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The US Perspective on Future War: Why the US relies upon Ares rather than Athena

Jan Angstrom
Swedish National Defence College
Stockholm, Sweden

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ABSTRACT: This paper addresses why the US in its military operations tend to focus on only one dimension in war – the military narrowly understood. Whether the US fails to connect its policy with its military operations or not is a long-standing and important debate. In this paper, I claim that this issue overlooks a perhaps more fundamental issue of how military organizations understand the military dimension in war in and of itself. In the US case, its armed forces tend to be preoccupied with platforms and understand military capabilities as those that deliver death and destruction. I explain this one-sided understanding of the military dimension in war with how the US armed forces think about future war. How the US understands future war is, in turn, a reflection of how it organizes its long-term defense planning procedures. In particular, by approaching the concept of future as by and large structurally deterministic and not allowing for agency, a focus on platforms becomes natural. Investments in weapons systems, too, are more easily motivated to Congress since it is easier to attach a price to developing, for example, a new submarine than it is to attach a price to the cost of developing a military organization that is adaptive, learning and anticipating. The understanding of the future as something that happens whether you like or not is particularly odd in the US context where of course a central tenet of the American dream is that the individual creates her own future.

Introduction

In his monumental new book, Sir Lawrence Freedman (2013: 22–41) reminds us that Greek mythology recognized that in war there is a tension between cunning and raw, brute force. *Mētis* was the *Zeus*' first wife and the goddess of planning and anticipation. Early on in their marriage, *Zeus* realized that if *Mētis* ever gave birth to a son that combined the strength and power of *Zeus* and the guile and intelligence of *Mētis*, the son would be a great threat to *Zeus* and his leadership of the gods. Fearing to be ousted, *Zeus* killed *Mētis* and ate her. *Mētis*, however, was already pregnant and *Zeus* had the rather unforgettable experience of giving birth to his daughter through his head. *Pallas Athena* – goddess of wisdom and war – was born. Later on, *Zeus* and his second wife, *Hera*, had a son – *Ares*. *Athena*'s brother was also the god of war, but crucially the god of violence and rage. In Greek mythology, thus, war was understood to have two faces: one controlled, planned, reasoned, and calculated as well as one violent, uncontrolled, and hell-bent on death and destruction.

The dichotomy of war as symbolized by *Athena* and *Ares* is a useful tool with which to approach also current strategic affairs. In a recent seminal study, John Stone (2011) demonstrates that the US in all its might almost exclusively have focused on developing capabilities to further its “technique of war”, rather than stressing how military means and methods can reach political ends. As such, Stone suggests that by focusing too much on the death and destruction in war, the US forgets the critical part of aligning military means with political ends. Colin

Gray (2005: 200-201) suggests that US armed forces confuses military with strategic success, combat with war, and war for its own sake with war for a better peace. Antulio Echevarria (2004; 2014) reaches similar conclusions stressing that the US has a very distinct limited idea of “way of battle”, rather than “way of war”. The US, in short, despite its wealth of documents proclaiming to be strategic, does not pursue a coherent strategy. The US leans too heavily on Ares, rather than Athena. The question is why. Why cannot the most powerful state in the world improve its strategic decision-making to avoid making plain errors of judgment such as not developing sufficient post-combat planning and resources for the Iraq War? Why the strong focus on war as a narrow military endeavor, rather than war characterized by politics permeating warfare allowing for moderation, calculation and foresight?

Unfortunately, although many have criticized the US effort (e.g. Gray 2005; Hanley 2008: 17; O’Hanlon 2009; Ricks 2006), few have tried to explain the apparent lack of strategic thought in the US war-planning in Iraq. Some answers have been put forward. Hitherto, however, they suffer from various shortcomings. One answer is blunt and very obvious. It is precisely because the US is the world’s most powerful state that it can ignore guile and anticipation and instead – by relying upon force – try to shape a system in which force decides outcomes. If it can convince the world to play the game according to its rules, it will always end up on top. Think David and Goliath. Goliath surely would like to continue to wage war in a way that enhances his strengths and not rely upon guile, deception, and new means and methods of war, which is difficult to plan for. David, meanwhile, needed to use guile, anticipation, and even some unorthodox means to bring Goliath down. We can also see this in how Virgil re-wrote the story of the siege of Troy and this time, Ulysses (Odysseys) was the villain, not the hero, since Ulysses was deceitful (Freedman 2013). In the context of then-superpower Rome, it was Achilles that was the hero. Strength was heralded and appreciated, while intelligence to anticipate and plan was understood nearly as cheating and less honorable. Hence, by planning for, and reinforcing, that war is about the exchange of kinetic energy, the US is trying to shape the rest of the world in its mold. This would certainly imply a very significant master plan worthy of Athena herself. The problem with this explanation, however, is that it pre-supposes a conspiratorial mastermind somewhere in the US administration with the power to suppress talk of such a plan.

