

› **TOWARDS A DYNAMIC THEORY OF HYBRID CONFLICT**
An Exploration with System Archetypes

Bas Keijser (Bas.Keijser@tno.nl), Guido Veldhuis, Peter van Scheepstal

› CONTENTS

Towards a dynamic theory of hybrid conflict

01. INTRODUCTION

02. LITERATURE ON CONFLICT DYNAMICS

03. SYSTEM ARCHETYPES

04. TEN ARCHETYPES OF HYBRID CONFLICT

05. APPLICATIONS IN HYBRID CONFLICT

06. DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

› 01. INTRODUCTION

Need for a theory of hybrid conflict dynamics

VIGNETTES ON HYBRID

- Chinese investments in various countries through the Belt and Road Initiative
- Russian influence activities in Ukraine
- US-Iranian narratives over Iraqi interventions

EARLIER ANALYSES

- Definitions of hybrid conflict, challenges to decision making
- Novelty of hybrid conflict
- Case studies: disinformation, election influence, strategic investment

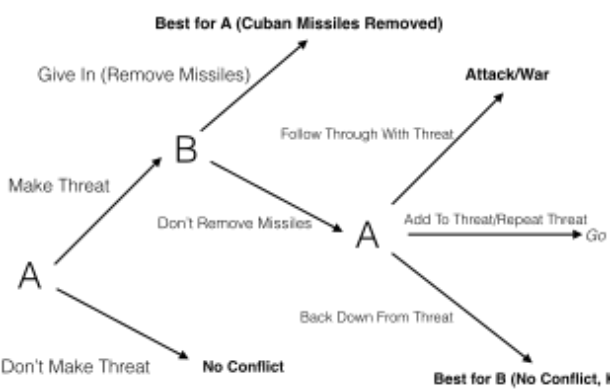
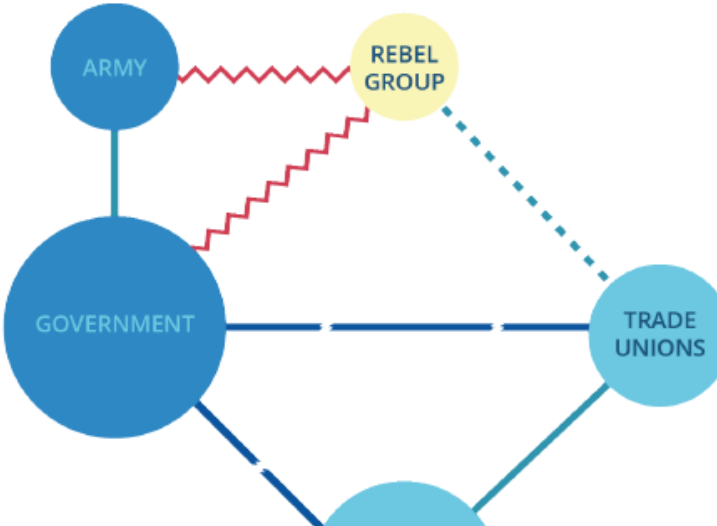
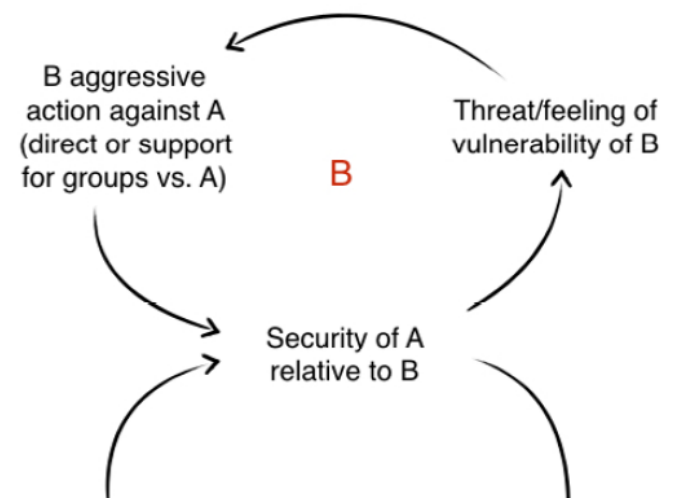
RESEARCH GAP

