

Case Studies for the Integrated Review, Part II

In coordination with the Cabinet Office, the Centre for Grand Strategy has commissioned a second series of reports to help inform the United Kingdom's forthcoming Integrated Review. These reports build on an earlier series of case studies which examined how major strategic 'resets'—i.e. significant redirections and realignments of foreign policy—have been developed across a range of historical and contemporary contexts. The purpose of this round of reports is to understand how, once a new national strategy has been decided, governments can best implement it. By examining specific historical instances in which countries, including the United Kingdom, have sought to deliver a new strategic realignment, the papers presented here offer valuable insights for policymakers currently developing the Integrated Review.

Select findings include:

- The importance of leadership: a number of case studies stress the importance of a Prime Minister and senior Cabinet ministers being consistently engaged and interested in delivering strategy across government departments and parliament. When this kind of leadership is absent, issues are left to drift as departmental rivalry and opposition grows.
- The importance of structure within the national security establishment: several reports emphasise the need to design effective and efficient bureaucratic structures to help implement and sustain a strategic realignment.
- The importance of so-called 'agents of change.' The implementation of a grand strategic change is dependent to a great degree on the ability of senior officials to deliver clear and sustained guidance on the nature, direction and pace of strategic change.
- To have lasting impact, policies need to be 'mainstreamed' across the policy machinery. Training and secondments can alter organizational culture, but these effects are weaker across government as a whole.
- Effective communications and feedback mechanisms inside government can help to ensure that strategy is being delivered as it was intended.
- Bureaucratic resistance can represent a serious challenge to the implementation of strategy. This is a product, in part, of an existing foreign policy establishment—made up of individuals and institutions inside and outside of government—which might favour certain ingrained policy priorities.
- A new national strategy can attract less criticism if it is bipartisan in tone; and policy changes should be framed as building on the work of predecessors.
- 'Budget documents are strategy documents', and as the implementation of a particular policy continues, the management of budgetary items can serve as a powerful lever of control.
- Communication with allies about a new strategy is essential; and closely related is the need to manage allies' expectations.
- The notion of 'national' or 'grand' strategy conveys a sense of agency that is not always reflected in practice: parliamentary politics, public opinion, and a host of other constraints—sometimes referred to as 'domestic veto players'—limit the extent to which government can deliver 'revolutionary' strategic change.

- The efficacy of a grand strategy is largely dependent on the proximity and intensity of external threats. Implementation of strategy can be easier in periods of perceived crisis, as opposed to more relatively benign periods.
- Existing national security policies have a sustainability factor within society. A strategic realignment can thus be more difficult to implement if the public perceives an existing policy as fiscally affordable and strategically necessary.
- Policy commitments involve difficult decisions down the line, and if government departments are not prepared to pay the ‘cost of implementation’, this can lead to contradictory policies and harm the government’s diplomatic reputation.
- When delivering on a grand strategic realignment, it is necessary to embrace inherent uncertainty. It is essential that ministers and officials always remain responsive and open to revising and re-inventing elements of a new strategy where necessary to meet new challenges.

Summaries of Reports

1. Strategy *and* delivery are the key to a successful Integrated Review (pp. 5-8)

Georgina Wright

This contribution puts forward five recommendations for how the government can successfully deliver its forthcoming Integrated Review. First, it stresses the need for the government to secure political buy-in from Cabinet ministers, especially with regard to its long-term strategic objectives. Second, the report proposes the creation of an effective communications and feedback mechanism inside of government—one which might ensure that the implementation is being carried out in line with its original aims. Third, the government should invest time and money in the right capabilities, resources and expertise inside of government. The Integrated Review, once it is published, should also be open to revision and re-invention, depending on changing circumstances and new challenges. Finally, Parliament has a crucial role to play in the implementation stage. In particular, the Foreign Affairs Select Committee and the Defence Select Committee, among others, must continue to scrutinise Britain’s foreign, security, defence and development policies.

2. Strategy by Committee: The Birth of British Grand Strategy c. 1900-1914 (pp. 9-13)

Dr David Morgan-Owen

This study examines the British experience of creating and implementing grand strategy in the first decades of the twentieth century. Specifically, it focuses on the work of a dedicated body—the Committee of Imperial Defence—which was designed to address the security challenges of a new century. Among the findings in this report are the inherent hindrances within British government and society to delivering a ‘revolutionary’ grand strategy, and the importance of an engaged and interested Prime Minister who can help to steer the new strategy through a number of bureaucratic layers. As the study highlights, strategy is essential to improve coordination between instruments of state power, but when there is a lack of interest and engagement from senior leadership, the implementation process becomes muddled and inefficient.

3. The challenge of grand strategic implementation: The British experience from Total War to Cold War (pp. 14-19)

Dr William James

This report explores two historical case studies in which a British government sought to initiate a grand strategic turn. The first looks at the decision to delay the opening of a ‘Second Front’ during the Second World War, a policy which was determined, in part, by the circumstances present in the early years of the war. The second historical study explores the difficulties encountered within Parliament and among allies as the United Kingdom sought to withdraw from ‘East of Suez’ during the Cold War. In examining the background and delivery of these strategies, the study highlights three important aspects of implementation—namely, the need to manage allies’ expectations, the dangers of an effective ‘veto’ power from domestic stakeholders, and the necessity of embracing uncertainty as a strategy is delivered in practice.

4. A Journey into the Ethical Dimension: A Case Study in Launching a New British Foreign Policy (pp. 20-25)

Dr Jamie Gaskarth

This report examines the implementation of New Labour’s ‘ethical dimension’ to foreign policy between 1997 and 2001. Beginning with Foreign Secretary Robin Cook’s announcement of a more ethical foreign policy in May 1997, the study describes the cases of the Sandline affair, arms sales to Indonesia and the interventions in Kosovo and Sierra Leone. Though there were noticeable contradictions in the way that a new ethical foreign policy was employed in practice, it set in motion bureaucratic initiatives and a collective mindset which survives in the present day. Among a number of important takeaways, the report highlights the importance of bipartisanship (and building on the work of predecessors); the need to mainstream policies across government machinery; and the need to ensure that ministers remain aware of how the strategy is being implemented abroad.

5. Strategy in the Eisenhower Administration (pp. 26-30)

Dr Kori Schake

This case study covers the implementation of a national security policy during the administration of US President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961). Faced with, among other challenges, the prospect of open nuclear warfare with the Soviet Union, Eisenhower succeeded in advancing his strategy by ‘structuring circumstances’, fostering coalitions and treating the budget as a powerful lever of control. To implement the administration’s chosen strategy, senior officials relied upon a bespoke bureaucratic structure, one in which the President himself exercised outsized influence. This organisation allowed Eisenhower to maintain strict oversight of the way in which the administration’s national security policy was deliberated and implemented across the government—but especially within the Department of Defense.

6. Stuck: “America First” and the Middle East (pp. 31-36)

Professor Patrick Porter

This case study assesses the efforts of the Trump administration to deliver on one of its early national security priorities: to extricate US military forces from simmering conflicts in the Middle East. The report highlights three principal sources of policy continuity and inertia. The first is ‘resistance’ mounted by officials in the State Department and Department of Defense. Even when Trump himself spoke of a change in policy, there were officials reluctant to fully implement these directives. Next, the Trump administration lacked an adequate ‘agent of change.’ Despite their statements, senior officials within the administration remained largely ambivalent about the nature and pace of the strategic realignment which they sought to deliver. Finally, the report shines light on the importance of public perception—in this case, a feeling within US society that American presence in the Middle East remains both affordable and sustainable.

Editor

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1. Strategy *and* delivery are the key to a successful Integrated Review

(1) This essay puts forward five recommendations for how the government can best set itself up to deliver its Integrated Review: secure political buy-in from ministers; appoint ‘Integrated Review’ champions in relevant government departments and agencies; strengthen expertise within government; set up a review process; and give Parliament a chance for scrutiny.

(2) The term ‘Global Britain’ was coined in 2016 by Theresa May during her first major speech as Prime Minister at the Conservative Party Conference. The aim was simple: to reassure Britons and allies across the world that Brexit would not lead to a diminished or retreating United Kingdom on the global stage. When Prime Minister Boris Johnson took office, he took this commitment one step further by promising one of the most ambitious reviews of the UK’s foreign, security, defence and development policy to date.

(3) Conducting a review is a challenging exercise under any circumstances. Getting the Cabinet to agree to one set of priorities for UK foreign policy is of course important—but so is the question of how the government is planning to implement them. Below are five recommendations that the government should consider if it wants its Integrated Review to stand the test of time, including government reshuffles and turnover, economic and fiscal pressures, and major internal and external shocks.

Leadership: the review will need political buy-in at the very top

(4) One of the immediate priorities for government will be to make sure that the Integrated Review enjoys the full support of ministers. They will need to be clear on the UK’s long-term strategic objectives—for example, how the UK’s priorities for the Indo-Pacific relate to the UK’s wider domestic and foreign policy goals.

(5) Securing ministerial buy-in will have two immediate benefits. For starters, ministers are more likely to take an interest in the UK’s international issues when they understand how these affect the government’s priorities. A lack of strategic direction from the top not only hampers internal decision making, but it can also result in conflicting messages about the government’s aims, and it can hinder engagement with allies and stakeholders outside of the government. Deciding where to allocate resources and effort should also be a priority of the government. In his bid to become Cabinet Secretary in 2005, Gus O’Donnell proposed a “capability review” programme to then Prime Minister Tony Blair. The support from the Prime Minister and his Cabinet was essential in giving the new Cabinet Secretary the authority and credibility to conduct the review—and then to deliver on it.¹

(6) It will also help to ensure that ministers sing from the same hymn sheet. A clear grasp of the content will help ministers inform their departments and government agencies to understand the priorities of the review—and what is expected of them. This grasp of detail will also extend to the Prime Minister’s team. His new Director for Communications, Allegra Stratton, will need to be able to communicate the joint benefits of how the Integrated Review serves the interests of Britain’s allies as well as those of British people. Getting this message right from the start will be essential.

¹ O’Donnell G, ‘Transforming Departments’ Capability to Deliver’, Letter to Prime Minister, 27 July 2005

Coordination: the government needs to set up an effective communications and feedback mechanism inside of government

(7) The next challenge for the government will be to ensure that it can deliver on the objectives it has outlined in the review—and to keep tabs on the implementation over time. To deliver the Capability Review, the Cabinet Secretary Gus O'Donnell set up a “Capabilities Review Team” (CRT) inside the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, with a total of four directors and over 10 deputies.² Civil servants across government reported directly to the CRT—guaranteeing a constant flow of information and updates on how the government was meeting its capability challenge. Likewise, the government should consider setting up a team at the centre of government—either in No.10 or in the Cabinet Office. This role could also be played by the National Security Council.

(8) Each government department or agency impacted by the review should also set up a team to monitor the implementation of the Integrated Review. The Centre should be receptive to their ideas and concerns, as this will ensure each team has a role to play in—and feels a sense of ownership over—the review. As the Institute for Government noted in 2011, it is important that “interdepartmental discussions [...] focus on producing best decisions, not seeking lowest common denominator agreement to reconcile conflicting positions”³. This is more likely to happen if departments see the review as a box-ticking exercise rather than a common endeavour.

