A NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY PRIMER

EDITED BY
STEVEN HEFFINGTON, ADAM OLER, AND DAVID TRETLER

National War College

National Defense University

The National War College at the National Defense University in Washington, DC, is the premier Department of Defense joint professional military education institution for national security strategy. Its mission is to educate future leaders of the Armed Forces, Department of State, and other civilian agencies for high-level policy, command, and staff responsibilities by conducting a senior-level course of study in the theory, development, and assessment of national security strategy.

The 10-month curriculum emphasizes the joint and interagency perspective. Reflecting this emphasis, approximately 60 percent of the student body is composed of equal representation from the land, sea, air, and space Services (including the Marine Corps and Coast Guard). The remaining approximately 40 percent is drawn from the Department of State and other Federal departments and agencies, as well as international fellows from a number of countries. Graduates earn a Master of Science in National Security Strategy.

The National War College commandant, a military officer of one-star rank, occupies a nominative position that rotates among the Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. As joint sponsor of the National War College, the Department of State nominates a Foreign Service Officer with Ambassadorial rank to serve as the commandant's deputy and international affairs adviser.

A NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY PRIMER

A NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY PRIMER

EDITED BY

STEVEN HEFFINGTON, ADAM OLER, AND DAVID TRETLER

National Defense University Press
Washington, D.C.
2025

Third printing, June 2025

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Creation of *A National Security Primer* would not have been possible without the enormous contributions of Dr. Mark "Clod" Clodfelter, Dr. Rich Andres, Ambassador Piper Campbell, Dr. Theresa Sabonis-Helf, Dr. Kelly Ward, Captain Joshua Wilson, USN, and Dr. Cynthia Watson. Their diverse backgrounds, expertise, and perspectives proved essential to the primer's development. Indeed, it was their dedication, scholarship, collegiality, and leadership that made it a reality. Many other National War College (NWC) faculty members, and countless NWC students, contributed to this effort as well. Their thoughtful application and critique of the primer's key concepts over the past 3 years were vital.

The editors would like to extend their appreciation to Colonel Eric "Mo" Moritz, USAF (Ret.), NWC Air Force Chair from 2015 to 2019. In addition to ensuring that we had the time and resources needed, Mo's level-headed, remarkably practical approach to teaching national security strategy helped ensure the primer's utility for students and practitioners alike. Additionally, his personal encouragement throughout this project was invaluable.

We would also would like to express our personal thanks to the late Colonel John Collins. As the scope of this project became apparent, John opened his home and provided just the right mix of coaching, instructing, and chastisement. His words of experience and wisdom set this project on the right path and provided the confidence needed to stay the course. Without his mentorship, we would never have gotten off the ground.

We would also like to thank both NDU Press for editing and publishing the primer and Jamie Harvey of the Government Publishing Office's Creative Services Division for the primer's design.

Above all, we both wish to thank our spouses for their support. Colonel Kate E. Oler (Ret.) and Lieutenant Colonel Karen N. Kraybill—both highly accomplished Air Force officers—graciously put up with our ceaseless banter, compulsive book buying, and meandering debates. They are amazing people—with the patience of saints.

PREFACE

Purpose

A National Security Strategy Primer provides National War College (NWC) students with a common point of departure for consideration of national security strategy and is designed as a principal tool for understanding and achieving Program Learning Outcomes. The primer specifically addresses key concepts of national security strategy and outlines a broad approach for strategy development. Additionally, the primer serves to set a common national strategy language for use within the college. To accomplish this task, the primer draws substantially from current joint and Service-specific doctrine as well as extant Department of Defense procedures and policy guidance. However, as national strategy is an inherently multi-instrument, multi-institution endeavor, the primer draws from interagency language and policy as well as significant literature on national security strategy found in the doctrine of partner/allied states, academia, the business sector, and elsewhere. While the primer is geared toward the NWC core curriculum, it may also serve as a useful tool for interagency practitioners charged with discussing, designing, or assessing national security strategies.

Scope

This primer details the elements of strategic logic taught at NWC and focuses on national security strategy development. For the purposes of this document, national security strategy is generally considered to encompass any strategic issue that would fall within the scope of the National Security Council. While strategic logic is relevant and applicable to strategy-making in general, the focus herein is not specifically single-instrument or single-agency strategies but the broader concept of multi-instrument national security strategy.

Application

The guidance in this primer should help inform and guide a student's course of study at the National War College. It should not be taken as the NWC perspective on the one right answer or the only viable way to approach strategy. Developing coherent and effective strategy is difficult due to the complexity and uncertainty inherent in any strategic challenge.[1] Unraveling the complexity and managing the uncertainty requires an ability to think strategically about the problem at hand. Thinking strategically entails applying some version of strategic logic. *A National Security Strategy Primer* is a restatement of the principal aspects of strategic logic. Students should be mindful that other useful approaches to strategy-making at the national security level exist. Some are covered elsewhere in the NWC curriculum, and others are employed in various departments and agencies of the executive branch. Yet, as with any discipline, the study of national security strategy must start somewhere. For NWC, *A National Security Strategy Primer* provides the common foundation from which to build.

Note

This primer is neither official policy nor doctrine. It is the product of a collaborative effort by members of the NWC faculty, staff, and student body.[2] The primer is one tool among many designed to assist students in mastering the NWC curriculum.

CHAPTER 1 | OVERVIEW

Introduction to National Security Strategy

A National Security Strategy Primer provides information and guidance on the development of national security strategy. Fundamentally, national security strategy entails the design and application of ideas for employment of means as well as the orchestration of institutions and instruments of national power (diplomatic, informational, military, and economic) to achieve viable ends that protect or advance national interests. National security strategy bridges the gap from a less-desirable current state of affairs or condition to a more desirable future state of affairs or condition. National security strategy can apply broadly, organizing or guiding nearly all aspects of a state's policy, or more narrowly regarding a specific situation. Conceptually, national security generally entails the competitive search for advantage over a foreign nation, group of nations, or nonstate actor; a favorable foreign relations position; and/or a defense posture capable of successfully deterring hostile action.

This primer is intended to assist students in better understanding the complex process of designing the national security strategies, from which all subsequent security planning should flow. It provides an introduction to the elements of strategic logic that frame the development of strategy at the highest levels of the national security apparatus.

Introduction to Strategic Logic

Development and execution of national security strategy demands the ability to think strategically. Thinking strategically entails applying the five following fundamental elements of strategic logic.

- analyzing the strategic *situation* (the challenge and its context)
- defining the desired *ends* (the outcomes sought), to include first defining the overarching political aim, and then the primary objectives required to achieve it
- identifying and/or developing the *means* (resources and capabilities) to bring to bear

- designing the *ways* to use the means to achieve the desired ends
- assessing the *costs/risks* associated with the strategy.

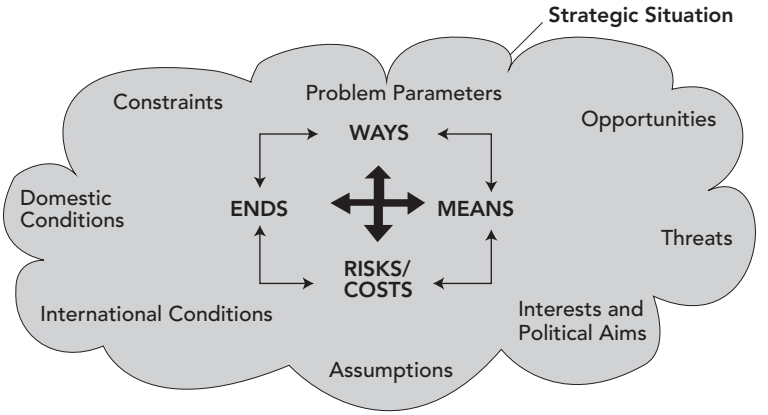
Applying this logic demands the highest levels of critical thinking, insight, and judgment, as well as the courage to act on that judgment. Each of the elements of strategic logic entails numerous questions that should be addressed to produce an effective strategy. Unfortunately, the strategist can find definitive answers to only some of those questions. For the rest, the strategist must rely on assumptions. In developing strategies, unknown factors often outnumber those that are known. Thus, the strategist always operates in an atmosphere of widespread uncertainty and ambiguity. Carl von Clausewitz, the early 19th-century Prussian general and military theorist who features prominently in the NWC curriculum, spoke to the qualities the strategist needs to operate in this atmosphere when he opined on military genius:

> *If the mind is to emerge unscathed from this relentless struggle with the unforeseen, two qualities are indispensable: first, an intellect that, even in the darkest hour, retains some glimmerings of the inner light which leads to truth; and second, the courage to follow this faint light wherever it may lead.*[3]

Clausewitz was writing about the unforeseeable future, but even the present is not fully knowable. Strategists must address critical uncertainties, whether about the future or the present, with assumptions. These could be assumptions about specific but unknown facts (truths), about cause and effect, about the influence of time on the challenge at hand, or about the consequences of inaction or certain courses of action.

While listing the elements of strategic logic makes that logic appear linear, developing strategy is a much more complex, multidimensional, iterative, and often imprecise process. One useful way to visualize the interrelationships of the elements of strategic logic is shown in figure 1. It depicts the strategic situation as a cloud because like a cloud, it is amor-

FIGURE 1. **The Five Fundamental Elements of Strategic Logic**



phous, nonlinear, ever-shifting, and considerably opaque. Comprising that cloud are considerations such as the problem's parameters, international and domestic conditions that bear on the problem, one's national interests and political aims, threats to those interests and aims (or opportunities for advancing them), constraints on one's freedom of action, the most critical assumptions about the dynamics of the problem confronted, and any other factors important to the strategic situation that surround the problem being addressed.

The key to developing a successful strategy lies in devising an ends-means-ways-costs/risks relationship that accommodates the strategic situation to produce the overall outcome desired. The ends are the political aims sought and their primary objectives; the means are the resources, power, and capabilities available or able to be developed; and the ways are how means will be used to achieve the ends. Costs are the price one must pay—financially and otherwise—to execute one's strategy, and risks are developments that could go wrong and work to one's disadvantage. To emphasize, the diagram portrays the ends-means-ways-costs/risks as nonlinear. This interactive relationship stresses the need to consider each element in relation to all the others. The strategist must consider the ends with reference to the available means, possible ways,

and likely risks and costs. This principle also applies to each of the other elements of the ends-means-ways-costs/risks formulation. Finally, the nonlinear relationship indicates that there is no defined beginning or ending to the process; the strategist must iteratively reassess the strategy across its execution.

Relationship of the National Security Strategy to Subsidiary National Security Strategies

In 1986, the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense (DOD) Reorganization Act established a more deliberate, structured, and formalized approach to developing an overarching national security strategy. The Goldwater-Nichols Act directs the President to submit an annual report to Congress that sets forth the national security strategy of the United States; details the country's vital worldwide national security interests, goals, and objectives; and outlines the proposed short- and long-term uses of national power. President Ronald Reagan submitted the first of these reports, titled *National Security Strategy of the United States*, in 1987.[4]

Generally subsidiary to the National Security Strategy (NSS) are a wide range of regional, functional, and departmental strategies. Each is broadly intended to align with the uses of national power described in the NSS and serve the interests and ends defined in that document. In this manner, the NSS plays a pivotal role in guiding and shaping the creation of derivative strategies and policies. The NSS should be prepared with enough wisdom, insight, and judgment to assist strategists and planners across the executive branch tasked with developing strategies and plans to resolve specific security challenges. As the Army War College's Harry R. Yarger emphasized:

> *The hierarchical nature of strategy facilitates span of control. It represents a logical means of delegating responsibility and authority among senior leadership. It also suggests that if strategy consists of objectives, concepts, and resources each should*

> *be appropriate to the level of strategy and consistent with one another. Thus* [military] *strategy at the national . . . level should articulate military objectives at the national level and express the concepts and resources in terms appropriate to the national level for the specified objective.*[5]

Associated regional, functional, and departmental strategies must serve national interests and be consistent with the broad outline of the National Security Strategy and applicable derivative strategies. Those charged with developing subsidiary strategies may begin assessment of the situation with a review of the overarching strategic concepts laid out in the NSS and other higher level strategies and policies. Alternatively, when tasked with developing a strategy, the strategist could start with a clean sheet of paper, work through the elements of strategic logic, and only after development, assess whether the strategy produced aligns with the overarching strategic concepts provided by the NSS. In either case, if the subsidiary strategy does not align with the NSS or other higher level strategies, the strategist should be prepared to reevaluate or make the case for divergence.

The relationship between the overarching National Security Strategy and associated functional and regional strategies is illustrated in the following two examples:

1. During the 40-plus years of the Cold War, the United States pursued a national security strategy of containment. Its scope and scale were enormous, driving global U.S. policy for decades and absorbing tremendous amounts of time, money, and effort. The overarching strategy of containment served as the guiding framework for subsidiary strategies aimed at addressing specific regional and functional security challenges. Thus, strategies such as the Marshall Plan, the American wars in Korea and Vietnam, and the U.S. space program were guided by the overarching containment strategy.
2. In 1994, the Clinton administration promulgated *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*. Its aim was to enhance

security by maintaining a strong defense capability and foster cooperative security measures; encourage open foreign markets and global economic growth; and promote democracy abroad. This overarching National Security Strategy was supplemented by regional and functional strategies throughout the two Clinton administrations. Those strategies dealt with specific security challenges such as the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement, and intervention in the Yugoslav Wars of 1991–2001.

