Understanding the Stability of Military Coalitions

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**Abstract**

In wartime, various nations, groups, and organizations cooperate on the basis of an agreement or treaty to achieve a shared strategic goal or realize a joint policy. Such a coalition may utilize a range of tools and measures, from support for civilian apparatus to the use of full military force to the occupation of territory. While military coalitions are hardly a new phenomenon in international relations, their in-depth study in theory and in practice is highly significant. This study examines whether coalitions in extended wars necessarily function as coherent, stable, cohesive structures, or if relationships among the partners develop into a new kind of hierarchic, differential model in which force is applied through separate efforts, in separate spheres, and under different authorities.

This essay proposes looking at military coalitions from the perspective of their stability. It finds that coalitions are capable of acting even if their stability is undermined as a result of factors inherent in the coalition that influence them, and not only because of their cohesion or the sum total of their power. The kind of player and the players’ form of participation in the coalition, as well as hierarchic and differential patterns, play a critical role in attaining such stability to the extent the campaign continues.

This study adds to the existing body of theoretical knowledge of the conduct of the international system when it activates military force and expects international mechanisms and norms, such as those operating in the setting of military coalitions, to attain established goals. The stability of future coalitions, the necessity of which is already apparent on the strategic horizon, requires sophisticated analytical tools and newer approaches than those used to date. Therefore, this study refreshes the debate about how we think about military coalitions.

**Introduction**

The literature is notable for consistently expecting military coalitions to operate effectively and cohesively to attain a strategic goal or realize a policy and to change the situation that led to their formation (Koehane 1990, 731; Walt 2009, 86; Weitsman 2003, 113; Wolfers 1972, 268; Wolford 2015, 47–51). In the World War II paradigm and history of the campaign to liberate Bastogne, the American and British leaders empowered their military commanders to make decisions and spearhead forceful moves based on their strategic considerations and international cooperation (Beevor 2012, 697–710). Despite the expectation that the WW II model would be a permanent one, coalition forces in the post-9/11 period faced completely different strategic challenges that threated the that coalition’s stability and integrity. Holsty (1985, 5–18, 41) clarifies that there are many competing and even contradictory explanations for treaties and coalition, such as duration versus effectiveness, and Bensahel (2006, 35–49) explains that Afghanistan experienced a “coalitions within coalitions” phenomenon. The many coalitions involved in security, the economy, law enforcement, reconstruction, and intelligence differ in their objectives, but, in reality, they operate side by side in a network of coalitions, and this requires all parties to coordinate policy on resources and other issues to maintain what Lanir (1997, 9) defines as a “system of systems.” In light of the experience in Afghanistan, Kerps (2011, 12) claims that the future will generate “hybrid approaches” of unipolar and multi-participant fighting at various stages of a campaign, including efforts to bypass international institutions.

Recent studies have not gone beyond these conclusions and are, essentially, the starting point for this study designed to assess the stability of military coalition and understand how these operate under destabilizing conditions. This issue of the stability of military coalitions raises other theoretical and practical questions, such as whether there just one model of a military coalition and whether the integrity and stability of a coalition are themselves important objectives.

This essay focuses on the question of how do the types of actors and their form of operational participation affect the stability of a military coalition in an extended campaign.

**Theoretical Approaches to the Use of Coalitions in International Relations**

From a classical theoretical perspective, those championing a liberal approach may favor operating in a coalition and cooperating with international institutions and NGOs whose inclusion is important for generating widespread legitimacy and promoting high levels of participation. By contrast, those taking a realistic structural-systemic approach believe that the international system is essentially disordered, anarchic even, and that all nations and their allies must have the material means to provide for their own security and survival. In their opinion, the international reality is shaped by the conduct of nations trying, in the face of threats, to promote their power and safety by participating in coalitions (Levy and Thompson 2010, 31–33; Miller 1995, 15; Walt 2009, 89; Walts 1959, 200–207). Thus, according to this approach, the creation of military coalitions is a highly necessary practice for preserving security. Weitsman (2013, 2–10) explains that all experiences studied to date point to one sphere in which the strategic advantage of cooperation is greater than the sum of individual nations’ capabilities and force, emphasizing that in the realm of warfare, nations need to operate in the context of a treaty or coalition rather than as solitary players. Lake (2009, 138, 166) and Henke (2019, 130) claim that cooperative relationships between nations continue to be conducted parallel to states of disaccord, and that the international system understands and accepts the fact that, in certain regions, there are hierarchic relations manifested in terms of size, force, and military, political, and economic hierarchies. Lake explains that the phenomenon of hierarchies within coalitions does not cancel any previous arrangement; but rather, they exist within the context of pre-existing and often complicated relationships, thus helping clarify other complex phenomena.

This approach raises the question of whether such hierarchies have also penetrated the sphere of the use of force in military coalitions. Some say that they have (Schmitt 2019, 72). The condition for coherence and the desire to achieve it raise many questions about the level to importance of coherence and if it represents an objective in and of itself (Clark 2001, 188, 240). Is coherence, conceptually and strategically, manifested in the reasons and objectives of the war, or does it belong to the professional military mechanisms operated by forces and nations in war for attaining a high level of effectiveness? Some would link effectiveness to the command and control system structure and the resources each player brings to the coalition’s joint battle (Grauer and Zielenski 2020). In addition, we must ask if coherence or cohesion is a condition for coalitions, or if there can be other forms for operating international coalition efforts. Holsty (1985, 15) states that many theoreticians in the field view coherence as a condition for effectiveness. However, there are others, such as Liska (1962, 116), who claim that the drive for cohesion is actually an impediment and that a more selective approach is required when forming military coalitions.

Historically, the tendency to present coherence as a condition for the success of a military coalition has also undergone change. Trask (1993, 11–13, 186) refers to the strategic and operational independence, including full political and logistical support with minimal restrictions, that General Pershing, as military commander, received from President Wilson and Secretary of War Baker to attain U.S. goals. Pershing was opposed to integrating U.S. forces into those of its allies, a move he labeled “amalgamation” (Ibid., 168, 12–13), insisting instead on operating in a separate arena with separate units fighting under the U.S. flag and applying a different doctrine of maneuvering (Ibid., 37–41).

In the global war on terrorism, Starvidis (2011, 66) strives to explain that, despite the differences, all that was needed was a “comprehensive approach,” but as we shall see below, this approach is not necessarily consistent with the strategies, models, forms, and behaviors of the members of military coalitions. Thus, the realization of such a condition is hardly ensured. Weitsman (2013, 20–25) explains that the paradox of the George W. Bush administration was that the international community related to the United States as a hegemon operating unilaterally, whereas, in reality, under Bush’s authority, much broader coalitions were able to operate successfully. Weitsman also claims that in all such coalition structures, a certain conceptualization of a country’s behavior, rather than the country’s actual conduct in practice, serves as the basis of how nations place that country, or any country, for that matter, in the international order.

I posit that it is important to study the distinctions between how nations understand military cooperation and how military cooperation is actually practiced. Like Henke, Weitsman (2013, 2–10) explains that the size of the coalition does not determine its quality; rather, the size merely reflects the legitimacy it receives, because a broad coalition might suffer from internal tensions, coordination problems, friendly fire, and incentives demanded by the small nations. Liska (1962, 117) clarifies that in the tension between compromise and integration, there are “areas of activity” or indices that could cause a player to prefer to attain its own national interests rather than the shared interests of the coalition, and I relate to them as stabilizing or destabilizing regardless of whether they are internal or external. The efforts and difficulties of cooperation when interests clash and the impact and form of participation are not one-time issues. In his memoirs, Lloyd George (1933–1936, 2, 346), the British prime minister during World War I, wrote extensively about conflicts of interest and how they would surface again and again. This issue would recur during World War II, in the 1991 war in Iraq, in the Balkans of the 1990s, and in the war on terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan.

