

EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES AND METHODOLOGY FOR STUDYING MILITARY-POLITICAL CRISES

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Abstract

The paper argues that the development of Peace and Conflict Studies as a social science is particularly pertinent nowadays, when crisis-response and conflict-resolution studies are an important part of any education in International Relations and Political Science, as well as in other studies focusing on international security as a social phenomenon. The study of military-political crises as prelude to armed conflict is essential for crisis management and conflict prevention.

Therefore, the paper ventures to present some educational approaches and methodology for studying military-political crises, which aim to facilitate learning, encourage critical thinking and contribute to the knowledge about the tools for anticipating a forthcoming crisis or evaluating an already unfolding one.

One important educational approach is to put an emphasis upon the military-political situation (MPS) as an integral component of the security environment dynamics and provide an insight to its characteristics. For example, one such characteristic are the interrelationships between military-political entities operating at different security levels and their impact upon the MPS in regions prone to crisis or armed conflict. This approach would allow educators to position the upcoming or existing conflict in the wider context of security and teach students to make better assessments of its local, regional and global implications. Another educational approach is to explain the essence of pre-defined observable diagnostic indicators supporting crisis forecasts and early warning mechanisms. To this end, the paper encourages educators to combine the crises and conflict studies with methods for structured analysis, which would allow students to cultivate in-depth situational awareness and ability to explore viable response options. Finally, the paper recommends an emphasis on the systematic approach in teaching and studying military-political crises as an efficient way to explore their nature and social repercussions.

Keywords: Crisis, Conflict, Social Science, Studies

1. INTRODUCTION

The global and regional security environment nowadays is diverse, dynamic and is fraught with significant conflict potential, fueled by the tendency of individual states or domestic actors to impose their interests by force, and their actions often have a lasting detrimental effect on international peace and security. Unfortunately, the stances of the opponents are often irreconcilable, and the contradictions between them are becoming more and more difficult to resolve, which determines the growing likelihood of implementing military force and makes the threat of armed conflict a distinct feature of international relations.

The security environment is increasingly shaped under the dominant influence of military-political and military factors, which sometimes reach extreme values and turn relations between opponents into openly hostile and confrontational. The resulting military-political tensions reduce the likelihood of resolving disputes

peacefully and increase the threat of military (armed) conflict

Therefore, educational and methodological tools are needed for in-depth study of military-political crises as an important aspect of the Military-Political Situation (MPS), which, in turn, is an essential element of the security environment. This should be done within the framework of education in crisis-response and conflict-resolution as core subjects of the studies in International Relations and Political Science, as well as in other studies regarding international security as a social phenomenon. The imperatives of the present day security environment strenuously require that Peace and Conflict Studies as a social science should encompass a comprehensive understanding of military-political crises as prelude to armed conflict. Hopefully, this would pave the way for improving our crisis management culture and making our conflict prevention tools more effective.

2. EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES

The educational challenges that educators and learners must face together could be overcome by sustaining a continued interest in this topic, promoting studies and research, encouraging critical thinking, applying objective criteria in assessing military-political crises, etc. In this way, forecasting, warning and other analytical tools and techniques will be upgraded to help anticipate an upcoming crisis or evaluate an already unfolding one.

The educational approaches and methodologies should facilitate learners to study in detail and reveal the driving forces that determine the origin, development and prospects for resolving military-political crises. This would help them interpret events, phenomena and trends, reveal the existing interrelationships, correctly identify the key factors, outline the prospects and directions in which the situation would evolve, forecast the development of the crisis and articulate sound conclusions about the consequences for security on a national, regional and international level. Planning adequate response options is hardly possible without a timely and accurate analysis of the military-political situation, allowing learners to suggest the right solutions out of various crisis scenarios. The completeness of the analysis and the accuracy of the assessments are especially important nowadays, when a tactical event could trigger a chain of events leading to strategic consequences for peace and stability. Moreover, detailed knowledge of the MPS in perspective is essential for long term defense planning, which is never just a technical procedure, but also a highly political process (Stojkovic, Dahl, 2007).

Therefore, an important educational approach is to put an emphasis upon the MPS as an integral component of security and provide insight to its characteristics. This approach allows MPS to be seen as part of the dynamic system of the current security environment and enables learners to explore military-political analysis and position MPS elements and characteristics in the broader context of security. This approach is an opportunity to correctly determine the relationships between the entities at different levels of security (national, regional, international) and to identify the direction, the intensity and the effect of the military-political factors. Moreover, it provides the means for an in-depth study of the criteria for assessing the various MPSs, including crisis situations. In this way the nature and the essence of the military-political crisis as a phenomenon is clarified more thoroughly and its characteristic features are outlined more clearly.

