

Issues in the Analysis of Smaller Scale Contingencies

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WHAT IS A SMALLER SCALE CONTINGENCY?

The Post-Cold War era has witnessed a proliferation of peace support operations, humanitarian operations, and a variety of other smaller scale contingency operations. These operations have challenged NATO and others with their complexity, intractability, and cost. At the same time overall alliance force levels have decreased as a result of the 'peace dividend' following the end of the cold war. SSC operations are likely to remain a major task for the alliance and the international community for the next decade. More recently the attacks of 11 September 2001 have highlighted the importance of operations to counter international terrorism.

There is no clear definition of Smaller Scale Contingency (SSC), indeed the term itself is not universally recognised among the profusion of similar terms: non-warfighting, military/operations other than war (M/OOTW), low intensity operations, complex emergencies etc. For the purposes of SAS027 we adopted the following working definition, however, I do not in any way propose it as authoritative:

An SSC is defined as an operation involving a coalition force initially deployed for up to six months and of no more than 100,000 personnel. The operation may continue at significantly reduced force levels for a longer duration.

The emphasis is on the military contributions to operations whose primary objectives are non-military, e.g. diplomatic, humanitarian or political. The military task will generally be to create and maintain a set of conditions within which non-military goals can be achieved.

This definition therefore includes a broad spread of types of operations. NATO doctrine identifies 9 types of SSC¹ operations under two headings:

¹ Under the term MOOTW; Allied Joint Operations Doctrine AJP-01.

A. NATO Agreed Tasks.

1. Peace Support Operations (PSO), which includes Peacekeeping (PK), Peace Enforcement (PE), as well as conflict prevention, peacemaking, peace building and humanitarian operations.
2. Humanitarian Operations (in non-PSO scenarios).
3. Search and Rescue Operations (SAR).

B. Tasks Conducted Nationally, Bilaterally, or Multinationally.

1. Counter-insurgency Operations (COIN).
2. Combating terrorism.
3. Non-combatant Evacuation Operations (NEOs).
4. Military aid/support to the Civil Authorities.
5. Counter drug.
6. Enforcement of sanctions.

In addition to these types of operation individual nations recognise a number of additional categories, including:

- Coercion.
- Support to insurgency.
- Opposed intervention.
- Freedom of navigation and overflight / protection of shipping.
- Enforcement of economic zones.
- Recovery operations.
- Nation assistance.
- Forward presence / show of force.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SSCS

It can be seen from the list of types of SSC that the term covers a very broad range of operations, with very diverse characteristics. It is difficult, therefore, to generalise about the characteristics of SSC operations. While some types of SSC may be of long duration (UN peacekeepers have been deployed in Kashmir since January 1949 and Cyprus since 1964),

non-combatant evacuation operations typically last only a few days. Peace support operations may involve many independent factions with different agenda, but in humanitarian operations all the actors share a common goal.

What is perhaps more important is to recognise the new challenges that SSC operations pose to analysis² when compared to more traditional analysis of Major Theatre Wars (MTWs). An MTW is characterised as a high density, high intensity, war-fighting operation involving 100,000 or more personnel with the potential to generate significant casualties. In contrast in a SSC:

- There may be many independent actors³;
- The aims of the actors are unlikely to be achieved through military means alone;
- The aims of all the actors may not be well understood;
- Social factors may have a significant role.

Because of these factors it is often difficult to establish causal links between action and effect.

A key element in the link between action and effect is the 'intent' or 'will' of an actor. In analysis of MTW it is generally assumed that the enemy forces are willing to fight. In SSC operations it is often unclear whether, or in what circumstances, an actor's military forces will be used, either against us or against other actors. Thus it is recognised that in peacekeeping it is not generally necessary for peacekeepers to have sufficient force to defeat any potential aggressor while in peace-enforcement, where the intent of the other actors is presumed to be greater, this may not be the case. It is generally assumed that the intensity of a MTW will mean it will not be protracted. By contrast some SSCs may last for many years. In such protracted operations the aims of the participants may change over time, further complicating the analysis.

Analysis of SSCs requires an understanding of a wider range of activities than analysis of MTW, including many activities undertaken by non-military arms of government and civilian agencies. Some of these activities are well understood, albeit not in the defence analysis community, for example the provision of aid to refugees. These are therefore amenable to analysis, although they may require data to be collected from non-traditional sources, which may itself be a challenge. However, some other activities, such as negotiations between parties to a conflict or influencing public perceptions are not well understood making them difficult, if not impossible, to model at present. Development of techniques to conduct analysis of these activities will have to be undertaken together with research into the human aspects of decision making.

