

The Virtual World of Exercises and Deterrence

Beatrice Heuser¹

Testing Procedures, Deterrence or Intimidation?

Exercises at all levels had always involved an element of practising procedures to ensure that all involved on one's own side would know what to do and – as important – what others would do, and what precisely commands meant, in the event that the procedures had to put into practice.² The latter was referred to as '*der Ernstfall*', in German military terminology, when the situation was no longer a game but 'earnest, serious'. In the UK in the Cold War, this meant implementing the 'War Book', a thick instruction manual on the procedures to implement once certain conditions pertained and certain decisions were taken by the government in emergency meetings.³

Another purpose of exercises in the political-military context, especially where they are visually observable, i.e. when they take the form of to large-scale field exercises, is that of impressing the adversary. This is true particularly when there is at least an element of defensiveness, the aim of deterring aggression, in the disposition of the state conducting the exercises. (Already Empress Maria Theresia and even Frederick II, himself not averse to making conquests in foreign wars but well aware of the inherited weakness of his own kingdom, invited foreign observers to witness exercises held by their forces.)⁴

Command post exercises, however, held behind closed doors, were, and are to this day largely regarded as something to be kept secret, even from one's own junior officers. On the eve of the First World War, when all European doctrine was heavily dominated by the cult of the offensive, General Lanrezac, who would become commander-in-chief of the French Fifth Army at its outbreak, addressed a group of high-ranking French officers. It was only at the end of his talk when he reportedly said: 'Are the doors well shut? Well, in that case I can speak to you about the defensive'.⁵

In the Cold War, both in NATO and in the Warsaw Pact, command post exercises behind closed doors, mostly at the highest levels, took on new roles: they became more than rehearsals of measures, they turned into a show aimed both at the adversary (despite their secrecy, as will be explained below) and at one's own side, including allies, to assure the latter that defence was possible and procedures were well rehearsed; and that there were workable plans for the use of

¹ I am grateful for comments by Professor Martin van Creveld, Dr Stephen Blank, Brigadier Michael H. Clemmesen and Dr Klaas Voss. All remaining mistakes are mine alone.

² For exercises' key function of practising NATO procedures, see the American CINCAD/NORAD post-exercise discussion of WINTEX 83, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:2.Notes_of_WINTEX_83,_22_March_1983,_and_related.pdf&page=7 accessed on 20 II 2016.

³ Most documentation on command post and other civilian exercises in the British National Archives concerns the adoption of measures from the War Book, see for example the documentation of WINTEX 81 and WINTEX 83.

⁴ For the only comprehensive history of military exercises, see Martin van Creveld : *Wargames: from Gladiators to Gigabytes* (Cambridge University Press, 2013)

⁵ Raoul Castex: *Théories stratégiques* Vol. 4, (Paris: SEGMC, 1934), p.137.

nuclear weapons against the adversary. The authoritarian governments of the Warsaw Pact member states kept any criticism of nuclear use very much under wraps so that we only have occasional indications of them. By contrast, it is no understatement to say that the history of NATO revolved around the problem of the credibility of its deterrence of aggression, its preparations for defence in case deterrence broke down, and the key role of nuclear weapons in all of this. In a crisis, their role was from 1949 seen first and above all as deterrents to aggression, and only secondly, if aggression did take place, as instruments to fend it off.⁶ In later NATO strategy, this second role – at least for initial nuclear use of nuclear weapons by NATO – was recast as a means of restoring ‘intra-war deterrence’. NATO doctrine was that, if this restoration of deterrence and the concomitant cease-fire could not be achieved, nuclear weapons with larger yields, usually aircraft or missile-borne, might ultimately be used to wipe out the enemy’s major cities, an existential threat which everybody fervently hoped would never have to be carried out, but the existence of which was taken to be the foundation of nuclear deterrence of any aggression. Consequently, this scenario was played in a variety of high level exercises – NATO-wide exercises at the highest government level, in the form of the autumn exercises FALLEX with large scale use of NATO forces, or the WINTEX-CIMEX command post (decision and staff procedure) exercises, with scenarios now available to us through declassified documents both in national and NATO archives.

NATO’s Winter Exercise (hence WINTEX) was played biennially from 1969 until 1989, and revolved around rehearsing procedures and consultation mechanisms for a response to aggression by forces of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation (WTO), up to and including nuclear use (first use by NATO, but also follow-on use by NATO, with or without a nuclear response by the WTO) and the use of chemical weapons (but exclusively in response to WTO use). Even the last of these exercises still included first nuclear use by NATO and preparations for follow-on use, but the then Chairman of the NATO Military Committee stressed that this was merely to rehearse procedures and should not be taken as an indication of real intentions in such a scenario.⁷

WTO exercises were not quite as regular. Large exercises with WTO partners included DRUZHBA (with Czechoslovakia, held in 1979 and 1982), DRUZHBA PO ORUZHIIYU (held with the GDR in 1980), TARCA (held with Hungary in 1976, 1979, and in 1981 and 1982 apparently also with a Black Sea component), and the multinational SOYUS (held in 1977 with Hungary and Czechoslovakia, in March-April 1981 with Poland, Czechoslovakia and the GDR, and May-June 1983, again with Polish, Czechoslovak, and East German forces.) Other types, e.g. ZAPAD, KAVKAZ, BERESINA, NYEMEN, DNESTER, and SEVER, included only Soviet forces, and in the period of 1975-1983 occurred only once or in the case of KAVKAZ, twice. Nothing in the GDR archives suggests that there was ever any element of joint designing of exercise scenarios in the WTO. The supreme command of the WTO was made up entirely of Soviet officers, unlike NATO with its European Deputy SACEUR and European regional commanders; the WTO was created to supplement the control system of the bilateral treaties between Moscow and its satellite states in the first post-war years, not to create a forum for collective decision-making.

