

Research Article

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Exploring *Resistance Operating Concept*. Promises and pitfalls of (violent) underground resistance

<https://doi.org/10.2478/jobs-2021-0003>

received June 19, 2021; accepted June 22, 2021.

Abstract: The paper aims to contribute to discussion on comprehensive defence development by looking into Resistance Operating Concept and Comprehensive Defence Handbook. These two documents are designed as a guide for the countries facing a formidable adversary to help them develop resistance (including violent) infrastructure before the potential invasion. After discussing the main tenets of the concept and suggesting a wider engagement with case studies and scientific literature on this and similar topics, the paper addresses the pitfalls and considerations of preparing such resistance in peacetime, focusing on five areas: C2, legitimacy, recruitment, potential problems in long-term and communication.

Keywords: Resistance Operating Concept; comprehensive defence; control of violence.

1 Introduction

It is already a cliché to say that the year 2014 changed the view of the Baltic policymakers and the entire populations about their countries' security and defence. The war in Georgia in 2008 showed that Russia was ready to use military force to advance its goals, but the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of the Donbas and Luhansk regions in Ukraine became an unquestionable message to reconsider defence in the 3Bs and NATO at large. Yet, for many analysts and even some policymakers in the West, the situation reminded of discussions of the early 2000s on the indefensibility of the region and the drawbacks of meddling in the 'Russian backyard'. The 'realist' pundits, such as Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, reiterated their objections to NATO expansion to the East (Mearsheimer 2014; Walt 2014); organisations such as RAND war-gamed the Baltic invasions with very sad results for the Baltic armed forces (Shlapak and Johnson 2016). Concerns were widely expressed about the attack on the countries presenting NATO with the *fait accompli* and Narva became the symbol of precariousness of both the Baltic states and the NATO alliance as such.

In the meantime, those who did not spend time lamenting the indefensibility of the Baltic region, focused on deterrence. The alliance implemented a series of measures to demonstrate alliance commitments to its Eastern flank initiated in the Wales and Warsaw summits, including the establishment of Force Integration Units (NFIUs) and Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) battalions, increasing significantly the presence of NATO allies in the countries. With these measures largely implemented, all three countries worked to complement external engagements with strengthening internal defence systems, tapping into the potential contribution of the society to defence matters, whose readiness to participate was demonstrated by swelling numbers for the volunteer defence organisations in all three countries after 2014. 'Comprehensive defence' became a buzzword of expert communities.¹

Simultaneously, the U.S. Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR) has been developing what became *Resistance Operating concept* (ROC) to deal with the situations when the overwhelming advantage of the adversary in the region would result in a crisis and potentially the occupation of an entire country or parts thereof. Consequently, the ROC was devised to help offset these significant imbalances in military power and improve the small nations' ability

¹ For more discussion of this topic, see Volume 6, Issue 2: *Special Issue on Understanding of Total Defence in the Baltic Countries* of this Journal.

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to deter larger aggressors. As such, this concept is actively popularised in the narrow expert communities of the Baltic countries. In view of this, it is worth expanding the scope of this discussion in order to highlight the benefits and draw attention to potential drawbacks of this type of approach to defence.

To be sure, elements of societal resilience have been discussed in the political and academic circles for a while. This concept entered the vernacular of defence analysts and professionals after the 9/11 attacks and were concentrated first on building societal resilience to the terrorist attacks.² Later on this concept has been adapted in discussions on hybrid threats after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and has been focusing particularly on building societal ability to deal with misinformation and other threats in the information environment. The discussion on these issues continues and work to build societal resilience both in peacetime and potentially in wartime has been a continuous concern for governments and some non-governmental institutions throughout this period.

The ROC, however, brings back the element of actual resistance to the fore of the discussion and it is this part of the adaptation of defence strategies that has received somewhat less attention. This article aims to address this gap by exploring in more depth the risks entailed in one element of the concept – Asymmetric defence component (ADC) as it is labelled in the Comprehensive Defence Handbook (further CDH) (NSHQ 2020) and the preparation for underground resistance in peacetime. The developers of the concept have paid a lot of attention and provide a lot of details on how the organisation of resistance should look like. Yet, more discussion is needed on a number of aspects of the concept, with particular emphasis on the ‘what could go wrong?’ question and the unintended consequences of its adoption.

For the purposes of this discussion, the article will be divided into three parts. The first provides a general overview of ROC and particularly the aspects of it pertaining to the ADC. The second will raise the question of case studies and the use of history in preparation of this concept with the suggestion to look deeper into the scientific literature on the subject. The third and largest part of the article will focus on the selected problems that need to be addressed. While the list is not exhaustive, five major issues will be discussed here. First, the question of C2 of (violent) resistance organisation and operations; second, the issue of legitimacy and its role in organising the ADC; third, the question of recruitment criteria; fourth, the aspect of time and its impact on the development of the organisation; and last, but probably the most important, the question of messaging and its implications.

The article purposefully tries to draw attention to the unclear or potentially dangerous aspects of the concept to further the discussion on this concept. While some of them can probably be easily answered and some suggestions on how to do that are also provided here, some others may need more thought and discussion, to which this article is meant to work as a catalyst.

