

Bridging the Academic Gap: OSINT Support to Military Planning

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Abstract

The quantity and quality of publicly available information has grown exponentially over the last twenty years. While it can be used for targeting non-state actors and to identify network connections, Open Source Intelligence's (OSINT) most important contribution is increased understanding of adversaries' and partners' goals and intentions.

This article provides a framework for teaching the tools and skills for beginner OSINT analysts. Specifically, it focuses on training analysts to conduct country analysis in support of strategic decision making. Leveraging academia, think tank reports, databases, and NGO research, the framework provides a guide to identifying the various factors that inform strategic decision making and its outputs of selecting and prioritizing national security objectives and associated resources.

Keywords: OSINT; non-state actors; military planning; decision-making; training.

Introduction

Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) should be the starting point for every intelligence problem as it provides the key cultural nuances to develop

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This is the work of the author and does not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Air Force Academy, the U.S. Air Force, or the Department of Defense.

(and potentially monitor) key warning indicators for predicted country behaviors.² OSINT primary advantages over other intelligence disciplines are speed and breadth of coverage for minimal cost and risk. The speed of news (print, radio, television, or internet), blogs, and public portions of social media can provide near real-time warning of events. To develop these warning indicators, OSINT can provide background information on the operational environment from journals, think tanks, and books which cover the spectrum of national security issues: politics, socio-cultural, economic, history, and civil infrastructure.

OSINT can even be used to support targeting decisions. Social media and other publicly available information can be used to conduct social network analysis to identify important linkages between individuals and organizations that go well beyond formal hierarchies. Videos and photographs can be analyzed to determine locations. Much to the embarrassment of some covert Russian soldiers in Ukraine, some social media imbed geolocation in the metadata of posts. In rare cases, real-time posts with geolocation data can be used to dynamically target high value individuals. Of course, improvements in privacy controls means that this information will not always be available.

While the speed of data is useful for warning purposes, the vast coverage of OSINT makes it a useful starting point to understand the problem being explored. The early days of OSINT focused on print newspapers and evolved into monitoring radio and television broadcasts. The sheer quantity of OSINT increased dramatically over the past thirty years as globalization improved physical and virtual access to remote areas increasing both the number of contributors and their geographic coverage. Every journalist, academic researcher, and social media poster is a potential contributor of valuable data. Every military spotting hobbyist can provide indications of force movements. During the Arab Spring, photos and videos posted to social media were especially convincing as to the quantity and diligence of protestors, particularly in Egypt.

The digitization of libraries, research databases, social media, blogs, radio and television broadcasts, public speeches, government & NGO statistics or reports, trade magazines, online video and meme postings, commercial imagery, and think tank studies provides a wealth of information with efficient methods for data search and retrieval. A wide variety of research websites provide useful insights into potential or actual conflicts. Location-

2 James M. Davitch, "Open Sources for the Information Age: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Unclassified Data," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 87 (4th Quarter 2017), 18-25; Eliot A. Jardines, "Open Source Intelligence," in Mark M. Lowenthal and Robert M. Clark, eds., *The 5 Disciplines of Intelligence* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2016), 40; Stephen C. Mercado, "Open-Source Intelligence," in Loch K. Johnson and James J. Wirtz, eds., *Intelligence: The Secret World of Spies*, fourth edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

based demographic data can help characterize identity-based fault lines such as ethnic, linguistic, tribal or religion. Other open-source information provide key statistics such as a youth bulge, population density, migration and urbanization trends, education and literacy levels, the size of the middle class, income inequality, resource exploitation (e.g., desertification), employment, and inflation which can be used as indicators for economic-driven conflict. Qualitative research is equally important as it provides insights into cultural nuances which are vital in predicting likely courses of action or prescribing the impacts of an action as groups may have different relative values regarding time, money, leisure activities, and family. Ideally, this type of information is collected pre-crisis to establish those warning indicators described above.

The breadth of coverage is a catch 22. There is ample evidence available to make a rigorous argument on every topic. The challenge is filtering through it all to find something relevant to the specified national security challenge without being distracted by interesting, but only tangentially relevant data. Finding relevant can be difficult for obscure issues since, despite its breadth of coverage, OSINT is limited to passive collection. OSINT is passive in the sense that it requires someone else to create data and distribute it via some medium—television, radio, internet, or print—before an OSINT collector can retrieve it. Transmission could be limited by a repressive government (e.g., North Korea) or by a rudimentary communications infrastructure (e.g., Somalia). In these cases, the OSINT collector may have to rely on sources from neighboring countries.

