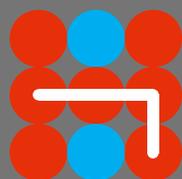


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# Hybrid CoE's key themes and approaches to countering hybrid threats in 2022

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Hybrid CoE

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**The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats** tel. +358 400 253800 [www.hybridcoe.fi](http://www.hybridcoe.fi)

Hybrid CoE is an international hub for practitioners and experts, building participating states' and institutions' capabilities and enhancing EU-NATO cooperation in countering hybrid threats located in Helsinki, Finland

# HYBRID COE'S KEY THEMES AND APPROACHES TO COUNTERING HYBRID THREATS IN 2022

## Introduction

2021 was still affected by the pandemic and the intensifying great-power rivalry in its shadow. Hybrid CoE broadened its work to encompass the areas identified by Participating States as key challenges, and continued to adjust its forms of activity to conditions under which possibilities for travel and physical events were still highly constrained. In addition to a growing number of virtual meetings and workshops, monthly webinars were organized to introduce new themes and perspectives. The Centre's publications activity was also further intensified.

Hybrid CoE continued to consolidate its fields of expertise and organize its work so that interaction with key stakeholders and delivery of its capacity in support of them would be smooth and easy. When launching new workstrands, Hybrid CoE reached out to its stakeholders to identify their interests and demands regarding the topic. Many successful projects have been further developed into modules to be provided for the Participating States on a recurring basis.

Along with its leading role in the Horizon 2020-funded EU-HYBNET project, the Centre extended its networks further and strengthened its close cooperation with various EU and NATO bodies. The Centre's training and exercises activities have expanded and been incorporated into many thematic workstrands to enable the Participating States to test both their national preparedness for hybrid threats and their opportunities for mutual cooperation to counter them.

Hybrid CoE's work plan for 2022 is firmly anchored in the work and fields of expertise developed during the previous year. New topics have been added on the basis of demand, and changes in the hybrid threat landscape. The work plan firstly presents the key thematic fields for the Centre's

work in analyzing, monitoring and countering hybrid threats in 2022. It then outlines the main operational modes of the Centre with some new innovations included.

## Hybrid CoE's key themes and approaches to countering hybrid threats in 2022

As defined in its constitutive document (Memorandum of Understanding), Hybrid CoE's key goal is "to serve as a hub of expertise supporting the Participants' individual and collective efforts to enhance their civil-military capabilities, resilience and preparedness to counter hybrid threats with a special focus on European security". The Centre fulfils this goal by providing a platform for its participants to come together, share best practices, build capability, test new ideas and practise defence against hybrid threats. As a hub of expertise, the Centre leads the discussion on countering hybrid threats through research and sharing best practices.

Hybrid CoE's assets are linked to its role as a network-based organization coordinating and supporting the expertise of its networks of practitioners, academics and private sector representatives. Enhancing both cross-governmental and public-private dialogue is an essential part of the Centre's work.

Thematically, the Centre's work plan for 2022 can be divided into three major fields of interest:

- Strengthening knowledge about **the particular characteristics of hybrid threats with their operational logic, and making proposals to counter them.**
- Strengthening knowledge about **hybrid threat action as a part of the strategies and policies of actors in charge of them,** and creating ideas about how to cope with them.

- Strengthening knowledge about the **key vulnerabilities of Western societies with respect to hybrid threats and providing ideas about how to address them.**

In the following sections, the Centre's work plan will be presented by grouping the workstrands planned under these three main themes.

### **Strengthening knowledge about the particular characteristics of hybrid threats with their operational logic, and making proposals to counter them.**

Hybrid threats differ from the traditional forms and instruments of power projection in international politics by virtue of their operational mode, instruments, and ways of using them. There are thus many particularities, ranging from the use of various interfaces to causing confusion and ambiguity and further to the use of proxies, which make the detection of responsibilities difficult. They are all aimed at preventing the target from effectively responding to the action and protecting itself against it. As a consequence, hybrid threats usually occur in many domains simultaneously, and are designed to remain below the threshold of detection and attribution.

Hybrid CoE continues to work on studying the particularities of hybrid threat action both through conceptual work and by mapping the forms of ongoing hybrid threat activity.