2 Resistance Operating Concept (ROC)

The discussion in this article is based on the information provided in the book on ROC published by the Swedish Defence University. The book is an outcome of a project spanning 5 years – since the initial seminars conducted in 2014 to its publication in 2019. The project and the publication were inspired by the SOCEUR and involved a number of participants particularly from the Nordic, Baltic countries and Poland (Fiala 2019, 15). The resulting book has as its aim to serve as ‘the (re-)introduction to national resistance and the collaborative planning guide’ (Fiala 2019, 16).

This chapter gives a short overview of the ROC as presented here and pays particular attention to its discussion of the (violent) underground resistance and its preparation in peacetime. It is not the aim of this article to reproduce all the arguments presented in this work and more practical CDH, but rather to distil the elements that are of particular importance.

The book consists of four chapters and nine extensive annexes discussing in detail some case studies, presenting the legal considerations and giving some examples of preparatory documents. The ROC defines resistance as:

‘a nation’s organized whole-of-society effort, encompassing the full range of activities from non-violent to violent, led by a legally established government (potentially exiled/displaced or shadow) to re-establish independence and autonomy within its sovereign territory that has been whole or partially occupied by a foreign power’ (Fiala 2019, 21).

² See, e.g. Barnett (2004). The governments started focusing on resilience to terrorism soon after the 9/11 incident, when talk about possible CBRN terrorism and other doomsday scenarios was widespread. For one of such documents see, e.g. UK Cabinet Office (2003)

The ROC indicates that its main focus is on ‘developing a nationally authorized organized resistance capability prior to an invasion’ (Fiala 2019, 17). It makes an additional commitment to enhance the national resilience through formation of such a capability, as well as develop requirements and support planning for the ‘struggle to restore and resume national sovereignty’ (Fiala 2019, 17). This struggle should take place under a clear and well-developed legal framework, emphasising the legitimacy of the country’s established authorities, illegitimacy of the occupation and having as a main goal of resistance ‘the restoration of *status quo ante bellum*’ (Fiala 2019, 19, emphasis in the text).

The concept is grounded in the notion of what in Cold War times was called total defence, where the whole of society, not only its armed forces, is mobilised for the defence of the country (Berzina 2020). The military and civil defence authorities are meant to be jointly responsible for organising synergetic military and civilian resistance activities in the country. The preparation for defence should thus include the preparation for both the civil and military defence. In the former, the citizens are encouraged to contribute to the system by preparing to survive in case of a crisis (not only linked to the war situation) and to contribute to the defence effort by fulfilling particular auxiliary roles for which they may be trained during peacetime (Fiala 2019, 19). On the side of the state, this requires a system for crisis management with clear roles for different rescue services, the pools of additional volunteers for these services ‘as well as creation and maintenance of shelters and evacuation capabilities’ (Fiala 2019, 19). At its basis the ‘strong civil defence requires social cohesion and the maintenance of a common culture and national traditions while ensuring that all citizens have access to state services and benefits and are treated equally under the law’ (Fiala 2019, 19).

The section on resilience also emphasises that ‘highly resilient population can be created through the development of a strong national identity accompanied by preparation to overcome crisis’ (Fiala 2019, 23), adding as well that ‘the government can also engage in practical psychological measures to strengthen popular identification with its national identity, emphasizing homeland rather than the government in power’ (Fiala 2019, 23). National identity itself is ‘obtained through promoting measures such as historical and patriotic education consistent with identified cultural values, transparent communication with minority populations to ensure their inclusion in civic and governmental life’ (Fiala 2019, 24). Thus, from an early age, psychological preparation should ‘include patriotic education that stresses good citizenship or affinity for the nation or land’ (Fiala 2019, 24). This psychological preparation in combination with the knowledge of vulnerabilities and work to reduce them as well as early identification of threat and preparation to deal with it works to create a resilient society.

The resistance and its planning occupy most of the book. It indicates the need to plan for the government in exile and for the ‘pre-crisis resistance component organization and core cadre’. It suggests that the structure should be devised in advance and later on can be filled by allowing the trained cell leaders to recruit the members themselves. The initial structure should be made out of the identified key personnel that can be held accountable for their actions. The organisation’s ‘structure must support ethical behaviour and control violence’ (Fiala 2019, 29). Yet, it is admitted that even when these members of resistance are well trained in ethical conduct, they may deviate from such behaviour when ‘isolated and cut off from legitimate government control’ (Fiala 2019, 29). It is thus further emphasised that ‘Resistance leadership must maintain command and control of all resistance activities to ensure compliance with legal standards and ethical mores inherent in the resistance narrative’ (Fiala 2019, 37).

