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Through an examination of Russian, Chinese, and American perceptions of time found in social science and military doctrine, it will be shown that strategy for the United States military should focus on a significantly longer timeline, creating a sense of future stability and importance for operational and tactical units, while conducting training on shorter, more easily managed timelines, similar to those seen in popular culture and everyday life.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE: Time Bound – Is the U.S. Military Limited by the American Perception of Time?

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Executive Summary

Title: Time Bound – Is the U.S. Military Limited by the American Perception of Time?

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Thesis: Through an examination of Russian, Chinese, and American perceptions of time found in social science and military doctrine, it will be shown that strategy for the United States military should focus on a significantly longer timeline, creating a sense of future stability and importance for operational and tactical units, while conducting training on shorter, more easily managed timelines, similar to those seen in popular culture and everyday life.

Discussion: For leaders in the United States (U.S.) military, there is never enough time. Napoleon also said that wars are won and lost based on hours, but in the post-Cold War era, where America and her allies are operating in the grey zone, the U.S. military must plan as if it is on an infinite timeline. The military planning process itself is built around the concept of planning to plan; figuring out when an objective must be achieved is essential when determining how to achieve it. Given that U.S. allies and adversaries perceive and plan military operations on vastly different timelines than the United States, the military limits its effectiveness by its perception of what planning horizons make sense to use and why. The United States' adversaries and allies, however, do not share these popular culture touchpoints and references, and this cultural disparity can lead to miscommunication among allies and loss of a strategic advantage among competitors. The U.S. military is working on far too short a timeline to achieve its strategic aims.

Conclusion: The military should conduct planning in a finite context nested within an infinite mission. If training meets the “flashbulb threshold” it can occur less often and have the same

impact. The military should address appropriate time horizons within its doctrine, as a guide for leaders at all levels to understand shared and effective perceptions of time.

DISCLAIMER

THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

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Table of Contents

	Page
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
DISCLAIMER	4
PREFACE.....	6
TIME BOUND – Is the U.S. Military Limited by the American Perception of Time?.....	7
Introduction.....	7
Arbitrary Timelines within the Military	8
Current Time Horizons in the U.S. Military	9
Time Horizons in Popular Culture	10
METHODS	15
FOREIGN PERCEPTIONS OF TIME.....	19
China	19
Russia.....	22
TRAINING TIMELINES: The Relationship between Time and the Impact of an Event.....	24
How are Training Timelines Translated into Planning Timelines?	26
CONCLUSION.....	28
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	29

Preface

You can ask me for anything you like, except time.

— Napoléon Bonaparte ¹

Sitting in Kuwait in 2014, huddled around a map of Iraq and an inventory listing of ammunition, I worked with sustainment planners from the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division to decide where we should hold theater stockpiles of ammunition. "Shouldn't we just use the same sites we had from 2003 to 2011?" We wondered. "How long would we be there?" "Is it worth investing in long-term storage structures, or would containers work for the time being?" I often wonder if America's greatest enemy is not a terrorist cell, or a rogue nation, but our own lack of a clear goal or end state. How do we know when the war is over if we do not know what the goal of the war was in the first place, and on what time frame?

This paper is a short foray into the military's understanding of time, and will address the proper time frame for military planners. Failure to consider time, or the miscalculation of time, is so pervasive in U.S. military thought that vast improvements can be made through a focus on the impact of an event. The military would see improvements in training efficiency by focusing on how frequently an event needs to be repeated in order to be an effective learning experience.

Effective training can make up for some planning failures, but placing arbitrary annual requirements on soldiers does not help leaders train them effectively. This thesis is meant to be practically applied by leaders looking to match training and operations with the appropriate time frame.

¹ Kiley, Kevin. Thumbing through the Napoleonic Wars: The Words of Napoleon and Others Who May Have Influenced His Methods. https://www.napoleon-series.org/research/napoleon/c_quotes.html

Introduction

For leaders in the United States (U.S.) military, there is never enough time. Napoleon also said that wars are won and lost based on hours, but in the post-Cold War era, where America and her allies are operating in the grey zone, the military must plan as if it is on an infinite timeline. The military planning process itself is built around the concept of planning to plan. Figuring out when an objective must be achieved is essential when determining how to achieve it. Given that the United States' allies and adversaries perceive and plan military operations on vastly different timelines than the United States, we limit our effectiveness because of our perception of what planning horizons make sense to use and why. The U.S. relies on a set of popular cultural touchpoints and shared references. Her adversaries and allies, however, do not share these references, and this cultural disparity can lead to miscommunication among allies and a loss of strategic advantage among competitors. The U.S. is working on far too short a timeline to achieve our strategic aims.

Through an examination of Russian, Chinese, and American perceptions of time, found in social science and military doctrine, it is argued that strategy for the United States military should focus on a significantly longer timeline, creating a sense of future stability and importance for operational and tactical units, while conducting training on shorter, more easily managed timelines, similar to those seen in popular culture and everyday life. At the strategic level, the U.S. military no longer abides by a timebound planning horizon. Strategic planning is based on infinite planning horizons with short-term, specific, timebound goals. The Operational and Tactical Army is forced to train and plan "by hours." In doing so, it sacrifices long-term value for near-term and quantitatively measurable "wins". Many of these quantitative measures are based on matrixes that may not have direct correlation with broader strategic objectives.

