

## Defence Transformation and Political-Strategic Culture: A Framework for Future Research

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### ABSTRACT

*The use of the military by NATO member states is shaped by their perception of the world and the norms that they adhere to. This has significant consequences for the paths of defence transformation that states embark on. Although key values among NATO member states are similar, their translation to policy is not necessarily the same. At its core is the transatlantic divergence in political-strategic cultures and necessitates attention from both analysts and policy-makers. Four factors have given rise to the importance of political-strategic cultures as guiding principles of defence policy; the political system of NATO states, the changing nature of the security environment, historical experiences from past operations and the developments in the technological realm. Several methods are introduced to unearth political-strategic culture. What follows is that the European and American divergence in political-strategic culture is mainly the result of a variance in threat perceptions based upon an understanding on either relative or absolute security. This leads to a primary focus on stabilization operations on the one hand and combat operations on the other. Understanding what this implies for defence transformation is a key necessity for creating a holistic transatlantic approach to current security and defence issues.*

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

For NATO to overcome the challenges of defence transformation, analysis should not only be focused on technology, and its homogenous application Alliance-wide. Instead, transatlantic differences *concerning the use of the military* need to be recognized and internalized in the analysis. Over the past few years, the primary differences that have surfaced within the Alliance have been of a political nature regarding the use of force and the deployment of armed forces. Central to these differences is a political-strategic gap; a divergence in the way allies perceive security threats and subsequently the solutions defined to these threats. The materialization of this gap is present at all different levels; operational, tactical and strategic. It pervades rules of engagement, doctrines, the decisions regarding types of missions and ultimately in the decision whether or not to use the military in a particular situation. In general, the difference in perceptions is expressed in the transatlantic divergence how to wield the military instrument. Although the Iraq Crisis was unique in its intensity and public nature, similar non-productive situations are not unthinkable in the future if current divergences are not addressed. For the process of defence transformation, understanding how different political-strategic cultures affect the Allies' use of the military, is helpful to achieve the common objective of enhanced and effective cooperation and will ultimately lead to a strengthening of the Alliance.

The work presented in this paper is introductory to a PhD research project pursued at the Clingendael Centre for Strategic Studies as part of a range of activities on issues of defence transformation. The PhD

Korteweg, R. (2005) Defence Transformation and Political-Strategic Culture: A Framework for Future Research. In *Analytical Support to Defence Transformation* (pp. 2-1 – 2-18). Meeting Proceedings RTO-MP-SAS-055, Paper 2. Neuilly-sur-Seine, France: RTO.  
Available from: <http://www.rto.nato.int/abstracts.asp>.

# Report Documentation Page

Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. REPORT DATE <b>01 APR 2005</b>		2. REPORT TYPE <b>N/A</b>		3. DATES COVERED <b>-</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Defence Transformation and Political-Strategic Culture: A Framework for Future Research</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>Clingendael Centre for Strategic Studies PO Box 96864 2509 JG The Hague THE NETHERLANDS</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release, distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES <b>See also ADM202031. NATO/RTO-MP-SAS-055, The original document contains color images.</b>					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

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research examines how aspects of national political and strategic cultures affect the way in which states use the military instrument. To that end, the consequences for defence transformation will be examined. One aspect of the research, and relevant to this forum, is the alliance-wide promotion and adoption of various aspects of the Revolution in Military Affairs and how it relates to various forms of political-strategic culture. Theoretical elements are drawn primarily from constructivist literature and subsequently a framework is developed within which defence transformation can be analyzed from the perspective of political-strategic cultures. This article will illustrate differences in political-strategic cultures along 'American/US' and 'European' lines. This categorization is a deliberate generalization, both for purposes of illustrating the point concerning the divergence in political-strategic cultures and because of a constraint in available space [1].

By no means does this article argue for a decoupling of the Alliance, instead a plea is made to incorporate political-strategic cultural criteria in the overall implementation of defence transformation processes so as to make full use of the comparative advantages of the Member States. The article attempts to be realistic in the sense that it recognizes and identifies differences among member states and seeks not to remove them but work with them. Rather than dismissing diversity, accepting it can prove to be conducive to a more effective Alliance. A functional analysis of how cultures affect different forms of transformation is necessary.

### 1.1 Defining Transformation

In order to venture on the topic at hand, it is important to delineate the definition of force transformation used. In this paper I use elements of definitions by two oft-quoted people in the field of transformation. First of all, I make use of the definition coined by Hans Binnendijk, director at the National Defence University in Washington DC. Binnendijk defines the term as "the act of creating and harnessing a revolution in military affairs. It requires, according to Binnendijk, "developing new technologies, operational concepts, and organizational structures to conduct war in dramatically new ways" [2]. Although the definition is applicable to the topic at hand, there are two assumptions underlying it that warrant mentioning and one qualification is to be made. One assumption underlying the definition concerns the placid observation that a revolution in military affairs is indeed taking place and that it 'merely' requires sound policy and coordination to translate it into defence transformation [3]. The fact that we are living in revolutionary technological times is taken for granted. A further assumption - which supports the general necessity of defence transformation - is that either current technology is not offering the required results and current military operations can be performed more effectively, or that meeting future threats requires different doctrines and technology. This is important to remember when discussing the consequences for transformation of a divergence in political-strategic culture. Finally, the qualification regarding Binnendijk's definition concerns his assertion that defence transformation redefines the way in which states conduct *wars*. Perhaps a convenient generalization, I would however contend that the effects of an RMA on crisis-response, evacuation operations, and stabilization operations are significant to say the least; defence transformation affects military operations short of war as well, perhaps even more so. The 'spectrum-of-conflict' model used by the Pentagon predicts that stabilizations operations have a higher likelihood of occurrence (even though they have a lower intensity) and in fact, this proves to be supported by empirical data. Figure 1 shows an alternative to the Pentagon model. Transformation affects all aspects of the way in which the military operates, not only the way it conducts war. *NATO's transformation efforts should thus be as much concerned with enabling effective peacekeeping as at effective high-scale combat.*

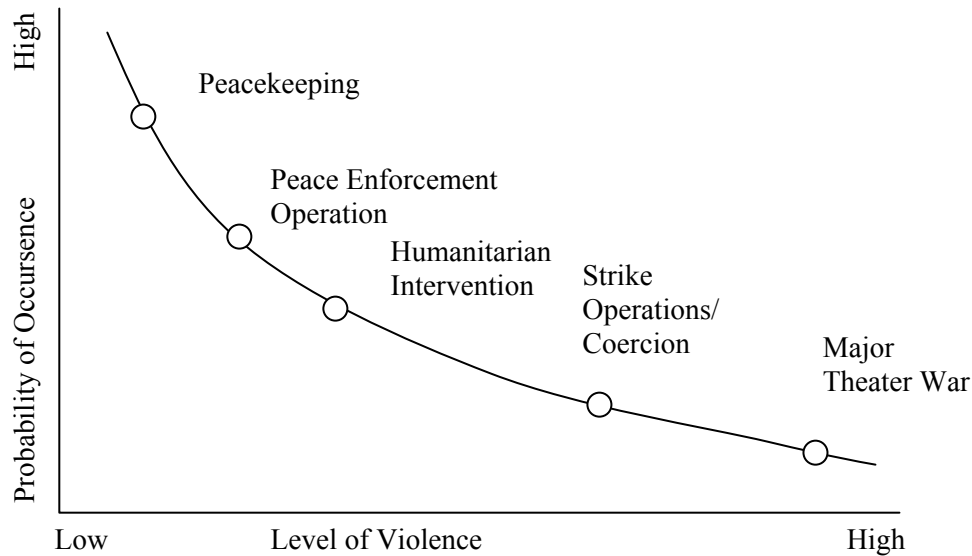


Figure 1: Spectrum of Operations Model.

The second definition of transformation that I want to put forward, expressed by Vice-Admiral (ret.) Cebrowski, contains an important central tenet, namely that transformation is a continuous process which contains our efforts of trying to cope with the future.

“Transformation is meant to identify, leverage and even create new underlying principles for the way things are done. Transformation is meant to identify and leverage new sources of power.” [4]

When viewed from a strategic perspective Cebrowski’s definition entails a broad conception of transformation, which does not only limit it to the practice of war-fighting. Essential components of transformation can in this context thus be considered the adoption of the products of the RMA and the subsequent redefining of doctrines to optimize the use of the military in its variety of missions. These two tenets guide this research on defence transformation.

## 2.0 POLITICAL-STRATEGIC CULTURE

Allied Command Transformation (ACT) has defined five core elements of transformation. These are:

- Effective engagement/ joint maneuver;
- Information Superiority, NNEC;
- Effective CIMIC;
- Expeditionary Operations;
- Integrated Logistics.

Concerning effective engagement, it is described in a NATO fact sheet as follows. “Effective engagement and joint manoeuvre can be described as the prosecution of the right target, in the right manner, at the right time, for the right reason to achieve the right effect”[5]. Although an accurate description of the concept, it is full of normative assumptions that are dependent upon the norm and value structure of the entity

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executing it. In particular, “the right manner” and “for the right reason to achieve the right effect” are open to interpretation. This interpretation is based upon a state’s perception of the use of the military, in other words its political-strategic culture.

