DECISIONAL CULTURE - IMPACT ON ASYMMETRY

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Abstract: *Nowadays, not only has the way fights are carried out changed significantly, but also education and the decision making system have changed dramatically. On the one hand, there are attempts to assist decision-making by using various tools, including computerized ones, in order to limit the errors and the time needed to make them, but on the other hand, the popularization of these instruments creates another type of asymmetry, the enemy having detailed knowledge of these and being able to use them for their own benefit. The paper aims to make a review of what military decision-making act represents and the influences that the commander's education and experience can have in limiting or, on the contrary, increasing the asymmetry of conflicts.*

Keywords: *decisional culture, asymmetry, education, decision making system, military decision making, operational experience.*

MILITARY DECISION MAKING

Organizations need accurate and timely information to enable their leaders to make effective decisions. This is especially true for military organizations, where decisions have an impact not only on economic resources, but also on people's lives themselves. Operation in a volatile, unsafe environment, marked by chaos and uncertainty, complicates the

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ability of commanders and their team to synchronize available knowledge and incorporate innovation into their information systems.

Computer-based decision support systems can help to evaluate available information and model the possible outcomes of alternative courses of action for comparison. Such systems, however, must balance the need for timely results with the desire to model the complexity of the operational environment as accurately as possible.

Decisions in the military, similar to decisions in civil organizations, are ranging from the trivial ones (what time there is a certain meeting) to critical ones (whether to risk some life to conquer a particular objective). In this context, military decision-making can also be interpreted as making command-control decisions. This category involves the integration of real-time information to a higher level in order to decide the best way to use force in combat where there is a high degree of uncertainty and great time pressure.

Currently, military decision-making research tends to focus either on the cognitive aspects of team or individual decision-making, on the design of computer models that establish a probabilistic relationship between the actions taken and the effects obtained and then their use in modeling and optimization of the course of action selection, or on the theory of games that seek to develop a mathematical model to understand the decision-making process. Computer modeling also supports simulation and war games that allow users to try out new operational or organizational concepts and discover possible deficiencies before they are put into practice.

For military decision-makers, there are a number of robust processes and tools to support decision-making. The way of thinking specific to the military has led to the development of models and processes to support decision-making such as the OODA loop (observe, orient, decree, and act) developed by the US Air Force, the Military Decision Making Process of the US Army, the Estimate Process and the Seven Questions developed by the British Army.

Although not all decision makers have to make life and death decisions, most of them have begun to focus on using this type of model in business decision making to improve this process.

Also, SWOT, PERT, etc. are increasingly used as support in making informed decisions.

One of the favorite models of the US military used in decision support is Military Decision Making Process (MDMP). This model is an optimized approach that assumes that even in a complex situation there will be a course of action that the decision-maker will address. It is a process that takes time to deliberate and analyze alternatives using a set of evaluation criteria.

Strategic planning is a key element in the decision-making process and the achievement of the set objectives. Also these processes receive some assistance, as outlined below, that can be used both in a personal and in the business or government issues. This consists of a set of questions arranged in a given order, which may have an iterative and cyclic character. They are divided into two groups: first to define the strategic framework of the situation (where? what? and why?), and the second to define a specific plan within the framework defined previously (how? when? and who?) (figure 1).

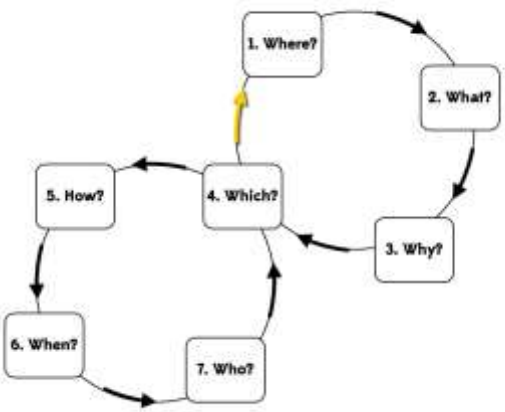

Figure 1: Strategic planning model

The two groups are linked by the question "who? ", a question that manages the concept of risk and course of action.

"Where?" defines elements such as present location and future destinations, current situation and vision. "What?" is the mission, the reality of what is going to be done. "Why?" defines the values, the identity of the planner. "How?" is the method or the plan through which missions will be

achieved. "When?" refers to time, timing and coordination to achieve the mission successfully. In most cases, time and synchronization are critical. "Who?" mainly defines the roles, the team, the organizational structure, the staff network. "Which?" defines the selection, the direction of action. After setting up several possible variants through which the proposed vision can be achieved, it is necessary to choose one in order to establish the action plan.

One of the factors with major influence on decisions is the risk. It has to be identified, evaluated, mitigated and managed so that decisions are taken in conditions that ensure the best chances of success. Risks vary from situation to situation; there is no template, so risk management is done as situations evolve.

Risk management is critical because, if performed unwittingly or based on inaccurate or incomplete information can lead to the failure of the operation. On the other hand, the "100% sure" approach is not always an optimal way to progress and evolution. Most situations call for risks.

