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La OTAN ha visto el futuro y no está preparada

Una simulación de guerra con drones muestra hasta dónde debe llegar la alianza para aprender las lecciones de Ucrania.

Por [Jillian Kay Melchior](#) [Seguir](#)
12 de febrero de 2026, 16:00 horas Y



Un soldado estonio realiza ejercicios con un dron de inteligencia, vigilancia y reconocimiento durante el ejercicio Hedgehog de la OTAN del año pasado. FUERZAS DE DEFENSA DE ESTONIA

Rusia y Ucrania han mostrado al mundo el futuro de la guerra, y Estados Unidos y sus aliados no están preparados. Esa es la lección de un importante ejercicio que los miembros de la Organización del Tratado del Atlántico Norte realizaron en Estonia el pasado mayo. Lo ocurrido durante el ejercicio, cuyos detalles se presentan aquí por primera vez, expuso graves deficiencias tácticas y vulnerabilidades en el combate de alta intensidad con drones.

El ejercicio, conocido como Hedgehog 2025, involucró a más de 16.000 soldados de 12 países de la OTAN, quienes entrenaron junto a expertos ucranianos en drones, incluyendo soldados prestados del frente. Simuló un campo de batalla "disputado y congestionado" con diversos tipos de drones, según el teniente coronel Arbo Probal, jefe del programa de sistemas no tripulados de las Fuerzas de Defensa de Estonia. "El objetivo era generar fricción, estrés en las unidades y sobrecarga cognitiva lo antes posible", explica. Esto pone a prueba la capacidad de adaptación de los soldados bajo fuego enemigo.

En Ucrania, la línea del frente está prácticamente congelada, pero Hedgehog imaginó un campo de batalla donde los tanques y las tropas aún tienen

cierta capacidad de movimiento. En un escenario, un grupo de combate de varios miles de soldados, incluyendo una brigada británica y una división estonia, intentó lanzar un ataque. A medida que avanzaban, no tuvieron en cuenta cómo los drones han hecho el campo de batalla más transparente, según varias fuentes.

El grupo de combate de la OTAN "simplemente andaba por ahí, sin disfrazarse, con tiendas de campaña y vehículos blindados", recuerda un participante que interpretó un papel enemigo. "Todo quedó destruido".

Durante la misión Hedgehog, los ucranianos utilizaron Delta, su sofisticado sistema de gestión del campo de batalla. Este recopila información del campo de batalla en tiempo real, utiliza inteligencia artificial para analizar grandes cantidades de datos, identifica objetivos y coordina ataques entre el comando y las unidades. Esto permite una rápida "cadena de aniquilación": verlo, compartirlo, dispararlo, todo en minutos o menos.

A single team of some 10 Ukrainians, acting as the adversary, counterattacked the NATO forces. In about half a day they mock-destroyed 17 armored vehicles and conducted 30 "strikes" on other targets.

Aivar Hanniotti, an Estonian Defense League unmanned aerial systems coordinator, led an adversary unit of about 100 that included Estonians and Ukrainians. Mr. Hanniotti, who has since left the regular military, describes how they deployed more than 30 drones against NATO troops in an area of less than 4 square miles. That's only about half the drone saturation Ukrainians currently see at the front, though Col. Probal says the Hedgehog umpires sometimes offset that discrepancy by recording the drone strikes as twice as damaging or more. But even with less reconnaissance than in real life, "there was no possibility to hide," Mr. Hanniotti says. "We quite easily found cars and mechanized units, and we were able to take them out quite fast with strike drones."

Overall, the results were "horrible" for NATO forces, says Mr. Hanniotti, who now works in the private sector as an unmanned systems expert. The adversary forces were "able to eliminate two battalions in a day," so that "in an exercise sense, basically, they were not able to fight anymore after that." The NATO side "didn't even get our drone teams."

Credit the Estonians for forcing NATO partners to confront these weak spots. Hedgehog was also an example of how Ukrainians can contribute to overall European security. There's only so much you can learn from watching online footage or reading about what's transpiring in Ukraine, says Sten Reimann, a former commander of Estonia's Military Intelligence Center who helped bring in Ukrainian drone experts for Hedgehog. He said the results of this exercise were "shocking" to military officials and troops on the ground.

