Defence Academy
of the United Kingdom

Making Strategy Better 2023

A guide for more effective strategy-making and its application.

The Royal College of Defence Studies

Condition of release

Disclaimer

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Contents

Foreword

It is seven years since the publication of the Royal College of Defence Studies' guide to strategy making: 'Getting Strategy Right (Enough)'. It has served us well, both in providing a handrail for the programmes that the college delivers and for all those across government who make up the National Security community. We have, of course, developed our thinking with respect to the essence of strategy making, reflecting the feedback of our alumni and the lessons learned from the successes and failures of our strategy makers, be they national, multinational or multilateral. If we are honest, we, collectively, have not been as good at this as we would want to be, particularly when it comes to the operationalisation and orchestration of strategy. If we needed evidence of this, it has been clearly provided by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the questions it raises with respect to our approach to our competitors, adversaries and the challenges that come with them. For all these reasons, we concluded that our core strategy publication needed updating.

'Making Strategy Better' represents the first steps in meeting this need. Readers familiar with its predecessor will recognise it for the fundamentals - culture, behaviours, leadership and the requirement properly to understand the nature of a problem - that remain central to the updated version. They will, however, find a more condensed document designed specifically to support the practical business of strategy making.

It acknowledges even more so than before that there is no simple formula that miraculously delivers a perfect strategy, but rather a 'handrail' and offers an array of decision-making tools that support and guide what must be an iterative process.

We have consulted widely across government departments, drawing on the recent experience of the development of the Integrated Review, with a view to providing a document with which the National Security community, in the widest sense, might find utility and a reasonable degree of consensus. One year on from the release of *Making Strategy Better*, we publish MSB 2023. The amendments made address a number of lessons that we have learned over the last year along with feedback from our Members and those who have made use of the first edition. The document remains iterative and we aim to refine and improve it over the coming years with the headmark goal of an interactive, digital publication by the summer of 2025.

Finally, I would pay tribute to all of those who have been engaged in this work on top of their busy schedules. It is the sort of thing that can too easily be put off for a 'better moment'; grasping the nettle was, therefore, vital, and I am grateful for it.

Sir George Norton KCVO CBE
Commandant
Royal College of Defence Studies
London

1 July 2023

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RELIABILITY
CORE VALUES
INNOVATION
TRUST


national society situation
foreign together teamwork peace state nations war crisis
treaty respect communication power international relations
foreign policy challenge polite world
rules diversity agreement political relationship
politician
diplomacy
negotiation
representative
diplomat resolve government unity conflict
business agree debate people
economy
nonviolent support conduct international embassy
consulate strategy discussion decision relations countries
skills trade
social interaction labor


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Introduction "A nation must think before it acts"[1]

Robert Strausz-Hupé

Purpose

1. The primary aim of the Royal College of Defence Studies (RCDS) is to develop a global network of strategic thinkers. Our courses and programmes seek to connect ideas, people and places through first class strategic learning to the mutual benefit of the UK and its international partners.

2. RCDS focuses on the making of strategy at the level of government, both nationally and internationally. This is the province of grand strategy, in which the instruments of a nation's power are orchestrated to meet policy goals. Studying strategy at this level helps to prepare individuals for the challenges which may confront them as senior members of their country's national security community.

3. Making Strategy Better (MSB) 2023 is the latest iteration of the RCDS guide. It offers a selection of ideas, tools and behaviours to help the national security professional explore challenging strategic problems and provide advice. It aims to summarise strategy-making and orchestration in a short, easy-to-read format. It is not an authoritative or complete account of strategy or strategy making. Rather, it is a handrail to guide the process of learning at RCDS. Above all, it is designed to stimulate reflection on how to think about strategy, as opposed to what to think, and to inspire further reading, research and debate.

Phil Lester
AVM
Senior Directing Staff
Editor MSB 2023

1. Motto of the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI) founded by Strausz-Hupé in 1955. The purpose of its inclusion here is to demonstrate that cognition is essential to action as well as to highlight the implied linkages between policy and strategy.

Section 1 –
Understanding Strategy

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Chapter 1 – What is strategy?

This chapter explains what strategy is and its relationship with policy and then explores how strategy is employed in a wide variety of contexts. It provides RCDS's definition of strategy.

Introduction

1.1 Strategy is about getting something done and is, or at least should be, related to policy. Understanding this relationship is critical to making better strategy. While both strategy and policy are often conflated, they are not the same, even if the definitions of each are varied. For the purposes of RCDS, we refer to definitions that are relevant to government and national security.

Strategy

1.2 There are many definitions of strategy. Here we review three and later in the book we offer our own definition. The first, by Lawrence Freedman, suggests it to be: "the central political art. It is about getting more out of a situation than the starting balance of power would suggest. It is the art of creating power".[2] The second, by Colin S Gray, offers what he claims is a more functional definition, that "strategy provides the 'how' answer to what in its absence are political ambition and military activity, with each effectively isolated. Strategy can be considered a system that enables functional cooperation among categorically distinctive behaviours in the interests of advancing some common purpose".[3] One further definition is included to introduce the constituent parts of a strategy. This is by Sven Biscop and he suggests that: "'…. strategy concerns the vital ends that a state has to achieve in order to assure the survival of its chosen way of life, for which if necessary, it will mobilise all instruments (the ways) and resources (the means) at its disposal".[4] This focus on ends, ways and means is reflected in the RCDS approach to teaching strategy.

2. Lawrence Freedman, 'Strategy: A History', Oxford University Press, 2013, xii.
3. Colin S. Gray, 'The Future of Strategy', Polity, 2015, 23.
4. Sven Biscop, 'Grand Strategy in 10 Words – A guide to great power politics in the 21st Century', Bristol University Press, 2021, 3.

"Strategy is a practical business. If the troops cannot do it, policy is a mere vanity."[5]

Colin S Gray

Policy

1.3 The UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) suggests that policy "is a statement of intent, or a commitment to act".[6] Policy making is thus the process of determining what a government wishes to be done and provides "strategy makers with the objectives or 'ends' to which they must ascribe ways and means".[7] Policy is inextricably linked to the grammar of strategy.

1.4 Political, or Ministerial, direction is likely, to encompass more than just setting a policy objective. Sometimes, political direction will indicate the broad parameters from the outset. It may also contain direction on constraints and approaches that are developed as part of the policy and strategy making process, with advice from officials and stake holders.

5. Colin S Gray, 'Another Bloody Century', Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2006, 39.
6. UK Ministry of Defence, 'UK Defence Doctrine', Joint Doctrine Publication 0-01 (6th Edition), 2022, 11.
7. Ibid.

Relationship between strategy and policy

1.5 Policy and strategy are related, yet distinct. Policy development is (or should be) a politically-led discourse leading to a vision of what government activity in pursuit of national or international objectives should deliver. Strategy, meanwhile, is (or should be) a practice-focused expression of what this activity looks like and how it will come together to deliver the policy vision. Good policy should determine the ends of a strategy, while the strategy itself determines the ways and the means to achieve them and how the activities will be orchestrated to achieve the policy objective.

1.6 UK 'Defence Doctrine' reinforces the inter-dependence between policy and strategy by stating that: "Policy ends can only be achieved if there is a credible strategy to deliver them, and strategy demands an achievable policy end state as well as a willingness to act and a commitment to resource the strategy."[8]

1.7 Four further elements of strategy require emphasis. First, that strategy is competitive, although it should not necessarily imply that the nature of the competition is zero-sum. Second, that the process is comparative – understanding the roles of other actors (their needs, interests and values) is essential to assessing the impact of your strategy. Third, that it may also be collaborative, involving other parties. And fourth, that strategy at the level being discussed pursues policy goals that are derived from an understanding of national interests and values. The relationship between policy, strategy and the associated orchestration of activities is shown in Figure 1.1 opposite.

8. UK Ministry of Defence, 'UK Defence Doctrine', Joint Doctrine Publication 0-01 (6th Edition), 2022, 11.

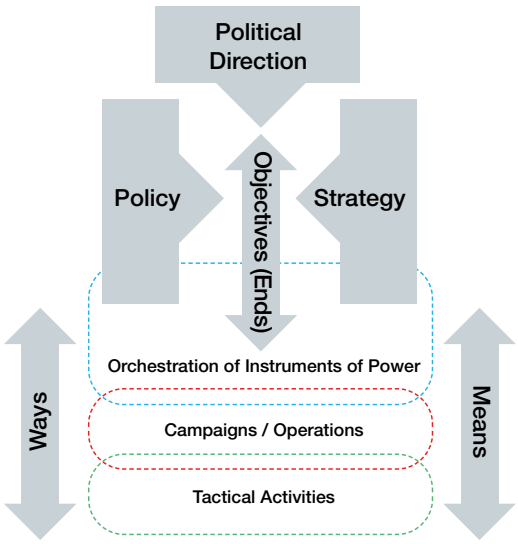


Figure 1.1 The Relationship between Strategy and Policy

Levels of strategy

1.8 As stated in the introduction, RCDS is mainly interested in the making of strategy at the level of government, both nationally and internationally. This encompasses what is sometimes referred to as 'grand strategy'. Grand strategy is a somewhat challenging concept, with some arguing that it is only relevant to great powers that have the ability to change the context in which they operate, rather than simply to respond to it. Conversely, we believe at RCDS, it implies the existence of overarching strategic goals that define a country's international behaviour, and that may also have wider implications for domestic policy as well. As such, grand strategy is as important to small states as it is to the great powers.

1.9 Grand strategy may not be written down and described as such by the state at the time (no current state appears formally to claim it has a 'grand strategy') and it may often be easier to observe with an historical perspective, and particularly in relation to protracted or existential conflicts.

1.10 A workable definition of grand strategy, is given by Peter Layton: "Grand strategy has an expansive and integrative scope encompassing the development of the economic, demographic and social resources of a society, the allocation of these resources, and the application of the various instruments of national power in a unified fashion… [It] is … a unique policy instrument that tries deliberately and with forethought to construct the future."[9]

1.11 States do produce strategies and strategy documents that attempt to pursue national objectives by integrating a broad range of instruments, even if they are narrower in scope than a true grand strategy as defined above. Typically, a national security strategy stretching across domestic and international security objectives might be accompanied by others in support, perhaps covering counter-terrorism or defence.

9. Peter Layton, 'The Idea of Grand Strategy', *The RUSI Journal*, 157, no. 4, 2012, 58.

Strategy – the RCDS definition

1.12 The focus at RCDS is on the challenges that are addressed by nations. Consequently, members are encouraged to study the international order and contemporary world events, drawing on historical examples to develop an understanding of why some strategies work and others do not. Members are also encouraged to consider strategy from the perspective of different nations – seeking to compare values, interests, needs and priorities. To provide a common frame of reference from which to do so, RCDS has adopted and employs the following definition of strategy across all its activities.

> **Strategy is the integration and orchestration (ways) of a range of instruments of power (means) to achieve government policy objectives (ends).**

Beyond the military and the political

1.13 National or grand strategy is defined in increasingly broad terms. Later in this document we discuss the types of objective that are often set in this area, under the headings of 'security, stability and prosperity' – a standard framing that RCDS adopts as a shorthand for overall government goals. Inevitably, strategies set at this level have the potential to engage many or perhaps all instruments of state power and therefore operate across government. Thus, strategy-making must make appropriate linkages between domestic and international policy goals. Strategy at this level will be rooted in national values and interests, and is likely to reflect a deeply embedded strategic culture, including persistent assumptions about the country's international role and status.

1.14 Whatever process is used to derive a given strategy, it must remain adaptable. Although a high-level strategy may have an enduring quality, the application of strategy must still evolve to meet changing circumstances, possibly radically and at short notice. This is because strategies

are designed to address what Ronald Heifetz termed 'adaptive' problems.[10] That is, they cannot be resolved by applying good management and technical expertise alone; their resolution requires innovation and constant learning as the dynamics of the problem change, often because of strategies being applied. Acknowledging the above, strategy is a process which undergoes: "…constant adaptation to shifting conditions and circumstances in a world where chance, uncertainty and ambiguity dominate".[11] Notwithstanding the need to be prepared to adapt a given strategy, there is an obvious requirement to guard against over-reacting to developments and amending a strategy too frequently, as this can begin to erode trust and confidence in the strategic leadership.

Applying strategy to interventions

1.15 One of the key challenges in the 21st Century is to derive and apply strategy across government (and with other actors) to complex security challenges. Another is how to deal with conflicts that will often be discretionary and to which strict limits on the expenditure of national blood and treasure will apply, either by design or because of political pressure. Unless national survival is immediately at stake, political judgment and strategic direction will be strongly influenced by competing priorities for expenditure. In such circumstances, the challenge will often be further complicated by the need to secure and maintain popular support for the commitment of national assets and even further complicated in an alliance or coalition context.

10. The concept of 'adaptive' and 'technical' problems is explored in Ronald A Heifetz's seminal book 'Leadership Without Easy Answers', Harvard University Press, 1994.
11. Harry R Yarger, 'Strategic Theory for the 21st Century: The Little Book on Big Strategy', US Government, 2006, 10.

1.16 There are numerous lessons which can be learned from recent military intervention. But there are arguably four over-riding ones that merit serious consideration: first, the need for a full 'understand' phase in advance of key decisions and military deployments, and to apply critical thinking and challenge to the evidence available and any assumptions that have been made – as one senior commander recently suggested to RCDS: "we should aspire to evidence-based decision making, not decision-based evidence making"; second, the need for clarity regarding the desired end state, and the resources required to achieve it; third, the need for built-in agility and flexibility to adapt when situations change, as they undoubtedly will, partly because 100% advance understanding of the problem to be addressed is never possible, no matter how thorough the 'understand' phase, and because 'the opposition has a voice' (and it is unlikely that all their moves will have been predicted); and fourth, the need to think through the potential unintended consequences at the political level of using force to pursue a policy goal.

Constructing Strategies

1.17 Noting the differences already outlined between grand strategy and the types of strategy that are more typically pursued by states, RCDS members are normally asked to reflect on national strategies under one or other of the following headings:

a. Strategy *au milieu.* In strategy *au milieu,* nations seek to influence the international environment in ways that are advantageous to their long-term security objectives. This might entail building the infrastructure of international cooperation, promoting trade and establishing partnerships that might be useful for various contingencies. It will also include the approach to dealing with competitors and enduring security threats, as well as preparing for or mitigating significant potential risks.

b. Positional strategy. A positional strategy is where nations seek to respond to a specific or acute challenge or a shock in the international environment. Positional strategies should ultimately be consistent with strategy *au milieu*, though there is of course a feedback loop.

Conclusion

1.18 This chapter has explained what strategy is, particularly in the context considered by RCDS. It provided a baseline definition, and examined how strategy is linked to policy and to implementation. The next chapter focuses on instruments of power – the 'means' of strategy.

Chapter 2 – Instruments of power

This chapter considers the instruments of power (diplomatic, informational, military and economic) in some detail and explores how an effective strategy can use them to achieve policy goals. This chapter also identifies some principles underpinning their application and considers whether 'hard', 'soft' or 'smart' approaches are suitable metaphors for characterising power.

Introduction

2.1 Chapter 1 differentiated policy from strategy and suggested that strategy could be defined as:

> **The integration and orchestration (ways) of a range of instruments of power (means) to achieve government policy objectives (ends).**

2.2 In this guide, we identify four instruments of national power which are easily remembered using the mnemonic 'DIME': Diplomatic; Informational; Military; and Economic. Although we focus on these four instruments, there is a case for other instruments to be included, such as Culture, Technology, and Legal. DIME is therefore a starting point for thinking, not a straitjacket.

2.3 No instrument can ever be truly effective on its own. The use of the military instrument, for example, is highly unlikely to achieve a favourable outcome unless it is applied in conjunction with the diplomatic, economic and information instruments. As current UK doctrine notes, "UK government pursues its objectives by leveraging the four instruments of national power… This is referred to by the UK government as the integrated approach and is similar to the comprehensive approach used by [NATO]".[12] Within the context of such an integrated approach, how specific instruments are employed under particular circumstances depends on the strategic context and the national policy goals being pursued. Before considering how best to integrate the four instruments into a coherent strategy, it is worth understanding more about each of them and the contribution they can make to achieving national policy goals.

Diplomacy

2.4 Diplomacy is the management of international relations in pursuit of national interests. It involves the use of influence to create and maintain alliances or isolate opponents and aims to achieve objectives through dialogue and negotiation. A state may pursue its national interests unilaterally, but will often do so together with other states (and non-state actors) who have similar or complimentary interests. This may involve informal coordination or partnership, or more explicit alignment, or formal collective commitment (e.g. multilateral commitments to address climate change). An important outcome of diplomacy is represented in the overall framework of international law, which creates mutually agreed obligations and constraints subject to various enforcement mechanisms.

12. Ministry of Defence, UK Defence Doctrine,JDP 0-01, (6th Edition) (2022), 12.

"…something called Power, with or without a capital letter, which is assumed to exist universally in a concentrated or diffused form, does not exist. Power exists only when it is put into action."[13]

Michel Foucault

2.5 A state's diplomatic 'weight' is undoubtedly enhanced by its economic and military standing, and international affairs reflect a tension between a search for international norms and rules with all states on an equal footing and the reality that some states are more powerful than others. International Humanitarian Law imposes constraints on action during conflict, although some (e.g. liberal democracies) may feel more constrained than others by it.

2.6 **Principles of diplomacy.** Although diplomacy has traditionally been viewed as a state-on-state activity it is evolving to incorporate other opinion-formers, power-brokers and third parties. The following list provides an idea of how to optimise the effectiveness of the diplomatic instrument. However, it should be remembered that diplomacy is essentially a human-to-human activity. Personalities and personal relationships are important, and what works in one situation might well not work elsewhere:

a. Long-term thinking. Diplomacy should focus on long-term interests, although it might occasionally be necessary to address short-term political imperatives. The longer-term consequences of actions or interventions also need to be considered.

b. Morality. States should aim to set a high bar. Beware of double standards - they may be unavoidable, but States must then expect others to notice and exploit.

c. Public diplomacy. States should not play solely to the domestic audience as the narrative may not resonate with other constituencies, especially those abroad, where it could have adverse effects. As such, states should be deft in their calibration of messages and narratives to ensure that they are 'tuned' to a wide range of audiences. A process of persistent audience analysis is key to understanding information 'targets', their values and beliefs and an assessment of how a message or narrative might be received.

d. Negotiation. In international negotiations, have a clear concept of what you are trying to achieve and how far you are prepared to go to achieve it – at least in your mind (for you do not declare your hand before you negotiate). Drawing on his experience as a diplomat, a previous Commandant of RCDS produced a note setting out his thoughts on how to succeed in meetings. It is reproduced at Annex D.

13. Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', *Critical Inquiry 8*, no. 4, 1982, 788.

e. Compromise. You must give and take. When irreconcilable positions are deeply entrenched, the only way forward is to compromise. Know what you are prepared to concede. Identify your 'red lines,' separating what is essential from what is desirable, and remember the adage that occasionally, you may have to lose a battle to win a war.

f. Preparation. Work out your responses to the positions likely to be adopted by others, identifying their 'red lines' as well as areas where concessions might be possible.

g. Comprehension. Understand those with whom you are dealing, especially their aspirations and expectations, and not least their hopes and fears. Much of this should come from a deep understanding of their culture.

h. Communication. Be prepared to talk, even to those deemed 'unacceptable' or vilified if they are part of the solution: a handshake is not an absolution.

i. Trust. The diplomat or negotiator needs many qualities, but among them must be honesty, integrity and courtesy, which are essential for building trust and confidence.

j. Respect. Respect is key to building trust. Through trust and respect, it is easier to understand the dynamics at play, provide a foundation from which to engage and with it the ability to inform and influence stakeholders.

Information

2.7 **Overview.** We now live in what has been described as 'the information age.' Information, and the means of both receiving and transmitting it, has become ubiquitous. As Joseph Nye has observed, one consequence of this is that: "cheap flows of information have enormously expanded the number and depth of transnational channels of contact".[14] While this presents an opportunity, it is also a threat. There are several different ways in which the information instrument can be exploited and these are discussed below.

14. Robert O Keohane and Joseph S Nye Jr, 'Power and Interdependence in the Information Age', *Foreign Affairs 77*, no. 5, 1998, 94.

2.8 **Understanding and intelligence.**[15] Intelligence is crucial to the development of understanding. An effective and integrated national intelligence apparatus requires systems, architectures and practitioners flexible enough to operate in complex environments and under demanding conditions. In so doing, such structures should promote inter-agency collaboration to facilitate the fusion of data and analysis at the point of need. There are many definitions of what constitutes intelligence, information and understanding but for commonality with other definitions, we use UK descriptions:

> ***Intelligence is the directed and coordinated acquisition and analysis of information to assess capabilities, intent and opportunities for exploitation by leaders at all levels.***
>
> ***Information is defined as unprocessed data of every description that may be used in the production of intelligence.***
>
> ***Understanding is defined as the perception and interpretation of a situation in order to provide the context, insight and foresight required for effective decision-making.***

2.9 **Strategic communication and the media.** Strategic communication, or StratCom, envisages the application of a state's capabilities and level of ambition as potential tools of communication. This approach sees the integration and alignment of messages transmitted over multiple means (e.g. actions, words or images) to influence audience attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. Therefore, one might use the following definition of StratCom.[16]

> ***Advancing national interests by using all instruments of state power as a means of communication to influence the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of audiences.***

15. Adapted from, UK Ministry of Defence, 'Understanding and Intelligence Support to Joint Operations', Joint Doctrine Publication 2-00, 2011, 1-1 to 1-18.
16. Adapted from UK Ministry of Defence, 'Defence Strategic Communication; an Approach to Formulating and Executing Strategy', Joint Doctrine Note 2/19, 2019, 6 & 7.

2.10 The media is one of the most powerful components of the information instrument. The media is powerful because it influences people, and, considered collectively, people are powerful. Technological developments, and the rise of social media, have meant that for a time this was also the case even in closed and authoritarian states, with social media playing a key role in some revolutions which impacted on authoritarian regimes. But there are also examples of social media exploitation to fuel inter-ethnic conflict and other forms of extremism, and to promote and plan terrorist attacks. Authoritarian regimes have in general found ways of reasserting control over social media in recent years and of weaponising it in attempts to undermine democracies, though the impact of such campaigns is disputed.

2.11 There is a clear link between the media, public opinion and political/strategic decision-making; the media has been known to influence strategic decisions directly. So, the media is not only part of the environment; it can also be used to shape it through effective strategic communications. To achieve the most out of the media, exponents of strategy must therefore understand how it works. Strategy-makers and strategic leaders can try to be silent or just use their own media for propaganda, but since the independent media exists, is ubiquitous, hugely popular, powerful, technically competent, and free, it is wasteful as well as risky to ignore it.

2.12 **Principles of media handling.** There are some guiding principles which should shape engagements with the media:

a. You are not in control! The first and most important principle is to remember that with the media, you are never in control. This is patently true in democracies with clear standards of press freedom, but even the most authoritarian regimes cannot control all the means of communication fully, nor how people respond.

b. Know your audience. The next principle is to know the target audiences and the media through which to engage them.

c. Clear message. It is critical to have a clear message: understand what you are trying to achieve (in the short and long term) and try to understand how the message will be received. Your narrative should address the following:[17]

1) **The current situation:** a brief description of the wrong to be righted or the desirable condition to be retained.

2) **The future state:** a description of the ends, be it the maintenance of the current state or a transition.

3) **The pathway:** how you intend to get there – a brief account of your ways and means.

4) **The justification:** why the proposed approach is better than the alternatives.

17. UK Ministry of Defence, 'Defence Strategic Communication; an Approach to Formulating and Executing Strategy', Joint Doctrine Note 2/19, 2019, 6 & 7.

d. Immediacy. Speed stems from two connected roots: the desire to be first with the story and the ever-increasing speed available through technology. Real-time news is now a reality and not only in the broadcast media. All this means that journalists in the field and editors in their offices demand speed and expect it of those with whom they do business. Nothing impresses them more than interlocutors who realise this and feed them stories as they happen.

e. Trust. A reputation for telling the truth speedily can establish mutual trust with journalists. There are risks, and one must always take care in dealing with journalists because even the most trustworthy of them will be tempted by a prize-winning scoop (and they will rightly assume that if they know a story but don't publish it, someone else will). However, journalists do trust those who are truthful and timely and will, for self-interest if for no better reason, refer to those who are both. This is the basis for a professional relationship with the media. Ideally, journalists check before going to print or broadcasting a story and even alert one to potential issues. The possible tension between 'trust' and 'immediacy' is acknowledged as confirming the 'truth' can take time. However, the important thing is to ensure that dialogue with the media continues, even if the state is limited in what it can say.

2.13 The importance of 'wrapping' a strategy in a compelling narrative – the 'strategic narrative' – and ensuring that it is communicated at every possible opportunity should not be underestimated. Social media and the speed with which even the more traditional media are now able to react mean that a description of how your strategy is unfolding on the ground will be widely broadcast the moment things start to happen. Being proactive in terms of 'setting the narrative' is therefore important to maintain the initiative and ensure that target audiences, both domestic and international, perceive events through a lens of your choosing.

Military

2.14 The military instrument is likely to absorb significant resources. Its size, shape and capabilities will generally be defined in peacetime – often in the context of periodic reviews of defence strategy – and rely on assumptions and policy decisions about the nature of an inherently unknowable future. Decisions about major investments (and disinvestments) will, however, inevitably send signals about national will and priorities in the present to both friends and potential opponents.

2.15 The primary role of military force within the international order, as viewed by most states, is to defend national interests (especially sovereign territory) and to deter others from aggression. Typically, this is done within a framework of cooperation between friendly countries, and in some cases within the context of formal alliances – NATO being the most developed contemporary example. Although the ultimate function of the military is combat, the use of the military instrument should not be considered simply in terms of warfighting. Reassurance of partners and allies, which may be delivered through forward presence, active cooperation and exercising, or collaborative planning and defence programmes, are also important. Nonetheless, for deterrence strategies to be effective, and for alliances to be seen as credible, it is important that military capabilities are effective, and at an appropriate readiness for conflict.

2.16 Military and other armed forces employed by a state can also be used in a wide variety of scenarios and roles to support security and crisis management goals. It may be tempting for governments to see the use of force as a mechanism for solving problems that actually demand much broader interventions, or more caution. The experiences of the Afghanistan and Iraq campaigns offer

many salutary lessons, which do not need rehearsal here. Some post-Cold War Western military interventions, whether driven by humanitarian, national security or other concerns, have, however, been successful. Deciding in principle to be resolutely pro- or (more likely) anti-use of force irrespective of the circumstances, would unnecessarily limit options. Overall, the use of military assets, and the use of force, needs to be governed by the type of sound strategic thinking advocated in this guide, and should always be in accordance with established principles of international humanitarian law and within the framework of national values and in the national interest.

Economic

2.17 Overseas investment, international flows of capital, as well as trade and development assistance, provide means through which a state can assert degrees of economic influence. The economic instrument of power can provide for a range of incentives, boycotts, sanctions, tariffs and other measures targeted at an opponent's or other actor's economy or financial situation to influence their attitudes, decisions and behaviours. It is also worth considering access to raw materials, the ability to deliver robust end-to-end supply chains and market manipulation. Used effectively, they can contribute to deterrence or coercive strategies and can persuade an actor to adopt, or desist from, a particular course of action.

2.18 The potential impact of economic measures can be diminished by the effects of economic integration as well as the political sophistication of the targeted state.The impact of COVID-19 as well as the war in Ukraine have highlighted the risks of deeply integrated globalised supply chains, and in particular of dependence on potential opponents for critical supplies. It may be driving moves towards reshoring or 'friend-shoring' relevant elements of supply chains and has already led to a decisive shift away from Western dependence on Russian hydrocarbons.

2.19 While the theory is relatively straightforward, economic measures designed specifically to damage a nation's economy unless it complies with another nation's or multinational organisation's direction can be effective but are often difficult to enforce. Thus, in some circumstances, military force may be required to support the economic instrument through embargo operations. The unintended consequences also need to be considered as it is possible that the impact of economic measures might only be felt by an already disadvantaged population rather than the ruling elite. When economic measures do work, it is often because they are executed within a wider context and by many actors as part of a broader tapestry of activities across the instruments of power (for example, in the context of a UN Resolution).

The application of power

2.20 States and organisations apply power across the instruments to achieve policy goals in one of three ways: as 'hard' power, 'soft' power, or 'smart' power. It is important to understand what these descriptions mean as they are in common usage across governments and in the literature relating to strategic thinking and strategy formulation.

2.21 **Hard power.** Most books on strategy will offer a definition of hard power. One of the most useful descriptions is that provided in UK defence doctrine:

> ***"Hard power uses military capability and economic strength (both sanctions and incentives) to achieve the desired behaviour of states, groups or individuals, or to directly change the course of events. Those using hard power often seek to coerce opponents to adopt a course of action that they would not otherwise choose themselves. The military and economic instruments are important sources of hard power, supported by diplomatic and information instruments. They also serve as deterrents."***[18]

2.22 The difference between deterrence and coercion is important. Both are aspects of hard power, but deterrence aims to dissuade a course of action whilst coercion aims to encourage a course of action. It is important to note that deterrence only works when other states and interested actors are aware of a nation's capabilities. Communicating these is an important aspect of deterrence strategies, and, in this sense, the nation is putting this power into action. .

18 UK Ministry of Defence, 'UK Defence Doctrine', Joint Doctrine Publication 0-01 (6th Edition), 2022, 40.

2.23 **Soft power.** Soft power is different to hard power in that it does not involve deterring or coercing another nation or organisation to do, or not do, something; rather, the aim is to get them to want to do it of their own accord. Although the concept is relatively straightforward, the nature of soft power is often misunderstood, and it is, therefore, helpful to understand the origins of the term. In the latter part of the Twentieth Century, the American political scientist Joseph S Nye noted how the effects of globalisation, and particularly the extent to which states were economically interdependent, made the application of hard power both costly and difficult. Realising that: "proof of power lies not in resources but in the ability to change the behaviour of states,"[19] he posited that whether a nation changes its behaviour because a more powerful nation orders it to or whether it does it because it wants to, makes little difference in terms of the outcome.[20] Of the two approaches, the latter is clearly preferable as it is less damaging to all involved and is more likely to lead to enduring change. Nye coined the phrase 'soft power' to describe this latter approach. Although quite lengthy, his description of the difference between it and hard power is well worth reading:

'Everyone is familiar with hard power. We know that military and economic might often get others to change their position. Hard power can rest on inducements ("carrots") or threats ("sticks"). But sometimes, you can get the outcomes you want without tangible threats or payoffs. The indirect way to get what you want has sometimes been called "the second face of power". A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries admire its values, emulate its example, aspire to its level of prosperity and openness. This soft power – getting others to want the outcomes that you want – co-opts people rather than coerces them. Soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others.'[21]

19. Joseph S Nye Jr, 'Soft Power', *Foreign Policy*, no. 80, Autumn 1990, 155.
20. Ibid.
21. Joseph S Nye Jr, 'The Benefits of Soft Power', Harvard Business School, 8 February 2004, http://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/4290.html

2.24 There is a temptation to assume that soft power is less effective than hard power. Nye asserts that cooperative soft power is just as important as hard power. If it can support institutions that make other states wish to channel or limit their activities in ways the dominant state prefers, it may be spared the costly exercise of coercive or hard power.[22] Of course, one issue related to soft power is that many of its elements will be outside a state's control. Soft power 'pull' is a result of multiple factors, as disparate as the reputation of a country's media, sporting reputation or a more general sense of its values.

2.25 **Smart power.** While soft power is as important as hard power, it is difficult to employ with precision and can take a long time to have a measurable effect.[23] In achieving a particular policy goal, a strategy might therefore need to project both hard and available elements of soft power. This approach is known as applying 'smart power'. This has numerous definitions but Nye is again helpful, defining it as: "the ability to combine hard and soft power resources into effective strategies."[24]

2.26 The military is generally considered the quintessential instrument of hard power. Still, it has important 'soft power' uses, for instance, in training assistance and studying at foreign training establishments and in carrying out or enabling humanitarian interventions. Aspects of some of the other instruments are also 'hard' in that they attempt to change other parties' behaviours against their will (for example, economic or diplomatic sanctions). Smart power, underpinned by the necessary intent and resolve, looks to deliver the optimum mix of hard and soft power required to achieve specific policy goals in particular circumstances.

Conclusion

2.27 This chapter has considered the instruments of power (diplomatic, informational, military and economic) and identified some of the key issues associated with their application in the contemporary strategic environment. It also examined how these instruments can be used to project hard, soft and smart power. The next chapter builds on this foundation and considers the difficult business of weaving all this together to create strategy. It suggests an approach for conducting a 'strategic assessment', enabling the strategy to be 'tuned' to the environment in which it seeks to achieve a policy goal.

22. Joseph S Nye Jr, 'Soft Power', *Foreign Policy*, no. 80, Autumn 1990, 157.
23. UK Ministry of Defence, 'UK Defence Doctrine', Joint Doctrine Publication 0-01 (6th Edition), 2022, 40.
24. Joseph S Nye Jr, 'Soft Power', *Foreign Policy*, no. 80, Autumn 1990, 157.

Chapter 3 – Fundamentals of strategy

Strategy is inherently difficult to formulate. Whilst there is no 'one size fits all' formula, this chapter considers the 'fundamentals' of effective strategy. It starts by considering the purpose of grand strategy, proposing some generic goals, and then identifies the characteristics of good strategy. It suggests five tests that can be applied to assess whether a strategy is likely to be fit for purpose.

Introduction

3.1 Examples of effective strategies do exist. Perhaps the most obvious are those adopted by the West during the Cold War but there are others. Malcolm Chalmers, for example, highlights the following recent interventions in which the UK was involved as having achieved strategic success: Sierra Leone in 2000; the NATO-led intervention in Bosnia from 1995 to 2002; and NATO intervention in Kosovo from 1999 to 2003.[25] The restoration of British Sovereignty to the Falkland Islands in 1982 and, arguably, the end of armed conflict in Northern Ireland provide other examples of where effective strategies have enabled policy goals to be achieved. Northern Ireland is also a good example of 'adaptive' strategy because, although the 'ends' endured, the 'means' and 'ways' evolved over the years as circumstances changed. However, there are many more examples of ineffective strategies – those that failed to achieve the policy objectives.

Assessing strategies – good, bad or effective

3.2 The main reason for strategic failure is that developing, implementing and then orchestrating an effective strategy is very difficult. Strategy is about addressing a problem and realising a vision for the future; it is not deterministic but should be probabilistic. For this reason, strategies need to be adaptable. Although principles can be captured and codified, they will always remain in practice an art, underpinned – but not driven by – calculation. The sheer complexity of the world, the number of independent actors and the uniqueness of each situation or strategic challenge all mean that there is no set formula for strategy. Moreover, a strategy that has worked in the past will not necessarily function well in the future. It is also worth considering that strategies are, by design, competitive.

25. Malcolm Chalmers, 'Wars in Peace: British Military Operations Since 1991', Royal United Services Institute, 2014, 90.

"A fundamental lesson from history is that strategy is necessarily purposeful, but must be designed in a world of ambiguity, complexity, and uncertainty."[26]
Frank Hoffman

3.3 With these points in mind, it is possible that labelling a strategy as good or bad based purely on adherence to doctrine and process misses the point and constrains reflective analysis. We might class a 'good' strategy as one that achieves a clear alignment of prioritised policy 'ends' with thoroughly assessed and compelling 'ways' supported by sufficient allocation of 'means' or resources. Whether a strategy is effective (or not) will depend both on its design and on its implementation and subsequent orchestration when it rubs up against the strategies (and actions) of others.

3.4 In designing strategy, we must recognise that every condition, crisis or context Is unique. The strategy needs to be tailored to the outcomes desired and the conditions faced. Although there is no 'one size fits all' template for a successful strategy, experience nevertheless suggests that there are several 'fundamentals' which, if observed, improve the chances of a strategy being effective. These range from being clear about what the strategy is trying to achieve to ensuring that the 'big idea' behind the strategy is articulated in an accessible way and that the strategy, as an 'adaptive solution', is kept under constant review and adjusted when appropriate.

