

STRATEGIC COMBINED JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND THE BALANCE BETWEEN NATIONAL AND COMMON INTEREST

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Motto: *“Men are moved by two levers only: fear and self interest. A man will fight harder for his interests than for his rights”.*

Napoleon Bonaparte

This paper’s purpose is to explore how the relation between national interest and common interest of different countries determine them to build a transnational military alliance in order to achieve common strategic aims by launching strategic combined joint special operations. Those common strategic aims are composed, in variable percentages, of the partners’ national goals. The use of special operations for achieving national objectives is made after all political possibilities are ruled out and when using conventional forces is neither necessary nor recommended. The balance between the coalition’s common interest and member states’ national interest influences the strength of the partnership. There are three types of relations between the common interest of the coalition and the national interest of a state: direct, complementary, and opportunistic relationships.

Key words: joint special operations, common interest, national interest

1. COMMON INTEREST IN TRANSNATIONAL ALLIANCES

Where commonality of interest exists, nations will enter political, economic, and military partnerships. These partnerships can occur in both regional and worldwide patterns as nations seek opportunities to promote their mutual national interests or seek mutual security against real or perceived threats (ABCA, 2008, p. ix).

James Chace (2002) observed that, “Political leaders have only

two basic tools at their disposal when enforcing the national interest—diplomacy and force. But diplomatic negotiation implies compromise” (p. 3). Moreover, Clausewitz’s well-known description of war as a “continuation of policy by other means”, broaden Chace’s observation (Howard & Paret, 2007, p. 28). Therefore, the only way to achieve the national interest when no compromise is possible is the application of power as depicted in **Figure 1.**

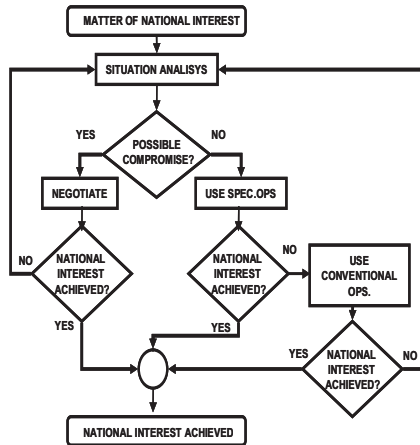


Fig. 1. A Decision Cycle for Achieving National Interest

As Heaney and Rojas (2007) noted, “While the length of a coalition’s life may vary by design, it may also fluctuate with the vicissitudes of politics, including ideological disputes, altered political opportunity structures, dwindling resources, and personality conflicts” (p. 1). While these factors influence the life of a coalition, they also have a major influence over the formation of a coalition. The political factor, as an expression of national interest, has a major role in shaping and maintaining a coalition.

Joe Bandy and Jakie Smith (2004) realized the importance of common interest in the birth of a coalition. They observed that, “many coalitions begin as a way to support only temporary and clearly delimited forms of transnational cooperation” (p. 3). Moreover, exploring the matter of coalition formation and existence,

Sidney Tarrow (2005), identified two main causes of the formation and maintenance of a transnational coalition, shown in **Figure 2**, as: the common interest and the partners’ commitment to pursue together the achievement of a common objective (pp. 165-166).

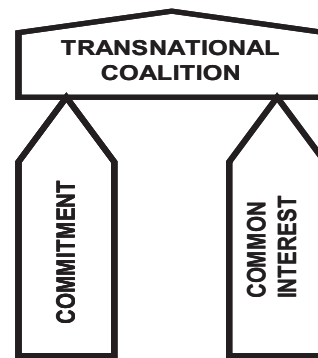


Figure 2. The Two Main Pillars of Transnational Coalitions

Beyond ethical considerations in international politics, the legitimacy of the national interest of a state is relative. What one state considers justified and legitimate, other players in the international arena may consider illegitimate and unjust. Situations differ from case to case, but any country will always try to benefit from any opportunity to achieve its national objectives.

When the national interests of two or more states are convergent, building a political-military alliance may be an efficient way to pursue that interest. Using this formula, the involved states share not only the benefits of their actions but the potential risks as well.

2. COMMON INTEREST IN STRATEGIC COMBINED JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS

Based on the preceding paragraph, the common interest is the main element that generates and maintains transnational coalitions. When the fulfilling of the common interest of a coalition requires the execution of strategic special operations, by extension we can say that the common interest generates strategic special operations as well. Therefore, strategic special operations may become valuable tools for two or more states that decide to form a coalition in order to pursue the achievement of common strategic interests in a fragile international situation.

As Heaney and Rojas (2007) observed, coalitions vary in temporal stability. They may be „*ad-hoc and short-lived*” (sometimes formed exclusively for the purpose of staging a single event), or they may be „*highly institutionalized and enduring*” formed with the intention of addressing a wide range of issues over a long period of time. (p. 1)

The speed, surgical accuracy, secrecy, and reduced costs are the characteristics that embody Commando type — strategic special operations for the quick resolution of potential crises from their earliest stages.

In addition, special operations are viable options for dealing with protracted conflicts when, due to various reasons, conventional

operations cannot be carried out, or when they did not achieve the expected results. Strategic Combined Joint Special Operations may be utilized as force multipliers in support of conventional operations as well.

