

## Strategic Uncertainty in National Security

Tuesday, 26 June 2018

Samuel Neaman Institute, Technion

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**Format.** Six lectures accompanied by open discussion will focus on conflicting and complementary approaches to managing deep uncertainty in strategic affairs for national security. The workshop will include up to 24 participants (lecturers and discussants) possibly with additional observers. Lectures and discussions will be published as a Samuel Neaman Institute publication after approval by all lecturers and discussants.

**Theses and approaches.** The following approaches, among others, for managing strategic uncertainty will be presented by the lecturers and discussed by all participants.

1. **Flexibility.** One cannot plan for what one cannot anticipate, so one must plan for agility in responding to surprise. The emphasis is bottom-up: initiative in responding to surprise must come from the locus of action. Centralized planning or control are of limited value.
2. **Diversity.** Joint operations of diverse highly trained and carefully chosen specialists can respond to diverse challenges. The emphasis is top-down: centralized planning of specialities, thorough training for inter-operability, and coordination of their actions in real time underlie the comprehensive response to surprise.
3. **Technology.** Technological advantage, supported by sophisticated training, is the basis for Western countries to prevail over non-Western and especially non-state adversaries, regardless of the surprises they initiate.
4. **Robustness.** Strategic uncertainty is managed by identifying critical goals and formulating security policy to achieve those goals over the widest range of surprise. The goal is to optimize the confidence in achieving good enough outcomes, rather than to optimize the outcomes.

### Background questions about strategic uncertainty for national security.

#### 1. What is it?

- (a) What is strategic uncertainty? What is new about it? Did Alexander or Napoleon or Rommel face strategic uncertainty in the contemporary sense?

- (b) Can strategic uncertainty arise from small armed units, or does it only result from large military threats? In this age of instant global information and powerful weapons, isn't strategic uncertainty essentially tactical?
- (c) What are the geo-political or non-military dimensions of strategic uncertainty?
- (d) How does the assessment of strategic uncertainty impact government defense policy? How should it impact policy?
- (e) What are the strategic threats today? Terrorism, insurgency, conventional warfare? Are there regional differences: Europe, Middle East, North America, etc?

## 2. What to do about it?

- (a) Doctrinal responses to strategic uncertainty. Is new doctrine needed? If so, what should it be?
- (b) Force build up. What type of force is needed? Should the emphasis be on joint special operations, or on conventional broad-capability forces (land, air, marine, naval)?
- (c) What is the role of intelligence assessment in managing strategic uncertainty? Emphasis on early warning, or emphasis on situational awareness and contextual understanding?
- (d) Who is responsible for identifying strategic uncertainty? What training do they need? What authority should they have? Should they be centralized or dispersed? How do military and civilian elements interact?
- (e) Organizational responses. What are the organizational implications of strategic uncertainty? What organizational structures are needed? What communication, control, and command protocols are appropriate? What are the methods for encouraging and improving organizational learning?
- (f) Methodological responses. The sources of strategic uncertainty are themselves highly uncertain. For instance, cyber is a new strategic threat. The future hides other (as yet unknown) innovations with strategic implications. What are methodologies for managing the strategically unknown future?

## Program.

9:30–09:45 Opening welcome

**First session** Chair: Yakov Ben-Haim

09:45–10:15 *Douglas Macgregor*: ISR and the Condition of Persistent Uncertainty

10:15–10:45 Open discussion

10:45–11:15 *Doron Avital*: Logic in Action

11:15–11:45 Open discussion

11:45–12:45 Lunch

**Second session** Chair: Chuck Freilich

12:45–13:15 *Milo Jones*: Strategic Uncertainty, Digital Technology and Formal Cause

13:15–13:45 Open discussion

13:45–14:15 *Meir Finkel*: Conservatism, Innovation and Adaptation in force design

14:15–14:45 Open discussion

14:45–15:15 Coffee break

**Third session** Chair: Eitan Shamir

15:15–15:45 *Rob Johnson*: Decision-making in ‘An Age of Uncertainty’: A Critical Analysis of the British Approach to Full-Spectrum Challenges

15:45–16:15 Open discussion

16:15–16:45 *Yakov Ben-Haim*: What Strategic Planners Need to Know in the Age of Uncertainty

16:45–17:15 Concluding discussion

**Publication.** Lectures and discussions will be recorded during the workshop. Lecturers will be asked to review and extend their talks in essay form of 3000–5000 words. All speakers will be asked to confirm or correct their statements. The resulting document will be published as a Samuel Neaman Institute publication.

**Organizing committee.**

Prof. Yakov Ben-Haim, co-chair, Yitzhak Moda'i Chair in Technology and Economics, Technion.

Dr. Eitan Shamir, co-chair, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA).

Brig. General (ret.) Dr. Meir Finkel, IDF Dado Center for Interdisciplinary Military Studies.

Dr. Chuck Freilich, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University.

Dr. Eado Hecht, IDF Command and Staff College.

**Auspices.** This workshop is organized under the auspices of:

Samuel Neaman Institute for National Policy Research

IDF Dado Center for Interdisciplinary Military Studies

Yitzhak Moda'i Chair in Technology and Economics, Technion

**Sponsorship.**

This workshop is funded by the Samuel Neaman Institute.