Asia.³² Meanwhile, China solidifies its global footprint, making significant inroads into the Baltics and other parts of Europe through its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, advancements in digital infrastructure, and a myriad of other economic ventures.³³

Russia's economic recovery and strategic positioning as a key energy supplier afford it considerable sway within Europe and Central Asia. By leveraging its vast reserves of oil and natural gas, Russia not only secures a steady stream of revenue but also acquires substantial geopolitical leverage. European dependence on Russian energy supplies becomes a vulnerability, one that Russia does not hesitate to exploit in pursuit of its broader strategic objectives. This dynamic introduces a layer of complexity to NATO's efforts to maintain unity and coherence, particularly as member states navigate the delicate balance between energy security and geopolitical alignment.

China's economic ventures, characterized by significant investments in infrastructure and digital technologies, transform the economic landscape of the Baltics and other European regions. The Belt and Road Initiative serves as a conduit for China's global ambitions, linking continents and reshaping trade routes in ways that enhance China's influence. The proliferation

32 D. Cass-Beggs, et al., Global Scenarios 2035: Exploring implications for the future of global collaboration and the OECD, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/df7ebc33-en/1/3/1/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/df7ebc33-en&_csp_=c4ae06ed263c4334853de24a3b5c7a9&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book (access 4.10.2024).

33 S. Brannen, Four scenarios for geopolitical order in 2025-2030: What will great power competition look like? Center for Strategic and International Studies: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/four-scenarios-geopolitical-order-2025-2030-what-will-great-power-competition-look> (access 4.10.2024).

of Chinese digital infrastructure – and an associated global surveillance system –, led by tech giants like Huawei, Tencent, and Bytedance, further entrenches China's presence, raising concerns about digital sovereignty and security within Europe. As China's economic footprint expands, NATO faces the challenge of addressing the strategic implications of China's growing influence within its own borders. These changes resulted in the US in a growing interest and commitment in Asia and the Pacific.

Amidst these external pressures, the European Union finds itself steering an increasingly complex economic landscape. According to projections, the EU will have expanded its membership, growing bigger but also messier and tougher to manage. This expansion, while strengthening the EU's global standing, introduces new challenges in terms of economic cohesion and policy harmonization. Efforts to vet investments on security grounds underscore the EU's awareness of the strategic implications of foreign economic influence. However, achieving consensus on economic policy and security measures becomes an uphill battle, as the diverse interests and priorities of member states collide.

The EU's struggle for economic cohesion is further complicated by internal disparities in economic development and the varying capacities of member states to adapt to technological advancements. These internal dynamics affect the EU's ability to present a unified front in negotiations and strategic economic policies, particularly in relation to Russia and China's economic maneuvers.

The economic transformations unfolding in 2035 have profound implications for NATO's strategic posture. The alliance must reckon with the economic leverage wielded by Russia and China, recognizing that economic ties and dependencies can translate into strategic vulnerabilities. The economic cohesion and resilience of the EU become critical factors in maintaining NATO's operational and strategic unity. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that integrates economic considerations into strategic planning, enhances cooperation between NATO and the EU on economic security matters, and fosters a deeper understanding of the nexus between economic policies and defense strategies.

The economic landscape of 2035 forces NATO to reevaluate traditional notions of security and alliance cohesion.³⁴ The strategic economic maneuvers of Russia and China, coupled with the internal economic dynamics of an expanding European Union, underscore the need for a holistic approach to security that encompasses economic resilience, energy independence, and the safeguarding of digital sovereignty. In this world, significant questions persist about NATO's capability to take such a holistic approach as well as the level of desire and commitment of its member nations to do so with severe challenges to face in their own homelands.

Conclusion: Navigating Evolution

As we have explored the first variable future world of 2035 through the DIME framework it becomes evident that the “evolution” world is not merely a continuation of the past but a complex tableau of existing and emerging challenges confronting NATO. For our protagonist in the fictional narrative that will follow in Chapter 5, Colonel Moreau-Girard, these challenges are not abstract policy debates but tangible realities that shape her leadership and strategic, operational, and tactical decisions.

In the diplomatic arena, the rift within NATO, driven by the U.S.'s focus on the Indo-Pacific theater and futuristic warfare at the expense of stability operations and policing, sets the stage for a world where European nations are thrust into a leadership vacuum. This geopolitical shift, while highlighting Europe's resilience, also exposes the Alliance to the machinations of adversaries like Russia and China, who seek to exploit these divisions to their advantage.

The information domain presents a battlefield of narratives where Russia and China's adept manipulation of media and technology poses a constant threat to the cohesion and moral authority of NATO. The challenge for Moreau-Girard lies in countering this barrage of disinformation while maintaining the integrity and trust of her forces and the civilian populations they seek to protect. In this battle of perceptions, the colonel's success hinges on her ability to wield truth as a weapon, reinforcing the alliance's commitment to stability and democratic values.

34 E. Benson and P. Alvarez-Aragones, NATO and economic security: A political oxymoron or inevitability? Center for Strategic and International Studies: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/nato-and-economic-security-political-oxymoron-or-inevitability> (access 4.10.2024).

On the military front, the disparities in technological adaptation and commitment to stability policing among NATO members underscore the complexities of achieving operational cohesion. For Moreau-Girard, these challenges are not mere logistical hurdles but testaments to the need for rapid innovative thinking and adaptability. Her leadership must navigate the uneven technological landscape, leveraging the strengths of each ally to forge a unified and effective force capable of addressing the multifaceted nature of contemporary security threats.

Economically, the strategic maneuvers of Russia and China, coupled with the internal dynamics of an expanding and diversifying European Union, present a backdrop of uncertainty and competition. Moreau-Girard's world is one where economic ties and dependencies wield significant influence over strategic decisions. The resilience of NATO, therefore, depends not only on military might but on forging economic solidarity and independence, challenging the colonel to think beyond the battlefield and consider the broader implications of security and stability.

"Evolution" is a future world rife with friction and challenges that test the bonds of NATO and demand a multidimensional approach to leadership and strategy. For Colonel Isabelle Amélie Moreau-Girard, and indeed for NATO as a whole, navigating this world requires a delicate balance of strength and diplomacy, innovation and tradition, unity, and flexibility. As the fictional narrative unfolds, the true measure of success will lie not in the absence of conflict but in the ability to adapt, persevere, and forge a path toward stability in an ever-changing global landscape.

5. Chapter 5. Evolutionary Struggle



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The Dawn of Uncertainty

In the year 2035, the geopolitical landscape of Europe teetered on the brink of profound upheaval. The air, once filled with the promise of unity and peace, now carried the ominous hum of an impending storm. At the heart of this brewing conflict lay the Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – nations that had found themselves the unwilling focal point

of a resurgent Russian ambition to reclaim the territory within its former Russian Empire sphere.

Colonel Isabelle Amélie Moreau-Girard, a commanding presence within the ranks of the French Gendarmerie Nationale and now the appointed commander of NATO's 1st Stability Policing Battalion in Lithuania, stood overlooking the vast, undulating landscape that bordered the Suwałki³⁵ Gap. Her sharp blue eyes, reflective of both the resolve and the weight of responsibility she bore, scanned the horizon. At 47, Isabelle's career had been a testament to her unwavering dedication and prowess in the realm of policing. Now, with her graying hair, cut to practicality and discipline, swaying slightly in the chilly Baltic breeze, she faced the greatest challenge of her life.

As winter's grip loosened, the first ominous signs of aggression manifested not through the declarations of politicians but through the silent, sinister avenues of cyber-attacks and hybrid warfare. Russian hackers, operating with surgical precision and an intimate knowledge of the Baltics' defenses, unleashed a digital onslaught designed to cripple communication networks and disarm electronic defenses. The cyberattack, both sophisticated and alarmingly effective, served as the harbinger of the physical invasion to follow. The hackers used advanced tactics, employing technology that seemed ripped from the fabric of science fiction, but by 2035, had become a harrowing reality.

In the depths of cyberspace, the hackers orchestrated their wave of attacks with a tool known as "Quantum Entanglement Malware" (QEM). This insidious program exploited the principles of quantum computing, enabling it to bypass traditional encryption methods with ease. The QEM allowed the attackers to infiltrate and manipulate the digital infrastructure of the Baltic states from the inside out, turning their own systems against them. Power grids flickered and went dark, financial systems plunged into chaos, and the flow of critical information stuttered to a halt, sowing confusion and fear among the populace. This disturbing power disruption also severely hampered NATO's ability to conduct its mission as well as national and local governments' together with law enforcement's ability to maintain stability and law and order.

35 Suwałki is the largest city and the capital of the historical Suwałki Region in Poland. The Lithuanian language name of the region is "Suvalkai". For the purpose of this book, the English name "Suwalki" will be used – editor's note.

Under the cover of darkness, the distant thunder of artillery broke the uneasy silence that had settled over the region. The Russian strategy, a blend of advanced robotic warfare, hybrid attacks and the devastating power of conventional forces, was unleashed in full force in Lithuania and Latvia. Armored columns, supported by drones that dotted the sky like a malevolent swarm, advanced across the border in a multi-pronged attack designed to overwhelm and disorient.

In Estonia, Russia applied other tactics. Already in 2034, armed mercenaries in unmarked uniforms began appearing in Estonia. Despite their Russian weapons and equipment, Russia denied involvement. The huge influx of Russian speaking and equipped men in Estonia marked a new phase in Russian-Baltic relations. It was clear that Estonia's strategic location on the Baltic Sea made it a valuable target for Russia.

Since the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991, Estonia had been an independent state, but Russia always held an interest in the region. Estonia's value to Russia was immense, primarily due to its access to the Baltic Sea, crucial for naval operations and trade routes. If Russia could annex Estonia, it would get an enhanced control over the Baltic Sea and a foothold to project power into Northern Europe.

Russia's strategy seemed clear, trying to destabilize Estonia from the inside and take over control like they had done successfully in 2014 in Crimea. Estonia had significant communities of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers, particularly in the east. It was important to distinguish between ethnic Russians and Russian speakers, as Russian was widely spoken in Estonia. In early 2034, a series of violent protests erupted, leading to clashes were pro-Russian groups protested against the government and NATO. Pro-Russian separatists declared independence, but Russia denied direct involvement. By late February, more armed masked separatists without insignias, known as the "little green men", appeared across Estonia, harassing the populations and threatening the security of strategic locations like harbors, airports and key government buildings. They disappeared as quickly as they came. The tactics were eerily similar to Russia's 2014 "little green men" attack and covert invasion of Crimea, but in Estonia NATO had a strong presence, backed by the anti-Russian imperialism population and the local government. Estonians still remembered the cruel history of Russian occupation in previous centuries. This complicated the task of the Russian organized separatists severely, but their presence held Estonia in a stranglehold.

In the end, the attempted annexation of Estonia was not successful. However, Russia did not stop its attempts to destabilize and conquer Estonia. It was entirely bloodless until mid-March, when pro-Russian gunmen attacked an Estonian army base, killing one officer and injuring another. Throughout February, hundreds of extra separatists quietly moved into Estonia with droves of civilian “volunteers” also arriving. The plan was executed swiftly and secretly.

The first sign of Russia upscaling its efforts to take over Estonia was in late February, with random checkpoints established at some key road crossings. These were controlled by men in various uniforms: Estonian army, Estonian police, and camouflage without national insignia. Some even wore civilian clothes. When trying to pass through a checkpoint in early March, a BBC cameraman and reporter encountered hostility. Their equipment and personal belongings were confiscated, the separatists clearly knowing what to search for.

In the following days, other groups arrived. Ultra-nationalist group members and bikers headed to support pro-Russian sentiments in Estonia, bringing social unrest and fear. Moscow’s operation in Estonia was an orchestrated infiltration, unlike its past invasions of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan, which were large and brutal.

The coup d’état attempt to take over Estonia was met with widespread shock and fear among the local population and the international community.

In the spring of 2034, pro-Russian separatist groups also emerged in the other Baltic states, leading to tensions and minor skirmishes with local authorities. Armed men in unmarked uniforms with Russian equipment appeared in Lithuania and Latvia, and Russian troops amassed along the borders of these countries. Tensions rose, but full-scale conflict was avoided.

In early 2035 Russian tanks rolled towards Latvia and Estonia. Latvia’s plight was different but no less dire, with the Daugavpils corridor – a critical artery for military logistics—becoming a battleground that saw Latvian, German, French, British, and Polish forces engaging against Russian forces in a struggle noted for its sheer intensity and the devastating toll it exacted on both sides.

Amidst the dense forests and along the serpentine Daugava River, Latvian forces, in concert with their NATO allies, faced a formidable challenge

against Russian advances, marking a significant chapter in the annals of cyber and hybrid modern warfare. As in Estonia, Russia was trying to mobilize the Russian minority to destabilize the Latvian society and government by organizing and sponsoring subversive hybrid actions. Only, in Latvia, Russia combined these with the immense power of the Russian army attacking Latvia which made the attack even more devastating.

As daylight pierced the morning fog, the air vibrated with the anticipation of digital skirmishes alongside the imminent clash of metal and might. The Latvian forces and their allies, bolstered by NATO's technological support, had fortified their positions, aware that the battle's outcome might well hinge on their ability to withstand the Russian cyber onslaught.

The skies above, alive with the hum of drones, belied the silent but fierce cyber warfare unfolding in the virtual realm. Russian cyber operators, leveraging advanced algorithms and quantum computing, launched a relentless series of cyber-attacks aimed at the very nerve center of the Latvian and NATO forces' command and control systems. These attacks, sophisticated and multi-faceted, sought to paralyze communications, disrupt logistics, and spread disinformation within the ranks of the defenders.

The Latvian cyber forces, despite their rigorous preparation and the backing of NATO's cyber defense expertise, found themselves on the back foot. The sheer volume and complexity of the Russian cyber aggression strained their resources and tested their resolve. Key systems flickered under the weight of relentless digital barrages, causing moments of confusion and disarray among the ground forces.

The use of hypersonic weapons, both cruise missiles and glide vehicles by both Russian forces and NATO, added a layer of urgency to the cyber conflict. With these weapons capable of striking with little warning, the importance of secure and reliable communications for their detection and interception became paramount. Yet, as Latvia and their allies' cyber teams worked tirelessly to safeguard these systems, they faced sophisticated malware designed to blind their sensors and misdirect their defenses.

In this high-stakes digital warfare, the allied forces had to adapt rapidly. They employed emergency protocols, switching to alternative communication networks and deploying mobile EMP units to shield critical infrastructure from electronic interference. Meanwhile, cyber defense units, drawing on a coalition of international expertise, began to

decipher the patterns of the Russian cyber-attacks, gradually mitigating their impact and launching counter-cyber operations aimed at exposing vulnerabilities within the Russian cyber infrastructure.

As the conflict wore on, the struggle to maintain digital superiority became a relentless tug-of-war, with each side adapting to the other's tactics. The Latvian and NATO forces, recognizing the critical role of cyber warfare in modern conflict, redoubled their efforts to innovate and secure their networks and civil society. The corridor, once peaceful and now marked by the scars of war, stood as a testament to the multifaceted nature of 21st-century combat, where victories were secured not just on the ground but in the ethereal realm of cyberspace.

In the shadow of geopolitical tension, Lithuania was at the epicenter of a crucial struggle for the future of the Baltic states and the integrity of NATO's eastern flank. The Suwalki Gap, a narrow corridor stretching between Lithuania and Poland, bridged the Baltic states with Central Europe, making it a strategic linchpin for both NATO and Russian military aspirations. It was here, in Isabelle's assigned area of operations, that the most intense confrontations unfolded, a focal point where the unity and resolve of NATO were put to the ultimate test.

As dawn broke over the verdant landscapes that characterize the Suwalki Gap, the serene beauty of the region belied the storm of conflict on the horizon. U.S., Polish and German troops integrated closely with Lithuanian forces and established defensive positions across this critical juncture. The air was tense with anticipation, as soldiers fortified bunkers, laid minefields, and set up anti-tank obstacles, transforming the area into a formidable barrier against the impending Russian advance.

The initial engagements were marked by a series of high-intensity clashes, where the advanced reconnaissance and drone warfare capabilities of NATO forces met head-on with a Russian military determined to break through the alliance's eastern defenses. The skies above the Suwalki Gap became a theater for a complex aerial dance of UAS, seeking to dominate the airspace and provide crucial intelligence for their ground forces.

The resolve of the NATO forces, however, was soon put to the test as Russian troops launched a multi-pronged assault, combining armored divisions, air support, and cyber warfare tactics aimed at disrupting the alliance's communications and command structures. The ferocity of the

Russian advance was met with an equally determined response from the U.S., Polish, German, and Lithuanian soldiers, who engaged in brutal combat, leveraging the difficult terrain to their advantage.

As battles raged, the NATO forces employed a mix of conventional and advanced warfare techniques. Stealth fighters and bombers streaked through contested airspace, launching precision strikes against key Russian positions, while cyber defense teams worked feverishly to counter attempts at digital sabotage. The Suwalki Gap echoed with the roar of tank engines, the crackle of rifle fire, and the ominous hum of drones overhead.

The Human Toll

The war's impact tore through the battlefield, reaching deep into the civilian heartland, shaking the foundations of human security and rule of law. Once-bustling capitals—Tallinn, Riga, Vilnius—transformed into places of despair. Civilians found themselves caught between geopolitical ambitions, blurring the lines between military and civilian realms. Within an hour of the conflict's onset, cyber-attacks plunged entire communities into darkness, cutting off basic amenities. Hospitals struggled to function with limited supplies, power, and food, while water supplies grew increasingly contaminated. The humanitarian crisis intensified as Russian forces advanced.

Power cuts immobilized public services, halting metro systems and traffic control, trapping the population in their homes or forcing dangerous foot journeys in search of safety and resources. Communication networks collapsed, isolating people from loved ones, and hampering emergency services. Refrigeration failures led to food-borne diseases and quickly depleted food supplies. Looting became rampant, with desperate civilians raiding stores for essentials. Food and clean water shortages caused malnutrition and waterborne diseases, overwhelming the crippled healthcare system.

Hospitals, without sufficient electricity, became places of torment. Life-saving treatments and surgeries were postponed or canceled, and patients dependent on medical equipment faced grim outcomes. Makeshift clinics emerged, often unsanitary, with medical workers enduring grueling twelve-hour shifts without breaks. Street crime surged and overwhelmed local and state police forces struggling to maintain order and to sustain their presence 24/7. Organized crime thrived, trading weapons and exploiting the chaos. Terrorist threats and extremist activities filled the

security vacuum, compounding the crisis and limiting the freedom of movement of NATO forces.

Residential areas were not spared. Russian BM-30 Smerch rockets wreaked havoc on Lithuania's civilian infrastructure during the invasion. The powerful MRLS (multiple-rocket launch systems) targeted critical urban areas, reducing once-vibrant neighborhoods in Vilnius and Kaunas to smoldering ruins. Schools, hospitals, and residential buildings bore the brunt of the onslaught, leaving widespread devastation and countless casualties. The relentless rocket fire disrupted essential services, cutting off electricity, water, and communication lines, plunging communities into chaos. Emergency responders, overwhelmed by the sheer scale of destruction, struggled to reach the wounded and trapped. The Smerch rockets' precision and destructive capability underscored the ruthless nature of the assault, transforming peaceful cities into war zones and forcing civilians into a desperate struggle for survival amidst the rubble.

Criminals exploited power outages and lack of security, making the night dangerous. Fear and tension gripped civilians, leading to widespread anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress. Children, especially, suffered the trauma of war, with schools closed and education halted, leaving a generation unable to learn and grow in safety. Gunfire, explosions, and the sight of soldiers and ruined buildings became a daily reality.

Evacuations descended into chaos. Roads out of cities clogged with refugees hindered military operations and supply movements. Shelters overflowed, creating overcrowded, unsanitary conditions ripe for disease and unrest. Local authorities and NATO used commercial end-to-end encrypted communication apps to inform and assist the displaced, but fake news and disinformation sowed confusion and distrust among the population.

The indigenous police and security forces faced the swift and devastating impact of the conflict but were unable to respond effectively because of the enormous magnitude of incidents and hostilities. Sudden cyber-attacks plunged entire communities into darkness, disrupting daily life and incapacitating essential services. Power cuts immobilized public transport and collapsing communication networks hampered emergency services' response efforts. Overwhelmed, the local police struggled to maintain order amidst rising crime and social unrest. A surge in looting and organized crime, coupled with terrorist threats exploiting the security vacuum, stretched their already thin resources to the breaking

point. Amidst this chaos, the indigenous police and security forces failed to fight crime and protect civilians effectively, deepening the sense of fear and vulnerability among the population.

As the conflict dragged on, the challenges for the indigenous police and security forces intensified. Hospitals, crippled by power outages and dwindling supplies, became breeding grounds for disease and despair, further burdening the police with maintaining order. The rampant spread of food-borne illnesses and waterborne diseases from refrigeration failures and contaminated water supplies overwhelmed the healthcare system. Security forces struggled to fight both crime and manage the humanitarian crisis. Makeshift clinics, often unsanitary and under-resourced, highlighted the dire conditions endured by medical workers and law enforcement. Organized crime, backed by Russian mercenaries with state-of-the-art technology and weaponry exploited the chaos to trade weapons and spread terror, and the police fought a relentless struggle to protect residential areas and maintain order. At night, despite the curfews, criminals preyed on vulnerable civilians, exploiting the lack of electricity and security, compounding the severe psychological toll of the war. In this environment, the indigenous police and security forces became incapacitated, leaving the civilian population in perpetual anxiety and danger. This had a severe impact on the stability in the country.

As the Russian invasion progressed, tensions in Lithuania escalated to brutal extremes. Amidst the chaos, Lithuanian civilians and militia groups turned on fellow citizens suspected of collaborating with the Russians. Vigilante justice took a gruesome turn, with hangings and executions becoming a grim reality. These acts of retribution, driven by fear and paranoia, aimed to root out perceived traitors and send a stark warning to others. Makeshift gallows and impromptu trials appeared on social media. These swift, lawless brutal punishments scared the Lithuanians and started the debate on the ability of police to maintain the rule of law. The brutalization of suspected collaborators exacerbated the already dire humanitarian crisis, deepening societal fractures and fostering an environment of mistrust and terror. In their desperate bid to protect their homeland, Lithuanians found themselves ensnared in a cycle of violence that mirrored the brutality of the invading forces, further destabilizing an already ravaged nation.

Stability Policing



1st SP BATTALION

The name and logo of the 1st SP Battalion is not a NATO official image or idea. They were created by the book Editorial Team and should be seen as a solely fictional motives serving the purpose of this book.

The names and pictures of the 1st SP Battalion staff have been generated by AI and thus do not represent any national or personal identity.

1st SP BATTALION STAFF



BATTALION COMMANDER
COL. ISABELLE AMÉLIE MOREAU-GIRARD
GENDARMERIE NATIONALE



DEPUTY BATTALION COMMANDER
LT. COL. MARCO RICCI
CARABINIERI



ALPHA COY
CAPT. ANDREI IONESCU
JANDARMERIA ROMÂNĂ



BRAVO COY
CAPT. ANGELO RESTRETTI
CARABINIERI



LOGISTIC SUPPORT UNIT
CAPT. MICKAEL DAVIAUD
GENDARMERIE NATIONALE



LIAISON OFFICER
CAPT. ANGELICA NOWAK
ŻANDARMERIA WOJSKOWA



SPECIALIZED ELEMENTS
CAPT. MUSTAFA KAYA
JANDARMA



BORDER CONTROL UNIT
CAPT. SANDRA JANSSEN
KONINKLIJKE MARECHAUSSEE



SPECIALIZED POLICE UNIT
CAPT. JUAN RODRIGUEZ
GUARDIA CIVIL



TDY INTELLIGENCE OFFICE
LIEUT. JACK BARNES
UNITED STATES NAVY

The Eye of the Storm

As the sun rose, casting long shadows over a landscape scarred by the previous day's intense fighting, Colonel Isabelle Moreau-Girard understood the monumental task ahead. Taking in the unique and unpleasant smell of chaos smoke, dust, and a unique scent of human sweat, fear, and adrenaline – she contemplated that the invasion was just the opening act of a complex and multifaceted war, one that would not only test the military mettle of the NATO alliance but also the resilience and unity of its member states and the local populations of the besieged countries.

Tasked with leading the NATO 1st Stability Policing Battalion, under the command of the NATO Force Commander, Isabelle was responsible not just with the enforcement of law and order amid chaos but also with safeguarding the very principles of sovereignty and freedom that were now under siege – sovereignty and freedom being the core values of NATO and France, her motherland. As she prepared her forces, drawing upon every ounce of her experience and strategic acumen, she remained acutely aware that the battle for the Baltics was not merely a confrontation of arms but a defining moment for the future of Europe and the world at large. Her thoughts were running between home and her new place of deployment. Protecting the Baltics meant protecting home, saving lives here meant saving future generations' peace and prosperity across all of Europe, including her own children back in France. In this new dawn of uncertainty, Colonel Isabelle Amélie Moreau-Girard stood as a beacon of resolve and leadership. The days and weeks ahead would demand the full measure of her skills and ingenuity. She knew that her Stability Policing Battalion could play an important role in achieving success for NATO.

Isabelle's journey to the forward operating area near Kaunas and Vilnius was marked not by the turbulence of the aging H160 helicopter that carried her but by the storm of thoughts swirling within her mind. As the Lithuanian landscape stretched out beneath her – its tranquil beauty masking the deep scars of ongoing conflict and the pervasive tension among its people – Isabelle's concentration was unwavering, squarely fixed on the daunting task of restoring human security, stability, governance, and law and order amidst the chaos of a large-scale combat operation.

NATO Stability Policing forces would be incredibly valuable in the struggle to maintain order and stability in support of the besieged Baltic states. These specialized units would be at the forefront, tasked with ensuring public safety and restoring normalcy in cities ravaged by the ongoing

conflict. With their unique blend of military and policing skills, they will serve as the critical link between military operations and civil security. As Russian forces were very experienced in hybrid warfare and could deploy advanced cyber-attacks combined with conventional assaults, the Stability Policing forces were needed to counter these threats with precision and resilience.

Isabelle's 1st Stability Policing Battalion was tasked with actively supporting the NATO war effort by executing a range of proactive duties designed to maintain control and stability and disrupt enemy activities. Her unit would soon be engaging in intelligence-led operations to identify and neutralize insurgent cells and criminal networks that seek to exploit the chaos of war. By conducting public order management activities, surveillance missions, and counter-crime operations, the 1st SP Battalion would work to preempt threats before they could destabilize key areas. Additionally, they would provide support to frontline military units by securing borders, managing refugee checkpoints, and controlling critical infrastructure. Their presence would ensure that the civil environment remains manageable, allowing NATO forces to focus on strategic military objectives without the constant threat of chaos, urban unrest or insurgent interference. Through these dynamic and forward-leaning actions, the 1st SP Battalion will be integral to sustaining the overall momentum and effectiveness of the NATO campaign.

Upon landing, the brisk Baltic air greeted Isabelle, a sharp contrast to the warmth of the welcome from her NATO colleagues who awaited her arrival. The base, a hive of activity and urgency, served as a stark reminder of the situation's gravity. Here, at the edge of Kaunas, stood the nexus of NATO's response to the Russian invasion, a forward operating area that was both a bastion of defense and a spearhead of the efforts to restore peace and stability to the region.

Isabelle stood at attention as the door to the command post swung open. The cold Baltic wind blew in, carrying with it the scent of pine and distant gunpowder. Polish Major General Andrzej Narusewicz, the NATO Multi-National Division-North (MND-N) Commander, along with his MP Provost Marshal (PM), Colonel Marek Kolar, stepped inside, his tall frame casting a long shadow across the floor. They greeted her with a firm handshake and a respectful nod.

"Colonel Moreau-Girard, it's an honor to meet you in person," Narusewicz began, his voice a blend of authority and warmth. His piercing blue eyes conveyed both respect and the gravity of the situation at hand.