These exercises – whether with the actual involvement of forces or as command-post exercises – had very real political functions. While they tended to be labelled ‘secret’ and ‘top secret’, many players were involved, and tended to be quite impressed by them – if not always in a reassuring way. While there is a general proclivity of the true Brit to retire to a pub at the end

⁶ NATO Document DC 6/1, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1949* Vol. IV (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1975, p. 354.

⁷ Interview with German General Wolfgang Altenburg, Alexander Szandar & Diethelm Schröder: “Ein Bruchteil der Atomwaffen genügt”, *Der Spiegel* No. 30 (1989).

of any collective enterprise of a fairly exhausting nature, there was more to the resort to a ‘stiff drink’ after such an exercise than its mere recreational or calorific purpose. Our access to British documents illustrates another phenomenon in keeping with what may be a particular British character trait, namely the resort to gallows humour when a situation gets too bleak or absurd to be bearable otherwise – hence the resort to bun and champagne-cork fights at the end of WINTEX 81, before the traditional withdrawal to a pub.⁸ Outside Whitehall, the reaction was less cynical: membership of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament which had originated in Britain in the late 1950s soared in the early 1980s, and a series of demonstrations took place. Similarly, anti-nuclear movements gained momentum in other European countries, notably in Germany, but also elsewhere.⁹

Generally, participants emerged rattled from NATO’s nuclear exercises. The West Germans discovered upon their admission to NATO in 1954 that extensive nuclear use against allied territory (particularly that nearest to the Warsaw Pact, i.e. West Germany) was part and parcel of prevailing planning: NATO’s CARTE BLANCHE exercise of June 1955 assumed millions of German casualties, as did LION NOIR two years later; in both cases, this information was released to the press.¹⁰ The outcome was not the intended one of reassurance: in Germany, too, an anti-nuclear movement came into being, the membership of which, just as in Britain, would rise and fall as a function of greater or lesser Cold War tensions and greater or lesser likelihood of the Third World War breaking out. After the period of Détente gave way in 1979 to the last peak of the Cold War, disagreements about NATO’s nuclear deterrence posture troubled the German electorate in particular to the point of bringing down the government of Helmut Schmidt in 1982. His Social-Democratic Party, much like Labour in the UK, was systematically split between anti- and pro-nuclear deterrence factions. His government was succeeded by a Conservative-Liberal coalition under Helmut Kohl, which confirmed the decisions taken by Schmidt – most notably his support for the deployment of the ‘Euromissiles’, ground-launched cruise and Pershing II missiles.

Nevertheless, in the following year the WINTEX 83 exercise ran into trouble. For the first time, the exercise ended with debates on possible follow-on use as the scenario did not let the Warsaw Pact agree to an armistice after NATO’s first use of nuclear weapons.¹¹ But in this context, direct communication between Bonn, London and Washington with regard to the use of British and American nuclear weapons (as launched from West German soil, targeted mainly at East German territory) broke down during the exercise; the only remaining forum for consultation was the Defence Planning Committee of NATO, which proved inadequate to settle the differences with a mutually agreeable decision.¹² Communication was particularly important on this occasion, as this was the first time, apparently, that NATO exercised ‘follow-on use’ of nuclear weapons, presuming in the scenario that the WTO onslaught had *not* been stopped by NATO’s *first* use of nuclear weapons. Presumably to avoid further intra-alliance friction, a series of NATO High Level Exercises (HLE) conducted also in member states’ capitals stopped short

⁸ TNA, CAB130/1169, MISC(81)34, Home Office Assessment of 19 March 1981, Doc. No. 34, p.94

⁹ Not France, for particular reasons, see Beatrice Heuser: *Nuclear Mentalities? Strategies and Beliefs in Britain, France and the FRG* (London: Macmillan, 1998), ch. 2.

¹⁰ Hans Henrich: ‘Sozialer Faktor Atombombe’, *Frankfurter Rundschau* (24 Apr. 1957); ‘Frankfurt gegen Atomwaffenversuche’, *Stuttgarter Zeitung* (27 Apr. 1957).

¹¹ West German Ambassador to NATO Wieck to FRG Foreign Office, 11 March 1983, in *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1983 Vol. I 1 Jan.-30 June 1983* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2014), p.334

¹² Notes on post-exercise discussion taken by Schauer, 15 March 1983, *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1983 Vol. I 1 Jan.-30 June 1983* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2014), p. 343

of a similar scenario.¹³ It complicated intra-alliance relations further that Greece, at the time under the Socialist government of PASOK, pulled out of a connected naval exercise in the Mediterranean altogether.¹⁴

The small alliance crisis that was triggered by WINTEX 83 was but the tip of the iceberg of domestic tensions exacerbated by exercises with a civilian defence component. Many individuals outside of Whitehall ministries and the armed forces – traditionally institutions with a culture of extreme secrecy¹⁵ – became involved in defence preparations that were begun in the 1950s at the latest, where they were not simply carried over from the practice of the Second World War. An extensive documentary on these was commissioned by the BBC in the early 1960s, made possible through officially sanctioned access government documents. The result, a film called *The Wargame*, directed by Peter Watson and containing amateur enactments of the events expected and government measures planned in case of nuclear war (which formed the core of ‘civil defence exercises’), was so horrific that the BBC decided not to broadcast the film; it remained available only for private ‘clubs’ to screen until the early 1980s.

