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Torgeir E. Fjærtøft

# Transformation of the Middle East State System:

Diplomacy as Persuasion  
by *Strategic Discourse*

NTNU  
Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Thesis for the Degree of  
doctor philosophiae  
Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Historical and Classical Studies



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Science and Technology



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# 1 Abstract

*EU, and Norwegian, foreign policy in a number of important conflicts fails to produce intended effects but seems to have grave unintended consequences and prohibitive collateral costs. Policy infers from a set of assumptions that form a theory and then a model. Policy fails when the theory is wrong. In any comparable field, including financial policy, failure would prompt research into the causes of the malfunction to find actionable theories that may produce more intended effects.*

*This dissertation develops an actionable theory on diplomatic intervention by strategic discourse, applying theories of cognition and emotion. The theory of strategic discourse posits that foreign policy decisions are shaped by historical analogies. Managing emotions in inter-group processes enables introducing alternative analogies that by persistent reiteration over time will influence in the intended direction perceptions of options. The theory of strategic discourse is applied to policy interventions in the current epicenter of world conflict, the state system formed by the remaining major stable states in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and Israel.*

*The theory evolved by abductive reasoning in the course of a series of encounters. Testing was possible by presentations in the Middle East to two different audiences comprising parties to the regional conflicts, primarily Syria. The observations in the testing reinforced the theory.*

*In five peer-reviewed articles published in level one journals, submitted for the dissertation, the theory of strategic discourse is applied to design policy interventions in the Middle East state system.*





## 2 Preface

My opportunity to be a Visiting Research Fellow with my own research project enabled this dissertation. My employer, the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 2010 accepted my proposal, following my posting to the Norwegian Embassy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and a project at the Ministry, to have my next assignment as a Visiting Research Fellow. I therefore got the opportunity to work with a group of Middle East scholars at the University of Oslo that now make up the core of the Centre for Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies. I am deeply grateful to Professor Bjørn Olav Utvik for accepting me and thank him and Professor Brynjar Lia for facilitating my integration in my role. In conversations and seminars with them and other scholars associated with the Centre along with my international network I have learnt a lot.

My research project has been to develop an actionable theory for Western policy interventions in the Middle East that by a reasonable probability will have more intended effects than the apparent current dichotomy between coercion by boycotts, sanctions and military intervention, or inaction. I was so far able to have five articles published by peer-reviewed level one journals. I submit them for this dissertation.

My work on this dissertation has proceeded on an independent, separate track, without anyone serving as my advisor, nor have I shown anyone the dissertation in its submitted version, or the submitted published articles prior to publication. This dissertation is, in other words, entirely my own work, from conception to completion.

The methodology of this dissertation is to infer from conversations and interactions. I am grateful to the University of Oslo for financing several important travels to meet sources. I am also grateful to the Norwegian Free Speech Foundation for allowing me a travel grant to meet further sources to turn the topics covered in this dissertation into a book on seminal Western foreign policy decisions and their unintended consequences following the end of the Cold War. All conversations referred to in this dissertation have been conducted on the understanding of confidentiality. Therefore, by my professional ethics and legal obligations as a diplomat, official and researcher, I apply Chatham House Rule, for easy reference subsequently referred to as

CHR.<sup>1</sup> Substance of confidential conversations may be quoted without attribution to individual sources or the institutions with which they are affiliated.

My background of practitioner in foreign policy, as a diplomat and an official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, sets me apart from the standard scholar on the Middle East; hence, my perspective generates a different type of research question. My concern is to make sense of the trajectory from triumph to decline of Western power and the Western Normative Project that has disturbed me since I experienced the end of the Cold War in 1989 as a Norwegian diplomat at the United Nations in New York. At my time at the United Nations 1989 – 1992, the world changed and the future seemed to hold immense promise of a new benign world order by a discourse on common security by global governance. We now know this was not to be. The analyses of this dissertation proceed from my conviction that the only way to resolve the issues driving the current escalating confrontations is to restore the discourse on common security by global governance.

A sequence of decisions cause, by degrees of probability, a trajectory. By consequence, different decisions may cause different trajectories. Decisions are applied analyses, in the sense that a set of assumptions determine the range of conceivable options. My quest is for theories that produce better analyses, enabling decisions that, by reasonable probability, cause more benign trajectories than the current descent into chaos, with its attendant death on a grand scale, violence, suffering and destruction.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about/chatham-house-rule>

### 3 Research question

The foreign policy of the EU/EEA states, which include Norway, is in a crisis. Policies in a number of important conflicts fail to deliver intended effects and influence on international political processes is eroding. This is now evident in the evolving crises following Western military interventions in Afghanistan,<sup>2</sup> Iraq, and Libya<sup>3</sup> and inaction towards the regime in Syria.<sup>4</sup> My project in this thesis is to develop a theory enabling interventions that are more effective. When coercion by boycotts, sanctions and military interventions fails to deliver intended effects, interventions by diplomatic discourse hold more promise, however, only if properly designed.

*Conceptualizing* is the cognitive process of applying theory, as a set of assumptions, to make sense of a problem.<sup>5</sup> In this dissertation, this cognitive process is termed *abductive reasoning*.<sup>6</sup> Decisions infer from a set of assumptions that conceptualize by abductive reasoning the nature of the problem. From these assumptions, ensue perceptions of the range of conceivable solutions and an idea of how to intervene. An *intervention* is a deliberate action with the purpose of effecting an intended change.<sup>7</sup> An intervention by discourse has as its purpose to change assumptions; hence, the inferred perceptions of the range of conceivable solutions and feasible interventions.

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<sup>2</sup> "Official Norwegian Reports NOU 2016: 8 A Good Ally: Norway in Afghanistan 2001–2014," ed. Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence (2016).

<sup>3</sup> "Evaluering av norsk deltakelse i Libya-operasjonene i 2011," (Oslo2018); "House of Commons Defence Committee Operations in Libya Ninth Report of Session 2010–12," (2012); "Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options," (London: House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee 2016 - 17).

<sup>4</sup> Western military intervention in Syria has targeted the Islamic State, not the regime, allowing it to regain its control, in contrast to the forced regime change in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

<sup>5</sup> A. Wenzel, *Strategic Decision Making in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* (American Psychological Association, 2013). P. 19

<sup>6</sup> *Abductive reasoning, also referred to as abductive approach is set to address weaknesses associated with deductive and inductive approaches. Specifically, deductive reasoning is criticized for the lack of clarity in terms of how to select theory to be tested via formulating hypotheses. Inductive reasoning, on other hand, criticized because "no amount of empirical data will necessarily enable theory-building"[1]. Abductive reasoning, as a third alternative, overcomes these weaknesses via adopting a pragmatist perspective.* <https://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/research-approach/abductive-reasoning-abductive-approach/> A case of abductive reasoning is Mitzberg's and Water's theory on strategy. A deliberate strategy is adjusted by emergent strategy. H. Mintzberg and J.A. Waters, "Of Strategies, Deliberate and Emergent," *Strategic Management Journal* 6, no. 3 (1985).

<sup>7</sup> M.B. Ballou, *Psychological Interventions: a Guide to Strategies* (Praeger, 1995). P. ix

Diplomacy works by persuasion, of either power equations, norms and principles, or shared interests. The record of Western foreign policy since the end of the Cold War forms a pattern suggesting that discourse on power equations, in the sense of who can to what degree affect or coerce whom, and norms and principles, whose ideas claim to have universal and absolute validity, will generate strong *counterforces*. These counterforces erode the enabling environment for such discourse to bring about intended effects. However, the record also shows that a diplomatic discourse on shared interests pools forces, and by so doing enables a policy's intended effects. Yet, in conflict, confrontation, and, in worst cases, war, the idea of shared interests seems counterintuitive.

Therefore, my research question is *how diplomatic discourse can be designed to persuade parties to pursue shared interests in political contexts, in which parties do not envisage such options?*

Persuasion is a cognitive and emotional process working by language in a discourse.<sup>8</sup> The purpose of persuasion is to affect decision-making. This dissertation develops an actionable theory on persuasion in the process of decision-making in foreign policy, denoting it *strategic discourse*. Then the dissertation sets out a methodology for elaborating, revising and testing the theory, describes how the theory evolved by observations and feedback in the testing, and concludes how diplomatic discourse can become more effective by applying the theory.

The theory of *strategic discourse* is applied to policy interventions in the current epicenter of world conflict, the state system formed by the remaining major stable states in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and Israel. They form a system in the sense of mutually generating each other's behavior. External states bear on this state system by interventions.

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<sup>8</sup> How language constructs and shares perceptions of social reality, *symbolic universe*, by projecting, in my terminology, assumptions, in this work denoted *typifications*: P.L. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Penguin Books Limited, 1991). P.13, 31,33, 72 -73

A. Ehteshami, D. Huber, and C. Paciello, "Introduction," in *The Mediterranean Reset: Geopolitics in a New Age*, ed. A. Ehteshami, D. Huber, and M.C. eds. Paciello (Durham: Global Policy., 2017). How policy works through discourse by *producing and distributing meaning*, p. 9, how the EU can construct policy by discourse: *by desecuritizing its own approach the EU could contain the other parties' securitized approach as well and identify pathways towards a more cooperative interaction...*P. 11

### 3.1 The relevance of the research question

As a diplomat serving with the Norwegian Mission to the United Nations in New York 1989 – 1992, at the end of the Cold War and its immediate aftermath, I experienced a strong surge in diplomatic discourse on shared interests. Ideas of shared interests evolved into concepts like *global governance* and *global common goods*.<sup>9</sup> The perception was that Western power found itself unopposed, and, by the concept developed by Winkler, the *Western Normative Project* of human rights, democracy and free markets<sup>10</sup> seemed set on a course towards universal acclaim in the discourse of the member states in the proceedings of the United Nations. Soon, however, this discourse changed.

Since the discourse on power equations seemed to have obviated itself for lack of countervailing force to Western military power, the normative discourse took center stage. Soon, this normative discourse turned into a new discourse on power equations, by the idea that those rulers and regimes that failed to implement the Western Normative Project should be coerced, if need be removed. Ensuing were ideas of “*responsibility to protect*” and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan’s idea of “*humanitarian intervention*”.<sup>11</sup> His formative idea was that the unopposed Western force should remove rulers and regimes that failed to secure citizens human rights and provide for their welfare.

To what degree the series of Western military interventions that followed the end of the Cold War were actually inspired by this normative discourse, remains a contentious issue. The interventions’ stated goals, however, corresponded the Western Normative Project, regimes that secured human rights, democracy and free markets. The idea was that such regimes would then naturally align themselves with the West under leadership of the United States.

We now know this was not to be. The military interventions, with few exceptions, did not produce the intended effects but rather disastrous unintended consequences and prohibitive collateral costs. The Western normative project failed to have the transformative power that the initial acclaim at

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<sup>9</sup> My own experience in UN negotiations, set out in my submitted article “From the Fall of the Berlin Wall to the Fall of Aleppo. The Decline of Global Governance – and How to Restore it”. *Global Policy* (2019) doi: 10.1111/1758-5899.12736

<sup>10</sup> H.A. Winkler, "Greatness and Limits of the West. The History of an Unfinished Project," in *LEQS Paper* (London: London School of Economics, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Kofi A. Annan, "Two concepts of sovereignty," *The Economist*, no. 18 September 1999 (1999).

the end of the Cold War promised. It will remain a contentious issue whether this failure of the Western Normative Project was caused by the military interventions to enforce it, by errors in the design of the military and political strategies, or by insufficient level of forces and aid. Indisputable is, however, the pattern that Western military interventions have not worked as intended.

Following my posting to the United Nations, in 1992, I was then exposed to an organized inter-state cooperation that demonstrated the transformative power of the Western Normative Project, the EU – The European Union. This transformation's point of departure was the polarization, violence and dysfunctional governance following the reshuffling of Europe after World War I, eventually a new world war.<sup>12</sup> The ideas of European cooperation that evolved into the EU emerged to cope with the legacy left by the destructions of World War II, of looming chaos and fear of a new war,<sup>13</sup> in significant respects comparable to the situation in the current Middle East with Iraq, Syria, and Libya as the epicenters of confrontation. The trajectory of European transformation began in circumstances resembling the violence, extremism and malfunctioning governance in current conflicts, but produced contemporary Europe, which, despite imperfections, uncertainties and pockets of rejection, in comparison to the end of World War II is stable, democratic and prosperous. After my return from the UN in New York, my new assignment was the Norwegian membership negotiations with the EU, and then, when membership was turned down in a referendum, on Norway's agreement with EU under EU's regime for states eligible for membership, the European Economic Area, for short the acronym EEA. The discourse in the EU is advocacy of national and special interests within the confines of assumed superintendent shared interests in eventual joint solutions.<sup>14</sup> This discourse forges incremental convergence by compromise and a "path dependence" on cooperation.<sup>15</sup>

After my last assignment with Norwegian EU relations, I changed to Middle Eastern affairs by my assignment to the Norwegian Embassy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. My special responsibility was to

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<sup>12</sup> R. Gerwarth, *The Vanquished. Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917-1923* (London: Penguin Books, 2016); I. Kershaw, *To Hell and Back: Europe, 1914-1949* (Penguin Books Limited, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> J.L. Gaddis, *The Cold War* (Penguin Books, 2007). P. 1-10 A. Wirsching, *Demokratie und Globalisierung: Europa seit 1989* (Beck C. H., 2015). P. 221. The fear of a new war was evident in the widespread preparations for a Soviet occupation by the so-called *stay behind* groups.

<sup>14</sup> My own observations

<sup>15</sup> A. Wirsching, *Der Preis der Freiheit: Geschichte Europas in unserer Zeit* (C.H.Beck, 2012). P. 17-18

analyze and report on Saudi Arabia's views and role in regional affairs. I encountered a region that by the violence, extremism and malfunctioning governance to a significant degree resembled Europe prior to the regional transformation by the Western Normative Project. The state of the current Middle East is also the aftermath of Western military interventions, with current epicenters in Iraq, Syria and Libya, along with associated conflicts in Yemen and Mali. Therefore, current Middle East demonstrates the consequences when the transformation by the Western Normative Project fails, as well as how military interventions, despite their intentions, may have as unintended effects to aggravate these consequences.

Following my posting in Saudi Arabia my next assignment was as a Visiting Research Fellow with the Centre for Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Oslo. My research project was to explore how the Middle Eastern region could transform in a similar way as Europe, by developing a theory for diplomatic intervention by discourse. The European transformation was in decisive phases prompted by seminal events, the last of which was the end of the Cold War in 1989. The Arab Spring of 2011 was a similar seminal event, prompted by protesters that embraced comparable normative projects to the Western Normative Project. To work as transformative force, normative projects need to turn into visions of a new social and political order. A vision is an evocative idea of an alternative political order beyond current contentious issues. Only envisioning could enable a political process to move beyond the contentious issues of the intractable conflicts that block attempts to forge alliances across fault lines, social cohesion and political convergence. Comparable to the failure of the global vision of 1989 was the failure of the regional vision of 2011.

Decisive questions for designing effective interventions by diplomatic discourse are why such evocative visions fail. Is the failure inevitable, or could different choices at critical junctures have produced different trajectories? Underlying these questions is a fundamental question, the answer to which constructs one of two basic assumptions: Do events evolve by their inherent forces and logic, hence, the political future largely beyond agency, calling for adaption rather than shaping? Is the opposite true, the future is open, determined by successive decisions?

My view is that the future is open, shaped by successive decisions.<sup>16</sup> This view is sustained by my observations in my professional role in the decision-making process. I have been party to considerations that shaped the decisions, and followed these decisions' aftermath. I find the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 15

cumulative unintended effects of successive decisions avoidable, not inevitable. My view that the future is open, shaped by successive decisions, is also a normative position on agency. Agency works through discourse shaped by assumptions.<sup>17</sup> My theory of strategic discourse, set out in this dissertation with the submitted published articles, shows how to construct a diplomatic discourse to enable agency in diplomatic interventions. The first step in agency to enable a transformation is to believe it possible, especially when defying seemingly overwhelming odds against it. Conversely, the fatalist view that deliberate transformation is not feasible becomes self-fulfilling by the paralyzing effects on agency.

My project, to develop persuasive diplomatic interventions in the Middle East, focusses on the five remaining stable states, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey and Israel. These states form a state system in the sense that they mutually generate their political behavior, and that, hence, a regional political solution, which as next stage can enter into a transformation comparable to the European trajectory, is what these states can agree, or at least accept. External powers involved in the region act as catalysts or breaks on the internal processes in the state system, without being able to impose their ideas of a solution. These external actors are primarily Russia and the United States, with the EU as a secondary actor. I argue that the EU now, under the altered international circumstances, needs to assume the role of a major actor and seek to act as a catalyst for a more cooperative state system.

Contrary to the assumption, often inherent in analyses, that states in this state system act as monolithic and static polities by a single will according to an inherent disposition and fixed, sophisticated strategy, they are actually diverse and dynamic. Interests and perspectives will differ among factions and individuals that form dynamic tension fields. It follows from Kahneman's theory, discussed in this dissertation, that associations by simplifications guide this divergent thinking, *heuristics*, vague ideas, even if strongly held.<sup>18</sup> Hence, decisions tend to improvise in response to perceptions of evolving circumstances. These opposing internal forces and improvised decisions create opportunities for a strategic discourse.

At present, these regional and external states seem to act under the assumption that their goal is to weaken the other states to enable a political solution in their own image. They seem to act out

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<sup>17</sup> Berger and Luckmann; Ehteshami, Huber, and Paciello. P. 8-9, 11

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Kahneman, "Maps of Bounded Rationality: Psychology for Behavioral Economics," *The American Economic Review* 93, no. 5 (2003). P. 1450, *The Architecture of Cognition*



Mearsheimer's theory of *offensive realism*, seeking hegemony.<sup>19</sup> However, the trajectories of the current conflicts do not bear out this assumption. Those acting accordingly err in two ways: first, imposing a solution by unilateral power is not feasible; second, the worst case is not the emergence of regional hegemony by one of the other states, but more failed states, a trajectory that disables both military force and diplomatic discourse as interventions.

### 3.2 The case for research-based foreign policy decision-making

In several other fields than foreign policy that make a significant difference in society, typically engineering, economics, medicine, psychology and therapy, there is a goal to improve decisions by research. Such research is actionable<sup>20</sup> in the sense that the goal is to enable interventions that more effectively affect practice in an intended direction. In research-based decision-making two goals are advanced. First, the theories and inferred hypotheses on options applied in decisions are continuously challenged, thus upgraded. Second, applying to the decision-making process principles of scientific methodology, critical probing and criticism by peers,<sup>21</sup> imposes on the decision-making process the comparison of *alternative* theories.<sup>22</sup> Thus, research-based decision-making is a deliberate design of the decision-making process.

The comparison between the related processes of financial policy and foreign policy decisions, both critical decisions coping with Norway's shifting external environment, raises an important

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<sup>19</sup> J.J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)* (W. W. Norton, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Chris Argyris, "Actionable Knowledge," in *The Oxford Handbook of Organization Theory* ed. Christain Knudsen and Haridimos Tsoukas (2005 (2009)).

<sup>21</sup> Critical in President Kennedy's ultimately successful crisis-management during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 was in the view of his brother, Robert Kennedy, the free discussion as peers in the advisory group. Significantly, President Kennedy instructed his brother to ensure that there was always disagreement in the group so ensure the best possible advice. R.F. Kennedy and A.M. Schlesinger, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (W. W. Norton, 2011). P.36, 86, 88-89. The same recommendation, always ensure differing views, makes the official Norwegian report evaluating the Norwegian military intervention in Libya "Evaluering av norsk deltakelse i Libya-operasjonene i 2011." P. 78. In my own project, as an official in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on decision-making in different European foreign ministries, I found in one foreign ministry that the decision-making process was designed to ensure systematic contradiction. President Obama wanted but failed to obtain alternative options for the further military operations in Afghanistan Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (Simon & Schuster, Limited, 2010). P. 160 - 171

<sup>22</sup> By way of example, in President Kennedy's cognitive processing of his range of options during the Cuban Missile crisis, the alternative theories considered were to what degree he was dealing with *deterrence*, calling for standing firm and respond by escalation to escalating threats, or *crisis management*, which called for flexibility and restraint. Kennedy and Schlesinger. G.T. Allison and P. Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Longman, 1999).

concern. In financial policy, entailing several potentially critical developments for Norway were recent external shocks like the banking crisis, Euro Crises and the occasional plummeting energy prices that jeopardize the oil and gas dependent Norwegian economy.

The effects of the financial policy interventions corresponded to the intentions. Collateral costs or unintended consequences did not exceed the intended effects. Significantly, the successful financial policy interventions followed from optimal analyses. Complex models, continuously elaborated and adjusted in consultation with highly qualified economists, shape Norwegian financial policy.<sup>23</sup> The purpose of the models is to find the chain of causality, to infer policy to affect causality in the intended direction.

While in financial policy, sophisticated analyses enable fine-tuned interventions, in foreign policy, in the absence of comparable analyses, decisions on Norwegian military interventions appear to have been based on simple narratives, offering only a dichotomy between coercion by boycotts, sanctions, and military intervention, or inaction.

Financial policy interventions in Norway are research-based, in a process of consultation.<sup>24</sup> This decision-making process is designed to advance two goals. First, to enable the application in the decision-making process of optimal actionable research; second, to build sufficient ownership to the necessary trade-offs between conflicting goals to enable implementation of the chosen options. By contrast, Norwegian foreign policy decisions have not been enlightened by comparable actionable research, nor is the decision-making process designed with comparable consultations to build ownership to trade-offs.

In another critical institution of the state, the police, investigation has previously not been research-based, but serious cases of miscarriage of justice prompted research projects into the cognitive process of decision-making in investigation.<sup>25</sup> In foreign policy, serious cases of

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<sup>23</sup> [https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/okonomi-og-budsjett/norsk\\_okonomi/finansdepartementets-radgivende-utvalg-f/id654149/](https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/okonomi-og-budsjett/norsk_okonomi/finansdepartementets-radgivende-utvalg-f/id654149/)

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/okonomi-og-budsjett/norsk\\_okonomi/finansdepartementets-radgivende-utvalg-f/id654149/](https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/okonomi-og-budsjett/norsk_okonomi/finansdepartementets-radgivende-utvalg-f/id654149/) [https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/okonomi-og-budsjett/norsk\\_okonomi/modellbruk/strategi-for-utvikling-av-en-ny-makrookonomisk-modell-for-finanspolitikk/id2576059/](https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/okonomi-og-budsjett/norsk_okonomi/modellbruk/strategi-for-utvikling-av-en-ny-makrookonomisk-modell-for-finanspolitikk/id2576059/)

<sup>25</sup> A. Rachlew, "En betenkning knyttet til avhørstaktikk og begrepet konfrontasjon, i Riksadvokatens arbeidsgruppe AVHØRSMETODIKK I POLITIET,," (Oslo: Riksadvokaten, 2013); "Justisfeil ved politiets etterforskning- noen eksempler og forskningsbaserte tiltak" (University of Oslo, 2009); I.A. Fahsing,

misjudgments, as established by reports commissioned by Parliament on the military interventions in Afghanistan<sup>26</sup> and Libya,<sup>27</sup> should for the same reason as in police investigation prompt research projects into the decision-making process in foreign policy.

The first stage in actionable research is to develop a theory. I will now set out my theory of *strategic discourse*.

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"The Making of an Expert Detective. Thinking and Deciding in Criminal Investigations" (University of Gothenburg, 2016).

<sup>26</sup> "Official Norwegian Reports NOU 2016: 8 A Good Ally: Norway in Afghanistan 2001–2014."

<sup>27</sup> "Evaluering Av Norsk Deltakelse I Libya-Operasjonene I 2011."; "House of Commons Defence Committee Operations in Libya Ninth Report of Session 2010–12."; The corresponding British parliamentary report "Libya: Examination of Intervention and Collapse and the UK's Future Policy



## 4 Developing the theory of *strategic discourse*

All perceptions of political reality follow by necessity from a theory,<sup>28</sup> in the sense of a set of assumptions about the generic characteristics of a set of circumstances. The theory structures the facts to which it applies by selection and interpretation (*what is important and why*). To answer the research question, *how diplomatic discourse can persuade parties to pursue shared interests in political contexts, in which parties do not envisage such options*, the theory needs to explain how decisions infer from assumptions. Then the theory needs to explain how counterforces emerge. Finally, the theory must set out how persuasion can overcome counterforces and change the cognitive and emotional process that produces decisions. The theory developed for improving the design of persuasion is denoted *strategic discourse*.

### 4.1 Innovation of traditional theory on foreign policy

The idea that a *strategic discourse* can offer an alternative option to the dichotomy of coercion, by boycotts, sanctions and military intervention, or inaction, is an innovation of the currently predominant conceptions of foreign policy options. The traditional theoretical divide in analyses of international relations and foreign policy lies between realist and constructionist approaches.<sup>29</sup> The theories part over the role of agency, its room for maneuver and its constraints. While realists, such as Waltz<sup>30</sup> and Mearsheimer,<sup>31</sup> tend to find the international system an equation of power, legalistic-moralistic constructionists tend to see the international system as a set of principles or codes to be advanced and, if need be, enforced. The archetypal cases of such constructionists are U.S. President Woodrow Wilson following World War I and President George W. Bush with his post-9/11 invasion of Iraq.

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<sup>28</sup> Mearsheimer. Kindle Loc. 354 K.N. Waltz, *Realism and International Politics* (ROUTLEDGE CHAPMAN & HALL, 2008). P. 47, K.R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies Vol. II* 5th ed. (Routledge, 1966). P. 268

<sup>29</sup> For an analysis of the role of, in the words of George Kennan, the “legalistic-moralistic approach” in U.S. foreign policy (in my terminology constructionist), A. Preston, *The War Council: McGeorge Bundy, the NSC, and Vietnam* (Harvard University Press, 2010). Henry Kissinger applies the term idealism to the same H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (Simon & Schuster, 1994).

<sup>30</sup> Waltz.

<sup>31</sup> J.J. Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (Yale University Press, 2018); *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*.

This divide bears on policy choices. Influential realists' normative purpose, such as Waltz's<sup>32</sup> and Mearsheimer's,<sup>33</sup> has been to restrain policy to avoid its ineffectual or, in the worst cases, destructive unintended effects, above all, war.<sup>34</sup> However, from the realists' assumptions of power as constitutive in agency, actors may also infer another option than cautious restraint, a deliberate policy to change the power equation, by boosting own military and economic prowess, and shifting alliances. This is where Waltz and Mearsheimer part. While Waltz posits that the power equation between states tends towards a stable balance, so-called *defensive realism*, Mearsheimer find this power equation unstable because parties will seek security by *hegemony*, what he denotes *offensive realism*. The archetypal case is perhaps the Prussian and then German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, although he proceeded with great caution to avoid prompting an opposing alliance by adversaries.<sup>35</sup> His long-term strategy of securing first Prussia's and then the German Reich's position and influence he pursued by a combination of building up military and economic strength, and shifting alliances, as did his successors but with less skill and restraint. The Bismarck version of realism was to have disastrous consequences in prompting the failures of crisis management that led to World War I and its aftermath.<sup>36</sup> A Bismarck-style realism, *offensive realism*, in Mearsheimer's sense,<sup>37</sup> forms the predominant assumptions in the current Middle East state system, with a reasonable inference of risks similar to those that precipitated World War I.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 255-256, 302-303. For an extended argument, see his book, K.N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities. The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*.

<sup>34</sup> Preston. P. 13-14, 26

<sup>35</sup> G.A. Craig, *Germany: 1866-1945* (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1981). P. 2-7, 30-34  
Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. P. 183-190

<sup>36</sup> V. Ullrich, *“Die” nervöse Großmacht: 1871 - 1918 ; Aufstieg und Untergang des deutschen Kaiserreichs* (Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 2013).

<sup>37</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. P. 183 - 190

<sup>38</sup> C.M. Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (Allen Lane, 2012).

(While actual policy may in hindsight appear to vacillate on a continuum between the polar opposites of realism and constructionism, our *thinking*, and hence our theories, tends towards seeing these concepts as a dichotomy.<sup>39</sup>)

The apparent U.S. and Western supremacy, the “unipolar world,” following the end of the Cold War enabled the constructionist idea to emerge within the United Nations that this unchallenged military power should be harnessed to enforce democracy and the protection of human rights. This led to Kofi Annan’s idea of humanitarian intervention,<sup>40</sup> an apparently benign idea that was seized upon by the second president Bush and the so-called “neocons”. In the words of someone who witnessed at close range the U.S. decisions to intervene, first in Afghanistan and then Iraq: “*We felt we could do anything, we had a responsibility to put things right.*”<sup>41</sup>

Seemingly bearing out realists’ call for restraint is the sequence of failed and by all appearance self-defeating Western policies in the legalistic-moralistic constructionist mode of thinking following Kofi Annan’s call for humanitarian intervention in 1999.<sup>42</sup> Mearsheimer posits that this idea of benign coercion is more dangerous than offensive realism because it leads to more wars.<sup>43</sup> After the disasters produced by the constructionist foreign policy of the George W. Bush, his successor, President Barack Obama, was greeted as a new realist, a “chess player,” by Henry Kissinger.<sup>44</sup> Kissinger has been an arch proponent of realism who rejects what he perceives as the idealistic — by my preferred term, the constructionist — tradition in U.S. foreign policy (although

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<sup>39</sup> This is in line with Berger’s and Luchman’s theory on typifications Berger and Luckmann. P. 13, 31, 56, 57, Levi-Strauss’s theory on concepts as binary opposites. R. Deliége, *Introduction à l’anthropologie structurale: Lévi-Strauss aujourd’hui* (Editions du Seuil, 2001). P. 49; Simons’s theories on bounded rationality, H.A. Simon, *Administrative Behavior*, 4th Edition (Free Press, 2013); and Kahneman’s theories on heuristics: A. Tversky, Kahneman, D. , "Judgement under Uncertainty: Huristics and Biases," *Science* 185, 1974 (1974); A. Tversky and D. Kahneman, "Choices, Values, and Frames," *American Psychologist* 34, 1984 (1984). For a brief overview, see Kahneman.

<sup>40</sup> “Two Concepts of Sovereignty,” *The Economist* September 16, 1999

<sup>41</sup> Confidential conversation. CHR.

<sup>42</sup> How Western interventions have had counterproductive effects, and hence been self-defeating, see Brynjar Lia, "Jihadism in the Arab World after 2011: Explaining Its Expansion," *Middle East Policy* XXIII, no. No. 4 (2016).

<sup>43</sup> Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*. Kindle Loc. 4050

<sup>44</sup> Henry Kissinger, interview by Jan Fleischhauer & Gabor Steingart, “Obama is Like a Chess Player,” July 6, 2009, *ABC News*.

he finds that realism needs an element of idealism to work).<sup>45</sup> On Obama, he was only partly correct. Obama himself, by his own account, embraced the moralistic realism of Reinhold Niebuhr, who, while endorsing the realists' call for restraint, urged as a moral imperative that power be harnessed for normative purposes.<sup>46</sup> Thus, President Obama was guided by a theory that fused the restraint of realism with the constructionist ideas of Kofi Annan.

The current conflicts in Libya, as well as in and over Syria, reveal the bankruptcy of theories in their vintage forms, realism, be it in both its versions, caution and changing power equations, and constructionist. In addition, the fusion of realism and constructionism of Niebuhr and Obama proved self-defeating when applied in actual policy.

I argue that these theoretical modes fail for the same reason. When persuasion fails, the recourse is to coercion, which invariably proves ineffective. In fact, a strategy of coercion, whether by boycotts, sanctions or by projecting military force, is doomed to fail for two reasons. Coercion cannot control all variables affecting the outcome, and it provokes counterforces to opt for unintended recourses, such as the emerging bloc of authoritarian states resenting Western influence in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Iran's recourse to missiles for lack of spare parts for their aircraft.<sup>47</sup>

When coercion ineffective or even self-defeating, it seems probable that Western policy can only succeed by *persuading* more effectively. We therefore need a theory of foreign policy that explains how differing sets of assumptions form alternative *mental models*.<sup>48</sup> Realists would tend to limit policy to adapting to whatever consequences to the regional and global order come out of

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<sup>45</sup> For an extended argument, see Kissinger.

<sup>46</sup> "Obama, Gospel and Verse," David Brooks, April 26, 2007, *New York Times*. Niebuhr's influence on Obama is clearly discernible in two statements, (1) at the beginning of his presidency in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, and (2) towards the end of his term in the interview in *The Atlantic*, "The Obama Doctrine".

