

CHAPTER 2

A PRIMER IN STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

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THE STRATEGY FRAMEWORK.

One of the key elements in teaching strategy at the United States Army War College is the strategy framework. Conceptually, we define strategy as the relationship among ends, ways, and means. **Ends** are the objectives or goals sought. **Means** are the resources available to pursue the objectives. And **Ways** or methods are how one organizes and applies the resources. Each of these components suggests a related question. What do we want to pursue (ends)? With what (means)? How (ways)? This very simple framework is useful in a variety of applications. Consider a common example drawn from the world of sports. In a basketball game, most teams begin a game with a straightforward objective of winning. We assume for the sake of simplifying the argument that both teams are relatively evenly matched and that both enter the game with the objective of winning.¹ Obviously, both teams have resources that consist first and foremost of the players on their respective rosters. Characteristics of those players provide additional dimensions of the resources available in the play of the game (e.g., speed, height, quickness, etc.). Rules of the game provide not only the context within which the game is played but also additional resources that the coaches can use. For example, the shot clock is not just a rule governing how long a team can hold the ball before taking a shot; it is also something a coach can use to increase one team's advantage over the other.² Most rules affect the choices coaches have as to how they use their resources. Essentially, a team achieves its objective of winning the game by outscoring the opponent. They can accomplish this with a strategy that employs both offensive (how your team will score) and defensive (how you prevent the other team from scoring) "ways" or "methods." Successful "strategic" coaches figure out ways to employ their means more effectively than their opposing coaches, thereby achieving their objective more frequently. (Of course, successful coaches also recruit better "means" than their opponents.) We can see that the choices a coach makes all relate back to decisions about how to employ the means in pursuit of the objective. The coach who is a strategic thinker is planning and the team is executing a strategy.

GRAND STRATEGY.

Countries employ strategies much as basketball teams do. However, the nature of the game and the elements of strategy are considerably more complex than in the game of basketball. And of course, the stakes of the game are considerably higher, thereby making the risk of failure much greater (a country losing its sovereignty as opposed to a team losing a game). Nonetheless, the basic framework remains the same. We want to consider what objectives a country decides to pursue, with what resources, and how.

When we talk about the strategy a country employs in pursuit of its interests, we usually use terms such as National Strategy, National Security Strategy, or Grand Strategy. We use the latter term in this chapter to denote a country's broadest approach to the pursuit of its national objectives in the international system. At times it appears that all three terms are essentially synonymous, and it is not really necessary to spend time trying to define them here.³ The essential point is that a country adopts objectives based on its interests and values and how they are affected, threatened, or challenged in the international system. The means it possesses to pursue those objectives fall into three or four (depending on how one conceptualizes them) broad categories of national power, which we call "instruments of national power." They are political/diplomatic, economic, military, and informational.⁴ How a country marshals and applies those instruments of national power constitute the "ways" of its grand strategy.⁵ One of our goals in this book is to provide a framework that the reader can use in analyzing and assessing the ways in which the United States is protecting and promoting its interests in the post-Cold War world. Such an analysis must begin with an assessment of U.S. grand strategy.

The Cold War provides an excellent example of how the strategy framework can be used to describe and subsequently analyze a country's grand strategy. We examine it from the perspective of the United States. The grand strategy of the United States during the Cold War was containment, a name that derived from the core objective of that strategy which was to contain communism, or prevent the further spread of Soviet communism and its influence. The early stages of the Cold War saw the strategy develop along the lines suggested by George Kennan in his now famous "long telegram" from Moscow. Kennan wrote: "The main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant *containment* of Russian expansive tendencies . . ."⁶ According to his assessment, there was both an offensive and defensive component to the strategy. The defensive objective was to hold back the political, economic and military influence and physical presence of the USSR. The offensive objective, somewhat overlooked in conventional analyses of United States Cold War policy, was the promotion of stable democracies and market economies; healthy market democracies would deprive the Soviets of fertile ground in which to sow the seeds of their revolutionary ideology.

Although a detailed analysis of containment is beyond the scope of what we want to accomplish here, it is useful to illustrate how the United States implemented its strategy of containment. The overall objective, of course, was to contain communism. The means consisted of the economic, military, and political/diplomatic instruments of power. On the economic side, the Marshall Plan provides the best example of how the United States used its considerable economic power in support of the strategy. The Marshall Plan, by infusing large amounts of United States capital into the devastated West European economies, would help restore their economic vitality. This would then remove one of the potential sources of appeal for communist ideology (the physical dislocations and psychological pressures people feel when they have no apparent economic sources of survival). The Marshall Plan is therefore one example of a "way" in which the United States applied the economic "means" in pursuit of its overall strategic objective.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) provides an excellent illustration of how the United States employed the military instrument of national power as part of its overall grand strategy. This military alliance was primarily a collective defense organization in which the United States provided the vast muscle of its military might to insure the West Europeans that the Soviet military could not threaten their physical security.⁷ Unable to marshal much in the way of their own military power, most of which had been either destroyed or exhausted in the war, the West Europeans were encouraged to rely on the capabilities of the United States. This was especially true of the United States nuclear umbrella, which was to take shape particularly in the 1950s as the Cold War unfolded. So NATO serves as an example of a “way” in which the United States applied the military “means” in pursuit of its overall strategic objective.