The Role of the National Security Council and the NSC Staff

The National Security Council is the President's principal forum for considering and coordinating national security and foreign policy matters with his or her senior national security advisers and Cabinet officials. The NSC staff, headed by the National Security Adviser, serves as the President's national security and foreign policy staff within the White House. Typically, the NSC is responsible for developing the National Security Strategy. Specific regional and functional strategies, however, often originate in executive departments, agencies, or Services. At some point, proposed national strategies will make their way into the NSC's interagency review and coordination process and will go before the NSC itself for final review and approval. Their genesis, however, and their early drafts will likely be the work of a single strategist or small team working within a component of one of the executive departments, agencies, or Services. That reality reinforces the need for a cadre of professionals across the national security establishment capable of developing national security strategies. NWC student papers are partly assessed by whether they are of sufficient quality for review by the NSC Staff without revision.

CHAPTER 2 | ANALYZING THE STRATEGIC SITUATION

General

Every security challenge occurs within a broader strategic context. Analyzing that extant situation is frequently the first step in applying strategic logic. For the National Security Strategy, the strategic situation encompasses the most important conditions and dynamics that bear on current and future U.S. security across the globe. For associated departmental, regional, or functional strategies, the strategist must assess how widely to cast the analytical net. As with the NSS, the goal is to capture the most important conditions and dynamics that bear on the challenge being addressed. Critically, the strategist must be discerning with the available information. Too much peripheral information can obscure rather than clarify the strategic situation. As important, the strategist must evaluate the information's ramifications for potential strategic approaches. As ever, the strategist must answer both the "*What* is happening?" and the "*So what?* Why does what is happening matter?" questions.

Assumptions Are Pivotal

Assumptions, which are suppositions taken as true in the absence of proof, are essential in the analysis of the situation. However, they should be identified clearly and assessed throughout the strategy development process. Despite today's information-rich environment, there are significant limits on what anyone can know about any strategic situation. Consequently, strategists must address uncertainties with assumptions. Strategies are necessarily built on assumptions about opponent capabilities and intent, the dynamics of the international situation, and the most important aspects of one's domestic situation. Assumptions also help define one's own interests, as well as what threatens them, and how. Assumptions about an opponent's interests and intentions are equally important, as are assumptions about the cause and effect of potential actions, the role of time, the likely outcomes, and the costs and risks of those actions. In short, assumptions enable and shape the development

of any successful national security strategy. Made purposefully, deliberatively, and with appropriate caution, they can promote strategic success. Made unwittingly or with inadequate reflection, they can undermine the entire strategic process. Perhaps the most dangerous assumptions are the ones made unwittingly when a strategist fails to question what is *known* to be true. Many assumptions surface throughout the development of a strategy. The strategist should identify explicitly and separately those assumptions most essential to a strategy's success, along with their implications. An explicit characterization of the strategist's level of confidence in each of those key assumptions is equally prudent. In both the context development and strategic assessment elements, assumptions make valuable targets for in-depth intelligence analysis. The *Marine Corps War College Strategy Primer*, which builds on *A National Security Stragegy Primer*, provides an excellent framework for analyzing assumptions across the spectrum of conflict.[6]

Problem Statement

To provide definitive focus for the development of a strategy, a clear, concise, and precise problem statement is essential. At its most basic, the problem statement is the strategist's answer to the question "What is going on here?"[7] In other words, what situation/condition is threatening, or presenting an opportunity for, which interests. ("_____" situation threatens or presents an opportunity for "_____" interests because "_____"). While the problem statement should be as fact-based as possible, because it is based at least partially on assumption, it is fundamentally the strategist's contextual hypothesis. Even relatively minor differences in this hypothesis can drive substantial differences in the resultant strategy. For example, consider the divergent strategies that would result from two related problem statements. First, "Aggressive Chinese actions in the South China Sea destabilize the region and undermine the U.S.-led liberal international order. China is taking

these actions because it feels threatened by encroaching regional states and forward U.S. military deployments and is acting to protect its interests by ensuring continued access to resources and global commerce." Second, "Aggressive Chinese actions in the South China Sea destabilize the region and undermine the U.S.-led liberal international order. China is taking these actions because it is a rising revisionist great power that recognizes its current political system is incompatible with the existing liberal order and is intent on changing that order regionally and perhaps globally."

To begin building a problem statement, the strategist should identify the salient characteristics of the strategic situation. What is it all about? What are the current conditions that make the strategic situation appear unsatisfactory or promising and call for concerted action? Which national interests are threatened, how significant are the interests at stake, and how great is the threat to those interests? Note that the strategist may begin analyzing the strategic situation with some preexisting ideas about the character of the problem. However, the strategist must critically assess the situation and be ready to revisit, refine, or completely reconstruct his or her perception of the problem if his or her initial perceptions do not match the extant situation.

International and Domestic Contexts

Though the strategic logic process is nonlinear and can begin on any element, it frequently starts with a strategic assessment of the international and domestic contexts.

- *International context* generally encompasses all the actions, events, situations, drivers, and conditions outside the borders of the strategist's state. This includes the internal (domestic) context of foreign states and may include the actions of foreign actors inside one's own state. Elements in the international context powerfully shape both the situation at hand and the possible approaches to dealing with it. The strategist must identify the most important regional and global

conditions and dynamics that bear on the nature of the situation at hand and the range of potential strategic responses.

- *Domestic context* generally encompasses all the actions, events, situations, drivers, and conditions inside the borders of a strategist's state. It also may encompass the activities of its citizens in cyberspace or around the globe. A state's own domestic context can enhance or inhibit the ability to develop a strategy for a particular challenge. Thus, the strategist must identify domestic political, economic, bureaucratic, social/cultural, and technological factors that are likely to help or hinder both the strategy-making effort and its viability once executed. Particularly important is the strategist's judgment of how robust a strategic effort the Nation's economy can support, and at what point the national will might falter in the face of a costly and protracted strategic effort.
- *Constraints* are tangible and intangible factors that limit strategic freedom of action; they restrict the choices a strategist has available to achieve an objective. For example, insufficient means, such as weak elements of power or limited institutions and actors, may reduce viable options. Another example is the element of time, which often poses a significant constraint on action, as can partner, ally, and competitor interests. Policy, legal, and normative boundaries (values), whether imposed from within the state or externally, can also present constraints. Appropriate policy and legal authorities needed to implement a strategy may also pose significant constraints; strategists should carefully assess any authorities that might be relevant to the situation. This complex analysis usually requires consultation with legal professionals. Explicitly stating the most important constraints on freedom of action helps ensure that the strategist takes each into account when designing the strategic approach. (Note: The definition of *constraints* used here aligns with common usage in the interagency community and differs from the joint doctrine definition. According to joint doctrine, a *constraint* in planning is a higher headquarters mandated action, while a *restraint* is a higher headquarters forbidden action. Both are encompassed by the term *limitation*.)

Interests, Threats, and Opportunities

National interests are best understood as fundamental and enduring needs or wants, the pursuit of which promote a state's well-being and thus guide its actions. National interests can be *categorized* broadly as security, prosperity, and principles (or values). Importantly, interests should not be viewed as finite achievable ends, but instead as enduring, unattainable guideposts. For example, a state may determine its security is not immediately at risk and thus place emphasis on the pursuit of other interests. Such was the situation in the United States following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The end of the Cold War did not mean security ceased to be an American interest or that it had been "achieved." Rather, based on the new conditions, pursuit of additional security was outweighed by other interests. After 9/11, security once again came to the forefront. When the international and domestic context changed, security again took primacy.

Interests

Having defined the nation's interests in a particular situation, the strategist must assess the importance of those interests. That evaluation helps determine the level of energy, effort, and resources to expend as well as the level of acceptable risk to incur in preserving, protecting, or advancing the interests at stake. Interest assessment should also be done for all relevant actors to include partners/allies and, most important, adversaries. There is no generally accepted valuation scale for interests, but the following three-level scale works well. *Vital* interests are ones that a state would bear nearly any cost and incur nearly any risk to protect, including undertaking or significantly risking war. While an existential threat to the survival of the state is certainly a vital interest, vital interests may include situations when the existence of the state is not threatened. That said, given the significant implications connoted by "vital interests," the strategist should be very careful in using the term vital or in

accepting others' use of the term to describe interests. An *important* or *major* interest is one that would see the state weakened if it did not act. However, unlike a vital interest, which suggests the bearing of nearly any burden, the negative consequences of failing to protect or further "major" interests must be very carefully balanced against the costs/risks incurred. Finally, a *peripheral* interest is one that is desirable but will likely only be pursued if the associated costs and risks are extremely limited. Whatever valuation scheme a strategist uses, the definitions of the various levels are necessarily imprecise and a matter of judgment. As valuation of an interest can change over time, regularly reassessing the value of interests is essential. Moreover, it is difficult to value interests in the abstract. Valuing interests may only become meaningful in a specific context in which those interests are threatened or in which one has an opportunity to advance them. Finally, political leaders have in the past and will continue to differ in their judgments over the valuation of interests (or in their judgments about threats to those interests). Such differences will almost certainly manifest themselves during the change from one Presidential administration to the next and in multinational and interagency strategy-making.

Threats

Fundamentally, a situation is threatening only if it endangers some aspect of a national interest. Thus, determining whether and to what degree a situation threatens the interests of the United States or a relevant foreign partner or adversary is crucial. This question should serve as a point of departure when assessing any strategic situation. As with interests, the strategist derives real advantage by prioritizing threats based on an honest assessment of which are most dangerous or most likely. Prioritization helps keep the strategy focused on what is most important. The strategist should develop a scheme for assessing the seriousness of threats. Used in combination with the strategist's assessments of the value of the interest,

this can provide important additional insight in determining the most appropriate strategic approach for dealing with the challenge. A significant threat to a vital national interest will call for a different response than a negligible threat to a peripheral national interest. The following abstract formula may be useful in assessing threats: Threat = Capability (theirs) × Will (theirs) × Vulnerability (ours). Conceptually, the higher the values, the greater the threat.

Opportunities

National security strategists should recognize when the strategic situation affords an opportunity to advance a national interest. Having defined the national interests at stake in a particular security challenge, the strategist may not see a threat to those interests. Instead, the situation may present an opportunity to advance the interests at stake. It is important, however, not to confuse opportunities with the advantages that derive from dealing successfully with a threat. Opportunities should not be thought of as the flip-side of threats, the desired state of affairs after successfully dealing with the threats, or the asymmetric advantages one enjoys for addressing the threats. Like threats, however, opportunities exist in relation to national interests, and the strategist should be no less rigorous in defining and distilling opportunities in a concise, coherent strategy. After all, national security strategies for cooperating with one's allies and trading partners are usually opportunity-based rather than threat-based strategies.

Personal and Cognitive Bias Awareness

Human beings naturally bring with them certain worldviews that inevitably shape their perceptions. Worldviews are neither inherently good nor bad. They develop over time and are shaped by countless factors, and may include one's education, experiences, values, and cultural mores. Worldviews are shaped by assumptions, and since they inevitably affect

one's ideas and attitudes about strategic-level problems and solutions, they introduce considerable bias into the strategy development process. Another source of bias is introduced by the natural patterns of human cognition. Strategists tend to agree with people who agree with them, and to overscrutinize or dismiss those who do not. The need for social acceptance can lead to in-group bias, just as innate preference for the status quo can inordinately affect perceptions of change. Past negative experiences tend to outweigh lessons from positive ones, and people tend to believe that other people and cultures think like they do. Given the stakes at hand, national security strategists should be cognizant of and account for bias. While it is all but impossible to eliminate the effect of personal and cognitive biases on perceptions, there are multiple analytic methods and tools, such as red-teaming, which the strategist should employ to reduce the influence of biases on the strategy-making process.

CHAPTER 3 | DEFINING THE DESIRED ENDS

The Role of National Interests in Defining Ends

Ends are the ultimate outcomes the strategist intends to achieve with the strategy. For example, in World War II the unconditional surrender of the Axis powers was a strategic end. Once the Axis powers had unconditionally surrendered, the strategy to achieve that end was concluded. National interests should be the primary driver of ends when addressing a security challenge. They should provide the benchmark against which to assess threats to the nation, or opportunities for advancing the nation's well-being. Yet national interests are generally too broad, amorphous, and enduring to provide a concrete, achievable end for a national security strategy. Strategies that set national interests as their ends generally lack clarity and are unachievable, thus diffusing effort and overextending commitments.

Political Aim

A security challenge constitutes an external situation that a nation finds either troubling (threat) or promising (opportunity). The purpose of national security strategy is to reshape the challenging circumstance (the existing condition) into a state of affairs (the desired new condition) that is either less troubling or more promising. That desired new condition is the political aim of a national security strategy, and it provides a well-defined and achievable focus for developing the strategy.[8]

Identifying the national interest(s) at stake in a particular strategic challenge clarifies why dealing with that challenge is important. A political aim should be clear, coherent, and achievable because, at its most fundamental, a strategy is the bridge between the existing condition and the political aim (the desired condition). The political aim defines the new condition the strategist believes will preserve, protect, and/or advance the national interest(s) at stake, as compared to the existing condition.