(9) The government must also make sure that different departments and people outside of government understand the roles and responsibilities of the new FCDO. The new department presents an opportunity to bring decision-making on foreign and development policy closer together, but also increases the risk that ministers are unable to keep an eye on key issues, given the increased scope and responsibilities of the new department. It will also be important for the FCDO to show that it can set the strategy for overseas engagement across the whole of the government, including by liaising with other departments like the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Trade, as well as central structures like the National Security Council.

Delivery: the UK must secure the right capabilities, resources and expertise inside of government

(10) The third priority will be to ensure the government can match its ambition with action. For this, the government will need to make sure that it has the right resources.

(11) Having a strong and extensive diplomatic network will be particularly important. Between 2009 and 2010 and 2014 and 2015, the FCO suffered a 14% reduction in staff as a result of its 2010 spending review commitments. Theresa May's government did put a stop to this trend by devoting more resources to British embassies in terms of postings, local recruits and the financial resources available to them. In November 2020, the Chancellor pledged £60 million to strengthen diplomatic relations with EU institutions and member states and £26 million of additional grant funding to support the British Council. A month before that, the government pledged a £16.5 billion increase

² For more information, see Panchamia N & Thomas P, ‘Civil Service Reform in the Real World: Patterns of success in UK civil service reform’, 24 March 2014, <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/civil-service-reform-real-world>

³ Hallsworth M, ‘System Stewardship. The future of policy making?’, Institute for Government, 18 April 2011, <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/system-stewardship>

in the UK's defence budget. But not all policy areas have escaped the pandemic squeeze: aid spending is now down to 0.5% of national income (from 0.7% just one year ago).

(12) It is also not just about money. The government must invest in building foreign policy expertise. It has already started to provide training on foreign policy issues through its diplomatic academies; but the challenge will be to make sure its foreign policy knowledge is up to date. There are several ways that the government can do this—some of which it is already doing. The first is to bring external expertise into government on a regular basis. Departments should continue to run dedicated training courses and lectures on foreign policy issues. The FCDO has also put in place a scheme that gives academics the opportunity to spend time in the department and has created schemes for civil servants so they can develop specialisms. Other departments are also offering specialised training. These should continue—and be open to participation from officials based in other departments. The government should also consider new and innovative ways to harness and reward specialism within departments.

(13) The government could also invest in training and skills through secondments to the private sector, international organisations and government departments in other countries. It has recently rejuvenated scholarships to study abroad, for example at France's prestigious *École Nationale d'Administration* (ENA)—where many alumni go on to occupy important positions inside the French Administration—or the Fletcher School of Diplomacy at Tufts University in the United States. These exchanges are particularly valuable in helping to understand complex institutions like the UN or the EU, as well as the foreign policy, trade, security and development priorities of other countries.

(14) The government should also ensure that it holds onto expertise. The recent FCDO merger, as well as the government's decision to reduce its aid spending to 0.5% of GDP, could spark an exodus of expertise from the development sections of the new department. Demonstrating that development is still a priority for the government will help to ensure that development experts still feel valued in the department. Ultimately, it will be the long-term strategy set in the Integrated Review that will set the tone for the new department—showing that the government cares about poverty reduction as well as UK interests will be important for retaining current staff.

(15) Finally, the government must make sure that it can showcase British expertise abroad, for example by securing British appointments to the secretariats of international organisations. The UK's ability to project power on the international stage will be measured by how it works together with other countries inside international organisations to address common challenges. The government should continue to appoint top-of-the-class candidates to international boards and organisations, who have an experience of working with other countries and organisations.

Review: The Integrated Review should be revised and re-invented to meet new challenges

(16) In 2011, the Institute for Government wrote that the best policies were those that could “follow the life of policy”⁴; in other words, that they are able to react swiftly to a changing context and internal and external shocks. This has not always been the case for UK foreign policy. When addressing the UK Parliament, former Minister of State for Security and Counter-Terrorism Baroness Neville-Jones

⁴ Hallsworth M, ‘System Stewardship. The future of policy making?’, Institute for Government, 18 April 2011, <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/system-stewardship>

remarked that the “fundamental shortcomings” of the UK’s 2015 National Security Strategy and its Security and Defence Review (as well as the 2018 National Security Capability Review) had been their inability to address and respond to rapidly changing geopolitical circumstances.⁵

(17) Reviewing and updating the Integrated Review will be key to its success—but it cannot be reduced to an internal government exercise. The 2008 Capability Review provides another interesting illustration of why this should not be the case. Three years after the Capability Review had first been launched, the Capability Review Team conducted a review exercise, where they asked teams in all relevant departments to fill in a performance questionnaire. This was counter-productive: not only was the exercise overly bureaucratic, the review failed to take into account the views of people and organisations outside of government.

(18) Instead, the government should run a review process that takes account of the views and positions of people and organisations outside of the government. The government launched a call for evidence for the Integrated Review, and formal and informal networks of this kind will continue to remain important long after the review has been published. Think tanks and universities will have deep subject-matter expertise and could be useful sounding grounds.

Checks and balances: Parliament must continue to scrutinise the UK’s foreign, security, defence and development policies

(19) Delivering on the UK’s global ambitions is a priority for the government, but also for the UK as a whole. Fostering an inclusive debate will be essential to make this happen. Parliament plays a key role in holding the government to account, but it is equally tasked with putting forward recommendations on how the UK can meet and deliver its broader objectives. The Foreign Affairs Committee recently published a report looking at the future of the UK’s international policy.⁶ It will be important that both houses of Parliament continue to hold hearings with ministers responsible for delivering the Integrated Review—as well as senior civil servants who are in charge of its implementation.

Conclusion

(20) The government’s Integrated Review will generate a roadmap of the UK’s long-term foreign policy commitments and priorities. 2021 could go down in history as a turning point in British foreign policy. Downing Street hopes to finally have the capacity to deliver on ‘Global Britain’ and to take it centre stage, with the UK chairing both the G7 and co-hosting the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow. But to make British foreign policy a success, the government needs more than a long-term vision. The Integrated Review will provide the basis of the government’s strategy; the next challenge will be to deliver on it.

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⁵ Neville-Jones P., oral evidence, “Revisiting the UK’s national security strategy: The National Security Capability Review and the Modernising Defence Programme”, 4 November 2019, First Special Report of Session 2019, HS293, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt201719/jtselect/jtnatsec/2072/207202.htm>

⁶ Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons, “A brave new Britain? The future of the UK’s international policy”, Fourth Report of Session 2019–21, HC 380, 22 October 2020.

2. Strategy by Committee: The Birth of British Grand Strategy c. 1900-1914

(1) This case study examines the British experience of creating and implementing grand strategy in the early twentieth century. Between 1900 and 1914 the British state faced a series of systemic pressures and acute crises. In response, a new strategy making body, the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID), was formed, with the aim of improving how Britain dealt with the key security challenges of the new century. The example of this group, an ancestor of today's National Security Council, reveals some of the challenges and opportunities of forming grand strategy within the structures of the British parliamentary system.

Introduction

(2) The turn of the twentieth century was a moment of contradiction for Britain and its Empire. In some respects Britain had never been more powerful. Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1897 presented an image of a confident, vibrant, and powerful empire – one which had enjoyed sixty years of expansion and progress under a symbolic and revered monarch. Yet in other respects the imperial state was riven with discord, anxiety, and doubt. By the time of Victoria's death in 1901, Britain had experienced the embarrassment of military defeats at the hands of the Boers in South Africa, and was the subject of international condemnation for the expansionism and avarice which had been revealed by its actions in precipitating that conflict. The war had also drawn attention to social ills within Britain itself, and to the physical deterioration and trauma which urbanization and industrialization had inflicted on the British people. For the ruling elite, the war extenuated a growing delta between the expenditure necessary to secure Britain's maritime and imperial security, and the state's ability to finance those demands. In short, the new century opened with a series of powerful factors all pointing towards the need for change.⁷

(3) In response, the British government responded with a series of reforms which have often been depicted as the first recognizably modern attempt to implement what could be described as 'national strategy'. A new body, the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) – a non-executive committee of the cabinet – was established in order to co-ordinate an integrated approach to British imperial and national security. This grouping, whose structures formed the basis of the cabinet secretariat from 1916, was a significant administrative innovation (even if it built upon a series of well-established ideas about how to reform the ways in which the state made strategy). It is therefore a potentially valuable example from which to draw some observations about the challenges of conceiving and implementing national strategy within the structures of the British state.⁸

Achievements

(4) The record of the CID as a strategy-making body has received mixed treatment. Defenders of the institution, including its long-serving secretary Maurice Hankey, present a highly favourable account of steady improvements in organisation before 1914.⁹ Others have been more critical, viewing the body as increasingly marginal after some early successes.¹⁰ For our purposes, the specific

⁷ The key work being G.R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ of Cali Press, 1971.

⁸ J. Devanny and J. Harris, *The National Security Council: National Security at the Centre of Government*, Institute for Government, 2014, p. 7: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/NSC%20final%20202.pdf>

⁹ M. Hankey, *The Supreme Command*, Vol. I, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961, *passim*.

¹⁰ N. d'Ombra, *War Machinery and High Policy: Defence Administration in Peacetime Britain, 1902-1914*, Oxford: OUP, 1973.

achievements of the CID are not vital and can be summarised briefly. In broad terms, between 1902 and 1905 the body served as a forum for shaping, agreeing, and implementing what could be viewed as the first explicit 'grand strategy' produced in Britain. The core tenets of this approach were (1) a focus upon Britain's position as a global, imperial power (2) an emphasis upon maritime power as a vehicle for global influence (3) a compact Army maintained primarily for imperial interventions (i.e. declining to prepare for a major war in Europe) (4) a priority on organisational efficiency, co-ordination, and technology to limit defence spending.

(5) By serving as a forum for discussion and debate between senior admirals, generals, and politicians, the CID played a valuable role in coalescing this vision. It also served as a forum within which the PM could resolve crucial questions of implementation – dictating solutions to Departments who would otherwise have been at bureaucratic loggerheads. The Committee served as a vehicle through which a major re-organisation of the Army (including significant budget cuts) was pushed through in the wake of the Boer War, and in which a cross-governmental understanding of how British imperial strategy was to function became established. This vision was, in its essentials, adopted by the new Liberal administration which entered office in 1906, and continued to define the contours of British naval, military, and foreign policy on the eve of the First World War in 1914.

(6) What, then, can this example suggest to us in terms of conceiving and implementing a national strategy? In the first instance, it is important to stress that the successes of the CID were most evident when its ambition was calibrated to match its agency and authority. It did not act as an agent of revolutionary change, nor was it ever possible for it to do so. Rather, what made the CID effective was its capacity to act in a co-ordinating role, resolving inter-departmental disputes and clarifying responsibilities and objectives across departments. In particular, it provided the Prime Minister with an ability to access the specialist information necessary to make important decisions in a well informed and reasonable manner, and to discuss key issues with the relevant ministers and their professional advisers.¹¹

(7) The centrality of the Prime Minister to the making of strategy within the CID construct was particularly evident in the reforms of the British Army which the Balfour administration conducted between 1902 and 1905. What made change possible was the personal intervention of the PM. Balfour used the CID as a forum to gather information and to test the arguments involved. Yet it was his constitutional authority, not the work of the Committee, that ultimately acted as the catalyst for change.¹²

(8) This reflected the fact that governments enjoy less agency than they might wish over the strategy making process. At the national level, strategy cannot be radically re-aligned unless that process reflects a consensus amongst key interest groups and is expressed within constitutional structures that command authority. Indeed, the work of the CID can helpfully be understood in terms of the constraints that shaped its work.

