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THE HUMAN DOMAIN: THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS IN 'WARS AMONGST THE PEOPLE'

Introduction

[SIGLA Brief 14/2019](#) conceived the emergence of a, yet unrecognized, Human Domain (HD) within the larger framework of the development of postmodern and post-industrial military theory. This brief will demonstrate how this emerging Domain fills a conceptual and doctrinal void. First it will address how the HD could contribute to the 'archetype' of wars amongst the people – counterinsurgency; second, its relationship with the Land and the other Domains will be explored briefly; and third, the HD characteristics will be matched against those of 'wars amongst the people'.

Discussion

Wars Amongst the People: counterinsurgency as an unfinished template

Smith coined the term war amongst the people and described this as both a graphic description of modern warlike situations, and (...) as a [conceptual framework](#): it reflects the fact that there is no secluded battlefield upon which armies engage, nor are there necessarily armies, definitely on all sides'. Insurgency remains the archetype of wars amongst the people.

Counterinsurgency theory became progressively codified since Johann von Ewald wrote his *Treatise on Partisan warfare (1784)*. A comparison between historical counterinsurgency (COIN) and contemporary COIN theories leads to at least five, unresolved fields of tension:

First, historical [counterinsurgents could occasionally escalate to acts of extreme violence](#) and resort to measures, which would now be deemed unacceptable.

Second, recent Western-led counterinsurgencies took place in independent states. This theoretically adds a superimposed strategic layer. Furthermore, these COIN efforts are coalition operations - again multiplying the number of strategic levels, actors and agendas.

Third, Huntington's influential *The Soldier and the State (1957)* accentuated an [operational level of war](#), and to a clear division of labour between the political and the military spheres. However, in counterinsurgency, there is an [intimate relationship between the strategic and the tactical levels](#).

Fourth, insurgencies (requiring mainly a population-centric approach) are invariably characterized by the concurrent employment of terrorism-as-a-method. Terrorism requires a

counterterror (enemy-centric) approach. The tension between these approaches lead, combined with the postmodern military's requirement for extreme force protection, to a [seemingly impossible trilemma](#).

Fifth, most historical insurgencies ended in political agreements, which were achievable. Yet, it remains uncertain how to reach a political agreement with actors akin to [the Islamic State](#), which declares the destruction of the Westphalian state order as an end. Defining victory remains evasive in the absence of such insights.

In summary, COIN doctrine might well be embedded in historical military best practices, but COIN remains seemingly agnostic to underexplored novel facts and assumptions. The HD provides for a strategic, bottom-up-politicised, conceptual framework, opening opportunities for fundamental academic research on societal conflicts, and the development of novel approaches.

Why the Human Domain is transversal and overarching and does not equal the Land Domain

Intuitively, one could argue that a HD is not required, since people live on land. If this holds true, then why is the addition of a HD required?

First, decision-makers deploy the tools of the Land Domain in geographically demarcated terrain as the taxonomy of area of operations illustrates, while the HD reflects global interconnectivity and is inherently [borderless](#).

Second, the Land tools originate from within the philosophical framework of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). RMA remains focused on the technical, tactical and operational levels that are based on the deeply engrained assumption that [military victory equals political victory](#). Adding a HD would re-balance this epistemological preference for the physical by adding anthropological, cultural and sociological notions, affecting all levels of war, and reflecting the transversal nature of the HD.

Third, Air and Sea Domain assets also intervene on Land. An overarching HD becomes the conceptual location inducing all force with strategic and political meaning.

Wars Amongst the People and the Human Domain

The vast majority of the literature on the HD proposes to add culture and language in curricula; to include complexity theory; a central place for the social sciences in theory development; and for a better fusion of all civil-military actors in conflict resolution. How do these characteristics apply to wars amongst the people?

War is a [cultural phenomenon](#) and strategic culture analysis [is traditionally confined to states](#), not to non-state actors. This exposes an epistemic and institutional preference for state-on-state war. Yet, in COIN, at the absolute cultural level, postmodern strategic culture clashes with a newly invoked pre-modern strategic culture such as Jihadism. Strategic-level culture is about uncovering the sources and dynamics of power and the rationale and narratives for violence in a given society. [Stone](#) remarked that raw intelligence collected in counterinsurgency is of little value unless contextualized within a given framework of meaning – a culture – located in the HD.

Wars amongst the people are unfolding in an interconnected, complex and conflicted ecosystem rather than in a geographically contained binary battle space. This interconnectivity leads to the phenomenon of '[strategic compression](#)' where events on the tactical level have an immediate strategic effect that adds to the complexity.

The uncovering of underlying societal mechanisms and [deeper realities](#) requires an anthropological and sociological approach to intelligence collection and analysis, and subsequent operations. In this

context, constructivist approaches offer more promising options than the traditional positivist stance. Military sociological notions as [soldier-diplomats and soldier-scholars](#) better fit the required soldier profile than that of the prevailing postmodern soldier as a fighting specialist.

Even NATO's Comprehensive Approach (CA) Strategy of [2010](#), when it comes to implementation, [continues to be problematic](#): divergent agendas, inter-organizational rivalry, and questions on the place of national contributions within a multinational context, pose challenges. CA frequently reflects the Western state-centric approach to governance in societies, where the culture refuses centralization. The HD offers conceptual space in military theory that embraces civilian actors, a better fusion of the elements of power¹ with the cultural sources of power in a given society, and a more effective alignment of the civil/military agendas. Here, the HD becomes a shared Domain in both military as well as grand strategy. Additionally, the said CA HD conceptual space allows rethinking the role of the military within CA efforts.

Conclusion

The discussion on COIN argues that the HD is a necessary and valid new canvas to study the dynamics in societal conflicts with a renewed and refined lens, and that HD could fully acknowledge the strategic/political nature of even hyper-local military efforts. The discussion claimed that the addition of a HD is required to uncover the cultural sources of power and the narratives for violence in culturally divided societies. Furthermore, that the inclusion of complexity theory is required (which would have paradigmatic ramifications), that a constructivist approach to intelligence and operations has promising potential, and that the HD could become the first Domain in military theory that fully embraces civilians. Hence, the HD would be both a transversal Domain (potentially transforming parts of Defence departments) and an overarching Domain (where other military Domains and CA efforts reach finality, as the settlement of societal conflicts is located in the HD). Consequently, the HD could form the conceptual bridge between the military and grand strategy. Finally, the HD allows for context- and culture-specific approaches; it guides how to think, and (as opposed to doctrine) not what to think.

Recommended reading:

1. Stachan, H. & Herbert- Rothe, A. (2007). *Clausewitz in the Twenty- First Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Angstrom, J. & Duyvesteyn, I. (2010). *Modern War and the Utility of Force. Challenges, methods and strategy*. Oxon: Routledge.
3. Stone, J. (2011). *Military Strategy. The politics and techniques of war*. London: Bloomsbury.

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¹ Contained in the acronym DIMEFIL, which stands for: Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic, Financial, Intelligence and Legal.