

Prologue

Starting this analysis with Flight HM17 of Malaysian Airlines shows how frail peace can be. How cruel war can be. If any doubt existed whether the plane was accidentally shot down, then that doubt now disappeared the last few weeks as we look at how the warring parties dealt with the victims, their possessions, contempt for the dead, contempt for them left behind.

Ukrain People living in peace in European environment which was their own choice to live in this freedom are now living suddenly in a 'World of Warcraft', except that it is no game. An atmosphere of relaxation and closeness, respect, friendship and reunification that came to exist after the Berlin Wall was fallen abruptly ended when Russia captured The Crimea, and invaded Ukrain.

Death and ruination was deposited on Ukraine and fear and uncertainty reign now in many countries that were formerly under the Russian sphere of influence, as well as in the other Western countries.

The driving force behind this violence seems to be called Putin, his actions caused so many victims already now, war victims, civilians. On July 17th Boeing 777-200ER from Malaysia Airlines was hit by a deliberately fired fragmentation missile and crashed in the eastern Ukrainian village Grabove. No survivors. It was literal raining mutilated victims, families, men, women, children, all of them were in a good mood due to vacation or family visits, seconds before the impact of the so called 'Grizzly' missile. By exploding it's fragmented content perforated the plane, igniting the fuel and destroying all systems in a split second. Cold comfort can be found for victims, family and friends that most probably the victims almost instantly lost consciousness by the impact at this altitude and did not realize anymore what happened.

If this war hadn't started, all of them of MH17 would probably have landed safely.



NOTHING FOR NOTHING, EUROPEAN MILITARY STATUS AND THREATS.

Who has seen and followed television the past few months how policies of major countries like Russia can upset the balance in full in another country must have ever scratched himself behind the ears. Ukraine though was still a large country? Yet Ukrain also had a large force in the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States under Boris Yeltsin? True, although not as large as the army of Russia, but certainly still formidable, and certainly not one that you think it would be possible to destabilize it and confiscate a large part of this land under Russian influence. What has happened over the years that it seems a toothless tiger now and seems to have descended to... yes to what? What lesson can we learn now from the same mistakes that are made? And what caused these mistakes?

A STRONG ARMY IS A CHOICE

On paper, when Russia and Ukrain split up the Ukrain had sufficient units and material in principle, the percentage that was operational and could be used seemed far enough. Though unguarded erosion and fast developments on an unexpected area can demolish a considered stable situation fast it so appears. And this goes for not only Ukrain, but also in fact for all (European) countries. For instance keeping up a fleet costs money, a budget should be created and governments then make choices. A strong army costs money as well and the need is to go for that. There is the need in peacetime, (looking at several unstable war-zones in the world) but certainly when a new threat suddenly pops-up. This choice has a

direct relationship to the spiral of violence in which a country or area of such land is located. For a country like Israel it is obvious, they will always have a strong army. For the first time since 'ages' Russia spends more money on its defense as the United States of America. It may also be that the ambition of a head of state plays a role such as in Turkey and then it helps greatly if the market conditions in such a country are on the rise so easy monetary resources can be mobilized. Nowadays, the economy has much more become a weapon. We cannot maintain our defense capabilities if we recline and keep on economizing on every tool that is called defense, that happened to the Ukraine. But actually also large parts of western Europe were hit by the crisis that emerged in 2008. It immediately made politicians cut on defense budgets, almost up til there was nothing to cut anymore. The Dutch also sold out their groundforce capability largely by selling the Leopard-II tanks. Yes, they are specialized in 'Airpower' but this comprises specific chirurgic actions which can be applied in various areas of crisis. It went hand in hand with a doctrine that was related with the most important military power that had to be delivered. This was also connected to multinational 'expeditionary' missions sometimes far from the homeland that had to be done. It may play a role that all cooperating countries act more or less together and each individual never had a serious ultimate responsibility on its own, so shared responsibility then. Also it was never the case speaking about threats to the homeland directly. Attention can also fall back when there is no direct enemy waiting. In such a case you can not have the large sums for defense that are in fact required and necessary, because of the public opinion.