¹¹ D.G. Morgan-Owen, *The Fear of Invasion: Strategy, Politics, and British War Planning, 1880-1914*, Oxford: OUP, 2017.

¹² R. Williams, *Defending the Empire: The Conservative Party and British Defence Policy, 1899-1915*, London & New Haven: Yale UP, 1991.

Public Opinion & Grand Strategy

(9) Britain was not a democracy before 1914, but ideas of public opinion and popular politics were an important part of the political calculus. Perceptions of public opinion therefore exerted a role in determining the parameters within which the government and the CID could act. When it came to strategy making, this was particularly evident with regards to two key issues: the strength of the Royal Navy, and the issue of compulsory military service. In the case of the former, politicians could consistently count upon the support of the press, and a vocal swathe of popular sentiment. This was made clear during the various crises which stemmed from Anglo-German naval competition before 1914, and the well-known cry for 'we want eight and we won't wait' which met the news of an acceleration in German naval construction in 1909.¹³

(10) Yet the public popularity of the Navy posed challenges of policy making in this area. As the 1909 example showed, the public understanding of naval affairs became hitched to the simplistic measure of the number of 'dreadnought' battleships built or building in Britain and abroad. Governments were thus willing to approve significant outlays in this area, especially after 1910. This simplification of policy to a single slogan or shorthand produced significant vulnerabilities in other vital areas. Most notably, when war broke out in 1914 Britain lacked a single suitable naval base along its entire East Coast. This significantly hampered naval strategy throughout the conflict, undermining the rationale for the expanded 'dreadnought' fleet.

(11) The problem of the Army was more simple, but no less difficult to resolve. The image of the British soldier and of the Army as an institution was hugely popular in Edwardian culture. However, soldiers themselves were often assumed to be disruptive and undesirable social elements. Military life was also seen as an arduous burden, which often involved long periods overseas and a variety of risks from disease and conflict. As a result, the Army consistently struggled to attract adequate numbers of new recruits, and both parties baulked at providing additional spending in order to rectify the issue. This meant that, even though powerful sections of the Army and the political elite appreciated that the Army was not necessarily strong enough to meet the foreign and security challenges Britain faced, it was politically impossible to take steps to bridge the gap between existing force levels and the potential demands the Army may be called upon to meet. The CID never satisfactorily resolved this imbalance. Perhaps more damagingly, it also never incorporated a realistic assessment of the Army's actual capabilities with the government's foreign policy commitments. This undermined Britain's capacity to pursue a policy of deterrence in 1914, or to play a major role in the land conflict in Europe at the outset of the First World War.

(12) Estimations of public opinion were thus a crucial factor in shaping the contours within which foreign and defence policy could be made. Politicians recognised that some measures vital to the security of the Empire did not command popular support. They responded through a variety of means: (1) making the argument for particular measures where public support might be gained through communication (2) compromising on policy aims (3) prioritization (4) accepting risk in some areas. The results were mixed, and demonstrated that strategy can neither be divorced from public opinion, nor enforced upon a sceptical public. Communication, education, and compromise were all more important than ambitious strategic vision.

¹³ The classic account being A.J.A. Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament, 1896-1914*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984.

The Issue of Cross-Party Consensus

(13) The CID was the creation of a Unionist (Tory) government, and there were genuine concerns that its Liberal successor might dis-establish a body whose role was inimical to the Radical wing of the incoming administration. In practice the 'Liberal imperialist' elements of the Liberal Party ensured a continuity of policy between administrations, fulfilling an ambition to take issues of defence and security above party politics.

(14) This continuity reflected the fact that considerable cross-party consensus existed on the core tenets of defence and security policy: preserving the 1904 Entente with France, ensuring Britain's naval pre-eminence, and safeguarding its imperial position.¹⁴ Elsewhere, however, the two main parties were in bitter conflict. Arguments over trade policy, social reform, education and a host of other issues culminated in an intense constitutional stand-off after the Unionist-dominated House of Lords voted down Chancellor Lloyd George's 'People's Budget' in 1909-10. These bitter disputes reduced the scope for co-operation on a host of important issues with implications for the design of security policy over the medium-to-long term: reform of imperial and colonial governance (especially India and Ireland), labour relations (especially railways and shipyards), and trade policy (with its social and geopolitical implications). Indeed, after 1910 the Liberal-Labour government became reliant upon the votes of Irish Nationalists for a Commons majority, setting the scenes for a military confrontation over Home Rule for Ireland in the summer of 1914.

(15) In sum, the co-ordination of strategy through the CID depended upon cross-party consensus. In areas where the parties could work constructively to ensure consensus and agreement, policy was developed and long-term solutions were pursued. Where points of difference emerged, relatively little was accomplished.

The Role of Expert Opinion

(16) The viewpoints of the government's military, naval, and foreign policy advisors represented another important factor in the strategy-making process.¹⁵ As is often the case, the Committee received a wide variety of often conflicting advice regarding the security and foreign policy priorities of different parts of government.

(17) The CID proved successful in two respects when it came to interpreting and acting upon these sources of advice. First, the Committee acted as a key forum for discussion between key cabinet members – especially the Prime Minister – and relevant departments. This enabled the PM to focus on particular problems, consult relevant officials and ministers, and – crucially – to make well-informed decisions on contentious points. This served to overcome a series of enduring disagreements and to enable policy changes to be implemented. Second, the CID served an important co-ordinating function at the level of senior officials and departmental ministers. By bringing together officials to work on particular technical problems it served to share opinions, circulate new ideas, and to co-ordinate on issues of inter-departmental concern. This culminated in the production of vital administrative guides such as the 'war book' which detailed the actions and responsibilities which fell upon different elements of the British state at the outbreak of war.

¹⁴ Williams, *Defending the Empire*; M. Johnson, *Militarism and the British Left, 1902-1914*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013.

¹⁵ S.R. Williamson Jr., *The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War, 1904-1914*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1969.

(18) Where the CID performed less effectively was when it became dis-engaged from longer-term strategic issues. Particularly after 1906, the CID was either neglected (sitting infrequently), or utilised as a forum for crisis management. This inconsistent engagement on the part of senior cabinet ministers meant that bureaucratic tensions quickly re-emerged, and that Departments rapidly began reverting to independent, isolated action – rather than collaborative or cross-governmental approaches.

Summary

(19) The government formed the CID with the aspiration of improving co-ordination and effectiveness, and of reducing the costs of security policy. Ultimately, the framework it established proved highly effective and became institutionalized into the working of the British state over the long-term. The revival of a similar body in the National Security Council reflected the inherent value of a forum dedicated to cross-governmental working in the area of foreign and security policy. The CID was different from today's NSC in important ways (although institutional parallels such as a tendency to swing towards crisis management and to rely upon an under-resourced secretariat remain).¹⁶ However certain features about its operation remain a valuable guide to the formation of strategy:

- (20) The notion of 'national' or 'grand' strategy conveys a sense of agency that is not reflected in practice: parliamentary politics, public opinion, and a host of other constraints limit the extent to which government can deliver 'revolutionary' strategic change. Where it can be much more impactful is improving co-ordination between instruments of state power, prioritizing interests, and making well-informed and effectively resourced decisions.
- (21) The Committee did not replace the ordinary functioning of the British government – it worked around and within it. Good relations between the CID and the cabinet, and alignment between the cabinet and majority opinion in the House of Commons remained vital. Cross-bench working was also key in terms of legitimacy and of socialising debates and ideas .
- (22) The CID was particularly effective when utilised by an engaged and interested PM who paid consistent attention to key issues, and also in terms of co-ordination between Departmental officials. When Prime Ministerial time was in short-supply and interest lacking, issues were left to drift as Departmental rivalry and opposition rapidly returned. Strategy thus easily became muddled and contradictory in the process of implementation, and results were unsatisfactory.

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¹⁶ House of Commons Defence Committee, Oral Evidence: Decision making in Defence, HC 682, 3 Feb 2015, Q. 352-53.

3. The challenge of grand strategic implementation: The British experience from Total War to Cold War

(1) This report argues that the ability to implement grand strategies is often dependent on the proximity and intensity of external threats. To demonstrate, the paper uses a pair of case studies to examine British grand strategy in two different threat environments: delaying the ‘Second Front’ during the Second World War and withdrawing from ‘East of Suez’ during the Cold War. The report first lays out the meaning of grand strategy and briefly explains the barriers to implementation. It then proceeds to the historical examples. The report concludes by drawing out the implications of these case studies for the current generation of British policymakers.

The intricacies of implementation

(2) Grand strategy is the art of connecting a state’s highest objectives with its finite resources.¹⁷ All states engage in grand strategic thinking, whether they know it or not. This is because all policymakers face trade-offs over competing interests, and they have to make judgements about which goals and threats are the most important and how resources should be deployed to meet them. History is replete with examples of states that have failed to achieve a balance or an equilibrium between ends and means.¹⁸ This can be due to flawed ideas, the failure to mobilise resources internally or because they were opposed internationally.

(3) The way in which states conceptualise their grand strategies varies. Some publish many of their grand strategic ideas (i.e., their assessment of the international system, their place within it, their interests, as well as the threats to those interests) in national strategy documents, while others do not disclose them. For those with a less formalised process, grand strategic priorities and ideas merely reside in the minds of key policymakers (with all of the obvious inherent dangers this entails).

(4) Irrespective of how grand strategies are conceptualised, they all require implementation. This requires interaction with domestic and international forces that have the potential to adjust or even derail the desires of the decision-making group (which could be a Cabinet, a small group of ministers and officials, or an individual leader). Potential domestic “veto players” include political parties, interest groups and the public.¹⁹ Even if the government can override or placate domestic opposition, implementing grand strategy often requires a degree of coordination with allies. In short, the best grand strategic idea is only as good as its implementation – and, even then, success may yet require a degree of luck.

(5) Certain conditions make implementation easier. When the state is at war or faces a security crisis, decisions are likely to be taken over short time horizons. Domestic veto players are likely to be excluded either forcefully or voluntarily from the process. In the first instance, the need for secrecy and quick decisions will separate the key decision-makers from the wider bureaucracy, political parties, interest groups and the public.²⁰ The willingness of veto players to block grand strategies is

¹⁷ William D. James, ‘Grand strategy and the Challenge of Change’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy* edited by Thierry Balzacq & Ronald R. Krebs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, September 2021).

¹⁸ For a lengthier discussion on measuring grand strategies, see William James, ‘Grandiose Strategy? Refining the Study and Practice of Grand Strategy’, *The RUSI Journal* (Vol. 165, No. 3, April 2020), pp. 74–83.