"The honor is mine, General," Isabelle replied, her French accent tinged with the formality of military decorum. She admired his reputation and was eager to prove her battalion's worth under his command.

Narusewicz introduced Colonel Kolar and gestured for her to sit. "Please, Colonel, let's discuss the task ahead."

As they settled into their seats, Narusewicz leaned forward, his gaze fixed on the screen on the wall. "Your battalion can be immensely valuable to our efforts here in Lithuania. The MP forces are overstretched and cannot support your SP battalion. Of course, my PM, Colonel Kolar will be your point of contact in all policing matters and will assist you whenever and wherever you are in need. Now to business, the situation is precarious, and we need to ensure that stability is maintained not just in the aftermath of engagements but actively during the conflict. My fighting forces are hindered by too many insurgent incidents in the backyard of the frontline."

Isabelle nodded, absorbing his words. "What are our primary objectives, sir?"

Narusewicz's expression grew serious. "First, you will conduct intelligence-led operations to dismantle insurgent cells and criminal networks. These elements are exploiting the chaos to destabilize our efforts. Second, you will need to assist local authorities when ordered, manage the refugee and humanitarian crisis so we can ensure stability in the cities and hinterland. I need stability for our forces and to keep the public at peace. Lastly, we need your battalion to support local law enforcement in maintaining public order, which can make a large difference for our overall mission success."

Isabelle took a moment before responding. "General, these tasks require a delicate balance of force and diplomacy. What level of autonomy will my battalion have in executing these operations?"

Narusewicz smiled, appreciating her directness. "You'll have considerable autonomy, Colonel. Trust your judgment and the capabilities of your officers. However, make sure you work through the chain of command

and coordinate closely with local commanders and keep me and the PM informed of any significant developments”.

She nodded again. “Understood, General. In order to be as successful and effective as possible, I need your consent to integrate military and police intelligence.”

Narusewicz said, “You have my permission to fully work together with my intelligence units. Colonel.”

Isabelle replied, “Thank you, sir.”

Narusewicz stood, signaling the end of their meeting. “I have full confidence in you and your battalion. The path ahead is going to be a treacherous one, but I know you are capable. Go make it happen, Colonel.”

She stood as well, offering a crisp salute. “Thank you, sir.”

As Narusewicz left the command post, Isabelle took a cup of coffee and went outside to smoke a cigarette, an American Marlboro Light. She appreciated this one-on-one meeting with the NATO force commander her battalion would be supporting. She returned to the screen covered in planning materials, already thinking through the first steps of her battalion’s mission.

As she surveyed the screens before her, Isabelle’s mind raced through the logistical planning and operational challenges that awaited her team. Urban environments, with their dense populations and complex infrastructures, posed significant hurdles for stability operations. The prospect of engaging in a delicate balance of force and diplomacy, of ensuring security, was a daunting task. At least the local populace was seemingly on their side. But the specter of hybrid warfare tactics – cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, and the shadowy involvement of organized crime – added layers of complexity to an already intricate mission.

Several hours later, Isabelle stood before her battalion, the gravity of their mission mirrored in the determined faces of her officers and personnel. The NATO 1st Stability Policing Battalion, assembled in the chilly Baltic air with their attention fixed on their commander.

“Good morning,” Isabelle began, her voice cutting through the cold morning air with clarity and command. “Today, we embark on a mission that is unprecedented in its complexity and vital to the future of Europe and the free world. Our task goes beyond the conventional boundaries of military engagement. We are here to restore order, protect the innocent, and uphold the very principles of sovereignty and freedom that have come under siege.”

Her gaze swept over the assembled ranks, ensuring she met the eyes of as many of her troops as possible. “The invasion,” she continued, “was only the opening moment of this war and it’s important for you to recognize, it was just the beginning of our mission, which I promise you will be extremely difficult. It will challenge each and every one of us, personally and as a unit. It is better that we face the enormity and complexity of our task with clear eyes and an attitude of resilience!”

Isabelle paused, allowing her words to resonate among her battalion. She then moved on to the tactical aspects of their mission. “The urban environments of Kaunas and Vilnius present unique challenges. Dense populations, complex infrastructure, and the ever-present threat of hybrid warfare tactics – including cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, and organized crime – will test our capabilities to their limits.”

She leaned slightly forward, her tone intensifying. “But remember, the heart of this mission, the true measure of our success, lies in supporting the NATO war effort through law enforcement and protecting the Lithuanian people. Our conduct, our integrity, and our ability will define this mission. We must be as adept in diplomacy and policing as we are in combat, as committed to the rule of law as we are to the defense of NATO territory.”

Isabelle’s eyes hardened with resolve. “This is not just a battle of arms; it’s a battle for the future, for the ideals that define us. We stand at the forefront of this struggle. Let us move forward with unwavering resolve, clear in our purpose and steadfast in our commitment. Give all the effort, dedication, and support you can possibly muster to your Coy and unit commanders. Their word is my word. Dismissed.”

As she concluded her briefing, the air around Isabelle and her battalion seemed charged with both excitement and anxiety. The weight of expectation and the enormity of the task ahead were palpable, but so was the unity and determination of the NATO 1st Stability Policing Battalion.

With Colonel Moreau-Girard at the helm, they were ready to face the challenges of the mission, aware of its significance not just for Lithuania, but for the stability and security of the entire region.

The challenge was monumental, but she was ready to face it head-on, armed with her intellect, her experience, and her unwavering commitment to the cause of peace. She ordered her Staff to prepare the next meeting with her unit commanders to work on detailed plans and orders to put ideas in practice. She also ordered a few more thermoses of stronger coffee. The air pressure was extremely low during her first day of mission.

Hell on the Border

Two days later, Isabelle was readying herself for her scheduled sync meeting with General Narusewicz. Isabelle adjusted her headset and straightened her uniform as the secure NATO video teleconference system (VTC) connected. The screen flickered before displaying the familiar face of the general. Despite the digital barrier, his presence remained commanding and reassuring.

“Colonel Moreau-Girard, it’s good to see you,” Narusewicz said. “When I spoke with General D’Arcy yesterday, he said you wouldn’t mind me calling you ‘Isa’. May I call you that?”

Isabelle smiled and briefly reminisced about the brilliant and genial French Gendarmerie officer who mentored her and treated her like an adopted daughter, having her over often at his home for dinner with his wife Amélie. She quickly snapped back to the present, responding, “Good to see you too, General. And of course, sir!

“Excellent”, he said with his tone then growing more serious. “We have some critical updates on the border situation that need your immediate attention.”

“Where can we help, sir?” she replied.

Narusewicz’s image shifted slightly as he brought up a series of digital maps and intelligence reports on the screen. “The border with the Kaliningrad Oblast is becoming hellacious,” he said, highlighting areas of concern. “We’re seeing not just military engagements but brutal violence and chaos. Smuggling of weapons and contraband is rampant, and there are infiltration attempts by paramilitary groups that are threatening to undermine

everything we're doing. Our intelligence elements are reporting trafficking of human beings, weaponry and drugs," his face showing a look of disgust. "While it's been mostly small arms, mortars, and a lot of ammo, they've also brought in some high-end surface-to-air missiles and a huge number of drones. Our analysts assess they're going to paramilitary groups in Lithuania. Some of it is possibly making it into Estonia and Latvia too."

Isabelle furrowed her brow with concern and asked, "Who is suspected to be behind it? Russian organized criminal organizations or is it state sponsored by the Kremlin?"

General Narusewicz replied, "It's mostly the Russian Brigada but they seem to be working with the Riga Syndicate as well. While we have nothing official, we can assume the Kremlin is backing this. I've had all the reports sent to you now, but I need more police intelligence on this topic."

Isabelle leaned forward, her eyes scanning the data. "What are our specific orders, General?"

Narusewicz's expression grew graver. "Isa, first, as soon as possible, provide my intel section the much-needed police intel on organized crime activities connected to the Kremlin, second, your battalion needs to support the local police and border units and establish and reinforce checkpoints along the key routes connecting Lithuania to Kaliningrad. You have to intercept any illicit smuggling activities and prevent the infiltration of enemy operatives. They've concentrated most of the smuggling lines through the Kybartai Border Crossing. This is going to require close coordination with local border security and intelligence units. The situation is critical."

"Understood, sir," Isabelle responded. "And the border with Belarus?"

"The situation there is equally dire," Narusewicz continued, shifting the map to show the Belarusian border. "Belarus is supporting Russian operations, and we're facing increased infiltration attempts, smuggling operations, and rather severe human trafficking. Refugees are pouring across the border, overwhelming our facilities and resources, creating an extremely chaotic and dangerous environment."

Isabelle's mind raced with logistics. "We'll need more personnel and resources to handle the refugee flow and prevent criminal networks from exploiting the chaos."

Narusewicz's expression softened with a hint of regret. "Isa, our resources are stretched to the breaking point across multiple fronts. This is why I need that police intel now, if we know where and what the enemy is up to, we can be more effective with deploying our resources and capacity. I can offer some additional personnel and resources, but you'll need to make do with what you have and coordinate closely with the local forces. The violence and chaos are only escalating. I'm not sure we've hit the apex."

Isabelle took a deep breath, accepting this unfortunate outcome. "And what about our ports and coastal areas, General?"

"The ports, especially Klaipeda³⁶, are flashpoints," Narusewicz said, his finger tracing the coastline on the digital map. "Local authorities are monitoring them closely. My staff is preparing plans for a possible influx of refugees by sea. I need extra support from your experts to join my staff in analyzing this threat. This adds another layer of complexity to the border issues."

Isabelle nodded, her mind already formulating a plan. "We'll be there, sir."

Narusewicz leaned back slightly, his eyes fixed on Isabelle. "I have full confidence in your ability to manage this. Your Stability Policing battalion's role is crucial in maintaining law and order and ensuring the security of our borders during this war. Keep me informed of your progress, and don't hesitate to request additional support if needed, even though our capacity is limited. This situation is more violent and chaotic than anything we've faced before. Do you have kids, Isa?" General asked.

"Yes, I have two daughters," Isabelle replied.

"I have two sons and a daughter. Imagine that would happen in our countries, to our children", Narusewicz pointed.

"Sir, I am really trying not to imagine that." Isabelle refused to empathize.

³⁶ The city in Lithuania is called Klaipėda. For the purpose of this book, the authors will use its English name being "Klaipeda".

“Wrong! Think about how we’re here to protect them, our families. That will give you a dramatically different perspective and additional motivation.” insisted Narusewicz.

With more confidence than she was truly feeling, Isabelle said, “We’ll take care of it, sir. I’ll put Lieutenant Jansen on this. She’s young but is a true expert with several years of experience at EU border police, FRONTEX, she performed excellently in Ukraine and Moldova.”

Isabelle stood and offered a crisp salute, even though she knew he couldn’t see the full gesture through the screen. “We won’t let you down, sir!”

As the VTC ended, Isabelle turned back to her operational plans, the enormity of the task ahead clear in her mind. She knew that the success of their mission hinged on their ability to adapt quickly and act decisively. With her orders clear, she prepared to lead her battalion in the daunting task of securing Lithuania’s borders in the face of overwhelming violence and chaos.

Twenty minutes later, Lieutenant Sandra Janssen and Captain Angelica Nowak, the liaison to the local authorities and FRONTEX, Europol and Interpol, reported to Isabelle in the Colonel’s command post. They entered and stood at attention, waiting for Isabelle to look up from the maps in front of her. Isabelle glanced up at them and said, “Come over and look at these maps and intel reports, so I can give you probably the toughest assignment you’ve had in your young careers.” Captain Nowak and Lieutenant Janssen walked over to where the colonel was looking over maps with several screens nearby displaying intelligence reports and said, “That’s what we are here for, ma’am”. Isabelle looked at both and sized them up. She admired the experience these young officers had but was further impressed with their bravado.

“The border with Kaliningrad Oblast is in complete disarray. We’re dealing with brutal violence, rampant smuggling, and infiltration by Russian paramilitary groups. This situation is critically threatening NATO operations and the stability in our AOR.”

Sandra leaned in, studying the data. “Understood, ma’am. We need to set up, upgrade and reinforce checkpoints along the key routes, especially at the Kybartai Border Crossing. I can deploy rapid response teams equipped with advanced surveillance drones and electronic countermeasures to

intercept smuggling activities and infiltration attempts. We don't have a lot of advanced drones. We're just too much of a mixed force between the large amount of earlier generation UAS some of the countries have provided and the limited number of top-end drones. I'm going to have to fight through some tough C2 and systems integration, but I think we can supplement the exquisite capabilities with some of the lower tier units and we'll have to do a little more analog, old-fashioned person-to-person coordination than the timeline is really allowing. But to put my plan to the chain of command I need good intelligence and good contact with the local police and border units."

Isabelle nodded, pleased with Sandra's proactive approach. "Indeed, and this is where I need you to step in, Captain Nowak. Connect immediately with your counterparts in the Lithuanian police and border institutions and help Lieutenant Janssen get her much-needed intel. Check and see what FRONTEX can do to help us with real-time satellite intel. Also, as soon as possible, I need a full intel update on the situation with the Russian sponsored organized crime organization in our AOR from Interpol and Europol. This request comes from the highest level, so get on this right away. Good. We need to enhance our intelligence-sharing between NATO and local border security and coordinate closely with them."

Sandra and Angelica took note and Sandra continued with her first assessment. Sandra said: "I'll plan out a joint operations center at the border crossing to streamline communication and coordination. We will identify the hotspots as quickly as possible, and we can use mobile command units to maintain flexibility and adapt to changing threats quickly. We're having some friction in the allied networks but I'm working around it with software-defined radios and some of the new satcom units we trained on last year."

Isabelle shifted the map to the Belarusian border. "Belarus is actively supporting Russian operations. We're facing severe state sponsored human trafficking from the Middle East and North Africa and an overwhelming influx of refugees fleeing the war. Our facilities are stretched thin, and the environment is a chaotic mess."

Sandra's mind raced for possible solutions. She said, "I could work with local law enforcement to set up safe zones for refugees, identifying them with our biometrics to filter out the bad boys and insurgents and increase patrols to prevent criminal networks from exploiting the chaos. By deploying our biometric systems, we will also better manage and track refugee movements

so we can maintain security while providing humanitarian aid. But we need NATO engineers to build border corridors to regain control."

Isabelle's expression softened. She said, "Our resources are limited, Sandra. I can offer some additional support, but you'll need to maximize what we have and leverage local forces. I will take your request for engineers up in my NATO chain of command."

Sandra nodded. She replied, "I can set up training and integrate local security personnel into our operations tactics to extend our reach. For the ports and coastal areas, especially Klaipeda, I'll coordinate with NATO naval units to enhance our maritime patrols and set up radar systems to monitor for smuggling attempts."

Isabelle, confident in Sandra's capabilities, told her, "You've already got a solid plan in your head, Lieutenant. Coordinate your plans with the Headquarters. I expect them in full detail, within 24 hours, on my desk. For the post and coastal areas, you need to join up with the Force Commander's planning cell. If we don't get a handle on this, it could spin even further out of control. I'm counting on you to get this done, no matter how hard. It's probably going to get worse before it gets better."

Angelica and Sandra stood and offered a crisp salute. Angelica replied with a steadfast voice "If it was easy, everybody would do it. We'll take care of it, ma'am."

"Do you ladies smoke?" Isabelle asked, putting a cigarette into her mouth and getting ready to leave the room.

"No, ma'am" they both replied with astonishment and slight repulsion.

"Well, me neither. Only when I am away." she replied.

Within a week, Sandra had established a joint operations center at the Kybartai Border Crossing. The hub buzzed with activity, with personnel from NATO's Stability Policing Battalion and local Lithuanian law enforcement working in unison. The atmosphere was thick with tension and determined focus.

Surveillance drones patrolled the skies, providing high-resolution, real-time information of the border. These drones revealed potential smuggling routes

and suspicious movements, allowing the rapid response teams, equipped with advanced electronic countermeasures, to intercept illicit activities. It wasn't long before the first major success: a convoy of several civilian trucks were intercepted moving small arms and ammunition intended for paramilitary groups. The contraband was secured, and the perpetrators were arrested and detained, providing valuable intelligence on the criminal organization and smuggling tactics and techniques they employed.

As the operation progressed, the integrated approach showed its worth. Smuggling attempts were thwarted, and key members of criminal organizations were captured. The local border security units were very much aware of the terrain, and law enforcement NATO SP units provided essential material and expertise on border security and public order management. Joint patrols effectively managed the influx of refugees, preventing criminal networks from exploiting the chaos. Coordination with local law enforcement proved beneficial, enhancing both security and efficiency. The amount of police information that was generated from these joint operations was staggering and provided NATO with much needed information.

However, challenges quickly emerged. Technological integration issues arose when biometric systems introduced to manage refugee flows failed to sync with existing databases. Many hours of troubleshooting and collaboration followed, with teams working diligently to overcome the technical setbacks.

By the end of the week, after the joint operations center stood up, the positive results were evident. Successful interceptions increased, and the border areas became more secure. The gathered intel proved to be valuable to NATO forces. Refugee processing improved, with fewer incidents of criminal activity. The integration issues, both technological and personnel-related, had been largely overcome through proactive and adaptive leadership.

The Kybartai Border Crossing, once a hotbed of chaos and violence, began to stabilize. Smuggling networks were disrupted, and the influx of illegal weapons and human trafficking diminished. Refugees were processed more efficiently, and their needs were met with dignity and better care. This contributed to a much-appreciated increase of support from the citizens of Lithuania and better press towards NATO actions and a decrease of Russian influence in Lithuania.

Early that evening, Sandra joined a secure VTC to update Colonel Moreau-Girard on the progress of the unit's border control initiatives.

"Good evening, Lieutenant Janssen" Isabelle began as they connected. Next to her sat Lieutenant Colonel Marco Ricci, the Deputy Battalion Commander, his presence adding another layer of authority to the meeting.

"Lieutenant, good to see you," Isabelle continued, her voice steady and reassuring. "Deputy Commander Lieutenant Colonel Ricci is here with me. We've been eager to hear your update."

Sandra took a deep breath. "We've made significant progress, ma'am. The rapid response teams and enhanced surveillance have been effective. We intercepted a convoy carrying small arms and ammo intended for paramilitary groups. The contraband has been secured, and we've detained several key individuals for questioning, which resulted in valuable information for our intel section."

Ricci leaned forward, nodding approvingly. "Excellent work, Lieutenant. How are you handling the influx of refugees and technological integration?"

Sandra nodded, glancing at the screens displaying biometric data. "We had some initial challenges with the biometric systems integration, but we managed to troubleshoot and resolve the issues. The integration has improved, and we're efficiently managing the refugee flow. We've also set up safe zones and increased patrols to prevent criminal networks from exploiting the situation."

"Good to hear," Isabelle said, her tone encouraging. "What about the training discrepancies you mentioned in your last report?"

"We've implemented immediate training sessions," Sandra replied. "Our officers that have more experience in these TTPs are mentoring local personnel and our other personnel with less training, and the joint training has significantly improved our operational cohesion. Our own personnel and the local forces are now better equipped to handle advanced tactical maneuvers and now we can coordinate our efforts by synchronizing our operations."

Ricci exchanged a glance with Isabelle before speaking. "What input did you bring to the staff process at Force Commanders level on the ports and coastal areas?"

"We were able to coordinate our border security plans with our NATO naval units, this improves the effectiveness of NATO maritime patrols and sets up a sort of overlapping radar net to monitor for smuggling attempts, SP border specialists are on board and in the maritime C2 structure to advise and assist on fighting crime" Sandra explained. "We also advised on preparing contingency plans for handling refugees arriving by sea."

Isabelle nodded, a hint of relief in her eyes. "You've done an impressive job, Sandra. Your leadership and proactive approach have made a significant impact. Keep up the good work and continue to adapt as needed. We're making headway, thanks to your efforts."

Ricci added, "Your adaptability and strategic thinking are commendable, Lieutenant. Continue leveraging the strengths of your team and resources."

Sandra smiled, feeling a surge of pride. "Thank you, ma'am, thank you, sir. We'll continue to do our best. I'll keep you updated on our progress."

"Stay safe and keep your teams focused," Isabelle said, offering a nod of respect.

As the secure comms channel closed, Sandra turned back to her team, her confidence bolstered by the words of both her commanding officers. With her orders understood and her plan in motion, Sandra prepared to lead her team in supporting the security and stability of Lithuania's borders.

As the sun set over the horizon, the joint operations center reflected a quieter, more focused energy. The NATO Stability Policing Border Control Unit, under Sandra's direction, had proven its resilience and adaptability. They had set a strong foundation for the continued defense and stabilization of Lithuania's borders, turning a chaotic situation into a better controlled and secure environment.

Echoes of the Past

As the dusk settled over the Lithuanian landscape, casting long shadows that danced across the makeshift operations center, Isabelle found herself

alone with her thoughts. The frenetic pace of planning and preparation had given way to a rare moment of quiet, a pause that allowed the past to seep into her consciousness, weaving through the fabric of her focus with insistent persistence.

Her mind drifted, unbidden, to the earlier chapters of her career, to the myriad operations that had sculpted her into the officer she was today. Each memory, vivid and instructive, was a mosaic piece of her understanding of Stability Policing – of its challenges, its nuances, and its indispensable role in the tapestry of international security.

With the smoke of her cigarette and steam from her hot and sweet coffee wafting in front of her, she remembered her deployment to the Balkans, where the scars of conflict were etched deep into the land and its people. There, she had learned the delicate art of navigating the labyrinth of ethnic tensions, of building bridges where walls had once stood. The importance of empathy, of listening and understanding before acting, had been a lesson hard-earned amidst the ruins of war-torn communities. The lesson she would never forget, as she arrived in the Balkans straight after losing her father to cancer and her depressed divorce. When she was through, she was at the bottom and saw what the bottom really looked like.

Isabelle had navigated some of the most challenging conflict zones and fragile states in the world throughout her career. Starting as a Platoon Leader with the Republican Guard in Paris and later in many assignments and missions in France and abroad, she built a reputation for exceptional leadership, tactical expertise, and a commitment to humanitarian principles. During operations in Africa from 2022 until 2030, she honed her skills and demonstrated her resolve to protect the vulnerable.

The African years tested Isabelle's mettle in unimaginable ways. As the conflict intensified and millions were displaced, her mission evolved from securing key regions and disarming militant groups to establishing safe zones and facilitating humanitarian aid. Being a single mother to two kids, her life was hard enough. Yet, it was incomparable to mothers living in poverty, conflict areas, where most newborn couldn't make it even a month. She felt this sense of giving back for everything that had happened to her and put herself tirelessly in building local capacities, mentored police forces, dismantled human trafficking networks, and fought against the cruelty

caused by private military companies. Her strategic acumen and empathy saved lives and helped restore order in the war-torn continent.

Isabelle's experiences in Africa profoundly impacted her, reinforcing her belief that military might alone could not resolve and sustain stability in complex crises. She recognized the need for a comprehensive approach to integrating several instruments of power and NGO's. Her leadership during the crisis earned international acclaim and exposed her to the harsh realities of human suffering and the profound ethical dilemmas inherent in such missions.

The ongoing migrant crisis had presented her with a different challenge altogether. This crisis unfolded as a multifaceted challenge, unlike Europe had faced in recent memory. With waves of refugees arriving at its borders, the continent found itself grappling with a dilemma that struck at the very heart of its values and capabilities. Amid this complex scenario, Isabelle found herself at the forefront, navigating a labyrinth of legal, moral, and humanitarian considerations.

Her role had been anything but straightforward. As a commander tasked with overseeing the enforcement of borders in Libya, Isabelle was acutely aware of the security imperatives that the situation demanded. Yet, the sight of families, children, and individuals fleeing war, persecution, and poverty tugged relentlessly at the strings of her conscience. She was thrust into a world where the lines between duty and humanity had blurred, where each decision carried the weight of profound ethical implications.

"The challenge we face is not merely logistical or political; it is fundamentally humanitarian," Isabelle often reflected internally. Her approach was characterized by a delicate balancing act, one that sought to uphold the integrity of borders while extending a hand of support to those in dire need.

One of her key initiatives together with the International Committee of the Red Cross was the creation of humanitarian corridors in the most volatile regions. Isabelle personally oversaw the setup of some corridors, ensuring that displaced families could move to safer areas without falling prey to human traffickers or militant groups. On one occasion, while coordinating an evacuation from a besieged town, Isabelle encountered a young boy who had lost his entire family in the chaos. She ensured he was placed in

a safe zone and personally followed up on his well-being, illustrating her commitment to individual lives amid the broader crisis.

Moreover, Isabelle's experience with the migrant crisis in Africa deepened her understanding of the root causes driving mass migration. She recognized that beyond the immediate need for shelter and safety, addressing the long-term challenges of conflict, poverty, and inequality was crucial for any sustainable solution. This realization further informed her approach, encouraging a broader perspective that sought not only to respond to the symptoms of the crisis but to engage with its underlying drivers.

During one of her missions, Isabelle, commanding a stability policing unit on patrol, visited a remote village that had been completely cut off due to the fighting. She facilitated the delivery of food and medical supplies and initiated talks with local leaders. Her efforts and talks gave her insight into the fundamental issues that force people to flee their home: in this village all young men were captured by a Russian affiliated PMC to work in the gold mines in the neighboring country and the village was plundered. The ongoing climate change, with rising temperatures, made it almost impossible for the remaining few to make a living.

The migrant crisis also presented significant challenges to military operations. The influx of refugees and migrants hampered military efforts and influenced public opinion, creating additional pressure to address the situation swiftly and effectively. Unaddressed, massive migration flows strained local resources, destabilized border regions, and complicated military logistics. Isabelle understood that stability policing played a critical role in this context, as the success of military missions depended on maintaining public support, fighting crime and mitigating the humanitarian impact of the crisis.

Throughout this period, Isabelle developed an acute sensitivity to the human stories behind the statistics and headlines. Thus, she was a big advocate of human security – a human-centric approach towards various domains of security, primarily food security, health security and community security. Each family she helped, each child she saw find safety, added layers to her comprehension of the crisis and its impact on individual lives. These experiences enriched her leadership, endowing her with a compass calibrated by justice and compassion.

The Pervasive Threats

Isabelle stood in the operations room with her full staff for a daily situation update, discussing the latest intelligence reports and the approaches her staff would suggest addressing the growing threat picture.

“Ladies and gentlemen, our intelligence indicates that Russian forces are deploying directed energy weapons, probably at 95 GHz, through portable units and UXS delivery methods. These weapons are precise and can incapacitate our troops or damage our equipment without warning,” explained Lieutenant Jack Barnes, a U.S. Navy intelligence officer embedded with the Stability Policing battalion on a special assignment.

Captain Kaya, the UAS expert from the Turkish Jandarma, interjected, “We’ve observed drones equipped with dazzling lasers to attract attention and temporarily incapacitate our personnel and local civilians’ vision. We can counter this with enhanced drone detection systems and protective eyewear for our troops. We may be able to inform the civilian population of indicators they should look for to warn them, but we can’t protect them as well.”

Isabelle concurred, “Good, Captain Kaya. I want you to execute this but coordinate it with the Coy commanders.”

Lieutenant Barnes added, “Additionally, we have reports of invisible tracking through smart-water and nanotechnology products. These can mark our movements and allow our enemy to track us undetected.”

Isabelle nodded, acknowledging the gravity of the situation. “Captain Kaya, coordinate with our cyber teams to develop countermeasures against these tracking technologies. We need to protect our forces from being marked and tracked.”

Captain Kaya responded, “Understood, ma’am.”

Lieutenant Barnes continued on, “Ma’am, we have received credible intelligence that enemy forces are using selective hailing around Vilnius. These stunning sound effects can range from information through warning to temporary incapacitation and even death.”

"You just have nothing but good news for us today, Lieutenant.", Isabelle said sardonically.

"Always here to cheer everyone up, ma'am.", Lieutenant Barnes retorted.

