

On grand strategy - a systemic approach

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Abstract

The paper suggests that understanding grand strategy can greatly benefit if seen from a systemic point of view in which the process of systemic anchoring may provide the opportunity to capitalise on those attributes of sectorial culture that account for the appeal of soft-power in a way that maximises the core ownership of a specific systemic model. Based on empirical evidence, it is an attempt to open a new perspective in analysing grand strategy, with a particular focus on its systemic dimensions, in an effort to provide more theoretical substance to a field that often bows too much to practicality in current foreign policy.

Keywords:

grand strategy, strategic culture, systemic culture, core ownership, anchoring, soft-power

Introduction

Strategy, as an academic discipline, is far from congregating scholars' attention beyond war and strategic studies and is often plagued by criticism. Suffice to remember comments in the early days of academic 'strategy'. Bernard Brodie had a rather dry and unapologetic view of strategists who 'presume to explain rather than merely to describe the past ... end to be repetitious, stereotyped, unimaginative, and I am especially sorry to say, usually propagandistic'¹. Ken Booth argues the world viewed through strategic lenses seems rather simplistic, where strategy is nothing more than international relations without its complexities². Williamson Murray admits 'there is considerable confusion of grand strategy with policy, military strategy, and strategies to achieve this or that specific goal.'³ Further discussions on the differences between 'strategy' and 'strategic studies' have not helped much in establishing strategy, let alone grand strategy, as a discipline and a science, as Brodie would have hoped.

Efforts to define strategy are hampered by little consistency and a too wide or a too narrow scope. They are either restrained to the use of military force and threat, or vague, as they try to include everything security studies have to offer. It may well subscribe to Kenneth Waltz's frustration that 'among the depressing features of international-political studies is the small gain in explanatory power that has come from the large amount of work done in recent decades'⁴.

It is very much as much a 'hands-on' art as it is a theoretical science. The practical side becomes apparent in working papers of different political and military policy makers. As one of the practitioners of the field put it, 'it lends itself to vigorous interpretive academic debates, yet it is so realistic that practitioners, current and former, can and must contribute to, for it to be properly understood'⁵. The theoretical side is more of an investigative attempt by scholars of different International Relations [IR] backgrounds to find a common theoretical ground for a term that 'has come to mean different things to different thinkers'⁶ in a discipline where 'different authors have focused on disparate aspects and defined the term in often dissimilar ways'⁷, to the point many challenge even the usefulness of the concept.

Finally, scholars of grand strategy are confronted by a significant array of works focused almost exclusively on the United States [US]. American scholars and practitioners have overwhelmed the topic *per se*, transforming grand strategy in an American ‘discipline’ with very limited additions investigating it in different contexts or different actors. One cannot escape the feeling that many interpretations of grand strategy are designed to cater to American decision-makers, be they political or military. Feeble attempts to investigate grand strategy in historic context apart the US and Britain were also conducted by English speaking, and minded, authors. Finally, works on China’s grand strategy, seem more a collection of thoughts on China’s rising as a world power and less concerned with the attributes of its grand strategy.

Despite significant efforts to establish grand strategy as a stand alone, fully fledged, IR-worthy science, by pushing forward toward a more structured understanding, they seem to lack the theoretical foundations other disciplines in the field enjoy. Admittedly, strategy’s need for practicality, constrains theoretical attempts and often rejects contributions from adjacent disciplines. Consequently, bringing to the field a deeper and more complex array of empirical insights, that would consolidate its theoretical approach, may be confronted with stiff opposition. This, in turn, could be enough for cementing forward a reputation for aridity or inconsistency at the very least. As such, grand strategy is nothing but condemned to suffer the same critiques of strategy. Without some attempt to produce a theoretical approach grand strategy will remain an orphan of both strategy or security studies, nothing but a futile exercise, good enough to justify or criticise US’s policies every time a new National Security Strategy is presented. At the same time, it should not be left to meander pointlessly in futile theoretical debates.

Murray tells us ‘grand strategy is a matter of great states and great states alone. No small states, and few medium size states, possess the possibility of crafting a grand strategy.’⁸ One can argue that crafting is not restricted to great states but rather its application. So what, of what we know about grand strategy, provides us with the clues to how it is structured and how it works. Can we pinpoint to the trademarks of grand strategy in action? For what should we look for? Sheer power; unmatched military prowess; technological superiority? How is grand strategy manifesting in the real world? Who can ‘do’ grand strategy, how and when? What is grand strategy?

Defining ‘grand strategy’

Grand strategy is very much defined by what it is as it is by what it is not. The literature on the topic abounds with reviews of current attempts to coin the term. I shall not treat them here extensively as they shall be addressed further on. However, since the obvious choice is to directly relate it to strategy, it is a subject that needs to be addressed sooner rather than later.

