

Armies on the Move: Trident Juncture 2015

By Mary Beaudoin



"Armies of the Air," by Albert Robida, French illustrator. Cover art for the paper novel, Guerre Infernale ("The Infernal War.") No. 2, Jan-Feb 1908

Over the last few decades, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has grown in strength to become a dangerous force in the world.

This was really brought home to the U.S. when the masters of war gathered at a NATO summit in Chicago in 2012 to renew their commitments to an ever-expanding military agenda, not long after NATO's destruction of Libya.(1) The summit was held over the objections of a mass mobilization of resistance on the part of the antiwar public, led through the streets by veterans of the U.S. wars on Iraq and Afghanistan, culminating in them throwing their medals back in the direction of the heavily fortified gathering of government officials and military brass, but the protests of these recalcitrant citizens and disgruntled former employees were completely

disregarded. At a subsequent NATO summit, held in Newport, Wales, in 2014, antiwar rallies were held outside a “ring of steel”— high, impenetrable walls keeping the enforcers of world power secure in their citadel and away from the people again.

Voices crying out for peace are not meaningful to war planners who claim that what they do is for the people’s defense and the people’s security; thus, NATO’s newest training-for-war exercise, which is called Trident Juncture 2015, commenced on September 28 and proceeded through November 6. It was conducted mainly throughout Italy, Portugal, and Spain, and involved the participation of 36,000 personnel from more than 30 allied and partner nations, almost 200 aircraft, and 60 ships and submarines.(2)

The U.S. played a leading role. The NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe is always a U.S. general appointed by the President. Given this fact, it should come as no surprise that NATO’s war training is consistent with the new national military strategy that the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff laid out in June.(3) Planners believed that while chasing violent extremists (that the U.S. helped create in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, etc.), the West had neglected to have its Rapid Response Force practice more maneuver warfare— “a variety of rapid, focused, and unexpected actions which create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which the enemy cannot cope.”(4)

This sounds a lot like the “Shock and Awe” tactic that was used when the U.S. attacked Iraq in 2003, and NATO attacked Libya in 2011. Now, through the coordinated efforts of NATO nations and partners, “battle staff readiness” is brought up to date. At the same time, NATO trained in counter-insurgency. Together these types of warfare combined—maneuver and counterinsurgency—are described as the new “hybrid warfare,” a lively, lethal mix that “blends conventional and irregular forces to create ambiguity, seize the initiative, and paralyze the adversary.”(5)

While designed to sharpen military skills, this training exercise served at the same time to ensure what NATO calls “high visibility.” Though NATO has openly professed hostility to Russia, General Hans-Lothar Domröse, Commander of Joint Force Command for Trident Juncture 2015, headquartered in Brunssum, Netherlands, announced, quite without irony, that Russia was invited as an observer, and that anyway (presumably if no Russian officials showed up), they were sure to hear about it.(6) After all, intimidating Russia with NATO’s prowess was one of the purposes for this show of force.

However, on October 16, Russia stole the show before it went live(7) by firing cruise missiles from the Caspian Sea 1,500 km (over 900 miles) away into Syria, hitting terrorist enclaves with what it claimed was pinpoint” accuracy. This took NATO by surprise and demonstrated that Russia had the technological capability to reach distant targets. It also proved hardly believable that the U.S., with its enormously powerful surveillance and military equipment chasing terrorists in Toyotas and

tennis shoes for months and years across Iraq and Syria, was as unsuccessful as bumbling Keystone Cops—even when those terrorists of the many monikers were aided by—or perhaps it would be accurate to say—because those terrorists were aided by “trainers,” “advisors,” and weapons donations from some NATO members and partners.

But there are many more implications to the Russian action than what it reveals about the War on Terror/War on ISIS. The power dynamic in the Middle East and the world has changed with Russia’s entry into Syria. The struggle over Syria embodies the struggle over how power in the world is determined. It is a struggle between international law based on the sovereignty of the nation state, which Russia says it adheres to, and the destabilizing usurping of national sovereignty for the globalists of the New World Order, which the U.S. and its NATO affiliates adhere to—the latter while attempting to make the concept of the nation-state appear antiquated (except when the U.S./NATO affiliates want to reinvent sovereignty on their own terms, as they do in the case of Crimea and Ukraine). Russia’s President Putin told the UN General Assembly in his speech on September 28 that Russia is in compliance with international law in Syria because its involvement has been by invitation of the sovereign state of Syria, unlike the involvement of the U.S. and some NATO nations that have been sending “advisors,” and “trainers” and weapons, uninvited by the government.

Differing over sovereignty is what the interests of Russia and NATO hinge on. Russia has got to be interested in sustaining its allies in the Middle East and stopping the spread of terrorism to its own geographic region (deeming a terrorist any of the militia groups: salafist, proxy, mercenary, or a combination of those, or something else). The U.S. is concerned about losing hegemony in the world. What’s at stake for all is control of resources and power in the Middle East, and beyond.

