



NETWORKING CENTERS OF GRAVITY

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Presentation Structure

- Part I:
 - ▣ “Political Conflict” as an additional strategic level in contemporary conflict analysis
 - ▣ Need for an overarching integrated strategy
- Part II:
 - ▣ “Center of Gravity” in Political Conflicts
- Part III:
 - ▣ Information
- Part IV: Consequences

Part I: “Political Conflict”

- One of the theoretical assumptions of Clausewitzian theory is the notion, that organized and politically motivated violence does not occur spontaneously, but as an eventual violent manifestation in the continuum of an underlying conflict.
- This is believed to be true for all kinds of war and political violence. Unlike the traditional paradigm of nation state war where warfighting is the exclusive realm of the armed forces since the peace of Westphalia in 1648, today’s (and arguably future) armed conflicts cannot be prosecuted by military means alone.
- Taking into account the ever-increasing interdependencies between diplomacy, economy, intelligence and defense efforts, future attempts to preserve peace and pursue political interests should be understood – and dealt with - in an overarching realm that could be called “political conflict”.

Example Afghanistan

- This concept of multi-agency efforts that is intended to solve the underlying reasons for the ongoing conflict is of particular importance in some of the contemporary asymmetrical conflicts the West finds itself increasingly involved in.
- The most notable example for this is the ongoing mission in Afghanistan.
- This led to attempts to coordinate the efforts of involved actors, e.g. in the so called “Interagency Management System”. But these efforts never received the top-level political support they would have needed to prevail in the turf-battles between government organisations.

Aspects of an integrated Strategy

- The various efforts that are made by more or less independently acting stakeholders in Afghanistan remain fragmented, there is no sufficient unity of effort, no functioning chain of command and no effective overarching strategy in place.
- This strategy would have to combine efforts to create and secure an attractive alternative to Taliban rule and fighting insurgents at the same time.
- The combined effort has to create a situation, in which the support of the insurgents is by any means the decidedly less attractive and in short-, middle- and long-term perspective more costly option for the Afghan people.
- This is not primarily about “winning hearts and minds”, but about creating a situation of incentive vs. cost.

Part II: Center of Gravity in Political Conflicts

- General assumptions on the use of the Center of Gravity Concept:
 - While Clausewitz did speak of a single (and not many different) Center of Gravity in battle, it is here believed that he did so in order to explain a concept by using the specific context of battle to illuminate it's function.
 - This specific model of explaining an overarching theory on a specific example can be found in several places of *On War*.
 - Another highly contested question regards the applicability of Clausewitz' concepts to different organizational levels of war.
 - Here, it is assumed that although every war (theoretically and in retrospective) only has one CoG on the highest command level, for commanders of lower (e.g. operational and tactical levels) local CoG's of the enemy can also be successfully attacked which in turn might alter the overall CoG of the enemy's warfighting efforts.
 - Thus, these different CoG's are understood as being in a constant state of dynamic change due to own and opponent actions.

Tri-polar structures

- Clausewitz uses tri-polar structures to describe the nature of war:
- In these, characteristics are aligned with actors. Purpose is linked to the government, hostility to the population and chance to the military.
- We believe, that the same structure can be used to describe the nature of a political conflict. Again, purpose would be linked to the government which is still in charge of setting the agenda in this effort. The population needs to support the mission and the actors in charge would still have to deal with a high degree of chance and uncertainty.

Political will as Center of Gravity

- These aspects combined constitute the political will to engage and eventually prevail in this conflict.
- What is of main interest in this context is that Clausewitz uses a networking structure to describe the relationships between and different influences of the stakeholders that might lead to a constantly changing dynamic nature of the political will.
- This concept of political will applies as much to the own efforts as to those of the enemy or enemies.
- And it constitutes the centripetal focal point of the whole political struggle – the Center of Gravity in a political conflict.

Dynamic Networks of Gravity

- While in the traditional example of CoG in battle only one overarching CoG is assumed, in complex operations like the one in Afghanistan the West (though in reality also heavily fractured and by no means a homogeneous monolithic block) faces a number of different opponents in the same theater of operations.
- The same is true for the efforts against violent extremism. While in this case the U.S. has one CoG, the opponents each have their own.
- The concepts of offense and defense are increasingly closely linked.
- From the U.S. perspective, these different opponent- CoG's form a to some extent interconnected dynamic network of Gravity (dNoG).
 - ▣ Hypothetic example: If the U.S. somehow succeeded to generally delegitimize religious violence, this would deliver a possibly fatal blow to the enemies CoG, their political will (e.g. by eradicating one of the three pillars, the political support).
 - ▣ If, on the other hand, the extremists could convince a majority of the population in the West, that their warfighting efforts were unjust, the political will of many opponents could be strengthened, which would influence both U.S. and extremists CoG.

Part III: Information

- The role of C4ISR:
 - In a political conflict the perceived legitimacy of the political alternative to the insurgent-regime is of supreme importance.
 - A balanced reaction to threats and imminent attacks presupposes a good situational awareness (to be able to decide on the character and intensity of the reaction), a working chain of command and an exact execution of the ordered actions by lower level actors.
 - C4ISR is a key enabler for a successful implementation of strategy not only in military, but also in political conflicts. An attack on C4ISR infrastructure could deliver a decisive blow to the CoG.
- Today's operations are already depending to a high degree on networking structures and will increase to do so in the future.
 - The cyberdomain is the information link between the different the actors in the tri-polar structure.
 - It also will increasingly be used to store data (cloud computing) and process information.
- Two major communication roles of the Cyberrealm:
 - Internal Link between sensor and effector, strategy and action
 - External Link between Stakeholders (e.g. via Social Media)

Social Networks and Public Support

- Wars are often won or lost through the public support or lack thereof.
- This proved to be the case in Napoleon's France (where the public support allowed the levee en masse), in Prussia (where peace was the citizen's first obligation – ordered by the king but supported by a majority of the citizens), but of course also in more recent wars like Vietnam or Iraq and Afghanistan.
- In the latter examples the wars were effectively lost by losing the support of the own population, although the military aims at least of the war in Iraq have more or less been accomplished.
- The Arab Spring poses an extreme example of a situation, where a singular action actually sparked a regional revolution that was effectively organized through social media (among other means of communication).

Findings

- Contemporary and future conflicts might be approached on the level of political conflicts that takes whole-of-nation efforts into account.
- The diversification of the different actors, ways and means need to be integrated by a strategy with common political ends and executed through a united chain of command.
- The concept of CoG's can be adapted to the level of political conflict.
- While Chance and Purpose remain decisive factors, the role of public support increases in the home and in the mission country.
- The concept of CoG's becomes more complex and dynamic.
- Legitimacy issues produce an increasing need for timely –but balanced– decisions in political conflicts.
- The ongoing revolution in mass-communication affairs might be a “game changer”.
- The information realm will more often become CoG.