

# HOW MUCH SUCCESSFUL THE TRADITIONAL STRATEGY-MAKING MODELS IN THE CONTEMPORARY STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT?: THE ANALYSIS OF THE ENDS, WAYS AND MEANS FORMULA

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**Abstract:** *Strategy-making is a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted process. It encompasses interrelationships among and within parties and the strategic environment at different levels, and incorporates a series of actions and reactions into a strategic plan. The deep consideration of interrelations and the length of the calculus of interactions affect the outcome, a strategy.*

*New era has brought new requirements to strategy-making. Globalisation, technological advancements and unsettled global order after the collapse of the Soviet Union are new phenomena that have increased the level of uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. The 'old' model and methods of strategy development are increasingly becoming inadequate to address the challenges associated with the modern strategic environment. Even carefully crafted classical strategies may become obsolete in a short period of time in today's fast-paced world.*

*These modern phenomena have raised criticism to existing concepts and models as strategies continue to fail. Current strategy-making model and concepts are required to be investigated in depth in order to understand if addressing especially the hybrid constructed challenges of the modern strategic environment would be possible by traditional strategies.*

**Keywords:** *Strategy, formulation, strategy-making, ends ways means, material-based strategy, uncertainty, contemporary environment.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Strategy formulation has been one of the most substantial topics throughout history. People have been exploring new ways of establishing successful strategies from micro to macro levels. It has

become much complicated since interconnectedness and dynamism of strategic environment have increased due to globalisation, advancements in technology and unsettled global order after the collapse of the Soviet Union. These phenomena together

drive the contemporary world towards a more complex, ambiguous and uncertain environment.

The world is now more interconnected than ever before. A crisis in one country can shake the entire security system; a single world leader's unpredictable decision can affect stability and prosperity in the world. For instance, a crisis in the subprime mortgage market in the United States in 2008, rapidly became a global problem and affected entire global financial system. Globalization has many different facets, including such areas as political, economic, sociological, technology, culture, finance and production<sup>1</sup>. It has brought inevitable global economic integration and continues to harmonise other areas. Beside the new success ways, the globalization carry risk factors and failure potentials for the strategies.

Furthermore, astonishing advances in technology extra complicates the situation. It is getting more uncertain due to the accelerating pace of change in technology. Now the world is on the entry of the

<sup>1</sup> "How does globalization relate to strategy, especially in large companies?", <https://www.global-strategy.net/how-does-globalization-relate-to-strategy/>

fourth Industrial Revolution<sup>2</sup> which will add further complexity and complications for strategists. The further development and wider use of new technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum technology, nano-technologies, robotics, and the Internet of Things would affect the strategy-making. Recently founded two domains - space and cyber would create tremendous opportunities as well as policy and security challenges.

Beside, the challenges brought by globalisation and technological advances, emerging new world order after the collapse of the Soviet Union adds dynamism to security environment. Global economic power is gradually moving eastward. Russia's appetite for risk-taking, China's rising assertiveness, US unpredictability, the EU's fragility and the UN's weakness adds more uncertainty to the security environment. Such conditions create new opportunities for mid-powers to conduct independent policies. These new global relationships have

<sup>2</sup> Commons Select Committee, "Fourth Industrial Revolution inquiry launched", 01 May 2018, <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news-parliament-2017/fourth-industrial-revolution-launch-17-19/>, (accessed July 07, 2018)

created a contemporary environment in which strategic realities can, and do, shift rapidly.

Global interconnectedness and the changing global order fuelled with the technological revolution, have changed the character of warfare from a traditional to a hybrid construct. Current dynamism and complexity drives future into more uncertain and unpredictable strategic environment, which pose serious challenges to strategy makers.

This research analyses the classicalized strategy-making model against the challenges of the contemporary strategic environment through the ends, ways, means and other necessary factors perspective. It tries to reveal the level of successful application of this formula in the long-term strategies, considering the level of change in the time being.

