

MASTERS OF GRAND STRATEGY

HOW STRATEGIC SIMULATIONS CAN AID THE CREATION OF A STRATEGIC CULTURE THAT
LEADS TO BETTER GRAND STRATEGY AND CIV-MIL RELATIONS.

Policy Report

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1. Abstract

In onderstaand beleidsrapport wordt geanalyseerd hoe *strategic simulations* een staat, zoals België, kunnen helpen bij de grand strategy, strategische cultuur en civiele-militaire relaties. Om dit te bereiken wordt eerst de term *strategic simulations* gedefinieerd. Dit is nodig om een fundatie te bouwen waarop kan worden verder gewerkt. De term *strategic simulations* wordt gehanteerd als containerterm zodat alle essentiële types simulaties hieronder vallen. Vervolgens worden alle hoofdthema's (grand strategy, strategische cultuur en civiele-militaire relaties) geanalyseerd en wordt er gekeken hoe deze in verhouding (kunnen) staan met *strategic simulations*. Op deze manier ontstaat er een rode draad doorheen het beleidsrapport die gevolgd kan worden en de verschillende thema's met elkaar verbindt. Aan de hand van de verschillende voordelen die *strategic simulations* bieden zijn volgende beleidsaanbevelingen opgesteld:

- verder onderzoek naar *strategic simulations*,
- het tot stand brengen van een expert in *strategic simulations* die diensten aan de staat kan leveren, cursussen houden met betrekking tot de hoofdthema's.
- De oprichting van een centrum voor *strategic simulations* in België die als centraal punt kan dienen in een internationaal netwerk en meer uitgebreide diensten kan leveren.

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3. Executive Summary

This research will focus on the use of Strategic simulations for the improvement of a state's grand strategy, the strategic culture and the civilian-military relations. In order to do this, the policy report examines strategic simulations, grand strategy, strategic culture and civilian-military relations on their own and in relation with strategic simulations.

The current international order could be described as turbulent with the war in Ukraine, continual conflict and extremism in Africa, violent regional power competition in the Middle-East and rising tension in Asia between China and a US led group of countries. A state, such as Belgium, would therefore benefit from having a coherent and resilient grand strategy. When examining grand strategy, we can deduce certain principles that are universally applicable and result in a more resilient state during turbulent times. These principles might lead a country towards a good grand strategy, this does not however assure that the grand strategy will function as intended. A grand strategy needs a compatible strategic culture. Strategic culture resides within the strategic establishment (those that influence a state's strategy the most) and is their perspective, frame of mind, their modus operandi. Combined, grand strategy and strategic culture are a driving car. The car is the state, the grand strategy is the engine and the strategic culture is the fuel on which it runs. Civilian-military relations is the 'check engine' light on the dashboard. In this sense the civilian-military relations can work as a barometer for the strategic culture and the compatibility between the strategic culture and the grand strategy. Unhealthy and broken down civilian-military relations are therefore a sign that your car is heading towards an undesirable future. Strategic simulations are the educational centre that teaches people how an engine can be designed, what fuel should be used, how to drive the car and what the rules of the road are. It is with strategic simulations that the residents of the strategic establishment can not only learn the principles of grand strategy, but also experience them. However, strategic simulations are not only an educational tool, they can also test current policy and instil a strategic culture that is compatible with the policy (or grand strategy). The versatile nature of strategic simulations allow it to be used as an educational, self-reflective, testing, communication and networking tool. Furthermore, strategic simulations are a relatively cost-effective tool. It is therefore in the interest of a state, such as Belgium, to invest into the research and use of strategic simulations. The recommendations this policy brief makes are as following:

Step 1: Research

Further research should be conducted on strategic simulations and their relation with grand strategy, strategic culture and civilian-military relations. This could be done in the format of a Phd research according to three phases.

Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Research foundation & construction of a general framework for the field. ● Networking within the field of strategic simulations. ● Experimental testing of strategic simulations.
Phase 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establishment of an encompassing general theory, allowing for future specialisation. ● Experimental testing by translating policy into strategic simulations. ● Holding strategic simulations with international partners.
Phase 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Final testing within the strategic establishment ● Creation of a course and groundwork for a centre of strategic simulations. ● Finalisation of the Phd research

Step 2: Strategic simulations expert

With the strong foundation that the Phd research has provided, the strategic simulations expert would ideally work for an institution that serves the government. He/she would have four main functions regarding strategic simulations. The hosting of high level strategic simulations in order to further his/her research. Providing strategic simulations on request by the institutions of the state and cooperating with them. Hosting international experts and policy makers (those that reside within the strategic establishment) in order to expand the network and relations with Belgium in the centre. Holding a strategic simulations course for the strategic establishment of the state with regard to grand strategy and strategic culture. Because of the international nature, it would be beneficial if the institution for whom the expert works with already has an international network in relation to strategy and policy making.

Step 3: A centre for Strategic Simulations

The end goal should be the establishment of a centre for strategic simulations. Such a centre would not only be able to conduct courses for the strategic establishment of the state, but also for partners. There would be a greater capability to provide on demand strategic simulations for the state, but also for the EU. The centre for strategic simulations would put Belgium at the forefront of strategic studies in the EU and provide an invaluable network that might serve as the cradle of creation for much more.

4. Abbreviations

- CCP = Chinese Communist Party
- China = People's Republic of China
- Civ-Mil relations = Civilian - Military relationships
- CNAS = Centre for New American Strategy
- COA = Course Of Action
- COIN = Counter Insurgency
- EU = European Union
- JSDF = Japanese Self Defense Force
- NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
- NC3 = Nuclear Command, Control and Communications
- NSSB = National Security Strategy of Belgium
- OODA = Observation, Orientation, Decision, Action
- PLA = People's Liberation Army (China)
- PR = Public Relations
- Strategic Compass = The European Strategic Compass for Security and Defence
- Taiwan = Republic of China
- UK = United Kingdom
- US = United States of America
- WWII = World War Two

5. Introduction

Mundus noster: the reality of our environment

The world currently faces multiple challenges. When Russia launched its full scale invasion of Ukraine the 22th of February 2022, it marked an irrefutable change the world had been going through. This change takes place on multiple fronts that influence each other and it is futile to try and mark one decisive event as the most important. They weave an overlapping course. In Europe, the war in Ukraine currently resides at the forefront of our collective mind. In a perhaps emotional reaction the European Union (EU) awarded Ukraine with candidate status for surviving a brutal Russian onslaught. Ukraine is now edging closer to fold into the EU family and the EU can never drop Ukraine from here on forward (Biscop, 2023). Although the question remains if Ukraine would have wanted to join the EU if it was not invaded, if it could have developed further with being the middle country between the EU and Russia (Larsen, 2022). Now that Ukraine is firmly in the camp of the EU, the balance should be made if the EU is able to continually support Ukraine throughout this war. The EU defence industry finds itself in a devilishly difficult situation through reduced production capacity that cannot keep up with current demands (Angelet, 2022). Perhaps the peace dividend that came after the cold war could be perceived as the grapes of wrath for the European defence sector. Of Course the EU is not operating in a vacuum and other actors are also positioning themselves to their own advantage. Russia is not sitting idly by and is not only focused on Ukraine, its activities around the Eurasian Spine have the capability of influencing Europe's strategic options for the future. Along this route, Russia could potentially bypass Europe.

The EU cannot ignore this crucial aspect and should invest in its relationships in the region. A region that is traditionally thought of as far away, the future may show that it is closer than first thought (Siman, 2023). In the Middle-East, Russia is an active player. Although less at present because of the war that is going on closer to home, it remains an important power in the region. With privileged military relations in Cairo, tactical cooperation with Tehran, nuclear-capable aircraft in Syria and mercenaries that have fought in Syria and Libya. At the moment of writing this policy brief the Middle-East is lacking a security architecture. It remains to a large extent a region where the local powers vie for influence through stimulating violence, supporting non-state actors, cyber attacks, hybrid attacks and much more (Giegerich et al., 2022). Further East, tensions between the United State of America (US) and the Chinese People's Republic (China) are cause for concern for many. In the South China Sea, the world's busiest economic maritime area, US warships routinely conduct freedom of navigation operations. This sea has however seen the creation of multiple artificially enlarged islands with military fortifications built on them by China. The states in the region that make up the ASEAN organisation are torn between their strong economic relations with China and their security concerns with regards to China, wishing to hedge between it and the US led states as long as possible without making a definite choice (Giegerich et al., 2022). And what if war broke out over the Republic of China (Taiwan)? The global supply chains that go through the strait of Taiwan are essential and the semiconductor trade is at this moment still not easily replaced, war would be devastating on multiple levels. In the case of war it

is not clear if there will be the sufficient instruments and political will in the EU to muster an effective response to such an eventuality (Boyd et al., 2020). We should also consider how the rest of the world would respond to a possible war over Taiwan. If we take the lukewarm reaction of many countries towards the war in Ukraine as an indication, we might be surprised by the lack of support. The nations of the African continent are plagued by their own problems and do not have the capabilities to incur the economic wrath of a country such as China. The leaders of many African countries are tied to China through investment deals and palace diplomacy. This is the act of buying and building palaces for leaders or investing in their local region before an election in order to ensure favourable economic deals. With a predicted population boom and rampant violence in many forms and especially jihadism, many countries in Africa remain unstable to say the least (Wilén, 2022). This violence is greatly enhanced through Moscow's Kalashnikov diplomacy. Russia's trade volume might not be comparable to that of China, the EU or the US, however it still remains the preeminent military exporter across the continent. Russia might not have a master plan for Africa to build a sustainable future with the countries there, but it remains a thorn in the EU's side. With the most blatant example the withdrawal of France in Mali and the operations of Wagner (Hirsbrunner & Masuhr, 2022). Which brings us back to the EU and Russia without even mentioning the never ending march of technology that casts its looming long shadow across the world, as Paul Sharre (2023) describes in his book detailing the new battlegrounds advancing technology has created. It is in these turbulent times, Belgium will take on the mantle of the presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Belgium will be the president, yet this will fall close to the country's elections. Meaning that most national party's will be in election mode. If recent times have been representative for Belgian politics, then I am afraid whether the country will cut a fine figure as president. It would be a shame if internal national politics deluded the waters of our European aspirations and international politics in large. As it has done in the past, episodes such as the CETA trade deal with Canada are best not repeated (Reuters Staff, 2016). Belgium should represent itself as one state throughout its presidency and remain faithful to the old adage that national politics stop at the water's edge. Belgium, as it will try and steer the EU through these times in the near future, is in dire need of a strategic culture that will support a grand strategy to guide us. The way to achieve this is through strategic simulations. In this policy brief I will discuss and explain four main concepts: Grand strategy, Strategic culture, Civilian-Military relations (Civ-Mil relations) and Strategic simulations. Grand strategy is the objective we should strive for. In order to facilitate this a coherent strategic culture is needed that sustains the grand strategy. By examining the Civ-Mil relations in a state we might find how the strategic culture is represented and how this bears on grand strategy. Strategic simulations are the foremost method to improve these three concepts and will be applied to them. Therefore we shall start with examining the concept of strategic simulations in order to create a foundation of understanding to build on.

