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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE - COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES
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MILITARY DECISIVENESS IN DYNAMIC CONFLICTS

By/par

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Abstract

Crises and conflicts are reflections of ongoing global change and its underlying dynamics. Consequently any successful crisis management has to be dynamic by nature. Frictions between the underlying global dynamics and interacting political systems cause communication disorder within the affected societies. This communication disorder is likely to increase until the incompatible political framework has adapted or vanished.

Military campaign planning and its underlying structure, the Operational Planning Process (OPP), in its current application reflect a more static approach towards crisis and conflict. This misperception of reality neglects the dynamic de-constructionist tendencies of conflicts and hereby causes military and envisioned political success to be increasingly detached. Post-campaign military interventions are an attempt to catch up with reality, but they often require higher efforts than the campaign itself and have, at best, an indirect impact upon the defined end state.

Current proposals to adapt the OPP mainly focus at changes in its terminology or add additional confusion by trying to generate multidimensional civil-military campaign models based upon complex system theories. This essay intends go a different route by re-emphasizing three basic truisms of operational planning: the operational idea, decisiveness and simplicity. The author argues that in order to adapt the OPP to the dynamic nature of warfare and to re-establish its previous usefulness, it needs to be introduced by an Orientation Phase. The aim of this Orientation Phase is to conduct a continuous analysis of potential frictions in the outlined context between global dynamics and national political systems. Based upon this analysis the OPP can be utilized as an efficient planning tool to ensure the effective use of military force.

Introduction

“The civil-military nature of any campaign, a reflection of the open system of military operations, will also increase the challenge of coordinating, harmonizing and integrating the various instruments of coalition or national power into a cohesive whole.”¹

“Chaotic behavior arises from a conjunction of some of the key characteristics of complex systems...multiple components, feedback loops, synergy, and nonlinear dynamics.”²

These statements by Lieutenant-Colonel Pierre Lessard and Thomas Homer-Dixon, the Director of the Peace and Conflict Studies Program and Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto, highlight the dilemma of any revised approach for operational planning.

In order to adapt to the complexity of modern warfare increasingly complex campaign concepts are likely to generate the outlined conditions of chaotic behavior. The necessity for vertical and horizontal co-ordination within the context of non-linear conflicts and coalition warfare stands in sharp contrast to the basic principles of operational art: the implementation of an operational idea, decisiveness and simplicity. Are military planners really “dammed if they do and dammed if they don’t” adapt?

¹ Pierre Lessard, *Campaign design for winning the war...and the peace* (AMSC 7), 43

² Thomas Homer-Dixon, *The Ingenuity Gap* (USA, Alfred A. Knopf and Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2000), 124

This paper will argue that in order to ensure a preventative and effective approach towards crisis and conflict management, the Operational Planning Process needs to be introduced by an Orientation Phase.

In support of this thesis the nature and characteristics of international crises and conflicts in the context of national security requirements will be examined. The advantages of mutually detached military and civil planning at the operational level and the basic concept of an envisioned Orientation Phase will then be examined. Finally the concept will be highlighted by selected generic examples of modern type crises.

The dynamic nature of crises and conflicts in the context of national security requirements

In contrast to common believe the world did not change after the 9/11 terror attack against the United States. Seemingly it re-introduced a traditional national focus in international politics but actually it underlined three main aspects of current global developments:

1. Political systems are dominated by global dynamics. Change is the only constant factor within a system of interrelated political decisions. The impact of emerging frictions is not definable within the traditional deterministic patterns of crises and conflicts, accordingly required strategic end states become evasive.
2. The disintegration of traditional structures, which tend to link military expertise with defined resources, emerges as a main characteristic in the context of asymmetric warfare.

3. Instant functional cohesion becomes a dominant organizational feature in modern warfare. This includes tactical level co-operation as well as international coalition building.

How can national policy cope with the above mentioned developments? Is the urge for national security only a blunt denial of global destiny? In order to answer these questions it is important to assess which factors constitute national security and in how far they can be affected by dynamic changes.

National security is not a logical entity, it is rather a system of systems. The different system levels generate a network of social and political structures.