## 2. ANALYSIS OF CURRENT MODELS

Recent political and military failures are indicators of a continuously changing security environment. The issue might not be the way that all necessary factors are taken into account, but the model of strategy-making. Not only the right application of the instruments of power but also the strategy-making

model itself affect the level of success of any strategy. The analysis of the current model in the context of the modern challenges would help us to evaluate its level of success in the contemporary strategic environment. The ends, ways and means formula which introduced by Arthur Lykke<sup>3</sup> is accepted as a classicized strategy-making model. All three pillars - ends, ways and means - of this model expose to some serious challenges in today's strategic environment that raises questions about the validity of the model.

Development brings changes. These changes could appear in the form of both, the emergence of new resources and changes in strategic goals. The ways are inclined to change in accordance with the level of changes in means and ends.

## 3. MEANS

Availability of resources is a critical factor for strategy-making. They are translated into the means to constitute one of the pillars of the model. Lykke's formulaic structure assumes all information about ends and means as known in advance. It assumes that not much

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<sup>3</sup> Colonel Arthur F. Lykke was a military strategist in the 1980s. His work remains the cornerstone for military strategy instruction at the U.S. Army War College.

critical information would become available or known during the implementation process.<sup>4</sup> Earlier speed of change and its low level of impact on strategy made possible to incorporate the minor changes in strategy during the implementation phase. However, technological rise exelerated the change process. Now exponential technological growth, as foreseen by Moore's Law<sup>5</sup> causes in significant changes, thus the high impact. This growth facilitates the emergence of unplanned resources with significant affects on opposite parties of the "Positional Strategy". In many cases such a change necessitates development of an entire new strategy. Former U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's following statement could be treated as a manifestation of deficiency of the end, way, means based on strategy-making. Once he said, "We go to the war with the Army (or Navy) we have. However, we don't necessarily win wars with the same armed forces or strategy with which we began

<sup>4</sup> Mintzberg, Henry. "The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning," The Free Press: New York (1994), pp 24-25.

<sup>5</sup> Robert R. Schaller, "Moore's law: past, present and future." *IEEE spectrum* 34, no. 6 (1997): 52-59.

them"<sup>6</sup>. This statement highlights the fact that strategies can be changed due to some factors and change in means is one of them. A few great powers and giant companies might afford the financial consequences of changing the strategy, but it might not be feasible for many states or companies.

Another deficiency of Lykke's formula is in its material-based architecture. It makes intangible and non-materiel-based resources harder to account in the strategy, which are often difficult to measure. However, contemporary conditions require their utilisation in strategy formulation process. Now, the conflicts are more hybrid rather than traditional ones. This fact per se is the sign of increasing role of intangible and non-material factors. Utilisation of geopolitical and geostrategic position, human domain, quality and effectiveness, strategic culture, public support, ability to reach information and deliver it to a wider auditorium, consideration of psychological, religious and legal aspects of the issue, cultural awareness and respect, reputation in international relations are samples of this category that need to be incorporated into new

<sup>6</sup> Meiser, Jeffrey W. "Are Our Strategic Models Flawed? Ends+ Ways+ Means=(Bad) Strategy." *Parameters* 46, no. 4: 2016-17.

generation strategies. Recent events around the globe display that material superiority stand alone is not enough for success. Overwhelming material superiority does not provide successful ultimate outcome even for the great powers. The fact is that the U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, have not yet come to an end is an evidence of this new realm. Recognizing this new paradigm and suggesting a new way to solve this emerging challenge, General Joseph Dunford insisted that the focus of the U.S. Department of Defense's professional military education system should be the development of intellectual overmatch, beside the materiel overmatch<sup>7</sup>.