When states act, they do so on the basis of a set of beliefs that arise from information shaped by their perceptions of the outside world [6]. A particular happening in the international arena can be considered a hostile act or a friendly act. The threats that states face are social constructs. This implies that the actions of the Self are to a certain extent a result of its perception of the Other. An Iranian nuclear weapon is considered by Western states as more threatening than an American, British or French nuclear-tipped ballistic missile. Perceptions shape the mix of policy instruments used to deal with the environment. In general, a state has a variety of instruments at its disposal, ranging from economic trade agreements generally referred to as ‘soft power’ to military interventions, or ‘hard power’[7]. But even within the realm of the military there is a difference between lower spectrum and higher spectrum operations. Willingness or preference to perform one instead of the other under particular circumstances is determined by perceptions of how to use the military; this is political-strategic culture. Political-strategic culture describes the determining factors that shape perceptions towards the use of the military. Political-strategic culture entails the way in which the identity of a state, based upon its historical experiences – including geopolitical - in relation to the normative foundation of its political society, gives shape to its use and employment of the military instrument in defence (or promotion) of its proclaimed interests. It shapes the way threats are identified and perceived, and how the decision to deal with them is made.

Political-strategic cultures play a role on two dimensions. First of all in the decision of the state to use the military to deal with a particular threat or crisis, and secondly at the level of the actual employment of the use of the military. The latter concerns the rules of engagement, and the ethics during deployment. While it is of importance to study how political-strategic cultures play a role on the battlefield, this paper focuses on the first aspect; how culture plays a role in shaping the use of the military.

Specifically, political-strategic culture does not constitute the *only* factor in explaining why states use the military. Complex decisions can never be reduced to a single explanation. However political-strategic cultures are a contributing factor to understand why the military is used. And it is this factor that must be analyzed as well in order to have an accurate picture how best to pursue transformation.

Among NATO officials and commentators, the necessity to look at culture has also been recognized. The NATO ACT brief on transformation stipulates that creating a transformed NATO force “is about culture”. It states that the first step to be taken in transformation is to “deconflict Services and Cultures”. Major General John Admire in turn has noted that NATO “often acknowledges ‘interoperability’ concerns, but focus[es] primarily on weapons systems, communications assets, and equipment. The more critical interoperability issues, however, are those associated with cultural and doctrinal differences among nations” [8].

### 3.0 FOUR FACTORS FOR POLITICAL-STRATEGIC CULTURE

There are four inter-connected factors that determine why political-strategic cultures are important to stimulating force transformation and why now.

#### 3.1 The Political System of NATO States

The first factor is of a technical-political nature and relates to the democratic systems of the NATO member states. A primary tenet of Western democracies is their system of parliamentary accountability and the subservient nature of the military to civilian rule. A consequence of parliamentary accountability is that governments need to justify their behaviour, first to parliament and in second instance to the public

at large. This especially concerns topics that are as close to the heart of the nation-state as the use of the military is. This convention to legitimate and/or legitimize policy leads to a governmental necessity to find justifications that are acceptable to their constituents, political supporters, parliament, the population or parts of any of these. Even if the true motivation for engaging in a particular action is otherwise, governments will seek a justification that holds support among the public, i.e. a justification that “sells”. This leads to a close relationship between policy and justification. As such, justifications for policy are indications of what is generally considered normatively acceptable in society and when it concerns the use of the military, they are a characteristic of political-strategic culture. The second tenet of Western democracies, namely the civilian rule over the military, reinforces the statement above. When deploying the military politicians take the justifications for policy into account. Simultaneously, it goes without saying that the military establishment is also influenced by these democratic principles in democratic states. A state can have all the offensive military capabilities it wants but still be prone to primarily perform lower-spectrum operations. Such a mismatch needs to be prevented. A consequence is that a state’s armed forces capabilities do not always say all about how and when a state will deploy its military force.

### 3.2 Changing Nature of the Security Environment

The second factor concerns the changing nature of the security environment. Over the past decade the focus of defence and security policy for Western European states has shifted from static, territorial defence to expeditionary operations. Globalization and Western military superiority have led to a situation where threats now may emerge far away from home. In effect performing crisis-management operations has meant that Western defence policy has become more offensive than during the Cold War, even in terms of warfighting which is similarly an expeditionary operation. Secondly, policy has implied focussing on actual deployments. Throughout the Cold War, NATO’s core function was to protect NATO territory from an invasion or attack (territorial defence). This functioned in practice on the basis of a *threat* of military retaliation; deterrence by training. During the 1990’s, NATO shifted towards *actual* operations. Not of the sort of large scale manoeuvre warfare prepared for during the Cold War, but limited crisis-management operations instead that could take place far away from home. Indicative is for instance NATO’s decision in 2002 to operate ‘out of area’. For European allies this marked a quantum shift. It has unearthed the importance of political-strategic culture as well. For a government to obtain political support to support territorial defence of the homeland, with Soviet tanks on the horizon being the dominant threat, was relatively straightforward. The situation changed when defence policy implied going abroad, sometimes far away to prevent a crisis from escalating into a larger threat. The 1990’s saw a marked increase in the actual deployment of armed forces. Counterterrorism, interdiction of ethnic conflict, or aiding humanitarian crises necessitate a broader conceptualization of ‘the national interest’. New justifications for a new type of military action were required. Expeditionary operations are justified by “fighting the war on terrorism”, “offering humanitarian relief”, “putting an end to ethnic cleansing”, “supporting the peace process”, and “creating a stable environment for peace”. The changing security environment has brought about a shift towards expeditionary operations, and simultaneously a higher frequency in the use of the military abroad. The new operations require new justifications and present new exclamations of political-strategic culture.

### 3.3 Historical Factors

The third factor is related to history. Power politics, especially among NATO’s European allies, is no longer a justifiable cause for engaging in military operations. Following the destruction witnessed on the European continent in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, European states have ventured upon a path of integration whereby the use of force in their internal dealings is shunned. A post-modern Kantian attitude is the result and the European continent has never been more stable, peaceful and prosperous. While the use of force became an unacceptable convention in their internal dealings it also influenced their perception on the use of the military in their dealings with the rest of the world. Western European

societies became uneasy with using the military for combat operations and for some states only under strict conditions were expeditionary operations accepted. Witness Germany's intense debate in the 1990's concerning the deployment of German troops abroad. The shift towards expeditionary operations combined by a post-modern outlook, whereby the use of force was considered a last resort instead of a Clausewitzian extension of politics, favoured multilateral and internationalist considerations in justifying military policy. International legal regimes and norms have become guides for European use of the military. Multilateralism and force as a last resort are dominant features of European perspectives on the use of force. It is hence not surprising that it has been under these considerations that European forces have performed expeditionary operations in the past decade and a half, participating mostly in UN (and NATO) sanctioned interventions or stabilization exercises.

Like any other state, for the United States historical experiences with the military also play a leading role in shaping its view of its use thereof. Well-documented events such as the Vietnam War and Operation Provide Hope in Somalia have changed and influenced the norms that US governments adhere to when employing the armed forces. In these cases experiences have generally been considered to have increased the United States' casualty aversion. At the same time Somalia dampened the US government's willingness to send forces abroad when it was unclear what specific US interests were at stake. The events of 9/11 changed this when the US homeland itself was struck. Norms for warfighting shifted again as vital interests were considered at stake. Historical events that led to shifting norms demonstrate the extent to which political-strategic culture, the relevance of a state's norms regarding the use of the military, is important to understanding what types of military operations are pursued.

### **3.4 Technology**

The final factor illustrating the relevance of political-strategic culture is technology. The current revolution in military affairs is characterized by the importance allocated to technology. Technology pervades all aspects of it. The enabling doctrine which consist of elements of network-centric warfare and effects-based operations have led to a drive for so-called Network Enabled Capabilities. The literature on the RMA is saturated with studies detailing the new capabilities the information revolution is able to afford military operations. Michael O'Hanlon in *Technological Change and the Future of Warfare* has identified three key elements within the current transformation discussion that highlight the aspects of the process. First of all, there are those that see the RMA in light of the information and communications revolution (*networking*). Secondly there are those that see that current developments in the technological realm will lead to better, more effective and more efficient weaponry (*improvements in firepower*). And thirdly, a negative element is that potential adversaries will also become more capable through perhaps a slow, but nevertheless a sure adoption of similar technologies.

The idea that nature can be harnessed through technological progress has been a driving force of Western civilization, essentially being a product of the Enlightenment. Subsequent historical experiences have interacted with these to give shape to political-strategic cultures. Among Western military cultures, in particular in the United States, there has been a drive to develop 'tech-heavy and man-light' armed forces. This was a consequence not only of Western (post-) industrial societies' reliance upon technology but also the historic experience in conflicts such as Vietnam and Somalia which triggered the development of doctrines that would reduce friendly casualty rates. "No body bags" became a guiding mantra which led to concepts such as the Powell-Weinberger Doctrine, and similarly the Pentagon's embrace of newly developed technologies which yielded a potential of warfare without casualties [9]. Although this casualty aversion and drive for technology was not as outspoken among European states, its reliance on technology is nevertheless profound.

Current technological improvements in capabilities and the development of new capabilities altogether have made it theoretically possible, notwithstanding financial and budgetary constraints, for Western states to be able to perform any type of operation with greater effectiveness. Advanced systems for

delivering better, more accurate and more sophisticated firepower are complemented by evolved capabilities for creating intricate networks between troops and commanders. In order to make a contribution to any type of operation, states theoretically have all the capabilities at their disposal. The dilemma is financial and cultural. The question that needs to be answered is does a country want particular capabilities, and what would those capabilities imply for the operations it can carry out? The choice for particular technologies is more and more culturally-determined. For instance will a country settle for increased networking, or focus mostly on improvements in firepower, on the larger weapons systems or on essential supporting force multipliers?