Another way to explain the seeming US failure to achieve long-term strategic success is that the process by which the US evaluates its military operations is flawed (Brooks 2009). According to this explanation, the strategic planning process feeds the decision-makers with the wrong kind of information and thus produces flawed decisions. However, this would imply that all US wars would fail and since this is not the case, this explanation fails to account for variation in

strategic outcome. Brennan and Kelly (2009) also suggest that US strategic procedures are to blame. In particular, they suggest that theorizing about conventional war gradually became routinized to a degree where Western planners forgot about the politics of war, instead focusing only on the fixed perceived enemy, the Soviet Union. The Cold War strait jacket thus made war militarized and in the mold of Ares.

Relying less upon a rationalist understanding, another answer would be that the US understands war in a particular way that stresses technology, mass, and overwhelming firepower (e.g. Weighley 1973; Sondhaus 2005). Emile Simpson (2012) advances such an interpretation. It is precisely because the US approaches its current wars such as operations in Afghanistan with a predominantly Clausewitzian perspective on war, stressing decisive military action determining outcomes on the ground before politics can translate the military outcome into a lasting solution that the US loses its way in Afghanistan. Conceiving of war with too much reliance upon Ares, it seems, makes you think about war in a particular way. The problem with this explanation, however, is that it does not explain where the idea of war as Ares comes from. Why does the US imagine future war as Ares would?

In this paper, I advance an explanation of why the US relies upon Ares in its conception of war. In similar fashion to Egnell (2009) and Brooks (2009) I draw upon how politics and military affairs are institutionalized. While they used a framework from civil-military relations theory to advance an explanation of, among others, the US behavior in the post-combat phase of wars, my empirical focus is rather on how military organizations consider the future and, in particular, the future of war.

My claim, in short, is that the way we organize our long-term planning procedures determines how we understand the concept of “future”. This, in turn, determines the contents of our predictions on future war and the image of future war that we hold. Case specific, by organizing the long-term defense planning in an essentially apolitical process, the US understands future war as a military – a bureaucratic – undertaking rather than politics. By not aligning politics and the image of future war, the US planning procedures and the resulting image of future war creates and continuously re-create an understanding of the future as something that will happen regardless of our own actions. The future happens – whether you like it or not. This future, moreover, will consist of war in the shape of Ares – a military duel – since the planning process is essentially apolitical. The image of future war that follows is war without politics. War as rage, death and destruction. War in the shape of Ares.

By contrast, one could easily fathom planning systems and conceptions of the future that allow for agency in the process of creating the future in a dynamic

interplay with other actors. In the latter sense, the course of the future is dependent upon your actions as much as others. Such a system would instead need to predict a much more active role of the subject in creating the future, but it would also entail a much clearer need to stress a political agency involved in war. Athena would be present.

The article proceeds as follows. I will first outline the causal story of the theory to explain exactly how a particular planning process will lead to a particular vision of the future. Second, I will provide empirical evidence of US planning procedures and demonstrate how a particular apolitical planning process lead to visions of future war in which there is a lack of political agency and one that stresses the technique of war.

Why planning procedures and decision-making procedures are important in creating a vision of war

In this section I develop the causal story explaining why and how planning procedures generate visions of future war. The logic draws upon how ideas become embedded in bureaucratic procedures that, in turn, determines how we approach future war. As such, the procedures produce certain documents that reinforce a particular understanding of the future, which leads to a particular vision of future war. More specifically, four institutional conditions are more likely to produce a representation of future war as apolitical: (1) separation of the power to wage war from the power to create, fund and organize military capabilities, (2) a separation of the processes for long-term planning, military acquisition, and the formulation of political ends, (3) a representation of future war as a narrowly understood military undertaking, and (4) a representation of the future as deterministic and without agency.

First, separation of the power to wage war from the power to create, fund and organize military capabilities will encourage an understanding of apolitical war since the two key strategic processes are divorced from each other. Waging war will be understood as separate from creating and funding war, thus making the actor that wages war fight the war for different reasons than the ones created the military capabilities. In turn, the actor creating military capabilities will not know of the future reasons to wage war thus making political ends less important in deciding exactly what military capabilities to develop. This separation of political ends creates a situation in which the politics of war does not come to the forefront. By contrast, parliamentary political systems in which government controls all of these processes, politics can permeate both the creation of, and use of, force. In legal-technical terms, of course, even in parliamentary systems, it is the parliament rather than the executive branch that allocates the budget, but since the government consists of the parliamentary majority, the government can to a

higher extent than in systems with separation of powers focus on the same political end.