Is it grand strategy a strategy in the first place? If we consider it usually derives from a vision, it can be orchestrated into a multi-sequenced or simultaneous plan of action and can be deployed at operational and even tactical level the answer is yes. Furthermore, like strategy, grand strategy needs the proper allocation of resources in order to achieve objectives. Defining grand strategy as much broader in scope and means than the ‘simpler’ strategy may prove counterproductive as generally strategy is perceived as the instrument of conducting war⁹. Since almost always the purpose of conducting a war is to win it, in the most favourable of terms, comparison with grand strategy ought to stop right there. Why? Strategy and grand strategy serve different purposes and are employed mostly in different context scenarios. In the simplest of terms *strategy is about survival, grand strategy is about replication*. It is a conscious quest for the development of the ‘overall worth’ of a nation¹⁰. In the quest for empirical evidence, we can follow along the breadcrumb trail left by both practitioners and scholars. Recent history provides us with examples of successful and failed grand strategies, enough to purge the theoretical framing and practical application of elusive truths.

Since survival and replication are overly simplified and vague concepts, I attempt to suggest a more complex approach, that integrates many ideas and concepts already present in IR literature, in a rather distinct way.

Grand strategy represents a state's set of correlated policies aimed at controlling the future by means of anchoring other actors or sectors of international interaction to its core, according to its own strategic and systemic cultural models, in order to maximise its hard and soft powers.

It is a definition that relies on commonly accepted theoretical concepts and terms in international relations with some degree of practicality for political and military decision makers. It should apply to any country, big or small, as it concentrates on ends rather than means, which may significantly differ in proportion, according to the task at hand.

Furthermore, it is an indication of five preconditions for grand strategy to 'happen'. The first one, and probably the most important, is the existence of a successful strategic and/or systemic model that can be replicated at a very large scale; secondly, the existence of a strategic and/or systemic core that can sustain and coordinate the process of replication abroad; in the third place, the existence of the resources enabling the model to be replicated, or the willingness to develop and allocate those resources for replication at a larger scale; fourthly, the ability and willingness to anchor, by means strategic or systemic, foreign systems or sectors to its own cores; finally, the capacity to sustain such policies for a long period of time. Without any of these preconditions fulfilled we are in fact in the absence of grand strategy potential and not necessarily as David S. McDonough puts it, 'hegemonic potential'¹¹. The limits of grand strategy are given on one hand by the resources available and the scope and on the other hand by the reaction of the other state actors to it.

In this definition I use several terms and concepts: controlling the future, sectors, anchoring, core ownership, strategic and systemic culture. With the possible exception of 'anchoring' the rest of terms have been used in literature and in direct or indirect correlation with the concept of grand strategy.

'Control of the future'

In classical strategy the control of the outcome means winning the war and peace in favourable terms. Allied victory in Europe over Nazi Germany was the desired outcome of war. The Yalta Conference was designed to insure war victors a desired outcome for peace. Winning the war yet losing the peace is a direct consequence of poor strategy. US' latest adventurism in Iraq and Afghanistan stands testimony. The American inability to control the situation proves the US had no strategy, let alone a grand strategy, apart from 'beat them up, take the oil'. The 'exit strategy' did not prove more successful either.

The problem of control is a recurrent theme in the field of grand strategy. In IR, the concept of control is intrinsically linked to that of uncertainty, and in the complete absence of it, of anarchy. By taking the unresolvable out of the unresolvable uncertainty¹², as Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler call it, controlling the future means escaping the predicament of the security dilemma. In the words of Steven Metz 'it attempts to impose coherence and predictability on an inherently disorderly environment'¹³. Peter Layton suggests grand strategy 'is about taking a planned series of successive actions to create a preferred world at some future time'¹⁴. The Quadriennial Defense Review and National Security Strategy both speak about "shaping the environment".

By establishing a dominant 'framework of reference'¹⁵, choice to comply or not becomes an option for the 'other'. By setting the 'rules' and norms others must follow, one is in the position to use a 'carrot and stick' policy. A consistent behaviour of punishment and reward buttresses the framework of reference, instils predictability and mitigates uncertainty.

Hew Strachan believes 'actors must stay on course, acting consistently with the grand strategy and not undermining it, in anarchy, an environment fraught with uncertainty, complexity, and danger'¹⁶. In essence, if anarchy is what states makes of it, then a grand strategy of 'control' may be the exact antidote. Imposing control either by force, or the treat of using it, or by normative institutionalised means should lead to behavioural consistency. Any dissonance between them allows for uncertainty to creep in.

'Policing' is not controlling as reward is missing. It is nothing more than primacy, unsustainable in the long term and extremely unpopular even with friends and allies. The risk to becoming a warden ensues with no added benefits like predictability.