In conclusion, from a political perspective there is a relationship between political-strategic culture and military policy. At the same time this has been supported by the emergence of expeditionary operations. Expeditionary operations have demanded new justifications, based on 'ideology' rather than *realpolitik*. Failing to take these norms into account when analyzing how best to attain transformation is failing to see the complete picture of why a Western state deploys its armed forces. Historical experiences have shown that norms for using the military in particular ways change at times, and simultaneously that the progress of technology has made it possible to perform any operation more effectively. However given its norms, it is the political-strategic culture that shapes a state's toolbox.

#### 4.0 FINANCE AND POLITICAL-STRATEGIC CULTURE

How culture plays a role in the use of force has been the topic of a substantive amount of literature. However this has mostly been confined to the differences in culture among adversaries or across the globe at large, i.e. among different civilizations instead of among allies. The difficulty with respect to the explanatory nature of political-strategic cultures lies in the classic dilemma between the chicken and the egg, which came first? Do particular countries perform particular operations because they wish to do so from a cultural perspective, or do they wish to do so because they do not have the capabilities to perform otherwise? Robert Kagan's *Power and Weakness* is an example of the latter reasoning, positing that a state's military inventory is the determinant for a country's strategic behaviour. This argument is essentially based on a causal finance-defence relationship; those that spend more on defence, will use the military more frequently and more offensively. However it fails to take into account the flipside of the coin namely that states have a trade-off to make when allocating their budgets and hence deciding what type of capabilities to purchase. The reasoning also fails to explain why NATO's European allies fail to spend more on defence; whether cumulatively in the European Union or separately. Instead the choice not to spend more on defence should be seen for what it is, as a choice: the traditional dilemma between butter and guns. European states, with a costly welfare state and aging population are unwilling to increase defence expenditures. European governments may simply not *want* more military. Decreasing defence budgets, either in real terms or absolute, are a reality that European states will be confronted with over the coming years. Transformation is capital-intensive and will require substantial investments over the coming years. European governments could make substantial progress by spending what they do more efficiently. Efficient implying that they tailor their purchases to the missions they are likely to perform, and taking their political-strategic culture into account.

#### 5.0 HOW POLITICAL-STRATEGIC CULTURE IS FORMED

In a recent article published in a transformation book published by Johns Hopkins University, Rob de Wijk presented a chart (figure 2) denoting the political ambitions that Western states can have and the subsequent force posture this would require. In it, De Wijk makes the distinction between *profile* and *risk* as determinants for political ambition. *Profile* relates to the type of operations that a state wishes to perform, *risk* is the role that a state wishes to play in that operation, for instance medium-profile/high-risk would require a state to have capabilities to be 'lead nation' for a peacekeeping operation.



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Political Ambitions		
Political ambition	Required force	Examples of required assets
Low profile, low risk (5 <sup>th</sup> tier).	No capabilities for expeditionary warfare; limited capabilities for stability operations	Light infantry for stability operations, lift.
Low profile, medium risks (4th tier).	Niche capabilities for expeditionary warfare	The aforementioned assets, plus niche capabilities such as mountain troops, special operations forces, medical units, NBC protection.
Medium profile, medium risk (3rd tier).	Focused toolbox for defensive expeditionary operations and (combat) support.	The aforementioned assets, plus niche capabilities such as air defences, ballistic missile defences, RPV, UAV, mine hunters.
Medium profile, high risk (2nd tier).	Focused toolbox for offensive expeditionary operations.	The aforementioned assets, plus frigates, fighters, submarines, initial entry forces such as air maneuverable brigades and marines and follow-on forces such as mechanized and infantry brigades and the capability to provide the backbone of a peacekeeping operation.
High profile, high risks (1st tier).	Broad toolbox for expeditionary warfare	The aforementioned assets, plus the capability to provide the backbone of a combat operation at division plus level.
Global responsibilities	Full spectrum expeditionary capabilities	The aforementioned assets, plus strategic assets such as satellites, strategic bombers and the means to provide the backbone for coalition operations at army corps level
Source: R. de Wijk, <i>The Implications for Force Transformation: the Small Country Perspective</i> , p. 127, in "Transatlantic Transformations: Equipping NATO for the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century", Hamilton (ed.), Center for Transatlantic Relations, Johns Hopkins University, Washington DC, 2004.		

**Figure 2: Political Ambition and Required Force.**

The figure illustrates how various types of force postures are choices based upon the willingness of a state to use the military in a particular way. Political Ambition is a concept closely tied to political-strategic culture. The former is essentially a product of the latter.

Martin Van Creveld argued that "the goals any social entity sets itself are not arbitrary but at least partly a product of its general belief system which, in turn, is based on its structure"[10]. Political-strategic culture additionally introduces an extra dimension for it not only delineates the risk that a state wishes to run in a particular operation, but also the types of operations (roughly combat or stabilization) and under what circumstances (unilateral or multilateral) that it will be geared to perform. At the same time, political-strategic culture maintains that states will have preferences for particular force postures on the basis of their norm- and value structures.

NATO is a "community of values". However this by no means implies that these values are hierarchically similar across the Atlantic board and lead to the same behaviour of states. They do however provide the basis for understanding, negotiation and consensus. To a certain extent they define a fundamental threat perception. NATO member states are in general representative of a common Western civilization whose primary hallmarks are representative democracy, rule of law, and various freedoms of the individual. However, unmistakably these different states also have different cultural identities shaped by history and their surroundings and hence have different perspectives on security policy and the use of the military.

The theoretically most desirable result of transformation is creating an Alliance that is capable of performing all types of operations effectively and successfully; either the more often, but less intense lower-spectrum operations, or the more-intense but less-frequent combat operations. The question is

whether, given the political-strategic cultures of the NATO member states, this holistic approach to crisis operations can be attained? This requires identifying political-strategic cultures. Unearthing the norm and value structure of a state is not an easy task, nor is it an objectively verifiable one. Instead through a number of methods and techniques the existence of various paradigms regarding the use of the military instrument can be made plausible. In the following paragraphs several methods are introduced that together can help to attain a reading on a state's political-strategic culture.

### 5.1 Comparing Operations

One way of doing so is comparing what type of military operations states have been pursued among states. The following chart illustrates the quantity and different types of operations that the United States and the Netherlands have pursued since 1991.

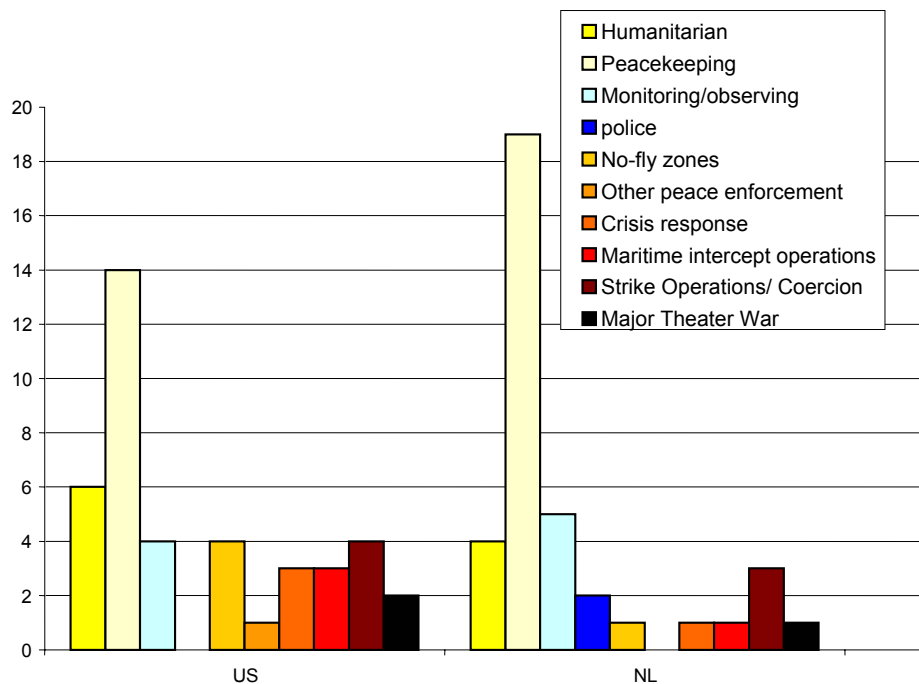


Figure 3: Comparison of Dutch and American Military Missions 1991-2004 (absolute).

Although Dutch contributions were in general much more limited than American deployments in terms of troops committed, the number of missions (as considered by the Dutch Ministry of Defence) were rather similar. Thirty-seven Dutch missions compared to forty-one US missions since 1991. From the statistic it becomes apparent that the Netherlands has performed a higher amount of peacekeeping operations. Also striking is that the Netherlands denotes several policing duties as military operations as well (this concerned the Dutch military police), and has generally performed much less high-intensity operations such as crisis response, coercive operations and major theater war than the US. The difference in Dutch-American division of operations also becomes apparent when translating the graph to percentages (figure 4).

From the fact that the Netherlands on the whole has performed a higher number of lower-spectrum operations (as delineated in figure 1) than the United States, it follows that the Netherlands has a higher inclination to perform these types of operations. As such it could serve as an indication that the Dutch political-strategic culture is more geared to peacekeeping operations than warfighting. Whether this inclination is based on a capability mix that predisposes it to perform these operations is irrelevant to the

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argument that states *choose* to perform a particular type of operation. Nor is this method based on the quantity of troops deployed. Nonetheless of course, the availability of capabilities is important because it is also another indication of the type of political-strategic culture that a state has.