The document further discusses the resistance organisation and its four distinct components: underground, auxiliary, guerrilla forces and public component; and emphasises the importance of strategic communication in achieving the objectives of the movement, with particular emphasis on the legitimacy and sovereignty narrative in them. Looking deeper into the underground element, similar aspects as before are emphasised and expanded deeper. The recruitment element is discussed and command and control element elaborated upon. It is indicated that the leaders of these organisations have to strike a number of delicate balances, such as between the conflicting requirements of security and expansion and the centralised vs. decentralised command and control (Fiala 2019, 49). Contemporary clandestine underground organisations, or what are often called terrorist groups, seem to provide a lot of examples and inspiration for this section. The rest of the section discusses the functions of underground, such as recruitment, intelligence, financing, logistics, training, communications and security.

Afterwards, the discussion moves on to the role of shadow government, addressing the aspects of its role and activities and to non-violent resistance, elaborating on aspects of its usefulness and some practicalities. The final section on resistance concerns the post-conflict phase after the restoration of sovereignty. It is emphasised that once the country’s independence is restored, ‘the resistance organization must cease all operations’ (Fiala 2019, 78). Yet, while the main goal of the resistance is to establish the *status quo ante* in terms of legitimate control over the territory,

the authors of the ROC understand that the social relations will not be the same after the conflict and that ‘social fabric itself may have been damaged by the intentional actions of the enemy as well as by some resistance operations – authorized or otherwise’ (Fiala 2019, 78). It also suggests that at this stage the collaborators with the aggressor should face trials for their actions during the period of occupation.

The last chapter of the ROC outlines in detail the potential responsibilities of other governmental agencies and the need for interoperability between them. The appendices then delve into specific aspects, such as legal considerations (Appendix A), methods of non-violent resistance (Appendix B) and specific case studies, starting from the Russian hybrid warfare tactics (Appendix C), WWII resistance cases (Appendix D) and Cold-War resistance preparation in Switzerland, Norway and Italy (Appendix E); thereafter, some conclusions from these different resistance studies are identified (Appendix F). These appendices are somewhat fragmented, but add detail to the main argument of the book. The last appendices address the population interaction with the occupier and the model of collaboration-accommodation-resistance (Appendix G) Again, this part is a little fragmented and touches only lightly on both these different ways of dealing with the occupation and such aspects as the role of terror. It suggests, however, that ‘an occupier □ is not likely to apply widespread terror in the forms analysed in the above case studies’ and that ‘today’s aggressive state actors are likely to use more subtle means of coercion and terror’ (Fiala 2019, 202). The final section of this chapter also introduces a ‘civilian code of conduct under occupation’ (Fiala 2019, 203). The two final appendices present the Swedish governmental pamphlet, *If Crisis comes* (Appendix I) and a chart of government interagency planning and preparation (Appendix J).

While the information provided in the ROC is detailed and at the same time general enough for a casual reader, the CDH provides some more practical overview of the system and training processes for the ADC. As in ROC, it is suggested that ADC should be ‘capable of performing a range of support, violent and non-violent missions’ and that its activities would ‘remain clandestine during peacetime and conflict’ (NSHQ 2020, 81). The CDH also puts a strong emphasis on the importance to maintain command and control of the organisation, that its members would be ‘volunteers from across society’ who should be ‘carefully screened’ (p. 43) and that its presence in the country should be publicly advertised (p. 43). The Handbook goes deeper into the need for the ADC to train together with the regular armed forces units (p. 48). It must be noted that CDH provides the ADC with a number of elements and functions, the violent part of which is identified as ‘adapted force.’ In addition to this element, the underground where leadership will be located is identified; large emphasis is put on the auxiliary (support) part and public component element, which depends on the occupier’s will to tolerate opposition (p. 47).

The CDH also tries to answer the potential concerns regarding the ADC, some of which this article will further raise. Of particular importance is the authors’ understanding that there is a concern that the same units that are trained to resist the occupier ‘can be used to overthrow the nation’s current, legitimately elected government’ (p. 102). To answer this concern, it is argued, throughout both documents, that the ADC should be an integral part of the nation’s defence and security forces. In addition, it is emphasised that ‘social and psychological pillar within the comprehensive defence framework further reinforces social harmony and civic responsibility’ (p. 102) and at the same time, the ‘ADC’s cellular structure inhibits mobilisation without the government-enabled coordination’ (p. 102).

3 Benefits and limits of learning from history. A note on case studies

The ROC and CDH present a novel approach and it is often emphasised in these documents that such a preparation for resistance has not been tried before. It is thus difficult to assess whether it would or would not work. At the same time, their development is strongly based on the existing historical case studies, as the structure of the ROC book demonstrates. It discusses at length some cases of actual resistance (Poland, France and Philippines during the WWII, Baltic states after the war) as well as the attempts to create such a system during the Cold War. The Cold War cases chosen – Norway, Italy and Switzerland – represent a spectrum in terms of outcomes of the system, with the Swiss case as the best organised, Norway representing mid-course and Italy a rather problematic example.