Another challenge with OSINT is accuracy. There seems to be an inverse relationship between speed and accuracy. High-speed OSINT is great for current events. For example, Al Jazeera television was a great source for near-real time reporting on the capture of a city during the 2011 Libya Civil War. However, high-speed OSINT tends to be poor in accuracy. While Al Jazeera showed convincing video of city captures, specific details on the number of troops, casualties, timing, sequence of events and causation would be ball-park estimates. Sometimes these estimates are useful but it entirely depends upon the intelligence requirement.

In many cases, OSINT sources are secondary sources—they are distributing information that they received from another source. Just because someone said a thing does not make it true. The internet and social media is full of misinformation and bias. For example, data relayed from an anonymous senior government official can be difficult to assess. Anonymous usually means that they are not authorized to release the information which suggests that they may be trying to influence policy, create a feeling of self-importance, or act as a type of whistle blower for policy that they disagree with. Even untampered videos that show “what really happened” may not provide the before and after

that could provide necessary context to the event. This is further complicated when multiple layers are involved. In an anecdotal story, a news agency asked one of their regular sources, retired police officer, for details on a minor incident in his home state. The source contacted a friend at the state emergency operations center. The center relies upon information from other state agencies and, ideally, directly from an on-scene incident commander. Of course, the commander was not present at the time of the incident and is relying upon bystander interviews to re-create the details of the incident. The multiple layers of sourcing creates opportunities for misinterpretations, miscommunication, and bias to shape the information as it travels from source to source.

Detailed, empirical academic research takes a significant amount of effort and time. Similar to HUMINT and COMINT, the expert analyst should be able to listen to and read the language and must take into account local dialects, idioms, cultural nuances, and the potential that the source is trying to influence the collector. The OSINT analyst must be able to dissect the difference between facts, estimates, opinions, and emotional arguments. The OSINT analyst must evaluate the source as much as the data to assess reliability, level of expertise, potential for bias or misperception, and timeliness of the data.

OSINT for Beginners

Novice OSINT analysts often struggle with both the quantity and reliability of publicly available information. Too often, unconstrained intelligence research results in an overwhelming amount of data that is not useful to a decision maker. Novices struggle to forecast a country's actions in a given scenario largely because there are some many factors involved and a plethora of data available that they struggle to filter the wheat from the chaff. In turn, novices "suffer a dual burden: not only do they reach mistaken conclusions and make regrettable errors, but their incompetence robs them of the ability to realize it."³ Predicting country behavior requires analysts to tackle complex political and socio-economic problems in which "the data are in flux, simple solutions are hard to come by, and what works one time doesn't work then next."⁴

Lacking an expert perspective, novice analysts will often begin a country study with the type of research that they conducted in high school or college. In school, political analysis likely meant the analysis of politics with a focus on political parties and government organizations and processes. While this

3 Justin Kruger and David Dunning, "Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* Vol. 77, No. 6, (1999) 1132.

4 Paul Hanstedt, *Creating Wicked Students: Designing Courses for a Complex World* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2018), 86.

data has its uses, it has little value for strategic planning which is more interested in the organization's national security decision making processes and the associated goals and alliances or partnerships. Similarly, the novice military analyst will confuse information analysis with analysis of the organization's ability to collect information or intelligence. They quickly forget that information can be used as a tool of influence via strategic communications and computer network operations. These information operations often leverage ambiguities in ethics and law to shape the perceptions of both domestic and foreign audiences. Socio-economic analysis is particularly challenging because there is such a variety of data available. Novice analysts are adept at data collection, but struggle to put it into context; they struggle with answering the "so what?" For example, a student may report that Malaysia's GDP is \$300 billion, comparing it to U.S. GDP of \$19 trillion or Indonesia's \$1 trillion. While comparison is a valuable tool, novices then struggle to find a connection to the security problem beyond a vague "they can afford a larger military" argument.

The framework seeks to improve student ability to use OSINT to support the forecasting of a country's actions within a real-world scenario. It is designed to improve student ability to effectively analyze the various factors that shape a country's national security interests. The framework leverages expert perspectives on how to think about the problem and how to contextualize the information so that it is relevant to a decision maker.