¹⁹ George Tsebelis, *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

²⁰ Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 61.

also likely to dissipate during a crisis, as the public, as well as opposition political parties and interest groups, “rally round the flag” – for a time.²¹

(6) It follows that a more benign security environment is likely to result in greater challenges to implementation. The core decision-making group is no longer the decisive stakeholder, as latent veto players *should* have greater access to information, particularly in democratic states. Without a pressing external threat, these groups no longer feel obligated to “rally round the flag”, so they can amend or even block policies at odds with their preferences.²² In conditions of relative peace, we should expect to see leaders spending more time bargaining and compromising with domestic veto players if they are to implement their grand strategic priorities. The paper now turns to its historical case studies in two different environments.

Case I: The decision to delay the ‘Second Front’ during the Second World War²³

(7) In the wake of Pearl Harbor, Winston Churchill penned his vision of Anglo-American grand strategy for the rest of the war. He foresaw the possibility of opening the pivotal ‘Second Front’ in 1943, once the Germans had been “hopelessly dispersed” across Europe. Achieving the latter, he wrote, would first require the intensification of operations in North Africa, as well as the establishment of a foothold in southern Europe.

(8) Implementing this design required American consent, which was not immediately forthcoming. The US military preferred a direct approach, advocating a limited cross-Channel operation by mostly British forces in 1942 to capture the Cherbourg peninsula (Operation Sledgehammer). They saw this as a “sacrifice in the common good” (i.e., relieving the battered Red Army by taking pressure off the eastern front), ahead of the main assault in 1943 (Operation Round Up). The British, however, were only prepared to sanction the decisive invasion of France once the Allies had an overwhelming majority of firepower. This required time to amass US forces in Europe, as well as weaken and disperse the Wehrmacht through a Mediterranean strategy.

(9) The campaign in North Africa achieved its key objectives by early 1943: American troops were hardened as Hitler reinforced the theatre, thereby starving his commanders on the eastern front. The deployment of additional German divisions prolonged the fighting in Tunisia, but the campaign ultimately ended in Allied victory and the capture of 240,000 Axis soldiers (more than at Stalingrad). The delay did, however, mean that the requisite men and materiel could not be transported from the Mediterranean to the United Kingdom in time for a cross-Channel assault in 1943. The Allies therefore concentrated on Sicily and then Italy, where they successfully diverted nearly thirty German divisions from northern France and the eastern front. Thus, although Operation Round Up (renamed Overlord) took place a year later than originally planned, the Germans were spread thinly by June 1944. They had also been weakened by titanic battles on the eastern front in 1943.

(10) Why did Churchill and his chief military adviser, General Alan Brooke, insist on delaying the ‘Second Front’? British grand strategy was geared towards the post-war world and the preservation of a generation; the cost of victory would be proportionately higher for the British than the Americans if casualties were anything like the First World War. The Americans could afford a more direct

²¹ John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (New York: John Wiley, 1973), pp. 208-212.

²² Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, pp. 91-94.

²³ This case is a condensed version of a chapter from the author’s doctoral thesis. Please consult for references herein.

strategy, which may have higher costs but with the chance of quicker gains. Churchill and Alan Brooke had a healthy respect for the operational abilities of the Wehrmacht and believed the Americans overestimated their own abilities. They feared that a premature invasion of France in 1942 would see Allied armies cast back into the sea. The longer the Anglo-American 'Second Front' was delayed, the fewer German divisions they would have to contend with on the European mainland.

(11) As expected, domestic veto players played very little role in the process. There was a movement in favour of opening the 'Second Front' in 1942, which was encouraged by the Soviet ambassador in London. An unlikely coalition formed between left-wing activists and the centre-right press baron, Lord Beaverbrook. Several rallies of 40-50,000 people were held in Trafalgar Square in support of a cross-Channel assault. In April 1942, the government lost a by-election to a candidate standing on a 'Second Front Now' ticket. Churchill refused to bend to this pressure. Indeed, his grasp on the conceptualisation and implementation of grand strategy remained strong throughout the war. Even after the losses of Singapore and Tobruk in the first half of 1942, Churchill easily overcame a vote of no confidence by 475 votes to 25. His public approval at the nadir of Britain's fortunes was still 78%. Deputy Prime Minister Clement Attlee's support for Churchill's vision was also vital in the War Cabinet and in keeping the Labour Party bound to the coalition.

(12) Allied grand strategy was, of course, a shared endeavour. Although Churchill apprised the Dominion leaders of Allied plans, he did not consult with them. There was, however, unprecedentedly close coordination with the Americans. The British were able to get their way on the key debates over the timing of the 'Second Front' throughout 1942 and 1943 because they were providing the bulk of the forces in Europe; the United States needed time to rearm and then ship troops and materiel across the Atlantic. Until the spring of 1944, the UK had between a quarter and a third more divisions in contact with the Germans than the United States. Thus, the Americans were forced to shelve Sledgehammer in 1942 and Round Up in 1943 in favour of North Africa and then Sicily. By January 1944, however, the total US strength in Europe was 60% larger than Britain's. Thus, by the beginning of 1944, the Americans were able to dictate the direction and timing of Allied grand strategy for the remainder of the war.

(13) This case study has interesting connotations for contemporary debates over burden sharing. When the British were doing the majority of the fighting, they were able to dictate the direction of Allied grand strategy. The UK today cannot hope to match the power of the United States, but Washington is shifting its gaze towards the Indo-Pacific. This provides Britain with an opportunity to lead European efforts within NATO. This example demonstrates the utility for the UK in securing its status as the foremost military power in European defence.

Case II: The withdrawal from 'East of Suez' during the Cold War²⁴

(14) In June 1965, faced with a mounting overstretch problem, key members of Harold Wilson's Labour government agreed that the UK should withdraw from its last major military bases 'East of Suez': Aden and Singapore. The retreat from the latter was more complicated than the former, as British forces were obliged to assist Singapore and the fledgling Malaysian Federation in their guerrilla

²⁴ For a lengthier discussion on Britain's withdrawal from its major bases 'East of Suez', see William D. James, 'Global Britain's strategic problem East of Suez', *The European Journal of International Security* (January 2021), pp. 1-19. Please consult this article, as well as the author's doctoral thesis, for references herein.

war with Indonesia, known as the 'Confrontation'. 50,000 British and Commonwealth troops, as well as one third of the Royal Navy's surface fleet, were deployed in Southeast Asia.

(15) How, then, to implement a drawdown? Unilateral withdrawal from Singapore and Malaysia was seen as unpalatable; the Foreign Office warned "it would be obvious to everyone that a British alliance was no longer worth having". The UK's credibility as a reliable partner would be in doubt across the globe, including among NATO members, if it was seen to abandon allies in their hour of need. Ministers on the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee (DOPC) continued to believe that "it was likely that we should have to withdraw from Singapore" but this could only be done "once confrontation ended". They endorsed Defence Secretary Denis Healey's plan for a smaller base in Australia for air and naval forces.

(16) The Foreign Office was instructed to quietly sound out key allies, including Australia, New Zealand and the United States, on the proposed drawdown (notably Singapore and Malaysia were not consulted at this stage). Officials reported back that they were all "firmly opposed" to any retrenchment from Southeast Asia in the foreseeable future. This did little to change grand strategic thinking in London. Denis Healey reiterated his belief to Wilson that "it would be right to give up the bases in the Middle East and to be ready to move from Singapore to Darwin" when the 'Confrontation' concluded.

(17) The British government stopped short of announcing this, however. The Defence Review of February 1966 made no mention of future retrenchment from Southeast Asia. It was not until August 1966 when the 'Confrontation' came to an abrupt end that ministers could finally contemplate implementing a drawdown. In July 1967, Healey publicly announced a phased withdrawal from Singapore to be completed by the "middle 1970s" (the blurry departure date was a nod to the concerns of Britain's allies in the region).

(18) Until this point, the DOPC had controlled the direction of British grand strategy and had mostly been concerned about coordinating with allies, rather than the domestic political scene. The majority of ministers on the DOPC were in favour of phased, consultative and muted retrenchment. This was not true of the wider Labour Party, many of whom wanted to withdraw from 'East of Suez' as soon as possible. Over 60 malcontent MPs had abstained on a defence vote in February 1967.

(19) A political storm erupted in November 1967 following the government's decision to devalue the pound; this provided the 'East of Suez' critics with an opportunity to impose their preferences more effectively. Devaluation gravely weakened Harold Wilson, who gave his new pro-European Chancellor, Roy Jenkins, the authority to proceed with a sizeable package of cuts. This included the hastening of the withdrawal timetable from Singapore; the drawdown would be complete by March 1971 instead of the "middle 1970s" (this was later amended to December 1971 after Wilson acceded to a personal plea by Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew). DOPC ministers, such as Healey and Foreign Secretary George Brown, were worried about the effect that this would have on British credibility, but they were outvoted by the 'East of Suez' sceptics in the wider Cabinet. Britain abandoned promises it had made to its allies only months previously.

(20) As with the previous case study, the concerns of allies were integral to the implementation of grand strategy. This example also shows the challenges of domestic implementation under more benign conditions. Veto players, notably the Parliamentary Labour Party, were able to exert greater influence in the 1960s than during the Second World War. One minister recalled "there were all sorts

of right-left arguments within the party. The Europeans had a funny alliance with the extreme left. The extreme left were against imperialism, of course, and were against 'East of Suez'. The Europeans were in favour of concentrating our efforts on Europe." The core team on the DOPC kept a lid on these pressures between 1964 and mid-1967. They identified the need to retrench early on but managed the process quietly and in coordination with allies while the 'Confrontation' was ongoing.

(21) This consensual approach later unravelled with the political chain of events that ensued as a result of devaluation in November 1967. With the weakening of the old guard on the DOPC, the opponents of 'East of Suez' within the Labour Party commandeered the government's decision-making apparatus. "After devaluation", one 'East of Suez' cynic gleefully noted, "we replaced Prime Ministerial by Cabinet government". The currency crisis turned what had been a reasonably well-ordered and carefully managed retreat into an ignominious rout.

Implications

1. The importance of managing allies' expectations

(22) The two case studies demonstrate that British policymakers have long paid close attention to the concerns of allies, particularly the United States. As such, these partners have, at times, been able to influence the timing and direction of grand strategic ideas, the broad outline of which had already been agreed internally in London. During the Second World War, this was inevitable as grand strategy was a shared endeavour. In the second example, by way of contrast, the British *chose* to consult with key allies before enacting their withdrawal plans. Is this a problem for implementation, or is it right that the views of partners are incorporated in the process?

(23) There is a balance to be struck between meeting the expectations of allies and fulfilling other UK interests. It is dangerous to assume that Britain's interests are synonymous with those of its allies. Today, partners in the Indo-Pacific, such as Australia and Japan, are calling for an enhanced UK presence in the region, but such requests should be squared against other priorities and relationships.

2. Paying close attention to the home front

(24) The case studies demonstrate that domestic veto players are liable to try and shape or disrupt the implementation of grand strategy if the country is not faced with an existential security crisis. Given the low probability of conditions akin to total war in the near future, policymakers should prepare for domestic pushback.