Captain Daviaud, the logistics expert, commented, "Colonel, we need to ensure our people are equipped with noise-canceling headsets and have proper training to recognize and react to these sound-based attacks."

Lieutenant Rodriguez added, "Moreover, they're using tracking devices on our personnel's communication and data storage devices, as well as acquiring physiological parameters through biometrics."

Isabelle's eyes narrowed in focus. "Captain Daviaud, connect with NATO LOG Base and ensure all our troops are equipped with the same necessary protective gear against these sound attacks as our infantry units. Lieutenant Rodriguez, I want a thorough sweep of all our devices for any tracking mechanisms. Collaborate with the UK's National Cyber Security Centre to check on protocols to prevent and detect these intrusions."

Captain Daviaud and Lieutenant Rodriguez both responded in unison, "Yes, ma'am."

Isabelle continued, "We will also work with the FBI's Cyber Division to implement advanced encryption methods for our police communications and data storage. One of our priorities has to be safeguarding our personnel and maintaining the integrity of our police operations. We need to make sure that we have secure comms with NATO and our police networks."

Turning to the lone American in the command post, Isabelle asked, "What other doom and gloom do you have for us, Lieutenant?"

"Ma'am, we have confirmed reports that Russian proxy forces are using directed energy weapons with precision targeting capabilities. These DEWs can incapacitate our electronics and personnel from a distance. They use them also in criminal activities." Lieutenant Barnes replied to her and the rest of the team.

Captain Mustafa Kaya spoke up, "Colonel, our drones can detect the deployment of these DEWs. If we can connect to our patrols and the local police on the ground to inform them on DEW locations, we should be able to counter this threat."

Isabelle nodded. "Captain Kaya, this sounds as a good solution, connect with captain Nowak, she can liaise with the local police. Let's neutralize these threats asap".

Captain Kaya responded, "Understood, Colonel. I'll also coordinate with NATO to share real-time data on DEW locations and movements."

Isabelle turned to Captain Restretti. "We need to integrate these measures in our Coys. Inform our outgoing patrols and surveillance to detect and disrupt these DEW bandits before they can strike."

Captain Restretti replied: "We'll work closely with our partners and NATO's Joint Forces Command to develop integrated defensive strategies."

Isabelle asked Lieutenant Barnes: "Any more threat updates, Lieutenant?"

"One more alligator close to the boat, ma'am.", he replied "Pardon?", Isabelle asked quizzically.

He smiled and responded, "Apologies ma'am. It's an American expression. Our communications have been targeted by sophisticated cyber-attacks. We need to update our advanced encryption methods to secure our police and governmental information, momentarily we work on this with our counterpart in the MND-N."

"Excellent, see what we can achieve together with our brothers in arms.," Isabelle agreed. "Our goal is to stay one step ahead of the enemy's alligator. I mean cyber capabilities."

Hunger and Insecurity Abound

Isabelle stood at the head of the table in the command post, surrounded by her deputy Lieutenant Colonel Ricci and key officers. Captains Angelica Nowak, Andrei Ionescu, Angelo Restretti, Mickael Daviaud and Lieutenant Juan Rodriguez listened intently as she laid out the latest updates and challenges facing their battalion. The atmosphere was tense, the weight of their responsibilities heavy on everyone's shoulders.

"We've received reports of increasing looting and black-market activity," Isabelle began, her voice steady but urgent. "This is directly impacting our humanitarian aid delivery and food security efforts. We need a

comprehensive strategy to address this, especially in coordination with local Lithuanian law enforcement.”

Captain Angelica Nowak, known for her sharp tactical mind, leaned forward. “We’re seeing organized groups exploiting the chaos to steal food and medical supplies. They’re reselling these on the black market at exorbitant prices. This not only deprives those in need but also fuels further unrest.”

Captain Andrei Ionescu, added, “We need to secure the supply lines better. I suggest we establish a series of checkpoints along the primary routes used for aid delivery and deploy our surveillance drones between the checkpoints. These will not only deter looters but also allow us to monitor and control the flow of resources more effectively.”

Captain Mickael Daviaud, the French logistics expert, nodded in agreement. He said, “We need to regain control otherwise we lose our resources, I’m in need of additional security information of the human relief and logistic convoys. We should also consider rerouting some deliveries to less predictable paths to minimize the risk of ambushes.”

Captain Angelo Restretti, commander of Bravo Coy, spoke up, “We have to enhance our engagement with local law enforcement. Joint patrols and shared intelligence can help us identify and dismantle black market networks. We can also deploy our SP units to hotspots known for looting.”

Isabelle listened carefully, nodding as she absorbed their input. She said, “Captain Restretti, I want you to oversee the establishment of these checkpoints. Coordinate with Angelica to ensure we connect with the Provost Marshal, we do not want to obstruct military checkpoint and NATO corridors, also coordinate with civilian police and try to cover all critical routes. Focus on securing the convoys and rerouting as necessary. Mickael, get me the status on all our supplies as soon as possible and work closely with NATO log base to give me a worst-case scenario and an expected scenario. Captain Andrei Ionescu, you need to brief Captain Rodriguez on this issue, I want to have a plan on my desk by tomorrow morning 09.00 hours sharp on how to stop these criminal activities as soon as possible.”

She then referred to the broader NATO strategy. “I received orders stating that we need to align our policing actions better with NATO’s Seven

Baseline Requirements for National Resilience, particularly in terms of civil preparedness. This includes ensuring civil transportation systems and civil communication systems remain functional and secure. We also better be prepared for mass casualties and manage our own food and water resources effectively.”³⁷

Isabelle continued, “We’re dealing with the uncontrolled movement of people, if the situation gets worse and the war intensifies, we will encounter more complications. Energy supplies and the continuity of government are also crucial. Our engagement with local authorities will be vital in addressing these areas. We must ensure that our operations support the overall stability and resilience of Lithuania.”

The officers nodded, understanding the gravity of their mission. Angelica asked, “Colonel, how do we plan to address the issue of mass casualties if these looting incidents turn violent?”

Isabelle responded, “We are here to uphold the law and help to stabilize the situation, this means we intervene and police the situation accordingly. Our goal is to protect the civilians, but we are also police for NATO.”

Andrei added, “We can use our communication systems to inform and reassure the public. Clear messaging can reduce panic and help control the movement of people. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We know the Russians are going to try and flood the zone with disinformation.”

Isabelle disagreed, “No need to do that, Andrei. Our NATO PsyOps team is working on this, we need to inform them and assist them, but they execute this task. Coordinate with them about what message we can send. Who knows? It could even help inoculate the population against disinformation.”

The meeting concluded with a clear strategy in place. Isabelle addressed her officers one last time. “Stay vigilant and remember that our success depends on coordination with all our key players and adaptability. Keep me updated on all developments. Dismissed.”

37 NATO Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence, 7 BLR: <https://www.cimic-coe.org/cimic/Definitions/7-BLR> (access 4.10.2024).

As the officers dispersed to their respective tasks, Isabelle felt confident. She knew they could maintain stability and support the people of Lithuania through these difficult times.

The days following the strategy meeting were a whirlwind of activity. The checkpoints established along the primary routes used for humanitarian aid delivery quickly proved effective. With looters arrested and rapid response teams in place and additional security details guarding the convoys, the incidents of looting began to decrease. The Stability Policing units, working in tandem with local law enforcement, dismantled several key black-market networks, cutting off the flow of stolen goods.

The rerouted convoys moved with a better sense of security, successfully delivering essential food and medical supplies to those in need. In the areas most affected by previous looting, aid distribution resumed, bringing much-needed relief to the local population. The coordination with Lithuanian law enforcement enhanced the overall effectiveness of these operations, ensuring that aid reached its intended recipients without significant disruptions.

Despite these successes, the situation was far from completely stable. There were still sporadic outbreaks of violence, particularly in areas where organized criminal groups attempted to reassert control, the problem increased due to the enormous number of weapons available. Those who wanted an assault weapon or hand grenade could buy it without much trouble. A particularly critical incident occurred near one of the newly established checkpoints, where a convoy was ambushed by an armed group attempting to steal supplies. The rapid response teams, trained for such eventualities, managed to repel the attackers, but not without sustaining some injuries.

The joint patrols and shared intelligence continued to play a crucial role. Information gathered from these operations led to the apprehension of several high-profile black-market leaders, significantly weakening the criminal infrastructure. However, the fight against these elements was ongoing, requiring constant vigilance and adaptation.

Meanwhile, the efforts to engage the local population paid off. Public communication systems were utilized to inform citizens about the locations of safe zones and the availability of aid, reducing panic and helping to control the movement of people. This clear messaging fostered

a sense of community resilience and cooperation, crucial for maintaining order during such turbulent times.

Medical triage centers set up near potential hotspots ensured rapid response to any incidents of violence, preventing mass casualties. These centers, stocked with protected medical supplies, provided immediate care to those injured in clashes, thereby saving lives and maintaining public trust in NATO's efforts.

As the days turned into weeks, the overall outcome was positive. The food and water resources were secured, civil transportation systems operated more smoothly, and the presence of joint patrols deterred many would-be looters. The continuity of local government operations was maintained, supported by the visible support of Stability Policing units. The police interventions and arrests of criminals and subversive elements drew a lot of attention in the public eye and press, bolstering the credibility of NATO and diminishing the influence of Russia on Lithuanian society. Some high-level arrests resulted in important information on how professional and widespread the Russian organized crime organizations were. Some networks had taken root in the harbors of Hamburg, Antwerp, and Rotterdam.

Yet, the critical incidents served as a reminder of the fragility of their achievements. The situation required constant oversight and a readiness to respond to new threats. The integration of NATO's Seven Baseline Requirements for National Resilience into the policing strategy proved important, guiding their efforts to support Lithuania's stability.

Isabelle stood before the secure video link, waiting for General Narusewicz to connect. The digital hum of the NATO communications channel filled the room as the screen flickered to life. General Narusewicz appeared, his expression etched with the strain of ongoing kinetic operations.

"Isabelle, let's make this quick," he began, his voice taut. "We're dealing with heavy fighting on multiple fronts. What's the latest on your end?"

"General, we've made significant progress with the Stability Policing Battalion," Isabelle started, maintaining her composure. "Our checkpoints and rapid response teams have successfully reduced looting and black-market activities. We've secured key supply routes and ensured the safe delivery of humanitarian aid and food supplies to those in need."

Narusewicz's eyes flickered briefly to the side, likely monitoring another incoming report. "That's good to hear but we're facing intense engagements out here. How is this aiding the overall war effort?"

Isabelle sighed, probably too audibly, knowing she needed to make her point clear. "Sir, by stabilizing these areas, we're directly supporting your combat operations. The resilience of the local population is still high, they believe and support NATO, your backyard is stable and Russian backed PMC's and organized crime stand no chance to mingle unseen in the population and start subversive sabotage actions against NATO. The reduction in looting and black-market activities means fewer resources are falling into enemy hands. Our efforts in managing refugee flows and securing food and water supplies prevent the kind of chaos that the enemy could exploit."

Narusewicz's expression remained strained. "We're stretched thin, Isa. Every resource and unit are critical. Can you quantify the impact?"

"Our coordination with local law enforcement resulted in 76 arrests of which three were high-level Russian mobs and four kills. We dismantled key black-market networks, significantly cutting off their supply chains," Isabelle explained. "This deprives the enemy of critical supplies and disrupts their operations. Additionally, by ensuring the safe distribution of humanitarian aid, we're preventing the kind of civilian unrest that could complicate military operations."

The General seemed to weigh her words, still visibly preoccupied. "And the casualties? Any incidents of note?"

Isabelle nodded, acknowledging the challenges, "There have been some critical incidents, including an ambush near a checkpoint. One officer has serious injuries, four with minor injuries. However, our rapid response teams managed to repel the attackers with minimal injuries. The setup of medical triage centers has also ensured immediate care for any injuries, preventing mass casualties and maintaining public trust."

Narusewicz leaned back slightly, a hint of consideration in his eyes. "So, you're saying your operations are reducing the pain and load for our combat forces to deal with?"

“Exactly, sir,” Isabelle affirmed. “By maintaining stability, order and supporting the local population, we’re freeing up military resources and allowing supply and combat units freedom of movement to focus on key engagements without worrying as much about the rear areas. This stability is crucial for sustaining long-term operations.”

The general’s gaze softened slightly, though the weight of the broader conflict was still evident. “Alright, Isabelle. I see the value. Keep me updated on your progress. We need every advantage we can get.”

“Yes, sir,” Isabelle replied, feeling a small victory. “I’ll ensure our operations continue to support the overall mission.”

As the secure channel closed, Isabelle turned away, her mind still focused on the broader challenge. She knew that while she had convinced General Narusewicz for now, the task of proving the importance of stability policing to combat-focused military leaders was ongoing. NATO forces needed to see that her battalion’s efforts weren’t just ancillary but an important part of the war effort.

In the meantime, she would continue to lead her teams, knowing that their work was making a significant difference, even if it wasn’t always immediately recognized. She learned that in the past, SP served quietly, not everyone even knew about its existence, yet the value it always brought to the area of operation, especially local populace, was all worth the bitter or unappreciated comments. It was not about her pride anyway.

The Weight of Command

The night after her update with her force commander was one of deep introspection for Isabelle. The weight of her conversation with General Narusewicz lingered, amplifying the sense of responsibility she felt towards her mission and the people under her protection. The challenges ahead seemed more daunting in the shadow of their strategic importance. She could not go back to sleep looking at the phone showing 2:50. She stepped outside to smoke a cigar. Scrolling her friends and neighbors’ pictures on social media, Isabelle was wondering about those two worlds she was standing astride.

The next afternoon, a secure 5 minute VTC was already scheduled with General Rob Devers, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR).

General Narusewicz, her immediate superior, joined the call, further underscoring the significance of this briefing. The meeting was an opportunity to present the ground situation directly to NATO's highest military command, seeking to bridge the gap between strategic directives and tactical realities.

General Devers, a figure known for his strategic acumen and his commitment to the alliance's integrity, greeted Isabelle with a nod of respect. "Colonel Moreau-Girard, your efforts in Lithuania have not gone unnoticed. Please, give me a straightforward assessment of the situation."

Isabelle took a moment to gather her thoughts before responding. "General, while we've made significant strides in stabilizing the region, our challenges are multifaceted and growing. Our intelligence reports confirm that the Wagner Group and other private military companies are employing terrorist-like tactics against civilians in Lithuania and want to expand their operations further into Europe. These groups are engaging in targeted assassinations, bombings, and cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, all aimed at destabilizing the region and eroding local governance. Their actions are creating significant challenges for NATO operations, as they exploit the chaos of the ongoing conflict to carry out these atrocities with relative impunity. The brutality and strategic intent behind these attacks are evident. They use the law whenever it is convenient and strike with great brutality when it pleases them. Their goal is to instill fear and chaos among the civilian population, complicating our mission to restore order and build trust within local communities. My battalion is working constantly with local law enforcement to counter these threats. However, the complexity and scale of these PMC operations are enormous. Especially because the PMCs operate in the whole of Lithuania. This requires a coordinated and robust response to mitigate their impact and restore stability in the region. Also, the intricacies of coalition warfare are complicating our path to lasting stability. My battalion has done everything they possibly can, but we are outnumbered, sir. We're stretched thin, and if the Russians intensify PMC activities, we could lose every gain we've made in re-establishing stability. We need more resources, sir."

General Devers listened intently, his expression thoughtful. General Narusewicz, however, appeared angry that Isabelle indirectly requested support after he had so recently told her it was likely not feasible. "I understand the difficulties you're facing, Colonel. However, you must also understand that our resources are stretched thin across multiple theaters.

What specific support do you require to enhance your operational effectiveness?" Devers asked.

Isabelle was prepared for this question. "Increased intelligence support to counter hybrid warfare tactics, improved comms equipment to advance interoperability among my multinational forces, and more robotics systems to compensate for the personnel shortages we're dealing with. We need to cover more ground, solidify our gains, and address the root causes of instability if we want to ensure future stability."

General Devers nodded, his gaze steady. "I'll see what I can do to address these needs, Colonel. But remember, the geopolitical landscape is complex, and our actions in Lithuania resonate far beyond its borders. You're not just fighting local actions; you're at the forefront of the alliance's eastern flank. Hold the line, Colonel."

As the call ended, Isabelle turned away, grappling with a tumult of frustration and resolve. General Devers' empathetic yet non-committal stance highlighted the strategic limitations constraining NATO's response. She knew that SP reinforcements were difficult, many Gendarme forces were desperately needed now in times of crisis in their own nations. Maybe her request for state-of-the-art equipment would be the best chance to get reinforcement. This conversation starkly reminded her of the delicate tightrope she walked with her higher command, balancing the efforts of the wider war with the immediate need to secure and uplift Lithuania. She quickly returned to consciousness when General Narusewicz addressed her with a snap. "Colonel, never surprise your commanding officer! Next time inform me of your needs before you take this one step higher, understood?", he said sharply. Isabelle immediately understood her mistake and replied without hesitation, "Sorry sir. It will not happen again."

The solemnity of command weighed heavily on Isabelle, particularly in the solitude that followed the briefing. In her stubbornness she liked her solitude. Or rather she got used to it since she was young. She joined the Gendarmerie following her father and role model. Since she was a little girl, she had this idealistic mission in her mind. Isabelle decided not to compromise her values, especially when she needed there were possibilities to help others, to protect the vulnerable, and fight for justice. She never agreed to give nor take any excuses. It was during these moments, amidst the quiet of her makeshift office, that the stark realities of her mission pressed in. Her contemplation was abruptly shattered as

she walked into the operations center and saw Lieutenant Juan Rodriguez, helmet in hand and an anguished look on his face, waiting to speak with her. "What's wrong, Juan?" she asked. He looked hesitant and struggled with his words. "Juan, tell me," She pressed.

He looked pained as he said, "There was an ambush in Vilnius where one of our squads was conducting a joint patrol. It was Wagner Group fighters. They used explosive drones and small arms." Isabelle's eyes widened, but she maintained a calm tone, saying, "Were there any casualties?"

Juan swallowed and nodded. He said, "Yes, ma'am. Major Martínez, Captain Müller, Sergeant Khouri, and Corporal Smith were killed along with six civilians. Warrant Officer Rossi and Master Sergeant Nowak were critically wounded and MEDEVACed. I don't know their status yet."

Overwhelmed by grief and anger at the loss of her gendarmes – brave and selfless – and more innocent civilians, compounded by the ambiguity of support from NATO's highest command, Isabelle's composure fractured. With a surge of raw emotion, she shouted, "Why?!" and furiously shoved maps and planning documents off her desk sending the materials flying. The items, a symbol of her strategic endeavors, organizational skills and professionalism, were scattered as a testament to her fury and despair.

The personnel in the operations center looked at her with shock but also shared sorrow. They had never seen their Colonel lose her composure like this before. She was always the embodiment of steely resolve combined with comforting strength. Isabelle closed her eyes and drew in a deep breath. She turned around to wipe off the tears. As Lieutenant Rodriguez was gathering the scattered maps and planning materials to put back on the table, Isabelle quietly apologized for her reaction to the Lieutenant and everyone else in the operations center. She looked at the unit photo – taken a few months before the war – that was hastily pinned up to one of the temporary walls in the operations center and placed her hand on it. She declared, "Tombés au champ d'honneur pour la paix et la liberté," and walked back to her office.

Yet, even as the echo of her outburst faded, Isabelle's resolve crystallized. She knew the path forward would be fraught with hardship and sacrifice. The recent attack was a brutal reminder of the stakes at play. Her leadership was defined by the resilience to face the encroaching darkness.

Her Stability Policing Battalion needed to stand steadfast and strong. She needed to lead and be an example for those under her command.

Shadows Unleashed

The fragile peace that Colonel Moreau-Girard and her battalion had begun to weave through the urban heart of Lithuania was violently torn asunder in a single, orchestrated act of chaos. An audacious jailbreak in Kaunas, masterminded by Russian Spetsnaz operatives, unleashed a torrent of criminals back onto the streets, plunging the city into a new depth of turmoil.

The operation was swift and devastatingly effective. Under the cover of night, the Spetsnaz units executed a precision strike on the city's main detention facility. Explosives disrupted the perimeter defenses, while inside, armed operatives neutralized the guards with chilling efficiency. In the chaos that followed, dozens of dangerous inmates spilled into the urban landscape, armed and emboldened by the promise of freedom and anarchy.

Isabelle received the news with a grim resolve. The released criminals, many of whom had ties to organized crime and Russian proxy forces, posed an immediate and dire threat to the civilian population and the overall security of the region.

As the first light of dawn broke over the horizon, casting a pale glow on the sprawling military encampment just outside Kaunas, Lithuania, Isabelle was already in motion. Gathered in the makeshift operations room, a tension-filled silence enveloped Isabelle's battalion as they awaited their orders. The walls, lined with maps and screens of Kaunas and its surrounding areas, served as a stark reminder of the urban complexity. Isabelle, standing before her officers and key personnel, exuded a calm that belied the gravity of the situation.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she began, "this morning, we face a challenge that threatens the very heart of Kaunas. A prison break, orchestrated by Russian Spetsnaz, has not only undermined our security efforts and those of NATO but also placed the citizens we are in immediate and severe danger."

The room remained silent; every individual acutely aware of the stakes. Isabelle continued, "Our response will be swift and decisive, encompassing a two-pronged strategy. First and foremost, our priority is the NATO

mission, secondly the safety of Kaunas's citizens. We know that both priorities are intertwined. The Lithuanian government will implement immediate safety measures, including public advisories and the establishment of secure zones to minimize civilian exposure to potential violence. We will assist them."

She paused, allowing her words to resonate, then shifted her focus to the second and third objective. "Simultaneously, we will support a coordinated manhunt for the escaped prisoners. Among them are individuals known to have direct connections and deep ties to organized crime and Russian proxy forces. Capturing these individuals is not just about rectifying the breach of security; it's about preventing further harm to our community. And our third priority is to investigate with the local prison authorities how this could happen. Lieutenant Juan Rodriguez, select two experienced officers from your team. They will be assigned to join the Lithuanian manhunt investigation team."

Isabelle's gaze swept across the room, meeting the eyes of her team. "The icing on the cake is that we need to deploy a Crowd & Riot Platoon to the prison, we need to relieve the Lithuanian riot police. They are still standing on their feet after more than 12 hours and need to be relieved. Captain Restretti, send one of your platoons and join them to liaise with the local authorities. I want a contingency plan which guarantees our support for at least 48 hours on my desk ASAP. Captain, they expect your presence at the prison within 1 hour. Let's go to work. Dismissed."

The strategy was clear. Secure zones would be established throughout Kaunas, with NATO forces working in close coordination with remaining local law enforcement to maintain order and provide reassurance to the public. Surveillance and intelligence gathering would be intensified, drawing on the battalion's diverse capabilities to track the escapees.

Unity Amidst the Ruins

In the wake of the chaos unleashed by the jailbreak in Kaunas and the frenetic operation to capture the escapees and restore order, Isabelle had found herself navigating a cityscape marked by tension and fear. The streets of Kaunas, once bustling with the early signs of recovery and normalization, now echoed with the silence of a community on edge. The impact of the orchestrated chaos went beyond the immediate threats to

public safety; it struck a blow to the fragile trust that NATO's Stability Policing forces had worked tirelessly to build with the local population.

As the dust settled and the city slowly regained its breath, Isabelle recognized the critical need to not only continue the pursuit of those still at large but also to address the broader implications of the incident. The jailbreak had revealed again how challenging the work of her gendarmes was and how committed and loyal all performed their duties.

Determined to hold up the 'esprit du corps' in her Battalion, Isabelle embarked on a series of initiatives aimed at demonstrating her commitment and confidence in her SP battalion. She needed to show that to be successful, everyone was important.

Isabelle personally visited the units operating in the field, spending time with the men and women who had faced the recent upheavals head-on. Her presence among them, often under the same harsh conditions they endured daily, served as a powerful symbol of solidarity and shared purpose. She listened to their challenges and achievements, offering guidance and encouragement. Through these interactions, Isabelle not only bolstered the morale of her forces but also strengthened the bonds of camaraderie that transcended nationalities, creating a unified front against the adversities they faced. She followed her mentors who very often repeated to her, "I believe in you". Thus, she learned the value of words, simple ones, but truly empowering.

In a significant move to address the security vacuum that had enabled the jailbreak, Isabelle initiated closer partnerships with local law enforcement agencies. By sharing intelligence, and coordinating joint patrols, NATO's Stability Policing units worked hand in hand with Lithuanian police to fortify the city's security against further threats. These collaborations not only enhanced operational effectiveness but also symbolized NATO's commitment to Kaunas's safety and order.

Amidst the efforts to strengthen security and foster community engagement, Isabelle faced the ongoing challenge of maintaining interoperability within her diverse force. The experiences in Kaunas had underscored the importance of seamless cooperation and communication among the different national contingents. In response, Isabelle introduced, where possible, in the overloaded agenda's interoperability exercises, creating scenarios that mirrored the complexities of their mission. These

drills, though demanding and too few in numbers, served as valuable learning opportunities, gradually smoothing the wrinkles of joint operations and cementing a sense of unity within the battalion.

As days turned into weeks, the tangible outcomes of Isabelle's initiatives began to emerge. The streets of Kaunas witnessed a cautious return to normalcy, with businesses reopening and families venturing out with a renewed sense of security. The visible presence of NATO's Stability Policing forces, now more integrated with the community, served as a reassuring sign of the progress being made.

For Isabelle, the journey from the initial shock of the jailbreak to the slow reclamation of stability was a testament to the power of unity and perseverance. In the face of adversity, her forces had demonstrated an unwavering commitment to their mission, drawing strength from their diversity and the collective resolve to stand as guardians of justice.

Echoes of Resolution

In the weeks following her conference with General Devers, Isabelle felt the pressure of her responsibilities more acutely than ever. The dead and wounded brothers and sisters in arms and the realities of her mission in Lithuania weighed heavily on her. She suffered from insomnia and refused to take calls from her daughter. How could she present herself to her girls like that? "I love you so much. I am busy, can't talk. Love, Maman." was her standard text. Yet another new challenge emerged that would test the very fabric of her battalion's purpose and resolve: A distressing report came to light, detailing a suspected war crime in a small town near Vilnius. According to police intelligence, Russian forces had left their battle station in a small village and retreated across the border with Belarus. The report suggested the systematic sexual abuse of women and children and execution of men. The Russians had tried to cover up their alleged war crimes, but the first reports showed that they had been sloppy doing so.

Tasked through the NATO chain of command to support the investigation on the suspected war crimes, Isabelle gathered her core team and outlined the plan for the investigation.

"This is a moment that defines our fight for the rule of law," she began, her voice steady despite the turmoil within, "We pursue this investigation with all the rigor and impartiality we possess. We will gather evidence, document

the scene, and ensure that those responsible are held accountable. This is our core duty, not just as soldiers but as guardians of justice.”

Lieutenant Barnes, with a serious expression, leaned forward, “Our MP colleagues are already on the crime scene, they secured the perimeter and are ensuring that the site is preserved as much as possible.” Isabelle nodded, “We need to deploy the maximum of manpower we have in our Specialized Police Unit, making sure we can work in shifts of 12 hours for at least 5 days, Lieutenant Rodriguez, make sure your unit is prepared. I’ll need Captain Nowak to contact the prosecutor’s office to liaise and see if the standby forensic unit from Europol is needed and available. Please coordinate with our forensic analysts and ensure we have all necessary resources on the ground ASAP.”

Isabelle nodded, “Good, I agree with your proposals. We need to move quickly but carefully. Captain Nowak, I want you to liaise also with international legal experts and human rights observers. Their expertise will be important in ensuring our investigation meets the highest standards.”

Captain Nowak responded confidently, “Understood, ma’am. I’ll get to it.”

Lieutenant Janssen, with her keen eye for detail, added, “We should also prepare for the potential pushback and disinformation campaigns. We need to control the narrative and ensure our findings are communicated transparently to avoid any manipulation.”