<sup>47</sup> A seminal case of sanctions turning self-defeating by producing the unintended consequence of war was the USA's refusal to provide Imperial Japan with oil and iron over Japan's invasion of Manchuria. Since it was not an option for Japan's leaders to give in because of strong ultra-nationalistic factions in the Japanese military, the sanctions precipitated further Japanese expansion to acquire alternative sources, as well as the preemptive Japanese attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor in 1941. I. Kershaw, *Fateful Choices: Ten Decisions That Changed the World 1940-1941* (Penguin Books, Limited, 2008). P. 331-381 Adrian Lyttelton, "Mad Men?," *Survival* 53, no. 1 (2011). P. 160

<sup>48</sup> R.J. Heuer and C.S. Intelligence, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis* (Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1999). For a brief introduction, see Introduction xxi-xxii.



the evolving events, or deliberately try to change the power equations. The constructionists will either reject the regimes for their significant violation of basic tenets of democracy and human rights, or try to coerce the adoption of Western standards. By contrast, a strategic discourse will engage parties on their own terms in the pursuit of options that are in the interest of the regimes' political projects. In essence, the premise for strategic discourse is the same as for Waltz's structural realism: the objective equation of power, in this case the ability to cause consequences for others. The purpose, however, is constructionist in Niebuhr's sense, a normative project.

In other words, the theory of strategic discourse is a synergy between the realist and constructionist theories, by building on cognitive theories on foreign policy, such as set out by Jervis.<sup>49</sup> The theory on strategic discourse turns these cognitive theories operational, puts to work Jervis' cognitive theories on how foreign policy decisions are made. However, the theory on strategic discourse differs with Jervis' theory.

Jervis, like other analysts that set out their theory of how foreign policy works, such as Kissinger,<sup>50</sup> Waltz,<sup>51</sup> Mearsheimer,<sup>52</sup> and Gaddis,<sup>53</sup> analyze historical developments. Mearsheimer specifically posits that explaining past events by his theory of *offensive realism* enables predictions about the future, though admittedly uncertain.<sup>54</sup> In other words, the choice and interpretation of past events seen relevant is the basis for their theory of how foreign policy does, and should, work. The uncertain assumptions in their analyses are if other past events or other interpretations could support differing theories.<sup>55</sup> By way of example, Kissinger, in his history of international relation, in which he argues for realist policies, mentions the seminal event of the Cuban Missile Crisis only in passing, and then interpreted in context of US deterrence of the

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<sup>49</sup> R. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics: New Edition* (Princeton University Press, 2017). P. xxiv

<sup>50</sup> Kissinger.

<sup>51</sup> Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis; Realism and International Politics*.

<sup>52</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition); Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*.

<sup>53</sup> Gaddis; *On Grand Strategy* (Penguin Books Limited, 2018).

<sup>54</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. Kindle Loc.339-342

<sup>55</sup> Popper. P. 270

Soviet Union.<sup>56</sup> He leaves out the countervailing consideration of crisis management that is the focus of Robert Kennedy's account<sup>57</sup> and the analyses by Allison & Zelikow.<sup>58</sup>

Jervis, in his analyses of the cognitive processes that produce foreign policy decisions, circumvents the factual and analytic uncertainties in the question of choice and interpretation of past events by analyzing how *decision-makers* perceived historical events *they* – not the later analyst – found sufficiently significant to form the basis for their decisions. In other words, he shows how foreign policy decisions are made by invoking historical *analogies*.<sup>59</sup> He then, having established that decision-makers' perceptions of historical analogies decide their perceptions of options, proceeds to show how the historical analogies, of their choice and in their interpretation, form misperceptions that may cause decision-makers to err in their judgment.<sup>60</sup> However, by this analysis, he misses an important point.

We have no option but to conceptualize current political reality by a historical analogy. We can only divine the future by projecting perceptions of past events. However, our intuitive but fallacious assumption is that the seminal events that form our analogies recur, offering predictable scenarios conditional on the right choice of action. Our problem in turning past events into predictable scenarios is that a unique set of circumstance do not recur, even if they may compare. The uncertain epistemological question is what compares, how and to what degree. Since past events offer such an uncertain basis for understanding current problems, Jervis is right that the relevant question is not how the past actually was, but how it is interpreted as analogies applied in current foreign policy problems.<sup>61</sup> However, whatever the uncertainties and fallacies inherent in the choice and its interpretation of past events for the analyses applied in decisions, an understanding of the past as an analogy is nevertheless unavoidable because the future, with

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<sup>56</sup> Kissinger.

<sup>57</sup> Kennedy and Schlesinger.

<sup>58</sup> Allison and Zelikow.

<sup>59</sup> Jervis. Kindle Loc. 7771-7777

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. Kindle Loc. 8053-8056, 8094. By way of example, on Trygve Lie, as UN Secretary General, invoking Norway's good experiences with negotiating with the Soviets in the case of Soviet troops remaining in Northern Iran, in Jervis' view erroneously because the two sets of circumstances did not compare Kindle Loc 8261-8267

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. P. xv, xxv, 218, 220, 223 Y.F. Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton University Press, 1992).

which the decisions cope, does not yet exist. Since historical analogies are inescapable in foreign policy decision-making, reinterpreting or changing the analogy is the instrument of persuasion in strategic discourse. Changing the analogy changes the history, or the story about the past's meaning and lesson.<sup>62</sup>

Put differently, the purpose of any diplomatic discourse is to persuade with a *policy story*, in Stevens's sense.<sup>63</sup> By abductive reasoning generated by his experiences as an intern in a British ministry, he developed his theory that decision-making was shaped by competing storytelling. The purpose of the stories was to persuade. Applying Steven's theory on policy stories, the various theories of foreign policy work as stories with a normative message. The realist, constructionist and strategic discourse differ in the policy story intended to persuade. In the *realist discourse*, the policy story is that parties need to accommodate to, or change, their relative position in a power equation. In the *constructionist discourse*, the policy story is that the other parties need to conform to norms held to be universal and absolute, typically democracy and human rights.

In the *strategic discourse*, the policy story is that there is common ground and options in joint interest. The idea differs from its related concept of *strategic narrative* by its purpose. In Freedman's analyses of Western military interventions in Afghanistan, he finds that these operations need a coherent and convincing narrative for effective coordination of operations to work and sustain domestic support. He denotes this *strategic narrative*. In his words, *a strategic narrative does not seek to predict events but to convince others to act in such a way that the story will follow its desired course*.<sup>64</sup> This is also a description of *strategic discourse*. However, the difference is that while a strategic narrative seeks to forge cohesion *against* an adversary, a strategic discourse seeks to convince parties *across fault lines* to seek common ground and options in joint interest. In this sense, the concept of *strategic discourse* has an important interface with Galtung's and Tschudi's concept of the *transcend approach*, by which parties by discourse opens up their *cognitive space* to enable them to reframe issues, thus facilitating a mutual understanding. Galtung and Tschudi operate with concepts like *rearranging cognitive structures*

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<sup>62</sup> Popper. P. 270-2079

<sup>63</sup> A. Stevens, "Telling Policy Stories: An Ethnographic Study of the Use of Evidence in Policy-making in the UK," *Jnl Soc. Pol.* (2011), 40, no. 2 (2010).

<sup>64</sup> Lawrence Freedman, "The possibilities and limits of strategic narratives," in *Strategic Narrative, Public Opinion, and War*, ed. Beatrice De Graaf, George Dimitriu, and Jens Ringsmose (New York: Routledge, 2015). P. 24.

that seems identical to the concept used in this dissertation of *cognitive restructuring*, and *anchor* that would correspond to *historical analogy*.<sup>65</sup> The difference, however, is that a *strategic discourse* invokes a *specific* historical analogy to evoke a vision of a new political order beyond current irreconcilable conflicts, and then intentionally increases the vision's cognitive accessibility by persistent reiteration.<sup>66</sup> The vision of what might be then forms a theory in the sense of a set of assumptions from which to infer the range of conceivable options.

## 4.2 Inferring from assumptions

All decisions infer from a theory, in the sense of a set of assumptions. Therefore, decisions are applied theory. Hence, policies fail by the theory that produce them. In actionable research into foreign-policy decision-making, sense making by abductive reasoning<sup>67</sup> generates a theory, as a set of assumptions, which emerges by cognitively processing an encountered problem. This theory then becomes a cognitive tool to make sense of successive observations of further phenomena. By the theory, analyses may ascertain what problems compare, how, and to what degree.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, as demonstrated by Norway's financial policy, better theories lead to decisions that are more effective.

By enabling the analyses of experience, abductive reasoning lends itself especially to practitioners that, like myself, seek scholarship and research to upgrade the theories applied in decisions.

Abductive reasoning, sense making of experiences, develops the theory set out in this dissertation,

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<sup>65</sup> J. Galtung and F. Tschudi, "CRAFTING PEACE: ON THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE TRANSCEND APPROACH," in *Peace, Conflict, and Violence: Peace Psychology for the 21st Century*, ed. D. J. Christie, Wagner, R. V., & Winter, D. A. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 2000). P. 15: *Dialogues have been explored in order to rearrange cognitive structures, using emotionally positive and negative anchors.*

<sup>66</sup> Kahneman. P. 1452-1454

<sup>67</sup> *Abductive reasoning, also referred to as abductive approach is set to address weaknesses associated with deductive and inductive approaches. Specifically, deductive reasoning is criticized for the lack of clarity in terms of how to select theory to be tested via formulating hypotheses. Inductive reasoning, on other hand, criticized because "no amount of empirical data will necessarily enable theory-building" [1]. Abductive reasoning, as a third alternative, overcomes these weaknesses via adopting a pragmatist perspective. <https://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/research-approach/abductive-reasoning-abductive-approach/> A case of abductive reasoning is Mintzberg's theory on strategy. A deliberate strategy is adjusted by emergent strategy. H. Mintzberg and J.A. Waters, "Of Strategies, Deliberate and Emergent," Strategic Management Journal 6, no. 3 (1985).*

<sup>68</sup> Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy*. P. 24, 32. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. P. 8-9

first as a diplomat and official, then as scholar and researcher, and participant in Track 2 diplomacy, which denotes confidential encounters outside the official diplomatic channels.<sup>69</sup>

In track 2 diplomacy encounters I have observed how even cordial encounters are unable to build bridges between minds across the fault lines of conflict. Unless engaged effectively by a strategic discourse, assumptions form self-confirming systems of the mind that interpret new discourse into the narrative that sustains them. These systems of the mind I term *mental models*.

#### 4.2.1 Mental models

Abductive reasoning needs to arrive at an understanding of the assumptions that guide choices and behavior by forming a model. The equivalent to mathematically computed models in financial policy in foreign policy is conjectured and inferred *mental models*.<sup>70</sup> A mental model is a set of superintendent assumptions that structures perception and the inferred range of options.<sup>71</sup> Mental models differ significantly from the economic models. In the economic models, all relevant data are computed mathematically to produce objective, shared perceptions of reality. Mental models are not shared or objective. Those who share a mental model, share its assumptions, and act in accordance with it, as do those with a different mental model. Conflicting mental models therefore establish opposing assumptions about reality, from which differing ideas of feasible options are inferred. The root cause of Western policy failure since the end of the Cold War is the failure to understand how mental models work; first, that parties act according to their own assumptions, mental models, not by a shared understanding of an objective reality, second, how mental models are dynamic, hence, malleable.

The nature of mental models, how they shape perceptions, hence behavior, and how they are dynamic, hence malleable, has profound implications for policy. While in financial policy mathematical computations establish a shared assumption about problems and the range of feasible options, in foreign policy diverging assumptions forming mental models may converge only by consultation and cooperation. This convergence of mental models by consultations and cooperation is the essence of the EU cooperation, and a hence the European transformation from

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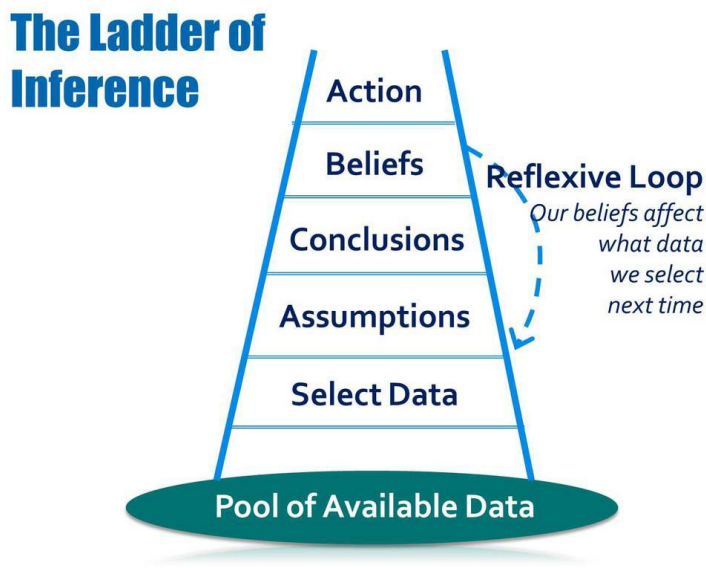
<sup>69</sup> P. Jones, *Track Two Diplomacy in Theory and Practice* (Stanford University Press, 2015).

<sup>70</sup> Heuer and Intelligence. P. 4

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. P. 4

extremism and violent confrontation to the current pragmatic cooperation producing convergence by a path-dependence on cooperation.<sup>72</sup>

The cognitive process by which mental models construct behavior is captured in the so-called *ladder-of-inference*.<sup>73</sup> Strategic discourse intervenes in the reflexive loop by introducing alternative assumptions.



This model shows how our cognitive process, unless compelled otherwise, relates to only a selection of available facts, and that in a self-fulfilling loop of interpretation. As evident by this model, mental models provide at best a crude guide for decisions; hence, entail uncertainty. This uncertainty is, however, by differing degrees, conditioned on the analytic and discursive process.

#### 4.2.2 Decisions under degrees of uncertainty

The decision to go to war in Libya followed from a specific mental model, as do the various criticisms, such as the assumption that when both coercion, ultimately by military intervention, and inaction lead to disaster, a third option, consultation and cooperation to forge a concert of involved states, must offer a better prognosis. A joint report by a Russian and an Iranian think

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<sup>72</sup> Wirsching, *Der Preis der Freiheit: Geschichte Europas in unserer Zeit*. P. 17-18

<sup>73</sup> HuffPost. Discussed in P.M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization* (Currency, Doubleday, 1994). P. 242 - 246

tank, calls for precisely a broad political process with the US and the West to deal with the looming contiguous regional crisis from Pakistan /Afghanistan to Libya and beyond.<sup>74</sup>

Admittedly, the assumption that the chosen options in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria led to disaster has an epistemological, hence methodological weakness. The problem with holding a certain foreign policy to be right or wrong is that certainty is beyond reach. Decisions are by necessity made under inevitable uncertainty,<sup>75</sup> an answer to two competing hypothesis about options: What are the consequences of the decision, and what are the consequences of not making it?

The answers to both hypotheses are conjectural. No factual knowledge can offer certain answers to these questions. An infinite number of variables in dynamic interaction shapes a political trajectory. Even when the conjecture comes close to certainty by a common denominator in a series of unique, but still comparable occurrences, we can never know as indisputable facts if our decisions actually produce the subsequent events, nor if alternative decisions would have produced different results. By way of example, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya each constitute a unique set of circumstances, but the common denominator is western military intervention failing to produce intended results but followed by comparable unintended consequences. This observation allows a conjecture that establishes with close to certainty that western military intervention is a self-defeating policy.

However, this close to certain assumption, inferred by conjecture from a series of unique circumstances with one common denominator, does not allow any comparable certain conjecture about the inherent alternative counterfactual hypothesis, which is that deciding against military intervention would have produced more intended and less unintended results. In Syria, the trajectory has been equally disastrous, conceivably worse, without Western military intervention removing the regime. We cannot know if the trajectories in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya would have differed from the trajectory in Syria if the West had decided against military interventions removing the regimes.

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<sup>74</sup> Russian International Affairs Council and The Institute for Iran-Eurasia Studies, "Russia-Iran Partnership: an Overview and Prospects for the Future," (Mocow2016).  
<http://russiancouncil.ru/common/upload/RIAC-IRAS-Russia-Iran-Report29-en.pdf>

<sup>75</sup> Tversky.

However, the fact that the actual effects of alternatives options can only be conjectured does not mean that the success of one cannot be considered more probable than that of the other. In other words, decisions are made under *differing* degree of uncertainty, and the purpose of analyzing mental models is to reduce this degree. Deciding rationally under uncertainty means comparing probability of trajectories presumably produced by alternative options. The probability of a trajectory depends on the degree of counterforces a policy engenders.

### 4.3 How counterforces are generated

Counterforces undermine the enabling environment conducive to a policy's intended effects. Counterforces may arise for a variety of reasons and, to a degree, may be an inevitable concomitant to any policy. Appeals to common interests may threaten those with stakes in conflict, coercion provokes resistance, and claims to universal validity of norms threaten identity.

#### 4.3.1 Structural causes of counterforces

Bourdieu explains how sub-divisions of a society, "fields", form around a shared narrative, *nomos*, which defines and delineates the "field".<sup>76</sup> Such societal sub-divisions may define themselves by their resistance to other groups or states and thus form a counterforce to a discourse that would challenge their constitutive narrative. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard would be a case in point, as would Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Revisionist Zionists.<sup>77</sup>

There are also disincentives to change inherent in organizational dynamics. Allison/Zelikow, in their analyses of the Cuban Missile Crisis, set out the *Organizational Behavior Model*, how the collective and individual stakes in the status quo make organizations resist change.<sup>78</sup> Military forces and their factional interests would be a typical case since more cooperative inter-state relations may obviate their mission, as was the case following the end of the Cold War, when the military was cut in all major states. On the other hand, a realist policy story of external threats may serve their organizational interests.

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<sup>76</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Propos sur le champ politique* (Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2000). P.63,67, 96

<sup>77</sup> Conversations with Israeli seeking workable relations with Israel's neighbors.

<sup>78</sup> Allison and Zelikow. P. 143-196



### 4.3.2 Cognitive biases

Another cause of counterforces are inherent distortions in our cognitive processing, what Kahneman denotes cognitive biases, *general features of cognition and preference*.<sup>79</sup> In his *prospect theory*, he shows how cognitive biases in favor of a chosen option induce decision-makers to accept higher costs and risks in persisting in a failing chosen option than in attempting alternative options.<sup>80</sup>

However, individuals *differ* in their limitation by these cognitive biases favoring persistence in a chosen failing option. Individuals will, when relating to the distortions of cognitive biases, differ in their *cognitive flexibility*, which denotes the will and ability to adjust to new circumstances. Aronoff has demonstrated how differences in cognitive flexibility among Israeli prime ministers bear significantly on Israel's policies towards the Palestinians.<sup>81</sup>

### 4.3.3 Individual agency: adversaries versus constituents

Differences in cognitive flexibility lead to the question of individual agency, its room for maneuver and the risk the individual incurs by acting upon their insight ahead of the predominant policy stories. Mnookin, at Harvard Program on Negotiation, points out that negotiation are always two-track, with adversaries *and* constituents,<sup>82</sup> or, put differently, out-groups and in-groups. The in-groups are alliances from which domestic power derives. The risk to the individual that acts upon the insight enabled by cognitive flexibility arises out of the implications for these domestic alliances. By acting upon their insight, these individuals may easily make themselves vulnerable by jeopardizing their position with their domestic alliance by which they have power to influence.<sup>83</sup> The relations between in-groups and out-groups are also affected by emotional dynamics.

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<sup>79</sup> Unpublished paper, received from Daniel Kahneman in his e-mail of 12 December 2013

<sup>80</sup> Kahneman. P. 1456

<sup>81</sup> Y.S. Aronoff, *The Political Psychology of Israeli Prime Ministers: When Hard-Liners Opt for Peace* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>82</sup> R. Mnookin, *Bargaining with the Devil: When to Negotiate, When to Fight* (Simon & Schuster, 2010). Kindle Loc. 2363

<sup>83</sup> Conversation with German scholar and diplomat with experience from negotiations between the two German states prior to the end of the Cold War and in contemporary Afghanistan.

#### 4.3.4 Emotional dynamics

Some counterforces also arise out of emotions generated by external intervention,<sup>84</sup> especially coercion. However, even a diplomatic discourse with a normative project may prompt emotions that generate counterforces. Berreby, in his analyses of identity, posits that claiming your own definition of yourself is the *most basic form of resistance*.<sup>85</sup> The degree of emotionally prompted counterforces depends on the nature of the process. Emotions bear on rejection versus acceptance, along the continuum between confrontation and cooperation.

Jervis finds analyses of emotions an innovation of the cognitive analyses of international politics.<sup>86</sup> Kahneman's view is that *the evaluation of stimuli as good or bad is a particularly important natural assessment*,<sup>87</sup> hence, inherent in our mental models. The evaluation of good or bad elicits emotions.

Shapiro sees political conflict shaped by emotions stirred by group identities, specifically how the group identities perceive their inter-group relations. To capture the role of emotions in shaping group identities, he has conceived a theory on how *relational identity concerns* shape group behavior. The two relational identity concerns are *affiliation*, by inclusion generating a sense of affinity, and *autonomy*, avoiding feeling constrained or coerced.<sup>88</sup> Shapiro has shown by experiments, such as at the World Economic Forum in Davos,<sup>89</sup> that the *relational identity concerns* determine the groups' response.

Groups who felt that their opposite group did not respect their sense of autonomy and affiliation reacted by *rigidity* of group identity and position, whereas those that felt the other group respected

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<sup>84</sup> D. Shapiro, *Negotiating the Nonnegotiable: How to Resolve Your Most Emotionally Charged Conflicts* (Penguin Publishing Group, 2016); Daniel L. Shapiro, "Relational Identity Theory. A Systematic Approach for Transforming the Emotional Dimension of Conflict," *American Psychologist* 68, no. No 7 (2010).

<sup>85</sup> D. Berreby, *Us and Them: The Science of Identity* (University of Chicago Press, 2008). P. 281-282

<sup>86</sup> Jervis. Kindle Loc 521

<sup>87</sup> Kahneman. P. 1453

<sup>88</sup> Shapiro. P. 635-638 These relational concerns are among the following universal *core concerns* Roger Fisher and Daniel Shapiro have identified that motivate social behavior: 1) *Appreciation*, the desire to feel understood and honestly valued. 2) *Affiliation*, the desire to feel included, as opposed to excluded. 3) *Autonomy*, the desire to make decisions without imposition of coercion. 4) *Status*, the desire for self-esteem satisfied by others' response. 5) *Role*, the desire for meaningful participation.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* P. 634-635

their relational identity concerns acted more *flexibly*.<sup>90</sup> Significantly, those groups who felt that the other group respected their relational identity concerns opened up to the possibility of multiple group identities under a superintendent identity.<sup>91</sup> Shapiro's theory implies that these multiple group identities could include a superintendent, shared identity defined by a narrative of interdependence. In this state of less rigid group identity, cooperative attitudes emerged.<sup>92</sup> In other words, exploration of solutions became possible.

Therefore, our responses to these relational identity concerns, *affiliation* and *autonomy*, shape our behavior towards others, on the continuum between confrontation and cooperation. Conversely, as long as we feel that our relational identity concerns are not respected confrontations make more sense than cooperation because such responses protect needs more basic - dignity, integrity and self-respect - than those met by cooperation - security and prosperity.<sup>93</sup>

Managing emotional dynamics is a condition for persuasion.

## 4.4 Persuasion

Probability of intended effects increases to the degree an option is acceptable to others with different mental models. Mental models determine choice and behavior because those holding them will act on their assumptions. Therefore, the degree of an intended effect's probability is conditional on the degree of effective persuasion.

### 4.4.1 How strategic discourse makes intended effects more probable

The conjectural nature of foreign policy decisions means that the best strategy to reduce uncertainty is to influence others' conjecture. The world that counts is in our minds, and international relations are therefore inter-mind relations. Since the analyses inherent in political decisions are inevitably conjectural, the decisive question then is how our minds produce this conjecture. Mental models, not objective reality, form the assumptions from which political

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.P. 637

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.P. 641

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.P. 637

<sup>93</sup> I am indebted to Professor Daniel L. Shapiro at Harvard Program on Negotiation for his encouragement and feedback in developing this theory. My insight arose out of our discussion of my question if the theories on *core concerns* and *relational identity concerns* were related to Tillich's concept of faith as an existential *ultimate concern*. P. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (HarperCollins, 2011).

choices infer, hence behavior, and then in turn others' behavior in response. Mental models therefore become self-fulfilling to the degree they shape behavior. A strategic discourse that influences mental models therefore also makes the intended effects of a chosen policy more probable.

I now turn to theories that explain the cognitive process that produces mental models applied in decisions, the theories of by three Nobel Laureates of Economics, Herbert A. Simon, Daniel Kahneman<sup>94</sup> and Richard Thaler. They denote themselves *behavioral economists* because they employ psychological theories to explain choices affecting economic performance, and how these choices can be influenced.

Simon coins the term *satisficing*, which denotes the fallacy in a decision-making process by which initial assumptions remain unchallenged, thus limiting the perception of the scope of feasible options,<sup>95</sup> what he terms *bounded rationality*, which denotes rationality within the mind's limited *knowledge and computational capabilities*.<sup>96</sup> Kahneman, building on Simon, finds that we by selection and interpretation construct simplified images, *heuristics*.<sup>97</sup> These heuristics work as *mental models*.<sup>98</sup> We perceive outcomes, and by implication effect of policies, by assessing deviance from a reference in a context, not from an absolute, objective reality.<sup>99</sup> In political thinking, such references are for all practical purposes *historical analogies*.<sup>100</sup> Thaler and Sunstein, in their own account, rely heavily on Kahneman in the theory on *nudges*, which denote

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<sup>94</sup> Kahneman has coauthored most of the work I cite here, but for the sake of simplicity, I refer only to him. The other authors will be in the footnotes and bibliography.

<sup>95</sup> H.A. Simon, *Administrative Behavior, 4th Edition* (Free Press, 2013). Kindle loc. 1768.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. P. 20

<sup>97</sup> Kahneman.

<sup>98</sup> This term is from Heuer and Intelligence.

<sup>99</sup> Kahneman.

<sup>100</sup> Henry Kissinger inspires my conversion of Kahneman's concept of *anchor* to the concept of *historical analogy*. H. Kissinger, *A world Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace, 1812-22* (Houghton Mifflin, 1973). P. 331 Khong.

deliberate persistent cognitive stimuli to change behavior in an intended direction.<sup>101</sup> Strategic discourse harnesses nudges.

The concept of *bounded rationality* prompts the question of rationality as such in political decision-making. I have discussed how cognitive and emotional variables, by omission and distortion, constrain rationality in mental models. In my view, *rationality means that intentions must be reasonable; effects must correspond to intentions while avoiding collateral costs and unintended consequences that exceed the value of the achieved intended effects. Rational behavior adjusts when effects differ from intentions. A rational decision-making process seeks optimal decisions by weighing alternative arguments on their merits.* This is in essence the so-called *Rational Actor/Agent Model*.<sup>102</sup>

When someone defends a policy failing to produce intended benign effects, such as previous Prime Minister Stoltenberg by still defending his decision that Norway should take a major role in the military intervention in Libya,<sup>103</sup> arguments are not rational, but *rationalization*. Rationalization argues benign intentions, while rationality analyzes actual effects by seeking to ascertain probable causality. While rationalization intends to substantiate our intentions, rationality seeks to understand how our rhetoric and actions affect others' perceptions and ensuing actions. The basis for rationality in foreign policy is the assumption that others proceed according to their own mental models, not ours.

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<sup>101</sup> R.H. Thaler and C.R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth and Happiness* (Penguin Books, 2009). R. Thaler, *Misbehaving: The Making of Behavioral Economics* (New York City: W.W.Norton & Company, 2015).

<sup>102</sup> There are slightly differing understanding of rationality in the Rational Actor / Agent Model / paradigm. Because of *satisficing*, Simon and Kahneman understand rationality as *bounded rationality*. Simon. P. 20 Kahneman.P. 1149 Their understanding of *bounded rationality* is the intention of rationality exercised within constraints. The essence of this understanding of rationality is that facts and options are considered on their own merits, under the exclusion of extraneous considerations. Allison / Zelikow apply this understanding in their analysis of the Rational Actor Model in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Allison and Zelikow.P. 13-77. Kahneman has a narrow understanding of rationality as *internal coherence* of an argument, and *invariance* under changes in framing. A Tversky and D. Kahneman, "The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice," *Science, New Series* 211, no. 4481 (1981). P. 452 Kahneman. P. 1458. My own understanding of rationality is in my perception the predominant understanding of rationality among the actors I have talked to and analyzed for this study: *Rationality means that intentions must be reasonable; effects must correspond to intentions while avoiding collateral costs and unintended consequences that exceed the value of the achieved intended effects. Rational behavior adjusts when effects differ from intentions. A rational decision-making process seeks optimal decisions by weighing alternative arguments on their merits.*

<sup>103</sup> <https://www.nrk.no/urix/stoltenberg-om-norges-libya-bombing--ville-ha-gjort-det-samme-igjen-1.14207425>

The pattern of Western policy failures after the end of the Cold War in 1989 can be explained by the untenable assumptions of the *Rational Agent Model*,<sup>104</sup> that all actors know all relevant variables and interpret them the same way, that on this basis benefits, costs and options are weighed detached from extraneous considerations, such as emotions and group dynamics.<sup>105</sup> Instead of asking what the facts are, more relevant in the analyses applied in foreign policy decisions are the mental models and inferred hypotheses about options that are the recourse in *satisficing*, and how a strategic discourse can change these assumptions and inferences.

Mental models construct discourse, and, in the process of sharing, are then changed, mostly imperceptibly and incrementally, but occasionally dramatically, as by the Arab Spring in 2011, the context of Norway's decision to take an active part in the military intervention in Libya.<sup>106</sup> Mental models are dynamic. By consequence, the strategy to change political choices is therefore to construct an effective discourse to change the mental models that produce cognition, emotion, preference and, ultimately, behavior, by *strategic discourse*.

#### 4.4.1.1 *Adapting a model for cognitive behavioral therapy*

To develop my theory on strategic discourse, I adapt a model for cognitive behavioral therapy.<sup>107</sup> The therapeutic intervention by discourse in behavioral cognitive therapy corresponds to the policy interventions by strategic discourse. The analyses of the cognitive structure shaping behavior in cognitive behavioral therapy can be adapted to the analyses of the cognitive process shaping policy choices.

- In the model for cognitive behavioral therapy, a formative experience and its interpretation in core beliefs steer behavior. In my adaption to political analyses, the formative experience, as interpreted, corresponds to a historical *analogy*.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Simon. See especially chapter IV. Kahneman. P. 1449 Shapiro. P. 635

<sup>105</sup> Shapiro; Shapiro.

<sup>106</sup> J. Stoltenberg, *Min historie* (Oslo Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 2016). p. 438-449

<sup>107</sup> Wenzel.

<sup>108</sup> The role of analogy in foreign policy decisions is set out in Khong. I first came across the idea of history applied as analogy in analyses in Kissinger, *A world Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace, 1812-22*. P. 331: “.the significance of a range of experience, that the answers we obtain will never be better than the questions we pose.

- The next stage in the model for cognitive behavioral therapy, rules and assumptions, in political analyses forms *grand strategies*,<sup>109</sup> superintendent assumptions that shape the perception of options.
- The final stage in the model for cognitive behavioral therapy, coping strategies, in political analyses form *policies*, the inference from grand strategies in specific issues, such as the intervention removing the regime in Libya and the inaction towards the regime in Syria.

The purpose of the model for cognitive behavioral therapy is to identify the chain of causality that cause dysfunctional thought patterns in order to change thoughts by *cognitive restructuring*.<sup>110</sup>

#### 4.4.1.2 Cognitive restructuring

The purpose of cognitive behavioral therapy to change dysfunctional patterns of thought by *cognitive restructuring* is also the purpose of adapting the model to strategic discourse.

Strategic discourse has as its intention to change mental models, hence the inferred perceptions of options, and, by consequence reduce the uncertainty under which decisions are made (provided the options remain within the range of conceivable feasibility). Thaler's and Sunstein's theory on *nudges*, persistent cognitive stimuli to change behavior,<sup>111</sup> shows how discourse can change mental models by increasing the cognitive accessibility of an intended change.<sup>112</sup>

By way of example, a realistic analysis of current realities would probably infer that a sustainable regional political solution in the Middle East, with Iraq and Syria as the epicenter of conflict, is what Turkey and Iran can agree, Israel and Saudi Arabia can accept, and Russia can broker. However, the mental model of cooperation set out in the joint report in 2016 by a Russian and an Iranian think tank on the regional crises<sup>113</sup> is in the current circumstances hardly widely endorsed in Russia and Iran while lacking credibility among Western decision makers. Engaging Russia and Iran in a strategic discourse on the report's analysis will have the intended effect to increase

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<sup>109</sup> The concept and role of grand strategy is set out in Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy*. P.M. Kennedy, *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (Yale University Press, 1991).

<sup>110</sup> Wenzel. Especially chapters 4 and 5

<sup>111</sup> Thaler. Thaler and Sunstein.

<sup>112</sup> Kahneman. P. 1452-1454

<sup>113</sup> Council and Studies.

the cognitive accessibility of the option of a broad political process. By increasing its cognitive accessibility, the intended effects of this option become more probable.