One of the main efforts in this context takes place in the framework of the Deterrence Workstrand, which has been continued from its initial conceptual analysis phase into a module consisting of both training and exercise activities, as well as various case studies in support of them. The goal is to increase understanding of how deterrence against hybrid threats can be built, what the various policy instruments are, and how the EU and NATO can best be involved in this activity. COI Hybrid Influencing (HI) leads the project and will continue offering exercises to the Participating States, as well as publishing a further set of case studies. A mid-term review of the deterrence work is planned for Q3/Q4 2022.

There are several workstrands planned for 2022 where the particularities of hybrid threat action will be analyzed by mapping their emergence within a specific geopolitical region or in a thematic context. The Research and Analysis (R&A) function will carry out a project on the Eastern Partnership countries by exploring patterns and trends in their security developments relevant to hybrid threats. The ongoing work on hybrid threat potential in and towards the Arctic will move into its second phase, building on the first phase's scoping work and framework tabletop exercise training module to develop further iterations through case studies on how hybrid threats are manifesting at local, national and regional levels amongst the Participating States.

Another workstrand will focus on identifying trends in the global economy from the hybrid threat point of view, resulting in a trend report and an expanded network of practitioners and experts. This work is based on joint efforts between COI V&R and the R&A function, and will draw inspiration from an external baseline study on the struggle for positions in the global economy, commissioned in 2021.

Another key effort to map and identify emerging hybrid threat activities takes the form of Hybrid CoE's internal open-source monitoring system – Monitoring, Assessment and Reporting Group Capability (MSG) – established in spring 2020 to monitor hybrid threat activities in the COVID-19 framework. Apart from enhancing situational awareness in the Centre, the system has produced monthly reports for the Centre's networks, focusing on actors and thematic fields of hybrid threat activity (Russia, China, the Arctic, Deterrence, etc.). In 2022, the monitoring capacity will be continued with a focus on hybrid threat activities in general, and new emerging threats and trends in particular. In addition to bi-monthly reports provided for Hybrid CoE's networks, an annual report will be launched in June built on the data and findings from that year. MSG is a Centre-wide project involving participants from all of the Centre's functions, monitoring hybrid threat activity in their field of interest. It also serves as an important tool for the Centre's internal professional development.

A new workstrand will be launched by COI V&R in the field of ‘instrumentalized migration’, which focuses on the use of irregular migration flows as a hybrid threat instrument. The workstrand will approach this phenomenon at a general level by addressing issues such as legal vulnerability used to exert pressure and create instability in the target countries. It will also study the set of tools used by state and non-state hybrid actors. Work will start by organizing expert meetings and commissioning background studies on the topic.

Finally, the Centre’s work on enhancing knowledge about the particularities of hybrid threat action will continue in the thematic field of cyber and modern technologies. Both of these themes build on the earlier work of the Community of Interest on Strategy and Defence (S&D), which will now be taken further. The results of an earlier project on Hybrid Warfare: Future & Technologies (HYFUTEC) will be used to enhance knowledge about the use of modern technologies in improving multidomain situational awareness. The cyber power project will continue to focus on the interlinkages both between cyber power and the cyber domain and hybrid threat action. Its results are disseminated through an annual cyber symposium and regular publication of Hybrid CoE cyber papers.

**Strengthening knowledge about hybrid threat action as a part of the strategies and policies of actors in charge of them, and creating ideas about how to cope with them.**

Another key theme in Hybrid CoE’s work plan deals with hybrid threat action as a part of the broader strategies and policies of actors in charge of them. This approach is designed to enhance knowledge about similarities and differences between different actors, as well as the more detailed political logic behind the selection of means used. The ultimate goal of the Centre’s work in this respect is to provide ideas about how to cope with these forms of action.

Two key workstrands planned for 2022 will shed light on hybrid threat actors: the first is a project

led by the R & A function comparing and contrasting the strategic cultures of authoritarian states (“Seeing red”), already launched in 2020. The aim is to enable the Centre’s networks to understand not just what but why actors such as Russia and China make certain choices, enabling efforts to anticipate and counter hybrid threats. In 2022, the workstrand will produce a comparative analysis research report as well as a methodology paper focused on enhanced best practices. This project will take advantage of the Centre’s strengthened expertise on China, building on existing Hybrid CoE work as well as the intensified expert-pool activity in the field.

Another workstrand under the leadership of COI HI will deepen earlier work on non-state actors functioning as proxies in hybrid threat operations, and develop the conceptual work into the form of more concrete detection and response analysis. New case studies will analyze the strategic drivers underpinning the use of non-state actors by state actors. The broader goal is to prepare to detect, deter and prevent or mitigate hybrid threats caused by the use of non-state actors.