Second, a separation of the processes for long-term planning, military acquisition, and the formulation of political ends will encourage an understanding of apolitical war since the future is planned without being connected to political ends and since the acquisition of military capabilities is done without a connection to the formulation of politics. There is a claim to be made that the separation of powers is especially acute in democracies. In democracies, the government is usually understood to be accountable to their voters in free and fair elections. When it comes to developing military capabilities, this accountability can be problematic since military hardware takes long time to develop. Strike fighters, for example, can be in action for several decades which means that four-year elections cycles may not always have an impact. The long-term political context is impossible to predict and therefore one relies upon the default position of building platforms. Again, this is, however, not the case by definition. You can make institutional solutions that try to accommodate these challenges. For example, it is possible to integrate long-term planning with political ends and allow these to guide military acquisition.

Third, a representation of future war as a narrowly understood military undertaking encourages apolitical war since the representation of the future guides us in shaping that very future. The main determinant of our understanding of the future is how we plan for it. In this case: long-term defense planning. As Hanley (2008: 1) suggests “War plans determine whom we fight, how we fight, where and under what provocation we fight – and to a large extent the peace that follows.” The point, in short, is that if we imagine future war in a particular way, we will develop military capabilities that enable to fight war in the way we imagine the future war. By developing these capabilities, however, we make this particular view of future war possible. If we would have conceived of future war in a different way, then that version of future will be created. Indeed, in order to develop capabilities for future war, the acquisition process will increase in pace. In order to develop systems for the future, you also inadvertently shorten the technical life span of the systems. This means that new projects need to be developed and thus military research and development will increase the pace of technological development.

Finally, a representation of the future as deterministic and without agency encourages apolitical war since it does not encourage the formulation of political ends that can permeate the conduct of war. If war happens regardless of what we do then producing the military capabilities ready to meet military challenges is logical behavior. When institutionalizing apolitical procedures where agency is not involved, then we will automatically favor interpretations of the future reinforcing Ares in future war. Since we do not know the political context (since

we do not plan it or take into consideration what we want), we end up stressing the means of war. The procedure, thus sets the boundaries for our conception of the future, thus also setting the boundaries of how we consider future war.

Conceiving of the future as deterministic, however, is not necessarily the only way to understand the future. The idea of the future was discovered during the Enlightenment almost by accident. When history was invented as an intellectual undertaking of not just re-telling the past but explaining it, it also became possible to explain past events through human agency. This leap of the mind also implied that mankind could alter the future. When the idea of a non-cyclical, non-determinist history entered us our minds, we could also start to think about the future as non-determined. We could influence its course. The enlightenment idea that mankind can intentionally shape the future through reason, knowledge and industry thus entered our understanding of the future (Liedman 1997: 522; Giddens 1991; Gaddis 2002).

The field of future studies usually separate between two main schools of thought regarding the future (Kuosa 2011). On the one hand, the future is understood as essentially deterministic and if we just can figure out what causes what (or which God we should listen to), we can predict the future accordingly. On the other hand, the future can also be approached as indeterministic, thus constantly being shaped by what images of the future we hold as well as other highly complex processes. According to this logic, the future cannot be predicted but various *futures* can be forecasted and alternative scenarios can be created. The second school of thought also stresses the contingent, path-dependent nature of the future: What happens ten years from now will depend upon what happens nine years from now and so on. However, in both schools of thought there is a tendency to think of the future as lacking agency. The future will happen whether we like or not. In both schools of thought, moreover, there are conceptions of causality. In the first, one tends to think of causality as *antecedent*, i.e. the future will be similar as the past, provided that the future will have similar conditions. In the second, one tends to think of causality as *concurrent*, i.e. the future will be a function of all other processes that goes on at the same time (Holman 2001). Prevention of certain futures is also based on a certain understanding of the future. If the future is deterministic by faith, what we do today will not have an impact on the future. If the future is determined by what we do today, however, we can avoid certain futures. It is this latter understanding that underpins, for example, the logic of prevention the spread of diseases (e.g. Offe 2001) and it certainly underpin the logic some strategic planning tools. Concepts of the future are in and of themselves cultural expressions (Offe 2001). In anthropological studies, there is plenty of evidence suggesting that various indigenous societies conceive of the future in very different ways – sometimes even not acknowledging that there may be such a thing as a future. The idea of the future as secular, deterministic by

social and political behavior is a distinctly Western idea that can be derived from Western experiences and history of ideas (Offe 2001).