Based upon years of teaching this material, the following section presents the analytical framework in an unorthodox fashion. After several years of working with students, I found that teaching traditional organizational schemes was insufficient for good country analysis. Schemes such as the military PMESII (Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, Infrastructure) and the corporate STEEPLE (Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, Political, Legal, Ethical) resulted in stove-pipe analysis in which the students failed to make connections between the systems. Furthermore, the results were overloaded with data that lacked a clear connection to the security problem being studied.

To correct this problem, the analytical approach grouped into two sections: political-information and socio-economic. The complexities of military and infrastructure analysis require them to be addressed in their own article. At this point, I want students to focus on the drivers of conflict. Only after they have explored in depth the objectives for the use of force should they venture to understand the military methods and forces to achieve those objectives. In part, this approach is driven by OSINT's limitations. While OSINT can support analysis of military forces, it is not the optimum tool. OSINT can provide insights into weapons systems, future weapons development programs, and arms transfers. Yet, OSINT is typically

insufficient for operational planning purposes as it does not provide the necessary current, detailed order of battle nor the adversary force's operational and tactical procedures.

The analytical framework recommends a set of research questions presented through the paradigm of Clausewitz's trinity of passion, reason, and chance. Pedagogically, the groupings help students to make inter-system connections and interdependencies. It facilitates recognition that changes in one condition have the potential to have a ripple effect in other systems. The Clausewitzian trinity provides a framing reference to drive the research in a direction useful to the decision maker. Finally, the variable of chance helps students recognize that the complexities involved results in future estimates "that tend to be neither right nor wrong, only better or worse."⁵

For most OSINT topics, a great place to start is Google Scholar to get a sense of the existing academic literature. However, it often excludes the great think tank research (discussed in the next section) and military journals that are critical in any strategic analysis. Using a standard internet search engine can capture these, but the analyst needs to provide very specific phrases to return something valuable. Exploring think tank websites and Scholar first can provide the analyst with the insights to put together better search phrases when using the broader search engines. Plus, these initial searches provide road maps for future research as their citations may reveal potentially valuable sources. Some novices avoid books due to the daunting length. Expert OSINT analysts use Amazon Books and Google Books to electronically search books for important passages relevant to their research. Plus, it gives the analyst a sense of whether or not they need one paragraph, one chapter, or the whole book. The framework provides guideposts to assist the novice analyst in developing their search and filter parameters.

Political & Information

Instead of focusing upon political parties and government organizational hierarchies, strategic planners want analysts to focus on four key research questions:

- Reason: What are their strategic goals & values?
- Reason: Who are their friends? Who are their potential friends?
How do their goals and values align (or not)?
- Chance: What is the probability of an internal change in leadership?

5 David H. Jonassen, "Toward a Design Theory of Problem Solving," *Educational Technology Research and Development*, Vol. 48, No. 4 2000, 80.

- Passion: How does the organization use information to influence the values and behaviors of others towards the above goals?

Understanding goals and values and the supporting process is a key step in determining how to influence friends, neutrals, and adversaries. Political goals and values are not necessarily static. Each state and organization has a decision making process to prioritize resources and activities towards objectives. While the final decision maker may be the head of government, head of state, or organizational leader, every decision maker has a group of key supporters whose cooperation is necessary either to a) execute the decision, or b) facilitate the decision maker's ability to stay in power. To some extent, the process and key supporters can be estimated from the country's political system and its associated transfer of power rules (e.g., Freedom House⁶ and Polity Project⁷). The structure of the political system also shapes the level of impact of domestic politics and associated socio-economic issues. This process is used to define their political objectives, intentions, and decisions to use force to achieve those objectives. Some countries publicly release their security goals in a national security strategy or the like.

A variety of security related think tanks are helpful in interpreting national security objectives. Several think tanks have dedicated research to specific security topics and each region of the world including: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,⁸ Center for New American Security,⁹ Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), International Crisis Group,¹⁰ and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). In most cases, finding your topic is as simple as selecting drop down menus from "research" or "topics." For example, CSIS has research dedicated to studying security issues in the South China Sea.¹¹ IISS has special sections on China, Iran, and cyber security.¹² Other sites have research that ebbs and flows based upon current events: Council on Foreign Relations,¹³ the Institute for the Study of War,¹⁴ and Small Wars Journal.¹⁵ Of course, Small Wars Journal tends to focus more on insurgencies and urban operations.

