

## **Introduction: Present Failings, New Approaches**

In 1934 the British Government adopted a sophisticated grand strategy of deterrence and engagement to try to avoid fighting a major war with Germany. In 1965 the Soviet government embarked on a grand strategy that sought to make it an accepted equal partner with America in the management of global affairs. In 2002 the American government announced a grand strategy to try to bring democracy to many Middle Eastern countries with Iraq being the first.

All three grand strategies produced dismal results. The British grand strategy ended in global conflict, the end of the British Empire and the demise of Britain as a first-rate power, exactly the outcomes the grand strategy was designed to avoid. The Soviet grand strategy was not only unsuccessful but arguably set in train events that led to the downfall of the USSR. The American occupation of Iraq partly succeeded but the costs in unintended consequences, blood, treasure and prestige were so high that the grand strategy was hurriedly abandoned.

These grand strategies spanned different kinds of government - a great colonial empire, a communist authoritarian regime and an extended commercial republic - but the policies these states implemented were all alike in not achieving their intended outcomes. The people that devised these grand strategies did not intend this. Failure was not their goal, but these were massive failures. How can we make better grand strategies and try to avoid catastrophes?

The first step is to appreciate what 'grand strategy' is. While, a strategy generally focuses on immediate concerns, a grand strategy looks well beyond this to a desired future and how to reach it. It is a conceptual roadmap that imagines a series of successive actions that could potentially improve - if only from the activist state's viewpoint - the political relations existing between the different states involved.

States mainly use grand strategies to improve their relations with a particular state or group of states, although some occasionally also boldly try to change aspects of the whole international system. There are other approaches (discussed in Chapter 8) that can be used to respond to events but a grand strategy is a methodology for purposefully shaping tomorrow.

There is a second important aspect often overlooked. A grand strategy applies the full array of the instruments of national power (the ‘means’) including diplomatic, informational, military and economic measures. In contrast, a strategy focuses on applying a single type of instrument. Moreover unlike strategy, a grand strategy also involves building the material and non-material resources needed for implementation. These resources once developed are allocated to the subordinate strategies that individually direct each instrument of national power in accordance with the overarching grand strategy. Without this guidance, these lower-level strategies would be uncoordinated, work at odds with each other and be unlikely to succeed. Reflecting this essential function, Colin Gray declares: “all strategy is grand strategy.”<sup>1</sup>

The most common way for governmental policymakers to formulate new grand strategies seems to be through applying historical analogies to current problems. People look backwards, choose an historical event and the responses made to address it, and then bring forward this understanding and impose it onto current problems and emerging issues. This approach is particularly useful for busy people as the need for deep, time-consuming analysis is avoided with preprocessed solutions quickly mapped onto new dilemmas. Moreover, this approach works with well-known human cognitive biases towards readily perceiving matches and easily disregarding differences. Unfortunately, numerous significant strategic failures can be traced to the use of historical analogies.<sup>2</sup>

---

1. Colin S. Gray, *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice*; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 28.

2. Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965*; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 9.

A recent example was their use by the George W. Bush administration in planning the 2003 American invasion of Iraq. For this administration the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe at the end of the Cold War showed for democracy to arise only the removal of an authoritarian regime was needed; the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s showed that allies would readily help with stabilization and reconstruction; the recent Afghanistan war showed how easy regime change could be; Nazi Germany showed that unaddressed threats worsen so Saddam's Iraq needed near-term action and lastly as Al-Qaeda had used terrorism against the American homeland therefore so would Saddam Hussein.<sup>3</sup>

Crucially, such misuse should not be disregarded as only being limited to those with a limited knowledge of history or a rigorous academic education in the discipline. Some of the 'best and brightest' academics served as advisers during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations but it seemed "the temptation of careless use of historical knowledge overpowers acquired... methodological skills."<sup>4</sup> The principal problem is that looking backwards at history a comprehensive understanding of the problem extending over time can be seen. In looking at an emerging problem its specific nature and key characteristics are literally unknown as they are still evolving. Choosing a historical analogy as being an appropriate guide to the future is akin to gambling on the results of a future sporting event. Success in either is serendipitous at best.

Given the well-known failures of historical analogies, think tanks and scholars have embraced an alternative approach. There is now a plethora of books, papers and articles that propose

---

Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decisionmakers* New York: The Free Press, 1986, p. xiii.

