

## Psychology and Emotions in War and Strategy

Psychology and emotions are integral to war, strategy, and the management of insecurity. This is evidenced by the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war and the passions that permeate it at every level of analysis. It is also apparent in the huge amount of attention the classical writers on strategy, from Thucydides to Carl von Clausewitz to Joseph Wylie and Thomas Schelling, dedicated to understanding human behaviour. Over the last few decades, research has demonstrated how cognitive biases, emotions, and other psychological factors influence human cognition and behaviour in the context of war and crises.

This panel highlights these themes. The papers explore the role and value of psychology and emotions in war and strategy. They articulate new ways of approaching strategy that takes account of psychology and emotions, and examine the challenges inherent in such approaches. Can the passions justify war? Can they be harnessed successfully to manage crises? Can new models help incorporate human factors more effectively into strategy and warfare? Where are the limitations? Drawing on political, social, evolutionary and behavioural psychology, and multidisciplinary research on emotions, this panel offers an innovative and interdisciplinary approach to the human dimensions of war. It aims to shine new light on the centrality of these topics to the wider field, and expand conceptual and theoretical understanding of these ideas.

Proposed setup of the panel:

1. **Chair: Dr Neil Renic**, University of Copenhagen, [neil.renic@ifs.ku.dk](mailto:neil.renic@ifs.ku.dk)
2. **Dr Claire Yorke**, University of Southern Denmark, [yorke@sam.sdu.dk](mailto:yorke@sam.sdu.dk)

### **The Psychological, Social, and Strategic Value of Care During Crises and its Limits**

From the conflict in Ukraine, to the global pandemic, and the rise of violent extremism, crises can generate uncertainty, trauma, and insecurity. Strong and intense emotions often accompany such events. Sometimes these emotions can cloud strategic vision, compelling swift action at the cost of long-term strategy, whereas at others they can help to mobilise society and generate shared feelings and connections that contribute to resilience and help societies to withstand shocks. For leaders and strategists there is an imperative to manage these emotions and harness them successfully to guide citizens and military forces alike through the crisis.

Despite the prominent image of strong leaders at such times, growing evidence points to the power of care. From Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand during the pandemic, to President Volodymyr Zelensky in Ukraine during Russia's war in the country, leaders are finding value in demonstrating consideration for how their people feel. Yet it is not without problems. Depending on its focus, and its expression, care can be perceived as weakness or a form of excessive control, undermining long-term policy efforts. A tension exists that is deserving of further study.

This paper explores the concept of care by examining its psychological, social, and strategic function during times of crisis. Care is considered to encapsulate ideas of empathy, compassion, and consideration of others, reflecting an approach that puts people first. It argues that different crises require different forms of care, and that it has to be situated within a broader context of the political environment, policy efforts by government, and

other qualities and characteristics of leaders. Critically, given the growing discourse around its value, this paper analyses the potential limits of care and the challenges it presents to security, politics, and strategy.

3. **Dr Marie Robin**, Université Paris Panthéon Assas (Centre Thucydide), [marie.robin@u-paris2.fr](mailto:marie.robin@u-paris2.fr)

### **Can passions help to justify war? The case of revenge and fear**

Can passions be used strategically to justify wars? To justify their violent endeavors, actors design strategic communications aiming at convincing others – their community, the international community, international jurisdictions – of the validity of their violent project. From Menelas who “had to” get his revenge against Pâris, to contemporary jihadists of the likes of the Kouachi brothers who mention that they fight to “avenge the Prophet”, desires for revenge seemingly constitute one of such strategies. In fact, Richard Ned Lebow sees in revenge one of the four main justifications of wars from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Centuries before them, Just War thinker Gratian had declared, quoting Cicero’s *De Republica*, that “those wars are unjust which are undertaken without cause. For aside from vengeance or for the sake of fighting off enemies, no just war can be waged” (Rep. III. 35a). Vengeful passions are thus strategically mobilized, at the discursive level, to posit the morality of a war cause, i.e., to justify taking up arms.

Other passionate outbursts also seemingly play a role in justifying political violence. In international law, preventive and preemptive self-defenders seem justified to act because they “fear” that something may happen. Similarly, States may be justified in acquiring nuclear capacities because they “fear” that others, non-liberal actors, may own them too. Realist accounts of war, additionally, justify the accumulation of capabilities around the fear that others may be preparing for attack.

In the history of conflicts, therefore, actors who feel vengeful and/or afraid may arguably be justified in going to war. How is that so? What is the status of passions as justifications for war? Can they ever be used strategically to justify violent endeavors and what are the ethical underpinnings behind such use?

