

On Diplomatic Relationships and Strategies

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I have been working on the development of diplomatic doctrine, something we will need when we rebuild America's atrophied diplomatic capabilities and competencies. My topic today is the taxonomy of relations between states and the varieties of strategy they have available to them.

Before I get into strategies, let me briefly describe the relationships that help decide them. Don't freak out when I use the word "relationship." I am mindful that my favorite Texas bandleader-cum-politician, Kinky Friedman, once confided that "on the whole," he preferred "cats to women because cats seldom if ever use the word 'relationship.'" I have always liked women much more than I like cats but can't help thinking he had a point. Relationships are hard to pin down. Bear with me.

There is a logic to the interactions between human societies. The fabric of geopolitics is woven from this logic. The strands that connect states embody and reflect varying degrees of affinity and aversion between them. They derive from perceived common or opposing interests and the remembered quality of past interactions. Accurately appraising the taxonomy of the ties between states and the levels of commitment they imply is the key to informing and enabling effective statecraft and strategic reasoning.

The relationships a state has or lacks define its strategic environment and determine its possibilities for maneuver. All relationships begin with transactions. Any relationship is built on a pattern of reciprocal favors or slights that establish expectations of cooperation or contention. The norm is noncommittal transactionalism. But differing categories of relationship embody differing mutual expectations and propensities for coalition or antagonism. These determine the ways in which states can build coalitions to aggregate the power of others to their own and guide their reactions to international challenges and opportunities.

Briefly, **coalitions** are based on common interests, shared values, or – better yet – both. **Alliances** and **ententes** rest on common security, economic or political interests to concert policies and actions. Shared values invigorate such partnerships. **Regulatory compacts** set and enforce standards and rules based on shared analyses, values, and aspirations.

Here's an outline of the basic categories of relationship from the most cooperative to the most antagonistic.

Alliances are formal pledges by members expressing broad mutual strategic commitments to each other. In a multinational alliance, a challenge to one ally presupposes a sympathetic and supportive response by all the others. In a bilateral alliance, one ally protects the other. Alliances are assets, but also liabilities of those who form them. Alliance members benefit from the deterrent effects of the expectation that they will not be alone in defending interests they

share. But they are on call to assist each other in response to situations they may have had nothing to do with creating.

NATO is the premier example of a **multinational** military alliance. Its Article 5 formally commits its members to treat the security of all other members as though it were their own. US-Australia ties are a good example of a **bilateral** alliance, though one with elements of a “**protected state**” to it, given the disparities in the two countries’ power. Australia and the United States have fought alongside each other in every war since World War I.

Sadly, as U.S. and partner nations’ interests and values increasingly diverge, America’s multinational and bilateral alliances are both dissolving. It is not yet clear what sorts of partnerships, if any, will succeed them. But they are far more likely to be ententes than alliances.

Ententes are partnerships of convenience that imply neither broadly shared interests nor values. Indeed, they often presuppose serious differences. They limit commitments to cooperate to specific politico-military and economic contingencies, threats, and opportunities. Ententes do not imply automatic mutual aid. They end once the interests that caused their formation have been realized or ceased to exist. Then, ententes give way to other sorts of relationships, including **rivalry** and **adversarial antagonism**.

The World War II partnership between Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union is an example of an entente. Wishful thinking in Washington born of imprecise diplomatic vocabulary and naïveté notwithstanding, it was a cynical partnership between states with major differences between them, not an alliance. The entente was limited to immediate challenges from Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. Once these threats were overcome, the relationship between the three relapsed into discord.

The Sino-American collaboration against the USSR in the 1970s and ‘80s was also an entente, not an alliance. It was premised on limited shared interests amidst broader disagreements. Like the US-Soviet coalition against Nazi Germany, Sino-American entente ended abruptly with the common enemy’s defeat.

Today’s relationship between Beijing and Moscow is an entente formed in response to Washington’s apparent hostility to both. It seeks to counter U.S. unilateralism and aspirations for global hegemony. Characterizing Sino-Russian cooperation as an alliance exaggerates the degree of mutual commitment it implies and misestimates its potential to expand.