By contrast, a discourse on the current Western strategy will reduce the probability of its intended effects, a regional stability accommodating Western interests and ideas. The policies set out in the Posture Statement by the US Central Command, the currently most authoritative and exhaustive statement of Western policies in Syria and Iraq, foresee projecting military force to pressure Iran, Russia and Turkey to accommodate Western policies.<sup>114</sup> A discourse on this strategy will provoke counter forces by polarizing mental models, and the brinkmanship of projecting military force may inadvertently stumble into war.

The question is how a strategic discourse may overcome counterforces in forging an agreement on the comprehensive pragmatic approach in the Russian and Iranian report, in a deteriorating regional situation, where the report's proposals appear counterintuitive, as a remote possibility. The method is to leave the current contentious, intractable and irreconcilable differences unresolved and move beyond them, by *envisioning* an alternative political order. In strategic discourse, envisioning is the instrument of cognitive restructuring.

#### 4.4.2 Fusing emotional and cognitive dynamics for strategic discourse by envisioning

In employing envisioning as instrument of cognitive restructuring, Shapiro's theory on relational identity concerns,<sup>115</sup> set out previously, presents some conceptual challenges with operational implications. The two relational identity concerns are in a paradoxical relationship. Affiliation and autonomy seem inverse variables in the sense that one can only be satisfied at the expense of the other. Someone is autonomous to the degree the individual is not affiliated, that is in a dependent relationship, and vice versa. Shapiro finds that these are opposing forces in any relationship that need to be kept in equilibrium.<sup>116</sup> However, in the operational context of foreign policy, maintaining such an equilibrium is hardly practically feasible.

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<sup>114</sup> <http://www.centcom.mil/ABOUT-US/POSTURE-STATEMENT/>

<sup>115</sup> Shapiro.

<sup>116</sup> Shapiro. P. 21



The solution is to relate to identities as *normative projects*.<sup>117</sup> Engaging group identities as normative projects can satisfy the relational identity concerns and resolve their paradoxical relationship. Identity is a normative project. *We are who we want to be*. Shapiro defines identity as *the story you tell yourself about yourself*. The stories that construct identity are critical for resolving an emotionally charged conflict: our *core identity*, which, in Shapiro's terms, is *my story about me*, and *relational identity*, which is *my story about us*. *Me* and *us* are the stories that construct, in Shapiro's terms, *core identity* and *relational identity*.<sup>118</sup> When, in a strategic discourse, I ask you open questions related to your identity, such as what is important to you, in what you take pride,<sup>119</sup> I invite you to establish your relationship on your own terms, which is building a sense of autonomy, while also inducing a sense of affiliation generating affinity.

In this way, emotional dynamics will not generate counterforces to alternative analogies. Since parties to the current conflicts in the Middle East have their core identities heavily invested in their stories of political reality, a strategic discourse may cope with the relational identity concerns by inviting parties to *envision* a new regional political order. A vision is an idea of a relationship beyond the current differences; hence, it fuses emotional and cognitive dynamics in increasing the intended acceptance.

The insight into the operational potential of envisioning in strategic discourse evolved in the course of my interaction at a succession of venues.<sup>120</sup> The abductive reasoning set out following Kahneman's theories on *System 1* and *System 2*. In System 2, our rational cognitive mode, contradiction and questioning challenge the assumptions and simplifications, *heuristics*, of the automated reasoning by association in System 1.<sup>121</sup> It became evident in the course of successive venues that this approach blocked the next stage in the strategic discourse, the introduction of

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<sup>117</sup> I derive the term *normative project* from H.A. Winkler, *Geschichte des Westens: Die Zeit der Gegenwart* (München: C.H.Beck, 2015). P. 579-615. For a shorter version "Greatness and Limits of the West. The History of an Unfinished Project." ""Ungeheuer subversive Kraft". Interview mit Heinrich August Winkler," *Der Spiegel*2009.

<sup>118</sup> Shapiro. P. 12-13

<sup>119</sup> Conversation with Professor Daniel L. Shapiro

<sup>120</sup> Under Chatham House Rule

<sup>121</sup> Kahneman.

alternative analogies. These alternative analogies had to become an instrument of persuasion to make the intended effects of a policy more probable.

#### 4.4.2.1 *Persuasive analogies*

Previous research into how diplomatic discourse may persuade parties to move from confrontation towards cooperation by invoking alternative analogies, shows two pitfalls, either the analogies are so open to diverging interpretations that parties are not induced to change their narrative, or the analogy itself prompts conflicts that abort the process.

The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs has involved scholars of the Peace of Westphalia, the long peace process that eventually ended the Thirty Year War in the mid -1600s, to develop a model for a similar peace in the Middle East.<sup>122</sup> In my exploratory conversations with these experts, the following interpretation of the analogy emerged to fit the current conflict in Syria:

- The common denominator of all parties was that security was collective, superseding their differences.
- Confidence among the parties did not produce the peace; it was the other way around, the peace treaty produced confidence, and only gradually.
- Agreed mechanisms of enforcement were essential in building confidence, and hence sustainability of the agreements.
- The peace treaty codified the status quo of religious pluralism, gradually defusing the sectarian tensions between Catholics and Protestants as modern Europe emerged out of the post-Westphalian order.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> <https://www.koerber-stiftung.de/en/a-westphalia-for-the-middle-east.html> M. Axworthy and P. Milton, "A Westphalian Peace for the Middle East. Why an Old Framework Could Work," *Foreign Affairs*, no. Oct. (2016).

<sup>123</sup> E-mail exchange with participating scholars, serving in the capacity of *epistemic community*. Professor Anuschka Tischer offered this feedback and elaboration:

*Those points summarize very well how the peace process worked. The decisive factor in the Westphalian Peace Process was eventually the realization by the parties most victimized and weakened by the war, the German princes, that their need for peace superseded other interests.*

*The German princes were no homogenous group. There were those who had no interest in the war at all, who were weak, and who suffered from the war. Some from this specific group worked together to put pressure on the conflicting parties. They are known as the "Third Party", because they had no interest and managed to work together beyond their own differences. However, there were also others who had goals in*

I see two problems with applying this analogy to engage parties in the region in a peace process over Syria. First, the analogy invokes an event so distant that the interpretation to make it relevant becomes too elastic to induce a change in mental models. This brings me to my second problem, precisely because the interpretation is so elastic, parties from the region interpreted it in support of their existing views, as evident from the official summaries and participants' account.<sup>124</sup> To the degree these perceptions also capture the nature of the proceedings at the margin of the sessions, the analogy therefore turns counter-productive. The perceptions of the analogy induce retrenchment rather than reassessment of positions, and recurring recrimination rather than dialogue. A case in point is the Russian Iranian report on regional conflicts I analyze in this dissertation. The report criticizes Western countries for violating the Westphalia principle of state sovereignty, in breach of the ideal international order. This is in their view *a multi-polar and pluralistic international system in which NATO is not developing, and the political norms and rules of the West undermining the acknowledged international norms and rules such as the national sovereignty, the Westphalian system and the principle of non-intervention.*<sup>125</sup> Even if experts could interpret the analogy of the Westphalian system differently, Russia and Iran would change neither their interpretation of the analogy nor their policies. Likewise, the West would not change its interpretation or any policy based on the Russian Iranian interpretation of the Westphalian analogy.

Another analogy, the CSCE - European Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe,<sup>126</sup> was actually attempted applied in the Middle East, but failed by adapting the design of the process

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*the war, but who understood that after some point they needed peace (not at last because further war would put at risk their goals). They also put pressure on other conflicting parties.*

*External guarantors, in this case France and Sweden, provided necessary leverage to forge compromise and gradually stability. Maybe it is important to say that it was a collective guarantee that worked only because there were external guarantors included. So there were princes inside the Empire who welcomed the external guarantors.*

*I would avoid the term of a post-Westphalian order. The Peace of Westphalia gave many options. It was up to the actors to fill this with life during the next generations.* I also consulted Professor Christoph Kampmann.

<sup>124</sup> <https://www.koerber-stiftung.de/en/a-westphalia-for-the-middle-east/events/workshop-january-2017.html> Conversations with participants

<sup>125</sup> Council and Studies. <http://russiancouncil.ru/common/upload/RIAC-IRAS-Russia-Iran-Report29-en.pdf> P. 26

<sup>126</sup> Christian Koch, Gulf Research Center Foundation and Christian-Peter Hanelt, Bertelsmann Stiftung, "A Gulf Conference for Security and Cooperation Could Bring Peace and Greater Security to the Middle

without its approach. In the window of opportunity that the end of the Cold War open up for a multilateral process in the Middle East, the design of the CSCE design was adapted to a the Arab-Israeli peace process by sub-dividing the contentious agenda in working groups to enable progress in one agenda without intransigence in other agendas blocking it. However, the process soon derailed by intransigence since all parties used the conference for posturing and recriminations instead of looking for common ground.<sup>127</sup>

For the CSCE design to work in the Middle East, the *approach* has to be emulated. The CSCE is a relevant analogy in several ways for the current state of hostile confrontation in the state system formed by Israel, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia:

- Its inception was in Germany in the early 1960s in a state of rigid political confrontation. The initiative was initially considered as provocative and unrealistic then as a similar initiative would be today in the state system.<sup>128</sup>
- The process evolved by bold political initiatives with incremental changes between them.
- The process, the summit and the follow-up process involved all concerned powers, also external powers, most notably the United States and Canada.
- Its trajectory holds out to interlocutors in the Middle East state system both the potential of dialogue and cooperation, and the danger of shutting down a political process in response to unacceptable actions. The climate of dialogue and cooperation of the summit in 1975, agreeing on a common agenda for security across the fault lines of the Cold War, ended abruptly in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan only four years later. The abrupt political changes of 1979 led to a new and – as we now know – very dangerous confrontation in 1983.<sup>129</sup> This trajectory of the CSCE shows the potential of dialogue and cooperation, as well as the risks caused by breaking it off.

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East," in *Gulf Paper* (Gulf Research Center, 2015). This paper sets out how the analogy of the European process could be adapted in a political process between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

<sup>127</sup> D.D. Kaye, *Beyond the Handshake: Multilateral Cooperation in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process, 1991-1996* (Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>128</sup> E. Bahr, *Zu meiner Zeit* (München: Siedler, 1996 (1998)). P. 155 On relevance of the Brandt / Bahr approach to Western – Russian cooperation on a regional political process in the current Middle East I held exploratory conversations at the 2017 Egon-Bahr-Symposium of the Willy-Brandt-Kreis, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Berlin with follow-up conversations. CHR

<sup>129</sup> Benjamin B. Fischer, "A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare," (CIA). G. Schild, *1983: das gefährlichste Jahr des Kalten Krieges* (Schöningh, 2013). P.V. Pry, *War Scare: Russia and America*

However, the original CSCE does not provide a blueprint that can be transferred to a current regional political process in the Middle East. The analogies that construct mental models work as *heuristics*, simplified narratives that can then work, by persistent reiteration, as nudges in Thaler's and Sunstein's sense. For these reason, the CSCE can be adapted into a persuasive *policy story*, to use Stevens' term,<sup>130</sup> as a policy intervention in the state system of Israel, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The long preparatory process for the CSCE was pragmatic. In the words of Willy Brandt, on his effort to change gradually the non-productive political confrontation with the Eastern bloc: *You must take the existing circumstances as your point of departure if you want to change them. Not recognizing altered circumstances is only a long-term option for someone not affected by them.*<sup>131</sup> Change from confrontation to dialogue was gradual and incremental, but deliberate. However, one European analogy has the potential to become even more persuasive, the EU – the European Union.

#### 4.4.2.2 The EU as analogy

The most powerful analogy for a strategic discourse is the EU, despite its shortcomings, current problems and pockets of rejection, by far the most successful case of political engineering ever. The EU was also my professional focus and particular expertise before my focus on the Middle East.

In my experience, there is a prevalent misunderstanding of the essential nature of the EU cooperation. A common misperception is to conceptualize the EU by its political declarations, legal framework or institutional development. By contrast, I find the most incisive and realistic analysis of the EU cooperation to be the *functional* model developed by Wirsching. In his analysis, the EU is a *path dependence on cooperation*, driven by crises. The agreed common response is invariably a compromise and therefore imperfect. Parties agree to the compromise because they see the alternative, no common solution, as worse. Gradually, solutions outside the

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*on the Nuclear Brink* (Praeger, 1999). P. 3-49 W. Grossmann, *Bonn im Blick: die DDR-Aufklärung aus der Sicht ihres letzten Chefs* (Das Neue Berlin, 2007). P. 125 M. Wolf, *Spionagechef im geheimen Krieg: Erinnerungen* (Ullstein, 2003). P. 331-332 Conversations with foreign policy advisors of President Reagan and Bundeskanzler Kohl. CHR

<sup>130</sup> Stevens. P. 245 - 247

<sup>131</sup> W. Brandt, *Erinnerungen*, 1 ed. (Berlin: List, Ullstein Buchverlage GmbH. Berlin, 2013 (1989)). P. 238

cooperation are considered unfeasible. An effect of the compromises is that thinking converges.

<sup>132</sup> In this way, the EU develops by incremental success at imperfect problem solution.

However, this functional model was prompted, at decisive crossroads in the trajectory, by courageous political initiatives defying overwhelming odds. Their policy story of European transformation envisioned a benign alternative political order. The purpose of these courageous political initiatives was to institutionalize collective security in Europe by way of the economic and social cooperation in the EU. Wirsching posits that the EU works as a superintendent story of transformation.<sup>133</sup> A story prompts associations.

#### 4.4.2.3 *Summary of emotional and cognitive dynamics: guiding associations*

The purpose of strategic discourse is to guide associations in the intended direction. In Kahneman's theory on the two modes of cognition, in System 1, thinking copes with a problem by associating with something previously processed, which then works as an analogy.<sup>134</sup> We choose the association that is most cognitively accessible, or, what is on the top of our minds at any given time.<sup>135</sup> This means that a strategic discourse must introduce an alternative analogy that evokes intended associations and reiterate it over time to make these associations more cognitively accessible.<sup>136</sup>

However, this works only if there is no emotional block. It became evident in the course of the encounters that Kahneman's remedy for correcting the fallacies inherent in the simplified, associative cognitive mode of System 1, the rational, critical cognitive mode of System 2,<sup>137</sup> as unintended effect generated emotional blocks, an issue not addressed by Kahneman. In System 2, the assumptions and inferences of System 1 are scrutinized and challenged, as an instrument of rationality. However, in Shapiro's terms, imposing rationality on people by System 2 to question

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<sup>132</sup> Wirsching, *Der Preis der Freiheit: Geschichte Europas in unserer Zeit; Demokratie und Globalisierung: Europa seit 1989*. P. 17-18

<sup>133</sup> *Demokratie und Globalisierung: Europa seit 1989*. P. 221

<sup>134</sup> Kahneman. Especially p. 1450-152 «The Architecture of Cognition: Two Systems»

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* Especially p. 1452-1454 «The Accessibility Dimension»

<sup>136</sup> This corresponds to Thaler's and Sunstein's theory on *nudges*. Thaler and Sunstein.

<sup>137</sup> Kahneman. Especially p. 1450-152 «The Architecture of Cognition: Two Systems»

their simplified assumptions and inferences in System 1 violated their relational identity concern of *autonomy*. Strategic discourse needed to find a way to manage the relational identity concerns of autonomy and affiliation without appearing to endorse dysfunctional and irrational behavior. The solution was to *envision* an alternative order, as previously set out.

As will be evident in Chapter 7, in cases when the discourse first felt obliged to impose rationality by arguing, or, Kahneman's terms, impose rationality on System 1 by System 2, the responses blocked a strategic discourse in introducing alternative analogies. By contrast, coping with the relational identity concern of *autonomy* by not challenging assumptions and inferences, while building *affiliation* by evoking a vision that can be shared, enabled a strategic discourse. Engaging on these terms also enabled a sense of affinity by exploring interfaces of values and views.<sup>138</sup>

#### 4.5 Conclusion on theory

A strategic discourse invoking an alternative analogy to evoke a vision, as an idea of an alternative political order beyond current intractable conflicts, enables the associations inherent in the alternative analogy to start the intended climb to the top of people's minds, where it would bear on the perception and choice of political options. Persistent reiteration of this vision increases its intended cognitive accessibility, hence influence on thinking by association. The nature of a vision, as an idea beyond contentious issues, obviates the need to incur the emotional transactional costs of challenging existing associations of narratives and their inferred policy choices. The testing of the theory set out in Chapter 7 seems to strengthen this conclusion. A diplomatic intervention by strategic discourse, designed to envision a new political order by invoking an alternative analogy, therefore increases the probability of a policy's intended effects.

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<sup>138</sup> Shapiro. A sense of *involvement* and a sense of *affinity* are two dimensions of the relational identity concern of *affiliation*.





## 5 Methodology

In my three roles, of diplomat, official and then researcher, I have gained important insights that are relevant data for analyzing political decision-making. The question is what methodology is feasible for analyzing this existing, available data. The methodology of this dissertation develops the standard procedure for diplomatic abductive reasoning: information from open sources is explored in confidential private conversations. I denote my methodology *exploratory conversation*.

My project<sup>139</sup> in this dissertation is to develop a decision theory by cognitive and emotional variables. The nature of my theory is such that it is beyond empirical testing. It can only be judged by conjecture.<sup>140</sup> However, I have been able to test part of my theory in encounters, during which it has evolved by abductive reasoning. In abductive reasoning, theories and inferred hypotheses are evolving sense making of reflections on observations and experiences.<sup>141</sup>

My empirical data serve to explore the validity of the theory I develop. In this sense, my dissertation has significant interface with two dissertations on police procedure, by Rachlew<sup>142</sup> and Fashing.<sup>143</sup> We share, although in very different professional fields, the same sense of urgency, after serious misjudgments with tragic consequences, to improve the procedures for analysis applied in decision. Their theoretical framework is in significant parts identical to mine.

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<sup>139</sup> For my development of my thinking on methodology, I am indebted to Professor Andrew Orton, Participatory Action Research Hub, Durham University

<sup>140</sup> Waltz, *Realism and International Politics*. P. 83-90

<sup>141</sup> *Abductive reasoning, also referred to as abductive approach is set to address weaknesses associated with deductive and inductive approaches. Specifically, deductive reasoning is criticized for the lack of clarity in terms of how to select theory to be tested via formulating hypotheses. Inductive reasoning, on other hand, criticized because "no amount of empirical data will necessarily enable theory-building"[1]. Abductive reasoning, as a third alternative, overcomes these weaknesses via adopting a pragmatist perspective.* <https://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/research-approach/abductive-reasoning-abductive-approach/> A case of abductive reasoning is Mitzberg's theory on *strategy*. A *deliberate* strategy is adjusted by *emergent* strategy. H. Mintzberg and J.A. Waters, "Of Strategies, Deliberate and Emergent," *Strategic Management Journal* 6, no. 3 (1985).

<sup>142</sup> Rachlew, "Justisfeil ved politiets etterforskning- noen eksempler og forskningsbaserte tiltak."

<sup>143</sup> Fashing.

Like me, they analyze *analytic pathologies*<sup>144</sup> producing error, using some of the same cognitive theory as I do. They document the errors, but not the effect of their remedial theory, which, pending introduction in practical investigative police procedures and a record of performance, remains conjectural, if probable. Short of documenting the actual effects, to a degree, they can sample opinions and test analyses of willing respondents. This is not feasible in my project. Those parties to the processes I observe would not agree to participate in a research project designed systematically to sample their views, and if they did, it would affect their behavior, thus undermining the validity of the study.

The purpose of methodology is to explore theories and hypotheses by application to empirical data. The question in my theory on political decision-making is what constitutes empirical data, and how can this empirical data be accessed.

In essence, political decision-making is intuitive, transactional and oral; hence, tending towards a simplified narrative in which the merits of the arguments are distorted by extraneous agendas.<sup>145</sup> For these reasons, the methodology for research into political decision-making is to study the interaction in which the decisions are shaped, and explore the narratives upon which the transaction is based.

My approach is in this sense similar to Stevens' in his study of policy making in the British Ministry, in which he served as an intern. He sees policies as *stories*, and describes how these stories serve the needs of groups and individuals in the internal interaction that produces decisions.<sup>146</sup> He identifies two constitutive stories forming the parameters that confine the range

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<sup>144</sup> J. Cooper and C. Intelligence, *Curing Analytic Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012).

<sup>145</sup> This is my own professional experience. A most obvious case in point is Norwegian policy towards the EU, which was my professional areas of expertise for many years. Also the CIA, in an open report, points to the same phenomenon: *the difference between the way intelligence analysts typically do their work (linear, cerebral, mostly written) and the way policymakers do theirs (nonlinear, transactional, mostly oral and interactive)*. R.S. Sinclair, *Thinking and Writing: Cognitive Science and Intelligence Analysis* (Nova Science Publishers, 2011). P. vii. A former leading CIA analyst considers this difference between the orderly and presumably professionally accountable process of analyses and the transactional nature of the domestic political process a malfunction of the policy input process rather than its premise P.R. Pillar, *Why America Misunderstands the World: National Experience and Roots of Misperception* (Columbia University Press, 2016). For a comparable perspective on the Soviet political process during the 1979-1987 trajectory by a KGB officer Y.B. Shvets, *Washington station: my life as a KGB spy in America* (Simon & Schuster, 1995).

<sup>146</sup> Stevens.

of specific policy stories.<sup>147</sup> By implication, he also argues that alternative stories would produce alternative political solutions.

Stevens' methodology is transparent. By describing his observations and analyses, he enables others to assess the validity and reliability of his research. On that basis, others, such as those whose role in the decision-making process he analyses, may produce alternative analyses. Conversely, by describing my abductive reasoning on my observations, I enable others to assess my decision-theory and on that basis develop an alternative theory.

## 5.1 Analyze interaction

My methodology is to analyze interaction in meetings and conversations I have had in my three capacities of diplomat, official and researcher. I assume a dual role, as participant and analyst. Observations generate reflection. Reflections, in turn, generate theories, in the sense of a set of assumptions, and inferred hypothesis about options. Evolving theories and hypothesis are therefore a process of *sense making* by abductive reasoning, parallel to the reasoning in police investigation described by Fahsing.<sup>148</sup>

### 5.1.1 My sources

I take notes on my observations following the interaction. In my roles of diplomat and official, I have recorded the process by continuous reports to which I have access. Given the sensitivities, vulnerabilities, and my moral as well as legal obligation to professional confidentiality, source protection is imperative. For this purpose, I apply Chatham House Rule, abbreviated CHR: Substance may be quoted, but not attributed, even implicitly, to individuals or their institutions.<sup>149</sup> This degree of source protection would be comparable, if not identical, to the standards in research into *cognitive behavioral therapy*, the field from which I adapt my model for *strategic discourse*.

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<sup>147</sup> The ministry in question was in charge of social policy. The two constitutive stories he identifies were 1) social problems were caused by individual failure, not, as proven by research, by inequality, 2) the tenet of New Public Management that the operational models of private business should be applied to public management. Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Fahsing. P. 12 - 15

<sup>149</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about/chatham-house-rule>. Recent incidents of breaches of professional confidentiality in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs add urgency to the caution called for by the massive leaks of Wikileaks and Snowden's leaks from the NSA.

My sources are quoted in footnotes only when particularly relevant. The sources are of these categories:

1. Colleagues at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, other Norwegian ministries, representatives of Norwegian civil society, business and academic scholars and experts.
2. At the United Nations, delegates and representatives from governments, including members of the UN Secretariat, and representatives of civil society and business, first during my posting to the Norwegian Mission to the United Nations in New York 1989-1992, and then representing Norway in the preparatory process for the Conference on the Financing of Development, 1999-2001.
3. At the EU, representatives of the European Commission, Council Secretariat, and other EU bodies, the EFTA Secretariat, ESA, other EU/EEA member states, civil society, lobbyists and business. The first period was in the negotiating team for Norwegian membership in the EU 1992-1994, then, in a brief interim between conclusion of the membership agreement and the referendum rejecting it, representing Norway in EU Council Working Groups. After the referendum rejecting EU membership, I worked on the EEA Agreement. In this capacity, I followed a number of working groups and various seminars addressing superintendent issues of policy and process. My assignment to EU relations and issues was in two phases, first 1992 – 1997, then, 2002 - 2008.
4. At the Norwegian Embassy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, official Saudi Arabian representatives, people in business, academics, activists, and colleagues from other embassies.
5. As researcher, my sources are official representatives, researchers in think tanks, with differing degrees of government affiliation, people in business, academics and activists. Of the four remaining stable states that I posit form the Middle East state system, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran and Israel, I have visited all of them for conversations, as well as met representatives of these states at various international venues. I have also had conversations with officials and researchers from the external states that project power and force in the Middle East state system, the United States, Russia and China, as well as officials of the EU and EU member states charged with Middle East relations.

### 5.1.2 Related methodologies

I have been able to test my theory on strategic discourse in a series of confidential private conversations and closed international gatherings. I was in a position to observe feedback to my policy interventions, in sense of the theory, in conversations, including in conversations following

my plenary presentations and interventions. In the course of these experiences of interaction, reflection on feedback enabled me to develop my theory on strategic discourse. Therefore, my methodology bears significant resemblance to Stevens' observations as a participant in the interactions of the ministerial policymaking in the UK. He observes the interaction and the effects of his interventions.<sup>150</sup>

Another methodology that resembles mine is Shapiro's observations on group dynamics. However, Shapiro's methodology, to manipulate groups to observe effects,<sup>151</sup> was not feasible to me. However, I approximated his methodology by developing and testing my theory on strategic discourse in a series of different settings in actual processes in which variables could not be manipulated. By this methodology, my theory evolved by abductive reasoning from one setting to the other in response to the feedback I experienced. A methodological weakness could conceivably be that cross-group comparison may have less validity than observing the same group under differing variables. While Shapiro's methodology presumably could establish causality by a high degree of certainty, arguably, my methodology enables conclusions that are more conjectural.

On the other hand, a case can also be made that a methodology of observing actual processes, inferring by abductive reasoning, offers higher validity than experiments in which variables are manipulated to generate observable effects. The circumstances manipulated in experiments are contrived; hence, the validity impaired to the degree the participants experience them as such and react on that assumption. This criticism has lately been raised against the seminal experiments of Milgram into the conditions under which otherwise normal individuals may commit evil acts.<sup>152</sup> However, this criticism of methodology does not necessarily make Milgram's theory less probable, that obedience to authority leads to evil acts by incremental steps. The same observation can be made by abductive reasoning in reflecting upon observable real life trajectories of transgressing individuals, from bullying in the workplace to violent behavior under extreme conditions of dictatorship and war. Significantly, Milgram's theory explains current atrocities in

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<sup>150</sup> Stevens.

<sup>151</sup> Shapiro. P. 634-625 Shapiro. Xv, 9, 10, 18, 24, 25, 132, 227

<sup>152</sup> <https://digest.bps.org.uk/2017/12/12/interviews-with-milgram-participants-provide-little-support-for-the-contemporary-theory-of-engaged-followerhip/>

Syria as typical human behavior under the given circumstances, not caused by the inherent nature of “the other”, such as implied in Said’s concept of Orientalism.<sup>153</sup>

In other words, conflict causes behavior more than, as commonly assumed, behavior causes conflict. Therefore, experiments like Milgram’s, whatever their methodological weaknesses, may generate innovating theories that can make sense of actual trajectories by abductive reasoning. The same argument may be made in response to criticism of other similarly seminal role play experiments, such as Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison Experiments,<sup>154</sup> now criticized for the same methodological weakness as Milgram’s, that participants acted on their assumption that circumstances to which they responded were contrived.<sup>155</sup> In a controlled experiment, Zimbardo intended to analyze the role of group dynamics in producing the same behavior that Milgram tested for individual’s obedience to authority. To avoid the distortion of the perception of contrived circumstances, the same theories can be tested by application in abductive reasoning to actual occurrences. For these reasons, Zimbardo’s application of this theories to the abuses of Iraqi prisoners by US military personnel in the Abu Ghrabi prison in Iraq<sup>156</sup> has more validity than his famous Stanford Prison experiment that was designed to test the same pathology of human nature as Milgram’s experiment. His theorizing on causality, such as the relationship between disposition, situation and system,<sup>157</sup> is a clear case of abductive reasoning. However, his experiment generated the theory by which he made sense of actual processes.

Also Shapiro has tested his theories in actual settings where he has acted as mediator.<sup>158</sup> In this way, his insights from experiments form a basis for abductive reasoning in real human encounters.

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<sup>153</sup> E.W. Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Books, 1978 (1994)).

<sup>154</sup> P. Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil* (Ebury Publishing, 2011). P. 3-258

<sup>155</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/freedom-learn/201310/why-zimbardo-s-prison-experiment-isn-t-in-my-textbook>

<sup>156</sup> Zimbardo. P. 324-444

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. P. 7-11

<sup>158</sup> Conversations with Shapiro

### 5.1.3 Analyze documents

I analyze documents that provide context to my analyses of interaction. There are two kinds of such documents:

- a. Public policy documents with which my sources engage in my exploratory conversations. In this dissertation, there are two: 1) Turkish sources referred to the Posture Statement by the US Central Command,<sup>159</sup> considered the most authoritative and exhaustive statement of current Western policy in the Middle East. 2) A source in Iran sent me a joint report by a Russian and Iranian think tank, which I subsequently discussed with the Russian expert in charge of the cooperation with the Iranians on the report.<sup>160</sup>
- b. Public documents, such as analyses and memoirs.

Non-public documents inaccessible to the unrestricted scrutiny of public documents are, in my own experience as a diplomat and official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in relating to and producing internal documents, as a rule, not reliable accounts or analyses of the actual decision-making process. It is a common methodology to explore the interaction of political decision-making by non-public internal documents as sources.<sup>161</sup> Contrary to my own view, most researchers see restricted documents as reliable primary empirical sources in research into political decision-making.<sup>162</sup> They even tend to assume that confidentiality is evidence that the substance is a more authentic account of reality than a public document. As sources, documents offer the advantage that they can be accessible to researchers, especially after the massive leaks by Wikileaks of restricted documents. However, there are three reasons why restricted documents may not be relevant sources for research into political decision-making:

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<sup>159</sup> <http://www.centcom.mil/ABOUT-US/POSTURE-STATEMENT/>

<sup>160</sup> Council and Studies. <http://russiancouncil.ru/common/upload/RIAC-IRAS-Russia-Iran-Report29-en.pdf>

<sup>161</sup> In my own thesis for the cand.philol. degree in history at the University of Oslo (1980), I studied non-public documents in an archive. However, my thesis spanned the period 1882 – 1905 in the United States, when, contrary to now, actors had largely to rely on written mail. With travel cumbersome, they could rarely meet in person, while lacking telephone and our wide variety of electronic communication. Under such circumstances, the archival records may offer a more complete insight into the actual process than would be the case today. By way of example, I found very confidential notes with the heading *read and burn*.

<sup>162</sup> Discussions during my sojourn October 2019 as Visiting Research Fellow – *Gastwissenschaftler* – at the German Institute of Contemporary History, Department for the Cold War, Berlin.

- First, their actual impact cannot be inferred from their distribution. How do we know who actually studied them, and if so, how they assessed them? A Norwegian Foreign Minister, whom I briefed, stated flatly he never read any document exceeding 1,5 page due to time constraints. Any important input had to be within that limit. The background for his exhortation was that some briefers thought an important item merited a more thorough presentation. From this experience, I infer that the likely impact of a document is inverse to its volume. However, the shorter the presentation, the more important is the implicit context, which cannot be inferred from the text itself. I have also experienced how documents I authored have been interpreted in a context differing from the context in which I produced them,
- Second, internal documents are rarely neither objective nor exhaustive accounts of the actual decision-making process, nor of the considerations actually bearing on the decisions. Internal documents are mostly constructed with an internal agenda. This agenda may not be accessible to those not party to the process that produced them. By way of example, current Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, in his memoir of his time in Norwegian politics, writes the following about the decision to go to war in Libya: *Almost all political decisions in Norway are made by some people talking together and agreeing.*<sup>163</sup> These conversations are hardly accurately recorded, if at all, and the presumably vast amount of internal documents relating to this decision is unlikely to reflect the actual deliberations.
- Third, internal restricted documents may be leaked with a purpose, as we have seen in the case of Wikileaks at the recent US presidential election.

However, these reservations do not apply to the same degree to public documents showing narratives bearing on decisions, such as public analyses or memoirs. These are open to public scrutiny, including their context and agenda.

#### 5.1.4 Focus on epistemic communities

At the top-level, in its final stage, political decision-making is for all practical purposes inaccessible to researchers. Observing the interaction is hardly possible, and personal accounts will be distorted by personal perspectives and self-serving.

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<sup>163</sup> Stoltenberg. P. 443



More feasible is to explore the mental models among what is termed *epistemic communities*, typically officials, experts and researchers.<sup>164</sup> They influence policies by their expertise. Such “epistemic communities” may form networks across the fault lines of the inter-state or inter-group conflicts. I infer from the role of these epistemic communities that the mental models they share also bear on the actual decision-making; hence, a source to ascertain what mental models bear on the actual decisions. However, how and to what degree they affect decision-makers cannot be established beyond conjecture of probability.