There are also many other workstrands where the role of hybrid threat actors will be analyzed as one element among a multifaceted set of questions. The workstrands on Cyber (COI S&D) and Economic Resilience (COI V&R) can be mentioned as two examples, with the first focusing on cyber threat capabilities and strategies as one question, and the latter on the economic potential of the key global actors with its possible hybrid threat implications in mind.

**Strengthening knowledge about the key vulnerabilities of Western societies with respect to hybrid threats and providing ideas about how to address them.**

The third key theme for Hybrid CoE’s work in 2022 deals with identifying Western actors’ vulnerabilities to hybrid threats, and building resilience and response capabilities.

One of the leading joint workstrands for the Centre in this field deals with resilience, and the

way in which resilience within different political and societal domains can be challenged by hybrid threat actors. This workstrand is a joint effort between R&A and COI V&R and is carried out as a cooperative project with the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (JRC). It thus builds on previous cooperation in the framework of the Conceptual Framework for Hybrid Threats project with the JRC.

Another external cooperation project related to this theme is the Resilient Civilians project (funded by the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme). R&A's contribution to this project takes the form of the delivery and execution of an exercise in support of decision-makers' ability to include civil society actors in the policies of building resilience. COI V&R's work on resilience focuses further on public-private partnerships in enhancing the resilience of critical infrastructures.

COI V&R will continue with the workstrand on Maritime Hybrid Threats, focusing among other things on legal vulnerabilities in the framework of international law at sea. An earlier published handbook consisting of different legal scenarios will be updated in 2022 with training events based on them to be continued.

Another workstrand with the general goal of mapping vulnerabilities is the COI V&R-led work on Aviation and Space, which started with the publication of a baseline study in 2021. This work will now be taken further by organizing an expert workshop to define the more detailed topics to be addressed in this context from the point of view of hybrid threats.

In 2021, a workstrand was established under this general theme by COI S&D, focusing on the Strategies and Policies of Hybrid CoE's Participating States in countering hybrid threats. By highlighting similarities and differences, this comparative analysis of the approaches aims to provide good practices and allow administrations to learn from each other. This work will now be continued on the basis of experiences and data accumulated during the first year and culminating in the publication of an annual report.

The final workstrand under the theme of mapping vulnerabilities and enhancing resilience

deals with key issues of Safeguarding Democratic Processes. This workstrand is led by COI HI and encompasses Situational Awareness (especially through Open-Source Intelligence training), public/private engagement (focusing on large tech companies), analysis of disinformation tools used to challenge Western democracy, and training to counter election interference. These projects will now be taken further with an expanded team, building partly on cooperation with key partners such as the EEAS and the NATO StratCom COE.

### **Hybrid CoE's operational modes for 2022**

Hybrid CoE's Helsinki-based office currently hosts 36 members of staff representing 12 different nationalities and a wide variety of professional backgrounds. The secondments from the Participating States – currently 15 experts – play an important role in this context as the Centre leads and coordinates Hybrid CoE's multifaceted international activities. In 2020 a new publications editor function was established to further strengthen the high quality and profile of Hybrid CoE's publications. In 2021 the fields of expertise were enhanced by creating a position for a China expert. In 2022 a modest growth in staffing is to be expected.

Hybrid CoE's operational modes combine a wide range of activities to ensure that the Centre is a credible and relevant leader in promoting a greater understanding of hybrid threats, from small brainstorming sessions and sets of consecutive workshops to large-scale meetings and conferences. These are sustained by the Centre's own research activities, and studies and reports commissioned from the Centre's academic and practitioner expert networks. Various forms of training, exercises and capabilities provided for different audiences form an important part of the Centre's commitment to applying work to counter hybrid threats.

### **Networks and partnerships**

As Hybrid CoE is a network-based organization, its networks and partnerships will also play a key role – and will be developed further – in 2022. In

2020, the Centre's IR unit started a comprehensive mapping of the expectations and interests of its Participating States vis-à-vis the Centre, and this work will continue annually. In 2021 it was complemented by bilateral (virtual) meetings between Steering Board Chair Jori Arvonen and all of the Participating State representatives in Hybrid CoE's Steering Board. Continuous dialogue with the Centre's key stakeholders is a vital part of its activities and takes continuously place in the form of meetings and visits at various levels.