This policy brief will in its conclusion and recommendation primarily focus on Belgium. The reason for this is that Belgium is perfectly situated for this endeavour. It has no immediate grand strategy, the strategic culture is sometimes perplexing and the Civ-Mil relations have ample room

for improvement. Furthermore, Brussels serves as a host for multiple international organisations and especially the EU. Belgium is also the host nation for NATO. This creates the possibility for ideas to spread in the so-called Brussels bubble and back to the partner nations. Belgium is not only in need of the recommendations made, but can also serve as a jumping-off point for the rest of the EU. The subjects that are examined are therefore also not only applicable to Belgium.

6. Strategic Simulations

Strategic simulations are used in many forms and many places. They have a long history under many names and are still used today. We will first define what we should understand under strategic simulations and why this concept was chosen. We will then shortly discuss the historical origin and evolution of strategic simulations and some examples of current applications. This introduction to strategic simulations enables us to examine how they might further the development of grand strategy, the forming of a strategic culture and the improvement of civ-mil relations. Each will be discussed in regards to the application of strategic simulations, building on the foundation laid out here.

6.1. Defining strategic simulations

There is a lot of discussion in the literature and the community on which term to use and what the exact definition of said term should be. Since a semantic debate is not the main purpose of my research, I will use the term ‘strategic simulations’ as a container concept. I will define it as such: “Strategic simulations are simulations of realistic events, transpiring in the past, present or future, with a focus to learning something”. Realistic events, meaning that they do not need to be events that have happened or are happening in the real world. They should however be applicable to real life events. NATO is for example known to have scenarios for exercises in fictional worlds. Countries in these exercises are complete with information on the economy, geography, population, etc (Wojtowicz, 2020). Although these countries do not exist, they resemble the real world closely enough and the events are plausible or have already happened in some way. A non-military example is LAND RUSH which simulates the negotiations over land rights between different social classes with different power relations. Although the simulation is fictional, the scenario is applicable to real world events in Africa (Ansoms et al., 2015). A strategic simulation does not however always need to be fictional. Historical events are used to study military history and gain insight into the events from a different angle (Steenwege, 2021). Current events can also be used for strategic simulations. In World War Two (WWII), the British navy established WATU, which stands for Western Approaches Tactical Unit. This unit played u-boat simulations in order to find tactics and create a playbook for warships that protected convoys in the Atlantic from German u-boat attacks. It were these, predominantly young women, that found the way to defeat

the u-boat menace and saved Great-Britain (Parkin, 2019). To stay within the nautical realm and WWII, strategic simulations have even been used to exercise and learn in preparation of future events. In the interwar years the American naval college did this for possible future wars and Admiral Nimitz, commander in chief of the US Pacific fleet, said that nothing in the war happened that was surprising except the kamikaze attacks (Perla & Curry, 2011). The Centre for New American Strategy (CNAS) has played multiple simulations of possible future events in Asia in order to research the implications they would have. What these simulations all have in common is that they strive to learn something. To gain insight that is deemed useful for the real world. This is the differentiation I make with simulations that do not have this goal. Strategic simulations are meant to provide knowledge and/or stimulate debate and research. However, this is mostly defined and determined by the user of the simulation. For example the German Command and Staff college uses commercial tabletop wargames that are modified for classroom use (Steenwege, 2021). The original purpose might have or not have been for teaching. It is by how it is used that we determine if it is a strategic simulation or not.

My last example introduced a new term, namely tabletop wargames. To further explain this I refer to the beginning where I said that Strategic Simulations will be used as a container concept. As mentioned before, this is because there is a lot of debate on how to define the simulations that are being conducted. Using a container concept such as Strategic Simulations enables us to create sub-divisions within this and take a closer look at the myriad of forms these strategic simulations can take.

Wargames are possibly the best known form of strategic simulations and with the most debated definition. The definition can differ when focussing on the purpose, form and the end user. One of the definitions that professor Wojtowicz (2023) provides is: “Wargame is a game about war employed to raise competence (Wojtowicz, 2023)”. Perla and Curry (2011) define it as the interplay of human decisions and game events that are accurate and realistic enough to make sure it is informative and not misleading. They are tools for gaining insight into the dynamics of warfare, providing a unique forum for communicating ideas (Perla & Curry, 2011). The question then arises if a wargame should always involve war and if this should be defined as the kinetic-use of force. Hybrid warfare is of all ages and is nothing new. We categorise it under warfare, yet it does not imply the kinetic use of force. We could determine that warfare is not inherently kinetic. Defining warfare however is a debate in itself and would lead us too far from the core subject: strategic simulations and their relations towards grand strategy, strategic culture and civ-mil relations. If we define a wargame within the container concept of strategic simulations through its correlation with war then we could create many more categories. Its context would define its type. LAND RUSH, the simulation mentioned before, would then be called an agricultural game or land ownership game.

Strategic simulations can also be divided in how the adjudication takes place between actions. Actions can be evaluated by comparing it to predetermined information and rules. When a horse takes a rook in chess that action is evaluated as correct by the knowledge of the rules of the game that are agreed upon beforehand. This is the same when experts create and determine the outcomes

of military actions through extensive tables based on prior research concerning probabilities which are agreed upon before the start of the simulation. The deployment of a certain force to combat an adversary will then have a certain result. The armoured division takes control of the town from the small local militia. Uncertainty and chance can always be introduced, the so-called role of the dice. This represents the incomplete knowledge of the situation and the unforeseen events that can evolve from this. If we take the invasion of Ukraine, many experts did not think that Ukraine would survive the Russian invasion (Konaev & Daniels, 2023). The discussion when such form of adjudication is applicable is to be determined in relation to the topic and goal of the strategic simulations. Another form of adjudication is the one we see in matrix games. The outcome in a matrix game is described through discussing the effects of the action and on what basis it is viable. The outcome is then reached through this debate by common agreement or an umpire who decides what the most convincing argument was (Curry et al., 2019). In this sense, a Model United Nations (MUN) simulation could be a matrix game where the adjudication of actions is reached through consensus. I myself participated in an inter-university MUN that was preceded by studying the position of your allotted country, the subject of the debate and weekly practice. The result of our actions were dependent on the ability to argue your case and find support for its outcome. The different types of adjudications might at first glance be difficult to reconcile, these forms however can be successfully used together within a single strategic simulation. Again, the design is dependent on the use. It is also important to note that the scientific field of game theory is applicable to strategic simulations in designing certain simulations and in the analyses of the results. The theory even supports the use and validity of the strategic simulations in the way that it explains how we can look at the world through the lens of games (Binmore, 2007). It does not however mean that game theory is a dominant factor or the underpinning theory for strategic simulations.

6.2. A short history

Strategic simulations have been used throughout history in different forms and in different ways. Most historical examples found are military ones, with a few exceptions. In more recent times we see the use of strategic simulations in a wide variety of subjects. The traditional format of representing armies through miniatures on a board is thought to date back to ancient Sumerian and Egyptian times (Perla & Curry, 2011). Wei qi (better known under its Japanese name go) is an ancient Chinese board game dating back to the famous military theorist Sun Tzu and according to professor Henry Kissinger still important in understanding Chinese strategy today (Kissinger, 2010). Envoys of the Byzantine empire were tested on topics with hypothetical situations in order to evaluate how they would react to them before being sent on mission (Luttwak, 2009). This form of matrix gaming is still used today in many diplomatic services around the world as a form of examination. When Machiavelli, in his book *The Prince*, recommends hunting it is also meant as a mental exercise. To learn the lay of the land and through imagining possible future conflicts the implication of the geographical features (Machiavelli, 2010). Military staff rides are the continuation of this practice. The Prussian general von Verdy (1876) would even argue that the

methods used during the staff rides of Von Moltke the elder should be applied in military strategic simulations. In 1664 Christopher Weikmann, a resident of Ulm, invented 'Koeningspiel' which was a complicated version of chess with a larger board and more pieces. The game's goal was to teach the military and political principles of the time (Perla & Curry, 2011). We find a departure from chess with Johann George Julius Venturini in 1797, who was an engineer officer for the Habsburg empire. His work used thirty-six hundred coloured terrain squares to show different terrain features to simulate its effect on war. These simulations were meant to support scenario planning and train future officers in war and the connection of all its components (Mitchell, 2019). This simulation was the basis for the later evolution of German military strategic simulations, such as those of general von Verdy regarding staff rides. The first naval military simulation was invented by John Clerk, a Scotsman that had most notably never been to sea. He used models to reenact naval battles in order to revolutionise the naval tactics of the time. His published works in 1782 influenced Admiral Sir George Rodney, who credited Clerk's tactics, with his victory over the French fleet and capture of the French Admiral de Grasse (Perla & Curry, 2011). As mentioned before, naval simulations did not end there but continued to flourish in the inter-war period and during WWII. Ground simulations even took a next step during this period with the Louisiana manoeuvres, held by the US army in 1941. A complete campaign was simulated with 472.000 military personnel. Going to such lengths even to drop flower bags from planes to simulate bombardments. The simulation has been attributed with changing the doctrine for the mechanised forces in the US army and signalling out the talent of future WWII war heroes, such as Dwight D. Eisenhower and George Patton (Mason, 2021). George Marshall himself, chief of staff of the U.S. army during WWII who made the army that won the war, first showed his extraordinary talents during a strategic simulation in 1914 in the Philippines. Lessons learned there found their way in the US war plans years later during the war with Japan (Roll, 2019).

Strategic simulations used for military ends can and have been misused however and it is in WWII that we find an example of this. Debating their future strategy for the war, Japan held a naval wargame for the Midway campaign. Senior officers tampered with the results they did not like during the simulation in favour of the Japanese forces (Perla & Curry, 2011). Defeating the point of the simulation. For a simulation used for such purpose is about imagining how you want your future to unfold and then testing it with rigour. In this way a simulation is a mirror, benchmark, test and a tool to learn and list the unknown unknowns. It does not show the future, it should enrich you to expect the unexpected and give experience in flexibility. Japan in WWII is not the only state that succumbed to this fallacy. The US made the same mistake in 2002 with their Millennium challenge simulation, diverting the original purpose of a free simulation to a scripted one (Zenko, 2015). Strategic simulations should not be seen as public relations (PR) opportunities because it is in these simulations that we should leave room to make grave mistakes.

6.3. Current examples of use

To take a step back from the historical evolution of strategic simulations, which is mostly dominated by the military users, we will now take a look at three strategic simulations that have been used after 2000. It should give us a better understanding of the broad application of strategic simulations.

In Japan, researchers studied how the use of imaginary role play can have a positive effect on the decision making process in regard to sustainable policy. Participants in the town of Yahaba were asked during policy debates to take the role of representatives of future generations and the current generation. Participants alternated roles, in order that all participants had played both. Participants were asked to wear certain clothing when they were a representative from the future. Helping them in their role, resembling a uniform. During multiple sessions the research found that a self-reflective viewpoint was created. Developing a greater awareness of the current generation's responsibility and exhibiting greater empathy for their neighbours in the present. Shared viewpoints were developed and with a higher degree of viewpoint-sharing came an increase in participants' feeling of responsibility to pass things on to the future generations. The study proved the effectiveness of the simulation in leading individuals to detach themselves and set aside their normal self-interests, adopting a self-reflective viewpoint. This study shows us how simulations can shift perspectives and could perhaps even change institutions and social systems (Hara et al., 2021). When applied to the field of grand strategy we can immediately see the advantage of creating a strategic culture that is geared towards the future.