By contrast, we have the approach of Gen. David Petraeus (2010) who claims that the coalition forces’ surge in Afghanistan was not only one of power but also “a surge of ideas” for different operational plans and patterns. The essence of this approach lies in incorporating ideas and tensions and not necessarily only military might and capabilities. To confront this strategic and operational complexity, various metaphors have been adopted (Morgan and Smirich 1980, 43; Altman 2016, 321–335) National leaders speak of the “billiard table” and “equalizer” to describe complex operational campaigns in an attempt to create a balance among the many dimensions of operational contexts and influence that do not necessarily lead to the creation of integrity and cohesion. It is interesting to recall that in 1974, Philippe Petit walked a tightrope suspended between the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. To my mind, this metaphor best explains—physically, conceptually, and symbolically—how any entity in general is destabilized and the many dimensions and efforts needed over time to maintain stability in general, and that of military coalitions in particular.

Kerps (2011, 7–8, 32) finds that international norms, regional systems, and domestic politics shape the conduct of world powers and their partners in military coalitions, expressed on the basis of a horizon of time and the scope of operational commitment that partners have assumed. Indeed, the dimension of time and its effect is a formative factor at the start and during a military coalition, especially if the coalition must last a long time. Liska (1962, 71) and McInnis (2020, 12) explain that leaders consider several variables when determining the profile of their participation in coalitions: international pressure, a careful examination of other nations’ conduct, the military capabilities at their disposal, domestic pressure and consensus, and the stance of their nations’ elites. These are the source of the tension between compromise and integration affecting and shaping the form that a player’s participation in the coalition will take.

The type of play and the form of participation are the player’s strategic and operational ID card. McInnis (2020, 1–9) explains that to avoid subjective interpretation of its participatory form, the U.S. administration has learned to relate only to the coalition partners’ participation profile in practice rather than declarations or force laydown actions. A group of actors with similar profiles can participate in active offensive warfare, be willing to operate deadly means, or choose to avoid them (Orswold and Zaidman 2014, 181; Schmitt 2019; Sloan 2012, 11). Greitser (2015, 57, 61, 96) explains that strategic rationale and operational form are interdependent: the spatial expression of patterns of thought and action and the form itself have the nature of coming into being, so that “the longer and farther a campaign extends in time and space, the form becomes more visible in its conventional context and in the context of deploying special forces.” The case study below will demonstrate this.

**The Stability of Military Coalitions**

Stability is a prevalent concept in almost all sciences and is used in the physical, material sense as well as in the abstract, conceptual sense. Stability is both a condition and an actor, while balancing refers to the act required to attain it (Even-Shoshan, 2006, 35). Deviations, changes, disruptions, and tensions can serve as both external environmental and internal factors with clear connections that interfere with functioning and, as such, characterize the basic rationale and nature of the matter being studied, whether physical or conceptual.

People often explain stability by referring to its antithesis, instability, while some claim that stability is merely a concept in the eye of the beholder (Altman 2016, 290; Preisler-Sviri 2014, 30,). Some, such as the Cynefin Framework, link stability with certainty, which explains that unclear situations can undermine the response given (Ibid., 30) because of the lack of linearity between the problem and its solution (Ibid., 225). Wolfers (1972, 269) explains that lack of certainty is inherent in every future commitment to assistance among nations partnering in a coalition, and Gamson (1972, 533) adds that in a coalition, military force can actually be a weakness. A partner nation or regional player can have a significant relative advantage over other partners even if it is weaker militarily and its scope of participation is smaller. Walt speaks of this with reference to Pakistan and Uzbekistan, which, while weaker nations militarily than the United States, possess infrastructure and logistical assets that are operational conditions for acting in Afghanistan (Walt 2009, 98).

The strategy of caveats has been extensively studied because of its centrality (Fermann 2018, 244; Orswold and Zaidman 2014,). In conjunction with a unique strategic context, these can help clarify if caveats are an inhibiting or even a destabilizing factor in a coalition. According to Tamari’s analysis (2007, 227–262), the caveats and conditions imposed on the forces during the 1956 Suez Crisis and ensuing Sinai Campaign served as a stabilizing factor that facilitated the coalition of Great Britain, France, and Israel reaching a rationale as a condition for action. For the Israelis, the initiative and attack on Sinai could have been considered as an event that destabilized the coalition and undermined its coherence. Thus, political and military reservations and caveats are neither good nor bad; they depend entirely on the unique context that arises.

Consensus about the goals and objectives or a campaign, national caveats, battlefield achievements, and domestic public opinion all play a stabilizing role manifested in identification and solidarity, and thereby contribute to stability. However, they also play a destabilizing role if there are disagreements over how the campaign is being conducted. In an extended campaign, the true test of a military coalition lies in its ability to continue to operate effectively, especially under destabilizing conditions. The link between the type of player and its form of participation also affects the other players that must, from their perspective, compensate for the instability. The type of a player participating in a military coalition is manifested in its form of participation, which represents the entire system of the player’s strategic considerations and the processes it undergoes en route to participation. The forms of military participation in military coalitions are many and varied, and are an expression of political and material aspects, such as the goal defined for a coalition player by its nation and the extent of identification with it, its available force composition, the caveats imposed on it, the player’s command and control system, its independence in terms of administrative and combat-supporting resources, and so on. What constitutes a good blending or mix of players categories for producing a stable coalition remains an open question, as does how to compare the stability of various coalition compositions. Schmitt (2019) concludes that the presence of many small nations in a coalition is a destabilizing factor even if it contributes toward its legitimacy.

A coalition’s composition, then, is a changing combination of players in different categories and player groups with similar participatory patterns. The composition ultimately determines if the force of once such a category has a restraining or destabilizing effect, e.g., actively participating in offensive or defensive warfare, playing a logistical role, or leading an international effort, as Germany supported the rehabilitation of the Afghani police force while other players participated in other forms and efforts. In a war of short duration, a military coalition can operate as a stable, coherent, cohesive entity, but in an extended conflict, a differential structural-conceptual pattern of action overcomes destabilizing factors and tensions in the relations among the types of players and their forms of participation. The collective operative conduct that develops to confront the set of differences among the players, their roles, and the duration of the fighting, whether this is a coherent military coalition as has been the thinking to date or differential and hierarchic as this study suggests.

The duration of the fighting in Afghanistan, occurring in tandem with the fighting in Iraq in which a world power—the material mainstay of the coalition— was distracted (Sloan 2012, 2), amplified doubts that the coalition could, in the long term, maintain coherence and cohesion given the many players, a situation exacerbated by friction among the military coalition’s partners (Wolford 2015, 154–157). Hence, military coalitions must be able to sustain an extended effort to preserve stability despite the effects of internal and external factors. The longer the fighting lasts, the more difficult this effort becomes.

This leads us to the next point, namely, that we must understand the meaning of destabilization of military coalitions and what solutions can be applied to that situation over time. This approach differs from the orders studied to date, such as “coherence,” “command and effort unity,” and the “comprehensive approach” (Barno 2007; Glatz 2011; Starvidis 2011) that characterize the study of coalitions to date. These are found lacking in the attempt to clarify complex phenomena and large-scale operational-strategic moves. All of this demonstrates the theoretical lacuna. Consequently, the issue of coalition stability is actually its own discipline.

The links among player types, participatory forms, battle duration, and the level of certainty of their effect on coalition stability or instability can be expressed via the following model:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **UNABLE** TO REMOVE THE BORDERS HERE… SORRY] | **Duration** |
| **Limited engagement** | **Extended warfare** |
| **Player type****and****participatory form** | **World Power****United States** | Stabilizing | Stabilizing |
| **Senior Partner****Great Britain** | Stabilizing | DestabilizingContributes to stability |
| **Partner in Fighting** | Contributes to stability | DestabilizingContributes to stability |
| **Regular nation partner** | Contributes to stability | DestabilizingContributes to stability |
| **Host nation** | Contributes to stability | DestabilizingContributes to stability |

**Hypotheses**

Based on the above survey of the literature, I would posit that player types and their operational participatory form affect the stability of a military coalition over time as follows:

1. **The more player types there are in a coalition, the higher the chances are for destabilization.**
2. **In an extended campaign, the more the player roles are differential and the hierarchy informal, the more stable the coalition.**
3. **The longer the campaign, the greater the chances are for the coalition’s destabilization.**

**The Study**

This study rests on one basic assumption: the coalition or parts thereof is/are simultaneously at war in two or more arenas. This assumption is required to demonstrate the heavy burden placed on the dominant player in the coalition and the possibility that tensions and competing interests might emerge.