6 <https://freedomhouse.org/reports>

7 <http://www.systemicpeace.org/globalreport.html>

8 <https://carnegieendowment.org/programs/>

9 <https://www.cnas.org/>

10 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/>

11 Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative at <https://amti.csis.org/>.

12 <https://www.iiss.org/regions/asia-pacific/china>.

13 <https://www.cfr.org/>

14 <http://www.understandingwar.org/research>

15 <https://smallwarsjournal.com/>

While countries have a variety of goals, strategic planners are most concerned with those objectives that include the use of military forces. Countries can use their military forces in a variety of ways to support national security objectives. Most countries rationalize a strong military to defend themselves or allies from aggressors. Yet, defensive forces can usually be used offensively. They can coerce neighbors. They can capture territory for economic gain or to create a defensive buffer zone from a perceived threat. Military force may be used pre-emptively due to perceptions of adversary threat capability and/or intent.¹⁶ In that case, force may be used in a limited manner to remove some key offensive capability of the adversary. Unfortunately, perceptions do not always match reality which can lead to over-reactions.¹⁷ Finally, military forces can supplement or train a partner or allies' force.

The above think tank research is valuable in defining alliances and partnerships which come in many forms. They may be formal bi-lateral or multi-lateral international alliances. They could be informal, temporary coalitions. They could be with security organizations such as ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) or the United Nations. Partners can even be non-state actors. Partnerships are not necessarily friendships and may only be for temporary convenience. In rare cases, countries will even partner with their political rivals. Due to these variations, partner interests do not always align which can result in significant variation in partner commitment. For example, it is not unusual for partners to limit their involvement to non-kinetic actions such as economic cooperation, weapons deliveries, training, or rhetorical support based upon their own domestic national security interests, priorities, and resources. In some cases, the status of bi-lateral relations and multi-lateral defense agreements are publicly available through the minister of foreign relations. For example, U.S. bi-lateral relations are available on the U.S. Department of State website.¹⁸

When analyzing potential future partnerships, a framework can be based upon location, willingness, capability, and appropriateness.¹⁹ A country is more likely to be willing if the desired effect is a shared objective of both countries though willingness can be tempered by a cultural differences, bi-lateral history, and domestic politics. The relevance of location and capability

16 Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

17 Robert Jervis, "Understanding Beliefs," *Political Psychology* vol. 27, (October 2006), 641-63.

18 For example, U.S. Relations With Brunei at: <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-brunei/>.

19 Jefferson Marquis, et al., *Developing an Army Strategy for Building Partner Capacity for Stability Operations* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010), 95-105; Michael Fowler, "Constructing Effects: A Strategic Theory of Security Cooperation," in Burke, Fowler, and McCaskey, eds., *Military Strategy, Joint Operations, and Airpower* (DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018).

depends upon the operational objectives. Finally, appropriateness is a culmination of various types of risk: the risk of internal political violence, the risk of regime collapse, and the political risk (both domestic and international) based upon the perception of the bi-lateral relationship.

Since governments dedicate resources to address their prioritized security problems, strategic planners are interested in the probability of a change in government leadership for both partners and adversaries. Drastic changes in government can turn friendly nations into enemies and vice versa. If a partner country is in danger of government collapse, planners are concerned about multiple secondary effects: partner withdrawal of troop contributions to the coalition, ejection of coalition forces from the partner country bases, and, if the security situation deteriorates, evacuation of coalition embassy personnel and civilians (i.e., a non-combatant evacuation operation). At a minimum, it causes serious short-term disruptions in international relations and strategic decision making processes. Internal stability of a country can be analyzed via a variety of datasets such as Corruption Perceptions Index,²⁰ Amnesty International,²¹ Cato Institute's Human Freedom Index,²² Fragile States Index,²³ and Human Rights Watch.²⁴ The Fragile States Index is often the best place to start as it will highlight state weaknesses that can be explored in depth on the other sites.