In our case controlling the future is not merely addressing clear and present dangers or vague threats. One does not grand strategy for that. In the worst of scenarios, such an approach obscures the bigger picture to the point it consumes essential resources in large amounts, utterly disproportionate to the benefits they provide and often counterproductive to the main interests of the state, with consequences that stretch over decades. Francis Fukuyama contends that 'American preoccupation with Iraq limits Washington's options in other parts of the world and has distracted the attention of senior policy makers from other regions such as Asia that in the long run are likely to present greater strategic challenges'¹⁷. Shawn Brimley joins in believing the attacks of 9/11 have blinded America from the full panoply of challenges'¹⁸ as '[it] is suffering from strategic distraction'¹⁹. Strategic 'blindness' may lead to unexpected and unwanted consequences. In recent years, the propensity to focus on task oriented strategies has become evident in American strategic thought.

For instance, Paul D. Miller suggests the following five pillars of grand strategy: building democratic peace, defending the American homeland, maintaining a favourable balance of power, punishing rogue actors, and investing in good governance and allied capabilities abroad²⁰. It is a mix of framework of reference and task oriented 'pillars' that provides a rather incomplete vision of the future. Miller advocates the US could successfully manage the new era ahead by concentrating on the three outmost threats: to the liberal order by autocratic regimes armed with nuclear weapons, by failed and rogue states harbouring organised crime and finally, by Islamist movements engaging in violent and hostile acts against everyone else²¹. Central to his argument is the need to identify and address threats and develop or revamp tailored capabilities to tackle them anywhere in the world. Furthermore, Miller believes maintaining a favourable balance of power during the conflict with Soviet Union hijacked much of the rest of US high politics imperatives, leading to a weakened presence overall, a sign that strategic blindness still lingers on the corridors of Washington.

Controlling the future is not about mitigating risks. It is about framing a strategic position that limits others ability and choices to pursue their own plans of action – whether through unilateral action or multilateral negotiations - while favouring and increasing its own. Grand strategy is not, or should not be, task oriented but conceptually developed by outlining frameworks of reference. The Partnership for Peace [PfP], the Non-Proliferation Treaty [NPT] or the Stability and Growth Pact [SGP] are but few of the frames of reference aimed at controlling future behaviour, insure predictability, are equipped with instruments of control and actors subject to retaliatory action. I have used these examples to show that 'world' may vary according to the ambitions one has. It may very well be the whole world in the case of the US in the unipolar era or simply 'its world' in the case of the Soviet Union or the European Union [EU] and its Neighbourhood in the case of the European Commission [EC].

Strategic and systemic culture

Why is systemic culture important and how it differs from strategic culture? What are the main ingredients of systemic culture and how they interact? I shall try to address these questions separately.

Strategic vs. systemic culture

Strategic culture plays an important role in works on grand strategy. However, it only provides half of the answer. The other half, systemic culture is never mentioned. Thomas G. Mankhen makes this distinction incidentally, when asks himself who is the keeper and transmitter of strategic culture²² without expanding the idea beyond the military realm. Strategic culture at the national level 'reflects society's values regarding the use of force. At the military level ... is an expression of the nation's military wants to fight wars'²³. Essentially, strategic culture is a byproduct of war and survivability. Systemic culture is a commodity of peace and replication. Society is the keeper and transmitter of a particular culture. For a long time, the role systemic culture plays in shaping grand strategy has been overlooked mostly because of the circumstances in which strategic culture surfaced.

After the WWII, an entire array of American policy makers struggled to understand the nature of the Soviet regime and its conduct of international relations. As early as 1947 Kennan underlined that 'the political personality of Soviet power as we know it today is the product of ideology and circumstances: ideology inherited by the present Soviet leaders from the movement in which they had their political origin, and circumstances of the power which they have now exercised for nearly three decades in Russia'²⁴. Facing the new soviet nuclear capabilities, policy makers found little comfort in the old school military strategy. The prospect of nuclear obliteration changed significantly strategic thinking, as it was no longer the preserve of the military²⁵. Obsolete, Clausewitzian logic witnessed a shift of attention 'away from war as an instrument of policy toward the threat of war, and studies of actual violence have given place to analyses of "deterrence," "crisis management," "the manipulation of risk"'²⁶. Hedley Bull argued that in the Western world and 'most prominently in the United States, the civilian strategists have entered the citadels of power and have prevailed over military advisers on major issues of policy'²⁷. Since the 'enduring principles of war' could no longer provide decision makers with straightforward answers everything and anything 'strategic' inevitably became the work of theorists, able and willing to 'overwhelm the military with their quality and quantity of contributions to the literature'²⁸. The constant state of war, hot or cold, in which America developed these concepts are the main reason why strategic culture took precedence and completely obscured its systemic component.