While the specific conflicts over Syria, and also Ukraine, continued throughout 2015, the real magnitude of the power struggle between the big states is evident. Both the U.S./NATO and Russia have been conducting war games near Russia’s borderlands, looking like part of a growing “action-reaction cycle in terms of military exercises.”(8) Russia has had its own show of force: last March on the Barents Sea coast which it shares with Norway in the high north, it conducted an exercise involving 38,000 troops, 41 ships, 15 submarines, 110 planes, and more than 3,000 vehicles.(9) But was this exercise a response to the fact that the U.S. has been planting, in several European countries within reach of Russia’s interior, tactical nuclear weapons and antiballistic missile systems which can also act as launch pads?



*NATO's Response Force carry out a landing exercise
Image: Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE)*

NATO' brought out the big guns with Trident Juncture 2015 to further demonstrate that it "means business." And that included military-industrial business with splashy exhibitions of some of the latest hardware in the air, on land, and sea, as well as some equipment not to be seen, but nevertheless included, because the exercise involved simulating surveillance and cyber, chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear warfare. NATO has something to control all aspects of going into battle—in other words, to create full spectrum dominance.

Trident Junction 2015 offered the opportunity to observe lethal products tested in live simulations to determine, as much as is possible, how they can deliver more bang for the buck. Defense procurement experts were sure to be interested in seeing what manufacturers like Lockheed Martin, Boeing, and Northrop Grumman prominently showcase for when it's time to Buy American.

Oh, but wait, there is more--the weapons industry didn't just create products. It actively participated in the exercise:

For the first time we've also invited a large number of defense industries to take part in the exercise and to observe evolutions, with the aim of generating exchanges and to bring insights and perspectives to possible technological solutions for the future and to accelerate military innovation.(10)

So said Lieutenant General Phil Jones, with the sci-fi-like title: Chief of Staff Allied Command Transformation on the exercise of Trident Juncture 2015.

The titles of military commanders weren't the only thing that conjured up fiction. The entire exercise, Trident Juncture 2015, was actually conducted based on NATO's invention of a fictitious geographical area known as SOROTON (which, for some reason, NATO always presents in capital letters). The scenario described sounds oddly familiar:

This fictitious but realistic setting sees a crisis unfold beyond NATO's borders in a fictional country that is the victim of internal tensions, natural hazards and a neighbor's aggression. This out-of-the-area setting in NATO terms has been designed to allow enough scope, depth and flexibility to really challenge our forces in the pursuit of an ambitious strategic and operational civilian and military campaign. Events in the exercise will range from subversion and terrorism to grand military maneuver on a large scale from the conditions of chemical warfare to the backgrounds of cyber and information, from the intricacies of tribal rivalries to the challenges of unpredictable and autocratic leaders...(11)

Bearing in mind that this fictitious scenario is a dress rehearsal presumably to be used in an actual plan, shouldn't some serious questions be asked—for starters: Doesn't NATO going "beyond its borders" foretell attack, invasion, and imperial expansion?

Trident Juncture 2015 does not only involve the military. From its inception, civilian groups have had a role to play, too. After all, you can't suddenly fill the skies and the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea around Italy, Portugal, and Spain with bombers and battleships without the cooperation of the government of these countries. Besides that, the soft power of some international organizations, NGOs and agencies complemented the hard power of NATO militarism. Hence, such assistance "has become standard in NATO's training and exercising and philosophy."(12) After all you need somebody to prepare the ground, and mop up the blood afterwards.

It takes a lot of cooperation for an exercise on this scale to take place. But not every citizen does cooperate. (See the article, "Saying No to NATO")

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Endnotes

1. Chicago Summit Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Chicago on 20 May 2012 www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87593
2. "Press briefing on NATO exercise Trident Juncture 2015," NATO Media Center, July 15, 2015. nato.int
3. The National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2015, subtitled The United States Military's Contribution to National Security. Joint Chiefs of Staff. June 2015
4. "The Conduct of War," Warfighting, U.S. Marine Corps Handbook, 1997
5. "The Military Environment: Continuity of Conflict." Ibid, endnote no. 3
6. Ibid endnote no. 2

7. Trident Juncture 2015 is divided into two parts: the live exercise involving tactical training and a joint operation from October 21 through November 6 were preceded by a computer-assisted command-post exercise beginning September 28.

8. Cycle description from Frear, Thomas; Kulesa, Lukasz, Kearns, Ian. "Preparing for the Worst: Are Russian and NATO Military Exercises Making War in Europe More Likely?" Policy Briefing. European Network. August 2015

9. Ove, Torsten, "Army Intel chief with Pittsburgh ties assesses Russia might," Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, October 20, 2015; Tass Russian News Agency, tass.ru/en/search?query=Barents+Sea+drill

10. Ibid endnote no. 2

11. Ibid endnote no. 2

12. Ibid endnote no. 2