Cases here serve as good examples of the various aspects of resistance and its build-up. Yet, for such an important endeavour, a more systematic approach is needed. It is crucial to look at a wide variety of cases and to analyse the recurring factors in them in order to see more clearly what factors contribute to successful resistance and in what

circumstances, including what the outcomes are of these struggles after they are over. History here cannot be used as a simple inspirational material; rather it should become a basis for an in-depth analysis. From the current presentation of ROC, it is not clear, however, how deeply these cases are analysed. The literature cited is quite limited, with most cases relying on only a few publications. The Polish case study relies almost exclusively on the work of Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, whose academic credentials are marred with the accusations of anti-Semitism, white-washing of history and far-right connections (Porter 2017).

The cases in ROC are limited by the authors' decision not to include insurgencies in general, with the argument that they are based on some particular grievances and thus are less about the re-establishment of sovereignty.³ This could be a valid point, as there is a need to establish some limits for the research in order not to drown in a potential flood of cases that may not be completely relevant. Yet, the boundaries between these categories are blurry and set limits unnecessarily narrowly. For example, many anti-colonial struggles were called 'insurgencies', yet, one can hardly suggest they are about anything but the re-establishment of sovereignty. There are surely only a few contemporary examples of countries that were forcefully annexed as a result of an invasion. Yet, if one added to these examples the countries where the 'regime change' was initiated, the list grows significantly and, unless one explores deeper, there is little ground to suggest that these cases have less to teach about the resistance. Annexation indeed is an extreme (that is why the Russian annexation of Crimea was so shocking), and it is more likely that the result of an invasion would be the establishment of a 'friendly' regime. Taking such cases and resistance provides a bigger pool of data and thus more possibilities for an in-depth research.

Another aspect that is not discussed deep enough in ROC is the preference of violent vs. non-violent resistance. These two modes may require different ways of preparing and different focus. As Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) demonstrate using statistical analysis of an extensive dataset of violent and non-violent campaigns, civil resistance has better chances of success in achieving its goals and leads to a more stable political system in the aftermath of the conflict. Indeed, they show that the probability for a country to be democratic is less than 6% in cases of violent campaigns that end successfully, while it is 57% in cases of non-violent campaigns (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 213–15). Given the demands put on the population in both these models, it may be useful to discuss deeper such research in planning the organisation of country's defence. Current ROC dismisses too lightly the value of such a resistance, arguing that it did not work in the WWII resistance settings (Fiala 2019, 192), while at the same time suggesting that the situation has changed and the occupier would even allow a certain degree of self-organisation (Fiala 2019, 202). These conclusions are contradictory and need to be much better substantiated. The preference of preparing for violent resistance should also not be taken so lightly, as will be discussed further.

Here it must be emphasised, and it would be important to discuss, the premises and assumptions of the ROC and CDH as to the nature of occupation and populations' interaction with the occupier (Appendix H of the ROC, pp. 195–202). The CDH follows ROC in this regard to suggest that there would be a level of toleration of opposition by the occupiers, thus certain 'old' forms of organisation would still exist (e.g., trade unions, opposition parties). In the ROC, it is suggested that the occupier 'is not likely to apply widespread terror in the forms analysed in the above case studies' and 'is likely to use more subtle means of coercion and terror. There they are more likely to use asymmetric methods that can be publicly denied while bringing about very similar effects to the methods of the occupiers examined' (p. 202). In this sense, it is worth then to look deeper into these cases, especially that of Chechnya and how its population was subdued after the second Chechen War. The Donbas and Luhansk district control can also probably shed some light into the potential nature of occupation. At the same time, China's work to subdue the Uighur, but also Tibetan resistance to its rule, can also bring some more ideas on how the 'more subtle' terror can be used. Indeed, the potential nature of the occupying regime may be of ultimate importance in devising ways to resist it, therefore, it is rather unfortunate that this is not discussed in more detail in the documents.

In addition, one would expect from such a work also a deeper engagement with the scientific literature, particularly on the use of violence in the armed conflict. This issue is probably closely linked with the above-mentioned limitations for the case studies, as most of this literature is not linked to the narrowly defined resistance contexts, but rather to the situations of 'civil wars' and 'insurgencies'. For example, Stathis Kalyvas' (2006) study of the highest scientific standard deals with quite a few aspects of the problem that are at the core of concerns of the developers of the concept

³ 'Here we distinguish resistance from other conflicts such as the uprising of ethnic or religious groups against their rivals or insurgencies against long established governments that may possess several types of legitimacy.' (Fiala 2019, 39)

as well – control of violence. His work has been criticised because of his case study – Greece under Nazi occupation, which would probably be exactly what is needed for the purposes of the exploration of resistance (Rožič and Verovšek 2008). Similarly, Max Abrahms' (2018) work analyses large datasets to distil some lessons learned on control of violence by militant, often clandestine organisations. The question of how the developers of the concept engage with these and similar works should be indicated with more clarity.

Finally, a deeper analysis, comparison and hypothesis testing is needed even for the presented cases, especially the ones concerning the preparation for underground resistance during the Cold War. In the current book on ROC, the Italian case, for example, ignores the most damning material against the stay-behind groups, suggesting simply that lack of policy and legal framework 'led to strong public suspicions of illegality and wrongful American clandestine influence within the country', which in turn brought 'negative attention to other similar European networks' (Fiala 2019, 194). Yet, Italian *Gladio* produced examples of probably everything that can go wrong with such a network in peacetime: from involvement in politics, to links to mafia, to terrorist offences.⁴ In order to avoid a similar fate for the currently discussed organisations, much more analysis is necessary.