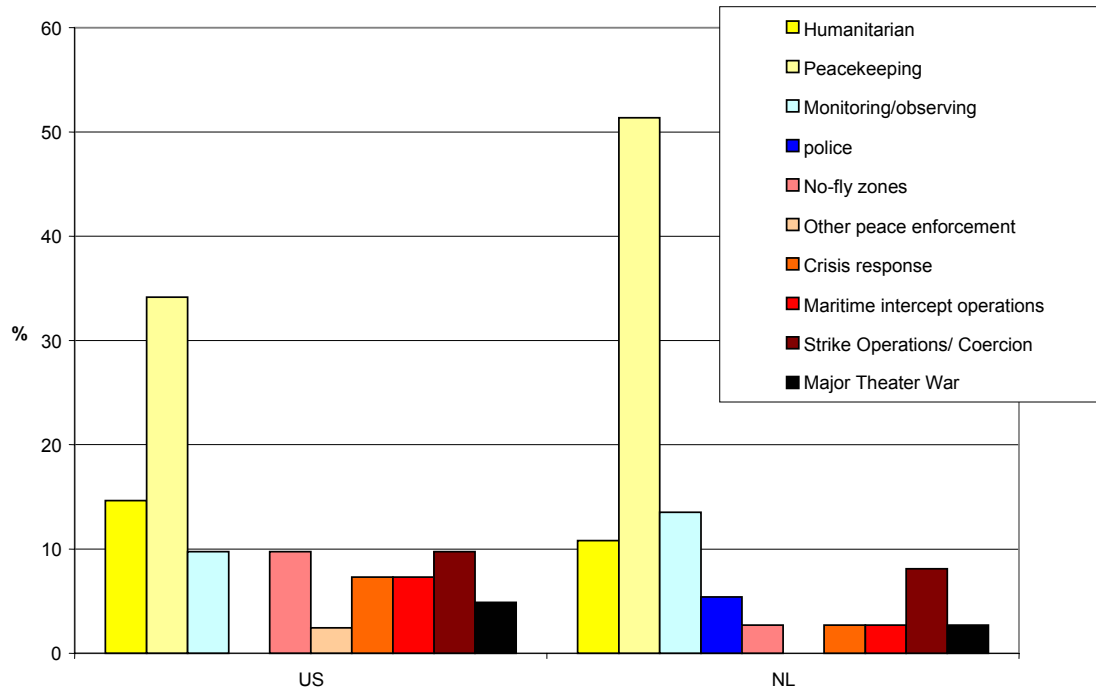


Figure 4: Comparison of Dutch and American Military Missions 1991-2004 (percentage).

## 5.2 Capabilities

A second way of discerning political-strategic culture is by drawing consequences from the weapon systems present within a state, concluding that the capabilities a state has can play a determining role in shaping a state's behaviour. However in the case of the NATO Alliance, this proves not to be the case. European NATO allies have a limited capacity in expeditionary capabilities and key multipliers such as strategic transport or satellite imaging capabilities. On the whole, European states have a much lower ratio in deployable forces vs. total forces than the United States does. Among European NATO states, of the roughly 2 million soldiers under arms only 40,000 are actually deployable at any one time. This observation is an obvious limiting factor for European states to perform large-scale deployments and they will hence be more focused at performing those operations that they can perform, i.e. smaller scale operations. This however primarily concerns the *size* of operations, not its type. As Operation Iraqi Freedom demonstrated, European allies can both participate with the United States in the initial-entry phase (e.g. the United Kingdom) and in the stabilization phase following (e.g. the UK, the Netherlands, Poland). Even in Operation *Enduring Freedom* European states are contributing at varying levels of the conflict spectrum. Dutch and British Special Forces are for example operating at the higher end whereas German forces contributed at the lower end. Indeed, the United States is the only power capable of being the lead/ framework nation in an operation at any spectrum, but a salient detail is that European allies have contributed to American-led high-spectrum operations from *Desert Storm* to *Allied Force* to *Enduring Freedom* and *Iraqi Freedom*. A European lack of particular capabilities is not an obstacle for European states to participate in a particular operation. For instance, because European allies do not possess distinct strategic bombing capabilities this may preclude them to perform particular missions, but it does not

preclude them from making contributions elsewhere in the operation, at any spectrum. In practice, Europe's capability gap is mostly limiting its capabilities for fielding a sizeable force and cannot be considered as the cause why European states prefer a particular type of operations. While the transformation effort to create larger quantities of European forces is a definite necessity, current capabilities are not a limiting nature for any particular type of operation, only the size thereof. Although this is of course an essentially important criteria, it is not demonstrative of a particular political-strategic cultural divergence between the two sides of the Atlantic. Nevertheless, the fact that the United States is the only state with a full-spectrum capability, implies it has much more freedom of action than European allies do. The United States could unilaterally and effectively if it so desired, for European states this is much more difficult. This creates some likelihood for European "cherry-picking" operations. Nevertheless, European forces do not prefer a particular type of operation over another because of their (lack of) capabilities. Nor has it at any point been suggested by European governments that European states could not perform a particular type of operation due to a lack of particular capabilities.

### 5.3 Threat Perceptions

The fundamental reason why some states pursue particular missions is of a political nature. Why do particular NATO allies use the military in some occasions and not in others? This is caused by a variance in threat perceptions, elements at the heart of political-strategic cultures. The United States holds a unique position in the world. It is currently the sole superpower and has the capability to perform military operations worldwide and unilaterally if it so desires. Nevertheless, the fact that it *can* does not mean that it actually *will* use the military to deal with all the threats it perceives. Defining threat perceptions, and what constitutes a threat, is central to this. According to the latest US National Security Strategy, the United States faces a twin threat; the risk of a non-state terrorist actor armed with a weapon of mass destruction (WMD). This threat is dealt with by focusing on agents, targeting terrorist groups and states considered to be WMD proliferators. The threat is perceived to lie with these agents; their existence is considered a threat to the security of the United States. It professes a strong belief in the possibility to create absolute security, i.e. a desire that the United States is not threatened by any type of agent. The quest for absolute security also coincides with the US desire to spread democracy and freedom throughout the world. These are two values that the US greatly adheres to. They rank as top motivators and justifiers for foreign policy. In George W. Bush's recent State of the Union address, this was also firmly established. The National Security Strategy made this explicit.

"We will [...] make freedom and the development of democratic institutions key themes in our bilateral relations." [11]

Absolute security can only be attained in a theoretically homogenous world. Since central tenets of US society are its adherence to freedom and its democratic political system, it is not surprising that these are key norms. Both operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom were waged with the objective - after having dealt with the direct threat caused by the Iraq's threatening agent, the regime of Saddam Hussein; and Afghanistan's agent, the Al Qaeda-supporting Taliban government - to give freedom to its citizens and install democracy. The emphasis on absolute security also has a strong historical factor. This is connected to the concept of primacy and the perception that the United States is the "shining city on the hill." This perception finds its roots in the founding of the United States in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and persists to this day. It is also supported by the fact that through its geostrategic positioning - in between two oceans and having been the dominant country in the Western Hemisphere since the proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine - the United States has remained free of outside invasion or bloodshed in the homeland up until 9/11. This has supported the sensation of primacy. The United States could engage in military interventions at its own choosing and under its own circumstances. 9/11 however made Americans feel threatened, primacy was threatened and their sensation of absolute security was threatened, leading to a shift in norms.

## Defence Transformation and Political-Strategic Culture: A Framework for Future Research

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For European NATO allies, security threats are defined differently. Its threat perception is not as black-white as the American threat perception. Instead European states tend to focus more on structures as being the cause of threats and concentrate their efforts on ameliorating these structures. Although at first sight the threats identified are similar; NATO's European allies have identified terrorism and WMD proliferation as key threats, European political-strategic cultures focus on structures that give shape to them. It is not the agents that European states focus their efforts on but rather the structures that bring them forth. Terrorist activity is seen as a symptom of instability, inequality and bad governance. European efforts to deal with terrorism have mostly been confined to internal national security activities to prevent further attacks from taking place and efforts to enhance European-wide law enforcement activities. In the foreign and security policy realm, European states have mainly focused on socio-economic development programs that enhance stability or good governance programs. Indirectly, programs designed to foster civil society – the reasoning goes – will also limit the spread of radical and potentially terrorist activities. Terrorism is considered a tactic that people resort to under certain conditions, people are not considered to be born terrorists but are nurtured as such by their surroundings. Most importantly, dealing with this threat is considered to be most effective as a multilateral undertaking subject to the legitimacy offered by an international regime. By attaining global support, legitimacy is enhanced and stability a more likely outcome. Internationalism and multilateralism are keywords when it comes to European threat resolution. Key to understanding the European threat perception is that contrary to the United States, European states emphasize attaining relative security. Managing risks, instead of removing threats altogether. Given their history marked by violence and bloodshed as well as their familiarity with forms of terrorism, European states tend to accept a certain presence of threat in the international system and instead strive to minimize the risk of a threat materializing. European states do not focus on pro-actively spreading democracy (although European states do believe in the concept of the 'democratic peace') instead enhancing international stability and fostering change from within are key. Also symptomatic of the European perspective is its identification of state failure as a similarly threatening occurrence. The presence of failed and failing states tears at the fabric of international stability. Diplomatic and trade efforts and especially policies in line with coherent international efforts are pursued. This reasoning also illustrates why European states will prefer to use the military for stabilization and peacekeeping operations instead of combat operations. Stabilization and peacekeeping operations contribute to enhancing stability, whereas combat operations tend to initially weaken international stability. Stabilization operations contribute to building structures; combat operations contribute to dealing with agents and potentially even weaken structures. Hence military interventions, if performed at all, are performed with the intent to bring stability and order and are accompanied by dedicated stabilization efforts focused on winning over 'hearts and minds'. For European states the 'just cause' of performing interventions is this; advancing stability and order through a multilateral, international legitimate effort. It also explains why the Netherlands denotes policing missions as military missions (see figure 3 & 4), and why the United States is adverse to nation-building exercises as professed on multiple occasions by US officials. When confronted with a swamp full of snakes, changing structures is like emptying the swamp, whereas targeting agents resembles fishing out the snakes. The former has a medium and long term focus making use of a multitude of instruments, whereas the latter shows primarily short-term results with the military's combat capability forming a prominent instrument.