As noted, at this point CND, which had declined considerably during the period of détente, burgeoned again. Civil defence exercises became highly problematic, especially as Labour-ruled local councils disagreed profoundly on a host of issues, prominently among them nuclear strategy and linked defence procurement (of ground-launched cruise and Trident ballistic missiles), with Thatcher’s Conservative government in London. The British Civil Defence Exercises SCRUM HALF (1978) and SQUARE LEG (1980) ran into so much opposition that further exercises of the sort were cancelled. Many of those physicians, hospital staff, fire fighters, police and local administrators were too horrified to contemplate scenarios of around 30 million British dead, and refused to ‘play’. Indeed, WINTEX 81 coincided with a civil servants’ strike, which inter alia affected the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Aldermarston in Berkshire, and an estimated 40 per cent of Britain’s non-industrial defence employees did not turn up for work on the day the exercise with its Civil Military Emergency (CIMEX) component started.¹⁶

Quite realistically, therefore, the British versions of the WINTEX scenarios included domestic problems with protests and even violent actions and sabotage by pacifist groups and Communist sympathisers. In WINTEX 81, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was known to dissent from Prime Minister Thatcher’s more pugnacious stance in defence-related matters, was identified as trouble-maker, and again in WINTEX 83, anti-nuclear movements caused trouble for the British authorities. By the time WINTEX 85 was played, rumours that the exercise treated anti-nuclear protesters as traitors had reached members of the CND who drew attention to what they regarded as scandalous assumption, by giving themselves up to police at Scotland Yard (who played along, but without bringing charges).¹⁷

In short, these exercises contained a large element of what in the trade became known as ‘self-deterrence’ or ‘auto-deterrence’. It is impossible to say to what extent allies were reassured by these exercises. They certainly served, on the Western side at least, to heighten the general

¹³ TNA, CAB 134/5021, FCO 46/3051.

¹⁴ <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1350&dat=19830202&id=UnkUAAAAIBAJ&sjid=vAIEA AAAIBAJ&pg=5384,315684&hl=en>

¹⁵ Zarah Steiner: “British and American policy making an open and shut case”

¹⁶ “Civil Service Strike”, (TNA, CAB 134/5021)

¹⁷ ITN/Reuters: “U.K.: NATO countries carry out 'WINTEx '85' exercise”, 27 Feb 1985, http://www.itnsource.com/shotlist//RTV/1985/02/27/BGY601170396/?s=* accessed on 20 II 2016.

perception that nuclear war would be an intolerable experience and had to be avoided, for some at the cost of political surrender to the Communist bloc, 'Better Red than Dead'.

The absence, construction, and fall of Deterrence in the 20th century

As large-scale exercises in previous centuries, extensive NATO and WTO troop or naval exercises also served to signal strength to adversaries. In the case of NATO, this strength was meant exclusively to serve deterrence, i.e. to render more credible NATO's aspiration to fend off any WTO aggression.

Here a brief excursion into the 1930s is required, a period in which the rise and expansion of Nazi Germany famously went unchecked in the absence of any Western alliance or other demonstration of determination and readiness to stand up to further aggression. Petty nationalist rivalries prevented in particular the democracies of Europe – that should have seen each other as natural allies in the face of the threats of Europe's authoritarian states, under Fascism and Communism – from concerting their defence efforts. The German government saw nothing but Western weakness: Britain and France only stood shoulder by shoulder when it came, at the Munich conference of 1938, to persuade a third state, Czechoslovakia, to hand over strategically vital strips of land to Germany, all for the sake of avoiding war. Only a few months later, Germany invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia while Munich Treaty partners Britain and France stood by passively. Upon this, London and Paris finally decided to take a firmly defensive stance, issuing Poland with a guarantee of support in case Germany would pick on it next. But no joint exercises were held to see how such a guarantee could be turned into military action, and not the faintest attempt was made to devise ways in which Poland could be actively supported, other than by a declaration of war. Even that was nothing but a declaration when it was made, shortly after Germany's lightning attack on Poland on 1 September 1939. The total absence of deterrence measures, the extreme hesitancy of the British staff chiefs to prepare for action and their less than half-hearted attempts to win over the USSR as ally against Germany famously caused Hitler to be flabbergasted when he received the British declaration of war. Hitler had clearly not perceived any attempt to deter him, let alone being deterred.

Again, the following months saw virtually no military action on the part of Britain or France – retrospectively called the 'phoney war' or '*drôle de guerre*', this period saw Germany in collusion with the USSR finishing off its Polish prey and consolidating its grip on central Europe. Patiently, the French and British defence establishments waited for the monster to finish feeding, and to turn around for its next attack, on Belgium, France, and the Netherlands. No attempts at deterrence were made.

The Brussels Treaty of 1948 between Britain, France, and the BeNeLux countries that gave birth to the absolute mutual defence commitment of the Western Union (later Western European Union)¹⁸ must be understood as the compensation for this *acte manqué* of forming a Western Alliance in the late 1930s. Upon its creation a little later, NATO was charged with handling all necessary preparations (including of course exercises) for such common defence, but the Washington Treaty on which NATO is based notoriously contains only a watered-down version of the unconditional commitment of the Brussels Treaty to 'afford the Party so attacked

¹⁸ Article 5 of the Modified Brussels Treaty of 1954 (=Art. 4 of the 1948 version) amounted to an unconditional surrender of any limitation on the commitment of all forces to mutual defence, and arguably to a partial surrender of sovereignty. The text has been subsumed into the Lisbon Treaty of the EU in 2010 (Article 42.7) and can be read as constituting a nuclear guarantee on the parts of the nuclear weapons states members of the EU for their allies.

all the military and other aid and assistance in their power, by making the form that the defence will take subject to the discretion of each member state's government.¹⁹

As the Cold War unfolded, a new factor came into play, however: the articulation and wide discussion of the problem often referred to as 'security dilemma'. The German-born refugee from Nazi Germany, John Herz, by then teaching at an American university, coined this expression in 1950:

The heartbreaking plight in which a bipolarized and atom bomb-blessed world finds itself today is but the extreme manifestation of a dilemma with which human societies have had to grapple since the dawn of history. ... Wherever [an] anarchic society has existed ... there has arisen what may be called the "security dilemma" of men, or groups, or their leaders. Groups or individuals living in such a constellation must be, and usually are, concerned about their security from being attacked, subjected, dominated, or annihilated by other groups and individuals. Striving to attain security from such attack, they are driven to acquire more and more power in order to escape the impact of the power of others. This, in turn, renders the others more insecure and compels them to prepare for the worst. Since none can ever feel entirely secure in such a world of competing units, power competition ensues, and the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on.²⁰

In the context of military exercises, this dilemma also applies. It could be described in terms of how to show enough strength to deter an enemy attack, while not letting the enemy fear a preventive attack. In the context of the nuclear age, prevention would mean a surprise attack with nuclear weapons, and in the nuclear age of plenty, when between them, the world's nuclear power owned enough nuclear weapons to destroy all life on earth, this would mean an attack which would wipe out the adversary's population. Exercises with a nuclear element could thus be, not just *de-terrents*, but terror-inspiring to the point of incurring the danger of triggering what they were designed to prevent.