In an attempt to counteract the Army's criticism, wary of all things theoretical and knowing it 'has no wish to scrap its previous experience in favour of unproven doctrine, or in order to accommodate enthusiastic theorists having little or no responsibility for the consequences of following the courses of action they advocate'²⁹, civilian advisers focused exclusively on military security, in a way corrupting Snyder's understanding of the term. One should remember that Snyder's concept of strategic culture aimed at rebalancing strategic thinking, away from decades of game theory. For Snyder game theory was based on 'generic' rationality. Soviet culture was far from being generic since, as Jack L. Snyder put it, culture bows to deep-seated attitudes and beliefs³⁰. When a nation is willing to sacrifice more than twenty million of its people, and play friends with the its utmost ideological adversary to win a war, 'culture' goes much beyond strategic into the realm of systemic.

In a timespan of two decades, Russian systemic culture changed so significantly it affected not only strategic perception but systemic behavior. Soviet systemic fracture that altered strategic culture is not singular. Strategic and systemic cultures differ between the

Ottoman Empire and the new Turkish Republic or the Imperial and Maoist China. 'The most salient beliefs and attitudes that comprise culture'³¹ as Mankhen put it, are of systemic not strategic nature.

There is a direct correlation between strategic culture and doctrine. Doctrine guides 'official behavior with respect to strategic research and development, weapons choice, forces, operational plans, arms control, etc.'³² in order to make strategic thinking relevant³³. Strategic culture needs to keep up with technological transformation, the nature of the enemy³⁴, security shifts and hostile or threatening circumstances. From Machiavelli's military writings³⁵ to the obsolete French armoured tactics in the WWII, history shows that every time strategic culture is 'left behind' technology, defeat ensues. It is a different pace to which systemic culture has often difficulty to adapt, or simply has no willingness to acquiesce it³⁶.

McDonough seems to agree³⁷ with other authors on the importance of securing systemic support as may encompass particularly aggressive or ideological strategies. Without the iron fist of Soviet repression chances are Russian society would have collapsed in face of Nazi aggression in less than a year. In more than three millennia of Chinese history there is no trace of a Long March. It was inspired by an ideological vision, a typically systemic component, and used as 'a manifesto' and 'propaganda'. More recent examples show public support is essential in conducting war. Protests against the Vietnam War, from street rallies to draft refusal and fleeing are well documented. Embedding press in operations in Iraq and the live coverage of the war in its early stages were nothing more than an attempt to secure public's opinion.

Systemic culture may consciously influence in its turn strategic culture based on ideational factors or economic grounds. Stand proof international treaties on the use of anti-personnel mines, chemical weapons or the more recent moral controversy over the use of drones. Therefore, in evaluating strategy, and particularly grand strategy, one ought to consider both strategic and systemic cultures working as a whole, interdependent and mutually influencing each other. For a better understanding of how grand strategy works one has to consider and analyse them separately. It is a continuous process in which one or the other take precedence in accordance to particular circumstances.

Systemic culture – from structure to process

'Systems' is yet another difficult concept to pinpoint. Its understanding depends very much on the mental instruments employed. Richard W. Chadwick's comprehensive review³⁸ of systems serves as a good point of departure for a chapter apart in IR that promised, not once, to hold the keys to understanding the nature of international relations. I try not to clue the reader towards a better understanding of the structure and processes but rather to better fit the concept of systemic culture into the analysis of grand strategy.

In analysing systems, mechanicism is the path often chosen by scholars and researchers. For instance, Chadwick's favourite definition, given by W. Edwards Deming, implies, as many others, a mechanistic interpretation: 'a system is a network of interdependent components working together to achieve a collection of common aims'³⁹. However, can anyone pinpoint at least one societal segment working in perfect harmony? Units, sub-systems and systems act according to particular motivations that may or may not coincide at some point with the 'common aims'. At best they can be manipulated or coerced into contributing to a particular aim for a limited period of time. Societal units and sub-systems are neither cogs nor transmission belts. It is an interpretation that fails, as it proved unsustainable in liberal societies⁴⁰ and inapplicable in the communist ones. There is no homogeneity in a social construct. With certainty, there will be agents, structures or sub-units, whatever one may call them, 'that work against the system'. The mechanistic approach fails in assuming, even further,

that a locked cog may trigger cascading effects. If connections are not linear, as it usually is the case, the domino effect is absent or felt to a much more limited scale.

Stalin's concept of 'transmission belts' assumed that interconnections are not linear and everything can be put in motion from a single centre. The transmission belts were supposed to link the party to the sub-units of the system. Unions, acting as the transmission belts, were supposed not only to substitute the fabric of interactions in society, organically created over time, but also realign them to serve the purpose of the party. This is one of the more interesting and more radical examples of systemic re-anchoring at national level.