Without a specified time frame for an achievement, the operational objective will remain unclear.

These errors in that plague the military's long-range strategic planning are also reflected in its training philosophy. When training, there is a direct link between the strength of a message and the time that has passed since the exposure to that message. Adjustments to military training, including the "flashbulb" impact training event, which will be discussed later in this thesis. The manner in which that training is tested will result in leaders with more flexible timelines and less on their schedule. Because of this strong correlation, "annual training" need not occur annually if the message sent is strong enough to trigger a significant response. These planning horizons and the research supporting them will be incredibly helpful to commanders and staff planners throughout the military, and their lessons will allow military leaders to focus their efforts on realistic and actionable planning and training timelines. Military leaders should reconsider long-term objectives, ensure they are clear and achievable, and then set short-term, time-bound strategies to achieve them. This approach should be applied to both major tactical goals and the training of the staff that will achieve them.

Arbitrary Timelines within the Military

In 2014, Retired Army Lieutenant General C.V. Christianson writes, "The process of developing and writing a strategic plan is widely regarded as the most challenging and frustrating task that leaders and managers are called on to execute."² Despite these challenges, strategic planning is the most vital job of any military leader. Without an effective or executable plan, any military force is left to its own devices and doomed to failure.

² Christianson, C.V and George Topic. Strategic Planning A "How-to" Guide. JFQ 74, 3rd Quarter 2014. https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-74/jfq-74_80-83_Christianson-Topic.pdf p. 80.

As a result, planning is essential and managing the staff's planning timeline is absolutely critical. Yet, as Christianson goes on to write, "In some cases...questions are unanswerable. Ironically, answers are not always necessary; a satisfactory payoff on the investment of time and energy can sometimes result merely from the process itself."³ If the U.S. military accepts this, why does the military place arbitrary timelines on the achievement of strategic, operational, and tactical goals, not to mention training timelines?

As General Dwight D. Eisenhower would instruct his staff, "plans are worthless, but planning is everything."⁴ In the planning process, planners get a sense of each other's capabilities, weaknesses, and level of intent, evaluating other actors in a potential fight. Planners also scrutinize variables and considerations. During the actual event, the formal plan may be abandoned, but the knowledge and relationships developed during planning are resources in their own right. The planning process and the plans it creates give the U.S. standing military purpose. The daily work of the more than one million Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines must build upon each day's effort towards the larger goal of fighting and winning the nation's wars. When the focus is shifted towards the time it takes to "win," rather than towards a careful allocation of the resources developed during the planning process, these assets are not used to their full capabilities. Time is the most valuable of these resources, in education, training, the planning process, or actual combat.

The U.S. military finds itself largely in defensive operations with a strategy based on deterrence. The objective of defense and deterrence is not to win but to continue the mission. In the nuclear age, against a near-peer competitor where there can be no victor of a nuclear

³ Christianson, C.V and George Topic. Strategic Planning A "How-to" Guide. JFQ 74, 3rd Quarter 2014. https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-74/jfq-74_80-83_Christianson-Topic.pdf p. 80.

⁴ "Plans Are Worthless, But Planning Is Everything". Quote Investigator. <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2017/11/18/planning/#note-17261-1>

exchange, deterrence is the best option, and the infinite game is essential. However, in Afghanistan, deterrence does not work. Now, after eighteen years, we proved the often-repeated statement, ostensibly from a Talib prisoner, “You have the watches. We have the time.”⁵ While a strategy of infinite deterrence may be the only option when planning against a large nuclear state, setting clear goals on a specific timetable works for small wars on the fringes.

An infinite framework, lacking a set time frame for the close of strategic deterrence and operational defense, creates pressure on leaders at all levels to implement arbitrary timelines for goals. As Christianson writes, “The final step in developing the plan is to describe the implementing process.”⁶ Without a time frame, leaders cannot determine a process. This means that for planning or training to occur, there must be a time-based goal. The mission may be infinite, but there are smaller, time-bound checkpoints to achieve along the way. How leaders determine which timeline is most appropriate for the goal is largely rooted in their own understanding of planning and time management, derived from popular culture and their everyday lives outside of the military.

Time horizons in popular culture

The concept of the “infinite game” is not a new one; as Simon Sinek writes in his 2019 book of the same name, the Vietnam War was a prime example of the infinite mindset. He writes that even though the North Vietnamese Army lost every battle, including losing more than 100,000 Soldiers in a nine-month period, it still won the war. As Sinek states, “North Vietnam was playing the infinite game. Their goal was to outlast the enemy, not defeat them.”⁷ This war

⁵ Solomon, Evan. “Fighting in Afghanistan: 'You have the watches. We have the time'” Macleans. Online. <https://www.macleans.ca/news/fighting-in-afghanistan-you-have-the-watches-we-have-the-time/>

⁶ Christianson, C.V and George Topic. Strategic Planning A “How-to” Guide. JFQ 74, 3rd Quarter 2014. https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-74/jfq-74_80-83_Christianson-Topic.pdf p. 83.

⁷ Conley, Randy. Simon Sinek’s 5 Steps for Mastering the “Infinite” Game of Leadership. October 27, 2017. <https://leaderchat.org/2017/10/27/simon-sineks-5-steps-for-mastering-the-infinite-game-of-leadership/>

perfectly demonstrates the difference between finite and infinite planning, playing to win versus playing to keep playing. These contrasting strategies are also demonstrated in our current conflict in Afghanistan.

