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EDITORIAL

DETERRENCE OF MILITARY AND OTHER THREATS

Introduction

During the writing of this editorial, another security hotspot (re)emerged: two Spanish coastal cities located in Africa (Ceuta and Melilla) were swarmed by several tens of thousands of unarmed Moroccans and other Africans, taking advantage of a recent ruling by Spain's Supreme Court (Rainsford, 2026). The court ruled that "that migrants stopped at sea while trying to reach Ceuta or Melilla, another Spanish enclave, cannot be summarily returned to Morocco" (Rainsford & Curry, 2026). The Spanish, and thus the European Union's, territory in Africa has been contested between Spain and Morocco, a former Spanish protectorate (Foissey, 2026). The majority of the illegal migrants returned to Morocco after Spain deployed military and police personnel. However, some saw this incident as another example of modern hybrid warfare (Dampier, 2026), similar to the Russian usage of "little green men" during the invasion and subsequent occupation of Ukraine's Crimea in 2014 (Senčar, 2021). The Spanish prime minister blamed the incursion on criminal networks involved in human trafficking (Ferreira Santos & Rainsford, 2026).

1 DETERRENCE

The concept of deterrence comes to mind when considering this issue. How can Spain, a member of NATO and the EU, not project enough deterrence with regard to the sovereignty of its territory towards its neighbour? During the Cold War, deterrence was primarily focused on preventing major military attacks or direct confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. However, in the past decades, deterrence or the lack of it has been tested by asymmetric threats (Morgan, 2012). The breach of Spain's territorial integrity by several tens of thousands of unarmed civilians can be considered an aspect of fourth-wave research on deterrence (Knopf, 2010).

With the EU facing another migration crisis and renewed discussion with regard to the (in)effectiveness of the Schengen Area, combined with the non-dwindling wars

in Ukraine and the Middle East, it is clear that the third decade of the 21st century will remain full of armed conflicts of different kinds and varieties.

With regard to interstate aggression, Mazzar et al. (2018) provided some insights. The motivation of the (potential) aggressor(s) is usually highly layered, combining aspects of different variables, thus negating the possibility of anticipating their next move and your response. There is a balance between the political leadership's paranoia and status, resulting in the use of aggression as a direct resort of fear and not as a forward land grab. To counter such opponents, deterrent messaging must be clear and consistent, leaving no room for misinterpretation. If this fails, the "firm but flexible" principle must be used, using compromise and even concession to prevent a large-scale armed conflict. When facing other parties and actors which are somehow connected to the principal actors (as supranational or regional allies), this can lead to even more problems, with others trying to expand their own influence, including to the detriment of the directly involved actors. Motivation is a major factor when using deterrence: a weaker opponent is much easier to deter, while a more determined actor will not be persuaded.

Since 2014, NATO has resolved to increase its deterrence and defence with the ultimate goal of improving the defence of its member states and allies. In 2014, the Readiness Action Plan was launched, which was expanded with the 2016 Enhanced Forward Presence at the eastern (European) flank of the alliance. This was followed by the NATO Readiness Initiative (2018), the Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (2020), and the NATO 2030 Agenda and NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept (2021). The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 resulted in the creation and implementation of more regional defence plans, along with the Defence Production Action Plan (2023) and the reorganisation of NATO forces according to the NATO Force Model, while simultaneously expanding military-industrial capabilities and capacities (2024). In 2025, all the member states agreed to spend at least 5% of their gross domestic product on defence (NATO, 2026). In the 2024 Defence Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia, it is written: "The capacity of a state to deter military and other threats depends on the common capacity and strength of national defence capabilities and the ability to increase and regenerate them."

Among the national defence capabilities, we can also include scientific and academic endeavours, seeking to create new knowledge based on the experience and events of bygone days. Such knowledge is always expanding and changing, following real-world problems. Deterrence is therefore a continuous process, which not only involves armed forces and political leadership, but is also bolstered by scientific research, resulting in technological innovation, leading to improved and resilient economies. Another vital and connected factor is societal preparedness and resilience to withstand any crisis, regardless of its nature. Critical reflection on existing practices is the basis of interdisciplinary research, eventually leading to the development of new defence concepts and, finally, strengthening national and collective security.

2 CONTENT

In this issue, we offer our readers the work of several international researchers dealing with different topics concerning the defence and security environment, which is dominated by computer technology.

The first article, *User support model for the communication and information system in the Slovenian Armed Forces: organisational architecture, process analysis and security dimensions*, written by **Mihael Plevnik**, deals with the current communication and information system used by the Slovenian Armed Forces, from the perspective of user support. The author concludes that such a system dictates more automatization, and increased proactive incident monitoring alongside continuous staff training to increase (or maintain) the level of reliability.

Continuing with the ICT theme is **Tal Pavel's** article *Big Tech and Cyber Resilience in the Balkans: A Comparative Analysis of Cyber Incidents in 2022*. In the article, the author examines the role of major technology corporations in the field of (cyber) resilience in eight Balkan nations (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia) during significant cyber incidents in 2022. Among his findings is also the conceptualisation of these large technology companies as being “quasi-sovereign actors whose engagement is selective and context-dependent, with implications for cyber resilience and digital sovereignty in smaller states”.

Staying in the digital realm is an article by **Inda Kreso**, entitled *The Role of Digital Forensics in Protecting Critical Energy Infrastructure from Cyberattacks*. The author combines a systematic literature review with case studies of major real-world cyber incidents from the viewpoint of cyber forensics. Based on the theoretical and practical findings, she explores the role of “digital forensics as a proactively used tool in the strategic defence and protection model for critical energy infrastructure”.

The final article, *Sino-Russian Military Integration since the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, by **Miha Erman**, deals with another aspect of (military and political) deterrence: an alliance. The author provides a historical and political overview of military collaboration between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation in the last four decades. At the same time, he asks whether “this cooperation is moving towards the establishment of a long-term strategic alliance based on the strategic interests of the two states, or whether it is merely short-term pragmatic cooperation driven by the pursuit of immediate benefits”.

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