

Terms in Search for a Theoretical Definition

Abstract This chapter deals with why social theory can be relevant in the context of military operations. The chapter does also give some examples of what have been done before in this matter, specifically the concept Effect-Based Operations (EBO). The French sociologist and theorist Pierre Bourdieu is also introduced here.

Keywords Effect-Based Operations (EBO) · Pierre Bourdieu · Algeria

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) first developed his theories about social fields when he made field studies in the North African mountain ranges, among the Kabyle in Algeria. The time period was the 1950s to the early 1960s, when France fought their war in Algeria. Even though most of the Kabyle are Muslims they are not Arabic, and they speak the North African Berber language *kabyle*. He then found that he could only understand them fully if he decoded the symbolic values which they placed on things, customs and behaviour.¹

¹This text is an extension built on a synopsis paper published in “Fältperspektiv. An approach to achieving one’s aims in armed operations” in *Studies in Education and Culture dedicated to Donald Broady*. Ed. Börjesson et al. Uppsala, 2007. For more on both the background to the theory and the theory it-self see: <http://www.skeptron.uu.se/broadys/sec/ske-15.pdf>.

This was a young researcher still strictly empirical, creating the foundation for his theories. Just recently his book *Algerian Sketches* was released post-mortem where he writes about Algeria, the Algerian conflict and his theories. Later on, Bourdieu found that much of the social mechanisms he had found among the Kabyle were present in all manners of other social contexts.

Bourdieu was one of the foremost French thinkers of the late 1900s and had great influence on many humanist and social science disciplines—mainly in Europe. Those who have not read his work consider his thinking to be post-modern, but strictly speaking, he is not of the deconstructive school. He saw himself as post-structuralist, which was partly an acknowledgement of structuralism, but which also showed that it was not as embedded in his thinking with the degree of rigidity normally imposed by structuralism. He has, for example, done extensive research in the fields of art, literature and even studied his peers, the professors in Paris as empirical material. Bourdieu might at times be hard to understand, but his theories are based strictly on empirical material which he then has generalised to theoretical systems. With the passage of time, he introduced new terms, for example the term *field*, which we will return to later on.

For more than a decade, I myself have used and expanded Bourdieu's theories and found that there is a case to state that they are valid for studies and practice regarding Military Operations as well. This text should be seen as an introduction of the theories into the military field, especially regarding the field of intelligence analysis. In military context, the theories can be used to make social patterns visible. If you have good empirical material and a good analysis, then you will be able to see how actors (collective as well as individual) relate to each other. In the end, one can be both able to predict what will happen (with a certain degree of certainty) and able to make the other part (enemy or not) behave in a certain way, without them knowing that you are manipulating them.

I would like to underscore that this text is primarily focused on the theory and not the empirical aspect. It only serves as a way to exemplify the theory and show its usefulness in operational analysis. I recommend the bibliography at the end for those interested in the empirical events briefly explained in this text. It should be stressed that field theory is more of an object than a tool in the text. The text is primarily a tool for training, inspire primarily military officers how to use field analysis. The overall aim of this text is to present an alternative approach to

knowledge support. It will, in essence, explain field theory in context and show the theory's potential for helping to understand certain types of military conflicts. This will be achieved by using the scientific theoretical system to create a picture of how an area of operations can be understood from a theoretical perspective. This will involve making a science of military practice, by transforming scientific theory into a military *modus operandi* in the operations area.

In counterterrorism theory with roots from the 1970s, you have an enemy centric approach, whereas the so-called classic counterinsurgency has a more population centric approach.² Both have an actor first perspective and do not focus on the structure. A post-structuralist approach will be used here, which is a mix of actor and structure perspective. Methods will also be examined for the creation of a social field. However, a field theory analysis based on an actual conflict will not be conducted. A completely different scale of effort would be required for this; the conflict itself would have to be in progress and considerable operational resources would be necessary. Instead, an example—the former Yugoslavia—will be used to show the feasibility of using field theory to understand a low intensity conflict. The reason why this discussion will concentrate mainly on the strategic level (politico-strategic and military strategic) is a result of the relatively good accessibility of source materials. However, it would be reasonable to consider using field theory as an operational and tactical tool, but the source material required to produce illustrative examples would amount to something approaching a collective biography of the many actors involved.