The mechanistic interpretation has been entrenched in the American understanding of systemic interaction, promising predictive capabilities. Its influence is so significant that, despite all evidence to the contrary, the theory has been transplanted into the realm of military strategy, eventually doing more harm than good when its principles have been applied on the field⁴¹. Linearity and 'hub-spoke' interpretations do not apply in social systemic analysis.

Discussing human interaction at this point yet is not about process, but structure. Systems can be sub-divided *ad infinitum*. However, discussing sub-units at a human unit level is both impractical and irrelevant in our case. The analysis concentrates on the sub-unit that, through its actions or role, can produce consequences relevant to the system. Since a societal unit or sub-unit cannot be strictly defined or measured I use relevance of action, or role, as a yardstick. This leaves us outside Waltz's critique of reductionism, 'where the whole is understood by knowing the attributes and the interactions of its parts'⁴². One can see a sub-system as an evolving 'blob' whose 'critical mass' is given by a common denominator at a given particular time. Its cohesion is determined by a shared identity, given or perceived, [norms⁴³] or a set of rules that define its boundaries⁴⁴.

As cohesion progresses it tends to transform into a process of integration that Talcott Parsons sees as 'boundary-maintaining' type of system⁴⁵. He asserts that 'the nature of the integration of stable systems ... focuses on the integration of the motivation of actors with the normative cultural standards which integrate the action system...these standards are ... patterns of value-orientation, and as such are a particularly crucial part of the cultural tradition'⁴⁶. Parsons explains the process of culture formation by a particular sub-system. In doing so, he assumes that in the process of creating systemic culture compatibility between the units is not required and integration can occur in a moving equilibrium⁴⁷. It implies that the boundaries of culture can be passed once the patterns of value-orientation are absorbed irrespective of the system's homogeneity. In other words, it may be possible for identities to be assumed, rules observed, norms accepted, and values shared by everyone without alienating the structure. As long as it succeeds in maintaining those boundaries it remains intrinsically a point of reference. As such, culture becomes a vehicle of integration that can absorb an unlimited number of heterogeneous sub-units.

Systemic relevance in grand strategy

Different systems produce different systemic cultures. However not all carry the same relevance leading to points of contention among scholars of grand strategy. Despite valid criticism, sectorial analysis is widely accepted. Buzan and Little acknowledge five of them: military, political, economic, socio-cultural and environmental⁴⁸. This type of analysis, extensively carried later on⁴⁹, is a point of departure for establishing a new type of security framework but offers little aid in discussing grand strategy.

If we consider sectors from the point of view of their potential for inflicting change, with consequences at the systemic level, the number of sub-systems relevant to grand strategy ought to bring us to a more relevant categorisation. Loosely, it would include a) financial, trade and strategic resources, b) politics, ideology and religion c) information and media, d)

technology, e) international institutions and organisations⁵⁰. Empirically, these are the main sectors that can contribute to exercising influence across the national boundaries and the main source of 'soft-power'. As Joseph S. Nye suggests '[one] should give top priority to those aspects of the international system that ... have profound effects on the basic international order'⁵¹.

Sectors do obviously interact and influence each other to a certain degree. It is practically impossible to imagine any of these categories without at least some form of organisation or institutionalisation as it is hard to separate information from technology. I choose to see them as sectors that juxtapose to some degree one over the other in a tridimensional perspective.

Core ownership and sectorial anchoring

In today's world there is almost impossible to imagine a country that does not exercise some degree of control over its sectors of society be they systemic or strategic. Countries that are unable to anchor them are considered practically failed states. At state level, the degree of anchoring varies to a large extent, from the ones completely under control like the military and administration to the lesser ones like independent media or religion. Evidently, the degree of control expected is in direct relation to the form of exercising power: democracy, autocracy or dictatorship.

In our case is important to understand that at some point the 'critical mass' of one or more of these sectors surpasses country borders. This process can be voluntarily like military intervention or involuntary like the internet, or as by-product of a voluntary action like the spread French Revolutionary ideas across the countries Napoleon defeated. Some are just an inheritance of times long gone. Imagine how would a government feel if the government of another state would fund and conduct massive, institutionalised policies unhampered. Would this thought be even tolerated? Yet the Vatican still has a massive influence among people in other states throughout a perfectly legal and institutionalised network of churches. This is an example of an inherited sector, religion, that has enormous coverage outside the anchor state.

Core and core ownership

I have used the Vatican example because it is a rather peculiar case. Generally, democracies pride themselves that church and state are separated. Since religious control of the nation state is theoretically absent in countries like Spain, Ireland or Brazil, all catholic by excellence, the Vatican can influence moral behaviour and even state legislation. Faith is directly anchored to the policies of Vatican, and sometimes the whims of a certain Pope. The Vatican 'represents' the core of catholic faith and it owes that core completely.

