The Role of Military Strategic Effects

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Future force structure issues for the Australian Defence Force (ADF) are being driven by a number of change drivers:
- The shift to network-centric warfare and effects-based operations
- The need to combat both nation-state and non-state actors
- The need to deal with increased concurrency and tempo of operations
- The increasing focus on whole-of-government and multi-national operations

Military Strategic Effects (MSEs) are a key military strategic planning product for encapsulating these issues in a form that aids force structure acquisition decisions, preparedness and operations planning. A fundamental issue confronting military strategic planners is **what is a military strategic effect?** Defining MSEs is further complicated by the evolution in the concept of “strategic” in the ADF over the past decade and the different meanings of the concept “effect”.

**Defining “Strategic”**

The 1990s saw an evolution in Australian military thinking from providing niche small unit tactical formations to support someone else’s campaign to thinking about the operational and strategic aspects of operations. This evolution was characterised by distinguishing the ends (strategic), ways (operational), and means (tactical).

**Definition 1. Strategic = ends (but note the context of conducting a respond operation).**

The second definition of strategic is focused on the tempo of operations and the concurrency aspects of performing multiple operations in parallel. Tempo and concurrency are major issues for the ADF in the early 21st century that are not addressed by either the Australian Military Strategy or current warfighting doctrine.

**Definition 2. Strategic = managing tempo and concurrency (in the context of resources across parallel operations)***

The third definition of strategic is focused on the inter-dependencies between operations in time and space. For example, the Solomon Islands peacekeeping operation in 2003 may be defined in terms of the ends (strategic), ways (operational), and means (tactical).

**Definition 3. Strategic = managing inter-dependencies between operations in time and space**

The fourth definition of strategic moves from a military focus to a national security focus. The underlying issue is what is the role of the military and what are the interactions between the military and other actors. The national security focus has taken on increased relevance since the advent of the War on Terror.

**Definition 4. Strategic = military role and interactions (in a national security context)**

**Defining “Effect”**

There appear to be at least two definitions of effect. Much of the literature on effects simply equates effects with outcomes or end-states.

**Definition 1. Effect = end-state**

However, Ed Smith has argued that an effects-based approach does not have an exit strategy. In this perspective, effects are about supporting goals that are ongoing. For example, we may conduct a peacekeeping operation in
the region to help achieve the ongoing goal of “ensuring the security environment is consistent with Australia’s national interests.”

**Definition 2. Effect = An intervention for achieving an ongoing goal**

**Mapping Strategic to Effects and Generating Military Strategic Effects**

Mapping the four definitions of strategic to the two definitions of effect creates a landscape of potential spaces for defining MSEs. However, it becomes quite clear that MSEs created in different parts of the landscape have very different roles and very different mindsets. For example, consider the follow mappings:

1. **Strategic = ends with Effect = end-state.** This definition is focused on respond operations, is focused on the effects that need to be generated for a successful operation. The underlying mind-set is essentially manoeuvrist.

2. **Strategic = military role and interactions (in a whole-of-nation context) with Effect = an intervention for achieving an ongoing goal.** This definition is focused as much on ongoing operations such as shaping, deterring and surveillance as it is on respond-type operations. The underlying mind-set is more systems thinking than manoeuvrist.

The two mappings have very different foci, but can be related:

- The second mapping provides the context for the first mapping
- While both mappings can be defined as a set of interacting complex adaptive systems, the first mapping assumes that the complex adaptive systems have been identified (e.g., who is the adversary) whereas the second mapping also has to deal with the issue of surfacing the relevant complex adaptive system (a major problem in dealing with non-state actors)

The relationship between these two mappings provides some interesting implications for defining MSEs:

- The military mind-set that conducts operations so successfully (the first mapping) does not simply scale to the national security level (since the focus and mind-set is quite different)
- MSEs are a boundary condition between the two mappings. They convert the national security level considerations into a form that the military can operate with
- The second mapping provides a richer mechanism for identifying non-state actors, and highlights the importance of the information domain at all levels of operations (whereas the first mapping tends to focus the information domain at the tactical battlespace)

The remainder of this paper will have the following foci:

- Generating the full landscape of mappings between the four definitions of strategic and the two definitions of effect
- Relating the manoeuvrist perspective to the systems thinking perspective
- Articulating the national security implications (Australia does not currently have a national security policy)
- Defining a set of MSEs
- Investigating the future force structure implications of these MSEs (does anything change from what we currently are planning?)