In establishing the political aim, the strategist must consider costs, risks, and constraints that could make that aim less viable. Additionally,

in crafting a statement of the political aim for a strategy, a strategist must remain mindful of outcomes or conditions that *must* be avoided. If such outcomes or conditions do exist, they should be clearly and explicitly articulated in the strategy. The strategist must also ensure that the political aim (the desired outcome/condition) attenuates, if not fully eliminates, the threat to interests. Where an opportunity to advance interests presents itself, the strategist must ensure that the political aim exploits the opportunity.

At times, domestic political or policy considerations may prompt an administration to define a political aim without the benefit of a rigorous, detailed analysis of the strategic situation. In such instances, the strategist may be provided the political aim and must craft the most viable strategy possible. Nonetheless, the strategist must conduct a rigorous, detailed analysis of the strategic situation. If that analysis leads the strategist to believe the political aim is not feasible, the strategist should be willing and able to make that case to the national leadership.

Primary Objectives

Having identified the condition the strategy aims to achieve (the political aim), the strategist now must specify what has to be accomplished to reach that goal. To do this, the strategist develops primary objectives—as distinguished from subordinate objectives described later—that, when completed in combination, will achieve the desired political aim. Each primary objective frequently becomes the focal point of a line of effort or means-ways package.

For example, in 1947 President Truman concluded the Soviet Union was an enemy, inexorably focused on ideological and physical expansion at the expense of the United States. As his administration built the strategy of containment to counter this threat, certain primary objectives became clear. If the United States was to successfully contain the Soviet Union (the political aim), Europe needed to be revitalized and aligned with the United States. This primary objective led to the Marshall Plan

and the creation of NATO. Additionally, the United States needed to protect access to energy and prevent a substantial Soviet breakout from the Black Sea. To support these primary objectives, the United States committed military and financial assistance to combat communist insurgencies in Greece and Turkey and instigated a Soviet withdrawal from Iran.

The most important characteristics of a sound objective are precision and brevity. Like a political aim, an objective must clearly describe a desired condition, and do so without wasted verbiage. Ambiguous objectives fail to provide focus for the strategy, and verbose objectives open the door to misperceptions and diversions. There is no standard for how many objectives a strategist should formulate for a particular security challenge. The character of both the challenge and the political aim will shape that. Generally, fewer and broader—while still precise—objectives will help keep the strategy focused on the desired political aim while addressing the most important threats and/or opportunities.

Coherence in a strategy partly results from a tight linkage among the national interests at stake, the political aim pursued to secure those interests, and the primary objectives that address threats or opportunities to achieve the political aim, thereby protecting or furthering national interests. Upon defining the desired ends, the strategist should have a clear understanding of why, when the primary objectives are attained, the political aim will be achieved.

CHAPTER 4 | IDENTIFYING AND/OR DEVELOPING THE MEANS

The Means of National Security Strategy

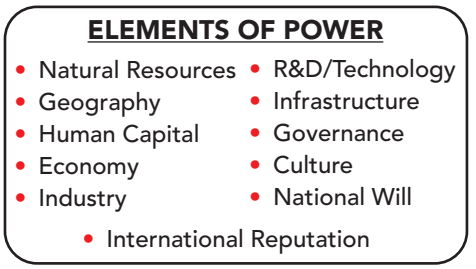
The third element in strategic logic is identification of the means needed to achieve primary objectives that will produce the desired political aim. In short, means are the capabilities and resources one can bring to bear in the effort to produce a desired political aim. Sometimes adequate means are available, and sometimes they must be developed. There are three components to the means in national security strategy: elements of power, institutions/actors, and the instruments of power.

Elements of Power

The elements of power provide the foundation for building and sustaining the power of a state. There is no universally agreed-upon list of the elements, and much scholarship exists on what, in fact, constitutes national power.[9] However, any list of the elements of power would likely include those shown in figure 2. Most important is not the exact composition of the list but the recognition that the means of national security strategy rest on foundational building blocks of power. The ability of a state or non-state actor to protect, sustain, and build, as well as effectively convert these building blocks—the elements of power—into specific capabilities that can be used to pursue political aims is crucial to its strategic success.

Although listing elements makes them appear distinct, they are overlapping and interdependent and must be considered in relation to one another. They defy simple definition, and their importance is

FIGURE 2.



always relative to a given strategic situation. In general, a state's natural resources, geography, economy, infrastructure, and industrial base are traditionally recognized as *foundational* elements of power—those that are critical for supporting strategic actions. Human capital encompasses demographics, which can include population size, birth rates, immigration trends, and levels of education. Governance refers to matters such as political structure, effectiveness, and abidance with the rule of law. National will is a broad and somewhat amorphous concept; it refers to the population's mood, its view of what the nation's aims and objectives ought to be, and what sacrifices it is willing to make to achieve them. A nation's level of research, development, and technology encompasses a state's capability to innovate. Like national will, culture is a particularly broad concept that is difficult to measure but can play an important role in the state's ability to preserve, build, and project power. Culture may also shape a nation's international reputation, which reflects the perceptions of foreign institutions, actors, and individuals.[10]

Institutions and Actors

Institutions and actors wield the instruments of power on behalf of the state. National security strategists often look to selected governmental institutions and actors, such as the Departments of State or Defense, to achieve objectives and produce outcomes tied to a strategy's political aim. Depending on the situation, however, other institutions and actors may be appropriate. Figure 3 illustrates a range of public, private, domestic, international, and other organizations and actors that may be leveraged to contribute to a strategy's success through formal, semi-formal, or informal wielding of the instruments of power.

International governmental organizations (IGOs) and *international financial institutions* (IFIs) are entities such as the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund, respectively. *Quasi-governmental* organizations are partially state-run but operate with broader independence

FIGURE 3.

than departments or ministries; one example is the United States Institute of Peace. *Partners* refers to foreign governments, their agencies, and personnel. *Proxies* refers to nongovernmental foreign partners who, through their actions, directly or indirectly implement a nation's strategy; the Mujahideen and the Contras are two historic examples for the United States; Hizballah is a current example for Iran.

Used here, the term *media* refers to the full spectrum of reporters, bloggers, journalists, and virtually any other person or agency that broadcasts, prints, or uploads any form of news; it also includes the entertainment industry, again, broadly construed. *Business* is another wide-ranging term that represents all forms of private or state-owned/controlled commercial enterprises including activities such as sovereign wealth funds. Used here, *civil society* includes charities, unions, private organizations, political parties, religious groups, noncommercial firms, and civic groups. Civil-society groups may be similar to *nongovernmental organizations* (NGOs), which include not-for-profit, voluntary citizens' groups organized at a local, national, or international level. *Empowered individuals* are persons with individual power independent of any institutional affiliations; examples could include celebrities, ex-Presidents, philanthropists, or other persons of notoriety.

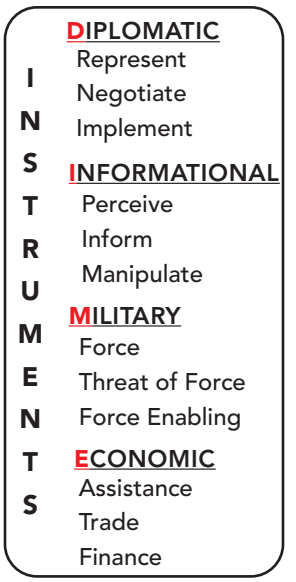
It is important to recognize that none of these institutions or actors hold a monopoly on a particular instrument of power. While it is helpful to recognize institutional expertise, capabilities, resources, and missions, it can be counterproductive for strategists to bind any

institution or actor too tightly to a specific instrument. For example, DOD is the institution most closely tied to the U.S. military instrument of power, and its capabilities and missions are usually associated with the application of the military instrument. However, DOD also can and does wield the diplomatic instrument, the informational instrument, and at times the economic instrument. Similarly, the State Department is most closely associated with the diplomatic instrument; however, it also frequently wields the economic and information instrument. The strategist who considers DOD synonymous with the military instrument or the State Department synonymous with the diplomatic instrument loses a wide range of capabilities potentially crucial to achieving the desired ends.

The Instruments of Power

Actors and institutions pursue objectives by wielding four primary instruments—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic (DIME)—to project power. Each instrument comprises a set of fundamental capabilities, which are broadly noted in the figure 4. The strategist's challenge is to determine what combination of those capabilities is best suited to deal with the situation at hand. This effort requires understanding the utility of each instrument; *what are its capabilities and limitations given a particular situation, what are the best concepts and methods for how to use it,* and *what are its costs and risks*?

FIGURE 4.



Some publications and practitioners use the acronyms *MIDFIELD*, *DIMEFIL*, or others to capture the instruments of power. These typically expand DIME to include elements such as finance, intelligence, law, and law enforcement. It is helpful to keep in mind that used here, DIME includes all available means and ways and is thus compatible with these other approaches. The critical point is to drive strategic thinking, so that all tools are considered, regardless of how specifically they are bucketed. Regardless of the mnemonic, strategists should always distinguish between instruments and the actors and institutions that wield them.

Diplomatic

Diplomacy is sometimes described as "the outward expression of foreign policy"—the effort to provide real-time coordination of all the other instruments. This definition is appealing to practitioners because it captures the lead roles of both senior diplomats in formulating foreign policy and Embassies in executing it overseas. Yet this perspective conflates diplomacy with both policy and statecraft. This conflation makes it difficult to understand diplomacy as an independent *instrument* of statecraft. A significantly more limited and practical definition, as used in the DIME construct, looks at diplomacy as official engagement—how a state formally interacts with state or nonstate actors. This interaction takes many forms, running the gamut from the hard or coercive diplomacy of officially conveying threats, notification and management of sanctions, and declaring war, to identifying shared interests, building alliances, and negotiating or sustaining agreements. It is important to emphasize that diplomacy usually is a *process* and not a single act; it is a two-way street in which details about the foreign actor's interests are collected to inform understanding of context; and that the diplomatic instrument is used to achieve political, military, *and* economic ends.

Engagement with individual foreign political (and military) leaders traditionally has been a significant part of diplomacy. This is described as *bilateral (two-sided) diplomacy* and can be performed up to the Head of

State level, with phone calls, meetings, and speeches used as mechanisms to collect and convey information about interests and to communicate strategic intent. In the United States, the Secretary of State and the Department of State are primary actors in the diplomatic field. (In most other countries, similar functions are performed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.) Overseas, U.S. Embassies are the primary platform for diplomatic engagement. The Ambassador acts as the senior State official and the President's personal representative with "full responsibility for the direction, coordination, and supervision of all U.S. executive branch employees" in that country.[11] But diplomacy is not limited to two-way relations between sovereign countries and their political leaders. *Multilateral diplomacy* describes the simultaneous engagement of multiple countries and sometimes also includes international organizations. Increasingly, it also embraces affected nonstate actors. Multilateral diplomacy has grown more common, given the range of global and regional organizations to which the United States belongs, or engages.

Exercise of the diplomatic instruments is not limited to diplomats and the staff of the National Security Council. The Departments of Treasury and Commerce engage foreign officials to support political and economic objectives, such as securing commercial deals, reaching trade agreements, imposing sanctions, or coordinating decisions of the international financial institutions. DOD officials and combatant commanders meet with foreign counterparts not only to discuss military cooperation but also to defuse tensions, build relationships, and negotiate agreements. Officials from the Department of Justice and law enforcement agencies coordinate with foreign counterparts to address global criminal networks, terrorist threats, and other transnational issues. Indeed, even officials at the state- and city-level conduct diplomacy with international counterparts, for example agreeing to create a sister city partnership.

Types of diplomatic engagement can be roughly characterized in three ways: representation, negotiation, and implementation.

- *Represent (explain and advocate).* The most common diplomatic acts involve the day-to-day building of relationships and engaging with foreign counterparts to persuasively describe, defend, or forward a position and seek responses that support or, at least, do not contradict, the position. These actions seek to create agreement by helping ensure that others feel their views are heard and ensure that other foreign governments, organizations, and populations understand U.S. policy.
- *Negotiate.* "Negotiation is getting something by giving something, and it is the search for solutions where there are conflicts of interests between countries."[12] As the principal diplomatic method for producing strategic results, negotiation is the give-and-take process to reach an agreement that resolves a problem/conflict or works to the mutual advantage of the parties involved. At a more mundane level, it also involves developing technical parameters on how countries, government entities, companies, and even individuals should proceed with transnational interactions. Negotiation can occur fairly rapidly when interests are closely aligned or can be a many-year process, with backsliding and inconsistent progress.
- *Implement (agreements of policy).* Diplomacy does not end by reaching an agreement; it includes implementation actions as well. Just as agreement takes many different forms (for example, bilateral statements, joint communiqués, partnerships, and treaty commitments), follow-up activities shape and manage the ensuing environment. Examples include maintaining a coalition, providing technical assistance, strategic dialogues, treaty verification, international law, and may include certain aspects of national and international law enforcement and immigration.

Overall, the strength and weakness of the diplomatic instrument are two sides of the same coin: diplomacy has limited enforcement capability. The strength of the diplomatic instrument lies in the fact that commitments freely entered, and which sufficiently satisfy the interests of the parties, are more likely to be sustained. The weakness of the diplomatic instrument is that compliance is generally voluntary, honesty is not assured, and the mechanisms to detect and correct violations are often

minimal. These weaknesses are particularly apparent in consensus-driven models of multilateral diplomacy.

