

# 2016/4/1: Ideal-typical planning mistakes

## Ideal-typical planning mistakes

### An analysis of the plans for the post-hostilities phase of the Operation Iraqi Freedom 2001-2004

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Already in 1998 D. S. Geller and J. D. Singer stated in their book „Nations at War. A Scientific Study of International Conflict“ that „individual-level ego-defensive mechanisms“ are amplified when decisions are to be taken in the squad. If one verifies the dysfunctional symptoms of Geller and Singer, the following will be explicitly confirmed for plans:

- Gross omissions in surveying objectives: From the strategic target („stable and democratic Iraq“) no consequences, necessary actions and resources were deduced.
- Failure to examine major costs and risks of the preferred choice: Information on possible frictions and higher personnel requirements for a long-term success were ignored. In dissolving the Iraqi army, plans did not consider the opportunity costs of this decision.
- Poor information search: Information available within and without the institutions was only insufficiently used for plans.
- Selective bias in processing information at hand: Information sustaining the own plans actions were used excessively, other information neglected.
- Failure to work out detailed implementation, monitoring, and contingency plans: Plans were insufficiently implemented only later (temporally delayed) impelled.

In addition to the dysfunctional symptoms, there were also organisational conflicts, sketchy allocation of rights and duties as well as subordination relationships, which made mistakes in plans even worse. Apart from the continuation of dysfunctional symptoms on higher levels on to the lower levels, there were other reasons for plans mistakes, and fundamental mistakes in the separate subareas, as far as decisions were concerned, as well. These are:

- Structural reasons for the plans shortcomings became apparent in the lacking regulation of civil/military responsibilities.
- Cultural reasons were, on the one hand, the conservative tenor of the military and, on the other hand, the lack of open interaction with civil expertise. Thus, assumptions were continued and decisions of supervisory levels were not questioned sufficiently.
- Political reasons were the strong exertion of influence of individual members of the Bush-administration on security-relevant assumptions (US Vice President Dick Cheney), and the favouring of variants which would not require long-term actions in Iraq.

From this analysis one can deduce that the dysfunctional Symptoms according to Geller and Singer as categories of plans and decision mistakes are still relevant and ought to serve as warning to future planners.