Hybrid CoE will also continue its close cooperation with the EU institutions (the Commission including DG DEFIS and the Joint Research Centre, the Council and its bodies including the EEAS, the European Defence Agency and the European Security and Defence College, as well as the European Parliament including its committees and secretariat). It will continue to support the incoming Council Presidencies in the Horizontal Working Party and in the POC meetings of the Hybrid Fusion Cell. Hybrid CoE's experts will present their work to the relevant political and military bodies of NATO (including the Hybrid Analysis Branch of the Joint Intelligence and Security Division and the Enablement and Resilience Section of the Defence Policy and Planning Division). The annual High Level Retreat, bringing together leading EU and NATO officials, will continue to provide an informal platform for discussions between the two organizations.

During 2022, the Centre will continue its work to deepen and structure its various partnerships. Cooperation with international and non-governmental organizations will also be further systematized as the Centre's networks continue to grow.

The Research and Analysis function will continue to support the Centre's work by establishing networks with the transatlantic academic and research community. Its expert pools provide a tool for this – an assessment of the forms and composition of the pools has recently taken place, ensuring their full representativeness with respect to the Participating States. The EU-HYBNET project will provide additional tools for the Centre to create networks and partnerships with new actors and the “Resilient Civilians in a Hybrid Threat Environ-

ment” project funded by NATO's science for peace mechanism and led by the Arctic University of Tromsø will continue in 2022.

## Training and exercises

Through the Training and Exercises function, Hybrid CoE's work is uniquely positioned to remove impediments to cross-societal, intra-governmental approaches aimed at reducing the effects of hybrid threats on individual member state societies and institutions. The Training and Exercises function continues to support the Centre's work by taking a pragmatic approach through the development of original hybrid threat-related training and exercise programmes. In 2022, Training and Exercises will expand the reach of the Centre by providing expertise in both NATO and EU exercises, build Participating State capacity through hybrid training opportunities, and create original exercises inspired by the conceptualization of hybrid threats. Exercises will continue to be the best way to offer the network of practitioners an opportunity to apply counter-hybrid threat tools to strengthen knowledge and build institutional muscle memory to counter future hybrid effects.

Continuing to produce innovative ways to explore the spectrum of hybrid threats in a pragmatic way, the Training and Exercises function will look at ways in which wargaming can provide a platform to better strengthen democratic institutions, communicate with populations, and develop a whole-of-society approach to recognizing, responding to, and defending against threats such as disinformation. Through funding from the US Global Engagement Center, Training and Exercises leads a series of events that will allow participants to develop and employ their own strategies to counter disinformation through the use of a virtual exercise platform.

In 2022, a Hybrid 101 training module will be offered to the Participating States and other stakeholders, consisting of topical presentations and briefings. The wargaming course organized in 2021 is planned to be run in 2022 as well.

In 2021, the Centre started to compile a catalogue of training events and exercises to provide a

better overview of its programme and the options available for its stakeholders. This practice will continue in 2022.

## **Publications**

Through its publications, the Centre will continue working on delivering timely and tailored analysis and advice on hybrid threat-related issues. The Centre's publications range from short paper formats such as the Strategic Analysis papers, which aim to seed discussion, to longer edited Research Reports designed to contribute to the existing academic body of knowledge, as well as more focused manuals and lessons learned, which present timely and targeted recommendations, and Records, which present workshop and exercise summaries and project outcomes. The papers are divided into public and limited release publications. The public publications are aimed at a broader audience, while the limited release publications cover more targeted and sensitive subjects.

During 2022, the Centre's aim is to reinforce external communication about its publications to ensure that Hybrid CoE is leading the discussion on hybrid threats, as well as providing timely and practical insights for the Participating States, NATO and the EU. Communication with key stakeholders will be streamlined as a part of the Centre's new communications strategy, the gradual implementation of which started in 2021. The goal is to ensure smooth and efficient communication about the Centre's work and activities, including publications, with its key stakeholders.

## **Events and conferences in hybrid form**

After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hybrid CoE shifted its modus operandi from organizing physical events to running all of the activities online. This practice will continue next year in parallel with the increasing number of physical events.

In 2022, Hybrid CoE will continue organizing monthly webinars. The purpose of the webinars is to have a discussion on topical hybrid threat-related issues, to introduce new topics, or to approach a well-known challenge from a fresh angle. Webinar topics are closely linked with the work done at the Centre. Topics can also be chosen according to the feedback received from Hybrid CoE network members. Webinars will be organized under the Chatham House Rule, so that discussions can take place in a safe space. Speakers will be invited from academia and/or from government.