Turkey has long been a member of NATO. But, at root, it has had an entente, not an alliance relationship, with both Europe and America. Once the Soviet menace to all concerned disappeared, Ankara began to pursue purely Turkish interests with Moscow and its Middle Eastern neighbors. Some Turkish interests are congruent with those of NATO, the EU, and the United States, but others are at odds with them. This matters greatly in terms of the prospects for cooperation between such misdescribed “allies.”

Regulatory compacts are institutions and organizations designed to harmonize policies and facilitate cooperation by setting and enforcing common standards of behavior. In contrast to alliances or ententes, they do not imply commitments of mutual aid to counter external challenges. In addition to global groupings like the World Trade Organization (WTO), such compacts include the European Union (EU), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and the

North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA), recently rejiggered as the USMCA. China's Belt and Road Initiative may be in the process of fostering another such grouping.

Regulatory compacts tend to compose and coordinate their members' interests only at the lowest common denominator. This makes them less than reliable or competent actors in relation to third parties. The EU's notorious inability to coordinate a coherent foreign policy is a disappointing case in point.

Another example is ASEAN, which includes countries with very different histories and international relationships. Today, ASEAN members differ in their degree of reliance on China or the United States and their stances on the issues of the South China Sea. American efforts to treat ASEAN as a bloc notwithstanding, it has been an ineffective – even counterproductive – vehicle for dealing with these issues. Similarly, the loose association of countries joining the Belt and Road Initiative is unlikely to become a coherent or diplomatically capable bloc on issues of importance to its members. Not every grouping is an empire, alliance, or entente.

Dependent relationships reflect the search by weaker and more vulnerable states for protection by a stronger state. They also represent a conclusion by the stronger state that the continued independent existence of the weaker state serves its strategic interests. Such relationships are of two basic kinds: **protected states** and **client states**.

A **protected state** is the object of its patron's interest in its strategic denial to an adversary or its utility in a conflict. An example is China in World War II. China was strategically important to the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union because it consumed Japanese military resources and tied down Japanese troops that might otherwise have been deployed elsewhere. This made China's continued independent existence strategically valuable. There was no expectation or demand from the three entente partners – the so-called "Allies" – that China itself attempt to defeat Japan or actively contribute to their war with Germany, Italy, or others.

After their defeat in World War II, Germany and Japan became U.S. protected states. America's objective was not only to deny their territory and industrial and technological capabilities to the Soviet adversary, but also to ensure that they did not reemerge as independent geopolitical actors that might challenge U.S. interests. For many decades, this worked, but, lacking confidence in U.S. reliability, both Japan and, to a lesser extent, Germany are now reacquiring the capabilities needed to act autonomously.

China regards alliance commitments as liabilities rather than assets, so it has no allies. China sees Pakistan as a protected state. Its independence usefully precludes India's unchallenged domination of South Asia. China supports Pakistan for this reason. It does not embrace Pakistan's ideology, sociopolitical order, or policies.

The Republic of Korea (ROK) is an example of a protected state that incorporates elements of alliance. The US-ROK relationship does not include a south Korean obligation to reciprocate American support for its interests with support for American interests and policies in third countries or regions, as a true alliance must. Still, Seoul has often volunteered such support – e.g. in Vietnam and Iraq – to ingratiate itself with the United States and strengthen America's commitment to it. The U.S. military presence in Korea grew out of an effort to ensure that the "Sino-Soviet bloc" did not expand territorially and that Korea would not be an invasion route to

Japan or a platform from which to attack it. But, as the ROK democratized, shared values helped add an ideological component to the U.S. will to defend it.

Buffer states are a **form of protected state**. From the Chinese point of view, North Korea is a buffer state between it and U.S. forces in South Korea. From the perspective of both the EU and Russia, Ukraine is potentially a buffer state, but not – as the United States imagines and Russia fears – a budding ally of the West. NATO's hesitant stance on Ukraine reflects this dissensus.

Client states subordinate themselves to a patron in return for favors or a role in setting the patron's policies. Client state relationships are **transactional**. They do not involve the patron's vital strategic interests or imply a mutual commitment, though the existence of similar value systems or political affinities may lead to one being erroneously inferred. For example, Israel is not a strategic asset for U.S. policies in its region and has no obligation to the United States, but there is strong domestic American support for the Zionist state. Similarly, some Americans have a passionate attachment to Taiwan despite its lack of any commitment or capability to aid the United States. Client-state relationships seldom come free. Support for Israel and Taiwan guarantees that their enemies will also be enemies of the United States.

