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Introduction. Special Issue on the Resistance Operating Concept (ROC)

In June 2021, the *Journal on Baltic Security* published an article entitled ‘Exploring Resistance Operating Concept: Promises and pitfalls of (violent) underground resistance’, by one of the editors of the issue, Dr. Asta Maskaliūnaitė. This piece outlined several contentious issues concerning the recently developed Resistance Operating Concept (ROC), attempting to initiate an expanded discussion on the topic, addressing questions and themes that were not covered or only briefly addressed in the final published version of the ROC. Dr. Kevin Stringer, the original project leader for the development of the ROC, accepted the challenge of renewing this discussion, and the result is this Special Issue of the *Journal on Baltic Security* of which he is an esteemed Guest Editor.

When the Editors considered a Special Issue in the Summer of 2021, the question of armed resistance as part of a sovereign nation’s national defence

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against an aggressor was still rather hypothetical and conceptual. The Russian assault on Ukraine in February 2022 altered this situation and reintroduced to Europe the reality of a conventional conflict accompanied by resistance to an occupying power. This latter effort is currently only visible through open-source reports that get filtered through the front lines of the Russo-Ukrainian War.

Indeed, Russian aggression rendered some concerns regarding resistance obsolete. For example, in the strategic communication section of Dr. Maskaliūnaitė's earlier article, she suggested that the advertised presence of a national resistance organization could be interpreted by occupying troops as a provocation, resulting the treatment of all civilians with suspicion (Maskaliūnaitė 2021). Yet, as we have seen in the ongoing occupation of parts of Ukraine, even without such an advertised organization, civilians are treated as partisan to the Ukrainian armed forces and its resistance organizations, and are often imprisoned or even executed. In addition, all such resistance is presented as illegitimate, thus not requiring due process or the correct treatment of prisoners under international humanitarian law. As a result, the question is not whether communicating the presence of such an organization during peacetime will serve as an excuse for an escalation, but rather to ensure that this communication will serve as a deterrent for future Russian or even Chinese aggression.

At the same time, resistance operations in general, as well as their preparation and organization in peacetime prior to a conflict, become very relevant, and this Special Issue is timely in addressing some of these themes. As such, the Special Issue gathered nine contributions from a mix of academics, practitioners, and researchers to examine the ROC from a variety of interdisciplinary angles. This multinational group of contributors includes military, diplomatic, intelligence, and academic personnel from the United States, Poland, Latvia, Hungary, Sweden, and Lithuania.

The first article by Derek Jones and Monica Lipert-Sowa directly addresses the five concerns raised in the catalyst piece by Dr. Maskaliūnaitė by focusing on

the Polish Underground State and looking at how these concerns were managed during World War II. These topics include the command and control (C2) question, issues of legitimacy, recruitment into resistance organizations, and the potential challenges it may bring, as well as long-term or post-conflict outcomes and strategic communication. All these elements are duly addressed in the article. The authors emphasize the importance of legal frameworks in establishing the legitimacy of the underground organizations and addressing the C2 issues; in parallel, they suggest that legal prosecution of unethical or illegal actions, as well as the closure of such wounds as soon as possible after the conflict, would aid in dealing with the long-term consequences of the conflict. Recruitment concerns, according to the authors and their historical examples, could be addressed by recruiting the ‘quiet professionals’ who would form the core of these organizations during peacetime. The article also mentions that communication with the population, whether involved or not in the organized resistance, should also be prioritized, and legal requirements for all sections of society during resistance should be clearly presented.

The Issue continues with an essay by James Stejskal, which further discusses the vicissitudes of establishing a pre-conflict underground organization, building it into a resilient structure. It provides some practical advice as to how to prepare such organization, thus continuing the discussion advanced by Jones and Lipert-Sowa.

The third article by Dr. Sandor Fabian continues this theme by looking at non-Western examples of resistance through the theoretical lenses of Mao Zedong, Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, and Vo Nguyen Giap with the focus on the First Russo-Chechen war. The importance of this example given the current context of war in Ukraine can hardly be underestimated, and as a result, the article presents an important addition to the discussions on resistance and particularly on the potential aggressor’s attempts to defeat it or limit its impact.

Such historical background cases pave the way for more specific investigations on the role of special operations forces (SOF) and territorial defence forces

(TDF) in resistance. In the fourth article, Dr. Kevin D. Stringer addresses the role of SOF as integrators for total defence and resistance. The article presents three different models for the interaction of SOF with territorial forces, thus providing a spectrum of possibilities for relevant countries to consider.

This topic is continued by Ulrica Pettersson and Hans Ilis-Alm, who approach the role of SOF in resistance from another angle. They argue that the major limitation for most countries is that SOF are typically and by definition small organizations. Taking the Swedish Defence Forces as an example, the article presents some ideas of how SOF could contribute to resistance activities and suggests to use retired SOF operatives in the resistance networks as connectors to the active forces and as potential trainers.

Transitioning from the theme of SOF and resistance, the article by Mehan and Klisz takes us to Territorial Defence Forces and how they were used in establishing an underground resistance organization. Using the example of the Polish Home Army and its role in the Polish underground state during the Nazi and then Soviet occupation, the essay proposes a potential way to use these overt forces for establishment of the resistance underground. The chosen case allows them to identify three significant lessons from this experience: the critical importance of civilian control of the organization, some calculations as to how large an underground force would be necessary to resist occupation, and finally, the importance of maintaining ambiguity, which is defined as the effort of the organization to deny the occupier the ability to detect and thus eliminate its members. The authors suggest that personnel transition from the overt resistance to the covert one may not be feasible, and the states should consider establishing separate clandestine structures.

Similarly, the article by Mareks Runts examines the linkage between the armed forces and resistance. It implies that, because small states have small populations and thus limited human resources, parallel structures for the overt and covert defence are impractical, and that the armed forces should serve as the backbone of the resistance organization.

The subsequent article of Brian Petit looks at the issues of command and control in the resistance organization. Using the historical examples of the Provisional IRA and personal experience from Iraq, the author examines the encountered C2 challenges, arguing that states should try to establish what type of C2 approach they would like to use before the conflict.

Finally, the contribution by Dr. Otto Fiala addresses the issue of legitimacy in the formation of resistance organizations. This critical topic is central to the ROC publication, and Fiala's article elaborates how organizations can maintain their legitimacy both inside the country and abroad. As legitimacy can be an important factor in gaining support for an organization, it is vital in ensuring that resistance is seen as legal and legitimate throughout the pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict cycle.

The editors' final piece concludes the collection by identifying lessons learned, ways forward for practitioners and academics, and promulgates the themes that require further research and examination in the future on this important topic of national defence and irregular warfare.

Bibliography

Maskaliūnaitė, Asta. (2021) 'Exploring Resistance Operating Concept. Promises and pitfalls of (violent) underground resistance', *Journal on Baltic Security*, Vol 7(1), pp 27-38.