MPS as a subject of Peace and Conflict Studies can be described as a set of factors and conditions that require states and military-political alliances to develop define and implement defense policy and foreign security policy - policies that actually reflect the military and the political aspects of security. This requirement is imperative, given the fact that under the influence of these factors crises may arise, increasing the likelihood of an armed conflict to be used as a mechanism for achieving political goals. In essence, the study of the environment in which military-political events and phenomena emerge and develop, by implementing unified educational approaches and methodologies, is important because the management of these events is crucial for the security and welfare of any society and requires rules, practices and procedures to be defined and applied in a more informed and, hence, responsible way.

When teaching this topic, educators should emphasize that one of the most important characteristics and components of the MPS are the goals, plans and intentions of military-political actors at the five levels of security - security of the individual, security of the group of individuals (various social and other groups and communities), security of the state (various national entities, groups, communities), security of a community of states (coalitions, unions, alliances) and world security (international and transnational organizations with global influence) (Slatinski, 2008). Educators should keep in mind that the interests of the entities define their goals, plans and intentions. Interests are the sustainable driving forces that determine the long-term developments within the MPS. The interests of the entities of the same order (located on the same level) often diverge and may even be diametrically opposed. This is also true for those at different levels, which

makes harmonization and reconciliation of interests often very difficult. Therefore, it is necessary for learners to develop skills to monitor the balance of interests and to identify the intentions of their holders to defend or enforce them at the expense of other actors. If the intentions turn into action, the tensions may escalate into a military-political crisis and become a precondition for an armed conflict.

Entities can achieve their goals through the use of economic, military-political, ideological, and information-psychological and hybrid tools, aimed at consolidating and expanding their influence, reaching leadership positions and establishing economic, political and military superiority over other entities of the same level. Some of the signs of a crisis situation may be the transformation of benevolent rivalry into hostile and belligerent confrontation, accompanied by manifestations of strength and supremacy.

In order for learners to identify these features, they must be familiar with other characteristics and elements of MPS, namely the capabilities of the entities, including military capabilities, the personal qualities of the political and military leaders, the interrelationships between the military-political entities and, last but not least, their actual behavior. These elements are interdependent and have a joint effect on the military-political situation and the security environment. Therefore, learners must envisage them in their totality and unity, while assessing their role and weight in shaping the incentives behind the actions of entities at different levels of security. In this way, learners will acquire skills to properly assess the prospects for the emergence and development of crisis events, to determine the moment of escalation and peak of the crisis, to assess the likelihood of the crisis escalating into armed conflict and to make better assessments of its local, regional and global implications.

The other educational approach is to emphasize the importance of diagnosing crisis symptoms and anticipating key moments and milestone events, positioned along a tangible timeline. This is important for crisis forecasts and early warning mechanisms. Learners have to understand the essence and purpose of pre-defined observable diagnostic indicators intended to establish with relative accuracy the beginning and the end of events related to the origin, emergence, development and de-escalation of crises.

These indicators will help to determine turning points in the development of crisis events, such as the moment when the conflicts between the entities might escalate to an uncontrolled level and the prospect of military resolution would prevail over the likelihood of a political settlement. Here the attention should be focused on identifying those destabilizing events that can take the relationship between the actors out of their ordinary status and deteriorate them to the extreme. To do this, learners need to know the criteria and indicators that outline the transition from normal to crisis. It is an important requirement for learners to know in detail the history, current state and prospects for the development of these relationships in order to correctly identify the signs indicating that a crisis is likely to emerge. They need to develop skills for monitoring the warning indicators in the pre-crisis period in order to assess the military-political risks and threats that determine the probability of the emergence and occurrence of a crisis.

It would be a good idea to apply these educational approaches together with training in structured analysis techniques, which will help learners to thoroughly comprehend the essence of ongoing events, to identify signs of upcoming or existing crisis, to properly assess the situation and its consequences and explore possible response options.

The systematic approach is an efficient tool for teaching and studying military-political crises, as well as for exploring their nature and social repercussions. The system in this context is an intellectual construct imposed upon reality to help organize it conceptually (Kugler, 2006). The MPS system includes numerous entities with variable stances, intentions and plans. The components of the security environment have an impact on the MPS components and vice versa - military-political factors influence the processes and trends in the security environment. This right and feedback causation must be followed in the analysis of the individual subsystems located at different levels of security. Educators and learners should bear in mind that the MPS subsystems possess exit points/emitters of their own to relay their impact on other systems, as well as entrances/receptors to receive incoming inputs and impacts.

3. CONCLUSION

These educational approaches have to be reconciled with the idea any analysis may be applied in an environment of uncertainty and ambiguity, due to either a shortage of relevant information or difficulties in processing excessive amounts of information. Moreover, attempting to provide a scientific basis for problematizing security is often futile, because security problems belong to the category of complex evolving problems (Raza, 2010). In this case, the system approach requires high expertise and abilities to analyze indefinite, but crucial components of the system such as the objectives and the intentions of the military-political actors.

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