A special form of such networks across fault lines is the so-called “track 2” diplomacy.<sup>165</sup> I have used my participation at such events to explore my theories. This has been a two-stage process. I have used the plenary sessions to present my theory invoking the dysfunctions of the current mental models. On this basis, I have suggested alternative, cooperative policies as more effective in pursuing goals, typically security concerns. Then I have observed the reactions of individuals in private conversations. Conferences convening participants that in their various capacities form epistemic communities<sup>166</sup> work in a similar way as “track 2” diplomatic meetings, and I have applied the same methodology.

In addition, I have conducted conversations in all the major Middle East states, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey and Israel, and with representatives from them at international venues. These sources form part of *epistemic communities*. I have also had conversations with representatives from major external powers involved in the Middle East, the US, Russia, the EU, and others.<sup>167</sup> Together, these states form or affect the Middle East state system by mutually generating behavior of states and groups. When these conversations are followed up by documents to support the argument of those I engage in conversation, I use the documents as a source to elaborate their views. Cases in point are US Central Command’s Posture Statement invoked by Turkish

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<sup>164</sup> P.M Haas, "Policy Knowledge: Epistemic Communities," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Elsevier, 2001). E Adler and P.M Haas, "Conclusion: Epistemic Communities, World Order, and the Creation of a Reflective Research Program," *International Organization* 46, no. No.1 (1992). M. Meyer, "Epistemic Communities and Collaborative Research," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Elsevier, 2015).

<sup>165</sup> I have been invited to track 2 diplomacy events on condition of strict confidentiality. I can therefore not share any details.

<sup>166</sup> Case in point is the Gulf Research Meetings at the University of Cambridge where I presented papers at three consecutive sessions

<sup>167</sup> My sources are from Israel, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, United States, Russia, UK, Germany, China, Egypt, Jordan, UAE, Qatar, the European Commission and the EU External Action Service.

interlocutors,<sup>168</sup> and the joint Russian-Iranian report I received from a contact in Iran pursuant to our conversation at a “track 2” venue, then discussed with Russian contacts from another venue.<sup>169</sup>

## 5.2 My methodology positioned

I see my methodology, *exploratory conversation*, as a form of *action research*.<sup>170</sup> My purpose is to analyze practical problems with the purpose of producing actionable recommendations. This methodology has been applied in research into pedagogic improvements in schools.<sup>171</sup>

My methodology, using *exploratory conversation*, also has interface with the methodology of *collaborative inquiry*, as *cycles of action and reflection*.<sup>172</sup> Collaborative inquiry with the purpose of producing actionable insight is *participatory action research*.<sup>173</sup> Parties involved agree on the terms of the research, in which they clarify the role of the researcher. In other words, the role of the researcher is *contractual* in the sense of being explicit, negotiated and agreed.

However, my methodology differs from some of the tenets of these methodologies. My role of researcher is not contractual, and observations, evaluations and actionable recommendations are not a collaborative effort. These tenets of the methodologies are not feasible for my purposes.

Therefore, I adapt these methodologies. My methodology is exploratory conversations and concomitant analyses of interactions to which I have been party in my triple role of diplomat, official and researcher. As researcher, I have been clear about my roles, and that my purpose is to generate alternative theories and hypotheses for abductive reasoning. With the same methodology,

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<sup>168</sup> <http://www.centcom.mil/ABOUT-US/POSTURE-STATEMENT/>

<sup>169</sup> Council and Studies. <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/activity/publications/rost-yadernoy-ugrozy-mery-po-sokrashcheniyu-riskov-v-evroatl/>

<sup>170</sup> I am indebted to Professor Andrew Orton of Durham University for guiding my positioning of my methodological approach in relation to other methodologies.

<sup>171</sup> J. McNiff, *Action Research: Principles and Practice* (Routledge, 1988).

<sup>172</sup> J.N. Bray, *Collaborative Inquiry in Practice: Action, Reflection, and Making Meaning* (SAGE Publications, 2000). P. 10

<sup>173</sup> S. Kindon, R. Pain, and M. Kesby, *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place* (Taylor & Francis, 2007). P. 1, 9-11. Helpful in clarifying the potential and limitations of this methodology for my purposes have been conversations with Professor Andrew Orton at Participatory Research Hub, Durham University <https://www.dur.ac.uk/socialjustice/prh/>

I also analyze previous conversations and interactions to which I have been party prior to becoming a researcher, in my roles as diplomat and official.

I am aware of a built-in distortion in my methodology of exploratory conversation. In my roles, my interlocutors have perceived me as a representative of Norway, seen as a champion of peace and understanding, and the sponsor of peace processes.<sup>174</sup> This perception of Norway has shaped our respective roles in the conversations and interactions. As a result, interlocutors inevitably relate to this perception in dealing with me. This is a methodological constraint in the sense that I may get a different narrative than the policy stories, to use Stevens' term,<sup>175</sup> operating within their own decision-making processes.

There are four reasons for adapting these methodologies, *action research*, *collaborative inquiry* and *participatory action research* to the study of epistemic communities in political decision-making:

- First, in these methodologies, the researcher does not assume a role outside the process that is the object of research. In my research into how discourse can affect the dynamics of mental models of epistemic communities, it is not feasible to separate myself from the interaction. Parties would hardly engage with me on such terms, but, if they would, such a role would distort our interaction by making everybody self-conscious and worried, as would any attempt on my part to establish myself in a different role. In my research, I am therefore by necessity part of the process I observe in the sense that I cannot observe it without affecting it.
- Second, in these methodologies, the researcher alternates between observations as a participant and reflection as a researcher. This is what I do.
- Third, theories evolve and I revise them in course of the research by feedback in conversations and meetings, which has significant interface with a collaborative cognitive process in *action research*, *collaborative inquiry* and *participatory action research*. These methodologies, as adapted, are therefore suitable to develop evolving analyses of policy making by abductive reasoning.

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<sup>174</sup> This is a statement of fact. This is how Norway is perceived. I make no judgment on the merits of this perception.

<sup>175</sup> Stevens.

- Fourth, in the model for cognitive behavioral therapy I adapt, presumably, involving the patient in the elaboration of the therapy builds necessary motivation for cognitive restructuring by generating a sense of ownership.<sup>176</sup> Conversely, in my theory on strategic discourse, building ownership by involvement is necessary to make my research actionable as tools for cognitive restructuring. However, in the types of interactions I analyze, the strategies for building motivation by ownership must be adapted to the constraints imposed by circumstances. These parameters limit the space for agency to windows-of-opportunity, as opposed to a series of scheduled sessions in therapy. Within the available space for agency, in my conceptualization of *strategic discourse*, the discourse constructs motivation for cognitive restructuring by first constructing emotions, as set out in my presentation of my theory.

### 5.3 Falsification feasible?

This methodology raises the issue if questioning assumptions of causality and inferred options can prove a particular mental model wrong, given the inevitable conjectural nature of political analyses, if to varying degrees, and, by consequence, the degrees of uncertainty in political decisions. In methodological terms, can we falsify a mental model?

I argue that in adapting a model for cognitive behavioral therapy,<sup>177</sup> the initial assumption in a political decision is the analogy,<sup>178</sup> as a formative experience, which is interpreted into a grand strategy,<sup>179</sup> as the frame constructing the perceptions of policy options. Causality by analogy raises the question of whether the analogy, as interpreted, constructs a policy that can be proved wrong, as maintained by Jervis.<sup>180</sup> A basic principle in scientific inquiry is that theories and their hypotheses shall be falsifiable, that is, possible to disprove. By contrast, I argue that the two hypotheses inherent in the analyses of political decisions, the consequences of the decision, and the consequences of not making it, are only answerable by conjecture since certainty is beyond

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<sup>176</sup> Wenzel. P. 29-31, 49-52, 103

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> For an introduction to the argument that foreign policy decisions follow from analogies, with case studies, see Khong.

<sup>179</sup> Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy*.

<sup>180</sup> Jervis. P. 220-221

reach, although an observable pattern in a series of comparable cases may *approach* certainty. The question is if some of these hypotheses produced by conjecture may still be falsifiable.

In their studies on cognitive errors in police investigations, both Rachlew and Fahsing call for the principle of falsification, that hypotheses should be systematically challenged with the purpose of being disproved.<sup>181</sup>

By contrast, Waltz claims falsification is not feasible in political theory. He posits that a political theory structures the facts to be tested; hence, facts cannot disprove the theory.<sup>182</sup> His theory on *structural realism*, that the relations between states is a function of their relative power, is such a theory. My idea of theory inherent in political decisions corresponds to Waltz's version of political theory, as an idea, a set of constitutive assumptions of how things are, and by implication the realm of conjecture, not certainty.

My contention in this dissertation, however, is that the theories behind Western policy choices after the end of the Cold War have been wrong because the effects have differed from the intentions and been disastrous. In Rachlew's and Fahsing's terms, I contend that the theories, in the sense of assumptions, and inferred hypotheses about options, have been falsified. I therefore find that the principle of falsification that Rachlew and Fahsing call for in police investigations, to the degree possible, should also apply to the theories and hypotheses of the analyses applied in policy decisions. While the consequences of theories and inferred hypotheses about options applied in decisions cannot be established with certainty, we can still make probable inferences from an observable pattern. The sequence of Western military interventions between 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and 2016, the fall of Aleppo, forms such an observable pattern, as I set out in my submitted article for this dissertation, *From the Fall of the Berlin Wall to the Fall of Aleppo. The Decline of Global Governance – and How to Restore it*.<sup>183</sup> While each set of circumstances were unique, the common variable was the mental model that military intervention could impose stability and the Western Normative Project, which failed to materialize. I therefore contend that

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<sup>181</sup> Rachlew, "Justisfeil ved politiets etterforskning- noen eksempler og forskningsbaserte tiltak." P. 27, 28, Fahsing. P. 14

<sup>182</sup> Waltz, *Realism and International Politics*. P. 47, 85, 90

<sup>183</sup> Global Policy (2019) doi: 10.1111/1758-5899.12736

the theory, in the sense of a set of assumptions, behind the sequence of Western military interventions has been falsified.

Waltz actually unwittingly delivers the argument against his own rejection of the falsification principle. He was a strong advocate of nuclear balance of power. In 1983, the year of the Soviet War Scare that brought the world to the brink of nuclear war by misunderstanding,<sup>184</sup> he set out his argument in an article that nuclear arms provided a secure and stable peace by mutual deterrence.<sup>185</sup> We now know that this theory was falsified beyond uncertainty by events the year of the article's publication. By the time Waltz advocated Iranian nuclear arms to provide a stable mutual deterrence in the Middle East, 2012,<sup>186</sup> the CIA had made their account of the 1983 events public.<sup>187</sup> Did Waltz not know of CIA's account, or did he reject its relevance since his idea of stability by mutual nuclear deterrence followed from his theory on structural realism, which he held to be beyond falsification? In my view, the empirical fact that an unintended consequence of nuclear deterrence can be nuclear war by inadvertence, falsifies his theory that nuclear deterrence provides interstate stability. By implication, his hypothesis that Iranian nuclear arms would bring stability to the Middle East is also falsified.

#### 5.4 Conclusion on methodology

By conversations and interactions in my three roles of diplomat, official and researcher, I have gleaned relevant insights. These insights form data. I need to find the most suitable methodology for analyzing these data. By adapting the three methodologies of action research, collaborative inquiry and participatory action research, I develop my methodology *exploratory conversation* that enables the analyses by abductive reasoning. This methodology is applied in my articles submitted for this dissertation.

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<sup>184</sup> Fischer.

<sup>185</sup> Waltz, *Realism and International Politics*. P. 260 - 275

<sup>186</sup> "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb. Nuclear Balancing Would Mean Stability," *Foreign Affairs* July / August (2012).

<sup>187</sup> Fischer.

## 6 Putting my theory to the test

In the fall of 2017, I tested my theory on strategic discourse, as it had evolved by abductive reasoning in the course of successive venues, as *persuasion by envisioning*, in presentations with subsequent encounters. These encounters involved representatives from all states involved in the conflicts over Syria.<sup>188</sup> One presentation was before an audience of all-Saudi Arabian officials, the other before a broad audience comprising representatives of all states party to the state system of the Middle East, including the United States, Russia, and the EU. The first encounter was therefore semi-official but on terms resembling those of Track 2 diplomacy. Participants, including myself following my presentation, shared presumably personal views under Chatham House Rule. The other encounter was a regular Track 2 diplomacy meeting. Was I able to start a cognitive restructuring by introducing the European transformation in the EU as an alternative analogy?

### 6.1 The EU as policy story

The two power point presentations and a summary requested by my Saudi Arabian hosts follow. This is the gist of my two presentations:

A realistic vision needs to invoke a historical analogy that evokes positive emotions about desirable changes. Therefore, my initial two questions were:

- What would a post-conflict political order look like in the Middle East?
- What can the states in the Middle East adapt from the European model of transformation from violent conflict to peaceful, pragmatic cooperation?

Decisive questions are if we need to solve major issues before we can cooperate, or can we solve those issues we agree on now and leave the major issues for later? When agreement on major issues is not feasible in the short term, deliberation on specific issues where agreement by compromise on imperfect solution is possible, will, in the course of deliberations, make agreement on major issues more feasible by incremental convergence. This is the European model of transformation.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> The specifics of these encounters are under Chatham House Rule.

<sup>189</sup> Wirsching, *Der Preis der Freiheit: Geschichte Europas in unserer Zeit*. P. 17

## 6.2 My Power Point presentations envisioning a new regional political order in the Middle East

These presentations document my strategic discourse put to a test with two different audiences in the Middle East in late 2017.<sup>190</sup>

### 6.2.1 My first presentation, before an all Saudi Arabian audience

#### **Envisioning a new regional political order in the Middle East**

Two questions:

- What would a post-conflict political order look like in the Middle East?
- What can the states in the Middle East adapt from the European model of transformation from violent conflict to peaceful, pragmatic cooperation?

What would a post-conflict political order look like in the Middle East?

Security means secure:

- Security interdependent because of mutual vulnerability (Giandomenico Picco).
- Only collective, or shared, security secure (Egon Bahr).

Adapt the European model of transformation from violent conflict to peaceful, pragmatic cooperation?

Europe was very violent and unstable. More like the current Middle East than current Europe.

- Current peace and cooperation produced by two decisive factors:
  - Courageous individuals defying overwhelming odds by personal initiatives at crucial cross roads.
  - Joint deliberations.

Joint deliberation forges:

- «Path dependence» on cooperation:

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<sup>190</sup> Copied from Power Point



*Solutions outside the cooperation become gradually inconceivable*

- Gradual convergence of views

*When we talk to each other, we learn from each other*

- Agreement on imperfect solutions and incremental change

*Nobody gets everything because everybody has to get something.*

- We know imperfect solutions can be gradually improved by further deliberation.

Decisive questions

- Do we need to solve major issues before we can cooperate?
- Can we solve those issues we agree on now and leave the major issues for later?

Example of feasible agreements?

- Support the Russian policy of «de-escalation zones” in Syria: first end violence, then work out political solution.
- Try same approach in the other regional conflicts.
- The GCC extends its consultations and expert cooperation to the other regional states, adapting the EU third-country cooperation and neighborhood policy.

## 6.2.2 My summary of presentation and subsequent deliberations, requested by Saudi Arabian hosts

Dear Dr...., <sup>191</sup>

Please extend to His Excellency, Dr. ...., and the others I met at the seminar my sincere gratitude for inviting me to present my ideas on envisioning a new political order in the Middle East! A special honor also that the Head of the European Department in your Ministry of Foreign Affairs, His Excellency...., was able to come and make such wise interventions. I learnt a lot from my conversations with all of you!

Further to my email of 17 October on my presentation 18 October at the Diplomatic Institute, I forward below, as requested, a summary of my presentation (enclosed) and our subsequent conversations with the participants at the seminar. Please give me your feedback! Does my summary capture the essence of our conversation?

I have discussed my presentation with His Excellency, the Ambassador of Norway, and his Excellency the Ambassador of the EU, and therefore copy them both on this email.

With my best regards,

Torgeir E. Fjærtøft

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### **Summary**

Envisioning a new political order

- A vision is a guide beyond current intractable problems.
- When we talk about how we want the Middle East to be, solutions to problems will emerge along the way. By contrast, focusing on current problems will block progress.
- The role of visions is scientifically proven. Three Nobel Laureates in Economics, Simon, Kaheman and Thaler, show how our minds form mental model of reality that determine our thinking and choices. Shapiro at Harvard Program on Negotiation has developed a model for communication that shows how mutual respect and involvement leads to solutions in mutual interest.

The European model of cooperation

- A vision invokes an experience that can be adapted. The most successful case of transformation from confrontation to pragmatic cooperation is Europe in the EU.
- This transformation was driven by two forces: courageous individuals defying odds by taking political initiatives at crucial crossroads, and deliberations.
- When we mutually engage in deliberations, our understanding gradually converges. In the course of deliberations, solutions without cooperation become unthinkable.

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<sup>191</sup> Saudi Arabian interlocutors anonymized under Chatham House Rule

- Deliberations enable agreements on imperfect solutions that can be improved by further deliberations.
- Deliberations lead to compromise. “Since everybody has to get something, nobody can get everything”.
- Deliberations do not eliminate crises, but thrive on them. Crises force the parties to face the fundamental question: How realistic is my prospect that opting out of the cooperation will give me a better result?

#### Adapting the European model to the Middle East

- In the Middle East, confrontation and conflict have not delivered the intended results.
- Conceived military strategies have had unintended consequences. Military strategies shall deliver security. Therefore, security needs to be secure. Because modern states cannot escape their mutual vulnerability, security is mutual, or collective.
- The European experience shows that deliberations on collective security is more secure than unilateral strategies without regard to the mental models of the perceived adversaries. From the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975 until deliberations on mutual security broke down in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, European security was more secure than between 1979 and the end of the Cold War in 1989. In 1983, the world was even on the edge of an all-out nuclear war by misjudgments of intentions.
- Saudi Arabia can take the initiative to turn the GCC into the EU of the Middle East. The EU maintains relations with third countries by extending consultations and cooperation. The GCC can extend its consultations and cooperation to the other major states in the region.
- The EU should discuss with Saudi Arabia how the GCCE can adapt the EU neighborhood policy in the GCC's relations with the other major states in the region.

#### Specific cases when deliberations can make Middle Eastern security more secure

- When agreement on major issues is not feasible in the short term, deliberation on specific issues where agreement by compromise on imperfect solution is possible, will, in the course of deliberations, make agreement on major issues more realistic.
- Saudi Arabia has shown how the GCC can be a vehicle for negotiating compromises in the interest of regional peace and stability. Currently, King Salman Humanitarian Aid & Relief Centre is able to maintain pragmatic working relationships with all parties to the conflicts in which it operates, such as with the Houthis, which enables the Centre to operate a hospital in the Houthi city of Sada. These working relationships show that Saudi Arabia is in a good position to initiate regional deliberations to make security more secure.
- Another case of emerging pragmatic working relationships is the Russian initiative to establish de-escalation zones in Syria. In the course of deliberations on these pragmatic working relationships, as I see it, very much in the spirit of the King Salman Humanitarian Aid & Relief Centre, agreement on feasible alternatives to the current Syrian regime will emerge.
- Under wise leadership, the experience of the de-escalation zones in Syria are applicable also to the other regional conflicts.

#### Human rights and democracy

- In deliberations on human rights and democracy, we should share our experiences and perspectives.

- My own experience is that modern Europe's ideas and practices of human rights and democracy give individuals a good life.
- Saudi Arabia has its own traditions of consultations and caring for the individual.
- We all agree that the most important human right is that the state shall protect and care for the individual. This is the priority now in the Middle East.

### 6.2.3 My second presentation, before an audience of representatives of all concerned states

#### **New US-European Relations: What Does it Mean for the Region?**

- First, my views on the nature of security
- Then, my views on current US policy
- Finally, a specific proposal for a European initiative

Security means secure:

- Security interdependent because of mutual vulnerability (*Giandomenico Picco*).
- Only collective, or shared, security secure (*Egon Bahr*).

Current US Security Policy in the Middle East

*Posture Statement by US Central Command:*

- Unrealistic because it foresees changing the strategies and policies of major states by projecting military force.
- Dangerous because unintended consequences can lead to war.

No military solutions to political problems

- In the Middle East, confrontation and conflict have not delivered the intended results.
- No one can foresee unintended consequences.
- Worst scenario for all states are failed states.

Collective security more secure

*European security more secure between 1975 and 1979 than before or after*

- Deliberations on shared, or collective, security in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975 ended abruptly in response to the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan in 1979.
- Following period highly dangerous. Misreading of intentions brought the world the brink of an all-out nuclear war in 1983.

*Security takes a new regional political order*

- Only regional states can construct a new regional political order.
- European model of transformation from violent conflict to cooperation can be adapted?

Envisioning a new regional political order in the Middle East

- Two questions:
  - What would a post-conflict political order look like in the Middle East?
  - What can the states in the Middle East adapt from the European model of transformation from violent conflict to peaceful, pragmatic cooperation?

Adapt the European model of transformation from violent conflict to peaceful, pragmatic cooperation?

- Europe was very violent and unstable. More like the current Middle East than current Europe.
- Current peace and cooperation produced by two decisive factors:
  - Courageous individuals defying overwhelming odds by personal initiatives at crucial crossroads.
  - Joint deliberations.

Joint deliberation forges:

- «Path dependence» on cooperation:

*Solutions outside the cooperation become gradually inconceivable*

- Gradual convergence of views:

*When we talk to each other, we learn from each other*

- Agreement on imperfect solutions and incremental change:

*Nobody gets everything because everybody has to get something.*

*We know imperfect solutions can be gradually improved by further deliberation.*

Decisive questions

- Do we need to solve major issues before we can cooperate?
- Can we solve those issues we agree on now and leave the major issues for later?

What can Europe do now?

*The EU can envision a new cooperation with the states in the Middle East:*

- Like Europe, the Middle East needs a regional organization for consultation and cooperation.
- Can the GCC become the EU of the Middle East?
- Adapt the EU third country/neighborhood policy?
- Extend consultations and cooperation to the other major states in the Middle East?

The EU third country/neighborhood policy. GCC?

- Market access
- Financial aid
- Access to the expert cooperation of the EU to forge convergence of policies and standards.

### 6.3 Methodology of testing

I tested the theory of strategic discourse in personal conversations after my presentations. Deliberately, I did not actively seek feedback, but waited for my interlocutors to raise the matter. To my surprise, I received unsolicited, very positive feedback by a significant number of representatives. My strategic discourse was in other words widely endorsed by those who engaged me.

Admittedly, this methodology has two obvious weaknesses. First, those who sought me out, were the most favorable, while those unfavorable would avoid me; second, those who responded favorably could intend to be courteous rather than sincere. However, two factors reinforced the

reliability of the responses. First, after previous attempts at strategic discourse that failed to elicit similar favorable responses, I expected that someone would dismiss my ideas as unrealistic or naïve (“*not a vision, but wishful thinking*”, as one critic put it on a previous occasion). Nobody did this time. My hosts for the seminar in Saudi Arabia posted pictures of the participants on their website, including of me taking center stage. This posting can be interpreted as positive interest in the vision with the EU as a policy story. Second, unfavorable respondents would not have sufficient motive to seek me out for conversation just to be polite.

#### 6.4 Conclusion on testing

I put this difference between previous unsuccessful and these successful attempts at strategic discourse down to the following change in my theory: from rejecting the predominant narratives, I began to manage the *relational identity concerns* by engaging identities as *normative projects*. By extension of the normative projects, I invited parties to *envision* a new political order, while I had previously contradicted policy stories<sup>192</sup> and made specific proposals. Therefore, the testing establishes by reasonable probability that strategic discourse by envisioning works. The question is what actionable conclusions can be inferred?

First, even if a majority in each state in the state system would not engage with the vision as my two audiences did, there will be those that do. Therefore, this finding is actionable in the sense that diplomatic discourse should seek out those that respond favorably to envisioning. The states forming the state system are not monolithic and static entities but dynamic tension fields between competing institutions, groups and individuals with differing perceptions of interests and diverging perspectives. The nature of Saudi Arabia as such a dynamic tension field is

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<sup>192</sup> Stevens.

demonstrated by al-Rasheed,<sup>193</sup> Yizraeli,<sup>194</sup> Gause,<sup>195</sup> Stensli<sup>196</sup> and Lacroix.<sup>197</sup> The nature of Israel as a dynamic tension field of competing groups and individuals is shown by Segev<sup>198</sup>, Jones,<sup>199</sup> Halevy, former head of Mossad,<sup>200</sup> and Aronoff.<sup>201</sup> Showing that Iran is actually a dynamic tension field of competing group identities and individuals are Thaler et al.,<sup>202</sup> Saleh,<sup>203</sup> and Posch.<sup>204</sup> Turkey's nature of such a dynamic tension field is demonstrated by Winkler<sup>205</sup> and Robins.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); M. al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>194</sup> S. Yizraeli, *Politics and Society in Saudi Arabia: The Crucial Years of Development, 1960-1982* (Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>195</sup> F.G. Gause, "Saudi Arabia in the New Middle East," in *Council Special Report* (New York, Washington: Council on Foreign Relations, 2011); F.Gregory III Gause, "Kings for All Seasons: How the Middle East Monarchies survived the Arab Spring.," *Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper*, no. Number 8, September 2013 (2013).

<sup>196</sup> S. Stenslie, *Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia: The Challenge of Succession* (Routledge, 2012).

<sup>197</sup> Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam : the Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, trans. Georg Holoch (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011); S. Lacroix, "Saudi Islamists and the Arab Spring," (Kuwait Program on Development, Governance and Globalization in the Gulf States, London School of Economics, 2014).

<sup>198</sup> T. Segev and J. Cohen, *1967: Israel, the War and the Year That Transformed the Middle East* (Abacus, 2008).

<sup>199</sup> Jones in R. Hinnebusch and A. Ehteshami, *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States, Second Edition* (Boulder London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2014).

<sup>200</sup> E. Halevy, *Man in the Shadows: Inside the Middle East Crisis with a Man Who Led the Mossad* (St. Martin's Press, 2008).

<sup>201</sup> Aronoff.

<sup>202</sup> Alireza Nader David E. Thaler, Shahram Chubin, Jerrold D. Green, Charlotte Lynch, Frederic Wehrey, "Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads. An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics," (2010), [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND\\_MG878.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG878.pdf).

<sup>203</sup> A. Saleh, *Ethnic Identity and the State in Iran* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>204</sup> Walter Posch, "The Third World, Global Islam and Pragmatism. The Making of Iranian Foreign Policy," *SWP Research Paper* (2013); "Domestic Reforms and Regional Power. Iran 2017," in *AlSharq Forum Analysis Series* (Istanbul: AlSharq Forum, 2017).

<sup>205</sup> H.A. Winkler, *Geschichte des Westens: Die Zeit der Weltkriege 1914-1945* (C.H.Beck, 2011).

<sup>206</sup> Robins in Hinnebusch and Ehteshami.



Second, individuals will differ in their *cognitive flexibility*, which denotes the will and ability to adjust to new circumstance. Aronoff has demonstrated how differences in cognitive flexibility among Israeli prime ministers bear significantly on Israel's policies towards the Palestinians.<sup>207</sup>

As set out previously, differences in cognitive flexibility leads to the question of individual agency, its room for maneuver and the risk the individual incurs by acting on the insight ahead of the predominant policy stories.<sup>208</sup> The insight that states are dynamic tension fields of competing institutions, groups, and individuals, all with differing perceptions of their interests and diverging perspectives, has profound implications for negotiating strategy. Mnookin, at Harvard Program on Negotiation, points out that negotiation are always two-track, with adversaries *and* constituents,<sup>209</sup> or, put differently, out-groups and in-groups. Given the nature of the state, the in-groups are alliances on which domestic power is contingent. The risk to the individual that acts on the insight enabled by their cognitive flexibility arises out of the implications for these domestic alliances. By acting on their insight, these individuals may easily make themselves vulnerable by jeopardizing their position with their domestic alliance by which they have power to influence.<sup>210</sup> Since any negotiating strategy should engage these individuals, they need to be hedged against adverse effects with their constituents. Their potential as well as their vulnerability decide the room for maneuver in negotiations.

This insight also forms the parameter of the type of diplomacy especially designed to allow room for individual agency, the so-called Track 2 diplomacy, in which individuals, as part of epistemic communities, meet for confidential deliberations in their personal capacity but on the understanding that they also speak for their governments, or, rather, parts thereof. The purpose of these deliberations is to forge common ground, which is only possible if participants exercise their agency within their room for maneuver. However, the track 2 process is designed to *optimize* individual agency, which is only feasible by a combination of cognitive flexibility and design of the negotiation process.

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<sup>207</sup> Aronoff.

<sup>208</sup> Stevens.

<sup>209</sup> Mnookin. Kindle Loc. 2363

<sup>210</sup> Conversation with German scholar and diplomat with experience from negotiations between the two German states prior to the end of the Cold War and in contemporary Afghanistan.

In Track 2 diplomacy, the finding in the testing suggests the need for a proposed specific alternative analogy to act as catalyst in forging common ground. Jones calls for the facilitators to limit their role to convenor only and refrain from introducing proposals to the parties. In his analyses, parties will only develop the ownership necessary for implementation to proposals emerging from among themselves. For the same reason he posits there is a risk facilitators, as external party, may prompt intransigence among the parties in conflict by introducing a proposal.<sup>211</sup>

As previously set out, my experience from Track 2 diplomacy meetings is that though a facilitator limiting her or his role to convenor manages to induce cordial relations, the substance of the deliberations does not move beyond reiteration of the parties' entrenched positions. My finding shows that the facilitator needs to introduce a proposal to move deliberations beyond their current contentious and irreconcilable issues, but maintain cordiality and induce amenability by *envisioning* rather than arguing. A vision, as opposed to an argument, is easier for participants to handle with their constituents in the domestic coalitions.

Since this particular vision of adapting the model for European transformation by the EU to the state system of the Middle East, with two different audiences of epistemic communities from the concerned states, encountered positive interest without prompting open defiance or intransigence, my theory is reinforced that envisioning works for its purpose of persuasion.

As I have set out, in Kahneman's theory we process new problems by associating with recent thoughts, the most cognitively accessible,<sup>212</sup> in the case of foreign policy the historical analogy that first comes to mind. Hence, as posited by Thaler and Sunstein, persistent exposure to benign ideas, in their term *nudges*, influences behavior by increasing cognitive accessibility in an intended direction.<sup>213</sup> Therefore, having established by reasonable probability that strategic discourse by envisioning works, the next step is to reiterate this vision persistently over time, as *nudges* at successive venues, to enhance its *cognitive accessibility*. This stage is not testable, but remains conjectural, if probable.

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<sup>211</sup> Jones. My discussions with Jones.

<sup>212</sup> Kahneman. P. 1452-1454

<sup>213</sup> Thaler and Sunstein.

In this case, the nudges' intention is to increase the cognitive accessibility of the analogy of European transformation as a policy story of feasible benign political change. This is how *strategic discourse* works, induce *amenability* by envisioning and increase *cognitive accessibility* by persistent reiteration.

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## 8 My submitted articles

### 8.1 Summaries

The submitted articles focus on specific problems related to policies of states bearing on the Middle East state system. Each of the articles elaborates aspects of the theory of strategic discourse, and develops diplomatic interventions as cognitive restructuring by policy stories. The articles address sub agendas of the superintendent agenda of transformation of the Middle East state system. The methodology is the same as set out in Chapter 6.

Three articles apply the theory of strategic discourse to set out European policy interventions in the state system formed by Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey and Israel. Two other articles addresses the role of external states parties to the state system. One of these articles sets out a European strategic discourse to engage the United States on policy interventions in the Middle East. Another article sets out how the theory of strategic discourse can enable the West to restore its lost influence in the Middle East.

**The first article**, entitled *Envision, Not Argue: Innovating EU Policy After the Failures of Libya and Syria*, presents the gist of the argument in the dissertation. It sets out the problems for European foreign policy of the military intervention in Libya and the probable implications in Syria. Then the article elaborates the theory of strategic discourse, in particular how envisioning an alternative political order can work as cognitive restructuring.

The adapted model for cognitive behavioral therapy can explain the self-defeating security policies of the states forming the Middle East state system, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel and Turkey. These states mutually generate the threats to which they respond.

The article sets out a diplomatic intervention as cognitive restructuring by a policy story evoking as vision the analogy of European transformation. This policy story argues that European security was more secure in the period around the European Conference on Security and Cooperation in 1975, when dialogue and negotiations constructed a common security, than during periods of confrontation.

The article then discusses the testing of the theory at two venues in the Middle East. Observations in the testing allow the reasonable inference that a strategic discourse by envisioning can invoke

the analogy of European transformation. Cognitive restructuring can by persistent reiteration of the vision of European transformation steer thoughts in an intended direction.<sup>214</sup>

The article is published in [European Foreign Affairs Review](#).

**The second article**, entitled *Making the Gulf Cooperation Council the EU of the Middle East* elaborates the argument in the first article by setting out how the analogy of European transformation can be applied to the Middle East.