***The Dependent Variable: The Stability of a Military Coalition***

The stability and functioning of a military coalition are affected by the set of player types, participatory forms, and warfare duration where there is no certainty that the military coalition will have the optimal conditions for operating as a single cohesive entity and where its stability might be undermined by a range of factors. In this study, the stability of military coalitions will be defined as the ability to meet the goal of unseating the Taliban, to operate effectively over time, to undertake relevant operative interventions, and to withstand reversals, changes, and formative events, whether internal or external.

Destabilization in a battle or an operational event involving many players of different categories is an ongoing, systematic matter rather than a momentary or singular occurrence. The type of player and the player’s form of participation as well as the duration of the fighting are significant contributing factors. This study is measured by two parameters: type and force. Type refers to the military manifestation in practice, such as the ability to cope with unexpected events. The force of destabilization is described by three levels: the coalition “is stable and continues,” “its stability has been undermined but it continues to operate,” and “it is in crisis and stops functioning.”

***Independent Variable 1: Player Type and Participatory Form***

Every player, nation, or partner in a coalition has its own interests, patterns of participation, limitations, resources, and unique characteristics. The participatory form is the operative strategic tool allowing each player to express its military participation (Kerps 2011, 78), whether it constrains the coalition or destabilizes it, and it represents each player’s operational identification card. Players with a similar participatory pattern create a category, and the fact that a player belongs to such a category also has a constraining or destabilizing effect. For the sake of this study, the categories of player types and participatory forms are as follows: world powers, senior partners, nation fighting partners, regular nation powers, and target nations.

The forms that a coalition partner’s participation may take vary widely and express the goal defined for the player and its nation and its identification with them, the force composition it has available, the limitations imposed domestically, active offensive or defensive participation, command and control system, and other tools allowing the player to be in control and maximize the power at its disposal, and more.

In analyzing the case study, I strove to identify which destabilizer of military coalitions was active and influential. To this end, the dominance of one or more of the following sufficed: an unstable strategic or operative functioning approach, destabilization resulting from a gap in capabilities or resources, destabilization of the command and control and decision-making structures, destabilization of the participating composition, and various cultural aspects.

***Independent Variable 2: Coalition Pattern of Action***

As noted, Henke (2019, 12) claims that the possibilities for cooperation are not binary and may change to represent a hybrid approach to a coalition’s application of force.

In addition to the time needed to achieve effective cooperation, it is also necessary to be able to adapt and exploit new opportunities. In an extended campaign, a differential structural-conceptual pattern of action is aimed to overcome friction arising from the presence of many destabilizing factors in the relations among player types and participatory forms by applying force in separate efforts and spheres and under separate authorities. This differs from the conventional orders in classical military doctrines, such as unity of command and unity of effort. To understand if the features of a coalition act in the event examined are indicative of coherent or differential efforts, it is necessary to identify the patterns of action that are present throughout.

***Intervening Variable: Campaign Duration***

Unlike the battle to liberate Bastogne in World War II, which lasted a few days, the war in Afghanistan required the coalition to operate effectively with varying degrees of force, and to sustain stability over 14 years or so (2001–2015) in a geographical region larger than Western Europe. Reference to the duration of fighting in most studies is generally measured in terms of concrete resources, force size, and casualties.

In this study, duration is a variable of a theoretical nature. The essence of duration is not expressed only in units of time or resources, but also in events, causes, and processes affecting coalition stability as well as the other variables. This innovative approach to the time dimension may contribute to understanding the rationale, context, and analysis applied to the emergence of time periods of operational significance that include internal and external events and factors affecting a coalition’s stability or instability. These may include policy changes, major operations, trends, reversals, and formative events in the block of time studied that may have occurred in a second arena, a regional or a global system that could have a direct impact on the players, and the duration of the campaign, such as major trends, resource constraints, or priorities of the world power in a second arena. Other occurrences could include global events affecting the conduct of the players in the arena, such as a NATO Conference or U.N. Security Council resolutions, mass casualty terrorist attacks, and even the election of new national leaders or the emergence of groundbreaking technological developments. All of these may contribute to an understanding of the context and circumstances under which a campaign continues and affects coalition stability.

To better understand the players in a military coalition, this study has undertaken a theoretical mapping of the military factors and the unique constraining, destabilizing, and blocking features of each player type in the coalition.. While these features may have roots or sources in other places or campaigns, and while it may be important to analyze these roots to better understand the broader phenomenon of military coalitions, they will not be discussed in detail here because of the limited scope of this study.

This case study requires observations and testimony from primary and secondary sources of key position holders and decision-makers involved in the conduct of the Afghanistan campaign who can shed light on the conduct of the relevant players—the policies, ways of thinking, decision making, and use of force—and explaining the stability component that was undermined and its impact.

The military coalition in the post-9/11 global war on terrorism in general, and in Afghanistan in particular, is one of the longest-lasting, broadest, and most complex coalitions that has ever been formed and functioned in history, involving 49 nations and dozens of organizations and other entities. Studies about this coalition have often claimed that it and its parallel coalition in Iraq failed.

**Case Study: Operation Medusa, Summer of 2006, Southern Afghanistan**

In the summer of 2006, the entire world focused its attention on four spheres: the rising violence in Iraq, the deterioration of security in southern Afghanistan, global terrorist attacks, and Israel’s war in southern Lebanon. While events had begun in 2004 and continued into 2007, they climaxed in 2006. Forty-nine nations participated in the coalition in Afghanistan, a campaign that claimed more than 3,500 casualties of the coalition’s armies as well as some 12,000 dead and 23,000 wounded Afghani soldiers. The campaign, whose cost was estimated at $900 billion, turned millions into refugees and continued the widespread destruction that began with the Soviet invasion in 1979 (Cordesman and Lemieux 2010; O’Hanlon and Lins de Albuquerque 2005, 2014).

For this case study, I have chosen to focus on the years 2004 to 2007 in Afghanistan, a period when the United States was at the height of its engagement in the war in Iraq while, in the other arena of Afghanistan, a coalition functioned simultaneously and would remain intact, in some format or another, for many more years. In the midst of this, Operation Medusa was the key operational campaign carried out by NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) coalition under the military leadership of Great Britain and Canada. It has often been described as the most important NATO campaign of the time (Richards 2014, 252–253; Richards cited by Fraser 2018, xvi) and was characterized by all the complexities noted in the Introduction and described in the paragraphs devoted to the variables for understanding coalition stability. I used the process tracing method (George and Bennett 2005, 81) to investigate the relevant decisions and operational efforts to facilitate a debate of the research question.

Many have claimed that, because the United States shifted its major effort to Iraq in 2003, the strategic direction of the war was lost and Western nations assumed the ambitious project of rebuilding Afghanistan without defining clear goals, a situation that changed only in 2009 under the Obama administration (Pearl 2014, 4). This shift transformed Afghanistan into a secondary arena. Several parallel strategic campaigns were created and carried out in Afghanistan that would, from then on, become the subject of debate and criticism about the extent of their compatibility or coherence. The debate about a world power’s ability to operate simultaneously in two separate arenas is not new (Clark 2001, 312–313). In this parallel occurrence, the United States reduced forces in Afghanistan to give primary attention to the Iraqi arena, and, whenever necessary, it shifted resources when the coalition required support in Afghanistan (Henriksen 2014, 287–288; Myers 2009, 258, 272–283), even if this meant bypassing international institutions (Myers 2009, 297). Great Britain followed the lead of the United States and, in 2006, concluded that this was its best strategy to extricate itself from the situation in Iraq while preserving its status as the United States’ senior partner in the war on terrorism (Ludwig 2017, 11, 39–40, 48–50; Pearl 2017, 418, 422; Strachan 2013, 46–51). The British arrival in Helmand Province stabilized the coalition in Afghanistan, albeit harsh criticism was leveled against Great Britain for leaving Iraq. To shift the major effort to the Iraqi arena, the United States pushed for other nations to assume responsibility in Afghanistan, but did not really abandon the arena, persisting in Operation Enduring Freedom and the ceaseless pursuit of terrorist organizations there (Andersen 2016, 26–31; Bolger 2014, 71, 89–91; Bowman and Dale 2009, 25–29; Pearl 2014, 132–139, 171). Regarding the form of such world power multi-arena participation, much may be learned from CENTCOM Commander Abizaid (2006):

CENTCOM will continue to transition conventional stability operation in Afghanistan to NATO. However, with significant U.S. conventional presence in the eastern part of the country, a robust American counterterrorism capability throughout the entire country, and continued development of Provincial Reconstruction Teams, U.S. efforts in Afghanistan will remain vital to achieving stability there (4).