Sinek, a *New York Times* best-selling author with a background in both law and advertising, approaches these concepts from a business perspective rather than a military one. The mindset of planning on an infinite timeline continues to gain momentum in corporate America,⁸ but runs counter to the two mainstream planning horizons used by the average American in achieving goals: financial budgeting by paycheck, and weekly meal planning for fitness or weight loss. It is important to address these common time horizons, as they affect typical thinking about planning. These horizons contrast with other generally understood time frames across the military, such as the concept of the Afghan fighting season.

Household budgeting nearly always reflects the time frame between a household's paychecks. According to Paycor, the U. S.'s largest payroll software management company, the majority of Americans, including most members of the military, receive bi-weekly paychecks.⁹ The majority of Americans therefore plan their financial strategies on a bi-weekly basis, while simultaneously setting long-term goals for financial savings. This concept of the bi-weekly budget feels comfortable and familiar to leaders in the military. If household budgeting is conceptualized as a way to continue playing the infinite game while achieving finite budget goals, the concept falls within the military professional's wheelhouse and can influence the manner in which leaders develop and apply their planning methodology.

⁸ Conley, Randy. Simon Sinek's 5 Steps for Mastering the "Infinite" Game of Leadership. October 27, 2017. <https://leaderchat.org/2017/10/27/simon-sineks-5-steps-for-mastering-the-infinite-game-of-leadership/>

⁹ Paycor HR Center of Excellence. 10 Things To Know About Pay Periods. January 21, 2020. <https://www.paycor.com/resource-center/10-things-to-know-about-pay-periods>.

According to Robert K. Nye of the University of Kansas, writing in “The Social Structure Of Performance Budgeting And Its Indirect Effects On Organizational Performance Within Public Organizations,”¹⁰ when government leaders apply their own family’s personal budgeting principles and look for performance-based outcomes in their organization, the office they lead is more likely to be successful.¹¹ If performance-based budgeting on familiar timelines leads to positive financial outcomes for municipalities, this principle may be applied to military planning as well.

Another planning time frame familiar to military leaders is the daily diet or weekly meal planning and exercise guidelines suggested by the American Council on Exercise for weight loss. Their weekly exercise and daily calorie intake recommendations have not changed in more than a decade: 2,000 calories a day and 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week, both spread out in whatever format makes the most sense for the individual’s tastes and schedule.¹² By planning for finite daily and weekly goals, an individual achieves the infinite goal of maintaining a healthy weight. Like budgeting, this concept is easily digestible for military leaders.

The final simple touchpoint for a planning timeline is that of the Afghan fighting season. After more than eighteen years of war, the Afghan fighting season concept is written into the U.S. military’s counterinsurgency doctrine as a time of heavy fighting and casualties in the war-torn country. As Barnett S. Koven writes in a 2016 *Small Wars Journal* article, the Afghan fighting season is based on a “confluence of three factors – the conclusion of poppy cultivation,

¹⁰ Nye, Robert K. Beyond Budget Rationalities: The Social Structure of Performance Budgeting and Its Indirect Effects on Organizational Performance Within Public Organizations. University of Kansas. 2009. p.110.

¹¹ Paycor HR Center of Excellence. 10 Things To Know About Pay Periods. January 21, 2020. <https://www.paycor.com/resource-center/10-things-to-know-about-pay-periods>.

¹² American Council on Exercise. Weight loss-Tipping the scales in the right direction. November 01, 2013. <https://www.acefitness.org/education-and-resources/lifestyle/blog/6776/weight-loss-tipping-the-scales-in-the-right-direction>.

improved weather conditions and recesses in madrassas in neighboring Pakistan – [that] have made spring Afghanistan’s ‘fighting season.’”¹³ Highs and lows in fighting because of weather or the harvest season have existed since the earliest days of warfare, but the U.S. military has fought its most recent near-peer conflicts (WWI, WWII, and the Korean War) in all weather, regardless of the enemy’s calendar. The low intensity, “infinite game” conflict unfolding in Afghanistan has forced military leaders to grow accustomed to seasonal fighting. The average troop deployment to Afghanistan varies between six and nine months, with the transfer of authority of troops occurring at staggered intervals. Military planners must therefore make cyclical planning decisions to coincide with the Afghan fighting season and their own personnel resources.

These familiar planning timelines are the starting point across the diverse leadership which makes up the United States military. Establishing the familiar cultural and sociological touchstones of the daily calorie intake, the weekly exercise routine, the bi-weekly budget, and the yearly fighting season creates a comfortable starting place for goal setting and a shared vision to begin creating strategic and operational planning timelines. These common and comfortable timelines serve as a narrative starting point to understand effective timelines for goal setting.

