

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

Most Popular News

Most Popular

OPINION

Recommended Videos

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.

Trump's Military Buildup Near Iran: Warships, Aircraft and More



WSJ Editor Breaks Down the Key Takeaways From January's Strong Jobs Report



WSJ Opinion: Is AI the Next Climate Change?



Tom Homan Announces End of Operation Metro Surge



WSJ Opinion: The Transgender Movement Is in Retreat



Review & Outlook: European leaders including NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and the UK'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/Kasper Pempel/Reuters/POU

Free Expression: A Daily Newsletter From WSJ Opinion

GET THE NEWSLETTER



Gender-Affirming Care Needs a Lobotomy



Politics at the Winter Olympics



Wrestling With Wrestling



About Free Expression

Appeared in the February 13, 2026, print edition as 'NATO Has Seen the Future and Is Unprepared'.

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.

Follow

HIDE CONVERSATION (20)

Conversation 21 Comments

By joining the conversation you are accepting our community rules and terms. To view rules, terms and FAQs, [click here](#). Questions can be sent to moderator@wsj.com.

Conversations on news articles and news columns must be kept on the topic of the story. In opinion content, conversations can delve into other subjects. The conversation will close on this article four days after publication.



AC

What do you think?



Sort by **Most Liked** ▾

- MB

Mark Van Baalen

4 hours ago

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

Reply · 4 · Share

...
- 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.

Reply · 1 · Share

...
- RF

Robert Findlay

3 hours ago

...

Russia and Ukraine have shown the world the unmaned 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 Ukranian and Estonian unit of about 100 deployed more than 30 drones against NATO trooops in an area less that 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 Ukranian-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.

Reply ·  1 · Share

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 competion 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.

Reply ·  1 · Share

KW

Kyle Waters

...

2 hours ago

Which game

Reply ·  · Share

DA

David Aronofsky

...

1 hour ago

Computerized Go.

Reply ·  · Share

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.
Reply ·  · Share

AA **Alan Adams** ...

2 hours ago

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

Reply ·  · Share

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 futrue of warfare is unmanned systems programs and hopfully the US will recognize the utility of working with and sharing with NATO allies

Reply ·  · Share

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.

Reply ·  · Share

Jl **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 thats 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.
Reply ·  · Share

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.

Reply ·  · Share

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 -

Reply ·  · Share

Powered by  OpenWeb

[Terms](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Feedback](#)

Videos

News

- Live Coverage World
- Business U.S
- Politics Economy
- Tech Finance
- Arts and Culture Lifestyle
- Real Estate Personal Finance
- Health Style
- Sports China
- Science Ukraine
- Middle East Elections
- Policy Trade
- Investing Earnings
- Taxes AI
- Obituaries

Markets

- Stocks
- Bonds
- Money Rates
- DJIA
- S&P 500
- Nasdaq

Opinion

- Opinion & Reviews
- Film Review
- Television Review
- Bookshelf
- Music Review
- What to Watch
- Art Review

WSJ Membership

- Subscription Options
- Corporate Subscriptions
- WSJ Higher Education Program
- WSJ High School Program
- Public Library Program
- WSJ Live
- Commercial Partnerships

Customer Service

- Customer Center
- Contact Us
- Cancel My Subscription

Advertise

- Commercial Real Estate Ads
- Place a Classified Ad
- Sell Your Business
- Sell Your Home
- Recruitment & Career Ads
- Digital Self Service

Tools & Features

- Newsletters & Alerts
- Topics
- Podcasts
- RSS Feeds
- Video Center
- Watchlist
- Latest News

More

- About Us
- Content Partnerships
- Corrections
- Jobs at WSJ
- Archivo de noticias
- Registrar gratis
- Reimpresiones y licencias
- Comprar números
- Tienda del WSJ
- Sala de prensa de Dow Jones
- Dinero inteligente de Dow Jones