“Absolutely,” Isabelle agreed. “Take this to the MND-N Public Affairs Officer and the Ministry of Justice and keep a close eye on the developments. Captain Ionescu, assign a team that will be responsible for the security of our personnel and the integrity of the evidence. We cannot afford any lapses in security.”

Ionescu responded with a firm nod, “I’ll ensure our protocols are airtight, Colonel.”

Captain Kaya raised his hand slightly, drawing Isabelle’s attention. “Colonel, I suggest we bolster our investigation by using our drones with thermal sensors and cameras mapping the crime scene area from the air.”

Isabelle considered his suggestion and nodded, “Excellent point, Captain. Approved. Coordinate with our technical teams and ensure we have the necessary equipment in place. Captain Ionescu is the Commander on Scene for this operation, you all report to him. Captain, you keep me informed, I expect the first update in two hours.”

The task was daunting. The site of the alleged war crimes was enormous, but the NATO K-9 unit still discovered new mass graves, with the local population reeling from the shock and loss. Isabelle’s teams, trained for stability operations, including battlefield evidence and technical exploitation, had to adapt rapidly. They worked closely with the local authorities, national and international legal experts, forensic analysts, and human rights observers to ensure that their methods met the highest standards of impartiality and thoroughness.

As the investigation unfolded, the depth of the tragedy became apparent. Testimonies from survivors, the grim evidence of the mutilated bodies and the discovery of several mass graves where corpses lay head down with one bullet in the head painted a harrowing picture. Isabelle immediately went back in her memories to the Balkans – ethnic cruelty, hatred, creative tortures. Witnessing the resilience of the Lithuanian community amidst such sorrow, she felt a profound sense of duty to bring justice to the victims and accountability to those responsible.

The process was meticulous and slow, often frustratingly so. The pursuit of truth in the fog of war was a challenge rife with obstacles – political pressures, security risks, and the ever-present shadow of disinformation campaigns aimed at undermining the investigation. That is why the quality of the collected evidence needed to be of the highest standards and preserved according to international rules. This was not an easy task in the midst of war, even for policing experts.

Despite these challenges, the investigation, thorough and unyielding, culminated in a comprehensive report that not only documented the events but also outlined the failures that had allowed such a tragedy to occur. It was a testament to the bravery and dedication of those who had sought the truth amid the echoes of conflict.

Submitting the first reports to the Lithuanian prosecutors’ office, Isabelle knew that the path to justice was only beginning. The evidence they had

gathered was a call to action, a demand for accountability that transcended the immediate confines of military operations.

In the aftermath of the investigation, Isabelle recognized the profound impact of the ordeal on her understanding of her mission. Upholding the rule of law was about safeguarding the very principles of humanity and justice and would reverberate far beyond Lithuania. For Colonel Isabelle Amélie Moreau-Girard and her NATO Stability Policing forces, the investigation had been a crucible, forging a deeper commitment to their mission and to the ideals they served.

The Long Fight

Isabelle stood at the head of the operations room, her expression reflecting the determination of the past six months. It was a crucial moment as she prepared to brief Major General Narusewicz on the significant progress made by the NATO 1st Stability Policing Battalion amidst the ongoing conflict with Russia.

General Narusewicz entered, his presence commanding and his gaze intense. Isabelle began her briefing, “General, we are now six months into this protracted conflict with Russia. Despite the considerable challenges, I am pleased to report significant progress in our operations and the stabilization efforts within Lithuania”

She gestured to the digital map behind her, highlighting areas where the 1st Stability Policing battalion operated, “We have reestablished a semblance of normalcy in most urban centers and critical infrastructure points.”

He nodded, signaling for her to continue.

“Our battalion has been instrumental in enabling NATO forces to execute their missions more effectively. By protecting civilians and human security, supporting Lithuanian law enforcement and border units, and providing critical intelligence, we’ve ensured that NATO units can focus on their operations without the constant threat of instability and insurgent activities in their rear. Furthermore, we did assist in preserving the public resilience and support to the fight against the aggressor despite mutual attempts of Russia to destabilize Lithuania and our own home front.”

She paused, allowing the weight of her words to settle. “However, this progress has not come without significant costs and friction. The battalion lost 23 gendarmes, all killed in action. 35 more were wounded, eight of those severely. In terms of friction, the varying levels of training and technological adoption among different NATO member nations have posed substantial integration challenges.”

Isabelle detailed the efforts made to overcome these obstacles. “We initiated rapid joint training programs to standardize procedures and improve interoperability. For example, we established specialized units equipped with advanced UAS and electronic countermeasures, which have been pivotal in detecting and neutralizing enemy drone threats.”

General Narusewicz interjected, “I’m sorry to hear of your losses, this war is taking a heavy toll on us all.” After a short silence he proceeded, “And how have these measures impacted operational effectiveness?”

After taking a short breathing space Isabelle responded confidently, “These measures have enhanced our operational effectiveness, but training in the mission is not advisable. My battalion is overwhelmed, time to train is very scarce, and we need our units ready for action the moment they touch Lithuanian ground. However, we’ve seen a marked decrease in successful enemy drone incursions and an improvement in our situational awareness. Additionally, our collaboration with INTERPOL, Europol, and other multi and national law enforcement agencies has fortified our intelligence capabilities, enabling us to preempt and disrupt potential threats more effectively.”

She then addressed the civilian aspect of their mission. “Considering how overwhelmed they were, the Lithuanian government and their officers were excellent and our cooperation on the ground was outstanding. Additionally, the reestablishment of essential services and humanitarian aid distribution has significantly contributed to a gradual return to normalcy in liberated areas.”

General Narusewicz’s expression softened slightly, showing approval. “Tell me more about your cooperation with local forces”

Isabelle nodded, “While initial integration was challenging, we have developed a robust partnership with local Lithuanian and Latvian law enforcement. Joint patrols and shared intelligence have been critical in maintaining security and rebuilding community trust. By creating coordination hubs at

the tactical and operational levels we were able to deconflict and multiply our efforts. Their knowledge of the terrain, criminal organizations and local circumstances has been fundamental for our success.”

Concluding her briefing, Isabelle emphasized her appreciation for the trust General Narusewicz had put in her and her battalion, “Sir, thank you for all your support. I know that this is the first deployment of Stability Policing forces at this scale in a war of this size, but I hope the battalion’s work has been beneficial to the larger war effort.”

General Narusewicz stood, his gaze fixed on Isabelle. “Isabelle, your efforts and leadership have been exemplary. I know how taxing this remains on you and your battalion, but I need you to keep progressing.” He paused and smiled widely. “And by the way, General D’Arcy told me, in front of General Devers, how very proud he is of you.”

“Thank you, sir,” Isabelle replied with a salute and a reciprocal smile. As General Narusewicz walked away, Isabelle felt an overwhelming sense of pride and satisfaction. She knew that her battalion’s hard work was truly making a difference, bringing stability and peace to the Baltics. Her brothers and sisters in arms had made the ultimate sacrifice, but in achieving future victory, their deaths were not in vain.

6. Variable Future World II: A World of Change and Possibility

In this chapter we will explore the second variable world of 2035 – noting the key differences that will distinguish the variable worlds from the baseline operational environment described in Chapter III – through a DIME (Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic) lens. Despite the presence of significant distinctions and variations in this envisioned future – “A World of Change and Possibility” – at its core, this world thrives on seamless collaboration and alignment among NATO nations regarding DIME priorities, harmonization in Stability Policing strategies, operational procedures, and uniform adoption and integration of technology, setting a conducive stage for our protagonist, Colonel Isabelle Amélie Moreau-Girard, to direct her challenges with enhanced support and unity in the unfolding fictional narrative.

Diplomatic

In the evolving geopolitical landscape of 2035, NATO undergoes a transformative shift that redefines its center of gravity, bringing it squarely to the European continent. This shift is characterized by an unprecedented level of cooperation and integration among NATO's member states, with traditional Western European leaders joining forces with their newer Eastern European counterparts. Together, they steer a world where the United States has recalibrated its strategic focus towards the Indo-Pacific, adopting a stance that borders on isolationism and intense prioritization of its national interests. Amidst this backdrop, the diplomatic dimension of the DIME spectrum reveals a complex tapestry of alliances, strategic dialogues, and a renewed commitment to collective defense that underscores the deepening geopolitical and security solidarity between NATO and EU members.

This new era is characterized not just by a concerted effort in traditional security measures but also by a sophisticated approach to stability policing and deterrence, particularly in countering Russian aggression. The collaboration between traditional Western European leaders and their newer Eastern European counterparts, alongside the recalibration of the U.S.'s focus, necessitates a comprehensive strategy that encompasses both diplomatic finesse and tactical acumen in operations.

The reorientation of NATO's focus towards Europe marks a significant departure from its historical reliance on the United States as the primary driver of its strategic initiatives. European nations, recognizing the need to fill the void left by the U.S.'s strategic pivot, embark on a path of increased responsibility and leadership within the alliance. This shift is not merely operational but deeply diplomatic, necessitating a recalibration of NATO's internal dynamics and its approach to global security challenges.

Central to this diplomatic evolution is the enhanced role of Eastern European nations within NATO. These countries emerge as vital partners in shaping NATO's strategic direction. Their unique geographical positioning and historical experiences with Russian aggression imbue the alliance with fresh perspectives and a renewed sense of urgency in addressing security threats on Europe's eastern flank.

The gradual shift of the U.S. towards an isolationist posture and its intensified focus on the Indo-Pacific region could have spelled a weakening of transatlantic ties. However, the diplomatic ingenuity of

European leaders within NATO and the EU transformed this challenge into an opportunity for greater European autonomy and cohesion. High-level dialogues, strategic partnerships, and a series of initiatives aimed at enhancing military interoperability and collective defense capabilities underscored the resilience of the transatlantic alliance, even as its center of gravity shifted.

The solidarity between NATO and EU members in this future world extends beyond mere diplomatic formalities, platitudes, and political talking points to reflect a deep-seated commitment to safeguarding the European continent's security and democratic values. This unity is tested by external pressures, particularly from an aggressive Russia and a strategically ambitious China, both keen to exploit any perceived fissures within the alliance.

However, the diplomatic landscape of 2035 is marked by a remarkable degree of resilience and adaptability among European NATO and EU members. Collective responses to hybrid threats, strategic investments in defense infrastructure, and a unified stance in international forums exemplify Europe's capacity to present a united front in the face of external challenges.

At the heart of this diplomatic transformation is a vision of collaborative leadership that transcends national interests in favor of a broader, alliance-wide strategic perspective. European NATO members, both from the West and the East, engage in a continuous dialogue to align their defense priorities, share intelligence, and coordinate their diplomatic efforts. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of shared destiny, reinforcing the notion that the security of one is the security of all.

Additionally, high-level dialogues and strategic partnerships, aimed at enhancing military interoperability and collective defense capabilities, now also focus on aligning policies and strategies to tackle migration effectively. These efforts are underscored by a recognition of the interconnected nature of security, defense, and humanitarian considerations in the modern world. Initiatives aimed at cyber defense, strategic communication, and joint military exercises expand to include coordinated responses to humanitarian crises, with NATO and EU members leveraging their collective capabilities to provide stability and support to regions in turmoil.

The period of 2035 marks a significant enhancement in mechanisms for EU-NATO cooperation, with a particular focus on leveraging the

EU's robust institutional framework to address migration crises. This collaboration leads to strategic investments in defense infrastructure that not only enhance border security but also support stability policing efforts in areas prone to conflict and displacement, thereby addressing potential migration flows at their source.

The diplomatic landscape of 2035 is marked by NATO's adaptability and resilience, particularly in its collective responses to hybrid threats. The alliance's enhanced focus on stability policing and the strategic deployment of Gendarmerie-type forces, form a component of its strategy to deter and respond to Russian aggression. Through an improved collaborative Law Enforcement intelligence-sharing, NATO and EU members improved their resilience and present a united front capable of countering mis/disinformation campaigns, cyber-attacks, and other unconventional tactics under the threshold of war employed by state actors and adversaries.

As we have explored the diplomatic dimension of NATO's evolution in 2035, it becomes apparent that the alliance has entered a new era of European leadership. This shift, while born out of necessity due to the U.S.'s strategic realignment and the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, has catalyzed a profound transformation within NATO, enhancing its unity, adaptability, and resolve. In a world of change and possibility, NATO's European members have risen to the occasion.

Information

In the strategic environment of 2035, the information domain emerges as a critical battleground where the narratives of power, influence, and sovereignty are contested fiercely. Within this arena, Russia operates with high operational tempo (up-tempo), exploiting every opportunity to sow discord among NATO and EU members and to paint NATO as a looming threat to the sovereignty of nations in Europe and beyond. Amidst this backdrop, NATO's response is a holistic information advantage strategy that, while not completely vanquishing Russian and Chinese information warfare operations, significantly blunts their impact and preserves the cohesion and strategic integrity of the alliance.

Understanding the complex nature of information warfare in 2035, NATO adopts a multi-pronged approach to safeguard its narrative and counteract adversarial misinformation. This strategy emphasizes not only defensive measures, such as cyber defense and the protection of information

infrastructure but also proactive campaigns designed to reinforce the legitimacy of NATO's missions and the unity of its members.

A novel aspect of NATO's information strategy involves the integration of its stability policing forces, including GTFs into its broader information operations. Recognizing the unique position of these forces in operations during competition and deterrence phases, NATO leverages their engagement with local populations and authorities in crisis zones to counteract adversarial propaganda and misinformation. GTFs, with their home based nuanced policing expertise and understanding of local military and civilian dynamics and ability to conduct policing and security operations on day-to-day- manner, play a pivotal role in disseminating accurate information and fostering trust in NATO's efforts to uphold security and stability.

In response to Russia's aggressive information operations aimed at exploiting fissures within NATO and the EU, the alliance enhances its capabilities in strategic communication and cyber warfare. NATO invests in advanced monitoring and analytics technologies to detect misinformation campaigns early and respond swiftly. By coordinating closely with the EU, NATO develops unified messaging that highlights its commitment to peace, security, and the sovereignty of nations, effectively countering the narrative of NATO as a threat.

A critical component of NATO's information advantage strategy is the emphasis on building resilience among its member states and partner countries. Through joint exercises, workshops, and exchange programs, NATO enhances the capacity of its allies to resist and counter misinformation by sharing best practices and resources, NATO strengthens the collective ability of its members to maintain a coherent and credible narrative in the face of external information threats.

Recognizing the global nature of information warfare, NATO extends its strategic partnerships beyond its traditional allies, engaging with non-member nations and international organizations to share insights and strategies for countering disinformation. This global outreach not only dilutes the effectiveness of adversarial information campaigns but also builds a broader coalition in support of democratic values and international law, undermining efforts to isolate NATO and its allies.

By 2035, NATO has transformed its approach to information warfare, adopting a comprehensive perspective. Through a combination of strategic communication, cyber defense, and global partnerships, NATO not only counters the high-tempo information operations of adversaries like Russia and China but also strengthens the internal cohesion and resilience of the alliance. This adaptive strategy ensures that NATO maintains its strategic integrity and continues to be seen as a bastion of stability and security in an increasingly contested information environment.

Military

By 2035, NATO's military landscape has undergone a significant transformation, characterized by a steady trajectory in defense spending and a remarkable leap in technology adaptation and integration across the alliance. This era marks a departure from the fragmented technological landscape of the past, ushering in a period of unity in development, interoperability, and regulation that spans across member states. Within this remarkable transformation there has been substantial understanding of the capabilities and operational capacity of NATO's stability policing forces, including the GTFs, which have benefited immensely from the changing focus. GTFs have the ability and quality to operate in a military and policing environment in a national and international setting, under the threshold of war or during war.

NATO's commitment to technological advancement has revolutionized the operational capabilities of its stability policing forces. Despite stability in end-strength numbers, the qualitative leap in capabilities has been significant, driven by the strategic deployment of autonomous and semi-autonomous robotic vehicles, AI/ML, advanced facial recognition, predictive analytics, AI-enabled real-time language translation, and mixed reality applications. These technologies have not only enhanced the operational efficiency of NATO forces but have also provided them with outsized effects in both conventional and non-conventional engagements.

The use of autonomous and semi-autonomous robotic vehicles has redefined the use of force, patrolling, surveillance, and logistics operations within NATO's stability policing missions. These vehicles operate in challenging terrains and urban environments, providing real-time data and enhancing the safety of personnel by performing tasks deemed too dangerous for human operators. Their integration into NATO operations

has led to a significant reduction in operational risks and an increase in mission effectiveness.

AI and machine learning technologies have become pivotal in processing vast amounts of data to support decision-making processes, particularly in enhancing law enforcement intelligence capabilities. By analyzing complex datasets, these technologies enable NATO's stability policing forces to identify patterns, predict threats, and uncover actionable intelligence with precision. This capability is critical for preventing criminal activities and managing security challenges efficiently. The integration of AI into NATO's joint operations facilitates them, producing a seamless fusion of intelligence gathering with operational planning, enabling a more adaptive and responsive approach.

Advanced biometrics, facial recognition and smart city technologies have been important in urban operations, allowing forces to identify and track persons in densely populated areas efficiently. These technologies, combined with predictive analytics, enable NATO to prevent potential threats and maintain security in urbanized regions. Smart city technologies facilitate far more consistent and secure communication and coordination among NATO forces, local authorities, and civilian populations, enhancing situational awareness and operational effectiveness.

AI-enabled real-time language translation tools have broken down language barriers, allowing NATO's stability policing forces to communicate effectively with local populations and international partners. This communication technology has been crucial in building trust and cooperation in operational areas, facilitating smoother interactions, and reducing the potential for misunderstandings in high-stakes environments.

Virtual and augmented reality technologies have been instrumental for many GTFs during national duties and operations. The lessons learned and experiences from the GTFs have been transferred to training and operational planning within NATO's stability policing forces. These mixed reality applications provide highly immersive training environments that simulate real-world scenarios, allowing forces to rehearse complex operations and adapt to rapidly changing situations. Additionally, mixed reality is used in operational planning to visualize terrains, plan logistics, and conduct rehearsals, ensuring that forces are prepared for any contingency.

The strides made in achieving uniformity and cohesion in training, standards, doctrine, and operational concepts among NATO's stability policing forces underscore the alliance's commitment to a unified military approach. The integration of emerging technologies has not only enhanced the capabilities of individual member states but has also ensured that NATO operates as a coherent and formidable entity, capable of addressing a wide array of security challenges with unprecedented efficiency and effectiveness.

As NATO marches into "A World of Change and Possibility" in 2035, its military dimension embodies the vision of a future-ready alliance, characterized by technological harmony, enhanced capabilities, and unwavering unity. The integration of emerging and disruptive technologies within NATO's stability policing forces represents a significant leap forward in the alliance's operational capacity, creating a new adaptive instrument of power and setting a standard for NATO operations. Through innovation, collaboration, and a shared commitment to excellence, NATO stands poised to navigate the complexities of the future, ensuring peace and stability in an ever-changing world.

Economic

In this future world of 2035, the global economy presents a landscape of stability punctuated by strategic maneuverings and regional shifts. Within this framework, Russia's economic recovery from the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine was powered by its vast energy resources. It has repositioned Russia as a country of significant influence in Europe and Central Asia. Ambitiously, Russia sees territorial expansion into the Baltics as a critical step towards reasserting itself as a global economic power, rivaling the United States and China. Meanwhile, China's footprint expands deeply into Europe, including the Baltics, through its Belt and Road Initiative, advancements in digital infrastructure, and an array of economic ventures, challenging the economic stability and security of the region.

Despite these challenges, the European Union and NATO member states have not only managed to maintain economic stability but, in several areas, especially in Eastern Europe, have showcased notable economic growth and resilience. This success can be attributed to several key strategies and innovations that have effectively countered the economic pressures exerted by Russia and China, while also addressing internal challenges such as aging populations.

Recognizing the transformative power of technology, NATO and EU member states aggressively invested in innovation and digital infrastructure and fostered a thriving ecosystem for tech startups and established industries alike. This strategic focus on technology spurred economic growth, created jobs, and increased competitiveness on the global stage. Advanced technologies in automation, AI, and green energy were also pivotal in offsetting the challenges posed by aging populations, ensuring that the workforce remains productive and economies vibrant.

In response to Russia's leverage over energy supplies, NATO and EU member states accelerated their efforts towards achieving energy independence. Investments in renewable energy sources – wind, solar, and hydroelectric power – significantly reduced reliance on external energy imports. The development of internal energy networks and the strategic use of energy reserves further insulated these nations from external economic pressures.

Economic diversification has been another cornerstone of stability for NATO and EU member states. By expanding beyond traditional industries, these nations have built robust economies capable of withstanding global market fluctuations. Significant investment in infrastructure, particularly through initiatives reminiscent of the EU's Cohesion Fund, has improved connectivity within and between member states, facilitating trade, mobility, and economic integration.

In the face of challenges from Russia and China, NATO and the EU have deepened their economic cooperation, recognizing the intricate link between economic stability and security. Joint economic security initiatives have focused on safeguarding critical infrastructure, enhancing cybersecurity, and protecting against economic espionage. This collaborative approach has not only strengthened the economic resilience of individual member states but has also presented a united front against attempts to undermine the economic fabric of the alliance.

As we look to 2035, the economic landscape of NATO and EU member states embodies a testament to resilience, and cooperative strength. Through a combination of technological advancement, energy independence, economic diversification, and regional development, NATO and the EU have forged a future where their economies are not just surviving but thriving, ensuring a stable and secure environment for generations to come.

Conclusion: Charting the Course in a World of Change and Possibility

As “A World of Change and Possibility” has been examined, it has become clear that the year 2035 marks a pivotal moment in the evolution of NATO and its member states. This future scenario, analyzed through the DIME framework, reveals a world where continuous collaboration, strategic alignment, and technological integration define the essence of the alliance. The journey of Colonel Isabelle Amélie Moreau-Girard through this complex landscape underscores the individual challenges she faces and symbolizes the collective endeavor of NATO to navigate the uncertainties of a rapidly changing global environment.

In the diplomatic realm, the shift of NATO’s focus towards Europe and the unprecedented cooperation among its members epitomize a strategic recalibration aimed at enhancing the alliance’s autonomy and resilience. This era of enhanced European leadership, born out of necessity and strategic foresight, demonstrates a robust response to the changing dynamics of global power and the recalibrated priorities of traditional allies. The concerted effort to counter Russian aggression and the strategic ambiguity posed by China’s economic ventures highlight the alliance’s adaptability and its commitment to safeguarding the Euro-Atlantic area’s peace and security.

The information domain of 2035 is a battleground of narratives, where NATO’s proactive and holistic strategy to counter misinformation and cyber threats stands as a testament to the alliance’s innovative and adaptive approach. The integration of stability policing forces into NATO illustrates a nuanced understanding of modern warfare’s complexities, where the battle for hearts and minds is as critical as territorial defense.

On the military front, the technological renaissance within NATO’s forces, characterized by the integration of cutting-edge technologies, has not only enhanced operational capabilities but also fostered an unprecedented level of interoperability and cohesion among member states. This transformation transcends traditional military might, incorporating advanced tools and tactics that redefine the parameters of security and stability operations.

Economically, the resilience and strategic ingenuity of NATO and EU member states provide a solid foundation for prosperity in the face of external pressures and internal challenges. The strategic embrace of technology, energy independence, and economic diversification serves as

a bulwark against the geopolitical ambitions of Russia and the expanding influence of China. This economic narrative, woven with threads of collaboration and innovation, showcases a future where stability and security are intrinsically linked to economic vitality and growth.

As this chapter concludes, it becomes evident that “A World of Change and Possibility” is not just a speculative vision of the future but a realistic portrayal of NATO’s potential trajectory. The alliance, through its dynamic and forward-looking approach, is poised to address the multifaceted challenges of 2035 with confidence and unity. For Colonel Moreau-Girard and her contemporaries, this world offers a stage for demonstrating the enduring relevance of NATO, its capacity for transformation, and its unwavering commitment to a collective defense and crisis management that transcends boundaries. In navigating this world of change and possibility, NATO reaffirms its pivotal role as a guardian of peace, stability, and prosperity in the Euro-Atlantic area and beyond.

7. What Wild Futures

Out of the Frying Pan and Into the Fire

Colonel Isabelle Moreau-Girard was tired of sweating in Gao, Mali and cursed the unrelenting heat. She hadn’t seen rain in the five months she had been in the heart of the Sahel, and she had seen far too little of her daughters, Chloé and Marie, too. She swept her graying hair back as sweat rolled down her brow and doom scrolled on the social media accounts on her phone, seeing bad news after bad news appearing around the situation in the Baltics. Russia was increasingly emboldened and belligerent while pundits continued to dismiss the aggression as “saber rattling” as they had in the lead-up to the invasion of Ukraine.

But Isabelle had more pressing concerns, drawing her attention to the mission at hand. She was working tirelessly in NATO’s “Operation Resolute Defender” where she was leading French elements of Gendarmerie National within the NATO Task Force Restorer to counter the instability caused by al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Daesh in the Greater Sahara. Both terrorist organizations had been continuing ambushes and attacks on Malian military bases and convoys, and civilians. Her gendarmes had shown superb skill and precision employing augmented and virtual reality,

AI/ML, autonomous robotics, and more but the harassing nature of AQIM and ISGS felt unyielding.

She looked toward the horizon and setting sun, contemplating her demanding career and the, in her opinion, disaster that was her family life. She had a resentful ex-husband who had grown weary of the demands of her career, was frustrated with his lack of success in his own career as a graphic designer, and he was too selfish to even stay around Paris to take care of, or even, spend time with their daughters. She had to leave her darling girls with their grandparents while she was on another continent trying to help bring peace and stability to region far too familiar with violence and chaos.

It was over 39 degrees Celsius, but Isabelle still stood outside drinking hot, dark coffee and lit a cigarette. As she inhaled the smoke from her first drag, she almost laughed out loud at herself. She flashed back to all the times her fellow French officers and her superiors had been stunned whenever she had smoked in front of them. They almost always reacted one of two ways, either they were horribly put off by it and then ignored it or they lectured her on how inappropriate and unhealthy it was and told her she should quit immediately. She had picked up the filthy habit from an American classmate during the Stability Policing for Leaders course at NATO SP Centre of Excellence, in Vicenza, Italy. Ever since then, she had always preferred American cigarettes and while she knew she should quit, she enjoyed and needed these moments smoking alone, where she could think and reflect by herself.

Her serenity was interrupted when she heard the voice of Malian Colonel Seydou Amadou, behind her. "Those things will kill you, Colonel", he said half-jokingly with a smile. Isabelle turned around with a smirk on her face and said, "Not if the jihadists get me first, Amadou." He laughed and replied, "That's one way to look at it, Colonel. I don't even know how you got American cigarettes over here and you never seem to run out." Isabelle responded, "Have you seen the large black chest in my room?" He nodded and looked at her quizzically asking, "Full of those cancer sticks?" She laughed, winked, and replied, "That and enough La Maison du Chocolat truffles and macarons to give half the Gendarmerie diabetes."

"You're a rare breed, Colonel. I'm sorry to interrupt your break but the Gendarmerie Headquarters in Paris needs to speak to you ASAP, it's urgent. Isabelle frowned and furrowed her brow, replying, "Interesting... thank you, Amadou. I'll head to the conference room to go find out what kick in

the teeth is waiting for us. She twisted her half-smoked cigarette until the still lit cherry fell on the ground and she put it out with her boot. She threw the rest of the cigarette in the trash and walked off smartly.

When she arrived in the conference room the message from Paris was short and clear. "Colonel Moreau-Girard, you need to report to NATO Headquarters to receive new orders from German Major General Ludwig at NATO Allied Command Operations Headquarters", Isabelle surprised by this but saw that in the conference room a NATO MARS (Mixed Augmented Reality System) headset was ready for her to meet with General Ludwig. She put on the device and within seconds her avatar was sitting with the General's avatar in a digital war room.