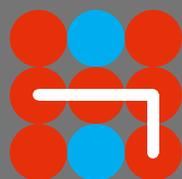
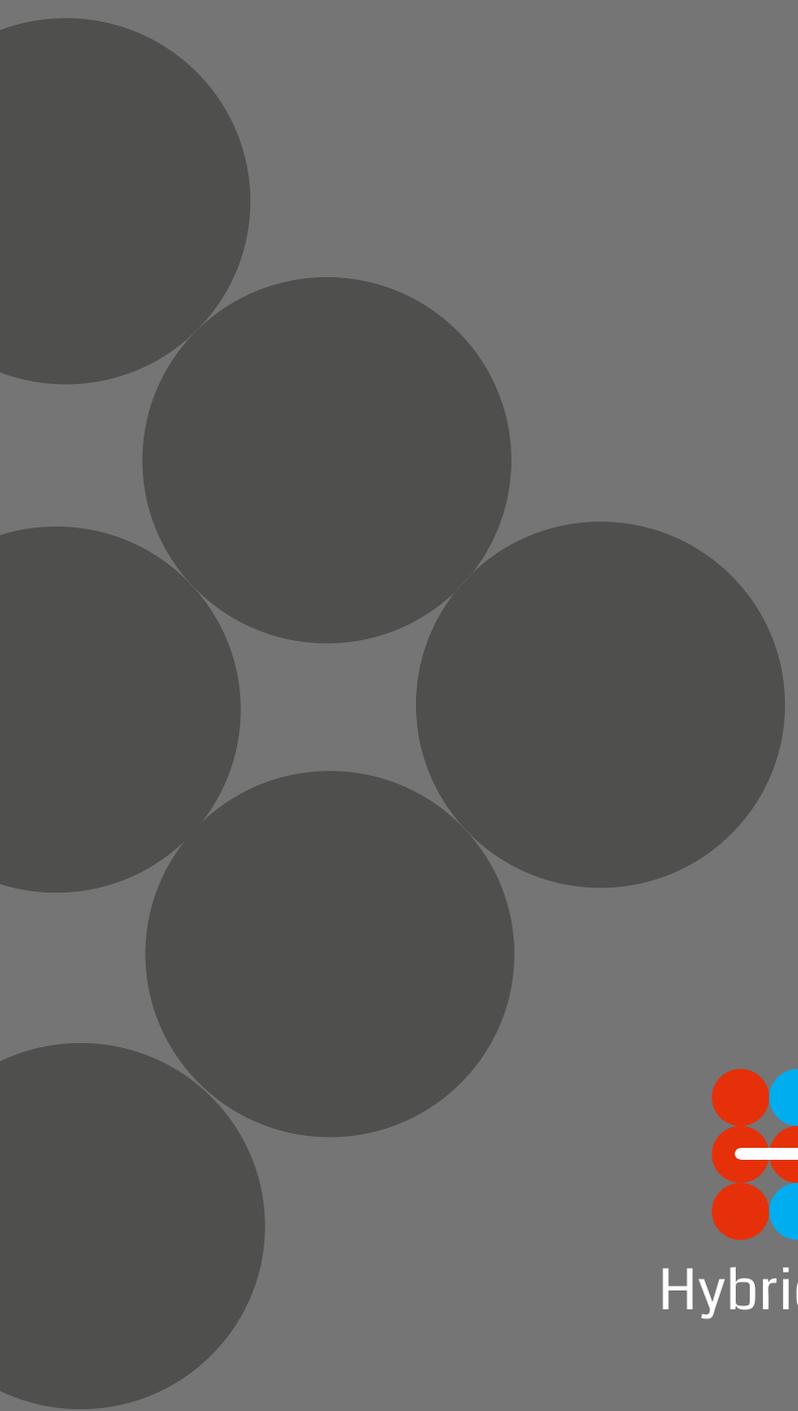
In addition to monthly webinars, Hybrid CoE will act as a co-host or support virtual events organized by distinguished think tanks, with a view to promoting the Centre's work and expertise, and to contributing to the public discussion on hybrid threats.

The functions will gradually increase the number of physical meetings and events to maximize interaction with Participating State practitioners and other stakeholders in the framework of all work-strands. In 2022, the Centre will organize major events on themes cutting across its work plan. The High Level Retreat will bring leading EU and NATO practitioners together to discuss important hybrid threat-related topics.









Hybrid CoE