LAND RUSH, the simulation over land rights has already been mentioned a few times and we will now take a closer look. This simulation is played out on a board with participants taking the role of three social classes of farmers. Rich large-scale investor farmers, middle income farmers and poor farmers. The simulations represent real-life dynamics we see, such as changing agrarian policies, institutional plurality and the effects of unequal power relations in negotiations. Core concepts of the simulation are replicating a scenario in how power relations influence agency of different socioeconomic groups and in which manner this can induce poverty and inequality. Replicating the situation on the ground we see in some developing countries, placing participants in the role of local actors, provide a new perspective on the major issues for the participants. Different iterations of the simulations provided different outcomes through the strategies used. Sometimes the poor were exploited, sometimes they were able to force the rich to act as benefactors in order to survive and sometimes they even thrived over the middle and rich farmers when successfully negotiating collective action between themselves. The simulation does not determine the correct future action that needs to be taken nor does it simulate the entire complexity of land rights (Ansoms et al., 2015). What makes it important for this research is the two capabilities of simulations it highlights. The first is in how simulations can teach certain theories and real-life dynamics that otherwise remain rather abstract. It gives the participant some experience in how they operate in relation to each other. Secondly, participants had to take stock of their situation and through trial and error deal with their position. Both are important cornerstones of strategic simulations and useful when applied to grand strategy. As we will see when examining

grand strategy, the ability to creatively deal with the reality of your situation is a must. A place to learn this general principle where mistakes are not permanent is highly recommended.

The last strategic simulation we will look at in this part of the research is the international crisis wargame. The study sought to develop the experimental wargaming method and practice that could provide new opportunities to answer broad questions concerning decision making, crisis behaviour and patterns of outcomes. Explicitly experimental choices were used to test hypotheses about cyber and nuclear stability. To test these hypotheses, the researchers designed their scenarios around the questions of how players would react if an adversary targeted their nuclear command, control and communications (NC3) during a crisis and how players would behave if they had the opportunity to target an adversary. The scenarios raised questions to the participants on territorial integrity and risks of potential escalation. Participants were selected with the aim to replicate a cabinet of policymakers with diverse expertise. Participants could choose certain roles that can be found in a national security cabinet. These roles had no special benefit except for those that the participants collectively gave them. The overall design of the simulation opted for replicability and control over complexity and player immersion, allowing game reproduction over a large scale and time to create generalisability. Providing insight on how crisis management in this scenario could evolve (Schechter et al., 2021). This strategic simulation provides experience for participants in a certain situation. In the same manner that the Japanese research did, participants had to assume and debate from a position that most do not hold until the moment arrives. This experience cannot of course be applied in a copy-paste manner. Events rarely unfold in the exact same way as the scenario of the simulation. They do however touch upon the same key aspects. It is experience that informs a person how they would instinctively react, giving the opportunity for reflection without the burden of lasting consequences. One of the methods used for data collection in the international crisis wargame was through the response plans groups had to provide when choosing their course of action (COA). Elements such as describing the desired end state, ranking objectives according to priority and redefining a complex debate in a simple COA are applicable to grand strategy. Because grand strategy is about knowing yourself and defining your priorities towards a desired future in a simple and clear way. As we will see in the next section.

7. Grand Strategy

Grand strategy is a simple and yet too complicated concept to faithfully explain in a few sentences. Good grand strategy can be described in core tenets that can be read, but should be understood for practical use. Grand strategy cannot be ignored according to the same logic that makes life difficult to ignore. Perhaps the question should not be if a state has a grand strategy but if a state knows what grand strategy implies. For a good grand strategy is essential if a state does not want to eternally react to the strategic choices of other states that establish the norms in the international order (Biscop, 2021).

7.1. Defining grand strategy

Grand strategy is the level at which states use different capabilities in order to achieve goals in the international realm that is also influenced by other states (Luttwak, 2009). The ultimate goals of a state, and the ultimate goal grand strategy strive towards, is the survival of the state and its way of life (Biscop, 2021). The aspects in the world that facilitate and further this goal are a state's interests. These interests can be divided into two general categories. Those that are necessary for the survival of the state and its way of life, being vital interests. Normal interests are those that enhance both the relative position of the state in the international order but are not directly necessary for the survival of the state or its way of life (Biscop, 2021). For example, we could say that the Nile is a vital interest of Egypt. Therefore, the building of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam in Ethiopia could be construed as a threat to that vital interest if no prior agreements are made (Marshall, 2021). Water shortages in Egypt would endanger the survival of the state and the way of life. Then there are interests that are not vital at the moment, but could spiral into vital interests down the line. The spread of extremism in the Sahel is not a vital interest for Belgium at the time of writing. Our state's survival and way of life are not endangered at this moment. However it is not difficult to imagine the situation evolving into a vital interest. Momentarily, the Sahel is a breeding ground for extremism and violence (Kovalčíková & Faleg, 2022). This region can have a lasting impact on the future of Africa if not handled correctly and the future of Africa is in the interest of most states (Wilén, 2023). A domino effect can always create a vital interest. Yet it doesn't have to. It is certainly not preordained that every interest will eventually evolve into a vital interest. The possibility is there and therefore it is important to know what has an effect on your interests and how interests may evolve into vital interests. The ultimate goal of grand strategy can never be accomplished. It is a continual labour until it fails and the state stops to exist. Therefore we can see the grand strategy of a state throughout long stretches of time. If a state has a relatively good grand strategy, it implies that the vital interests are secured and that the state survives the passage of time. Studies on the grand strategy of the Roman (Lacey, 2022), Byzantine (Luttwak, 2009) and Habsburg (Mitchell, 2019) empires are examples of this.

Grand strategy will first and foremost be an acknowledgement of the reality in which the state is situated. This means that it will clearly determine the vital interests and the normal interests of the state (Biscop, 2021). Furthermore a grand strategy must acknowledge the current capabilities and position of the state in relation to the world and other states and how it wants this to be in the future. Ends, ways and means. The historical example of the Habsburg empire shows how this is done. Knowledge about the people and geography from which the empire was made dictated a certain type of military and political strategy for the survival of the Empire. This could be summarised as defensive layers to provide time. The first line were secure buffers to hinder and give early warning of invasions. The second was a network of frontier forts to hold the enemy at bay because of the distance between the multiple frontiers of the empire. The third was a standing army to react and hold until an allied coalition was formed through diplomacy, because the multi-ethnic composition of the empire made the fast and large ensemble of armies difficult (Mitchell, 2019). The Habsburg empire acknowledged the reality in which the state was situated. Grand strategy is however more than the military and political reality as shown in this example (Hart, 2004).

Grand strategy encompasses all aspects out of which the state exists (Biscop, 2021). These aspects are those that determine the reality of the world that influences that state (1) and those that the state itself has influence over to shape the reality of the world (2). However, there is not always a clear divide between the two, because the boundaries of human capabilities are not yet found. Perhaps it is better to define them as aspects that don't change easily and quickly and those that are more able to do so. The first set of aspects are for example geography, population and history. A state will be beholden to its geography which in turn will determine its (vital) interests. As mentioned before, Egypt can't change the fact that the source of the Nile is in Ethiopia. Militarily, the Habsburg empire had strong geographical defensible features yet was also vulnerable when the entryways to the empire were breached with the Danube making internal travel fast. Not dictating its strategic options, but limiting it when rationality is applied (Mitchell, 2019). The population of a state also has influence on the state. If we take Belgium, we might discuss the effect of the language and identity divide between the Flemish and Walloon parts of the country (Deneckere et al., 2019). The fact that a country such as Japan is facing serious future problems with low birth rates certainly has an effect on the state (McElhinney, 2023). The history of a state is not easily changed, because it already happened and it has an impact on its strategic culture, which in turn has an impact on the grand strategy of a state. Yet we can see that these aspects are not completely safe from the influence of the state. Policy might be created that changes the history books, or encourages parenthood. This will however not immediately make the population forget what they know or fill the maternity wards in hospitals. The second set of aspects are the political system, the economy, the military, etc. All the elements we traditionally associate with the state instead of the country. To clarify the difference between what is understood under a state and a country: the *country* we know as Belgium has existed since 1830, the federal *state* of Belgium in its current form came to be in 2014 (FOD Kanselarij van de Eerste Minister & FOD Beleid en Ondersteuning, 2023).

In the intersections created between the first and second set of aspects we find the domains that a state would normally focus on. An export based economy with natural harbours might invest in the creation of actual harbours and enhance its trade capabilities. Further ensuring access to these harbours and the sea routes used for trade remain open, might then be a logical consequence. All these domains, together with the reality of the world and the (vital) interests of the state, need a strategy to survive the test of time. Admiral Wylie (2013) described strategy as “*A plan of action designed in order to achieve some end; a purpose together with a system of measures for its accomplishment.*”. These strategies serve the domain itself, can serve the purpose of another domain and are the sub-strategies for the greater grand strategy of the state (Biscop, 2021). In grand strategy they all revert back to the vital and non-vital interests of the state. The economic composition of the Byzantine empire, its cultural heritage and splendour together with the reality of the world the empire found itself in is an example of this. All these elements induced a grand strategy that was primarily focused on influencing foreign rulers to serve the empire instead of destroying it. Although this has not kept the Byzantine empire from investing in its military (Luttwak, 2009). A grand strategy cannot ignore a domain which should always work in service of the grand strategy. Grand strategy works with power through the capabilities of the state. The capabilities are generated by the aspects out of which the state exists and all are interconnected. Making power something that comes from all and is felt by all (Biscop, 2021).

Grand strategy when created is also a method of communication. You let your population, allies and adversaries know what can be expected from the state (Biscop, 2021). Because grand strategy also communicates the future that the state wants, it should be guarded against sudden large shifts in policy. When changed too often you take the risk of never reaping the fruits of strategy and becoming an unpredictable actor in the international community (Biscop, 2021). It should not be forgotten that grand strategy is the combination of more than one domain and it is through the experience of the past, the efforts of connecting the ends through successful ways with the available means that should form the basis from which grand strategy comes forward (Mitchell, 2019). Furthermore, grand strategy has the possibility of creating a multiplier effect through its interconnectivity with all aspects of the state (Biscop, 2021). The Byzantine grand strategy of persuading their adversaries in fighting for Constantinople was exemplified in the enhancement of the capital and its religious credentials. Serving religious unity and a dominant position within the empire and developing overwhelming prestige and awe, enticing others to the imperial banners (Luttwak, 2009). Therefore it should not be surprising that changing your grand strategy too often leads to difficulties down the line and a weak grand strategic concept. A good grand strategy should be able to react to changes in its environment, which is not the same as changing the grand strategy. When it is changed, this could disqualify a document from being a grand strategy and be a sign of a weak strategic culture.

