Anders Strindberg reflects on the impact of Jonathan Gaddy's CHDS thesis, "An Ontology of Power: Perception and Reality in Conflict."

By Anders Strindberg

Whatever else homeland security involves, at its core we find a multi-tiered, multi-disciplinary network of actors and interests (exemplified by the students and alumni of CHDS) that intersects with other, similarly complex networks of actors and interests. What does strategic planning and strategic action entail in this kind of environment? What does power mean in such a networked world?

As a new discipline or area of praxis emerges, it may be necessary to re-examine established concepts and assumptions. The terminology we use and what we assume it to mean can shape both thought and action, policy and legislation. Jonathan Gaddy goes straight to (actually, beyond and behind) the basic concepts in homeland security strategy in his CHDS thesis, "An Ontology of Power: Perception and Reality in Conflict." Understanding the strategic environment as a networked world, the thesis, in a nutshell, argues for a view of strategic agency as the ability to frame and shape reality, based on the ability to accurately identify, describe, and explain the behavior of other actors in the strategic environment.

Ontology – the philosophical study of reality – may seem far too abstract a domain to produce something applicable or actionable. And yet, through an analysis of strategy and power at their conceptual core, Jonathan's thesis develops a model for understanding the nature of strategic agency (based on actor-network theory) and outlines a model for strategic security, along with ideas for how these can be further developed and implemented. This has lasting value for homeland security as both an academic discipline and an area of praxis.

About the Author

Dr. Anders Strindberg teaches at the Naval Postgraduate School's Center for Homeland Defense and Security (CHDS). His areas of specialization include terrorism and violent extremism, hybrid warfare, and influence operations. He has held academic appointments at Princeton University, Damascus University, Syria, and St Andrews University, Scotland. Prior to joining CHDS, he was Special Correspondent for *Jane's Intelligence Review*, and served as consultant to several European law enforcement agencies and security services, as well as ministries of defense, foreign affairs, justice and immigration. He has served as Political Scientist with the RAND Corporation and is currently a Scientist with the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI). He is author of numerous articles, book chapters, and books including *Islamism* (Polity, 2011, with Mats Warn).

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