3. Steven Metz, *Decisionmaking in Operation Iraqi Freedom: Removing Saddam Hussein by Force*, ed. John R. Martin, Operation Iraqi Freedom Key Decisions Monograph Series; Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2010, p. 44-46. See also: David B. Macdonald, *Thinking History, Fighting Evil: Neoconservatives and the Perils of Analogy in American Politics*; Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009.

4. Yaacov Y. I. Vertzberger, 'Foreign Policy Decisionmakers as Practical-Intuitive Historians: Applied History and Its Shortcomings', *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 30, No. 2, June 1986, pp. 223-47, p. 241.

policymakers across various states adopt a particular grand strategy to address some specific contemporary challenge.<sup>5</sup> This approach has several serious shortcomings.

Firstly, the policymakers may hold important information about the problem not available to the proposed grand strategy's author, which invalidates the solution offered. Secondly, there could be political aspects concerning the problem that the author is unaware of or considers differently to the policymakers involved. Thirdly, in aiming to convince rather than educate, the prescribed solutions offered are generally derived from a particular view of how the world functions.<sup>6</sup> The policymakers considering grand strategy alternatives however may not necessarily hold the same worldview or be convinced that it is the only one to examine the issue against. Fourthly, the authors mostly advocate solutions based on a worldview appropriate to a single specific circumstance. The solutions are then unlikely to be useful when people encounter other situations, especially when the author's worldview merges theoretical perspectives in an eclectic, idiosyncratic manner.<sup>7</sup> Lastly, most of these prescriptive publications consider only how the grand strategy advocated will induce change; the development of the resources needed to implement the grand strategy is generally

---

5. Examples include: Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America*; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003. G. John Ikenberry, 'An Agenda for Liberal International Renewal', in Michèle A. Flournoy and Shawn Brimley (eds.), *Finding Our Way: Debating American Grand Strategy*; Washington: Center for a New American Security, 2008, pp. 43-60. Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present*; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006. Robert J. Lieber, *The American Era: Power and Strategy for the 21st Century*; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

6. There are multiple examples of this in Michael E. Brown et al. (eds.), *America's Strategic Choices: Revised Edition*; Cambridge: The MIT Press; 2000.

7. Posen's grand strategy of restraint proposal in Michèle Flournoy's and Shawn Brimley's *Finding Our Way: Debating American Grand Strategy* is an example of this. The proposal while built around state-centric realism carefully integrates identity politics that in being 'first image' would not normally be considered. Posen's proposal arguably fits only the unique worldview he has devised. Barry R. Posen, 'A Grand Strategy of Restraint', in Michèle A. Flournoy and Shawn Brimley (eds.), *Finding Our Way: Debating American Grand Strategy*; Washington: Center for a New American Security, June 2008, pp. 81-102, pp. 84-86.

assumed.<sup>8</sup> This approach aids conciseness but is a notable shortcoming especially in times of economic and financial turbulence.

Both the historical analogies and the advocacy approach share a fundamental failing. They each propose a take-it-or-leave solution, not a way for people to better understand and apply the information they themselves possess about a problem. Historical analogies and advocacy works offer pre-processed unique solutions not a problem-solving method useable in many situations. And yet, support with problem solving is what people actually need when developing strategies. After examining such high-level policymaking across several decades, Alexander George found people could be best assisted by giving them a means to methodically investigate complex problems: “a correct diagnosis of a policy problem should precede and - as in much of medical practice - is usually a prerequisite for making the best choice from among policy options.”<sup>9</sup>

Accordingly, to address ‘how can we make better grand strategies’, this book develops an optimized grand strategy diagnostic process. The aim of this process is to assist busy people make sound judgments about complex strategy problems. Such a process:

“is not itself a strategy but...the starting point for constructing a strategy. The usefulness of an abstract model for policy-making is limited to providing the basic framework for understanding the general requirements for designing and implementing a strategy. The abstract model identifies...the general logic...needed for the strategy to be successful.”<sup>10</sup>

---

8. Examples of this are found Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, 'Competing Visions of U.S. Grand Strategy', *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 3, Winter 1996/97, pp. 3-51; and Pascal Vennesson, 'Competing Visions for the European Union Grand Strategy', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2010, pp. 57-75.