² The NATO SAS027 panel is addressing analyses that support national defence resource decisions to ensure that the appropriate forces structure is available when and where it is needed and that the equipment available to the force is appropriate to the tasks that are likely to be assigned when they are employed. Analytical support during operations is not addressed, but is the subject of the SAS 044 group.

³ Including international civilian organisations, multinational military forces, donor nations, non-governmental civilian organisations, and commercial entities, possibly including private military corporations (sometimes called mercenaries), as well as warring factions, the affected nation's government and its population.

Human aspects of decision making may also affect military activities:

- The overall success of a coercive strike against a rogue state may be as dependent on the psyche of the leadership of the state as upon the damage inflicted by the strike;
- In peace support operations the actions of warring factions may be influenced as much by emotions, such as hatred and revenge, as by a logical plan to achieve certain fixed objectives.

HOW DO SSCS DIFFER FROM MTW?

Clearly analysis of SSCs is far more difficult than analysis of MTW — or is it? Looking back over the MTWs since the Second World War in which NATO members have been involved, Korea, the Suez Crisis, Vietnam, the Falklands Conflict and the Gulf War, do they fit the characteristics of our ‘ideal’ MTW? Clearly they do not. In the Gulf War the objectives of Iraq were not well understood and our own aims were unclear and changed over time. Indeed a great deal of effort went into trying to get unity of purpose within the U.S. led coalition, an objective that was never fully achieved. In the Falklands Conflict the political necessity to be seen to act affected the military campaign plan and led to the decision to attack Goose Green. The level of participation of both Iraqi and Argentinean conscript forces had a major bearing on their military effectiveness. In the Suez Crisis while the British and French forces achieved all their military objectives, the operation was called off because of political failure. In Vietnam, although US forces took only one tenth the losses they inflicted, this was not sufficient to give victory.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ANALYSIS?

If these issues also arise in MTW, how have we been able to successfully conduct operational analysis over the last 50 years? The answer is by limiting the scope of our analysis to those issues with direct bearing on the decision we need to inform. It is rare for analysts to be asked the direct question “Will we win the war?” for which a full understanding of all these factors would be necessary. More usual issues for analysis include:

- *Force Structure Planning*: What mix of forces is best able to undertake a range of operations?
- *Support to Equipment Procurement*: Should we procure equipment A or equipment B?
- *Support to Research and Development*: What characteristics are desirable in this future equipment ?

We do not therefore have to have all the answers!

How then do we simplify the problems posed by SSCs to allow us to conduct useful analysis? The following guides are proposed:

1. We are not generally considering whether the SSC in its totality will succeed or fail. At worst we are only considering whether the military component will succeed or cause a mission-critical failure in another component. If this is all we wish to comment upon it is legitimate for us to simplify the system to focus solely on these issues.
2. We can test the consequences of another component failing to achieve its own aims by running the analysis again with different assumptions. It is not necessary to understand how the other components may fail in themselves, it is only necessary to know how the role of the military may change as a result of such a failure. The only exceptions we need consider are how the activities of the military component may cause an undesirable failure in another component and/or how activities in another component may cause the military component to fail.
3. Where the military component in an SSC fails this is not in itself evidence of inappropriate equipment or an inadequate force structuring. Training, doctrine and operational decisions can also cause failures. A failure in an actual operation is sometimes interpreted as a key failure mechanism that must be understood for successful acquisition and force structure analysis. In reality there is often very little that can be done at the acquisition or force structuring stage that will make less likely fundamental failures in the implementation of the military mission. Therefore, such failure mechanisms are irrelevant to our analysis.
4. Although we need to understand when the activities of the military component may cause a failure in the other components⁴ (and vice-versa) it is not necessary for us to understand in detail why that failure occurs. Although it cannot be denied that a better solution can be obtained through understanding why something has failed, if empirical evidence is all that can be obtained it is not necessary to know why one option works better than another to recommend the better option.
5. Determining when a military task could cause a failure in another component (and vice-versa) can be achieved through discussion with experts in those domains or from lessons learnt from past operations. Again, it is not necessary for the military analyst to understand the whole system to determine where those failures could occur.

WHY IS ANALYSIS OF SSCS IMPORTANT?

⁴ For example, assume the mandate of the international intervention includes disarming, demobilising, and reintegrating former warring factions into the civil society. The military tasks include disarmament and demobilisation of the individuals from the factions, and the military commander could independently establish a short time line to accomplish these tasks to minimise the burden on his forces. However, unless the civilian-conducted reintegration task can accommodate the former fighters into training programs, the economic development is sufficient to absorb them into the labour pool, and the public accepts the former soldiers into the society, the rapid military action is likely to result in a well-trained unemployed criminal element that will adversely impact civil law and order and public security, making it more difficult to accomplish the mandate and probably delay the redeployment of the military forces.