4 Best laid plans...

The ADC notion is definitely convincing when observed from a military perspective. Indeed, countries like the three Baltic states, rammed in between their substantially larger neighbour and the sea, lacking strategic depth, should seriously consider the possibility of being overrun by an adversary and thus having to strive for re-establishment of their sovereignty under the occupation. It may make sense thus to prepare the underground resistance to the occupier already in advance. This preparation, however, brings forth a great number of challenges, which have to be seriously considered when discussing further development of the concept. Indeed, the developers have to be conscious of the potential unintended consequences of this approach and think very seriously whether the potential benefits truly outweigh the potential negative effects of this approach, especially and particularly in light of grey-zone conflicts and hybrid actions of the adversary. The rest of this article will raise questions about five different aspects of the ADC component that need to be discussed in-depth if countries are to adopt such an approach. As mentioned in the Introduction, these are grouped into five categories.

4.1 Command and control

The ROC book and CDH strongly emphasise the importance of leadership and governmental oversight. They also acknowledge that in the case of loss of such control, the networks could be 'used for criminal purposes' and 'nefarious political purposes' as well as 'become uncoordinated, random and ineffective' (NSHQ 2020, 44). It is admitted also that such a result is possible both in the preparation phase (in peacetime) and in the actual resistance phase. The dynamics

⁴ Initial revelations about *Gladio* came in 1990. Subsequently a parliamentary commission was instituted to investigate the Italian 'years of lead', encompassing the decade of the 1970s when the country suffered from a great number of terrorist attacks emanating from the left-wing and also right-wing activists. It was revealed how in the 1960s and 1970s, the organisation, initially designed to combat the potential invasion of Trieste by the Yugoslav forces, turned inward to focus on the attempt to keep the strong Italian Communist party (Partito Comunista Italiano - PCI) out of power. The methods used in this endeavour included threats of coups and involvement with organisers of terrorist attacks. Similar concerns have been raised about the lesser known stay-behind organisations, such as those in Belgium and Germany (see, e.g. Ganser (2005), while some researchers emphasise that 'for the time being the available primary documentation does not allow any firm conclusions' (Nuti and Riste 2007, 934) regarding the involvement of stay-behind organisations in such attacks. Yet, the authors mentioned in this footnote are on the possibly two extremes of the treatment of Italian *Gladio*, with Ganser wanting to put all the blame of all what happened during the 'years of lead' on the organisation and Nuti insisting there are no documents of such strategy. As usual, the truth is somewhere in the middle – while there is truly no documentary evidence of the systematic strategy to use stay-behind for terrorist purposes, there is *some* evidence linking people who *did* perpetrate attacks (such as the most famous Vincenzo Vinciguerra) with *Gladio*. It is also documented in the court proceedings that a number of officials collaborated in suppressing evidence in some of these occasions, resulting in a number of convictions for such actions. This should be taken into consideration first when considering the recruiting and control aspects of the organisation and secondly, when considering the image that such organisations (still) have.

of the organisation itself can be different during these two phases, so it makes sense to separate them to look into the potential problems in each.

Looking at the phase of resistance, as was already mentioned, the concept, though implemented to a certain degree during the Cold War in European countries, remains untested. Therefore, there is no empirical evidence as to how they would behave during such a period. There is little to suggest, however, that they would behave differently than similar such organisations that are not prepared in the peacetime and of which we know a lot. The quality of leadership here is of utmost importance to avoid their descent into terrorism and turn their capacity from fighting the enemy to intimidation of a lukewarm population. The ROC case studies themselves provide such examples (e.g., p. 147 on Polish resistance and p. 163 on Baltic). The discussion of those cases also tallies well with the discussion of the development of terrorist organisations. Starting off by attacking security services, when weakened, most move to ‘soft’ targets, thus attacking civilians.

The ROC admits of the potential of such occurrences; yet, it should be more forceful in its explanation of how unethical/illegal behaviour by the members of ADC will be avoided, and how the adverse impact on civilians will be minimised. These should be part of the discussion of the concept itself, as according to the major studies on the topic, the fish does start rotting from the head. Probably the most forceful elaboration on this topic is provided by the author of the Stanford prison experiment, Philip Zimbardo, who shows the importance of ‘systems’ in either encouraging or discouraging abuse (Zimbardo 2007).

Other research also emphasises the role of systemic and situational factors in human rights violations (see, e.g. Rowe 2008, Bartone 2010). Ethical preparedness should be a part of implementation of the model and not only as a means to tick the box. In case such an ADC is prepared in peacetime, the strategic importance of (military) ethics should be an important part of its preparation. As I also show in an article on ‘Dirty wars’, the abuse of human rights, especially the most basic right to life, has very serious strategic consequences (Maskaliunaite 2009).