Informational

In the DIME construct, the informational instrument encompasses a diverse range of functions: intelligence, public diplomacy, strategic communications, many cyber operations, psychological and influence operations, and propaganda, as well as certain operations in the electromagnetic spectrum, among others. It is wielded by an even broader range of actors, including government, academia, businesses, media, civil society, individuals, and many more. Despite the remarkable breadth of functions and actors involved, the nature of the informational instrument remains cohesive, revolving around the three pillars of perception, distribution, and manipulation of information. As with all the instruments, in application these pillars function more as an overlapping continuum than distinct theoretical categories.

- *Perceive* involves the struggle to accurately understand the world as it is. It occurs from the individual cognitive level up to the level of states and multinational organizations. It encompasses the collection, processing, integration, analysis, and interpretation of available information. From the perspective of the state, the consequence of perceiving the world is exemplified in former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's attribution of the Allied victory in World War II to the Ultra Program, which deciphered German encryption and allowed the Allies to read German war plans. However, this aspect of perception, generally centered around the intelligence community, is more institutional than instrumental. In other words, it relates to the creation, maintenance, or enabling of power rather than the direct wielding of power. The second aspect of perception relates to external recognition of a state's ability to accurately perceive the world. The belief that an adversary has a robust ability to identify and understand creates a powerful constraint that can, itself, be wielded to directly influence target behavior.

- *Inform* focuses on clarifying or improving target perception (information environment) and consists of the persuasive transmission of information to an audience of choice. It rests on the connectivity with an audience, content of the message, and its cognitive effect. Many aspects of inform are embodied in the concept of strategic communication, which involves efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of one's interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products. Yet inform is broader than just strategic communications. It also may include such actions as intelligence-sharing and more passive, soft, or informal forms of knowledge transmission such as cultural/social exchanges and public media programs, releases, and narratives. Successful dissemination of a message is based on myriad contextual factors that influence its legitimacy. These facets include trust in the sender, relation of the sender to the message, preconceptions of the audience, culture, language, method of transmission, and the capability and durability of transmission systems.
- *Manipulate* focuses on degrading a target's information environment by the destruction, modification, obfuscation, and restriction of information. Manipulation has two broad aspects, corrupt and deny. *Corrupt* involves destruction, usurpation, falsification, or obfuscation of information to prevent targets from accurately perceiving or responding to a situation, persuasively disseminating their own message, or effectively controlling their own information environment. *Deny* involves the restriction of unwanted information from one's own information environment. Manipulation is partly encapsulated in the doctrinal definition of information operations, which entail efforts by one party to deny another the ability to acquire and use information, and to protect and enhance its own ability to do the same. Information manipulation involves actively disrupting perception and/or interdicting dissemination of rival state and actor communications, conducting deception operations, many offensive cyber activities, certain operations in the electromagnetic spectrum, propaganda, and other actions intended to restrict, twist, or destroy information to control capability, behavior, and/or perception of a target.

Because social media and information/technical infrastructures have dramatically expanded over the past quarter-century, and as more activity shifts to cyberspace, information is now an increasingly critical aspect of state power. State and nonstate actors work to exploit new technical information capabilities; autocratic states broadly project propaganda and disinformation; and terrorist groups exploit social media and other digital means to spread their messages, recruit armies, and elicit funds. As significantly, virtually all critical infrastructure—civilian and military—in the developed world is attached to computer networks. The ubiquity and permeability of cyberspace create vulnerabilities that states and nonstate actors exploit to their advantage and overlook at their peril. Cyberspace, however, is not synonymous with the informational instrument; it is a domain through which information can flow and in which certain types of information operations can take place. It is difficult to assess how information will develop as an instrument of power in the long run, but current trends point to ever-increasing importance.

Military

The military instrument of power entails applying, threatening to apply, or enabling other parties to apply or threaten to apply force in furtherance of political aims. Application of the military instrument is potentially the most dangerous action a state can undertake; strategists and leaders should apply it only with a clear understanding and assessment of its nature, capabilities, limitations, and costs/risks. Though there are no universally accepted definitions of the military instrument, the concepts of force, threat of force, and force enabling capture its essence and provide an appropriate framework for assessment.[13]

- *Force* is the application of violence by one party to coerce, subdue, or eradicate another, and it can occur in any domain (land, sea, air, space, and cyber). Force may include overt large-scale conflict, clan-

destine and covert activities, single targeted strikes, employment of proxies, the use of destructive cyber power, or any other activity in which violence is applied to achieve political aims and their associated primary objectives.

- *Threat of force* is used to coercively modify an adversary's current behavior or shape its future actions. Like force, threat of force is used to achieve political aims; it can be used either defensively/preventively to *deter* an adversary from initiating action, or offensively to *compel* an adversary into ceasing action or giving up something of value.[14] In either case, the key determinant of effectiveness is credibility; an adversary must believe in an opponent's *capability and willingness* to make good on the threat. Moreover, threat of force can be *explicit or implicit;* diplomats and heads of state frequently express or imply it in diplomatic messages, adding weight to the diplomatic instrument of power.
- *Force enabling* consists of improving the capacity/capability of international partners to apply or threaten force and encompasses a wide array of concepts. It may be used to help state or nonstate actors bolster their military capability, to improve state or regional security, to enhance elements or institutions of military power, to make an allied or aligned state a more effective military partner, or to link a foreign state to one's own by way of military cooperation. Force enabling activities are frequently, though not exclusively, conducted by the Armed Forces and intelligence services. Such efforts are often tied to the diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments. Force enabling is distinct from other forms of military aid. The distinction resides in the intent behind the provision of improved capacity and capability.

To expand a point from the primer's institutions and actors section, the military *instrument* should not be considered synonymous with the Armed Forces (*institution*). Conflating instrument with institution undermines strategic reasoning in three ways. First, like most institutions, the Armed Forces can wield all, or nearly all, the instruments on behalf of the state. For example, a combatant commander may be used to wield

the diplomatic instrument by representing U.S. views to a foreign leader, or the NSC may direct a U.S. Navy hospital ship to a region in an application of the economic and informational instruments. Second, institutions other than the Armed Forces wield the military instrument. For example, U.S. intelligence agencies can wield force or enable others to wield force. Additionally, proxies, law enforcement and gendarme agencies, businesses (contractors), and at times even private citizens wield the military instrument on behalf of states. Third, the inherent risks associated with using the military instrument are not always evident when the Armed Forces are used for nonmilitary instrument functions. For example, using the Navy and Marine Corps to provide humanitarian relief to natural disaster victims does not create the escalatory pressures, fear, and public/political passions these same forces produce through combat operations. The conflation of instrument and institution restricts thinking and may inure the strategist to the risks of applying the military instrument.

Economic

As an *element*, domestic economic strength is a key underpinning of state power. At a minimum, a state must generate, collect, and use enough surplus wealth to create and maintain competent state institutions. These include institutions that provide for security, infrastructure, and predictability. All states have some measure of economic power, but the extent and utility of that power varies. Some factors that determine a state's potential economic power include the size of its market, which is connected to population and gross domestic product (GDP); the standard of living of its people, often measured as GDP per capita, or purchasing power parity; the natural resource endowments of the state; the state's access to capital; the productivity of its labor force; and the innovative capacity of the population. A large economy is an important, but not individually sufficient, factor enabling a state to develop effective institutions. The larger and more productive a state's economy, the more

resources available to convert into institutions, fund external operations, and offer as inducements. A large economy also empowers the various instruments; by its very existence a large economy strengthens the ability of the instruments to effect external change.

As an *instrument*, economic power focuses on either furthering or constraining the economic prosperity of regions, states, institutions, key groups, and individual decisionmakers. When a state seeks to use its economic power to create effects in the international community, there are three major aspects of the economic instrument it can wield: assistance, trade, and finance. The national security strategist must critically assess both the positive and negative effects that a proposed strategy may have on national economies. Strategies that jeopardize domestic economic health should be chosen warily, with a clear understanding of the interests at stake.

- *Assistance* is money, goods, materiel, or services given by one state or nonstate actor directly to another. Assistance can be used to improve the target's capability/capacity in a specific sector, as budget support, as humanitarian support, and to develop goodwill or ties to shape a longer term relationship or induce short-term actions. It can be either directed (that is, "with strings attached") or undirected. Assistance can be bilateral or multilateral and often leverages international financial organizations such as the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, or the Asian Development Bank. Relative to private capital flows, private philanthropy, and diaspora remittances, state-to-state assistance has become a smaller and smaller proportion of assistance to poor nations in the past 50 years. However, assistance is still a relevant and potentially useful category of the economic instrument of power.
- *Trade* of goods and services has the potential to substantially increase the wealth and prosperity of trading partners. Limits or restrictions on trade (including sanctions and tariffs) harm or threaten to harm an adversary's economy. Conversely, trade agreements or reduced tariffs can be inducements to change a target's

cost/benefit analysis and drive desirable foreign policy outcomes. Although trade is normally considered mutually beneficial, a state must carefully consider the potential harm to its own economic prosperity when considering trade restrictions as an instrument of state policy. A state may also want to consider the role of private and state-owned enterprises in the projection of state power and the potential direct and indirect influences these enterprises may have.

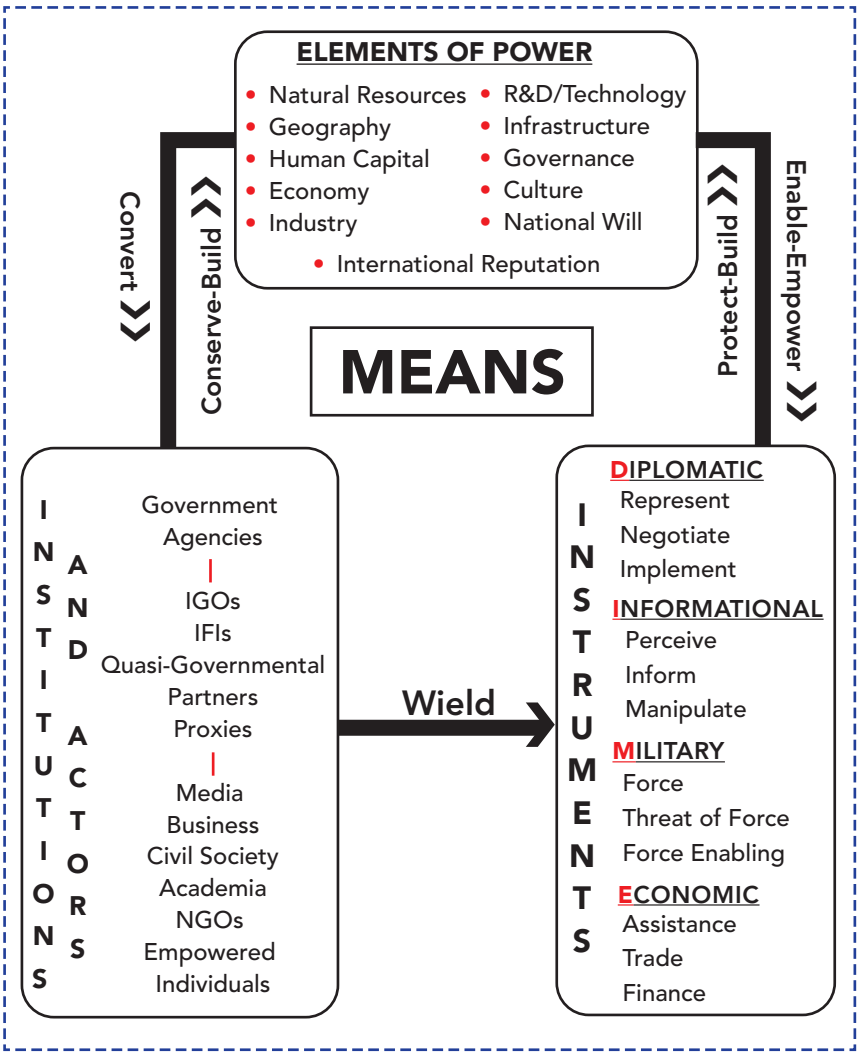
- *Finance* refers to the complex global network of state and commercial capital flows and investments as well as the instrumental aspects of monetary and fiscal policy. Access to capital markets is required so that modern businesses may undertake investments to increase productive capacity, and so that modern governments are able to provide expected services (for example, infrastructure, health, welfare, education) to their citizens. Financial lending, investment, and capital flows are necessary for the macroeconomic stability of states and the entire global economy. Restricting or impeding access to finance and banking systems (sanctions) or manipulating state and/or commercial investments can achieve political aims or objectives. However, like trade restrictions, a state must carefully consider the potential harm to its own and its allies' or partners' economic prosperity (and reputation as an impartial financial entity) when considering the use of financial tools to wield the economic instrument.

Strategists should consider the character of their own state's economy, the target's economy, and its allies' or partners' economies as well. The more a state's economic activity is privately controlled (by proportion) and the more it relies on free-market forces to generate economic prosperity, the less direct ability it has to shape its own trade and financial activities to achieve primary objectives. In such situations, strategists should be less confident that trade, financial, or aid actions will be able to produce a particular strategic effect on a target country.

