

Black Swan Planning: A review of Iran and Turkey

Squadron Officer School (22A)

33d Student Squadron, Flight F-71

Capt Herman Bapsed

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Research Question: With a focus on Turkey, how might we more effectively plan for unexpected, or “black swan” events, that might negatively affect critical military operations.

Problem Statement: Due to great competition and contested warfighting domains, critical military operations will be impacted by unexpected, or “black swan” events.

Abstract

This paper presents an analysis of how unexpected, or “black swan” events might negatively affect critical military operations. Although much of the literature suggest inability to predict these events, hindsight analysis uncovers the contrary. Two key elements from the literature will set the framework for recommendations. They are: (1) the reaction or overreaction to the unexpected (emotional) event, and (2) post-event analysis into pre-conceived assumptions that could have informed better risk communication or planning, to include post-event planning. A focus on Turkey is utilized as an attempt to illustrate how great competition and contested domains increase the likelihood and impact of these unexpected events on critical military operations. The paper will define unexpected, or “black swan” events as they pertain to military operations, then transition to how current U.S. and Turkey relations create the environment and/or potential to promote a “black swan” event. This discussion will set the stage for author recommendations on how joint planning considerations will ultimately determine how well the U.S. predicts or responds to a black swan event.

Defining a “Black Swan” event

A review of black swan literature suggest a connection between black swan events and traditional risk communication theory. This is an important distinction because much of the literature also suggests that known/unknown and unknown/unknown elements are present in

black swan events. To that end, "...the occurrence of uncertain risk events, which is to say Black Swans, may be considered so rare, or the consequences so unthinkable, that there is insufficient basis for identification or measurement that would otherwise allow the prediction of losses and avert accidents or catastrophes"¹. From a military perspective risks communication is informed by likelihood (probability) and the impact of defined risk events. On a grandiose stage COVID-19, or the events of 9/11 are good examples of black swan events. On a more scalable stage, like military operations, black swans can be characterized as hacked systems, jammed capabilities, or in the case of U.S and Turkey relations denial of strategic basing access during critical operations.

U.S. and Turkey History and Relations

The Turkey and U.S relationship thrived prior to and during the Cold War due to similar interest in the region. Throughout the 20th century emphasis was placed on the relationship due to Turkey resting at the geographic center of some of the United States most pressing foreign policy concerns². The relationship was founded on a shared vision to control the Soviet Union and the spread of Communism. The tension has increased since the fall of the Soviets due to a failure to work together on key issues in the region, as well as American underestimation of Turkey's ability to bring stability to the region. The relationship has been marked by a 'cat and

¹ Wardman, Jamie K, and Gabe Mythen. "Risk Communication: Against the Gods or Against All Odds? Problems and Prospects of Accounting for Black Swans." *Journal of risk research* 19, no. 10 (2016): 1220–1230. https://aul.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01AUL_INST/q8te0i/cdi_crossref_primary_10_1080_13669877_2016_1262002

² Cook, Steven A. *Neither Friend nor Foe : the Future of U.S.-Turkey Relations* New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2018. https://aul.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01AUL_INST/1nq9p5l/alma995632303406836

mouse' game where Turkey leveraged threats to swing away from the West and U.S. as a way to seek further backing for its interest³.

Fast-forward to present day and it appears the threat to swing towards the Russians has materialized. This is very concerning because Turkey's location promotes American objectives of deterring Russia and defeating ISIS (Iraqi and Syrian terror groups). Examples of the shift in power is evident by the Turkish acquisition of advanced missile defense systems from Russia, and their subsequent removal from the F-35 program. Additionally, conflicting interests and objectives in Syria and Iran are equally notable. An attempt to establish a nuclear alliance with adversaries, along with Turkish belief that America backed a recent Coup attempt have added 'fuel to the flames'. Current U.S. and Turkey relations are a great test case for how great competition and contested domains can promote behavior that is unfavorable to coalition relationships. A failure to understand how competition and contested domains could potentially impact the Joint Planning Process (JPP), could promote an unexpected (black swan) event.