Taken together, these four conditions create actors that are more or less strategic illiterates. They conceive of war as a narrow military business, conflating war with combat, thus waging war as Ares would. In the long run, it means actors that cannot use the necessary moderation and control of the use of force in order to guide the conduct of war to political ends.

Research design and analytical tool

Intentionally, I approach the theory from the perspective of identifying conditions, rather than to try to treat them as separate independent variables. It is too early and it would require a different research design, if the ambition were to test these factors in order to separate the explanatory power of each of them. Most importantly, it would require a comparative design. However, in this exploratory, theory developing paper, I only expand on one pilot case study in order to develop the causal mechanisms. Below I will develop the analytical tool and briefly elaborate on a few methodological issues.

First, as discussed above the four conditions considered in this paper are (1) separation of the power to wage war from the power to create, fund and organize military capabilities, (2) a separation of the processes for long-term planning, military acquisition, and the formulation of political ends, (3) a representation of future war as a narrowly understood military undertaking, and (4) a representation of the future as deterministic and without agency. All of these conditions can be interpreted at least binary, i.e. there are various possible outcomes for each of the conditions.

Conditions	Ares	Athena
Distribution of power	Separated	Uniform
Planning processes	Divided	Integrated
Representation of future war	Apolitical	Political
Concept of future	Deterministic	Indeterministic

Table 1: The analytical tool outlined

Second, the distribution of power in the decision-making process will be ascertained by a analysis of the formal decision-making procedures. This approach has its weakness considering that it cannot capture informal decision-making processes or the impact of political culture. However, it is not completely problematic since the formal rules still set the stage for the decision-making. The planning processes will be analyzed through examining the degree of coherence between the three main planning procedures of defense planning: a) long-term planning, b) military acquisition, and c) the short-term planning. This analytical division appears fruitful. The representation of future war will be ascertained through content analysis of the key futures documents of the US Joint Chiefs.

Again, there is also planning in the different services, but the Joint Chiefs' documents on future war, the so-called *Joint Vision* is a reasonably authoritative source for how US forces understand and represent future war. Finally, the concept of the future will be ascertained through analyzing the long-term planning documents, the so-called *Global Trends* issued every fourth year by the National Intelligence Council (NIC).

Third, considering that this paper consists of an analysis of open-source documents, it is necessary for some words of caution. It may, for example, be the case that planning procedures are highly politicized and have clear political agendas and premeditated outcomes, but this will not be visible in seemingly apolitical, and public processes that are supposed to produce objective threat assessments that allows for rational, unbiased decision-making. Moreover, the acquisition process can be laden with inter-service rivalries, bureaucratic politics, partisan competition, and influences from defense industries. Neither of these can perhaps be expected to be visible in open-source documents. Furthermore, considering that military organizations – as other bureaucracies – mainly are able to do what they have planned for, it creates incentives to be secretive in order not to give rivals too many advantages. In particular, since war according to Athena would rely upon flexibility, moderation, calculation, and deception – rather than raw force – it may be the case that the US will not be open about its powers to deceive (Gooch & Perlmutter 1982).

Fourth, engaging with representations of future as pathways to the future is not simply about conceiving a certain future and then it emerges out of itself as a self-fulfilling prophecy. When we think of the future, we should think of it as one being created by multiple patterns of agency. The future is created in the present by planning a desired end-state and then back-casting to the present. Here, we can talk, in Holman's (2001) terms, of *prospective* causality. It is by no means certain that a future will develop because it is planned for. The reason, of course, is that other actors also plan for certain futures and provided that resources are scarce, not everyone will be able to reach their preferred outcomes. Defense planning is therefore, as Echevarria (2010) reminds us, not as easy as just to plan for one war and another will automatically emerge just because US rivals will plan for a different war than the US.

Pilot case study: US Defense Planning after 9/11

In this section, I will demonstrate that the US long-term defense planning procedures follows an essentially apolitical process. By not recognizing, indeed by being prevented from explicitly addressing the US role in the world in the future, the process produces documents that reinforce the image that the future will just happen. The fact that the US in and of itself probably will have an impact on the future is not recognized. Hidden, in this conception of war, of course, are still

important political and ethical judgments on the composition of war. War itself does not become apolitical just because one actor describes it as such. But this is at the core of the problem. Because the US does not include agency in its vision of future war, it does not recognize that war is political, and it therefore ignores Athena and focuses only on the military, kinetic dimension of war – Ares. The section is structured according to the four key conditions earlier identified: (1) separation of the power to wage war from the power to create, fund and organize military capabilities, (2) a separation of the processes for long-term planning, military acquisition, and the formulation of political ends, (3) a representation of future war as a narrowly understood military undertaking, and (4) a representation of the future as deterministic and without agency.