"Good evening, Colonel. I'm very happy to meet you, virtually at least. I am Major General Ludwig, at Allied Command Operations. I'm currently the officer primarily responsible for the force generation in Lithuania at NATO Headquarters. I need to make this short because time is of the essence. Your work in the NATO Task Force in Mali has been widely praised."

Isabelle was pleased to hear this compliment. She said, "Thank you, sir! We've had some great successes in working with the Malian National Police and local law enforcement to clamp down on AQIM, ISGS, and an assortment of other bad actors but most importantly to make the people here feel safe again. But my headquarters informed me that you have new orders for me, sir?"

The General's facial expression grew serious and concerned. He said, "Colonel, I wish I was meeting you under happier circumstances, but this isn't good news and I'm going to be giving you an extraordinarily difficult task. We have verified indications and warnings that Russia is going to be invading Lithuania and Latvia imminently."

In the real world, Isabelle dropped her coffee cup and heard the metallic clang in the room as it hit the ground. She tried to hide any emotion that would be given away from her facial expressions, but she was certainly surprised. She said, "How imminently, sir?"

He replied, "Our intelligence analysts assess that the Russians will cross the border within two weeks. Maybe three weeks depending on weather and other conditions."

"Oh, mon Dieu! They're really going to do this, sir?", she asked.

The General replied, “Yes. This assessment is high confidence, driven by reliable and verified sources. I think there were many of us who were surprised when the Russians launched their full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, but we cannot assume this is some bluff or strategic messaging. This is our reality now, Colonel.”

“What do you need from me, sir?”, Isabelle asked.

“I need you to pack your bags and get to Lithuania as fast as possible. I know you’ve already been in Mali for the last five months, but this may be the biggest conflict we’ve ever seen in our lifetimes, and we need you out here, Colonel. There will be a C-28 Neuron in Modibo at 1030 CET tomorrow morning, ready to take you and your most critical staff members to Vilnius.”

“Yes, sir. I understand. What exactly will my mission be there, sir?”, Isabelle said.

The General replied, “The entirety of the 1st Stability Policing Battalion will be assembled in Vilnius in the next days. You will be in command of the 1st Stability Policing Battalion. All the paperwork has been approved by your headquarters in Paris and we’re going to integrate this Battalion in the NATO Multinational Division North. If this war really happens, your unit is going to be not only a critical asset in restoring stability in the post-conflict space but also to help bolster and secure all our warfighting functions. Populated areas and transportation networks are going to be devastated if we see even half the number of fires we witnessed in the Russia-Ukraine War and, in reality, I think we’ll see four or five times the amount of missile, artillery, and rocket fires. I need you to collaborate extremely closely with all the joint staff but especially the J2, J3, J4, and J5. There is too little time to integrate your SP Battalion ‘by the book’ into the NATO Multinational Division North. This means that you need to be creative and decisive to make this happen. All staff of the Multinational Division North know you are coming. I want you to coordinate with, and closely follow the direction, of my Provost Marshal, Czech Colonel Marek Kolar. He is your point of contact if you need me. So many of my peers have commended your work and your abilities, Colonel. NATO needs you now more than ever.”

“Understood, sir. I’m on my way to Modibo.”, Isabelle said steadfastly.

“Very good, Colonel. Have a safe trip to Lithuania.”, General Ludwig responded.



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The Anticipation is What Kills You

Thirteen hours later, having bid an emotional farewell to her staff and colleagues in Mali, Isabelle was boarding the hypersonic C-28 transport jet and tamping down her own anxiety to be the unwavering face of resolve her troops needed to see.

As the plane was taxiing and then taking off, she silently ruminated about the wild path her profession had taken her on. She tried to think about what the central narrative of her career had been. What tied it all together? She reminisced about her time at the Saint-Cyr Military Academy as a bright-eyed young student, her tours as a platoon leader, operations officer, deputy commander, and chief of staff, and now as a battalion commander throughout a whirlwind career. She thought of the seemingly endless deployments to North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Afghanistan, and most recently Mali. Then as the plane's scramjet propulsion sent all aboard racing toward the Baltics at speeds greater than Mach 5, the premonition hit her like a lightning bolt to both the heart and the brain. It was always about the people. Her whole career, and the rest of her life for that matter, had been focused on people. She

thrived whenever she had the chance to lead people, to protect them, and to give them hope for the future. She was sitting in a true technological marvel and would soon be leading elements of the most technologically advanced force in the world's history, but what always proved to be the biggest difference maker in conflict wasn't the technology of sci-fi legend but the humans wielding it.

Satisfied with her self-reflection, Isabelle put on her MARS headset to review the immersive briefing that the Provost Marshal had informed her would be critical for her understanding of the situation in the Baltics.

Hybrid Warfare and Biological Terror: Estonia's Struggle Against Slavoclast-34

In Estonia, Russia had been using purely hybrid warfare tactics – akin to its relatively quiet capture of Crimea and parts of the Donbass in Ukraine from 2013 – 2015, with an even darker twist. In February 2034, Russia flooded armed mercenaries into organized crime and other subversive or pro-Russian organizations in Estonia. Regardless of the mercenaries using obviously Russian equipment, Russia continued to deny involvement. The shocking influx of Russian-speaking men marked a new phase in Russian-Baltic relations. Estonia, strategically located on the Baltic Sea, became a key target for Russia, which sought control for naval operations and trade routes. Estonia's ethnic Russian communities made the country susceptible to internal strife, stoked by Russian proxies.

In a wicked turn, Russia deployed biological attacks against the non-ethnically Russian populations in Estonia. By using stolen personal data from government databases to identify victims, Russia used covert aerosolized dispersal in urbanized areas. The malevolent pathogen – Slavoclast-34 – released was deadly, or depending on the doses at least critically wounding, to all who were infected with it. The fatality rate of those infected was high, but the citizens who survived were subjected to debilitating neurological and muscular issues. Russian officials falsely claimed, much like Chinese officials did during the COVID-19 pandemic, that the virus originated from a U.S. biological weapons lab and was released to show the Russians in negative light. These Russian claims brought back horrifying memories from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019-2022.

Despite the potential chaos and pandemic that could have resulted from Slavoclast-34, Estonian national and local officials acted quickly, with NATO support, to contain the deadly virus. NATO was as well prepared as possible, thanks to the “Boosting NATO Resilience to Biological Threats Project” facilitated by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health’s Center for Health Security” in the 2020s.

A Biological Defense Task Force was rapidly organized in 2034, with representatives and action officers from the Estonian Health Board (Terviseamet), Estonian Defense Forces (Eesti Kaitsevägi), Estonian Internal Security Service (Kaitsepolitseiamet, KAPO), the Estonian Forensic Science Institute (Eesti Kohtuekspertiisi Instituut), the NATO Centre of Excellence for Military Medicine, NATO Joint Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Defense Centre of Excellence, and the NATO Emerging Security Challenges Division. This task force, coordinating with other international health and research organizations, quickly employed smart bio sensors, nanotechnology-based air filters, and automated quarantine systems – comprised of autonomous robots and AI-powered advanced analytics – largely stymying the spread of the virus.

Those who were infected before the spread could be prevented were treated successfully with CRISPR-based pathogen neutralization treatments. Personalized vaccines, developed using AI-driven drug discovery tech and synthetic biology platforms, were quickly distributed and administered to the Estonian population as well as its neighboring Baltic states’ populations. Hundreds of Estonians suffered painful deaths from Slavoclast-34, but the deadly pathogen never produced the horrific pandemic it could have.

In the face of Russia’s hybrid warfare and biological assaults, Estonia demonstrated remarkable resilience and technological prowess. As Russian forces intensified their hybrid tactics, Estonia leveraged revolutionary technologies to defend its sovereignty. But in the face of asymmetric tactics used by Russian-sponsored forces to cleverly commit nefarious acts in the “gray zone”, there was a desperate need for NATO to fill the vacuum of capabilities Estonian law enforcement agencies were suffering from while trying to conduct policing in an area where the threat vector grew daily.

Russian proxy forces “sped up the game” of their insurgency with more than just their weaponized pandemic. They started using drones for

seemingly everything. Drone swarms deploying non-lethal chemicals were used for harassment of large civilian gatherings. Loitering munitions were used to attack critical infrastructure – key electrical grid nodes, power plants, transportation hubs, government buildings, ammo depots, and military bases. Estonian vehicles that were transporting food, fuel, and medical supplies. The Russian proxy forces employed microrobots to sabotage equipment, contaminate fuel and water sources, and even conduct espionage in spaces considered secure.

The Russian proxies also carried out targeted assassinations against Estonian high-level government officials and military, law enforcement, and “Estonian Patriotic Front” leaders. Russian-backed cyber actors supporting the proxy forces hacked autonomous vehicles deliberately causing severe traffic accidents and used the vehicles to attack pedestrians in urban and residential areas, making Estonian civilians scared to even walk outside. One of the more frightening activities executed by the Russian proxies was their kidnapping of Estonian civilians – especially women and children – that they then either used for prisoner exchanges, ransomed, or sold off to Russian criminal organizations to experience the horrors of human trafficking. Wives, daughters, sisters, and children were no longer seen traveling without an armed escort, even to markets that were previously bustling and crowded.

The constant danger, fear, and obvious lack of security caused massive civil unrest across Estonia. As a result, the number of vigilante justice, looting, hoarding, shortages, and riots increased. Estonian law enforcement was outnumbered and outgunned. They worked tirelessly to restore stability and law and order but were constantly losing a seemingly endless numbers game.

In May 2034, NATO Stability Policing units arrived in Estonia to help the besieged Estonian local and national law enforcement elements. NATO SP detachments quelled the riots, secured government facilities and critical functions, and provided desperately needed protection of aid and services distribution. They integrated with Estonian law enforcement with remarkable efficiency and precision.

In collaboration with Estonian law enforcement, NATO SP forces leveraged the plethora of joint law enforcement intelligence (Joint LEINT) resources available to them to investigate the roots of the Slavoclast-34 scourge that was ravaging Estonians. They also quickly mapped out the Russian proxies

and criminal organizations' networks and worked feverishly with Estonian law enforcement and military forces to disrupt, degrade, or destroy those insidious networks.

Autonomous NATO bipedal robots, called Guardian Sentinels, commanded by human operators, patrolled urban areas and assisted in maintaining order. The Guardian Sentinels observed and reported on all activities happening on the ground and were driven by Joint LEINT Targeting Lists to detain identified dangerous individuals. Though Estonian civilians initially viewed Guardian Sentinels with apprehension and wariness, the robots soon became a symbol of security and stability for Estonians. UAS sentries provided real-time surveillance, allowing NATO and local forces to anticipate and counter threats swiftly. AI-driven intelligence activities ensured efficient responses to Russian cyber-attacks and mercenary infiltrations. The integration of these advanced technologies not only mitigated the impact of the biological attacks but also strengthened Estonia's overall defense strategy. Autonomous drones, exoskeleton-equipped soldiers, and AI-coordinated battlefield operations enabled NATO and Estonian forces to outmaneuver and repel Russian advancements.

In the wake of the Slavoclast-34 biological attack, Estonia's law enforcement agencies quickly found themselves not only dealing with the devastation of a biological weapon but also facing a relentless surge of organized crime and insurgent activities fueled by Russian proxies. The Estonian Internal Security Service (Kaitsepolitseiamet, or KAPO), already stretched thin from trying to maintain order amid social unrest, took immediate action. They initiated a large-scale operation, targeting the Russian-backed groups that had infiltrated Estonia's organized crime rings and pro-Russian militias. These proxies, responsible for spreading terror and weaponizing biological attacks, were now at the top of KAPO's hit list.

In collaboration with NATO Stability Policing units, Estonian law enforcement launched targeted raids across urban centers and border regions, focusing on capturing or neutralizing high-value individuals responsible for orchestrating Slavoclast-34 attacks. KAPO, backed by NATO's Joint LEINT resources, meticulously pieced together the sprawling web of Russian proxy forces operating in Estonia, identifying key operatives who had facilitated the weaponization of the virus. Autonomous drones equipped with AI-driven facial recognition technology provided real-time surveillance and tracked the movements of these operatives, allowing NATO SP units and Estonian police to move in with surgical precision.

As the proxies moved to evade capture, often retreating to safe houses or blending into civilian populations, law enforcement teams utilized AI-powered analytics to trace patterns in digital communications, financial transactions, and movement. Data from intercepted communications revealed the locations of proxy operatives and their supply chains, which were used to distribute Slavoclast-34. KAPO's relentless pursuit led to a series of high-profile arrests, including the capture of two major Russian operatives responsible for coordinating biological attacks on civilian targets. These captures sent shockwaves through the Russian proxy networks, significantly disrupting their activities.

One of the most significant breakthroughs came when law enforcement agencies uncovered the direct connection between Slavoclast-34's distribution and a covert network of safehouses used by Russian mercenaries. Acting on Joint LEINT intelligence, Estonian SWAT teams, supported by NATO Guardian Sentinels, conducted a high-risk operation in the Narva region, where a key Russian proxy commander was hiding. The operation, executed with precision, resulted in the dismantling of a major node in the distribution chain of Slavoclast-34 and the recovery of critical evidence that linked the Russian proxies to the biological attacks.

Simultaneously, KAPO's counterintelligence division spearheaded operations to hunt down the mercenaries responsible for aerosolizing the virus in densely populated areas. Working with NATO's cyber units, they traced the technical logistics behind the deployment of Slavoclast-34, identifying the cyber-actors responsible for manipulating Estonian government databases to target non-ethnic Russians. These cyber mercenaries were arrested in a coordinated strike after a month-long investigation involving multiple intelligence-sharing agreements with NATO partners.

Beyond the biological attacks, KAPO and NATO SP forces made significant progress in breaking the backbone of Russian-organized crime rings that were exploiting the chaotic environment to traffic weapons, drugs, and even Estonian civilians. Joint raids in Tallinn and other major cities led to the disruption of human trafficking networks linked to Russian criminal organizations. Dozens of traffickers were arrested, and hundreds of civilians—mainly women and children—were rescued from captivity.

As the situation stabilized, Estonian law enforcement and NATO SP detachments, emboldened by their victories, continued to pursue the

remaining Russian proxies responsible for the biological and cyberattacks. The hunt for those involved in Slavoclast-34 became a rallying cry for Estonia's security forces, symbolizing their determination to root out Russian influence in their homeland. Though the battle was far from over, the capture of key operatives and the dismantling of Russian proxy networks were significant steps in restoring Estonia's sovereignty and preventing further atrocities.

Through the integration of advanced technologies, intelligence collaboration, and the sheer willpower of Estonia's law enforcement agencies, the country turned the tide against Russia's hybrid warfare tactics. The proxies that once operated with near impunity were now being hunted down, one by one, their networks dismantled, and their operations exposed to the world.

Despite the challenges and casualties, Estonia emerged from the conflict with its sovereignty still intact. The nation's ability to harness and integrate emerging technologies with its NATO partners, in the face of hybrid warfare, underscored its resilience and strategic acumen. Estonia's successful defense against Russia's aggressive tactics served as a testament to NATO's credo, 'stronger together'. The power of innovation and international cooperation in safeguarding freedom and stability in the Baltic region proved to be unbreakable.

Worse Than You Think

Isabelle had just finished her briefing on Estonia when she saw a Signal message from an old friend who was working in the European Union External Action.³⁸ Jean-Luc asked if she had any time for a quick conversation. The C-28 had decent connectivity, and Isabelle was able to speak with Jean-Luc in a virtual environment with her XR headset. Jean-Luc had designed his personal virtual environment to look like a cosy café in Paris. Isabelle smiled, warmed by nostalgia.

Jean-Luc said, "Isabelle, it's so good to see you. Where are you right now?"

"I'm flying at what feels like a million kilometers an hour to Lithuania. Probably to get kicked in the teeth.", Isabelle responded sardonically.

³⁸ The European External Action Service (EEAS) is the European Union's diplomatic service. Since 2011, the EEAS carries out the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy – editor's note.

Jean-Luc smirked but looked concerned. He said, "Isabelle, I'll be glad to see you soon if you end up near Kaunas, but I actually reached out because I wanted to give you a heads up."

"A heads up? This doesn't sound good.", she replied.

He looked back at her seriously and said, "Not good for any of us. The situation over here is bad. I've been all over the Baltics for the last year and the last couple weeks are as bad as I can remember."

She replied, "I've seen most of the reporting and from what I've read and heard coming out of Estonia, it sounds a lot like what was happening in Ukraine, back in 2014."

Jean-Luc said, "Isabelle, it's worse than you think. Estonia is bad but that's just the tip of the iceberg. The Russians are flooding in mercs, all assortment of little green men – I've heard from several sources that some of them are VDV, Spetsnaz, GRU, and FSB –, and drones and weapons galore. Even some high-end anti-air missiles, hypersonics, and rockets. It really feels like they're gearing up for something big."

Isabelle involuntarily clenched her jaw for a moment and then said, "What are the LEOs in those countries doing? We have some SP elements in Estonia helping their law enforcement agencies."

Jean-Luc replied, "They're doing the best they can, but they are playing goalkeeper covering some very wide goalposts facing about twenty strikers at once. There's just too much ground to cover. The protests, the riots, the looting... it just seems to grow every day. People here are scared. They don't know if they're going to have food or water tomorrow or if they're even going to survive the day. The disappearances are unnerving, even to us. My superiors are trying as hard as they can to get as much support as they can for the Baltics but it's a zero-sum game and the Western EU nations are plenty concerned with their own defense and domestic issues. I wish I could say I was surprised you were heading toward this mess, but I had a feeling it was going to happen soon, and I wanted to let you know about the disaster you're coming into."

She sighed and responded, "I appreciate it, Jean-Luc. Truly. Unfortunately, I had a feeling this was going to be the case. I owe you many *soixante-quinzes*!"

Jean-Luc smiled and said, “I look forward to cashing that in. Be safe, Isabelle, and let me know when you’re in Kaunas or nearby and we’ll link up.”

“Stay safe and I’ll see you over there, Jean Luc.”, Isabelle said.

Cyber Blitzkrieg and Rolling Tanks

In 2035, Europe’s geopolitical landscape stood on the brink of turmoil. The atmosphere that recently had such hopeful promise once was now electric with the menace of conflict and chaos. The Baltic states were the center of this brewing, wicked storm; caught in the crosshairs of Russia’s drive to reclaim territories from its former empire.

As winter began to fade, the first signs of Russian aggression emerged not through boisterous political statements but through old-fashioned hybrid warfare and breakneck cyber-attacks. Russian hacker groups – FSB, GRU, Russian Federation Forces, and government-backed criminal groups –, using wave after wave of autonomous digital entities, launched a veritable cyber blitzkrieg aimed at disabling communication networks and dismantling defense systems. Russian AI cyber avatars swept across NATO networks in seconds, before political leaders could even understand if this was an act of war and utter the words, “Article 5”. Power grids faltered, financial systems were quickly in shambles, and the flow of critical information slowed, sparking initial confusion and fear among the populations of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and more.

However, NATO military forces had prepared well for such an occurrence, and fortunately their presence had increased by big numbers after the unprovoked war of Russia against Ukraine in 2022. Its cyber defense forces contained and mitigated the Russian cyber onslaught quickly. An army of NATO autonomous cyber defenders swept across the alliance’s military networks and its allied nations’ civilian networks to quarantine compromised nodes and cut out Russian AI-powered malware like it was cancer in NATO’s metaphorical body. The NATO AI cyber defense avatars were just minutes behind the Russian bots, enabling NATO and its member nations to stop the bleeding in cyberspace and restore critical services in just hours. Russian and NATO digital avatars fought intense battles across the immense expanses of cyberspace, with the advantage constantly swinging between the attackers and the defenders. NATO cyber forces, in well-trained coordination with their partner nation’s indigenous

cyber defenders, restored communication networks, stabilized financial systems, and secured critical infrastructure, preventing a major collapse.

Due to the need for a whole-of-government approach, early in 2035, NATO stood up a Joint LEINT Cell (JLC) in Kaunas, Lithuania. The JLC enabled NATO SP elements to coordinate and consolidate their resources to have the greatest effect for the lowest output while implementing ruthless prioritization. Vast swarms of drones on the ground, on and in the water, in the air, and even in the subterranean layer of cities, scoured the environment providing a quantity and quality of intelligence never seen before. AI-powered intelligence fusion applications processed and exploited this ocean of data all day and night without the human need for rest, enabling human law enforcement operators and analysts to focus on the contextualization and critical thinking they did best.

Additionally, the JLC used blockchain technology to create tamper-proof digital forensics chains, ensuring that any cyber or criminal activities attributed to Russian proxies could be verified with unalterable data. This bolstered their present and future legal efforts to prosecute proxy forces and ensured that evidence presented to international bodies was trustworthy and verifiable. The JLC also applied blockchain tech to track critical supply chains – weapons, humanitarian aid, etc. – ensuring that Russian proxies couldn't manipulate supplies by introducing counterfeit goods or disrupting shipments.

The JLC also employed AI and natural language processing (NLP) to monitor social media platforms, forums, and the dark web for disinformation campaigns, recruitment efforts, and coordination of proxy operations. Machine learning algorithms sifted through enormous volumes of online chatter to detect and counter Russian influence campaigns targeting Baltic state populations. Virtual AI cyber operators constantly monitored deep web markets and forums, enabling the JLC to track illicit weapons sales and crypto transactions linked to Russian criminal syndicates, and proxy force logistics. With extreme velocity and in coordination with local and national Baltic states law enforcement, NATO SP forces were able to disrupt the flow of resources and money to these groups, weakening their operational capacity.

While Russia achieved some disruption, NATO's resilience, adoption and seamless integration of technology, and swift action thwarted much

of Russia's early, broader ambitions, and demonstrated the alliance's enhanced defensive prowess.

Hitting the Ground Running

As she hit the ground in Kaunas, Isabelle felt like a rugby player getting slammed by the opposing team after catching a throw in. As she was walking down the ramp of the C-28, an over-caffeinated and overwhelmed American Army Major greeted her immediately. The major, carrying a tablet and energy drink excitedly told her, "Colonel Moreau-Girard, I'm Major Lee Brennan. General Narusewicz sent me to link up with you as soon as you got here. If you'll follow me, ma'am, I'll take you to your CHU³⁹ and we'll get you plugged into the MND-N network so you can get your updated briefing and get up to speed."

"Up to speed?", Isabelle thought. "It's been less than a day since I left Africa." But events were happening at breakneck speed.

Isabelle arrived at her CHU and Major Brennan sent another soldier to bring her coffee. She set her cup of steaming hot coffee on the small nightstand next to her bed and put on the headset for her situation update. Twenty minutes later she had a good grasp on what was happening but felt like there was a large mountain in front of her that she had to start climbing. Jean-Luc had been right. The Baltics were in worse shape than she thought. All the NATO warfighters seemed ready, and some even eager, to face a Russian offensive but there was so much nefarious activity happening below the threshold of open conflict they either couldn't see or seemingly do much about. She had seen this play out too many times before. The Russians were so adept at employing hybrid warfare methods that confounded conventional military forces and other national defense elements.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were all experiencing severe amounts of crime – some petty, some wickedly organized – in both the physical world and in cyberspace. Coupled with the growing civil unrest, there was an overall sense of insecurity and instability. Despite being temporarily awash in trepidation over this overwhelming challenge, Isabelle had an epiphany. This situation was exactly what her SP battalion was built for.

³⁹ CHU is an abbreviation of containerized housing unit. These semi-permanent housing units are shipping container prefabricated into living quarters, some with bathroom and shower facilities. CHU give the garrison the flexibility to transition soldiers, sailors, marines and beyond into more structured living conditions with heat and air conditioning – editor's note.

They potentially had the most defined mission of any of the units in the MND-N. While commanders of infantry, cavalry, and armored units had to change their priorities and operational approaches based on what was happening across the theater of war, Isabelle's SP battalion would always have one overarching mission: to use their experienced all-round policing expertise along with their military skills and training to provide human security, law enforcement and stability operations where NATO combat forces had no answer for Russian aggression.

Isabelle stood at the entrance of the briefing room, her posture straight but relaxed as she prepared to meet the team she would be leading into one of the most crucial operations of her career. The air inside the room was cool, the hum of the air conditioning the only noise until she opened the door. She was used to these introductions—new faces, new dynamics—but this one felt different. The stakes were higher than ever, with the upcoming deployment to the Baltics looming large in her mind.

As she stepped inside, her eyes immediately landed on Lieutenant Colonel Marco Ricci. They shared a brief, knowing glance—a recognition of their history together in Kosovo, where they had faced down challenging operations and built a mutual respect. His steady presence was a small comfort in this unfamiliar room. Ricci gave her a slight nod, his stoic demeanor unchanged by the years.

“Colonel Moreau-Girard,” he said formally, stepping forward to greet her with a handshake, but the warmth in his eyes spoke of their long-standing camaraderie.

“Good to see you again, Marco,” Isabelle replied, her voice soft but purposeful. They had been through enough in Kosovo to understand each other without needing to say much.

Her eyes moved to the rest of the room, where the other officers stood waiting. She took a breath, shifting seamlessly into the role of the commander.

“Let's get started,” Isabelle said, her tone sharp but welcoming.

Standing at attention were the men she would depend on in the months to come. Captain Andrei Ionescu, the ALFA Coy Commander, was the first to catch her eye. He had the sharp, serious look of someone who had seen

his fair share of combat. A Romanian officer, he nodded as she approached him, his eyes assessing but respectful.

“Captain Ionescu,” Isabelle said, shaking his hand. “I’ve read your file. Your experience will be crucial in the field.” “Thank you, Colonel,” he replied, his voice low but firm. “I’m ready for whatever comes.”

Next was Captain Angelo Restretti, the BRAVO Coy Commander, an Italian officer whose calm demeanor masked a reputation for quick thinking under pressure. He offered a confident handshake, his expression showing none of the nerves that might accompany such a meeting.

“Captain Restretti,” Isabelle said with a nod. “I’ve heard good things.”

Restretti gave her a slight smile. “I’ll do my best to live up to them, Colonel.”

Finally, her attention turned to Captain Mickael Daviaud, the French Logistics Support Unit Commander. He stood quietly to the side, his arms behind his back, watching the introductions unfold with an air of quiet confidence. His background in logistics had been praised in several operations, and Isabelle knew he would be key in ensuring the battalion’s efficiency in the upcoming deployment.

“Captain Daviaud,” she said, extending her hand. “Your expertise in keeping us supplied will make all the difference.”

Daviaud took her hand, nodding firmly. “I’m ready to make sure we’re always one step ahead, Colonel.”

With the introductions complete, Isabelle looked around the room once more, taking in the weight of the moment. She had led teams before, but this was different. The crisis in the Baltics demanded something more, and she could already feel the unique dynamics forming among her new officers.

She gestured for them to take their seats as she stepped to the front of the room, pulling up a map of the Baltics on the digital display. “Let’s get right to it. The situation in the Baltics is deteriorating rapidly, and we’re being deployed to stabilize key urban centers and support NATO’s efforts in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.”

The team leaned forward; eyes locked on the screen as Isabelle laid out the mission. Though they were strangers to one another now, she could feel the beginnings of something stronger taking root—trust, respect, and a shared sense of duty.

As she spoke, her eyes met Marco's briefly, a silent acknowledgement of the journey they'd already been on together in Kosovo. But now, there were new faces to rely on, and new challenges ahead. Isabelle knew that the success of this mission would depend on their ability to come together as a team, and she was determined to lead them through whatever was to come.

Z-Day Arrives

The next morning, Isabelle stood at attention outside of Major General Narusewicz's command post. Major Brennan came out of the command post door and told her, "The general is ready for you now, ma'am." Isabelle removed her cover and entered.

Isabelle stepped into the command office, the door closing behind her with a soft click. The room was dimly lit, the only brightness coming from the myriad virtual overlays on the wall-sized screens. They displayed the chaotic situation in the Baltics—marked with flaring red zones of conflict, troop movements, and real-time data feeds. It was clear that every corner of the region was on the brink of erupting into full-scale war.