This is precisely what happened in the early 1980s, when a series of actions and counter-movements by the USSR in particular and NATO collectively took the Cold War to its last crisis. At the time, chief nuclear strategists, defence officials and top officers in the NATO member states, most notably Britain and the US, were confident that NATO measures and nuclear exercises would not be misread in the Kremlin and the military leadership of the WTO. There were several reasons for this.

The dangers of the abuse of exercises against the background of the security dilemma were by now widely understood. There were examples of Soviet and WTO use of exercises to prepare military operations, indeed to serve as preparation for military operations: the ŠUMAVA exercise in July 1968 was intended, first, to intimidate the Dubřek government in Prague, before becoming the preparatory stage for the WTO invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.²¹ Therefore, in 1975, the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe

¹⁹ Article 5 of the Washington Treaty (North Atlantic Treaty) reads: "[I]f such an armed attack occurs, *each* of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action *as it deems necessary*, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.' [my emphasis]

²⁰ John Herz: "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma", *World Politics* Vol. 2, No. 2 (1950), p. 157.

²¹ Vojtech Mastny & Malcolm Byrne (eds): *A Cardboard Castle? An Inside History of the Warsaw Pact, 1955-1991* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), Doc. 53, pp. 286-293.

(CSCE) included in its 'Basket 1' Confidence Building Measures, which in turn centred upon the prevention of 'misunderstandings' arising from the other side's military exercises. The main solution adopted was the mutual commitment to provide notification, twenty-one days in advance, of military exercises involving more than 25,000 military personnel taking place on the territory of member states within Europe, and adjoining air space and seas.²² Thus in theory at least, a surprise invasion prepared behind the smokescreen of an exercise should have been ruled out.

Secondly, NATO nuclear powers were trying to show their good faith by reducing, unilaterally, their nuclear weapons in the context of replacing some by more accurately targetable and lower yield missiles. On 12 December 1979, just before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, at their Montebello meeting, NATO ministers published their intention to reduce the collective NATO nuclear arsenal by 1000 warheads, each hugely more powerful than those exploded in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They would be replaced by 572 more precisely targetable Pershing II and Cruise missiles, better known at the time as 'Euromissiles' as they would be stations on the territory of European member states of NATO, a net reduction in fire power. (In 1983, NATO would decide on the removal of another 1400 warheads.)

Thirdly, apart from the Soviet navy tracking NATO maritime exercises with great ease, in the elaborate games of Cold War espionage, British intelligence at least was aware that there were spies within NATO, and indeed counted on them passing on information on NATO exercises to the USSR in almost 'real time'.²³ Such spies included, for example, the East German 'Michelle', who worked in NATO's International Staff from 1967 until 1979. According to the East German intelligence officer Heinz Busch, 'Michelle' obtained 'the entire documentation on NATO's strategic command-staff exercise "HILEX 7" [of 1977], ... all proposals and concepts for the defense ministers' meeting[s] (DPC and NPG²⁴), ... [and] extensive correspondence between NATO entities and national leaderships about the strategic staff exercise WINTEX-CIMEC [sic] 79, ... extensive, almost complete documentation on the strategic staff exercises WINTEX 77 and HILEX 8...'.²⁵

Other spies included West German Rainer Rupp, a.k.a. Topas, who while working as an official in NATO's International Staff in Brussels from 1977-1989 passed documents up to the highest levels of classification to the Soviet Union, or Ingrid Garbe, also at NATO HQ, or Elke Falk, whose work in the German Federal Chancery gave her access to further WINTEX documents.²⁶ Indeed, the Luxembourg diplomat Guy de Muiser, ambassador to Moscow from 1981 to 1983 and Luxembourg's permanent representative to NATO from 1986, was in 1990 relieved of his post and deprived of his security clearance after being accused of having passed classified NATO information to a Soviet contact.²⁷

²² <http://www.state.gov/t/isn/4725.htm> for a summary of CSCE Basket 1 Confidence and Security Building Measures. Accessed on 8 IV 2016.

²³ Interview with Sir David Oman, formerly defence official, London, 1 June 2015.

²⁴ Defence Planning Committee and Nuclear Planning Group

²⁵ Excerpts of Busch's testimony in Mastny & Byrne: *A Cardboard Castle?*, Doc. 80, p. 404f.

²⁶ When I worked at NATO HQ in 1997/98, I had access to a MC 161 report of the early 1980s, and the last person who had consulted ('signed for') this secret document before me was Rainer Rupp. On Elke Falk, see Marianne Quoirin: "Romeo und Elke - Codewort 'Liebe': Die klassische Arbeitsweise der Geheimdienste", *Die Zeit* (2 June 1989).

²⁷ <http://www.upi.com/Archives/1990/05/09/NATO-ambassador-from-Luxembourg-dismissed-for-security-breach/6963642225600/> accessed on 21 Feb 2016.

An additional twist in these exercises was that, to enhance their credibility and avoid the suspicion on the part of the WTO leadership that they were just a matter of posturing, the nuclear use phase of the exercise tended to be played as ‘top secret’ and in the UK, ‘UK eyes only’. This did not prevent articles from regularly appearing, for example, in the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, stating that nuclear use had been ‘played’ and sometimes giving even more details, usually accurate.