As NATO eventually assumes control over all conventional U.S. and Coalition Forces in Afghanistan, the United States will remain the single largest contributor of forces to this NATO effort, while also retaining a very robust counterterrorism force throughout the entire country (28).

Since 2003, the U.S.’s command and control challenge of multi-arena coalitions has grown even more pronounced. The operational development of CENTCOM until the establishment of the CFC-A resulted in differential activity in Afghanistan, many systemic and strategic efforts, and separate command and control systems from 2003 until 2006 and even, I would argue, much beyond that date. These are generally explained as disunity of command and effort or lack of coherence that I suggest actually represent intentional differential patterns of action in military coalitions. Similar organizational changes happened in tandem in the Iraqi arena to confront the rise in violence from 2004 until 2007, and the same would be true in the Horn of Africa (Barno 2007, 33–34; Dawson 2010, 16–23; Kingston 1984, 2–5; Weitsman 2013, 136; Wright 2010, 237–247). These organizational adaptations are indicative of the genuine need of the United States as a world power to control and manage an effective, multi-arena campaign, while retaining its freedom of action and systemic flexibility it required by means of a stabilizing differential operational mechanism despite the burden it, as a world power, bore in Iraq (Bush 2003, 2; Peck cited by Henriksen 2014, 30). This U.S. exigency explains its participatory form in Afghanistan during Operation Medusa.

But the shift in responsibility from the United States to NATO took place only on paper and was barely discernible in subsequent operations (Morelli and Belkin 2009, 17, 21–22). In fact, the United States continued to operate a logistical system that spanned the globe (Clemente and Evans 2014, 19). On July 31, 2006, responsibility for the Regional Command South was transferred to NATO-ISAF. Canada played a leading role in this shift and had fighting partners such as Great Britain, Australia, and Denmark by its side, as well as others, including Romania and Estonia, which all received massive U.S. support for every combat and administrative component needed to undertake a large-scale, extended campaign, including assets enabling multi-branch fighting (Abizaid 2006, 22, 27, 45; Peck cited by Henriksen 2014, 17–29, 32; McChrystal 2014, 264). Their **differential** and **hierarchic** operation allowed the United States to have an impact on one arena after another whenever necessary after prior planning, and operate informally in real time to serve as a stabilizing factor despite the war in Iraq. The description of the battle in Operation Medusa is an opportunity to examine the mechanisms at work to preserve the stability and form of action of a differential military coalition of this sort.

***Background, Reasons, and Causes for the Operation and Its Importance***

By August 2006, the cumulative assessment of the enemy indicated that the Taliban was planning an attack on NATO forces in Panjwai, Kandahar (Collins 2015, 33–38; Richards 2014, 251). The weakness of the central government in Kabul, corruption, imbalanced tribal representation in the government, and the abuse of other tribes blessed with resources and land, as well as other processes, paved the way for the return of a stronger and well-equipped Taliban determined to carry out a wide-spread campaign in the summer of 2006. While the United States was struggling with the large-scale uprising in the Iraqi arena, the Taliban perceived NATO forces in southern Afghanistan as weak (Clarke 2011, 17; Pearl 2017 161–165; Sloan 2012, 6). Fraser (2018) described the operational reality created before the operation under the Canadian RC South multinational command center as follows:

Not ideal, but that was our reality. In sense we were spinning plates; whenever a plate started wobbling, we would get it spinning again, then move to the next wobbling plate (102).

This is a description of destabilization seemingly caused by a lack of force, but fundamentally expressing a relevant operative gap, which is destabilizing. The importance of the operation, as Fraser explains, was like “being in Ontario and losing Toronto to the enemy,” and, moreover, to show the locals that NATO’s commitment was real and its ability to generate change was high (Cordesman and Lemieux 2010, 44–49, 57–58; Fraser 2018, 114). Richards (cited by Fraser 2018), the commander of the NATO-SAF coalition forces, explained that not to attack would be understood by the Taliban as proof of the NATO alliance’s powerlessness and a Taliban victory. Richards’ decision to attack and intervene in the system created may have escalated the situation and destabilized it in the short term, but, I see the decision actually as a stabilizing factor, conceptually and practically, in its offensive approach to the Taliban.

Attaining this operational objective would achieve the broader objective of making it possible to rebuild Kandahar and its provinces, develop their economy, and raise the level of trust between the local population and the authorities at the expense of the population’s support for the Taliban and other power sources, on the basis of the ADZ (Afghan Development Zone) pioneered and led by Richards (Pearl 2014, 181; Richards 2014, 206–208). One may say that Operation Medusa was a “to be or not to be” situation for the international project in Afghanistan (Richards 2014, 5). By contrast, success in Kandahar was the key to NATO’s future and reputation. NATO and its allies viewed the operation as daring—the battle on which everything else hinged (Richards 2014, 253, and cited by Fraser 2018).

***The Objective of Canada’s War in Afghanistan***

Since the Korean War, the Canadian army had become accustomed to peacekeeping efforts. The Canadian presence in Afghanistan, operating alonside the United States since the start of the fighting, took various forms, and its contribution was manifested in the dispatch of large battle and planning teams, participation in different NATO settings, such as the Provincial Reconstruction Team, and involvement in many military operations between 2001 and 2006, when it assumed responsibility for the Regional Command South (Casson 2007, 39–51). The objective of the war fought by Canada, which merged with its partners in the RCS and other ISAF coalition forces in Afghanistan, was articulated as follows:

The joint Aegis force will act in the full range of operations to allow the efforts of the Afghan government to overcome the enemy forces and create a safe, democratic, and independent Afghani nation state (Fraser 2018, 196).

In this study, I refer to Canada’s choice to act as a fighting partner in light of the challenges its forces would face during the operation, and hence its centrality and importance to the case study as a coalition stabilizing factor.

*Planning and Preparations*

The planning preceding Operation Medusa began in Canada about a year before (Fraser 2018, 1–3). From a professional military perspective, the Canadian force came unprepared for fighting of such extensive scope. It needed to step into the shoes of U.S. soldiers, but lacking the combat experience that their American counterparts had accrued during several tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nothing could have prepared the Canadians for the number, range, and intensity of the operations other than the operations themselves (Fraser 2018, 74–76). The dearth of the Canadian force’s ability and preparedness was an early, inherent internal destabilizer, which Fraser (2018) summarizes as follows:

We did not train for conventional battles and were unprepared. It was not our mission; COIN (counterinsurgency) was, in tandem with country-building. We were not equipped, staffed, or prepared to undertake a large-scale offensive. We didn’t plan a glorious victory. We had a much more modest goal: not to lose (48).

Lack of security, professionalism, and appropriate knowledge are internal destabilizers in an organic force, and all the more so when the force is multinational. The convergence of processes in the second half of 2006, including the fourth increment of the ISAF mandate expansion to the south of the country, planned for July 31, 2006, undermined the coalition’s stability. The decision to embark on the operation sooner and the desire to gain the trust of the local Afghani leadership were stabilizing system interventions/actions that justified accelerating the timetable despite the operation’s complexity.

*August 19-September 2, 2006 – Preparing the Forces and the Battle Sphere*

The operation’s preliminary stage, deploying and readying the forces in the Panjwai Valley, continued in tandem with this occurrence until September 1. Thus, the formative stage, originally planned to last several weeks, was reduced to just a few days because of resource constraints and the need to coordinate with an operation of the Tenth Division in Regional Command East (Fraser, 2018, 113). A description of other nations’ participatory patterns, caveats, and missions indicate the presence of a hierarchy of participation in the campaign, expressed in terms of being exposed to high-quality intelligence, data systems, and operation of fire, and consequently also a hierarchy in terms of operational and strategic decision-making. Knowing Canada would get no help from NATO, writes Fraser (2018, 14), he informally asked his colleague Gen. Benjamin Freakley for help from the 1st Battalion of U.S. Special Forces TF-31, a highly skilled force, a five-year veteran of operations in Afghanistan and, during Operation Enduring Freedom, under the command of the United States rather than the coalition. This force was superior in every component of combat support: intelligence, offensive aerial power, logistics, aerial evacuation, and communications. These would ensure ongoing aerial support of every time thanks to informal flights of resources. Ultimately, according to Fraser, they had everything they needed to carry out the operation. Without U.S. involvement, the Canadians would not have been able to perform their operations in a significant way (Fraser 2018, 140–143). The participation of the Special Forces expressed the informal presence of the United States as a world power, hierarchy, full assistance to a fighting partner, and differential pattern of action. Understanding the pattern of informal assistance outside the decision-making process when there is risk to soldiers’ lives is especially noteworthy in warfare by military coalitions, because it is a key factor in restraining crises.