Five main conditions of national security can be identified³:

1. Political Security
2. Economic Security
3. Social Security
4. Ecological Security
5. Military Security

Political security describes the integrity and stability of the government and the underlying governmental system. The main factors of political security are the sovereignty of governmental power, the legitimacy of this governmental power, the effectiveness of governmental organization and the existence of a sustainable social structure. The key parameter for political security is the level of acceptance and

³ Walter Buehl, *Krise und Konflikt in den internationalen Beziehungen (Grundlagen eines neuen Sicherheitskonzepts)*, 55-66

voluntary participation in public affairs by the national population and the level of integration within the international community.

Economic security encompasses the national access to required resources, finances and markets. It aims to ensure an accepted national living standard. The existence of appropriate internal economic structures including access to required resources and functioning external relationships is essential for this factor of national security.

Social security includes a rather heterogeneous subset of factors. National demographic developments have to reflect the ability for adequate reproduction of the population or planned immigration. The population has to grow or decrease in accordance with available national resources and the required living standard. Social interaction in between the population has to be as intense as possible. Any decrease in social interrelationships can fragmentize national societies. Simultaneously national culture and language needs to be preserved and further developed in order to maintain a national identity.

Ecological security is closely linked to the national biosphere. As a mutually international aspect of national security ecological security requires adequate national environmental standards as well as extensive international co-operation in an effort to maintain the global biosphere.

Military security seems to be the hunchback in the cathedral of national security. The quest for military security potentially violates nearly all previously outlined aspects of national security. Why is it so? Military security is linked to the existence of armed forces. These require substantial funding in peacetime and war, which impacts the national living standard. In wartime soldier-citizens get killed, national treasures are

destroyed and the biosphere gets mutilated. With the one exception of the national fight for survival it is mainly the quest for political security, which requires military security.

By analyzing national security in the context of the previously outlined three main aspects of current global developments it is obvious that both closely interact. In other words, the quest for national security continuously pushes developments in the national and international context and is similarly impacted by external dynamics. Consequently it is of the utmost importance for every nation to maintain or re-establish the required sustainability conditions within its own society while managing a crisis abroad.

A high impact military approach has a destabilizing impact on many aspects of national security and hereby increases the frictions it aims to eliminate. Furthermore it also destabilizes the targeted society and consequently requires extensive “nation building” efforts. Within this dynamic context deterministic end states are not useful and even the notion of intended conditions⁴ still reflects a static approach in dynamic disguise. The intention to establish desirable conditions based upon an unknown constellation of national factors is as overly challenging as achieving a fixed strategic end state. This approach is likely to end up with a random selection of conditions for the targeted society with questionable overall sustainability.

The disintegration of traditional structures linking military expertise and required resources makes it impossible to establish any equation relating towards an expected impact based upon specific investments in military resources. At the same time military expertise enables the use of non traditional resources in the military context. In other words, analytical abilities in the realm of military expertise represent up-to-date

⁴ Pierre Lessard, *Campaign design for winning the war...and the peace* (AMSC 7), 20

knowledge and establish a future oriented leverage effect, while actual military resources constitute “frozen” materialized knowledge with an inconsistent usefulness in the context of future crises and conflict management. This does not mean that both are totally detached from each other, it just implies that “more bang for the buck” analogies are a thing of the past. Ironically terrorist organizations have shown a remarkable ability to utilize non traditional means for asymmetric warfare.

Instant functional cohesion as an emerging dominant feature in modern warfare reflects the above mentioned increasing relevance of analytical abilities. Intense co-operation under tight time constraints requires a deeper level of analysis based upon thorough education. The incentive is that tactical level co-operation and international coalition building create a decisive leverage effect in the context of modern conflict and crisis management.

The advantages of mutually detached military and civil planning at the operational level and the basic concept of an envisioned Orientation Phase

Any type of crisis management requires the ability to make informed choices. This applies to all hierarchical levels involved. Any type of warfare utilizes a deductive approach to achieve clarity and focus. The Operational Planning Process is a reflection of this flow of thoughts. Consequently operational planning fails to be effective in an insufficiently definable environment. In other words, there is a maximum complexity level for the application of operational art. It is essential to understand this logical limitation in order to see the advantages of mutually detached military and civil planning at the operational level.