Interrelationships Among the Three Components of Means

National security strategists must appreciate how the three components of means—elements, institutions actors, and instruments—relate to each other (see figure 5). The elements of power are the "raw material" or "the bank account" that states use to create and sustain institutions and/or to enable the instruments of power. Yet these elemental building blocks of power are inevitably finite (though neither linear nor zero-sum); thus, a state must use its institutions and instruments to develop, protect, and conserve its elements. Preserving the elements sustains the state's power; if one or more elements is significantly diminished—whether through strategic inattention, adversary action, or the pursuit of strategies that are too costly—state power is weakened, and relative or absolute decline could ensue. The Soviet Union in the 1970s provides a cautionary example. Forty years ago, the Soviet Union appeared extremely powerful, its military and nuclear arsenal had matched, if not surpassed U.S. capabilities, and it exerted strong regional and global political influence. Said another way, the Soviets had built very powerful institutions. However, these institutions were enormously expensive and rested on an increasingly weak economic and social foundation (elements). When President Ronald Reagan identified and capitalized on this weakness, Soviet institutional power proved unsustainable. The imbalance between Soviet institutions and elements facilitated the state's collapse and dissolution. The Soviet example highlights the significance of understanding and valuing the relationship between the elements and the institutions . As critically, the direct relationship between institutions and the instruments is just as crucial. The fundamental capabilities of the instruments, employed by appropriate institutions and actors and brought to bear in appropriate combinations, produce effects to resolve security challenges and achieve desired political aims. Put more simply, institutions and actors wield the instruments in pursuit of the state's political aims. In this

FIGURE 5. Interrelationships Among the Three Components of the Means



sense, the Armed Forces do not produce effects; instead, the use of force, threat of force, or enabling of force produces effects. Similarly, diplomats do not produce effects; rather, it is the use of representation, negotiation, or implementation that produce them. The activity, not the actor, produces the effects that achieve primary objectives. It is the circular,

interdependent, self-sustaining relationship that, when used appropriately, maintains state power.

Employing Means/Developing Means

At the National Security Strategy level, strategists examine not only the current global security situation but also the desired situation for the Nation in the future. This analysis requires considering not just the means needed to achieve political aims *today* but also the means (elements, actors and institutions, and instruments) the Nation will need *in the years ahead*. These may include alliances, specific military capabilities, international agreements, access to natural resources, critical infrastructure, or an educated workforce trained with particular skills.

Strategies designed to respond to acute security challenges are usually developed within the bounds of existing means. However, a threat or opportunity may be of such magnitude or duration that a strategy can employ the means at hand and—with enough time—develop new means as well. For example, America's ultimate political aim in the Pacific during World War II was Japan's unconditional surrender. In the months immediately after Pearl Harbor, U.S. strategy focused on employing existing means to blunt further Japanese advances. That effort bought time for the United States to mobilize and innovate, which eventually created vastly improved military capabilities. Together, mobilization and the development of advanced technology enabled the United States to create the military means needed to achieve its political aim. Similarly, as part of the U.S. strategy toward the Soviet Union, President John F. Kennedy established the goal of a manned mission to the Moon. That effort spawned a national space program that enhanced America's elements of power. The United States strengthened its geography (occupying key points in space), research and development and technology, human capital, international reputation, and national culture. These newly developed means proved crucial to America's eventual triumph over the Soviet Union. Means development can even define a strategy's political aim.

Deng Xiaoping's multi-decade *Tao Guang Yang Hui* strategy's central premise was the development of economic, military, and other capabilities. China successfully maintained a low profile, which allowed China to expand its power without drawing an international reaction that would limit access to resources or restrict growth.[15]

General

Designing the ways to achieve primary objectives in pursuit of a political aim is the fourth element in strategic logic. Whereas "identifying the means" focuses on *with what*, "designing ways" addresses *how*. In deciding how to use the selected means (elements, institutions/actors, and instruments) to achieve the political aim and its primary objectives, the national security strategist must answer—and continuously revisit—the following four fundamental questions. First, what fundamental strategic approach(es) is most suitable? Second, within that fundamental strategic approach, which modes of action seem most promising (for example, direct versus indirect, sequential versus cumulative)? Third, given the answers to the first two questions, which instruments are best suited to help secure the political aim, and what institutions should wield them in that endeavor? Finally, how will the strategist orchestrate the selected instruments to achieve the desired ends?

Theory of Success

A *Theory of Success* (ToS) is a strategic hypothesis that makes explicit the causal logic linking selected actions to the outcomes a strategy seeks to achieve. In short, it is a strategist's understanding of *why*, not *how*, a strategy should work. Unlike the ends-ways-means triad, which can leave causal logic implicit, a ToS compels the strategist to state the assumed cause-and-effect mechanisms—the propositions about why a given behavior, applied in a specific context, is expected to change an adversary, system, or environment. This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding and articulating the logic that connects actions with expected outcomes, ensuring that strategies are not only plans of action but are also grounded in a logic that explains their anticipated effectiveness.

Treating a ToS as a hypothesis is especially critical in complex adaptive security environments characterized by many interacting

agents and often chaotic feedback. Making the causal logic explicit helps leaders sooner identify when reality diverges from the predicted causal chain, enabling rapid course correction and iterative adaptation. By making the causal logic explicit, strategies can better coordinate efforts across different levels, ensuring that all actions are aligned with the overarching strategic objectives. Thus, a well-articulated Theory of Success serves as both a roadmap and a diagnostic tool, guiding strategy development and implementation while enabling continuous evaluation and adaptation.

Examples of a Theory of Success

- Nuclear Deterrence: A secure second-strike capability will create fear in our nuclear adversaries who will logically understand there is nothing their first strike can do to prevent us from destroying them with our second strike. This will cause them to refrain from using nuclear weapons against us.
- Era—"Marshall Plan": The growing pull of communism in postwar Europe is primarily a result of collapsed economies, poverty, and uncertainty. Righting European economies and giving the populace hope will take the heart out of procommunist movements and cause Europe to remain supportive of and aligned with Western democratic liberalism.

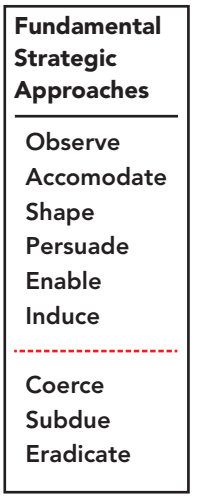
These examples illustrate high-level Theories of Success. But the underlying logic could be applied at any level. When addressing primary or subordinate objectives, the ToS may require more detail. Even so, clarity remains paramount. If one cannot articulate one's ToS in a clear and concise paragraph, it may indicate a need for deeper comprehension on the strategist's part.

Fundamental Strategic Approaches

The process of formulating the ways for a strategy will likely begin with consideration of the most appropriate strategic approach(es) for dealing

with the national security challenge at hand. Strategic approaches fall roughly along a spectrum from virtually no action to the eradication of an opponent. Figure 6 lists the fundamental strategic approaches a strategist could choose to pursue, ranging from least to most aggressive. The dashed line in the figure demarcates a critical decision point in the formulation of a strategy—the point at which the strategist is considering approaches that include the potential use or threatened use of force. In selecting the appropriate approach, the strategist must consider the interests at stake, the strategic context, the political aim and its objectives, and the available means. Conversely, once chosen, the approach should guide employment of the selected instruments. Finally, the strategist must continually revisit whether the chosen strategic approach is effective. Once a state or nonstate actor puts a strategy into effect, the strategic situation may change, often in unanticipated—and at times almost unimaginable—ways. As that happens, the strategist must rethink whether the initial approach continues to suit the situation. Will it still achieve the political aim with the available means at acceptable levels of cost and risk? Potentially, the strategist must also consider if the situation has changed to such a dramatic degree that the desired political aim is no longer viable. Below is a list of strategic approaches, further defining the terms in the figure.

FIGURE 6.



- *Observe* is the least active strategic approach and is often appropriate when threats to interests are minimal, international partners

independently address an issue sufficiently, or when assessed costs and risks of greater action outweigh potential benefits.

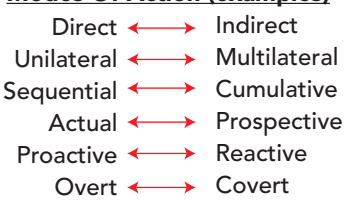
- *Accommodate* means acceding to others' interests/aims with the belief that acceding will limit or prevent additional competition or conflict. Though this approach has certain negative connotations it may be the most appropriate if the level of interest at stake does not support the risks/costs of a more confrontational approach. Depending on the situation, accommodation can take multiple forms, including appeasement, adaptation, abrogation, retraction, or abandonment, among others.
- *Shape* is often a means-building approach, intended to engender a more beneficial environment. This approach may be most appropriate when threats are not clear or immediate/severe and an opportunity creates a chance to mold the strategic situation in one's favor. It may also be seen as a potentially long-term strategy, intended to slowly maneuver an opponent into a position of weakness with little to no use of more obvious actions.
- *Persuade* generally entails trying to convince another actor through force of argument. Persuasion is primarily viable where the parties' interests align or significantly overlap; its utility is otherwise limited. Successful persuasion generally creates ideological agreement and thus can lead to a stronger partnership than more aggressive actions.
- *Enable* is used—when interests align—to improve the capability of an actor already taking beneficial action or who is likely to produce or benefit one's political aim/interests. Enabling can occur in myriad ways, such as force-enabling of a partner's military capability or providing information or financial assistance to an ally.
- *Induce* involves offering something positive—for example, promises of assistance, security guarantees, or tariff concessions to change another state's or actor's behavior. Inducement generally works by changing the targets cost/risk/benefit calculation, and thus can work even when interests do not align or significantly overlap. Inducements often create a transactional relationship.

- *Coerce* crosses an important conceptual and psychological threshold by moving from positive to negative engagement with the potential for the use, or threatened use, of force. Coercive actions may be actual or prospective and may include actions such as eliminating aid, refusing weapons sales, raising tariffs, imposing sanctions, curtailing diplomatic relations, deploying or posturing forces, and actually employing force. Coercion is generally understood to encompass both deterrence and compellence.
- *Subdue* seeks to remove all choice from the target; this is in contrast to even the most forceful act of coercion, which still leaves the choice to be or not be coerced with the targeted actor. Subdue is generally heavy on force and may include occupation, forceful regime change, and destruction or severe degradation of the target's capacity to employ force or defend itself.
- *Eradicate* seeks the absolute elimination of the target state or actor, many or all of its key leaders and believers, as well as the ideology guiding it.

Modes of Action

In addition to choosing a fundamental strategic approach, the strategist should consider which mode(s) of action will best accomplish the chosen strategy. The modes of action shown in figure 7 are not a checklist but examples of choices about various methods a strategist could utilize to build a strategy. Although the choices may seem binary, different objectives within the same strategy may simultaneously employ multiple modes of action (for example, using both overt and covert force). The modes of action listed are not all-encompassing; strategists need to consider a wide range of potential modes as part of their "ways" development. They also need to consider whether a particular mode

FIGURE 7.



fits the strategic situation, will achieve the political aim and its primary objectives, and can do so with the available means at acceptable levels of risk and cost.

Matching Institutions/Actors with Instruments

When designing the ways, strategists must again remember that institutions/actors are not instruments. Institutions/actors wield the instruments of power in pursuit of the political aim and its primary objectives. This notion is central to the link between means and ways. Strategists should think broadly when deciding which institutions or actors should employ the chosen instruments. For example, tasking DOD with the application of force seems intuitive, but may not always be the right choice. In certain circumstances, an intelligence agency, a proxy, a partner, or a law enforcement agency may be better suited to apply force (wield the military instrument). While having DOD employ force may be one option, the strategist should consider as many other options as practicable.

Orchestration

The instruments of national power overlap, interconnect, and are interdependent. Each of the instruments works most effectively when supported by and operating harmoniously with the others. Consequently, the strategist should consider what the proposed strategy is asking each instrument to do; at any point in time and space, one of the instruments may play the principal role in advancing the strategy, while the others are in support. The strategist works to ensure each is doing all it can at that moment to achieve its particular purpose and to support the efforts of the other instruments. It is especially critical for the success of the strategy that supporting instrument do not work against those of the principal or lead instrument.

Orchestration *defines* how all the pieces fit together. If they are to accomplish the political aim, institutions must wield the instruments of power through distinctive actions and approaches in a logical,

coherent strategy. Effective orchestration depends on multiple factors. Because strategy normally includes several primary objectives intended to accomplish the political aim, and because actions taken in support of one objective could undermine other objectives, each objective must be *prioritized* in terms of its importance. Moreover, given that resources are finite, prioritization is essential to ensure that the most important objectives get the resources needed for their attainment. In addition, strategies often benefit from the clear identification of a lead instrument—and lead institution—with the rest operating in support. The strategist must take care not to let the actions of supporting instruments undermine the main line of effort. The strategist should also *sequence* objectives, specifying whether one objective needs to be attained before another objective can be pursued. Some objectives can be achieved in parallel, that is, simultaneously. Also vital is the need to *coordinate* the instruments to ensure they are not working at cross-purposes. To ensure limited means are appropriately apportioned to achieve the desired effects, strategists must properly *balance* resources between objectives and instruments. Achieving objectives often requires the *integration* of multiple instruments in a unified approach. Such integration may be exceedingly difficult but can make the difference between success and failure.