As soon as 1994, Barry S. Posen and Andrew Ross were convinced America's 'domination of the news media, mass culture, computers and international communications'⁵² was unmatched. It is a position largely unchanged, if not increased, since then making the US the prime candidate to core ownership in the western world.

Advanced technologies are the penchant of the American military-industrial complex which is at the forefront of innovation. The US is the 'master of the most advanced military technologies, especially intelligence and command and control capabilities and precision-guided munitions'⁵³. In the same vein, the US military might has served as the core for NATO and other security or defence organisations. To a less visible level, the US is protecting the major oil exporters in the Gulf (and sea routes), being the most important player in that market. IMF and the World Bank are *de facto* American institutions. The US dollar is still the favourite foreign currency reserve of the world, an immense systemic advantage over any other direct competitor.

But America secures cores of power not only at strategic, economic, or technological levels. A country with a questionable human rights record has appropriated the cause for human rights and democracy at world stage, regularly championing them in relations with China or North Korea (but not Saudi Arabia). Finally, the US is the poster child for neo-liberalism⁵⁴, an ideology heavily pressed upon those still oblivious to its 'benefits'.

At a regional level, one can find similar evidence of core ownership in Russia's supply of natural gas to Europe, or endless fields of legislation, regulating manufacturing and safety standards by the EC. Another example of core ownership is France's International Organization of La Francophonie, a particular one though as it is based on language and culture proper. Not in the least, ISIL's attempt to establish a Caliphate is an attempt to secure the core ownership of not only a religion but an entire societal system.

Core ownership is not necessarily a trait of grand strategy; however, it is essential in developing one. Examples shown are of core ownership that aim to capitalise on it. There are instances where countries could not or would not be willing to do that. For instance, the Japanese economic boom of the 70's and 80's relied on a specific economic model that eventually seems to have been transferred throughout Asia-Pacific, particularly to Korea, and to some extent to Singapore. Typically resting on *keiretsu* and a set of specific government policies promoted at their request, Japan emerged as an economic giant after the WWII. Nevertheless, such a model could not be successfully replicated in the western world for obvious reasons.

Lastly, core ownership is not implicit. In the case of systemic culture many of its appealing sectorial features, that convey soft-power, are 'the unintended by-product of social forces, the government will often find it difficult to manipulate'⁵⁵. Consequently, as soon as systemic culture develops attributes of soft-power with perceivable effect on sectors abroad it operates under constant threat and pressure to relinquish its ownership towards the institutionalised cores of power of the host country.

Sectorial anchoring

The idea of core is not new. It has been developed in the mid 50's by Karl Deutsch *et al.* in correlation with the concept of security communities and later on build upon among others, by Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett. In the words of Deutsch *et al.* 'larger, stronger, more politically, administratively, economically, and educationally advanced political units were found to form the cores of strength around which in most cases the integrative process developed'⁵⁶. The concept of 'cores of strength' is one of the principles of development of security communities defined as a group that has become integrated by means of 'the attainment, within a territory, of a "sense of community" and of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough, to assure for a "long" time, dependable expectations of "peaceful change" among its population'⁵⁷.

One can imaginatively speculate that 'sense of community' through institutions and practices refers to 'culture', while 'dependable expectations' is another expression for predictability of the future. Furthermore, as Deutsch *et al.* put it, the 'sense of community requires some particular habits of political behaviour ... and some particular traditions and institutions on the part of the social groups and of political units... acquired by process of social learning'⁵⁸, which is essentially a process of creating or adopting a 'culture'. Before explaining the process of anchoring it is useful to view patterns of international interaction that seem similar: integration and alliance formation.

In creating security communities, the process occurs when initially two or more cores of strength come together based on a certain array of commonalities. They are 'pushing' in the same systemic direction basically doubling or multiplying the strength⁵⁹. Systemic sectors

share so much in common that minor differences are ignored in the interest of creating 'security'. Bruce Russett speaks even of similar cores of identity⁶⁰ in addition to strength. Creating security communities is a common voluntary process in which actors go on the path of integration, aligning and juxtaposing their systemic sectors. It is an important distinction that separates integration from alliance formation or bandwagoning.

Alliance formation and bandwagoning is a process motivated by different factors, threat being the most evident. States can choose to mitigate threat either by balancing against it or by bandwagoning⁶¹ and hoping for benevolence. As Stephen M. Walt underlines, it is about how states that select their partners⁶². In the case of security communities is about shared identity. In the case of alliance formation is about power and the need to survive. Integration revolves around systemic factors to produce security, in alliance formation revolves around strategic factors exclusively. The difference goes further. Integration is viewed as a long time endeavour while alliance formation and bandwagoning are purely circumstantial and may end once the threat disappears. Switching sides may also occur as survival interests dictate or power balancing tilts from one side to the other.