Finally, the United States used its considerable political/diplomatic power by initially declaring and then implementing the Truman Doctrine. This doctrine stated that the United States would support those countries seeking to resist communist movements. Obviously economic and military resources backed up this doctrine. But the fact that the United States was willing to make an open political declaration of its intentions to provide such assistance is an example of the use of political/diplomatic “means” in support of the grand strategy of containment. One can also argue that even then, long before the “Information Age” made the use of information technology part of our national security lexicon, the United States employed the informational dimension of power through Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, and the like. So the Truman Doctrine serves as an example of a “way” in which the United States applied the political/diplomatic and the informational “means” in pursuit of its overall strategic objective.

U.S. GRAND STRATEGY TODAY.

With the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the United States has had to reassess its grand strategy. Whether a result of the success of the United States grand strategy of containment or other factors,⁸ this profound transformation of the international security environment has rendered much of the common strategic frame of reference, so familiar for the past 50 years, less relevant today. The challenge lies in identifying a new grand strategy that captures the critical characteristics of the new international security environment and identifies appropriate ends, ways and means for organizing and executing the search for security in the post-Cold War world.

Such periods of significant transformation and change in the strategic environment are not new but they do occur infrequently. Historically change in the international security system tends to unfold incrementally and in an evolutionary manner, rather than as a result of wholesale transformation and revolution. Yet sweeping transformation does occur periodically, and we often refer to the ensuing period in which the search for a new grand strategy occurs as a “strategic pause.” What is often daunting in a period of strategic pause is the fact that continuity and change coexist. We must examine a newly emerging system with an eye toward identifying factors and forces that fall into four basic categories: 1) that which is “old” but still relevant; 2) that which is “old” and no longer relevant; 3) that which is “new” and

relevant; and 4) that which is “new” but not relevant. Adapting effectively to the new circumstances while simultaneously balancing against the lingering circumstances from the older system is the central challenge. If we jettison too quickly parts of the old framework, we may find ourselves ill prepared to deal with some of the traditional challenges that have endured from one period to the next. If we fail to identify and respond quickly enough to the new characteristics, we will find that we have outdated and only marginally useful instruments for dealing with the new challenges. So how do we proceed in this search for a new grand strategy in a period of strategic pause?

First, we must know what characteristics and factors are generally important in building a grand strategy. Then we turn to an analysis of the contemporary international security environment in an attempt to identify as precisely as possible the relevant characteristics of that environment. Figure 1 provides one methodology for conducting such a strategic assessment.

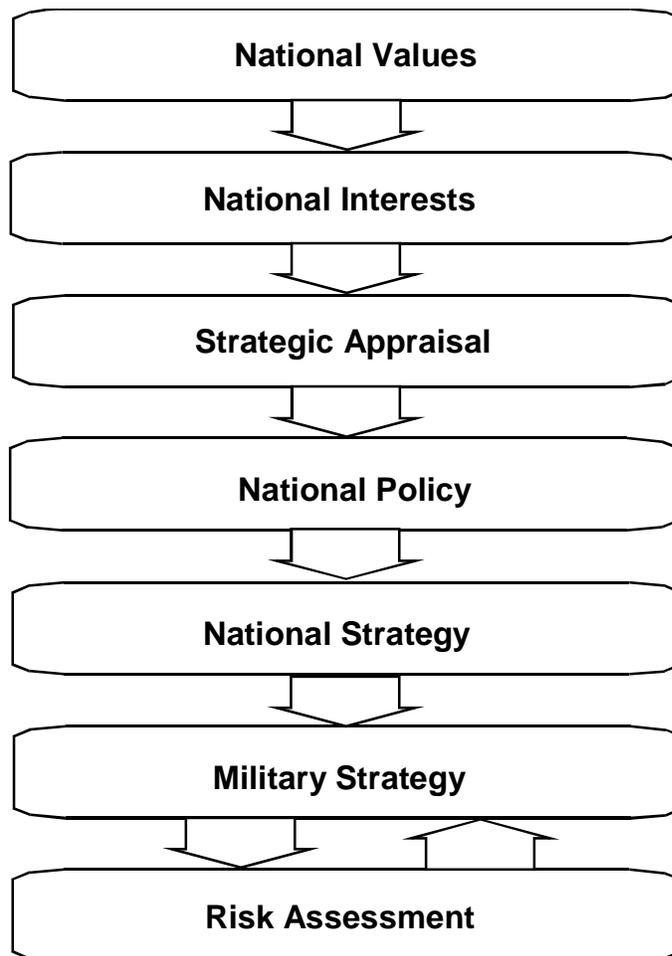


Figure 1. Strategy Formulation.