*September 2-4, 2006, First Attack*

The attack and maneuver plan of Operation Medusa differed from the Soviet plan in 1982 when Soviet forces attacked the Panjwai Valley in one main effort from west to east (Grau 1996, 15–18). On September 3, at 9:30 AM, there was a technical refueling mishap involving a British intelligence gathering plane, which led to its crash and the deaths of 14 British soldiers about four hours after the start of the fighting. It also became clear that the Canadian troops had run out of 25 mm ammunition for its LAV III infantry fighting vehicles, a result of careless management; dealing with it turned into an urgent global logistical operation of the National Defense Headquarters in Canada (Fraser 2018, 147–151). A tactical oversight becoming a strategic effort diverted attention and destabilized the situation because of its weakness. In a battle with the Taliban that started going awry about seven hours into the fighting, the attack failed because of gaps in battle management skills and operational experience, despite ISAF’s involvement (Richards 2014, 254–255) and the troops decided to retreat. This was a critical internal and external destabilizer that also destabilized the decision-making mechanism because the data and the planning, in which many resources had been invested, failed.

*September 4-8, 2006 – Crisis in the Canadian Force, SF Effort Becomes an Iraqi Effort*

The next day, September 4, which Fraser calls “the worst day of my life” (Fraser 2018, 163), the forces were ready to attempt another breakthrough. This was preceded by the concentration of effort of artillery and aerial support entities, most if not all American, in managing American aerial coordination officers who had been assigned to the forces. An A-10 plane identified a dumpster fire, which was a sign for the coordination line to attack. It dove and accidentally attacked the Canadian force. The incident resulted in chaos in the command structure and, in fact, derailed the ability of the Canadian force to operate over the next few days, causing the force commanders to reconsider their plan (Fraser 2018, 165–167, 181–182). At this stage, NATO’s most important operation was halted. The realization that it was necessary to reconquer the territory became clear both at the RC South command center and within the battalion combat team. Everyone was aware how desperate the situation had become, in particular due to the heavy pressure coming from Ottawa and the concern about further casualties (Fraser 2018, 152–161; Richards 2014, 251, 255). This was a destabilizing factor of a fighting partner, not just a tactical crisis resulting from a coordination problem or gaps in skills and control in operating aerial assistance that destabilized the entire operation.

On September 6, when the Canadian force was at its nadir, the North Atlantic Council visited the operational headquarters. According to Fraser, this resulted in further destabilization, including the constraints of the forces and the large gap between NATO assistance of means along with the importance of the operation to NATO and the campaign assessment present to the heads of the NAC (Richards 2014, 259). The battle on September 7 was conducted under the close personal supervision of the commander of the Tenth Battalion, Gen. Benjamin Freakley, who exhibited differential operational conduct as an example of the involvement of a world power in a coalition operation by means of a differential pattern of action of Special Forces. The challenges of the fighting and the clearing of the area led Fraser to the important realization that tanks are necessary for the troops on the ground. Unlike Iraq, these were not supplied to Afghanistan by the nations mainly because of the difficulties of moving heavy equipment and the lack of access to a landlocked zone, but also as a result of the understanding that the campaign was a campaign to build a nation, not a campaign of incursion and conquest of land. Although Canadian public opinion expressed willingness to provide for this operational demand, the movement of tanks was insufficient given the operation’s tight deadline. The Halford tanks that finally arrived were said to be decommissioned, “memorials” not fit for war; later on, they were used in several routine security missions (Fraser 2018, 186).

Bringing the tanks to Kandahar raises several questions on which this study focuses. Was this merely a tactical initiative or act, or was it a world power intervention in a coalition crisis? For the coalition of that time, was the introduction of the tanks a stabilizing or destabilizing factor? Had the deeper strategic meaning of bringing the tanks been coordinated with the United States? Great Britain? Or the other partners? In addition to Fraser’s description, that this was a land-based operational need, what were the considerations that made the Canadians bring them? Some say that the response to the threat of IEDs and the lack of aerial teams for helicopters and aerial forces was what triggered their arrival (Sullivan cited by Henriksen 2014, 195–197). However, a close look at the operational material “Spirit of McChord” (USAF 2006) shows that there was a transatlantic leadership operation that went through Kyrgyzstan using American and Canadian C-17 planes until their arrival in Kandahar, and that it is possible to identify them as intervention during crisis, i.e., a differential pattern at its best rather than a simple tactical action.

*September 9–14, 2006, Second Attack*

The appointment of the deputy commander, an American officer with experience as a brigade commander in the U.S. National Guard and a background as a helicopter pilot, to serve as a combat team commander in the midst of a crisis seems to have been a necessity. The appointment of so senior an individual to command a small force was meant to stop the chain of destabilizing events and inject confidence and leadership thanks to the charisma of an exceptionally skilled officer (Fraser 2018, 183–185; Richards 2014, 251). On the other hand, this also exposed the extent of the crisis in which the force found itself.

The second plan, which was put into effect on September 9, would also run into trouble. It was to be carried out on September 10–11 near the targets of the original operation deep in the Panjwai Valley, until the Taliban’s resistance was broken.

It is important to bear in mind that, despite the intensity with which these events occurred, at the same time they were happening, events no less dramatic were taking place in Musa Qala, Helmand Province, also involving British and U.S. Special Forces personnel. These events worried the coalition HQ (Pearl 2014, 185) just as much as the battles in Kandahar.

*September 12-14, 2006 – Ridding the Region of the Enemy and Concluding Actions*

The sequence of serious failures ended between September 12 and September 14, when the forces cleared the Taliban out the region and reached the 24th parallel. The operation ended there as the last of the enemy forces fled to the western provinces of Helmand and Farah, and even to Iran (Fraser 2018, 191–192). On September 17, 2006, the operation was officially declared as over. ANA and other TF-31 forces stayed in the field and were finally evacuated after four weeks.

*Outcomes, Implications, and Follow-up Operations*

Fraser’s observation, “at least we didn’t lose” (Fraser 2018, 191), is not enough for a professional army, especially not in the context of a confrontation fought by a Western coalition and defined as “NATO’s most important battle” (Richards 2014,5, 253, and cited by Fraser 2018, xvi). Fraser explained that, in the short term, the operation achieved its goals: ousting the Taliban and improving security. As far as the long term was concerned, the operation created the conditions needed to develop the economy, rebuild the nation, bring back the people displaced by the fighting, return millions of children to school, and many other social goals (Fraser 2018, 193–196, 208; Sloan 2012, 8). According to Fraser, because of the complexity in managing the coalition, coupled with an incorrect assessment of the speed at which Afghan tribal culture operates, it will be decades before it is possible to say anything about achievements in other areas (Fraser 2018, 198). However, regarding all things related to the Taliban and other terrorist organizations, Richard’s assessment about succeeding in ousting them would be revealed as far from true. The fighting in southern Afghanistan would continue and even intensify at least until 2011 (Cordesman and Lemieux 2010, 5; Gal 2014, 139–142, 266–285). As early as January 2007, another ground operation would be needed in the same area, in Baaz Tsuka, to oust the Taliban that had returned (Finlayson and Meyer 2007, 1; Richards 2014, 270, 293).

The battle, perceived as being highly important, failed utterly, a failure that was scathingly criticized when it emerged that this was not the first time a ground force had been targeted by friendly fire from the air (Sullivan cited by Henriksen 2014, 157). This is a professional conceptual destabilizer that stresses that there are operational conditions for acting in the context of a multi-branch international battle. In addition, the rural sphere, which was designated for social and infrastructure development, suffered great damage from the fighting and use of fire in the course of Medusa and subsequent operations, and many years would be needed to rebuild it. There are elements, such as HQ weaknesses, the diplomatic cover for an operation, participatory forms of other players, and international organizations that expand the debate about coalition stability versus instability. These, however, are beyond the scope of this study.