Most countries work to shape their internal stability through the information domain. The country's information infrastructure enables governments and organizations to distribute messages on a massive scale. From a security perspective, strategic communications can be used for three purposes: legitimization, securitization, and influence. Legitimization is a strategic communication method to convince audiences that the regime is the legitimate ruler of the country. In the case of the insurgent, this method is used to make the insurgent appear more legitimate than the current ruler. In the case of a government, this method typically focuses on emphasizing how the government has provided for the needs of the people. Securitization is used to promote an issue to a national security interest. Within the Clausewitzian paradigm, states and non-state actors will seek public support for their rational choice interests. For example, the Chinese use internal messaging to garner popular support for the "9-dash line" as a key national security issue. Finally strategic communication can be used to send a message of coercion or

²⁰ <https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/overview>

²¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/>.

²² Ian Vasquez and Tanja Porcnik, *The Human Freedom Index* (DC: Cato Institute, 2016), available at: cato.org/human-freedom-index.

²³ <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/>

²⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/>

cooperation to another state or to non-state actors. Some governments control the local media, giving them an additional ability to transmit their message.

These methods can be targeted against a variety or combination of audiences: domestic population, diaspora, partners, international opinion, or an adversary. Messages can be distributed through a variety of mediums including: internet, radio, television, pamphlets, social media, and the education system. Data on penetration rates for radio, television, cell phones, and internet are available from CIA's World Factbook.²⁵ Regardless of the method of transmission, most strategic communications require some type of physical node such as a radio station or relay tower.²⁶ Some countries augment their strategic communication activities by limiting opposing viewpoints through tight controls on information distribution methods and computer network attacks. Creating effective strategic communication messages requires a detailed understanding of the local socio-economic situation. Unfortunately, this partly explains the success of insurgents living among the "regular" people compared to government bureaucrats living in the relatively affluent capital. To fully understand a country's strategic communications requires insights into their unique socio-economic situation.

Socio-economic

Novice analysts are great at collecting socio-economic data which is plentiful. However, they struggle to put it into context; they struggle with answering the "so what?" Part of the challenge is the vast amount of socio-economic data available from sources such as the World Bank or the United Nations Development Program. Analysts should focus upon three key research questions:

- Reason: How do their economic interests contribute to the problem?
- Passion: How are their values and fears reflected in how they perceive other key actors, both internally and externally?
- Chance: What is the potential for domestic economic or social crisis?

Whether it is to protect existing economic activities or to expand its access to resources, economics can be a major factor in shaping the national security agenda. Student analysts are quick to gravitate towards Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure. They may even compare GDP, GPD growth

²⁵ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

²⁶ For a more detailed analysis on the relationship between the cognitive, information, and physical, see Robert Cordray and Marc Romanych, "Mapping the Information Environment," *IOSphere* (Summer 2005), 7-10.

rates, or GDP per capita across countries. These measures are typically not helpful in explaining national security objectives. Comparing Vietnam's and China's GDP does little to explain why the two countries have a dispute over the economic resources associated with island chains in the South China Sea. Even comparing the amount of GDP dedicated to military spending says little of the actual capabilities that they might use during a conflict. Comparing military spending of Somalia to that of the United States is unlikely to be helpful. While money is necessary to project power across the globe, these measures are inadequate to explain the capability and capacity to move and sustain forces overseas. Certainly the projection might tell you that the U.S. military will be larger and/or better equipped than the Somali military.

More important than GDP comparisons is territorial disputes over economic resources. These disputes often include the economic exploitation rights for natural resources: oil and natural gas, fishing, and water. It is not enough to identify that a territory has a resource. To get a sense of the relative importance of the resource, it should be considered in proportion to the rest of the economy. For example, does Vietnam's oil claims in the South China Sea represent 1% or 50% of its oil reserves? Would successful exploitation be a major impact on the Vietnamese economy or a drop in the bucket?

A typical novice mistake in economic analysis is over-estimating the impact that trade links have on a country's decision to coerce its trading partner. Trade relations did little to prevent conflict throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries.²⁷ However, data from the latter half of the 20th century indicates that trade interdependence does reduce the likelihood of conflict, though only when the initiator expects conflict to result in adverse prices for its imports and exports.²⁸ Since many goods (e.g., oil) are fungible, initiators may assume that they can shift their trade elsewhere.