Without the framework provided by these concrete examples, military planners functioning in an “infinite game” create arbitrary or unrealistic timelines instead. These same unrealistic timelines have also hampered corporate planning, hobbling C-suite executives and planners as well. Publicly traded companies provide investors with quarterly earnings projections at the beginning of each fiscal year, and manage their respective companies to meet

¹³ Koven, Barnett S. “The End of Afghanistan’s Spring Fighting Seasons and the Demise of the Afghan National Security Forces?” Small Wars Journal. 2016. https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-end-of-afghanistan%E2%80%99s-spring-fighting-seasons-and-the-demise-of-the-afghan-national-secu#_edn1

those estimates. However, an open letter written in 2016 by Larry Fink, the Chief Executive Officer of Blackrock Investments, the largest investment house in the United States, is changing all of that. As Fink writes, “One reason for investors’ short-term horizons is that companies have not sufficiently educated them about the ecosystems they are operating in, what their competitive threats are, and how technology and other innovations are impacting their businesses.”¹⁴ The organization’s stakeholders expect immediate results. In the same way, operational and tactical commanders feel pressure from their higher headquarters, whether through mission orders or performance reports, to achieve tangible results in the short term.

Fink goes on to write that, “Companies also expose themselves to the pressures of investors focused on maximizing near-term profit at the expense of long-term value...allowing these perspectives to fill the void and build support for potentially destabilizing actions.”¹⁵ Achieving greatly in the short term at the expense of long-term results is not only detrimental to the unit, but also to the mission. Fink then turns his letter to address the public sector. He writes that “in Washington ...long-term is often defined as simply the next election cycle, an attitude that is eroding the economic foundations of our country. Public officials must adopt policies that will support long-term value creation.”¹⁶ Where does the military look for long-term value creation? Value creation is not part of its lexicon. In terms of planning horizons, it is tempting to look to neuroscience and attempt to better understand how our brains work to budget and

¹⁴ Turner, Matt. “Here is the letter the world's largest investor, BlackRock CEO Larry Fink, just sent to CEOs everywhere.” Business Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.com/blackrock-ceo-larry-fink-letter-to-sp-500-ceos-2016-2>.

¹⁵ Turner, Matt. “Here is the letter the world's largest investor, BlackRock CEO Larry Fink, just sent to CEOs everywhere.” Business Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.com/blackrock-ceo-larry-fink-letter-to-sp-500-ceos-2016-2>.

¹⁶ Turner, Matt. “Here is the letter the world's largest investor, BlackRock CEO Larry Fink, just sent to CEOs everywhere.” Business Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.com/blackrock-ceo-larry-fink-letter-to-sp-500-ceos-2016-2>.

manage time, but this field of research is new and not nearly advanced enough to provide leaders with the answers they seek.

Methods

The main sources for this thesis were scientific journal articles, largely focusing on humans' perception of time. Following a conduct of the review of available neuroscience and social science literature on human perception of time, in which the recurring theme was the importance of time-based goals for short-term objectives, as well as long-term goals based on articulating the “infinite game” model. Simon Sinek published his book on this topic during the research for this thesis. It fit nicely into the argument and has since seen a steady outpouring of leadership and sociology literature arguing the same point.

To the extent the translations and secondary source material allowed, Chinese, Russian, and American military doctrine concerning operational planning and planning horizons were somewhat available, yet there was a large research gap in this area. The Grey Research Center (GRC) databases for sociology articles on time perception and defense and national security publications for articles, of which there are very few, on timing of Russian and Chinese strategy, which are cited below when appropriate.

Hofstede's cross-cultural analysis of time, from his 1980 *work Culture Consequences: International Differences in Work-related Values*¹⁷ served as a starting point for understanding the difference in long-term versus short-term time orientation, yet his analysis is easily critiqued, given his sample population, it is unlikely to be fully applicable to entire nation states. As Pheng and Yuquan of the University of Singapore write, “because a culture is a complex system, cross-

¹⁷ Hofstede, G.H. (1980), Culture Consequences: International Differences in Work-related Values, Sage Publications, London.

cultural studies need a systems approach.”¹⁸ Sample populations, they continue, do not represent the workings of an entire system, making Hofstede largely inapplicable outside of his study populations (mostly businesspeople and international students) and therefore not helpful for military purposes.

There are considerable differences between neuroscience and social science. This paper focuses on social science, because neuroscience cannot reliably show the connection between brain activity and action. Many areas of social science discuss and reference neuroscientific studies, but this paper does not reference or focus on that research. According to Dr. David Ludden, a professor of psychology at Georgia Gwinnett College, “The problem is that, unlike the natural sciences, psychology has no grand unifying theory (or GUT) that ties the whole enterprise together. The list of topics that psychology includes is vast, but it's not really clear what they all have in common.”¹⁹ As he writes, many of the connections that psychologists make to neuroscience are tenuous and unproven.

The majority of neuroscience has come into existence in the last thirty years, and, as Dr. Ludden continues, “The allure of neuroscience is that it may finally give psychology a GUT. This is because neuroscience is based on the premise that all psychological processes can ultimately be explained in terms of brain processes. This new hope for psychology has spawned a veritable neuro-zoo, as each sub-discipline now has its own neuro-doppelgänger.”²⁰ More and continuing research is desperately needed in this field, to better understand what effects planning on these narratively comfortable timelines have on electrical impulses in the brain, but the

¹⁸ Pheng, Low Sui and Shi Yuquan. “An exploratory study of Hofstede’s cross-cultural dimensions in construction projects.” *Management Decision* 40/1 [2002]. MCB UP Limited.

¹⁹ Turner, Matt. “Here is the letter the world's largest investor, BlackRock CEO Larry Fink, just sent to CEOs everywhere.” Business Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.com/blackrock-ceo-larry-fink-letter-to-sp-500-ceos-2016-2>.