**Discussion**

**Hypothesis 1: The more player types there are in a coalition, the higher the chances are for destabilization.** The case study here shows that the intervention capabilities of the United States as a world power to be trusted to provide combat and administrative assistance and resources allowed it to stabilize the military coalition over time and, in particular, during crises. This stability was achieved by maintaining the hierarchy while also managing differential patterns of participation in the coalition.

The multiplicity of players, a factor that increases the chances of destabilization, both internal and external, is linked primarily to the participatory forms of the fighting partners compared to the other partners and the host nation. The case study indicates that Canada, the fighting partner, operated under extreme destabilizing conditions and crisis, and that only the intervention of a world power and action in a differential pattern enabled it to continue to function. This is one way of understanding the recommendations that Canada operate only under U.S. guarantees in any future mission (Sloan 2012, 14). The study also shows that more sophisticated conceptualization and assessment capabilities are needed than “like-minded” to describe nation partners in a military coalition (Anderson 2016, 4) and integrate the many variables into an overall view of joint stability.

In the category of fighting partners, nations like the Netherlands, Australia, and France are interesting. Over the long term, they managed to sustain operational attack delegation, including an appointed multi-branch HQ and Special Forces while relying on full or partial regional combat and administrative assistance components of the United States as a world power. This form of fighting partnership has a precedent. In Kosovo, the partners were known as the “quad” or the “quint” (Clark 2001, 447). The stabilizing capacity of these nations lay in their ability to operate independently in a sector or alongside the British and Canadian delegations while acting without almost any restrictions. They were capable of carrying out the mission on their own, thereby freeing U.S. and British forces to operate in the most challenging locations, such as Helmand, Kandahar, and eastern Afghanistan. I contend that this is a practical manifestation of both the operational hierarchy that the participatory form of these players created and of the ability to operate in a differential pattern, which does not undermine stability despite the constitutional and political complexity at home which these delegations were forced to face (Brangwin and Rann 2010, 1–22; Dimitriu and De Graaf 2010; Siracusa 2006, 39–48).

Great Britain has a special standing in terms of leadership, broad military capabilities, central political status in Europe, and a reputation as the senior ally of the United States from World War II until 9/11 (Pearl 2014, 422; Weitsman 2013, 101–102, 149). Its simultaneous participation in both battle arenas despite the difficulties, including harsh domestic criticism, and its European and global reputation express a dual participatory form as both a senior participant and a fighting participant (Clarke 2011, 12). But, as such, Great Britain remained alone, and therefore its strategic status was unique. Henke (2019, 12) identified a “hybrid approach” to the use of military force in the context of a coalition. This case study demonstrates that the use of Special Forces during the period being examined as a separate effort is itself a participatory form that existed side by side with the coalition’s operations—related to them but separate from them. Richards noted how surprised he was to discover that Special Forces were operating in his zone that were not under his command and responsibility (Richards 2014, 273). Their military excellence, proximity to sensitive information gleaned from interrogations, and access to groundbreaking technologies resulted in a preference for their differential deployment until the end of the war, given their counterterrorism effectiveness (Cordesman and Lemieux 2010, 51). The case study indicates that, within a coalition, preference for such a special effort creates a hierarchy and a significant difference among the forces used. The ability to identify one type of player or participatory form in a coalition is highly valuable, and belonging to a player category, whether broad or narrow, in a military coalition also serves as a tool supporting the decision-making process of every individual nation. Therefore, the more players that participate in a coalition, the more difficult and complex this task becomes. However, knowing if a participatory form stabilizes or destabilizes a coalition can affect the hierarchy developing in the coalition and therefore has an impact on the issue of the relationships or relative weights among player categories. Australia and Belgium are two good examples demonstrating this process. In Afghanistan, Australia reduced unnecessary friction by operating mostly Special Forces in ground battles, while Belgium avoided friction by operating F-16 fighter planes that seemingly were not needed. Australia’s contribution to the stability of the military coalition was far greater than Belgium’s, because of the form its participation took and not because of the profile of its intensity. Hence, one cannot expect a multiplicity of players, constraints, and forms of participation in different categories to do anything but undermine stability.

A critical question that must be addressed here is: was it possible to better utilize the German, Swedish, and Norwegian delegations and their power? On the one hand, they controlled the area differently: they worked defensively on civilian and humanitarian needs and also participated in the effort to build the Afghan National Police; on the other hand, we know that they imposed severe restrictions on their forces. In this case, did the participatory form have other aspects of legitimacy, policy, and economy stabilizing the coalition? Or was this form of “isolationism” proof of the need for a sophisticated differential pattern of action to maintain the military coalition’s stability? These questions are relevant to the dimensions of time and the development of the campaign. It is true that differential integration between fighting partners and natural partners such as Canada and Estonia in this case study entails operational hierarchy, but it also achieves better operational effectiveness than the existing norm in which every player contributes to the coalition as it sees fit and the status of all players is seen as equal.

Although I did not include the coalition command bodies as a player type similar to a nation in my theoretical model, the study demonstrates that the coalition’s command and control structures and the processes taking place in each one, such as long-term planning, affected the coalition’s stability. The proximity and different type of participation between two headquarters operating in Afghanistan during this period—the U.S.’s CFC-A and NATO’s ISAF—as well as the SOF of the Special Forces and other HQs affected the stability of the military coalition. The case study shows that the multi-branch operational HQs represented their own participatory forms and entities in terms of designation, functions, and capabilities at their disposal. Not every nation wanted or could allow such a structure despite its NATO membership.

As the nation hosting the coalition and also participating in it, the scope of the crisis and increasing terrorism in Afghanistan were some of the factors in the formation and expansion of the coalition. The corruption, the power of the local militias, and the distrust of the central government and its institutions became key destabilizers and hindrances to the coalition and its central goals in the ongoing campaign. Much has been written on this topic.

The attempt to contain and blend participatory forms of all player types into a single military coalition would seem to demonstrate that the desire for coherence and cohesion is at best useful at the declarative level. Farrell and others have treated the coalition pattern of action as a failure in realizing NATO’s comprehensive approach (Farrell 2011, 119, 121, 124). This study has found that, in practice, the coalition’s use of force during the period examined was made possible when the pattern selected—the differential one—served as a strategic and operational receptacle for diverse participatory forms and player types managed by a world power, and is well-rooted in policy, divisions into sectors, and rules of engagement (Clark 2001, 327). The statement by Richards, the ISAF commander, allows us to move from a debate over player multiplicity and many participatory forms and their effect on coalition stability to a debate over the differential pattern that emerged (Richards 2104):

The key to making the Unholy Alliance work was to deploy the various elements in common cause but allow them to operate separately in the field (158).

**Hypothesis 2: In an extended campaign, the more the player roles are differential and the hierarchy informal, the more stable the coalition.** In a process of tracing (George and Bennett 2005, 82) the roots of the informal hierarchy and differential approach in a multi-arena campaign, and based on the goal of showing that these are not one-time incidents unique to Afghanistan, but, rather, part of the U.S. military strategy as a world power, can be inferred from Clark’s statement (2001):

We maintained that we would seek coalitions where we could, but fight unilaterally where we must (45–46).

It wasn't a “beauty contest” between potential commanders; rather, the nation that contributed the most forces usually got the most significant position (154).

In the document entitled “Memorandum: Strategic Guidance for the Campaign Against Terrorism,” which was declassified by the Pentagon, then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld suggested treating campaigns as multi-branch and extended, while adding a specific instruction that a campaign should involve “multinational cooperation on specific missions.” In the same text, he gave explicit direction to “arrange multiple coalition, each tailored to a specific purpose” (Rumsfeld 2001, 9, 11).

We may therefore conclude that the policy did not reject differential use of force in the coalition. On the contrary, it viewed the military coalition as a tool for resolving specific problems. Later on, in 2004, Rumsfeld went to explain (2004):

The Coalitions that are being fashioned will not be fixed; rather, they will change and evolve…. [E]ach country has [a] different perspective and different relationship, views and concerns (13).