Along similar lines, novices, and some experts, often over-emphasize control of maritime trade routes as a potential source of conflict. In theory, total control of a trade route could be used for pure profit or to close trade to opponents. Conceptually, a country could charge a fee for transit through a maritime choke point. In reality, it is somewhat rare and might be difficult to enforce in areas of overlapping claims. While a country could stop the use of a trade route, closing it does not actually stop trade. It simply makes it less efficient as maritime vessels find an alternate, longer route.

27 Katherine Barbieri, *The Liberal Illusion: Does Trade Promote Peace?* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

28 Quan Li, Rafael Reuveny, "Does trade prevent or promote interstate conflict initiation," *Journal of Peace Research* 48, 4 (2011), 437-453; Havard Hegre, John R. Oneal, and Bruce Russett, "Trade does promote peace: New simultaneous estimates of the reciprocal effects of trade and conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, 6 (2010), 763-774.

When analyzing a country's national security objectives, the domestic economy is often of little import. However, it is useful for analyzing internal conflicts and for target selection. In many internal conflicts, the unequal distribution of government resources is often a point of complaint for insurgents. The domestic economy also matters for targeting selection as a country's economy is often vital to support a war effort with: electric power; petroleum, oil, & lubricants (POL); ammunition, armaments, and explosives; military vehicles, aircraft, maritime vessels; civil trucks and MHE (materials handling equipment such as cranes & forklifts); and basic industry for construction & repair such as cement and steel. Attacking economic targets requires detailed "understanding of the economic structure of a country... not just on production, but also on consumption, backup systems, and, most importantly, the projected effects of eliminating [that system]."²⁹

For long-term projections, economic changes drive social dynamics such as education, literacy levels, urbanization, professions, and economic income classes are interdependent with economic changes. Over time, these changes can create cleavages in social identities. They can be particularly problematic when the cleavages fall along other demographic factors described below.

Differences in social identity can be exploited for political gain, particularly within weak political systems.³⁰ They can be used to support military action whether to support government actions or to overthrow the government often by depicting an opposing group as sub-human, evil, or somehow lesser in value. For analysts, it is important to keep in mind that societies have different relative values regarding time, money, leisure, family, life, and human rights. Mirror-imaging the analyst's values onto another society is a common pitfall that can lead to gross errors in judgement based upon "unrealistic expectations about shaping behaviors and attitudes."³¹ A society's culture, values and beliefs are shaped, in part, by their history – domestic, regional, international and bi-lateral. For example, some states and organizations perceive efforts at democratization and the spread of human rights as a threat to their government or way of life.³² Culture, values and beliefs are, in part, shaped by identity. To some extent, identity can be mapped by various demographic factors shape how states and sub-state groups perceive each other.

29 Thomas E. Griffith, "Strategic Attack of National Electrical Systems," Thesis for School of Advanced Airpower Studies, pp. 45, available at: www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=ADA425504.

30 Ann Hironaka, *Neverending Wars: The International Community, Weak States, and the Perpetuation of Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 81-96; Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

31 Thomas A. Drohan, *A New Strategy for Complex Warfare* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2016). 276.

32 Charles K. Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right," *Military Review* (Jan-Feb 2016), 30-38.

- Ethnicity (Even if artificial or contrived such as Hutu vs. Tutsi)
- Linguistic
- Religion
- Dominant professions (e.g., farmer, herder, rancher, miner)
- Tribes or clans
- Ideological factions
- Regionalism
- Age (e.g., youth bulge or senior bulge) ³³
- Urbanization
- Education & Literacy Levels
- Income inequality and economic classes
- Displaced people ³⁴

Demographic factors that shape perceptions

Simply gathering demographic data is insufficient. The analyst needs to explore how demographic differences shape internal and external conflict. In many cases, the above social cleavages are geographic in nature. For example, Sudan is predominantly Arab-Muslim while South Sudan is mostly black Christian-Animists. This north-south split actually goes across the entire continent. Even so, the social dynamics of a country or even a region are rarely homogenous. People are complex. Binary measures of identity (e.g., religious versus secular) are misleading.³⁵ Identity is not deterministic for the behavior of an individual. People do not always behave as we expect them to as violating “rules” is often easier than following them.³⁶ Plus, they tend to identify with more than a single group creating a multitude of over-lapping identities (see Table 1) with rulesets that may conflict. However, group interests

33 A youth bulge can lead to a significant proportion of disenfranchised unemployed or underemployed, but well educated, youth.

