



NORDIC SECURITY CONFERENCE 2022

Patricia Moreno & Miriam Méndez

Introduction

President and Secretary General of the Youth Atlantic Treaty Association (YATA) of Spain, Patricia Moreno and Miriam Méndez respectively, were invited to participate in the 17th edition of the Nordic Security Conference. Organized by YATA Norway on a yearly basis, this year's NorSec 2022 was celebrated in Oslo, Norway, on April 2nd and 3rd. The main theme of the conference was *"Hybrid Threats: implications for Nordic Security in the 21st Century"*, tackled in six different panels of experts who provided their insights on the existence, consequences and impact of hybrid threats and operations for both the military and the civil society. Besides the interventions themselves, the President and Secretary General of YATA Spain enjoyed a series of gatherings with members of other YATA chapters during those two days, enhancing cooperation between the Spanish and other international representatives.

Conference panels, day 1

The first day of the Nordic Security Conference 2022 began with the registration of participants and a morning coffee to warm up after the walk from the hotel to the conference venue, located downtown Oslo. The day started with the words of welcome by President of YATA Norway Elias Baccouche. This first session also counted on the participation of high-level panellists, namely Kate Hansen Bundt, Secretary General of the Norwegian Atlantic Committee; Eivind Vad Petersson, State Secretary to the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs; and Ambassador Øystein Bø, Norway's Permanent Representative to NATO.

The second session was titled “Hybrid Threats as a concept and strategic tool”. What exactly does the term “hybrid threat” mean? That was the first question that participants were asked as the panel kicked off. If anything was etched in the minds of everyone in the audience, it was that a hybrid threat is an action carried out by actors, whether state or non-state, whose purpose is to damage a target by influencing its decision making at the local, regional, state or institutional level. As the conference progressed, the speakers explained the characteristics of hybrid action, which revolve around the concepts of ambiguity, legal and illegal, peace and war. Ambiguity is created by combining conventional and unconventional means: disinformation and interference in political debate or elections, riots or attacks on critical infrastructure, cyber operations, different forms of criminal activities, or the use of an asymmetric use of military and warfare means. The person in charge of bringing this panel to life was Bernhard Christofer Caspari, Security Advisor at the Norwegian Directorate of Public Construction and Property; with a Q&A session moderated by Mathea Reine-Nilsen, President of YATA Oslo.

“The influence of Hybrid Threats across multiple sectors of society” was the name chosen for the third panel, in which speakers presented the consequences that hybrid threats have for civil society. Njord Wegge, Professor at the Norwegian Military Academy, explained the impact these actions have on people, some of them being lethal. The truth is that hybrid threats are new forms of conflict. They combine the use of military force with other elements such as cyber-attacks, manipulation of information through the internet and social networks, or economic pressure vectors. The development of new technologies and their easy access make it easier for these actions to come from anywhere in the world, from both state and non-state actors, at a much quicker pace than in the past, making prevention and response more complicated. Other panellists such as Eskil Grendahl Sivertsen, Special Adviser at the Norwegian Defence Establishment (FFI) and Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv, Professor of Security Studies at The Arctic University of Norway (UiT), seemed to agree with these statements.



The fourth and final session of the first day was “Deterrence: who are the central actors within hybrid operations?”. As explained by Tormod Heier, Lieutenant Colonel and Director of Research and Development at the Command and Staff College of the Norwegian Defense University College (NDUC), hybrid attacks can be the work of governments, but also of non-state actors, such as companies, pressure groups, terrorist organizations or popular movements. The most important and far-reaching risk, especially in social media at the present times, is “fake news”. Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, Postdoctoral Fellow of Political Science at the University of Oslo, and Henrik Stålhane Hiim, Associate Professor at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies at NDUC, expanded information on the subject. The concept of fake news refers to disinformation in the sense of a lack, manipulation or even abundance of information. The alarm was raised when they became a turning point for governments throughout Europe and the United States on the consideration of the destructive power of fake news. Their purpose is to generate a manipulation of public opinion through the use of new technologies and social networks, with an enormous impact on society, such as in elections, speakers highlighted.

Conference panels, day 2

The second day began with a panel on “The changing character of warfare and the application of international law” with regards to Hybrid Threats. International humanitarian law does not prohibit war, but establishes minimum requirements for protection during armed conflict based on principles of humanity, distinction between categories of persons, military necessity, and proportionality. Reference was made to the current conflict between NATO and Russia, and the military differences between both. NATO is currently the world's leading military alliance, with a capacity of nearly 3.5 million combined troops, and with a variable contribution from each of its 30 member states at the strategic and influential levels. Although it is difficult to make predictions, NATO's power tends to increase and Russia's to decrease. The speakers on the implications of conflict for international law were Camilla Guldahl Cooper, Associate of Operational Law at the Norwegian Defence University College, and Agata Kleczkowska, Associate Professor at the Institute of Legal Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences. After this session, Patricia and Miriam seized the opportunity to speak to Agata Kleczkowska on the *weaponization of migration* by Belarus against Poland and by Morocco against Spain, in a very fruitful chat among the three women.

The final session of the NorSec Conference 2022 revolved around “Perspectives from the North: strategies on tackling Hybrid Threats”. The main takeaway from this latest session, which featured Erik Reichborn-Kjennerud, is that Europe's geopolitical rivals are increasingly incorporating hybrid threats into their arsenals and deploying them. This amorphous set of threats exists below the level of war, allowing other powers to exploit existing social divisions and spread confusion and instability. Furthermore, the session counted on the participation of three members of the YATA network who expressed their country views on Nordic security vis a vis Hybrid Threats. These were Andreas Salomonsson, Vice Praesidium Member of the Nordic Youth Council; Akseli Mäenpää, Member of the Atlantic Council of Finland's Youth Network; and Jacob Nørholm, President of Youth Atlantic Treaty Association Denmark; on Sweden, Finland and Denmark respectively.

Networking and social activities

As international participants of the NorSec Conference 2022, Patricia and Miriam had the opportunity to engage in a variety of gatherings with like-minded students and young professionals from the various YATA network chapters around Europe. Ranging from breakfasts, coffee breaks and even a formal dinner, Patricia and Miriam enjoyed free time with YATA representatives from countries like Portugal, Denmark, or Slovakia. The environment was very inviting to interact with the rest of the participants, who kindly chatted and shared their views on security with the President and the Secretary General of YATA Spain.

Hybrid Threats, international security, a variety of different cultures, profiles and interests. Both Patricia and Miriam agree that the experience was enriching at the professional and personal levels, and encourage every young person interested in international issues to attend the conference next year. YATA Norway, thank you for the welcome and the excellent reception. We hope to see you soon.
