

Why Does Defense Planning Always Fail? (And What to do About it?)

'Everyone has a plan until they get hit in the mouth'

Mike Tyson, Pugilist, Philosopher, Convicted Felon

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Why Does Defense Planning Fail?

- Review of a wide sample of countries in Central and Eastern Europe share a commonality
 - Finding: a universal inability to produce viable defense plans
- ‘Viable plan’ is defined as:
 - Producing a plan that is informed by costing data (€) and operational planning analysis (what can the force do?)
 - And consequently, is *implementable*
- There follows a list of countries that by their own admission in public documents and/or inference by their inability to produce defense outcomes is staggering
- Record is likely replicated in other regions of the world?
- Purpose: what is the causation of this wide-spread failure?

Defense Planning Failures

- Albania
- Bosnia and Hercegovina
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Czech Republic
- Estonia
- Georgia
- Hungary
- Macedonia
- Moldova
- Poland
- Romania
- Serbia
- Slovak Republic
- *Slovenia*
- Ukraine

Why is this Group Significant?

- Provides a good sample of young democracies faced with the challenge of creating new, or reforming extant, defense institutions
- A good indicator of the development of an organization if it can produce implementable plans
 - I.e., an ability to judge whether managerial and leadership are effective
- One can also use this representative sample to examine:
 - Causation for weak planning capabilities within these defense institutions
 - How to discern practical solutions to respond to these challenges shared by many other countries
 - And to include the U.S. Department of the Navy....

Why the Inability to Plan?

- Generally speaking, defense institutions that have been unable to *plan* share many common 'pathologies'
 - Fundamentally, there is a lack of a policy-framework managed by the Policy Directorate in the MoD
 - All activities and expenditures must conform to the guidance, policies, and priorities outlined in the policy framework
 - Essential necessity of operational planning analysis and costing data to *drive* the planning process
 - Armed forces *should* produce operational planning analysis as a daily activity
 - Costing data must be 'owned' by the planning directorate to produce 'costed plans'
 - *But* information should be open to all to use

The Power of Incorrect Assumptions-

- In addition to the lack of policy frameworks, costing data and the results of operational planning analysis, many officials have accepted *incorrect* assumptions
- Western nations and the NATO International Staff's advice and assistance in the realm of defense planning has improperly introduce fallacious assumptions about planning
- Assumptions are based on planning is:
 - Predictable
 - Linear
 - Scientific (even algorithmic)
 - In short: *rational*
- But *is* planning rational?

Can Planning be Predictable?

- Western planning advisers have introduced the assumptions that planning should be predictable and linear
 - Ergo, advocated the introduction of programming and long-term development plans (LTDPs)
 - NATO has even stressed the need for both
- These actions have created the perception that 'correct' planning is predictable
 - If the plan is developed using Western methods and is accepted by government, it will be funded
- When this has not happened, there has been hardly any efforts by defense officials to change the method of planning that has consistently not worked
 - Einstein: The definition of insanity is...

Erroneous Western Assumptions

- By reviewing the record of planning failure, it is clear that
 - Many Western advisers do not fully understand ‘planning, let alone their own national models that they were ‘exporting’
 - Misconception by US advisers that US defense planning is linear, predictable, and logical
 - Misunderstanding that US law is actually *followed* when it comes to the conduct of defense planning
- Ergo: there is a belief that US ‘strategy’ documents are faithfully developed and that they influence planning

‘Strategy documents’:	National Security Strategy	National Military Strategy	Defense Strategy
Legal authority:	50 USC § 404A	10 US Code, Section 153	Title 10, U.S. Code, Section 118 states that the QDR produce ‘delineate a national defense strategy’
Frequency:	Annually	Semi-annually	Quadrennial, following a QDR

The Actual Record of US 'Strategy' Documents

	NSS	NMS	DS
1987	√		
1988	√		
1989			
1990	√		
1991	√		
1992		√	
1993	√		
1994	√		
1995	√	√	
1996	√		
1997	√	√	
1998	√		
1999			
2000	√		
2001	√		
2002	√		

	NSS	NMS	DS
2003			
2004		√	
2005		√	√
2006	√		
2007			
2008		√	√
2009			
2010	√		
2011			
2012			√
2013			
2014			
2015	√	√	
2016			
2017	√		
2018			√

How 'Strategy' Actually Works in the US

- Clearly US planning does not adhere strictly to law
- 'Strategy' documents are also of questionable value
 - Hard to point to where they 'touch' defense spending
- Real strategy documents must establish
 - *How* much money is to be spent on defense
 - *Where* the money is to be spent
- The only U.S. documents that address these issues are two annual Congressional acts:
 - *National defense appropriation act* (annual)
 - *National defense authorization act* (annual)
- Therefore, why have US 'strategy' documents been so extensively 'exported' to young democracies?

Confronting 'Irrationality' in Planning

- Defense planners have a major challenge
 - To develop plans that will be approved *and* funded
 - *Not* the same thing
- Realities that will Impede the funding of defense plans
 - 'Cash flow', inflation, higher costs, world events, acts of God, governments changing priorities, the Ministry of Finance says 'no'
- What can planners do to mitigate these realities
 - Accept that planning is inherently political, and always will be, and therefore governed by irrationality, i.e., unpredictability
 - Reject the 'Siren calls' for predictable funding levels and to think 'resource unconstrained'

Caveat: Maintaining Capabilities

- Although priorities should not change in spite of variations in the defense budget...
- Caveat
 - Planners need to avoid the trap of starving capabilities to the point that they do not 'exist'
 - No such thing as a 99% capability
 - Need to avoid the practice of many countries of maintaining 'hollow' forces with *no* capabilities
 - E.g., MRFA where pilots get only 50 flying hours per year
- Planners need to be prepared to cite risks of insufficient funding of a capability
 - Best to retire an underfunded capability than to keep it on the books, but as inoperable

Supporting Readings

- *'How to Defend Romania?: Identifying Legacy and Institutional Impediments'*
Problems in Post-communism 70, no. 1 (2023): 94-106.
- *'Capabilities-Based "Confusion": Why Capabilities-Based Planning Systems Struggle'*
Korean Journal of Defense Analysis 33, no. 1 (March 2021): 95-119.
- *'What are Governments in Central and Eastern Europe not Buying with their Defence Budgets? The Readiness Clue'*, *The RUSI Journal* 164, no. 2 (May 2019): 36-55.
- *'Questioning the "Sanctity" of Long-Term Defense Planning as Practiced in Central and Eastern Europe'*, *Defence Studies* 18, no. 3 (2018): 357–373.
- *'The Failure of Defense Planning in European Communist Legacy Defense Institutions: Ascertaining Causation and Determining Solutions'*, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41, no. 7 (2018): 1031-1057.
- *'Is PPBS Applicable to European Post-Communist Defense Institutions'?*, *The RUSI Journal* 161, no. 5 (October/November 2016): 68-77.
- *'When Programming Trumps Policy and Plans: The Case of the U.S. Department of the Navy'*, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 39, no. 7 (2016): 936-955.

Conclusion

- Central/Eastern Europe experience in defense planning provides rich data base of challenges and failures
 - Clear that Western advice/assistance has not been effective
 - Western models simply do not work and are inappropriate
 - Result: too many defense officials continue the same ill-suited practices that do not produce viable defense plans
 - Scientific approach does not work
 - Solutions:
 - Policy framework
 - Costed priorities
 - Priorities are defined as capabilities
- Defense planning is often more a question of what to *cut* than what to *add*