A dynamic theory of hybrid conflict on strategic interactions between actors



02. LITERATURE ON CONFLICT DYNAMICS

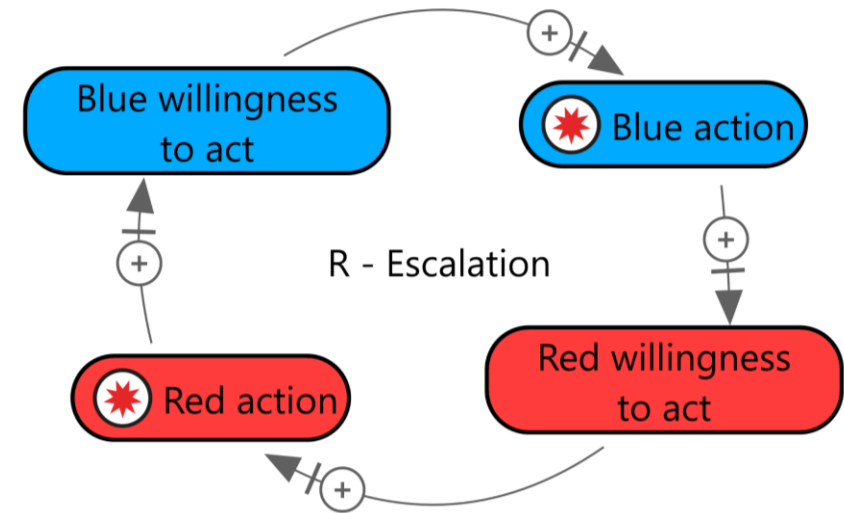
Combining elements from IR, conflict analysis, systems thinking

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Cuban Missile Crisis Game Tree A: The United States (President Kennedy) B: The Soviet Union (Premier Khrushchev)</p>  <p>The diagram is a game tree starting with node A. From A, there are two main branches: 'Make Threat' leading to node B, and 'Don't Make Threat' leading to 'No Conflict'. From node B, there are two branches: 'Give In (Remove Missiles)' leading to 'Best for A (Cuban Missiles Removed)', and 'Follow Through With Threat' leading to node A. From node A (after B's threat), there are two branches: 'Add To Threat/Repeat Threat' leading to 'Go' (which leads to 'Attack/War'), and 'Back Down From Threat' leading to 'Best for B (No Conflict, I)'. There is also a branch from A labeled 'Don't Remove Missiles' leading to node A.</p> |  <p>The diagram shows four nodes: ARMY (blue circle), GOVERNMENT (large blue circle), REBEL GROUP (yellow circle), and TRADE UNIONS (light blue circle). ARMY is connected to GOVERNMENT by a solid blue line. GOVERNMENT is connected to REBEL GROUP by a red zigzag line. REBEL GROUP is connected to TRADE UNIONS by a blue dashed line. GOVERNMENT is connected to TRADE UNIONS by a solid blue line. There is also a blue semi-circle at the bottom connecting GOVERNMENT and TRADE UNIONS.</p> |  <p>The diagram shows a causal loop diagram with three main nodes: 'B aggressive action against A (direct or support for groups vs. A)', 'Threat/feeling of vulnerability of B', and 'Security of A relative to B'. A red 'B' is placed between the first and second nodes. Arrows indicate the following relationships: 'B aggressive action against A' leads to 'Threat/feeling of vulnerability of B'. 'Threat/feeling of vulnerability of B' leads to 'Security of A relative to B'. 'Security of A relative to B' leads to 'B aggressive action against A'. There is also a feedback loop from 'Threat/feeling of vulnerability of B' back to 'B aggressive action against A'.</p> |
| <p>International relations theory:</p> <p>Focus on interactions between states</p> | <p>Conflict analysis:</p> <p>Application of systems thinking tools to conflict</p> | <p>System archetypes:</p> <p>Representing actor behaviour in causal relation diagrams</p> |

› 03. SYSTEM ARCHETYPES

Archetypes of actor behaviour

- › The behaviour of actors in hybrid conflict is **not unique**, it follows repetitive patterns
- › An archetype is an **elegant and simple explanation** of a pattern of behaviour and its underlying structure
- › Archetypes provide a **template for quick analysis** of observed behaviour and reflection on proposed actions
- › Decisionmakers can use archetypes to take a systemic perspective on **the interaction between actors** in hybrid conflict and **develop effective courses of actions**