The separation of the power to wage war from the power to create forces

In the US case, there is a strong separation of powers between the actor waging war and the actor with the power to create the armed forces. Indeed, separation of powers is the fundamental principle permeating the entire US constitution. At the federal level, the Presidency is responsible for the conduct of war, while the Congress is responsible for declaring war and financing war.

The US constitution is based on a separation of the executive and legislative branches. The executive, the Presidency, is also commander-in-chief of the armed forces (article 2, section 2) and is thus the body that is entrusted to wage war. The legislative branch, meanwhile, has the power to declare war (article 1, section 8) as well as the budgetary power, i.e. it controls acquisition and defense spending. Although this suggests a seemingly straightforward division of power, there is a vast grey area since the Presidency was afforded the power to wage war without a Congressional declaration of war to repel an immediately impending attack on the US. This pragmatic solution created space of political contention between the Presidency and the Congress. Where do you, for example, draw the line between a threat against US interests abroad and the constitutional arrangement? Indeed, many presidents have understood this as it does not need Congressional support to wage war abroad, while the Congress has tried to infringe these rights. (Hays, Vallance & van Tassel 1997: 73-100)

In 1974, Congress passed the War Powers Act in an attempt to curb Presidential self-proclaimed powers to wage war abroad. Although the President (in this case Richard Nixon) tried to use his veto powers to stop the law, the Congress passed it anyway. Effectively, the War Powers Act has not been a major infringement on Presidential powers, but it requires the Presidency to report to the Congress, within 48 hours of the beginning of hostilities, about the reasons of the use of force. It also stipulates that the President shall consult with Congress before committing troops abroad even if there is no declaration of war. The Act also provides to the Congress the powers to stop ongoing wars. Through the Act, the

Congress tried to ensure that it had a saying in the use of force even in cases where it did not declare war (Nathan & Oliver 1994: 79). There is thus a distinction between the power to wage war and declare war in the US.

Moreover, there is also a separation of powers regarding the power to create forces and organize forces and the power to use force. The Congress has virtually all of the formal powers regarding defense spending and organizing the armed forces. The US armed forces are organized through two major pieces of legislation, the 1947 National Security Act outlining the four services – the Army, the Air Force, the Navy, and the Marine Corps – as well as institutionalizing the National Security Council (NSC) – the body tasked to integrate foreign and defense policies. The next major legislation, the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act, institutionalized the Joint Chiefs of Staff and a joint staff at the Pentagon to integrate the services. Hence, it is the Congress that decides upon the organization of the armed forces. Naturally, the executive branch can suggest changes to the Congress, but the decision rests with the Congress.

Meanwhile, the annual budget as well as military procurement is also decided by the Congress, but in practice the executive branch also plays a role. The Department of Defense (DoD) is tasked to regularly update Congress on its spending as well as its future projects spending in both a five-year estimate and the so-called future years defense program. Within the executive branch, the DoD is tasked to develop a budget proposal to the Congress based on the *National Security Strategy* (published by the National Security Agency (NSA)) that usually is signed by the President. Within the DoD, the Joint Chiefs is tasked to develop a *National Military Strategy* that then is operationalized into a Guidance for Development of Force and Joint Programming Guidance that is the key document engaging particular military missions and begin to translate strategy into capabilities. The four services can then develop force composition and acquisition plans that inform the budget as well as the future years' defense program (O'Hanlon 2009; Hays, Vallance & van Tassel 1997: 205-233; Hodgson 2010).

The division of powers regarding the power to wage war, declare war, and finance war effectively means that the Presidency has to wage war with whatever resources the Congress has afforded it. Moreover, the military resources created, will not be related to the executive branch's political aims. There is, thus, in the US case a condition set to favor Ares rather than Athena. War will be understood as apolitical.

The separation of the planning processes

In the US case, there is a strong separation of the key planning processes in war planning. First, the long-term future planning is carried out by the National Intelligence Council, which produces its Global Trends reports to the President

every four years. Second, military procurement is decided in interplay between Congress and the Presidency in ten-year plans. Third, the Presidency issues so-called Quadrennial Defense Reviews (QDR:s) together with National Security Strategies to try to outline in the short term how political aims and military means are combined. Finally, the war planning is done exclusively within the Pentagon and the DoD.