The document “NMSP-WOT: National Military Strategy Plan for the War on Terrorism” of February 2006, which was valid at the time of Operation Medusa, delineates the strategic working assumption of the United States, defined therein as (Rumsfeld and Pace 2006):

Together and alone: The United-States leads a coalition of more than 80 countries to combat violent extremism, but will act alone, as necessary (21).

These messages are repeated, whether explicitly or by inference, in many sources. There are reasonable grounds to assume that NATO’s 1999 extended yet ineffective campaign in Kosovo turned the attention of the United States from Iraq to a secondary arena on the European continent, concluding with a weak and unnecessary operation at the Pristina airport, which involved leadership friction with the British and a show of hesitancy by the United States in contrast to Russia’s rapid response. All of the above taught the American leadership the lesson of “no more,” and to prefer an effective differential pattern of action rather than the pattern in place until then: inert consensus and cohesion (Riley 2002, 110; Weitsman 2013, 100). This would be the case even if the cost was high or if it meant bypassing the chain of command, other players, or international institutions (Clark 2001, 424, 447). The United States, as a world power and key for any NATO move (Clark 2001, 285), could, after 9/11, allow itself to continue acting unilaterally in accordance with this lesson, while the other players went on from 1999 Kosovo with the need for a “comprehensive approach.” The NMSP-WOT document (2002, 66–71) from the beginning of the war, later declassified, describes the mechanism of incorporating offers of participation in a military coalition led by the United States. It also explains that the campaign commander must balance the military requirements of the participating players. Decision-making within such a mechanism is subject to a clear hierarchic approach and a preference for participation in battle rather than other participatory forms.

This would seem to mean that the stability of a military coalition made up of players not necessarily in full agreement with this instruction is an undesirable destabilizing strategic situation. The operational and intelligence hierarchy created among player types and participatory forms implemented in practice in the coalition’s use of force remained in place even after Operation Medusa ended. This fact is evidence for the existence of an approach and modus operandi as described by Lt. Col. Frederik Meulman (U.K./Netherlands) who served as Deputy Commander Air at the ISAF Headquarters in Kabul (cited in Henriksen 2014):

First and foremost, this revolves around the U.S. Then there is nothing. Then it is the U.K. Then nothing for a while and somewhere down the road the other Anglo-Saxon countries (including Australia and New Zealand). After that maybe Germany, the Netherlands, France, etc. His assessment implied that information-sharing mechanism – that is, if you fit in the “two-eyes,” “four-eyes” or other intelligence-sharing arrangements (71).

This study revealed clear lines of policy and approaches as well as the mechanism used to apply them chosen by the United States as the world power that the other player types were forced, willingly or not, to accept in a hierarchic manner with regard to the operation of military force in the coalition. This leads to the conclusion that the pattern selected to incorporate a wide variety of players and different participatory forms to ensure the stability of the coalition operated by means of a differential mechanism. The study of Operation Medusa showed that to realize and operate these coalition differentials, these components were systematically present:

1. The operational status of the world power did not change, even when its main efforts were concentrated in the second arena.
2. The participating fighting nations cooperated amongst themselves to improve their capabilities in the fighting arena, bypassing the coalition’s command and control system or qualifications defined by their nations.
3. Force multipliers and special efforts were conducted along a secret, indirect axis.
4. The allocation of combat and administrative assistive resources from the world power to the partners was hierarchic.
5. NATO and U.S. efforts in the arena were parallel and overlapping, blurring any distinction between them.
6. Extreme operational mechanisms and behavioral patterns were operated to stabilize crises.

**Hypothesis 3: The longer the campaign, the greater the chances are for the coalition’s destabilization.** To date, much research has been devoted to the debate over what constitutes victory and the effective ways to effect counterinsurgency, rebuild nations, develop operational ideas and schemes of “shape-clear-hold-build,” and construct local armies as an almost absolute strategic condition-based ending (Bowman and Dale 2009, 3, 38). The only point I would like to add is that, beyond agreeing that this type of confrontation requires much time and many resources. On the other hand, when the continuation of a campaign becomes a major factor in destabilizing a coalition, its importance increases and requires a critical debate (Cordesman and Burke 2011, 15).

The long campaign in Afghanistan in general, and during the period under examination in particular, affected each of the variables—player type, participatory form, coalition pattern of action, and coalition stability as a phenomenon. This extended period of time is expressed not only in the accretion of time units, tours of combat, months, or years, which themselves are of tremendous importance, but also in external and internal events and processes and their impact as restraints or destabilizers. Therefore, the nature of the describing intervention, the viewpoint of the debate, and the examples provided to that dimension require, I suggest, a different approach to **time-based processes** and the dimension of time, which will enable us to understand a coalition’s rationale, context, and restraining/destabilizing contribution when a campaign becomes protracted. Strategic understandings, the involvement of technologies in extended campaign, ongoing threats, the development of doctrines and approaches, the adjustments and adaptiveness of the delegation from military coalition participants are all individual factors as well as manifestations of the campaign’s extension.

Abizaid (2006, 29) recognized the meaning of the extension of the campaign as a time frame and demand of the coalition:

But much work needs to be done and progress is not guaranteed… Helping Afghans build infrastructure, which in many regions is nonexistent, attack endemic corruption, address narco-trafficking, train their army and police, all while fighting an insurgency that remains patient, hidden, and dangerous, are tasks that will require years. As America and our partners continue to pressure al-Qaida and associated extremist, it is important to emphasize the global scope and duration of this endeavor to create a coalition with a long-term horizon, supported by U.S. and partner nation interagency organizations (46).

Kerps found that the “time horizon” is derived from the expectations of the conduct of the environment, and the more security risks there are, the shorter the horizon (2011, 29–30). She explains that a more distant horizon leads to a preference for multinational cooperation, but even it cannot anticipate the participatory form the various nations will choose after making an operational commitment (Ibid., 31). When such processes are conducted in real time, there is an expectation that, over time, conditions will ripen. However, without resources, a suitable operational approach, high-quality and available intelligence, a common language, and good learning mechanisms, the transfer of responsibility and operational approach will remain hollow: it will not be applied and/or will not be effective. The enemy displays strength and determination everywhere, as was shown by Operation Medusa, even in the fierce battles with the British forces in Helmand Province. In this case, the United States as a world power, Great Britain, and Canada were extended to the limit of their abilities between the two arenas, and instead of stabilizing the action of the coalition, these constraints became, in my opinion, clear destabilizers and a danger to the coalition’s foundation. All were time-based and depended on the length of the campaign.

How can a military coalition succeed in functioning over time with great effectiveness? In coalition fighting, there is no simple tactic. Operation Medusa showed that the political and military echelons involved were involved in the operational details of the arena. In such a situation, one must ask: are offensive military operations over the long term the result of initiative from below or the result of situation assessments and troop deployments steered from above? Intelligence gaps and an unstable approach lead to risk management and a preference for security for the forces over the risk inherent in planned offenses. This is a central operative topic based on the dimensions of time and place with implications for a campaign’s duration. Operation Medusa took place under precisely such conditions: there was no choice but to go ahead with it before control of the area was lost along with the Afghan population’s trust in the coalition forces.

Another time-based factor in the discussion of coalition stability in each of the four dimensions comprising it is technology. The war in the Iraqi and Afghani arenas accelerated the advance of groundbreaking technological developments that succeeded in overcoming conceptual gaps, the threat of IEDs, intelligence gaps, the need for precision in the operation of fire, the need to reduce collateral damage, and more.