Relative security implies that democracy and freedom should be spread but not at the costs of civilian casualties, and disheartening and frustrating entire groups of people. Stability and the presence of various liberties and mutual respect are the premium breeding ground for Western-style democratic thought. This European post-modern liberal internationalism although complementary is succinctly different from US pro-activeness. The US' focus on dealing with threats resolutely in an attempt to attain absolute security is also explanatory for the US policy of preventive warfare and its acceptance to perform unilateral operations. It is also explanatory why it does not shy away from combat operations. In a metaphor, one terrorist killed is a threat less, whereas a European approach would be that one terrorist killed, can be a martyr for three others; instead from a European perspective the terrorist should be persuaded not to become a terrorist.

## 5.4 Discourse Analysis

A further way of identifying elements of political-strategic culture is, as mentioned, taking account of the justifications for recent military operations. Analyzing words and rhetoric may seem an abstract and circumstantial way to approach the topic yet as explained above the manner in which a state justifies its actions is symptomatic for the manner in which it perceives the world. It is within this realm that a strong distinction can be found between the United States on the one hand and European NATO allies on the other and is supportive of the variance in threat perception as outlined above. It is also these policy justifications that illustrate the political-strategic culture most verifiably. Taking stock of justifications in policy forums is a semantic exercise easily performed. Some examples suffice to illustrate the point. British prime minister, Tony Blair made the following remark on the eve of military operations against Iraq. Essentially a justification for the military intervention.

“These challenges [terrorism. WMD proliferation] and others that confront us – poverty, the environment, the ravages of disease – require a world of order and stability. Dictators like Saddam, terrorist groups like Al Qaida threaten the very existence of such a world.” [12]

The Minister of Foreign affairs of another transatlantic partner, France, explained the threat of the proliferation of WMD as follows.

“Why does this development arouse the international community's profound concern? Above all because it adds to the problems we face in crisis regions, from North Korea to the Middle East. It can thus only lead to even more instability, multiply the risks of confrontation and create greater imbalances. Proliferation is putting a lit match to a powder keg. It is time to extinguish it.” [13]

George W. Bush on the other hand justified policy on the following terms.

“Our commitment to liberty is America's tradition. [...]Where freedom takes hold, hatred gives way to hope. When freedom takes hold, men and women turn to the peaceful pursuit of a better life. American values and American interests lead in the same direction: We stand for human liberty.” [14]

And furthermore even under the Clinton administration this was apparent.

“As we approach the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the United States remains the world's most powerful force for peace, prosperity and the universal values of democracy and freedom.” [15]

What becomes apparent from these quotes is that European states seek stability from their security policy, whereas the United States seeks the spread of freedom. Of course this is only a random example however it gives an indication as to how policy is justified and how discourse analysis can contribute to unearthing the perceptions concerning justifiable use of the military [16].

## 5.5 Deconstructing Doctrine

A by-product of the discourse analysis mentioned above is the discourse used by states by which they organize the armed forces. The United States for instance has made a primary difference in operations between War, *combat operations* and Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW); all other operations. MOOTW includes operations ranging from arms control; combating terrorism; support to counterdrug operations; enforcement of sanctions/maritime intercept operations; enforcing exclusion zones; ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight; humanitarian assistance; military support to civil authorities; nation assistance/ support to counterinsurgency; non-combatant evacuation operations; peace operations; protection of shipping; recovery operations; show of force operations; strikes and raids; and support to insurgency [17].

This dualism demonstrates the extent to which war fighting takes the dominant position among the US armed forces. The division entails that fighting wars is what the US armed forces are primarily created for, anything else is of secondary importance, or at least that is what they seem from a discursive perspective.

Wars are what the armed forces should be prepared, trained and equipped for. Among European states such a rigid distinction is not made. Taking the Netherlands' armed forces as an example, three core operations are identified 1) the defence of the Netherlands and its overseas territories, 2) the contribution to international peace and stability and 3) support of civil authorities for humanitarian purposes, disaster management and law enforcement, both nationally and internationally. Arguably, the United States is more focussed on warfighting than the Netherlands. This short discourse analysis shows the extent to which elements of political-strategic culture can be discerned by deconstructing such statements.

## 6.0 CONSEQUENCES FOR DEFENCE TRANSFORMATION

The recent challenges experienced by the United States in Iraq and European difficulties to fight large-scale expeditionary combat operations are exemplary of differences in political-strategic cultures. The perception of relative and absolute security have led European states to emphasize stabilization operations and the United States to emphasize war fighting operations. It offers an alternative element in explaining why the United States pursues large-scale, expensive weapons programs, and why European states have difficulty acquiring similar systems. The United States is well-equipped and motivated to perform conventional warfare operations, as demonstrated by the armoured assault at the outset of *Iraqi Freedom*. However, the stabilization phase following the end of regular combat became much more difficult. For the United States the Iraqi experience offers a lesson which is that a force that is trained for war fighting is not necessarily the most capable for performing stabilization tasks and campaigns for winning over 'hearts and minds'. There is no doubt that combat operations are more intensive than stabilization operations, and that different equipment and training is required. However more often than not stabilization operations have been considered a 'hierarchically lesser' form of military deployments; an operation that forces trained for higher spectrum operations can also perform, simply because they are 'easier'. The general idea is that stabilization operations can be performed with similar forces, only that the operations take place at a lower level of intensity (see left-hand side of figure 5). However because the execution of stabilization operations and combat operations are closely tied to divergent political-strategic cultures, stepping away from the idea that similar forces can perform these different operations can yield greater results in effectiveness [18].

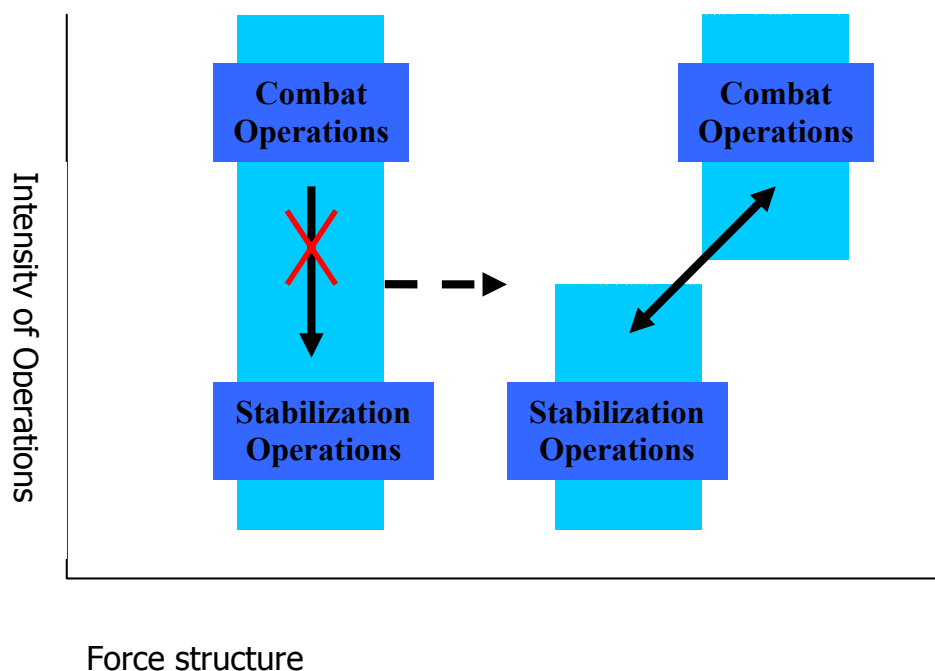


Figure 5: Force Structures in Relation to Operational Intensity.

Recent campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq have shown the necessity for Western armed forces to maintain a strong capability for stabilization operations. Among some European states this is a daily practical reality. For instance, the UK's efforts in Northern Ireland, Dutch and German experiences in Bosnia and Afghanistan, or French operations in West Africa. Over the past years the primary missions that European states have performed has been of the 'stabilizing' sort. One of the key aspects of the current transformation process is to ensure that European states' armed forces indeed become expeditionary or at least can contribute to expeditionary operations. However European states, because of their political-strategic cultural inclination towards stabilization operations, should analyze to what extent transformation efforts – including new technologies, doctrines and operating procedures - coincide with enhancing the effectiveness of these operations. It would constitute a grave mistake if the significance of a divergence in political-strategic cultures among NATO allies was ignored. Political-strategic cultures however are not static concepts. Instead they are dynamic, and change as history affects the perception of states. Nevertheless, if the armed forces are not tailored to the political-strategic culture of the state there is the risk that missions are not performed to their optimal effectiveness. To exaggerate, peacekeeping operations might be performed with combat personnel and combat operations might then be performed by forces trained for stabilization. Transformation should be in line with the political-strategic culture of the transforming state and fluctuations in political-strategic cultures need to be tracked at a steady basis.