Hedgehog didn't deal with political or strategic issues like drone procurement. Estonia is small, and land-use limitations sometimes constrained how troops could move. No single exercise can reflect how quickly drone technology evolves during an actual war. Still, Hedgehog showed how visible the battlefield has become—and how vulnerable that makes anyone or anything moving on it. NATO will need to adjust its tactics and find better ways to protect its tanks and armored vehicles.

Another lesson is the need for a faster kill chain, which requires more efficient cooperation on strikes. During a future war game, NATO might consider pitting Delta against a similar battlefield-management platform developed by the U.S. to see how they stack up. There's also room to improve communication and coordination between units. Ukrainians accelerate

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attacks by sharing large amounts of data between command and units. But that runs counter to NATO's instinct to restrict sensitive information.

"Lessons are not learned when they are identified," says retired Gen. David Petraeus. "Rather, they are only learned when you develop new concepts, write new doctrine, change organizational structures, overhaul your training, refine leader development courses, set out new materiel requirements that drive the procurement process, and even make changes to your personnel policies, recruiting, and facilities."

Estonia is trying to implement such major changes. It has updated its training, tactics and military doctrine for the drone era. It is also increasing defense spending and building deeper relationships with its vibrant private tech industry to work on drones and other military innovations.

Yet too many NATO members continue to show "a fundamental lack of understanding of the modern battlefield" and train their soldiers "based on doctrines and manuals that are not adapted to today's realities," says Maria Lemberg of the Ukrainian nonprofit Aerorozvidka, which supported Delta's development. She helped coordinate Ukraine's participation in Hedgehog and hopes it can serve as a wake-up call and basis for more knowledge-sharing between Kyiv and its partners.

Multiple sources told the story of one commander, who observed the drill and concluded, "We are f—." I asked Estonia's Col. Probal about this reaction. He said that one aim of the exercise was to help participants "think more, to make them critical toward themselves, to make sure they are not complacent in what they are doing right now." Was it a success? "From my point of view, mission accomplished."

Ms. Melchior is a London-based member of the Journal's editorial board.

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Review & Outlook: European leaders including NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and the U.K.'s Chief of Defense Staff Richard Knighton are urging voters to make sacrifices to guarantee national security. Photo: Lucy North/PA Wire via Zuma Press/Kauper

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Jillian Kay Melchior is a London-based Editorial Board Member of The Wall Street Journal. She has covered the war in Ukraine, the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong and other international news. She is a native of Cheyenne, Wyo., and a graduate of Hillsdale College.

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MB Mark Van Baalen ...

4 hours ago

This exercise deserves high praise. Hopefully there will be other similar events.

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RS Rick S ...

2 hours ago

Simple solution. Welcome Ukraine into NATO and instantly become the premier operator of drones in the world.

Reply • 3 • Share

JV Jim Verdonik ...

1 hour ago

A war in Europe would be a bloodbath like in World War I. Not a place I want my grandson to be fighting in.

Reply • 1 • Share

RP ron prichard ...

2 hours ago

The flip side is that relatively cheap drones affordable by any nation can take on and destroy the costliest, most advanced weaponry that any nation has. We're all vulnerable, which means we should all seek peace since no one can really win.

Pretty sure our leaders will find a way to avoid that, though.

Reply • 1 • Share

RL Russell Laughead ...

3 hours ago

Good to know that NATO is addressing this now. Drone warfare may be the only Ace Russia holds, but it could certainly prove to be a big advantage for Russia to be going up against learn as you go combatants.

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RF Robert Findlay ...

3 hours ago

Russia and Ukraine have shown the world the unmanned systems program, the future of warfare—and America is not ready.. Thats the lesson of a major exercise, Hedghog, conducted by NATO members in Estonia in May. Basically a Ukrainian and Estonian unit of about 100 deployed more than 30 drones against NATO troops in an area less than 4 sq. miles. In about half a day they mock-destroyed 17 armored vehicles and conducted 30 “strikes” on other targets. But even with less reconnaissance than in real life, “there was no possibility to hide,” “We quite easily found cars and mechanized units, and we were able to take them out quite fast with strike drones.” The results were “horrible” for NATO forces..The Ukrainian-Estonian sofisticated battlefield management enabled a fast “kill chain” all within minutes or less.Although the US was AWOL, the Hedghog exercise is basis for more knowledge-sharing between Kyiv and its NATO partners..This activity would better serve American military than Secretary Hedseth fixation on bombing suspected drrug boats or taking over Americna cities.