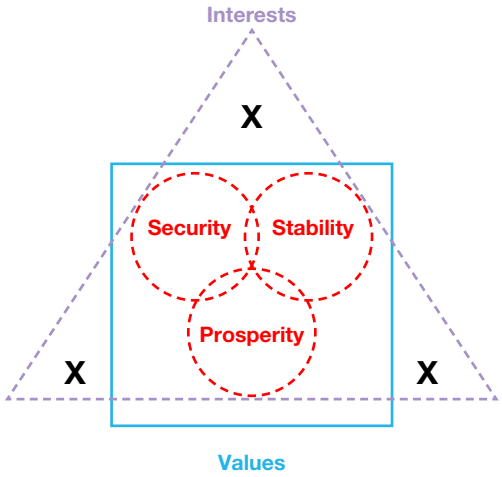
The nature of grand strategy

3.5 **Values and interests.** Effective strategies should, as we will explore in paragraph 3.9, be rational and that is to say that they are constructed around the core values and interests of the nation. Definitions in this area are, as elsewherein international relations theory, hard to pin down. 'Values' are typically portrayed in ethical or moralistic terms, or as enduring commitments to specified principles of international behaviour. The two terms may be used to characterise tensions, or just differences, between higher principles and more realist, pragmatic or even selfish concerns with power, economic prosperity or national security. Some commentators, on the other hand, seek to differentiate between enduring primary national interests – sometimes characterised as 'needs' – and shorter-term interests related to a particular problem or context. In whatever way values or interests are seen, it is important to recognise that states, and therefore politicians, will often have to resolve conflicts between competing values, interests, needs, priorities or objectives. There is no magic formula for doing so. What is 'in the national interest' is ultimately a matter of judgement.

26. Frank Hoffman, 'Grand Strategy: The Fundamental Considerations,' *Orbis*, Fall 2014, 474.

3.6 Some nations may describe their values and interests while others may imply them, or deliberately retain a degree of ambiguity. Whatever the approach, it is likely that nations and stakeholders will attempt to assess others' values and interests. Many of the tools in Annex B can help with collating ideas and perspectives. For RCDS purposes we find it helpful to view 'values' in terms of enduring characteristics of a nation or actor, that will also influence how that nation or actor determines its interests. Again, for RCDS purposes, 'interests' broadly fall within a nation's assessment of its security, stability and prosperity objectives. Once identified, these interests can be prioritised and the appropriate ways and means assigned to achieve the required ends or objectives. Whatever these interests and priorities, they should in principle be pursued in ways that are compatible with values. In so doing, strategies should remain rational (see paragraph 3.9) and appropriate (see paragraphs 3.16 to 3.20). That said, tensions will often arise between values expressed in moral terms and interests defined in more immediately material economic or security terms, and more generally, as noted above, there will always be competing requirements.

Decisions about what to prioritise in these circumstances are firmly in the political space, but should be supported by the best possible advice on the implications of different courses of action. The relationship between values and interests might be represented schematically as shown in Figure 3.1.



Comments:

- National values are moral principles, or accepted standards, of a nation or alliance of nations (**blue square**).
- National values should be relatively static/ constant.
- National interests are a statement of connection to any given event, location or condition as well as an indication of a nation's (or alliance of nations) determination to become involved in something of concern or of value to them (**purple triangle**).
- Interests may change as the strategic context changes but should fall within a nation's set of values.
- A nation's strategy for its security, stability and prosperity (**red circles**) should lie within its national values and interests.
- Combined, values and interests help to characterise a given nation or alliance and explain its relative strategic culture and identity.
- A perfectly balanced framework is most unlikely and aspects of the construct will, for most countries, vary in size and shape. Of particular interest is when the national interests fall outside a nation's stated values (X on the diagram). Why is this important?

Figure 3.1 The Relationship between Values and Interests

3.7 **Prosperity, security and stability.** It is unlikely that different strategies will have the same objectives, but it is more probable that they will have similar long-term generic goals. These goals typically include the sustainment, if not furtherance, of key national interests such as prosperity, security and stability. Considering these generic goals in more detail provides an insight into how the instruments of power – which were considered in more detail in Chapter 2 – might be employed to achieve a strategic outcome:

a. Prosperity. Prosperity is arguably the most straightforward purpose of strategy. In addition to the acquisition of material wealth, it might also include societal, cultural or environmental aspects as well as enhancements in well-being, respect, self-respect and confidence.

b. Security. Security is a complicated and contested concept. It can mean freedom to live, act and make choices in accordance with a nation's values, priorities, rules and norms. Economic prosperity can, to an extent, rest on military security, including the protection of trade routes and, ultimately, the defence of national sovereignty. Notwithstanding this, only those policy goals which will impact on national or international security should be included in this category; there is a need to guard against unnecessarily securitising issues as this can lead to governments and organisations implementing inappropriately draconian measures which, in the longer term, may be detrimental.

c. Stability. Stability is also a complex idea. The very word suggests the opposite of change, which is itself inevitable. It is therefore important to understand that in using the word, we do not seek to deny or overcome change but to take proper account of it. So, stability does not mean stasis or standing still but rather a firm platform for action, like a ship at sea. It, therefore, has connotations of balance and harmony, but also adaptability to changing circumstances.

Characteristics of effective strategy

3.8 **Characteristics.** Effective strategies have several characteristics. Taken collectively, they give the strategy 'substance' and ensure that it is more than just a narrative. At RCDS, we suggest that strategies have six characteristics:

3.9 **Rational.** A strategy is designed to achieve a clearly stated policy goal and rooted in a nation's strategic culture and based upon a nation's interests, values and priorities. Much of this characteristic was covered in the previous section but it is worth reiterating that this is the central characteristic around which an effective strategy is constructed. It recognises that there is an intrinsic link between policy outcomes and strategic orchestration to achieve them. Without a clear link to policy and the national interest, values and priorities, a strategy will lack a rational compass by which it can be implemented, assessed and reviewed.

3.10 **Connected.** A strategy has clear ownership at the right level and is subject to continuous constructive challenge, during both formulation and implementation. The connections in strategy-making and implementation are numerous but, in this characteristic, we focus on ownership and leadership and the connections that are required for appropriate ownership through design, implementation, orchestration and review. It is essential, in whatever manner strategy is conceived and developed, that strategic leaders take personal responsibility for its implementation and effectiveness. In UK terms, the forum for discussion and agreement on strategic issues is the National Security Council and, ultimately, the Cabinet. The experts responsible for the detailed work on strategic design need to have the ability and authority to question and challenge the realism of policy goals. A range of opinions, bringing real diversity of thought into the decision-making process, can provide a valuable source of insight and challenge; the inclusion of external experts in the decision-making process (from academia, think-tanks etc) is therefore strongly recommended. Although strategy follows policy, there is a clear requirement for strategy-makers to influence policy, reminding policy-makers

of what is realistically achievable given the resources available (including time). From a strategy-maker's perspective, this can be summarised as having the responsibility to "speak truth to power". This requires moral courage – senior leaders and government officials have a responsibility to give honest and impartial advice. But the responsibility for deciding what to do resides with those elected to run the country. In reaching a decision, politicians may well choose to disagree with some of the advice they have been given. This does not necessarily mean they are failing to think strategically; they may just see the situation differently.

3.11 **Simple.** This characteristic emphasises the simplicity of an idea or approach rather than a simple plan. The importance of strategic ideas is often over-looked. The innovative and compelling 'Big Idea', or clear vision, is often the basis of a new strategy. It must not only bind the ends, ways and means but inspire others to support it. It plays as much to people as to process, giving the destination, direction and means of travel in such a manner that they feel bound to make the journey.

3.12 **Clear.** It should be possible to encapsulate the essence of a strategy – the 'Big Idea' – in a brief set of words. It should be memorable to those involved in its execution (and wider target audiences) and expressed in a manner which enables them to see their part in achieving it. The 'Big Idea' should be rooted in policy and dock with priorities, values and interests. Brevity and simplicity force clarity of thought and expression. In practice, the purpose of all good strategies can be summed up in a page if not in a paragraph.

3.13 **Dynamic.** This characteristic acknowledges uncertainty and that strategies can and must adapt as circumstances change. It recognises that political will and popular support, key tenets if a strategy is to resonate and have broad support, will ebb and flow. The strategist will never know everything about the environment in which their strategy is designed to achieve a policy outcome, no matter how thorough the 'understand' phase. Nor will they be able to predict the unintended consequences once their strategy starts to be implemented. It, therefore, follows that strategists need to be comfortable planning on the basis of incomplete information. Because of this, they need to recognise that, despite their best efforts, outcomes are far from certain and therefore, good feedback loops to ensure they are sighted on what is happening on the ground once a strategy has entered the implementation phase are important, as is being prepared to adapt the strategy as necessary to achieve the desired outcome. But while the need for reliable feedback is self-evident, the difficulty of obtaining it should not be underestimated. Even after considering all the risks, being prepared for events to take an entirely unexpected turn is the embodiment of strategic flexibility and adaptability. One way of reducing the possibility of being surprised by an outcome is to ensure that an organisation has a "challenge culture" - led from the top.

3.14 **Competitive.** Finally, we must never forget that our strategy will invite or be in response to competition. Other actors, including opponents, have strategies too. Strategies will therefore be contested and not merely in the military domain. Diplomatic, economic and information instruments of power will be applied to oppose the objectives of your strategy. Not only does the opposition have a voice, but partner nations within a coalition might also find their interests diverging. Within the context of an agreed overarching policy, it is important that national strategies are mutually reinforcing. We must also recognise that competition is part of the naturally occurring dynamic within international relations.

The five tests of effective strategies

3.15 The characteristics offer broad suggestions on what an effective strategy might 'look like'. Other commentators take slightly different approaches. Hoffman, for example, provides a "framework of eight considerations" which "provide a foundation to think about, design and apply a national strategy".[27] His considerations are culture and context; constraints; compromise and consensus; competitiveness; coherence; contingency; continuous assessment/adaptation. and communication. Although arguably slightly contrived (to ensure that each principle begins with the letter 'c'), it provides a useful intellectual framework that is not too dissimilar to that provided by RCDS' characteristics. Gray and Johnson provide an alternative view in their General Theory of Strategy, stating that: "…the particular details of each newly crafted strategy are derived from and must be attentively executed within each of seven contexts".[28] They then go on to identify the contexts as political, sociocultural, economic, technological, military, geographical, and historical. Whatever approach the strategist adopts to develop their strategy, experience suggests that it should pass five simple tests: first, it must be acceptable; second, it must be suitable to the circumstances; third, it must be feasible; fourth, it must be sustainable, not only in terms of resources but also in terms of the common will of the members of an organisation or the people of a nation to see it through; and fifth, it must be adaptable as circumstances change. It is useful to consider each of these tests individually, noting that they should be applied using a critical thinking approach.[29]

27. Frank Hoffman, 'Grand Strategy: The Fundamental Considerations,' *Orbis*, Fall 2014, 479.
28. Colin S Gray and Jeanne L Johnson, 'The Practice of Strategy', in *Strategy in the Contemporary World*, eds. John Baylis, James J Wirtz and Colin S Gray, Fourth Edition, Oxford University Press, 2016, 364 – 367.
29. A critical thinking approach is one where assumptions, arguments and conclusions are questioned, rather than just accepted, before a reasoned judgement is made.

3.16 **Acceptability.** This covers legal acceptability in terms of compliance with both domestic and international law; and political acceptability both to the government of the day and in terms of the wider public support that might be required. Political acceptability is more likely if the interests at stake, and their importance, are readily apparent. If they are easily understood and the consequences of failure evident, then a clear and coherent narrative can be constructed and articulated.

3.17 **Suitability.** This is a test of whether the strategy proposed is appropriate to the problem being addressed. In other words, assuming it was properly resourced and carried through, would the strategy lead to a sufficiently desirable outcome? Would it do so in a way that aligned with other government priorities?

3.18 **Feasibility.** Every strategy must be feasible. This is the simple test of 'whether it can be done'. Are the resources needed available? Is the 'way' in which the strategy is going to be carried out well thought-through and deliverable? Are the assumptions and risks properly understood and can the former be supported, and the latter adequately mitigated?

3.19 **Sustainability.** This is a broad concept and encompasses both physical and moral sustainability – the will to see it through – that needs to be assessed as a strategy is developed. Strategy is about the future; it must be sustainable over sufficient time. Sustainability must consider the potential for changes in political will and popular support.

3.20 **Adaptability.** No strategy survives contact with reality fully intact, and it will inevitably have to be adjusted once its implementation commences and events begin to unfold. Adaptability, therefore, needs to be built into the strategy from the outset. Thorough testing against alternative scenarios, or high impact risks, are amongst the ways of assessing this quality.

Applying the tests

3.21 Few potential strategies are likely to get immediately high scores across all these tests, though they can be applied at different stages as options are developed, to help refine and discard those that are unlikely to work, and better develop those that might. A simple scoring framework is included in Annex B. For many reasons our strategic assessment framework recommends the importance of comparative analysis and assessment; where emerging strategies are tested against those policies and strategies (known or in development) of partners or competitors.

Conclusion

3.22 This chapter provided an overview of what experience suggests are the 'fundamentals' of effective strategy. As well as considering the generic goals that strategy might be designed to achieve, it identified the characteristics of good strategy and proposed five tests which can be used to assess whether a strategy is likely to be fit for purpose. The next chapter builds on this and offers a step-by-step process to build and implement an effective strategy.

Section 2 –

Achieving Strategic Outcomes

Defence Academy
of the United Kingdom


Strategy

Chapter 4 – Strategy formulation

This chapter considers the practical business of making strategy. It suggests an iterative eight element process – referred to as the 'strategy framework' – as one way of developing a strategy that orchestrates ends, ways and means. In doing this, it highlights the over-riding importance of understanding the environment before developing strategy options and the value of developing metrics in order to know when a strategy is beginning to fail.

A refined approach

4.1 In Chapter 1 we defined strategy as the integration and orchestration (ways) of a range of instruments of power (means) to achieve government policy objectives (ends). Therefore, the most important skills for a strategist are thier ability to work out what to do, to express this vision, to determine how to implement it and with what, and then to get people to get on with it. However, integrating ends, ways and means within a complex and dynamic environment is far from easy. One action prompts a reaction, and every consequence (both intended and unintended) may change the character of the situation and the second-order responses to it. As events unfold, strategic complexity may multiply in unexpected dimensions rather than adding arithmetically in a linear manner. Truly to understand and attempt to master such challenges, the strategist must think comprehensively about the issues at hand, challenging received wisdom and asking 'so what?' when each new 'fact' is presented.

4.2 One of the most challenging aspects of making strategy is that the more the strategist tries to calculate the likely effects of their actions, the more *uncertain* the outcomes may appear. It is to be expected that the opposition will be seeking to shape the environment with their own strategies to try and achieve their policy goals. It would, therefore, be a grave mistake to underestimate them. As discussed in Chapter 3, a conclusion from this is that strategies need to be flexible and based on the rigorous examination of possible scenarios. The initial strategy is just the start point; it needs to be kept under constant review and adapted, or even discarded and replaced as events unfold.

4.3 Strategy cannot be 'done' by referring to a doctrinal handbook. With that in mind, rather than attempt to set out a 'strategic estimate' with fields to fill in and boxes to tick, in a desire to 'solve' strategic problems by applying a mechanistic template, it is more productive to identify the core *activities* that should be undertaken in formulating strategy. Additional analytical tools, such as SWOT and PESTLE,[30] have utility within some of these activities, but there is no guarantee of deriving the 'right' solution in a formulaic manner. In short, the strategist needs a broad appreciation of the factors and forces which may influence a desired outcome before they attempt to determine a preferred strategic design.

30. See Annex B for some examples of strategy tools.

"The realm of strategy is one of bargaining and persuasion as well as threats and pressure, psychological as well as physical effects, and words as well as deeds. This is why strategy is the central political art. It is about getting more out of a situation than the starting balance of power would suggest. It is the art of creating power."[31]

Sir Lawrence Freedman

A strategic framework

4.4 **Introduction.** RCDS has developed a 'strategy framework' that involves several closely related elements, all of which require continual review to ensure appropriate contextual alignment and overall coherence. It can serve as a handrail for creative thinking and critical questioning, which may create the spark of better understanding, decision-making and action. It is worth emphasising that it is only a framework – it is *a way* to think about the problem – rather than *the* definitive answer to strategy design.

4.5 **An approach.** Our strategy framework recognises the following aspects of strategy and strategy-making and builds upon the characteristics we outlined in Chapter 3:

a. A strategy must have **a purpose or a problem** to address or solve – it is worth considering the 'exam question' before anything else.

b. The process of strategy making is **not linear, formulaic or sequential.** It is discursive and adaptive and must be agile to changes in context.

c. Unlike tactics and operations, strategy does not always have a clearly defined start or finish – it is likely to be a continuous cycle of actions, reactions and changing context.

d. It is a process enveloped by many competitive internal and external factors.

e. It is a competitive process, but not necessarily within a zero-sum game.

f. Involves an element of embracing and tackling the ambiguous.

g. Strategy can only be realised through appropriately orchestrated understanding, engagement and influence activities using the instruments of national power.

h. Strategy is a **comparative** and **iterative** process across the developmental, implementation and orchestration phases.

31. Lawrence Freedman, 'Strategy: A History', Oxford University Press, 2015, xii.

4.6 **The framework.** Our framework is constructed as a metaphorical **wheel,** rotating around the **axle** of strategy delivery and orchestration, with **spokes** radiating out to the constituent elements of strategy design and application, encapsulated by the **tyre** of factors affecting the situation at hand. We construct it to show that all elements are focused on delivery – and must therefore be rational and grounded. Furthermore, the model shows that although there is a point at which specific strategy making must begin, it does not necessarily represent 'the' strategic origin. Inevitably you will be entering a dynamic that is already underway, and events will have already happened, some more events are happening, and other events will happen at points in the future.

4.7 Our strategic assessment framework comprises 8 elements. Elements 1 to 3 are designed to improve **understanding** of the context, the desired objectives and what these may mean for a strategy under development. Elements 4 to 6 are the strategy **design** functions. Elements 7 and 8 are associated with **delivery, orchestration and review**.

4.8 All these aspects will affect strategy design and delivery. So, in schematic terms, the overall framework might look like that in Figure 4.1. Elements 1 to 6 will be covered in this chapter as they are key constituents of strategy making. Elements 7 and 8 will be covered in the next chapter as they outline a methodology towards application.

A Dynamic Strategy Process

...That recognises that strategy

- Needs a problem to solve.
- Is non-linear.
- Is discursive and adaptive - not formulaic.
- Should be constantly evolving - adapting to, and shaping, a situation.
- Does not always have a clear start or finish - it is a continuous circle.
- Is enveloped by internal and external factors.
- Is not necessarily a zero-sum game but is competitive.
- Involves embracing ambiguity.
- And can only be realised through understanding and engagement - a clear communication narrative.

...it is a living and comparative enterprise that requires high levels of simultaneity in design and implementation and orchestration.