Stabilization forces are not in a hierarchically lower echelon than high-end expeditionary operations. Instead stabilization is in a league of its own, requiring different doctrines, operating procedures, training and weaponry. One of the reasons why this has not been the case hides in the concept of escalation dominance, namely the necessity to be able to perform at a higher level of operational intensity than initially expected in order to maintain superiority over the adversary under any type of situation. Escalation dominance is both necessary in qualitative and quantitative terms; it requires strategic reserves of troops but also residue capabilities that allow a force to 'scale up'. Escalation dominance during stabilization operations however requires two different sets of forces (see right-hand side of figure 5). One for the stabilization operation itself, and a back-up, quick response, force trained and equipped for higher intensity operations. The same forces should not pursue both stabilization and combat operations.

Combining the various aspects mentioned above, the following figure plots the estimated positions of several NATO allies with respect to their willingness to use force unilaterally as well as their preference for a particular type of operation.

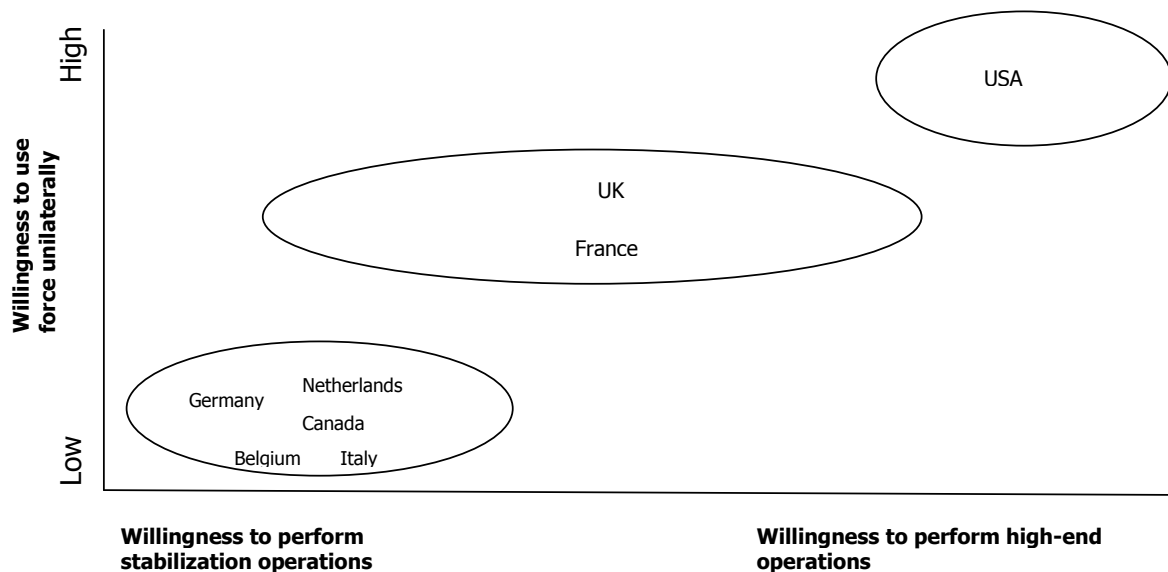


Figure 6: Plot of Selected NATO Allies' Political-Strategic Cultures.



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At this point the US armed forces are the driving force behind transformation. The DOD's Office of Transformation and NATO's ACT are the leading institutions to coordinate the efforts. Significant is that Admiral Giambastiani runs both ACT as well as US Joint Forces Command, signalling the interconnectedness between the American transformation effort and its leading role for Alliance-wide transformation. Former SACLANT Admiral Forbes stated that "A transformational process akin to that which has been taking place in the United States is essential to modernize the Alliance's capabilities and ensure that they stay consistent with US military thinking and development"[19]. In fact, it can be said that the European transformation effort is trying to follow in the footsteps of the United States. However, a dedicated analysis needs to be made regarding whether the American path of transformation is also the most effective for European states given their political-strategic culture.

The following chart offers an indication how variance in political-strategic cultures can be translated into succinct military capabilities for both combat and stabilization operations. First of all, political-strategic cultures are denoted along the lines of willingness to perform operations (combat or stabilization) unilaterally or multilaterally. Secondly, it is denoted along the ambition of a state to play a particular role; as either a contributing nation or a framework or even lead nation. For unilateral operations, the state automatically needs to have a broad range of capabilities, in order to maintain escalation dominance.

<b>Political-Strategic Cultures and Force Structures</b>			
	<b>Low-end Contributing nation, supporting role</b>	<b>High-end Contributing nation to combat operations and stabilization operations</b>	<b>Lead nation, high risks</b>
<b>Multilateral, for stabilization operations</b>	No capabilities for expeditionary warfare; limited (niche) capabilities for stability operations, (combat) support	Focused toolbox for defensive expeditionary operations.	Broad toolbox for expeditionary stabilization operations
<b>Multilateral, for combat operations</b>	Combat support and Niche capabilities for expeditionary warfare	Focused toolbox for offensive expeditionary operations.	Broad toolbox for offensive expeditionary operations.
<b>Unilateral, for stabilization operations</b>			Full spectrum expeditionary capabilities
<b>Unilateral, for combat operations</b>			Full spectrum expeditionary capabilities
<b>Multilateral, both stabilization and combat operations</b>	limited capabilities for stability operations and combat support	Broad toolbox for defensive expeditionary and focused toolbox for offensive expeditionary operations	Broad toolbox for defensive and offensive expeditionary operations.
<b>Unilateral, both stabilization and combat operations</b>			Full spectrum expeditionary capabilities

Figure 7: Political-Strategic Culture and Force Structures.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

Perceptions matter and so do the political and strategic cultures that shape them. Although the moral compasses of European and North American NATO countries generally point in the same overall

direction, the quirks that define the hierarchy of values lead to different interpretations regarding the use of the military. Europe's general emphasis on relative security and the United States' quest for absolute security have the potential to lead to difficulties in the transformation process, leading to transatlantic miscommunications, mismatches between the political arena and the military execution of operations. This is highly undesirable yet inevitable if note is not taken of the significance of the divergence of political-strategic cultures and is subsequently not translated into well-informed paths of transformation for specific countries. Political-strategic cultures delineate how norms shape a state's preference for a particular, political and societal acceptable role for the military. Transformation along these lines is both a more politically realistic and normatively satisfying method. At all times however during the transformation process, member states need to have the ability to deal with threats once they arise, but they should be doing so in the style that fits them best.

Several countries, from the viewpoint of their political-strategic culture, are better equipped to deal with stabilization operations rather than high-end combat operations. European states have both more experience and greater willingness to perform stabilization operations. To exaggerate for purposes of clarity, while the United States sees stabilization operations as *Operations Other Than War*, European states see combat operations as *Operations Other Than Stabilization*. A transatlantic decoupling is unlikely to be the result if European and North American states pursue transformation by focusing on those capabilities that will allow them to execute those particular military operations in those particular roles as are accepted by their political arenas and societies at large. The scientific community, the military, policymakers and politicians need to answer the following questions. What are the military tasks that this state wants to perform? What is its political ambition? And what does our political-strategic culture tell us about what capabilities we need? At the same time, research needs to be focused, both in the field of technology, doctrine and operational conduct, on what the RMA means for stabilization operations. How do Network-Enabled Capabilities work out in Operations Other Than War; what are the advantages of which networked capabilities for peacekeeping and peace support operations. Which doctrines are most suitable for executing effective 'hearts and minds' campaigns and how can technological developments contribute to this. In a period when the necessity for stabilization forces is so blatantly demonstrated, how is NATO to proceed with network-centric warfare and transformation in general? More than ever, the current security environment demonstrates a necessity for a holistic approach to the military. This does not mean that the military should be poised to do everything, but it does imply that classic tasks for the military have expanded. In this author's perspective, the development of NATO into an alliance where there are different degrees of expeditionary capabilities and varying yet complimentary paths of specialization does not constitute a weakening but rather a strengthening of the toolbox that is NATO and creates the potential to achieve the holistic crisis-management and defence toolbox that it requires.

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# Defense Transformation and Political Strategic Cultures

*A Framework for Future Research*

Rem Korteweg MA  
Clingendael Centre for Strategic Studies

Tuesday, 26 April 2005

NATO-SAS-055 Symposium  
"Analytical Support to Defense Transformation"  
Norfolk, Virginia