In this sense, grand strategy is ultimately rational. Rational in the sense that it is logical to a certain extent. Perhaps even predictable. Yet also rational that it should not react emotionally to changes in its environment (Biscop, 2021). Today's enemies are perhaps tomorrow's friends or even saviours (Luttwak, 2009). This does not mean that a grand strategy is inherently immoral or

opportunistic. A strategy that is supported by a shared system of morality has an effect on its validity and political or societal survivability (Wylie, 2013). However important this can be, an overbearing morality has no use in strategy when it imperils the end goal of grand strategy (Gladdis, 2018). In this sense, grand strategy needs to enable a state of working with others on certain aspects without agreeing and contributing to those that go directly against our values. Grand strategy cannot be perfect, because the goal is unattainable yet ever necessarily strived for. Waiting for the perfect situations can only lead to doing nothing (Biscop, 2021). When discussing the exploits of Scipio Africanus, Liddle Hart (2004, p.44) stressed the importance of gaining strategic initiative. Meaning that you create situations where you are one step ahead of the others and limiting the choices other states have. Grand strategy in this sense is preparing the state so that it may have a general understanding of how it should react towards unfolding events in the future (Biscop, 2021). If we take the famous OODA loop, developed by US Air Force colonel John Boyd as an example we can see how grand strategy helps a state to gain the strategic initiative. The OODA loop is a representation of how initiative is gained by disrupting the OODA loop of your adversary and starts with *Observation*. The continual development of awareness under changing circumstances and imperfect information. Through this the *Orientation* evolves with every new input, on which *Decisions* are made and *Actions* taken. This process creates a certain rhythm in which actions are taken. Initiative is gained when the other's rhythm is disrupted. Through the effectiveness of your own OODA loop and how it interacts with that of your adversary, you gain insight into the rhythm and how it might be disrupted (Luft, 2020). Grand strategy is preparing your OODA loop to the fullest possible extent of effectiveness. A state knows its interests and goals by which it can filter what is important to observe. The state has already oriented itself through its interests and self-knowledge by which it gains flexibility to apply new observations. This leaves room to find the correct timing to make decisions on actions towards the desired end state.

Building further on this, good grand strategy and strategy in general can to a certain extent bridge the gap between states. Forcing conscious regard for the needs of the future and beyond the demands of the present, by which they have to find the most effective way of using the internal resources of the state (Mitchell, 2019). This refers back to the multiplier effect of the grand strategy discussed earlier, if it is applied rationally. Ideology can guide us when organising our own society but should never be applied in foreign policy in order to force other states to conform to our own way of life (Biscop, 2021). Using ideology to build your grand strategy is a double edged sword. Success could lead to strategic and ideological victories, failure guarantees a strategic setback and imperils the entire foundation on which you have built (Luttwak, 2009). Normative power is also not enough for effective grand strategy because it can be ignored and moralising across the line makes it difficult to maintain relations with other states and creates blocs that won't cooperate.

Grand strategy is not without sometimes having to choose an unpleasant option from even worse alternatives (Biscop, 2021). B. H. Liddle Hart phrased it perfectly when he wrote:

“No man is a hero to his valet and but few generals are heroes to their chief of staff officers, who see them intimately in their nude qualities beneath the trappings of authority and public reputation” (Hart, 2004, p. 25).

Courage is needed to take the responsibility to act, doing nothing is also an action when chosen, and actions are needed in face of an ever changing environment. Grand strategy can provide guidance and courage if it is used. Having a grand strategy is not the same as effectively using your grand strategy (Biscop, 2021).

7.2. Grand Strategy in Europe & Belgium

In order to examine grand strategy in Europe and Belgium we will look at two documents. The EU strategic compass for security and defence (strategic compass) and the National Security Strategy of Belgium (NSSB). Looking at the strategic compass (European Union, 2022), we see certain aspects of grand strategy. In his foreword, High Representative Joseph Borrell, defines the strategic compass as a guide for the EU security and defence agenda for the next ten years. Highlighting the importance of prospective reasoning and long term goals which are essential for grand strategy. The purpose is to make the EU a stronger and more capable security provider to protect the EU interests and values. We could ask ourselves what the interests are of the EU considering they do not always align with the interests of member states. It is however possible to ascertain EU interests. As long as the member states of the union find it of vital interest, the survival of the EU and the protection of its way of life remains a common vital interest. The strategic compass starts with an observation of the world today. An important step as we have seen is identifying the world around you in relation to your own position. The first two aspects of the OODA loop, observing and orienting. It identifies countries and regions, communicating how the EU views these and what the EU's interests are. All chapters in the strategic compass clearly state the desired objectives of the respective subjects and how it plans to achieve these. In most perspectives it could be deemed a grand strategy of the EU, but is it? No. One of the most important defining aspects to determine if something is a grand strategy is its implementation. If we take the definition at the beginning of this section we can first ask if the EU is a state. In some perspectives it certainly acts as a state-like actor. However, if a state(-like actor) does not use the different capabilities in the way described by the grand strategy, then the document is not a grand strategy. It would not have been possible to study the grand strategy of Roman, Byzantine and Habsburg empires if they did not act according to a definable long term course. The possibility

exists for the strategic compass to become a grand strategy, but the actions of both institutions and member states will have to match that grand strategy. If a crisis validates the disregard of the grand strategy, then it was no grand strategy to begin with.

The NSSB is another document with the possibility of being a grand strategy. If we look at the table of contents we already see the basic components of grand strategy. An acknowledgment of Belgium's position in the world, its vital interests, the elements that change the world in relation to Belgium's interests and a general direction for policy (Nationale Veiligheidsraad, 2022). When describing Belgium in the world, the NSSB highlights important factors. It clearly describes the position of the state without going into too much detail. There is little to remark on this section because it passes the grand strategic hurdle of knowing yourself. Belgium is a diverse country with strong multilateral connections, an open economy and logistical hub for Europe. There are only two elements that could have been developed more. The historical legacy that created a unique political structure is not something to be disregarded, although the NSSB does not dive deeper into what this means for its grand strategy. This begs the question whether this is something that could serve the state and the grand strategy in a peculiar way or if it is something that the political parties agreed to mention as a mere talking point. The former could imply some use, the latter is an empty acknowledgement. Grand strategy is rational. It does not mean it bypasses cultural history completely. Mentioning its existence is not the same as acknowledging its place in grand strategy. The geographical context is explained briefly and without a clear message. It is however possible to find the components throughout the documents that paint a more complete picture. The ports play an important role in Belgium on multiple fronts and have historically proven their worth. The maritime domain could have been stressed more clearly, communicating its vitality for Belgium's interests. Geography is one of the grand strategic junctions for other elements and as we have seen for those that are more deterministic than others (Mitchell, 2019). There is also nothing to be said on the vital interests that are stated. Overall the NSSB could be a grand strategy in the same manner that the strategic compass could be. Yet in the same manner this document too fails to be a grand strategy at this point in time. It raises the question whether everybody understands the grand strategy in the same way when reading it. A grand strategy with multiple interpretations that could lead to contradictions is no grand strategy. The NSSB clearly states the importance of cooperation and synergy in the security domain with our strategic partners, such as the UK (Nationale Veiligheidsraad, 2022, p. 38). A governing party however blocked the export of technology to the UK that was essential for the nuclear submarines of Belgium's NATO partner (Van De Velden, 2023). Ideology, national political profiling and/or a grand strategy with multiple interpretations could have played a role. On nuclear weapons, the NSSB states that it will work with EU-NATO allies in finding a way to give a new impulse to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (Nationale Veiligheidsraad, 2022, p. 36). Leaving room for interpreting certain sections of the NSSB in different ways.

The purpose of this policy brief is however not to find all discrepancies between the two documents and grand strategy. The main focus remains establishing strategic simulations as a method to provide good grand strategy and a healthy strategic culture. This short overview of both

documents does raise the question if grand strategy is possible when it is not carried and followed across the strategic establishment? If it is not, then the supposed grand strategy is liable to change with every election and new government. Which would automatically imply that it is not a grand strategy. Is it then possible to establish a written grand strategy, that would comply with all the tenets of good grand strategy, in a democracy? Yes it is, through strategic culture. The danger of a document such as the NSSB is what I would call: the expert's grand strategy. In principle such a grand strategy is written with little fault and a great deal of rationality. The strategic establishment made a document that could be a grand strategy. Yet the wording of such a document leaves political (and not strategic) flexibility because it is not carried in the same manner by the political elite. Political flexibility to ignore key tenets of good grand strategy. The reason for this is because there is no overarching strategic culture that binds the political elite with the entire strategic establishment to the grand strategy. We will examine strategic culture more closely in the next section of this policy brief.

7.3. Strategic Simulations and Grand Strategy

In his book 'On Grand Strategy', John Lewis Gaddis makes probably the best argument for strategic simulations to be used in service of grand strategy. Stating that: "*training is the best protection against strategies getting stupider as they become grander, a recurring problem in peace as well as war. It is the only way to combine the apparent opposites of planning and improvisation*" (Gaddis, 2018, p.25). Yet it is said that strategic thinking, power and how to use it is lost in many EU member states (Biscop, 2021). Making the reintroduction of a method to practise this important.

Strategic simulations can be beneficial to grand strategy in different ways, especially in educating the concepts of grand strategy. One of the key advantages is creating an understanding of grand strategy step by step, whilst leaving room for improvisation. Gradually providing experience in what a good grand strategy is and can provide. A luxury that is rarely given in the real world because events rarely afford mistakes without consequences. The US AirForce for example invests a lot in the creation of flight simulations to train fighter pilots and test AI controlled fighter jets. Valuable lessons are learned and experience gained during these simulations without risking material damage or loss of life. This does not mean that these simulations are a true representation of the real world. The simulated planes fly in controlled, known, digital environments and would most likely fail in real life. This tells us two important aspects of simulations and to an extent strategic simulations (Scharre, 2023). It is not possible to completely establish the world in a simulation. It is however possible to find and learn certain principles. Referring back to WATU during WWII, this unit could not predict submarine attacks or recreate all influences. It could and did however discover and teach principles of convoy defence against submarine attack to great effect (Parkin, 2019). The same holds true for grand strategy. Strategic simulations are able to discover and teach principles of grand strategy. Professor Biscop (2021) notes that creativity is an essential part of grand strategy. Creating new ways to produce, use and combine instruments

together with determining new goals in service of the state's interest (Biscop, 2021). After having spent half of my secondary education in the arts and three years of higher education in the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, I can say that most creativity comes from doing and experiencing. Input produces new output. More detailed research between creativity and play can be found in Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* where play is the central concept of the theory (Huizinga, 2014).

Strategic simulations are also perfectly placed to simulate end state situations and instil a reflective thought process to describe the desired end state to its fullest. Liddle Hart (2004) rightly points out that there are far more who have won than those that have used it to their advantage and that the fruits of victory are to be found in the years after peace. The argument has been made that the US might have won the war in Iraq but that it certainly has lost the peace afterwards (Mattis & West, 2019). A country that is still unstable and plagued by violence at the moment of writing. Achieving an objective is not enough and certainly not in grand strategy. Grand strategy takes the long view because its ultimate goal remains as long as the state remains. This means that reaching an objective is also only part of the bigger timeline and level on which grand strategy is settled. Strategic simulations can help develop such a comprehension by forcing participants to think about what they want to do after success. Why was success necessary in the first place if it signals the end? Success in a sub-strategy can have an ending, success in grand strategy does not have an end state. This could be modelled through the combination of military and political simulations. The political simulation has a certain set of problems it needs to tackle and on the basis of this it gives directions to the military simulation who will have to tackle their own specific problems within the lines set by the political simulation. An end state of the military simulation can then provide the scenario for the political simulation where the purpose is to evaluate how certain decisions translated into new realities with which will have to be worked now. It is important to know what is understood under a more perfect peace.