²⁰ Ludden, David. “Is Neuroscience the Future or the End of Psychology?” *Psychology Today*. Feb 02, 2017. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/talking-apes/201702/is-neuroscience-the-future-or-the-end-psychology>.

neuroscience is simply not yet to the point of making this feasible. Future research should focus on how the planning habits may affect individuals' willingness and ability to plan on other timelines. Scientists may be interested in the effects on brain activity, but as a military we largely care for the effect on behavior.

Current Time Horizons in the U.S. Military

The Army's eight-week training model was developed by U.S. Army Europe in the mid-1990s as a way for battalion-level leaders to monitor the progress of their company commanders towards a training objective.²¹ The eight-step model leads to the accomplishment of a finite goal along the company's infinite mission of readiness for war. The eight steps (Plan the training, Train and certify leaders, Conduct a reconnaissance, Issue an order for the training, Rehearse, Execute, Conduct an after action review (AAR), and Retrain) are standards designed to keep leaders from squad to brigade in line with emerging requirements and prepared to execute effective training.²² Each of the other services uses similar training management timelines, setting a date for the conduct of training and "backwards plan" in either eight- or twelve-week schedules with weekly milestones.

Tactical and Operational leaders in each of the four services then produce annual training plans, setting annual goals for the training level of their units. However, as stated in Army Doctrine Publication 7-0: Training, "Leaders train to standard, not to time by allocating sufficient time to train tasks to standard."²³ There is no further definition throughout the entire publication of what "sufficient time" entails. For military leaders, used to doctrine that defines

²¹ Little, Matthew R. "The Eight Step Training Model" Engineer. January – April 2012. <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a560296.pdf>.

²² Little, Matthew R. "The Eight Step Training Model" Engineer. January – April 2012. <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a560296.pdf>.

²³ U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Joint Training Policy for the Armed Forces of the United States," Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction No. 3500.01H, April 25, 2014, p. A-5,

specific, quantifiable standards, “sufficient time” is remarkably broad and may lead to the consequences confusion and miscommunication, including the missed deadlines and failed operations outlined by Christianson previously.

At the executive levels of the United States government, the definition of “sufficient time” is never explored. The President’s 2016 National Security Strategy does not mention a single timeline or planning horizon. The document addresses four specific priority actions: “enhance missile defense, detect and disrupt weapons of mass destruction, enhance counterproliferation measures, and target WMD terrorists,” but gives no timeline, even a vague one, for when these priorities must be established.²⁴ How can the national security community plan or prioritize without any time frame?

According to Catherine Dale of the Congressional Research Service, the timelines laid out in the National Security Strategy should tie directly to the congressional funding cycle, showing direct funding driving priorities, or time-based priorities as a driver of increased or decreased funding. Dale writes, “most observers would suggest that the optimal frequency for any given national security strategic review would balance the need to update strategic thinking based on changing circumstances and priorities, with the need to provide sufficient continuity for effective and efficient execution.”²⁵ Since the National Security Strategy has not received an update since 2017 it is clear that the priorities are not tied to a specific time-based budget item, and without a time-bound goal, there is no way to assess progress towards the President’s strategic priorities.

²⁴ Department of the United States Army, ADP 7-0: Training. 31 July, 2019. https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN18024_AD%207-0%20FINAL%20WEB.pdf. P. 3-2

²⁵ Trump, Donald J. National Security Strategy of the United States of America. December 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

Funding from Congress regulates the National Defense Strategy more precisely. According to Dale, “In the defense arena of national security, Congress requires the submission of a National Security Strategy (NSS) at least once per year, of a national defense strategy (NDS) as part of the quadrennial defense review (QDR) report every four years, and of a national military strategy (NMS) or update every two years.”²⁶ Even though there is a specific process, and timelines for submission of strategies are set by Congress and tied to funding requests, these timelines are nebulous and often go unmet. The late submission of strategy documents and the lack of specified timelines trickle down into the ability of strategic planners to draft time-based campaign plans and operational plans.

In the opening guidance of Joint Publication 5-0, Joint Planning, Vice Admiral Kevin Scott writes, “Our Armed Forces serve to support our national leadership in attaining national objectives. I encourage leaders to ensure their organizations understand and use joint doctrine and this Joint Publication in particular as you continue to assist our nation in advancing its enduring interests.”²⁷ Though time and time-frames are referenced more than 300 times in the publication, the document gives no specific time frames that cover an operation. A campaign plan is defined by JP- 5-0 as “a series of related military operations aimed at accomplishing strategic and operational objectives within a given time and space.”²⁸ Without higher guidance as to the amount of time the campaign should last, how can planners know what is an achievable time frame? It is likely these planners revert to their common understandings of time frames for achievements based on the American notions of popular goal setting and time budgeting

²⁶ Dale, Catherine. “National Security Strategy: Mandates, Execution to Date, and Issues for Congress” Congressional Research Service. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R43174.pdf>. P. 20.

²⁷ Dale, Catherine. “National Security Strategy: Mandates, Execution to Date, and Issues for Congress” Congressional Research Service. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R43174.pdf>. P. 21.