# Content of Presentation

1. Trends
2. Political-Strategic Cultures
3. Consequences for Transformation
4. Conclusion

*Focusing on Stabilization Operations in transformation*

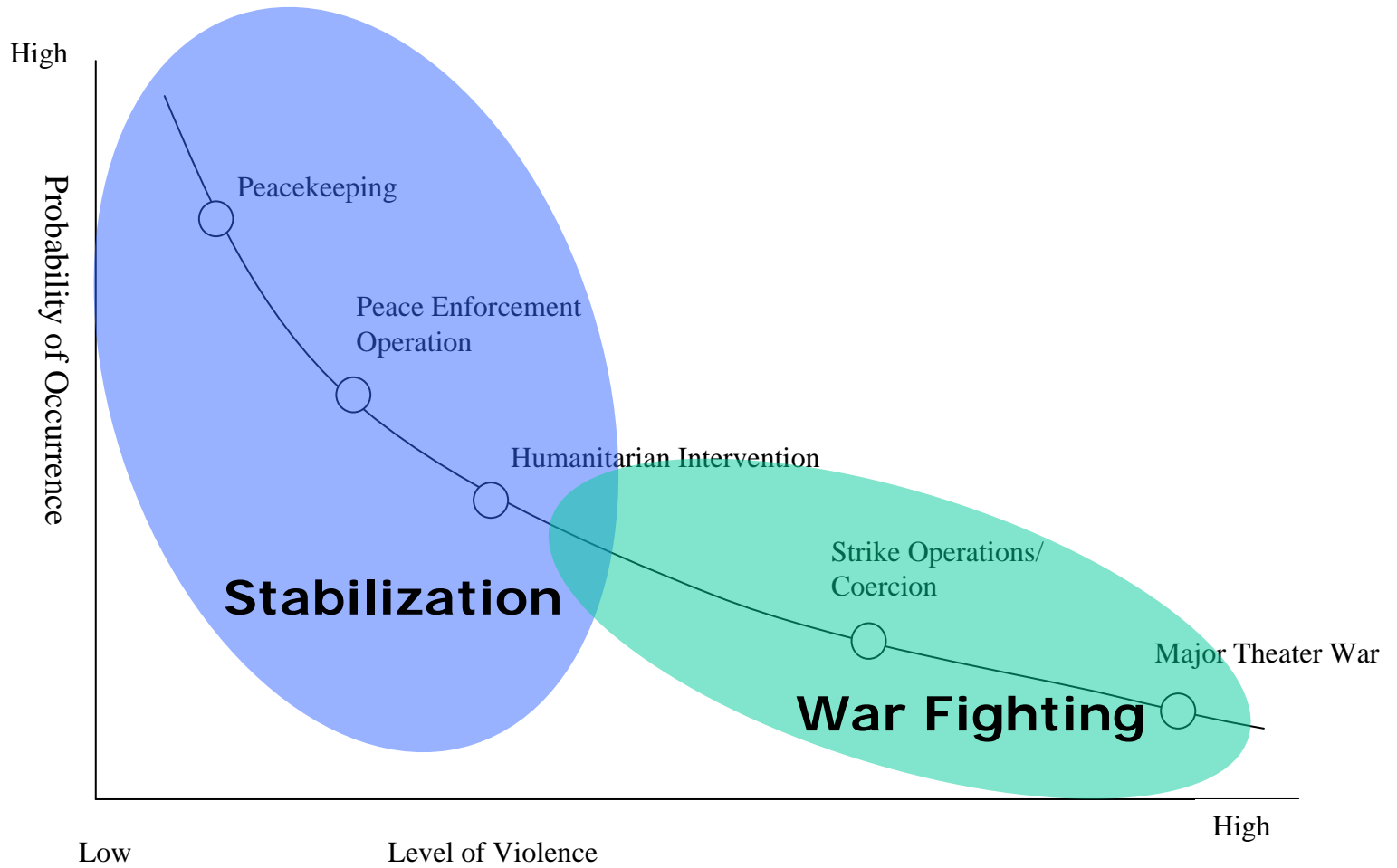
# Trends in Military realm

*Post-OIF/OEF*

Greater Emphasis on  
Stabilization Operations due to:

- Nature of threats
- Policy of regime change & preemption
- Paradox of Transformation







# Trends in Political realm

*Pre & Post-OIF*

Divergent views on the use of force

Political strategic gap

*Heterogeneity in Alliance*

*Different Perceptions of Security*

Iraq crisis could be prelude to further disagreement  
if this gap is not addressed







# The dominant Political Paradigm? Mars and Venus

Europe is civic power, US a military power

WHY?



Encyclopedia Mythica  
<http://www.pantheon.org/>



# Political Strategic Cultures

Constructivism: identity of a state affects its behavior

The effect of the **normative foundation** of a state's political society on its **use** and employment of the **military instrument**

US and Europe have similar values, but a different hierarchy

# Political Strategic Cultures

Different perception of security (absolute vs. relative)  
*Managing risks vs. Eliminating threats*

Different implementation of the use of the military  
 (multilateral/ unilateral, warfighting/ stability etc.)





# Methodology

Identifying **Political Strategic Cultures:**

*Comparing operations*

*Capabilities?*

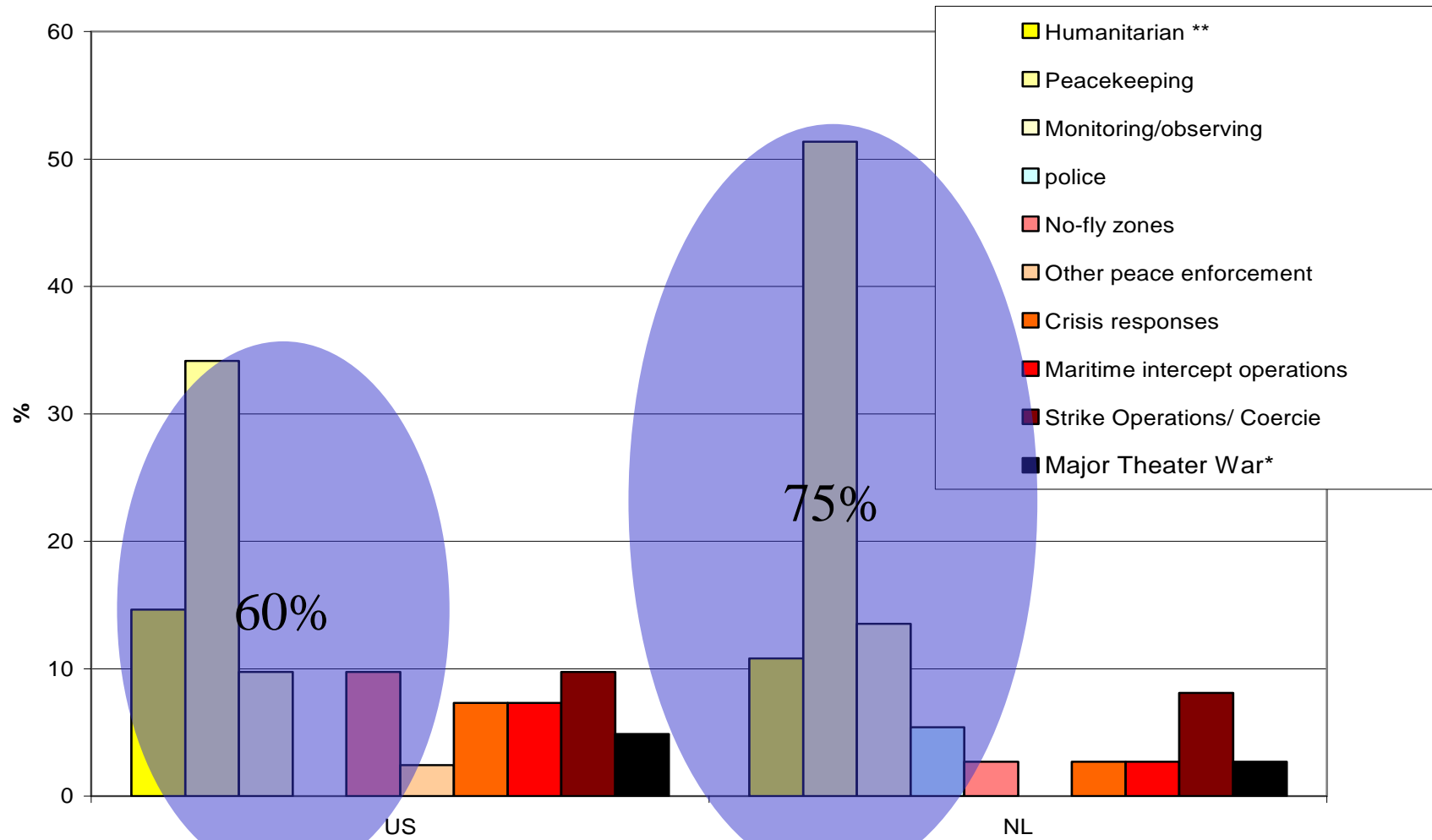
*Threat or Security Perceptions*

*Discourse Analysis*

*Deconstruction*



# Comparison US-NL military operations



# *Operations Other Than War*

VS.

