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Dealing with the challenges and uncertainties of the 2020s requires a resilient system of European security and defence. One that has the capacity to absorb disturbance and continue to develop. Disturbance causes (triggers or drives) some form of change to a system's fundamental functions, internal structures, external relations, development path and, therefore, identity. Understanding the persistence (or lack thereof) of peace, freedom, democracy, rule of law, human rights and other desirable concepts in Europe depends on understanding the interplay between disturbances and how systems change in response.

There are three different types of disturbance. Here I borrow useful terms from ecology (Lake 2000). A 'pulse' disturbance is a discrete action, event or process of relatively short-term duration. A shock is a sudden and surprising pulse disturbance. A 'press' disturbance may arise sharply, but continues at a similar intensity for a relatively long-term duration. Press disturbance is akin to sustained pressure. The third type is the 'ramp' disturbance, which is characterised by a gradual increase (or decrease) in the intensity of the disturbance over time.

Periodically, Europe receives a reminder that it cannot take its peace, security, freedom and democracy for granted. The September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001, Iraq War in 2003 and Madrid train bombings in 2004. Russia's war against Georgia in 2008. The Arab Spring uprisings, Libyan and Syrian civil wars, and Norway attacks by the far-right Breivik in 2011. The Euromaidan revolution and Russia's war against Ukraine in 2014. The peak of the migration crisis (Europe's biggest influx of migrants and refugees since the Second World War) and November Paris attacks in 2015. The election of Donald Trump as President of the United States (US) and the United Kingdom's Brexit referendum in 2016. The emergence of the anti-establishment Gilets Jaunes (Yellow Jackets) movement in France in 2018, and escalation of the US-Iran crisis in 2019, to name but a few.

These are headline-grabbing shocks. They often involve an initial 'shocking' pulse disturbance that develops into a longer-term press or ramp disturbance upon which other pulse disturbances may be superimposed.

There are, of course, many more gradual and predictable disturbances of the ramp type that pose a threat to European security and defence. An example would be the growth of politically motivated cybertechnology-enabled aggression against governmental, military, industrial, commercial and civil society targets. Offensive cyber operations or 'cyberwarfare' are conducted both by state and state-sponsored actors, and by non-state actors. Superimposed on this long-term pattern are the cyberattacks themselves: discrete and sometimes shocking events (pulse disturbances) with profound implications for security and defence, including regarding critical infrastructure.

Another example of a gradual ramp disturbance is the spread of populism across Europe. This issue intersects with political positions and far-right ideologies that are antithetical to liberalism,

secularism, the establishment, immigration, open borders, multiculturalism and European integration. Populism often equates nationalism with culture and traditional values. In Hungary, for instance, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán uses the notion of 'Christian liberty' as shorthand for his populist vision of a nationalist illiberal democracy geared to the protection of Hungary's culture, values and borders (The Guardian 2019). The issue of culture, or as European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen put it "the European way of life" (POLITICO 2019), is already a battleground with ramifications beyond politics.

As a disturbance, populism has the potential to damage democracy (Taggart 2012), divide the population (Baptista and Urribarri 2018) and thwart long-term economic progression (Savills 2019). Indeed, Plattner (2010) labels populism a 'democratic disorder' (p. 87). Likewise, Galston (2018) considers that populism is the 'enemy of pluralism' (p. 12) and, therefore, of modern liberal democracy. It embraces tribalism, plunges democratic societies into constant moralised conflict, threatens the rights of minorities and 'enables over-bearing leaders to dismantle the checkpoints on the road to autocracy' (p. 13). Galston states that sometimes the populist challenge does directly threaten liberal democracy:

'Left unchecked, moves to undermine freedom of the press, weaken constitutional courts, concentrate power in the hands of the executive, and marginalize groups of citizens based on ethnicity, religion, or national origin will undermine liberal democracy from within' (p. 15).

Many disturbances to European security and stability (and the responses to those disturbances) are barely acknowledged outside of academic and policy circles. For instance, the economic, social and political repercussions of the 2008 financial crisis and recession, and the narrow focus on austerity measures. These continue to amplify long-standing grievances and discontent among Europe's populations regarding economic and industrial decline, unemployment, globalisation and the perceived European Union democratic deficit. Russia is acutely aware of such distrust of Western liberal democracy endemic in European societies. Russian President Vladimir Putin has shown that he is prepared to exploit it to divide Europe and reshape the postwar international system (Financial Times 2019a). Putin's aim is not dissimilar to that of Trump's (The Nation 2019). The net result is the undermining of European values and institutions and erosion of European security.

To these we can add other scarcely acknowledged slow-burn disturbances (ones that involve gradual change, are often ignored, but eventually escalate into full-blown crises) including the ongoing militarisation of space, demographic trends such as ageing populations, increasing global urbanisation, security risks associated with Europe's reliance on natural gas from Russia (Financial Times 2019b) and China's Belt and Road Initiative (Handelsblatt 2018), and Turkey's rising middle power status, especially in the Mediterranean region.

At any one time, there are a large number and diversity of both abrupt and gradual disturbances affecting European security and defence, some of them originating from endogenous (internal) factors and some from exogenous (external) factors. Some of the disturbances interact with each other, producing novel and unexpected disturbances. For example, Turkey's rise as a middle power in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea (2014), intervention in the Syrian civil war and peak of the migration crisis (2015) has emboldened President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to expand Turkey's area of influence into the Eastern and Central Mediterranean regions.

Taken together, the suite of disturbances interact across different scales and levels to influence the European security and defence system's capacity to continually learn, adapt, develop and renew in response to changing conditions. Therefore, it is essential to study and understand the interactions between disturbances and both the system's actual and potential responses. This is where a conceptual framework based on the understanding of complex adaptive systems and resilience can be of significant help.

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