“That the true national object in war, as in peace, is a more perfect peace. War is the result of a menace to this policy and is undertaken in order to remove the menace and by the subjugation of the will of the hostile state.” (Hart, 2004, pp.152-153)

Brand and Edel (2019) tell us that the ancient Greek proclivity for tragedies was an expression meant to face the chaos of the real world and inspire them to construct order out of it. Strategic simulations can be those representations of chaos that should induce us to create order through grand strategy. Since the world is not inhabited by one state, it remains important to remember that other states have a grand strategy and that you face a thinking adversary that reacts. This elementary fact of grand strategy can be represented in strategic simulations through the use of two teams that don't know they are playing against each other. When one group learns about a certain set of concepts about grand strategy, the other group simulates the concepts and vice versa. Their actions create the conditions for each other to act in. Enforcing the idea of having a thinking

adversary. A strategic simulation could signal the vital interest and normal interests of states through domino effects. When in play certain actions or allocations of resources could produce worsening results or end game finalities. This is akin to simulating nuclear escalation. When does the threat of nuclear war imperil the vital interests, outweighing the normal interests? Yet a sense for domino effects is important to have, this is the ability of prospective rationality. Understanding how certain things such as the Sahel may evolve into vital interests down the line. Strategic simulations are perfectly placed to train people in long term goal thinking. Because you have the luxury of working with turns that stretch multiple years. This makes it possible to gain a comprehensive understanding on the principle that grand strategy does not stop at a certain point. It continues. It is important that actions taken have a lasting effect and that a good grand strategy should enable the continued use of a general COA.

It would only be logical then that we simulate documents that strive to be grand strategies. If we take the NSSB for example. There are statements in this document that could be simulated and put to the test. A simulation offers a means to identify and test possible outcomes of new policies (Bae, 2022). Firstly it is a test of interpretation, because when you simulate it you find out how everybody acts under the given grand strategy. What is understood will translate in what actions are taken and a debate will ensue on how the grand strategy should be operationalised. It is a form of communication because you can invite allies to see or participate in a simulation to give them a better and more practical understanding of what is meant by the grand strategy. This builds for example on the statement that professor Biscop (2021) made on the importance of not only showing the physical aspects of a connectivity strategy but also feeling connected. This mental connection can be produced through practice which gives reassurance. Strategic simulations are a cost effective method to establish this. Not replacing other methods but supplementing them, strengthening the bonds with partners and within a state itself.

8. Strategic culture

Strategic culture is the driving force behind grand strategy. It is the element that interconnects the aspects of (grand) strategy, civ-mil relations and so much more. It is influenced by all and influences all. Therefore it is important to examine strategic culture in order that we may use it and contribute to it. For it is a strategic culture that strategic simulations are suited to adapt. We will see how when discussing the application of strategic simulations. First we will take a look at certain definitions of strategic cultures and examples of how states are influenced by their strategic culture.

8.1. Defining strategic culture

There are certain definitions of strategic culture that are interesting to put forward and examine. Firstly, they show that there is no common definition that is accepted across the board (which is true for many terms in the art of strategy). They remain, however, in the same abstract theoretical spirit to a large extent. Secondly, the definitions are not contradicting each other to the extent of complete confusion. They can be forced together in a satisfactory scientific monster of Frankenstein. Many elements are capable of explaining a certain strategic culture and when examining a country's strategic culture one should strive to encompass all these elements. Some however will have more weight in the make-up of the strategic culture than others. To keep with our morbid metaphor; one body part donor holds the largest share in the total constitution of the monster. Yet this does not imply that the other elements are to be overlooked. For it could even be argued that all elements will be swallowed by time to become part of the historical argument. You can look at the elements separately and gain great insight, yet should never forget that it is connected to much more, knitting the body together. The elements that a good strategic culture and grand strategy share are those that for the greatest part should define a grand strategy. The elements that lean more towards strategic culture are those that influence how a grand strategy will look and how it will be followed. For one should always be wary of the perfect grand strategy from experts that is ignored by the policy makers.

"The sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses and patterns of habitual behaviour that members of a community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to strategy (Zapfe, 2016)"

The most interesting part in this definition that stands out is the fact that strategic culture can also come from instruction or imitation. Meaning that if enough people are taught to think in a certain way, others will follow and a strategic culture may be formed. The (sometimes) slow and

unpredictable march of time to create history is not always necessary to change a strategic culture. Certain events, people or practices can also create a strategic culture for worse or good. Something I will dive into further when discussing how authoritarian regimes with a cult of personality create a certain strategic culture. Strategic culture however is not always deterministic for the policy behaviour of a country. Certainly in democracies some leeway should be given to discrepancies or deviations from strategic culture. Many elements make up a strategic culture, this is a double edged blade. Meaning that many elements also influence and change strategic culture.

"Strategic culture can be defined as a distinctive and lasting set of beliefs, values and habits regarding the threat and use of force which have their roots in fundamental influences such as geopolitical setting, history and political culture. (McCraw, 2011)"

Certain similar elements can be noticed in this definition when comparing it with the definition of Zapfe (i.e. : set of beliefs - sum total of ideas. // values - conditioned emotional responses // habits - habitual behaviour). This definition however comes closer to the (political) security domains and is less abstract. Furthermore it puts greater emphasis on what could be described as elements coming from the realist tradition of political science. It puts forward a more deterministic view on strategic culture with less agency for individuals to create sudden changes. However, McCraw (2011) points out that there is some disagreement with experts claiming that strategic culture outlasts all except from major changes, whereas others put forward that change can also come from continual small deviations. But more on the change of strategic culture later.

"Strategic culture is...a set of institutional beliefs within a society (more precisely within its political elite), transmitted through socialization mechanisms, regarding the roles of war, international relations and the use of force in foreign policy...[it] represents the framework through which the political elite interpret the main threats and opportunities that may emerge from the international system and the correct strategies of action (social practices) for addressing them (Rosa, 2014)"

Again we see recurring elements in this definition. Stating that the strategic culture is and can be transmitted through socialisation mechanisms. This is very similar to Zapfe's (2016) 'instructions or imitating' in the first definition. Rosa however gives more agency to the political elites when considering strategic culture. His definition also touches more explicitly upon elements of grand strategy. The interpretation of main threats and opportunities emerging from the international

system are core elements of what a grand strategy should have. He also acknowledges that it will be the political elite that respond to these emerging threats and opportunities with policy. Defining strategic culture as a framework more along practical lines. Strategic culture influences what should be done. It is the mother of a state's grand strategy.

"Strategic cultures include both the images of international politics (conflictual or cooperative) and the strategic preferences of the actors (military instruments or nonmilitary instruments). Strategic preferences are the result of the interaction between the collectively shared images of the world and the available resources (Rosa, 2018)"

This is a later definition of Rosa for strategic culture and although it does not contain any conflicting elements with his former definition, it adds an important aspect to consider. The aspect of available resources. When considering grand strategy one of the important articles is knowing yourself. Which of course includes knowing which resources are available, this eventually separates grand strategy from dreams for the future. Available resources furthermore are a deterministic element. Meaning that it is an element that should have an easier time crossing party lines than others. Again this is not surprising if we follow the argument from before that the elements strategic cultures share with grand strategy are those that (should) define the grand strategy of a state to the greatest extent. Grand strategy should cross party lines if you want an effective grand strategy. Grand strategy is almost a flexible truth. It can take different outward appearances, but the internal make-up remains to a large extent the same old truth of the matter. Other elements such as the geography are deterministic elements that share the same traits with available resources as an element that make up a strategic culture.

"States develop such a concept of their broad ends, and thus of their vital interests, over long periods of time, together with a general way of looking at the world and of dealing with other states. This can be called a state's strategic culture...This broad orientation may be shared by the public, but it mainly reposes in a state's strategic establishment: the politicians, diplomats, military officers and civil servants who prepare, decide and implement strategy, together with the specialized academics and journalists that contribute to the strategic debate. (Biscop, 2021)"

To close the definition portion of Strategic Culture, we will look at part of the definition professor Biscop gives us in his book *Grand Strategy in 10 words* (2021). Again we notice similarities with the previous examples. Yet instead of referring to the political elite, the term strategic

establishment is used. Which broadens the possible participants of this select group. Furthermore, this group is defined for us, giving a clearer picture. This is important because the term 'political elite' could be misinterpreted, including and excluding a great number of people, all with somewhat logical arguments. It is important that this group is defined correctly because strategic culture displays its duality when coming in contact with people. It influences people and is influenced by people. Further in his book professor Sven Biscop (2021) points out that countries with a weak strategic culture have certain characteristics. These being volatile and with fragmented internal politics, no coherent strategic elite, a weaker military and diplomatic capabilities than states with strong strategic cultures. Having no clear grand strategy or at least not a really inspiring one. This constitutes an important fact. You need a strategic culture to support your grand strategy. Otherwise there is almost no certainty that the governing class will follow the grand strategy, hollowing the grand strategy until it simply is another government document.

8.2. Seen in the world

8.2.1. Australia

Australia is a country where there has been a common strategic culture across party lines for many years. This strategic culture is dominated by the sense of vulnerability and insecurity. It has to do mainly with its geography and moments in history that enforced those elements. (McCraw, 2011). Geographically, Australia is one of the largest countries in the world and does not have the means to completely defend its territory and surrounding waters on its own. It is a western democracy far away from most countries that share its cultural basis. Its economic arteries are sea based and predominantly run through Asia (Marshall, 2021). This created a historic fear of being cut off by a large and strong Asiatic power that could dominate the region. Creating the need for being militarily capable and having strong allies (O'Keefe, 2019). Geography is in this sense a deterministic element. A lot will have to happen first before the geographical reality of Australia changes any time soon. Climate change is creating such a new reality, although it will not immediately change its strategic culture. Australia has always looked at military power and especially powerful allies to safeguard its security. Historically this was the British empire, but was replaced by the US when the UK was not able to stop the Japanese onslaught during WWII (McCraw, 2011). The AUKUS alliance is the most recent expression of this strategic culture.

8.2.2. Italy

A study on Italian strategic culture from 1945 (after WWII) up to 2010's found a main strategic culture concerning foreign policy that crossed party lines. This was partly explained by certain factors being; losing the war and internal stability (Rosa, 2014). When Italy lost in WWII a whole political class that followed the fascism of Mussolini had to make way for the more pacifist politicians. Furthermore, to deal with the past of the war, the term *mito autoassolutorio* was created. Meaning the self-absolving myth. A myth of the friendly, poor and simple Italian soldier next to the brutal German soldier. In the case of internal stability, the argument was made that internal Italian politics were volatile enough without giving external actors the opportunity to divide the country on matters concerning external policies. Concluding that Italy after WWII followed a temperate idealpolitik strategic culture (Rosa, 2018).