# *“Operations Other than Stabilisation”*

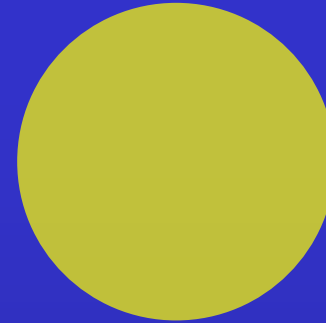




Missions



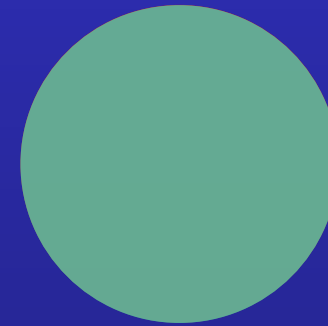
Capabilities



Political Strategic  
Culture



*Mismatch*



*Idealtype*

*Transformation: being more effective in future missions*



# Consequences for Transformation I

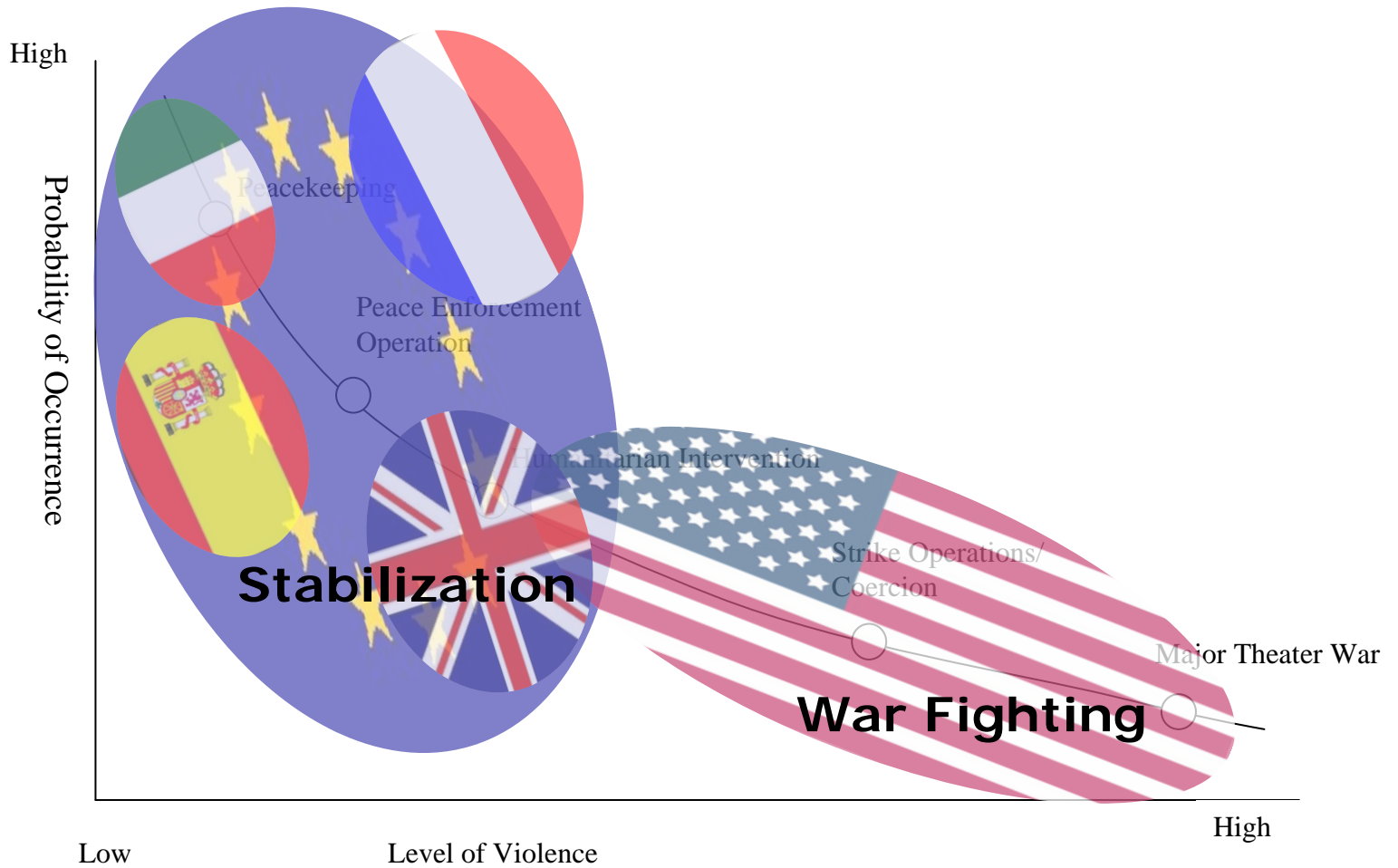
Political strategic cultures **need to be in-sync with capabilities and missions**

*Transformation: being more effective in future missions*



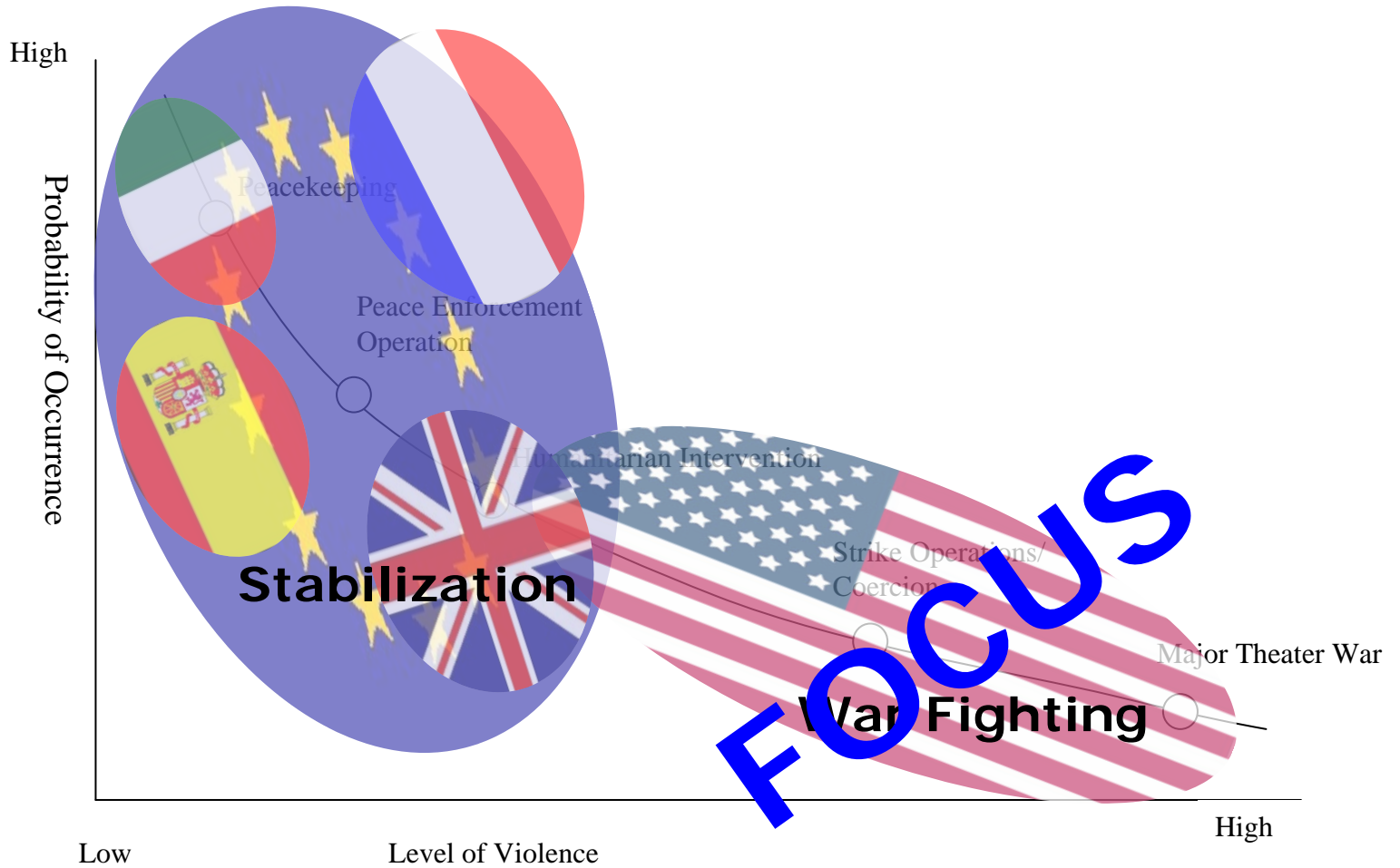


# European states' focus **stabilization operations** & US focus' **high-end combat operations**





# US leads transformation (technology-focused)





# Consequences for Transformation II

Stabilization is neglected in transformation

*Transformation: being more effective in future missions*



# Consequences for Transformation III

*Because*

Transformation:

Not "one size fits all"

Transformation is not quest for homogeneity

Interoperability is not homogeneity

Stabilization operations are not hierarchically inferior to combat operations

Stabilization is different from warfighting (doctrine)

*It follows*

NATO's transformation efforts:

high-scale warfighting AND effective stabilization

*Transformation: being more effective in future missions*

# Conclusion

Stabilization operations are central to transformation

Military and politico-cultural trends point at  
stabilization operations

*Political Strategic Cultures affect the use of the military  
US political strategic culture points at large-scale warfare,  
transformation primarily US-driven*

Stabilization needs new emphasis, European allies can play a  
leading role

*Technology gives a head start but does not put you over the  
finish*

*Give Attention to Political Strategic Cultures*





# Conclusion

*Operations Other Than War*

vs.

*Operations Other than Stabilisation*



Political-Strategic Cultures and Force Structures			
	Low-end Contributing nation, supporting role	High-end Contributing nation to <i>combat operations</i> and <i>stabilization operations</i>	Lead nation, high risks
<b>Multilateral, for stabilization operations</b>	No capabilities for expeditionary warfare; limited (niche) capabilities for stability operations, (combat) support	Focused toolbox for defensive expeditionary operations.	Broad toolbox for expeditionary stabilization operations
<b>Multilateral, for combat operations</b>	Combat support and Niche capabilities for expeditionary warfare	Focused toolbox for offensive expeditionary operations.	Broad toolbox for offensive expeditionary operations.
<b>Unilateral, for stabilization operations</b>			Full spectrum expeditionary capabilities
<b>Unilateral, for combat operations</b>			Full spectrum expeditionary capabilities
<b>Multilateral, both stabilization and combat operations</b>	limited capabilities for stability operations and combat support	Broad toolbox for defensive expeditionary and focused toolbox for offensive expeditionary operations	Broad toolbox for defensive and offensive expeditionary operations.
<b>Unilateral, both stabilization and combat operations</b>			Full spectrum expeditionary capabilities

*Develop for Stabilization:*

Doctrines, Capabilities,  
Force structures &  
Modules

*Analyze Political-strategic  
cultures*

*Nato's strength lies in its diversity,  
the current environment calls for  
diversity*







Technology, Doctrine  
and Stabilization: US & European

How to operationalize differences  
in political-strategic culture?

# Questions?

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How to match political-strategic  
culture with capabilities?

Analyze European differences  
In political-strategic culture



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<b>Political-Strategic Cultures and Force Structures</b>			
	<b>Low-end Contributing nation, supporting role</b>	<b>High-end Contributing nation to <i>combat operations and stabilization operations</i></b>	<b>Lead nation, high risks</b>
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