In order to generate a theoretical discussion around operations of so wide-ranging nature as those in play when a country or a region is threatened or finds itself at war, requires a balance between generalisation and operationalisation. Theory must become a practical tool to assist those responsible for operational decisions. At the same time, it should remain at a level general enough to allow theory to link to various empiric scenarios without losing relevance. In this text, field theory will be applied to an area where it has not been used before, with empirical material being analysed using a field perspective. After a certain amount of refining, the theory becomes an even sharper tool for the analysis of armed conflict, in particular, peace promotion operations and operations

²Kilcullen (2009, p. xv).

where information operations are prioritised. This approach will also require considerable information resources from the units involved. However, the aim is not to provide the definitive answer as to how these types of missions will be conducted. The aim is to offer a tool that will more easily enable the successful achievement of tasks for all types of organisations working in the area of operations. The minimum requirement here is for the theory to serve in a teaching role and as an eye-opener for those who have previously not thought in wider conceptual terms. Ideally the model should move from its teaching role to become a practical tool for analysis. As an extension doctrine could be developed based on field theory, in particular for low intensity conflicts such as peace promotion operations or conflicts where manipulation of the social field might provide a fruitful avenue of approach.³

Before proceeding further one must acknowledge that a theory can never fully reflect reality, only certain aspects of it. The principal purpose of a theory is to identify the essential elements considered peculiar to the area under study; this is important because reality can often appear far too complex and confusing. What is essential or not is both dependent on what is characteristic for the researched object, but also what at the same time is important for the mission itself. The field of operations described below is not an empirical reality but a heuristic tool used here to provide a foundation for decision makers. The theoretical model avoids going into detail, it merely describes an approach to an empirical situation. In this respect, the theory is well-suited to its purpose in that it does not lay down any detailed guidelines; it is the empirical reality that directs the practical design of the model. For example, the definition of what is important for the actors in this study is based entirely on the assessment of the actors themselves, the assessment is *not* shaped by theory nor is the nature of the theoretical categories determined on beforehand—more on this later.

When it comes to the insurgency type of warfare, we in the *West* have had the winning of hearts and minds approach in some shape or form at hand since the Vietnam war. The concept of Strategic communication

³“Low intensity conflict” is a vague term, but it may be defined as conflict that does not fulfil the criteria for war. The latter is itself a term with several definitions, but that low intensity warfare is different from high intensity warfare (i.e. war) is often considered to be true. It is the criteria that changes, not the relationship between the terms. *Militärstrategisk doktrin* (2002), p. 103.

has been important and still is. Prominent authors like David Kilcullen and John Nagl have been proponents of this approach, even if they of course also realise that it is a problematic endeavour.⁴ A problem with strategic communication is that it is more of a strategic monologue. The concept being put forwards in strategic communication can be as basic in practice as building roads but should deliver the message that there is righteousness in our concept of why the conflict is fought. If we take the opposition's ideas into account we might need to find a middle ground and that is not desirable, as it delegitimises the very idea of the conflict at home. Strategic communication is basically a monologue because the communicator wants it to be one and by that, it is often not very successful as it does not appreciate the Clausewitzian concept of the conflict being a duel situation. The handling of the Iraq situation after the toppling of Saddam is a clear example of a strategic monologue with disastrous effects. There was no willingness to read the situation and act accordingly, it was just a dictate and efforts to push that dictate out to the population.⁵ Others have underscored that the USA must improve when dealing with HUMINT on the tactical level.⁶ It is perhaps stating the obvious as improvement is always wanted, the real question is *how*.

It might also prove useful to touch on some of what has been written about the now less used military concept EBO (Effects-Based Operations).⁷ This paper will not deal with EBO, but rather serve as an alternative to it. The theoretical foundation for EBO was so hollow yet so widely discussed that it is better to leave that debate open and concentrate on developing our theoretical thinking on military operations instead.⁸ But the EBO debate can serve as an example that there was

⁴Kilcullen (2006, 2009, 2010), Nagl (2005).

⁵Forbidding even low-level Baath party members' state employment, disbanding the whole Iraqi army without compensation and not recognising Islam as a political force was an almost perfect recipe for disaster.

⁶Cordesman (2004, pp. 40, 44, 51).

⁷Mattis (2008).

⁸When the term EBO was in fashion there was a wide range of interpretations. Ho (2005, pp. 64).

and actually still is need for theory regarding military operations. A number of the articles written attempted to capture the essence of the new term, which at the time was afforded a certain currency, with the aim of loading the term with old rehashed material so that more resources could be obtained for projects initiated earlier.⁹ An approach that resonates with the content of this paper is offered by the researchers Michael Callan and Michael Ryan: “Effects-Based Operations are the application of military and non-military capabilities to realise specific and desired strategic and operational outcomes in peace, tension, conflict and post-conflict situations”. The later application of the term maintained a relatively general level, which was appropriate since the approach required a high degree of generalisation. The definition is also good because it can be applied to the border area between the use of force and more peaceful means, as described in the above text. The fact is that the definition works very well from a field theory perspective underlines the relevance of the field theory approach. The focus below is on those aspects of the JFCOM (United States Joint Forces Command) interpretation that stress the winning of peace.¹⁰ The aspects of both interpretations that focus on weapons effects are not relevant for the purposes of this paper.¹¹ The theory presented in this text offers a practical approach that can be applied in situations where conventional warfare and its concepts are not appropriate. The issue is scientifically relevant, much research, for example, having been conducted into examining terms such as the now dearly departed EBO or the current strategic communication approach. This particular term is one for which researchers and other writers have created a number of definitions, the problem having been very much one of mastering the terminology. This resulted in a series of straggling

⁹See, for example Dawen (2005, p. 81) and Herndon et al. (2005). Stockholm.