The Turkey case lends itself to an example in the literature where potential strategic insights can be overlooked due to how unfathomable pre-conceived assumptions are viewed. While not considered an adversary, competing priorities can lead to unexpected events like those that led to American basing at Incirlik, AB, during OIF and failure of the Turks to acquire a 5th generation capability. In the context of our relationship with Turkey, perhaps an astute concentration on reality would have revealed the need for a plan that excluded the use of Turkish airspace. Ideally, the call to seek other joint planning course(s) of action (COAs) will occur prior to the black swan event. Cook (2018), suggests "The US should seek now for alternatives to

³ Tyler Rodgers. "Turkey in the Age of Trump: A Path Forward for US-Turkey Relations." Kennedy School review 17 (2017): 87–90.

https://aul.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01AUL_INST/q8te0i/cdi_proquest_journals_2188097766

Incirlik, AB and look to other ways to achieve objectives in Syria”⁴. The key leadership dilemma is does unexpected event(s) (black swan), that inject uncertainty, warrant an argument for enhanced war planning to ensure U.S. interest are as agile as the contested environment(s) that will characterized the next conflict.

The events of 9/11 were undoubtedly a black swan event that triggered (over)reactions across the globe. Deteriorating relations with Turkey manifested partial due to great competition (Russia) and led to unexpected disadvantages. Perhaps this is a paradigm that can be challenged with additional professional military academia research and analysis. Misplaced and pre-conceived assumptions about the planning, basing, and ultimately global relationships underpin a need to scrutinize the JPP to ensure it accounts for the volatility associated with great competition and contested warfighting domains.

Joint Planning Recommendations:

An analysis on joint planning consideration is inherent to any discussion on reacting to black swan events. Great competition and contested domains have amplified planning uncertainties while simultaneously eroding our advantages over revisionist powers and rogue regimes. As quoted in the 2018 National Defense Strategy, “For decades the United States has enjoyed uncontested or dominant superiority in every operating domain...Today, every domain is contested—air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace”.⁵ To that end every domain must be subjected to planning activity(s) that account for the likelihood of the unknown. President

⁴ Cook, “Neither Friend nor Foe”

⁵ US Department of Defense (2018), *Summary of the National Defense Strategy of the United States*, (2018)

Dwight D. Eisenhower, 34th POTUS, as quoted in Joint Publication (JP) 5.0, *Joint Planning* proposes:

...Plans are worthless, but planning is everything. There is a very great distinction because when you are planning for an emergency you must start with this one thing: the very definition of “emergency” is that it is unexpected, therefore it is not going to happen the way you are planning⁶.

While this may sound abstract and contrary to the purpose of this paper, it is simply a call to understand that unexpected is inevitable, unimaginable relevant, and post-black swan actions critical. The role of big data processing, intelligence gathering, and surveillance must not be underestimated. Modeling and simulation must be integrated into war-gaming and “what if” analysis. Critical, but vulnerable capabilities like GPS and SATCOM must not anchor critical kill chains.

Comprehensive planning for black swan events considers how to leverage joint doctrine in a continuous and enduring manner. JP 5.0 assumes:

To maintain a competitive advantage, the joint force should constantly evaluate effects and objectives, align them with strategic objectives, and verify that they are still relevant and feasible. Joint forces, through their assessments, identify when their actions begin to negatively affect the OE and change their operations and activities to create the desired effects and better align actions and objectives⁷

⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff (2020). *Joint Publication (JP) 5.0, Joint Planning*.
https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp5_0.pdf

⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff (2020). *Joint Publication (JP) 5.0, Joint Planning*.

Joint doctrine cornerstones like the Competition Continuum, Range of Military Operations, and Instruments of National Power must be leveraged to ensure the correct employment of strategy, not assets, in response to perceived black swan events. Planning for black swan events must be executed within the guise of absent, incomplete, partial, and/or contingent information. From the ‘Initiation’ step to ‘Plan/Order Development’ in the JPP process, planners must be scrutinizing the status quo. Finally, once the inevitable and unexpected occurs, decision-makers must challenge institutional competencies for errs in pre-conceived assumptions and (over)reactions which left unchecked may continue to degrade military operations.

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