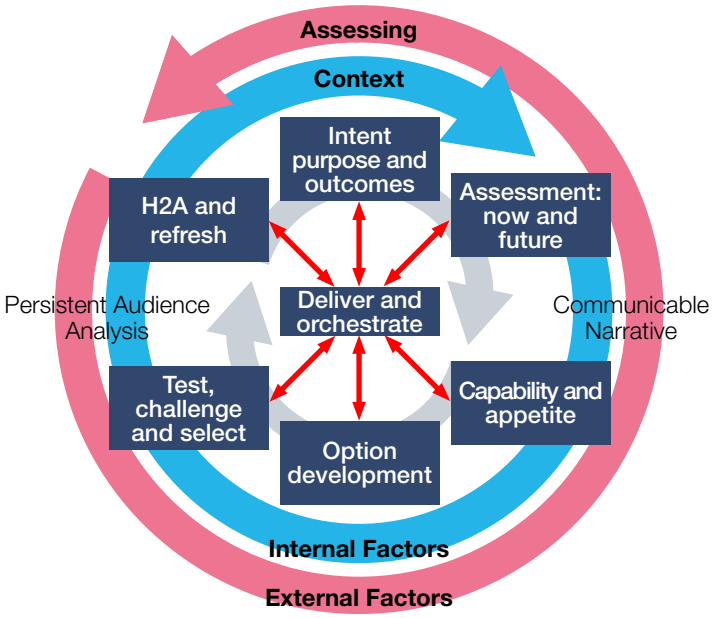


Figure 4.1 – A strategy framework

Element 1- Assessing the context.

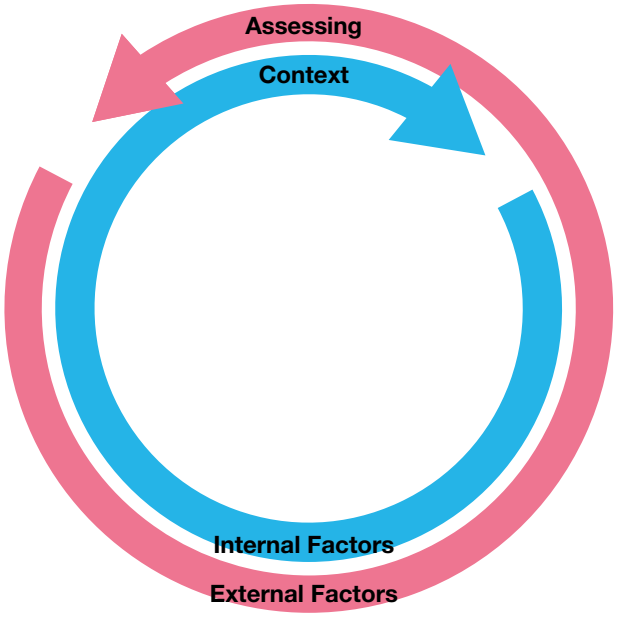


Figure 4.2 – Assessing the context

4.9 **Element 1- Assessing the context.** This is the tyre of our metaphorical 'strategy wheel'. Contextual understanding is achieved through analysis of internal and external factors that may be significant to the choices we will have to make. Our goal here is to understand the environment or context within which we find ourselves. There are various analytical frameworks that we might use to guide us. PESTLE (Political, Economic, Sociological, Technological, Legal and Environmental) analysis is a standard approach but needs to be complemented with, at a minimum, a stakeholder analysis of some kind. More possibilities are at Annex B. Some of the questions we may wish to ask in this element are:

a. What are the key international and domestic factors – what are the relationships we seek to preserve, disrupt, or develop if we are to succeed?

b. What do we understand about the situation we are attempting to affect? What are the associated gaps in our understanding and how might we improve this? Do we understand the perspectives of others operating in this strategic space and how our emerging strategy might compete with or complement theirs?

c. Which actors hold what leverage over us – treaties, policies and other commitments; and how might these constrain our thinking?

d. Do we, our potential competitor(s) and other actors have strategic centres of gravity that are critical to our understanding? What does our multi-actor centre of gravity analysis tell us?

e. What are the broad policy, resource, legal and ethical constraints on our strategy design?

f. What are the national values, interests and needs at stake – how do we know their relative value?

4.10 Our framework is laid out to show that the various elements can compete with each other. Therefore, analysis of these factors should be conducted with the competitive relationship in mind, and these factors should be constantly reviewed throughout the strategic framework process.

Notes:

Element 2 – Determining outcomes.

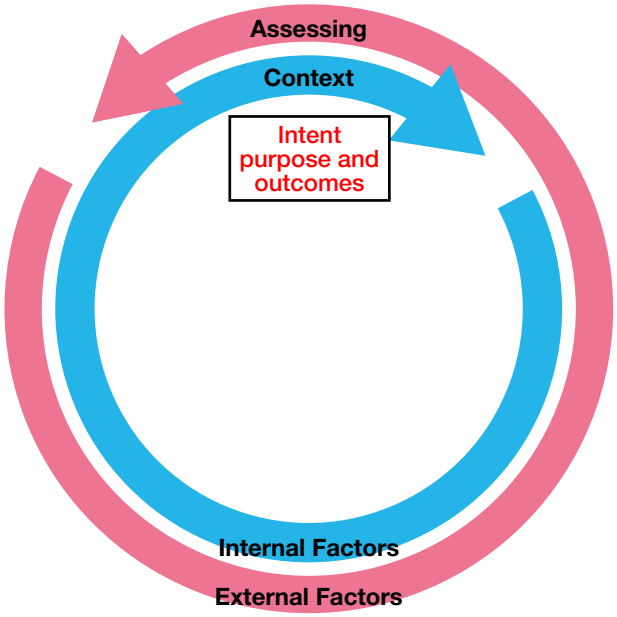


Figure 4.3 – Determining the outcomes

4.11 **Element 2 – Determining outcomes.** The purpose of our first strategy spoke is to explore our desired outcomes, purpose and overall approach – what is our 'theory of success'? Policy and political objectives are likely to be the key element framing this element. Using our analysis from Element 1, we should be able to clarify the outcomes we seek to deliver and how these might be characterised through defining a 'vision of success' in relation to the internal and external factors. In so doing, we might wish to consider:

a. Is this vision clear and appropriately linked to the policy objectives? If not, what additional guidance is required from ministers?

b. If further guidance is not forthcoming, what assumptions need to be made (and subsequently tested) to guide the remaining aspects of strategy design and implementation?

c. How might we test the relative importance and prioritise the desired outcomes?

d. How can we create multiple dilemmas that destabilise our opponent's understanding, decision-making and action cycles?

e. How can we be more dynamic and pre-emptive in our strategy design and its application?

f. How do we respond to events while developing our strategy?

g. What initiative do we have and how can we use this to be proactive and pre-emptive?

h. How can we drive these outcomes from the outset and maintain tempo?

i. Can we determine what activities/actions must be achieved and what activities and actions must be avoided?

4.12 From this element, we should have a clear picture of what success might look like, its linkages to policy goals and an outline explanation of the strategy's purpose – in simple terms, this element provides a broad intent or purpose and desired outcome(s).

Notes:

Element 3 – Current and future

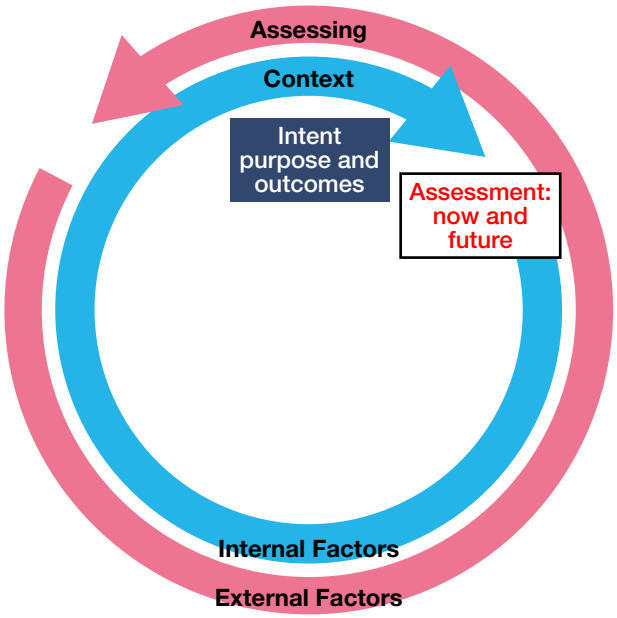


Figure 4.4 – Assessment: Now and future

4.13 **Element 3 – Current and future assessment.** The purpose of this element, our second spoke, is to test the emerging strategy against the current and likely strategic environment. Within this element, we should seek to assess the relevance of our desired outcomes against wider time and place dynamics that may be relevant to a developing strategy irrespective of it being *au milieu* or *positional* in design. It also serves as a useful point to review our policy ambition. In assessing this element, we may wish to consider:

a. Is there alignment between policy and emerging strategic thought?

b. Does this assessment serve to reinforce or undermine our national values, interests and priorities?

c. How is the emerging thinking connected across government – who is the 'lead or owner' of the strategy?

d. How will the emerging strategy (and the policy objectives) align with or influence political will and popular support? What factors might change this assessment?

e. What might the unintended consequences of our emerging strategy be – are these desirable?

f. What are the factors (internal and external) affecting the desired outcomes, visions and theory of success, and how?

4.14 There are several ways that this could be achieved but options might include 'Red Teaming' (the detail of which is contained in Annex B). At this stage, we should reflect on what we have learnt in elements 1 and 2 and test these for relevance against our vision of success/strategic outcome(s).

Notes:

Element 4 – Capability and appetite.

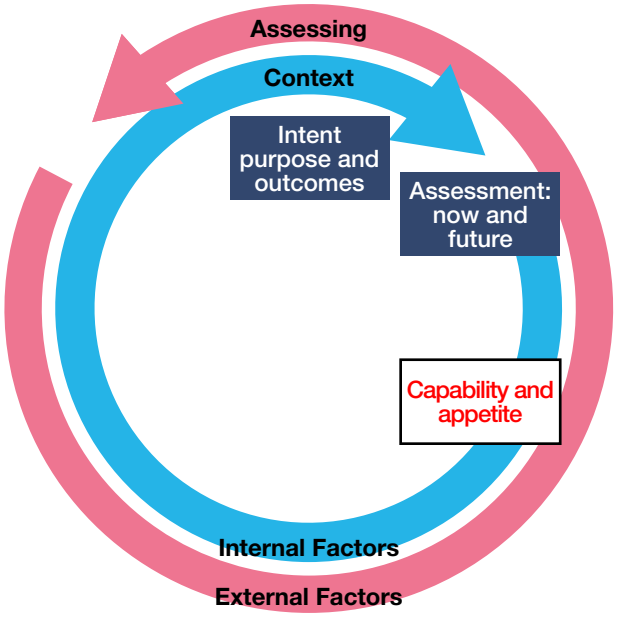


Figure 4.5 – Capability and appetite

4.15 **Element 4 – Capability and appetite.** In this element, our third spoke, we explore the capabilities available to us and seek to understand the opportunities for and constraints on their use. This element combines both the science and the art of strategy making and should be used to inform the most appropriate balance required to achieve the vision/outcomes desired. The product of this element should be an understanding of how we intend to mobilise the strategy.

To help guide us in this element, it is worth exploring the following questions:

a. What are the 'ways' we could use our available resource (means)? Are the legal and ethical aspects appropriate to how we might employ such resources?

b. What are the capability dynamics at play in the strategic environment and are they appropriate to the issue at hand?

c. What are the capability strengths and weaknesses of the actors we are seeking to influence? What are our allies and partners bringing to the table? Where can me make the most difference from a national perspective? (In addressing this question is it worth considering a net assessment of own and others' capabilities?)

d. What fault lines or seams can we exploit and what must we protect?

e. What are the associated risks and opportunities – is there sufficient political will and/or popular support to pursue such avenues?

f. What can we do on our own and where or how do we need assistance from others? What might the trade-offs be?

Notes:

Element 5 – Option development.

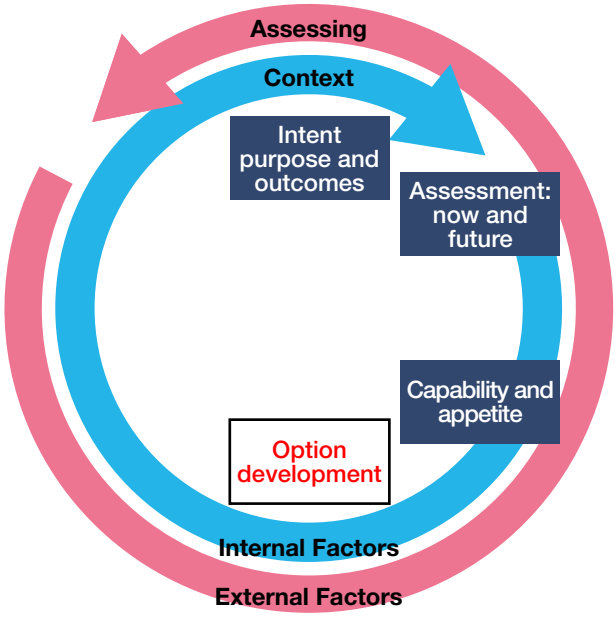


Figure 4.6 – Option development

4.16 **Element 5 – Option development.** In this element, our fourth spoke, we aim to explore the options available to us. It sees the blending of 'ways and means' to meet the policy vision. Each option needs to be tested in order that the most appropriate options can be developed further and to inform decision-making on strategy selection. Our toolkit at Annex B has several models or tools that you might consider using to guide you through this element. In this element, we may wish to use the following questions to inform our understanding and option development:

a. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each option under consideration?

b. What is the 'big idea' for each option and how does it achieve our vision or outcome?

c. How communicable is the narrative associated with each option – are we likely to maintain the necessary political will and popular support to see it through?

d. What do the five tests of strategy tell us for each option – is each option acceptable, suitable, feasible, sustainable and adaptable?

e. What are the measures of effectiveness or success for each option? Do we understand how we will measure progress?

f. Can we ‘wargame’ each option to understand the associated risks and use this to refine options?

Notes:

Element 6 – Test, challenge and select.

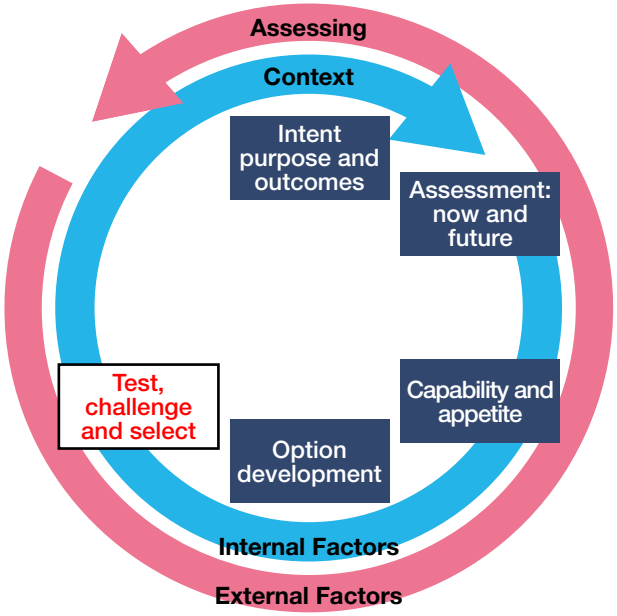


Figure 4.7 – Test, challenge and select

4.17 **Element 6 – Test, challenge and select.** The purpose of this element, our fifth spoke, is to select the most appropriate strategy. This requires a blend of art and science and is rooted in the analysis undertaken thus far – we can explore the relative merits of each strategy through a number of quantitative or qualitative tools. In this element, we seek to assess the relative merits (and weaknesses) between the competing options. There are various tools that can be used to help with this process. Some of the options are included in Annex B. To help guide this element, you may wish to address the following questions:

a. How do we recommend an option? How do we use decision-making tools and evidence to assess relative merits?

b. Is our analysis free of bias – can we assure this? Are we being honest to our Ministers and with ourselves in our recommendation?

c. Who ‘owns’ the selected strategy? Does the owner understand their responsibilities?

d. How might the five tests be used to inform a strategy selection – is one test or factor more important?

e. Similarly, how might we use the six characteristics of effective strategy (see paragraphs 3.8 to 3.14) to help select and how might these be weighted?

f. Which option is the most appropriate towards meeting the strategic objective? How do you recommend the chosen option and how do you demonstrate accuracy of the recommendation?

4.18 **Some observations.** Although the strategic process outlined above can be viewed as a process comprised of sequential steps, the reality is more likely to be a series of iterative loops as understanding of the issues grows and each element needs to be reconsidered. The framework provided serves little more than to create a structure within which discussions and assessment can take place. The product of a strategic assessment is a strategy itself. There is no definitive structure but we recommend the headings contained in Figure 4.8 as a useful framework for the purpose of RCDS exercises, case studies and comparative strategic assessments.[32]

Notes:

32. We have not included an exemplar strategy here – to do so would add little value for several reasons, including the difficulty in providing sufficient context/detail to make such an exemplar worthwhile. The series of headings in Figure 4.8 are recommended but can be refined and re-ordered to meet the challenge in question.

	Description / Content
Vision	A simple statement that sets out exactly what the strategy is trying to achieve (which is both definable and achievable).
Values	A summary of the enduring national values that are significant in the context of the strategy.
Interests	Identification of the specific security, stability and prosperity (or other) interests that should be advanced or protected by the strategy.
Strategic Objectives	Realistic 'ends' which, if achieved, would collectively realise the vision.
Theory of Success	Explanation of how the 'ways' and 'means' will be orchestrated to exploit opportunities, mitigate threats, and achieve the strategic objectives ('ends').
Opportunities and Threats	Opportunities to be exploited and threats to be dealt with in the strategic environment (could be states' approaches, people, relationships, situations etc).
Ways	Outline 'how' the strategy will be orchestrated – the alignment and integration of concepts from across the DIME.
Means	Outline the broad capabilities ('means') and approaches, from each of the DIME components, that will be employed in the delivery of the strategy.
Risks	Areas of risk that remain and how they will be managed, noting that these can be 'positive' risks as well as 'negative' ones.
Performance Metrics	SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) leading indicators that trigger the adaptation of the strategy before it fails.
Governance	Clear lines of responsibility for implementing the strategy and monitoring its performance.
Strategic Narrative	A compelling story that explains what needs to be done, why and how you are going to do it. It should include your 'big idea' (or 'theory of success') and should give people a reason to care and a reason to act.