9. Alexander L. George, *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy*; Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 1993, p. 17-18.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

The process is designed to help people structure their initial thinking about a grand strategy problem and provide a useful starting point for developing alternative courses of action. Using the process, people can ascertain what is relevant amongst the typically large amount of information presented about the problem, how all this fits together and what further confirmatory information should be sought.

The envisaged diagnostic process offers a new way to better structure our thinking about grand strategy but in so doing draws attention to another area George was deeply influential in. Much of his early work on decision-making was on cognition, particularly the mental biases that influence how policymakers interpret information and develop policy solutions.<sup>11</sup> Each individual has a unique set of beliefs that leads to information being screened and processed in different ways. A nation's international policies may best be seen as being addressed to the "image of the external world" as perceived by the policymakers concerned, not necessarily simply in response to the objectively real world.<sup>12</sup> George's work indicates that for a diagnostic process to be effective it needs to be designed to take into account that the thinking of policymakers is impacted by their beliefs and cognitive biases. The cognitive processes of policymakers will influence the use they make - and can make - of the diagnostic process. *How* policymakers think about issues is as important as *what* they think about.

There is though considerably more to strategic-level decision-making than just the initial thinking of the people involved, including small group dynamics, organizational processes, bureaucratic politics, culture, national identity and domestic politics. The interplay of these other various aspects determine which ideas are eventually selected for implementation, but they do not in

---

11. Alexander L. George, 'The "Operational Code": A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1969, pp. 190-222.

12. Alexander L. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* Boulder: Westview Press, 1980, p. 55.

themselves generate the preliminary ideas.<sup>13</sup> These ideas spring from the thinking of individuals, not from the group and organizational processes that decide which particular ideas live or die. The UNESCO Constitution observes that: “ wars begin in the minds of men....”<sup>14</sup> Arguably, so do grand strategies: they originate in people’s minds.

To devise an optimized diagnostic process, this book uses a design methodology focused on the principal function of grand strategy from a policymaking perspective: inducing purposeful change in the political relations existing between the different states involved.<sup>15</sup> This function is subjected to deductive reasoning to develop two typologies: one that relates types of grand strategy to specific change methods and a second that addresses developing the power needed to implement a grand strategy.

Chapter Two deeply examines the meaning of grand strategy from a policymaking viewpoint. The Chapter develops the definition of grand strategy as: *the art of developing and applying diverse forms of power in an effective and efficient way to try to purposefully change the order existing between two or more intelligent and adaptive entities*. Chapter Three combines this understanding with

---

13. A seminal work in Foreign Policy Analysis, Graham Allison’s book explaining why specific policies were chosen to address the 1962 Cuba Missile Crisis, well illustrates this matter. Individuals initially determined a range of alternative courses of action. These several potential courses of action were then debated and analysed in groups of varying sizes with the final decisions taken on which to adopt being influenced, so the book determined, by numerous interacting organizational processes and the impact of bureaucratic politics. Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*; Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1971.

14. 'Unesco Constitution', viewed 24 June 2013 [portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=15244&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=15244&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html).

15. A design methodology is conceptually different to that used in many International Relations studies focused on explaining why past events occurred. It focuses on approaches to intentionally creating change, synthesizes diverse knowledge, integrates empirical and normative thought, assumes people have bounded cognition, employs heuristics, and uses flexible placements to orient thinking rather than fixed-meaning categories. Gerry Stoker, 'Blockages on the Road to Relevance: Why Has Political Science Failed to Deliver?', *European Political Science*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2010, pp. S72-S84, p. S80-S82.

specific International Relations theoretical perspectives to develop the grand strategy diagnostic process. The process is then critiqued to determine if there are other potential alternatives that could be more efficacious. This chapter provides the confidence that the diagnostic process while simple is not simplistic. For busy policymakers with limited time, a grand strategy diagnostic process framework that is easy to apply is essential but it must also not mislead. Chapter Four then sets out the grand strategy diagnostic process including in an easy-to-apply diagrammatic form.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven examine practical examples of each of the three different types of grand strategy: denial, engagement and reform. Each chapter applies the diagnostic process to historical case studies to make clear the particular grand strategy's design and operating logic. Some unsuccessful grand strategies are included as these bring out some particularly important design aspects. Chapter Eight concludes in discussing grand strategy as a practical problem-solving method when compared with some alternative approaches that in certain circumstances may be more suitable.