4. **Mr Samuel Zilincik**, Masaryk/Leiden University, [zilinciks@gmail.com](mailto:zilinciks@gmail.com)

### **The approach/avoid tension as the third strategic question**

Classical strategic studies literature posits that sound strategic practice ought to be guided by appropriate answers to two kinds of questions. The first kind of questions relate to an inquiry into the character of the war at hand. Strategists ought to ask about the respective political objectives of the belligerents, the means at their disposal etc. The second line of questions concerns the anticipation of the consequences of strategic performance. The “so what?” question, which directs attention to the consequentialist logic of strategy, is the prime example here.

This article advocates for strategists to adopt the approach/avoid tension as the third crucial question in the strategist’s toolkit. The approach/avoid tension forms the most fundamental question of human psychology, especially its motivational system. Consequently, everything strategists do can be understood with reference to either approach or avoid motivations. Most importantly, the approach/avoid tension gives meaning to the first two questions. It only makes sense to ask about the character of the

war at hand if one intends to approach or avoid it. Similarly, it only makes sense to ask about the consequences of one's actions if one intends to take those actions or to avoid them. Contemporary psychological research further indicates that the approach/avoid tension can improve our understanding of how particular choices change strategist's character in the long term. Drawing on the relevant literature from evolutionary psychology, the article discusses the many relevant implications of the approach/avoid tension for our understanding and navigation of strategic affairs.

**5. Mr Robin Burda**, Masaryk University, [robin.burda@fss.muni.cz](mailto:robin.burda@fss.muni.cz)

### **Cognitive Warfare as Part of Society: A Never-Ending Battle for Minds**

Russia has been attempting to influence politics and society in various European and NATO countries in recent years, aiming at the minds of the citizens. Decades ago, Jacques Ellul (1973) described propaganda as a *social phenomenon* that grows within society and is intrinsically intertwined with it. In recent years, a new concept has been emerging and is even being described as the *sixth operational domain* – Cognitive Warfare (Cluzel 2021). The implications on the information domain were not yet explored in depth.

Without a look back into the historical experience, it is impossible to assess what should be done in the long term by organizations such as the EU or NATO in the information environment. As Cognitive Warfare can be considered a relatively new phenomenon, albeit not dissimilar to Ellul's (1973) view of propaganda, the experience of nations involved in protracted conflicts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including Russia's hybrid warfare campaigns, is invaluable. Therefore, an inductive approach is utilized to draw inferences from available data from such countries. One of the nations used for the analysis is the Czech Republic, a country with a quite significant pro-Russian segment of society, which Russia has exploited for many years. The other is Ukraine, which is now in a full-out war but has been a victim of Russian hybrid warfare since at least the 2010s.

The paper aims to assess the importance of continuous effort of organizations such as NATO or the EU in the cognitive, human-oriented domain. I expect the Czech and Ukraine's experiences to show that being on the defence in the cognitive domain might prove to be a mistake with a significant impact on the future of democracy for any country.

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## **Participant Biographies**

**Claire Yorke** is an author, academic researcher, and advisor. Since September 2021, she has been a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship at the Centre for War Studies at the University of Southern Denmark, leading a new project funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Fund on Empathy and International Security (EIS). Between 2018 and 2020, she was a Henry A. Kissinger Postdoctoral Fellow and Lecturer at International Security Studies and the Jackson Institute for Global Affairs, Yale University. She completed her PhD in International Relations in the Department of War Studies, King's College London in 2018, and is currently writing two books on empathy and emotions. She has co-edited two volumes on diplomacy, working with Professor Jack Spence and Dr Alastair Masser, which were published in April 2021 (IB Tauris and

Bloomsbury). Her work combines academic research with policy relevance having begun her career in the UK Houses of Parliament, and at Chatham House.

**Marie Robin** holds a PhD in International Relations from Université Paris Panthéon Assas (Centre Thucydide) and the University of Southern Denmark (Center for War Studies). She is currently a postdoctoral researcher at Centre Thucydide where she leads the "strategic studies" stream of the institute. Marie is also a co-editor of the Francophone platform of strategic analysis: Le Rubicon. Her research interests revolve around the strategic uses of revenge and emotions in propaganda, and in international politics more generally. Marie recently published in the *Annuaire français de relations internationales* (AFRI) and in Alex P. Schmid's *Handbook of Terrorism Prevention and Preparedness*.

**Samuel Zilincik** is a doctoral student of security and strategic studies at Masaryk and Leiden Universities and a lecturer at the University of Defence in the Czech Republic. He has also worked at the Hague Centre for Strategic Studies. His research interests include military strategy in general and its emotional aspects in particular. His work has appeared in the *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *Texas National Security Review*, the *RUSI Journal*, and *Military Strategy Magazine*. He is currently acting as an assistant editor for two volumes of *History of Strategy*, edited by Beatrice Heuser and Isabelle Duyvesteyn, to be published by Cambridge University Press.

**Robin Burda** is a Ph.D. candidate in Security and Strategic Studies at Masaryk University. He is a project team leader in NATO Science and Technology Organization. His main research interests are psychological operations, propaganda, and hybrid warfare.