The process begins with identifying core national values from which one can derive national interests. Based on the identified interests, we can develop statements of national objectives that are the ends of our grand strategy. Identifying the interests we wish to protect is an essential ingredient of a strategic appraisal. That appraisal then continues with the identification of threats and challenges to those interests. We want to know, as best we can, who or what can threaten our interests in what ways. The threats and challenges may derive from specific actors in the international system (states or non-state actors), or they may be more generally based in developments and trends occurring within the system (such as increasing economic globalization or weapons proliferation). Once the threats and challenges to U.S. interests have been identified, we must examine current policy to see if we are adequately addressing the protection and promotion of our interests. Realigning our strategy with the protection and promotion of our interests, given the threats and challenges to them in the contemporary security environment, is the essence of the search for a new grand strategy. Of course, we must also identify and articulate the other component parts of that strategy (such as a military strategy in support of the national security strategy), and conduct a risk assessment. The latter is important because no country, including the United States, has unlimited resources (means) with which to pursue its objectives (ends). This implies that we must make tradeoffs in what we protect and promote and how. Such tradeoffs entail risk, and we must make conscious decisions about how much risk in what areas we are willing to bear.

Let us use this strategy framework to explore the ongoing United States search for security in the contemporary international system. One of the most fundamental questions of grand strategy is the general role that the country will play in international affairs. This question has a long and serious history in the debate within American society. In its simplest form it was a debate between isolationists and interventionists. The former argued that United States interests were preeminently domestic and could be best protected by a refusal to become engaged in international affairs. The interventionist school argued that United States interests required an active international role for the country. In more recent years this debate has played out in the realist-idealist schools of thought, with Wilsonian idealism serving as an organizing framework for the advocates of intervention and realism serving the same purpose for advocates of isolationism (or at least minimal activism).¹⁰

The post-Cold War debate has witnessed the emergence of many proposals for the proper grand strategic role for the United States, and our purpose here is not to review all of them. Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross offer one very useful review of four general alternatives that we use in this overview.¹¹ They are: neo-isolationism, selective engagement, cooperative security, and primacy. Neo-isolationism takes its cue from its isolationist precursors and argues that the United States should adopt a minimally active, largely defensive role. Selective engagement draws on the traditional realist concept of balancing power for its definition of the proper United States role. Primacy is perhaps the extreme version of realism, arguing for a highly active United States role designed to maintain American dominance of the security environment. And cooperative security is the Wilsonian idealist legacy: Very active United States role in support of cooperation and stability maintenance through close and frequent participation with other actors in the international system.

In the remainder of this chapter we examine the existing United States National Security Strategy. We will review this document for what it has to say both about United States national interests and the current strategy for addressing them. What we don't address here is the nature of the threats and challenges to those interests in the contemporary international system, and hence the overall soundness of the strategy. Readers may wish to conduct their own assessment employing the framework outlined here.

CURRENT U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY.

Beginning with congressional passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Department Reorganization Act of 1986, the President of the United States is required to produce an annual statement of the National Security Strategy.¹² Although there are problems with the document, it nonetheless provides an excellent starting point for our analysis of current United States strategy. The most recent document appeared in October 1998 and is entitled "A National Security Strategy for a New Century." Let us highlight the key elements of that document as they pertain to our search for security in the 21st Century.

According to this and other official statements of United States policy, there are certain "fundamental and enduring needs" which our national security strategy must ensure. They are: "...protect the lives and safety of Americans, maintain the sovereignty of the United States with its values, institutions and territory intact, and promote the prosperity and well-being of the nation and its people."¹³ Based on these enduring needs, the document articulates a set of national interests for the United States in three categories: vital interests, important national interests, and humanitarian and other interests. Among vital interests the National Security Strategy identifies "the physical security of our territory and that of our allies, the safety of our citizens, our economic well-being and the protection of our critical infrastructures." Important national interests are identified as those that "do not affect our national survival, but [which] do affect our national well-being and the character of the world in which we live." The document provides no specific list but continues on to state: "Our efforts to halt the flow of refugees from Haiti and restore democracy in that state, our participation in NATO operations in Bosnia and our efforts to protect the global environment are relevant examples."¹⁴ Humanitarian and other interests require action because "our values demand it." Examples include responding to natural and manmade disasters or violations of human rights, supporting democratization and civil control of the military, assisting humanitarian demining, and promoting sustainable development."¹⁵

