

# *The* NATIONAL STRATEGY FORUM REVIEW

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## **Chapter 9: Complementary Strategy** **By Richard E. Friedman and Eric S. Morse**

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A fundamental tenet of the National Strategy Forum's approach to U.S. national security strategy is *complementary strategy*, the common sense principle that U.S. strategy must be developed with awareness of the strategic objectives of other states. In practice, complementary strategy emphasizes listening to others, rather than transmitting U.S. policy in a vacuum. While U.S. strategic objectives may conflict with other states' objectives, it is important to recognize that U.S. strategy is interdependent and relies, in large part, on other states. In this regard, U.S. objectives must be carefully calibrated.

Complementary strategy means listening to other states, identifying their strategic objectives, and relating these objectives to U.S. national security strategy. Ideally, it would be beneficial for the U.S. to learn the strategic objectives of all 191 states in the international system. Realistically, the U.S. can only focus its attention on a select group of key countries in the hope of achieving significant goals.

A simplified synthesis of complementary strategy in practice might occur over four stages. First, categorize countries according to a spectrum of friend or foe. Second, identify which states hold the greatest strategic interest to U.S. goals. Third, identify important mutually held goals and interests between important countries and the U.S. Fourth, implement targeted foreign policy actions to bring about desired change in the international relationship.

This process is described in greater detail below.

## Complementary Strategy Spectrum

The first step in implementing complementary strategy is understanding where countries lie on a spectrum of friend to enemy. Categorizing countries along the complementary strategy spectrum outlined below will provide a rough, albeit inexact, overview of how countries relate to the U.S.

We have created a *Complementary Strategy Spectrum* that defines and categorizes major countries as Enemies, Adversaries, Competitors, Allies, and Friends. A primary strategic objective is to convert enemies into adversaries; adversaries into competitors; and competitors into friends. At times, it may be necessary to alter defined international relationships in the opposite direction; for example, from friend to ally and competitor to adversary.

*Enemy:* A country that does not share an ideological affinity with the U.S., nor does it work with us to achieve mutual goals. In addition, an enemy country actively pursues confrontation with the U.S. and seeks to undermine U.S. security and prosperity. This country is a direct military and/or non-military threat to the U.S. It destabilizes global politics and national security. Conflict and confrontation—military and/or non-military—is inevitable. Opportunities for diplomatic engagement, productive dialogue, and policy coordination are minimal.

*Adversary:* A country that does not share an ideological affinity with the U.S. This country could be actively engaged in economic, cultural, and military competition with the U.S. This country may or may not be a direct military and/or non-military threat. Conflict and confrontation—in some form—is possible. Opportunities for diplomatic engagement, productive dialogue, and policy coordination are unlikely, but possible.

*Competitor:* A country that may or may not share an ideological affinity with the U.S. In the global arena of power, this country would be actively engaged in economic and cultural competition with the U.S. While not a direct military and/or non-military threat, this country may have significant and growing military capabilities. Direct conflict and confrontation are not in their immediate interest, although these are not ruled out. Opportunities for diplomatic engagement, productive dialogue, and policy coordination are common, but not always fruitful.

*Ally:* A country that is partnered with the U.S. in binding economic and/or military alliances. This country may or may not share an ideological affinity with the U.S., but is at least accepting of U.S. ethos and leadership in the world. Opportunities for diplomatic engagement and productive dialogue are prevalent, and positive policy coordination is likely.

*Friend:* A country that is partnered with the U.S. in binding economic and/or military alliances. Also, they share an ideological affinity with the U.S. and actively work with us to achieve mutually beneficial goals. Opportunities for diplomatic engagement and productive dialogue are prevalent, and positive policy coordination is frequent.

### Levers of Change

After countries are appropriately classified, the next step is to identify common objectives and goals between the U.S. and the indicated country. Mutually shared objectives and goals are the foundation for creating policies that directly improve international relationships. The ability for the U.S. to move countries from one category to another or to prevent them from moving into a more hostile category is a vital foreign policy objective. For example, moving China from a competitor to an ally would be a major foreign policy victory. Similarly, preventing countries from moving into a hostile category would also be a victory.