(25) Governments which attempt to secure public and parliamentary backing (or, at least, acquiescence) for their grand strategic ideas will likely face fewer hurdles in the long-term. The UK today is re-establishing military bases in the Persian Gulf with others mooted for Asia as part of an Indo-Pacific 'tilt'. Does the public know of and support this return 'East of Suez'?²⁵ The Integrated Review offers an ideal opportunity to articulate the rationale behind this shift in grand strategic thinking.

²⁵ For a lengthier discussion on public detachment from current UK grand strategy, see William D. James, 'Between a Pandemic and a Hard Brexit: Grand Strategic Thinking in an Age of Nationalism, Renewed Geopolitical Competition and Human Insecurity', *The RUSI Journal* (February 2021), pp. 1-12.

3. Embracing uncertainty

(26) Both of this paper's examples demonstrate the importance of flexibility and the need to adapt to changing circumstances. During the Second World War, the Allies did not expect Hitler to send so many reinforcements to North Africa in late 1942. This delayed the 'Second Front' but provided an opportunity in 1943 to further disperse German forces through Sicily and then Italy while preparations were made for Operation Overlord in 1944. In the second case study, British policymakers identified the need to withdraw from Singapore in 1965 but could not do so until the 'Confrontation' had concluded. Denis Healey admitted that the British benefitted from "good fortune" when it came to a sudden end in August 1966.

(27) Strategy (grand or otherwise) should not be seen as a fixed document which has to be implemented to the letter. As Lawrence Freedman observes of strategy: "with each move from one state of affairs to another, the combination of ends and means will be reappraised. Some means will be discarded and new ones found, while some ends will turn out to be beyond reach even as unexpected opportunities come into view."²⁶

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²⁶ Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 611.

4. A Journey into the Ethical Dimension: A Case Study in Launching a New British Foreign Policy

(1) This report examines Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's announcement of a foreign policy with an "ethical dimension" and his attempts to advance human rights as a cornerstone of British policy, from 1997 to 2001. The case represents a rare effort to pursue a new course for British foreign policy and carries lessons for the promotion of 'Global Britain' in the post-Brexit era.

(2) In particular, when it comes to implementation, this case underlines: the importance of bipartisanship; the need to 'mainstream' policy and change cultures through training and secondments; the risks in only 'preaching to the choir', and the requirement for Ministers to know how policies are being carried out on the ground.

(3) When it comes to practice, policymakers need to: be wary of international legal commitments, especially arms embargoes; be prepared to make hard choices or suffer reputational costs; know that successes can come from having sufficient political will and clear objectives (and to ensure that the right lessons are drawn from them); and know that actions can set a precedent for others to follow (including hostile states).

Background

(4) On 12 May 1997, Robin Cook, the incoming British Foreign Secretary, gave a speech in the Locarno Room of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). The Labour party had been out of office for eighteen years and there was heightened anticipation about what he might say. The content of his speech had been worked out in advance with the Permanent Under-Secretary at the FCO, John Coles, and was not expected to be controversial.

(5) In reality, it became a defining moment of the New Labour government. References to an "ethical dimension" and "ethical content" to foreign policy, which Cook contrasted with narrow realpolitik, led to the tagline "ethical foreign policy". This generated significant media attention, much of it critical. Cook's reference to "the Tory trend towards...splendid isolation" and barbed allusions to an amoral Conservative foreign policy alienated his predecessors.

(6) *Lesson: Foreign policy attracts less criticism if it is bipartisan in tone. Policy changes should be framed as building on the work of predecessors.*

Bureaucratic Changes

(7) The aim of the new policy was to "put human rights at the heart" of British foreign policy. This aspiration was elaborated on by Cook in a speech to Amnesty in July 1997, which referenced human rights 48 times. Cook introduced an Annual Human Rights Report, designed to monitor how the UK government was advancing human rights globally, as well as a Human Rights Project Fund providing £15 million of funding in 90 countries in New Labour's first term. In addition, the FCO devised human rights strategies for individual countries—over seventy in the first year alone.

(8) Human Rights were 'mainstreamed' across the organisation through the use of training courses, run with NGOs such as Justice. 420 staff had attended the one-day course by 2001. Cook stated he wanted to make the commitment to human rights "irreversible" by changing the culture of the FCO.

This goal was further pursued by bringing in staff from Amnesty International and Save the Children to advise on strategy and projects, having FCO staff seconded to NGOs like Article 19 and the Minority Rights Group, and allowing NGO staff to brief Ambassadors prior to postings.

(9) Cook also launched a review into the criteria for arms export licensing and produced an Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls which was conveyed as a fundamental change in the UK's approach to arms exports. Other aspects of the ethical dimension included support for a new International Criminal Court, stronger action on apprehending war crimes suspects in the former Yugoslavia, a Torture Reporting Handbook, and the aspiration to spend 0.7% of GNI in development aid, untying it from trade.

(10) *Lessons: To have lasting impact, policies need to be 'mainstreamed' across the policy machinery. Training and secondments can alter organizational culture, but these effects are weaker across government as a whole. Policymakers should be wary of only speaking to those who intuitively support a policy (in this case activists).*

The opposition of events

(11) The progress of this foreign policy initiative can be traced through four key events of New Labour's first term: the Sandline affair, the sale of arms to Indonesia, the intervention in Kosovo and the intervention in Sierra Leone. As the contradictions and compromises of foreign policy were laid bare, the moral authority of the ethical dimension increasingly rested on intervention—the complexity of which was downplayed, along with its non-military elements.

Sandline

(12) In May 1997, as New Labour came into power, the democratically elected President of Sierra Leone, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, was overthrown in a military coup. In October of that year, the UK helped draft a UN Resolution (1132) imposing an arms embargo on the country and passed an Order in Council banning the supply of military material. Two months later, Tim Spicer, the head of Sandline International, a private military company, met with the High Commissioner to Sierra Leone, Peter Penfold, over lunch and later alleged that he informed Penfold of an agreement to supply military equipment to Kabbah to allow the deposed President to regain power. The following February, the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), led by Nigeria, commenced using force to restore the Kabbah government, which was achieved in June 1998. Sandline contributed 35 tonnes of rifles, a helicopter and logistical advice to this effort.

(13) This case was controversial as it appeared that FCO officials had conspired to breach international and domestic law, including a UN resolution they had devised. There was significant confusion over the meaning of both the UN resolution and the Order in Council (reflecting poorly on the UK drafters). Both were ambiguous about whether they intended to prevent the sale of arms to all actors inside Sierra Leone or just the new illegitimate regime, and whether this applied to the deposed Kabbah government. FCO personnel gave conflicting accounts about who knew what and when. Subsequent inquiries suggested that Penfold had acted in contravention of government policy by seeming to approve the arms shipment and senior officials had not responded swiftly when informed. Worse, the Permanent Under Secretary failed to tell Ministers about this issue, even when customs officers conducted raids on the FCO and Sandline.

(14) The affair had a serious impact on Cook's authority as Foreign Secretary. It was clear that the department he oversaw was not just dysfunctional but also failing to act in accordance with the new overarching strategic outlook. Furthermore, it underlined the ethical complexity of foreign policymaking. A democratically elected President had been restored to power; but with the help of Nigeria, which at the time was under dictatorship and accused of serious human rights abuses. Moreover, it was done (with tacit official approval) with military equipment supplied in contravention of a UK-drafted UN resolution, and UK domestic law.

(15) *Lessons: Ministers need to keep their ear to the ground; legal commitments should be carefully drafted and thought through; arms embargoes often end up constraining moral action.*

Arms to Indonesia

(16) In November 1975, Indonesia invaded the former Portuguese colony of East Timor. For the next 24 years, there were widespread allegations of human rights abuses until an UN-authorized force (INTERFET), under Australian leadership, intervened to protect the population and manage the transition to independence.

(17) Whilst in opposition, Robin Cook had queried UK arms sales to the country, noting in a Commons debate in May 1994 that "Hawk aircraft have been observed on bombing runs in East Timor in most years since 1984." Despite this, in July 1997 Cook approved the sale of £300 million worth of Hawk jets, a legacy of export agreements made by the previous administration. Between 1997 and 1999, the government approved 125 export licences for arms to Indonesia. Strong lobbying by the Department of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Defence, and sections of the FCO, overcame Cook's misgivings, backed by Prime Minister Tony Blair's desire not to be seen as soft on defence or anti-business. In September 1999, as criticism of human rights abuses in East Timor increased, the UK agreed to suspend all arms shipments, including nine Hawk aircraft approved for delivery (2 days after the US announced a ban).

(18) In addition to Hawk jets, New Labour decided to honour a contract agreed in 1996 to supply Indonesia with 100 Scorpion armoured vehicles (made by a British manufacturer, Alvis). The basis of their argument was that they could not cancel a legally binding contract without paying compensation. The former Conservative minister, Richard Needham, justified the sale by noting that it preserved 150 jobs and kept Alvis afloat. These vehicles were later used in operations in East Timor as well as during efforts to put down protests in Jakarta in 1998 and Aceh province in 2003.

(19) This was perhaps the most controversial episode of New Labour's 'ethical dimension' to foreign policy. Cook defended the UK's policy towards Indonesia by citing the rhetorical and diplomatic support that had been provided to the East Timorese. Underlying the decision to honour contracts were two ethical claims that competed with those of human rights: that of keeping the UK's word (a variant of *pacta sunt servanda*—'agreements must be kept'—which is perhaps the most longstanding principle of international law); and the importance of looking after the economic wellbeing of UK citizens.

(20) *Lesson: Policy commitments involve hard choices. If you are not prepared to pay the cost of implementation, this will impact on your reputation.*

Intervention I: Kosovo

(21) Kosovo was a province of the former Yugoslavia which had been granted autonomy in 1974 but later had it removed in 1989 through the machinations of the Serbian President, Slobodan Milosevic. Riots followed, and an armed insurgency periodically attacked police and government targets over the next decade. On 15 January 1999, Serbian forces killed 45 ethnic Albanians in the village of Racak, following an ambush of three Serb policemen the week before. OSCE observers on the ground drew public attention to the killings and a major diplomatic effort was launched to resolve the conflict. At the Rambouillet talks, co-chaired by Robin Cook, it was proposed that NATO insert a peacekeeping force into Kosovo and administer the province, whilst keeping it within the overall territory of Yugoslavia. The Albanian delegation agreed but the Serbs refused.

(22) The UK had played a leading role in trying to resolve the dispute, via the Contact Group, the EU, NATO and the UN. With the breakdown of the Rambouillet talks and reports of summary executions and expulsions of Albanians by Serb security forces, Britain urged tougher action. On 24 March 1999, NATO launched air strikes against Serb forces. OSCE monitors withdrew and in their absence the Serbs engaged in large-scale military operations in the province. A huge exodus of refugees fled to neighbouring countries. NATO's bombing campaign lasted until 10 June 1999.

(23) Just as it seemed to be faltering, the idea of ethical foreign policy received new impetus from the Kosovo campaign. Cook's speech in May 1997 had drawn explicit contrast with the previous administration, with an implied rebuke about its amorality. Conservative prevarication in Bosnia was seen (unfairly) as having enabled human rights abuses and so the robust response to Kosovo stood in stark contrast. Moreover, Blair assumed a more central role in the drama, galvanising support for using force and lobbying President Clinton to consider sending ground troops. Importantly, the Kosovo campaign was conducted outside of the UN. In the anticipation of a Russian veto, Britain and the US had not sought UN Security Council approval. A subsequent Independent International Commission on Kosovo, endorsed by the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, described it as "illegal but legitimate".