#### 4. ENDS

The ends, ways, means model's formulaic structure requires a *clearly articulated end state* to formulate a strategy. Without it the achievable objectives cannot be driven and a timeline cannot be set. Two main challenges, the complexity of the contemporary environments and the unpredictable developments as a result of the interacting factors and

<sup>7</sup>"Developing Today's Joint Officers for Tomorrow's Ways of War," Predecisional Draft Working Papers, Unclassified, February, 2019.

actors within the environment, are serious threats for leaders' to set clear long-term goals. As a result, a planning and execution become a challenge. However, ends are not so clear-cut, especially in the contemporary environment, therefore it might be easy to say, but difficult to implement. Williamson Murray and Mark Grimsley acknowledge the issue by saying "it is easy to state that the policy goals should be clear before a strategy starts being developed, in reality, achieving such clarity and defining exactly what needs to be done can be extremely difficult"<sup>8</sup>.

The world order emerging after the collapse of the Soviet Union is still at the stage of formation. In the current strategic environment, the realities on the ground might change rapidly and cause significant changes in ongoing strategies. For example, Turkish and Russian relations drastically shifted between 2015 and 2017. In a short period of time, just after downing a Russian attack aircraft and assassination of Russian ambassador (2016) in Turkey they were on the brink of a trade war and military conflict. But later, this state

<sup>8</sup> Mintzberg, Henry. "The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning," The Free Press: New York (1994), pp 24-25.

were transformed into high economic cooperation again, consulting strategic issues such as Syria and a deal of strategic weapon S-400. Russia-Ukraine is another vivid example. They had close relations by 2014, but now they are adversaries. Such rapid-changes indicate the re-balancing process of the strategic relations in an unsettled global order which composes very dynamic strategic environment. Under such circumstances thinking for a long-term and planning to an ultimate end state might not be successful through the ends, ways, means formula.

Furthermore, frequently tasks are given to develop a strategy which aims to disfunction an undesired actor or factor within the environment rather describing the desired end state. It is believed that this would solve the issue. For example, General Tommy Franks was given the end state of regime change and WMD removal during this Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2004, without describing the post-Saddam Iraq<sup>9</sup>. Such inadequate thinking illustrates the lack of clear vision and would continue to as much as political or strategic leaders would prefer what they don't want, rather they want.

<sup>9</sup> Franks, Tommy, "An American Soldier," Harper Collins: New York, (2004), pp. 331-333.

## 5. WAYS

The ways is aligning the ends and means, according to the Lykke's formula. It directs a strategist to consider all aspects and create an image that adding all available information to the formula would help to produce a successful strategy. It would be simplistic to believe that the strategists could consider the all variables, their interrelationships and potential long-term effects, and incorporate them into a strategy-making in contemporary strategic environment. Such approach presents some shortfalls that must be better understood for successful outcome. Firstly, adding all-important factors to the model might not be possible due to the complexity and dynamism of the current strategic environment. It would counteract as Collin S. Gray highlights: "because strategy embraces all aspects of the military instrument (among others), as well as many elements of the polity and society it serves, the maximum possible number of things, can go wrong"<sup>10</sup>. Secondly, the more variables reduces the agility and increases the possibility of establishing a passive strategy.

<sup>10</sup> Gray, Colin S. "Why Strategy Is Difficult." *JFQ: Joint Force Quarterly* 22 (1999): 6-12.

On the other hand, new strategic realities require agile and proactive strategy to be able to address the complexity challenges. Lastly, considering all variables, their interrelations and long-term precautions and adding each factor to a plan reduces the velocity of the strategy-making process. However, in many occasions strategy-makers are under time pressure. Time and timing has a great value in this complex and dynamic environment. Therefore, the number of variables must be limited for the planning purposes.

This model is preferable due to its linear and easy way of thinking. It guides and directs strategic *thinking* and *planning* in a similar way: all efforts are focused on achieving end state from the beginning to the end with the means available. This monotony eliminates the difference between thinking and planning which reduces strategy-makers' level of self-criticism and creativity. By its nature, a linear engineering-oriented design of the model restricts numbers of creative variations of possible ways. Thus, Dr. Jeffrey W. Meiser describes traditional strategy formulation model as "inherently uncreative, noncritical, and limits new and adaptive thinking"<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Meiser, Jeffrey W. "Are Our Strategic Models Flawed? Ends+ Ways+ Means=(Bad) Strategy." *Parameters* 46, no. 4: 2016-17.