Taking the concept seriously, we need to find ways to deal with the situations of loss of control and abuses as numerous researches show how difficult it is to maintain the wished-for ethical standards even in strictly controlled military units. To avoid strategic damage of occurrences of use of violence against civilians, Max Abrahms suggests using denial (Abrahms 2018). On the leadership level, preparing for such a denial would require a significant level of cynicism. Yet, the members of ADC can be warned that their actions against civilians will never be acknowledged as part of the resistance effort with all the consequences this may bring in the aftermath of the conflict. When preparing for the ‘aftermath’ thus, the message should be very clear that it is not only the active collaboration with the enemy but any harm to civilians even from ‘own side’ will be persecuted. It is also important to establish early on the leadership responsibilities, especially in the system which allows them to directly recruit the members of the cells. It should be clear that not only the actual perpetrators, but the leaders as well could be held accountable for these occurrences.

Coming to the control of ADC during peacetime, this should be a more straightforward task; yet, here there are a few damaging historical examples of the abuse of the element. The infamous Operation Gladio and its activities in Italy stand as a glaring example of where the loss of oversight over this element may lead.

4.2 Legitimacy

Another element that is strongly emphasised in the ROC is legitimacy. It is rightly presumed that given the suggested tactics for such an element of resistance, only its authorisation by the established authority can lend it credibility and distinguish it from other unruly elements. At the same time, the ROC itself delves periodically into the murky waters of so-called hybrid warfare. There are several issues here that may arise both in peacetime and wartime. Taking first the wartime, the ADC takes on the part of armed resistance to oust the occupying forces. Yet, in most cases discussed in the ROC itself, one element becomes apparent – these organisations spent more energy on trying to intimidate the ‘collaborators’ than actually fighting against the armed units or government structures of the occupier. While some aspects associated with the reasoning behind this strategy may be sound – attacks against armed forces call for reprisals against the civilian population – they nevertheless raise the question of legitimacy of such attacks, and the general strategy of employing the ADC. Taking the *ius ad bellum* and *ius in bello* parallel, the ROC has a lot to say about the legitimacy of *ius ad bellum*, and rather less about *ius in bello* type.

In peacetime, what should be considered is that legitimacy is not only a legal term, but also a psychological ‘green light’. By organising and arming the ADC, the state also confers to it the legitimacy to the clandestine elements’ use of violence. Take, for example, a change of government that would be more willing to look for accommodating solutions with Russia. The elements in the ADC may decide that the role of protectors of the state bestowed to them demands that they act against such a government and they start disobeying its orders, especially if these orders demand disbandment of such structures.

That such a scenario is not unrealistic – again Italian *Gladio* is a good example. Such dynamics can also be supported by discussions of the existing underground organisations. Indeed, as many of the classic texts on causes of terrorism emphasise, the view that governments are illegitimate despite having been democratically elected and the view that violence against such governments is acceptable, is one of the root causes of terrorism in peacetime (see, e.g., Crenshaw (1981)). Additionally, by adding the discussion of hybrid warfare, the developers of the concept seem to acknowledge that the line between black and white, right and wrong and also legitimacy/illegitimacy is not always easily established. Thus, conferring legitimacy to the underground fight may end up detrimental to the stability of the state itself, a risk that must be taken very seriously.

4.3 Recruitment

The ROC and the CDH put a lot of emphasis on the processes of recruitment. It emphasises that the recruits should be vetted, that they should probably go through a probation period and be observed before actually engaging in any activity. The findings follow closely those of the researchers working on the dynamics of recruitment in underground organisation and provide some reasonable suggestions as to how this process would work best. Yet, beyond touching upon the need for vetting, the ROC does not touch much upon who would be ‘undesirable’ in these circumstances. At the same time, it must be emphasised that the development of the cadre for such an element of resistance should be considered in the context of contemporary situation and especially the rise of radical right throughout the Western world and the spread of ‘culture wars’ throughout the West.

Recently, these issues were brought sharply to the fore by the events at the US Capitol on 6 January 2021. Europe was confronted with signs of the rising danger already in 2011. While the perpetrator of attacks in Norway, Anders Breivik, was underwritten as a psychologically unstable individual, his connections with the radical milieus both inside and outside the country told a story of the rising radicalism of the right. Currently, the US security services already indicate that extreme right wing poses more danger to the continental USA than any other ideologically driven organisations (Jones, Doxsee, and Harrington 2020).

The ROC and CDH place emphasis on vetting the recruits and rightly so. Yet, recruitment into clandestine functions tends to be concentrated in social networks that are already linked to the defence effort.⁵ In this sense, ROC’s take on a potential recruit for the clandestine organisation needs to be discussed deeper.

Throughout, the book on ROC emphasises nationalism and patriotism as the guiding virtues of the resilient population. Nationalism is more often than not viewed unfavourably because of its connection with the tumultuous 20th century and its wars. In addition to pride and devotion to one’s nation, it implies that one’s nation is better and more deserving than others. On the other hand, patriotism is often offered as a replacement term for nationalism as it does not have such negative connotations and is often used as a more ‘defensive’ term in contrast to nationalism’s offensiveness.