General Andrzej Narusewicz was pacing behind his desk, his brow furrowed in deep concentration as he absorbed the information flashing on the screens. Isabelle had read about him – his reputation for being both relentless and composed under pressure preceded him—but this was their first meeting in person.

He paused in his pacing, turning sharply to face her. His gaze was intense as he took her in, his eyes scanning her with the practiced scrutiny of a seasoned officer. There was a brief moment of silence as he sized her up, evaluating the new commander standing in his office.

"Colonel Moreau-Girard," he said finally, his voice calm but carrying an unmistakable edge. "Good to meet you. I assume you've been briefed on the situation?" His eyes flicked to the screens behind him, the chaotic visual

of the Baltics looming over their conversation. "As you can see, we are in quite a precarious position."

"Yes, sir.", she said.

"Well, it's probably worse than you think, Colonel.", he continued.

"That's what I keep hearing, sir.", she said.

The general frowned but nodded, "I believe our combat forces are as ready as they can be. Are you and your battalion ready?"

Isabelle was almost offended by the question but hid her annoyance and replied, "Of course, sir. We're ready to support the fight."

The general raised his eyebrows and replied, "Very good. I don't mean to insult you, Colonel."

Isabelle thought, "I must not have disguised my face as well as I meant to."

The general continued, "I know how capable your battalion is. But I want to be absolutely clear when I say, I don't just need your battalion to support the fight. I need you all in the fight. This division will have critical policing needs and not just in a post-conflict period. I need your unit even as the bullets are flying. There won't be much value in winning the war if we inherit a hellacious, unsustainable peace."

The general pointed to a bronze figure on his desk of a Greek hoplite and said, "Look at this hoplite. He represents my combat forces. He is well armed with his spear and sword. He is seemingly well protected by his armor, helmet, and shield. This warrior is well equipped to fight against a Persian adversary. But imagine if while this warrior, and his brothers-in-arms, are in a Phalanx formation fighting the Persian Army, there are droves of venomous vipers slithering between them, biting at any sliver of unprotected flesh. For all the power of violence this soldier and his companions have, they cannot defeat the enemy in front of them while also protecting themselves against these deadly snakes. They get bit. They fall, they vomit, some of them die. The Phalanx falls apart and they are overrun by a Persian onslaught. Now imagine a pack of mongoose, trained by the Greek hoplites to attack and kill sand vipers with incredible ferocity, released at the feet of that phalanx. These mongoose dart between the feet

of the hoplites, using their agility and cunning to decimate those vipers as the Hoplites defeat their Persian foes. Please do not take this to be condescending or demeaning but I intend to employ the 1st SP Battalion as a pack of ferocious mongoose to protect my hoplites from this insidious swarm of sand vipers. You and your battalion's roles are absolutely critical, Colonel. With you, our phalanx will stay strong."

While she felt like she was being lectured at by a schoolteacher on the capabilities of the SP Battalion at first, Isabelle saw the merit in the Polish general's analogy and was glad he saw her battalion as critical. That was important to her in order to get the SP Battalion on active duty in this war. She said, "Sir, I understand. We will not let you down."

"Colonel, when I was a young Lieutenant just starting out, I found that...", General Narusewicz began but was interrupted by Major Brennan rushing in through the door, breathlessly. The major managed to say, "Sir, it's happening. Z-Day has begun. The Russian 1st Guards Tank Army just moved into the Suwalki Gap, Russia's 6th Combined Arms Army is moving west towards Riga, and elements of the VDV are dropping just outside Kaunas as we speak."

The general looked surprisingly calm and said, "Colonel, you know what I will need. This is the "Golden Hour" for SP. Seize it! Dismissed. Major, get me on with Brussels and Washington now. All the brigade commanders should already be executing our CONOPS."

Despite NATO's admirable actions in cyber defense over the last several months, Russia was still holding onto its employed overarching strategy – a mix of autonomous robotic warfare, hybrid attacks, and conventional forces – in earnest on Z-day. Cloaked in darkness, Russian armored columns, with overwatch from a seemingly endless sea of drone swarms, rushed across the Lithuanian and Latvian borders in a multi-vectored attack, aiming to overwhelm NATO defenses and disorient NATO military commanders' OODA (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act) loop. Due to the sheer mass of its forces and the surprising amount of autonomy given to those forces, Russia managed to gain small amounts of territory, creating pockets of chaos and confusion. This *modus operandi*, despite being included in the lessons learned from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, caught NATO a bit off guard. Even with a very tenuous hold on these areas, Russia's advance caused significant disruption. NATO forces, after initial setbacks,

quickly regrouped and mounted a resilient defense, working tirelessly to repel the Russian invaders.

Guardians of the North

While a cascade of Russian Army divisions, as well as their enabling units and joint Russian Armed Forces partners, had rushed into the Baltic states en masse, NATO forces were on a solid war footing thanks to years of preparation through NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) efforts. The crucial catalyst for any NATO success in this emerging war was the alliance's Multinational Division North (MND-N. Headquartered just outside Riga, Latvia and subordinate to the NATO Multinational Corps Northeast (MNC-NE) was responsible for the daunting task of coordinating operations for four Multinational Battlegroups headquartered in Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

A decade of intensive, well-coordinated, and highly integrated training, wargames, and joint readiness exercises had substantially prepared NATO forces for the crucible they would have to endure to beat back and defeat the metaphorical Russian bear. Warfighters from 31 different nations stood shoulder-to-shoulder ready to defend the great alliance against Russia's belligerent aggression. An attack against one was an attack against all. Russia had tugged on the wolf's tail and now the pack was snarling and circling them.

Raging Riverfront: The Battle for Daugavpils

In Latvia, the city of Daugavpils, with its strategic location along the Daugava River, became a critical battleground. The roar of artillery fire echoed across the riverbanks as Russian forces attempted to establish a bridgehead. The river's normally placid surface was now churned into frothy waves by the relentless barrage.

NATO's response was swift. From concealed positions, autonomous amphibious drones emerged, armed with A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial) weapons. These drones targeted Russian boats and pontoon bridges, creating fiery eruptions that lit up the overcast sky. The smell of burning rubber and fuel mixed with the fresh, crisp scent of the river.

Northwest of the city, the dense forests provided cover for NATO's next move. Equipped with MARS headsets, NATO soldiers coordinated with

autonomous land drones, setting up ambushes along the forest trails. The damp, pine-scented air was filled with the hum of drones and the quiet murmur of soldiers communicating through encrypted channels.

As the first Russian armored vehicles entered the forest, they were met with a devastating crossfire. Directed energy weapons, mounted on autonomous drones, sliced through the air, disabling vehicles and causing explosions that reverberated through the trees. The sound of cracking branches and the occasional cry of injured soldiers echoed in the otherwise serene forest.

NATO forces, using their MARS headsets, navigated the terrain with precision. The headset's display highlighted enemy positions and suggested optimal routes for engagement and evasion. This technological edge allowed NATO to outmaneuver the Russians, pushing them back toward the city.

Harbor Havoc: The Struggle for Riga



Riga, Latvia's capital and major port city, was a crucial target for Russian forces. The battle began at the harbor, where the salty sea air was filled with the sounds of combat: the deep thud of artillery, the high-pitched whine of incoming missiles, and the roar of naval guns.

Russian autonomous sea drones, sleek and deadly, cut through the harbor waters, attempting to breach NATO's defenses. However, NATO's own fleet of autonomous underwater vehicles met them head-on, engaging in a silent but deadly underwater dance. Explosions sent geysers of water skyward, while the smell of saltwater and fuel permeated the air.

In the heart of Riga, the city's iconic Freedom Monument stood as a symbol of resilience. NATO forces, bolstered by Latvian defenders, prepared for the Russian assault. The streets were filled with the sounds of battle: incoming missiles and drones, the rattle of machine gun fire, and the dull thump of grenades.

Autonomous supply vehicles darted through the streets. NATO soldiers, using exoskeletons and advanced targeting systems, held their ground against waves of Russian drones. The smell of gunpowder, smoke, and sweat created a pungent miasma.

Overhead, the skies turned into a battlefield. Swarms of NATO and Russian drones clashed in mid-air, their dogfights leaving trails of smoke and debris. Directed energy weapons fired beams of intense light, cutting through the clouds and disabling enemy drones in spectacular bursts of energy.

The Razor's Edge: Battle for Kaunas

Against the backdrop of a burnt orange Lithuanian sunrise, Colonel Isabelle Moreau-Girard stood on Aukstejas Hill, surveying the battle taking place through her piercing blue eyes. She knew, however this battle ended, that it was just the beginning of her mission in Lithuania. Russian and NATO drone swarms and crewed aircraft waged a violent battle in the sky, dancing like fireflies, but wreaking havoc on the ground, in the much grimmer reality of the day. Plumes of smoke followed in screaming land attack cruise missiles (LACMs) and long-range guided missiles. The metallic staccato of machine gun fire served as a constant reminder of the bloody horror the ground pounders were living. Tanks engaged in armor-on-armor fights and provided supporting fires and counterfires while maneuvering through the obstacle-laden battlefield like elephants

through a predator-laden jungle, using their brute strength and cunning to survive and fight.

“Isabelle!”, Isabelle heard someone yell behind her above the din of warfare. She turned and saw German Colonel Markus Weidemann, the MND-N J3, waving her over. Isabelle hadn’t seen Markus since they both attended a conference on stability operations in Hannover several years before. She walked over to the balding colonel, broad and smiling in his Bundeswehr uniform that had been dirtied from flying soil and shrapnel. They shook hands firmly and Colonel Weidemann said, “It’s quite lively isn’t it, Isa?”

Isabelle smiled because her favorite mentor, French General D’Arcy had always called her Isa. She said, “Yes, it is, Markus.”

“Let’s take a better look, shall we?”, Colonel Weidemann said to Isabelle. They both put on their MARS headsets.

Isabelle’s vision, enhanced by her headset, provided a strategic overlay of the battlefield, highlighting the positions of NATO forces, enemy units, and the autonomous systems that clashed violently across the landscape. Despite the augmented technology giving her a clearer picture of the situation, the visceral horror of war was palpable—the mud, blood, and fire mixing together into a maelstrom of destruction.

As the battle raged on, the scene intensified with the introduction of even more autonomous robotic systems on all fronts. The air was dominated by NATO’s “Griffin” aerial drones, sleek and agile, darting through the sky to engage Russian “Berserker” attack drones. Between these algorithmically led dogfights, the NATO drones gracefully executed complex maneuvers, launching deadly precision strikes against enemy positions while avoiding counterfire. The sky was a destructive dance floor where each side sought to gain air superiority while simultaneously executing strike missions in support of their forces’ formations and soldiers on the ground trapped in a bloody, muddy, and hellacious battle for critical territory.

On the ground, autonomous tanks known as “Goliaths” rolled heavily across the battlefield. These behemoths, equipped with advanced AI targeting systems and reinforced and reactive armor, engaged in fierce combat with Russian “Ironclad” tanks. The Goliaths’ adaptive tactics and rapid decision-making allowed them to outmaneuver their human-piloted adversaries, delivering devastating blows with their high-velocity cannons and

smart missiles. Infantry support came from robotic soldiers, “Sentinels,” programmed to provide cover fire, evacuate the wounded, and secure key positions with relentless precision and zero fear or indecisiveness.

The waters of the Nemunas River, too, became a fiery hellscape of robotic warfare. NATO’s “Hydra” underwater drones patrolled the depths, hunting for Russian “Kraken” submersibles. These autonomous underwater unmanned vehicles (UUVs) fired torpedoes and deftly conducted mine-laying operations, aiming to disrupt enemy supply lines and naval capabilities. The Hydras’ advanced sonar systems and stealth capabilities made them formidable adversaries, turning the river into a perilous domain for any hostile force.

As the battle moved towards Kaunas, the fighting grew even more intense. The urban environment added a new layer of complexity, with tens of thousands of trapped desperate civilians, and narrow streets and dense buildings providing both cover and hazards. The Sentinels, now accompanied by “Raptor” scout drones, navigated the cityscape, clearing buildings and marking safe routes for advancing NATO forces. Griffin drones provided overwatch from the sky, their cameras and sensors feeding real-time intelligence to command centers.

“We’re in the thick of it now, Isa.”, Isabelle heard Colonel Weidemann say through her MARS headset. He continued without giving her a chance to say anything in response, “We need your battalion’s unique capabilities to support the division’s fight on multiple fronts. Orders are coming down the chain of command and I want you to have a heads up, so you have a decent chance to prepare. While our combat units are doing their best to hold the line and the MP battalions are overstretched to guarantee mobility support and control the influx of prisoners of war, we have some critical gaps that your Stability Policing Battalion is ideally suited to fill. You’ve got the experience, and the skill set to handle this, so here’s what I need from you and your team.”

“First, human security is going to be vital. As you can see, the fighting is pushing deeper into urban areas, and that’s where your unit comes in. We need your people securing key cities and towns behind the front lines, keeping the civilian population safe and calm. Russian proxies are activated and cause chaos and disruption behind our lines. Riots, looting, and insurgent activities are bound to flare up, especially in places like Kaunas, where the fighting is close by. Your battalion can work alongside

local law enforcement to prevent that chaos from spilling over into our operations. We need you to keep things stable – our supply lines are fragile just as the resilience of the population. Detain dangerous elements, break up any organized crime or sabotage efforts, and keep those critical urban centers functioning for our logistics and ops hubs.”

“Second, transportation network security is a top priority. Our supply lines are lifelines, Isa, and they’re already under constant threat from Russian sabotage teams and rogue drones. MP units work hard to keep the military mobility floating but the enemy seems to be everywhere, and they hit us hard. It looks like years of integration and investments of malicious entrepreneurs and state sponsored businesses have infiltrated deep into the Baltic society. They’ve tried to take over the control of essential IT infrastructure and communication nodes. We need your SP specialists to find out what the hell is going on to secure vital infrastructure, routes – especially around the bridges and rail lines. We need to hunt down and dismantle the proxy organization that infects the Lithuanian social and infra structures. If the Russians and their proxies keep hitting our supply lines hard, we’re going to be in serious trouble. You’ll need to coordinate with the Lithuanian law enforcement ASAP. We need to keep everything flowing smoothly and secure those critical points.”

“Think of it like being both our traffic cop, SWAT, private investigator and bodyguard, Isa. If the civilians see that NATO is there keeping the law and order, it’s going to help morale, both for the troops and the people.”

“Finally, we’re going to rely on you for reconstruction and recovery operations as the battle ebbs and flows. We’ve already taken a beating in some areas, and when we push the Russians back, we’ll need to quickly re-establish control over those areas – repairing infrastructure, in close cooperation with local authorities and law enforcement agencies, restoring law and order and getting essential services back online. You’ll be key in ensuring that happens without a hitch, so our combat units can keep the momentum.”

Colonel Weidemann paused, looking at Isabelle seriously. “I know this is a lot to ask of you, Isa, but your battalion is in the fight. You’re not just here to clean up afterward – you’re an integral part of keeping this whole division moving forward. I expect you’ll get your orders from your commanding officer within the next 20 minutes.”

Isabelle nodded, “Thanks Markus for informing me in advance. We’ll get it done. My battalion’s ready.”

“Good,” Weidemann replied with a firm nod. “Now let’s get to work.”

Isabelle keyed up her Deputy on her MARS headset and said, “Marco, tell the staff to jump into the VBR⁴⁰ in fifteen minutes. You, Captains Ionescu, Restretti, and Daviaud are coming with me. I’ll be picking you up in ten minutes outside the CP.”

Marco responded, “Yes ma’am!”

Isabelle quickly jumped into her autonomous, hybrid Hummer that Major Brennan had set her up with. She wondered if this war wouldn’t be over by the time her battalion could make as much of a difference for the MND-N as she wanted.

The Battalion is Oscar Mike

Isabelle’s vehicle pulled up to the CP and Marco and the rest of her requested staff quickly saddled up. Inside the hybrid Hummer, Isabelle sat focused, her MARS headset streaming data as the vehicle sped toward the Division TOC. The rest of her staff – Captains Angelica Nowak (PL, Mustafa Kaya (TK), Lieutenant Sandra Janssen (NLD), and Lieutenant Jack Barnes (US) were located throughout the AO and were connected through their own MARS headsets.

Isabelle opened the secure communication line through the MARS network, addressing both those in the vehicle and the officers in the field.

“All right, everyone, listen up,” Isabelle began. “These are our orders and our outlined priorities – human security, enforce the rule of law, infrastructure defense, fight crime and reconstruction. We need to be focused, precise, and fast.” After her opening remarks Isabell outlined in more detail the operational intent of the MND and the part their SP Battalion needed to play in this war.

She turned to her Deputy. “Marco, once we reach the TOC, I need you to maintain up close and personal contact with the Provost Marshal and

40 Virtual Briefing Room (VBR).

Deputy Division Commander. We need to keep our operations synced with the division. No missteps in communication.”

Marco nodded sharply. “I’ll keep the comms open and ensure we stay aligned.”

Next, she looked at Captain Ionescu, commanding Alfa Coy. “Captain, your focus is on maneuvering Alfa Coy to secure key urban areas and maintain public order behind the front lines. You’ll need to respond to any hotspots and maintain order to prevent chaos. Stay in close contact with the Lithuanian Law Enforcement agencies. Make sure the local population understands our effort and get as much as intel as you can.”

Ionescu gave a resolute nod. “We’ll move swiftly to clean up those urban areas and keep things peaceful.”

Isabelle turned to Captain Mickael Daviaud, her logistics officer. “Mickael, your task is crucial. I need you to make sure the battalion is and remains fully equipped with the most advanced biometrics tools and non-lethal weaponry we’ll need for enforcement and investigations.”

Daviaud gave a sharp nod, already in problem-solving mode. “I’ve been thinking ahead on this, Colonel. For biometrics, we’re looking at quantum-encrypted DNA scanners—portable devices that can analyze trace DNA in under a minute, even from degraded samples. We’ll also have neural pattern readers that can match individuals by their brainwave signatures, providing identity confirmation even through interference like helmets or masks. And then there’s the multi-spectrum facial recognition systems. These will give us real-time ID capabilities, even in low-visibility conditions or through facial coverings.”

Isabelle gave a brief nod, impressed with his thoroughness. “Good. We’ll need all of that.”

Daviaud continued, not missing a beat. “For non-lethal weaponry, we just received some nice state-of-the-art stuff. I’m securing plasma-disruptor cuffs—non-invasive restraints that can temporarily immobilize without causing harm. We’ll also have sonic incapacitation devices for crowd control. These emit controlled sound waves to disorient without any permanent damage. Then there’s the kinetic pulse rifles—they have adjustable impact settings for everything from light incapacitation to more

forceful suppression. On top of that, we're bringing in nanofiber tasers – much more effective and precise than the older models – and liquid armor drones that can deploy adaptable containment barriers in real time."

Isabelle raised an eyebrow. "You've covered a lot of ground, Mickael. What about larger-scale engagements?"

"I'm also working on getting crowd-control drones equipped with both advanced surveillance and non-lethal payloads," he added. "And for more technical needs, we'll have directed-energy hand weapons. These will allow us to disable vehicles or shut down electronics without causing physical damage."

Isabelle allowed herself a brief smile. "That's exactly what we need. These tools will give us control while minimizing harm."

Daviaud smiled slightly, his confidence shining through. "I'll make sure we're ready, ma'am. We'll have everything we need to keep the peace and stay ahead of the threats."

With Daviaud's detailed preparation in place, Isabelle felt more assured that her battalion would have the technological advantage needed to manage the complex and volatile situations they were about to face. Isabelle then turned her focus to the officers connected via MARS.

"Captain Nowak," she said, "you'll be coordinating with local authorities and law enforcement. You are the linchpin between them and us. Make sure our people use your connections and get me the best and most up-to-date information available. I need a strong network with our Lithuanian partners: we can't let local and internal disruptions affect our operations."

Captain Nowak's voice came through the headset. "Understood, Colonel.

"Captain Kaya," Isabelle continued, "synchronize your demands with Captain Daviaud and get your unmanned systems ready to conduct surveillance along critical areas. Use your ISR to provide early warning of any threats to our supply routes or urban centers. We're counting on you for eyes in the sky and on the ground."

Kaya's calm voice responded. "The drones are operational in 2 hours, ma'am. We're also fully integrated with all the Division ISR assets and even

have some help from some spooky American friends. You'll have constant coverage, Colonel."

"Lieutenant Janssen," Isabelle said next, "you are our eyes and hands to secure our perimeter in the border areas. Ensure that no Russian proxies or infiltrators get through the border areas without us knowing. Work with the engineers to see if we need to fortify entry points or assembly areas".

Janssen answered back quickly, "I'll ensure the perimeter is secure, Colonel."

Finally, Isabelle addressed Lieutenant Jack Barnes (US). "Jack, your intel is crucial. Connect with the J2 and feed us continuous updates from our SP assets. Focus on LEINT, HUMINT, and ISR from Captain Kaya's unmanned systems. Make sure we're getting a complete picture and any emerging threats. Plus, I need you to be pushing, not just pulling. The Division J2 might not realize how beneficial the LEINT we can feed them is, but you'll make sure they see the value."

Lieutenant Barnes responded with determination. "I'll stay linked with the J2 and ensure we have real-time intel on all fronts, Colonel."

With the orders given, Isabelle surveyed the battlefield map on her MARS headset. The key objectives were laid out: "We're not just a support element – we're keeping the division moving forward and crushing Russian formations. Stay sharp, stay disciplined, and execute the mission."

Her team confirmed their readiness, Isabelle ordered all to report back with their detailed plans within 3 hours. She knew that while the battle raged ahead, their ability to coordinate across multiple fronts would determine the success or failure of the operation.

As the Hummer continued its journey to the TOC, the tension in the air grew palpable. A sudden, high-pitched whine filled the air, breaking the relative quiet inside the vehicle. Isabelle's eyes shot toward the sky through the windshield, and she caught sight of movement—fast, darting shapes against the backdrop of clouds.

"Berserkers!" Isabelle shouted as the vehicle's AI system registered the threat, immediately attempting evasive maneuvers. The vehicle swerved

hard to the right, causing everyone inside to brace against their harnesses. Explosions erupted nearby as small rockets fired from enemy drones hit the road, sending debris and dirt flying through the air.

In the backseat, Captain Ionescu cursed as the vehicle was hit by a shockwave, jostling them violently. "Contact left!" he yelled.

Just as the Hummer recovered from the swerve, Isabelle saw it clearly – a swarm of small, agile drones, the Russian "Berserkers," descending from the sky like mechanical vultures. Before she could give another order, a rocket screamed down from the heavens, slamming into the road just ahead of them. The blast sent the Hummer flipping into the air, spinning violently before crashing back down on its side in a cacophony of twisting metal and shattered glass.

The world went white for a moment, the deafening ring of the explosion disorienting everyone. Isabelle's vision blurred, her ears buzzing as she fought to regain her bearings. Smoke filled the cabin as the Hummer groaned under the strain of its damaged frame. Isabelle's head pounded, but she forced herself to move. She could hear Marco coughing beside her, while Restretti and Daviaud groaned in the back.

"Everyone... give me your status," Isabelle rasped, her voice hoarse from the impact.

"Here," Marco replied, his voice strained as he struggled to free himself from his seatbelt.

"Restretti here, I'm good," the captain called from the back, pulling himself up from the wreckage.

"I'm here too," Daviaud grunted, blood trickling from a cut on his forehead.

Isabelle turned to look at Andrei Ionescu. He was slumped in his seat, his face pale. His right leg was a mangled mess of blood and twisted metal, caught between a crushed section of the vehicle's door and frame.

"Hold on, Andrei!" Isabelle shouted, leaning over to assess his condition. His breathing was shallow, and blood was soaking through his pants rapidly.

“Andrei’s hit! We need CASEVAC now!” Isabelle yelled over the din of nearby explosions. She activated her MARS headset, connecting directly to the Division’s tactical network. “This is Colonel Moreau-Girard! We’ve been hit by enemy drones and rockets. I’ve got a critically wounded officer—request immediate CASEVAC!”

Within moments, the network’s AI confirmed her request, and an autonomous CASEVAC unit was dispatched. Isabelle keyed her attention back to Andrei. He was still conscious but barely hanging on.

“Stay with us, Andrei,” Marco said, gripping his shoulder. “We’ll get you out of here.”

A loud, mechanical whir filled the air. Through the wrecked side of the Hummer, Isabelle saw the approach of the CASEVAC unit—an autonomous robot resembling a large, sturdy, dog-like machine with extendable limbs and a reinforced platform on its back. It moved with speed and precision, ignoring the debris and flames as it approached the overturned vehicle.

The robot’s sensors scanned the situation and quickly extended its limbs, prying open the damaged section of the vehicle and freeing Andrei’s trapped leg. As it worked, Marco and Angelo carefully stabilized Andrei and lifted him onto the robot’s platform. The CASEVAC unit locked him into place, securing him with robotic arms designed to stabilize wounded personnel.

“CASEVAC unit en route to field hospital,” the robot’s synthesized voice announced before taking off, moving with surprising agility as it navigated the wreckage and smoke toward safety.

Isabelle breathed a brief sigh of relief, knowing Andrei was in good hands. But there was no time to waste—the fight wasn’t over yet. A convoy of armored vehicles approached rapidly, kicking up dirt and rubble as they screeched to a halt nearby. The lead vehicle, a heavy armored troop carrier, had the NATO logo emblazoned on the side.

A sergeant popped his head out of the hatch, waving them over. “Colonel! Get in, we’re pulling out now!”

Marco, Angelo, and Mickael scrambled from the wrecked Hummer, all of them nursing minor injuries, but still able to move. Isabelle grabbed her

weapon, her eyes sweeping the horizon for any more threats before she joined the others in the convoy vehicle.

As they climbed into the relative safety of the armored carrier, Isabelle keyed up her MARS headset again, this time connecting to the Division TOC. “This is Moreau-Girard. We’ve taken casualties—one officer critically injured but CASEVACed. The rest of us are en route to the TOC with minor injuries. ETA fifteen minutes.”

“Copy that, Colonel,” came the calm reply. “Glad to hear you’re still in the fight.”

Isabelle settled into her seat as the convoy began moving again, the tension in the air thick as they navigated toward the Division TOC. The battle raged on around them, but she forced herself to focus on the mission ahead. There was no time to dwell on what had happened—her battalion had work to do, and the division was counting on them.

Andrei would make it. She had to believe that. For now, all that mattered was keeping the mission moving forward and ensuring that they would live to fight another day.

Getting to Work

Colonel Isabelle Moreau-Girard stepped into the secure operations room of the Multinational Division North (MND-N) Tactical Operations Center (TOC). The room was a hub of activity, with officers and analysts moving between stations, the air thick with tension and purpose. The battles outside were growing more intense by the hour, and the decisions made here would shape the outcome.

Waiting for her near the center of the room were Brigadier General Krzysztof Lewandowski, the Polish Deputy Division Commander, Colonel Kolar, the MND-N Provost Marshal and Lieutenant Colonel Hans Voss, the German MND-N J2. Both men turned as Isabelle approached.

“Colonel Moreau-Girard,” General Lewandowski greeted her, extending a firm handshake. “We’ve got a lot to cover, and time is of the essence.”

“Agreed, General,” Isabelle replied. “Let’s get started.”

Lieutenant Colonel Voss gestured toward a circular platform in the center of the room. “We’ve set up the MARS to provide a complete situational overview. This will allow us to integrate live data from our ISR assets, as well as the intelligence that will be gathered by your Stability Policing Battalion.”

Isabelle nodded and stepped onto the platform alongside the two officers. They donned their headsets, and the bustling TOC around them faded into a hyper-realistic 3D rendering of the battlefield. The entire operational area of Lithuania was laid out before them, with key locations and troop movements vividly displayed.