Up until the 1880s, the US military did no serious war planning. Instead, when called upon by Congress or the President volunteers quickly amassed to the armed forces with little or no training. (Hanley 2008: 3) At the turn of the century, then US secretary of war, Elihu Root influenced by the emergence of General Staffs in Europe and their planning capabilities, introduced operational planning in the US army. Still, this planning was rather undeveloped and heavily permeated by the then US isolationism. For example, even during the First World War, the US planning consisted of two plans where Japan attacked the pacific coastline (Plan Orange) or Germany invaded the US over the Atlantic (Plan Black). (Hanley 2008: 5-6) Clearly, the idea that US forces would go to war abroad was not, apart from the newly organized Marine Corps, an obvious option.

With the US engagement in the First World War, this gradually changed and US war planning became gradually more detailed and sought to develop planning for a full width of strategic options. With this as well as the rapid development of the mass army and increased focus on development of gradually increasingly advanced complex military technology planning also became harder to institutionalize in a rational way. War planning gradually became separated in several different strands.

First, operational war planning is conducted by the DoD and the Pentagon, i.e. the armed forces. This planning, as all military operational planning, is challenged by three major uncertainties: from uncertainty of future enemy and allies, uncertainty about the nature of future war, and uncertainty about the timing of the future war (Duffy Toft & Imlay 2006: 1; Gray 2010; Gray 2014). In order to manage these challenges, operational planning consists of method development in planning as well as both generic and more specific future war plans. Crucial for this paper, however, the operational planning is secretive, which means that there are difficulties to ascertain the degree to which politics are allowed to guide the military planning. What we do know from previous US wars such as the Vietnam War or the Second World War is that the operational planning was shaped by developing different scenarios. "Scenarios are stories about how the world changes and how it will be changing at some future time." (Hopkins & Zapata 2001: 8) Scenarios are about thinking about different futures without necessarily predicting them. The scenario approach was developed during the mid-1950s among long-term defense planners in the US, in particular to try to identify relevant developments of weapons technology. Using scenarios, however, have

the downside that they limit our capability to envision other futures. It can also imply an understanding of the future as something that will just happen regardless of present action.

Second, the short-term strategic planning is guided by the National Security Strategy as well as the QDR:s (QDR 2001; 2006; 2010; 2014; Flournoy 2001). In 2001 the QDR introduced a capabilities-based planning, rather than the traditional threat-based planning (Quester 1992). Regardless, this process is separated from both the more long-term military procurement processes as well as the immediate operational planning processes. Admittedly, the QDR goes to great length to anchor its ideas of the use of force with US interests. It therefore seems clear that the QDR projects future war as clearly political. The problem, however, is that the military means and methods are already set within the four-year process till the next QDR. The means are present and one could, cynically, claim that the main task of the QDR is to find suitable use of an already existing tool box. The problems addressed here are thus still prevalent. The planning procedures are separate and therefore, war in the mold of Ares will permeate the US understanding of future war.

Third, defense spending, furthermore, follows a yet further process. Here, the President and Congress agree upon ten-year plans that do not necessarily follow presidential elections. This seemingly undermines an integration of both presidential and congressional visions of US future, but this is to take it a bit too far. Currently, the Obama administration is planning cut-backs of up to one trillion USD over the coming decade. Much of it is “natural savings” coming from the withdrawal from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but there are also “real” budget cuts that will lower US defense spending. Historically, US defense spending as percentage of GDP is low at around 4.5%. During the Cold War, it varied between 6 and 10%. These figures are not necessarily a result of lack of political involvement. On the contrary, politics – even intra-service politics – is heavily involved in choosing various long-term military procurement projects (e.g. Karlsson 2002). As explained above, moreover, there is a great deal of interaction between the executive and legislative branches when it comes to defense spending. Rather than a clean – once-every-ten-years’ master plan – defense procurement is updated annually. The fact remains, though, that the formal powers rest with the body that will not decide the strategy of any future war.

Finally, the long-term defense planning, more specifically, involves forecasting future war in a 20-30 years perspective. Again, upholding the analytical distinction, this process is separate from the operational planning, military procurement as well as the short-term strategy planning. Rather than integrated with the other necessary planning processes, the National Intelligence Council issues quadrennial futures reports that focus on the 20-30 year perspective. Summarizing, the various different necessary war planning procedures are not integrated in the US

case. Thus, the condition of separated procedures is upheld and this separation makes it difficult for politics to permeate war.