Most international relationships are **noncommittally transactional**. They do not imply mutually compelling interests or either mutual or unilateral obligations. Interactions between states other than allies, entente partners, protected, and client states are normally based on realistic appraisals by both sides of their respective interests and how cooperation or opposition can serve them. An example is cooperation between the United States and nonaligned countries like India and Indonesia. Another, despite its intensity, is the Singapore-American relationship.

Competitive relationships are of three kinds: **rivalry**, **adversarial animosity**, and **enmity**. Whether military, economic, or political, all aim at the achievement of political advantage over other nations.

Rivalry pits parties against each other in a competition to excel. Each seeks to improve its own performance rather than to impair the competitiveness of the other. This can be a spur to self-improvement by both.

Rivalry is typical of economic and technological competition but can also be military or political. Arms races exemplify military rivalry. The Cold War's space race epitomizes technological rivalry. The relationship between a rising United States and weakening Great Britain at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries illustrates a broad rivalry for international prestige and influence. Thanks to a British decision to appease and court, rather than oppose, America, the contest remained civil and did not evolve into a situation in which one side's loss was necessarily the other's gain.

Adversarial animosity is just such zero-sum competition. It relies as much on crippling an opponent as on upping one's own performance. Japan's perception that the United States intended to hamstring it led it to a vain attempt to turn the tables with a preemptive attack on Pearl Harbor. The Cold War relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, contemporary relations between India and Pakistan, and current U.S. interactions with China are more recent examples of such adversarial animosity. Only the fear of a mutually fatal nuclear exchange kept the competition between the U.S. and USSR in check.

Enmity treats the interests of an adversary as illegitimate and rejects all notions of compromise. It seeks the adversary's incapacitation or conquest, thereby posing an existential challenge to it. The classic example of this is Rome's fear-driven determination in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE, to destroy Carthage once and forever. This is the most extreme type of zero-sum competition, exemplified in the unconditional surrenders demanded by Washington in the U.S. Civil War, World War I, and World War II.

Relationships evolve between categories. Only occasionally, as in the 1972 Nixon opening to China, do they leap across them. The Nixon initiative transformed Sino-American relations from adversarial animosity to entente based on a common interest in checking Soviet power. But, as the common interests underlying alliances attenuate, alliances often devolve into ententes. This is what now seems to be taking place in NATO.

Geopolitical change can also transform protected state relationships into ententes. This may now be occurring between the United States and Japan, as Japan develops its own policies and military capabilities to counter China and reassert a leadership role in its region. And, as has just happened in Sino-American relations, rivalry can become adversarial antagonism.

Washington has decided that Beijing is attempting to displace it from its ebbing regional and global primacies. This is turning out to be self-fulfilling paranoia. Meanwhile, Russia is no longer prepared to accept the reduced status in European and Middle Eastern affairs to which the United States assigned it after the Soviet collapse. Treating both China and Russia as strategic adversaries of the United States pushes the two into entente. But this provides a welcome rationale for escalating defense spending to sustain continued U.S. global hegemony. Policies positing a need for dual containment sustain employment in the American military-industrial-congressional complex. Meanwhile, Washington's designation of powerful new adversaries is a cure for the enemy deprivation syndrome from which this most powerful sector of the U.S. economy has suffered since its high-tech military antagonist – the USSR – collapsed.

American hostility to Russia and China is domestically appealing but inevitably separates the United States from its former allies and entente partners. They are neighbors or near neighbors of Russia or China. They were on the front lines of the Cold War. They have no desire to reexperience its nerve-wracking uncertainties.

Europeans and Asians want America to help them balance and deter both Moscow and Beijing, not drag them into a confrontation, still less a fight, with Russia and China. America's erstwhile protégés are disinclined to view either of these great powers as unmanageable adversaries to be actively confronted militarily, rather than vigilantly accommodated. Recent experience causes them to question Washington's wisdom, reliability, and habitual risky reliance on coercive means -- including sanctions and the use of force -- to address international problems. They fear that contemporary U.S. policies are driven more by domestic neuroses than by external realities. They do not want to be either strategic pawns or a free fire zone between the United States and its officially designated adversaries.