As to the main content of the nuclear use phase of WINTEX (and other HILEX High Level exercises), they would stress every time that NATO would resort to the use of nuclear weapons when WTO incursions could no longer be fought off with conventional forces, but that NATO’s rationale in doing so (along the definitions of the PPGs of 1969 and the GPGs of 1986) was not to attempt to *defeat* the Warsaw Pact, but to shock its leadership into agreeing on a cease-fire. The aim was thus war termination, or the restoration of deterrence in wartime, not ‘war fighting’ (defined as aiming for military advantage through nuclear use), a choice that was also reflected in targeting.²⁸ It was thought that this would become clear to the Soviet and WTO leadership through their intelligence agents.

None of this had the full hoped-for effects or mutual reassurance, however. First, WTO exercises continued to assume that *NATO* would use an exercise – especially WINTEX – as a smokescreen for an invasion of *WTO* territory, an assumption that was made in increasingly in *WTO* exercises since the 1970s.²⁹ It was also made in the scenario of the *WTO* exercise SOYUS 1983, for example, the year of greatest danger and misunderstanding in that last crisis of the Cold War.³⁰ Secondly, the warhead reductions on the part of *NATO* had no positive effects whatsoever, and were drowned entirely by the Eastern bloc’s hysterical and alarmist propaganda denouncing the deployment of the Euromissiles as though these were about to transform the Cold War fundamentally and allow *NATO* to launch a surprise attack against the Warsaw Pact.³¹ And thirdly, while there is evidence from the East German archives that *NATO* documents were passed around among the *WTO*’s intelligence services, and were correctly interpreted as there as indicating nothing but defensive intentions, *WTO* leaders and intelligence agencies ‘acted, even among themselves, on the assumption that it served as a cover-up for a possible surprise nuclear strike, thus justifying their own offensive strategy on ideological rather than practical grounds.’ in the words of historian Bernd Schäfer.³² After two years of extreme tension surrounding the Solidarność crisis in Poland (in which *WTO* exercises played an important role³³) and the

²⁸ WINTEX-CIMEX 81 in TNA, CAB 130/1169 and CAB 164/1159; WINTEX-CIMEX 83, in CAB 130/1249. .

²⁹ See the scenario of ZAPAD 77, in Mastny & Byrne: *A Cardboard Castle?* Doc. 406 and comments, p.406f.

³⁰ Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BAMA), VA-01, 39528, pp. 76-77, Information given on 1 July 1983 to the GDR’s National Defence Council about the exercise. See also: Beatrice Heuser: ‘The Soviet response to the Euromissile crisis, 1982-83’, in Leopoldo Nuti (ed.): *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: From Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 137-149, and Dimitry Adamsky: ‘The 1983 Nuclear Crisis – Lessons for Deterrence Theory and Practice’ in *Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 36 No. 1 (2013), pp. 4-41.

³¹ See for example Michael Ploetz: *Ferngelenkte Friedensbewegung? DDR und UdSSR im Kampf gegen den NATO-Doppelbeschluss* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004)

³² <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/east-german-spying-reveals-nato-war-plans>, accessed on 20 II 2016.

³³ The Polish General Jaruzelski took power insinuating that the USSR would otherwise have used an extended *WTO* exercise to invade Poland; this claim is challenged by a record of a Soviet Politburo

wrangling about the Euromissiles, 1983 was probably the year of greatest danger in the Cold War since the Cuban Missile Crisis. Early in the year, the deployment of the Cruise and Pershing II missiles began in earnest, followed by a sequel of exercises beginning with the NATO-wide command post exercise WINTEX 83, then SOYUZ 83, a series of local exercises involving troop movements, the shoot-down of the Korean Airliner 007 on 1 September 1983 when Soviet pilots mistook it for a military aircraft trespassing into Soviet airspace, and finally NATO's ABLE ARCHER command post exercise in November, which seems to have been interpreted temporarily among the NATO leadership as the actual initiation of a surprise attack. This story is now well documented and well known, and we can assume that there is a widespread determination among NATO member state governments not to allow such a misunderstanding to happen again.³⁴

High Level Exercises since 1989

With the end demise of the WTO and the USSR, military exercises of the FALLEX, WINTEX, and large-scale WTO or Soviet-only type ceased for a while on both sides. In NATO, WINTEX gave way to CMX, Civil-Military Exercises, held usually in February, which were used, inter alia, to prepare for eventualities such as deployment in the Balkans and Afghanistan [check!]. CMX exercises tended to revolve around tackling political problems in reaching Alliance consensus on courses of action to take before the real decision-making process was engaged.³⁵ No large-scale military exercises on the scale of FALLEX have been held since the end of the Cold War, first as there seemed no need for them any longer after the dissolution of Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union, and later, in order not to bring on a return of the Cold War.

By contrast, Russian large-scale military exercises – with Belarus or, more often, without allies – have resumed in 1999, leading to complaints in the West about a NATO-Russia military exercise gap.³⁶ By 2002 these were explained in terms of a NATO threat.³⁷ 2008 saw important reforms in the Russian defence sector, and along with these, exercises assumed a new dynamism. In July 2008, KAVKAZ 08 contained a scenario which was then put into practice with the short war on Georgia in August 2008. The war itself was explained in part as a reaction to a Georgian-Ukrainian-Azeri-cum-US exercise Immediate Response 2008, which in reality was supposed to prepare forces of the three Central Asian republics for deployment in Afghanistan. Here we have a strong example of how, in recent times, exercises on both sides were destabilising. Not surprisingly, Georgia reacted very nervously when plans for the Russian exercise KAVKAZ 12 – to be held without foreign observers as it involved fewer than 25 000-personnel, a figure above which foreign observers have to be invited according to OSCE rules – were announced. (The

meeting indicating there was no Soviet plan for invasion, see Mastny & Byrne: *A Cardboard Castle?* Doc. 94, pp. 456-461

³⁴ See for example Beatrice Heuser: 'The Soviet response to the Euromissile crisis, 1982-83', in Leopoldo Nuti (ed): *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: From Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 137-149.