At the very beginning of operational art, military planners intended to fill an emerging logical gap in 19th century warfare. The singularity between battle and war had been destroyed by emerging technologies and a new tool was required to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of warfare. New means of transportation and communication had to be utilized in order to outmaneuver the increasing firepower of land forces in a broader geographical context.

The Prussian Field Marshall Helmuth Graf von Moltke was the first one to fully understand the impact of this intellectual challenge. He factually created the operational level of warfare and hereby re-established the required deductive approach of warfare. His structural approach for campaign planning is in principle still valid today⁵. He could be called a grammarian of warfare, who reformed the language of war. By closing the gap between the tactical and strategic level of warfare, he created a highly efficient “war-machine”, which was continuously refined during the three increasingly complex campaigns against Denmark, Austria and France.

Graf von Moltke differentiated the specific objective of the military campaign from the overarching strategic goal and hereby shaped a suitable focus for military engagement. He emphasized the necessity to focus campaign planning at the initial deployment phase, because any mistake in the first phase of a campaign can hardly be outbalanced during the further conduct of the campaign. It is important to draw two important conclusions from this approach. First of all, Moltke focused at a linear differentiation of goals. His campaign goal derived from a clear cut strategic goal. He did not widen the focus of the given strategic intention, instead he further narrowed it

⁵ For more information see OTL i.G. Thorsten Koehler, *Helmuth von Moltke, the father of modern campaign planning*, MDS Essay CSC 28

down to its core aspects. Secondly, he emphasized the importance of the early stages of a campaign and the according planning. This is explicitly different thinking from some current models, which emphasize the importance and complexity of later phases or even post-campaign efforts.

Moltke's operational design set the conditions for military success and hereby re-established the required homogeneity within warfare. Political end state, campaign goals and battle sequence reflected the required deductive approach and ensured informed choices at all levels. In order to be successful, campaign design had to be based upon a decisive operational idea and an adequate level of planning simplicity.

The clear disadvantage of this classic military campaign concept is that it is embedded in a static framework. This axiomatic condition requires fixed action-reaction patterns, defined beginnings and endings of campaigns and set conditions for military success in order to ensure maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

Unfortunately modern warfare destroys this precondition. Lateral civil-military integration and non linear logical perceptions in between strategic, operational and tactical level drive the necessity for increasingly complex and adaptive campaign models. Consequently military planners struggle with highly interdependent and, in the end, indefinable factors. To make things worse, mutual misunderstanding dominates the current discussion.

A study conducted by Robert Grossman-Vermaas states that "The Effects Based approach and complexity theory both deal with how a widely distributed collection of diverse autonomous agents acting individually can nonetheless behave like a single,

even directed entity.”⁶ The mentioned most current western model, the so called Effects Based Approach, is based upon a system of systems approach and differentiates itself from the classical campaign approach, which Grossman describes as follows: “..., warfare is deterministically predictable-given knowledge of the initial conditions and having identified the universal laws of combat, one should be able to resolve specific political and military issues and predict the results.”⁷

Unfortunately Grossman does not adequately reflect the original concept of campaign planning, which was arguably static but never deterministic in its deductions. This would have been in contradiction to the inherent realization that military success ultimately has to be achieved at the tactical level, which is dominated by unpredictable events. It is interesting to note that Grossman’s study reflects Newtonian principles as a key cultural source for Western warfare, consequently the necessity emerges to move beyond these principles towards the findings deriving from complexity theory. The problem with this analogy is that the findings of theoretical physics continue to be based on the solid footing of mathematics, which, by definition, is axiomatic and deterministic.

The key question in the context of the above mentioned dilemma is: Should the operational level planning approach be enriched by a diversity of additional factors and feedback loops or is it logically better to go back to the basics? One thing is for sure, it would be the worst decision to just keep on muddling through with inadequately adapted tools and over-reliance upon logically inconsistent perceptions like the concept

⁶ Robert Grossman-Vermaas, Department of National Defence (Canada) and Department of War Studies, King’s College London (UK), *Discourse of action: Command, Control, Conflict and the Effects Based Approach*. Study prepared for the Directorate of Defence Analysis National Defence Headquarters. Ottawa: 2004, 11

⁷ Ibid, 11

of information dominance. “The illusion of control in war portrays the use of force innocuously and blurs distinctions between war and diplomacy.”⁸ This quote describes the current loose/loose relationship of civil-military efforts.

