

The culturally¹ endorsed perception of the phenomenon of time as a driving force in the development of a renewed European/Western concept of strategy

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The current paradigm change regarding the concept of *war* has to be perceived also as a consequence of the ongoing paradigm shift in the underlying concept of *strategy* – i.e. as a result of the necessary (r)evolution of strategic thinking.

This presentation discusses the perception of the *phenomenon of time* as a critical factor in European (or Western) states' re-thinking of strategic concepts. It tackles the *philosophical aspects* of how the perception of time influences strategic thinking, as well as its *practical impact* on the strategic assessment of the adversary's intentions and capabilities in military operations – and thus provides a synthesis of the *theoretical* basis of strategic thinking and its concrete transformation into military *practice* with regard to the factor *time*. It will also be shown how the perception of time directly influences operational command and control procedures (i.e. not only via its effect on the concept of strategy/war).

The research goal is a revised European concept of strategic thinking on the basis of a reconsidered understanding of a perception of time which is culture and region-specific. The effect of the theoretical findings on the practical level of military operations will be derived.

The research starts from the observation that Europe clearly suffers from a massive lack of strategic thinking, whereas there are – for the first time since the end of the Cold War – two hegemonic emerging powers on the Asian continent, which strive for power projection towards the West as well as Africa, and which follow distinct and rigid long-term strategies.

¹ The term culture is used throughout this paper in the Kantian sense of *Kultur*, i.e. comprising the moral-ethical context (categorical imperative);

By necessity, Europe must make up for the strategic deficit mentioned above, particularly because Europe's current security-political paradigm depends on the freedom of action to project democracy to crisis regions to secure access to vital resources abroad, and because a continued lack of strategic thinking would also lead to a conventional inferiority *vis-à-vis* the new emerging hegemonic powers of Russia and China.

The hypothesis starts with the assumption that the cultural, region-specific perception of the phenomenon of time is one of the *main* factors governing the extent to which states are capable of defining and pursuing long-term strategies. It will be shown that the perception of time is a phenomenon that is older than today's religions, the Enlightenment, modern democracy or any post-modern set of values: this means that time is not only a *main* factor, but also a *driving* factor in the definition of a re-calibrated Western strategic concept (and in the revised concept of war² to be derived from it), because changing this *driving* factor makes it possible to change the factors associated with it, according to plan. The main message of the hypothesis lies in the assumption that a thorough analysis and comparison of the respective cultural and region-specific perceptions of time will enable the Western state community to

- (re)define a concept of strategy that copes with the offensive strategic potential of possible adversaries (in particular from Orthodox and Sinic cultural regions),
- harmonize antagonisms between Anglo-American and Continental European strategic interests that might weaken the overall defence capability of the transatlantic alliance, and
- raise public awareness that the dramatic increase in mid-term threat momentum is – due to a lack of strategic orientation – currently only opposed by ever-decreasing European defence capabilities.

The analysis part of the research builds on the understanding of strategy as the definition of vital long-term goals which are imperative for a society's survival. These goals can often only be accomplished in a time-frame that reaches beyond the terms of office of the political leadership that defines them. Accomplishing these goals, furthermore, requires that restrictions be imposed in the present which the addressees can neither easily understand nor accept. Thus, strategy turns into a trade-off between current prosperity and long-term future security – with the factor *time* consequently being the *driving* factor.

² The concept of war is here deliberately distinguished from the strategic concept, as strategy is to be understood as the more comprehensive, wider term which can be substantiated by the fact that the outbreak of war could already indicate a failed strategy.

In the beginning, the research focuses on the ancient Greek philosophers, as their findings represent the basis of the Continental European tradition of thinking about time.

The more they gave the phenomenon of time serious scientific consideration, the more they changed the prevailing Χρόνος-oriented, static perception into a dynamic one that represented the Καιρός-principle. Heraklit's famous "πάντα ῥεῖ" was extended to Plato's "Πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει" (*Everything moves on, and nothing remains the same*). For Augustine, similar to Parmenides, *past* and *future* only mirror memory and anticipation, represent a metaphorical extension of the human mind, but do not really exist. All these approaches point into the direction of emphasizing the present and of defining a human's life as the framework within which everything has to be accomplished that matters to him/her.