(24) At the time, this appeared to be a one-off but it set a dangerous precedent that would legitimise the Iraq war in 2003 and be cited by Russia in their wars with Georgia and Ukraine. The ethical dimension of foreign policy had suddenly gone from being disavowed and marginalised to a transformational force in world politics. The UK, with its allies, was now claiming the right to use force in support of human rights and proposing the idea of an "unreasonable veto" in the UN Security Council—necessitating the avoidance of that forum as a means of pre-authorisation (though it would later be seen as endorsing action).

(25) *Lessons: A clear objective and political will can lead to success; but exceptions can become rules, setting precedents that others may follow.*

Intervention II: Sierra Leone

(26) The one unequivocally 'good war' of the New Labour era was Britain's intervention in Sierra Leone in 2000. Despite the restoration of President Kabbah and numerous attempts to reach a peace settlement, conflict in Sierra Leone persisted. Some 20,000 people suffered amputations and an estimated 70,000 were killed over the course of the war from 1989 to 2002. A UN force (UNAMSIL) was established in October 1999 and expanded in February 2000. It was designed to implement the

Lomé Peace Agreement between the warring factions. In May 2000, Foday Sankoh, the leader of the main rebel force, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), kidnapped around 300 UN troops and marched on the capital, Freetown. Britain deployed a military contingent to the country to help evacuate civilians.

(27) Having achieved this objective, British troops then went beyond their original mission and began to engage in wider patrols. The commander on the ground, Brigadier David Richards, took the decision—apparently unilaterally—to expand his remit, although when this show of force in support of the UN and government forces met with success, British politicians conveyed this as a natural progression of intervention. Sankoh was arrested and detained on 17 May 2000. The UK maintained its presence in the country, bolstered its troop numbers and engaged in extensive training and support of UNAMSIL and the Sierra Leonean army. Importantly, the use of force was only a part of a wider political strategy. The conflict was eventually brought to an end in January 2002 and elections were held in May of that year.

(28) Lesson: Having a leader (Richards) with good local knowledge and the will to use force can transform a situation; but success did not come down to force alone and this was a very favourable case. Learning why policies succeed is vital to knowing if they can be repeated.

Aftermath

(29) The ‘ethical’ dimension of foreign policy was overshadowed from 2001 onwards by the UK’s participation in the War on Terror and the Iraq War of 2003. An Intelligence and Security Committee report in 2018 showed that the UK was complicit in wide-scale abuse of detainees during the War on Terror—including twenty eight cases where British officials suggested, planned or agreed to rendition operations, and two hundred and thirty two cases where they continued to supply questions or intelligence to liaison partners in connection with detainees being abused. This suggests that training programmes in human rights had not managed to penetrate the intelligence community.

(30) Meanwhile, the successes of Kosovo and Sierra Leone ultimately led to the hubris of the Iraq War in 2003. As Blair later put it: “In my first term, we had toppled Milosevic and changed the face of the Balkans. In Sierra Leone, we had saved democracy after the ravages of the diamond wars...There was no way Saddam could resist”. In reality, Sierra Leone was a unique case that provided a poor lesson on the utility of force in other contexts. The rebels were weak, ill-disciplined, deeply unpopular, opportunistic, and reliant on the support of Charles Taylor in neighbouring Liberia.

(31) At the bureaucratic level, the Human Rights Project Fund was renamed the Global Opportunities Fund; and in the FCO’s 2003 strategy white paper, human rights were presented as a subset of development priorities. Yet, many of Cook’s initiatives survive to the present day. The UK government continues to publish an Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls, an Annual Human Rights and Democracy Report, and works closely with NGOs on human rights issues. It has been a leading actor in advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda globally and has spearheaded campaigns on sexual violence and the rights of women and children.

Takeaway

(32) Cook’s ‘ethical dimension’ initiative had impact. He provided a platform for human rights advocates, made it costly to contravene rights standards, and set in train bureaucratic initiatives that

survive today. The way this policy was 'mainstreamed' sets a useful precedent for the 'Global Britain' programme.

(33) Ultimately, it skewed towards intervention when Blair assumed the moral mantle of foreign policy and the poor performance on human rights after 9/11 speaks ill of its resilience. The shock of this event and the pressure to support the US are mitigating factors, however. Above all, the uneven application of human rights standards underlines the need to ensure that training and policies are implemented across government to ensure consistency.

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5. Strategy in the Eisenhower Administration

(1) The Eisenhower Administration succeeded at both crafting and implementing strategy because the President had a clear vision of what constituted security, which was enough military strength to protect while economic and cultural vitality advanced the Free World. The President's World War II experience and continuing popularity allowed him to withstand challenges, but he also structured a disciplined policy process, including the famous Solarium exercise, to produce his preferred results, using agreed memoranda of cabinet meetings and the budget as his principal levers for implementation.

Background

(2) The American government is appallingly bad at effective implementation. We aren't designed for it—in fact, we're actually designed to prevent it. Because the American system resembles the excellent description of the navy in the 1954 movie *The Caine Mutiny*: “a master plan designed by geniuses to be run by idiots.” The American government has such a diffusion of power, so many ways that balance competing interests and check the ability to utilize the means of government to prioritized purpose, requiring such broad public support to align, and is so porous to outside ideas and influence, that wielding its reins effectively requires a master strategist. The American public has elected but few to the highest executive office in the land: Abraham Lincoln; Grover Cleveland in his second term; Franklin Roosevelt; and Dwight Eisenhower.

(3) These presidents had very different life experiences, paths to power, size and scope of American government to command, and challenges in office. What they all have in common is a clear understanding of the central challenge and an elegance of political action—most evident in their ability to structure circumstances and foster coalitions. Lincoln's navigation of slavery as motivation for the Civil War, culminating in passage of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, is unequalled for its degree of difficulty. Cleveland's orchestration of the courts and Congress to strengthen a weak executive hand was magisterial. Roosevelt's relentless experimentation during the Great Depression created the conditions for vastly expanded executive power.

(4) Eisenhower had the easiest tenure structurally of the four, as he was greatly assisted by passage of the 1947 National Security Act, which created a unified Department of Defense with a single cabinet-level Secretary, established the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Council, giving the president tools to enforce collaboration in the defence enterprise that had been unavailable to those predecessors. Eisenhower was also greatly advantaged by having had the most demanding preparation for running the large inchoate organization of the American government by having run the large inchoate Allied war effort in Europe. The country was less restive than typical for the U.S., coming out of the trauma and colossal common undertaking of the war.

(5) Still, the politics of his presidency were not unchallenging: the first president forced to wrestle with nuclear Armageddon, the Korean War raging with higher casualty rates for the U.S. than even World War II, Soviet launch of Sputnik, frenzied anti-Communist agitation from Senator McCarthy investigating the departments of State and Defense, implementation of Court-ordered desegregation in schools over the objection of Southern governors and publics, emergence during his tenure of 29 new countries via decolonization amidst great power competition, a party platform committing him to “roll back” Communist control in Eastern Europe, expectation by Republican power brokers that

he was a celebrity factotum they could dictate policies to, and he considering them “the most ignorant people now living in the United States.”

There is No Substitute

(6) The first and most important element of effective strategy in the Eisenhower Administration was Eisenhower himself. He came into office with a theory of victory—a philosophy about what made the country successful—and aligned his policies to achieve it. He considered the Truman Administration’s strategy was simply unaffordable. He believed that military force

(7) Can only contribute by deterring military action, thus borrowing time during which the political, economic, and psychological programs of Free World strategy can function. In the final analysis, the relative strengths of the opposing Blocs will, to a large extent, be determined by the success of the non-military elements of our national security strategy.²⁷

(8) Direction in NSC 5602, the Basic National Security Policy, stated “in the last analysis, if confronted by the choice of (a) acquiescing in Communist aggression or (b) taking measures risking either general war or loss of allied support, the United States must be prepared to take these risks in defense of its security.”²⁸ Eisenhower “was clear in his own mind that in any war with the Soviets we would use [nuclear weapons].”²⁹

(9) Militarily, Eisenhower thought a limited war with the Soviet Union impossible—either localized incidents would be quickly defused, or both sides would escalate to nuclear exchange.³⁰ He believed nuclear weapons would produce a ‘stability of the stalemate’ between the U.S. and Soviet Union, wherein neither would challenge each other’s central security interests and wars would migrate to the periphery of their interests.³¹ Ground forces committed the nation’s prestige, so beyond “a few Marine battalions or Army units” there was no rationale for U.S. conventional forces—especially given the numerical dominance of Soviet forces compared to the West.

(10) That bedrock belief—that war with the Soviet Union was both unlikely and would inevitably be nuclear—enabled Eisenhower to tolerate the fundamental contradiction in his strategy: reliance on nuclear weapons which our public and allies would not support the use of. Public and allied concern about nuclear war called into question the Administration’s main reliance on nuclear weapons, leading the administration to conclude in 1955 that “the ability to apply force selectively and flexibly will become increasingly important in maintaining the morale and will of the free world to resist aggression.”³² By 1957 he concluded that the “concept of deterrent power has gone as far as it can. In view of this incredible situation, we must have more fresh thinking on how to conduct ourselves.”³³

²⁷ Memorandum of Discussion at the 277th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, February 27, 1957, *FRUS* 1955-57 Volume XIX, National Security Policy #61, p 295.

²⁸ NSC 5602, Basic National Security Policy, 15 March 1956, *FRUS* 1955-57 XIX, p 247.

²⁹ Memorandum of a Conference with the President, White House, Washington March 30, 1956, *FRUS*, #70, p 281.

³⁰ Memorandum of a Conference with the President, 24 May 1956, *FRUS* 1955-57 XIX, p 312 in which the President and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Radford reviewed the Joint Strategic Objectives Plan for nuclear targeting. Kori Schake, A Broader Range of Choice? US Policy in the 1958 and 1961 Berlin Crises, in John Gearson and Kori Schake, eds., *The Berlin Wall Crisis: Perspectives on Cold War Alliances* (Palgrave, 2002), p 23, 72.

³¹ Memorandum of Discussion at the 320th Meeting of the National Security Council, 17 April 1957, *Foreign Relations of the United States* 1955-57, XIX, p 482.

³² NSC 5501, *FRUS* XIX, p 31-33.

³³ ‘Fiscal and Budgetary Outlook,’ Memorandum of Discussion at the 309th Meeting of the National Security Council, 11 January 1957, *FRUS* 1955-57 XIX, p 409.

(11) Eisenhower's personal stature and military experience gave him the latitude to sustain the contradictions of his strategy and to discipline the government to implement that strategy. Chiefs of Staff of the Army, first Maxwell Taylor then Matthew Ridgway, testified in vociferous objection, produced studies showing that nuclear war would require *more* not fewer soldiers, but were powerless to change either the strategy or its funding.

