

# The United States National Strategy Formulation Process

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## Abstract

The United States national strategy formulation is a deliberate and thoughtful process, which has some challenges. It is very important to examine the foundation and nature of the United States policy and strategy processes. The strategic policymakers must evaluate the concept of national security in the context of modern international relations. This study brings some examples from the beginning of the Cold War to the present, and examines the U.S. policymakers' decisions to use hard power – as an instrument of national power, which is the last option in the foreign policy. Whole-of-government is a concept related to grand strategy, which includes all instruments of national power. This study introduces the concept and potential opportunities of whole-of-government collaboration. Finally, it introduces my recommendations for key decision makers and strategists at the national level, and guidelines of strategy formulation for policymakers, who are involved in designing, developing, and executing national security policy and strategy.

**Keywords:** Grand strategy, hard power, national security policy, national security strategy, smart power, whole-of-government

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**Introduction**

“When you are asking Americans to die, you have to be able to explain it in terms of the national interest” Henry Kissinger (as cited in Bartholomees, 2010, p. 9).

The most fundamental task in devising a grand strategy is to determine a nation’s national interests. Once they are identified, they drive a nation’s foreign policy and military strategy; they determine the basic direction that it takes, the types and amounts of resources that it needs, and the manner in which the state must employ them to succeed. Because of the critical role that national interests play, they must be carefully justified, not merely assumed (Art, 2003, p. 45).

Both Henry Kissinger and Robert Art argues that determination of the national interests is very important for the development of policy and strategy. National interests play a significant role and help to determine the objectives (ends) of the national policy and strategy, as well as the types and amounts

of the national power employed as the resources (means) to implement a designated policy or strategy. There are four vital components of the U.S. fundamental national interests (USNSS, 2017, p. 4).

- 1) Protecting the American people, the homeland, and the American way of life
- 2) Promoting American prosperity
- 3) Preserving peace through strength
- 4) Advancing American influence

The concept of the national interests is not a new concept; it has always been a fundamental concern of all actors in the international system (Bartholomees, 2010, p. 9). I will argue that not only national interests play an essential role for the development of policy and strategy, but also other concerns and aspects need to be considered, which I explain in the strategy formulation framework (Figure 1).

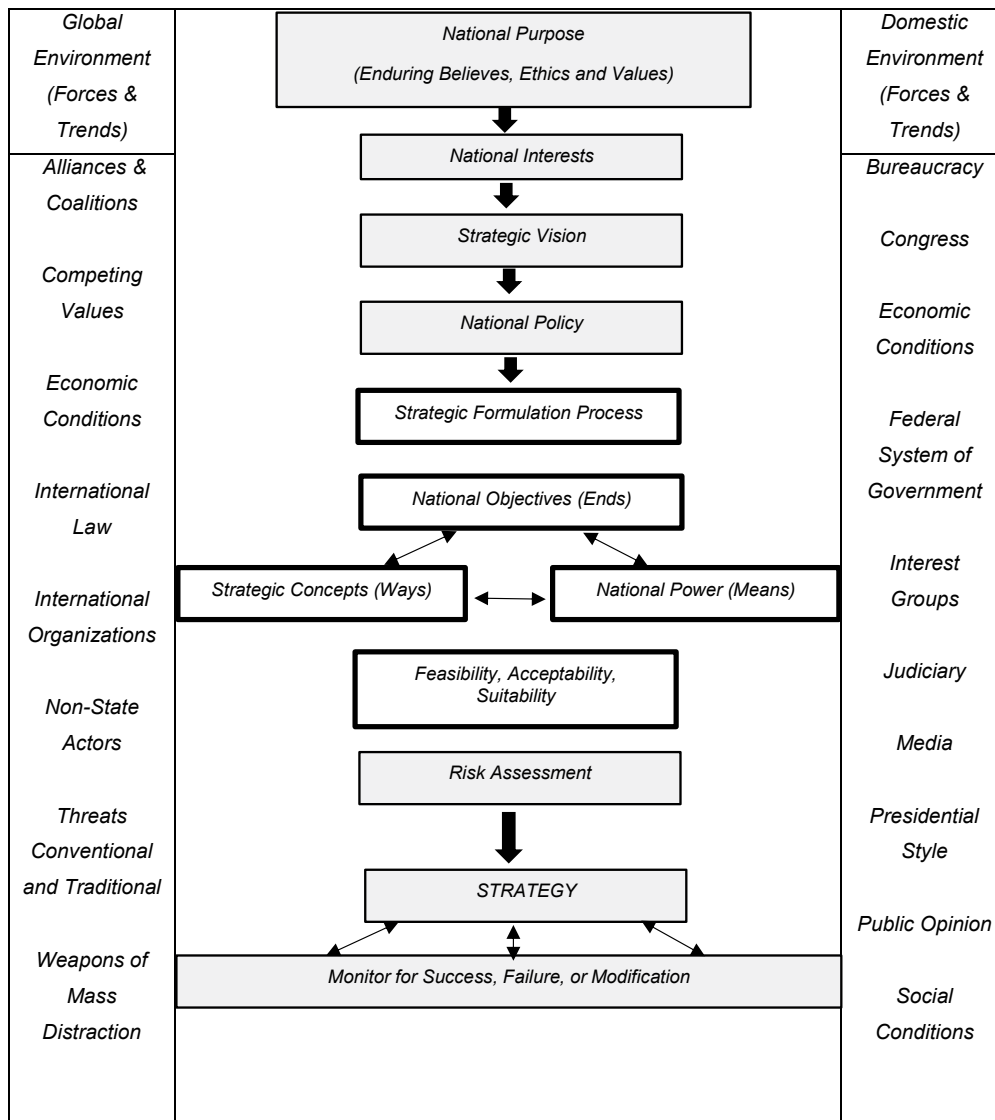


Figure 1: Strategy Formulation Framework (Bartholomeus, 2010, p. 397).