Yet, this term currently also starts to be hijacked by the more radical elements and comes to signify not so much a love for one’s state, but to a particular vision of the nation. This type of ‘patriotism’ brings back the troubles that the concept of ‘nationalism’ faced, as it demands from society a uniformity of views of the past and the future and thus allows little space for the changes of attitudes and mores. It does not allow for the different interpretations of history either, trying to whitewash the past and purge out the inconvenient episodes of country’s history. This is combined with the view of the future, which demands the slowdown of the changes in the society and return to some kind of golden times where people loved their country more and knew how to behave better. Such hijacking of patriotism alienates parts of the population with either a different memory of the past or different visions for its future and only fosters the

⁵ The stay-behinds in Europe often had origins in the anti-Nazi resistance (Cogan 2007) (Cacciatore 2021)

divisions in society, which can be exploited by the adversary. Indeed, this type of ‘patriotism’ feeds very well into the hands of Russians, as it is very similar to their own efforts to promote Russia as an alternative to the EU with a clear vision of the patriotic past and emphasis on maintaining ‘traditional family’ values.

Indeed, in many countries the self-proclaimed patriots are questioning the existing institutions, doubt the value of belonging to the European family in the form of the EU and tolerate corruption and abuse of power in both the public and private settings. Instead of encouraging such sentiments with a type of nationalist-patriotic education, the language should be adapted to the focus on the virtues of civic-mindedness and the civic society. Those considering to implement the ROC and its elements of ADC, should be careful to include not the loudest ‘patriots’ but the dedicated adherents of the civil society; otherwise, there is a risk that established cells would be hijacked by the people who have more on their agenda than protecting the sovereignty of the state.

4.4 Long-term perspective?

The ROC touches lightly on the question of how the resistance would end. It is emphasised that the organisation will be disbanded after the sovereignty is restored and the collaborators will be judged. In this paper, it was already mentioned that this requires a deeper look at the actions of the ADC itself and emphasised that the underground resistance should not be handed in a ‘blank check’ for its future actions and its activities after the conflict should also come under scrutiny.

It is also worth to consider also long-term ADC development in peacetime. When the danger seems imminent, the motivation of members of such organisation would not be difficult to maintain and their focus would be very strongly on learning to resist an external aggressor. With time, any organisation faced with the situation where its original purpose has disappeared contends with two possibilities: either to disband or to transform to address different challenges. In historical examples of stay-behind organisations, as the imminence of the Soviet attack seemed to recede, most networks became dormant and were quietly disbanded in the beginning of 1990s (Nutti and Riste 2007).

Italian *Gladio*, on the other hand, offers the opposite example, where the organisation experienced a ‘mission creep.’ Initially, the organisation was devised to stop the incursion of armies from the Communist Yugoslavia, yet with time, its mission was changed into that of fighting internal Communist threat (see, e.g., Cacciatore, 2021). It is important to pay attention to this case in light of the hybrid actions of the enemy and the divisions in societies, which may not be less significant now than they were in times of opposition between the two ideologies, as the section on recruitment has already discussed. In situations of internal tension it is not difficult to imagine situations where government officials ‘in the know’ may be tempted to use the ADC cells for their own purpose. Alternatively, these cells themselves start taking seriously the role of the guardians of the state and become a rogue element that decides for itself which government is ‘patriotic enough’ to lead the country and which is not.

4.5 Informing about ADC

The ROC and the CDH suggest that as a part of defence system and part of deterrence effort, the existence of the ADC should not be hidden. This knowledge that the potential aggressor will definitely face a fierce resistance should, in this thinking, have a deterrent effect. This is clearly suggested as a mitigation of one of the most serious issues that the Cold War stay-behind organisations faced, where the secrecy surrounding their existence and activities led to a backlash against the program once it was revealed in the beginning of the 1990s, including many myths surrounding their activities and intentions. Yet, here as well, there are ways in which such messaging can have unintended consequences and be detrimental to the conduct of the war and even act as an excuse to enact hostilities. The ROC admits that preparing for such a resistance can cause it to become a self-fulfilling prophecy as ‘there may be elevated risk levels associated with activities during pre-conflict which may themselves act as triggers to aggressor actions’ (Fiala 2019, 33).

Indeed, the Baltic and other Central and Eastern European countries’ concern about potential Russian actions should also be assessed by evaluating how their own actions will be reflected in Russia. Current, Russian military thinking particularly emphasises the importance of potential terrorist activities. Terrorism is understood clearly as an instrument in the hybrid phase of conflict, but especially feared is a coordinated terrorist attack coming from outside of the country (Revaitis 2021, 133). The example of the Zapad exercise could be useful here as well. The scenario uses

incursions of the ‘illegal armed groups’ into the territory of Belarus from what is largely territory of Lithuania to act as a trigger for war between Russia and NATO (Boulègue 2017). Lithuania in particular, probably because of its small and well-integrated Russian population that leaves little room for promoting the ‘abuse’ of compatriots’ rhetoric, is portrayed in the Russian media; the constructed image is that of the rogue state which uses its territory for training terrorists. This image was formed already during the war in Chechnya (Lietuvos radijas 2004) and continued on to other conflicts, resurfacing in the war in Ukraine and currently in the events in Belarus, linked to which Lithuania is often portrayed as a destabilising force in the region (Beniušis 2020). Official announcements of the development of ADC in the countries would resonate well with this Russian discourse.