Structure Drives Outcomes

(12) Eisenhower ran a structured, cabinet-based administration not unlike a military staff. The administration distinguished between policies, which are the purposes of action and objectives to be attained, and strategies, which establish priority of effort, identify means available, and describe how the objectives will be achieved. Departments contributed to development of policies and strategies, descriptive papers were produced identifying differences of opinion and their holders, then the cabinet assembled to review the issues. The President decided; he tolerated dissent of view amiably, but not unwillingness to support the policy. The President also explained his thinking at length in NSC meetings to better enable the Secretaries in conduct of the strategy.

(13) When the Department of Defense proposed an alternative to the President's 'new look' reliance on nuclear weapons, the Secretary of the Treasury declared it unaffordable, and DOD was sent back to find an approach within budget. When Eisenhower's strategy, NSC 162/2, was presented to the Cabinet, the Secretaries of both State and Defense opposed it. Eisenhower put it into practice anyway.

(14) The National Security Advisor monitored compliance by circulating memoranda of NSC meetings and conversations with the President. They were the definitive record, against which performance of duties in implementation were judged. If a cabinet member disagreed with anything attributed in the memos or the actions agreed, the Cabinet had to reconvene. No changes were permitted or failures of compliance were tolerated.

(15) Eisenhower also convened panels of outside experts to inform the machinery in government and challenge the thinking of the cabinet. The most influential of these groups was the Net Evaluation Subcommittee, a highly classified organization within the NSC but also containing outside experts. The group assessed the likely effects of nuclear war. Their studies, more than anything else, affected Eisenhower's thinking about nuclear strategy and were the genesis for developing a single integrated operations plan for nuclear war.³⁴

(16) The most famous expert panel was known as Project Solarium. It convened members including George Kennan, author of the famous Long Telegram on the Soviet Union, organized them into competing teams to make their best cases in favour of three different policies for managing the Soviet threat. Team A argued for a Euro-centric strategy of Western economic and cultural attraction; Team B advocated reliance on unilateral nuclear deterrence; Team C supported clandestine warfare to liberate states under Soviet dominion and foment regime change. Teams were required to produce specific policy recommendations and budgets, with implications assessed in the near-, medium-, and long-term.

³⁴ National Security Archive, Studies by Once Top Secret Government Entity Portrayed Terrible Costs of Nuclear War, 22 July 2014.

(17) Solarium draws plaudits from strategists, but most fail to appreciate it was designed primarily to solve a political problem for the President: repudiating the party platform on which he was elected and to which the most prominent member of his cabinet, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, ascribed. Eisenhower used Solarium to lever independent political forces into supporting his policy—it red-teamed the approaches he wanted to discard, without him having to be their opponent.³⁵ Eisenhower didn't let the review dictate his strategy; he used the process to expose the weaknesses of his adversaries' arguments and consolidate support for his approach. And he undertook the studies early in his administration to set the course of policy and establish those priorities in spending.

Security and Solvency

(18) Strategy in the Eisenhower Administration was principally about restraining government, and in particular the defense establishment. The budget was President Eisenhower's principal lever. The strategy was reviewed annually as the first step in building foreign affairs and defense budgets. Those budgets were capped by Presidential fiat, because Eisenhower believed sustaining the huge force the Pentagon said it required—a more than doubling of the 13 Army divisions—would damage the U.S. economy and limit the aid available for economic and social programs abroad that enhanced the attractiveness of the Western model. He believed the central national security challenge was “how to stay strong against threat from outside, without undermining the economic health that supports our security.”³⁶

(19) Eisenhower genuinely believed defense spending detracted from social good. And he took his arithmetic public to box in the Pentagon:

(20) Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. The cost of one modern heavy bomber is this: a modern brick school in more than 30 cities. It is two electric power plants, each serving a town of 60,000 population. It is two fine, fully equipped hospitals. It is some 50 miles of concrete highway. We pay for a single fighter plane with a half million bushels of wheat. We pay for a single destroyer with new homes that could have housed more than 8,000 people.³⁷

(21) He arbitrarily selected the defense topline, rather than allowing it to be set by analysis generated in the Department of Defense. In 1956 he challenged the Defense Department to demonstrate “why we should put a single nickel into anything but developing our capacity to diminish the enemy's capacity for nuclear attack.”³⁸ In rejecting the Fiscal Year 1958 Joint Chiefs of Staff request for increased military spending, Eisenhower said “if we do not now have enough military strength to deter the Soviet Union...[we] could not be sure that 20 times as much military strength would succeed.”³⁹

³⁵ Kori Schake, Trump Doesn't Need a Second 'Solarium', *The Atlantic*, October 30, 2018.

³⁶ Dwight Eisenhower, *Address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors and the International Press Institute*, April 17, 1958.

³⁷ Dwight Eisenhower, *Address "The Chance for Peace" Delivered Before the American Society of Newspaper Editors*, April 16, 1953.

³⁸ Memorandum of Discussion at the 306th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, December 20, 1956, “Report by the Net Evaluation Subcommittee,” *FRUS*, p 381.

³⁹ Memorandum of Discussion at the 307th Meeting of the National Security Council, 21 December 1956, “US Military Program for FY 1958,” *FRUS 1955-57 XIX*, p. 390.

(22) Few Presidents could so unflinchingly face down challenges from the Defense Department; most wouldn't even try. But by cutting against the grain of his own experience and bringing the Pentagon to heel, it gave him the ability to rein in other government departments. The discipline held until Democrats won control of both houses of Congress in 1958; in 1959 to his great embarrassment, Eisenhower signed authorization bills producing a \$13 billion deficit (but with no significant increase in defense). He vetoed the housing bill three times in 1960 for creating long-term spending obligations. Across the 8 years of his presidency, he issued 181 vetoes.⁴⁰

(23) Few American presidents have ever implemented strategy as effectively as did Dwight Eisenhower. Eisenhower's immense popularity (his approval rating across the 8 years of his presidency averaged 64%, something no American president has equalled) was unquestionably an advantage, but it was as much effect as cause of his success in developing and implementing his strategy. Eisenhower was a brilliant bureaucrat, which is what made him such a successful president. He identified the means available to him: his personal stature that commanded deference on national security issues, structuring an orderly policy process that kept him in control of the agenda and able to hold officials accountable for implementation, using outside experts groups to provide fresh perspectives and remove him from criticizing the ideas of political adversaries, and—most of all—using the budget for strategy implementation. Other leaders can't replicate Eisenhower's resume, but they can replicate his elegant effectiveness at appreciating that budget documents are strategy documents, and structuring the processes of government to produce their preferred outcomes.

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⁴⁰ Rudolph G. Penner, *TaxVox: Federal Budget and Economy* (Tax Policy Center, Brookings Institution, December 17, 2012).

6. Stuck: “America First” and the Middle East

(1) This paper examines the failure of President Donald J. Trump to extricate the United States from its wars in the Middle East⁴¹, or to revise its many commitments there. This is an issue worth investigating, because he promised to do so, attracted significant support, and from all accounts held authentic convictions. It identifies three principal sources of policy continuity and inertia: Resistance, an Ambivalent Agent, and Perceived Sustainability. This is not an exhaustive list. Other factors are also candidates, but these three are the focus.⁴² This study considers both forces that are specific to the Trump era, and those that are likely to outlast his brief and turbulent presidency. It serves as an important case study in the difficulty of revising grand strategic ‘fundamentals.’ Any similarities with the UK I happily leave to readers to discern.

Background

(2) Trump came to power in January 2017, vowing to fulfil his vision of “America First” by ending America’s wars of ‘blood and sand’ and either winding down its manifold commitments in the region or to making them crudely transactional, promising to “drain the swamp” of the grandees and mandarins that had gotten America into disastrous conflicts. Throughout his one-term presidency, he reasserted this promise repeatedly in public and private.

(3) Despite the frustrations of many, that the neighbourhood is too unruly, allies too wilful, and conflicts too expensive, of all America’s exertions abroad the Middle East still consumes a large share of blood, treasure and time. By 2015, “about 80% of the main meetings of the National Security Council focused on the Middle East.” If “grand strategy” is the orchestration of power and commitments over the long haul to secure a polity, one pillar of U.S. strategy is the effort to remain the hegemonic power and superintendent there. The region is one of the three principal ‘power centers’ that Washington prioritises, along with north-east Asia and Europe. Capitalising on growing disillusionment after decades of grinding war and disaffection, Trump threatened to put it to an end.

(4) Yet Trump has not delivered on this stated strategic realignment. For most of his tenure, roughly the same number of troops were deployed in the Middle East as in the Obama era, not including thousands of contractors. Trump has not terminated any of the conflicts, direct or proxy, he inherited from the era of the ‘Global War on Terror’, the ‘Arab Spring’, and general geopolitical struggle around Iran, and has ramped up military responsibilities in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, Libya, Somalia and Syria. There have been since some late drawdowns, though these in most cases involved redeployments in the region. America’s longest war, in Afghanistan, endures. On taking office, the U.S. had roughly 8,500 troops there. As recently as August 2020, there were 8,600. Trump has since ordered thousands drawn down, but only as his presidency finishes, leaving a garrison which his successors could keep in place or even enlarge. The U.S. also intensified and extended its bombing campaigns. Arms sales to the Gulf increased. Ties with client states, especially Saudi Arabia and Israel, tightened. Washington helped broker the Abraham Accords between Israel and the UAE, and peace/normalisation deals with Bahrain and Sudan. With sanctions, cyber-attacks, threats, arms sales,

⁴¹ By which I mean the designated ‘Greater Middle East’ the swathe of territories from Algeria through the Persian Gulf to Pakistan.

⁴² These include the agency of clients in Middle Eastern states, who added to the pressure to remain engaged, from manipulating conditions on the ground to direct lobbying; the passivity of institutions supposed to exert scrutiny, such as Congress; and the agitation of allies. Space precludes detailed consideration of these.

support for opposition and assassination, Trump has waged a campaign to break the regime in Tehran via “maximum pressure.” America remains deeply engaged, or to critics, embroiled.

Resistance

(5) One source of Trump’s failure is the *resistance* mounted by Washington’s foreign policy establishment. Foreign policy is a collective creation of a group, even in a superpower led by an increasingly powerful executive branch. In this case, the establishment is a cohesive group of well-placed, experienced and often effective figures. It supplies most of the personnel to staff a presidency, who are charged with advising, formulating and implementing policy decisions, and who constitute the pool from which any president is drawn to select from in their appointments. They range across the national security bureaucracy, intelligence agencies, think-tanks, foundations, corporations and universities, linked by a ‘revolving door’ in and out of government, and supported in their traditionalism by large sections of the political class.

(6) Those in the foreign policy establishment are predominantly “primacists”, united by a consensus that the U.S. has first-order interests at stake in the region and that withdrawal will unravel America’s global position. They disagree about how ambitious Washington should be in the region—whether or not to transform it or just hold the ring. They agree, though, that it remains critically important and worth significant investment. As well as “oil, Israel and terrorism”, proponents of continued primacy argue it is necessary in order to prevent adversaries dominating the region, to suppress proliferation risks, and to protect maritime approaches and chokepoints (like the Straits of Hormuz). More generally, they argue that persistent commitment there is necessary to reassure allies of America’s resolve globally. Opinion divides over whether this consensus is due primarily to a flawed and narrow marketplace of ideas, or due to the obvious merits of hegemony over abandonment. Regardless, the net effect was to inhibit revision even of small-scale deployments.