¹⁰(Wikström 2005, p. 12).

¹¹The theoretical writings on this topic are somewhat undeveloped and hackneyed. See, for example David A. Deptula’s paper Effects-Based Operations. Without going into detail it focuses on what action one can take against an enemy that is incapable of defending himself. The study also gives an insight into the competition that takes place between the armed services in the USA.

definitions, simply because the term EBO was formulated without any normative content. One often has an idea of what one would like to achieve on a particular operation, but there has been no theoretical framework to enable a link to the problem at issue. One approach is to create specific theoretical terms to facilitate analysis of military operations. However, it might also be of value to do what is often done in academic circles, to apply a fresh, untested line of thinking to the material under study. This is the approach that will be adopted in this text, albeit only purely tentatively. This shows that it is far from impossible for terms to be given value without even the definitions of the term itself being defined, it is like a casino where the stakes are being thought over and the winner defines the content of what was at stake. A more reasonable approach is, of course, to define what is being discussed before proceeding with a power struggle over the same subject of discussion.

A theoretical perspective will now be presented that gives an alternative perspective to military planning, or it will at least provide an understanding of how an operations area can be analysed using theory. It is worth stressing that this does not necessarily mean presenting a theory that will lead to new practices on the field. Rather it so happens that much of what is advocated by the theory actually already occurs on the field. The problem is that the practices being examined here have hitherto lacked any form of explanatory foundation, other than that proven experience has shown that they work well. If the practices are given a theoretical explanation this may illuminate how current practice can be further developed. Therein lies the benefit of a theory that can be applied to the practices under discussion here.

I emphasise this point here, but believe it to be so important that you will find it repeated throughout the text: theories are used mainly to *generate issues of interest* that will be played out empirically. *Theories are not primarily used to provide answers to questions.* If the latter were the case empirical research would not be necessary, theory alone would suffice to explain reality. This is an unempirical process that should be avoided. Only in exceptional cases where there is a lack of empirical foundation can one generalise using an empirical approach, and assume that a situation will play out in a certain way. Nonetheless, theory is important in empirical research, as it helps us structure the reality which empirical data consists of.

Military intervention in an area where armed conflict is taking place is, to say the least, a risky undertaking. There is a mass of information that

decision makers can and must gather and analyse in order to find answers to important questions. In addition, there is a wealth of information that cannot be acquired beforehand. Once a military force has intervened in a crisis area the conditions will change and new structural patterns may emerge. However, it is of great help if one has a theoretical model in advance that can be applied to the local arena, especially if the same picture is shared by everyone in your organisation. This essay introduces such an approach and aims to show the value of field theory. Military operations will always be conducted in line with a specific operational practice that will often have been well tested. Why does this practice take this particular form? A simple answer is because it has been shown to work. But why does it work? What are the underlying structures on which that practice is based?

The method in this text has a disadvantage in a quickly evolving scenario if the theoretical approach is to be used in a quickly unfolding ongoing conflict, by, for example, military units. The method here in is the one which one rather uses after the conflict, in order to try to reconstruct the events. Or it can be used in a prolonged conflict where there is time for analyses as events unfold. One can classify the method as a qualitative analysis based on primary and secondary sources.

The method chosen, however, is to show through the use of a number of examples how sociological theory can be applied in general to military planning. In particular, the so-called *field theory* is put forwards as the example, a theory hatched by Pierre Bourdieu. This theory, after examination, will then be applied to the scenario of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The methods used in a real context depend primarily on what kind of source materials there are. The theory is not dependent on any specific type of method, so one can use whatever one thinks works best, qualitative as well as quantitative material. This and the following text present a theory that will be transformed into practice; it is both a generalisation of reality and a road map for practice in the same reality. The preferred method for a contemporary ongoing conflict would in this case be quantitative correspondence analysis often called *MCA*, and it is a statistical method. For those interested in this method one can look at the course material for a wide range of courses teaching this method.¹²

¹²Recommended software for performing the method can be found here: <http://www.spadsoft.com/> [Visited 170509].

The method is best explained in the book *Multiple Correspondence Analysis* by Birgitte le Roux and Henry Rouanet.¹³ This method makes use of a large host of different data, of which you do not know the real importance at the start of the case—it is a *tabula rasa*, to get the value of the data mapped during the research. You can, for example, use 50 different questions just about religion, they can be keywords, or physical objects like buildings, or religious practices. One can suspect that some of them have importance and some do not, but confronted with the actors on the field one might get some surprising results which let you understand the field as a whole together with all the other parameters (perhaps thousands) you confront the reality with. You get a pattern, a system of beliefs which constitute the field with this method.

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¹³Le Roux and Rouanet (2010).

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