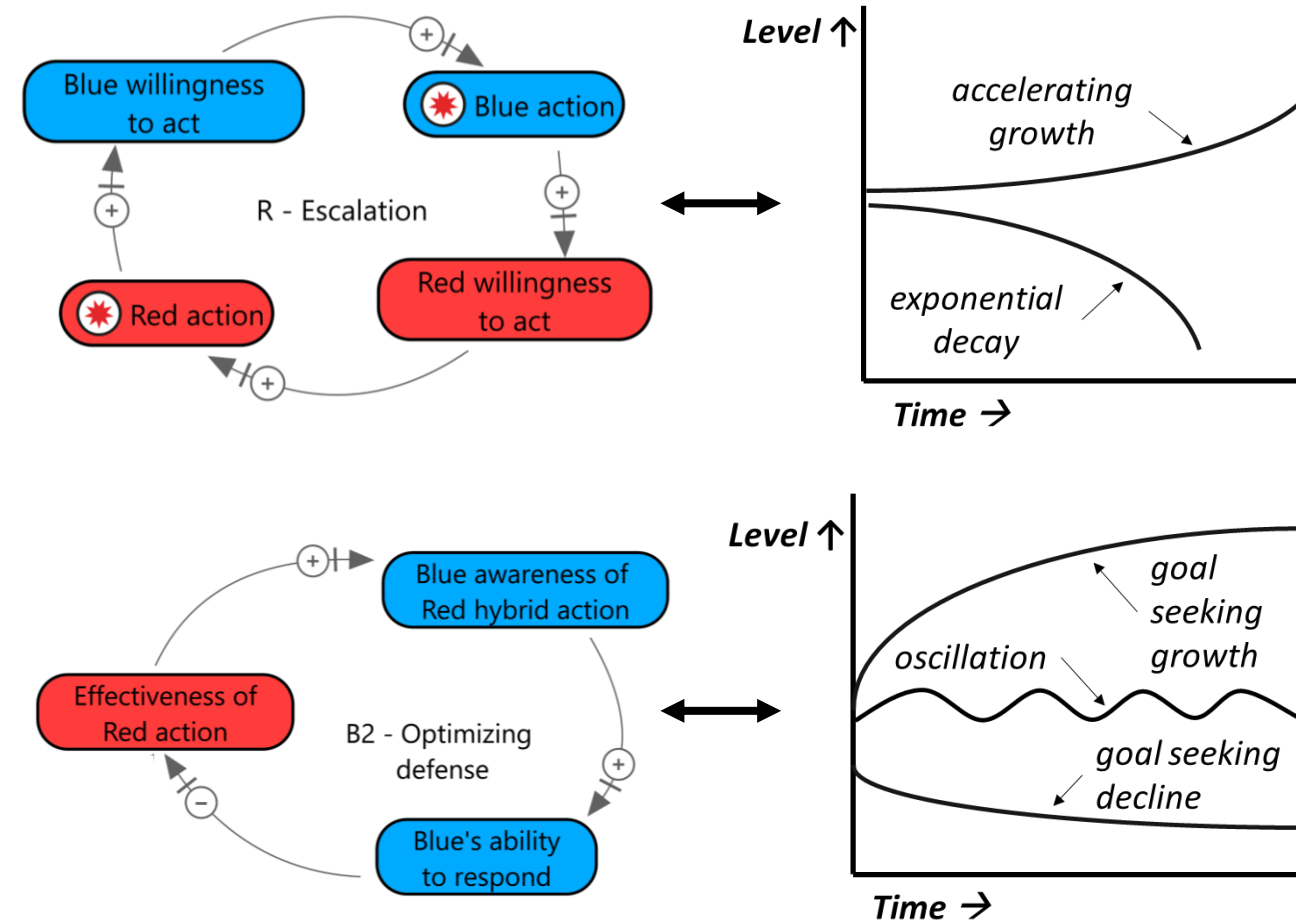
Research questions:

1. Can the interaction between actors be effectively captured in system archetypes?
2. How can archetypes of actor behaviour be applied to analyse hybrid conflict?