How can we go back to the basics of distinct military campaign planning, if the axiomatic context has vanished? In the following I will outline a possible model for adaptation, which introduces a crucial new element to the operational planning process, the Orientation Phase.

In order to identify necessary adaptations it is essential to go back once more to the key aspects of operational planning. It was originally intended to fill a logical gap between the strategic and the tactical level and it aimed to ensure the option of informed choices for military leaders. It was a roadmap rather than an algorithm in its basic construct. Culmination of forces and operational speed were technical aspects within this construct and reflected the military knowledge at its time. The operational level planning process aimed to reflect the unpredictability of war by supporting an operational idea but at the same time intended to decrease chaotic information influences by focusing at the gist. Simplicity and decisiveness ensured the singularity between strategic and operational level goals and, sometimes, even tactical level goals.

Obviously the singularity aspect in modern warfare has shifted towards a sequential input of military and civil interventions towards a complex overall situation. Consequently decisiveness is the one factor which needs to be introduced in a different way. How can military decisiveness be adequately implemented in the context of dynamic conflicts?

⁸ Lieutenant Colonel H.R. McMaster, *Crack in the foundation: Defense Transformation and the Underlying Assumption of Dominant Knowledge in Future War*, Student Issue Paper, Center for Strategic Leadership,

Military campaigns should not be aiming at achieving strategic end states. Instead they have to aim at selected operational level military end states, which translate into overall changes within dynamic developments. These influences upon dynamic developments have to be aimed at the establishment of system sustainability conditions, which will be defined as conditions for self-governance. These conditions ensure the overall ability of the affected society to cope with ongoing dynamic changes within the self-defined patterns of system reactions. This is a distinctively different approach from nation building or the establishment of preferred conditions from the perspective of intervening countries.

It is essential to have a clear understanding about the required military impact in order to de-conflict the use of military from non-military means and to identify a maximum effectiveness intervention point within a defined static context. These two essential preconditions have to be conducted in the context of an initial phase, called Orientation Phase. Overall the Orientation Phase is intended to:

- link the strategic level with the military operational level
- define and monitor the conditions for self-governance within earmarked societies
- divide global dynamics into their component parts
- look for unintended effects upon earmarked societies
- identify the possible outcome of expected communication disorder within affected societies
- consider different civil and military options for possible interventions and

- define a fixed frame for military operational planning, if the military option has been chosen by the strategic level decision makers.

The basic idea for an Orientation Phase derives from Col. John Boyd's (USAF Ret.) OODA loop concept (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act)⁹. Boyd's Orientation Phase was intended to shape the interaction with the environment within the context of OODA loop. The Orientation Phase within the outlined concept of this paper is intended to fulfill the same function. The key aspect within this rather complex decision making process is to reduce the number of relevant indicators down to an absolute minimum. Even though the assessed problems are highly complex, the envisioned minimalist approach is in line with similar methodologies in the realm of medical diagnostics. Emergency room treatments are often based upon one-reason-decision-making, which proved to be highly successful when complex problems have to be solved in a limited time-frame¹⁰.

In the following chapter selected categories of generic conflicts will be introduced in order to highlight specific aspects within our model and to illustrate the interaction between the proposed Orientation Phase and the Operational Planning Process.

Generic examples of modern type crises

What characteristics have these to be earmarked societies in common and which reductionist approach is suitable to define and monitor their self-governance capabilities? In the following, generic examples are intended to shed light into the

⁹ For more information see Robert B. Polk, *A Critique of the Boyd Theory-Is it Relevant to the Army?*, Defense Analysis, Vol 16, No 3 (December 2000), 257-276

¹⁰ For more information see Gerd Gigerenzer, *Adaptive Thinking. Rationality in the Real World*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2000

question of model applicability. The selected categories reflect previously outlined subsystems of national security. Even though any kind of major disturbance affects all aspects of national security, there is mostly one subsystem to be affected first. Only military security is a reflection of major disturbances in other areas of national security.