(7) Despite the churn of personnel, Trump’s senior appointees—his national security advisors, secretaries of defence and state, military and intelligence chiefs—were hawkish primacists of varying degrees and types. They all favoured an expansive foreign policy, from Secretary of Defence Jim Mattis for whom alliances and stabilising hegemony were fundamental, to National Security Advisor John Bolton and his belligerent unilateralism. They successfully steered the president, in most cases, to maintain a forward-leaning status quo, both advising and exhorting Trump to his face, more covertly slowing or altering policy decisions, or resigning.

(8) A pattern developed, whereby the president would announce a drawdown or retrenchment, only to reverse himself soon after. Advisors arranged briefing sessions to persuade the president, warning that withdrawing from Afghanistan risked another 9/11-style attack, warning that primacy was necessary for U.S. business interests to thrive, or linking Gulf State support to lucrative arms sales. Withdrawal from a nineteen year war they presented as precipitous, rather than overdue. Trump reportedly felt constrained by this advice, recalling that “you have four guys that look like they’re right out of Hollywood” saying “I’d rather fight them over there than fight them over here. I’ve had four generals say almost exactly the same words. That’s a hard line if you’re sitting here and you have to make that decision.”

(9) In tandem, resistance also took subtler or more duplicitous forms, from hostile leaks to sheer deception. Consider the determined effort to reverse Trump’s announcement of a withdrawal from Syria in December 2018 and October 2019. The first announcement led to fierce opposition on

Capitol Hill and in the Pentagon, with critics publicly presenting it as a sudden, impulsive abandonment of Kurdish allies, instead of the known priority it had been for six months beforehand. The U.S. Centcom Commander publicly stated his disagreement. U.S. Ambassador James Jeffrey recently acknowledged his team intentionally misled senior leaders about troop levels in Syria. “We were always playing shell games to not make clear to our leadership how many troops we had there,” Jeffrey said in an interview. The actual number of troops in northeast Syria is “a lot more than” the roughly two hundred troops Trump initially agreed to leave there in 2019. When Trump wanted to pull out, “In each case, we then decided to come up with five better arguments for why we needed to stay. And we succeeded both times.” Indeed, the Syria deployment became a garrison in search of a rationale, any of which Trump proved receptive to: to counter Iran, to ensure ‘enduring defeat’ of ISIL, or to take or guard the oil. In the second ‘Syria withdrawal’ moment, Senator Lindsay Graham and General Jack Keane persuaded Trump with a map, warning that the areas vacated were oilfields Iran could grab. Together, these moves succeeded. To this day, a residual force remains in Syria, bodyguarded by multiple rationales.

An Ambivalent Agent

(10) As well as structure, one important variable in any juncture of potential grand strategic change is *agency*, and *agents of change*. To overhaul a legacy strategy and outflank its determined defenders requires a cost-tolerant, committed agent of change. That was missing in this case. Trump—and Trumpism as a political phenomenon—is ultimately ambivalent about—and only inconsistently focussed on—American commitment and retrenchment abroad.

(11) This is so, firstly, in terms of organisational effectiveness and its lack thereof. Trump and his loyalists were insufficiently committed to their mantra of ending endless wars. They were inept at bureaucratic manoeuvring and at the sustained pursuit of goals. This was partly due to the problem that Trump’s presidency functioned like a medieval court, organised around personal loyalty, rewarding loyalists and punishing dissidents, with frequent firings and purges continually overshadowing organisational coherence and disrupting the pursuit of policy aims. It is also partly to do with the ‘showbiz’ modality of Trumpism, preoccupied as it is with televisual spectacle over substance, and declaratory drama over policy execution. A president preoccupied with media coverage presided within a media ecosystem that treated any proposed withdrawal as a symptom of fecklessness, isolationism, and weakness.

(12) There is also an internal ideological dimension to Trump’s ambivalence. His statements and actions suggest not a reversion to “isolationism”, but a desire for shedding burdensome commitments while retaining dominance. Campaigning for office, Trump attacked established alliances and suggested he would tolerate others acquiring nuclear weapons, but also pledged to annihilate the Islamic State. His relationship with the military is fraught: faced with criticism, he denounced their commanders for being profiteers, yet also described himself as “militaristic”, identified Generals Patton and MacArthur as his heroes, went on to appoint “my generals” to senior offices, and pardoned convicted war criminals who he called “warriors.” Indeed, Trump’s desired domestic constituency for his brand of conservative nationalism includes the military and Christian evangelicals with their alignment with Israel. His rhetoric, too, suggests an exhilaration in violent domination (Caliph al-Baghdadi “died like a dog” or his threat to bomb Iranian cultural sites), sympathy for torture, and to martial displays of power. Vice President Mike Pence, echoing a resurgent fatalistic acceptance about armed conflict breaking out undeterred, even told West Point’s graduating class fatalistically that it was a “virtual certainty” they would fight on a battlefield, with future wars

preordained. Though on some occasions Trump proved gun-shy, under his administration the United States bombs with increased frequency, unaccountability and abandon. Though on some occasions Trump proved gun-shy, under his administration the United States bombs with increased frequency, unaccountability and abandon. Trump has often acceded to the Pentagon's wishes. His administration stopped releasing data on troop deployments in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria starting in December 2017. For those who hoped Trump would make good on his verbal pledge to make fundamental change, the policy of concealing the scale of US military presence is inauspicious.

(13) Trump, then, is not simply a provincial nativist, but in Stephen Wertheim's phase, a "radical imperialist", or a "Caesarist", drawn to the prizes of primacy, and the control and prestige it affords, without the liabilities. In other words, Trumpism wants it both ways. Trump demands the termination of wars. But at every turn, he has shrunk from what war termination entails, a relinquishing of some control or dominance in the vacuum it leaves, and an abandonment of the spoils and pillage of conquest ("we're keeping the oil"). America may leave, if only it can impose its own terms without compromise. In the Middle East, destroying the Islamic State and then inducing a crisis in Iran took precedence over leaving, as well as what he inherited, a growing arms-sales bonanza. Any suggestion of withdrawal took a back seat to the campaign to isolate and coerce Iran, as the administration supercharged the Gulf's sectarian and geopolitical divides, thus ending up more embedded, not less. His administration stopped releasing data on troop deployments in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria starting in December 2017. For those who hoped Trump would make good on his pledge to make fundamental change, the policy of concealing the scale of US military presence is inauspicious.

(14) These variables came together in the successful lobbying of Trump to strike Iran with the assassination of General Soleimani in January 2020, namely his fear of looking weak, his receptivity to media criticism, his obsession with presenting himself as the antithesis to Obama-era diplomacy towards Tehran (and perhaps with the shadow of President Jimmy Carter and his reputation for irresolution), and his attraction to dominance via dramatic escalation. As this demonstrates, the net effect, even on sometimes-reluctant presidents, is that the 'pull' toward continual conflict remains strong.

Sustainability

(15) America also persists in the Middle East because it feels it can, because of a perceived *sustainability*. While there is a general fatigue with America's wars and general interactions with the Middle East, aversion to commitments in the region is not generally intense across the U.S. population as a whole. Even at the height of disillusionment, disenchantment never approximated the intensity of outcry, dissent and civil strife that the Vietnam War called forth.

(16) This is partly because of a widely held view that the U.S. should stay in some capacity, despite everything. Enough of the masses and elite share a baseline perception, not always well-specified or articulated, that the U.S. should sustain its Middle East mandate because the region matters, at least enough to retain a military presence. Most surveyed in opinion polls agree with withdrawal in short order from Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet this has not translated into a wider desire to retrench from the region.

(17) It is also partly because there remains an underlying perception that however dispiriting, such commitments are affordable and sustainable. This perception is possible because a particular 'way of war' that has evolved. America's pattern of warfare insulates most citizens from the wars' direct

consequences. Those who bear the brunt of war are from an all-volunteer professional force that represents only a small fraction of the population. Modern medicine (as well as medivac, etc) has caused a ratio shift from fatal to non-fatal casualties. Most losses suffered by U.S. troops are not combat deaths or disease. In other words, a fairer accounting of losses in Afghanistan this year would price in not only the 17 hostile deaths, but the 180 wounded. Yet non-fatal wounds, maimings, and psychological distress (linked to high suicide rates) rarely feature in the 'headline' reckoning of U.S. losses. Media coverage often measures losses in terms of troops killed. America's campaigns do not penetrate as directly into the living rooms of its citizens as did its earlier conflicts.

(18) Reinforcing this trend is the method of war-financing. In the era of 'credit card' wars, the U.S. tends not to finance its campaigns directly from taxation or popular 'war bonds' but from borrowing. After 9/11, the US turned to private capital markets, while contracting many services out to private specialists. Governments believed that states could run up extra debts rather than extract resources from their citizens. This was intended to quarantine, as much as possible, the economy and the general population from the strains of conflict. One result of the attempt to distance 'the people' from the conduct of wars is to remove an important stake the population could have in the fight, making the war 'over there', for those not directly linked to family or friends, feel to most like an abstract curiosity. In turn, there is no sustained, energised mass anti-war movement.

(19) This is not to say that the perception of sustainability is necessarily correct. Arguably, the deficits matter economically. The attrition of the wars matters politically. A constituency of disillusioned communities has grown, and helped propel Trump into office and also given increased support to the progressive wing of the U.S. Democrats. This constituency helped give Trump gain a marginal victory in some swing states. The disappointments of wars in the Middle East may well contribute to a resurgence of populist insurgency in the near future. But for enough Americans, the wars are distant affairs, sustainable fiscally and necessary strategically, and the costs are being borne by others. As a result, pressure to terminate these wars decisively fluctuates but is not overwhelming. For the next president, there will probably always be matters that seem more pressing.

Conclusion

(20) At the time of writing, in November 2020, there is an unresolved struggle as the Trump presidency's night is falling within the White House and across government over his determination to end America's war in Afghanistan. Officials and commentators dispute whether it should end its longest war unilaterally or only after certain conditions are met. Typical of the drama of the Trump-era, the issue is clouded by palace intrigue and sudden firings of dissenting officials. The course of this latest clash is unknown. But the apparent compromise to leave a reduced force fits the larger pattern. As before, any U.S. president is bound to have a hard time extricating from the region, significantly reducing America's footprint or downsizing commitments. America remains stuck.

(21) The causes for this strategic inertia are various, but this report has highlighted three principal sources. First is the problem of ingrained resistance from the American foreign policy establishment. A complex network of government officials, think tanks, academics and commentators often serve as a bulwark against grand strategic change. During the Trump presidency, this resistance has often been apparent among senior administration officials. Next, Trump's desire to withdraw the United States from conflicts in the Middle East has often lacked a resolute 'agent of change.' Even as the administration publicly denounced certain policies of the Obama and Bush presidencies, Trump himself remained ambivalent about the nature and the pace of strategic change. Finally, there is an

underlying perception within government and society that the presence of American troops in the Middle East is affordable and sustainable. So long as the American public sees the country's involvement in this region as fiscally sustainable and strategically necessary, subsequent administrations will find it hard to disentangle from these prolonged conflicts.

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