

Military capabilities and the strategic planning *conundrum*

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Abstract

This paper deals with the *conundrum* of military strategic planning based on capabilities. We argue that in order to prepare Armed Forces to face a future of blurring dichotomies that is the result of a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment in a truly speed of change, military strategic planners have revisit the capability vectors to solve the strategic planning *conundrum*.

- The military strategic planning

After the end of Cold War, western military strategic planning has been mainly based on capabilities. According to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a capability is a combination eight vectors (hence the word DOTMLPFI): doctrine (the way to fight); organization (how to be organized to fight); training (how to be prepared to fight); materiel (how to equip the forces to fight); leadership (how to prepare the leaders to fight); personnel (availability of qualified people to fight); facilities (installations needed to assure conditions to fight) and interoperability (how to integrate efforts to fight). To build a capability we need to reach, to integrate, to combine and to consolidate these eight vectors.

- The VUCA environment

Twenty-first century has confronted the world with a rampant technological evolution, with information in quantity, with disinformation, with new arising and resurgent powers, such as China and Russia, with nuclear proliferation, with the increase of fragile states, with refugees, with radicalism and consequent global terrorism environment, with climate change, with hunger, with extreme weather events, with pandemic diseases, with state and non-state actors, with cyber threats, with space and arms race, with prolonged wars, with hybrid wars, with proxy wars, with protracted wars, with dirty wars, with new wars, with war among us, with fear! We are therefore in the middle of irregular, catastrophic, traditional and disruptive challenges which can also arise combined.

- Speed of change

Strategic planning and its capabilities need time available. Time, that speed of change doesn't allow Armed Forces to have. Speed of change dictates that military

planners must know to manage lack of time in a comprehensive way. In fact, lack of time available affects decision making process mainly when we consider hierarchic institutions like Armed Forces, and, especially when we talk about collective defense organizations such as NATO. So, the less time available, the more accurate risk assessment we need. Those who decide have also to deal with different types of risk, the risk of using badly the time available, the risk of a bad decision, the risk of not assessing the risk, the risk of not clearly validate the strategy criteria (suitability, acceptability and feasibility to attain the policy end state objectives), the risk of not communicating clearly the risk to the above decision makers, the risk of not considering the risk as an opportunity, the risk of yielding to the political level's will.

- **The blurring dichotomies**

Regarding the new strategic environment, it's not clear anymore the difference between war and peace, war and post-war, internal and external, soldiers and civilians, war and catastrophe, victims and perpetrators. These diverse issues are no longer watertight compartments that can be narrowly defined.

So, it's in a mix of VUCA environment, speed of change, blurring dichotomies and fear that planners have to survive.

- **Aim and questions**

This paper aims to confront the DOTMLPFI capability vectors with the "new normal" above described in order to reassess their importance and, if necessary, defining any other vectors. So, we'll seek to know how this "new normal" affects the way we (NATO member-states) perform military strategic planning? In order to reach a better answer for that question, other questions can be previously answered namely: (1) How does an environment in constant metamorphosis, where irregular, catastrophic, traditional and disruptive threats may arise, can affects the building capabilities process?; (2) How to look at the capability vectors in Armed Forces of a small state with budget constraints?; (3) How to solve the paradox of long term versus high mutability/metamorphosis? What shall be the role of the capability vectors? Should the weight amongst these vectors be the same?; Should a capability consider any other vectors to fill the "new normal" gaps?

In sum, we believe that by answering these questions we deeply contribute to solve the military strategic planning *conundrum*. In order to do that we must consider that military capabilities have to be flexible, comprehensive and interoperable, which

many times is not aligned with the necessary stability needed by military planners in a middle and long-term basis.