It does not help that the U.S. approach to alliance management has become financially exploitative and coercive, rather than respectfully conciliatory and affirmative of common interests and values. Security partners can't be bullied into solidarity or a sense of shared concerns and purposes. The reluctance of other countries to sign onto U.S. efforts to reverse the

rise of China and resurgence of Russia is grounded in judgments of self-interest that America's leaders seem unwilling to consider, let alone address.

If foreign nations align themselves with current American policies, they make China or Russia (or, perhaps, both) into an active adversary. In the case of China, they alienate what is probably their largest economic partner. They see many costs and no benefits in risking this.

They also object to America's ever more frequent demonstrations of disrespect for their sovereignty through highhanded unilateralism. And they are not much taken by the self-righteous and semi-hysterical tone of contemporary U.S. rhetoric about America's self-designated adversaries. They cannot make out what end state America intends to produce with military, economic, and political confrontation with a rapidly growing China and a resurgent and diplomatically agile Russia. They look in vain for a persuasive appeal by Washington to harness their power to common, as opposed to purely American interests. And they are alienated by the extent to which the United States is repudiating the rules of international relations it sponsored and professed in the last century.

The essence of any **strategy** is the efficient linkage of resources and institutional capabilities to feasible objectives. But Americans are not now prepared to muster the resources needed to pursue strategic ends and are gutting our capabilities to pursue them by measures short of war. We are committed to self-indulgent fiscal policies in which tax revenues perpetually fall far short of the cost of government operations. We talk about strategic initiatives but have no money to fund them and are therefore unable to implement them. Unfunded programs are fantasy foreign policy, not part of any effective strategy.

A pertinent example is Washington's current "strategic" concept of a "free and open Indo-Pacific." This commits the U.S. Navy to ill-defined objectives related to sustaining American primacy in the USINDOPACOM "area of responsibility (or AOR)." Yet it has no credible funding, contains no economic development component, leaves trade and investment relationships unaddressed, offers nothing to security partners beyond the risk of involvement in American confrontation with China, and has little resonance with geographic concepts in either East or South Asia, which it attempts to redefine to coincide with the original PACOM AOR. It is a convenient bureaucratic conceit masquerading as a strategy.

Americans have long had a bad habit of equating "strategy" with almost exclusively military means of controlling the nation's geopolitical environment and dealing with perceived rivals, adversaries, or enemies. But there are many kinds of strategy. Nations switch and mix these to realize their objectives, rearrange their geopolitical environment, reweave their relationships with other nations, or reposition themselves for future gain. Contrary to the conventional American understanding, strategy need not be either reactive or primarily military in nature. Nor must it necessarily be focused on competition with other nations. As some contemporary examples illustrate, a strategy can aim at expanding relations with other countries and regions and enlarging national wealth and power, rather than at deterring or clipping the wings of others.

A case in point is China's "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI), which aims to connect everything on the Eurasian landmass and adjacent regions to China. This is an instance of a **mobilization strategy** – the announcement of a visionary goal and the enactment of incentives for entrepreneurial entities to find ways to profit from its pursuit.

Mobilization strategies are especially suited to economic initiatives. They eschew top-down planning and rely on market forces to stimulate, guide, and reward efforts to achieve their goals. They make it worthwhile for entrepreneurs and institutions to “cross the river by feeling the stones,” as Deng Xiaoping put it, gradually finding appropriate partners with whom to cooperate in mutually advantageous projects, securing cheap state-backed credit to implement them, and doing so with maximum flexibility. This is so alien to the overmilitarized American concept of strategy as to be incomprehensible to the U.S. policy establishment. We keep looking for a top-down plan where there is none. The BRI is a geoeconomic mobilization strategy with likely military consequences, not an effort to establish a military sphere of influence. As the United States is discovering, it cannot be countered by military means, still less combatted by offering those who hope to gain from it nothing but a pat on the head for refraining from doing so.