› 03. SYSTEM ARCHETYPES

A reading guide

- › Each archetype is organized in a **Blue and Red actor**
- › The variables describe different **aspects of the actors**: actions, beliefs, perceptions, motivation and strategy
- › The archetypes are composed of variables organized in **feedback loops** indicated with R (Reinforcing) and B (Balancing)
- › Feedback loops are the **systemic explanation** of behaviour. They work in both directions, cause an increase and decline



› 04. TEN ARCHETYPES OF HYBRID CONFLICT

Descriptions of actor behaviour in hybrid conflict

| Archetype | Description |
|--|---|
| 1. No smoking gun | Hybrid actions are difficult to attribute. Only if a smoking gun is found, Blue counteracts, and Red might refrain from actions |
| 2. Raising the threshold, boiling the frog | Aggressors in hybrid war conduct their actions by constantly finding ways to maximise effects whilst not causing conflict escalation |
| 3. Tit-for-tat escalation | Hybrid operations performed by Red directed at Blue cause an increase in the willingness of Blue to respond, provoking tit-for-tat reactions in Red |
| 4. Horizontal shifting | Horizontal shifting occurs when an actor employs a different instrument of state power. This occurs if Red decides its goals are better met using other instruments |
| 5. Endogenous societal developments | A societal development can create a vulnerability that can be exploited by Red and can be unintentionally perceived as result of Red actions, triggering Blue response. |

› 04. TEN ARCHETYPES OF HYBRID CONFLICT

Descriptions of actor behaviour in hybrid conflict

| Archetype | Description |
|---|--|
| 6. Deterrence-by-denial and by-punishment | Blue can deter actions in hybrid conflict by using two mechanisms: deterrence-by-denial, reducing Red's benefit, and deterrence-by-punishment, increasing Red's cost |
| 7. Targeting capability to defend | Red aims to degrade Blue capability to defend. Blue capability to defend shall slowly degrade until Blue is suddenly confronted with an effective Red action. |
| 8. Conflicting narratives | Narrative plays a major role. At the micro-level (what happened?) and at the level of ideologies (what is just?). Blue/Red narrative are promoted and attacked by the other. |
| 9. Friend or foe | Actors in hybrid conflict weigh their actions on the basis of multiple interests. A mutual beneficial relation can preserve cooperative attitudes between Blue and Red. |
| 10. Competing spheres of influence | Actors in hybrid conflict vie for influence over a third country. Red and Blue conduct hybrid operations aimed to secure the allegiance of Green, destabilizing Green |

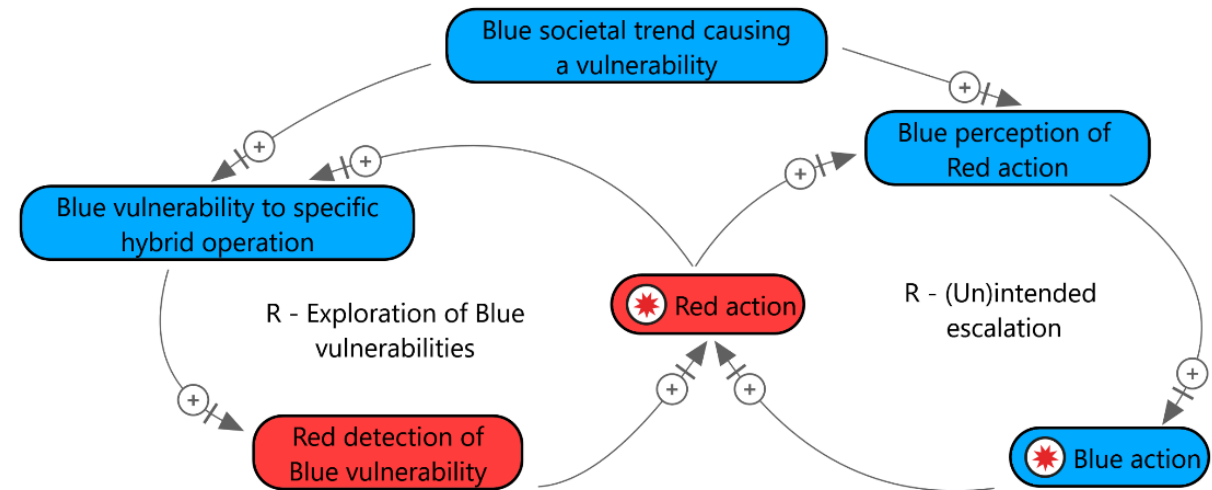
04. TEN ARCHETYPES OF HYBRID CONFLICT

#5: Endogenous societal developments



Ukrainian polarisation post-Soviet collapse – exploiting social vulnerabilities

- › Pro-Russian sentiments in Ukraine has been strong in the previous decades (soc. trend)
- › The Ukrainians had long perceived this as a vulnerability, but mostly refrained from action (R-right was not completed).
- › In 2010, the Russian Federation acted upon their detection of this Ukrainian vulnerability (R-left) by enabling compatriot status
- › In 2014, Ukrainian polarisation was at its apex. The Russian Federation annexed Crimea
- › Russia and Ukraine have recently mutually escalated their tit-for-tat battle of legal citizen status