The Division TOC’s MARS overlay was stunningly detailed. The terrain of Lithuania stretched out beneath them, with areas of critical concern highlighted in various colors. The city of Kaunas, the Nemunas River, and several other urban centers glowed on the map, representing the most active conflict zones.

Lieutenant Colonel Voss zoomed in on the region around Kaunas. “Here’s the current situation. Russian forces are pushing hard in multiple sectors, with their heaviest focus on Kaunas and surrounding areas. The city itself is becoming a flashpoint, with insurgent groups and Russian proxies stirring up unrest among the civilian population.”

Isabelle watched as the MARS display updated with live feeds from NATO’s unmanned systems. She could see “Griffin” drones patrolling the skies and “Hydra” drones in the waters of the Nemunas River, monitoring enemy movements and providing real-time intel.

“Kaunas is critical,” Voss continued, “but we’re seeing similar patterns in Vilnius and Klaipeda. These urban centers are under increasing pressure, both from direct Russian attacks and from the internal instability that’s growing by the hour. We’re particularly concerned about Vilnius. The city has a large civilian population, and we’re getting reports of Russian-backed insurgents trying to incite instability, sabotage, and violent riots.”

General Lewandowski pointed to Vilnius on the map, which was now highlighted in red. “If Vilnius falls into chaos, it could create a domino effect across the country. We need your battalion there, Colonel, to work with local law enforcement and secure the city.”

Isabelle nodded, her mind already racing through the possibilities. "I'll have Captain Ionescu's...", she started and then remembered Andre bleeding horribly in the Humvee and said, "our Alfa Coy deploy to Vilnius. They'll focus on stabilizing the situation, coordinating with local police to prevent any unrest from spiraling out of control."

Voss then shifted the display to Klaipeda, the port city on the Baltic coast. "We're also seeing significant movement here. Russia is trying to disrupt our supply lines and gain control of the port. It's a key logistics hub, and if they succeed, it could severely impact our operations across the region."

Isabelle studied the display, which showed Russian sabotage teams and naval movements closing in on Klaipeda. "What is your intent and primary objective, sir?"

Voss was very clear. "We need to stop the sabotage teams ASAP, but I need more intel to get a clearer picture on what's going on. We need control of the IT systems. We think the Russians are using organized crime structures, created many years ago for their sabotage activities. Get me the criminal data in detail, and whatever the police already have on what's going on in the port of Klaipeda".

Isabelle replied, "I will get my intel people to work ASAP. Captain Restretti's Bravo Coy will be tasked with securing Klaipeda's area"

General Lewandowski nodded in agreement. "That's essential. We can't afford to lose Klaipeda. The port is our lifeline for reinforcements and supplies."

Lieutenant Colonel Voss then zoomed out, showing the entirety of Lithuania. Areas along the border with Belarus were now highlighted. "We're also facing increased threats from Russia trying to supply their proxies with more weapons and ammunition through these border regions. They're attempting to destabilize the area and open new fronts. We need enhanced surveillance and quick reaction capabilities."

Isabelle turned to the border regions and considered the challenge. "Lieutenant Janssen will oversee the border security efforts. Her teams are specialized in this line of work. We will be able to get you a better detailed intel picture."

The map then shifted back to Kaunas, focusing on key infrastructure within the city—power plants, communication nodes, and transportation hubs. “These sites are prime targets,” Voss said. “The Russians managed to disrupt them already, if they manage to do more harm it will cripple our ability to coordinate and sustain operations, and the population will be vulnerable for Russian propaganda. We need them on NATO’s-side. The moment we have to evacuate large numbers of civilians from our cities we are in trouble.”

Isabelle pointed to the infrastructure sites. “My Battalion does not have the numbers to secure all those infrastructure sites, this is simply not possible. We can mitigate the damage by being in the streets, showing ourselves, stabilizing the situation and building trust into the hearts and minds of the population. Of course, we’ll set up additional defenses where we can and ensure that any attempts to sabotage our C2 systems and critical nodes are dealt with immediately.”

The MARS display then highlighted a series of Russian cyber operations hubs that had been identified by NATO intelligence. “Our cyber intel teams have uncovered potential vulnerabilities in the Russian networks. If we can exploit these, it could give us a significant advantage,” Voss explained.

Isabelle’s expression grew serious. “I’ll coordinate with Lieutenant Barnes directly. We’ll work with the Joint Cyber Task Force to target those vulnerabilities and prepare our teams to respond to any counterattacks.”

As the discussion continued, the MARS display shifted once again, showing the fluid and chaotic nature of the battlefield. Isabelle could see the swirling icons representing both NATO and Russian forces, the intensity of the conflict increasing by the minute.

General Lewandowski turned to Isabelle, his tone firm. “Colonel, your battalion is going to be stretched thin, but your efforts are critical to holding the line. We need your battalion.”

Isabelle removed her MARS headset, the TOC’s bustling environment coming back into focus. “We’ll get it done, sir.”

Lewandowski gave her a determined nod. “I know you will, Colonel. Let’s get to work.”

Isabelle felt confident that she had anticipated the needs of the division well and already had her battalion in place to execute almost immediately.

Robots Rescue the Day

After a long, grueling day, Colonel Isabelle Moreau-Girard sat back in the debriefing room at the Division TOC, her mind briefly wandering to Captain Andrei Ionescu, the previous Alfa Coy Commander. She remembered his determination, the way he had led his people with a quiet strength that had earned him the respect of all who served under him. But there was no time for dwelling on the past. She refocused on the present as the acting Alfa Coy Commander, Captain Darius Petrescu, a no-nonsense Romanian officer, began his debrief.

“Colonel, the situation in Vilnius was chaotic from the start,” Captain Petrescu began, “The insurgents were more organized than we anticipated, and the civilian population was caught in the middle, terrified. We couldn’t have managed without the support of the robots.”

Isabelle leaned forward, nodding for him to continue. “Tell me more about how they performed in the field, Captain.”

Petrescu’s eyes lit up, despite the exhaustion evident in his features. “Those bipedal units were incredible, Colonel. We had a situation where several families were trapped in a collapsing building. My men were struggling to get through the debris, but the robots navigated it like it was nothing. They located the civilians, advised them on the safest way out, and even carried the injured to safety. We were able to focus on securing the perimeter and dealing with the insurgents because the robots handled the evacuation so efficiently.”

Isabelle couldn’t help but feel a sense of relief. The integration of such advanced technology was proving to be a game-changer, not just in combat but in protecting the civilians caught in the crossfire. “So, they truly made the difference?”

Petrescu nodded emphatically. “Absolutely. Without them, we still could not have completed the mission, but we would’ve lost many more lives. They not only assisted in evacuations but also helped maintain order in the streets because the people trusted them—they’re not just machines; they’re a lifeline.”

Isabelle allowed herself a small smile, though her thoughts briefly drifted back to Andrei. She knew he would have been proud to see how his company was continuing the fight, adapting to the ever-changing challenges. “Good work, Captain Petrescu. I’m glad you were able to keep things under control.”

“Thank you, Colonel,” Petrescu replied, his expression earnest. “We’ll keep pushing forward.”

As he left the room, Isabelle sat back, a mixture of pride and determination settling in her chest. The battle for Vilnius was just one part of a much larger conflict, but it was moments like these – when lives were saved, when new leaders like Petrescu stepped up, that reminded her why she fought. And why she would keep fighting, no matter the cost.

Maman Calls Home

Colonel Isabelle Moreau-Girard sat in the back of a NATO transport vehicle, the hum of the engine blending with the distant sounds of the war-torn city. Her MARS headset rested on the seat beside her, the weight of the day’s events pressing heavily on her shoulders. The evacuation of civilians from the ravaged outskirts of Kaunas had been brutal. The faces of the dead and dying haunted her, but she knew she had to push it aside, at least for now. She had promised her daughters, Chloé and Marie, a video call. They needed her, and she needed to hold herself together for them.

Taking a deep breath, Isabelle pulled out her phone and initiated the FaceTime call. A few moments later, the screen lit up with the faces of her daughters, their bright smiles instantly tugging at her heart.

“Maman!” Chloé, the older of the two, exclaimed, her voice filled with excitement. Marie, her younger sister, waved enthusiastically beside her.

Isabelle’s lips curled into a smile, though it felt fragile against the weight of the day. “Hello, mes petites étoiles,” she said softly, her voice steady despite the storm of emotions just below the surface. “How are you both?”

“We’re good!” Marie chirped; her eyes sparkling. “We just finished drawing pictures. Look!”

Marie held up a colorful drawing of their family—herself, Chloé, and Isabelle, all smiling, holding hands under a bright sun. It was such an innocent, happy scene, in such stark contrast to the horrors Isabelle had witnessed just hours before.

“That’s beautiful, sweetheart,” Isabelle said, her voice catching slightly as she fought back the rush of emotion. The image on the screen blurred for a moment as her eyes filled with tears, but she blinked them away quickly, forcing herself to focus.

“How’s work, maman?” Chloé asked, her brow furrowing slightly in concern. “You look tired.”

Isabelle hesitated, her throat tightening. How could she explain what she had seen today? The bodies of civilians – men, women, children – pulled from the rubble, many of them already gone, others clinging to life with little hope. The devastation of war was something she had always tried to shield her daughters from. They were too young to understand, and she wanted to keep their innocence intact for as long as she could.

“I am a little tired, ma chérie,” Isabelle admitted, her voice gentle but firm. “But I’m okay. We’re doing important work here – helping people who need us.”

Chloé nodded, her expression serious. “Like the people you save, right?”

Isabelle swallowed hard, the image of a lifeless child pulled from the debris flashing in her mind. She had to fight to keep her composure. “Yes, like the people we save,” she said softly, her voice thick with emotion she was struggling to contain.

Marie, blissfully unaware of the weight her mother carried, giggled and held up another drawing. “This one’s for you, maman! It’s you as a super soldier! You’re saving everyone!”

Isabelle couldn’t help the small laugh that escaped her, despite the tightness in her chest. “Thank you, my brave little artist. I’ll keep that picture in my heart.”

For a brief moment, the horrors of the battlefield seemed far away, overshadowed by the love and innocence of her daughters. But the images

wouldn't leave her – civilians huddled in makeshift shelters, their faces etched with fear and pain, some clinging to life while others... others didn't make it.

"I'll be home soon, I promise," Isabelle said, though her voice was tinged with the uncertainty of war. "We'll spend time together, and I'll tell you all about the good things we've been able to do."

"We miss you, maman," Chloé said quietly, her serious eyes holding Isabelle's through the screen.

Isabelle's heart clenched, and she nodded, forcing a smile. "I miss you too, more than you know. I love you both so much."

"We love you too!" Marie exclaimed, her excitement undiminished. "Be safe, okay?"

Isabelle's throat tightened again, but this time she let the tears prick at the corners of her eyes. "I will, sweetheart. I'll be safe, I promise."

As the call ended, and the smiling faces of her daughters faded from the screen, Isabelle sat in the quiet of the transport vehicle, the weight of the day crashing back down on her. She wiped at her eyes, her hands trembling slightly as the images of the war-torn city flooded her mind once more.

The civilians, the destruction, the lives lost—it was almost too much to bear. But she would bear it. For Chloé, for Marie, and for all the people who still needed her to be strong.

She took another deep breath, steeling herself. The fight wasn't over, and neither was her role.

Blackout and Breakdown: Navigating the Edge of Collapse

Widespread power outages halted public services, immobilizing metro systems and traffic controls, forcing people to either remain at home or embark on perilous journeys for safety and resources. Communication networks failed, isolating individuals from their families and complicating emergency response efforts. The failure of refrigeration systems led to food-borne illnesses and rapid depletion of food supplies. Desperate civilians turned to looting, raiding stores for necessities. The collapse of the

traditional food distribution system led to malnutrition and waterborne diseases, straining an already overstretched healthcare system.

Despite these challenges, AI-driven intelligence activities and UAS sentries played a crucial role in maintaining some semblance of order. Unmanned aerial systems monitored urban areas, providing real-time data on crowd movements and potential threats. This enabled local forces and NATO to respond swiftly to emerging situations, preventing widespread chaos.

Hospitals, grappling with power shortages, became centers of distress. Non-critical treatments and surgeries were postponed or canceled. Makeshift clinics emerged and were extremely helpful but not equipped or manned for protracted operation. The point of no return came closer every day when the population needed to be evacuated.

Street crime fueled by Russian proxies surged, and local and Lithuanian national police forces struggled to maintain order because they were outgunned, outnumbered, and not sufficiently trained for this. Russian state-sponsored organized crime thrived, trading weapons and exploiting the disorder. Terrorist groups and Russian proxy forces took advantage of limited security vacuums, but due to the large-scale deployment of autonomous robotics and NATO's Joint LEINT Cell backed up with SP capacity and targeting prowess, the threat groups could not operate with impunity.

There Will Be Drones

Isabelle stood in the operations center, her MARS headset in hand, as she waited for Captain Mustafa Kaya, the commander of her drone operations. The recent successes in the Baltics had been hard-won, and Isabelle knew that the advanced drone systems under Kaya's command had played a crucial role in turning the tide. She was eager to hear more about how the integration of these systems had impacted their operations and what they could improve moving forward.

Captain Kaya entered the room with his usual calm demeanor, his eyes sharp and focused. "Ma'am," he greeted, giving a respectful nod. "You wanted to discuss the recent operations?"

"Indeed, Captain," Isabelle replied, gesturing for him to take a seat. "We've seen significant success in the AOR and I know your drone teams

were integral to those operations. I want to hear your thoughts on how the systems performed and how we're integrating them across the force."

Kaya settled into his chair, leaning forward slightly as he spoke. "Colonel, the drones have been absolutely critical, especially in the urban environments where visibility and maneuverability have been compromised for our boots on the ground. Just for example, the 'Griffin' aerial drones have provided us with real-time ISR that's been essential for both SP and combat operations. They've allowed us to monitor enemy movements, identify threats before they materialize, and provide overwatch during critical missions."

Isabelle nodded. "I've seen the results firsthand. The ability to adapt and respond quickly has made a huge difference. But how are we integrating these capabilities with the rest of the division, and how do we connect with our Lithuanian brothers in arms?"

Kaya smiled slightly, appreciating the question. "The integration has been multifaceted. First, we've ensured that the drones are directly linked to our MARS network, so all units – whether they're on the ground, in the air, or at command centers – have access to the same real-time data. This has been particularly important for our SP units, who need to make quick decisions based on the most current intelligence. The data streams from the drones are also fed into our AI systems that analyze and predict enemy movements, allowing us to stay one step ahead."

He paused, then continued, "But it's not just about surveillance. We've integrated the drones with our targeting systems, enabling precision strikes when necessary. The "Hydra" underwater drones, for instance, have been vital in securing ports and waterways. They've intercepted smuggling operations and provided critical support in neutralizing threats before they could reach our supply lines."

Isabelle leaned back slightly, processing the information. "This is good. They're not just tools, they're force multipliers. This is what division leadership is going to want to hear. How are the teams on the ground feeling about coordination?"

Kaya responded thoughtfully, "The coordination has been strong, but there are always challenges. One of the key aspects we've focused on is ensuring that the data the drones collect is not just accurate but actionable. We've trained our operators to work closely with ground units, so they're not just

relaying information, but also interpreting it in a way that's immediately useful. When our SP units are moving into an area to secure a neighborhood, the drones are already scouting ahead, identifying potential ambush sites or civilian areas that need protection. This is where we make a big difference, especially for our Lithuanian Law Enforcement colleagues who can benefit from our intel, while we get their local situational understanding as benefit. It works both ways and it works well."

He added, "We've also been refining our communication protocols to ensure that the data is distributed efficiently. This means integrating drone feeds with the MARS headsets so that commanders, like yourself, have a full situational awareness without information overload. The goal is to give you exactly what you need to make informed decisions in real time."

Isabelle considered this for a moment, then asked, "And what about the future? What do we need to improve or expand as we continue to push the Russians back? And as we have more and more regained territory to help stabilize?"

Kaya didn't hesitate. "We need more drones – in the air, on the ground, and underwater. The demand for ISR and precision strikes is only going to increase as the enemy becomes more desperate and we push into more contested areas. We also need to continue advancing our sensing, intelligence, and targeting processes and approaches. The more we can automate data analysis and threat identification, the faster we can react."

He continued, "Another area of improvement is integrating drone operations with psychological operations. We've started using drones to broadcast messages and counter-narratives directly into enemy-controlled areas. It's an area with huge potential, especially as we work to undermine enemy morale and stabilize the regions we've reclaimed."

Isabelle smiled, impressed by Kaya's forward-thinking approach. "I agree. We need to keep pushing the envelope, especially when it comes to integrating these systems with all aspects of our operations. Your team has done incredible work, Mustafa. I want you to continue developing these capabilities and ensuring that our drone operations remain a step ahead of the enemy."

Kaya nodded. “We’ll do whatever it takes, ma’am. The drones are a powerful tool in our toolkit, but it’s how we use them – how we integrate them with our overall strategy – that will make the real difference.”

Isabelle stood, offering her hand. “Thank you, Captain. Keep me updated on any developments or needs. We’ve got the momentum now, and I want to make sure we keep it.”

Kaya shook her hand firmly. “Understood, ma’am. We’ll make sure the skies, the ground, and the waters remain ours.”

As Kaya left the room, Isabelle felt a renewed sense of confidence in the capabilities of her team. The battle for the Baltics was far from over, but with leaders like Captain Kaya and the advanced technology at their disposal, she knew they had the tools and the expertise to see it through to victory.

The Vilnius Clampdown

In the early hours of a foggy morning in Vilnius, the streets were eerily quiet. Russian proxy forces and state-sponsored criminal gangs had been exploiting the chaos, smuggling weapons and orchestrating acts of terror across the city. The local police were overwhelmed, outgunned, and struggling to maintain any semblance of order. But this morning would be different.

The 1st SP Battalion, in coordination with the Joint LEINT Cell (JLC), had been meticulously gathering intelligence over the past few days. The JLC, with its advanced LEINT capabilities, had intercepted encrypted communications between the criminal leaders and their Russian handlers. Using deep-learning AI algorithms, the JLC pinpointed the exact locations of several key operatives within the city.

NATO’s autonomous bipedal robots were deployed to the periphery of the suspected hideouts, their AI-driven sensors scanning for any movement. In the command center, Isabelle watched the live feed through her MARS headset, the detailed overlays providing her with a comprehensive view of the operation. The Griffin drones hovered silently above, relaying real-time ISR data to the tactical teams on the ground.

Spanish Captain Juan Rodriguez, the Specialized Police Unit Commander, coordinated the ground assault. The robots moved with stunning precision, entering the buildings and neutralizing threats with non-lethal methods when possible. As Rodriguez's team moved in to secure the area, their action was bold and decisive, with proportional use of force. The JLC fed them continuous updates, identifying potential escape routes and countering the criminals' every move.

The criminals, who had once roamed the streets with impunity, found themselves trapped. As they attempted to flee through back alleys, the robots were there, cutting off their escape. Within minutes, the entire operation was over. The key figures were captured, arrested and brought to justice. Their operations dismantled, leaving the remaining elements of the criminal network leaderless and in disarray.

Vilnius, at least for that day, was brought back from the brink, thanks to the seamless integration of LEINT, advanced robotics, and SP forces.

The Klaipeda Net

The coastal city of Klaipeda had become a hotbed for smuggling and illicit trade, with Russian proxies using it as a key hub to spy and disrupt NATO maritime movements, funnel weapons and resources to insurgent groups throughout Lithuania. NATO's Joint LEINT Cell had been monitoring the port for weeks, using AI-enhanced signal intelligence (SIGINT) and human intelligence (HUMINT)) gathered by Isabelle's SP teams embedded in the city.

The turning point came when the JLC intercepted a high-level communication detailing an imminent large-scale smuggling operation. The operation was set to bring in a massive cache of advanced weapons that could turn the tide of the conflict if it reached the hands of Russian-backed forces.

Isabelle immediately mobilized Captain Restretti's Bravo Coy to intercept the shipment. The JLC provided continuous updates, mapping out the criminal network's movements and identifying their key logistical hubs. Autonomous underwater drones, the "Hydras," patrolled the port's depths, using advanced sonar to detect any incoming vessels.

As the smugglers' ship approached the port under the cover of darkness, it was met not by a sleepy harbor, but by a coordinated and lethal response.

The Hydras launched torpedoes that disabled the ship's engines, forcing it to a halt. On the docks, autonomous ground units secured the area, while Restretti's forces moved in to round up and arrest the smugglers. Griffin drones provided overwatch, their high-resolution cameras tracking every movement.

The criminals had nowhere to run. Trapped like rats between the Hydras in the water and the SP forces on the ground, they were quickly captured. The weapons cache was confiscated, and the port was secured. The operation was a textbook example of how advanced technology, coupled with precise intelligence and well-integrated SP forces, could cripple criminal operations and protect vital NATO interests.

Breaking the Chains in Kaunas

In the heart of Kaunas, a human trafficking ring had taken root amidst the chaos of the ongoing conflict. The ring, backed by Russian proxies and operating under the guise of legitimate businesses, had been exploiting the vulnerable – refugees, displaced persons, and even local residents – turning them into commodities in the illicit trade. The local authorities, overwhelmed by the larger conflict, were unable to dismantle the network on their own but saw the big impact it had on their society. Adding to the problem was the misinformation spread by Russian backed social media networks, blaming the Lithuanian government on discrimination, deportation and human trafficking of the Russian minority. This had a big negative impact on Lithuania's and NATO's international prestige. Isabelle's battalion was prepared and eager to take action to reveal the true nature of these crimes.

Having a personal interest in this human tragedy of exploiting the weakest in society, Isabelle had been monitoring the situation closely. The JLC had flagged suspicious activity in several areas of the city, using a combination of HUMINT and advanced AI-driven analytics to piece together the intricate web of operations. The trafficking ring operated out of seemingly innocuous locations: a nightclub in the city center, a warehouse on the outskirts, and a string of small businesses that acted as fronts.

With the intelligence in hand, Isabelle staff formulated a plan to take down the entire operation in one decisive strike. Captain Nowak coordinated as liaison with local authorities who had gathering crucial intel on the

ground. Nowak's connections within the local police provided invaluable information on the ring's movements and the identities of key players.

As the operation kicked off, NATO's bipedal robots were deployed to strategic positions around the city, their advanced sensors scanning for any signs of the traffickers or their victims. These autonomous units were equipped with facial recognition software and real-time data links to the JLC, allowing them to identify suspects on sight and relay their positions to the tactical teams.

The operation began in the early hours of the morning, just as the city was waking up. The traffickers, overconfident in their ability to blend into the current chaotic urban environment, were caught completely off guard. The robots moved silently, positioning themselves at key exits and escape routes, effectively sealing off the traffickers' avenues of escape.

Captain Nowak, leading a team of SP officers supporting the local police, targeted the nightclub first. The bouncers, who were part of the trafficking network, had no time to react before they were subdued by the robots and the human officers. Inside, the gendarmes moved quickly, freeing the victims who were being held in the basement and arresting the traffickers who had been running the operation from behind the scenes.

Simultaneously, another team, led by Captain Restretti, stormed the warehouse. The building, which had been under surveillance for weeks, was a hub for the trafficking ring's operations. Inside, the traffickers had been holding people in deplorable conditions, awaiting transport out of the city. Restretti's team breached the warehouse with precision, using drones to provide overwatch and identify threats before they could react. The traffickers inside were swiftly overpowered, and the victims, many of whom had lost hope, were freed.

Back at the command center, Isabelle watched the operation unfold through her MARS headset. The live feed showed the coordinated efforts of her unit as they systematically dismantled the trafficking network. The JLC continued to feed real-time intelligence to the teams on the ground, ensuring that no stone was left unturned.

The final phase of the operation focused on rounding up the ring's leadership. The traffickers had set up a command center in a high-rise apartment complex, believing they were safe above the fray. But the local

police and SP forces, guided by the JLC's precise intel, launched a swift and decisive raid. The robots led the charge, NATO's advanced technology neutralizing the traffickers' security systems and ensuring that the operation's leaders had no chance to escape.

By midday, the entire human trafficking ring had been brought to its knees. Dozens of traffickers were arrested, and hundreds of victims were freed, their nightmare finally over. The traffickers, who had once operated freely were now being led away in chains, their empire of human suffering dismantled.

As the dust settled, Isabelle walked through the city streets, surveying the aftermath of the operation. The people of Kaunas, who had lived in fear for so long, felt relieved and were cautiously optimistic that the worst was over. Isabelle knew that there was still much work to be done, but today had been a glorious day — for the victims, for the city, and for the rule of law.

In the end, the operation was a testament to the power of NATO's 1st SP Battalion and the Joint LEINT Cell. Through their combined efforts, advanced technology, and unwavering commitment, they had not only dismantled a human trafficking ring but had also restored hope to a city that had been on the brink of despair.

Terror and Restoration

As the Russian forces were forced to retreat under pressure from NATO's advancing units, the once-occupied territories of Lithuania began to experience a new kind of turmoil. Though liberation brought hope, the vacuum left by the Russian withdrawal posed immense challenges. Villages and cities, ravaged by conflict, were still too dangerous for local police to fully resume their duties and warzone policing needed specialists. NATO's 1st Stability Policing Battalion, was called in to police these newly freed areas and help restore order.

Isabelle's battalion moved in cautiously, following behind the front-line forces. While Russian military forces had pulled back, the reality remained deadly, shelling and drone attacks were fewer, but still deadly. The Russians left behind a trail of destruction—and a civilian population grappling with fear, anger, and disillusionment. What the gendarmes encountered as they secured the towns and cities shook them all to the core.

Rumors of atrocities had been circulating for weeks, but nothing could have prepared them for the grim reality. In their battlefield investigations, the SP units uncovered clear evidence of Russian war crimes. Among the worst discoveries were sites where mass executions had taken place. A dozen high-ranking Lithuanian government officials and military commanders, previously reported missing, were found executed in cold blood. The bodies were arranged in shallow graves, hastily covered, their dignity stripped in the final moments of their lives.

Isabelle's battalion got to work and carefully documented many crime scenes, ensuring that every piece of evidence was preserved. All knew that the collected evidence had to be bullet proof to stand scrutiny in court. Autonomous drones, outfitted with forensic analysis tools, hovered over the sites, capturing detailed images and scanning for traces of chemical residues or ballistics evidence. The unit's Guardian Sentinels patrolled the perimeter, guarding against any remnants of Russian proxy forces that might attempt to interfere with the investigation.

In addition to the executions, mass rape sites were identified, where Russian forces had systematically targeted Lithuanian women. The brutality of these acts left deep emotional scars in the civilian population, further complicating efforts to restore peace. Isabelle's team, though experienced in this kind of work, struggled with the sheer scale of the violence they uncovered. They meticulously collected testimonies, recorded physical evidence, and gathered data that could be used in future war crimes trials, all while offering what support they could to the shattered survivors.

In areas near bombed-out civilian infrastructure, the battalion found clear evidence that Russia had deliberately targeted known civilian sites. The wreckage of homes, schools, and hospitals bore the unmistakable signatures of rocket and drone strikes, many of which were aimed not at military targets but at population centers. Using AI-driven battlefield forensics, the team traced the origins of these strikes back to Russian missile batteries and drone operators, systematically piecing together the chain of command responsible for the devastation.

"This wasn't collateral damage," Isabelle said grimly as she reviewed the data in one of the bombed-out neighborhoods. "They knew exactly what they were hitting."

The evidence was undeniable: the destruction was not a byproduct of war but a calculated effort to terrorize the civilian population and destabilize the country. Isabelle knew the significance of what they had uncovered—these were war crimes, and the world needed to see them. Through joint investigations with Lithuanian police, Isabelle's unit pieced together the truth behind the carnage. It wasn't the Lithuanian people who were responsible for the majority of the bloodshed – it was the Russian forces, who had orchestrated a campaign of terror, attempting to shift blame onto the local population.