China’s attraction to such strategies was born in its domestic reforms. These often involved replicating the tediously achieved successes of Western market economics but doing so on an accelerated basis. To carry this off, Beijing typically declared an aspiration to do something foreign to its inherited ideology and practices, e.g. tap private capital through domestic stock markets. It would then authorize selected provincial and provincial-level municipal governments (usually three of them) to experiment with their own combinations of foreign best practices for achieving its proclaimed goal. Such mobilization strategies involve no clear statement of specific objectives, no restrictions on innovative approaches to achieving their broad purposes, no top-down supervision or central coordination, and no direction of tactics. A few years after launching a mobilization strategy, Beijing typically evaluated, compared, considered, and incorporated its most successful innovations into a national policy.

This strategy of seeking the bottom-up elaboration and implementation of policy resonates with the way industrial policies mobilize profit-seeking individuals and institutions. It requires the government to set the parameters for the market-driven pursuit of change, enhance prospects for it to be profitable for those engage in it, mitigate the risks of investment in new endeavors, and then wait to see what happens. Such mobilization strategies are hardly limited to either China or economics.

For a time, NATO relied on a mobilization strategy to enlarge it to help manage a Europe “whole, free, democratic, and at peace.” The “Partnership for Peace” (PFP) sought to transition NATO to “cooperative” vs. “collective” security in the post-Cold War era, i.e. to take on the managerial responsibilities of the erstwhile “Concert of Europe.” To that end, PFP aimed to establish NATO as the pan-European defense architecture, ensure the survival of an American defense link with Europe through NATO, provide a balance and link between Russia and NATO, while limiting full participation in NATO to nations willing and able to invest in and contribute to the management of European defense and security issues. PFP provided a path to possible NATO membership for those countries prepared to make the wrenching effort to reform their defense ministries and armed forces to be compatible with those of other Europeans already in NATO.

Rather than deciding where Europe began or ended, PFP defined “Europe” for defense purposes as the community of countries that conformed to specified Western European norms. These norms were civilian control of the military, legislative oversight of defense budgets, and military mastery of NATO standards of interoperability (or “STANAGs”) on the battlefield. PFP created a market in politico-military “Europeanness.”

Technically, rigorous adherence to the PFP process would enable all the members of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the CSCE), which included many former Soviet republics outside Europe's traditional geographic boundaries) eventually to qualify for NATO membership. All they had to do was make a sustained and successful effort to conform to American-defined "European" norms and practices. But., as intended, PFP soon separated the European wheat from the chaff. No nation outside the traditional boundaries of Europe rose to the challenge of demonstrating a credible European identity or mastering the STANAGs.

Unfortunately, as it turned out, PFP's mobilization strategy was vulnerable both to the impatience of U.S. ethnic politics and to American partisans of continued Cold War-style confrontation with Russia. PFP's requirement that prospective members of NATO demonstrate an ability to work with and help defend other members did not last long. Countries began to be invited to join NATO regardless of their differences with neighbors, the provocation their inclusion would offer to Russia, or their inability to be more than net consumers rather than contributors to European security other NATO members provided.

Alliances are only as strong as their weakest link. The gratuitous extension of protection to nations unable to defend themselves, still less come to the aid of others, created security liabilities for the United States and NATO without strengthening either. It also provoked a Russian riposte.

In effect, in both Asia and Europe, the United States has reinvented almost purely military strategies of "containment" in circumstances where they cannot work even if substantial resources are assigned to them, which, despite much bluster, they have not been and will not be. Containment strategy rested on deterrent concepts that presupposed a preponderance of American power that is no longer certain.

Deterrence aims to preclude, rather than facilitate, the resolution of conflicts of interest between disputants, effectively leaving disputes to fester. To America's adversaries, these so-called "strategies" look like bluffs waiting to be called. As balances of power shift against the United States, America's adversaries hope their ability to force solutions favorable to their interests will expand to the point at which they will be able to impose such outcomes at acceptable cost.

"Containment" is an example of a **quarantine strategy**. Such strategies are rare. They are premised on a contest between political-economic systems in which the side imposing the quarantine is superior and can muster global enforcement of its effort to block a breakout by its adversary. Cold War containment assumed that, if isolated and encircled, the inherent infirmities of the Soviet system – its dysfunctional command economy, oppressive politics, bureaucratism, and overmilitarized foreign policy – would bring it down. It took four decades to prove this hypothesis correct. In the interim, containment evolved from a grand strategy encompassing diplomatic, economic, information, and military policies to a mostly military confrontation. This is the distorted model now being mindlessly misapplied to China, despite its inapplicability to today's global or Chinese realities.