Figure 4.8 – A possible strategy structure

Conclusion

4.19 This chapter considered the practical business of making strategy. It suggested an iterative eight element approach – referred to as the 'strategy framework' – as one way of balancing and integrating ends, ways and means into an effective strategy. The chapter covered in detail the first six elements of the framework that were focused on strategy making.

Notes:

Chapter 5 – Application of Strategy

This chapter considers how to translate strategy into integrated activity to achieve policy and strategy objectives and outcomes.

Element 7 – Deliver and orchestrate.

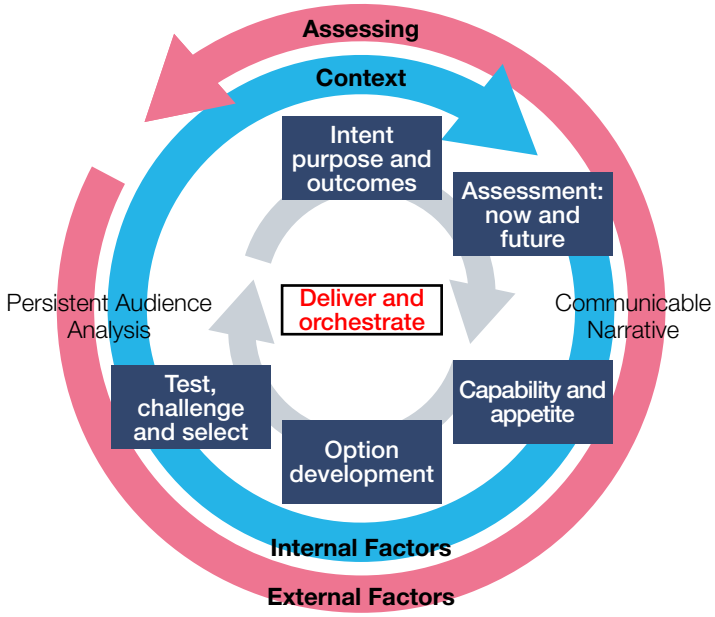


Figure 5.1 – Delivering and orchestrating strategy

Introduction

5.1 In the last chapter, we outlined the initial six steps in our strategic assessment framework. In this chapter, we address the final two elements of the framework, which are focused on strategy application. We also address an approach that we term 'strategic orchestration'.

Delivering strategies

5.2 **Element 7 – Deliver and orchestrate.** Implementation of the selected strategy will require close orchestration of activities spread across all instruments of national power. Most important will be how the strategy is communicated to multiple audiences. Over-complexity may 'kill' the most elegant of strategies. Alongside communication is the need for continuous assessment of the strategy's impact on the audiences affected. Above all, the strategy's logic and appeal must be compelling and therefore understood and we will need to understand its impact and use this to guide delivery. Building on what we discussed in Chapter 2, especially about StratCom, we must not lose sight

"However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results."[33]

Anonymous

of the enduring purpose of strategy and that is to influence the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of others. Persistent audience analysis and a communicable narrative are critical aspects to achieving these. Without these two elements, we have neither the way to understand the actions of others nor a navigable pathway to the future. Throughout the process of delivery, it is important that we continue to review progress against the deductions made throughout our framework – constantly looking back at the factors, our desired outcomes, the assessments of context, capability and appetite, option development and testing to ensure the strategy is optimised towards the intended vision of success. In shaping delivery and implementation, you may wish to consider the following:

a. What immediate effect do we seek to achieve? Do we need to conduct preliminary or 'shaping' activities to help the strategy achieve its immediate effect?

b. What mechanisms are required to direct and cohere the activities and inputs from all instruments of power? Who owns them and how is the process managed?

c. How do we maintain understanding of what is seen/experienced by those affected by the strategy? How reliable is this picture?

d. What information management and information exchange mechanisms are required to be able to understand the changing context? How is this used to guide reviews of the strategy?

e. How do we measure effect and progress and how reliable are these measures?

f. How do we ensure maintenance of the strategic approach, or adjust our desired outcomes if public or political support starts to wane?

Notes:

33. This quote is often attributed to Winston Churchill, although there is no evidence he said or wrote it.

Element 8 – Holding to account and strategy refresh.

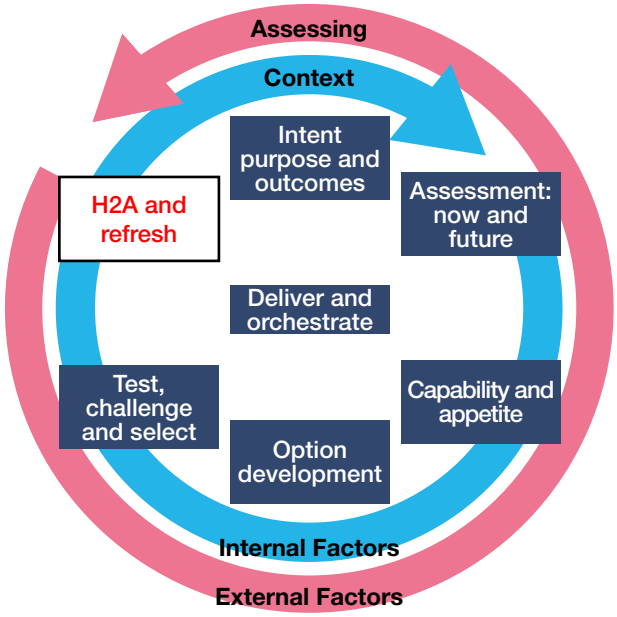


Figure 5.2 – Holding to account and refreshing the strategy

5.3 **Element 8 – Holding to account and strategy refresh.** The final element in this framework is the mechanism to review, hold to account and, where necessary, refresh the strategy. Although regular reviews should be undertaken through the lifecycle of a strategy, there is also a place for a deliberate and focused element. Thus, this element should explore delivery/implementation, leadership and ownership, measures of progress to make an informed assessment of progress and effect.

Such a wide-ranging review and holding to account (H2A) will need to incorporate perspectives from across all instruments of power to ensure appropriate orchestration and effectiveness. In guiding this element of the framework, you may wish to consider the following questions:

a. What processes are required to ensure pan-agency input? How do we ensure that the review addresses the role of all instruments of power?

b. How is the strategy being led and owned – are the structure and authorities right?

c. Has there been sufficient and effective challenge – how have we avoided 'group think'?

d. What is the frequency of a formal review and what events or outcomes should trigger a formal review?

e. How do we ensure honest and auditable conversations with ministers and senior officials over delivery and outcomes?

f. Is the vision of success or desired outcome still valid and appropriate? What might be needed to reflect a change in ambition or in capability?

g. How is the strategy landing with the multiple audiences – are any adjustments to the narrative required?

h. Is political will and popular support intact – is there sufficient backing for the current strategy to allow freedom of action?

i. Does the strategy still pass the five tests: acceptability, suitability, feasibility, sustainability and adaptability?

j. If needed, how do we adapt? Do we need to undertake the complete framework again or can we use specific elements to guide adaptation?

k. How do we communicate failure or imminence of failure?

Notes:

5.4 **Maintaining perspective.** As one goes through the strategic assessment, the strategist should maintain an open and enquiring mind. There is no single technique for ensuring this, and the pressures of a crisis will make it increasingly difficult to stand back and take a fresh look, but there are a number of questions which might help:

a. 360 degree vision. How do the other actors (both external and internal) see this issue; how will they react?

b. Mirror-imaging and bias. Are we making assumptions about others based on our own ways of thinking or behaviour? What other bias do we demonstrate – are we overly optimistic in our ambition, objectives or capabilities?

c. 80:20 balance. Do we understand the necessity of planning on the basis of incomplete information? What are the 'known unknowns' and are we doing everything we can to find out more about them? How do we make an 80% solution effective?

d. Centres of gravity. What matters most to the key actors (including us and our allies) and how are they linked? How can we hold this at risk (to our opponents)?

e. Soft or hard power. Have we explored every opportunity to exploit soft power opportunities and assets? Can we harness an amalgamation of hard and soft power in the smartest way possible?

f. Actual vs. potential power. Is your overall influence greater by not acting and retaining the ability to intervene in a range of different situations rather than intervening and becoming 'fixed'?

g. Unintended consequences. What unintended consequences may arise, directly or indirectly, from taking, or not taking, decisive action?

h. Friction. Bearing in mind the complexity of alliance building and coordinating operations, as well as the adversary's scope for action, are the timescales realistic?

i. Short and long term. In addressing a new 'problem at hand', are we in danger of losing sight of the desired, longer-term strategic objectives?

j. Building bridges to the future. How do we ensure that all parties, including adversaries, emerge with self-respect and positive prospects?

k. Crisis Management and Strategic Orchestration. Strategic orchestration requires the integration of capabilities (means) and concepts (ways) of all instruments of power in time and space to achieve the desired outcome (end). But this is not a simple process as the effects of time and space, at the strategic level, are seldomly as clearly defined, or bounded, as they might be at either the tactical or operational levels. A national strategy should address values and interests in national, regional and global contexts, laying out strategic priorities and objectives. A specific event or crisis may require a positional strategy to define specific objectives and guide action, ideally in alignment with that national strategy.

l. End state Accounting for all above, is the policy goal realistic or do we need to consider reviewing it?

5.5 Once the draft strategy has been developed, it should be compared against the characteristics of effective strategy and the five tests described in Chapter 3. It should then be kept under constant review.

5.6 As already explained, the RCDS strategic framework provides nothing more than a 'handrail'. It should help structure an approach to developing a strategy to achieve policy goals under a given set of circumstances. But it is not a panacea. Its effectiveness depends, from the outset, on whether sufficient time and effort is allocated to developing a thorough understanding of the situation. When time is tight, there can be a temptation to hurry through the stages to develop a plan, perhaps to present to ministers or senior officials. This is a mistake; as will be apparent from the previous sections, one of the overarching lessons to emerge from the UK's formal inquiries into interventions in Iraq and Libya is the need to apply critical thinking, knowledge and challenge to the evidence available, rather than accepting received wisdom or cherry-picking from the available evidence to reach outcomes desired by political masters. Put simply, strategists must make the time to understand the situation to the best of their ability, calling in experts to contribute and challenge as appropriate. As circumstances change, strategists should ask themselves 'so what?' and have the courage to recognise when their strategy is no longer fit for purpose and use the strategic assessment framework as a guide to refine their approach.

Strategic orchestration

5.7 **What do we mean?** Strategic orchestration is more than a process of integrating stove-piped departmental activities in pursuance of a strategic outcome. For strategy to be better designed and better applied requires a fused, whole of government approach under a single lead with each department fulfilling its obligations to time and performance criteria. The metaphor of an orchestra works well. For the leader, read conductor. For the departments, read the sections of an orchestra: percussion, strings, woodwind etc and for time and performance criteria, read the music sheet – or playbook. While the music sheet is a script, the conductor changes the focus, pitch, pace and effort of the orchestra according to many circumstances, not least the acoustic performance. The sections themselves 'know the score' and can pre-empt elements but not all of the conductor's actions and directions. And the 'score' itself is selected to meet the needs of the audience. So, what does this mean for strategists and strategic leaders?

5.8 **What does it involve?** Strategic orchestration requires a broad approach that can be aided by considering the following:

a. Knowing and understanding the audience is essential – their values, interests, and priorities are key but so is an understanding of their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours – pick the wrong strategy and you'll fail to deliver the needed influence and, with it, the desired strategic outcome.

b. Ensuring all stakeholders have a voice in determining the strategic outcomes and how they are achieved.

c. Ensuring a proactive and pre-emptive approach to strategy design and application that encourages a multi-disciplinary approach.

d. Ensuring that our approach to strategy application gets onto and maintains a 'campaign footing' where the strategic environment is constantly observed, the strategic machinery consistently (re-)oriented to the context, where the decision to act is made in a coherent way and the activities are applied in a coordinated manner.

e. Seeing the strategic level as a continuum in which the end of one crisis or event is the beginning of the next. By understanding the strategic level as an enduring cycle of observe, respond, recover we can hope to be better at identifying key indicators and warnings of the potential crisis earlier and then adapting our approach rather than reacting and responding.

5.9 **Measuring success.** It is self-evident that failing strategies should either be adapted or replaced. The difficulty is detecting when this is starting to happen. Milestones have some utility in helping to measure progress and ultimately success. Still, they have the disadvantage that failure is only apparent when the milestone has not been achieved – in that sense, they are 'lagging' indicators. Sufficient thought, therefore, needs to be given to designing 'leading indicators' of success that provide an early indication of whether things are going according to plan. Once appropriate measures have been developed and endorsed, their periodic review needs to be formalised. Ensuring the right level of oversight and governance including regular stock takes are key elements in ensuring progress is monitored and strategy refined. Done routinely, these should alert the strategy owner, as well as other key stakeholders, to the possible need to adapt or replace a strategy when it becomes apparent that it is unlikely to achieve its policy objectives. Attention also needs to be paid to the 'feel' of key players on the ground who might detect a change of atmosphere before it is picked up by more formal measures.

Strategic choice

5.10 In determining the most effective response to a given situation, there will be a range of strategic choices available. In a war of national survival, these may be extremely limited and non-discretionary. In other less demanding circumstances, there may be a broader range of possible responses. Which are the most appropriate may depend on the perceived urgency and importance of the situation, as well as on the resources available in the required timeframe. In some circumstances, the most appropriate course of action might be to do nothing on the grounds that the benefits of getting involved are unlikely to exceed the costs.

Conclusion

5.11 This chapter focused on strategy application and orchestration. It provided an overview of the remaining three elements in our strategic framework and outlined an approach to orchestrating strategy to achieve the desired outcomes.

Annexes

Defence Academy
of the United Kingdom

Annex A – Tenets of strategic leadership

This annex considers the qualities, capabilities and behaviours that experience suggests characterise the most effective strategic leaders. It examines the responsibility that a strategic leader has to act both morally and legally, using the Chilcot Report to illustrate how nuanced the legality and morality of a course of action can be at the grand strategic level. It then examines the traditions of Jus ad Bellum and Jus in Bello, of which the strategic leader needs to be aware.

A.1 **Introduction.** Exceptional demands are made of strategic leaders, particularly at the grand strategic level. To be successful, they need extraordinary breadth and depth of character, intellect and industry. Not only must they possess the right personal qualities and capabilities but they must also behave in a manner that commands a natural authority and inspires widespread confidence. They require patience, insight, wisdom and versatility; ultimately, they must also be able to think and act decisively, particularly in times of national crisis or existential challenge. Notwithstanding the above, true strategic leadership is more art than science. It is also context-dependent. Churchill proved to be an excellent wartime leader, but, arguably, Atlee was the right man to rebuild Britain once the fighting was over. The point is that an individual who emerges as an effective strategic leader in one set of circumstances might fail even to get noticed in another. Because of this, it is very difficult, despite the number of books on the subject, to identify the exact mix of ingredients which, when combined, produce a successful strategic leader. However, there are some qualities, capabilities and behaviours which experience suggests characterise the most effective strategic leaders.

A.2 Although only a few of those attending RCDS programmes will go on to lead their nations, departments and services, it is probable that most members will, later in their careers, be involved in formulating strategy at the highest levels. Leadership at this level – whether of a country, service or large multinational company – is undoubtedly strategic and it is, therefore, appropriate to consider examples from the political realm and the higher echelons of both the armed services and the commercial world to illustrate the points this section is trying to make.

A.3 **Qualities.** A quality in this context can be defined as: "a distinctive attribute or characteristic possessed by someone or something".[34] The following list of qualities has been assembled from the thoughts and writings of the many distinguished speakers who have addressed RCDS over the years:

- **Sincerity, humility and truthfulness** the integrity that flows from true self-knowledge and self-awareness. This includes the capacity for self-criticism and knowing one's strengths and weaknesses, and how to play to the former and compensate for the latter (especially by selecting people to join the team who can compensate for the leader's weaker areas). Another key part of this is authenticity; that you are who you are seen to be and that you live the values you are promoting.

34. 'Oxford Dictionary of English', Second Edition, Oxford University Press, 2003, 1438.

"…it is the responsibility of a statesman to resolve dilemmas, not to contemplate them."[35]
Henry Kissinger

• **Flexibility** the ability to give and take. When irreconcilable positions are deeply entrenched, the only way forward is to compromise. To be able to make choices and decisions which are almost always the 'least bad', not the 'best'. A good example of flexibility in terms of strongly held views is provided by John Maynard Keynes. He, in response to criticism during the Great Depression that he had changed his position on monetary policy, replied: "When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?"[36]

• **Moral courage and boldness,** including a willingness to face down natural supporters and public opinion to deal with the most difficult personal ethical challenges. As discussed in previous sections, the courage to speak truth to power is fundamentally important. Both the Chilcot Report and Hooker and Collins's analysis of lessons from the US's campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan comment on the number of occasions where senior commanders and officials were found wanting in this respect. The reluctance to speak truth to power is not a new phenomenon. Moral courage is also important in recognising when the team is no longer working effectively and certain individuals need to be removed. Prevaricating at the strategic level can have significant consequences as individuals who are struggling are more likely to fail when the pressure is greatest.

• **Great stamina and resilience in the face of setback,** self-confidence and an ability to inspire confidence in others, whatever the adversity. There is probably no better British example of determination in the face of a crisis than that shown by Winston Churchill in 1940.

• **Human and intellectual breadth** of a high order, beyond normal or corporate mind-sets. Emotional as well as traditional intelligence, which provides an exceptional understanding of what Thucydides termed the *anthropinon* (the human condition), guided as he suggested by *phobos* (fear), *kerdos* (self-interest) and *doxas* (honour).

• **Inspirational enthusiasm** for people, international affairs and strategy. A genuine interest in people characterised by inclusiveness, openness and respect for others' views and backgrounds. An ability to define and promulgate a values-based and inspirational vision of the desired end state.

• **A natural instinct for networking,** bonding people of potentially very different political and social persuasions to build communities of common interest and shared vision.

• **A blend of inspiration and common-sense,** much of strategic leadership is common-sense but the highest form is inspired. As Kissinger noted, "the statesman's duty is to bridge the gap between his nation's experience and vision".[37]

35. Henry Kissinger, 'Years of Upheaval', Simon & Schuster, 2011, 178.
36. Paul Samuelson, 'The Keynes Century', *The Economist*, 287, 25 June 1983, 19.
37. Henry Kissinger, 'Years of Upheaval', Simon & Schuster, 2011, 41.