²⁸ Office of the Secretary of Defense. Joint Publication 5-0: Joint Planning. 16 June 2017. https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp5_0_20171606.pdf.

techniques exemplified by financial management or fitness goal setting. U.S. adversaries and allies, however, do not share these popular culture touchpoints and references, and this cultural disparity can lead to miscommunication among allies, and loss of a strategic advantage among competitors.

Foreign Perceptions of Time

China

Named a “strategic competitor” by the 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy, China operates under two unique time perceptions, as discussed in Mengyu Li’s 2008 article on Chinese Cultural Time Orientation. As Li writes of “the pursuit of the right occasion in Confucianism’s time orientation, as well as the relativity view and carefree manner of spending time in Taoism’s time orientation.”²⁹ Both of these perceptions run counter to the western perception of time as a commodity, wherein if one is not doing something with the time it is “wasted.” Neither time orientations in China view time in such a transactional manner.

As Li writes, “Confucianism holds a flexible attitude towards time. It accentuates ‘the right Occasion’ and ‘the right opportunity’ in dealing with affairs. Whatever things they might be, whether they are issues concerning big events of the state or trivial household matters, they should all be performed on a right occasion.”³⁰ This understanding of time is difficult for western cultures to grasp, since it is unclear and without a firm delimitation. When is the right time? What if it never comes? The common Chinese perception of the best way to represent Confucian Time is through the idea of patience and a focus on the past.

²⁹ Li, Mengyu. “The Unique Values of Chinese Traditional Cultural Time Orientation: In Comparison with Western Cultural Time Orientation” *Intercultural Communication Studies* XVII: 1 2008. Ocean University of China. P. 64.

³⁰ Li, Mengyu. “The Unique Values of Chinese Traditional Cultural Time Orientation: In Comparison with Western Cultural Time Orientation” *Intercultural Communication Studies* XVII: 1 2008. Ocean University of China. P. 67.

Li uses an anecdote about a Chinese rice farmer pulling up a crop too soon to check if it is ready to explain the Confucian focus on patience and past focus. He writes, “its past-time focus enables its ethical core to be established upon the rich legacy passed down from the former dynasties and its positive and agile attitude towards time is also enlighten.”³¹ Such a relaxed attitude towards time seems completely foreign to Americans focused on achievement and goals. It is the antithesis of the entire premise of this paper, that there is a “right” time, planners just cannot know what it is until it arrives.

The Taoist perception of time is largely similar in its focus on the past, as “Furthermore, the time orientation in Taoism which places more emphasis on the subjectivity and relativity of time has helped cultivate the unique Chinese temperament as well as the carefree life style of the traditional Chinese culture.”³² The concept that time continues on regardless of human action, and that there are no actions leaders can take to stem the flow of time limits the impact one individual can have on future outcomes, and as such, watching the clock and planning on a set timeline is unnecessary. Plans are designed, and decisions are made to allow the Chinese people to continue existing in the infinite game.

China is playing that game in a measurable way through the Belt and Road Initiative, as explained by *Foreign Affairs*. “In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the launch of both the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, infrastructure development and investment initiatives that would stretch from East Asia to Europe.”³³ The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the actualization of the Confucian idea of the right time presenting

³¹ Li, Mengyu. “The Unique Values of Chinese Traditional Cultural Time Orientation: In Comparison with Western Cultural Time Orientation” *Intercultural Communication Studies* XVII: 1 2008. Ocean University of China. P. 68.

³² Li, Mengyu. “The Unique Values of Chinese Traditional Cultural Time Orientation: In Comparison with Western Cultural Time Orientation” *Intercultural Communication Studies* XVII: 1 2008. Ocean University of China. P. 69.

³³ Chatzky, Andrew and James McBride. “China’s Massive Belt and Road Initiative” *Foreign Affairs*. May 21, 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>.

itself when the road is prepared. The United States fears that the initiative is “a Trojan horse for China-led regional development, military expansion, and Beijing-controlled institutions.”³⁴

Creating the opportunity to provide support to developing nations in the form of infrastructure improvements and investment allows China’s military and diplomatic leaders to position themselves to be prepared for the Confucian right time.

Much U.S. thought and consternation arises when trying to understand this much more infinite and past-focused view of time. In 1959, Edward Hall was one of the first to recognize time perception as a cause for cultural clashes. He writes, “People of the western world, particularly Americans, tend to think of time as something fixed in nature, something around us and from which we cannot escape; an ever-present part of the environment, just like the air we breathe.”³⁵ Chinese time perceptions stand in stark opposition to this, experiencing time and believing there will be a right time to act once all the pieces are in place.

If the U.S. is not actively working each day to counter the Chinese moves, it will fall irreparably behind. Like the businesses that Fink writes about, which focus on short-term, quarterly goals, an American military pushing for easy wins can no longer keep the U.S. competitive.³⁶ While the U.S. may not understand every Chinese action, it must realize that the correct decision cannot be watchful waiting. While the U.S. focuses on the next quarter, China focuses on the next decade and the next century. Creating an infinite mindset in the military’s planners and leaders is absolutely essential to future success.

Russia

³⁴ Chatzky, Andrew and James McBride. “China’s Massive Belt and Road Initiative” Foreign Affairs. May 21, 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/background/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>.

³⁵ Hall, E.T. (1959). *The Silent Language*. New York: Fawcett. P. 19.