The article argues that the Middle East needs a regional organization comprising all parties to the conflicts to provide a vehicle for consultations with a low threshold for contact. Turning the GCC into the “EU of the Middle East” is the easiest way to achieve this. The article then shows how the EU and the GCC have some functional similarities that should facilitate the adaption of other EU policy instruments and frameworks.

The EU, within its consultations with the GCC – Gulf Cooperation Council, needs to engage, by a strategic discourse, Saudi Arabia, as the dominant power within the GCC. The purpose of this strategic discourse is cognitive restructuring by evoking European transformation as an alternative analogy. The EU should invoke its own example as a policy story of transformation. By this policy story, the EU may persuade Saudi Arabia to adapt the EU third country and neighborhood policies to involve the other states in the Middle East state system, Iran, Turkey, and Israel, in its consultations and cooperation.

The article is published in [European Foreign Affairs Review](#).

**The third article** is entitled *The Saudi Arabian Revolution: How Can It Succeed?* This article elaborates the argument in the second article.

A failure of the Saudi Arabian revolution could easily lead to a failed state, with grave regional, even global implications. Success, by contrast, may conceivably turn Saudi Arabia into a modern and pluralistic, albeit still authoritarian, state. With its economic power, such a Saudi Arabia could become a regional leader turning the disintegrating violent societies in its neighborhood onto a new path towards stability.

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<sup>214</sup> I am grateful to Professor Daniel L. Shapiro at Harvard Program on Negotiation for his support in applying his theory in this article, in the following excerpt from his e-mail: *I also appreciated the way you built off of Relational Identity Theory and its possible implications.*

The article sets out how Saudi Arabia can be engaged by strategic discourse to pursue policies in the interest of its political project.

The policy story is that Saudi Arabia can only avoid a trajectory towards a failed state by a sustainable domestic coalition and an enabling external environment, the key to which is a cooperative relationship with Iran. The best way to generate an enabling external environment with Iran would be for Saudi Arabia to initiate the adaption by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) of the EU third-country and neighborhood policies. There is already a working relationship between the two regimes by an agreement on Hajj and Umrah for annually 75000 Iranian pilgrims to Mecca and Medina.

The article is published in [\*Middle East Policy\*](#).

**The fourth article**, entitled *Engaging the US in the Age of Trump: The Case for a New European Strategic Discourse* expands the analyses of enabling environment for a more cooperative Middle East system to the role of external states. The article asserts that international agreements of consequence are not feasible without the USA as partner. A case in point is the European inability to pursue an independent policy to sustain the nuclear agreement with Iran and shielding European business from the reach of US sanctions.

The article elaborates the theory of strategic discourse by arguing that a model for cognitive behavioral therapy and a theory on identity can innovate theory and make policy more effective. The article sets out how a European strategic discourse, applying the adapted model from cognitive behavioral therapy, can engage the USA in a comprehensive political process in the Middle East. Policy is an intervention, as therapy uses the term. Policy and therapy are comparable because both work through discourse to effect change by cognitive restructuring. Therefore, psychological theories offer cognitive tools for designing a strategic discourse as policy intervention.

The article argues that a strategic discourse must distinguish between stages in the cognitive process of policy. Competing identity stories drive the current US political discourse, as is the case in the states upon which the US identity stories project their enmity, Russia and Iran. Because of the nature of identity, engaging identity stories in a confrontational international environment will prompt intransigence and only bestow value on confrontation as assets in the respective domestic power struggles. To enable a strategic discourse, it is necessary to leave identity stories unchallenged but engage USA, with Russia and Iran, on *grand strategy*, the sets of superintendent assumptions that determine the perceptions of policy options. The article points

out how the conceptualization of grand strategy enabled the transformation of East-West relations in Europe that led to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975.

An intervention for cognitive restructuring of grand strategy would be to propose a similar conference over a new political order that needs to arise out of the ruins of Iraq and Syria. A new European strategic discourse should start consultations with all concerned states on a joint Russian – Iranian report that advocates cooperative strategies, also with the US, to all regional conflicts from Afghanistan/Pakistan to Libya. A climate of low tensions induces political solutions. Following the end of the Cold War, a US/Russian cooperation succeeded in removing Soviet nuclear arms from the new independent states, most significantly the Ukraine. In the recent Middle East, US/Russian cooperation could achieve two significant results, removing Syrian chemical arms and the agreement to prevent Iranian nuclear arms.

The article is published in [\*European Foreign Affairs Review\*](#).

**The fifth article**, entitled *From the Fall of the Berlin Wall to the Fall of Aleppo. The Decline of Global Governance – and How to Restore it*, elaborates the superintendent context of the current confrontations in the Middle East, the trajectory from the promises of common security by global governance at the end of the Cold War in 1989 to the current war, violence and destruction in Syria.

The article argues that theories on cognitive and emotional construction must upgrade the traditional methodology of diplomacy to understand why the West lost its position, and how it can be reclaimed. In the theory of *nudges*, persistent cognitive stimuli in an intended direction changes behavior. A strategic discourse must harness these theories to persuade more effectively by leaving contentious issues and instead evoke visions of common security by global governance. In its first stage, common security by global governance is an idea structuring a discourse to mobilize power and resources for solutions in joint interest, typically within the UN. Only a Western strategic discourse resuming the abandoned multilateral diplomacy that the end of the Cold War prompted can restore Western influence and the Western Normative Project; now both have yielded to Russian influence and an authoritarian political project in the Middle East.

A strategic discourse must change analogies. A case in point is Iran's option of procuring nuclear arms. The article shows the volatile discourse on nuclear arms proliferation in the Middle East by the competing interpretation of two analogies, the compliance with non-proliferation and then removal of the Libyan regime versus the challenge of non-proliferation and then impunity of the North Korean leadership. With the nuclear agreement no longer working, circles in Iran may find

the North Korean analogy convincing. Since both analogies to a degree are valid, the only feasible way to sustain non-proliferation in the Middle East is to restore the idea of common security by global governance that held such promise at the end of the Cold War.

The article is published in [\*Global Policy\*](#).

## 8.2 Articles

- First article: **Envision, Not Argue:  
Innovating EU Policy After the Failures of Libya and Syria**
- Second article: **Making the Gulf Cooperation Council the EU of the Middle East**
- Third article: **The Saudi Arabian Revolution: How Can It Succeed?**
- Fourth article: **Engaging the US in the Age of Trump:  
The Case for a New European Strategic Discourse**
- Fifth article: **From the Fall of the Berlin Wall to the Fall of Aleppo.  
The Decline of Global Governance – and How to Restore it**



# Envision, Not Argue: Innovating EU Policy After the Failures of Libya and Syria

Torgeir E. FJÆRTOFT\*

*The EU now needs to innovate policies towards the Middle East. The disastrous consequences of the military intervention in Libya are for all practical purposes a European mistake. The air campaign was originally a French initiative with Norway taking a lead role. By the perception of failure, it most likely caused inaction towards the regime in Syria. Only a concert of the regional states can create a new regional political order, and an innovative EU policy needs to engage these states for this purpose. A regional concert is the yet untried option in Western policy towards the Middle East. An effective EU diplomacy is to engage parties in envisioning an alternative regional political order by the analogy of European transformation from violent confrontation to pragmatic cooperation.*

**Keywords:** EU, Middle East, common security, strategy, discourse.

## 1 THE PROBLEM

A series of misjudgments by faulty analyses produced the Western trajectory from universal acclaim and unopposed power at the end of the Cold War to the current widespread rejection and seeming impotence in the regional conflicts from Afghanistan to Libya. This persistence in failure raises the question of how theory, in the sense of a set of assumptions, bears on action. In any other field, be it engineering, medicine or economics, a pattern of close to persistent failure that causes dysfunctions on such a grand scale would spur a quest for innovative theories from which alternative hypotheses about options can be inferred. This failure to develop innovative theories is brought into sharp focus in the contrast between the military intervention in Libya in 2011, and the ensuing inaction towards a similar regime in Syria.<sup>1</sup> Disaster followed both military intervention and inaction.

The military intervention in Libya was for all practical purposes a European policy,<sup>2</sup> initiated by President Sarkozy of France and with Norway in a lead

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<sup>1</sup> The Western military intervention in Syria targeted the Islamic State, not the Syrian regime.

<sup>2</sup> J. Goldberg, *The Obama Doctrine* (The Atlantic 2016); House of Commons, *Defence Committee Operations in Libya*, Ninth Report of Session 2010–12.

role on the initiative of Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, soon to become Secretary General of NATO. A European responsibility was also the inaction towards the regime in Syria to the degree it was a likely consequence of the perception of failed military intervention in Libya.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the European misjudgments leading to the combined failures in Libya and Syria makes it imperative for the European Member States of EU and NATO to develop alternative policy interventions to military action and inaction. Under the current circumstances, such policy innovation is most feasible within the foreign policy cooperation of the EU.<sup>4</sup>

Policy innovations need to start with innovative theories. An innovative theory is to adapt a model from cognitive behavioural therapy. Applying this model will enable a discourse that persuades more effectively, what I denote *strategic discourse*. This article will show why and how.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this article follows the standard procedure for diplomatic abductive reasoning and fact-finding from open sources and confidential private conversations. The basis for the following analysis comprises my conversations as a diplomat and my subsequent conversations as a researcher. These conversations have been conducted at various venues with diverse sources in all four of the states that form the Middle East state system. Sources comprise the various elites in government, business and academia. Personal interests, perspectives and opinions differ, but, taken together, the sources offer a realistic, albeit necessarily limited, picture of the dynamic diversity of society and polity.

The methodology is what can be termed *exploratory conversation*: raising issues, offering arguments and asking questions, and then listen, inferring insights from the answers into feasible courses of action.

A contentious methodological issue is transparency in the use of sources. By professional ethics as a diplomat and researcher, source protection is paramount. They are not to be identified, unless explicitly otherwise agreed. Therefore, Chatham House Rules apply, abbreviated CHR.<sup>5</sup> Sources may be quoted, but neither their identity nor their institutional affiliation revealed.

<sup>3</sup> A particularly authoritative analyst making this argument is Horst Teltschik, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl's closest foreign policy advisor and then leader of the Munich Security Summit. H. Teltschik, *Russisches Roulette: Vom Kalten Krieg Zum Kalten Frieden 192* (C.H. Beck, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> [https://europa.eu/european-union/topics/foreign-security-policy\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/topics/foreign-security-policy_en) (accessed 11 Nov. 2019).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about/chatham-house-rule> (accessed 11 Nov. 2019).

## 2.1 INNOVATIVE THEORY: STRATEGIC DISCOURSE

What passes for *political reality* is a cognitive construct, in the sense that a cognitive process strongly influenced by affective dynamics produces *heuristics*, which is our mind's default mode of simplifying, while framing and distorting ideas of problems and options.<sup>6</sup> Heuristics form *mental models*. Since we are not cognitively capable to process all available information and perceptions, our mental models determine what we reject and what we process, and how we by interpretation frame what we process.<sup>7</sup>

The decisive role of heuristics and ensuing mental models in our cognitive processes means the world that counts is in our minds and international relations are inter-mind relations.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, I argue that we should see foreign policy as similar to the concept of *cognitive restructuring* in cognitive behavioural therapy: change *maladaptive behaviour patterns through correcting errors in thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs*.<sup>9</sup> The concept of *intervention* is pivotal in therapy.<sup>10</sup> An analysis of a problem should produce a workable action that could cause desired change. So also the analyses of foreign policy problems. Since mental models construct perceptions of problems and options, an actionable theory needs to provide analytic cognitive tools to develop policy interventions that can change mental models.

In the following, the article will discuss the application of the theory on strategic discourse to the current conflicts within the state system formed by Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The preference to focus on intentions over risks is in Kahneman's analyses a common cause of failure, hence in his view irrational.<sup>11</sup> In international relations, rationality is an expectation to behaviour without which options are reduced to the primordial 'fight-or-flight' response. Rationality therefore works as a *psychological contract*<sup>12</sup> that policies be intended and perceived as reasonable, realistic in their purpose to advance the intended results, and seen to avoid high risks, collateral costs and unintended consequences exceeding the intended results. When policies fail, the rational behaviour is to revise them by considering alternative options. If current policies are self-defeating, the argument for alternative policies is that they are more

<sup>6</sup> D. Kahneman, *Maps of Bounded Rationality: Psychology for Behavioral Economics*, 93(5) *Am. Econ. Rev.* 1449 (2003).

<sup>7</sup> R. J. Heuer & C. S. Intelligence, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis* 62 (Center for the Study of Intelligence 1999).

<sup>8</sup> This observation ensues from P. L. Berger & T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Penguin Books Limited 1991).

<sup>9</sup> L. Matthews & L. Litwack, *Cognitive Restructuring*, in *Psychological Interventions: A Guide to Strategies*, (M. B. Ballou ed., Praeger 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Ballou, *Introduction*, *supra* 9, at IX.

<sup>11</sup> D. Kahneman & A. Tversky, *Conflict Resolution: A Cognitive Perspective in Barriers to Conflict Resolution* 48 (K. J. Arrow, Stanford Center on Conflict and Negotiation, W.W. Norton 1995).

<sup>12</sup> The term derives from D. Rousseau & P. O. B. D. M. Rousseau, *Psychological Contracts in Organizations: Understanding Written and Unwritten Agreements* (SAGE Publications 1995).

rational in the sense that they lead to higher goal achievement with lower risks, less collateral costs and fewer unintended consequences.

A strategic discourse will argue that rationality should be the standard by which to assess operational decisions, the need to revise the chosen option, and the alternative options. The article will now first set out why current security strategies by the remaining major stable states in the Middle East appear self-defeating, hence irrational. Then the article will set out the theory of cognitive restructuring by strategic discourse. Finally, it will describe how it was possible to put it to a test in a series of encounters.

### 3 THE SELF-DEFEATING SECURITY STRATEGIES OF SAUDI ARABIA, IRAN, ISRAEL AND TURKEY

The question of rationality will now be addressed in the predominant mental models of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel and Turkey. By mutually generating their behaviour these states form the state system of the Middle East. Without a modicum of concert between them, a new regional political order is not feasible.

The following shall describe the predominant current mental models in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel and Turkey by identifying the analogies that drive them. The article analyses their policies by applying the stages in the model for cognitive therapy<sup>13</sup> adapted to political conceptualization: A formative experience generates core beliefs, which in political analyses form a historical analogy.<sup>14</sup> The next stage in the model for cognitive behavioural therapy is rules and assumptions, which in political analyses form grand strategies.<sup>15</sup> The last stage in the model for cognitive behavioural therapy is coping strategies, which applied to political analyses form specific policies within the confines of the grand strategies. In other words, I see policies as coping strategies, the manifest expression of the preceding cognitive stages.

#### 3.1. SAUDI ARABIA

The need they see to protect their way of life and their oil fields from regional threats drives Saudi Arabia's current security conceptualization. In the Saudi Arabian

<sup>13</sup> A. Wenzel, *Strategic Decision Making in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* 24–27 (American Psychological Association 2013).

<sup>14</sup> The role of analogy in foreign policy decisions is set out in Y. F. Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton University Press 1992). I first came across the idea of history applied as analogy in analyses in H. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metemich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace, 1812–22* (Houghton Mifflin 1973), at 331: 'the significance of a range of experience, that the answers we obtain will never be better than the questions we pose'.

<sup>15</sup> The concept and role of *grand strategy* is set out in J. L. Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (Penguin Books Limited 2018); P. M. Kennedy, *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (Yale University Press 1991).

perception, the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 changed Iran from an ally against revolutionary Arab nationalism to the main threat to Saudi Arabia.<sup>16</sup> This became a *formative experience*. The Iranian revolutionaries saw the Royal Family as a pawn of the enemies of the revolution.

Today, the Iranian narrative about the political forces driving Iran's conflict with Saudi Arabia is that the majority of the Saudi Arabians would, if given the chance, support the Moslem Brotherhood, whom Iran designates as its Sunni regional ally in its policy of *political Islam*.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, it became a *core belief* by the Royal Family that Iran threatens the Saudi Arabian regime. The threatening Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 therefore becomes the analogy that constructs the Saudi Arabian mental model for foreign policy.<sup>18</sup>

The political Iranian threat to the Saudi Arabian regime is with some Saudi Arabians compounded by the traditional Wahhabist rejection of the Shia as Moslems and the ensuing fear of Shia eschatology, which envisages the return of the Hidden Imam with the end of time.<sup>19</sup> The core belief that Iran threatens Saudi Arabia leads to the *grand strategy* that Iran must be contained at all costs. This grand strategy vacillates between being pragmatist, *we are forced to*, and triumphalist, *we can bend them to our will, even destroy them*.

Saudi Arabia's current regional policies are a response to their perception of encirclement by Iranian proxies. These policies therefore work as *coping strategies*. In the words attributed to a senior prince, *'the Shia Crescent has turned full moon'*.<sup>20</sup> However, Saudi Arabia, by aggressive rhetoric directed against Iran and armed to the teeth with state-of-the-art western arms, regional power projection and even the disastrous war in Yemen, generates, by provoking counter forces, the threats to which they respond.

### 3.2. IRAN

Iran's security thinking is, since the Islamic revolution in 1979, commonly believed to be driven by a narrative of resistance combined with an expansionist revolutionary mission. This is at least the predominant image of Iran among its main adversaries in Israel<sup>21</sup> and Saudi Arabia.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Conversations in Riyadh, 2008–2009, 2017, CHR.

<sup>17</sup> Conversations in Teheran May 2014, CHR.

<sup>18</sup> An open issue is to what degree this analogy is realistic. When the author walked the streets of Teheran, it struck him that he was perhaps the only one remembering the Iranian revolution in 1979. Officials he talked to focused on pragmatic issues and perceptions of threats, not missions.

<sup>19</sup> Conversations in Riyadh 2008–2009, 2017, CHR.

<sup>20</sup> Conversation in Riyadh 2009, 2017, CHR.

<sup>21</sup> Conversations in Israel 2011, London 2013, Berlin 2016, CHR.

<sup>22</sup> Conversations in Israel Dec. 2011 and Saudi Arabia 2008–2009, 2017. Gulf Research Meeting, University of Cambridge, 2014, 2015, 2016, CHR.

However, this article argues that this image is too simplistic. The *formative experiences* driving Iranian security thinking are the British and US supported coup in 1953 and the war with Iraq 1980–88 when Iraq was supported by Western powers. This led to the *core belief* that Iran is threatened by the United States, and by those states seen as their pawns, Israel and Saudi Arabia. The analogies driving Iranian foreign policy today are therefore primarily these interpretations of the coup in 1953 and the war with Iraq 1980–88.

However, Iranians today differ over what *grand strategy* to infer. Today, the Iranian thinking about relations with the outside world is torn between a triumphalist revolutionary mindset, and pragmatist traditional balance of power thinking or a cooperative approach. Three competing Iranian narratives about security can be identified:

- **The revolutionary narrative.** The Islamic revolution bestowed on Iran a mission to support liberation of other oppressed groups, most notably the Palestinians.<sup>23</sup> In this narrative, adversity and loss, actually strengthens the revolutionary narrative,<sup>24</sup> as Iran now experiences in Syria, where Iran is alone in its support of an otherwise universally rejected dictator,<sup>25</sup> incurring huge expenditure and loss of political capital as well as lives.
- **The traditional power politics narrative.** Iraq, Syria and Palestine are Iran's strategic depth in its defence against its enemies, most notably Israel.<sup>26</sup> An extension of this power politics narrative about strategic depth are two ideas about the role of proxies: Alliances with sub state movements, most notably Hezbollah, weakens the enemy by imposing diffusion of forces otherwise positioned against Iran. At the same time, support of such proxies can demonstrate Iran's power and entice adversaries to negotiate to secure Iran's cooperation.<sup>27</sup>
- **The cooperative narrative.** Iran's security is only feasible by dialogue and defusing of political tensions. In this narrative, the costs Iran incurs by confrontation are prohibitive. Since the costs are not sustainable, Iran needs to accommodate. This is the narrative of President Rohani and his supporters.<sup>28</sup> The supreme leader, while assumed to prefer the revolutionary narrative, was probably nudged to support the nuclear agreement

<sup>23</sup> Conversations with Israeli in Israel, 2011, London 2013, Berlin 2016, with Turks Ankara 2017, with Iranians Berlin and Doha, 2016, CHR.

<sup>24</sup> Conversation with Turkish Iran expert well connected in Iran. Ankara 2017, CHR.

<sup>25</sup> Russia officially disagrees with Iran over the support of the Assad regime by eventually foreseeing a secular majority rule, *Russia-Iran Partnership: An Overview and Prospects for the Future* 16 (Russian International Affairs Council and The Institute for Iran-Eurasia Studies, Moscow 2016).

<sup>26</sup> Conversations, Teheran 2014, CHR. This is also the gist of Posch's argument in W. Posch, *The Third World, Global Islam and Pragmatism. The Making of Iranian Foreign Policy* (SWP Research Paper 2013).

<sup>27</sup> Conversation with Iranian scholar, 2016, CHR; see also Posch, *supra* n. 26, at 21.

<sup>28</sup> Conversations in Iran, 2014, with Iranian experts Doha, Berlin 2016, CHR.

by concerns that the costs of confrontation were not sustainable. It remains to be seen if the current confrontational policies by the US under President Trump will weaken the cooperative narrative, or demonstrate that recourse to alternatives to cooperation offers worse prospects.

These differences lead to competing *coping strategies*, producing seemingly contradictory Iranian policies. While the nuclear agreement follows the cooperative narrative of President Rouhani and his supporters, the Revolutionary Guard, who supported a different candidate for president than Rouhani, controls the confrontational policies in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, as well as the contentious missile tests.

Like Saudi Arabia, Iran generates the threats, by provoking counter forces, their security policies intend to contain. The Israeli perception of an existential threat by Iran has made an Israeli attack a permanent item on the security agenda.<sup>29</sup> By contrast, would Iran recognize the State of Israel, cease its hostile rhetoric and abandon its strategy to arm Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria, and Hamas with other groups in Gaza, and instead enters into a regional political process with Israel, the Israeli threat would cease and sanctions impossible to continue. Without the perceived Iranian threat, there would also be more pressure on Israel to find workable political solutions with the Palestinians, a purported Iranian goal.

### 3.3 ISRAEL

Israel's security thinking is driven by the *formative experience* of the collective, existential trauma of the Holocaust. Therefore, Israelis have *core beliefs* in which they cast themselves in the role of victim and easily casts adversaries in the role of Hitler, or at least anti-Semites. The formative experience of the Holocaust as interpreted by the core beliefs turns into an analogy in Israeli security thinking that evokes a sense of chronic vulnerability. Israel's small territory and population in comparison to those seen to threaten Israel's existence aggravate this sense of chronic vulnerability. In this perspective, territorial expansion on the West Bank and the immigration of around a million Russians, combine to make Israel less vulnerable.<sup>30</sup>

However, these core beliefs lead to competing *grand strategies* between military and political considerations. These two factors of vulnerability, small territory and population, constitute Israel's strategic dilemma: military considerations make preemption imperative, while political considerations, the need to secure international support

<sup>29</sup> Conversations in Israel 2011; C. Jones, *The Foreign Policy of Israel*, in *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States* 297 (R. Hinnebusch & A. Ehteshami, 2d ed., Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. 2014).

<sup>30</sup> Conversations with Israeli experts 2016, CHR.

from potential allies, call for restraint. The ensuing policies, *coping strategies*, therefore balance the conflicting military and political imperatives. The current trade-off is probably strongly shaped by the diverging experiences of three wars.

In the Suez Crisis in 1956, Israel joined forces with Britain and France to eradicate the threat from Nasser in Egypt, seen as a new Hitler, in a preemptive strike, which failed for lack of international support. The feeling of abandonment by the US in the Suez crisis of 1956 gave impetus to the development of nuclear arms, at the time considered the panacea of security.<sup>31</sup> The Soviet nuclear threats during the Suez Crisis, by Soviet leaders thought to have been decisive, probably reinforced this impetus.<sup>32</sup>

In 1967, the preemption of an impending attack brought victory. The failure of 1956 for lack of political support instilled caution in the Israeli Government, but the military considerations prevailed.<sup>33</sup> Israel's war reached its immediate goals but turned into a self-defeating security strategy. The long-term political costs of occupying power still undermine Israel's security by blocking normalization of relations with surrounding states.

In 1973, the trade-off between military and political considerations turned out differently. This time, the decision not to preempt the impending attack caused a near-defeat and probably brought Israel close to using tactical nuclear arms.<sup>34</sup>

On balance, Israel's historical experiences will probably make decision-makers prone to preemptive attack. However, Israel, although under the current circumstances obviously dependent on a strong military force for their survival, also generates its own security vulnerabilities by failing to enter into political processes. While the victory in 1967 turned Israel into an occupant, and thus created a long-term political vulnerability, the failure to deliver on the promises of the Oslo process undermined trust that Israel enters into political processes in good faith, a high cost for short-term gains.

### 3.4 TURKEY

In the state system formed by the remaining major stable states in the Middle East, Turkey is on the margin of the core triangle formed by Saudi Arabia, Iran and Israel. In the state system, they alternate between the three roles of mediator, balancer and catalyst.<sup>35</sup> With its close ties to the EU as well as membership in

<sup>31</sup> M. G. Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* 508 (Random House Publishing Group 1988); S. M. Hersh, *The Samson Option: Israel's Nuclear Arsenal and American Foreign Policy* 43 (Random House Incorporated 1993).

<sup>32</sup> A. Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* 55 (Columbia University Press 1998); J. L. Gaddis, *The Cold War* 77, 128 (Penguin Books 2007).

<sup>33</sup> T. Segev & J. Cohen, *1967: Israel, the War and the Year That Transformed the Middle East* 244–245, 285, 286–287, 288–289, 296 (Abacus 2008).

<sup>34</sup> Bundy, *supra* n. 31, at 510; Hersh, *supra* n. 31, at 226.

<sup>35</sup> Conversations with Turkish diplomats and scholars, CHR.



NATO and the Council of Europe, with a social and political model still not too far removed from Europe, Turkey is the key entry point for an innovative EU policy towards the Middle East states.

Turkey differs fundamentally from the countries in the triangle by the fact that the *formative experience* at the root of the current policies is not the memory of an external threat, but the experience of forging a national identity over divisive Islamic and Kurdish identities. The emergence of a Turkish Islamic political party now in power must be seen as the culmination of a domestic Sunni Islamic power struggle with the secular nationalistic regime supported by the military.<sup>36</sup> The ensuing *core belief* is that Sunni Islam has been under threat but is now triumphant in Turkey. The next step, the *grand strategy*, is to seek replicas of the Turkish experience in other Sunni majority states. Therefore, other Sunni Islamic movements in the region with whom the Islamic regime in Ankara feels an affinity should have Turkish support, especially the Moslem Brotherhood.<sup>37</sup>

This grand strategy leads to *coping strategies* in the form of specific policies in the various local conflicts. In Iraq, Ankara has been cultivating relations with the independent Kurdish polity, despite the concerns of Kurdish separatism in Turkey itself and in Syria. In Syria, Turkey originally wanted to remove the incumbent regime rooted in the Alevite religious minority and the vintage secular Arab nationalist Baath party to replace it with a majority Sunni Islamic regime.<sup>38</sup> This policy has now been abandoned in favour of a pragmatic, preferably transitional accommodation with the incumbent regime in Syria for two reasons. The resurgence of Kurdish political assertiveness prompted by their role of Western military ally in Syria, and the missing feasible Sunni political alternative in Syria, left Turkey with no other choice. The recent Turkish invasion of Kurdish strongholds in Syria is a long announced consequence of the overriding concern over Kurdish assertiveness on Turkey's border, driven by the perception of implications for internal Turkish – Kurdish affairs.<sup>39</sup>

Seen over time, the current Islamic Turkish regime has failed in its foreign policy goals of projecting the Turkish model in the region, most notably in Syria. Instead, like the other states in the state system discussed in this article, also Turkey generates its own security vulnerabilities. Turkish security is undermined by polarizing the Turkish – Kurdish conflicts, in which Turkey's war against the Kurdish forces in Syria is a projection of the inter-Turkish conflict. Potentially, the Sunni – Alevi polarization in Turkey could be aggravated by Turkey's conflicts

<sup>36</sup> P. Robins, *The Foreign Policy of Turkey*, in Hinnebusch & Ehteshami, *supra* n. 29, at 320, 329. Conversations in Turkey 2017, CHR.

<sup>37</sup> Conversations with Turkish scholars, CHR.

<sup>38</sup> Robins, *supra* n. 36, at 322, 335. Conversations with Turkish scholars, CHR.

<sup>39</sup> Conversations in Ankara 2017, CHR; P. Tank, *Turkey's Intervention in Northeast Syria and the Withdrawal of US Troops Has Created Upheaval in the Region, Forcing Kurds to Renegotiate Gains and Alliances*, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/80099> (accessed 11 Nov. 2019).

with the Alevite minority regime in Syria. Worst of all, Turkey has destabilized its immediate vicinity, Syria, with serious repercussions in the form of refugees and terrorism, and even more serious long-term vulnerabilities. Turkish security is not feasible without regional stability.

#### 4 THE COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING BY STRATEGIC DISCOURSE

All policies discussed fail to bring the intended result, more security. Instead, they have dangerous unintended consequences. The four states that form the Middle East state system are currently locked in a dysfunctional dynamic edging them closer to the brink of an all-out regional war. Conflicts are generally conceived as military confrontations rather than political differences that can be managed, even resolved, by consultations. To show how these policies are self-defeating, a strategic discourse should hold out the analogy to the political crisis in Europe prior to World War I<sup>40</sup> and the dangerous period during the Cold War between the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the end of the Cold War in 1989.<sup>41</sup> How can this be done?

Time to take the model adapted from cognitive behavioural therapy a step further, from explaining dysfunctional thoughts that form the mental models to designing a cognitive restructuring by strategic discourse.

Three behavioural economists that are Nobel Laureates have elaborated the concept of mental model:

- Simon coined the phrase *satisficing*,<sup>42</sup> which denotes the common behaviour of relating to a problem by picking the most available theory and hypothesis about options, and then stick to it, proceeding within the confines of the initial assumptions. The failure to consider alternative theories and hypothesis about options are in his view the most common cause of error in decision-making. It certainly has been in Western post-Cold War foreign policy decision-making.
- Kahneman argues that we think by *associating with a reference in a context*, and intuitively chose the association that most easily comes

<sup>40</sup> How World I was precipitated by failure of political and diplomatic crisis management, hence 'a tragedy, not a crime', is the argument in C. M. Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (Allen Lane 2012).

<sup>41</sup> This CIA study describes how the Western reactions to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 had dangerous unintended consequences by precipitating a Soviet fear of a US nuclear attack B. B. Fischer, *A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare* (Central Intelligence Agency, Center for the Study of Intelligence 1997).

<sup>42</sup> H. A. Simon, *Administrative Behavior* 118–120 (4th ed., Free Press 2013).

to mind at any moment.<sup>43</sup> In political analyses, the reference is a historical analogy.<sup>44</sup> We analyse a new political problem by comparing it to a previous occurrence, as we interpret it. An example will show how this works. In his memoirs of his time in Norwegian politics, previous Prime Minister, now Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg places his policy in Libya in the context of Rwanda and Ex-Yugoslavia. In his interpretation, Western failure to prevent by humanitarian intervention the mass murder enabled these cases of genocide. He felt, in his own account, compelled to prevent the same from happening in Libya. However, in hindsight, a more relevant context would be the failures of previous military interventions to produce the intended results, in Afghanistan and Iraq. He explicitly prefers the analogy of failure to prevent humanitarian catastrophes by military intervention to the analogy of failed military interventions.<sup>45</sup>

- Thaler argues that behaviour can be influenced by persistent messaging, ‘nudging’.<sup>46</sup> Kahneman supports this argument. The implication of his theory that *cognitive accessibility* influences our thinking<sup>47</sup> is that frequency of exposure to an argument makes it gradually more persuasive by moving the intended association closer to the top of our minds. This is of course the secret behind all propaganda from Hitler to Trump, and of all advertising.

It follows from the theories that a *strategic discourse* can influence mental models by introducing an alternative historical analogy as a new reference and make this more persuasive by persistent communication. In this specific strategic discourse, the preferred alternative analogy is the European transformation from violent confrontation to the pragmatic, peaceful cooperation in modern Europe. Therefore, an innovative European policy in the state system should invoke Europe’s own experience.

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<sup>43</sup> D. Kahneman, *Maps of Bounded Rationality: A Perspective on Intuitive Judgment and Choice*, in *Nobel Committee. Prize Lecture 1454* (Stockholm 2002).

<sup>44</sup> Kissinger first introduced the author to the role of history as analogy in foreign policy in his analyses of the post-Napoleonic political order in Europe, see Kissinger, *supra* n. 14. For a comprehensive analyses of the role of analogies in political decisions, see Khong, *supra* n. 14.

<sup>45</sup> J. Stoltenberg, *Min Historie* 439–449 (Oslo Gyldendal Norsk Forlag 2016).