The cases of North Korea, Cuba, Iran, and Venezuela illustrate the limitations of quarantine strategies. In all these countries, such strategies have definitively failed. If the object is to induce political-economic change in another society, then the opportunities for seduction inherent in engagement are far more likely to achieve it than excommunication.

One is tempted to wonder whether Washington's evidence-free faith in disengagement from those with whom it disagrees reflects use of a **strategy of misdirection** against the United States. Such strategies, outlined in the Chinese concept of 谋略 – "*moulüe*," a word with no counterpart in any Western language – mirror the martial arts in their use of the strengths, presuppositions, and ambitions of opponents against them. Strategies of misdirection include the decoys and other deceptions the Russians call "маскировка," stratagems to manipulate perceptions, schemes for strategic entrapment, the concealment of both military capabilities and intentions from adversaries, and the achievement of decisive surprise. Strategies of misdirection are foreshadowed in Sunzi's emphasis on "subduing the enemy without fighting," tactical maneuvering to "turn the devious into the direct, and misfortune into gain," and deception as an essential aspect of warfare. Napoleon advised that one should never interrupt an enemy while he is making a mistake. How much better to be able to maneuver him into making that mistake!

The Chinese military study and teach "*moulüe*" – the enticement of others into strategic and tactical error, exhaustion, overcommitment, distraction, denial, etc. – as a distinct subject. But it is not uniquely Chinese. Despite the absence of a word for **strategy of misdirection** in Western languages, Otto von Bismarck's engineering of German unification is a classic example of it.

The great Prussian chancellor deceitfully provoked the French into a declaration of war that brought the German South under unified Prussian command. German unity created a formidable geopolitical rival and ultimate adversary for France that both ended French hegemony in Europe and made Germany a world power.

But the supreme contemporary example of a **strategy of misdirection** is the Zionists' use of the nearly five-decade-old "peace process" to implement Israel's project of colonizing and annexing all of Palestine. Zionism has skillfully leveraged the asymmetry between a weak and isolated Palestinian self-determination movement and a strong Israel generously backed and politically protected by the United States, pro-Zionist overseas Jewish communities, and Europeans who feel justifiably guilty about the antisemitic atrocities of World War II. These factors, plus wishful thinking by Israel's foreign friends, have enabled Zionist settler colonialism to obfuscate its continuous territorial expansion. Israel has never ceased to remind the world of Jewish suffering in the Holocaust and to protest its desire for peace with the Palestinians even as it continues to dispossess them from their homes and shrink their homeland.

Israel's ability to dominate the Palestinians has been facilitated by tactics of divide and rule, preventative repression and incarceration, step-by-step ethnic cleansing, the murder of potentially effective Palestinian leaders or negotiators, "lawfare" that redefines relevant terms to Israeli advantage, and effective propaganda to impose Zionist narratives and taboos against contradicting them on the globally dominant American media.

In democracies like the United States, a combination of subventions for pro-Zionist candidates for public office and successful efforts to smear or intimidate their opponents have silenced critics of Israeli policies and ensured that all but fringe political parties embrace the Zionist line. Zionism (European Jewish nationalism) has successfully equated itself with Judaism (Jewish monotheism) and defined criticism of Israel or its policies as antisemitism. The taboo imposed by charges of antisemitism has ensured that Israel's undisguised interference in U.S. elections has been consistently overlooked or excused while that of other nations was called out.

Decades of effort by donors and lobbyists organized by Israeli front groups in the United States have culminated in the election of the unreservedly pro-Zionist Trump administration. This paved the way for American backing for direct or indirect Israeli sovereignty throughout historic Palestine, contrary to international law and regardless of the almost unanimous opposition of the international community.

The purpose of international strategy is to achieve adjustments in relations – changes in others’ policies, behavior, borders, alignments, partnerships, and other elements of the strategic environment – through diplomacy or the use of force. Bismarck’s victory in the Franco-Prussian War and the later history of Franco-German relations illustrate the impermanence of arrangements to which all the relevant parties have not been reconciled. French bitterness at their country’s humiliation found full expression in World War I and its aftermath. German grievances at the harsh terms of that aftermath led directly to World War II.