As a strategy unfolds, instruments and institutions interact with each other. Many of those interactions are intentional and positive, part of the strategic design. Some interactions, though, are unintentional and potentially negative. Consequently, strategists must assure that interactions among the instruments and institutions produce positive synergistic effects. As an example, when U.S. strategists formulated the plan for providing relief to Southeast Asian nations after the December 26, 2004, tsunami, they assessed that the effort would also send constructive messages about America to local populations. In turn, they anticipated those positive messages would undermine support for al Qaeda's Indonesian affiliate, Jemaah Islamiyah. Similarly, strategists

have to shape their strategic designs to prevent unanticipated interactions from producing negative effects. For example, using force can often lead to collateral damage, which may strengthen an adversary population's resistance or enhance enemy recruiting. Such concerns mandate extensive consideration and may well limit actions.

CHAPTER 6 | ASSESSING THE COSTS, RISKS, AND RESULTS

Iterative Assessment

Assessing the costs and risks stemming from a strategy is the fifth fundamental element of strategic logic. As with the first element—analyzing the strategic situation—assessing costs and risks must permeate the process of developing national security strategy. Like analyzing the strategic situation, assessing risks and costs should be pursued iteratively and with regular frequency.

Evaluating Costs

Costs represent the outlay of means needed to achieve a political aim. They include the resources required to acquire, build, enable, protect, convert, achieve, or maintain something of strategic value, whether tangible or intangible. Costs also can include people killed and injured, infrastructure damaged or destroyed, diminished capital, accumulated debt, weakening of the economy, or tarnished reputation and diminished influence. They can be transactional, political, temporal, or stem from forfeited opportunities.

While the strategist can calculate some costs with specificity, others must be based on assumptions. Nevertheless, whether based on hard data or estimates and judgments, strategists must provide a definitive statement of likely costs for the decisionmaker. Only in this way can the strategist make it possible for the decisionmaker to weigh a strategy's hoped-for benefits against its expected costs.

Proposed strategies for which the anticipated costs exceed the value of the hoped-for benefits ought to be rethought. This process reinforces the criticality of having defined precisely: the interests the state has at stake in the problem, the value of those interests, threats to those interests, and the seriousness of those threats. The essential question in the cost-benefit analysis of any strategy is whether it protects/advances the state's interests at an acceptable cost. One way strategists can conduct this cost/benefit evaluation is to asses whether their strategies, when

implemented, will add to or detract from their nation's elements of power. States should avoid embarking on a strategic course of action if it will ultimately diminish national power rather than preserve or supplement it. Ultimately, many national strategy debates revolve around value tradeoffs—for instance, lives versus economic harm—that are difficult, if not impossible, to resolve definitively. Strategists ought to consider at least three categories of costs—resources (lives, money, equipment, time), political costs, and opportunity costs. In addition, strategists would do well to consider the costs of inaction.

Identifying Risks

Strategists must consider risks as they design strategies. In general, risk entails the probability and severity of loss linked to hazards. With respect to strategy, risks are elements that could go wrong. The severity of a risk is determined by both the likelihood of its occurrence *and* the magnitude of damage that would ensue if the risk became manifest. Thus, a state that employs force against an adversary that possesses nuclear weapons runs the risk that the enemy would retaliate with a nuclear strike. The magnitude of the ensuing damage would be huge, but if there is little or no likelihood that the other state would respond with a nuclear strike, then the severity of the risk might be deemed acceptable.

There is no magic formula for calculating risk. Risks emerge as the strategist brings insightful, objective analysis and judgment to bear on what research and intelligence have revealed about the nature and dynamics of the problem. Despite the strategist's best efforts, however, both the likelihood and severity of any identified risks will remain only probabilities. Therefore, it is critical that the strategist develops a scheme for valuing both the likelihood and the severity of risks and uses that scheme to characterize each of the risks considered by decisionmakers.

Strategists must assess both *risks to the strategy* and *risks from the strategy*. Risks to the strategy are things that could cause it to fail. Risks

to a strategy may be evident in the strategy development process, with mitigation actions written into the strategy, or they may emerge from target behavior. Risks from the strategy are additional threats or undesired consequences caused by the strategy's implementation. In either case, risks often stem from assumptions that prove invalid in whole or in part. When the United States invaded Iraq in 2003 with the political aim of regime change, a risk to the strategy was that popular resistance within Iraq to the U.S. invasion would coalesce into an effective insurgency. At the same time, a clear risk from the U.S. strategy was that the invasion's weakening of Iraq would open the door for Iran to establish a much stronger position in the region. In the end, U.S. decisionmakers discounted these prospects and failed to mitigate them.

Viability Assessments

Throughout the strategy development process, strategists must continuously assess a strategy's overall viability. Multiple factors can affect a strategy's prospects for successful implementation. To assess the viability of a national security strategy, strategists can use the "____ility" tests, which facilitiate evaluation of the strategy from multiple vantage points. Strategists should begin by considering *suitability*, which addresses whether the strategy will protect/advance the national interest(s) at stake and not work against other national-level strategies, policies, and goals. Broadly, is the application of the strategy in the overall interest of the state? Second, the strategist should test *feasibility*, which examines whether the strategy presents a reasonably likely path toward achieving the political aim. Are sufficient means of the appropriate type available (or attainable) to achieve the political aim? Even if a strategy is suitable and feasible, the strategist must determine its *desirability*, which entails assessing whether the expected benefits outweigh the expected costs—is attainment of the political aim worth what it will cost to attain it? To be judged desirable, the strategy (not just the hoped-for outcome) must

deliver something valued beyond all that will be expended to purchase it. Next comes the test of *acceptability*. Is the plan of action consistent with the state's values, the national mood, domestic concerns, the interests of allies and partners, and the personal goals of political leaders? As importantly, will the strategy be deemed legally acceptable? If the strategy requires authorities that either do not exist or might not be forthcoming, its viability will be greatly diminished. Finally comes the test of *sustainability*. Can the necessary level of resources, political will and backing, and popular support be sustained long enough to attain the political aim? Strategists should continuously apply these basic tests of viability throughout the strategy development process. Assessments of viability are generally a matter of degree. If the answer to any one of the tests is a definitive "no," the strategist should consider a different strategic approach that offers greater viability.

Red-Teaming

Throughout the strategic logic process, but particularly during the assessment phase, use of a red team to think critically about the problem, the major assumptions, and other key elements of the proposed strategy from the target's perspective is essential. The discussion in Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Planning,* on the use of red-teaming in joint planning offers a helpful guide on how similar red team efforts could sharpen strategic logic and improve the strategy-making process.[16]

Course Corrections

Once a state or other party launches a strategy, it must conduct frequent iterative assessments of that strategy's progress. No strategy is infallible. Each is, after all, built upon a foundation of assumptions, and some—maybe many—of those assumptions will prove flawed to some degree. Some of the most powerful assumptions are judgments about how the adversary will react to the various aspects of the strategy.

Adversaries, however, act in line with their own logic, which may lead them to respond in unexpected ways, including ways that seem at odds with their interests. As assumptions prove incorrect or are invalidated, the strategist must adjust the strategy's ends, means, and/or ways to accommodate the new reality.

Moreover, adversaries are not passive targets of a strategy, but active paricipants. As such they can be expected to do all they can to frustrate or prevent an opposing plan's success and to maximize their own gains. As German Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke the Elder is credited with noting, "No plan survives first contact with the enemy." That statement captures an essential truth about strategy: as soon as a strategy is put into effect, the strategic situation changes in numerous ways. The opponent is also a strategic actor, with his or her own strategy. The implementation of strategy is thus, in a sense, a contest between two or more competing strategies and a test of which actor can most effectively adapt to the other.

Therefore, successful execution of any strategy entails constant adjustments to an adversary's moves. As the strategic situation changes, the strategist must revisit the analysis to ensure the strategy continues to rest on a comprehensive and timely understanding of the most important conditions and dynamics shaping the unfolding situation. Significant changes should force the strategist to adjust the strategy's ends, means, and/or ways to accommodate new realities. As a strategy proceeds, the strategist should constantly assess the prospects of achieving the political aim. If those prospects are not increasing—or worse, are decreasing—then alternative courses of action should be explored. This requirement might entail defining a new political aim, bringing new or additional means to bear, formulating a new strategic approach, or abandoning the effort altogether.

Changing one's ends, means, and/or ways can be difficult. Scaling back one's aims is especially challenging once force has been used. As history teaches us, loss of life makes it exceedingly difficult to moderate or change the political aim, lest sacrifices be perceived as in vain. That

said, the principal consideration for assessing whether a strategy may need to be reassessed is whether it is achieving the desired political aim at an acceptable cost. If strategists and political and military leaders determine the costs to be "sunk," that is, they cannot be recovered because the political aim cannot be achieved, it is time—however painful it may be—to change the political aim, and, accordingly, the strategy that supports it.

CHAPTER 7 | CONCLUSION

The modern strategic environment poses significant challenges, which are evolving at considerable speed. The collapse of the Soviet Union changed the strategic environment from one dominated by bipolar considerations to one transitioning to multipolar challenges. Globalization powered by rapid advances in information technology and processes has reshaped the dynamics of international relations. Long-suppressed ethnic, religious, and even personal conflicts have spawned an increase in intra- and interstate violence. Terrorism, civil wars, secession, and irredentism threaten to fracture existing states and break down regional order. The world has witnessed a revival of Great Power competition, nationalism, populism, and nativism that further threatens to undermine the post–World War II international order. Most recently, revisionist great powers have risen and begun challenging the existing order and U.S. preeminence.

Simultaneously, the character of war is quickly changing with rapid technological and social upheavals. The time when U.S. strategists could fall back on the Cold War's overarching strategic concept of containment is long past. Strategic thinking must adjust to the evolving strategic environment. Each strategic challenge is unique. Each demands thorough, comprehensive, and insightful analysis of the situation. Each demands definition of a realistic political aim and primary objectives, grounded in an objective assessment of one's interests, resources, and capabilities, as well as those of one's adversaries and allies. Each requires the crafting of a creative, coherent strategic approach that considers all the possible ways the adversary might try to counteract and/or frustrate one's strategy.

The best "insurance" for strategic success is to think strategically—to diligently and systematically work through the five fundamentals of strategic logic. Strategists should ensure that each judgment and decision made to resolve the questions inherent in each of the elements of strategic logic builds upon and fits with all those made previously, leaving no gaps in the logic. As importantly, strategists must not "pre-judge" the outcome, decide on a preferred strategic approach at the outset, and

then manipulate the logic to justify that approach. Strategists must let an objective application of strategic logic reveal the best strategic approach to adopt.

Good strategists never forget that strategy is—at a minimum—a two-player game. Every strategy must work against a thinking, proactive adversary who always has a vote in how events unfold. His or her aim—his or her job—is to find ways to neutralize an opponent's strengths and frustrate that opponent's strategic approach. Even a significant power differential in one's own favor does not guarantee success. Time and again, superior powers have learned that skilled, determined, and creative adversaries can find ways to minimize their opponent's superior capabilities and create leverage of their own that creates a more level playing field.

Finally, strategists must consider what kinds of outcomes are reasonable—and achievable—given the advantage and leverage they are able to create. To reach for more than that, no matter how seemingly desirable, is strategically foolish and generally ends up costing far more than whatever benefits—if any—are gained. The best safeguard against strategic folly is a cadre of well-educated, trained, and experienced professionals and leaders who rigorously apply the elements of strategic logic. This is perhaps the most important lesson students can learn from their experience at the National War College.

APPENDIX A

1. Analyzing the Strategic Situation

- What is the story? Develop a problem statement.
- Assess the international and domestic contexts.
- Identify knowns, critical unknowns, and key assumptions (for example: self, others, environment).
- What national interests, if any, are at stake? How vital is each interest?
- Determine threats and opportunities and their relation to national interests.
- How imminent are the threats? How salient are the opportunities?

2. Defining the Desired Ends

A. Political Aim

- Stated and implied political aims; define desired endstate/success. What does success look like?
- What are likely constraints? Governmental, domestic, international, media-driven, etc.?

B. Primary Objectives

- Can the political aims be translated into viable objectives?
- Specify objectives, achievable at a reasonable cost that will accomplish desired political aims.
- Rank objectives by priority.

3. Identifying and/or Developing Means

- Identify our instruments of power (DIME) needed to obtain ends.
- Assumptions about capabilities/limits of our instruments.
- What are the intangibles for all actors, to include morale/will and time available?

4. Designing the Ways

- Develop theory of success; Specify fundamental strategic approach(es); State how the instruments blend together. Are the associated objectives pursued sequentially or simultaneously?
- Consider Modes of Action.
- Identify institutions/agencies that will direct the various instruments of power.

- Most likely constraints? Does the strategic approach account for them?