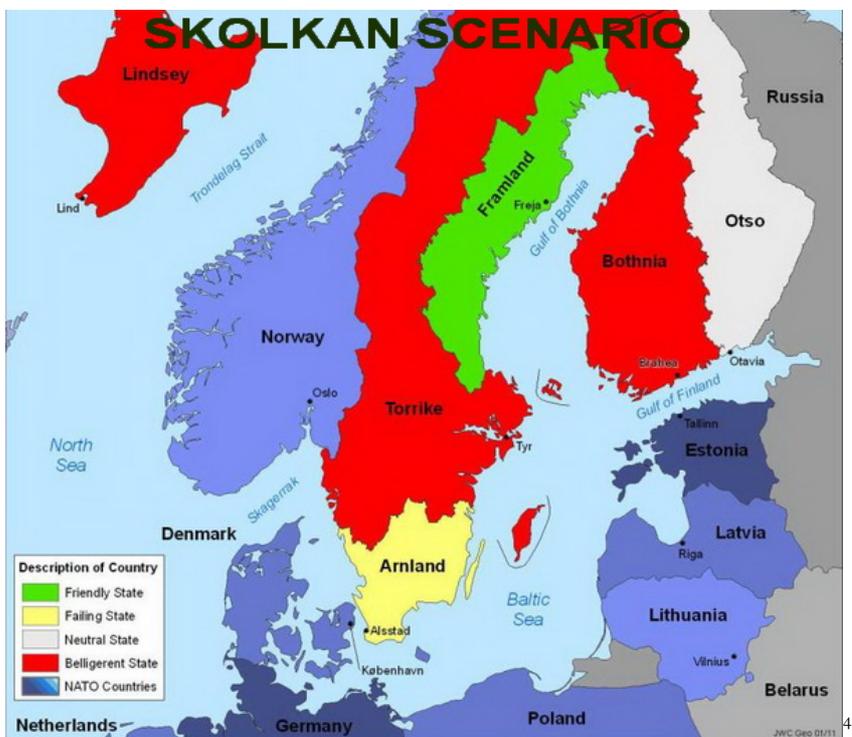
³⁵ This was at any rate the case for CMX 1998 which largely turned on a possibility of intervention in Kosovo.

³⁶ "Russia resumes big military exercises", in *EIR: Executive intelligence review*, Vol 26; No 27, (1999), p. 70; Ian J. Brzezinski & Nicholas Varangis: "The NATO-Russia Exercise Gap", *Atlantic Council* (23 Feb. 2015).

³⁷ "Russian, Belarussian Military Believe Their Countries Are Real Targets of Big NATO Exercises Next Door", *The current digest of the post-Soviet press* Vol 54, Pt 10, (2002), p. 17.

exercise proceeded to take place.³⁸) In March and August 2014 Russia held military exercises along the frontier with Ukraine, exercises that served to bring Russian forces into theatre (in the former case also to distract attention from the move to annex Crimea).³⁹

It was not just the territory of former Soviet republics that was now in no-man's land between East and West, but also actual NATO territory that played a role in Russian military exercises. The scenarios of ZAPAD in 2009 and 2013 involved a Russian intervention under 'responsibility to protect' Russophone minorities against an oppressive Baltic state government. In reaction to this, to the 2007 Russian cyberattack on Estonia, and the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 (which again included elements of Russian cyberwarfare to disrupt Georgian defences) NATO's Joint Warfare Centre from 2011 developed a series of SKOLKAN exercises. These had scenarios including naval operations turning on the defence of the Baltic States with the support of Partnership-for-Peace NATO partners (Sweden and Finland), but with fictional names for the entities (Bothnia, Torrike, Lindsey, Armland, Framland, and Otso) rather than real names. NATO previously held CERASIA exercises with a greater humanitarian component and vague geographical frameworks. By contrast, 'Skolkan has shifted the intent of training from Humanitarian Assistance at strategic distances, to a perceived threat and potential conflict in NATO's backyard.'⁴⁰



³⁸ Johan Norberg: *Training to Fight: Russia's Major Military Exercises 2011-2014* (Stockholm: FOI, 2015), p. 30f.

³⁹ Putin admitted that Russian forces had operated in Ukraine in the TV documentary *Crimea. The Way Home*. Documentary by Andrey Kondrashev, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t42-71RpRgI> accessed on 23 Feb 2016.

⁴⁰ Ronel Reynes: "Skolkan, Scandinavia's Alter Ego", *Three Swords* No. 21 (2011), pp. 5-8, <http://www.jwc.nato.int/images/stories/threeswords/skolkan.pdf>, accessed on 21 Feb 2016

⁴¹ https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=skolkan&espv=2&biw=1366&bih=667&tbm=isch&imgil=ER-Uh8JO1nKQpM%253A%253BavfZHSpzO2ej_M%253Bhttp%25253A%25252F%25252Fwww.gianluacarossi.it%25252Fpost%25252F2014%25252Flesercitazione-eagle-joker-14-

Further exercises in the area included STEADFAST JAZZ (SFJZ) 2013 alongside a French exercise (BRILLIANT LEDGER), BALTIC HOST 2013, SABER STRIKE 2015 (with Lithuania), and the multinational mainly naval exercise BALTOPS 2015 including units from the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland, Sweden, Georgia and the UK. To my knowledge, none of them contained a nuclear deterrence element. This is an intelligible precaution to prevent any false impression of aggressive intention. Aiming to deter aggression, these exercises thus show only that NATO could take effective measures to defend also the territory of the new NATO member states.

Russia is showing less hesitation to use nuclear weapons in its exercises. It held an air exercise on 29 March 2013 that simulated an attack on a Swedish island with two nuclear-capable TU22 Backfire bombers.⁴² Russian nuclear doctrine also includes the use of ‘tactical’ nuclear weapons – for the purpose of war termination – in contexts that could not be called major war..