To enjoy peace, Israel also needs to find a basis for mutually respectful coexistence with its antagonists. Despite Israel’s military supremacy in the Middle East region, absent a successful effort by it to reconcile with the Palestinians, there will be more violent chapters to come in their resistance and that of other Arabs to Zionism. Similarly, unless Americans want to end up in wars with China, Iran, and Russia – our current adversaries of choice – we must find a way to end our mutual antipathy.

Experience underscores the imperative of making a termination process part of any competitive strategy, whether military, economic, or political. Neither war nor adversarial antagonism can end until the defeated or disadvantaged reconcile themselves to the changes in relationships that their humiliation has imposed. Achieving such reconciliation is a task for diplomats, not soldiers. In the absence of a negotiated end to war, the vanquished will plan a reversal of their defeat through plausibly deniable violence, the recruitment of entente partners, passive resistance, or renewed warfare.

The American way of war has been shaped by four seminal experiences – our Civil War, World War I, World War II, and the Cold War. In all these conflicts U.S. strategy set aside diplomacy to pursue confrontation aiming at unconditional surrender and the ideological reconstruction of the defeated. American history since the Mexican War has imparted no experience with a successfully negotiated conclusion to our wars. As a result, Americans have great difficulty ending limited wars – wars in which we fail to crush and occupy our enemies. But limited wars are everywhere the historical norm rather than the exception Americans take them to be. The usual purpose of war is the establishment of a more perfect peace, not the permanent abasement of the enemy. And peace requires all who have the capacity to disrupt the status quo to judge it preferable to renewed conflict.

No strategy, whether predominantly military, economic, or political, can succeed without a process for consolidating its end state. It is a fatal error to enter a conflict without first considering how to negotiate an end to it, on what terms, and with whom. The error is compounded when war aims are left vague and the goal posts can be and are moved. These failures of strategic reasoning are the fundamental causes of America’s inability to bring our so-called “forever wars” to a conclusion.

Our national strategy deficit also finds expression in the serious decay of key institutions in Washington. The National Security Council (NSC) staff now worries more about the vanity of

presidents than about orchestrating the formulation of strategies and policies, levying human and fiscal resources for them, and overseeing their implementation. Populist disrespect for the expertise of so-called “unelected bureaucrats” is draining the government of ever more of its institutional talent, memory, and knowhow. Many departments and agencies – especially the foreign affairs agencies – have been largely, if not yet completely deprofessionalized. Only the cult of the warrior saves the Pentagon and the U.S. armed forces from equal degradation. There is now no coherent process for formulating, evaluating, or monitoring strategies to advance or defend the interests of the United States. Except for the defense department, the institutions that traditionally did this are underfunded, understaffed, poorly led, dysfunctional, ignored by the president, and ineffectively overseen by the Congress.

But when we Americans emerge from our current disastrous experiment with diplomacy-free foreign policy, it will not be enough to refund and replicate the institutions and capabilities of the Cold War period. The world is no longer divided into two competing spheres of influence. It is multipolar and fragmented. The uneven distribution of military and economic or political power creates many disparate orders. In some of these the United States stands above other countries. In others, it does not. If the theme of Cold War statecraft was deterrence and steadfast holding of the line, that of the new era will be the promotion of advantageous change and diplomatic maneuver.

Our national security establishment badly needs to shed its overmilitarization. National strategy must, as the hackneyed phrase now has it, be a “whole of government” effort. It should draw on diplomacy, economic statecraft, correctives to fake news and deceptive narratives, as well as a military devoted to defending American interests rather than fostering foreign dependence on the United States. Reinstating it will require us to reinvent and rebuild our government and its institutions, redesign and implement an orderly policy process in Washington, and insist on professionalism in staffing both. Adaptation to the new realities of foreign affairs will also demand that we reexamine and renew the way our policy makers, diplomats, and soldiers are trained to think. We must ensure that realism, sound doctrine, alertness to opportunity, and the flexible pursuit of it underly our statecraft.

None of this will be either cheap or easy. But it can be more efficient and effective if we use the time before reform becomes politically possible to develop diplomatic and strategic doctrine. Doing this can add rigor to our thinking about international affairs and make our policy formulation and implementation more intelligent and efficacious.

As a former practitioner of statecraft and diplomacy. I am trying to contribute to the development of such doctrine. I hope to challenge others to do the same.