5. Assessing the Cost, Risks, and Results

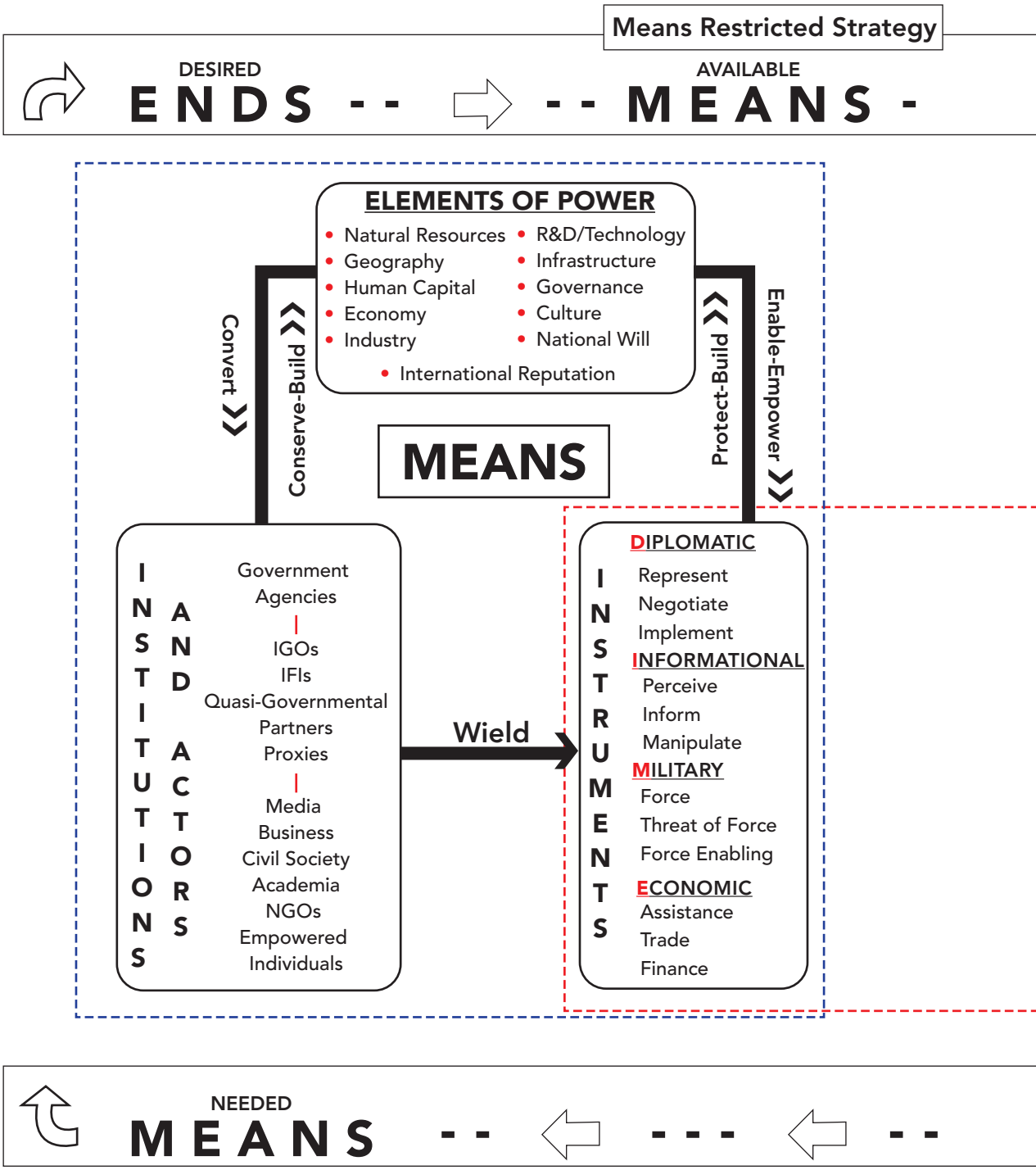
- What are likely costs and benefits? Can they be tracked/measured?
- Most likely risks, including those to and from the strategy—have they been accounted for and mitigated?
- Viability Assessments: Is our strategic approach suitable, feasible, desirable, acceptable, and sustainable?
- What are the most pivotal assumptions? Consequences if wrong? What mechanisms to validate?
- How does success translate into lasting political effects?

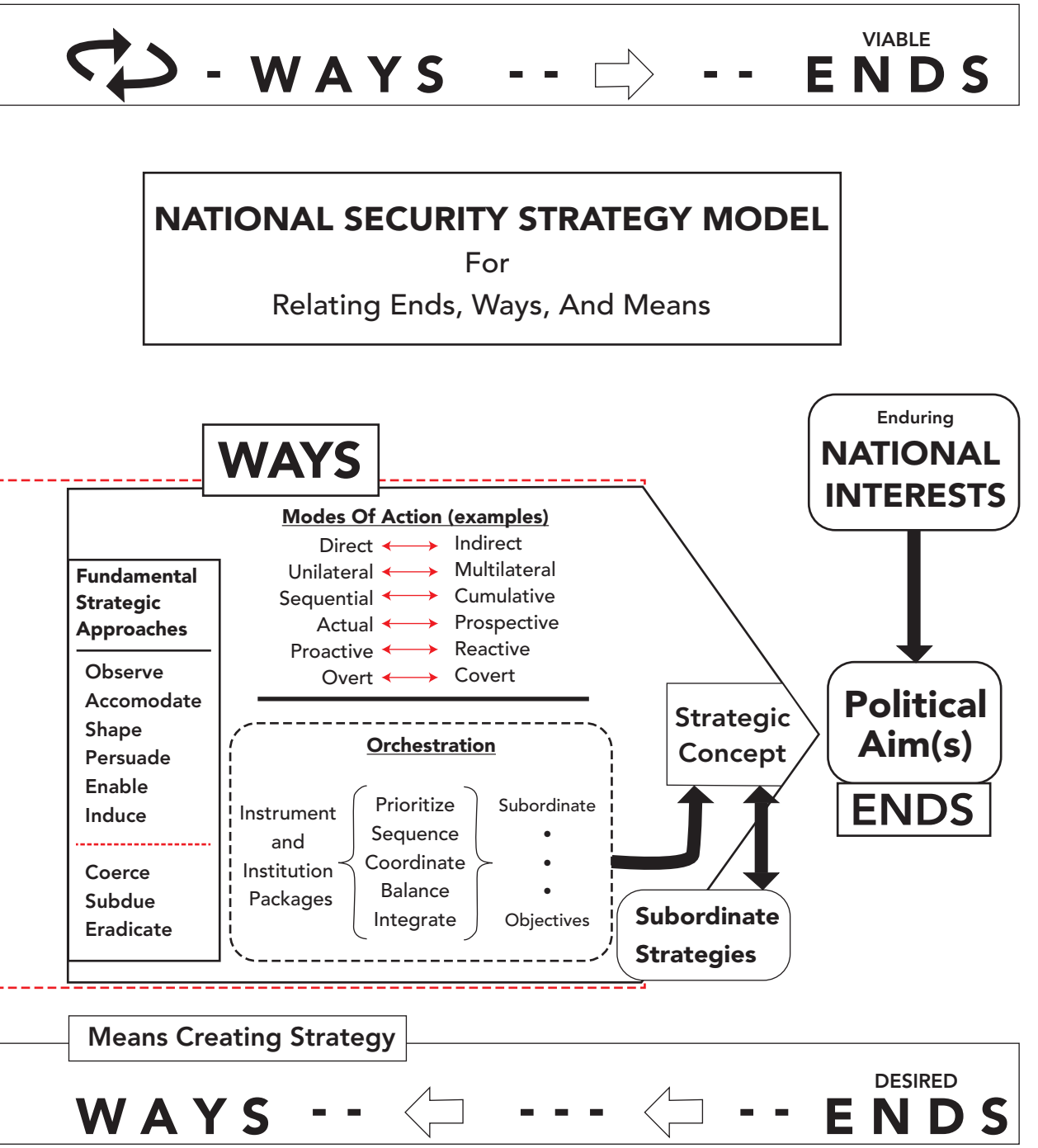
Red-Teaming

- Assumptions about allies', neutrals', target's political aims, underlying rationale, and primary objectives.
- Identify target's instruments of power needed to attain ends; Is one or more likely to be dominant?
- Assumptions about the capabilities/limits of target's instruments.
- What are the target's most likely and most dangerous courses of action? Does our strategy negate them?

NOTES

APPENDIX B


Means Restricted Strategy
DESIRED
ENDS
AVAILABLE
MEANS
ELEMENTS OF POWER
Natural Resources
Geography
Human Capital
Economy
Industry
R&D/Technology
Infrastructure
Governance
Culture
National Will
International Reputation
Convert
Conserve-Build
Protect-Build
Enable-Empower
MEANS
INSTITUTIONS AND ACTORS
Government Agencies
IGOs
IFIs
Quasi-Governmental
Partners
Proxies
Media
Business
Civil Society
Academia
NGOs
Empowered Individuals
Wield
INSTRUMENTS
DIPLOMATIC
Represent
Negotiate
Implement
INFORMATIONAL
Perceive
Inform
Manipulate
MILITARY
Force
Threat of Force
Force Enabling
ECONOMIC
Assistance
Trade
Finance
NEEDED
MEANS


- WAYS -- -- VIABLE ENDS
NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY MODEL
For
Relating Ends, Ways, And Means
WAYS
Modes Of Action (examples)
Direct ⟷ Indirect
Unilateral ⟷ Multilateral
Sequential ⟷ Cumulative
Actual ⟷ Prospective
Proactive ⟷ Reactive
Overt ⟷ Covert
Fundamental Strategic Approaches
Observe
Accomodate
Shape
Persuade
Enable
Induce
Coerce
Subdue
Eradicate
Orchestration
Instrument and Institution Packages
Prioritize
Sequence
Coordinate
Balance
Integrate
Subordinate • • • Objectives
Strategic Concept
Subordinate Strategies
Enduring NATIONAL INTERESTS
Political Aim(s)
ENDS
Means Creating Strategy
WAYS -- --- -- DESIRED ENDS

NOTES

Preface

[1] A wide variety of definitions for *strategy* exists. We are guided, throughout this primer, by the definition of strategy as "a prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives." See *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, April 2019), 220, available at <https://fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/dictionary.pdf>.

[2] Attentive readers of the primer may note a substantial overlap with elements of Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 1-18, *Strategy* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, April 25, 2018). The primer and JDN 1-18 share initial authorship and began as an integrated product. Through the process of writing, editing, and coordinating the draft note, the need to split the military strategy–focused JDN and the primer became apparent. This primer is intended to complement the JDN, allowing students to fit JDN guidance on military strategy into the larger picture of national security strategy.

Chapter 1

[3] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 102.

[4] For online access to the 17 National Security Strategies of the United States, please see National Security Strategy Archive, available at <http://nssarchive.us>. The site also includes links to subordinate strategies (National Defense Strategy and National Military Strategy). The site is maintained by the Taylor Group, a national security consulting firm unaffiliated with the U.S. Government or any foreign government. Many national strategies covering a wide range of issues are prepared within the U.S. Government, for example, see *National Strategy for Counterterrorism* (Washington, DC: The White House, June 2011), available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/06/29/national-strategy-counterterrorism>; and *National Strategy for the Arctic Region* (Washington, DC: The White House, May 2013), available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat_arctic_strategy.pdf>. Herein they are referred to variously as associated, subsidiary, functional, and regional strategies. In most cases they address in more detail interests identified in the National Security Strategy (NSS), and, while not subordinate in a strict sense, they generally are consistent with direction provided in the NSS.

[5] Harry R. Yarger, "Towards a Theory of Strategy: Art Lykke and the Army War College Strategy Model," in *U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues, Volume 1: Theory of War and Strategy*, ed. J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr. (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, June 2008, 3rd ed.), 45.

Chapter 2

[6] *Marine Corps War College Strategy Primer* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2021).

[7] Richard P. Rumelt, *Good Strategy, Bad Strategy: The Difference and Why It Matters* (New York: Crown Business, 2011), 79.

Chapter 3

[8] In discussing the relationship between war, policy, and politics, Clausewitz identifies *political aim* (translated, at times, as *political object*) as the national-level objective. For instance, he states, "The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose." See Clausewitz, *On War*, 87. The conception of political aim used herein follows Clausewitz's general logic, though we refer to all means available to a nation, not just war.

Chapter 4

[9] "Elements of power" may also be described as "correlates of power."

[10] Though not included in the figure, in the modern environment, data may also be considered an element of power.

[11] The principal exception is for military personnel under command of a combatant commander. See *Foreign Service Act of 1980*, Public Law 96-465, 96th Cong. 2nd sess., October 17, 1980.

[12] Fenn Osler Hampson and William I. Zartman, *The Global Power of Talk: Negotiating America's Interests* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 3.

[13] Though sharing similar terminology, the three aspects of the military instrument presented here are not synonymous with the range of military operations outlined in Joint Publication (JP) 3-0. JP 3-0 describes operations that U.S. Armed Forces may perform. Those operations generally fall within the conceptual bounds of force, threat of force, and enabling force, but also include activities that, while performed by the Armed Forces, do not represent applica-

tions of the military instrument (domestic disaster response, certain foreign law enforcement and humanitarian operations, and some types of foreign assistance/development). See JP 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, January 17, 2017, Incorporating Change 1, October 22, 2018).

[14] For the classic discussion on the distinction of these two forms of coercion, see Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966) 69–78.

[15] Thomas J. Wright, *All Measures Short of War: The Contest for the 21st Century and the Future of American Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 27.

Chapter 6

[16] See JP 5-0, *Joint Planning* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, December 1, 2020), J-1–J-7.

assessment. Consists of evaluating a strategy's national and international costs and risks.