## 6. OTHER FACTORS

There are some important factors besides the ends, ways and means that affect the result of the strategy formulation process. A good strategy-making model should account those factors for the successful outcome. For example, a clear *division of responsibilities* among strategy-making bodies of policy-maker, strategy-maker and strategic planner is necessary for strategy formulation in today's contemporary environment. This would help to employ right people with relevant skills and expertise at the appropriate organizational level to make decisions. Each body has different ways of approach to issues, different priorities and they have different responsibilities and obligations. As Colin S. Gray, stresses this tension saying, "Politicians, by virtue of their craft, perceive or fear wide ramifications of action, prefer to fudge rather than focus, and like to keep their options open as long as possible by making the least decision as late as feasible"<sup>12</sup>. Due to the tension between policy and strategy one of the characteristics of the strategy-making model should

<sup>12</sup> Gray, Colin S. "Why Strategy Is Difficult." *JFQ: Joint Force Quarterly* 22 (1999): 6-12.

facilitate the balancing role between policy-makers and strategists while identifying the goals of the strategy. This would align political goals and strategic objectives and enhance their synergetic work. Unfortunately, Lykke's formula does not present such mechanism or play such role.

The *information* and *time* are other necessary factors in the strategy-making process. Gathering the required information takes much longer than expected in many occasions. Especially, under the time pressure people would not make extra effort to gather detailed information. Dietrich Dörner describes this condition by stating, "Politicians faced with the need to make a decision will rarely have time to digest even readily available information, much less to pursue new lines of inquiry"<sup>13</sup>. However, an ends, ways, means type of strategy-making model requires sufficient time to gather information and calculate the consequences of remote goals. Additionally, the velocity of processing information in the time available might be adequate for the accuracy of the decision in 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, similar speed could not be enough for the

<sup>13</sup> Dörner, Dietrich, *The Logic of Failure*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996,44

contemporary security environment. Much time is needed to analyse and process due to its abundance and the "info pollution". On the other hand, this process creates a time pressure on decision makers.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

It is a beginning of a new era where the strategy-making and its execution face serious challenges posed by the complex and dynamic nature of the strategic environment. It is not that easy to generate a good strategy in such unpredictable environment. Besides the environment, there is a significant role for the strategy-making model which needs to have required characteristics in order to achieve in successful outcome. Any inability to meet requirements of the strategic environment would further exacerbate the strategy-making process.

The result of analysis of the ends, ways, means formula clearly shows its limitations in addressing the contemporary challenges. Recent strategic developments drive the world to an uncertain, complex and dynamic environment where all three pillars –ends, ways, means - of Lykke's model might easily change.

It is not an easy task to generate a healthy strategy on this shaky pillars. On the other hand, the model itself faces significant challenges due to its formulaic, result-oriented architecture. Some failures could be assessed as an outcome of the model's insufficiency and inflexibility. For example, difficulties in converting intangible and non-material resources into the means and utilising them in the formula; inability to adapt big changes in means and ends; inflexibility of strategic thinking; inability to distinguish the functions and responsibilities of different strategy-making bodies are some of main deficiencies of this model. Instead of being a whole strategy-making model, ends+ways+ means is a better fit for the planning.

The research acknowledges that the strategic environment is too complex and dynamic due to globalisation, technological advancements, and an unsettled world order. These phenomena made a result-oriented, linear and pre-planned strategy-making obsolete and thinking and planing everything ahead impossible. Strategy-making has become a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted process in contemporary era. The increasing

number of variables and their interrelationships require a much artistic approach and a more novel mindset.

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