THE INFLUENCE OF EDUCATION AND OPERATIONAL EXPERIENCE ON CONFLICT ASYMMETRY

The contemporary military environment is constantly changing and, as a result, the challenge has arisen for professional soldiers to act creatively and rationally. Not only are the military equipment and technologies constantly changing, but also the rules of engaging in combat, the temperament of contemporary soldiers and the operational environment, so that the old requirement for soldiers to obey the orders no longer works.

Experience gained in recent conflicts shows that a soldier's activity is no longer limited to fighting and causing loss to the enemy, but also requires other skills and qualifications, not all of them military in nature. In the current operational environment, the soldiers have to think on their feet and make decisions during the action, so they can better enforce national interests, the safety of their men and to enforce international conventions.

The need for such courses arose because the existing education system did not prepare the military to be able to manage the current challenges. They were educated what to think, but not how to think. Developing this way of thinking should lead to the education of the new generation of soldiers in the spirit of certain autonomy in decision-making.

However, although this type of critical thinking course does exist in the curriculum of many military education institutions, it is hard to tell whether these skills are being developed or just being trained in using tools that help this kind of decision-making. This also arises from a common paradox that, on the one hand, it is attempted to develop an independent way of thinking and, on the other hand, it is attempted to impose a certain control on the way of thinking by imposing a set of parameters and guidelines. For this reason, the use of tools to help the decision-making process, at the time when the experience gained reaches a certain critical level, will only restrict autonomy and flexibility in thinking, which will increase the existing asymmetry at this level compared to terrorist and paramilitary groups.

Luck rarely plays an important role in the success of military operations. Often, the quality of the commanders' decisions and their experience offer to a numerically inferior army the upper hand over a numerically superior army, as was the case in the war in the Falkland Islands.

Also, all the experience and quality of the commanders' decisions may make a poorly equipped army gain advantage over a technologically superior army.

An example of this case was the decision of the Iraqi Republican Guard to avoid direct conflict with the much-technologically superior army of the US-led coalition, instead of initiating a psychological war of attrition with the help of the civilian population. What should have been a short and precise war turned into a lasting and exhausting operation. Also in this case, the concept of guerrilla war, though not quite new, combined with the use of Improvised Explosive Devices, proved to be an exceptional idea.

Another example was given by the Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap who was often referred to as a military genius due to his highly effective military decisions. His attacks on several of the enemy's interests not only forced the French army – far superior in number and technology – to disperse its forces into smaller units that could easily be attacked by the Vietnamese forces, but also led to a very tiring psychological war many years later when the US military decided to protect southern of Vietnam from the communist regime. Another one of Vo's strategy was to choose the moment of offensive action in such a way so as to obtain a maximum negative impact on public opinion in enemy countries. The moment of assault on Dien Bien Phu was obviously chosen to coincide with the 1954

Geneva Conference where the territories of Indochina were divided and dispersed. The news referring to the brutality of the attack had a major impact not only on French public opinion but also on the public opinion of other colonial countries. The impact was so great that it is suspected that President Eisenhower ignored the cabinet's recommendations to send troops to help France in the fight against communism, precisely because of the negative public opinion that the attack had in the US.

These two strategies were used with devastating effects in the Tet offensive, which, despite failing to meet its objectives, was considered a turning point in the involvement of Americans in the Vietnam War. There are numerous documents describing the strategy chosen by Giap, namely to continue a prolonged war with special effects on the morale of American soldiers and the perception of US public opinion. By the simultaneous attack on several cities, he left the impression that the American troops were fighting an enemy who had unlimited resources, while the siege of the American forces gave the impression that these were easy targets for the Vietnamese soldiers. The propaganda value of these actions has often been cited as a reason for the withdrawal of the US Army from Vietnam. Osama bin Laden and other terrorist leaders have often mentioned Vietnam as a model of the type of victory pursued, a strategy of demoralizing those at home and inducing a desire to withdraw. Though effective, the costs of this strategy meant a colossal loss of human lives and was an enormous burden on the country's production capacity. This kind of decisions is not the product of a specific military process, but rather motivation to defeat the enemy (indeed Giap was not a professional military).

CONCLUSIONS

Fighting an enemy in a situation where the future of men in uniforms and a whole nation depends on the decision of a few must be addressed using all the intellectual resources available to officers and soldiers. Reducing these intellectual resources to a checklist of elements, as the well-known models (MDMP) do, will not lead to a clear chance of victory.

This is even more sensitive and can lead to the mentioned asymmetries, as there are currently many military education institutions that promote training programs with international participation based on existing alliances. These programs promote and teach operational procedures in use

to ensure a certain degree of homogeneity in alliance decision-making, but often these procedures are not secret and can be easily accessed by the enemy and used to their advantage.

Another element that can destabilize decision-making is that alliances may change over time. Nations that until recently struggled together will later try to annihilate each other using the same methods previously used jointly.

Limiting the decision-making capacity of officers and soldiers to a set of rules and tools such as those presented (MDMP, for example) can put militants at a disadvantage when they face an inventive enemy, and this can lead to extraordinary human and material costs needed to win the war.

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