



NATO Special Forces Learn Drone Warfare from Ukraine

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In August, Polish special forces became the first allied unit to test a new U.S. exercise in Germany built on lessons from the Ukrainian front. Infiltration, concealment, electronic warfare, and drone strikes are rapidly being incorporated into the training of NATO special operations units.

Last August, at the U.S. training area in **Hohenfels, Germany**, a unit from the **Polish special forces** took part in a new exercise developed by the **U.S. Army Green Berets** based on experience gained in the war in Ukraine.

Poland thus became **the first NATO ally to test this new special forces training model**, which had previously been trialed by U.S. teams.

The objective was not simply to learn how to operate a drone. The special operations units had to **infiltrate beyond enemy lines, cross hostile territory, evade aerial and electronic surveillance, and reach a position from which to direct a simulated attack using an**

unmanned system.

This training directly reflects the lessons of the Ukrainian front and shows how **the role of special forces is changing on a battlefield dominated by drones and sensors.**

Special forces under constant observation

The war in Ukraine has shown that drones are no longer merely support tools.

They have become a constant presence on the battlefield, particularly affecting units that must move deep behind enemy lines.

And this is precisely the traditional operating environment of **special forces.**

Small commercial drones can monitor roads, forests, buildings, and military positions for hours. Once a target is identified, information can be rapidly passed to an attack drone, artillery, or other weapons systems.

For a special operations patrol, therefore, it is no longer enough to move without being seen by a human observer.

It must also avoid **thermal sensors, cameras, electronic warfare systems, and interception of radio emissions.**

At Hohenfels, Polish special forces had to decide **when to move, when to remain concealed, when to communicate, and when to maintain electronic silence.**

The change is clear: **special forces training is no longer solely about infiltration and combat, but also about the ability to survive within a permanent network of enemy surveillance.**

Infiltration takes on a new form

For decades, Western special forces have built much of their capability around clandestine infiltration, navigation, concealment, and the ability to operate for extended periods behind enemy lines.

These capabilities remain essential.

But the war in Ukraine has shown that **traditional infiltration must be rethought.**

A patrol can be detected not because it has been seen directly, but because it used a radio, activated an electronic device, or crossed an area monitored by drones.

For special forces, the consequence is profound: **concealment must simultaneously become physical, thermal, and electronic.**

This is precisely the philosophy behind the new U.S. exercise.

Lessons from Ukraine are being observed and analyzed by the Green Berets, turned into training procedures, and then passed on to allied special operations units.

Special forces are thus becoming one of the main laboratories through which NATO is testing new forms of warfare.

From the special patrol to the “kill chain”

Perhaps the most significant aspect concerns the relationship between reconnaissance and strike.

A small special forces team infiltrated behind enemy lines can locate a target, identify it, and quickly transmit its position to weapons systems positioned even at great distances.

This is the so-called **“kill chain,”** the sequence linking the sensor, identification, decision, and strike.

The war in Ukraine has drastically shortened this chain.

A drone can locate a target and, just minutes later, another drone, artillery, or a missile can strike it.

For special forces, this represents a decisive change.

The value of a patrol no longer depends solely on the weapons it carries. An infiltrated team can become **an advanced sensor capable of directing the firepower of an entire combat network.**

This role is fully consistent with the very nature of special operations units: small formations capable of operating independently and generating strategic effects far greater than their size would suggest.

But there is also the opposite problem.

Any digital communication can reveal the team's location.

For this reason, **special forces must learn to reconcile connectivity and invisibility**, using networks only when necessary and minimizing their electronic signature.

Why Polish special forces

The choice of Poland as the first ally does not appear accidental.

Warsaw regards the war in Ukraine as a direct reference point for its own military planning and is rapidly strengthening its armed forces.

Polish special forces, moreover, are among the most important assets for operations on NATO's eastern flank, where potential reconnaissance, infiltration, and target-designation missions would take on particularly high value.

For these units, therefore, learning to operate in a drone-saturated environment **is not a theoretical exercise, but preparation directly linked to high-intensity conflict scenarios in Eastern Europe.**

Special forces as a laboratory for the new warfare

For years, Western militaries have regarded drones as an additional capability.

The war in Ukraine is imposing a different perspective.

The drone is now part of the combat environment, just like artillery, communications, or electronic warfare.

And special forces, precisely because of the nature of their missions, are among the units that must adapt most rapidly.

They will need to know how to operate their own drones, evade enemy ones, reduce radio emissions, employ electronic warfare systems, and continue operating even when communications are jammed.

The Hohenfels exercise therefore represents something more than a simple bilateral activity between the United States and Poland.

It shows how special forces are becoming the testing ground through which the lessons of the war in Ukraine are being turned into new NATO tactics.

In the next high-intensity conflict, special units will continue to infiltrate behind enemy lines, identify targets, and conduct high-risk operations.

But they will have to do so under entirely new conditions: **knowing that the skies above them could be constantly occupied by enemy drones.**