³⁶ Turner, Matt. “Here is the letter the world’s largest investor, BlackRock CEO Larry Fink, just sent to CEOs everywhere.” Business Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.com/blackrock-ceo-larry-fink-letter-to-sp-500-ceos-2016-2>

Also directly named in the U.S. National Security Strategy as a strategic competitor, Russia's time perception is similar to that of China. Maria Lebedko of the Far Eastern Federal University in Russia examined the difference in Russian and American "Time Talks," and found the Russian understanding of time and the idea of waiting for the right time to be similar to that of China. Again, the idea contrasts with the concept of not wasting a single moment seen in American culture. She writes, "compared with American culture, the Russian cognitive system did not have monetary conceptualization of time because it did not comply with parameters: polychronic culture presupposes collective labor; time is perceived as approximation."³⁷ According to Lebedko, the Russian perception of time is fluid and less quantifiable. Time passes; It is never spent and never wasted.

Analyzing the differences between Chinese and Russian time perceptions and American understanding of time lays bare the peril of the strategic position in which U.S. military planners find themselves. If the United States' two greatest competitors and most important strategic partner in the Middle East perceive time and therefore planning timelines completely differently, how can we plan with our ally and against our competitors in the heavily time bound culture of the U.S. military? Our national strategy documents are not linked to specific time-based goals, and even at the operational level of war time-based goals are arbitrary and based on future common touchpoints for leaders in terms of planning, rather than tied to specific goals. The lack of research on time-based strategy and goal setting within the military inevitably leads to friction between levels of leadership.

As Larry Fink writes, "Over the past few years, we've seen more and more discussion around how to foster a long-term mindset. While these discussions are encouraging, we will only

³⁷ Lebedko, Maria. "Time Talks: Anthropocentrism of Time across Russian and American Cultures" *Intercultural Communication Studies* XXV: 1 (2016). P. 140.

achieve our goal by changing practices and policies.”³⁸ The military is still woefully behind corporate America in terms of long-term planning. Operational and Tactical level commanders are bound by the two-year National Defense Authorization Act and cannot plan the expenditure of funds more than two years into the future.

Such shortsightedness trickles down through the ranks into the planning and resourcing of training. Such short budgeting timelines force commanders to execute training immediately whenever the resources are available, even though the mission plan the training supports may be largely undefined, and not resourced. When planning timelines are arbitrary but training timelines are fixed and set in regulations by service, there is inevitable friction. There is more focus in the military on the one-hundred-percent accomplishment of annual training by a certain date than there is on the accomplishment of a strategic or operational objective by a certain date. The reverse would seem to be relevant, since the frequency required for training a skill correlates directly with the impact the training has on an individual.

Training Timelines: The relationship between time and the impact of an event

In American military culture, accomplishment drives a leader’s career success. Leaders’ annual reviews are based on their performance during the year. There are specific milestones and timelines for re-evaluation and deployment to combat or not, and leaders must show results for their time spent. The Russian and Chinese concepts of waiting until the right time to act, of lining up the pieces in place and simply continuing to make small strategic moves, do not align with the American view of time as a valuable commodity that must be spent wisely.

³⁸ Turner, Matt. “Here is the letter the world’s largest investor, BlackRock CEO Larry Fink, just sent to CEOs everywhere.” Business Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.com/blackrock-ceo-larry-fink-letter-to-sp-500-ceos-2016-2>

All components and branches of the military measure personnel evaluations and training on an annual basis. According to the Joint Training Policy for the Armed Forces of the United States, training is defined as “instruction and applied exercises for acquiring and retaining knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes (KSAAAs) necessary to complete specific tasks.”³⁹ There is no set time basis for training other than the arbitrary timelines applied by leaders to ensure a class graduates on time, or a unit is ready for deployment by a certain date. Leaders conduct training based on the tasks their higher-level leader deems necessary for them to accomplish their assigned mission, and then training is tied to the annual budget to ensure resources match training priorities. Training is then executed by the subordinate unit. More impactful training could be instituted less often, saving money and personnel time.

According to Dr. Jeffery Karpicke of Purdue, a powerful event triggers a longer lasting memory, which is strengthened through retrieval, rather than re-learning. He writes, “Retrieval is critical for robust, durable, long-term learning. Every time a memory is retrieved, that memory becomes more accessible in the future. Retrieval also helps people create coherent and integrated mental representations of complex concepts, the kind of deep learning necessary to solve new problems and draw new inferences.”⁴⁰ Instead of conducting training, then, what the military needs to consider is recalling and testing its members and leaders based on past events.

Repeated, practiced recall is essential for memory.

As Karpicke writes of the study he conducted on his students, “Many students view retrieval as a ‘knowledge check’; they test themselves to see if they know something, rather than out of

³⁹ U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, “Joint Training Policy for the Armed Forces of the United States,” Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction No. 3500.01H, April 25, 2014, p. A-5, http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/training/cjcsi3500_01h.pdf?ver=2017-12-29-171241-630.

⁴⁰ Karpicke, Jeffery D. “A Powerful Way To Improve Learning And Memory” Psychological Science Agenda | June 2016. <https://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2016/06/learning-memory>.

the belief that practicing retrieval itself will help them learn. This means that many students will use a ‘one-and-done’ strategy: If they can recall something once, they believe they have learned it, so they remove it from further practice.”⁴¹ If leaders view the time between training events as time to be filled with recall events, the need for retraining would significantly decrease.