Perhaps it is with the intention not to let misunderstandings like those of the early 1980s that a group of retired British diplomats, military officers and a peer⁴³ agreed to go along with a BBC proposal to play an enactment of a WINTEX -type scenario, projected to the present, and building on the Russian ZAPAD scenarios of 2009 and 2013 with Russian military intervention to protect Russophone minorities in the Baltic States.⁴⁴ Broadcast in the UK on 4 February 2016, the programme ‘World War Three: Inside the War Room’ begins with a scenario modelled largely on events in Ukraine in 2014: Russophone citizens demand regional independence in the South-Eastern part of Latvia, around the town of Daugavpils; forces thought to be Russian military cross the border from Russia in support of the Russophone insurgents. Initially the scenario is fairly realistic, and in some conformity with SFJZ, BALTIC HOST, SABER STRIKE and BALTOPS. It is explained at the beginning of the film that real footage from past events elsewhere is mixed with enactments of the Latvian scenario using actors, and that the simulation of the decision making inside the war room – clearly inspired by documents of WINTEX exercises of the early 1980s now available in the British National Archives, on which the BBC has already made a radio re-enactment programme⁴⁵ – would normally be ‘Top Secret’.⁴⁶

[ej14%25252F&source=iu&pf=m&fir=ER-Uh8JO1nKQpM%253A%252CavfZHSpzO2ej_M%252C_&usg=__ZPDDWwN6F2nWCPan9oBCZTqnBzE%3D&ved=0ahUKEwjn0PaR0oJLAhVL7BQKHUG8B1oQyjcIOW&ei=kpDJVue_F8vYU8H4ntAF#imgrc=ER-Uh8JO1nKQpM%3A](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-33888888) accessed on 21 Feb 2016.

⁴² “Russian Tu-22M Backfire bombers escorted by Su-27 Flankers simulate night attack on Sweden.” *The Aviationist* (22 April 2013), <http://theaviationist.com/2013/04/22/backfire-sweden/> accessed on 21 Feb 2016.

⁴³ Including diplomat and ex-Chair of Whitehall’s Joint Intelligence Committee Baroness Pauline Neville-Jones, Sir Christopher Meyer (formerly British Ambassador to the US), Admiral Lord West (formerly First Sea Lord, i.e. Chief of the UK Naval Staff), General Richard Shirreff (Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe, 2011-2014), Baroness Falkner (Liberal Democrat Foreign Affairs Spokeswoman), Lord Arbuthnot (formerly Chair of the Defence Select Committee), a former MoD Director of Communications (Oona Muirhead), a former British ambassador to Russia (Sir Tony Brenton), a former UK ambassador to Latvia, and a former specialist advisor on the UK’s national security strategy (Dr Ian Kearns)

⁴⁴ A less impressive part-fictional re-enactment had also been broadcast on 11 Aug 2015 named “War Book” on BBC Four, see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b065ylyy>, but this included at the end resort to nuclear use.

⁴⁵ BBC Radio 4 Saturday Drama: “Winter Exercise”, broadcast on 14 Dec 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03lkmpy> accessed on 15 Dec 2013.

⁴⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b06zw32h/this-world-world-war-three-inside-the-war-room> accessed on 21 Feb 2016.

Procedures inside the ‘War Room’ are modelled on the decision making in the British Cabinet, with video links to NATO Headquarters (from where the British ambassador to NATO reports), Washington, Berlin (but not Paris or – arguably an important omission – Latvia’s government in Riga).

Significant features of this wargame docudrama include the proposal by one player that NATO states could launch a cyber-attack on Russia (rejected by his colleagues who emphasise that NATO is a defensive alliance), the question of whether a (conventional) missile from a Russian missile site attack on a NATO helicopter in Latvian airspace should be countered by an attack on the launch battery on Russian territory (rejected by the group as too aggressive), and the willingness only of self-selective NATO member states (‘a coalition of the willing’) to act to what now must be seen as an Article 5 issue (attack on one or all). Moreover, another player expressed doubts as to the effectiveness of any multinational unit in this context, and his preference to pursue the limited aims of forcing any foreign combatants out of Latvian territory with a single-national contingent (preferably American; so much for the high expectations raised by NATO’s Welsh summit in the autumn of 2014 which emphasised efforts to be made to strengthen and render more effective multinational contingents). NATO is falling apart, the scenario suggests, with the USA, Britain, France, the Scandinavians, the Baltic States and Poland willing to fight, and the Southern Europeans and Germany unwilling to resort to military measures.

Then the scenario became deliberately escalatory. As US and British ships in the Baltic approach Russian ships, a Russian naval commander launches a ‘tactical’ nuclear weapon against the former destroying a British and an American ship. President Putin (actually named as such in the exercise) sends an (utterly unrealistic) message claiming that this had occurred without his authorisation, and asking NATO not to escalate. The group agrees not to, and emphasises the importance of the UK using its influence to stop America from acting otherwise. The scenario authors, however, keen to explore the nuclear dimension further, let the USA respond with nuclear weapons.

The final part of the film explores the decision-making surrounding the question whether the participants would instruct Britain’s submarines equipped with Trident missiles to launch these against Russia (against Moscow? Against Russian nuclear installations still containing missiles or nuclear-capable aircraft, even though those about to strike the UK would already have taken off?) if it were confirmed that Russia was about to launch or had launched missiles to destroy London. This is not an element that would have been played in a WINTEX or HLX scenario, which tended to assume that World War III could be stopped by first or at the latest by follow-on use of nuclear weapons by NATO. Again, crucially, the majority of the exercise group in the BBC documentary voted against, and one of the minority voting for use specified that this should be only against military installations – it would be pointless to massacre millions of Russians now, as the only reason for having nuclear weapons, thus the majority consensus by far, was to *deter* Russian nuclear use, not to *punish* it retrospectively.⁴⁷ This part of the programme seems not to have been lost on Russian spectators: apparently the TV Channel *Zvezda*, run by

⁴⁷ Already the 1978 government-commissioned Duff-Mason Report of on the future of the British deterrent argued that, once the USSR had launched weapons against the UK, any strategic retaliation by the UK would represent “an act of rage and revenge ... there can be no certainty that a Government would take a deliberate decision to launch this act involving the killing of large numbers of enemy civilians but serving no rational purpose”. see <http://tridentploughshares.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Replacing-Polaris.pdf> accessed on 6 III 2016. The report itself is in the UK National Archives, DEFE 19/275. I am grateful to Dr Kristan Stoddart for having brought this to my attention.