The strategy formulation framework starts from the national purpose and understanding the core of national interests. There are four core U.S. national interests, which have formed three grand strategic objectives: preserve American security, strengthen American economic prosperity, and promote American values. At the grand strategic level, all administrations focus on these objectives, but historically they have depended on risk assessments and threats analyses; and have had different strategic visions of America's role in the world. From the beginning of the American Revolution until the present day, American leaders have had different visions on how best to achieve U.S. national interests, starting from isolationism, that is, a non-interventionist position, to global engagement (Bartholomees, 2010, p. 398).

The United States remained neutral during WWI, which started in 1914. President Woodrow Wilson believed that the U.S. could serve as the mediator in this conflict. By 1917, the impact of key events across the Atlantic changed the mind-set of U.S. officials and the population as well; an isolation and neutrality strategy had become untenable. On April 6, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany. Additionally, at the beginning of the WWII, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his administration followed the concept of isolation. However, after the risk assessment of U.S. national interests, strategic leadership changed their vision from a non-interventionist position to one of global engagement (Nye, Jr. & Welch, 2009, p. 104). After WWII, President Harry Truman articulated a grand strategic vision of global engagement with the main objective to contain the Soviet Union from its further expansion and domination in Eurasia. The U.S. made an unprecedented investment in hard power, which led to the arms race. The containment policy remained as the U.S. grand strategy until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Nye, Jr. & Welch, 2009, p. 141).

During the Reagan administration, Iraq was an ally of the United States because its leader, Saddam Hussein, had gone to war with Iran in 1980. Iran since that time remains as the greater enemy of the United States. However, during the George H. W. Bush administration (Bush 41), Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, taking control of not only the country but also its oil fields. The United States together with coalition forces went to war against Iraq to fight Saddam Hussein in the first Persian Gulf War (1990-91). The war ended, and Iraqi forces left Kuwait to their original Iraq-Kuwait borders. After 10 years, George W. Bush (43) arrived in the White House in 2001. Without a clear grand strategy, Bush (43) acting as a moral idealist in March 2003 went to war against the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. He won this war on a tactical level, but lost on a strategic. The Bush administration lost this war strategically

because they did not have a strategy and clear vision, or a plan for what to do after the military campaign (Houghton, 2013, pp. 218-20). U.S. policymakers and strategists during risk assessment should consider the nation's interests not only based on domestic needs, but also on a global level considering legal, philosophical and moral aspects.

### Recommendation

Carl von Clausewitz was accurate when he wrote, "Everything in strategy is very simple, but that does not mean that everything is very easy" (Howard & Paret, 1976, p. 178). The United States political leadership provides national policy as a guidance, which integrate many diverse sources, ranging from formal national security directives, presidential speeches, and other cabinet-level appearances concerning national interests. U.S. policymakers must work constantly to collect this guidance and work on different options: identify and determine U.S. interests and the level of intensity for each interest; evaluate threats and opportunities; identify policy objectives (ends), and consider alternative concepts (ways) that use resources (means) to achieve objectives (ends). Policymakers must determine the feasibility, acceptability, and suitability of various strategic options, conduct risk assessment and present strategy recommendations (Bartholomees, 2010, p. 401).

National grand strategy presents options, and without risk assessment, strategy may fail. Policymakers must eliminate the risk of second and third order effects that implementation of a strategy could have (effects on the economy, relationship with allies, etc.). In terms of *feasibility*, each option of the strategy must go through the process of evaluation, to determine, if the nation has the means to execute the ways. In term of *acceptability*, strategy must be legal, ethical, have necessary constituent support, and be *suitable* to achieve national objectives (ends) (Bartholomees, 2010, p. 401). The former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, "America cannot solve the most pressing problems on our own, and the world cannot solve them without America... We must use what has been called 'smart power,' the full range of tools at our disposal" (Get Smart, Combining Soft and Hard Power, 2009).

### Conclusion

The strategy formulation framework is a continuous process, and needs constant assessment and monitoring of the strategic environment, which is very dynamic and rapidly changing. Continuous assessment should be a systematic process during the life of the strategy that evaluates a tactic effectiveness in achieving policy objectives (ends). Systematic assessment and accurate monitoring are necessary for success or essential

modifications of an existing strategy to ensure that strategy supports the directing policy and interests appropriately; strategies that fail this assessment need replacement. Besides, national interests and policy may also change over time. Moreover, if during the strategy formulation process policymakers thoughtfully and suitably plan their strategies, then these strategies will have flexibility and adaptability for changes and modification (Bartholomees, 2010, pp. 401-402).

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