That would be received as reckless and unnecessary expenditure. In some countries that is called for years already by people from the Defence organizations, but it is labeled as a self-interest and the Secretary of Defense shall be returned with a 'job' that exists to continue to prune on material and personnel in an as responsible way as possible. One could think it truly seems as if politicians do not realize what continuous skinning means. Probably the idea arose that we live in a time of relaxation with only local military conflicts and therefore then defense money can be spent on other things. 'There is no critical situation on your own borders so... let us relax. And yes, there may be humanitarian reasons to cut costs, such as a continuous stream of refugees floating in your country which balance is extremely expensive. Lookin again at the Dutch, a country with already 16 million inhabitants, recently it received some 1000 persons a week, momentarily a few less. All have to be fed, taken care of housing, health-care, work where there is not enough work for about 700.000 people. Pity that it also entails a lot of crime, and let's not talk about the Italians with their 'Lampedusa-gate' problems. Finally we have 'Brussels', that urges us to cut, which is imposed on us while a country like Russia rebuilds its defense rapidly. European and national politics cannot seem to see the need to stop these processes and to achieve a turnaround in cuts and spending, and try to keep up paying the enormous amounts of money to 'Brussels', it works as the law of communicating barrels. These barrels also have several leakages that we won't discuss now and here.

DEFENSE OF GAS YIELD

Man is tempted once one is at the peak of economic success to think that this will always be so, but is this the fact ? Make no mistake which was made in the past often enough, remember the collapse of Roman Empire. Yes, it's true, we lived in friendship with Russia (our traditional enemy) under Yeltsin and Clinton and the cold war had ended. Large stocks of military equipment suddenly became over-completely. This was never foreseen. How easy is it to be overtaken - no matter how well you think ahead - by the facts and developments that happen in this very present. One thing is a logical inference. It is easier to dispose of things and dismantle for which only a short time is needed, then build the new technology which takes years. It would be wise to show more vision in this and start from the own position. Russia fell back sharply under Yeltsin, but that situation is left behind in history. A strategist would say you should also change the doctrine. We considered Russia as a friendly nation and we thought a situation of détente gave us the idea that Europe and Russia stood side by side more or less, in spite of the difference in language.

But the personal ambition of their current leader Vladimir Putin does not account European interests nor those of Russia, we blindly must follow his ambitions. This is no war rhetoric, but it painfully exposes how our state is perceived. Our military strength is certainly considered by Russia before a big mouth is given. Russia is well aware of its current military power. There has been purposefully building in recent years, while budgets in our region were concised. Thanks to fortunate gas revenues of Russia (including the recent 30-year contract with China) defense budgets can be paid now and in the future. Even more important precisely is the economic factor as the great dependence of Europe on gas supplied by Russia. Putin approaches the European countries directive act without military means, threathning to close the gaspipe and though it has only the appearance that you could do that is enough.

SHOWING FORCE

Recently aircraft of the Russian 'long-range aviation' regularly enter or fly near to several European airspaces again while this was not the fact during many years. President Putin initiated this again since it stopped after the end of the Cold War. This fact sells for its own public as a way to convert Russia on the map again. The greatness of Russia is the motto. This needs to be restored and that is felt as a duty. Is there more going on here as just the feeling to count? It is difficult to estimate where ambitions can lead to. How many frustrations there are at the root and how many people you get along in any adventures? Recent developments in Ukraine show that adventure started quickly, it is more than a test case and Russia is not the only one. On the other side of the world China is pushing hard as well and actually the whole of Asia is being increasingly militarized. Obvious this will also be marked by the United States and keep them busy. The U.S. conventional strength umbrella over Europe could possibly become increasingly thinner.

KEEP UP YOUR OWN PANTS

It is time for Europe to maintain their own pants. Unlike in Ukraine, where in addition to depleted resources also a lack of training units obviously undermines the preparedness, training in Europe is at good level. Organizing major military exercises is a continuous ongoing process. It is well scored on 'interoperability' which is to say that we understand each other's systems and have learned to work well together. A few examples: Frisian Flag and EART in The Netherlands, Joint Warrior in the United Kingdom, Green Blade Belgium, Hot Blade Portugal, DACT Spain and many more. Italy and Greece participated recently in the exercise Blue-Flag in Israel. There are some good developments, by name European Defense Agency (EDA) that conducts several complicated training programs on a variety of subjects and personnel.

Only numerically we don't keep up with the developments in Russia, and also the country has been evolving a superior weapon (Pak-Fa, their own JSF) to bring the country in balance or even preponderance. Furthermore some Western European countries got rid of vital systems causing that weakness arises. NATO needs maritime patrol aircraft, as stated the Dutch sold all their Orions and the UK Harrier fleet at sea has been dismantled in anticipation of an aircraft carrier that may host Lightning-II (JSF) aircraft while these aircraft will not be operational the coming time. They are sold but simply not yet 100% developed and ready to fly their missions, while the techniques are unique we must admit by the way. Units are also often long from home and engaged in distant multi-national operations. This has recently led to six Russian navy ships including the nuclear powered flagship 'Pyotr Veliky' and the aircraft carrier 'Kutnetzov' with advanced aircraft other than through the usual route in the Atlantic now "just" run by the Dutch influence regions through the channel, and there really was no preparedness to accompany this well. The Dutch had already sold their P-3C Orions in earlier days, so some help was asked by the British who sent a ship to keep an eye around.