The breakthrough came when battlefield forensics revealed encrypted communications between Russian commanders, outlining orders to break the resilience by systematically targeting Lithuanian civilian infrastructure and conducting mass killings. These communications, recovered from discarded Russian equipment and decoded by NATO cyber units, provided the irrefutable link between the atrocities and the Russian high command.

As Isabelle's battalion continued their investigations, the evidence mounted: war crimes, mass rapes, targeted civilian bombings, and deliberate attempts to frame the Lithuanian population for the chaos that followed. The atrocities were part of a broader Russian strategy—an attempt to fracture Lithuanian society from within while covering their own tracks as they retreated.

Despite the overwhelming challenges, the efforts of the NATO Stability Policing forces began to turn the tide. Their careful documentation and battlefield investigations helped restore some semblance of justice. Local police, still too vulnerable to handle the full scale of the atrocities, worked closely with NATO forces to ensure that evidence was processed to prosecutors and perpetrators identified.

Psychological operations teams launched targeted campaigns, informing civilians that the evidence of Russian war crimes had been uncovered. These efforts were critical, to prove to the world what really happened and in rebuilding trust among the population, demonstrating that NATO's presence was not only about defeating the Russians but also about bringing those responsible for the atrocities to justice.

As the SP units secured more ground, they helped restore basic services and ensure that the remaining Russian proxies in the region were apprehended

or neutralized. In the end, the battalion's work was instrumental in revealing the true scale of Russian crimes and providing the foundation for international war crimes tribunals. Lithuania, though scarred, began to rebuild—not only its infrastructure but its faith in the future.

With NATO's help, Lithuania had survived the invasion. It was through the diligent work of Isabelle's Stability Policing battalion that the truth was uncovered, processed, and justice was set in motion. The road to recovery would be long, but the first steps had been taken.

Negotiating Hope in a City of Ruins

Isabelle Moreau-Girard sat in the back of her autonomous, hybrid Hummer as it quietly navigated the war-torn streets of Vilnius. Big parts of the once vibrant capital had been reduced to rubble, the chaotic aftermath of the Russian invasion lingering in every corner. Civilian life had dissolved into a grim reflection of survival, with local authorities overwhelmed and unable to restore order. The lines between military and civilian domains had blurred, leaving behind a landscape where fear and desperation reigned.

As the self-driving vehicle smoothly adjusted its path, maneuvering through debris-strewn roads, Isabelle couldn't shake the weight of the task before her. Establishing stability in these increasingly lawless conditions seemed nearly impossible at times. She had seen it in the hollow eyes of the civilians – people who had once trusted their government, their police. Now, they were left to fend for themselves in a city where the rule of law had crumbled.

A sudden alert flashed on the console screen, signaling a roadblock ahead. Isabelle looked up and saw it – an impromptu checkpoint, with armed civilians standing guard. They were grim-faced, vigilantes who had taken it upon themselves to defend their neighborhoods from looters, Russian proxies, or anyone they deemed a threat. It was a sight she was seeing far too often.

The Humvee slowed automatically as it neared the barrier, stopping just shy of the makeshift barricade. Isabelle sighed, knowing this was a delicate situation. The tension in the air was palpable, the men at the checkpoint gripping their rifles tightly, their eyes scanning the vehicle warily.

"Let's not escalate this," she murmured to herself, pushing open the door. She stepped out of the vehicle with two-armed SP officers accompanying her. Their blue uniforms and NATO insignia immediately drew the attention of the armed civilians. She raised her hands slightly, her movements calm and deliberate, showing she meant no harm.

"I'm Colonel Isabelle Moreau-Girard with NATO," she called out, her voice firm but reassuring. "We're here to help restore order and protect this city."

One of the men, clearly the leader, stepped forward, his expression hard and suspicious. His grip tightened on his rifle as he spoke in flawed English, his voice tinged with anger and frustration. "Where were you when the Russians came? Where were you when they started killing our people?", he spat.

Isabelle met his gaze, understanding the pain and bitterness behind his words. "I know you've been through hell," she said softly, her voice steady. "I know you feel like you've been abandoned. But we're here now, and we're not leaving. Our job is to support you, to help rebuild; to bring back stability so you don't have to carry this burden alone."

The man hesitated, his eyes flicking back to his comrades, uncertainty clouding his face. "We don't trust anyone anymore," he muttered. "The police can't protect us; the government is in chaos... how do we know you're any different?"

Isabelle took a careful step closer, her voice lowering so only he could hear. "Because we're not just here to fight the Russians. We're here to help you rebuild – to bring back the rule of law, to protect the innocent, and to ensure that people are safe. But we can't do it without you. We need your help, to keep your people safe. We're on the same side."

The man studied her for what felt like an eternity, his expression still guarded but softening ever so slightly. After a long pause, he lowered his rifle a fraction and nodded. "What do you want from us?"

"Coordination," Isabelle said firmly, holding his gaze. "We need to work together. We'll provide support, but we need you to communicate with us – let us know where your needs are, where the people need help. We'll handle the heavy lifting, but we need you to trust us to do our job."

Another moment of silence passed before the man turned to his group. He gestured toward the barricade. “Let them through.”

As the barriers were lifted and the Humvee began to move forward again, Isabelle gave the man a small nod of thanks. Climbing back into the vehicle, she watched the road unfold in front of her, the city still in ruins, but something had shifted. It was just one encounter, one small victory in a city teetering on the brink, but it was a step in the right direction.

As the Humvee continued down the road, Isabelle allowed herself a brief moment of hope. Establishing stability in lawless conditions wasn’t about enforcing control with an iron fist – it was about earning trust, building relationships, and showing the people that they weren’t alone in this fight.

Moments like this, where fear and suspicion gave way to cooperation, reminded Isabelle that stability could be restored – one conversation, one street, one neighborhood at a time.

Embracing and Leveraging the Revolutionary Change

Isabelle Moreau-Girard sat at the small round table in her command tent, the soft hum of generators outside blending with the distant sounds of ongoing operations. Across from her, Lieutenant Colonel Marco Ricci, her Deputy Commander, was reviewing a series of reports on his tablet. They had just wrapped up another successful operation in the Baltics, but Isabelle knew that now was the time to reflect on what had been achieved, what gains could be consolidated, and what could be improved.

“Marco,” Isabelle began, “we’ve seen some incredible progress these past few weeks. The way we’ve been able to integrate all the new tech into our operations – honestly, it’s been nothing short of revolutionary. But I want to hear your thoughts on how this change is affecting our force as a whole, especially our people.”

Ricci looked up from his tablet, nodding slowly. “I agree, boss. The tech we’ve deployed – drones, robots, AI-driven systems, the MARS headsets – it’s all been critical to our success. But what stands out to me even more is how our people have adapted. It’s one thing to have advanced tools at our disposal, but it’s another to integrate them effectively into our operations. Our gendarmes, our unit’s leaders, they’ve embraced these changes, and that’s made all the difference.”

Isabelle leaned forward slightly, her expression encouraging him to elaborate. "Tell me more. How do you see this integration playing out on the ground?"

Ricci's eyes lit up with the passion he had for his work. "Take our SP units, for example. The way they've utilized the MARS headsets to maintain situational awareness in complex urban environments – it's like they've gained a sixth sense. They're not just reacting to threats; they're anticipating them. I hate to repeat myself but it's not just about the tech; it's about how our people are using it."

He continued, "Our integration in the MND is a success, we worked successfully close together, utilizing each other's tools and expertise. For me to prove that our SP is of added value in war is the best win. The training programs have evolved to emphasize not just technical proficiency but also adaptability. Our people are learning to think differently – to trust the data but also to understand the limits of technology. They know when to rely on the AI and when to fall back on their instincts and fast expertise. It's this combination of human intuition, policing and military experience and technological precision that's giving us the edge, in my opinion."

Isabelle smiled, clearly proud of the strides her team had made. "It's amazing to see how far we've come. But what about force modernization overall? How do you see this shaping the future of our operations? Or, really, in the rest of this war?"

Ricci leaned back slightly, considering his response. "We're the new kid on the block and at a crossroads, ma'am. This is SP's first experience with intense warfighting, side by side in NATO with our brothers in arms. We need to be humble and learn as much as possible because I saw that we have a place in this MND in the Baltics. The tech we're integrating is redefining what's possible on the battlefield, but it also demands that we modernize our approach to leadership, strategy, and even the way we think about warfare. It's not just about having the latest and most expensive gadgets; it's about transforming our entire force to make the most of these capabilities."

He paused for a moment, then added, "But modernization isn't just about the tech – it's about the people. We're asking our gendarmes to learn new skills, to adapt, become comfortable with technologies that didn't even exist a few years ago. And they're rising to the challenge. But we need to

ensure that our training programs are keeping pace, that we're not just teaching them how to use these tools, but also how to innovate with them."

Isabelle nodded in agreement. "You're absolutely right. The human element is what ties all of this together. We can have the best tech in the world, but if our people aren't equipped – physically, cognitively, even psychologically! – to use it to its fullest potential, we won't see the results we need."

Ricci smiled, clearly happy with the direction of their conversation. "And I have to say, ma'am, the way you've led this battalion through these changes – it's been inspiring. You've shown that while technology can enhance our capabilities, it's the leadership and the human connection that drive true progress. Our people see that, and it motivates them to push even harder."

Isabelle's expression softened, though she tried not to show her bursting pride. "Thank you, Marco. But it's a team effort. Every one of us has had to adapt, to learn, and to grow. That's what will keep us ahead of the curve – our ability to evolve. Learning the lessons from the past, adapt and prevail in the present and prepare for the future not just as a force, but also as individuals."

She paused, then asked, "What do you think our next steps should be, in terms of keeping pace with modernization? When Russia invaded Ukraine, the Ukrainians never got a chance to just enjoy the tech innovations and adaptations they'd achieved. They had to constantly evolve."

Ricci considered for a moment before responding. "We need to focus on continuous learning. Technology is advancing faster than ever, and we need to ensure that our forces are not just keeping up but staying ahead. That means more than just formal training – it means encouraging innovation at every level. If a soldier in the field comes up with a better way to use a system, we need to be ready to listen and adapt."

Isabelle nodded, her eyes gleaming with purpose. "Agreed. Keep the learning and adaptation at the forefront, Marco."

As Ricci stood to leave, he extended his hand. "I will, ma'am."

Isabelle shook his hand firmly. "Thank you, Marco."

The Tide Turns

Despite the intensity of the Russian assault, NATO's preparation and technological superiority coupled with the strong resilience of the Baltic populations began to turn the tide. The population in all three Baltic states felt confident that together with NATO they could withstand Russia's aggression because in the streets and in everyday life they experienced and saw their police and soldiers fighting and standing shoulder to shoulder with their NATO counterparts. Autonomous cyber defenders continued to secure critical networks, while coordinated efforts between air, land, and sea units pushed back the Russian forces.

Throughout the Baltics, the sights, sounds, and smells of battle gradually shifted from chaos to determined resistance. The Russian attempts to destabilize and spread chaos in the Baltics faded and failed in the end because the anger towards the aggressor, Russia, boosted the resilience and courage of many, strengthening the will to win. NATO forces, using their advanced technologies and superior training, regained control of territories lost at the start of the invasion. The Russian advance, once so threatening, was halted and pushed back.

Briefing on Stability and Progress in the Baltics

Colonel Isabelle Moreau-Girard stood at the head of the conference room, a holographic map of the Baltic region projected behind her. The room was filled with senior NATO leaders, their expressions a mix of determination and cautious optimism. The battle for the Baltics had been fierce, but recent successes had begun to turn the tide in their favor. Isabelle knew this briefing was crucial—not just to update the leadership on their progress, but to emphasize the vital role of Stability Policing in securing their hard-won gains.

"Generals, admirals, dear colleagues," Isabelle began, her voice steady and clear, "the situation in the Baltics is shifting. What was once chaos has transformed into determined resistance. Our forces have not only halted the Russian advance but have pushed them back. This success, however, is not just a product of superior firepower and advanced technology – it's the result of our ability to stabilize and secure the territory we reclaim."

She gestured to the holographic map, which highlighted the critical territories where NATO had regained control. "In Kaunas, the city has gone

from the brink of anarchy to a bastion of resilience. Our Stability Policing Battalion, working in close coordination with local law enforcement and community leaders, has been instrumental in restoring law and order. We've secured further degradation of vital infrastructure, protected civilians from lawlessness and retaliatory strikes, and dismantled Russian backed organized crime networks that were exploiting and igniting the chaos."

The senior leaders watched intently as Isabelle continued, her tone underscoring the gravity of the situation. "In Vilnius, our SP unit played a key role in thwarting Russian attempts to destabilize the region through disinformation and insurgent activity. By integrating our Law Enforcement Intelligence capabilities with on-the-ground operations, we've managed to outmaneuver their efforts to incite violence and spread fear. The local population, once paralyzed by terror, is now rallying behind our forces, contributing to our efforts to secure the city."

She paused, letting the significance of the achievements sink in before moving on. "Throughout Lithuania, the battles were fierce, but our ability to maintain stability in the rear areas allowed our combat units to focus on repelling the Russian forces. Our SP teams worked tirelessly to protect the civilian population, prevent looting, and ensure that critical supply lines remained open. This allowed our combat forces to sustain their momentum and keep the pressure on the enemy."

Isabelle's eyes swept across the room, meeting the gaze of each leader. "The progress we've made in Lithuania is a testament to the vital role of Stability Policing. We are a powerful tool in the toolbox of the Force Commander. It's not enough to push the enemy back – we must ensure that the territory we reclaim are safe and secure, that the civilian population is protected, and that the foundations of law and order are restored. We investigate war crimes at the crime scene, sometimes we even have a 'smoking gun' to be used as evidence in court. All so that in the end justice will be done."

She took a step forward, her voice gaining a slight edge of urgency. "Stability Policing is not just about maintaining law and order – it's also about human security and protection of civilians. This creates resilience in the hearts and mind of the population because they know they can rely on us. It's about showing them that NATO is not only here to fight, but to rebuild, to protect, and to support. This is what differentiates us from our adversaries, and this is why we are starting to see the tide turn in our favor."

One of the senior leaders, a general with years of experience in both combat and strategic planning, nodded thoughtfully. “Colonel Moreau-Girard, it’s clear that Stability Policing has been a force multiplier in this conflict. How do you propose we expand these efforts as we continue to advance?”

Isabelle didn’t hesitate. “We need to scale up our SP operations in tandem with our combat operations. As we push the Russian forces back, we must immediately deploy SP units to secure the areas we reclaim. This will require additional resources – both personnel and technology – but it’s essential if we want to claim and restore our territory. Additionally, we must continue to integrate our intelligence capabilities with SP operations, ensuring that we stay one step ahead of any attempts to destabilize the regions we control.”

Another leader, an admiral with a keen interest in the human dimension of warfare, leaned forward. “Colonel, how do we ensure that the local populations continue to support our efforts?”

Isabelle’s response was measured but firm. “We must remain transparent and consistent in our actions. We need to be there in the streets, continue engaging with local leaders, addressing the concerns of the civilian population, and demonstrating through our actions that NATO’s presence is a stabilizing force, not an occupying one. This means prioritizing the protection of civilians, respecting local customs and laws, and involving the local population in the rebuilding process. The more they see us as partners, the stronger their resilience and support will be.”

As Isabelle concluded her briefing, the room was filled with a sense of purpose.

“Thank you, Colonel Moreau-Girard,” the commanding general said, standing. “Your insights are invaluable, and your leadership in these challenging times is exactly what we need.”

Isabelle nodded, a sense of resolve settling over her. The battle was far from over, but with the right approach, she knew that they could secure peace and stability in the region. And that, she thought as she left the room, was a victory worth fighting for.

Honor and Recognition for the NATO 1st Stability Policing Battalion

The sun hung low in the sky over the makeshift parade ground, casting a golden glow on the assembled gendarmes of the NATO 1st Stability Policing Battalion. The flags of NATO member nations fluttered gently in the breeze, their colors vibrant against the deep blue sky. The battalion stood in perfect formation, their uniforms immaculate, their faces a mix of pride and anticipation.

At the head of the formation, Isabelle stood at attention, her heart swelling with pride for the unit she had led through the darkest days of Operation Baltic Shield. The battalion had been important in turning the tide against the Russian invasion, their actions in Lithuania having saved countless lives and secured critical territories. Today, they were being honored for their courage, their resilience, and their unwavering dedication.

General Andrzej Narusewicz, the commanding officer of the NATO Multinational Division North, stepped forward. His tall, imposing figure was a symbol of strength and authority, yet there was a softness in his eyes as he looked out over the battalion. He approached Isabelle with a regimental flag in his hands, the fabric rich and heavy with significance.

“Colonel Moreau-Girard,” General Narusewicz began, his voice carrying across the silent field. “Today, we honor the men and women of the NATO 1st Stability Policing Battalion.” Turning back to the battalion, standing in formation, he continued, “Your actions during Operation Baltic Shield were nothing short of heroic. You stood firm in the face of overwhelming odds, and you helped turn the tide of this war. It is my great honor to present to you this regimental flag, a symbol of your Battalion’s courage and excellence.”

With great care, General Narusewicz handed the flag to Isabelle. She accepted it with both hands, the weight of the fabric and the moment sinking in. This flag was more than just an emblem—it was a testament to the bravery and sacrifice of her gendarmes.

As she held the flag aloft, the battalion erupted into a big roar, the sound echoing across the parade ground. Isabelle’s heart soared with pride as she lowered the flag and handed it to the battalion’s color guard, who took it with reverence and raised it high for all to see.

General Narusewicz then turned to the battalion. “Gendarmes of the 1st Stability Policing Battalion, for your outstanding service during Operation Baltic Shield, it is my privilege to award each of you the NATO Medal for your courage, your resilience, and your commitment to the defense of our Alliance.”

One by one, the gendarmes stepped forward, receiving their medals from senior officers. Isabelle watched as each member of her battalion was recognized, her chest tightening with pride and gratitude. When the last gendarme had received their medal, General Narusewicz turned back to her, a small but significant smile playing on his lips.

“Colonel Moreau-Girard,” he said, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a large, shining coin. “For your extraordinary leadership, I am honored to present you with the Commander’s Coin. This is a token of my personal appreciation for the role you played in leading this battalion to victory.”

Isabelle accepted the coin, the metal cool in her hand. She looked up at General Narusewicz, her eyes meeting his. “Thank you, General,” she said, her voice steady despite the emotion welling up inside her. “This coin will serve as a reminder of what we accomplished together – and of the sacrifices that made it possible.”

As the ceremony ended, the men and women of the 1st Stability Policing Battalion stood taller, prouder. They had been recognized for their bravery, and they would carry that honor with them for the rest of their lives.

Lessons in the Aftermath: Reflections from Operation Baltic Shield

Isabelle leaned back in her seat, her eyes fixed on the endless stretch of clouds outside the window as the plane cruised toward France. The hum of the engines was a steady backdrop to her thoughts, which wandered through the battlefield and beyond. Operation Baltic Shield had changed her—more than she expected. Her unit had achieved victories, but it was the lessons learned that stayed with her now, more vividly than the battle reports or commendations.

The first thought that came to her was the resilience of human adaptability. No matter how advanced their tools had become—AI-driven systems,

drones, or the MARS headsets—it was the unpredictable nature of the war that reminded her how critical human instincts were. Machines could process data faster, but there had been moments when quick human decisions had saved lives, moments where no algorithm could replace the split-second judgment of a gendarme with years of experience in day-to-day policing, at home or in missions abroad. That adaptability had been their greatest asset.

She thought of the technology next, the power of integrating force multipliers like drones, unmanned aerial systems, and AI-based surveillance. The way these technologies had enhanced her battalion's operations had been remarkable. Whether evacuating civilians or targeting enemy positions, the precision and efficiency they provided were unmatched. But even as she appreciated their value, Isabelle knew there was still room to push the boundaries—especially in how quickly they could process and act on the information gathered.

Her mind drifted to the streets of Kaunas and Vilnius, and how crucial it was to win the trust of the locals. Engaging with civilians had become one of the most important aspects of their mission. She could still hear the voices of the displaced families, their relief palpable when her unit helped restore order to neighborhoods in chaos. The job wasn't just about defeating the Russians—it was also about rebuilding the trust between the civilians and the forces protecting them. In the end the rock-hard resilience of the population was key to defeating the enemy.

Coordination and integration across NATO forces had been another key lesson. Technology made it easier, of course—her MARS headset gave her real-time data feeds from multiple units—but it was the trust and cooperation built over months that truly allowed them to work seamlessly side by side in NATO. The reliance on other units, whether logistics or intelligence, showed her how deeply interconnected modern warfare had become. It wasn't enough for her battalion to excel in their mission; they needed to be part of a much larger, coordinated effort to see success.

She couldn't ignore the role that joint intelligence efforts had played in their victories. The Joint LEINT Cell had proven invaluable, feeding her battalion critical intelligence that allowed them to stay ahead of enemy movements and anticipate Russian proxies' tactics. The combination of human insight with AI-driven analysis had turned fragmented information into actionable

intelligence—something that had allowed them to intervene before things spiraled out of control in urban centers and at critical infrastructure points. Another thought lingered in her mind—the nature of the fight itself. This wasn't just a conventional war; it was a lesson in hybrid warfare, where the battlefield wasn't just physical but cyber, psychological, and civilian too. The Russians had used everything in their arsenal—cyber-attacks, disinformation, even biological threats. Stability Policing had become more than just keeping order; it meant defending critical infrastructure by finding and arresting the perpetrators, countering misinformation, and neutralizing threats that were as much about shaping perceptions as they were about taking land. It was a new type of war, and her unit had adapted, but there was still a long way to go and much more to learn.

Finally, her thoughts returned to the people—both her gendarmes and soldiers and the civilians. The human cost of war weighed on her more now than it had during the operation. The faces of those who didn't make it back, the civilians caught in the crossfire—they were with her constantly. Leadership wasn't just about guiding troops to victory; it was about carrying the weight of those sacrifices, about knowing when to push and when to shield them. It was this balance—between strategy and empathy—that defined her role moving forward.

As the plane continued its smooth path through the sky, Isabelle felt a quiet sense of resolve and utter fatigue. She had left Lithuania with victories, but it was these lessons that she knew would shape her future—and the future of Stability Policing.

A Promotion and a Legacy

A few months later, in a grand hall in Paris, a different ceremony was unfolding. The room was filled with military personnel, dignitaries, and family members, all gathered to witness the promotion of Colonel Isabelle Moreau-Girard to the rank of Général de Brigade. The air was thick with anticipation, and Isabelle stood at the front of the room, her heart beating rapidly in her chest.

Her two daughters, Chloé and Marie, stood beside her, their faces beaming with pride. They had seen their mother through countless challenges, and today they would see her achieve one of the highest honors in her career.

But it was the presence of another figure that filled Isabelle with both pride and a deep sense of humility—her mentor, retired French General Émile D’Arcy. The man who had shaped her career, guided her through the complexities of military life, and instilled in her the values of leadership and service, stood ready to pin the new rank onto her uniform.

As the ceremony began, the officiating general spoke of Isabelle’s long and distinguished career, of her courage in the face of adversity, and of the pivotal role she had played in NATO’s defense during Operation Baltic Shield. But as the time came for her promotion, Isabelle found herself focusing on the faces of her daughters and her mentor.

General D’Arcy stepped forward, holding the new rank insignia in his hands. His eyes met Isabelle’s, and for a moment, it was as if time stood still. “Isabelle,” he said, his voice filled with pride and emotion, “I have watched you grow from a young officer full of potential into a leader of the highest caliber. You have surpassed every expectation, and you have done so with grace, strength, and an unwavering commitment to those under your command.”

He gently put the new rank onto her uniform, the weight of it a reminder of the responsibilities she had shouldered and would continue to bear. “It is my great honor,” General D’Arcy continued, his voice thick with emotion, “to see you promoted to Général de Brigade. You have earned this, and I know you will continue to lead with the same integrity and courage that have defined your career.”

Isabelle could feel the tears welling up in her eyes as she looked at the insignia on her uniform. She was now a Général, a leader of leaders, but it was the journey that had brought her here that made this moment so poignant.

Her daughters rushed forward as soon as General D’Arcy stepped back. “Maman!” Marie exclaimed, her voice filled with excitement and pride. “You did it! You’re a Général!”

Chloé hugged her tightly, her arms wrapped around Isabelle’s waist. “We’re so proud of you, maman,” she whispered, her voice trembling with emotion.

Isabelle hugged them back, feeling the warmth of their love and pride. “Thank you, my darlings,” she said softly, her voice breaking slightly. “This

– everything I’ve done – it’s been for you, and for all the people who believe in a better future.”

General D’Arcy placed a hand on her shoulder, his eyes shining with tears of his own. “Isabelle, you are not just a leader, but an inspiration. You’ve shown us all what it means to serve, to sacrifice, and to succeed. This promotion is just the beginning of the legacy you’re building.”

Isabelle looked around the room, at the faces of her colleagues, her family, and her mentor, and she felt a surge of emotion—of pride, of gratitude, and of determination. She had reached a milestone, but the journey was far from over. With her new rank, she would continue to lead, to protect, and to inspire those who followed in her footsteps.

La Fin

As the dust settled and the smoke cleared, the resilience and cooperation of NATO and its member nations stood as a testament to their strength. The battles had been fierce, but the resolve to defend their homelands and uphold peace had ultimately prevailed. Europe was finally at peace, The Baltic states, though scarred by the conflict, remained free and sovereign, a beacon of hope and resilience in a turbulent world.

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ACRONYMS LIST

- AI/ML - Artificial Intelligence / Machine Learning
- C2 - Command and Control
- CASEVAC - Casualty Evacuation
- CRISPR - Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats
- DDIL - Denied, Degraded, Intermittent, or Limited environments
- DIME - Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic
- DIB - Defense Industrial Base
- DOTMLPF - Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership and Education, Personnel, Facilities
- EU - European Union
- FSB - Federal Security Service (Russia)
- GTF - Gendarmerie-Type Forces
- HUMINT - Human Intelligence
- IDF - Israeli Defense Forces
- ISR - Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance
- JLC - Joint Law Enforcement Intelligence Cell
- LEINT - Law Enforcement Intelligence
- MLRS - Multiple Launch Rocket System
- NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- NGOs - Non-Governmental Organizations
- NSA - Non-State Actors
- PAP - People's Armed Police (China)
- PLA - People's Liberation Army (China)
- PMESII - Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, Infrastructure analysis tool
- PRC - People's Republic of China
- SP - Stability Policing
- TCOs - Transnational Criminal Organizations
- TTPs - Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures
- UAS - Unmanned Aerial Systems
- UXS - Unmanned Systems
- VEOs - Violent Extremist Organizations
- VNSAs - Violent Non-State Actors
- VR/AR - Virtual Reality / Augmented Reality

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STABILITY POLICING FUTURE







Throughout my career, I have participated in many coalition operations and witnessed the pivotal role played by Gendarmerie-Type Forces. Consequently, I assert that NATO must adopt a more comprehensive "blue lens" approach in our military endeavours, particularly as the nature of warfare evolves, states and countries become increasingly interdependent, and non-state actors, akin to authoritarian regimes, attack our cherished values of democracy, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights.

Lieutenant General David Julazadeh
US Air Force; Deputy Chief of Staff, Capability Development
NATO Allied Command Transformation



This trilogy is a must-read for all security actors who engage in stability policing. The three volumes can either be read separately or in succession. It represents a major step in the further codification of stability policing as an indispensable doctrine within policing and security studies. The concise essays are highly informative and can easily be devoured by a wide audience of policing students, practitioners, security specialists as well as journalists and politicians who want to enrich their knowledge in this area. The books in this trilogy represent a wealth of collective wisdom, which supersedes the provision of information about state of the art stability policing, but which demystifies, unravels and definitely shapes and sharpens the agenda on future challenges for stability policing in regard of the re-establishment of the Rule of Law. On that note, the future of stability policing is now.

Prof. Dr. Monica den Boer
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