In the case this invasion actually happens, advertised presence of such elements could have disastrous consequences for the civilian population. Take as example the start of the WWI and the German incursion into Belgium. The German units went into Belgium with many soldiers being strongly convinced that there were ‘*Francs-tireurs*’ on every corner, hiding in between the civilian population. The result of these fears was numerous atrocities committed against the Belgian civilians at the very start of the war. Repetition of such scenarios when the soldiers are convinced (and in this case with much reason) that there are armed people among civilians is more than likely.

While the ROC acknowledges the right of the civilian population to not participate in the armed resistance, it does not seem to address enough the consequences for this population of the establishment of the ADC. It presents the entire civilian population as a target of enemy actions as the elements of ADC are hiding among population. It thus places enormous demand on the countries’ citizens. Openly talking about such a system may also have an adverse effect in the country itself as parts of population may turn away from the government that plans to use them as ‘human shields’.⁶

The mitigating effect here can probably also be messaging, but coupled with a clear vision of strategy, including the infrastructure development, for the civil protection. It should be emphasised that the aspect of human security still has a very high priority and that measures are taken to protect the population as much as possible. Thus, also, such measures have to be made visible. For example, Switzerland, which is used as a positive example in ROC, still has a requirement to build bomb shelters in new developments and keeps on an elaborate system of civilian protection. There is almost nothing of a kind in the Baltic countries. The old shelters are obsolete and the regular members of the public have no clue about where to go in case there is an emergency. A leaflet here and there helps, but is not a panacea. The system of civil protection does not rest on paper alone, an infrastructure of civil protection needs to be prepared to show that the government cares also about its citizens, not only about the territory. Only once these efforts are strongly under way, the resistance should be complemented with the ADC.

5 Conclusions

The concept originated in the tense environment of the occupation of Crimea, the demonstration of Russian modernised military capabilities and the will to employ them. For the small countries bordering such a big and powerful neighbour, the ‘total defence’ or ‘comprehensive defence’ concepts, ‘whole-of-government’ and ‘whole-of-society’ approaches became very appealing. It is thus understandable that ROC generated a heightened interest in the countries.

The aim of this article was to draw attention to some potentially controversial elements of the ADC component of the ROC. As the concept is now ever widely discussed in the expert communities of the Baltic countries, it is important to note not only the potential positive but also the negative sides of this system so that the policymakers have a clear view of the pros and cons of such an approach when they need to make a decision.

The concept originated in the SOF milieu and the initial workshops on the topic seem to have been conducted primarily among the military personnel. Later on, the participant pool was expanded to include more members of academia. Yet, it is not entirely clear from the description of the project what their role was. It is thus important to extend the discussion beyond this rather narrow circle and to draw in more voices into the discussion and this article was aimed as a part of such a discussion.

⁶ When we combine this with the message that the government and their families should be transported to safety (p.27), the result appears to be reasonable from a practical point of view, but also lends itself to being viewed cynically by anyone who is not in a category of being so protected.

Surely, some of the arguments here will probably be easily refuted by a well-developed argumentation on the part of the creators of the concept; yet, some others may need more discussion and a clearer indication of how to mitigate their potentially noxious effects. The article does not question the utility of increasing the national resilience and the general preparation for resistance of the countries. It does, however, draw attention to the potential negative aspects of establishing already in the peace time the so-called ADC as a clandestine organisation meant to violently resist a potential invader.

To sum up the arguments here, first, we do not know if it works, as it was never tested and the cases from the Cold War raise more concerns than reassurances. Second, there are serious concerns about the C2, recruitment into such an element and its role of legitimising clandestine violent activities. The long-term strategy of maintaining such a component is very tricky, but particularly tricky is the communication about the ADC element of resistance, as it integrates too well into Russian discourse on the terrorist danger on its doorstep. In this regard, the development of this element may have the opposite effect from the intended.

The major question, however, is about the impact on civilians, which is discussed in the section on messaging. Any policymaker who is wooed by this concept should be clear on what are the demands placed on civilians by such organisation of defence. Given that it requires a lot from the civilians, before any such ADC is established and widely advertised, the civil protection measures should be enhanced, and thus civil protection should be given an utmost priority in a crisis response mechanisms. When there are no clear crisis response mechanisms, as the COVID-19 widely showed, the states should focus on fixing first what is of wide and crucial importance.

Having said that, it is important to note that one cannot underestimate the importance of discussion on the future of defence, especially concerning such a vulnerable region as ours. It is thus the purpose of this article not to advance empty criticisms, but rather raise questions and encourage the search for solutions. It is similarly hoped that this paper generates discussion and the discussion itself will inform decision making on this important topic.

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