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MO **Mike O**

5 hours ago

I'm glad the U.S. has the best teenage Gamers in the world. The best time to prepare for war is when you're flush, fat and happy and don't get too complacent.

Reply •  1 • Share

DA **David Aronofsky**

2 hours ago

China and South Korea outrank the US teenage farmers and Japan probably outranks all three in war gaming. Finland and Sweden are also close to the US. I saw firsthand China's prowess when the US military recruited, with an expedited US citizenship offer, a young mainland Chinese student at my US university right after he won a national Chinese gaming competition. Interestingly, this same student represented our US university in a world university gaming competition and lost to Chinese and South Korean rivals he had known since high school. They teased him about becoming soft by being in the US.

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KW **Kyle Waters**

2 hours ago

Which game

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DA **David Aronofsky**

1 hour ago

Computerized Go.

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TA **Trevor Aldwin**

1 hour ago

If Putin wanted, he could legally declare war, call up all two million reservists and the last four years worth of 18 year old conscripts, add them to the 700,000 battle hardened vets already in Ukraine, and sweep everything and everyone in front of them all the way to Calais.

(Edited)

Reply •  • Share

SP **S Prout**

2 minutes ago

Numerous senior active and retired US commanders have repeatedly said that in a war between NATO and Russia, Russia would lose Kaliningrad in 24-48 hours. All of Kalinigrad. In one day. What do you think happens to the rest of

western and southern Russia? To say nothing of its "navy" and military presence in Crimea.

Russia is going nowhere in the 21st century. It's only going to get worse for Russia economically and militarily going forward.

Reply •  • Share

JN **Jason Norton**

2 hours ago

...

Russia and Ukraine have shown the world the future of warfare.

Truth. Months ago I saw a video on WSJ. I think it was B&W. In my mind it is anyway. A small Ukrainian drone flies over a Russian soldier in some type of prepared position. I wouldn't call it a trench. The soldier gets up and attempts to fire on the drone. There is a flash, then stillness. That video made an impact.

This is the frightening future of ground warfare. This should be another deterrent for placing U.S. troops on the ground. And possibly a reason to encourage further air superiority. There will be future conflicts. It is human nature. We need to be sure we have the "big stick".

I say this while recognizing the poor history of regime change without ground forces.

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AA **Alan Adams**

2 hours ago

...

I have zero military experience but is there any useful role for a battle tank?

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kw **Kyle Waters**

2 hours ago

...

Of course. Seige.

Reply •  • Share

RF **Robert Findlay**

2 hours ago

...

Russia and Ukraine are showing the world the future of warfare and the unmanned systems program, i.e. drones. The Americans aren't ready for it. This article reports that in May NATO members participated in a major exercise in Estonia, involving Estonia and Ukraine siding against NATO partners, absent the US. Overall the results were horrible for NATO but credit Estonians for forcing NATO partners to confront their weak spots. Hopefully this will serve as a wake up call and more knowledge-sharing between Kyiv and the NATO partners. The future of warfare is unmanned systems programs and hopefully the US will recognize the utility of working with and sharing with NATO allies

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JL **James Logothetis**

2 hours ago

...

I like to think that we have many bright leaders in our military who-- being forewarned-- will be able to counter drone warfare.

If they fail to address this problem, shame on them and woe to the free world.

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JW **John Warner IV**

3 hours ago

...

Russia might pull a False Flag OP and make a NATO nation attack them. Thus Putin can save face while the world burns. Economy be damned, Russia has a bevy of new

classified weapons that make a hydrogen bomb look like a firecracker. People may not believe me and that's fine, but there are frequency earthquake weapons, DEW, weather manipulation technologies and much worse. See: Raytheon's ICE CUBE project in Antarctica, See HAARP. Etc.

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William Wahl

3 hours ago

Those aircraft carriers of ours? Obsolete. Tanks? Too slow and too visible. I'd like to own the drone manufacturing business for the US, as it is going to be pretty busy.

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...

RB Richard Baron

3 hours ago

I think we need even more aircraft carriers. 😱

Reply •  • Share

...

Marty K

3 hours ago

as does the world -

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