Representation of future war as a narrowly understood military undertaking

Combined, the separation of constitutional powers and separation of different war planning procedures creates the foundation for the operational war planning to represent the future in a particular way. The US case is no different. Because the conditions are set in a particular way, the military planners tend to focus on the means of war in their planning. On top of these conditions, the way civil-military relations are understood in the US case, military planners rarely venture outside of the military domain (Huntington 1957; Nielsen & Snider 2009). In the Joint Chiefs' planning documents future war is represented in the shape of a military undertaking.

From the National Security Strategy of the National Security Council and the QDR, the Joint Chiefs of Staff develops the US National Military Strategy (Lovelace & Young 1995). The Joint Chiefs also plan for future war in their Joint Visions-documents that are supposed to identify military capabilities for future wars. The documents (Joint Visions 2010; 2020) are not totally void of strategic deliberations. Indeed, both identify certain elements of a future strategic context and identify some US interests and derived from it, key military tasks. For example, adversaries are portrayed as being adaptable to US strengths and being in possession of modern communications technology (2010: 11; 2020: 4). However, this picture is very generic and arguably you would not need to develop a representation of future threats for reaching a conclusion that the US armed forces are supposed to successfully deter enemies or, if push comes to shove, “fight and win the nation's wars”.

If the representation of future war is far too generic when it comes to the politics of war, it is much more detailed when it comes to the military dimension of war. Here, the Joint Chiefs identify key operational requirements and operational lines. It is, for example, suggested that full-spectrum dominance, i.e. “the ability of US forces, operating unilaterally or in combination with multinational and interagency partners, to defeat any adversary and control any situation across the full range of military operations” (Joint Visions 2020: 6) is the aim of US forces. It suggests, moreover, that future war will be more lethal as a symptom of rapidly improving military technology (Joint Visions 2010: 11). Furthermore, mass and concentration of force are still believed to represent future warfare. In effect, the representation of future war in the documents portrays future war as a military undertaking characterized by more precision-guided munitions.

Still, this representation of future war also entails the standard defense planning paradox. It is aptly captured by Hanley: “Active duty officers are discouraged

from commenting on policy, for the time-honored and compelling reason that service members must not be seen as challenging the supremacy of civilian leadership on such matters. Even so, military officers are duty-bound to recommend to political authorities the best means of employing military force in the service of national, strategic aims.” (Hanley 2008: 16) This is in many respects a perfect depiction of the schizophrenic nature of documents such as the Joint Visions. While they have to relate to politics in order to make certain choices reasonable and certain choices procurements possible to motivate through the Congress, they cannot involve too much politics.

It is this latter argument that also shows the promise of this condition regarding an explanation of why the US understands future war in a particular way, focusing on the trademarks of Ares. Because it cannot be too explicit when it comes to political ends, these documents tend to focus on the military dimension of war – much like Ares.

Representation of the future as deterministic and without agency

In the final part of the analysis, I assess the extent to which the US planning procedures includes agency in its concept of the future. Above I argued that this final condition is important in the overall explanation of US failure to understand war as political (instead favoring an understanding of war as military) since a future void of agency would automatically imply that the US does not think it has a say – a political end – with its wars. Even if Echevarria (2014) moderates Weighley’s (1973) image that the US way of war is about overwhelming fire-power, reliance upon mass and concentration as well as technology, the image of future war in the US as shown above, still focuses on kinetic energy. Weighley’s (1973) analysis is still correct, though. The vision of future war is heavily influenced by deductions from current, developing, or futuristic technologies. It is technically possible to perform now system-of-system warfare, where you can - if you want to remove human decision-making. Sensors can alert other systems that go for the kill within minutes of discovery and from a whole range of automated responses - from submarines, drones or regular fixed-wing aircraft. Developing the platforms to perform these tasks becomes the task. The purposes for which you would want to apply such force is ignored. Naturally, this may not be a problem at all. It only poses a problem if the political aim is neglected – if Athena is forgotten in favor of Ares. Harmony (or at least balance) between them seems necessary and even in such cases there are no guarantees of victory since the adversary may either be more clever or more powerful.

The NIC has used several different methodologies for its long-term future planning over the last few decades. For example, the roles of government and non-government experts have varied over the years and estimates of the future have varied. Still, the least common denominator in the different methodologies is

that the representation of the future is derived from extrapolations of current trends. The role of informed estimates on a series of factors that are contingent on political decisions in the upcoming decades have varied. For example, in *Global Trends 2015* (NIC 2000), there is considerable weight attached to a series of experts opinions on how quick scientific progress will be the upcoming 20 year-period.