8.2.3. Germany

Germany is, like Italy, another state that lost WWII and is influenced by this in its strategic culture. The difference however is that there is no myth of the innocent, simple soldier in Germany as we have seen there is in Italy. German politics and certainly its strategic culture is greatly impacted by the sense of guilt for the horrific events that took place under the Nazi regime (Giegerich & Terhalle, 2021). The Nazi past does not however stand on its own. After the war, Germany was partitioned, occupied and put under certain structures in order to reintegrate into the West as a trusted partner. An example of this is the fact that the Bundeswehr (Germany's army) did not have its own operations command and control structures above the level of army corps until the 1990s (Zapfe, 2016). With all those influences, German strategic culture shaped its security policy to reject the use of military force as a legitimate political tool. Leading to neglect of and the creation of capability gaps in the military (Giegerich & Terhalle, 2021). Furthermore it leads to a focus on limiting the military to external threats, the slow adaptation to functional pressure and semantic struggles in the political sphere that hinders progress (Zapfe, 2016). An example of this is the 'COIN' doctrine debate. COIN stands for Counter Insurgency. The term was deemed unacceptable and ultimately replaced with 'conceptual basic thought on the military contribution to the establishment of security and public order in crisis regions', which does not exactly aid practical use (Zapfe, 2016). In my own country of Belgium we had a similar debate on arming military drones with missiles. This became a political discussion that started to use the term 'Killer Drone' and spiralled out of strategic rationale (Franssen, 2022). However, such debates that pride themselves on embracing pacifism might not be morally tenable today. Furthermore it could be perceived as self-indulgent and closing one's eyes to the world (Giegerich & Terhalle, 2021). Realities on the ground can force a strategic culture to change, as we can see in Japan.

Also one of the states that lost in WWII and was occupied, that even banned the use of military force in its constitution. However it is changing its stance away from history towards the needs of the future (S. A. Smith, 2019). A strategic culture that keeps hindering the adaptation to new realities might create certain problems that will be looked at more closely when we discuss civ-mil relations.

8.2.4. Authoritarian leaders with a cult of personality

As we have seen, many factors can determine a strategic culture. However this does not only happen because of geography, existing societal culture or the slow passage of time and the events that dot a countries timeline. Sudden events and political systems, with certain leaders, can have tremendous impact on the strategic culture of a country with the possibility of fusing with already existing trends in a state and creating a more lasting strategic culture. To further examine strategic culture in the effort to understand it better I put that a certain political structure has a greater chance of creating a certain strategic culture. This gives us greater insight in the meaning of strategic culture and what influences it. Furthermore it will help us to make the transition to civ-mil relations. The political structure in question is an authoritarian state with a leader that has a cult of personality. The general concept will be explained first, followed by examples.

A leader in such a state needs to look strong and stable. The continual maintenance of an image of strength and infallibility is crucial. The important question then is, what sources could fulfil the needs to build such an image? There are multiple answers to this question, because the answer is never black or white. It is nuanced. However, a majority share comes from the military. The military is not only a source of hard power, but also a source of soft power. It has an inherent image of strength. The military can also claim a special bond to nationalism if necessary. Serving the nation, the greater idea, can be powerful arguments. Military parades are an example of this. It should therefore also be no surprise that a leader with a cult of personality in an authoritarian regime would want to use this potential source of power to enhance the image. Therefore it is not uncommon to see such leaders wear the regalia of successful military commanders. There are a plethora of pictures to be found of such leaders with questionable military histories. Yet when we go further than just the image, the military also holds another important (hard power) function. The military is the ultimate force to keep the country and its people under control. To protect the leader and his/her policy from opposition. The military remains, besides becoming a soft power, also a source of hard power. Symbolic for the nation and the strength of the leader. It is at that moment the strategic culture starts to change. The military not only becomes a major power source for the regime but also one of its biggest threats.

For the military to be a profitable source for the cult of personality it should at least hold the mirage of capability and be able to control the population when necessary. This means that certain

investments need to be made to ensure it is a source of power. Making it potentially more dangerous. For the military can use this for their own personal popularity and bid for power. The military could launch its own coup d'état or refuse to stop a revolution from the people. The population is the final and greatest source of power, the military is the keeper of keys. Therefore an authoritarian leader with a cult of personality will make sure that he/she is at the top of the military establishment. Making sure that no coup is forthcoming. This means that two general options are available: making sure that the state leader is the beloved military leader at the top or creating the space for internal (organisational) dysfunctionality in the military to prevent another person becoming a national hero with a unified command. To quote the Sultan of Muscat Said bin Taimur, who said to his British military adviser:

"You must know, Colonel Smiley,' he replied in faultless English, 'that all revolutions in the Arab world are led by colonels. That is why I employ you. I am having no Arab colonels in my army.(Barr, 2018)"

Thus creating a weak strategic culture within a state, because almost all strategic thought will start and end with the leader of the state. His/her beliefs will dictate what is believed and over time become the strategic culture. This is however to the detriment of the state's capabilities and certainly to those of the military. A cult of personality is never a good source for a healthy strategic culture and does not have the necessary longevity aspect to create a good Grand Strategy. When the leader with a questionable military past holds the reins it becomes dangerous. For he who holds the reins needs to ride the horse, beware of the rider who only has experience on ponies. Fear of being outshone is what creates hollow strategic culture and could explain a weak elite at the top. The Roman empire is a prime example of this and will be our first deeper dive. For the fear of beloved generals with armies at their back is something that goes back to the time of the Roman Republic. Creating the strategic culture of the strong military leader of the state.

Power during the Roman empire in the age of emperors came from the legions, the military. Roman emperors needed their armies to gain the purple or keep it. A general with that was popular and with the love of his legions could make a bid for the throne. This is the reason why an emperor needed the image of being a strong military leader. Starting an almost necessary tradition of waging military campaigns when taking the title of emperor when it was thought that the military prestige was not great enough to be secure. Furthermore, the fear of rivals dictated the need to make sure that no cult of personality could take root around another. A general could also not have too many legions under his control for too long a time. Military success and power meant the danger of revolt (Lacey, 2022). This created and strengthened the strategic culture of a cult of personality in an authoritarian state. For it enforced the principle of taking out potential rivals

instead of trusting them or letting them take the lead. Successful generals had an incentive to revolt because they had become a danger. Linking the legions, the military to the emperor in this way is not only something of the past.

Saddam Hussein, the president of Iraq from 1979 to 2003 is perhaps one of the perfect embodiments of this. The study of Lawrence Freedman in his book *Command: the politics of military operations from Korea to Ukraine* (2022) paints the picture of what happens when this goes wrong. Saddam led Iraq into two wars that it was not prepared to fight and became weaker from. The strategic culture in the country revolved around the president. Around the belief in his cult of personality. Creating a weak strategic establishment at the top. He furthermore made sure no coup could be launched from the military, promoting (incompetent) loyalists and bringing to life the Republican guard and other paramilitary organisations (Freedman, 2022). Republican or Praetorian guard, the reason for its existence was the same for Saddam as it was for the Roman emperors. We see this also in another authoritarian state that leans heavily on a cult of personality next to Iraq, namely Iran. The revolutionary guard corps also functions to keep the regime in place and make sure that the traditional military does not have all the capabilities (Marshall, 2021).

This raises the question if it could partly explain the reason for Russia's failure to conquer Ukraine during its failed invasion that started on the 24th of February 2022. Could it be that a weak strategic culture, which is the driver behind grand strategy, was shaped by an authoritarian leader with a cult of personality? Putin might have created his own failure. Firstly, to lay the foundation of the argument. Putin can be described as an authoritarian leader with a cult of personality (Freedom House, n.d.). The military and military history hold special places for the cult of personality that is linked to a strong Russia. Military parades are moments of pride and a nationalistic symbol (Galeotti, 2022). Moreover, the Russian military is also a Russian institution that has a similar level of support from the Russian people as president Putin (Van Bladel, 2023). This could mean that the army is a potential rival if it wanted to, or if it really had the capacity. Because this brings us back to the failure in Ukraine. The invasion was initially launched from three points and it would have seemed that there was no overall commander in charge of the war (Evans, 2022). To a certain extent it could have been that this was a side effect of the strategic culture where no strong unified command could exist next to the authoritarian leader. The Russian army might have undergone a material transformation in the last decade (Kagan & Clark, 2023), but if the strategic culture does not facilitate internal reforms then it might count for significantly less. Keeping your army under centralised control with a decentralised military elite and corruption in the lower ranks might be a form of 'coup-proofing' your regime.

This shows the uneasy relationship between the military and political power in a state. In an authoritarian state with a cult of personality around its leader, it means that the strategic culture will suffer. However even democracies are not completely devoid of the tension between military and political power. They are certainly not immune to the power of a successful military hero. Eisenhower became president of the US and Charles de Gaulle of France. Popularity from

whichever origin can have the same effect when reaching for political power. A democracy however has its institutions and separation of powers that protects itself from the strategic culture of the authoritarian leader with a cult of personality. The foundations of the democratic state are there to serve as protection from the change in leadership and policy. The difficult line between the political elite and the military elite does however also exist in a different form. The line between military autonomy which is needed for it to be effective and how much political control should remain to restrain within the boundaries of our system. This refers to the Civ-Mil relationships within a state and will be discussed to a greater extent in the next section of this policy brief.

8.3. Strategic Simulations and Strategic Culture

“Success creates nations out of diverse groups, and expands them by attracting volunteers”
(Luttwak, 2009, p. 16)

When considering strategic culture, we have seen that it has been described as the result of instructions or imitation (Zapfe, 2016) or transmitted through socialisation mechanisms (Rosa, 2014). This would indicate that it is possible to create a strategic culture, perhaps even without a long history that preceded it. It suggests that by continual practice, a strategic culture could emerge. McCraw (2011) calls it a set of beliefs, values and habits. Habits are established through repetition and beliefs can be taught. In this sense we could describe strategic culture as a set of norms. This becomes interesting when we compare this with the study of Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink on international norm dynamics and political change (1998). In their study they state that norms have a life cycle in three steps: emergence, cascade and internalisation. This cycle could serve as the cycle in which the strategic culture can be established through the use of strategic simulations. In the first step, emergence, norm entrepreneurs with an organisational platform try to persuade others. This would be the initial training/lessons given through strategic simulations that try and persuade the strategic establishment in thinking along the lines of grand strategy and its implications. The second step, cascade, happens when state's, (international) organisations and networks promote the new norm(s) through socialisation, institutionalisation and demonstration. In the case of strategic simulations this would mean that the first phase is complete and that participants of a strategic simulations course on grand strategy are spreading the new 'norms' in their respective institutions. During such a course, the concept of demonstrations can be taken literally. Strategic simulations are capable of demonstrating how a certain set of beliefs, how different norms are translated into situations. The actions of participants can be analysed after the simulations and through interviews determine how and why certain decisions were taken. Furthermore, the norm of thinking along certain grand strategic principles can not only be shown but also instilled by strategic simulations. A course that lasts for a certain amount of time will amount to a socialisation process and create a further network that holds the new principle to value. Lastly, the third step, internalisation, constitutes the internalisation of the new norm. At this point it has become a habit and is institutionalised. This would mean that the strategic culture is

established. The norm of thinking along the lines of grand strategy has developed to the extent that it is used professionally. We have seen in the case of the Japanese research on imaginary future generations that this is possible. By instructing people to view a problem through a different perspective, it is possible to change perceptions (Hara et al., 2021).