Also, the emotional connection a service member has to an event leads to increased recall and memory of that training. This is called a “Flashbulb Memory” first studied by Brown and Kulik in 1977, they write that flashbulb memories are “memories for the circumstances in which one first learned of a very surprising and consequential (or emotionally arousing) event. Hearing the news that President John Kennedy had been shot is the prototype case. Almost everyone can remember, with an almost perceptual clarity, where he was when he heard, what he was doing at the time, who told him, what was the immediate aftermath, how he felt about it, and also one or more totally idiosyncratic and often trivial concomitants.”⁴² These events immediately resonate with the memory holder and create a shared state of consciousness for the learner. Using significantly powerful and emotional training places the memory “deeper” in the psyche of the learner and allows him to recall it with greater clarity. This means that training must be “surprising” and “emotionally arousing” for it to trigger a flashbulb level memory. It must engage the learner in such a way as to sear itself into the learner’s psyche.

If the military could focus on creating more surprising and emotionally arousing training and focus on recall of the event through testing, rather than constant, mundane retraining, the time in between training events could significantly increase. If the military re-examines the manner in which it conducts training, training can occur less often and have the same impact as if it

⁴¹ Karpicke, Jeffery D. “A Powerful Way To Improve Learning And Memory” Psychological Science Agenda | June 2016. <https://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2016/06/learning-memory>.

⁴² Brown, Roger and James Kulik. “Flashbulb Memories” Cognition Volume 5, Issue 1, 1977, Pages 73-99

occurred more frequently. Adjustments to training, including the power of the training event and the manner in which the military tests retained knowledge, will beget leaders with more flexible timelines and less on their schedule. That open time can allow for more focus on planning.

How do we translate training timelines into planning timelines?

It is essential to translate operational and tactical level training to a long-term mindset, which more closely matches the open-ended perception of time of U.S. adversaries. The National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy set the priorities for training and resourcing for the military and communicate to Congress what the bi-annual defense authorization should include. Since the National Strategy documents do not mention timelines, it seems unrealistic to force leaders at the tactical and operational levels to set timelines based on arbitrary goals simply to show progress for annual evaluations.

Separately, it is nearly impossible to resource long-term improvement of an organization with a two-year NDAA. As Fink writes, “the absence of effective long-term policies in these areas undermines the economic ecosystem in which companies’ function – and with it, their chances for long-term growth.”⁴³ The same can be said for operational and tactical units in the military. There is no incentive for leaders of these organizations to train their units in preparation for the threats of China and Russia. There is no incentive to train the U.S. military for the infinite period of uncertainty in which it currently exists. It is impossible to tell what type of battle the U.S. military will find itself in, or when the battle will begin, but training must be nested and focused on long-term improvements rather than short-term wins.

⁴³ Turner, Matt. “Here is the letter the world’s largest investor, BlackRock CEO Larry Fink, just sent to CEOs everywhere.” Business Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.com/blackrock-ceo-larry-fink-letter-to-sp-500-ceos-2016-2>.

Timelines should either be synchronized from the strategic through the tactical level, or not specified and only worked towards to match the time perception of U.S. adversaries. According to Michael Spirtas, a senior political scientist at the RAND Corporation, “preparing for major power conflict could require the U.S. armed forces to undergo a generational shift in its approach to combat operations. Almost two decades of fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq have resulted in a generation of American service members with little experience in thinking about or preparing for major power conflict.”⁴⁴ A synchronization and shift in time perception in planning is necessary for the U.S. to be competitive in a future conflict with Russia and China. Creating shared understanding on the importance of an infinite timeline with finite achievable goals is essential for U.S. preparation for the coming great power competition.

Conclusion

Through an examination of Russian, Chinese, and American perceptions of time, found in social science and military doctrine, strategy for the United States military should focus on a significantly longer timeline, creating a sense of future stability and importance for operational and tactical units, while conducting training on shorter, more easily managed timelines, similar to those seen in everyday life for financial management or weight loss. This specific timeline will also force policy makers to clarify the specific goal tied to the timeline. With regard to training there is a direct link between the strength of a message and the time that has passed since the exposure to that message. Because of this strong correlation, “annual training” need not occur annually if its message is strong enough to trigger a significant response. These planning horizons and the research supporting them will be incredibly helpful to commanders and staff

⁴⁴ Spirtas, Michael. Are We Truly Prepared for a War with Russia or China? The RAND Blog. October 9, 2018. <https://www.rand.org/blog/2018/10/are-we-truly-prepared-for-a-war-with-russia-or-china.html>.

planners throughout the military, allowing them to focus their efforts on realistic and actionable planning and training timelines.

Based on social science research on memory, if **training** meets the “flashbulb threshold” it can occur less often and have the same impact. Based on the mindset held by the U.S.’s adversaries and allies, **planning** requires a finite context nested within an infinite mission. Establishing realistic and meaningful timelines is key to mission accomplishment. Adjustments to training, including the power of the training event and the manner in which that training is tested will lead to leaders with more flexible timelines and less on their schedule. A recalibration of the manner in which the U.S. military imagines time, including how it plans and trains, could prove to be a strategic advantage in an uncertain future.

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