Most importantly for the purposes of this paper, the US is clearly considered to possess agency in the early 2000s, but gradually this agency disappears. In *Global Trends 2015* (NIC 2000: 12), it is stated as a natural fact that: “The United States will continue to be a major force in the world community. US global economic, technological, military, and diplomatic influence will be unparalleled among nations as well as regional and international organizations in 2015.” Meanwhile, in *Mapping the Global Futures 2020* (NIC 2004: 9), it is recognized that “The role of the United States will be an important variable in how the world is shaped, influencing the path that states and nonstate actors to follow.” But this is more or less it. In the report, the US is more systematically examined from outside. The US is treated as an object, rather than a subject or an “imperial we”. Still, US agency is not altogether forgotten. For example, a new section on how the US is perceived abroad is introduced. There is also an ensuing section on policy recommendations if the US wants to change how the world looks upon it. Again in *Global Trends 2025* (NIC 2008: xi), the US is objectified. The report talks of the US in third person, rather than first, but this time there are no policy recommendations and there are uncertainties surrounding the role of the US in the future. Finally, in *Global Trends 2030* (NIC 2012), there are grave concerns of whether or not the US will be able to maintain its technological superiority. In the midst of deducing from global megatrends (demography, access to raw material, trade flows, energy scarcity, the climate change), identifying game-changers and black swans to develop four different scenarios, the *Global Trends 2030* (NIC 2012), treats the US as an object in a future destined to emerge as a result from the megatrends. Oddly, for a US government product on the future, it does not agency to the US.

Summarizing, the US long-term planning is remarkably void of agency. For the greater part of the post-Cold War period, the planning tool considers the US as an object – a third person – involved in the story, but not to a lesser and lesser degree one that can influence the future. Supreme interest must be to avoid war while still being able to pursue interests. Same thing for the US. Create the future you want. The really odd thing about the agency-less defense planning process is that it utterly lacks the American dream – in which of course – you create your own destiny and fortune. It also goes against the grain of the idea of manifest destiny in US foreign policy. Much like the idea that the US had a manifest destiny (and indeed an obligation) to colonize and culture the American West in the nineteenth

century, it has been suggested that the US in its foreign policy identity is driven by an idea to spread its Enlightenment values world-wide (e.g. Pfaff 2010). Considering the lack of political will manifested in the long-term futures planning, though, it rather seems that the US understands its destiny as isolationist yet again.

Conclusions: Why Athena should matter more than Ares

Why cannot the most powerful state in the world improve its strategic decision-making to avoid making plain errors of judgment such as not developing sufficient post-combat planning and resources for the Iraq War? Why does the US put so much weight on war as a narrow military endeavor, rather than war characterized by politics permeating warfare allowing for moderation, calculation and foresight? Why, in short, does the US focus that much on war as Ares, rather than war in Athena's mold?

In this paper, I have argued that the way we organize our long-term planning procedures determines how we understand the concept of “future”. This, in turn, determines the contents of our predictions on future war and the image of future war that we hold. Case specific, by organizing the long-term defense planning in an essentially apolitical process, the US understands future war as a military – a bureaucratic – undertaking rather than politics. By not aligning politics and the image of future war, the US planning procedures and the resulting image of future war creates and continuously re-create an understanding of the future as something that will happen regardless of our own actions. The future happens – whether you like it or not. This future, moreover, will consist of war in the shape of Ares – a military duel – since the planning process is essentially apolitical. The image of future war that follows is war without politics. War as rage, death and destruction. War in the shape of Ares.

Through a first-cut case study on US defense planning structured according to the four theoretical conditions: (1) separation of the power to wage war from the power to create, fund and organize military capabilities, (2) a separation of the processes for long-term planning, military acquisition, and the formulation of political ends, (3) a representation of future war as a narrowly understood military undertaking, and (4) a representation of the future as deterministic and without agency, the paper has demonstrated that the way we plan for future war has an impact on how we pursue it.

Why, then, would a stronger emphasis on Athena be advantageous? And how should such a strategy be devised? Instead of platform-centric warfare, we should approach future war as about identifying and building certain key strategic capabilities. Perhaps a greater investment could be made in creating generic organizational skills and characteristics: learning, adapting, recruitment, planning and “shaping”. The strict focus on Ares, moreover, has other problems. If we

only, in short, focus on the technique of war, we fail to consider how our adversaries should understand future war. It is, for example, exceedingly difficult to create and maintain a strategic narrative of war as understood as exchange of kinetic energy. Consider, for example, the case of the US so-called Global Shadow War, i.e. the ongoing war against al-Qaeda and its associates using in no small part Drone technology for both re-con, targeting, and delivery. This would certainly seem to be a case of war as Athena. Secret operations carried out by special operations units. However, it is far from certain that it is possible to construct a narrative that influences local Yemenites of the coherence of such a strategic narrative.

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