A.4 **Capabilities.** As was discussed in the characteristics of a good strategy in in Chapter 3, the strategic leader requires a profound understanding that it is their personal responsibility to set the strategy, direct it and adjust it when necessary. Having given broad direction and confirmed the policy goal, the strategic leader may task a trusted team to develop the strategy but before it is agreed and implemented, they must take personal ownership of the finished product – this cannot be delegated. Likewise, once it has been agreed, the strategic leader remains personally responsible for its implementation – again, this cannot be delegated. And they should have insisted on the maximum possible clarity on actual and potential resource commitments and possible implications. However, strategic leaders often lack the time and means to maintain a constant over-view of how the implementation of a particular strategy is faring. Formal stock-takes, chaired by the strategic leader, therefore provide a useful way of addressing this, particularly when they are able to review progress against a set of well-crafted performance metrics (see Chapter 5).

A.5 Experience suggests that a sense of the pattern of history will help the strategic leader in developing and implementing a successful strategy, although some leaders can go astray because of their tendency to 'read' a new situation incorrectly as fitting the conceptual frame of a previous crisis; Eden arguably saw the threat from Nasser's Egypt through the lenses of the Second World War rather than in the context of emerging Arab nationalism. In this context, it is interesting to note the comment made by Isaiah Berlin, the celebrated philosopher, that Churchill's greatness was in part due to a: "historical imagination so strong, so comprehensive, as to encase the whole of the present and the whole of the future in a framework of a rich and multi-coloured past".[38]

A.6 An understanding of what has gone before, combined with personal experience, can help develop 'strategic intuition'. While some might argue that this is an innate ability, others would argue that it is often the product of long experience and prior reflection, combined with an ability to act adroitly when required. It should also be borne in mind that although history rarely repeats itself, the course of world events is determined by the behaviour of people.

A.7 In addition to taking personal responsibility for developing and implementing a particular strategy and understanding how similar strategies have fared in similar

38. Isaiah Berlin, 'Mr Churchill', *The Atlantic*, September 1949.

circumstances in the past, the strategic leader requires certain capabilities to be truly effective (where capability is defined as "the power or ability to do something"[39]). These capabilities are in addition to the personal qualities described above and include:

• **The confidence to operate in a province of uncertainty:** an ability to comprehend and handle extreme complexity, to overcome self-doubt and the hesitation of colleagues and subordinates, and to operate successfully in an environment of potential disorder, disunity, uncertainty and ambiguity. An acceptance that knowledge is *always* imperfect and that the strategy will need to adapt to accommodate these is vital for successful strategic leadership, as is an acceptance of risk. An inevitable consequence of operating in an uncertain environment is that mistakes will be made. An effective strategic leader recognises this, learning from their mistakes and imbuing their organisation with a learning culture.

• **Making and sustaining sufficient space to consider and act strategically:** the freedom to think is essential for both the strategic leader and the supporting team. This requirement includes resistance to the widespread phenomenon of 'groupthink', that is, the silent subordination of individual insight to a single narrative or course which may well be wrong. Despite the pressures of day-to-day decision making, a leader needs to use time wisely to create and devote sufficient time to strategy in both its formulation and execution. While the pursuit of the last detail is invariably unproductive in terms of time and effort, the strategist must be able to gather and master the critical detail.

• **The ability to operate under intense media pressure:** the spotlights of 24/7 news and public opinion polls are relentless and unforgiving. The strategic leader should choose his media appearances carefully (in most situations, a well-informed and authoritative spokesman is preferable in order not to 'dilute' the impact of the leader speaking when a particularly important point needs to be reinforced). They should not succumb to 'sound bite communication' and reflex politics, sacrificing long-term strategic goals for short-term popular gain.

• **Acknowledging human limitations, including their own:** the leader is not indispensable, let alone immortal. Arrogance (in its extreme form, hubris) has led to some of the greatest strategic

39. 'Oxford Dictionary of English', Second Edition, Oxford University Press, 2003, 255.

failures of the past and present. It is also important that the strategic leader is aware of our inherently human failings in terms of the way we think about problems and take decisions. Our cognitive biases, such as being more prepared to act to avoid a loss than to achieve a gain and our natural inclination to see new problems as being similar to previous ones, need to be understood.[40] Furthermore, succession planning is often neglected. A leader must, at the right point, stand down and hand over his responsibilities, a decision that many – even great – leaders get wrong: Churchill, for one, long prevaricated over when to resign during his second premiership.

• **Respect:** a wise strategic leader has a natural respect for his colleagues and subordinates and a desire to consult, develop and mentor them. Reflecting on Churchill's leadership style, President Dwight Eisenhower noted that: "leadership by persuasion and the whole-hearted acceptance of a contrary decision are both the fundamentals of democracy".[41] Some would go further, arguing that being respected is not enough and that there needs to be a degree of affection between the leader and their team otherwise, when the going gets tough, which it occasionally will, people will be reluctant to 'go the extra mile' for their leader. Moreover, they will be unlikely to provide constructive challenge if they do not feel secure.

• **Recognising the benefits of collaborative working and collective decision making:** Cabinets and teams have a greater collective capability and depth than their leader acting in isolation. They provide an opportunity for constructive challenge by informed and highly experienced people. As the Chilcot Report noted:

> ***'In addition to providing a mechanism to probe and challenge the implications of proposals before decisions were taken, a Cabinet Committee or a more structured process might have identified some of the wider implications and risks associated with the deployment of military forces to Iraq. It might also have offered the opportunity to remedy some of the deficiencies in planning...'***[42]

It is important to reiterate that the sorts of 'wicked' or 'adaptive' problems that strategies are usually designed to address defy easy resolution. They require innovative solutions which are best developed by a 'brains trust' of people working collaboratively. However, unless people feel comfortable in their environment – both physically and emotionally – they are unlikely to give their best. The multi-coloured creative

40. Daniel Kahneman's seminal book 'Thinking, Fast and Slow' (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011) provides an excellent introduction to understanding how humans think about problems.
41. Dwight D Eisenhower, 'What is Leadership?', *Reader's Digest*, June 1965, 49-54.
42. UK Cabinet Office, 'The Report of the Iraq Inquiry: Executive Summary', HMSO, 2016, 59.

workspaces favoured by some high-tech companies might seem excessive but the leader should at least ensure that conditions encourage free-flowing discussion and lateral thought.

A.8 **Behaviours.** In addition to *qualities* and *capabilities,* experience again suggests that the strategic leader's effectiveness can be enhanced by *behaving* in a particular way, where *behaviour* is defined as: "the way in which one acts or conducts oneself, especially towards others".[43] These behaviours, which are important for the health of the nation or organisation, include:

• A desire to push work across boundaries (and out of 'stove-pipes'). This also requires an instinct for intelligent cooperation, not confrontation; in politics and in strategy-making, an internationalist inclination.

• A habit of building, leading and listening to teams, drawn from all the instruments: teams which constitute a trusted network, educated appropriately at the strategic level through mentoring as well as more formally, consciously cooperating across traditional structural boundaries and stove-pipes and untrammelled by party lines. The point about mentoring and education is particularly important and was highlighted by Porter in 2010, who suggested that one reason Britain "doesn't do grand strategy" was that "Britons hardly study it".[44]

• A personal ability to work and act collegiately with allies when necessary. But conversely, to be alert to, and be ready to confront, 'groupthink.'

A.9 *The qualities, capabilities and behaviours* identified in this section are drawn from the wisdom and advice of the many distinguished statesmen, strategic leaders, academics and other 'experts' who have addressed RCDS over the years. They are not exhaustive and they are no guarantee of success: a potential leader could possess all of them and still fail to be effective; conversely, someone possessing very few of them could, in the right circumstances, prove to be a highly effective strategic leader or statesman. Context is critical: when faced with an existential threat, people require less persuasion to accept a course of action and an autocratic style of leadership might be effective; when the threat is less immediate or tangible, such as with Climate Change, powers of persuasion and personal charisma might well be at a premium.

43. 'Oxford Dictionary of English', Second Edition, Oxford University Press, 2003, 148.
44. Patrick Porter, 'Why Britain Doesn't Do Grand Strategy', *The RUSI Journal* 155, no. 4, 2010, 7.

A.10 **Other perspectives.** As previously stated, numerous books have been written on the essence of strategic leadership. While there is little point in trying to summarise where they differ from the RCDS view, it is helpful to consider what some leaders personally believe the requirements of a strategic leader to be.

A.11 **Law and ethics.** A statesman must be prepared to take personal responsibility for the most difficult decisions, some of which may challenge morals and even universal ethics and may well have to be made based on incomplete data. While some strategists might argue that there is a 'morality of results,' in the sense that strategic success creates its own virtue, the RCDS view is that the ends rarely justify the means and that the means, therefore, need to be both *legal and moral.* Unfortunately, determining whether a particular course of action meets both criteria is not as straightforward as it sounds. It is worth considering the UK's intervention in Iraq in 2003 to illustrate the point. The legality of the UK's intervention hinged on the interpretation of whether Iraq was in "material breach" of a particular clause (or "operating paragraph"/"OP") of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1441. Whether it appeared to have been uncertain. Prior to the intervention, the Chief of Defence Staff and the Treasury Solicitor asked the Attorney General (the UK Government's chief legal advisor) to give a final: "...clear-cut answer on whether military action would be lawful rather than unlawful".[45] There are at least three key points for the strategic leader in this extract from the Chilcot Report:

• First, that 'the buck stops' with the strategic leader. Although the Attorney General was, and remains, the UK's chief legal advisor, in the final analysis, he asked the Prime Minister to confirm whether grounds for the legal use of armed force existed.

• Second, when the legality of an issue is highly nuanced, the strategic leader is very strongly recommended to seek expert advice, not just from lawyers but from whoever can provide the level of understanding that an issue requires.

• Third, the strategic leader should ensure that they have the support of their organisation's highest-level decision-making board (Cabinet in the case of the UK Government) before deciding on a course of action. Occasionally, the strategic leader might decide to go against the considered view of the board. Still, a suitably high-level discussion would at least ensure that all the options were considered and subjected to constructive challenge, or what Hooker and Collins call "respectful dissent".[46]

45. UK Cabinet Office, 'The Report of the Iraq Inquiry: Executive Summary', HMSO, 2016, 66.
46. Richard D Hooker and Joseph J Collins, 'Lessons Encountered - Learning from the Long War', National Defence University Press, 2015, 8.

A.12 Even when the legal risks associated with a course of action are assessed as being within reasonable limits, the strategic leader needs to ensure that it is likely to be perceived as moral and legitimate in a wider human and political context. Moreover, there is a personal dimension to morality. As Charles Guthrie and Michael Quinlan note, "moral accountability is a central part of what it means to be a human being".[47] The strategic leader's own moral code will inevitably be tested whilst in office. They should prepare for this, not only to try and keep their strategy within acceptable moral limits but also to give themselves the best chance of living on with minimal personal regrets. To quote from Shakespeare's Henry V: "every subject's duty is the King's but every subject's soul is his own".[48] Whatever their calling, the strategic leader must know their own soul and be prepared to live with the consequences of their actions.

A.13 **The Just War Tradition.** In addition to international law, the statutes of the land and a leader's own moral code, the strategic leader should be familiar with the normative frameworks that have evolved to help inform decisions about the use of force, both whether it should be used in the first place and, when that decision has been taken, how it should be applied. While there is a lot more to the subject of military ethics than the Just War Tradition, the latter represents a 'fund of practical moral wisdom' that has evolved over time to reflect the changing character of war.[49] What is often missed by those who approach it as an abstract theory rather than as a true tradition is that during its evolution, it has developed to acknowledge the crucial importance of context when determining a correct course of action.[50]

A.14 In brief, the Just War Tradition demands that actions which can cause harm to others (such as going to war) can be undertaken only if there is a compelling, morally justifiable reason – a just cause. It also requires that the actions are: undertaken with the right intentions and authorised by those who have the legitimacy to sanction the suspension of the normal rules prohibiting this kind of action; as well as that the harms that the action may produce in both the short and long term are proportional to the injury that has been suffered; that there is a reasonable prospect for success; and that there are no alternative options that might do less harm and still produce results (ensuring that war is a genuine last resort). In addition to these *ad bellum* requirements, there are also certain *in bello* principles to take into account, which are concerned with how the war may be

47. Charles Guthrie & Michael Quinlan, 'Just War: The Just War Tradition: Ethics in Modern Warfare', Bloomsbury, 2007, 1.
48. William Shakespeare, 'Henry V', Act 4, Scene 1.
49. James T. Johnson, 'Can Modern War be Just?', Yale University Press, 1984, 15.
50. David Whetham, 'The Just War Tradition: A Pragmatic Compromise', in D. Whetham, ed., *Ethics, Law and Military Operations*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 15.

conducted. Specifically, the importance of discrimination to ensure that any harm to the innocent is limited and that harm inflicted on the opposition is proportionate to the aim being legitimately pursued.

A.15 Throughout the history of the Tradition, the goal of Just War Thinking has always been to 'make a better peace.' However, following the US-led coalition's intervention in Iraq in 2003, there was a view that insufficient attention was given to thinking through the latter stages of the conflict. This has led to greater attention being paid to the idea of *jus post bellum,* or justice after war. *Jus post bellum* considers factors such as the legitimate 'ends' of a Just War and stipulates that, for example, the settlement between the antagonists must be publicly declared and proportionate to the initial justification for the conflict; it must recognize and vindicate the rights of everyone involved, not just the victor; it must discriminate between those who are morally culpable and those who are not, administering appropriate punishment for those (on both sides) who may have violated both *ad bellum* and in *bello* principles; it must consider compensation that does not sow the seeds of future conflict; and, finally, it must allow rehabilitation or reform of those state institutions that require it.[51]

A.16 The Just War criteria should inform the formulation of both policy and strategy when the use of violence is being considered. The criteria also provide a useful guide for action that does not involve the direct application of lethal force, such as the imposition of economic sanctions. Interestingly, although it is often associated with western or even Christian traditions, the principles underpinning the Just War Tradition resonate with ideas, cultures and religious principles found all over the world.

A.17 **Conclusion.** This annex considered the qualities, capabilities and behaviours that, experience suggests, characterise the most effective strategic leaders. It examined the responsibility that a strategic leader must act both legally and legitimately, using the UK's intervention in Iraq to illustrate how nuanced the legality and morality of a course of action can be at the grand strategic level. It then examined the traditions of *Jus ad Bellum* and *Jus in Bello.* In covering these areas, the intention has not been to identify a definitive set of characteristics that the strategic leader must develop or provide a set of 'rules' that they must follow but to stimulate reflection about what it means to lead at the highest level. One thing is certain, it is not easy, particularly when a nation is at war.

51. Ibid, 83.

Annex B – Decision-making tools

This annex considers some of the tools and approaches that one might consider using to inform decision-making and/or to reinforce the quality of assessment during strategy design and implementation. Like much of this guide, this is not an authoritative or exhaustive compendium. It is nothing more than a brief reference point from which more detailed analysis and practice in application is necessary

Introduction

B.1 Throughout this guide we have referred to tools to aid strategy development and associated decision-making. This annex will provide a brief outline of some of the most frequently used tools. It is not definitive or exhaustive but should encourage further research and practice.

B.2 **PESTLE.** This tool was introduced in Chapter 4 as a means by which we can analyse the internal and external factors – or context – enveloping the strategic environment. PESTLE, as a tool, seeks to identify the key Political, Economic, Societal, Technological, Legal and Environmental factors that might impact on the organisation and challenge under consideration and the implications for one's strategy. The mnemonic should be applied for each primary actor involved (self, adversary(ies), allies and principal neutrals). The product of this work should help to provide a rich picture of each actor's relationship with the strategy being developed and may also inform the Power Matrix in paragraph B.4 below or be used to assess the suitability of a selected strategy. This analytical process might use the following format as a template to record the discussions and analysis. It is recommended, where possible, that different members of the strategy development or review team assess the factors for each actor/ stakeholder in the dynamic.

Consideration	Factors	Deductions	Effect on strategy
Politics/Policy			
Economy			
Society			
Technology			
Law			
Environment			

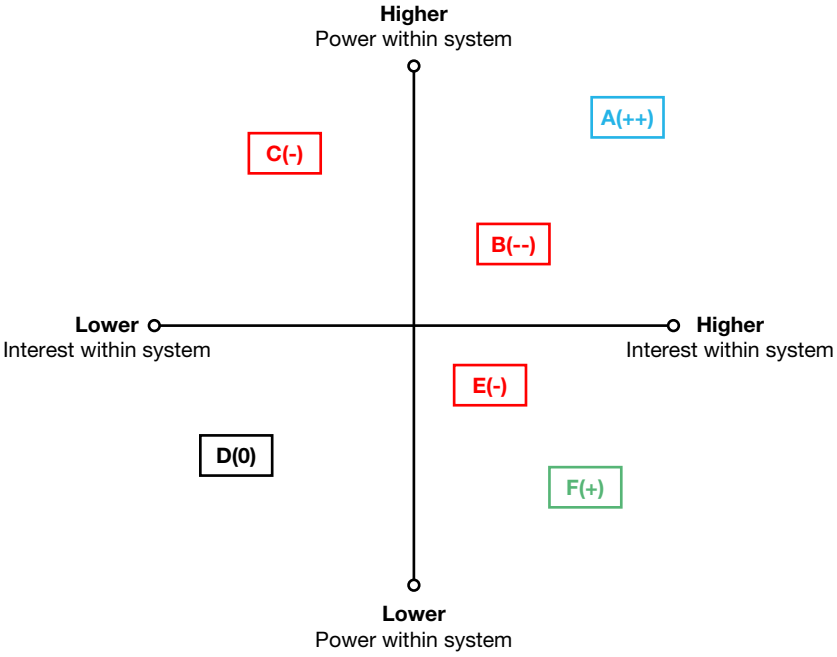
B.3 **STEEPLEMS.** This tool is little more than an expanded version of PESTLE and includes environment, military and security. This tool could be expanded further to include information and infrastructure or, for that matter, any other factor that needs explicit consideration in one's strategy development process.