<sup>46</sup> R. Thaler, *Misbehaving: The Making of Behavioral Economics* (W.W. Norton & Company 2015). In this book, he takes stock after his influential book *Nudge* came out in 2008. I find the book of varying quality of analyses and relevance, but in the *Conclusion* he gives an overview of the insights for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics, at 347–359.

<sup>47</sup> Kahneman, *supra* n. 43, at 1452–1454.

## 5 COPING WITH THE COMPLICATION OF EMOTION

Is it, really, that simple, introducing an alternative historical analogy and communicate it persistently over time? No, all humans are more complicated. The problem is that a strategic discourse cannot separate cognition from emotion.

Emotions, inevitably inherent in all human interaction, may block or induce a change of mental model. The sense of identity is heavily invested in the mental models. The reason is that individuals interpret events into the narrative of their lives. This narrative constructs identity. Core identity, ‘my story about me’, is inflexible, while relational identity, ‘my story about us’, is flexible and dynamic in an inter-group process.<sup>48</sup> This turns into the fundamental problem of political process: How may a strategic discourse construct the relationship between ‘us’ and ‘the others’. Where does the discourse draw the boundaries, and, most significantly, how can the discourse construct the inter-group relations along the continuum between confrontation and cooperation?

In other words, minds construct mental models that subsume individuals in a group. At Harvard Program on Negotiation, the essence of Shapiro’s theories on managing emotions in conflict, his *Relational Identity Theory*, is that the nature of the inter-group process determines the nature of inter-group relations by generating or violating a sense of *affiliation* and *autonomy*.<sup>49</sup> As a function of these *relational identity concerns*, inter-group relations produce a sense of group identity that ranges between rigid and monolithic to flexible and pragmatic. Significantly, in a flexible and pragmatic mode, group identities may become multiple and overlapping under a superintendent identity,<sup>50</sup> such a modern state or a regional political order, typically modern Europe.

## 6 ENGAGE IDENTITY AS NORMATIVE PROJECT

The problem in applying this insight into the relational identity concerns of affiliation and autonomy is their paradoxical relationship: To the degree ‘I’ am affiliated, that is included, ‘I’ am not autonomous, and vice versa.<sup>51</sup> This article argues that the solution is to accept identity, the story, as a *normative project*.<sup>52</sup> Identity, sense of self, is who ‘we’ want to be, not the one others may find ‘we’ are.

<sup>48</sup> D. Shapiro, *Negotiating the Nonnegotiable: How to Resolve Your Most Emotionally Charged Conflicts* 4, 8–9, 12–14 (Penguin Publishing Group 2016).

<sup>49</sup> D. L. Shapiro, *Relational Identity Theory. A Systematic Approach for Transforming the Emotional Dimension of Conflict*, 68(7) *Am. Psychol.* 68, 636–638 (2010).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, at 641.

<sup>51</sup> Shapiro, *supra* n. 48, at 223.

<sup>52</sup> The concept of *normative project* derives from the historian Winkler in his ‘History of the West.’ For a brief version of his argument: H. A. Winkler, *Greatness and Limits of the West. The History of an Unfinished Project*, LEQS Paper (London School of Economics 2011).

This approach of accepting identity as a normative project obviates the need to point out how their story contravenes others' story or is unreasonable, or how they fall short by their own standards. In cases when the author first felt obliged to set the record straight in this way, the responses blocked a strategic discourse to introduce alternative analogies. By contrast, a strategic discourse was enabled in cases where autonomy was respected by not challenging assumptions and inferences, while building affiliation by the act of engaging. Engaging on these terms, so the author found out, also enables building a sense of affinity by exploring interfaces of values and views. A sense of involvement and a sense of affinity are two dimensions of the relational identity concern of affiliation.

## 7 ENVISIONING

Knowing that parties to the current conflicts in the Middle East have their identities heavily invested in their perceptions of political reality, the strategic discourse coped with the relational identity concerns by inviting parties to envision a new regional political order. A vision is an idea of a relationship beyond the current disagreements. The nature of a vision obviates the need to set the record straight by challenging existing narratives and policy choices. This vision then enables the alternative analogy to start its intended climb to top of people's minds where it would bear on the perception and choice of political options.

### 7.1 EVOKING THE EUROPEAN ANALOGY. PUTTING MY STRATEGIC DISCOURSE TO A TEST

In the fall of 2017, the author was able to put the theory on strategic discourse to a test in encounters with representatives from all states and parties involved in the state system formed by the four states. The specifics of these encounters are under Chatham House Rule. Was the strategic discourse able to start a cognitive restructuring?

This is the gist of the strategic discourse, initiated by presentations and followed up in interventions:

A realistic vision needs to invoke a historical analogy that evokes positive emotions about desirable changes. Therefore, the initial two questions were:

- What would a post-conflict political order look like in the Middle East?
- What can the states in the Middle East adapt from the European model of transformation from violent conflict to peaceful, pragmatic cooperation?

The strategic discourse then proceeded to contend that security must be secure. This statement is not the truism it appears because, so the discourse contended, the

historical record shows that most security policies have had the effect of impairing security for all concerned. This is certainly the case in the state system formed by Israel, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

To substantiate the point, the discourse quoted two successful practitioners of highly complicated diplomacy. Giandomenico Picco, in his capacity of UN envoy, negotiated the peace between Iraq and Iran in 1988 and the related agreement to free hostages in Lebanon. He finds that security between states in the Middle East is interdependent because of *equality in vulnerability*.<sup>53</sup> Egon Bahr negotiated the German agreements with the Soviet Union and then the Eastern Bloc countries to secure peaceful coexistence. He advocated the concept of *collective or shared security*, stating that only this kind of security was truly secure.<sup>54</sup> Conceived military strategies have had unintended consequences. Military strategies shall deliver security. Therefore, security needs to be secure. Because modern states cannot escape their mutual vulnerability, security is mutual, or collective.

The European experience shows that deliberations on collective security is more secure than unilateral strategies without regard to the mental models of the perceived adversaries. From the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975 until deliberations on mutual security broke down in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, European security was more secure than between 1979 and the end of the Cold War in 1989. In 1983, the world was even on the edge of an all-out nuclear war by misjudgments of intentions.<sup>55</sup>

Then the strategic discourse argued that a vision invokes an experience that can be adapted. The most successful case of transformation from confrontation to pragmatic cooperation is Europe in the EU. I raised the question if the states of the Middle East could adapt the European model of transformation from violent conflict to peaceful, pragmatic cooperation. Europe was very violent and unstable, more like the current Middle East than current Europe. Two decisive factors produced European peace and cooperation. Courageous individuals defied overwhelming odds by personal initiatives at crucial crossroads. These initiatives were followed by joint deliberations.

Joint deliberation forges 'path dependence' on cooperation: Solutions outside the cooperation become gradually inconceivable, views converge gradually because 'we learn from each other when we talk to each other'. Deliberations do not eliminate crises, but thrive on them. Crises force the parties to face the

<sup>53</sup> [http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n\\_1687](http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_1687), (accessed 10 Nov. 2019). See also G. Picco, *Man Without a Gun: One Diplomat's Secret Struggle to Free the Hostages, Fight Terrorism, and End a War* (Times Book 1999); G. Picco, *The Future of the Past. The Sunni-Shiite Divide in the Greater Levant* (America. The National Catholic Rev. 2014).

<sup>54</sup> For a source in English, see interview 1994 with Metta Spencer, <http://russianpeaceanddemocracy.com/egon-bahr-1994> (accessed 10 Nov. 2019).

<sup>55</sup> This insight derives from CIA's study, Fischer, *supra* n. 41.

fundamental question: How realistic is my prospect that opting out of the cooperation will give me a better result?<sup>56</sup>

Agreements in deliberations will be compromises, imperfect solutions and incremental change. Nobody gets everything because everybody has to get something. However, we know we can gradually improve imperfect solutions by further deliberation.

A decisive question is if major issues need to be resolved to cooperate, or can those issues where agreement is feasible be resolved first, leaving the major issues for later? When agreement on major issues is not feasible in the short term, deliberation on specific issues where agreement by compromise on imperfect solution is possible, will, in the course of deliberations, make agreement on major issues more realistic.

The strategic discourse pointed to the Russian de-escalation zones in Syria as examples of feasible agreements. Under wise leadership, the experience of the de-escalation zones in Syria are applicable also to the other regional conflicts.

To consult on such matters of common importance, the Middle Eastern states need a regional organization, comparable to the role of the EU in current Europe. Saudi Arabia has shown how the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) can be a vehicle for negotiating compromises in the interest of regional peace and stability. The GCC could extend its consultations and expert cooperation to the other regional states, adapting the EU third-country cooperation and neighbourhood policy.<sup>57</sup>

The thorniest issue in Westerns relations with the states forming the state system is the differences over human rights and democracy. Yet, these issues were unavoidable in a strategic discourse that needed to establish credibility with all sides.

These issues were addressed as follows: The European experience is that modern Europe's ideas and practices of democracy and human rights give individuals a good life. Other countries have their own traditions of consultations and caring for the individual. The superintendent agreement is that the most important human right is that the state shall protect and care for the individual.

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<sup>56</sup> This dynamic, functional interpretation of the EU derives from the German historian Andreas Wirsching in A. Wirsching, *Der Preis Der Freiheit: Geschichte Europas in Unserer Zeit 17–18* (C.H. Beck 2012).

<sup>57</sup> This argument elaborated T. E. Fjærtøft, *Making the Gulf Cooperation Council the EU of the Middle East*, 23(4) *Eur. Foreign Aff. Rev.* 485–503 (2018).

## 8 HOW THE ATTEMPTED STRATEGIC DISCOURSE WORKED OUT

The theory set out, enabling cognitive restructuring, increasing cognitive accessibility of an alternative analogy, by engaging identity as a normative project, was tested in personal conversations after the presentations. Deliberately, feedback was not actively solicited, but the author awaited interlocutors to raise the matter. Surprisingly, unsolicited, very positive feedback ensued by a significant number of representatives from all concerned countries and parties to conflicts. The strategic discourse was in other words widely endorsed by those engaged.

Admittedly, this methodology has two obvious weaknesses. First, those who offered their positive feedback, were the most favourable, while those unfavourable would not engage; second, those who responded favourably could intend to be courteous rather than sincere. However, two factors reinforced the reliability of the responses. First, after previous attempts at strategic discourse that failed to elicit similar favourable responses, to be expected was that someone would dismiss the ideas as unrealistic or naïve (*'not a vision, but wishful thinking'*, as one critic put it on a previous occasion). Nobody did this time. Second, unfavourable respondents would not have sufficient motive to engage in an unsolicited conversation just to be polite.

A reasonable inference is that this difference between previous unsuccessful and this successful attempt at strategic discourse was caused by the following change in the theory: from rejecting the predominant narratives, the strategic discourse began to manage the *relational identity concerns* by engaging identities as *normative projects*. By extension of the normative projects, the strategic discourse invited parties to *envision* a new political order, contrary to the previous practice of making specific proposals in rejection of the dysfunctional narratives presented.

## 9 CONCLUSION

The trajectory of western foreign policy between the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the war in Syria shows a persistence in failure. In any other field of policy, most notably financial and economic policy, or applied science, like medicine, engineering or therapy, failure of this magnitude would spur a drive for more effective approaches. The persistent pattern of failure shows that this has not been the case in Western foreign policy decision-making.

These failures are brought into sharp focus by the French initiative, with Norway taking a lead role, to intervene militarily in Libya. A reasonable inference is that this intervention's failure to produce the intended results of a stable democratic regime respecting human rights led to inaction in Syria.



With the French and Norwegian responsibility for the crisis in Libya and Syria, European states now need to develop an innovative policy in the Middle East with more effective options than the current dichotomy between military intervention and inaction. The yet untested option is to engage the remaining major stable states that form the Middle East state system to advance a regional concert on a new regional political order by invoking the European transformation from violent confrontation to the current pragmatic cooperation in the EU.

European security was more secure in the period around the European Conference on Security and Cooperation in 1975, when dialogue and negotiations constructed a common security, than during periods of confrontation. Following Western boycott of political contacts in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 security became less secure. In 1983, the World was even on the brink an all-out nuclear war by misunderstanding.<sup>58</sup>

Such a European strategic discourse is now imperative and urgent to halt and reverse the current dynamic that edges the remaining stable states towards the brink of the abyss of an all-out war. Recurrence of war in the Middle East would have serious repercussions in Europe.

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<sup>58</sup> Fischer, *supra* n. 41.



# Making the Gulf Cooperation Council the EU of the Middle East

Torgeir E. FJÆRTOFT\*

*European countries must assume the leadership vacated by the United States under President Trump by a bold new political initiative in the Middle East. The EU should engage Saudi Arabia on extending the consultations and cooperation within the GCC – the Gulf Cooperation Council – to the other major regional states, in addition to Saudi Arabia they are Iran, Turkey and Israel. These states form the Middle East state system by mutually generating their behaviour. Specifically, the EU should urge that GCC adapt the EU third country and neighbourhood policies that would be the quickest way to turn the GCC into the EU of the Middle East. A strategic discourse adapting a model from cognitive behavioural therapy can introduce the European transformation as a vision in the state system.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The global political landscape has changed dramatically with the election of President Trump. European policy makers need to face up to the new reality: the post-World War II US leadership of the West has ended – at least for the near future. Therefore, Europe must assume the leadership the US vacated. A bold new European political initiative is imperative.

### 1.1 A BOLD NEW INITIATIVE

This bold new political initiative, this article argues, is that the European states should now engage Saudi Arabia, as the dominant power of the GCC – the Gulf Cooperation Council, to turn it into the EU of the Middle East. Within the regular consultations between the EU and GCC, European states should urge Saudi Arabia to initiate that the GCC adopts the EU third country and neighbourhood policies.

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This was the essence of the argument in a series of talks in Riyadh in the fall of 2017 and a presentation to a seminar with Saudi Arabian diplomats.<sup>1</sup> Their reaction was encouraging. As a vision beyond the current intractable conflicts, they found the idea of adapting the EU third country and neighbourhood policies interesting.

## 1.2 SIMPLEST WAY TO REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS

The argument made in Riyadh was that the simplest and fastest way for Saudi Arabia to extend consultations and cooperation to the other remaining stable states in the region, Iran, Turkey and Israel is by way of the GCC. Saudi Arabia could decide the GCC provides the missing vehicles for the kind of regional consultation and coordination that Clark finds made the difference between the successful handling of the Euro crisis and the political failures that led to World War I.<sup>2</sup>

The major regional powers, Saudi Arabia with Iran, Turkey and Israel, form the state system of the current Middle East in the sense that they primarily relate to each other and mutually generate their behaviour. Their interstate behaviour, and not the interventions by external powers, is the most decisive influence on the regional political stability. In this state system, the necessary first step in a political process is to persuade Saudi Arabia that using the GCC as a regional vehicle for consultations and cooperation is in their interest.

## 1.3 A DIFFERENT ANALYSIS OF THE EU

My analyses of the EU will depart from the two standard analytic approaches, either judge the EU by its stated policy goals, or by its legal framework, such as its institutions and its legislation. Few, if any, ask the obvious question if the inevitable shortcomings of a policy or legal framework means that the cooperation itself fails. Instead, we must assess success or failure of a policy by the presumed effects of a feasible alternative course of action. Therefore, my analyses are *functional*. I see the EU as a joint dynamic, evolving crisis management effort. On this basis, I set out some little known functional similarities between the GCC and the EU.

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<sup>1</sup> Eight years after I left the Norwegian Embassy as a diplomat I was invited to visit Riyadh as a visiting research fellow from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the Centre for Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies.

<sup>2</sup> C. M. Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* 555 (Allen Lane 2012).

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The following argument is generated by reflections, first on experiences as a diplomat and then researcher. These experiences comprise innumerable conversations with diverse individuals that form *epistemic communities*.<sup>3</sup> They have what can be termed *decision-shaping* roles.

These reflections form theories by *abductive reasoning*, which is applying theories to make sense of observations. Therefore, a *theory* is set of assumptions about the generic nature of a problem and its solution, and a *hypothesis* inferences from the theory in a specific case. In this article, the theory is that a strategic discourse can change assumptions by introducing an alternative analogy, and the hypothesis is that the EU by a strategic discourse can persuade Saudi Arabia to extend the consultations and cooperation within the GCC to the other major regional powers.

The following argument will reflect the abductive reasoning on intimate experience with the EU over many years, mostly on Norway's integration with the Internal Market, which Norway, with a few exceptions and adaptations, joined as part of the agreement on the EEA – European Economic Area.

Then the abductive reasoning on the EU formed a frame of reference for abductive reasoning on Saudi Arabia and the Middle East.<sup>4</sup>

## 3 STRATEGIC DISCOURSE

This article argues that the European states can persuade Saudi Arabia by following a theory on *strategic discourse*, adapted from a model for *cognitive restructuring* in cognitive behavioural therapy. In this model, our minds interpret a formative experience to shape our behaviour.<sup>5</sup> In political behaviour, the formative experience, as interpreted, is a historical analogy. Cognitive restructuring replaces a dysfunctional analogy with one more constructive. To work, the discourse must motivate change by persuading that it is both desirable and feasible.

The first step is the *cognitive case conceptualization*,<sup>6</sup> which for all practical purposes is abductive reasoning, sense making by applying theory to observations and experiences. The purpose of case conceptualization is to develop hypotheses

<sup>3</sup> E. Adler & P. M. Haas, *Conclusion: Epistemic Communities, World Order, and the Creation of a Reflective Research Program*, 46(1) Int'l Org. (1992).

<sup>4</sup> I served at the Norwegian Embassy in Riyadh 2008–2009. To my knowledge, I am the only diplomat-turned researcher that combines a broad professional experience with EU affairs, posting to Saudi Arabia and conversations, in my current capacity of researcher, in all the major states in the regional state system, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey and Iran.

<sup>5</sup> A. Wenzel, *Strategic Decision Making in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* (American Psychological Association 2013). Especially Chs 4 and 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, at 19.

for effective interventions. An intervention is a deliberate action with the purpose of effecting a desirable change.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4 HOW CAN WE CONCEPTUALIZE THE GCC AS A REGIONAL ORGANIZATION?

First three caveats. In the following, the article shall not address EU's current troubles for two reasons. First, the assumption that the EU will cope with also these crises; why is beyond the scope of this article. Second, the EU that the article suggests as alternative analogy is an idealized, simplified narrative of successful transformation that is true and relevant to degree it is persuasive. Moreover, in a longer historical perspective than a narrow focus on the current problems the narrative also holds up well against critical scrutiny. Nor will the article address the current stalemate of the GCC cooperation over the confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The reason is the assumption that Saudi Arabia can easily turn this around if persuaded it would be in their own interests, which it would be for reasons set out in this article.

The existing interstate organization most resembling the EU in the Middle East is the GCC – Gulf Cooperation Council. There are two overriding reasons for turning the GCC into a region-wide organization modelled on the EU:

- First, in his recent book on the political malfunctions that caused World War 1, Clark points out that lacking at the time of the political crises that turned into World War I were the current institutions serving as vehicles for consultations and crisis management during the Euro crisis at the time of his writing the book.<sup>8</sup> So also in the current Middle East. A regional interstate organization offers a low threshold for contact, consultation and cooperation. In other words, such an organization would provide a vehicle also for political crisis management and dialogue.
- Second, economic cooperation and integration will produce synergies that turn into regional economic growth, which in turn could open up employment. Idle young men are a security risk, and employment a security policy.

Critics of the argument that the EU can serve as model for the GCC may find it counter intuitive that specific historical developments in Europe have relevance in the current Middle East. Conversations forming the basis for this article have encountered two specific arguments against applying the European analogy to the current conflict in the state system formed by Israel, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia:

<sup>7</sup> M. B. Ballou, *Psychological Interventions: A Guide to Strategies* ix (Praeger 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Clark, *supra* n. 2.

- First, the current European cooperation is the result of unique circumstances. Hence, it is not a transferable model. A representative of the European Commission argued this, a Czech who had experienced the transformation following the end of the Cold War.<sup>9</sup>
- Second, only the defeat of Nazi Germany enabled the current peaceful European cooperation. An Israeli scholar argued this.<sup>10</sup> His implication was that a similar development in the Middle East required the defeat of totalitarian regimes, especially Iran.

However, these counter arguments miss the point. This article has previously set out how we can construct a *strategic discourse*. The arguments against the analogy of European transformation fail to appreciate Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman's *prospect theory* on how we construct our sense of political reality by associating with a reference in a context, or, put in simpler terms, by applying an analogy. We conceptualize by associating with analogies, not by relating logically and analytically to an objective reality.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the question is not whether the European transformation is a relevant model for the Middle East by some objective criteria. Since our political reality is entirely a cognitive construct, the analogy of European transformation is relevant to the degree decision-shapers can make decision-makers believe it is. The EU is, in the analyses of Andreas Wirsching, a *grand narrative* of change starting with the ashes of Europe after World War II bringing us the modern European society.<sup>12</sup> This narrative begins in the aftermath of a catastrophe comparable in destruction and human suffering to what the people in the Middle East endure today.

This argument is supported by the analyses of Robert Gerwarth. He argues that the breakdown of the superintendent pluralistic empires caused by World War I turned Europe into the most violent place on Earth, torn by a life-and-death struggle between competing group identities. He argues that the current conflicts in the Middle East are unresolved conflicts caused by the breakdown of a superintendent pluralistic polity, in this case in the wake of the breakdown of the Osman Empire.<sup>13</sup> In other words, in his analysis, by their root cause, the conflicts in the Middle East today do not differ fundamentally from the European conflicts overcome by the EU.

<sup>9</sup> Conversation in Riyadh (2009).

<sup>10</sup> Conversation in Israel (Dec. 2011).

<sup>11</sup> D. Kahneman, *Maps of Bounded Rationality: Psychology of Behavioral Economics*, 93(5) *Am. Econ. Rev.* (2003); Spiegel Interview with Daniel Kahneman (Spiegel Online 2012), <http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/interview-with-daniel-kahneman-on-the-pitfalls-of-intuition-and-memory-a-834407.html> (accessed 25 May 2012).

<sup>12</sup> A. Wirsching, *Demokratie Und Globalisierung: Europa Seit 1989* 221 (C. H. Beck 2015).

<sup>13</sup> R. Gerwarth, *The Vanquished. Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917–1923* (Penguin Books 2016).

The analogy of the EU should therefore have a powerful cognitive and emotional potential to capture the minds of the current decision-makers in the state system of the Middle East.

#### 4.1 WHY THE EU SHOULD ACT IN ITS OWN BEST INTEREST

There are two main reasons for the EU to act proactively to promote its cooperation as a model for interstate consultation and cooperation in this state system:

- First, the EU has an interest in stabilizing the region to prevent refugees, terrorism, organized crime and the negative effects on the world economy by disruptions of oil supplies.
- Second, the EU has an interest in discouraging the formation of a competing block of authoritarian states with Russia, Turkey, Iran and China. Conceivably, this block would be ethno religious, potentially aggressive, not pluralistic, pragmatic and peaceful, like the EU.<sup>14</sup> A nascent block of this kind is the *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* with its distinct mission of being an alternative block to the West.

For these reasons, I argue that it ought to be a goal of the EU, and by implication Norway, to make this happen. I now turn to how.

### 5 CONSTRUCTING THE EU'S STRATEGIC DISCOURSE IN THE STATE SYSTEM

Human rights issues currently block EU's efforts to conclude a free trade agreement with the GCC,<sup>15</sup> and by implication a common discourse with Saudi Arabia for persuading them to turn the GCC into a regional organization.

It is significant that the talks on a free trade agreement with the GCC seem to have stalled over the most normative part of the agenda, at the cost of unrealized synergies in economic cooperation and, conceivably, lost opportunities for cooperation in crisis management. Compromise on issues central to the EU cooperation has obviously been difficult.

The most likely reason is that the EU sees itself as a normative project<sup>16</sup>; this self-image is the motivational force driving the successful quest for pragmatic compromises. A common discourse on human rights imposed by the EU was a

<sup>14</sup> Conversations with Turkish and Iranian scholars.

<sup>15</sup> Conversation with Norwegian expert.

<sup>16</sup> I derive the concept of *normative project* from Heinrich August Winkler's work *History of the West*. For his brief introduction in English, see H. A. Winkler, *Greatness and Limits of the West. The History of an Unfinished Project*, 30 LEQS Paper (London School of Economics 2011).



major stabilizing factor in EU's dealings by pragmatic compromises with the Eastern European states following the end of the Cold War in 1989.<sup>17</sup> EU's normative project has two dimensions: first, peace, democracy and respect for human rights, second, pragmatic problem solving by compromise on imperfect solutions in processes comprising diverse interests.<sup>18</sup>

Normative projects establish political legitimacy.<sup>19</sup> Legitimacy is important in defusing potential conflicts because it is a condition for accepting policies. Legitimacy in international relations derives from ideas along the continuum between realists and constructionists. To the pure realist, the international order is the result of a balance of power while the pure constructionist believes an idea or an ideology can engineer the international order by their blueprint. To constructionists, legitimacy is the perception of correspondence between normative projects and perceptions of reality. However, I share the view of the historian Gordon Craig and the political scientist Gordon A. Alexander that political legitimacy has actually two dimensions: first, the goals pursued by power must be desirable; the normative, or constructionist, dimension; second the policy in pursuance of the desirable goals need to be feasible, the cognitive, or realist dimension.<sup>20</sup>

In dealing with the state system formed by Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey and Israel, conflicting legitimacies are a serious obstacle to developing an effective discourse with the purpose of promoting regional institutions that are more inclusive.<sup>21</sup> This obstacle of conflicting legitimacies exists between the West and potential partners among the regional states, in particular in the case of the EU dealing with Turkey as a possible Member State and Saudi Arabia as a desired contract partner for a trade agreement between the EU and GCC. These conflicts are actually over the two competing concepts of legitimacy: correspondence between normative project and reality, or the double demand of desirability and feasibility.

This insight has two important implications for the design of a strategic discourse to introduce the EU cooperation as an alternative analogy:

- First, a strategic discourse cannot challenge the normative projects that form the core of the group identities.<sup>22</sup>
- Second, some will be more attuned to arguments about feasibility.

<sup>17</sup> A. Wirsching, *Der Preis Der Freiheit: Geschichte Europas in Unserer Zeit* 73 (C. H. Beck 2012).

<sup>18</sup> My own inference after several years of contact with EU officials and officials in Member States.

<sup>19</sup> E. Stoddard, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place? Internal–External Legitimacy Tensions and EU Foreign Policy in the European Periphery*, 37(5) *J. Eur. Integration* (2015).

<sup>20</sup> A. George Craig Gordon & L. Alexander, *Force and Statecraft. Diplomatic Problems of Our Time* 103 (Oxford University Press 1983).

<sup>21</sup> Stoddard, *supra* n. 19.

<sup>22</sup> On the nature of core identity, see D. Shapiro, *Negotiating the Nonnegotiable: How to Resolve Your Most Emotionally Charged Conflicts* 13–15 (Penguin Publishing Group 2016).

When the issues of conflicting legitimacies are handled in a discourse over the normative projects, a discourse on solutions can stand a better chance to have the intended effect. In my view, Saudi Arabia has a domestic political culture of pragmatic decision-making by consensus building,<sup>23</sup> and essentially remains so during the ongoing political changes.<sup>24</sup>

GCC is today dominated by Saudi Arabia and for that reason an instrument of Saudi Arabian power. The most effective argument to expand parts of the GCC cooperation to comprise Iran, Turkey and Israel is precisely that it is in Saudi Arabia's objective interest, the premise for a rational policy. Regional cooperation is now imperative in the face of new, shared threats like IS the Caliphate and successor extremist movements, and general destabilization of Saudi Arabia's region. The EU is the most effective regional organization ever. It has served as the vehicle for European change from confrontation to cooperation. As such, it should serve as a model for a new Saudi Arabian strategy for the GCC.

A common perception is that for cooperation to evolve between Israel, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia, all parties must have their normative projects implemented to resolve the crises between the countries. In other words, the assumption is that resolving the issues in the current crises leads to cooperation, instead of the alternative assumption that cooperation leads to solutions of crises. Andreas Wirsching, in his study of European history after the end of the Cold War, points out that European cooperation has not eliminated crises. Quite to the contrary, precisely crises drive the cooperation.<sup>25</sup>

This observation on the very basic mechanism that drives cooperation is highly relevant for the current state of crisis in the state system formed by Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran, where the assumption seems to be the reverse: that they need to solve crises *before* they can initiate cooperation. By contrast, in Europe, the cooperation succeeds in response to crises because parties settle for compromise on imperfect solutions. Between bold political initiatives and crises, the European cooperation evolves by incremental successes in deliberations. The participatory decision-making process generates ownership to the compromises required. Nobody can get everything because everybody has to get something.

Gradually, parties to the cooperation come to think that they have more to lose by opting out. Solutions outside the cooperation become increasingly

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<sup>23</sup> My own inference from conversations in Saudi Arabia as a diplomat 2008–2009.

<sup>24</sup> Conversations in Riyadh, fall of 2017. I address this issue in a separate article.

<sup>25</sup> Wirsching, *supra* n. 17, at 154. The following analyses of European cooperation is based on my experience with EU/EEA affairs as a diplomat and numerous conversations, meetings and seminars in this capacity.

inconceivable. *Path dependence* is the term Wirsching applies to this political phenomenon.<sup>26</sup> In his view, this path dependence of cooperation also leads to convergence in thinking.<sup>27</sup> Wirsching's concept of *path dependence* corresponds to Kahneman's concept of *anchoring*: The point of reference for considering options.<sup>28</sup> As I have set out, in political analyses the point of reference is a historical analogy. For this reason, I now introduce the *German analogy*.

### 5.1 THE GERMAN ANALOGY

In considering policy interventions in the Middle East, the EU should view The Arab Spring in 2011 as a paradigm change comparable to the end of the Cold War in 1989. Therefore, it is relevant to consider the potential and pitfalls of an expanded GCC role with the analogy of the role of the EU following the end of the Cold War in 1989. At that time, Germany drove EU policies towards the countries set adrift by the collapse of the Soviet power block and communism. Therefore, the analogy of German policy in 1989 may serve as a reference by which we could analyse the potential and pitfalls of current EU policy towards the Middle East.

German policies in Europe following the end of the Cold War we can classify as one success and one failure. The difference between the two shows the potential and pitfall of using the EU as a lever in regional crisis management.

In Wirsching's analyses, the German policy to use the EU to stabilize Eastern Europe following the end of the Cold War succeeded by three decisive factors:

- The framework of the nation states was left intact as stabilizing frameworks in the most decisive period of transition.<sup>29</sup>
- The perception of a successful economic and social development of Western Europe created a strong pull towards joining a working cooperation<sup>30</sup>;
- The EU offered a ready political discourse to which the new partners could latch on.<sup>31</sup>

This article argues that these policies initiated by Germany and implemented with the EU as policy instrument enabled the peaceful transition to democracy and

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, at 72.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, at 17.

<sup>28</sup> A. Tversky & D. Kahneman, *Judgement Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*, 185 Sci. (1974); D. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* 427–430 (Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Wirsching, *supra* n. 17, at 121.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, at 72–77.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, at 73.

regional stability in Eastern Europe. The result was the integration of Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War.

This article takes issue with those that now dismiss this EU expansion as a misjudgment producing a dangerous failure, the main cause of EU's current crises. Despite EU's current problems with these new Member States, ranging from corruption to rejection of EU's normative political project, this integration was successful in comparison to the likely alternative, a development as in Ex-Yugoslavia.

The integration of the Eastern European countries took dramatic conceptual changes in the EU, departing significantly from how it was designed up until that time. Germany drove this change by its initiatives to leave the cautious approach of the EU up until that point of avoiding new members before consolidating the integration. This was a significant change. The leader of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, as an instrument of the old cautious policy, had initiated the framework of the European Economic Area as an alternative to membership. On German initiative, the EU left the old cautious line of consolidation before enlarging and decided to pursue both goals at the same time.<sup>32</sup> This bold move, a political leap of faith, was probably decisive in stemming the potentially disruptive effects of the emerging ethno-nationalisms in Eastern Europe.<sup>33</sup>

However, in Yugoslavia all these critical factors failed:

- The framework of the nation state fragmented into weak and disputed successor political entities.<sup>34</sup>
- There was no prospect at that point to join the successful model of Western Europe;
- There was no available alternative discourse to the polarization of the emerging ethno-nationalistic group identities.<sup>35</sup>

In Wirsching's analyses, the Ex-Yugoslavia tragedy was set in motion by a German policy mistake, premature recognition of Slovenia's and Croatia's independence.<sup>36</sup> As a result, while the ethno-nationalism that succeeded communism as superintendent identity in Eastern Europe was defanged, in Ex-Yugoslavia it was left unabated and took a destructive course, leading to violation, violence, war and ethnic cleansing. Put differently, while the EU

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, at 169.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, at 80.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, at 125.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, at 124.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, at 15; H. A. Winkler, *Geschichte Des Westens: Vom Kalten Krieg Zum Mauerfall 1094* (C. H. Beck 2014).

under German stewardship took charge of the social and political development in Eastern Europe, they left Ex-Yugoslavia to its fate. The analogy to Syria is striking. While the violent disruption of Yugoslavia, with its collateral damage of mass migration, extremism and organized crime, posed a very serious threat to European stability, so does the violent conflict in Syria, with similar collateral damage, pose an equally serious threat to both Saudi Arabia and the other regional powers. Therefore, I now turn to how Saudi Arabia can apply the German analogy.