- Costs: The price, financial or otherwise, one has to pay to implement a strategy. Costs can include deaths, resources, expenses, penalties, prestige, and/or missed opportunities.
- Risks: Aspects of a strategic design that could go wrong or work to the strategy's disadvantage. Risks often relate to the divergence between assumptions of an opponent's or likely third-party reactions to a strategy and the *actual* reactions to that strategy.
    - Assessing a strategy's internal viability involves determining whether it is suitable, feasible, desirable, acceptable, and sustainable (that is, the "_____ility tests"). Multiple failures in the _____ility tests may indicate that the strategic design is flawed.
    - *Suitability* addresses whether the strategy serves national interests and is consistent with other national-level strategies, policies, and goals.
    - *Feasibility* examines whether political aims are realistically achievable and whether sufficient means and time are available or attainable to achieve the political aim.
    - *Desirability* assures that the strategic plan matches the desired political aim and the expected benefits of implementation outweigh the anticipated costs.
    - *Acceptability* determines if the strategy is consistent with the state's values, the national mood, domestic concerns (political or otherwise), legal constraints, and partners' interests.
    - Sustainability considers whether resources and popular support can endure long enough to attain the political aim, even in the face of potential changes in the strategic environment.

assumption. An unproven assertion treated as true. To produce a coherent, effective strategy, strategists must fill knowledge gaps with assumptions. Strategies are replete with assumptions about opponent capabilities, interests, and intent, the dynamics of the

international situation, and the most important aspects of one's domestic situation. Assumptions help define perceived threats to one's own interests and the cause and effect of potential actions.

condition. A current or desired state of affairs.

constraint. Tangible and intangible factors that limit strategic freedom of action. Constraints include insufficient means or political restrictions on the means available. Legal, political, and normative considerations can also constrain strategy.

context. Any factor(s), international, regional, or domestic, that affect the development or implementation of a national security strategy. Context can include political matters; historic events; cultural, religious, ethnic, or tribal factors; societal norms and structures—almost anything that could influence the strategist's work.

elements of power. The tangible and intangible factors from which the power of a state or nonstate actor is built and sustained. While there is no definitive list of the elements of power, they include, inter alia, the economy, geography, governance, human capital, industry, infrastructure, international reputation, national will, natural resources, and research and development/technology. To have enduring viable strategic options, states/actors must sustain, conserve, or build the elements of power.

ends. An overarching, generic term that encompasses political aims and their subordinate objectives.

fundamental strategic approaches. A continuum of strategic approaches for applying instruments of power to achieve a desired political end. The spectrum spans everything from taking no action to eradicating an opponent.

- Observe: Monitoring without otherwise acting.
- Accommodate: Acquiescing to a rival's demands/wishes.
- Enable: Creating, supporting, or otherwise bolstering the capabilities of other international actors.

- Shape: Taking action to adjust the strategic environment to make it more favorable or conducive for future action.
- Persuade: Convincing another actor through the force of argument.
- Induce: Promising or providing something positive to achieve a desired response from other international actors.
- Coerce: Taking or threatening negative actions to affect another international actor's behavior. Deterrence is a form of coercion that threatens negative consequences for an opponent should it attempt to change the status quo. Compellence is another form of coercion that threatens negative consequences for an opponent should it attempt to maintain the status quo.
- Subdue: Using force to make another actor voluntarily or involuntarily capitulate.
- Eradicate: Destroying another international actor, to include its government, ideology, economy, military, and so forth.

institutions and actors. The organizations, structures, and individuals that national security strategists rely on to secure a strategy's political aim. Government agencies and their personnel generally design and implement most strategies; however, other nongovernmental institutions and actors may be better suited for certain tasks.

instruments of power. The instruments of power include diplomacy, information, military, and economic (DIME). Each instrument possesses a unique nature/essence and distinct capabilities and limitations.

lines of effort. Doctrinally, an LOE links multiple tasks, through a logical cause-and-effect sequence, to concentrate actions toward achieving an objective. At the National War College, the term is used, in conjunction with *objective instrument package*, to mean a framework that identifies which institutions or actors will employ what instruments of power (capability sets), through which strategic approaches and modes of action, and in what combination (ways) to accomplish a defined objective. Clearly articulated LOEs are critical for assessing cost, risk, and viability; ensuring strategic clarity and focus; and maintaining

overall cohesion across a strategy. They also underpin the effective development and execution of subordinate strategies. Every LOE should be purposefully designed toward achieving an objective.

means. Generally, resources and capabilities that either exist or need to be developed to achieve desired ends. There are three interrelated components of the means in national security strategy: the elements of power, such as resources, human capital, and industry, which sustain national power; institutions/actors, such as the President, Congress, the United Nations, and so forth, that wield the instruments of power; and the instruments of power themselves—diplomacy, information, military, and economic.

modes of action. A set of binary strategic options regarding how the instruments of power are used to achieve the desired subordinate objective/political aim. Strategists should consider a wide range of potential modes to implement a strategic concept. They should consider whether a particular mode fits a strategic situation, will achieve the political aim and its subordinate objectives, and can do so with available means at acceptable levels of cost and risk. Examples of modes of actions are direct/indirect, unilateral/multilateral, sequential/parallel, action/message, offensive/defensive, active/passive, and overt/covert.

national interests. The fundamental, enduring values of a state. National interests are subject to various interpretations. The strategist must define precisely and concisely the interest(s) the nation has at stake in the challenge addressed. For purposes of this primer, national interests are not a specific or achievable endstate. They are aspirational and thus distinct from political aims, which are tangible conditions.

National Security Council and NSC Staff. The NSC is the President's principal forum for considering and coordinating national security and foreign policy matters with his/her senior national security advisors and Cabinet officials. The NSC staff, headed by the National Security Adviser, serves as the President's national security

and foreign policy staff within the White House.

National Security Strategy of the United States. A document mandated by the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act 1986. It outlines the broad national security strategy of the United States.

National Security Strategy. The art and science of developing, applying, and coordinating the instruments of national power (diplomatic, information, military, and economic) to achieve ends that protect or advance national interests.

objective instrument package. Closely linked to lines of effort, objective instrument packages specify which institution or actor will employ a particular instrument of power (capability set) to achieve a defined objective. They represent the intentional alignment of desired ends (objectives) with the appropriate means (instruments of power), ensuring that strategic actions are tailored to the capabilities and authorities best suited for the task. By design, this concept helps mitigate ends-means mismatches—whether through insufficient or excessive allocation of resources—thereby improving strategic coherence and effectiveness.

opportunity to advance national interest(s). A favorable set of circumstances extant in the strategic context that may allow for the advancement of one or more interests; opportunities exist independently of the successful resolution of a threat to an interest. The strategist should not confuse opportunities with advantages derived from successfully dealing with a threat.

orchestration. A logical, coherent strategic plan for accomplishing political goals using the instruments of power. Strategic plans prioritize objectives, sequence actions, and coordinate instruments to ensure they are not working at cross-purposes and balance limited resources between instruments and objectives. Orchestration often requires the integration of multiple instruments (for example, in a whole-of-government approach).

political aim. Here, *political* refers to the Clausewitzian use of the term, in which *political* and *policy* are interchangeable. It is not a reference to *politics* or the *political process*. The desired endstate of a national security strategy. The political aim defines the outcome that the strategist believes will preserve, protect, and/or advance the national interest(s) at stake. Because the political aim is a distinct and achievable goal, it is best defined using nouns and adjectives—for example, "a stable, secure Iraq." The strategist must ensure that the overarching political aim—the desired outcome—preserves or advances interests.

primary objectives. As elements of the strategic *ends*, *primary objectives* represent the ultimate outcomes each line of effort is designed to achieve. When accomplished in concert with other primary objectives, they collectively enable attainment of the overarching political aim. They are distinct from *subordinate objectives*, which are intermediate goals internal to individual lines of effort and serve as milestones toward achieving the primary objective.

problem statement. A concise summation of why a strategic threat or opportunity warrants attention. A problem statement should briefly describe issue/situation (that is, the BLUF), explicitly link the problem to a national interest, and specify how the threat/opportunity affects that interest. Crafting the problem statement helps discern whether the threat or opportunity is significant enough to warrant a strategy without being so broad as to be unmanageable.

strategic logic. The logic needed to develop and orchestrate national security strategy. Strategic logic entails applying the five following fundamental elements:

- analyzing the *strategic situation* (the challenge and its context)
- defining the *ends*, which include the overarching political aim and primary objectives required to achieve it
- identifying and/or developing the *means* (resources and capabilities) to bring to bear

- designing the *ways* to use the means to achieve the desired ends
- assessing the *costs/risks* associated with the strategy.

subordinate objectives. Intermediate goals nested within individual lines of effort. They serve as measurable milestones that, when achieved—individually and in combination—enable the successful attainment of the associated primary objective. While essential to operational progress, subordinate objectives are distinct from primary objectives, which define the ultimate outcomes required to meet the overall political aim. In doctrine and other strategic guidance, subordinate objectives may also be referred to as intermediate objectives, supporting objectives, milestone objectives, phased objectives, or, in business strategy, benchmarks.

theory of success. The causal logic undergirding *why* a proposed strategy will create the effects necessary to achieve the desired ends. A prerequisite for ways development.

threats to national interest(s). A strategic situation that endangers one or more national interests. Threats occur only in relation to interests and should be defined in a concise, coherent manner.

viability. The overall assessment produced by the "_____ilities" test.

ways. How the strategist achieves the political aim and subordinate objectives. Though *means* focus on questions of taking action *with what*, national ways address the question of *how* those means are used.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Art, Robert J., and Kelly M. Greenhill. *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.

Art, Robert J., and Kenneth Neal Waltz. *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.

Beaufre, André. *An Introduction to Strategy: With Particular Reference to Problems of Defense, Politics, Economics, and Diplomacy in the Nuclear Age*. New York: Praeger, 1965.

Blainey, Geoffrey. *The Causes of War*. 3rd ed., 1st American ed. New York: Free Press, 1988.

Brands, Hal. *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2014.

Cerami, Joseph R., and James F. Holcomb. *U.S. Army War College Guide to Strategy*. Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2001.

Clausewitz, Carl von. *On War*. Ed. and trans. Michael Eliot Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.

Collins, John M. *Grand Strategy: Principles and Practices*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1973.

———. *Military Strategy: Principles, Practices, and Historical Perspectives*. Washington, DC: Brassey's, Inc., 2002.

Deibel, Terry L. *Foreign Affairs Strategy: Logic for American Statecraft*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Earle, Edward Mead, Gordon Alexander Craig, and Felix Gilbert. *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943.

Evans, Graham, and Jeffrey Newnham. *The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations*. London: Penguin Books, 1998.

Freedman, Lawrence. *Strategy: A History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

George, Roger Z., and James B. Bruce. *Analyzing Intelligence: Origins, Obstacles, and Innovations*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008.

Gilpin, Robert, and Jean M. Gilpin. *Global Political Economy: Understanding the International Economic Order*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Gow, James. *War and War Crimes: The Military, Legitimacy, and Success in Armed Conflict*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

Gray, Colin S. *Modern Strategy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Howard, Michael. "The Forgotten Dimensions of Strategy." *Foreign Affairs* no. 5 (1979), 975.

Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.

Harlow, Giles D., and George C. Maerz. *Measures Short of War: The George F. Kennan Lectures at the National War College, 1946–47*. Washington, DC: NDU Press, 1991.

Kennedy, Paul M. *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. New York: Random House, 1987.

Liddell Hart, Basil Henry. *Strategy*. 2nd rev. ed. New York: New American Library, 1974.

Lykke, Arthur F. "Defining Military Strategy." *Military Review* 77, no. 1 (January 1997), 182.

Marine Corps War College Strategy Primer. Marine Corps University Press, 2021.

Martel, William C. *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice: The Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Morgenthau, Hans Joachim. 5th rev. ed. and reset. *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: Knopf, 1972.

Murray, Williamson, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin H. Bernstein. *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Nye, Jr., Joseph S. *The Future of Power*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2011.

Organski, A.F.K., and Jacek Kugler. *The War Ledger*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Paret, Peter, Gordon Alexander Craig, and Felix Gilbert. *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.

Rosecrance, Richard N., and Arthur A. Stein. *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Rumelt, Richard P. *Good Strategy, Bad Strategy: The Difference and Why It Matters*. New York: Crown Business, 2011.

Sanger, David E. *The Perfect Weapon: War, Sabotage, and Fear in the Cyber Age*. New York: Crown, 2018.

Schelling, Thomas C. *Arms and Influence*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

Singer, P.W., and Emerson T. Brooking. *Likewar: The Weaponization of Social Media*. Boston: Eamon Dolan/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018.

Treverton, Gregory F., and Edward Sylvester Ellis. *Measuring National Power*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005.

Walzer, Michael. *Just and Unjust Wars: a Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*. New York: Basic Books, 1992.

Worley, D. R. *Orchestrating the Instruments of Power: A Critical Examination of the U.S. National Security System*. Washington, DC: Potomac Books, Inc., 2015.

Wright, Thomas J. *All Measures Short of War: The Contest for the Twenty-First Century and the Future of American Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.

Yarger, Harry R. "Toward a Theory of Strategy: Art Lykke and the Army War College Strategy Model." Chapter 8 in *Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy*. 2nd ed. Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2006.

Zarate, Juan Carlos. T*reasury's War: The Unleashing of a New Era of Financial Warfare*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2013.


NDU
Press