34 <https://www.refugeesinternational.org>; <https://reliefweb.int/countries>

35 Jason Klocek, “Seek, and You Will Find: Religious Intelligence in British Counter-insurgency Operations,” *St. Anthony’s International Review* Vol. 12, No. 1 (2016), 16-37.

36 Dietrich Dörner, *The Logic of Failure* (New York: Metropolitan Books, English translation in 1996), 31.

and the potential size of those groups are useful in identifying preferences and predicting group behavior. These identity differences can be used to create an ideology that serves as a recruiting and strategic communications tool.

The potential for social-identity divisions can be exacerbated by domestic economic crisis. Economic crisis creates social unrest at a time when the government can least afford to spend additional funds on internal security. Therefore, an analysis of factors that could lead to an economic crisis can be useful. Examples include:

- Over-reliance on a single commodity (e.g., oil, sugar, coffee) as a percentage of GDP or as a percentage of government tax revenues. An unexpected commodity glut or crop failure can precipitate an economic crisis.
- Export economy makes up a major percentage of GDP or tax revenues. A global economic crisis could have a disproportionate impact on their economy.
- Resource exhaustion from non-sustainable activities that lead to desertification, deforestation, soil depletion, over-fishing, over-hunting, and competition over water rights. This can be exacerbated by countries prone to natural disasters such as flood, drought, or disease which destroys the resource or halts extraction. Long-term resource exhaustion increases a country's vulnerability during an economic crisis.
- Serious infrastructure flaws. Similar to resource exhaustion, long-term negligence of infrastructure inhibits economic growth and increases the severity of economic crises.
- A major portion of GDP comes from aid: foreign aid, international aid, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, non-government organizations, or diaspora donations. A sudden reduction in aid (e.g., world financial crisis, evidence of human rights abuses, major crisis diverts funds elsewhere) can leave this country vulnerable.

Economic crises are a problem for both the government and the people. The economy is a key driver to most of the other systems. It enables spending on political institutions, security, infrastructure, and information distribution. Most crises result in a drop in GDP per capita and a sudden drop in revenue for the government. In response, the government must cut back on spending, propelling the downward spike in the economy. For example, some countries subsidize basic staples such as flour or fuel. During times of economic trouble, the country may have to slash the subsidy. This cut typically comes at a time of overall economic downturn when people can least afford the

price increase in items required for basic sustenance.

Not only will this potentially decrease the government's ability to provide security, it will usually require the government to reduce spending on social welfare programs and infrastructure improvements. These cuts in spending typically coincide with significant increases in the unemployment rate. These newly unemployed then face a second problem as previous social welfare programs are dramatically reduced. In other cases, the patron-client system is reliant upon a healthy economy. As the economy collapses, key supporters may abandon the regime to find a leader that is more likely to salvage the situation. Economic collapse can be especially dangerous in countries with large amounts of lootable natural resources. Commodities such as oil, gold, timber, and diamonds are easily exploited by non-state actors to fund warlords and insurgent operations.³⁷

Conclusion

The political-information and socio-economic analytic framework is designed to focus analytical efforts on key issues for national security problems. While designed for country-level analysis, it can also be used for internal conflicts. Using the Clausewitzian lens for the key research questions creates guideposts to frame the analytical problem. Considering that every analyst has limited time, the framework helps focus the initial research. When doing this country level analysis, it is important to not get overly fixated on identifying which system a particular type of information fits into. There is a lot of overlap and inter-relationships between the elements. The important thing to remember is that the information is conveyed to the decision maker in a manner that is clear and logical regardless of where it fits within the analytical framework. Decision makers do not care about your analytical framework or the level of effort you put into doing it the "right way." They want good analysis to help them make decisions. Analytical frameworks are for analysts—to help ensure that you covered all of the key aspects of a problem without putting an inordinate amount of time into tangentially related material. A framework does not necessarily result in good analysis. Like any organizational systems, garbage in equals garbage out. While the framework will point you in the right direction, you still have to do the high-quality research. Ideally, this should improve productivity, efficiency, and help you to focus your efforts on the material that really matters.

37 Philippe Le Billon, *Wars of Plunder: Conflicts, Profits and the Politics of Resources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

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