B.4 **Relative Power Matrix.** This is a straightforward tool to identify the relative power and interests of actors who have a role (or influence) in the strategic dynamic in question. Like the PESTLE tool, this matrix helps understand the relative context and might be a useful tool during Element 1 of the Strategic Framework (Assessing Context). The outline approach is covered below:

RELATIVE POWER MATRIX

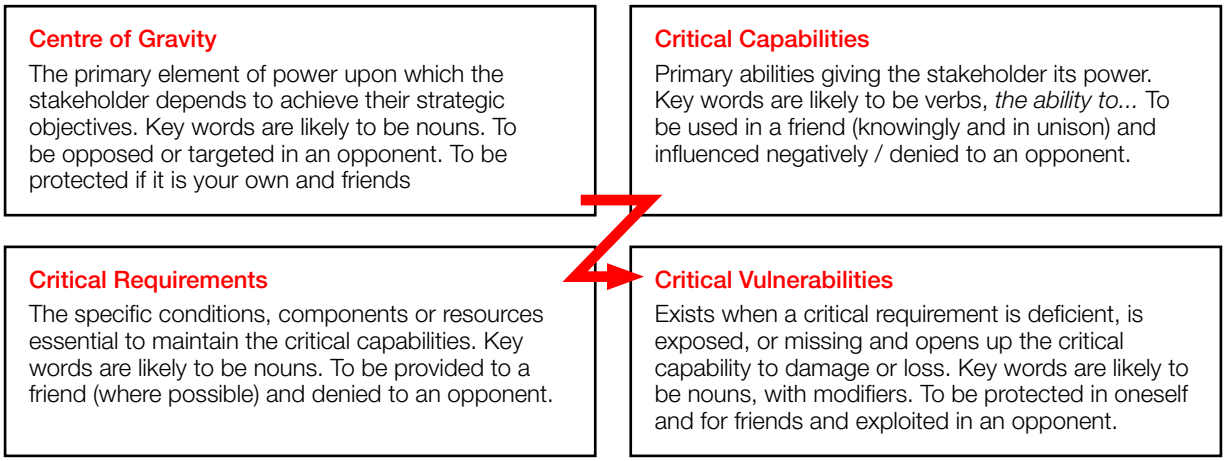
Method:

- Identify stakeholders operating in the system.
- Consider each stakeholder's 'power' (to influence - hard, soft and smart aspects).
- Consider each stakeholder's 'interest' in the problem being addressed.
- Plot each stakeholder in terms of power and interest on the matrix.
- Add in additional parentheses alongside each stakeholder an assessment in relation to one's eventual strategy.
- This might be (++) strongly supportive, (+) supportive, (0) neutral, bystander, unknown, (-) oppose and (--) strongly oppose.
- As a starter for ten, consider:
  Top right: cooperate closely or oppose
  Top Left: satisfy or block.
  Bottom Right: keep informed or block
  Bottom Left: Monitor.



B.5 **Centre of Gravity analysis.** The Centre of Gravity tool has mixed advocacy at the strategic level – some feel that it is only useful when related to the operational and tactical levels of warfare. In contrast, others feel it is a very useful tool to understand an adversary's hard, soft and smart power capabilities. Therefore, if one chooses to use this tool to assist understanding, it is important that the focus remains at the strategic level. Like the PESTLE and Power Matrix tools, it is worth reviewing each actor or stakeholder in turn and potentially by using different team members to conduct the analysis to mitigate the risk of group think or bias. Again, like the PESTLE tool, this approach can be used to inform the relative Power Matrix. The Centre of Gravity matrix looks like this:

CENTRE OF GRAVITY MATRIX



B.6 **SWOT analysis.** This is a useful tool to assess options and inform the selection of the strongest option(s) for further testing. SWOT analysis can also be used to inform how to use each instrument of national power in a more focused way against an adversary. The SWOT matrix looks like this:

SWOT MATRIX

INTERNAL	**Strengths** What is the relative strength of an option? How to use national strengths to take advantage of opportunities.	**Weaknesses** What are the relative weaknesses of an option? Identify one's own weaknesses that need to be protected.
EXTERNAL	**Opportunities** What additional opportunities does this option afford you? How can you exploit these opportunities to mitigate threats?	**Threats** What are the threats to this option? How to overcome the weaknesses that will make these threats a reality.

B.7 **DIME catalogue.**[52] A simple tool that seeks to deliver a consolidated and integrated synopsis of how the instruments of power might be used to support the strategy under development.

The following is a template of what examples could be considered – the relative strengths, weakness or wider impacts of each aspect can be further analysed using other tools, including PESTLE and SWOT:

Diplomatic	Information	Military	Economic
• Negotiation. • Use of IOs and NGOs. • Exploit treaties or international law. • Exploit alliances. • Confidence building measures. • Alternative diplomatic tracks.	• Use of intelligence agencies. • Strategic communication. • Psychological operations. • Information operations. • Narratives.	• Constructive use (security reform). • Containment. • Deterrence. • Show of force/intent. • Border security. • Exploitation of space and cyberspace capabilities.	• Foreign Aid. • Trade and financial policy. • Sanctions. • Inducements. • Sector reform. • 'Blockade'. • Seizure of capital/ investment.

The above framework might also be adapted to look at each aspect of the DIME tool but through the lens of ends, ways and means as follows:

	Diplomatic	Information	Military	Economic
ENDS (or objectives)	Such as a negotiated end to the crisis			
WAYS	•Exploit treaties or international law. • Confidence building measures.			
MEANS	• Utilising all resources to demonstrate (required outcome).			

52. You may wish to consider other aspects such as culture, finance, legal and technology. Although these are not considered as instruments of power they may help bring focus to a specific strategic issue.

B.8 **Acceptability Framework.** The Acceptability Framework seeks to identify the impact and probability of success of a given strategy option'. The tool, as an example of its use, might look like this:

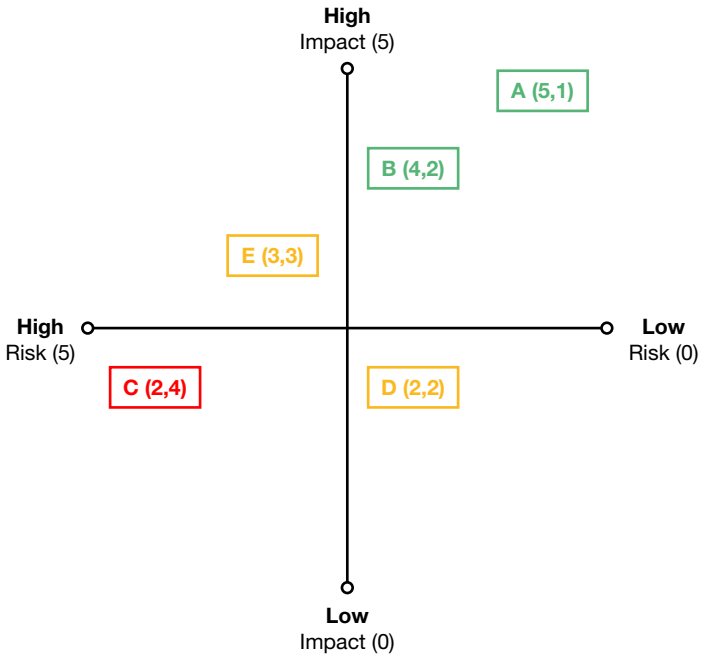
ACCEPTABILITY – RISK FRAMEWORK

Method:

- Using 0 to 5 scale:
- Assess the IMPACT each Option is likely to have on the strategic outcome/aim, if it works as intended.
- For RISK, assess the likelihood that each Option will work as intended. High likelihood equals low risk (score of 0).

For example:

- Option A - Impact 5, Risk 1
- Option B - Impact 4, Risk 2
- Option C - Impact 2, Risk 4
- Option D - Impact 2, Risk 2
- Option E - Impact 3, Risk 3
- Using this approach option A and B look the strongest options, where risk appetite might become the key determinant.



B.9 **Red Teaming.** The UK MOD, through its Development, Concept and Doctrine Centre, has produced a Red Teaming Handbook.[53] In the guide, Red Teaming is defined as the *'independent application of a range of structured, creative and critical thinking techniques to assist the end user make a better-informed decision or produce a more robust product.'*[54] The guide suggests that Red Teaming is conducted in three distinct phases to complement the planning and review process. The three phases are:

• **Diagnostic phase.** In this phase, the task of the Red Team is to determine if the information being used is accurate, well-evidenced, logical and underpinned by valid assumptions.

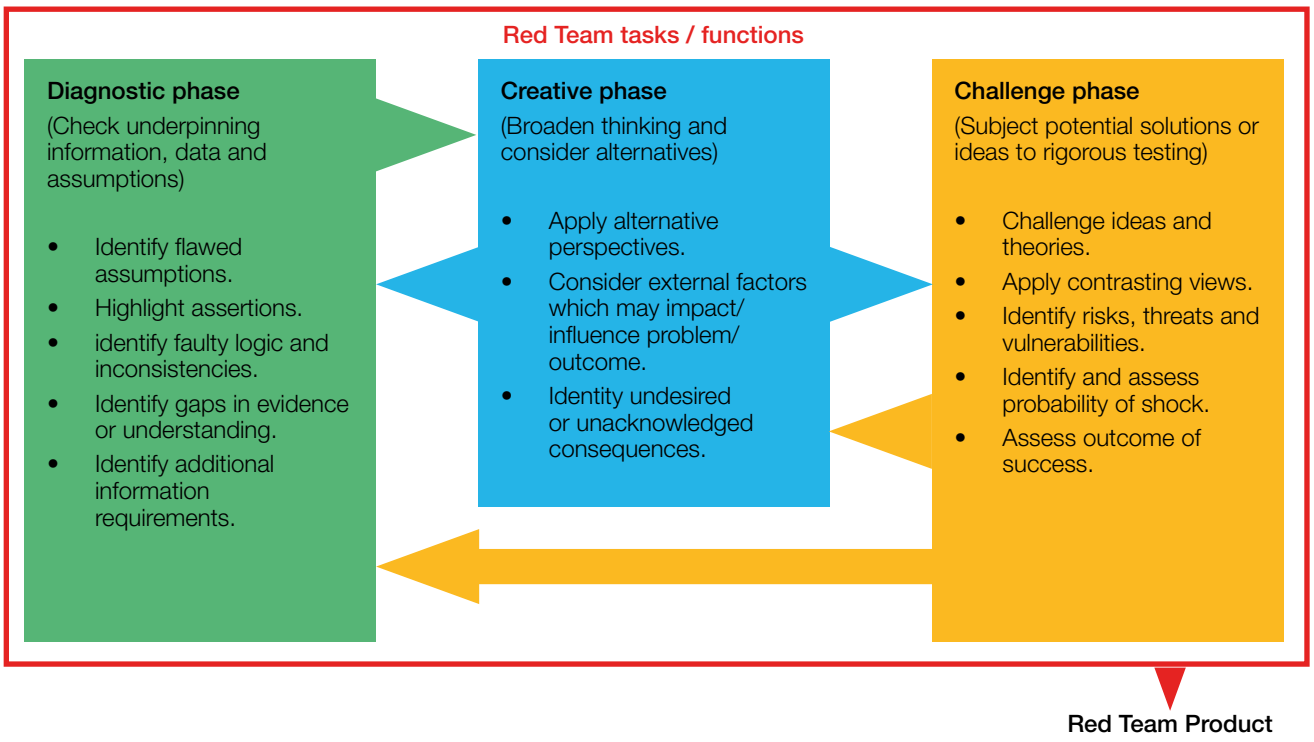
• **Creative phase.** During the creative phase, the Red Team seeks to examine the problem space and offer alternatives to that being considered by the main strategy team.

53. UK Ministry of Defence, 'Red Teaming Handbook', Third Edition, 2021.
54. Ibid, 5.

• **Challenge phase.** Here the Red Team seeks to provide constructive challenges on the options being offered by the strategy team. Are these options robust, resilient to shock, disruption or challenge? The Red Team should also challenge the logic process behind the option selection process and provide alternative perspectives on successful outcomes.

B.10 The overall process is **structured challenge and assurance** that decision-making has been appropriate. The process of Red Teaming is covered in outline in the following schematic but practical application requires a more considered and focused design and implementation approach:

RED TEAMING IN PRACTICE



B.11 **Wargaming.** In the context of strategy making, wargames are analytical tools to develop and test plans for dealing with particular events or circumstances and to expose plans to rigorous examination to identify risks, issues and previously unconsidered factors. So, a wargame is a simulation of selected aspects of a situation, conducted in accordance with predetermined rules, data and procedures to provide decision-making experience and/or decision-making information that are applicable to real-world situations.

Wargames, therefore, provide several benefits to aid strategy-making and strategy implementation. These include:

- An opportunity to explore options and take risks.
- Exposure to friction and uncertainty, including adaptive thinking of adversaries, competitors, allies and other stakeholders.
- A mechanism for exploring innovation in strategy-making and implementation.
- A method for discovering new factors and questions not previously identified.

B.12 The MOD, through the DCDC, has published a detailed handbook on wargaming.[55] Wargaming can therefore be a useful tool to guide strategy option selection by providing a critical framework to assess the effectiveness of each strategy under consideration. Wargaming can also be used to test the implementation of a selected strategy.

55. UK Ministry of Defence, 'Wargaming Handbook', 2017.

B.13 **Role Playing Model.** This tool has similarities with both wargaming and Red Teaming in that it seeks to use the team to challenge its own thinking and review an emerging strategy through different lenses. The approach, as outlined 'The Decision Book'[56] recommends the following perspectives, each of which should be adopted in turn by the whole team:

- **White:** analytical, objective thinking with the emphasis on facts and feasibility. The output is an affirmation of the factual basis behind a strategy and a fact-based assessment of feasibility.
- **Red:** emotional thinking, subjective feelings, perceptions and opinions. The output is a sense of how the strategy might be received by others.
- **Black:** critical thinking, risk assessment, identifying problems, scepticism and critique. The output is a clearer understanding of risk and a focus on where and how risks might be mitigated.
- **Yellow:** optimistic thinking, speculative best-case scenario. The output of which is a sense of where opportunities might exist that could be better exploited in the strategy.
- **Green:** creative, associative thinking, new ideas and brainstorming. The output of which is the identification of other objectives and outcomes that are worthy of inclusion in the strategy.
- **Blue:** structured thinking, process overview and the big picture. A 'capture all' review to determine missed or weak elements in the strategy.

56. Mikael Krogerus and Roman Tschappelar, 'The Decision Book – Fifty Models for Strategic Thinking', Profile Books, 142.

B.14 The process needs to be adjudicated and directed by an independent member to ensure appropriate reflection and analysis. Each strategy is discussed, covering all the perspectives above and involving all the team members. Such an approach seeks to 'ground' the strategy team and provides an inclusive approach to challenge thinking and root out concerns over group-think or unconscious bias.

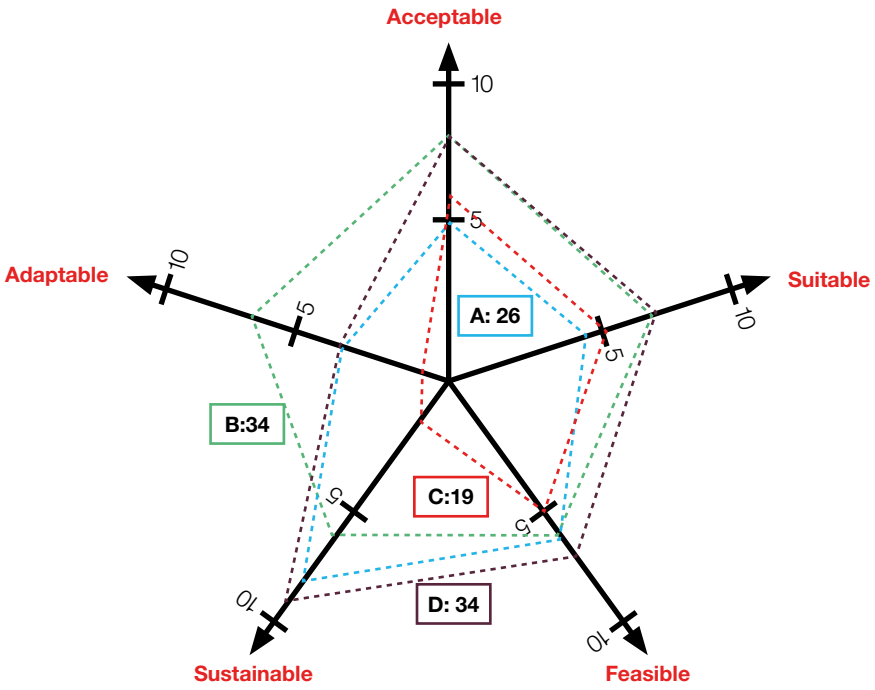
B.15 **Mapping the Five Tests of Strategy**. A 'radar chart' provides a simple means to represent an assessment of strategic options against the five tests (acceptability, feasibility, sustainability, suitability and adaptability).

Using objective analysis of a given option, score the strategy from 1 (low) to 10 (high) for each of the five tests. The scores are then portrayed graphically, as shown in the example below. This can be used to assess a selected strategy prior to implementation, as part of a post implementation review, or to inform the selection of candidate strategies during Element 6 (test and challenge).

Strategy	Acceptable	Suitable	Feasible	Sustainable	Adaptable	Total
A	5	4	6	8	3	26
B	8	7	6	6	7	34
C	6	5	5	2	1	19
D	8	7	7	9	3	34

Observations/Questions

- Separation of same score: consider weighting the factors?
- How objective is the scoring?
- How might these scores be weighted or given priority?



B.16 **OASIS – A Strategic Communication (StratCom) Tool.** The OASIS model is an adaptation of a tool that is used across communication industries contextualising the conditions and desired outcomes to be achieved through StratCom. In simple terms, it is a methodology for determining and implementing activities that will influence (change or reinforce) behaviours in a target audience or group of audiences in a more complicated multi-actor dynamic. The model is outlined below. It can also be used as a simple framework to conduct a rapid strategic assessment. We have included in the model an element to reflect where and how the military contribution might nest within an overall grand strategy.

OASIS – A TOOL FOR STRATEGY COMMUNICATION

OASIS Heading	Plain English	Defence / Sy Equivalent (nested to show the military contribution)
Objective	Outline the key strategic outcomes or effects and the desired behaviours.	Determine the military strategic objectives.
Audience insights	Gain a level of understanding of the target audience and how they communicate. Necessary to be able to influence target effectively.	Target audience analysis (TAA).
		Information environment analysis (IEA).
Strategy formulation	Formulate your narrative around the activities most likely to be effective in achieving the required behaviours. Deduce outputs/effects. Provide direction.	Define the strategic intent and construct the defence strategic narrative.
		Identify and monitor the StratCom narrative to deliver strategic activities and effects.
Implementation	Implement the strategic narrative and monitor whether the activities are giving rise to the intended outputs and behaviours.	Implement and monitor the StratCom narrative to deliver strategic activities and effects.
		Manage the narrative as the situation evolves.
Scoring (evaluation)	Monitor target audiences for evidence of desired behaviours. Adjust activities in consultation and coordination with partners (national and international).	Measure effectiveness of activities.
		Adjust activities.

