

# S – Strategy

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The crumbling of the world order—a metaphor central to the 2018 Valdai Club report—continues. Observers ever more often find it difficult to explain the logic of what is happening or guess which way the wind of change will blow. Amid the mounting chaos, actions by individual states become increasingly important. The focus of attention switches from the level of system to the level of its individual participants, i.e. specific countries.

But what is the yardstick with which to measure the standing of countries in the international system? Which of them are more important and which are less? After all, the difference between potentials may be dramatic, but these potentials are far from always converted into significant foreign policy achievements. Probably the quality of a state's foreign policy strategy is the most accurate common denominator. In this context, of great importance are not only major players, but also small countries that were able to develop a comprehensive foreign policy strategy that multiplies their power. One can postulate that only top-notch strategies can really work in the premier league of world politics.

Israel can serve as a prototype for a model state in the anarchist world. This small newly founded country, forced to survive in a hostile environment, has built up internal motivation and a foreign policy strategy

aimed at maximizing the use of limited resources for the sake of national development. Several countries existing in adverse geopolitical conditions can be named as having optimal strategies: South Korea, Finland, and Uzbekistan. But what are the quality criteria a sensible strategy is to meet?

Let's try to deconstruct the very notion of strategy. The classical definition says that strategy is the ability to correctly correlate foreign policy goals with resources. But several other components are no less important.

**Firstly**, it is the ability of elites to properly identify the cause–effect relationships in current events and to formulate foreign policy goals based on genuine, rather than imaginary, development needs. In other words, the ability to properly formulate one's own needs and not to set false goals.

**Secondly**, it is strategic culture, which acts as a kind of "credit history" reflecting the use of force in the past and at the same time is the product of the accumulated experience of great power politics. European countries with their vast experience of using force and conducting negotiations (every war inevitably ends in peace) often turn out to be more skilled strategists than newly-established states with inexperienced elites, which often indulge in foreign policy experiments.

**Thirdly**, it is leadership, which is the product of willpower, determination and readiness to make sacrifices. In a world that tends to get increasingly anarchic and remains relatively safe and affluent, the readiness to sacrifice dwindles.

**Fourthly**, it is empathy as the ability to build a constructive strategy taking into account the interests of all parties concerned. Only an integrated approach, consonant with the general context and the specific features of other players, will be sustainable in the long run.

**Lastly**, it is the organizational resource that implies the potential for internal mobilization and the ability to focus on key development tasks. Satiety and relaxation prevent mobilization and often do not let even successful and well-off powers achieve their goals.

If all of these parameters are scrutinized and employed for the analysis of leading states, it will be readily seen that each of them has a significant flaw that impedes the implementation of the most effective strategy. In some cases, this flaw is irreparable.

For instance, China, Saudi Arabia, India, and Japan have a problem with converting their major economic and political potentials into proportional influence on the international scene. While having indisputable advantages by a number of parameters (China is a frontrunner in most respects), the listed powers experience difficulties in achieving their strategic goals.

The United States and the European Union are both plagued with egocentrism, obsession with internal affairs and ideological bias. Western countries have cultivated self-righteous political elites, which have come to believe they are impeccable. Bored with strategic thinking, these elites have preferred to take a break. Quite often they make decisions that have little to do with genuine national interests. In the United States, strategic guidelines, once immutable, are being eroded due to acute internal polarization.

For Iran, Israel, Cuba, and North Korea, the most acute problem is external pressure. In most cases, it is heavy enough to exert decisive influence on the formation of their identity. Should this pressure ease or vanish, significant consequences for the domestic political life of these countries will be imminent.

Brazil, Mexico, and Indonesia have difficulty mobilizing themselves and focusing on crucial tasks. The heterogeneity and deep stratification of the population do not allow these states to focus on achieving key development goals.

Finally, Ukraine, Georgia, and Palestine can be placed next to each other in a group of countries that have not formulated their development goals yet and pursue some illusory aims rather than genuine needs. It is hard to tell how success can be achieved in a situation where the defeat of a stronger opponent is declared as its mandatory condition.

In terms of strategy, Russia is a special case. Just like Turkey, it is internally fragile, and this problem can emasculate even the most skillful foreign policy strategy. However, in the current international situation, Russia's elites have a number of advantages. The pragmatism they have developed with experience (often on the verge of cynicism) makes it possible to better correlate foreign policy goals with available resources. Pragmatism is combined with a sufficient level of empathy and willingness to take into account the interests of rivals. It is for this reason that Russia

has proved to be an effective security overseer in the Middle East and built comprehensive relations with China. Russia's empathy does not apply to the United States and many countries of Europe, though, with the conceptual gap between Russian realism and Western idealism being the reason.

Russia has extensive historical experience of using force and diplomacy, which makes its strategic culture one of the most fruitful of all. The Russian elites have a large reserve of determination. They are able to mobilize resources to achieve foreign policy goals. Apparently, the strategy that stems from these qualities works best at a time when the international order is crumbling down and anarchy is rising.

Each of these states has significant problems as far as strategies are concerned. True, the largest of them have an advantage: they can afford to make mistakes, at least much more often than smaller countries, which are less strong and any mistake may become fatal. But even small countries are of importance to the international system, provided their strategy takes weaknesses into account and sets forth development goals that match genuine national needs.