In the following, two selected model-societies will be further investigated:

- Fundamentalist pseudo democracy – Political Security
- Society with outrunning non-multipliable resources – Economic Security

The key parameter for political security, the level of acceptance and voluntary participation in public affairs by the national population and the level of integration within the international community, will be examined in the context of a fundamentalist pseudo democracy. Within this type of society there are obviously continuous tensions between the religious leadership, the political leadership and the population, which

Due to the fact that the new leadership most likely will prefer a centralized and ideologically fundamentalist approach of government, there is not too much flexibility available to achieve this goal. In this situation the crises will be addressed by external /international escalation. The aim will be to initiate an international reaction, which then again will trigger internal developments in favor of the new leadership (“We against the others”). Ideally external economic and political needs might be ensured through concessions from the international community and internal stability re-established.

The outlined international escalation could be a direct military threat against neighboring nations or the development of WMD technology. This technology could be either developed covertly or openly. A covert development has the advantage that the project will be rather mature before it will be detected. It is also a quite good bargaining chip at the negotiation table because it allows the new leadership to decide about escalation or de-escalation at any time.

A specific military campaign goal for possible counteraction could be the destruction of this WMD capabilities and/or the destruction of selected offensive military power capabilities. A campaign plan, which fulfills these goals, could be creative within its operational idea, decisive and simple. All further dynamic developments within the effected society would have a factual internal focus. Consequently there may be an ongoing suppression of the population instead of an instant revolution, but there is a fair chance that at a certain point of dissatisfaction and frustration the behavior of the population will transform the dissatisfied into a mass movement. If this mass movement fails, the social interaction will be dominated by

increasingly irrational and uncontrollable behavior, out of reach for any type of government. At this very point the old structures will vanish. The monitored key factor for political security will show a “zero” value at this point. Global dynamics will be a permanently interfering factor within these developments, be it in the form of globalized economy or the ongoing technological revolution.

The aspect of disturbances within the area of economic security will be highlighted by the example of a society with outrunning non-multipliable resources. Societies with relevant quantities of non-multipliable resources are always endangered to postpone necessary adaptations to the globalized economy. In our case the monitored society is facing exactly this type of situation. Non adapted economic and social structures become under pressure by the fact that the availability of valuable resources decreases. The economic consequences could be catastrophic, major layoffs and the collapse of parts of the industry a likely consequence.

The rapidly decreasing access to required resources, finances and markets would cause the economic implosion of the affected society. The main indicator for the level of economic security, the perceived national living standard, would fall sharply. Social fragmentation and political turbulence would be a consequence. In this situation the tendency for ethnical separation could lead to a civil war.

In the context of the emerging civil war, the armed forces might fall apart and be utilized by rivaling ethnical groups. It could be in the best interest of the international community to largely eliminate the military option in the context of this inner conflict. Consequently those military bases, which join separatist forces, could be targeted by an air campaign. At the same time international coalition forces could support loyal

national troops to maintain control of selected harbors, airports and transport routes to ensure that they can be continuously utilized by the central government.

The national economic adaptation process is unavoidable, but a decisive military campaign within a static logical frame can help to ensure the national economic survival. The main precondition within this example is of course the willingness of the central government to temporarily accept external military support. If this is not the case, a limited military campaign can be envisioned to contain the conflict within the national borders.

Conclusion

The key question in the context of military campaigns is in how far the operational level can add value to the use of military means. Operational art aims at providing the framework for informed choices by political and military leaders. This can only be ensured if an operational idea can be implemented into a simple and decisive campaign plan. This is important to note in a world which is dominated by increasingly complex and interwoven problems. Diseases and ideas can be spread worldwide within hours and any grand strategy is reaching its structural and intellectual limitations. Consequently short notice crises and conflicts will appear on the radar screen of international politics.

This essay argued that in order to use the advantages of the operational level of warfare within this challenging overall situation the instrument needs to stay within the limitations of its logical toolbox. Most of all, this means that despite of the dynamic nature global dynamics, military campaign planning has to stay within its axiomatic static

framework. In order to ensure a preventative and effective approach towards crisis and conflict management, the Operational Planning Process needs to be introduced by an Orientation Phase. This Orientation Phase is the missing link between the strategic and the operational level of crises and conflict management.

Within the Orientation Phase a suitable systematic and continuous monitoring of earmarked societies ensures the definition of optimum effectiveness points for military engagements. This ensures decisiveness and efficiency of military campaigns.

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