Russia's ministry of defence, announced it with the headline: 'Britain will not reply to Russia's nuclear strike.'⁴⁸

This is not the first time we have key Westerners say they would not use nuclear weapons. Former French President Giscard d'Estaing admitted in his retirement that he would never have authorised nuclear use,⁴⁹ but arguably, such a retrospective claim does not invalidate the existence of deterrence under his presidency or that of any former or subsequent president. It is true that the letters written by British Prime Ministers to the captains of the Trident-missile carrying submarines are handwritten by them, no copy is kept, and the letters are destroyed after their retirement from office. But educated guesses have suggested that at least one or two prime ministers would have given instructions *not* to launch the British strategic missiles against Russian cities once it is clear that deterrence has failed and London is in all likelihood destroyed.⁵⁰ Again, such retrospective speculation does not rule out that a present or future prime minister would give quite different instructions.

The matter is of course different with British Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn's statement that *if elected* Prime Minister, he would never use nuclear weapons.⁵¹ As the 'War Room' programme, like many war games previously conducted by RAND and the US Naval War College, is likely to reflect current opinion among the British defence elite, it could be seen as preparing the way for two things: the unilateral divestment by Britain of its nuclear force, and/or its withdrawal from the unconditional commitment to the defence of EU members now enshrined in Article 42.7 of the Lisbon Treaty, if Britain leaves the EU.

Coming down so firmly on the side of caution and fear of escalation, the BBC war game arguably spells out end of British nuclear deterrence; by making their deliberations public, the former officials on screen leave no lingering threat that derives its credibility from something left to chance.⁵² This would leave only Paris as further centre of decision-making on nuclear use in NATO, and having such additional centres had long been seen as strengthening NATO deterrence.⁵³

Where does this leave deterrence? Arguably, while not quite back in the situation of the 1930s – there is no sign that the British wargamers in the BBC docudrama of February 2016 were willing to leave Latvia to its fate, although Germany and the southern NATO members are cast in the role of Appeasers – we are facing a new situation: nuclear deterrence may not play much of a role in scenarios in which new NATO allies in the East are attacked, and the feeling is

⁴⁸ Annabelle Chapman: "The BBC's 'Inside the War Room' should never have been made", *Prospect Magazine* (3 Feb 2016).

⁴⁹ Valéry Giscard d'Estaing: *Le pouvoir et la vie II L'Affrontement* (Paris: Cie. 12, 1991), 206-10; also General Guy Méry: 'Une armée pour quoi faire et comment?', *Revue Défense Nationale* Vol. 32 (VI/1976), p. 14.

⁵⁰ Peter Hennessy: *The Secret State: Preparing for the Worst, 1945-2010* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2010), p. 209.

⁵¹ "Jeremy Corbyn: I would never use nuclear weapons if I were PM", *The Guardian* (30 Sept 2015).

⁵² US Strategist Thomas Schelling coined the expression of the 'threat that leaves something to chance', see *The Strategy of Conflict* (1980).

⁵³ 'The threat that leaves something to chance' was long thought to be one component of deterrence, integrated into NATO strategy as the strengthening effect on deterrence of the existence of two further centres of nuclear decision-making (Paris and London) besides Washington, see North Atlantic Council, 'Declaration on Atlantic Relations', Ottawa, 19 June 1974, The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation - Facts and Figures (Brussels, 11th ed. 1989), pp. 405-407.

clearly around (expressed in the BBC wargame by one player) that it would be madness to risk World War III for a nation of two million, equalling no more than ‘a few London boroughs’. From here it is not a very large step to saying Latvia is ‘a far-away country of which we know nothing’ (Chamberlain in 1938), prompting complaints that the film ‘should never have been made’.⁵⁴

Deterrence is not just a matter of willingness to stand up to a threat, but also of the perception of that threat. Much like Germany in the mid-1930s, Russia is not *felt* to be a threat in countries far from its borders. While Soviet Communism with its network of fifth columns in other countries, coupled with Soviet nuclear weapons and Warsaw Pact forces, could be seen from Vancouver to Madrid to Ankara as a clear and present danger, shorn of the WTO and of the ideological dimension, Russia’s behaviour is of concern mainly to its immediate neighbours. That this is not the only factor in the function is clear from the geographic anomaly that the present British government presents itself as more hostile to Putin than others (denouncing Russia as ‘aggressive, authoritarian and nationalist’⁵⁵ in its latest defence white paper), and that the USA still sees Russia as a rival.

Either way, one could argue that with this wargame docudrama, publicly broadcast although ostensibly reflecting what would go on behind closed doors, we are entering a new configuration of international security relations in which deterrence, at any rate nuclear deterrence, is receding. This means that the delicate balance of terror is tipping away from any direct nuclear escalation scenario, but towards scenarios in which new NATO members could suffer the fate of Ukraine, while allies do little to prevent this.

At least what one can say is that the West can by no stretch of the imagination be coming across as provocative or intimidating with its exercises, which are truly at best examples of procedure testing and (rather feeble) deterrence. All one can hope in the current situation will not lead to misunderstandings and miscalculations leading to unintended developments that could get out of hands. It was thus good news that in February 2016, against a background of a significant growth in numbers of Russian snap exercises,⁵⁶ Russia voluntarily notified the OSCE of one such exercise (by definition normally unannounced).⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Annabelle Chapman: “The BBC’s ‘Inside the War Room’ should never have been made”, *Prospect Magazine* (3 Feb 2016).

⁵⁵ See the H.M.Government: *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review* (2015), 3.19-3.22, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478933/52309_Cm_9161_NSS_SD_Review_web_only.pdf accessed on 21 Feb 2016.

⁵⁶ For figures to 2014, see Norberg: *Training to Fight*.

⁵⁷ <http://sputniknews.com/russia/20160208/1034413924/osce-drills-notification.html> accessed on 8 IV 2016.