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## ‘SEAL OF EXCELLENCE’ ON A FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY IN AN ANARCHIC WORLD



**The larger states have the advantage of being able to make more mistakes – at least, more than the smaller countries that have a lesser resilience margin. On the other hand, smaller countries can play a more important role in international affairs if their strategies take care of their weaknesses and set development goals based on genuine national needs.**

The world order continues crumbling – a metaphor my colleagues and I coined in the Valdai Club annual report in 2018. An increasing number of observers find it difficult to explain the logic of what is happening or even suggest where the key international trends are leading to. And, as a new international system has not yet formed, the moves made by individual states are becoming increasingly more important because the new order will eventually emerge as a result of their actions. This shifts the focus from the system level towards its participants, namely specific countries.

In this connection, the question is how exactly we could measure a country’s agency in international affairs – which of them is more important and which is less so? The difference between their potentials is often dramatic, but these potentials do not get converted into any significant foreign policy achievements.

The most accurate common ground for assessment is probably the quality of a state’s foreign policy strategy. From this perspective, the largest players are not necessarily the most important in the world; smaller countries that have developed comprehensive foreign policy strategies to use as “power boosters” can be their match. In this sense, only high-quality strategies can play in the Big League of global politics.

Israel for example can be considered the prototype of a model state in the anarchic

world era. A small and young state locked in a hostile environment, it is building internal motivation and a foreign policy strategy aimed at maximizing the use of its limited resources for national development purposes. Other candidates for the Big League include several more countries finding themselves in similar far from easy conditions – South Korea, Finland, and Uzbekistan. But, how do we evaluate and measure the quality of their strategies?

To do this, we will try to decompose the very concept of strategy. The classical definition says that strategy is the ability to correctly correlate a country’s foreign policy goals with its resources. At the same time, there are several other important components to a good strategy.

The first factor is common sense – the ability of the ruling elites to correctly trace the cause-and-effect relationships in what is happening and formulate their foreign policy goals based on genuine rather than imaginary development needs – in other words, the ability to correctly recognize one’s own needs and not set any false goals.

The second one is its aggregate strategic culture, which is seen as a kind of track record of using force in the past and consequently a product of the accumulated experience of great-power politics. European countries with longstanding experience in the use of force and negotiation – since every war inevitably ends in peace – are often more skilled strategists than younger countries with inexperienced elites embarking on foreign policy experiments.

The third component is leadership, which is a product of will and determination, and preparedness to sacrifice. In a world growing increasingly anarchic, being prepared to sacrifice while remaining relatively safe and well-fed, is an ever decreasing quantity.

The fourth is empathy, taken as the ability to build a constructive strategy taking into consideration the interests of all parties involved. Only such an integrated strategy would be sustainable in the long run and will suit the interests of all participants.

Finally, the country needs to have an organizational resource – the ability to rally and focus on key development tasks. Satiety and defocus hamper mobilization and often prevent wealthy and sustainable countries from achieving their goals.

If we apply these criteria to analyze some of the leading states’ strategies, we will see that each of them has a major flaw, sometimes uncorrectable, in the quality of their strategy.

So, China, Saudi Arabia, India, and Japan obviously have a problem with converting their great political potential into foreign policy influence. Despite their strong foreign policy, they have significant limitations when it comes to achieving their strategic goals.

If we take Turkey and Russia, the obvious problem is their internal fragility, which can undermine even a skillful foreign policy strategy. The United States and the European Union share a common problem of self-absorption, their focus on internal problems and ideological bias in politics. Western countries have produced well-fed political elites, who seem to have taken a vacation from strategic thinking and often make decisions that are not based on their best national interests.



Taking a look at Iran, Israel, Cuba and North Korea, the most significant problem in their strategies is external pressure. In most cases, the pressure is so great that it has an overwhelming influence on building their identity. If we imagine for a moment that this pressure weakens or disappears, it would entail significant consequences for these countries' domestic politics.

Brazil, Mexico, and Indonesia have a problem with internal rallying and focus. The deep stratification of their populations impedes government efforts to focus on key development goals.

Finally, Ukraine, Georgia and Palestine can be considered together as a group of countries that have an obvious problem with the formulation of development goals that rely on genuine rather than imaginary needs. It is difficult to imagine how a state's development goals can be achieved if one of those goals is the collapse of their more powerful opponent.

Although each of these states has major problems with their strategies, the larger ones have the advantage of being able to make more mistakes – at least, more than the smaller countries that have a lesser resilience margin. On the other hand, smaller countries can play a more important role in international affairs if their strategies take care of their weaknesses and set development goals based on genuine national needs.

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## AUTHOR



**Andrey Sushentsov**

President

**Location:** Moscow, Russia

**Competence:** United States, Global Trends

**Field of expertise:** Andrey is a leading Russian international relations scholar with a focus on American foreign policy. His research concentrates on American foreign policy in international conflicts, on South Caucasus, Ukraine, and the Middle East. He performed analytical tasks for the Presidential Administration of Russia, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Office of the Russian National Security Council, Russian Federal Space Agency, as well as other governmental bodies. In his studies, he examines the spheres of conflicting interests of Russia and the United States in Europe, the Middle East and the post-Soviet space. His key publications include monographs "America's Small Wars", "Essays on US Policy in the Regional Conflicts of the 2000s", and the collective monograph "Russia and the World in 2020". He is also an editor of the annual forecast "International Threats".

**Work experience:** Andrey is a director of the Laboratory of International Trends Analysis at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. He also is a Program Director of the Valdai Discussion Club, and editor-in-chief of the "Vneshnyaya Politika" (Foreign Policy) journal. He was a Visiting Professor and Research Fellow at Georgetown University, Johns Hopkins University, Guido Carli Free University of International Studies, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Harvard University and Middlebury Institute for International Studies in Monterey. He is a member of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy and a member of the Working Group on the Future of Russian-American Relations.

