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HYDRA

**Hybrid threats versus
Democratic Resilience:
An analytical and
practical toolkit**



Session 1: Defining Hybrid Threats (HTs)

The first session of the expert meeting delved into the intricate question regarding the definition of Hybrid Threats (HT). Unanimously, the discussants acknowledged the absence of a singular, universally accepted definition of HT. They underscored the variability in definitions across nations, shaped by cultural nuances, political systems, and response capabilities. Despite this diversity, a consensus emerged on the necessity for a cohesive understanding of HT within democratic countries, crucial for fostering coordinated responses and nurturing a collective resilience ethos.

One discussant tried to identify some characteristics of HT. Primarily, HTs were recognized as malicious actions perpetrated by either state or non-state actors with the intent to destabilize a nation. While civilian populations constituted a primary target, the spectrum of targets extended to international organizations. Notably, the insidious nature of HTs was emphasized, spanning from blatantly unlawful acts to morally questionable behaviors, often operating below detectable thresholds.

The attribution of HTs to a specific perpetrator emerged as a significant challenge, further compounded by the nebulous nature of the concept itself. Contrary to misconceptions, HTs were not conceptualized as tangible facts but rather as abstract notions, adaptable to diverse contexts. The evolution of the HT concept was traced from its initial association with warfare by the US in 2006 to its broader inclusion of civilian domains by NATO and the European Union (EU), reflecting an amalgamation of military, unconventional, political, and economic elements.

The discussion also scrutinized the significance of delineating thresholds, with divergent perspectives on the requisite severity for triggering responses. The potential for threshold definitions to elicit provocative actions or facilitate intentional circumvention was highlighted, complicating efforts to address HTs effectively. Additionally, parallels drawn between HTs and the "grey zone" delineated a realm of competitive conflict interactions, straddling the tenuous boundary between peace and war, thereby exacerbating instability.

Central to the discourse was the perceptual dimension of HTs, characterized by a dichotomy of "us versus them," often aligned with Western democracies versus non-democratic regimes. This perception, underpinned by notions of harm and ethicality, imbued seemingly innocuous actions with the potential for classification as HTs. To mitigate arbitrary categorizations, a suggestion was made to anchor assessments on the principle of "harmfulness."

Furthermore, deliberations on the subjective element of intention underscored its pivotal role in discerning between benign and malevolent actions. While some advocated for a focus on distinguishing "good faith" from "bad faith" intentions, others advocated for a nuanced understanding that acknowledges the complexities of intentionality.

Session 2: HTs as a multi-domain concept

A recurring theme underscored throughout the discussion was the fundamental criterion of harmfulness, transcending specific domains and serving as a linchpin for determining actionable responses by states.

Among the domains scrutinized, the upcoming **democratic elections** emerged as a focal point of concern, with HTs poised to exploit vulnerabilities in processes such as vote counting and dissemination



of disinformation. With elections scheduled in 83 countries this year, heightened vigilance was deemed as imperative to safeguard the integrity of democratic processes.

The **weaponization of migration** emerged as another salient domain, with migration patterns manipulated to serve diverse agendas, including resource mobilization and strategic manipulation of legal frameworks. Balancing individual rights with state security imperatives necessitates the formulation of coherent principles to navigate this complex terrain effectively.

Critical infrastructure investments assumed significance as potential vectors for HT exploitation, with varying thresholds of sensitivity dictating state responses. Distinguishing between benign and potentially harmful investments is paramount to preempting coercive control exerted through strategic infrastructure acquisitions.

The concept of "**lawfare**" garnered considerable attention, encapsulating the instrumentalization of legal frameworks to achieve strategic objectives. Discussions underscored the challenges posed by widespread misinterpretation of laws and processes, necessitating nuanced responses to mitigate abuse while safeguarding individual rights to legal recourse.

Session 3: HTs vs. Democratic resilience

The culminating session of the expert meeting delved into the pivotal concept of democratic resilience, underscoring its intrinsic connection to national security and the imperative of broad-based societal engagement.

Some experts highlighted the Estonia's unique model, where civilian involvement in state security extends beyond conventional military realms, exemplifying a comprehensive approach to resilience encompassing societal preparedness and contribution. Resilience, thus, transcends military confines, necessitating inclusive engagement across diverse sectors of society.

Discussants converged on the multifaceted nature of resilience development, emphasizing the roles of governmental responses, legislative enhancements, and robust countermeasures. Resilience strategies, whether strategic or tactical, doctrinal or functional, mandate cross-governmental coordination and integration.

A discourse ensued regarding the enhancement of military manuals and specialized training for public administrations, underscoring the imperative of capacity building and skill development. Complementing these efforts, legislative reforms targeting emerging threats and bolstering accountability mechanisms were deemed essential, alongside the imperative of proactive countermeasure implementation.