Based on these categories of interests, the document proceeds to identify three core national objectives for our national security strategy: enhancing our security, bolstering our economic prosperity and promoting democracy abroad. The threats and challenges it identifies to U.S. security are regional or state-centered threats, transnational threats, the spread of dangerous technologies, foreign intelligence collection, and failed states. Bolstering our economic prosperity and promoting democracy abroad are objectives that support our security, and a variety of ways and means are identified as potential contributors to the accomplishment of these objectives. The strategy identified by the Clinton Administration, as stated in its broadest terms, is one of "engagement and enlargement."¹⁶ Arguing for the

“imperative of engagement” (the United States “must lead abroad if we are to be secure at home”) it identifies the “enlargement” of the community of market democracies as the strategic concept for achieving our objectives. The means? “Today’s complex security environment demands that all our instruments of national power be effectively integrated to achieve our security objectives.”¹⁷ Military instruments alone will not suffice; we must employ the full range of the instruments, to include military, political, economic, and informational.

The question of course remains whether this is indeed a sound and appropriate strategy. Has the document correctly identified United States interests? Do the stated objectives reflect the underlying interests? Does it address the likely challenges and threats to those interests and objectives? Does it adequately articulate the concepts for pursuing those objectives? Can we see the proper mix and amount of means for use in the ways proposed? In other words, does this stated national security strategy offer a reasonable chance for finding security in the 21st Century? It is here that the search begins in earnest. We provide no answers but suggest that by using the basic framework and approach outlined in this essay, readers can reach their own conclusions about the adequacy and appropriateness of current and future U.S. National Security Strategy.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 2

1. That this might not always be true is illustrated by the case of a hopelessly outclassed team up against a powerhouse: the former may just want to “make a good showing.”

2. This is consistent with the game framework used in many analyses of political systems. For example, see James Eisenstein, Mark Kessler, Bruce A. Williams, and Jacqueline Vaughn Switzer, *The Play of Power: An Introduction to American Government* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996) in which the authors consistently argue that rules are also resources that players can employ in the pursuit of their objectives. The same argument can be made about rules such as international law and regimes in the international system.

3. For example, the DoD Dictionary contains the following statement as its definition of National Security Strategy: “The art and science of developing, applying and coordinating the instruments of national power (diplomatic, economic, military, and informational) to achieve objectives that contribute to national security. Also called national strategy or grand strategy.”

4. See the chapter on “National Power” by David Jablonsky in this volume. Jablonsky focuses on “elements” of national power, whereas the focus here is on instruments of national power and their use in the strategy framework.

5. Ways are also “courses of action.” They represent the alternative approaches one can take in the pursuit of the objectives.

6. George F. Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” reprinted in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Spring 1987): pp. 852-868. Quote p. 868.

7. We say “primarily” a collective defense organization because there was always something of a collective security dimension to NATO’s purpose, too. This is perhaps most aptly summed up in a statement attributed to the first Secretary General of NATO, Lord Ismay, that the purpose of NATO was to keep the Russians out, the United States in, and the Germans down.

8. For a discussion of the role played by U.S. grand strategy in winning the Cold War, see John Lewis Gaddis, *How Relevant Was U.S. Grand Strategy in Winning the Cold War* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1992).

9. This is the methodology employed by the United States Army War College in its core curriculum of instruction. See also Appendix I for a detailed explanation of the Strategy Formulation Guidelines.

10. See the discussion of these schools of thought in my other essay in this volume, Chapter 4: "Some Basic Concepts and Approaches to the Study of International Politics."

11. Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Winter 1996/1997): pp. 5-53.

12. Section 603 stipulates this requirement. However, all Presidents from Reagan through Clinton have had difficulties meeting this annual requirement.

13. *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Washington, DC: The White House, 1998), p. 5.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

16. The title of the Clinton Administration's first three national security strategies (1994, 1995, and 1996) was in fact "A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement." The basic concepts were that the United States would play an active role in world affairs (engagement) in an attempt to expand the community of market democracies (enlargement). Although the title was changed primarily because of concerns that it seemed to suggest a US-based neo-imperialistic approach to exporting democracy and capitalism, the fundamental components of the strategy remain the same: an active US role internationally in pursuit of a growing community of stable market democracies.

17. *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*, p. 1.