JP 3-05 (2003, I -1) defines special operations as „... *operations conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to achieve military, diplomatic, informational, and/or economic objectives employing military capabilities for which there is no broad conventional force requirement. These operations often require covert, clandestine, or low-visibility capabilities*”.

Because of these characteristics, Strategic Combined Special Operations can be used to solve a wide range of delicate international situations. This makes them very attractive for achieving the state’s national interests, and a transnational coalition’s common interests.

The multinational task force designated to execute Combined Joint Special Operations in order to fulfill transnational common interests is nominated as a Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF).

Therefore, a Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force is primarily the result of a military and political transnational cooperation between states that have decided to achieve common strategic interests by carrying out special operations.

3. NATIONAL INTEREST VERSUS COALITION COMMON INTEREST

As previously stated, the participation in the construction of a Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force has a clear goal: to achieve a common interest by carrying out special operations. However, from case to case, this aspect has several different particularities.

A transnational coalition is usually initiated by the state that has the highest national interest in solving the problem concerned. For this reason, the proportion of the national interest's amount of a state, within the common interest of the coalition, may be unequal and nuanced.

Narlikar (2003) considered three different coalition building type's theories: (1) theory highlighting an interest-based method of coalition-building; (2) theory emphasizing processes and institutions; (3) constructivist theory: ideational (based on common beliefs and ideas) and identity-based method of coalition formation (pp. 17-33).

For the purpose of this paper, considering Narlikar's (2003) analysis on the interest-based method of coalition-building, three main different situations whereby a state may participate in forming a political-military coalition may be distinguished. They are direct complementary and opportunistic relationship between the common interest of the coalition and the

national interest of a state as explained below (pp. 17-24).

a. Direct Relationship between the Common Interest of the Coalition and the National Interest of a State.

The first situation occurs when the state's national interests are similar to coalition's common interest. This is an ideal and merely theoretical situation, but when the similarity of the national interests of coalition partners is high and reflected in the common interest of the coalition, the coalition is much stronger (Weitsman, 2008, pp. 7-8).

b. Complementary Relationship between the Common Interest of the Coalition and the National Interest of a State.

The second situation occurs when the state's national interests is not entirely reflected in the coalition's common interest. In this case, the national interest of a particular state is not necessarily similar to the common interest of the coalition. However, the end state of a coalition's actions may prove advantageous to a particular member state by creating favorable conditions for further actions in pursuing its national interests (Weitsman, 2008, p. 5).

c. Opportunistic Relationship between the Common Interest of the Coalition and the National Interest of a State.

The third situation arises when some countries join a transnational coalition due mainly to reasons related to the advantages that membership in such a coalition may offer. The interest for participating in

coalition operations may be motivated by a degree of international or regional prestige and influence that can be gained (Weitsman, 2008, p. 5). The above relationships between national interest and coalition common interest are depicted below in **Figure 3**.

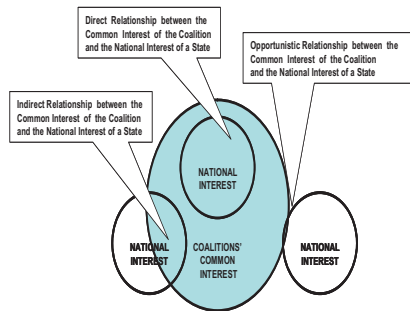


Fig. 3. The Relationships between National Interest and Coalition Common Interest

Comparing presented coalition types, a much stronger cohesion exist when there is a direct relation between the common interest of the coalition and the national interest of a state, and less strong when a opportunistic relation exists, as in **Figure 4**.

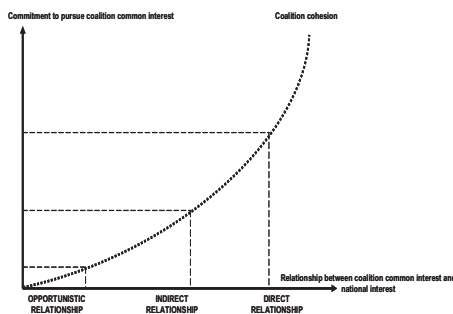


Fig. 4. The Strength of Transnational Coalitions

4. CONCLUSIONS

The decision to participate in a transnational coalition in general and to conduct Strategic Combined Joint Special Operations in particular, is mainly a political-military decision. Considering the benefits and risks that such a decision involves, political and military leaders should perform a detailed analysis of the situation. Answering the following questions can aid in making such decisions easier:

- Is there a common interest, which requires the creation of a political-military coalition, in order to carry out special operations for solving a case?

- Do the implied states have technical capabilities to participate with military forces in a combined joint special operation?
- How do coalition partners perceive the state's national interest?
- How does the international arena perceive the state's national interest?
- What are the risks and benefits of such an enterprise in terms of the state's national interest? Are the risks acceptable?
- Do coalition partners agree to share both the benefits and risks related to coalition's actions?

The main advantage in conducting Strategic Combined Joint Special Operations is that the states involved in such operations may share the benefits, costs, and risks of such

an enterprise. However, for each state, the national interest, rather the common interest, is the main reason to be a member of the coalition. Accordingly, the balance between the national interest of a state and the common interest of a state coalition is the main element that dictates the best method in pursuing national interest.

Therefore, the choice between unilateral Strategic Special Operation and Strategic Combined Joint Special Operation – in solving a matter of a state's national interest – should be based on a comprehensive comparative analysis between the national interest of that state and the common interest of a potential coalition.

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