If we choose to avoid analysis of the ‘difficult issues’ of SSC operations why do we need to consider them? The reason is the breadth of environments and tasks they encompass. For example, an analysis of the desirable characteristics of an Armoured Infantry Fighting Vehicle if confined to examination of MTW scenarios might emphasise firepower and protection. A broader analysis including SSC scenarios might demonstrate the benefits of being smaller and lighter and as a consequence being able to go places a heavy vehicle cannot and being more maintainable.

Scenario-based analysis generally needs to consider multiple scenarios, both MTW and SSC, as all relevant issues are unlikely to be addressed within any single scenario. The very different nature of SSC operations compared to MTW operations and the broad spectrum of types of SSC makes it important to consider a number of separate SSC scenarios in most studies. Hence, the analyst must balance limited resources with the need for a large scenario set. Therefore, scenario selection is a critical activity. It may not be necessary to analyse all scenarios to the same level of detail. A detailed analysis of small number of scenarios with a simple, possible judgmental, assessment of a larger number may be sufficient and will certainly be better than the detailed analysis alone.

DATA FOR ANALYSIS OF SSCS

There are two significant advantages we have in collecting data for SSC as opposed to MTW. The first is that we almost always have forces committed to SSC operations, so at any given moment there are likely to be a number of live operations from which to collect data. The second advantage is that there is more time for the forces (or analysts) in theatre to collect the information. MTW can be a chaotic and fast moving environment, where there is often inadequate time to collect data during the operation or to preserve them before they are destroyed for operational security. The slower pace of SSC operations gives us a greater window of opportunity to have direct access to real-world data.

There are of course also a number of difficulties:

1. Military forces deployed on enduring SSCs generate an enormous quantity of data, however, much of it is not stored beyond the short term or where it is kept it is not in a format that facilitates later analysis. If we have not clearly identified which data are important and which are not it will be necessary to collect a lot of data to ensure we get most of what we need but there will always be gaps. As understanding of the issues for analysis of SSCs increases this problem should diminish. Also, some data may be politically and/or operationally sensitive while we are dealing with live operations. It may not be possible to gain access to this information or to share it for some time.
2. The military analysis community does not yet know how to model the activities and influence of other organisations such as the donor nation civilian agencies, the UN and its system of response agencies and financial institutions such as the World Bank, and other inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations, nor generally do we have the necessary contacts within these organisations to gain this understanding. Many of their activities might be amenable to analysis given the necessary resources and access, indeed some

of these organisations have already applied analytical methods⁵ to plan and manage their activities, and we need to establish co-operative efforts with them to share methodologies.

3. We do not fully understand non-state 'military' organisations such as belligerent factions in peace support operations, insurgents and terrorists. We need to develop an understanding of their motivations and collect data on their activities and constraints. However, we generally have limited contact with such groups and therefore little chance to gain real understanding.

The breadth of types of operations and the variety of activities, military and civil, they involve mean that, over time, a very large amount of data will need to be collected. There is also the likelihood that many of the 'human factors' will be ethnographic or cultural. This may render the data case specific, which again increases the volume of data we have to collect to support our analytical processes.

CONCLUSIONS

The term SSC is used to cover a very broad range of operations with very different characteristics. It is important that we consider the full spectrum of operations anticipated in structuring our forces and procuring military equipment. There is a great deal of concern in the international analysis community about our ability to analyse SSC operations because of a number of intractable issues related to human factors, the duality of the civil-military activity and understanding the motivation of the participants.

But these issues are also important in major theatre war yet they haven't prevented us from doing useful analysis. We may not be able to determine what will be the outcome of an operation but we can generally answer force structure or equipment balance questions provided we structure our analysis appropriately. Due to the immaturity of the field, data collection represents a significant challenge to the analysis of SSCs, however, unlike MTW, the high frequency with which we undertake these operations provides the opportunity to get the data we need.

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⁵ See for example: "The Sphere Project: Humanitarian charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response," at the following address: <http://www.sphereproject.org>; "Handbook of Democracy and Governance Program Indicators" and "Democratic Electoral Assistance: A Practical Guide for USAID," U.S. Agency for International Development; and "Logical Framework (LogFrame)," The World Bank, at the following address: <http://www.worldbank.org/html/oed/evaluation/html/logframe.html>.