Early Catholicism temporarily deviated from these findings, as it consoled people with the promise of a life after death, whereby they became more easily governable and accepted poverty and deprivation. However, the Age of Enlightenment brought a return to the rational individual acting independently. Kant defines man as the dialectical synthesis between mind and matter and understands the phenomenon of life as a cyclic sequence of aggregate states of development processes – both loops, however, only make sense if they can be fulfilled within one lifetime. His support for the dynamic perception of time is expressed most clearly in his phrase "*If man could stop time, for how long would it then stand still?*". Since the Age of Enlightenment, man has learned to control his life and to take it into his own hands. Corresponding to the underlying dynamic perception of time (which in turn supports the willingness to undergo education) he also wants to reap the fruits of his ambition within his own lifetime. This creates a selfish momentum and the unwillingness to sacrifice present prosperity for the long-term security of next generations – this unwillingness, via the pluralistic democracy, also shackles the political leadership. The postmodern shift of values towards self-expression and individuality reinforces this trend and leads to a *structural strategy-inhibition* or *strategy-incapability*.

In a further step, the analysis tries to verify whether a more static perception of time is present in the mass of less educated people in regions *de facto* still led by authoritarian regimes (in particular the Orthodox and Sinic regions). **This static perception moreover shows that enlightened thinking has prevailed less, that people are willing to trust in religion and to defer their already low expectations to a next life. People are aware of their limited educational opportunities resulting in low skills and therefore do not expect too much from the present. A pluralistic democracy, therefore, has no chance to develop. The question of a post-modern change of values does not arise due to persistent**

poverty. The political elites, however, are highly educated and imbued with a dynamic perception of time that enables them to define long-term strategies and to claim the fruits of their work in their lifetimes. This intention of harvesting in the present thus meets the largely un-enlightened willingness of the masses to make sacrifices, whereby the definition and pursuit of a long-term strategic direction for the state becomes possible despite an unrestricted standard of living for the elites.

This leads to the dangerous constellation that European citizens who are imbued with the dynamic perception of time tend to find fulfillment exclusively in the present. This trend towards an unwillingness to make sacrifices for long-term security is additionally reinforced by the postmodern change of values as well as the general unwillingness to follow a long-term strategic approach. The latter - via the pluralistic democracy - also hampers the political leadership of these countries, whereas the authoritarian regimes of the emerging hegemonic powers Russia and China have highly educated political elites who are able to define and pursue clear strategies. They can also sacrifice present prosperity for a strategic objective, as they govern a less enlightened (educated) population led by a rather static perception of time. The population also cannot oppose the leadership politically due to the lack of an established pluralistic democratic order.

The practical implementation of the result of the analysis aims at the responsibility of military science to enable future leaders at the military-strategic echelon to accomplish a comprehensive strategic assessment on the basis of findings that result from the cultural, area-specific perception of time, as well as to make the political leadership - by means of policy advice – sensitive towards the emerging global strategic imbalance.

The direct impact of the factor *time* on the operational echelon results primarily from the higher time requirements of mission-oriented leadership, which is currently understood in Europe as a compensation for scarce material resources, and from the increasing use of computerized battlefield management systems, which provide benefits mainly when evaluation quality is traded in for faster response time.

In conclusion it can be stated that, although a people's culturally engrained perception of time as the underlying principle of their state's strategy capability cannot be changed in the short term, the ability of military-strategic leaders to conduct a holistic and comprehensive assessment which includes the perception of *time* as a factor and which allows for responsible policy advice would successfully counteract the current European *strategy-inhibition*.

Remark: The text exceeds the limit of 1200 words – if this could not be accepted, it would be suggested to skip the [paragraph in blue](#);