Finally, Walt addresses the issue of 'creating' allies by means of 'bribery' and penetration. Offering aid, usually by means of money, arms or resources, has been common currency in modern international relations. Usually, in such transactions aid has to be accepted, and consequently, both parties should feel it is in their interest⁶³ before it can actually produce results. Penetration on the other hand relies on the ability of one state to influence sectors of other states by means of covert or indirect manipulation whether is through officials, lobbying organisations or simply propaganda⁶⁴. There are caveats in this approach that otherwise may be lucrative in pursuing a grand strategy. Firstly, they are much likely to be efficient in open societies where elites are more accessible to foreign ideas. Secondly, they can only be used as long as are not perceived as subversive or illegitimate by the target state⁶⁵. Thirdly they count too much on elites that may or may not be in antagonism with the majority of people⁶⁶ and finally, they do not rely in the appeal or power of a core. This should not be ignored.

In some cases, the appeal of a particular sector is so strong that foreign ones want to be associated with it, be it for their value, identity and/or various benefits. Nye underlines the appeal of American model of values and liberties⁶⁷. Adler and Barnett show countries in the former communist bloc did not expect to be invited in Europe, 'they had invited themselves'⁶⁸.

After the Cold War the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe were more than willing to anchor themselves to the western world by adhering to NATO and the EU, a process substantially facilitated by the establishment of the PfP and the transformation of the EEC in the EU as new frameworks of reference. In order to pass the cultural 'threshold', the countries in Eastern and Central Europe were presented with a set of norms, rules and values on social and economic behaviour to be internalised. These countries have been 'assisted' in the process of internalisation and in some cases 'monitored' after their acceptance.

The process of systemic anchoring aims to encourage the development of similar patterns of value-orientation in the sectors of another state to the point where they involuntarily internalise and replicate the core's norms, rules and values. Once the process is complete the anchored sectors will produce similar 'collective goods' under 'core supervision'. The process is informal although some form of institutionalisation may occur. The value bearing attributes of systemic culture that create soft-power do not provide the coercive capability that hard power does⁶⁹. Instead systemic anchoring capitalises on their appeal in order to prompt rapprochement, internalisation and ultimately replication, not only of the appealing parts but the systemic attributes in their entirety.

Systemic anchoring is difficult because it often occurs without the willingness of the one of the actors involved. It is even more difficult for a country perceived as a liberal hegemon. Hegemon, because it builds on the on the great power advantage ...liberal because

it aims to defend and promote a range of values'⁷⁰ like liberal democracy, human rights, market economies and free trade. 'To be tolerated in any hegemonic role hegemons will have to be "nice" ones who provide collective goods as well as coerce recalcitrants'⁷¹. Nye rallies behind this idea: 'our grand strategy must first ensure our survival, but then it must focus on providing global public goods...because they legitimize our power in the eyes of the others'⁷².

First, it is a matter of how much of the 'collective goods' is one willing to share and in what conditions. Systemic appeal remains lucrative as long as the it retains core ownership and has sufficient resources to sustain a flow of 'collective goods' abroad. However, this is a transactional process, what Walt calls 'bribery' and has limited value. It offers little predictability and questionable control and, as such, the potential to capitalise on it is rather limited. However, once a particular sector starts to internalise those patterns of value-orientation, the need for constant legitimisation disappears. The anchored sector's limited access to collective goods is replaced by the feeling of shared ownership, shared power and unconditional access. It is more than 'bribery' as it adds true value to the anchored sector in a form that is not necessarily politically motivated or perceived as subversive while adding to the overall value of the core. Because it replicates the same patterns of value-orientation, it becomes predictable leading to very little, if any, need for control.

Secondly, anchoring does not cater to elites alone but rather to the general public interest. Consequently, the need for what Walt calls penetration becomes irrelevant.

The limits of this model.

Grand strategy is not executed in a vacuum. Each country has its own strategies and its own agenda. As such any grand strategy will meet opposing forces.

The limits of strategic anchoring

Strategic anchoring has its obvious limits. During 'containment' it became evident that American anchoring would entice direct and indirect military confrontation with the Soviets and the Chinese. The attempt to strategically and systemically anchor countries like Georgia and Ukraine, in order to curb the seeds of expansion of Russia's culture⁷³, overstretched beyond its limits. The 2008 war in Georgia and the annexation of Crimea shown the limits of American reach for the moment. ISIL's attempt to overtake all of Iraq and Syria was met with harsh opposition.