The U.S. has common interests with enemies, adversaries, competitors, friends, and allies. These interests vary in degree of commonality and can shift based on the nature of the situation. Continuity of relationships is desired, but constancy on most future issues is unlikely. The overarching strategic objective is to identify the common interests of the U.S. and other states and to agree upon an implementation plan that will address mutual interests. Major examples include:

- Energy Dependence: This affects all energy dependent states. The common cause is to enhance technology, resulting in substantial reduction of dependence on oil and coal.
- Scarce Natural Resources: (e.g. water, minerals, fish, etc.).
- Terrorism (domestic and international)

Some states may not have readily identifiable objectives. In these cases, long-term learning could occur, for example, through personal dialogues, state visits, citizen to citizen exchanges, and other interactions. The goal is to take the time to learn about other countries to a degree where interests and goals are understood well enough to form a comparison with U.S. interests.

U.S. strategic relations with the rest of the world should be flexible and adaptive to emerging trends. Trade-offs for nonessential issues, where the U.S. need not be a hard bargainer, might be necessary, provided that vital U.S. interests are protected.

Once mutual objectives are clarified, targeted foreign policy levers can be created to achieve the desired effects. Several obvious tools include the following:

1. Economic and Trade Policy: Countries that trade freely together have a greater incentive to engage in open and productive diplomatic relationship. Foreign direct investment is another signal of healthy economic ties. For example, the U.S-China relationship suggests a symbiotic economic relationship in which mutual economic policy coordination is in the interest of both countries. Calibrating economic policies to
2. Educational & Cultural Exchange Programs: Although education is often considered a component of domestic national security, international education may be just as important for creating a unique level of understanding between two cultures at the civilian level. A productive policy tool might take the form of expanded foreign exchange opportunities

for both U.S. and international students. Greater civilian to civilian contact improves the mutual understanding of each country's customs, beliefs, goals, and dreams.

3. **Public Diplomacy:** The messages that America conveys to the world are as important as the intent behind them. Calculating our words and actions for maximum effect is difficult. Moreover, the government is no longer the sole proprietor of public diplomacy; everyday citizens are increasingly capable of communicating America's messages to a foreign audience. Consequently, efforts at public diplomacy should aim to calibrate government communications, while simultaneously managing and supporting civil society's ability to shape foreign perceptions about the United States. The idea of America is still a powerful tool in the world, something to be promoted to its greatest potential.
4. **Humanitarian Aid:** Foreign aid has long been a controversial topic. The discussion often centers on the question of whether monetary aid is effective, or whether it is usually siphoned off through corruption. Nevertheless, any foreign policy must recognize the potential for monetary, development, and humanitarian aid to improve conditions on the ground. Examples include disaster relief, civilian infrastructure projects, and debt forgiveness. When the U.S. is perceived as a generous partner on global initiatives, this boosts our political capital for diplomatic initiatives and creates an environment where other countries are more open to America.
5. **Joint Military Operations:** Increased military to military contact deepens that level of trust, understanding, and openness between conventional militaries. By conducting both joint training and military operations, the U.S. military and other global militaries decrease the likelihood of armed misunderstanding. In addition, partnering with foreign militaries that share common goals decreases the burden of responsibility and increase the capacity for success.
6. **Alliances:** America's allies are a great source of strength for our national security. Moreover, America's participation in alliance structures has significantly improved global collective security goals over the years. The key to continued success is to ensure that our allies feel secure in these partnerships. America must be careful not to cast aside existing alliances too rashly, lest our allies fail to come to our aid when we are in crisis.
7. **Confidence Building Initiatives:** While these types of activities can encompass nearly every conceivable form of diplomacy, the basic feature is the same: build confidence among actors by working together and keeping promises.

Complementary strategy offers no easy fix to America's international relationships. Rather, it seeks a long-term change in the existing order. Listening is elevated over transmitting; confidence building is more important than shadow games; policy coordination is preferred to dominating the agenda; and multilateralism is prioritized above unilateralism. There may be times when America finds the need to take action without the support of the global community, but this calculation carries a number of risks. If recent history is any lesson, America cannot do everything alone. America may still be the most powerful country in the world, but we must recognize that we are the strongest and most secure when we are surrounded in like-minded

endeavors with our friends and allies; and that we stand the best chance of turning enemies into friends when we first seek to understand their points of view.