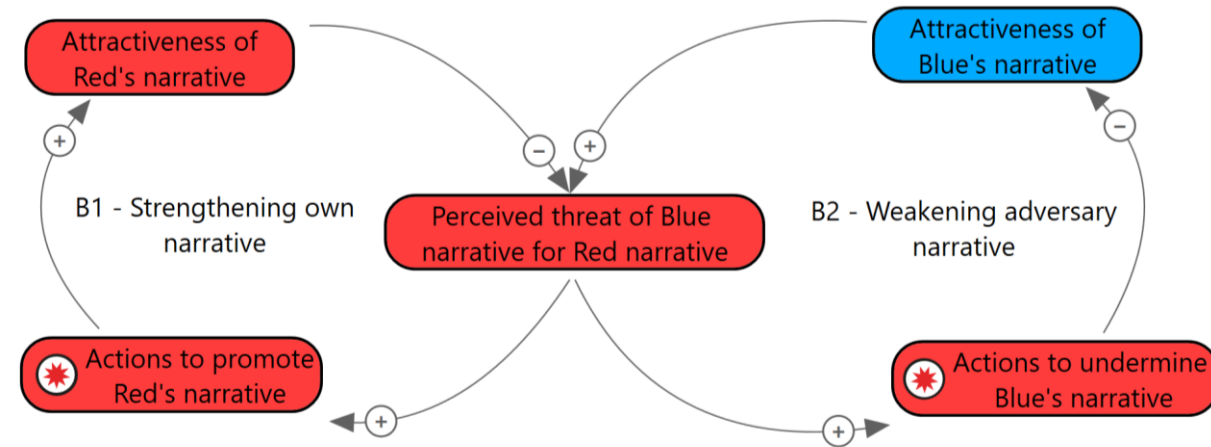
› 04. TEN ARCHETYPES OF HYBRID CONFLICT

#8: Conflicting narratives



Intervention in Iraq – Iranian contrarian narratives

- › Iranian efforts to gain a foothold in Iraq by lobbying Iraqi political parties and expanding its paramilitary operations since the withdrawal of US troops were challenged by the return of the US.
- › Iranian perceptions of the US narrative have led to parallel Iranian campaigns to discredit the US narrative, emphasizing US forces in Iraq as occupiers (B2).
- › Whilst promoting its own narrative for Iraqi interventions: supporting local authorities in fighting ISIL, protecting Shi'a religious sites, and strengthening Iraqi security efforts (B1).



› 05. APPLICATIONS IN HYBRID CONFLICT

How to use archetypes?

- › Behaviour: Recognize patterns of behaviour in hybrid conflict
 - › Which patterns of behaviour can be observed in the behaviour of actors?
- › Dynamic theory: Understand drivers of behaviour in hybrid conflict
 - › How do the feedback mechanisms in the archetype give rise to the observed behaviour?
- › Action: Know how to prevent behaviour of actors in hybrid conflict
 - › How can the feedback mechanisms in the archetype be leveraged to create a sustainable beneficial outcome?



› 06. CONCLUSION

Towards an analysis strategy of hybrid conflict



LIMITATIONS

- Limited set of archetypes, every situation is unique
- Exploring true motivations in a conflict that is partially covert



CONCLUSION

- Aide a deeper understanding of underlying causes for conflict dynamics
- Unravel patterns of behaviour, investigate root causes and propose actions



FURTHER RESEARCH

- Scrutinising, testing and extending to better reflect intricacies of hybrid conflict
- Embedding in a broader analysis strategy of hybrid conflict

› **TOWARDS A DYNAMIC THEORY OF HYBRID CONFLICT**
An Exploration with System Archetypes

Bas Keijser (Bas.Keijser@tno.nl), Guido Veldhuis, Peter van Scheepstal