It is obvious that strategic anchoring becomes more and more difficult to achieve and becomes practically impossible where two military powers meet. One particular example is interesting to mention as it is not involving another country but a strategic position along important sea routes – the artificial islands the Chinese build in the South China Sea. This indirect type of strategic anchoring may soon be replicated by other 'underdog' countries.

The limits of systemic anchoring

President Kennedy once said: 'every man has two countries, France and his own'⁷⁴. To what extent can identities be assumed or imposed is a question difficult to answer.

Probably one of the keys to the successful development of the British Empire was the fact they understood the limits of systemic anchoring. Unlike others, who pressed on forcefully imposing their systemic culture on others by way of cross and whip, they only focused on those sectors that were lucrative. Indian princes retained their influence and acted on behalf of the Crown, Indians were accepted and integrated in the military, British education became available for those willing to 'emancipate', 'collective goods' were provided. Indian culture became part of British culture. Indian identity was absorbed but left untouched⁷⁵.

However, every time identity becomes an issue problems surface. Probably today any attempt to anchor it would be equivalent to assimilation, annihilation even, and counter-reactions would be immediate and resolute. Even if orchestrated with the best of intentions they can lead to unexpected consequences.

After the devastation of the WWII, Europe embarked on an ambitious integrative project. Instead of focusing on the superiority of one particular systemic culture and identity a new concept has been pushed forward, 'European-ness'. Being a European implicitly meant accepting another identity in addition to your own, not substituting it. In normal conditions, national identity could be preserved. However, changes in the other systemic sectors intrinsically produced effects at identity level.

As Europe became more and more integrated, under a pile of cumbersome legislation, cultural differences started to be affected and in some cases, even fade, leading to Euro-fatigue and rejection. The transfer of national identity towards continental identity ironically produced 'pan-European' differentiators like Christianity and race or precipitated the fall back to national identity and a rejection of a grand idea. It is the classic case of a value that has lost its appeal as 'public goods (threatening to) become a self-servient ideology of the powerful'⁷⁶. Across the ocean, Americans seem to have a different situation.

'The United States is uniquely well placed among modern great powers to misunderstand the political power of nationalism, ethnic identity, and religion'⁷⁷ asserts Posen. This may explain why 'America is genuinely puzzled by the idea that American assertiveness in the name of universal principles could sometimes be seen by others as a form of American unilateralism'⁷⁸. Posen's explanation about the individual rather than group identity in America's development as a society may be a valid explanation⁷⁹. It may also explain the US's propensity towards a 'generic' identity culture that normally transcends nationalism, ethnicity and religion.

Instead of thinking of Arabs or Chinese, black or white, Christians or Muslims America leans towards the universality of humanity. Being a Tunisian, Bolivian or Korean is good. Being a human is much better. Humanity is as generic as it gets. As such we should all believe in human rights, in freedom, democracy or free trade. One can be free to believe in any God he or she may like – as long as one holds these universal values true.

Is it an inherited idea or a conscious effort to transcend identity from particular to generic? The universality of a 'generic' identity would largely advance American systemic culture in the world. Owning the identity cores of human rights and democracy and the constant effort to be perceived as their champion seems essential to US foreign policy. In theory, it can lead to anchoring the world to a 'generic' identity and presumably transform it in some sort of 'collective goods'. In practice, 'generic' identity has little appeal. It is called identity for a reason and it is always there to fall back to when things go wrong, as they usually do.

Conclusion

In the quest for a better understanding of the idea of grand strategy, I visited some of the concepts that provide a more consistent theoretical foundation that vies, at the same time, for (some) relevance in policy making.

'Systems' are a good point of departure in imagining grand strategies because they offer a framework of reference, allow the analysis of structures and processes, admit an indefinite number of variables and not in the least offer both a general and a particular view on a topic.

By looking at grand strategy as a process of maximising the core ownership of particular strategic and systemic models by means of anchoring we can identify the traits that make it more effective and therefore more efficient.

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³⁶ This is evident in the Pentagon's literature on nuclear war where terms like counterforce or countervalue aim to mask their true nature.

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⁶² Ibid., 3.

⁶³ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁴ An elaborate model of 'penetration' is offered by Yuri Bezmenov in one of his lectures on Soviet subversion - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fQoGMtE0EY>

⁶⁵ Ibid., 31.

⁶⁶ After the Cold War most elites in Central and Eastern Europe wanted to keep their countries gravitating around Russia but had to concede fast in the wake of the popular uprisings. Most Arabs see their governments' dealings with the US something that should be kept to a minimum if not altogether dismissed.

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⁷⁴ From President's Kennedy's remarks at Orly airport in Paris, France on May 31, 1961 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHZyeVU0k1c>

⁷⁵ True, things happened completely different in Australia with the indigenous population.

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