Of course this is not always a simple process because the existing strategic culture might have a dominant effect on the use of strategic simulations. If we look at Germany, the strategic culture there decides which strategic simulations can be played. In the case of wargames, the ones that are played in the Command and Staff College are situated in a distant historical time period. The strategic culture, that is heavily influenced by WWII, prohibits the use of WWII or modern day wargames (Steenwege, 2021). There are still significant political, constitutional, educational and institutional factors that make changing German strategic culture a slow and difficult process, yet it is not perceived as impossible (Giegerich & Terhalle, 2021). In this sense, strategic simulations should be the last place to put restrictions on because they are a safe space to make mistakes without public repercussions. Strategic simulations should be the successes of Luttwak's quote at the beginning. Successes that create a nation. This is especially true for Belgium, where the strategic culture might sometimes be defined as splintered between the political parties.

9. Civilian-Military relations

When examining civilian-military relations we will predominantly focus on the relations in the strategic establishment between the political and military elite. The reason for this focus is because grand strategy and strategic culture are also predominantly made and felt in the strategic establishment as we have seen earlier. Therefore it will be the relationships between the political and military elite, who are part of the strategic establishment, that will have the largest effect and be the most affected by the strategic culture and the consequent grand strategy. The status of this Civ-Mil relationship could then be used as a barometer for the strategic culture in a state. Lastly we will again look at how strategic simulations can make a contribution.

9.1. Defining Civilian-Military relations

To begin, the military has three main responsibilities towards the state. Representing claims for military security within the state, advising and reporting on policy choices and implementing state decisions in regard to military security (Huntington, 1957). How these three functions are exactly represented will influence the civ-Mil relations and is decided by the government. Civ-Mil relations are the relations between the government and its military, how these should be ordered and maintained (Galbreath & Deni, 2018). The side that holds the most power will be able to decide the dynamic of the relationship and how it is structured. The military serves the state and in

extent those that represent the state. Meaning that it is the political elite that will predominantly decide how the Civ-Mil relation will take shape.

If the main ideology within the government is anti-military then the military will only acquire influence on policy by discarding some of their professionalism and conforming to the values and attitudes of the dominant ideology (Huntington, 1957). The military needs some measure of influence on policy in the sense that they are the experts who advise policy according to one of the three functions. If this is not desired, why should a state have a professional military elite in the form of an officers corps? When the military needs to politicise to the detriment of professionalism it can only lead to a constricting intellectual environment, stopping those that seek to improve the ability of the military to function (Friedman, 2021). When there is too much harmony it is as much a signal for bad Civ-Mil relations as is constant conflict. It can indicate that one side is neglecting their proper function in favour of duplicating the other's work (Huntington, 1957). One needs to only look at the purges under Stalin in the red army before WWII and the dismal state it produced to conclude that ideology is not a stable basis to build Civ-Mil relations on (Glantz & House, 2015). Along the same line it could be questioned if the military is also not a domain that is ill suited to mass opinion. In the same way that grand strategy is not suited for mass opinion and in extent ideology. This is not the same as taking power away from the population. It means that if the military is an instrument of grand strategy with the purpose of the survival of the state, the needs of the military are also influenced by the same elements that influence grand strategy. Meaning the reality of the world where there are more actors than the state itself. Certain facts that popular demand from the population cannot change. The aspects of the military that are therefore inline with the vital interest should be protected from popular mass opinion politics. Otherwise bad Civ-Mil relations can become a prelude to policy that is being led by popular demand and not according to grand strategy. If we take the example of the US before WW1, the influential naval officer and historian, A. T. Mahan regretted the unmilitary spiritedness of the American people who viewed it as alien. Finding that his warnings of the German threat and the need to prepare a naval force fell on deaf ears (Huntington, 1957). Strong civ-mil relations are a symbol of mutual understanding and a base for political courage.

On the military side, the quest to stay away from politics and politicisation can also cause harm. Making the military a machine dependent on the (political) state to start it, guide its actions and give it meaning. This type of civ-mil relations is problematic given the inevitable political nature some of the military's tasks have (Huntington, 1957). Furthermore the relationship described could lead to a disconnect between the military and the political elite that it serves, creating knowledge gaps on both sides with regard to the other. It could lead to politicians overcommitting the military beyond its capabilities on policy. Creating a military that is spread thin that has to be a jack of all trades. Senior officers within the Belgian armed forces have already said that they are not equipped for the demands that are being made upon them and which divert their attention from their core tasks. An example of this was patrolling the streets after the terrorist attacks. Another example is that of the Japanese Self Defence Force (JSDF). The high level of depoliticisation of the JSDF and the extreme level of political control over the JSDF have historically limited its

value abroad in military coalitions (S. A. Smith, 2019). It is also important that the military is aware of and adjusts their thinking to the political realities and public opinion to maintain effective and healthy Civ-Mil relations.

Samuel Huntington (1957) lays down three actions that both the civilian and the military side should refrain from to ensure military professionalism and objective civilian control. These negative duties are the basis for good civ-mil relations. Firstly, the administration should not punish officers for presenting their professional opinion when asked by a parliamentary body. Otherwise you will create knowledge gaps within the political elite. This was a constant during Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency and the Vietnam war that would eventually lead to a total breakdown in civ-mil relations when all was revealed at the end of the war (McMaster, 1997). Sadly, forcing military leaders to take responsibility for political mistakes is not a practice of the past. Secondly, the civilian control should never use the military to embarrass the administration. This only makes the position of the military more difficult towards the current administration and the population of the state. This refers back to the argument that we should not use the military, which holds an important position in grand strategy, for short term political gain. Thirdly, the military should not cross the boundaries of their expertise or their jurisdiction into those of politics and diplomacy. The best known example of this is General Douglas McArthur during the Korean war, who regularly overstepped this boundary (Freedman, 2022).

9.2. Why is it important now

Better Civ-Mil relations have always been, yet are becoming even more important in the future. When looking at the Ukrainian war with Russia, a lesson that is being drawn is the significance of societal resilience and resistance. Ukrainian territorial defence forces have shown their worth in repelling the invasion next to the regular military (Verstraete & Audoore, 2023). Multiple experts in Belgium are advocating for a similar territorial defence force, as some EU partners already have such as the Scandinavian countries, France and the Netherlands (Verstraete et al., 2023). Territorial reserves would take over aspects of homeland defence, security and aid to the nation. Freeing up the regular armed forces to focus more on core tasks. Meaning that there still would be a regular force with expeditionary capabilities. As can be seen at the moment of writing this policy brief, the revitalization of a military after years of neglect is not an easy task. Bringing a neglected military back up to standards comes with a price tag (Giegerich & Terhalle, 2021). Which asks a lot of political courage to do. The territorial defence force could be a cost-effective way to increase a military's capabilities, which is essential at this moment (Verstraete & Audoore, 2023). It would however mean a closer relationship between the military and society, making Civ-Mil relations more important in this regard.

A similar effort was made in the US during the period of 1918-1925 when the focus was on training the civilian components. The so-called splendid isolation of the military had to make way for a military that belonged to, was accepted by and could identify with the community. The US secretary of war in 1920 described it as the need of being in fresh and constant contact with the

thoughts and feelings of the civil fireside from which it had come (Huntington, 1957). Incidentally, this would take form before the US entered WWII in the concept of the ‘army of citizen soldiers’ that US Chief of Staff, General Marshall advocated strongly. Under the selective training draft, the regular army would take the role of training 600.000 citizens and swelling the army to around 1.4 million men by mid-1941. It is important to note that this was to a large extent possible because of the good civ-mil relations between the political and military top (Roll, 2019). During a crisis, good relationships can enable the necessary flexibility to deal with a situation. The proposal for a Belgian territorial reserve force does not suggest that the reserve would constitute an ‘army of citizen soldiers’. It does insinuate that it would have to gradually take up more tasks from the regular military when a crisis escalates further. The importance of civ-mil relations will only increase when we look to modernise our military structures for the realities we face today. The peace time structure should meet wartime needs.

9.3. A barometer for strategic culture

When I heard senior military officers of the Belgian armed forces talking about the state of the Civ-Mil relations, I always got a rather pessimistic explanation. They explain about the difficulty and sometimes even hostility experienced from the political elite. The most interesting comment however was when one officer told me that he/she always felt that politicians and officers spoke a different language (of course not in the literal sense). This discrepancy can be found when the Military doctrine and the Strategic Culture are at odds with each other. To define the term (military) doctrine, I utilise the definition of General Sir Rupert Smith: “...*by which I mean a way to think about the matter rather than a way to deal with it, so there is coherence of view, interpretation and expression from strategic to tactical levels.*” (Smith, 2012, p. 65). This definition, with some minor alterations, could have been used when discussing strategic culture. Strategic culture could in fact be viewed as the civilian counterpart of military doctrine. Especially when the strategic culture can be guided by the tenets of grand strategy along with the other elements that influence it. This does not mean that strategic culture is predetermined and fixed as military doctrine can be. The makers of grand strategy have sometimes been viewed as gardeners and not mechanics, grand strategy being the organic realities that are being grown (Mitchell, 2019). In this sense we should view strategic culture as the garden in which it is grown. When military doctrine and strategic culture are not able to coexist healthily, it is the same as trying to plant flowers in acidic soil. What is being grown will not take root and the wrong tools will be used because you do not have the necessary information. This translates itself into bad Civ-Mil relations.

Bad Civ-Mil relations can thus be a sign of an unhealthy strategic culture and a grand strategy that leaves much to be desired. During the first war in Iraq the US military command never pointed out the contradictions between the military and civilian view on the war. Furthermore the goal was never clearly defined. The government wanted Iraq to become a free-market democracy and the military only to stabilise the country. The Civ-Mil relationship had already broken down in the

years before the invasion of Iraq during the war in Afghanistan and there is no indication that there was a post-war plan for Iraq (Ricks, 2012). The discrepancy between the military and civilian side only grew when the Bush Administration appointed Paul Bremer as the presidential envoy and director of the Coalition Provisional Authority after the Saddam regime was defeated. Bremer disbanded the Iraqi Army and banned most members of the Baath party from government positions, without consulting the military commanders in the field. Most former government workers lost their jobs since you had to be a Baath party member to work for the government. This decision set the most skilled people against the Americans. This was a shame because, in want of direction from Washington, the military already undertook steps to stabilise the country. The US Marine forces under General Mattis ran a programme that paid the remnants of the Iraqi army that were not openly hostile to them. This ensured that jobless, trained soldiers would not take up arms for another cause. It further enhanced talks that were underway with senior officers to establish an Iraqi army alongside the US presence. Furthermore, the complete dysfunction of the Civ-Mil relations resulted in the collapse of the process to hold elections, when the civilian side pressed for immediate elections (Mattis & West, 2019). The strategic culture did not facilitate the necessary open conversations needed between the military and the administration. The grand strategy could not be effectively put into practice because both saw different ways to use the means in their approach to the desired end. The end being that Iraq could not pose any form of threat towards the US anymore. The soil did not allow the plant to take root and nothing grew. Iraq is to this day still an unstable country.

