

Gap Analysis: Grounded Basis for Assessment

Complex operations assessments need more open, detailed examination

Complex operations are by definition *complex*. They have proven extraordinarily difficult to assess: are we succeeding? How long will this take? What resources will we need? Methods exist, but the literature examining these methods is quite thin—in fact, inexcusably so.

Challenges and questions:

- (1) How should the NATO S&T community assess complex operations?
- (2) What are the best, *proven* methods?
- (3) What is the evidentiary basis for applying these methods in the field?

Literature *should* provide the answers:

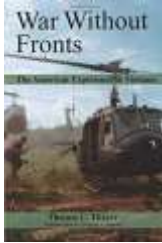
- Theories of change and scientific theories of assessment
- A broad array of case studies of applied methods in context
- Evidence from applied cases that given methods deliver useful results

But that is currently not the case:

- Theories of change and scientific examination of assessment is limited to a few papers
- Case studies are almost all recent (post-2001), few in number, and inconsistent
- Evidence of results is generally subjective, replicability of methods has not been attained

Examples of Current Literature

Existing work is often good, but it is insufficient to support research



Thomas C. Thayer, *War Without Fronts: The American Experience in Vietnam*



Sarah Jane Meharg, *Measuring Effectiveness in Complex Operations: What is Good Enough?*



U.S. Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare: Countering Irregular Threats*



UK Ministry of Defence, *Joint Doctrine Note 2/12: Assessment*



NATO, *Innovations in Operations Assessment: Recent Developments in Measuring Results in Conflict Environments*

The Challenge and Recommendation

Complex operations assessments need more open examination

Diverse problems within this singular field—complex operations assessment—hinders the ability to develop central, singular solutions: there is no one-size-fits-all answer for the complex array of complex problems facing our community.

Complex Operations Assessment is wildly diverse:

- Everything from counterinsurgency to humanitarian operations to counter-piracy
- Vastly different scales, objectives, and timelines
- *How do you conduct a large-n case study without a bounding function?*

Lack of depth in the literature:

- Literature is NO MORE than 30 years old, but really 10 years old
- Field of written material is thin, scattershot, and often experiential
- *How do you argue for the empiricism of your approach without literature to back you up?*

Recommendation: Our community needs to write more frequently, more openly, and with greater depth of focus. We must seek to publish in peer-reviewed journals of record in order to stimulate debate and lay the foundation for scientific validity. Military Operations Research Society (MORS) is already making some progress. *This must be a NATO wide effort.*