

Needed—New Maps for the New Struggle of Narratives (11/10/01)

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In two recent back-to-back seminars at Stanford University's Center for International Security and Cooperation, military experts focused our attention on "the battle of the narratives." They regard these as the larger strategic sphere in which the combat in Afghanistan is one of a series of engagements. How do we use what kinds of effort (including force) to confront adversaries that are non-state, intensely ethnic or religious, actors who have strategic goals that are ideological rather than exclusively geographic in nature. The names the experts used were "postmodern combat of ideas," a "war of the stories," in older formulations, a "battle for the hearts and minds," or "propaganda" and in military parlance, "info-war," or "psychops." In a geopolitical perspective, the battle of stories has been called the "clash of civilizations," by political scientist, Samuel Huntington. But whatever it is called, what is new is that this clash of ideas and beliefs is now regarded as a, *or perhaps the*, major strategic concern of Western nations.

Needed--maps for the new kind of war

For centuries, military mapping has been in the forefront of cartography. Yet for all its strategic importance, no new maps of the war of narratives to guide the generals and their political counterparts are available.

Maps are possible

If we are to maintain conceptual clarity and strategic focus in the battle of stories, we need to develop knowledge maps that enable us to get our minds around these vital strategic issues. My project at Stanford, Knowledge Mapping for Public Policy, has focused on the development of a broad array of kinds of conceptual maps or visual displays to display specific ways of viewing problems. To date we have focused on scientific and technical issues as well as problems of domestic concern. The approaches, methodology, and philosophy of our project can make a contribution to the problems described above, mapping for the war of narratives. (Some of our work is described in my talk to a recent Packard Foundation Conference, entitled *Knowledge Mapping for Complex Social Messes* < <http://www.stanford.edu/~rhorn/SpchPackard.html>>).

Specific needs: the new missions

Conventionally, wars are seen as the confrontations of interstate actors with massed forces in particular geographic locations. While this kind of war is still a possibility, the new war on terrorism that is taking place within the larger war of narratives requiring different kinds of conceptualization and, as a consequence, a different kind of visual representation, a different kind of mapping.

The missions of our side in these nonconventional uses of force are variously described as peacekeeping, peacemaking, humanitarian interventions, and or counterterrorism. On global TV its more visible aspects are seen as riot, ethnic cleansing, car bombings, genocidal rampage, civil and ethnic wars, assassinations, provoked migration, and refugee assistance, etc. This intense international media coverage can be thought of as a "new fog of war."

What is largely unmapped

Underlying all of these specific events are violent differences of beliefs and ideas, all of which are largely unmapped. They aggregate into public opinion, often fragmented within nation states, largely unmapped. Looking inside these beliefs are facts and falsehoods, truth and errors, tradeoffs and deals, overlooked and unmanaged dilemmas, and inadvertent self-deceptions—all of which are largely unmapped. From one perspective, it is a complex knowledge management problem that is also largely unmapped.

Maps as important for strategic focus

Perhaps as a result of the absence of adequate ways of envisioning the battle of stories, the discussion in the seminars mentioned above drifted away from larger strategic matters of narratives, to things the scholars and military people in attendance could focus on within their usual conceptual tools (i.e, the more traditional components of military discourse, technology, capabilities, doctrine, rules of engagement, etc.). This could foreshadow fatal mistakes in national strategic analysis, doctrine, training, and mission execution.

Methodologies now becoming available

The methodologies on which we have been working are now robust enough to help committees, task forces, etc. who are engaged in ongoing discussions, debates, and deliberations about these war of narrative issues. At this point we are ready to support such task forces with knowledge mapping architectures and approaches.

Research needed

That we are ready to help active task forces does not mean that more research and development is not needed. We believe that R & D is needed to develop this methodology in several directions:

- How to represent details, strengths, weaknesses of worldviews
- How to represent changes in beliefs and methods for changes
- How to interlink different mapping layers and templates that can be crafted for different viewpoints on beliefs
- How to automate the creation and updating of different conceptual mapping templates.

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