## 6 SAUDI ARABIA APPLYING THE GERMAN ANALOGY

An EU policy to turn the GCC into a regional organization by an adapted model of the EU third country and neighbourhood policies would first have to engage Saudi Arabia as the decisive power. Applying the European analogy, as set out by Wirsching, to the Middle East state system, the question is how Saudi Arabia can apply the three decisive factors he found made the difference, between peace in Eastern Europe and war in Ex-Yugoslavia, to the current regional conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen:

- How can the existing political entities be preserved to stabilize transitions?
- How can a successful pull towards cooperation be built?
- How can a discourse conducive to cooperation be constructed?

### 6.1 PRESERVING POLITICAL ENTITIES

The decision-makers in Riyadh now make similar mistakes as Germany towards the dissolving Yugoslavian state. The strategy of supporting certain factions in the internal power struggle rather than broker a national process of inclusion and integration has that effect in Yemen, Iraq and Syria. In fact, a worst case scenario would be if Saudi Arabia's current efforts to weaken Iran succeed to the degree that Iran became a failed state, or, short of that, the revolutionary Islamic regime were replaced by a more aggressive and expansionist Persian nationalistic regime.<sup>37</sup> By contrast, a realistic reading of Saudi Arabia's regional security interests indicates that the single most effective policy initiative would be to enter into collusion with Iran about regional crisis management.

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<sup>37</sup> A. Saleh, *Ethnic Identity and the State in Iran* 167 (Palgrave Macmillan 2013); Conversation with Iranian researcher.

## 6.2 GENERATING PULL OF COOPERATION

The German analogy shows that cooperation perceived to be successful exercises a strong pull on potential new partners. How can the GCC cooperation present itself as attractive to the other major regional powers? Especially Iran will conceivably meet with initial reservation a Saudi Arabian initiative to invite them to join GCC consultations, not to mention cooperation.

At the inception of the current European Union, the strategy was to prevent war by integrating the basic economic sectors of coal and steel. In the Gulf today, the corresponding economic sector would be natural gas. In fact, natural gas is even more strategic in the Gulf Region than coal or steel was in Europe in the early 1950s since gas can only be utilized to its full economic potential in a regional integration.<sup>38</sup> Cooperation on the integrated exploration and utilization of gas could spur a wider agenda of practical cooperation in joint interest.<sup>39</sup>

Regional integration of gas supply requires huge infrastructure investments in pipelines. The perspectives need to be long-term. The parameters for calculating profitability cannot be confined to current market price, since the circumstances deciding it are volatile and subject to change. Building interdependence reduces risk and stabilizes prices. Therefore, such projects in the Middle East must be sustained by political visions of cooperation.

Regional integration of gas supply can ease the Saudi Arabian long-term energy predicament of declining export earnings combined with the dual challenge of increasing domestic consumption of oil and spending of oil revenue.<sup>40</sup> By tapping into gas fields that straddle borders, such as the vast South Pars field under the Gulf, extending into Iran and Qatar, Saudi Arabia could release oil for export, which they currently need to divert to domestic power production, desalination and the petrochemical industry. Iran, for its part, would reap enormous benefits from regional energy integration by creating a stable market for Iranian gas. This Saudi Arabian/Iranian complementarity has an inherent potential for powerful synergies.<sup>41</sup> In addition, certain promising new oil fields in Iran straddle borders.<sup>42</sup> To be commercially feasible, the development of cross-border

<sup>38</sup> J.-F. Seznec, *Intra-Regional Energy Cooperation. Unlocking the Middle East's Potential*, MEI Policy Paper (The Middle East Institute 2016).

<sup>39</sup> I am indebted to Professor Anoush Ehteshami for pointing my thinking in this direction.

<sup>40</sup> E. Woertz, *The Domestic Challenges in the Saudi Energy Market and Their Regional and Geopolitical Implications*, NOREF (2013), [http://www.peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow\\_site/storage/original/application/05a485f202440778052158eb7ef9808b.pdf](http://www.peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/05a485f202440778052158eb7ef9808b.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> P. Aarts & J. van Duijne Aarts, *Saudi Arabia After U.S.-Iranian Detente: Left in the Lurch?*, XVI(3) M. E. Pol'y 74 (2009); Seznec, *supra* n. 38, at 13–17.

<sup>42</sup> R. Mills, *Iran's Oil Plans in 2014*, Payvand Iran News, 14 Jan. 2014, <http://www.payvand.com/news/14/jan/1094.html>.

fields needs a modicum of political stability. Only a degree of regional political cooperation can induce stability.

In the case of Iran, an additional pull towards the GCC could conceivably be the pragmatic cooperation in areas covered by the EU Internal Market that Hertog points out as a significant achievement by the GCC cooperation.<sup>43</sup> GCC has a potential as a vehicle for technical consultation and cooperation between the Gulf States and Iran. The EU could conceivably facilitate joint expert groups between the GCC and Iran within its European Neighbourhood policy to develop ideas for common solutions to shared problems. EU's so-called European Neighbourhood Policy comprises Israel, along with Arab countries.<sup>44</sup> EU excludes Iran, which, whatever the reasons, is obviously untenable given Iran's weight and influence. Expert groups is probably the type of cooperation with the lowest threshold. Such cooperation could then evolve into the kind of path-dependence on cooperation Wirsching sees as the driving force of EU cooperation.<sup>45</sup>

The chief pull factor in Europe following the end of the Cold War in 1989, EU membership, is not a feasible option in the current Middle East, not for Turkey either, at least not under the current circumstance and for the near future. The EU now conducts its discourse with countries considered important for the stability of EU's neighbourhood by various programs designed to accomplish the same goals of stabilization without the leverage of membership prospects. In other words, the EU tries to enforce compliance with EU goals by various sorts of conditionality, such as offering the prospect of financial contributions and inclusion in various EU programs and areas of cooperation.

With Saudi Arabia and the other GCC countries, the EU wants to conclude a free trade agreement. This agreement is foreseen to cover the parts of the EU cooperation seen most relevant to promote EU interests with this group of countries.<sup>46</sup>

These talks were suspended in 2008 by the GCC side,<sup>47</sup> presumably over the human rights issues.<sup>48</sup> However, the case for cooperation remains urgent in the areas the EU intends to cover by the agreement.

<sup>43</sup> S. Hertog, *GCC Economic Integration: Focus on Nitty-Gritty of Convergence Rather Than High-Profile Projects*, GRC Gulf Papers, 18 (Gulf Research Center 2014).

<sup>44</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/ext-dimension/neighbourhood/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/ext-dimension/neighbourhood/index_en.htm), [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/overview\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/overview_en) (accessed 12 June 2016).

<sup>45</sup> Wirsching, *supra* n. 17, at 18.

<sup>46</sup> The EU Commission, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/regions/gulf-region/>, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/regions/gulf-region/> (accessed 25 May 2018).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> My conversations with officials familiar with the discussions.

The most urgent case for technical cooperation across the Gulf is on shipping security. The current unstable situation in the Gulf poses a threat to both Saudi Arabian and Iranian security and economic interests. The Gulf is probably the most vital and yet vulnerable shipping lane in the world, which teeters chronically on the brink of military clashes and environmental catastrophes, such as oil spills.

The larger Gulf region also shares a common vulnerability in case of accidents at nuclear power plants. Nuclear power plants in the U.A.E. and most likely Saudi Arabia may follow the Iranian nuclear power plant at Bushehr close to the Gulf. The recent nuclear accidents in Japan, a highly developed industrialized society, show that the risk of accidents is a collateral cost to the economic and environmental benefits of nuclear power. The regional cooperation on nuclear power safety seems imperative.

Solar power and other alternative sources of energy can avoid the environmental costs of oil and gas and the safety issues of nuclear power. An important item for regional cooperation is therefore the technological challenges that the scientists need to resolve for the technology to reach the stage of economic feasibility, such as sand blowing on the solar panels and the energy loss during long-distance power transmission.

Another urgent agenda for regional cooperation would be preventing water pollution and managing the rich fish stocks as a joint resource. By way of example, the joint Russian/Norwegian management of cod in the Barents Sea is very successful. This cooperation arose across the old fault-lines of the Cold War to cope with the shared threat of stock depletion and crime.

Some joint challenges call for innovative technological solutions. Expert cooperation between leading centres of research and development, such as the new King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia, could probe this and other innovative ideas. Centres of science and technology become more powerful when they build their networks with other related institutions to form clusters.

Expert cooperation in joint committees could evolve. The further stages of cooperation would be mixed commissions of officials, then regular ministerial meetings. The ultimate stage of a regional cooperation model is arbitration, along the line of the role of the European Commission and the Court of Justice of the European Union.



### 6.3 COMMON DISCOURSE

To establish alternative analogies, discourse must address normative projects and seek common ground between them. The common ground between Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey, even to a degree Israel, is the inclusive Moslem identity of *Ummah* during the pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina. In fact, a firmly established interstate cooperation, excluding Israel, facilitates the visit of around 2.5 million people, of which around 75,000 a year from Iran and 6,000 from Israel.

This inclusive vision of Moslem unity across the sectarian fault line between Sunni and Shia and other branches of Islam also facilitates trade and business. In all four countries that form the state system in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Iran Turkey and Israel, there are strong traditions of business and trade. These interest groups will see the business opportunities in a more cooperative regional environment with harmonization of standards and rules as in the EU internal market. I now turn to the functionality of the GCC by comparing it to the EU.

## 7 COMPARING FUNCTIONALITY OF THE EU AND THE GCC

There are some important similarities between the two regional organizations. The GCC has two significant roles in common with the EU. Both roles are important to enable the participating states to deal with shared problems:

- First, both organizations embody a vision of cooperation. The implication of Kahneman's theories on the role of associations with a reference<sup>49</sup> is that visions, grand narratives, inspire human agency without providing blue prints for specific problem solving. Visions work as guiding stars, not roadmaps.
- Second, they both provide a vehicle for networking. For facilitating international cooperation, multilateral arenas are useful because they have a lower threshold for contact than bilateral meetings.

Like the EU, the GCC was established to avert war, the EU after World War II and the GCC at the onset of the War between Iraq and Iran. Both organizations have pursued this mission by becoming agents of economic cooperation. Both have been the object of intermittent attempts to militarize the cooperation – so far with only limited success. Legrenzi finds that the failures to use the GCC as a vehicle for military cooperation testify to its impotence.<sup>50</sup> I find this opinion ill advised. Had the GCC evolved into a NATO type military cooperation, the

<sup>49</sup> Kahneman, *supra* n. 11.

<sup>50</sup> M. Legrenzi, *GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf: Diplomacy, Security and Economy Coordination in a Changing Middle East* 84 (I. B. Tauris 2011).

tensions with Iran could have been considerably worse. Especially dangerous would be the pressure to cut losses by pre-emptive strikes, which is inherent in any military posturing designed to deter by threats.

Instead of acting as a military alliance, the GCC, like the EU, has engaged in crisis management in conflicts within its sphere of influence. Most recently, Saudi Arabia, as the dominant partner in the GCC, has tried to use the organization as vehicle for crisis management in Yemen, but then attempted to turn the GCC into a military alliance, as Legrenzi seems to advocate. First, the GCC negotiated a transition agreement between the old regime and the successors following the Arab Spring. Since this agreement did not accommodate a large and already disgruntled minority, the Zaidi Houthis, the new political order collapsed. Then Saudi Arabia used the GCC to pursue its policy of defeating the Zaidi Houthis that, at this time of writing, have taken over large parts of the country. Now, crisis management efforts with the GCC as vehicle have failed; instead, the regional organization has become party to Saudi Arabia's war with the Zaidi Houthis.

The Saudi Arabian war in Yemen is a serious error. In the end, a political solution including the Zaidi Houthis is inevitable to stabilize Yemen. A smarter policy would therefore be to revert to the crisis management role of the GCC and include Iran, as supporters of the Zaidi Houthis, in the consultations.

#### *GCC as EU? Two divergent views*

There are two diverging views among scholars on whether the GCC can serve as vehicle of regional integration in the Gulf-region as the EU does in Europe.

Legrenzi finds this unlikely.<sup>51</sup> He has two main reasons for this view. First, the participating states have divergent interests, and they have not been willing to confer power to the GCC institutions.<sup>52</sup> Second, the larger GCC projects of economic integration, such as working free trade agreements and customs union, have failed.<sup>53</sup>

Hertog, on the other hand, has a different perspective. He finds the GCC contribution to economic integration significant, but for other reasons than the success of grand schemes. He points to the progress in standardization and integrations of services, such as telecom, air transportation and real estate.<sup>54</sup> The larger stalled projects, such as a monetary union, are of less economic importance, according to him.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, at 108–109 and 150.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, at 109 and 111.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, at 63–66 and 151.

<sup>54</sup> Hertog, *supra* n. 43, at 6.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, at 1.

The areas marked by Hertog as successful integration in the GCC correspond to parts of the EU cooperation on the Internal Market, the least politicized part of the EU collaboration, but probably that with the highest direct effect on business and consumers.<sup>56</sup> The EU Internal Market is in my view the part of the EU cooperation with the greatest effect on the two main policy goals of the Member States, economic growth and security. Harmonized standards and procedures reduce transaction costs, and removal of barriers enlarges market size to allow economies of scale. The Internal Market can also serve as a practical and flexible foreign policy instrument to stabilize neighbouring states and regions.

Hertog shows that, in the shadow of political failure of grand schemes, a practical cooperation has evolved within the GCC in areas covered by the EU Internal Market. Could this practical cooperation conceivably evolve into a political cooperation on political crisis management by compromise on imperfect solutions? When grand schemes aimed at some total solution do not work, could incremental convergence gradually defuse the lethal potential of current conflicts? In Wirsching's analysis of European cooperation after the end of the Cold War, such incremental convergence creates the path dependence of cooperation.<sup>57</sup> One neglected aspect of the social fabric of the Middle East is that the culture of business and trade is by necessity pragmatic. Without compromise on price, no win-win option in the form of profit is possible.

## 8 THE EU AS POLICY STORY IN THE STATE SYSTEM

In the current climate of confrontation in the states system formed by Israel, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia, we can construct the following policy story<sup>58</sup>

- Such a move would objectively be in Saudi Arabia's interest, and therefore rational.
- The time has come to face the truth that *all* policies have failed in the Middle East. Therefore, only a radically innovative idea can now bring peace.

<sup>56</sup> Since the Norway's integration with the EU Internal Market was my responsibility for many years, I observed this first-hand.

<sup>57</sup> Wirsching, *supra* n. 17, at 17–18.

<sup>58</sup> I have the concept of policy as story from Stevens' analyses of British decision-making. To prevail in an internal power struggle, a policy must be presented as a policy *story*, which depicts both the advocates and the superintendent policy in a favourable light, A. Stevens, *Telling Policy Stories: An Ethnographic Study of the Use of Evidence in Policy-Making in the UK*, 40(2) J. Soc. Pol'y (2011).

- By comparison, the EU is the result of defying bad odds by bold political initiatives followed by demanding deliberations on incremental, pragmatic changes. At the inception of the current EU, in the 1950s, the circumstances probably bore more resemblance to the current Middle East than to current Europe. At several critical junctures, less bold decisions would have produced a less successful vehicle for European economic cooperation and crisis management.

As stated initially, the outbreak of World War I in Europe can in hindsight be attributed to the absence of institutions for consultation, which led to a result nobody wanted, war.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, this policy story can continue as follows: The current confrontation between Israel, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia resembles the scenario that led to the outbreak of World War I, with a high risk of misunderstanding the domestic decision-making processes and misreading intentions. The Israeli government reportedly has had attack on Iran as a recurring agenda item; at least on one occasion an attack came very close.<sup>60</sup> An Israeli attack on Iran could set in motion exactly the kind of political and military chain reaction that led to the outbreak of World War I in Europe. In another conceivable scenario, the structural imbalance between Saudi Arabia and Iran, superior air force facing a superior missile force, a pre-emptive strike by one of them could cause a similar regional chain reaction. It is therefore urgent to include Israel and Iran in regional crisis management by the GCC under Saudi Arabia's leadership. In the case of Turkey, evolving and contradictory regional strategies have prolonged the war in Syria, at times a proxy war between Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia, edging them closer to the abyss of an all-out war. A regional organization for consultation and cooperation modelled on the EU could lower the threshold for pragmatic consultations to defuse the dangerous confrontation.

## 9 CONCLUSION

European states must now assume leadership by a bold new political initiative. This initiative should be engaging Saudi Arabia in a strategic discourse to persuade them to take the initiative to have the GCC – The Gulf Cooperation Council extend its consultations and cooperation to the other major regional states. The easiest way to

<sup>59</sup> Clark, *supra* n. 2, at 561.

<sup>60</sup> C. A. Jones in R. Hinnebusch & A. Ehteshami, *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States, Second Edition* 297 (Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc. 2014). Conversations in Israel (Dec. 2011). Closed seminar on regional crisis management in the Middle East with also Israeli participants.

accomplish this extension is to have the GCC adapt the EU third country and neighbourhood policies.

The grand narrative of European transformation under the EU from the ashes of World War II to the current European cooperation the EU can turn into a policy story of Saudi Arabia turning the GCC into the EU of the Middle East.

It would be in Saudi Arabia's interest to enter into a cooperation with Iran to forge a regional integration of gas supply to free up oil for export. Also in Saudi Arabia's interest is a regional vehicle for low-threshold informal contact for consultation and crisis management.

A regional political process in the Middle East state system by an extended GCC as vehicle could build on the indigenous interstate cooperation on facilitating the pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. The daunting task of facilitating annually 2.5 million pilgrims is in my view evidence that Saudi Arabia has a capacity for pragmatic interstate cooperation that its detractors fail to appreciate. A regional political process is now imperative to contain and reverse the current skid to the brink of regional war by political failure, the World War I European scenario.



# THE SAUDI ARABIAN REVOLUTION: HOW CAN IT SUCCEED?

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**E**vents in Saudi Arabia since the rise to power of Mohammed bin Salman represent, in effect, a revolution from above that is now beyond the point of return to the old stasis. Whether this abrupt change results in success or failure will have profound effects on the region and the wider world.

A failure of the revolution could easily lead to a failed state, taking Saudi Arabia down the path to destruction that turned so grim in Iraq, Syria, Libya and then Yemen. Since the state is an indispensable oil producer, armed to the teeth and with a potential for extremism seething among segments of the population, the implications for global economic and political stability could easily turn very grave. Success, by contrast, may conceivably turn Saudi Arabia into a modern and pluralistic, albeit still authoritarian, state. With its economic power, such a Saudi Arabia could become a regional leader turning the disintegrating violent societies in its neighborhood onto a new path towards stability and a better life.

The question is, how can the positive scenario be realized? For the Saudi Arabian revolution-from-above to succeed, supportive forces must be stronger than the counterforces. Therefore, the strategic

problem is how to build supportive forces. In the following, I will offer my answer to this question.

## **THEORY: STRATEGIC DISCOURSE**

The traditional theoretical divide in analyses of international relations and foreign policy lies between realist and constructionist approaches.<sup>1</sup> The theories part over the role of agency, its room for maneuver and its constraints. While realists tend to find the international system an objective equation of power, Kenneth Waltz's concept of structural realism,<sup>2</sup> legalistic-moralistic constructionists tend to see the international system as a set of principles or codes to be advanced and, if need be, enforced. The archetypal cases of such constructionists are U.S. President Woodrow Wilson following World War I and President George W. Bush with his post-9/11 invasion of Iraq.

This divide bears on policy choices. Influential realists' normative purpose, such as Waltz's,<sup>3</sup> has been to restrain policy to avoid its ineffectual or, in the worst cases, destructive unintended effects, above all, war. (While actual policy may in hindsight appear to vacillate on a continuum between the polar opposites of realism and

constructionism, our *thinking*, and hence our theories, tends towards seeing these concepts as a dichotomy.<sup>4</sup>)

The apparent U.S. and Western supremacy, the “unipolar world,” following the end of the Cold War enabled the constructionist idea to emerge within the United Nations that this unchallenged military power should be harnessed to enforce democracy and the protection of human rights. This led to Kofi Annan’s proposal for humanitarian intervention,<sup>5</sup> an apparently benign idea that was seized upon by the second president Bush and the so-called neocons. In the words of someone who witnessed at close range the U.S. decisions to intervene, first in Afghanistan and then Iraq: “We felt we could do anything, we had a responsibility to put things right.”<sup>6</sup>

Seemingly bearing out realists’ call for restraint is the sequence of failed and obviously self-defeating Western policies in the legalistic-moralistic constructionist mode of thinking following Kofi Annan’s call for humanitarian intervention in 1999.<sup>7</sup> However, the question remains: What options does foreign policy actually infer from a realist paradigm? This is not necessarily a cautious policy of constraint. If power is an objective force forming the international system, the purpose of policy could be to improve the relative power position by a combination of boosting military as well as economic power and forming alliances at the expense of other interested parties. The historical record of this applied realism shows that it, too, like its opposite, the legalistic-moralistic constructionist mode, is self-defeating if undeterred by countervailing considerations. In essence, Bismarck and his successors in Imperial Germany practiced this type of realism, with tragic consequences in World War I and beyond. This is also essentially the

type of realism that guides policies in the Middle East today.

After the disasters produced by the constructionist foreign policy of George W. Bush, his successor, President Barack Obama, was greeted as a new realist, a “chess player,” by Henry Kissinger.<sup>8</sup> Kissinger has been an arch proponent of realism who rejects what he perceives as the idealistic — in my terms, the constructionist — tradition in U.S. foreign policy (although he finds that realism needs an element of idealism to work).<sup>9</sup> On Obama, he was only partly correct. Obama himself, by his own account, embraced the moralistic realism of Reinhold Niebuhr, who, while endorsing the realists’ call for restraint, urged as a moral imperative that power be harnessed for normative purposes.<sup>10</sup> Thus, President Obama was guided by a theory that fused the restraint of realism with the constructionist ideas of Kofi Annan. However, in actual policy, this fusion also proved self-defeating, at least in his endorsement of the French-Danish-Norwegian initiative for humanitarian intervention in Libya, and the failure to intervene effectively in Syria.

The current conflicts in Libya, as well as over Syria, reveal the bankruptcy of both realist and constructionist theories in their vintage forms. In addition, the fusion of realism and constructionism of Niebuhr and Obama proved self-defeating when applied in actual policy.

I argue that these theoretical modes fail for the same reason. When persuasion fails, the recourse is to coercion, which invariably proves ineffective. In fact, a strategy of coercion whether by projecting military force or sanctions, is doomed to fail for two reasons. Coercion cannot control all variables affecting the outcome, and it provokes counterforces to opt for unintended



recourses, such as the emerging bloc of authoritarian states resenting Western influence in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Iran's recourse to missiles for lack of spare parts for their aircraft.

With coercion ineffective or even self-defeating, I argue that Western policy can

only succeed by persuading more effectively. We therefore need a theory of foreign policy that explains how differing sets of as-

sumptions form alternative mental models.<sup>11</sup> In my adapted model for cognitive behavioral therapy,<sup>12</sup> the mental models are constructed by a specific historical analogy with an inferred grand strategy that guides policy choices. On this basis, the theory needs to offer operationalized guidance for policy choices. I call this theory "strategic discourse." Strategic discourse needs to remove emotional blocks<sup>13</sup> to introduce alternative mental models, especially the analogy of European transformation from violent confrontation to peaceful pragmatic — if imperfect — cooperation.<sup>14</sup> The strategic discourse therefore avoids challenging existing narratives in which parties are cognitively and emotionally invested, for two reasons: the current issues have no feasible solution, and the narratives construct identity,<sup>15</sup> the impregnable fortress at the core of our minds. Instead of attempting to "set the record straight,"<sup>16</sup> the strategic discourse envisions a desired alternative political order.

In the following, I shall discuss the application of my theory on strategic discourse to the current Saudi Arabian revolu-

tion. The current phase of that transition presents a showcase for the impotence of the vintage theoretical alternatives of realism versus constructionism when applied in actual policy. Realists would tend to limit policy to adapting to whatever consequences to the regional and global order

come out of the crown prince's political project. The constructionists will either reject the regime for its significant violation

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**Any state is a composite, diverse, contradictory polity, a dynamic tension field of competing groups and individuals. ... Change is inevitable, often incremental and hardly noticeable, but then suddenly spectacular, as now.**

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of basic tenets of democracy and human rights, or try to coerce the adoption of Western standards.

By contrast, a strategic discourse will engage with the Saudis on their own terms in the pursuit of options that are in the interest of the government's political project. In essence, the premise for strategic discourse is the same as for Waltz's structural realism: the objective equation of power, in this case the ability to cause consequences for others.

The Saudis will not go away even if we reject them, and they will act according to their own ideas, not ours. If we have differences with their current policies, as I do, there is no alternative to engaging them. The Saudi crown prince, like all of us, acts within the confines of his assumptions.

In addition, those who now reject Saudi Arabia ignore the basic insight that any state, including Saudi Arabia, is a composite, diverse, contradictory polity, never monolithic, but rather a dynamic tension field of competing groups and individuals with diverging interests and perspectives. Permanence is an illusion;

change is inevitable, often incremental and hardly noticeable, but then suddenly spectacular, as now.

Before proceeding, a note of caution about me as the author. I am an optimist, not only by nature, but also by professional ethics as a diplomat and scholar. I believe that the first step to progress is to envisage it possible. Our sense of political reality is a cognitive construct, hence malleable. Therefore, the purpose of political analysis needs to be instrumental, to develop the insight into how we can change the cognitive construction of political reality. I see political discourse, such as this article, as strategic, similar to cognitive behavioral therapy with its dual purpose of motivating change by generating optimism, and cognitive restructuring of dysfunctional thoughts.<sup>17</sup> I should also add that my analysis is partisan. I *want* the Saudis to succeed. During my tenure as a diplomat in Saudi Arabia, I developed an affinity for its people and culture. As a diplomat and then as a researcher, I had many good conversations with smart official representatives that I feel justify my optimism.

## METHODOLOGY

The basis for the following analysis consists of my conversations as a Norwegian diplomat posted to Riyadh in 2008-09, my subsequent conversations as a researcher at various international venues with diverse Saudis and experts on Saudi Arabia and, finally, my round of talks in Riyadh in fall 2017. My Saudi sources comprise the various elites in government, business and academia. Personal interests, perspectives and opinions differ, but, taken together, my sources offer a realistic, albeit necessarily limited, picture of the dynamic diversity of society and polity.

I am the arbiter of my sources' reliabil-

ity and validity. To this conjecture, I apply my broad experience as diplomat and then researcher.

Despite my methodological limitations, a more systematic and comprehensive approach is, under the circumstances, not feasible. In a society like Saudi Arabia, any standard interview process or quantifiable data collection would be distorted by the circumstances such methodologies generated. Written sources may be distorted by their purpose.

With my conversations, I have gleaned important data that is not obtainable by standard methodologies. I need to find the best feasible methodology to capture this unique information.

My methodology is what I call exploratory conversation. I raise issues, offer arguments and ask questions, and then listen, inferring insights from the answers into feasible courses of action — in this case, how to build supportive forces for the Saudi revolution from above.

A contentious methodological issue is transparency in the use of sources. By my professional ethics as a diplomat, source protection is paramount. I therefore apply Chatham House Rule: a source may be quoted, but neither their identity nor their institutional affiliation revealed. I even take this standard a step further. Sources shall not be identifiable by inference from information about time and place. This is also the standard applied in medical research, such as studies of cognitive behavioral therapy, which I adapt for my strategic discourse. This restriction on the standard Chatham House Rule is necessary because of the aggravated malign attacks on legitimate confidentiality now evident from the indiscretions of Wikileaks, Edward Snowden and Facebook. Even in my own country, Norway, we experi-

ence occasional violations of professional confidentiality. Today, source protection is a personal responsibility.

## ANALYSIS

Having established my theory and methodology, I proceed to practical political analysis in an attempt to solve problems. What are the conditions of agency, its opportunities and limitations, in building supportive forces? Two conditions make or break the supportive forces. First, the crown prince needs to negotiate a domestic coalition strong enough to prevail over any feasible combination of internal counterforces. Second, he needs to secure an enabling external environment, without which his domestic political project of modernization cannot overcome the obstacles. Those who claim or whom he assigns the role of Saudi Arabia's adversaries will put prohibitive obstacles in his way.

### Domestic Coalitions

Political power in Saudi Arabia has depended on the ability of the king to maintain certain domestic political coalitions, a core coalition within the royal family that extends to religious and business elites, and a broader societal coalition in which a power broker needs to accommodate various interests. The crown prince's revolution, at its present stage, is that he appears to have secured his independence from these coalitions by breaking them. The next stage, he declares, is to use his power for a modernization project.

### Core Coalition

Breaking the existing domestic coalitions has not obviated the need for them, but a modernizing project makes it more difficult to build alternative ones. A predominant view among experts on Saudi

Arabia has been that there is a structural conflict between two imperatives. The need to modernize by replacing entitled privilege with meritocracy conflicts with the need to negotiate a coalition strong enough to maintain power.<sup>18</sup>

The reason is that power in Saudi Arabia is transactional. The society is tribal in the sense of the medieval Islamic scholar Ibn Khaldun's idea of tribe as the cohesion generated by group feeling. In tribal societies, leadership, according to Ibn Khaldun, is by consent, which the tribal leader forges by justice and fairness in providing for those who reciprocate with their allegiance.<sup>19</sup> In modern Saudi Arabia, tribes, clans and families form social and political structures. Within these networks, transactional power is the function of allegiance in exchange for benefits.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the two key Arabic terms necessary to understand the Saudi Arabian social and political system are *wasta* (connections) and *nasab* (lineage), or the assets bestowed by family status.

It appears that the crown prince is now master of the core coalition. However, the appearance may be deceptive. I am uncertain to what degree he is capable of blocking any conceivable combination of adversaries. The pivotal question is whether he is still committed to maintaining the process of consultation within the royal family and, by extension, with the wider tribal, clan and family networks that make up the key social and political structures.

My sources were convinced that these consultations continue as they typically have, although the relative weight of the various parties may have shifted. The crown prince has made a widely supported move by forcing certain members of the royal family — who, incidentally, could also form a challenging opposition — to

relinquish a substantial portion of their excessive wealth and transfer it to the state. He has skillfully avoided provoking them to risk forming a coalition against him by leaving them very rich. However, they know that if they challenge him, he, with his control of the armed forces, has recourse to worse options than confining them in a luxury hotel.

In other words, the “shura” principle — the indigenous Saudi Arabian version of democracy,<sup>21</sup> forging consensus by consultations — still works, my sources maintained. As evidence, they point out that the king and crown prince, in the course of consultations within the royal family, changed their initial idea of the line of succession to the throne. The successor to the crown prince, when he becomes king, must come from a line of the royal family other than his own, they maintained.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Broader Societal Coalition**

I have discussed how transactional power forges a core coalition within the royal family in alliance with key social actors, the Islamic establishment and economic elites.<sup>23</sup> Beyond this core coalition, however, there is a broader societal coalition. This is more volatile than the core coalition because it is more susceptible to influence from the extremist Islamic ideas voiced by “alternative” imams, with their resentment of the Shia and resistance to the social independence of women — their main religious credentials in the challenges to any modernization project.<sup>24</sup>

The rule of thumb in the broader societal coalition is that the transfer of funds, positions and other benefits — the basis for tribal leadership, according to Ibn Khaldun — is in an inverse relationship with challenges to the Islamic legitimacy of royal power. A historical example shows this in-

verse relationship: to date, the most serious challenge to the broader societal coalition forged by transactional power was from the Sahwa (Islamic Awakening) movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s. On the surface, it appeared that the king’s decision to call on U.S. forces to operate in Saudi Arabia as protection against Saddam Hussein during the first Gulf War provoked the Sahwa. They perceived it as a kind of sacrilege, a violation of the royal family’s Islamic obligations to keep infidels out.

However, the root cause of the Sahwa movement was a breach of the social contract that Ibn Khaldun considered the basis for tribal leadership and, hence, a weakening of transactional power in the broader societal coalition. When oil prices dropped in the mid-1980s because new producers caused a marked glut, cuts in public expenditures denied new graduates of Islamic studies their expected jobs in the religious establishment. Consequently, they sought an alternative outlet in the Sahwa movement that ended up challenging the royal family’s legitimacy on Islamic grounds.<sup>25</sup>

Modernization and entitlement by social contract still pull in opposite directions. The crown prince has offered a vision of modernization to replace the embrace of tradition, and bold visions of economic development instead of entitled privilege. He must come up with more new moves to prevent another new Sahwa-style challenge to his power. Wahhabism inspires political challenges in times of economic constraints, and the crown prince has to do something to preempt them.