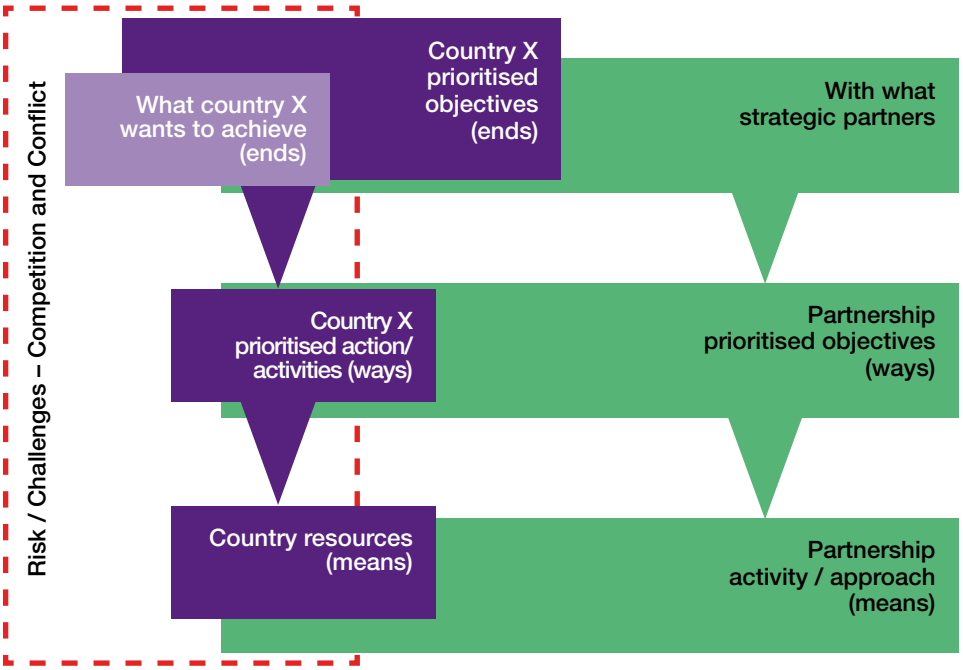
B.17 **Pre-Mortem Analysis.**[57] A pre-mortem is the hypothetical opposite of a post-mortem. A post-mortem in a medical setting allows health professionals to learn what caused a patient's death. A pre-mortem, in contrast, comes during the strategy development process to refine subsequent design and de-risk subsequent implementation. To be effective, a pre-mortem takes place once the end state or vision and supporting objectives have been identified. At this point, the pre-mortem participants work on the assumption that the strategy has failed and so question what went wrong. Pre-mortem participants then consider the reasons for the strategy's failure. The result of this is a consolidated account of potential reasons for failure – *what, why and how.* The group then analyses this account, working back from each point of failure, and identifies ways in which the strategy can be refined to reinforce chances of success. We have included a template below that might be a useful guide in the conduct of a pre-mortem:[58]

A PRE-MORTEM ANALYSIS TEMPLATE

<table>
<tr><th>Describe the failure</th><th colspan="2">Symptoms</th><th>List the causes</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Describe the failure</td><td>How will we know we failed?</td><td rowspan="2">If we don't (it's a fail):</td><td>What did we do to cause us to fail?</td></tr>
<tr><td>When did we realise we'd failed</td><td rowspan="2">If the only thing we do (it's success):</td><td rowspan="2">What did we not do to cause us to fail?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Why do these outcomes constitute failure?</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">What current problems remain?</td><td>Who knew we'd fail?</td><td rowspan="2">Was it well coordinated, communicated and supported?</td><td rowspan="2">What did others not do to cause us to fail?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who is suprised we failed?</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">What new problems emerged?</td><td>Who or what will be glad we failed?</td><td rowspan="2">What got in the way and was there something we lacked?</td><td rowspan="2">What incorrect assumptions did we make?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who or what will be dissapointed with failure?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Objectives to be refined:</td><td colspan="2">Options to mitigate risk:</td></tr>
</table>

57. Gary Klein, 'Performing a Project Postmortem', *Harvard Business Review*, September 2007.
58. Developed from Mitre Innovation Toolkits at https://itk.mitre.org/toolkit-tools/premortem

B.18 **Issues and Values Matrix.** The strategic framework will generate a considerable amount of information that needs to be captured and used to generate an assessment of potential ends, ways and means. The following matrix provides a tool to collate the information and aid the orchestration of activities within a state or between partners:



B.19 **Strategic net assessment.** Net assessment might be better labelled as an approach or process rather than a specific tool. Interest in, and the application of, net assessment has re-emerged in recent years, especially within NATO as well as in Russia, the US and the UK since its inception in the 1970s. Net assessment is a mechanism to understand simultaneous competitive dynamics at the strategic level where complex and interconnected challenges, threats and opportunities exist. In its current guise, it is seen as a comparative process to understand and assess relative strengths and weaknesses between actors for strategy application and orchestration. As such, it is a multidimensional and systematic approach and an effective net assessment would seek to provide decision-makers with strategic options that exploit identified asymmetries. In a recent paper, the NATO Defence College highlighted the following:

"…intelligence is about obtaining information about the adversary, and strategy concerns the formulation of plans to achieve goals, net assessment is closer to pre-surgery and post-surgery comparative radiology: it aims at comparing the balance of forces between two actors, and thus, while highlighting differences, it identifies possible asymmetries in respective strengths and weaknesses."[59]

B.20 To help guide the process of net assessment, strategists and strategic analysts might consider using several tools already outlined in this annex. Key to the design of a particular net assessment is the development of a clear and focused set of questions that need to be answered. We could use the following schematic to show how a net assessment might be constructed.

A COMPARATIVE STRATEGIC NET ASSESSMENT OF CENTRAL ASIA

Phase 1: An independent assessment from each actor's perspective of:

- The region, seams, IOs, NGOs.
- The global commons
- National ambition, priorities and objectives
- National risks and opportunities
- Dependencies - collaboration, cooperation, competition and conflict
- Areas of (potential) common or competing interest
- Common or competing values
- Implications for 'Global Britain'
- A pre-mortem assessment of an actor's strategy (or assumed)

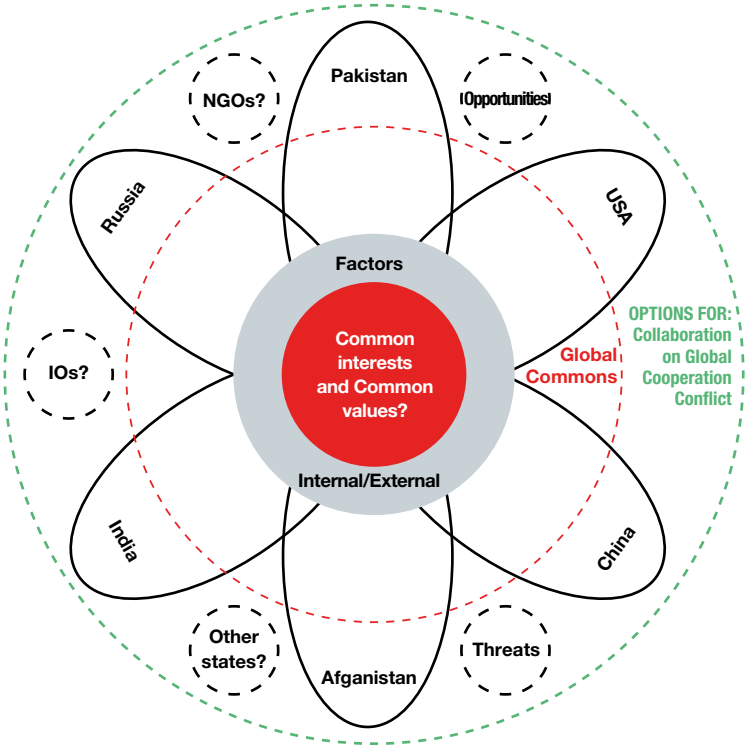
Phase 2: Collaborative Information Exchange

- The output of Phase 1
- Assessment of each actor's perspective

Phase 3: Analysis & Synthesis

- Development of a fused regional picture
- Understand the impact of each actor's post-mortem
- What will the outcome of failure mean - a post mortem
- A consolidation of asymmetries to exploit - risks and opportunities

Phase 4: Options for exploitation



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Annex C – Reasonable challenge guide

Ministry of Defence

The Iraq Inquiry (Chilcot) Report tells us that it's important to avoid 'groupthink' as we develop policy, and the best antidote to that is reasonable challenge. An environment in which challenge is expected and accepted is important. People should be receptive to reasonable challenge and assume that it is provided with the best of intentions, while

For those receiving challenge, you should:

- Not take it personally - the challenge isn't about you, it's about the issue at hand.
- Make it known that you welcome reasonable challenge, and create space in the way you run your business to receive it. Recognise that challenge might result in change.
- Seek real diversity of thought, not just shades of mainstream thinking.
- Give staff the opportunity fully to articulate different views and give them credit for doing so. And remember that the person challenging shouldn't be expected to have the solution there and then.
- Demonstrate that you are giving serious thought to the challenge being offered - do not dismiss it out of hand and make sure people aren't just telling you what you want to hear.
- Respond respectfully - never belittle someone's view, and never (even after the event) sideline those offering it.
- If you do not accept the challenge, explain your reasoning, including supporting evidence when necessary.
- Encourage the use of evidence from beyond the immediate organisation, think tanks, academia and other sources
- Support both junior colleagues and peers to raise a challenge with more senior colleagues.

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those offering challenge should know how to do so effectively. Challenge isn't about proving someone right or wrong; rather its about highlighting and exploring alternative options. These cultures and behaviours reflect a healthy organisation and we have created the following guide to support their development.

For those offering challenge, you should:

- Make the challenge with courtesy and politeness.
- Be prepared to explain the logic and reasoning behind your alternative view and provide evidence. Keep your challenge concise and relevant to the issue at hand.
- Think about the interpersonal dynamics. Keep it professional - it's the issue you're challenging, not the person. Be respectful to the approach from which you are differing.
- Choose your moment and your medium. A one-to-one discussion or a smaller team meeting may be more appropriate than a big meeting at which positions are being taken and decisions are expected; a gently probing conversation or email is better than a confrontational one.
- Raise issues in a timely manner. Don't leave your challenge too late in the process, when changing course could be too difficult.
- Accept if the eventual decision remains unchanged - a decision has to be taken once all reasonable challenge has been considered. Only in cases where regularity or propriety have not been observed should you need to turn to the Department's whistleblowing process.

Annex D - How to succeed in meetings

Introduction

D.1 There are no single or simple rules on how to succeed at meetings. Much also depends on the level at which a meeting is being held and your precise role in it. But in all cases, you should think about how to prepare **before** the meeting, how to behave **during** the meeting, and what to do **after** the meeting.

D.2 What follows focuses on meetings within a particular government system (in UK terms, 'Whitehall'), particularly inter-departmental ones. But the broad themes of careful preparation etc are always relevant, including for multilateral meetings.

D.3 It is also worth noting that there are different types of meeting in terms of the 'outcomes' you are seeking. Sometimes they are win/lose, for example, in Whitehall/ government funding discussions and in some international meetings. But often, they are win/win, for example, in developing cross-government advice to ministers, or in seeking a mutually beneficial multilateral compromise.

Before

D.4 When you receive an invitation to a meeting, you and your time should ensure you are clear:

a. What the meeting is for.

b. Whether the meeting is a priority and you should attend/be represented (if not, at what level you should be represented).

c. Who else will be there – membership and authorities.

d. What your goals are for the meeting.

e. Whether you have allies in the pursuit of these goals.

f. What information you need to assemble in advance of the meeting – whether you need to commission any special briefing and/or arrange an oral briefing session etc.

D.5 This is not an exhaustive list. But if you decide to attend then (within the time available and in the light of your judgment of competing priorities) in advance of the meeting, you must seek to master the detail and history etc. You will not be able to deploy everything you know at the meeting itself, but you must be able to respond authoritatively if pressed on the detail underlying your arguments.

D.6 You may think you know the positions others invited to the meeting are likely to take but check. Talk to them on the phone or face-to-face. If you can, win the argument in advance, or seek an acceptable compromise. Talk to the relevant experts, and be prepared to bring in 'outside challenge' to your/your team/your

department's thinking, on the assumption such challenge will not be in the meeting room itself if only to challenge your own thinking and in the interest of avoiding Groupthink.

D.7 If feasible, talk to the chairperson in advance to understand (if you don't already) the driver for the meeting and the political factors behind it, and what their preliminary views are on what an outcome might look like.

D.8 Think hard about the politics of the issue, and shape your proposals accordingly (without giving up on what you think the right goal should be). This is, of course, particularly important if the meeting is with ministers (who would normally chair any such meeting) when advance contact with their Political Advisers ('SPADS') can be important.

D.9 Be absolutely clear before you go into the meeting about what your real bottom lines/ fall-back position(s) are. Clear any fall-back positions with your seniors/ministers before you go into the meeting: it is important that they will back you up if you are forced to fall back on them.

D.10 More generally, know from the start that the outcome will almost certainly be a compromise decision taking account of the views of a number of stakeholders in the debate. To the extent possible, you should have a clear view of what you can accept and to have thought the issues through in your contacts with others before the meeting starts. You will not be able to (and should not!) treat every issue as a 'resignation' one and need to think carefully about whether an issue matters sufficiently (to you personally and to your minister/ministry) for you to die in the ditch/block/be isolated etc.

D.11 Always consider whether there would be an advantage in holding the drafting pen or being involved in the drafting of any paper to be considered at the meeting. 'He who drafts first, laughs last'. But there can be a downside to having the job of finding the formal compromises.

During

D.12 In the meeting room, judge carefully where you sit (so don't be too late arriving – all the best places will have been taken). Do not sit at a corner of a square table. Go for the middle, possibly opposite to the chair, certainly in a position where you can get good eye contact so that they know when you want to speak.

D.13 Meetings are a people business, as well as a policy business. There is no one style about how to play a meeting – whether to try to speak first and make your points forcibly or to let others burn themselves out and then come in with what looks like a compromise/ reasonable/reasoned proposal which the exhausted group of individuals will accept. You need to judge tactics according to the personalities at the table and the issues involved.

D.14 Body language matters. Do not look unprepared, disengaged or bored. If papers have been circulated, have them in front of you. Look at people when they are speaking – make it clear you are listening. If their points are significant, ensure you or one of your team are visibly noting them. Keep eye contact with others when you are speaking. Use language they will understand. Refer to the points others have made, either incorporating them in your argument or showing that you have weighed them up carefully before discounting them.

D.15 But do listen carefully to other points. If their counter-arguments are persuasive, be prepared to change your position – either in the meeting or subsequently by reference to your own hierarchy.

D.16 As noted above, your key arguments should be boiled down to a few key points by this stage – no one will have time to set out their whole stall. A classic brief for a meeting would include the following sections, or at least cover this ground:

- Goals/desired outcome.
- Points to make.
- Defensive points/if raised issues. Possible fall-back(s).
- Background (such as history/positions of others, plus political and presentational points.)

D.17 Be ready to argue the long-term, strategic view rather than (or at least as well as) the need for immediate responses to immediate pressures.

D.18 At the meeting, ensure that full account is given to the publicity or strategic communications aspect of any decisions reached.

D.19 Insist on clarity over the implementation and monitoring arrangements in relation to any decision-taking and on the resource consequences partly if they affect your department.

Afterwards

D.20 Watch out for the record/minutes. If they come round in draft, ensure any points you made which you think important are included. If the record comes round in final and ignores your input and/or gets other key points wrong, comment in writing to the chair and all those present at the meeting.

D.21 Ensure all key players (and, if necessary ministers) in your department are briefed promptly and succinctly on the outcome of the meeting, highlighting action points and explaining why you made any necessary compromises.

D.22 If you have had significant differences with other participants at the meeting, then find a way to reach out to them, perhaps on the way out of the meeting or shortly afterwards. You will almost certainly need to work with that individual in future.

D.23 Be prepared to be the one to say that conclusions reached at any particular meeting need to be revisited because the world has changed.

Machiavelli

D.24 You should consider how media or parliamentary comment could influence the debate. It may be in your country's or your department's interests to generate such comment in advance of key meetings. This is particularly true in international relations, where you could influence a foreign government through engaging their press. It is more difficult in cross-government debate and, as a rule, you should only do so with ministerial agreement.

Annex E - The Chilcot Checklist

Introduction

The 'Chilcot Checklist' was developed by Partners Across Government to provide a rule-of-thumb guide to aid decision-making during both the planning and execution of military operations. It draws heavily on the lessons of the 2016 Iraq Inquiry (Chilcot Report) but also on other reports, as well as on cross-Whitehall experience of developing and then implementing UK strategy.

1. **Vision: Why do we care?** What does this mean for national interests? What are the risks of acting or doing nothing, including in the longer term? What is different now?
2. **Analysis: What is happening now?** What are your sources of ground truth/evidence? Have assumptions been exposed to analytical tools or external challenges?
3. **Scenarios: What might happen next?** Have you looked at a range of options, and scenarios and consequences that could flow from them?
4. **Options: What should we do?** Have you designed your options collaboratively, built in challenge and presented Ministers with clear information on risks, opportunities and costs?
5. **Legal Implications: How do we ensure action is lawful?** What is the wider legal context? Are Ministers aware of any legal risks? What are the policy implications? How will you ensure that any international legal basis remains sound if circumstances change?
6. **Policy and Strategy: What does success look like?** Does a clear strategy, and a feasible course of action that will meet policy objectives, exist? Is the approach supported by analysis?
7. **Resource: What do we need to deliver?** What are the resource implications of your options?
8. **Planning and Doing: How should we do it?** Have you planned for a range of possible contingencies? Who is accountable and responsible for what?
9. **Policy and Performance: How will you monitor performance?** How will you measure and evaluate success/failure?
10. **Evaluation: Is the policy working?** When and how will you review this policy? Has the context changed? Have national objectives/interests changed? Do you need to change direction?

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MSB 2023 represents the next step towards the production of a more interactive and accessible digital publication. We have now commenced a programme to develop a digital, interactive toolkit for our use in 2025 and beyond. Should you wish to comment on *Making Strategy Better* and therefore inform our next steps, please contact the editor, Air Vice-Marshal Phil Lester, by e-mail at:

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