Warfare technology allows the central players that enjoy a relative advantage in the field to contribute to the stability of a coalition, while the smaller nations or those who do not participate in the fighting are not partners to them in any way. In an extended campaign, the creation of a technological advantage is a strategic tool that relies on a process of development and assimilation, itself a time-based process available to the decision-making authority as well as to the military commanders. In Kosovo, the surgical technological capabilities of the American Apache helicopters had already been developed, but they lacked the capacity for attacks deep in enemy territory and had no political authorization. Instead, intelligence gathering for targets and the use of fighter planes, the majority of which remained under the differential command of the United States, for signaling targets, only escalated the campaign and destabilized the coalition (Clark 2001, 278–280, 346, 427–430). By contrast, at the same time, the mine resistant ambush protected (MRAP) vehicle project in Iraq and Afghanistan, developed by various American, British, and other defense contractors, dramatically reduced casualties from IEDs over time (Cordesman and Lemieux 2010, 8). High levels of protection for the forces facilitate greater restraining operational flexibility and reduce threats whose negative significance accrues over time, restrains the scope of fire used, and allows for long-term force construction and economic investments (Clarke 2011, 8). Most importantly, this sort of protection has a direct effect on public opinion and decision-makers, and hence its increasing importance the longer a campaign lasts. This suggests that technologies, including adapted protective equipment, can even determine a player’s form of participation. Changing participatory form and deploying tanks, which are identified with incursions and occupations of territory—quite contrary to the rationale for this particular coalition’s existence—provides protection but is also liable to undermine its stability, as was the case with the Canadians.

As for the claim that military coalitions need a learning curve to **improve adjustment and adaptiveness**, one may argue that Canada’s battles in Kandahar Province as well as the British experience in Helmand Province indicate the difficulty of adaptiveness and improvement over time in an organic, experienced army. Even the British army in Afghanistan suffered from a conceptual instability because its troops and the means at their disposal changed every six months (Neville 2015; Pearl 2010, 568–588) and this only extended rather than shortened the campaign.

Hoffman (1985, 144) claims that **an extended threat** affects nation partnered in an alliance differently and causes more separation than cohesion. The global terrorist attacks that continued for most years of the war were another destabilizer in the period studied (2004–2007) as well as later on, because they were attended by videos issuing threats against the nations participating in the coalition. In March 2004, the Madrid train bombings, and, later, Abu Sayyaf’s attacks on the *SuperFerry 14* in the Philippines, in 2005 in Sharm al-Sheikh, Amman, and London (July 7), in 2006 the train bombings in Mumbai by the Lashkar-e-Taiba, and in 2007 the attack in Karachi, and many subsequent attacks.

Another aspect affecting coalition stability is **the frequency of commander turnover in the arena**. Frequent turnovers are a symptom of the extension of a campaign and of problems in its management. Although the chronology of this war has been studied and its stages are familiar, its time dimension continues to be described according to those who led it and on the basis of their understanding, character, conduct, and effect on the developing fighting (Bolger 2014, xvi; Cloud and Jaffe 2009; Holland cited by Henriksen 2014, 61; Richards 2014, 264), and when they switch almost every year or are dismissed from their command—as was the case with two Americans, Gen. David McKiernan and Gen. Stanley McChrystal—the stability of the military coalition must be at the center of the discussion. Therefore, the extension of a campaign and its impact on the stability or instability of a coalition are of utmost importance. From the aspect this study addressed and the examples provided, it seems that the longer a campaign lasts, the greater are the chances that a coalition’s stability will be undermined.

**Conclusions**

This essay has provided an extended analysis of the phenomenon of stability of military coalitions and the factors affecting it. A stable military coalition fighting a war can be defined as a coalition that succeeds in attaining its objective, functions effectively over time, leads relevant operational interventions in campaigns, and successfully confronts reversals, changes, and formative events, both internal and external. In an extended campaign, this stability and the functioning of a military coalition are made possible because they are based on a fabric consisting of player types and participatory forms. The essay expands on the insight that, a priori, there is no guarantee that a military coalition will have optimal conditions for operating as a single cohesive entity; on the contrary, its stability might be undermined by various factor. A destabilizer, whether internal or external, in a battle in which several players of various categories are involved is an ongoing, systematic event rather than a one-time occurrence; the player’s type and its form of participation, as well as the continuation of the campaign are significant in this sense. This essay demonstrates that a military coalition in an extended war does not necessary operate as a stable, coherent, cohesive structure. The relations among the players and their participatory forms lead to the creation of a separate, differential structural and conceptual pattern in which the use of force is affected by separate efforts in separate spheres and under separate commands.

The discussion and analysis of the first two hypotheses suggest there is a strong link between the variables and the phenomenon being studied and, as such, allows us to use them as theoretical tools. The third hypothesis is more complex because it does not address the extension of a campaign in units of time but instead tries to shed light on the period of time studied from different perspectives. This approach should be further developed.

The essay furthermore shows that participatory forms can be defined and identified as an empirical tool with emphasis on the systemic stabilizing function of the “fighting partner,” even if the impact of the destabilization it experiences reaches a crisis point, as was the case with Canada in this study. The essay also demonstrates how a military coalition makes operative use of a range of informal interrelations: from different ways for a force to join a battle to a hierarchy of what and how assistance is provided. These participatory forms can stabilize or destabilize a coalition. Abizaid’s statement words in an interview that in the 21st century, problems are solved with 21st century tools are particularly apt. Such a hierarchy, i.e., action in separate but parallel differential campaigns, does not necessarily indicate a flaw or a failure. In particular, the NATO nations had a preliminary natural, even automatic expectation to strive for cohesion and coherence. This expectation may perhaps have belonged to the goals set for the war, but was not necessarily a condition for it. This essay sheds much light on the way such a coalition behaves and demonstrates that there was no happenstance involved: the coalition’s conduct was intentional, conducted in a certain way from the start and throughout the period under examination.

Lake (2009, 138) claims that a hierarchy among nations does not cancel a previous arrangement but exists within it and makes it possible to explain complex phenomena. This essay demonstrates that differential patterns of action, a hierarchy, and diverse participatory forms do not cancel the old-order networks of international cooperation in a coalition, but they do allow for additional empirical depth, because the challenges military coalitions face are only growing.

The findings of this study allow us to offer another explanation for the use of force in the context of military coalitions in other campaigns of the past. The literature tends to refer to the First Gulf War in 1991 (Operation Desert Storm) as a short, full, and coherent coalition. Even if one agrees with this assessment at the tactical level, a closer look at the research of that war shows that the player types, participatory forms, and operational hierarchy of a differential pattern existed in a very stable coalition and were therefore less prominent in the glow of that victory. By contrast, with regard to the Kosovo campaign, one can refer to a coalition whose stability was undermined and whose action was differential from beginning to end.

**Hence, the conclusion and general answer to the research question is that military coalitions can continue to operate even if their stability is undermined by factors affecting them and not only due to their cohesiveness or the totality of their strength. The player types and the participatory forms in coalition also play key roles in attaining and maintaining stability the longer the campaign lasts.**

This study demonstrates that, from the perspective of a world power, a differential pattern serves as a kind of safety coefficient vis-à-vis tensions and past adversities among coalition partners. On the other hand, in unique force constructions, a player’s specialization or technological advantage may allow small nations or nations that are not fighting partners to replace dated strategic mechanisms, such as the imposition of caveats, with other tools and more relevant, balanced, sophisticated, and confidence-building participatory forms. This can have an important effect on international systems of intervention in which the composition of players presents a challenge of diplomatic, strategic, and operational complexity.

**Future Research Directions**

The stability of a military coalition in an extended campaign is a perspective that has so far been missing from the research literature. It is my contention that this study has paved the way for future studies on military coalitions. A military coalition is a shared international sphere of interest to nations, organizations, and many other players, and it is therefore necessary to further clarify if and how a clear definition of the type of player and form of participation is limiting or creates strategic degrees of freedom. How should such activities be conducted vis-à-vis the U.N. Security Council or other international institutions without arousing tension and distrust among players? Does such a participatory form strengthen the unit of the nation as a level of analysis, or does the composition of the nations participating in a coalition require a different analytical methodology? Is a pure technology-based participatory form possible? And what is the function of diplomacy in this approach? All of these issues require further research and the improvement of the research methods used in the study of military coalitions.

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Key of Abbreviations

ADZ: Afghan Development Zone.

ANA: Afghan National Army.

ARRC: Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (NATO).

CAOC: Combined Air Operation Center.

CENTCOM: U.S. Central Command.

CFC: Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan.

CJTF: Combined Joint Task Force.

DDR: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration.

FATA: Federally Administrated Tribal Area.

ISAF: International Security Assistance Force.

ISI: Inter-Services Intelligence (Pakistan).

NAC: North Atlantic Council – the NATO policy making group.

OMLT: Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team.

PAG: Policy Action Group.

PRT: Provincial Reconstruction Team.

RC: Regional Command.

SHAPE: Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe.

UNAMA: United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.