9.4. Strategic Simulations and Civilian-Military relations

The contributions of strategic simulations for better Civ-Mil relations are perhaps the most straightforward. Through practice bonds and common understanding is created. General Stanley McChrystal (2015) describes a team of teams as a large command that captures the traits of agility that are normally limited to small teams, such as remaining responsive to a constantly shifting environment. He advocated the need for a shared consciousness, which relates to systems thinking in that people had to have a rudimentary understanding of the whole in order to grasp the function of a part. A holistic view on the matter. Furthermore, teams work better through the cohesive ability to improvise relying on specialisation, overlapping responsibilities and familiarity with each other (McChrystal et al., 2015). It is through the practice of strategic simulations between the political and military elite that such a team of teams is created. A strategic simulation would be a format that provides a natural meeting between the two parties without the need for a real crisis to take place that forces both to learn through experience. It is through simulations that we can find the discrepancies between the strategic culture and the military doctrine. Through practice the military and political elite learn to speak the same language.

Ideas such as creating a territorial reserve force would most certainly need a common understanding in how this would be achieved and what the ultimate goal is. When a political elite sees the concept through a different lens that is not focused on the most efficient way to achieve a

more resilient society, then the military needs to be able to speak. For this we need better Civ-Mil relations. In order to fully grasp the respective views of the military and political elite it would be desirable to simulate a crisis that puts the territorial defence force in action. Otherwise we might find ourselves working in different directions as the US military and Administration were doing in Iraq. Strategic simulations make it possible to reach an end state in order to hold a reflection session. This again forces the strategic culture and the military doctrine to collide with each other, especially if the end state is disastrous. It is about avoiding pluralistic ignorance that is built on the individual ignorance of others and leads to poor decisions. During the Vietnam war there was no end to pluralistic ignorance and both sides were dishonest or at the least withholding information (McMaster, 1997).

Strategic simulations can take on the form of waterfall simulations. Meaning that actions taken at a top level have a waterfall effect creating ripples down the line which creates new impulses and a new situation to deal with because of the first major choices. Forcing participants to reevaluate their interests and the current desires against the future needs and the effects choices might have. Also instilling the understanding that decisions are never made in a vacuum, but that grand strategic choices are the connections between the different domains of the state. When used for Civ-Mil relations, this simulates the effects decisions made at the political level have on the military and how the military translates these decisions, creating new situations. Matrix games can for example give a participant an almost complete freedom of choice, but the scenario still forces the participant to accept certain facts that limit the rational choices. Making the participants aware of the limited options they have in an unending realm of possibilities. Although it is in these moments that creativity can be found. When a participant finds that the options are broader than first perceived. Strategic innovations occur when all parties accept that the current practices are insufficient and find new ones through the limitations the situation offers (Luttwak, 2009). It remains important however that both the military and the civilian side play a role here. Simulations need to show their interconnectedness and how healthy Civ-Mil relations contribute to the grand strategy. The collective intelligence of groups has more to do with the connections between them than the intelligence of their individual members. Confinement to silos is never conducive for qualities to rise to the strategic level (McChrystal et al., 2015).

10. Conclusion

When considering grand strategy, we find that it is an interwoven web of much more than a first glance may convey. Grand strategy is the interpretation and way forward for the reality of the world. The reality of the world today is highly complex. Perhaps not because of the inherent constitution of the problems that are faced, but because of the speed they travel at. There is seldom much time to react to a given situation before it changes completely and problems that arise are rarely isolated events. It is this higher level of interconnected challenges that grand strategy wrestles with. Instead of pulling at different problems with as many ropes, grand strategy seeks to latch a string to each problem, intertwining them into a single rope to pull. A single rope that enables all to pull in one direction.

In order to achieve such a feat, there must be a strategic culture that enables the strategic establishment to keep the line strung and tense. A strategic culture that is reconcilable with the grand strategy that is set. Otherwise we might find that not the entire strategic establishment is pulling with the same effort. When the strategic culture is entirely hostile towards the principles of grand strategy we find that it can lead to disaster and instability. A strategic culture is shaped by aspects that are there to stay, but the interpretation of them and the ultimate form is not set in stone. A strategic culture that is able to support the grand strategy and bind the strategic establishment to it is a soil where lush gardens may come to fruition. Grand strategy's ultimate goal is the survival of the state and the way of life. It is for the most part a highly complex yet rational endeavour. A supporting strategic culture should therefore provide the shared requirements to prevent the withering of the organic system grand strategy seeks to create.

Withered grand strategies are however not inconceivable. When the strategic culture is not suited the grand strategy will not take root and the first indication of this are the Civ-Mil relations. The military is inherently more trained by their occupation to take the long term view. To think strategically. Most studies in strategy also find their origin with the armed forces and their exploits. Because of the nature of their occupation they reside longer within the strategic establishment than the political elite (in a democratic system). The military is traditionally also the institution that has most to lose when the grand strategy takes a disastrous turn. They put their lives on the line for the ultimate goal of grand strategy. The political elite are more distracted by the here and now. Their professional survival depends on their popularity. The level of friction between these two sides are therefore a barometer for the strategic culture. Unhealthy Civ-Mil relations, too much or too little friction, might indicate that the strategic culture will not be able to adequately support the grand strategy.

Strategic simulations are there to provide a correct amount of friction without dangerous implications that decisions in the real world create. There can be an immense amount of friction without the danger of a coup d'etat taking place or the danger that officers would be dismissed. The political elite are free to make decisions and learn from them without incurring the wrath of the population. Relationships of trust and mutual understanding are created through experience

that may serve the state throughout both respective careers. Discrepancies in the strategic culture are found without the grand strategy withering away. This may lead to a different grand strategy, yet the interpretation of the strategic establishment will be coherent. All involved parties will find through simulation the common direction to pull. Strategic simulations especially enable those that reside in the strategic establishment to take an overarching perspective on the world and the situations of the state. Through strategic simulations we are able to see the interwoven web of different strings and understand why it is advisable to intertwine them in one rope to pull. Why it is to a state's advantage to employ and understand grand strategy.

11. Recommendations

11.1. What to do

What a state such as Belgium needs to do is establish the practice of strategic simulations. The strategic simulations should in the first place be focussed on grand strategy and its principles. This means that the strategic establishment should have an institution that is capable of running strategic simulations. The use of strategic simulations needs to become a habit when a new policy that has bearing on the grand strategy of the state is established.

11.2. Who to focus on

Those at the top of the current strategic establishment do not have the time to be involved with strategic simulations. Although they would benefit greatly from the experience, the fact remains that too many other responsibilities rob them of their ability to spend the necessary energy in a strategic simulation. On the other hand, in 1983 President Ronald W. Reagan participated in a two week lasting nuclear war simulation named Proud Prophet. It was described as the most realistic exercise involving nuclear weapons ever played by the US government (Taylor, 2022). An argument could be made for strategic simulations that would not require around the clock participation from the top echelons of the strategic establishment. However, it should be said that the US already had sufficient experience with strategic simulations in one form or another. Making the task of persuading top level policy makers less difficult. Another method of grounding the simulation in reality when top level policy makers are not available is asking people who have held senior positions to participate. Such an approach was used during a simulation that sought to examine if the US and Japan were on the right course to deter grey-zone challenges from China. The actions that were taken could be viewed as reliable because the participants had experience and insider knowledge surrounding the situation (Cronin et al., 2018). This leaves us predominantly with testing existing policy of grand strategic aspirations, but not with teaching the principles of grand strategy. Nor with converging it with the strategic culture or sowing the seeds for better Civ-Mil relations. The top echelon of the strategic establishment is predominantly

already set in a certain mental framework. If we take the military for example, the first five years are where the strongest cultural development takes place (Hunter, 2022).

Therefore, in regard to teaching, the focus should be laid in the first place on the lower, to the lowest level of the strategic establishment. Strategic simulations should be held with recently graduated officers and those that just started a career in the civil service or a political party. The focus should be on the strategic establishment of the future. It is this segment that are most likely to be expendable within an organisation and able to participate in strategic simulations. Furthermore, it is the perfect opportunity for those at the bottom of their respective organisations to forge valuable networks. Networks that might serve their organisations of origin and will most definitely aid the participants in their future careers. It will be an opportunity to instil the principles of grand strategy and give experience which would otherwise only come slowly with the passing years. This experience would spread further throughout the strategic establishment, providing fresh perspective. Creating a strategic culture that provides the needed sustainability for future grand strategy.

Strategic simulations that focus on testing the existing policy can use, as mentioned before, those that have held senior positions or work with the different levels in the strategic establishment. This means that assistants and junior officers would liaise between the strategic simulations and their bosses. Junior assistants/officers would be the main participants of the simulation and would write short summary reports on the basis of which the senior policy makers can make their choices. This would again provide valuable experience for those that just started in their respective careers. It would also provide the state with the opportunity to test policy in regard to the different interpretations it may hold for the different elements within the strategic establishment.

11.3. How to do it

Multiple steps have to be taken to reach these objectives. The first is research and networking. This implies that a further study should be done in regard to strategic simulations and its varied applications. At the moment of writing, the field is still not coherently established. Within the field there reside many experts and multiple practices. However there is no single all encompassing study that could provide the foundation for further establishment within Belgium and the EU. Therefore this would be the first objective to reach. A doctoral study into strategic simulations, grand strategy and strategic culture would provide the needed starting point to build on. The research in question would have to include multiple elements that can be ordered in different phases. During the first phase, research should be devoted to further establishing the concept of strategic simulations. As said before, it is a container concept which still needs to be fleshed out further. By doing this the groundwork will be laid out for future research to focus more in depth on different aspects that fall under strategic simulations. The goal is to create a comprehensive understanding that enables specialisation starting from a shared baseline. In order to test these findings, phase one of the research would translate different policies in strategic simulations. For example the NSSB. Testing these simulations will enable the researcher to define the different

forms of strategic simulations more extensively and aid in validating the theoretical framework that is being established through experimentation. Next to this, in phase one, a network needs to be established within the field. This means contacting the different institutions that are involved with strategic simulations. Georgetown University, the RAND corporations, Centre for New American Strategy, King's College London and University of Leiden are only some of the many institutions that could be networked with. It would be an advantage if the research could take place or in cooperation with an institution that already has an extensive network in regard to strategy and policy making/related research. This would enable a prospective researcher to use the already existing network and supplement it with the new network he/she seeks to create. Phase two of the research would consist of providing the first fruits of labour. This means holding strategic simulations with the lower levels of the strategic establishment of Belgium and the international community. This would create a network surrounding strategic simulations and strategy with Belgium as a central part in that network. These simulations however would remain experimental. The main purpose is still to first establish an overarching framework that can be applied to more than specific cases. Therefore the participation of multiple international partners at this stage is desirable. Underlining the advantage of working with an institution that already has an international network to work with. Phase three of the research would consist of finalising the overarching framework, holding specific strategic simulations at the request of the strategic establishment and creating a course where strategic simulations provide insight into grand strategy.

The second step is anchoring the practice and expertise of strategic simulations within an institution that serves the Belgian state. The residing strategic simulations expert would hold four main tasks within the institution he/she works for. Hosting strategic simulations courses for those that set their first steps within the strategic establishment. These are the young officers and assistants that will one day become the generals, admirals and ministers or directors respectively. Secondly, providing strategic simulations for the government institutions when requested. Thirdly, continuing with enlarging the network that was created during the Phd research. Lastly, continuing with his/her research on the subject.

The last step would be the establishment of a strategic simulations centre, where the practice is taught as a discipline and where there is a staff to use strategic simulations to conduct research on demand. Similar to what we can currently see in the US when looking at the RAND corporation or the Centre for New American Strategy. This centre would not only work for the Belgian state, but also for the European Union.

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