We can expect more often this kind of 'surprises' while Russia laughs secretly. With these kinds of provocations Russia exposes our weakness, but this may just lead to corrective actions, and you can already see that more support is arising for a common European energy policy. It is unacceptable even under the current conditions to be depending on Putin's erratic Russian policy. A joint European army is not yet in design. There have been some initiatives in the military field as a joint command of transport aircraft on European level, although at the same time it concerns also cost efficiency and is therefore also easily realized. Still the situation is not critical, not even while The Crimean is occupied and the eastern part of Ukraine calls itself 'The independent state of Donetsk'. Though... just for argument sake suppose Putin repeats the trick in one of the Baltic states, such an act would turn around the situation 180 degrees and would be seen as an attack where NATO would have to react. It was agreed in 2006 that we try to get as each EU-member 2% of GDP (gross domestic product) on defense and accommodate the ever present strong dependence of the United States in the context of common European initiatives. Only a few member states have responded, many achieve less. A joint European army is only then possible and to be realized if money is pumped in this project. EDA however concludes that many many hurdles are to be taken.

DANGER IN THE EAST

The weak links are the NATO Member States in the east. Not only are they close to Russia, but Putin also considers them as lost provinces with large Russian-speaking minorities. An action as in Crimea can easily cause chain reactions. Make no mistake, these countries themselves choose to join the European Union and NATO in a democratic way. The countries feel at ease as NATO exercises in their

area take place in Poland as often happens. For the Baltic States it is not beyond a continuous 'air policing'. From September this year, four Dutch F-16s are supporting and stationed at Malbork in Poland to additional support including the Baltic States, who have no fighters. Alternately various NATO countries will provide some support this way. It is quite unpredictable what Putin is up to. Recently (August) he stationed 12.000 men near the border with Ukraine, the number of arms is increasing and the American general Breedlove stated: "We see that the materials are moved from the central military district in Russia to the area around Rostov. There they are collected, trained and moved towards the border. We also see them beyond the border " Valentin Nalivaichenko, the head of the Ukrainian security service SBU, claims that Russia transports so called 'Grad rocket launchers' the border with Ukraine, which does not serve military training but it resembles military aggression. Russia currently has about 25 divisions in what they call the 'Western Military Theatre' 'while that was five times as much in the cold war period. The West has a lot bigger territory and more Member States and soldiers, so in that way a better startingpoint. Yet the training nature of the Russians as in the exercise Zapad 2013 seemed increasingly anti-NATO. Along with Belarus they trained in a scenario where it was a 'large scale' war against conventional armies of the West, while Zapad 2009 still assumed an exercise against a limited conflict in which three 'NATO-like' brigades entered the country . That's a big change in draft. The military budget of Russia has increased last year by 26% ! It's not just the exercises, but also small jobs are distributed. Five Russian aircraft simulated a bombing run in Lithuania and Poland recently. Also two Tupolev 22M3 bombers capable of launching cruise-missiles simulated an attack on Sweden in which an object was a stone's throw from Stockholm. A scary thought.

OUR COUNTRIES IN THIS SCENE

What does this all mean for our countries, NATO or PFP or otherwise ? As with other memberstates training levels have been focused for a long time on counterinsurgency warfare in foreign countries. Preparing for large-scale conventional conflicts in the own region was no longer in focus. Though less, there are still many older people that remember World-war II, and we must not underestimate their warnings. The number of units that can be deployed surely are little experienced when dramatic developments occur. The number of EU combat aircraft has been depleted and the number reserved for future purchase is reduced. Currently the aim is shrinking budgets, but how will that change as the world scene is changing rapidly? Experience shows that it takes ten years to build up a force. That time we don't have when developments take place close to your borders of fellow-countries. We trust on high-tech at the cost of quantity of units. This became obvious when by actions in Libya suddenly a major shortage of precision bombs arose by a European coalition and the US had to jump in and complement on the spot. Most EU countries show a good readiness and are well trained, but also weakness shows because we are balancing on a dangerous minimum as former NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer recently stated. Hopefully the memberstates acknowledge that this situation can not persist unlimited. Every freedom has its price, and when the time is reached to protect this great good then you need to provide for this to be done and doing it as well and as long as you can.

We may hope that President Putin will soon recognize the wise views of his former predecessors as Yeltsin and Gorbatsjov, but for the moment this dream still seems at long distance.

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