### **Replacing Wahhabism**

Mohammed bin Salman has publicly challenged the conservative Wahhabi state narrative.<sup>26</sup> Contrary to common opinion, I

think it is perfectly feasible for Saudi Arabia to move on from Wahhabism. There is a deep-seated misunderstanding that Wahhabism is integral to the state of Saudi Arabia, an unbroken tradition since the mid-1700s, when the preacher Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab entered into an alliance with the first Al Saud. This is, upon closer critical scrutiny, a far-fetched interpretation. In what other society would we assume an unbroken religious or ideological influence for well over 250 years?

The Wahhabism that until now has provided Islamic legitimacy to Al Saud

rule is actually a recent state-building strategy from the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>27</sup> The royal family were faced with the triple

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**The challenge of building the necessary broader coalition should be manageable with the right moves. Modernization enjoys substantial support among young people, who are the current majority and the future.**

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challenge of Arab nationalism, brought ominously close to home by Nasser's war in Yemen; the leftist leanings of predominantly Shia oil workers who were organizing and even striking;<sup>28</sup> and a disputed succession to the throne. They decided to strengthen their domestic alliance with the families that, as successors of Abd al-Wahhab, claimed positions in the religious hierarchy. The Al Sauds also agreed to expand their positions and influence in society, most significantly over education. In other words, strengthening the cohesion of the state through Wahhabism was also a strategy for domestic coalition building, since the religious hierarchy was one societal interest to accommodate.<sup>29</sup> This state-building strategy was also used in response to another crisis: the 1979 occupation of the Holy Mosque in Mecca by a religious

group that rejected the Al Sauds' Islamic credentials.<sup>30</sup>

However, the Saudi Arabian state today is hardly Wahhabi in any meaningful sense. Instead, Wahhabism is, for all practical purposes, an ideology extremists can use to invoke the tenets of their old-time religion, uncorrupted by the subsequent compromises necessary for the Al Sauds' state-building project. These extremists can potentially invoke Wahhabism to challenge the Al Sauds' legitimacy as rulers. The reason this can be effective is that the Saudi Arabian state is now pluralistic

to a degree incompatible with vintage Wahhabi principles. The essence of Wahhabism's political implications boils down to

two tenets: enforcing Islamic uniformity by the dual principles of *hijra*, the obligation of Muslims to settle in communities under the right Islamic rule, and *jihad*, fighting those who do not adhere to the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam.<sup>31</sup> Modern Saudi Arabia's break with enforcing Islamic uniformity is evident by the inclusion of the Shia, Ismaili and Zaydi minorities in the state, the state's inclusive role of host to Muslims of all persuasions at the Hajj and Umrah in Mecca and Medina, and the inclusive modern corporate culture in Saudi Aramco and other businesses.

The experience of the Sahwa shows that the broader societal coalition needs to be resilient in times of contracting revenues. By all prognoses, Saudi Arabia will experience a new phase of austerity in government budgets from a combina-

tion of low oil prices and high domestic oil consumption at the expense of revenue-producing exports, combined with external challenges bleeding the budget, above all the war in Yemen, but also transfers to regional allies such as Egypt.

The crown prince probably thinks that, for these and other reasons, he needs a new narrative to replace 1960s-era Wahhabism for his political project. By comparison, a modern Western state is a social contract based on the individual rights and obligations of *citizens*. He has abandoned Wahhabism; now he needs a new bold move to come up with an alternative that can captivate those who have to make up his domestic coalition.

### **A Feasible Societal Coalition**

My impression after talking to people in Saudi Arabia in the fall of 2017 is that the challenge of building the necessary broader coalition should be manageable with the right moves. Modernization enjoys substantial support among young people, who are the current majority and the future. The difference between Riyadh during fall 2009, when I left my post at the Norwegian embassy, and my recent visit was very noticeable. While most people in 2009 would confine themselves to repeating some official line if asked their opinion, in 2017, of their own volition, many would share their enthusiasm and concerns. The fight against corruption and excessive wealth seems to enjoy wide support.

Most notable to me was the change in gender relations. Young women and men mingled in public places, appeared relaxed in each other's company and seemed to engage in meaningful conversations. Without communication and cooperation between women and men, the crown prince's

revolutionary project is doomed to fail. It is a known fact that economic growth and social development in Saudi Arabia require the integration of highly qualified women, a reform the conservative Wahhabis have blocked in its full potential up to this point. However, the Sahwa experience shows that the resilience of the broader societal coalition comes under strain when transactional power faces the obstacle of contracting disposable income. This barrier to the power of the crown prince can only be overcome by some wise moves that combine cutting expenses, creating jobs and boosting oil-export revenues. The key to this is to secure an enabling external environment.

### **An Enabling Environment**

The only public costs the crown prince can cut without risk of weakening his transactional power are military expenditures. These are very substantial, so even small cuts could make a noticeable difference for other financial needs. The crucial question is whether Saudi Arabia's security makes such cuts feasible.

#### *Cutting Military Expenses*

Conceivably, those manufacturing interests in Western countries that target the Saudi market will envisage scenarios in which the arms procurements they offer enhance security, for all practical purposes, against Iran. However, Saudi decision makers must, given limited resources, weigh this added security against the alternative investment in the broader societal coalition, which the Sahwa challenge shows is necessary for domestic security.

In such an analysis of options and alternative costs, it could also be useful to probe the assumptions underlying the scenarios that promote arms sales. Security is

by necessity a mutual dynamic. Additional military expenses could be cut if a regional arms-control process involving Iran obviated expensive investments in air force and ballistic-missile defense.

A smart move might be for Saudi Arabia to initiate a regional multilateral process, an adapted version of the Madrid Process of the 1990s. This was a nascent multilateral process for the Middle East in the window of opportunity opened by the end of the Cold War. Its purpose was to negotiate how parties in a regional concert could agree on specific measures to improve mutual security. The agenda was subdivided into composite agendas, adapting the model of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).<sup>32</sup>

Over and above the potential for cutting military expenses, to achieve security, regional arms-control is now imperative. The current imbalance between Saudi air superiority and the Iranian missile force is potentially destabilizing: it could generate pressure for a preemptive strike.<sup>33</sup> A further arms build-up to contain a threat from Iran would aggravate this problem. The more menacing that weapons appear, the stronger is the perception that they need to be neutralized before they can be used.

#### *Stopping the Yemen War*

The ongoing war in Yemen is an extension of the security scenario in which Saudi Arabia needs to contain an Iranian threat. If an alternative strategy were conceivable, Saudi Arabia could free up public funds for other purposes and avoid the war's collateral damage, horrific suffering and destruction. Although the issues of the conflict seem intractable, during my recent talks in Riyadh I learned of a parallel Saudi policy, building working relationships with all parties to the conflict for

alleviating suffering through humanitarian relief.<sup>34</sup> It is a two-pronged strategy: waging war against the Houthis while building a working relationship with them to alleviate suffering.

Because the war has failed to produce the intended results, an alternative strategy of building working relationships holds more promise. There are several sound reasons, in addition to cutting expenses and putting an end to human suffering, for building on these relationships to broker a political solution:

- The Houthis would need to form part of any conceivable coalition in Yemen if it is to be sustainable.
- Iranian influence — by way of what the Saudis during my recent talks denoted the *Hezbollah Model* — is not the cause of the conflict. To the contrary, it is the conflict that enables Iran to establish a presence. In the Saudi view, the *Hezbollah Model* denotes Iran's use of militias to undermine negotiated power sharing, as they do in Lebanon. Conflict enables the *Hezbollah Model*. Brokering a political deal with the Houthis would, in other words, both stop the war and put an end to Iranian influence.<sup>35</sup> (In fact, *Hezbollah* itself is the direct unintended consequence of a far-reaching Israeli miscalculation, the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 that had the effect of enabling Iran to establish its presence by proxy in the window of opportunity Israel created. Actually, the scheming of one man, Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, forcing the hand of a wiser government majority against him, led to the ill-advised invasion.<sup>36</sup>)
- The *Hezbollah Model* is, for all practical purposes, operated by the Al-Quds

Brigade, the branch of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards for foreign operations. This represents one among several competing political factions in Iran.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, Saudi Arabia could also contain the Hezbollah Model in Yemen by building alliances with other Iranian factions, such as Foreign Minister Javad Zarif.

- Without war, Al-Qaeda, which in the early 2000s posed such a terrorist threat in Saudi Arabia from its haven in Yemen, would lose its current political platform: its hybrid role of terrorists-turned-semi-co-combatants against the Houthis, legitimizing themselves there, as they try to do in Syria, by a popular-front strategy of seeming to be absorbed into a broad political movement.
- Finally, the sooner the war in Yemen is stopped, the sooner Saudi Arabia can halt the dangerous disintegration of its “soft underbelly” into chaos. With a population comparable to that of Saudi Arabia, Yemen’s turning into a “new Somalia” would pose an almost unimaginable security threat.

The war in Yemen will effectively block the necessary enabling external environment. One casualty is the investment climate. To overcome this obstacle, bold moves are imperative.

#### *Improving the Investment Climate*

To make the domestic coalition more resilient in the face of contracting disposable public income, an important move would be to improve the investment climate, to attract the kind of labor-intensive manufacturing that could boost employment and export revenues. Since attracting more foreign direct investment in export-

oriented manufacturing seems an urgent concern, another bold move by the crown prince could make a big difference fast. A dramatic and therefore potentially highly effective move could conceivably be to engage Amnesty International in a mutual clarification of perspectives and expectations in the complex human-rights agenda. Contrary to the current common perception, I find such encounters feasible as well as potentially productive. The basis for this contention is my experience as a diplomat discussing human-rights issues with Saudi officials and experts. The difference I observed between my service as a diplomat, ending in 2009, and my round of talks in fall 2017 shows that changes are dynamic in evolving political strategies. Saudi Arabia’s current policy on human rights is a response to the perceived needs of the new political project. Boosting the investment climate would call for different adjustment imperatives.

#### *Iran Makes or Breaks the Deal*

Another smart move would be to connect to the Iranian and Qatari South Pars gas field for power generation, desalination and petrochemicals. This would free up oil now consumed by other vital domestic sectors so it could be exported. The best way to open up talks to generate an enabling environment with Iran and Qatar would be for Saudi Arabia to initiate the adoption by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) of the EU third-country and neighborhood policies that enable it to extend its political leverage without the complications of membership. By these policies, the EU invites other regional powers to join consultations and cooperation.<sup>38</sup> In fact, the nascent EU cooperation in the early 1950s was the integration of the strategic economic sectors of coal and steel. In the



GCC at the current state of acrimonious confrontation, the corresponding strategic economic sector would be natural gas.<sup>39</sup>

In other words, Iran as an adversary in regional conflicts may block the crown prince's modernization project, while Iran as a partner in regional political solutions and supplier of natural gas will enable it. Actually, to a degree, Iran is already a partner. Contrary to common belief, there is now significant cooperation between

Saudi and Iranian government agencies to facilitate the participation of about 75,000 Iranian pilgrims annually to the Hajj and Umrah in Mecca and Medina.<sup>40</sup> As in Yemen, Saudis act wisely by building working relationships across the fault lines of conflict. By so doing, they have positioned themselves well to engage those who assume the role of adversary, or to whom they attribute such a role.

<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the role of, in the words of George Kennan, the "legalistic-moralistic approach" in U.S. foreign policy (in my terminology constructionist), A. Preston, *The War Council: McGeorge Bundy, the NSC, and Vietnam* (Harvard University Press, 2010), 11- 24.

<sup>2</sup> K.N. Waltz, *Realism and International Politics* (Routledge Chapman & Hall, 2008), 57-58, 197-229.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 255-256, 302-303. For an extended argument, see his book, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> This is in line with Levi-Strauss's theory on concepts as binary opposites. R. Deliége, *Introduction à l'anthropologie structurale: Lévi-Strauss aujourd'hui* (Editions du Seuil, 2001), 49; Simons's theories on bounded rationality, H.A. Simon, *Administrative Behavior*, 4th Edition (Free Press, 2013); and Kahneman's theories on heuristics: A. Tversky and D. Kahneman, "Judgement under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases," *Science* 185 (1974); and A. Tversky, Kahneman, D., "Choices, Values, and Frames," *American Psychologist* 34 (1984). For a brief overview, see Daniel Kahneman, "Maps of Bounded Rationality: Psychology of Behavioral Economics," *American Economic Review* 93, no. 5 (2003).

<sup>5</sup> "Two Concepts of Sovereignty," *The Economist*, September 16, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Confidential conversation. Chatham House Rule.

<sup>7</sup> For a thorough study of how Western interventions have had counterproductive effects, and hence been self-defeating, see Brynjar Lia, "Jihadism in the Arab World after 2011: Explaining Its Expansion," *Middle East Policy* 23, no. 4 (2016).

<sup>8</sup> Henry Kissinger, interview by Jan Fleischhauer & Gabor Steingart, "Obama Is Like a Chess Player," ABC News, July 6, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> For an extended argument, see H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (Simon & Schuster, 1994), 29-55.

<sup>10</sup> David Brooks, "Obama, Gospel and Verse," *New York Times*, April 26, 2007. Niebuhr's influence on Obama is clearly discernible in two statements, (1) at the beginning of his presidency in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, and (2) towards the end of his term in the interview in *The Atlantic*, "The Obama Doctrine."

<sup>11</sup> R.J. Heuer and C.S. Intelligence, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis* (Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1999). For a brief introduction, see Introduction xxi-xxii.

<sup>12</sup> A. Wenzel, *Strategic Decision Making in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* (American Psychological Association, 2013); M.B. Ballou, *Psychological Interventions: A Guide to Strategies* (Praeger, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Daniel L. Shapiro, "Relational Identity Theory. A Systematic Approach for Transforming the Emotional Dimension of Conflict," *American Psychologist* 68, no. 7 (2010).

<sup>14</sup> A. Wirsching, *Der Preis der Freiheit: Geschichte Europas in Unserer Zeit* (C.H.Beck, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> D. Shapiro, *Negotiating the Nonnegotiable: How to Resolve Your Most Emotionally Charged Conflicts* (Penguin Publishing Group, 2016), 12.

<sup>16</sup> In Kahneman's terms, contradicting, "setting the record straight," would be an instrument of rationality. I find this does not work in a strategic discourse. A further elaboration of my disagreement with Kahneman on

this point is beyond the scope of this article. Daniel Kahneman, "Maps of Bounded Rationality: A Perspective on Intuitive Judgment and Choice," in *Nobel Committee, Prize Lecture* (Stockholm 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Wenzel, 83, 300.

<sup>18</sup> F. Gregory Gause III, "Kings for All Seasons: How the Middle East Monarchies Survived the Arab Spring," Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper, No. 8, September 2013 (2013), 3, 24, 25. Seminar at the Centre for Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, Oslo.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, F. Rosenthal, and N.J. Dawood, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, in Three Volumes, 1 (Princeton University Press, 1967), 264, 269, 292.

<sup>20</sup> Saudi Arabian sources. Chatham House Rule.

<sup>21</sup> I am indebted to Chas Freeman, former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia, for pointing out the indigenous democratic process of *shura*. Seminar, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Oslo.

<sup>22</sup> Saudi sources. Chatham House Rule.

<sup>23</sup> S. Stenslie, *Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia: The Challenge of Succession* (Routledge, 2012), 43.

<sup>24</sup> S. Lacroix, "Saudi Islamists and the Arab Spring" (Kuwait Program on Development, Governance and Globalization in the Gulf States, London School of Economics, 2014), 2, 5, 15.

<sup>25</sup> Stéphane Lacroix, "Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia," ed. George Holoch (Harvard University Press, 2011), 268.

<sup>26</sup> "Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Promises to Lead His Country 'Back to Moderate Islam,'" Raf Sanchez, October 24, 2017, *The Telegraph*.

<sup>27</sup> Conversations with Saudis who shared how they recalled their society changing because of this new strategy. Chatham House Rule.

<sup>28</sup> T. Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 82, 85, 87-89; and "Migration, Minorities, and Radical Networks: Labor Movements and Opposition Groups in Saudi Arabia, 1950 - 1975," *IRSH* 59 (2014): 473, 477, 482, 489, 492, 493, 500, 503.

<sup>29</sup> S. Yizraeli, *Politics and Society in Saudi Arabia: The Crucial Years of Development, 1960-1982* (Columbia University Press, 2012), 71, 88-89, 185-227, 251-265.

<sup>30</sup> Conversations with Saudi sources. Chatham House Rule.

<sup>31</sup> Lacroix, 109, 111.

<sup>32</sup> D.D. Kaye, *Beyond the Handshake: Multilateral Cooperation in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process, 1991-1996* (Columbia University Press, 2012), 197.

<sup>33</sup> Diplomat, expert on Saudi Arabian security. Chatham House Rule.

<sup>34</sup> Conversations in the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre, fall 2017.

<sup>35</sup> The Saudi understanding of the *Hezbollah Model* in my view corresponds to the analyses of the renowned Iran expert, Walter Posch. Walter Posch, "The Third World, Global Islam and Pragmatism. The Making of Iranian Foreign Policy," *SWP Research Paper* (2013): 30-31.

<sup>36</sup> G.T. Allison and P. Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Longman, 1999), 283.

<sup>37</sup> Walter Posch, „Die „Qods“ —Truppe Der Revolutionsgarden,“ *Iran-Brief, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, no. No/H/3/14 (2014). This was also my own impression inferred from my conversations in Teheran in May 2014.

<sup>38</sup> I proposed this in my presentation to a seminar for Saudi Arabian diplomats fall of 2017. Their response is under Chatham House Rule. The Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs posted a presentation of the event with a picture of the seminar at <https://goo.gl/D93ePT>. From this I infer that they found my proposal an input worth considering in their policy-making process.

<sup>39</sup> Jean-François Seznec, "Intra-Regional Energy Cooperation Unlocking the Middle East's Potential," in *MEI Policy Paper* (Washington: The Middle East Institute, 2016).

<sup>40</sup> Conversation with Saudi Arabian officials, Riyadh, fall 2017. Chatham House Rule.

# Engaging the US in the Age of Trump: The Case for a New European Strategic Discourse

Torgeir E. FJÆRTOFT\*

*While the prevailing perception of EU Member States of NATO is that cooperation with the US under President Trump has become close to impossible, there is still no alternative to engaging. International solutions of consequence will hardly be sustainable without the US. How can EU/NATO Member States and the EU engage effectively with the US on workable international solutions? Policy is applied analysis that inevitably infers from theory in response to the question: what works? Therefore, policy is an intervention, as therapy uses the term, and theories are cognitive tools. Policy and therapy are comparable because both work through discourse to effect change by cognitive restructuring. Therefore, psychological theories offer cognitive tools for designing a strategic discourse as policy intervention. A model for cognitive behavioural therapy and a theory on identity can innovate theory and make policy more effective.*

*Current US political controversies mainly boil down to conflicting US identity stories. Foreign policy issues are an extension of competing domestic group identities and derived domestic issues. The domestic political process does not consider foreign policy issues on their own merit. As a result, current US foreign policy of unilateral confrontation causes some serious risks and costs to US interests.*

*The states now seen as adversaries, such as Russia and Iran, have comparable identity stories that are in a similar way dysfunctional. Stories of confrontation bestow assets in a domestic power struggle while undermining international solutions. A new European strategic discourse should avoid identity stories but seek cognitive restructuring of grand strategies by proposing within the EU/Russian Permanent Partnership Council a comprehensive multilateral conference on the new regional political order in Syria and Iraq. This proposal can emulate the most successful cognitive restructuring of a grand strategy ever, the process led by Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr in West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s leading to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.*

## 1 THE PROBLEM

President Trump has changed the nature of NATO and the relationship between the EU and NATO. The prevailing perception by EU/NATO Member States is that President Trump has turned US foreign policy erratic, confrontational, unpredictable and potentially dangerous. By consequence, the US has changed from a mainstay of the EU Member States' cooperative European foreign policy to an obstacle, a very serious problem. This new situation creates a dilemma nobody

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in Europe yet knows how to deal with. On the one hand, the US now appears impossible to relate to as a partner; on the other, the US remains an indispensable party to any international political and economic order. An international agreement of consequence is hardly sustainable without the US on board.

The controversy over the Iranian nuclear agreement is a case in point. The predominant view among EU Member States is that all parties to the agreement must uphold the *modus vivendi* because the alternative would be worse, possibly a nuclear-armed Iran driving regional conflicts. The US under President Trump has abandoned the agreement in a declared attempt to pressure Iran by applying new sanctions to renegotiate the agreement's purported untenable terms, as well as contain Iran in the regional conflicts in the Middle East. The prevailing view among EU Member States is that Trump's Iran policy is not rational because the boosted confrontation raises the risks of a new round of war without a realistic prospect to deliver on the intention to pressure Iran to accommodate. The perception of rationality, as I will elaborate later in this article, is that behaviour is reasonable in a consistent and persistent effort to maximize goals while minimizing costs and risk of unintended consequences.

If need be, the EU Member States must proceed without US partnership, but such a recourse would entail problems. Shielding European interests from the consequences of the new US Iran policy is hardly realistic. Conceivably, a new regional order in the Middle East may be feasible without the US after the agreement between Russia, Iran and Turkey.<sup>1</sup> However, this agreement brokered by Russia may boost Russia's political leverage also in Europe when the traditional US security guarantees appear less realistic by the changes in US policy and rhetoric. In addition to the implications for European security of breaking with the new US administration, the economic ties make European business vulnerable to US pressure. In their predicament, European businesses in Iran faced with the stark choice between the huge US market and the small Iranian one will follow their bottom line, or corporate rationality, not political rationality.

Therefore, to cope with these dilemmas, EU Member States need to engage with Trump's America. The question is how to engage effectively to avoid the two obvious pitfalls. One pitfall is rendering the communication ineffective by confrontational rhetoric, 'setting the record straight', for which there will be a strong domestic political pressure. The other pitfall would be to avoid all conflict by submitting to any US pressure, which would seem the most tempting option for leaders struggling to find a way out of the dilemmas, at the cost of policy rationality. This article shows a feasible way out of the dilemmas President Trump's US poses to European states.

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<sup>1</sup> S. H. Mousavian, *Why Iran Prefers the Eastern Bloc Over the West*, LobeLog 10 Sep. 2018, <https://lobelog.com/why-iran-prefers-the-eastern-bloc-over-the-west/>.

In the following, I shall show how we infer policy from a theory, and then set out my theory of *strategic discourse*. Then I will discuss my methodology in exploring how this theory can explain the current US political landscape across the entire specter of current US political narratives. Based on these findings I suggest how EU Member States and the EU can engage more effectively with the US under President Trump. Then I identify interfaces with the various predominant discourses in the Middle East, especially Iran. Finally, I will suggest how a new European strategic discourse can engage all parties, including the US and Iran, in a broad political process towards a new shared political order, a process comparable to *cognitive restructuring* in cognitive behavioural therapy.

## 2 THE CONSTITUTIVE ROLE OF THEORY IN POLICY

Coping with these dilemmas and avoiding the pitfalls raises the question of what policy actually is. Policy is the end of an affective and cognitive process that produces an intention. We inevitably infer policy from a set of assumptions. Put differently, a policy is an applied analysis. When the policy fails to deliver on its intentions, the analysis that it applies is wrong.

The assumptions from which we infer policy form a theory, a superintendent conjecture. In this sense, I use the term theory in the same sense as Karl Popper<sup>2</sup> and Kenneth Waltz.<sup>3</sup> They attribute a constitutive role to theory in analyses in the sense that the theory constructs the facts to which it applies. Put differently, any description is by necessity a reduction and an interpretation. A theory of what is important and why determines the selection and interpretation of facts. Therefore, a description is by necessity also an analysis in the sense that it is an answer – explicit or implicit – to the questions of how something is, how it should be, and how we can change what it is to what should be. Therefore, in Popper's<sup>4</sup> and Waltz's view on political theory, there is 'no analysis without prescription'.<sup>5</sup> Put differently, the selection and interpretation of fact inherent in any description has prescription as its purpose. Prescription comprises both a normative and a strategic statement: why the prescribed purpose is important, and how we can reach our purpose.

When the parameters of policy change as dramatically as they have recently, the old assumptions no longer hold. A new theory is imperative. From this new theory, we can then infer new political options.

<sup>2</sup> K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. Ii 5th ed., 259–280 (Routledge 1966).

<sup>3</sup> K. N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis*, Kindle Loc 333 (Columbia University Press 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Popper, *supra* n. 2, at 278–279.

<sup>5</sup> Waltz, *supra* n. 3, at 374, 379.

The intention of a policy is to affect a complex and dynamic chain of causality. In the case of engaging the US under President Trump, the purpose of concerned EU/NATO Member States is to affect the chain of causality that produces such, in the prevailing European view, irrational policies as the rejection of the nuclear deal with Iran. Therefore, we need a theory of foreign policy decisions that explains the affective and cognitive processes that produce policy, and how we can develop policy interventions that affect these processes as we intend. Theories on foreign policy therefore need to be prescriptive of action, operational, as theory in other fields, such as economics or therapy.

Traditional theories of foreign policy revolve around the paradigms of realism, advocated by such practitioners of foreign policy as Bismarck and Kissinger,<sup>6</sup> and constructionism, most notably represented by US presidents Wilson<sup>7</sup> and the younger Bush. Our minds tend to perceive these paradigms as polar opposites, although actual policy would vacillate along a continuum between them. Realism sees international relations as an equation of power, and the purpose of policy to adapt to this equation or change it. Constructionists, by contrast, are concerned about the moral and legal principles that should guide international relations, and consider the purpose of policy to advocate and enforce these principles. For my purpose, finding an actionable theory for foreign policy decisions, both paradigms lead policy to failure because they do not adequately capture the nature of policy as an affective and cognitive process of dynamic interactions between differing perceptions and ensuing perspectives. The world that counts is in our minds, and international relations are inter-mind relations.

### 3 MY THEORY OF *STRATEGIC DISCOURSE*

My theory is that an adapted model for cognitive behavioural therapy can explain and change the affective and cognitive processes that produce policies. I denote my theory *strategic discourse*. This differs significantly from the current predominant discourse in international policy. While traditional diplomatic discourse tends to relate to statements of grievance and intent at face value, strategic discourse will engage the affective and cognitive process producing policy in its distinct phases. Strategic discourse distinguishes between *rationality*, as reasonable behaviour in a persistent and consistent attempt to maximize goal achievement while minimizing collateral costs and risks of unintended consequences, and *rationalization*, invoking arguments in support of decisions made for other reasons.

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<sup>6</sup> H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (Simon & Schuster 1994). On Bismarck see H. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metemich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace, 1812-22* 103–137 (Houghton Mifflin 1973).

<sup>7</sup> Kissinger (1994), *supra* n. 6, at 218–246.

The purpose of diplomatic discourse is to persuade, whether of power equations in the realist mode, or of principles and ideas in the constructionist mode. When efforts at persuasion fail, the traditional recourse is to apply power, from various boycotts to sanctions, military posture and finally military intervention, eventually withdrawal. This is, in a generalized simplification, the trajectory followed by Western policy in the Middle East, including Afghanistan, since the end of the Cold War. By consequence, not the West, but an emerging block of authoritarian states led by Russia is now in the position to broker an agreement between the major regional states in the Middle East on a new regional order to end war.

In my view, the West, as bearer of a normative project,<sup>8</sup> squandered by mismanagement the opportunities opening up in its triumphant moment at the end of the Cold War of unchallenged Western values and power. The West is a normative project of democracy and human rights. Western power, to be effective, must derive its legitimacy from this normative project. However, the trajectory of the Western normative project from triumph to failure has now even reached the domestic politics of some western states. The Western normative project has deteriorated to the degree that the new US President, with his numerous and strong supporters, for all practical purposes has taken the US, up until this point a mainstay of the Western normative project, out of the communal deliberations of Western states, the policy problem I address in this article.

The root cause of the mismanagement of the Western normative project and power was an untenable theory that rendered persuasion ineffective and power projection self-defeating. Therefore, a new theory on foreign policy needs to show how the bearers of the Western normative project can reclaim the predominance of Western values and power by persuading more effectively. I will therefore show how a model for cognitive behavioural therapy can offer tools for a more persuasive discourse.

The purpose of a theory on foreign policy should be to conjecture a chain of causality to develop a policy. A policy is an intervention intended to change causality in order to produce a desired outcome. Cognitive processes, influenced by affective processes, construct this chain of causality. In this sense, foreign policy has significant theoretical and practical interface with *cognitive behavioural therapy*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> I use the term 'West' in the sense of Heinrich Aug. Winkler in his 'History of the West', as a normative project. H. A. Winkler, *Geschichte Des Westens: Von Den Anfängen in Der Antike Bis Zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Beck 2009); *Geschichte Des Westens: Die Zeit Der Weltkriege 1914–1945* (C. H. Beck 2011); *Geschichte Des Westens: Vom Kalten Krieg Zum Mauerfall* (C. H. Beck 2014); *Geschichte Des Westens: Die Zeit Der Gegenwart* (C. H. Beck: München 2015); *Greatness and Limits of the West. The History of an Unfinished Project*, LSE 'Europe in Question' Discussion Paper Series (London School of Economics 2011).

<sup>9</sup> A. Wenzel, *Strategic Decision Making in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* (American Psychological Association 2013); M. B. Ballou, *Psychological Interventions: A Guide to Strategies* (Praeger 1995).

A manual for *cognitive behavioural therapy*, states that conceptualizing the problem is applying theory to case.<sup>10</sup> On this basis, hypotheses about causality and hence interventions are elaborated. Theories are therefore cognitive tools to develop actionable options. When an intervention, or policy, appears to fail, the probable reason is that the theory, and hence the inferred hypothesis, is wrong or inadequate.

However, the perfect theory and inferred policy is a chimera. We do not know all facts, are not able to process all available facts, and interpret the facts that we do process according to pre-existing schemata, or mental models, the term CIA's settles for, drawing on Kahneman, in a public report.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, to improve analyses, we need to understand our own mental model, that of those we relate to, and design systematic procedures to improve our cognitive processing. These are CIA's recommendations in response to their own failures, in a public report.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, foreign policy should follow *abductive reasoning*, which is making sense of an occurrence by a theory and ensuing hypothesis, as in cognitive behavioural therapy, conceptualizing the problem by applying theory to a case, forming hypotheses.<sup>13</sup> To conceptualize analysis as abductive reasoning is to approach our ideas and perceptions as work-in-progress, as evolving *heuristics*. Kahneman, in one of the articles he cites for his Nobel Prize in Economics, actually describe how abductive reasoning works by heuristics,<sup>14</sup> the common mode of thinking in foreign policy analyses. A heuristic is a simplified cognitive process in which we apply an association that comes to mind to a new context as an approximation. In other words, our behaviour follows from a cognitive construct.

I will apply a model for the cognitive construction of behaviour developed for cognitive behavioural therapy.<sup>15</sup> This model is relevant for foreign policy for four reasons:

- First, the model is a generic description of the abductive reasoning, first as sense making and then as inference from assumptions, inherent in all human choices in social and political contexts. I posit that there is no separate cognitive mode of political reasoning.
- Second, the model has an operational purpose, *cognitive restructuring*, which is a concept denoting a process in which discourse changes

<sup>10</sup> Wenzel, *supra* n. 9, at 19.

<sup>11</sup> R. J. Heuer & C. S. Intelligence, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, Ch. 9, 62, 63, 66, 111, fins 88, 89 (Center for the Study of Intelligence 1999).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, at 60–63.

<sup>13</sup> Wenzel, *supra* n. 9, at 19.

<sup>14</sup> A. Tversky & D. Kahneman, *Judgement Under Uncertainty: Huristics and Biases*, Science 185 (1974). For an overview of his argument D. Kahneman, *Maps of Bounded Rationality: Psychology of Behavioral Economics*, 93(5) Am. Econ. Rev. 1449–1475 (2003).

<sup>15</sup> Wenzel, *supra* n. 9, at 23–27.



behaviour by changing dysfunctional patterns of thought,<sup>16</sup> or in my preferred term, mental models.

- Third, the therapeutic discourse in cognitive behavioural therapy motivates change by generating optimism that desired change is feasible.<sup>17</sup> A strategic discourse must therefore strive for a dual persuasion, that constructive change is both desirable and feasible.
- Fourth, the model is collaborative. The therapist involves the patient in the evolving design of the therapeutic discourse by abductive reasoning: *what makes sense, what works*.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the abductive reasoning evolves by feedback, and motivation is the function of evolving ownership generated by involvement.

The model for strategic discourse I adapt from the model for cognitive behavioural therapy posits that human behaviour is cognitively constructed in distinct but interacting phases:

The first stage is the *formative experience*. As both individuals and groups, we relate to certain previous events to which we attribute far-reaching significance. The second stage is the *core beliefs* that we infer from the formative experience.<sup>19</sup>

In the political analyses for decisions in foreign policy, these two stages form the *historical analogy*,<sup>20</sup> which is the choice *and* interpretation of the past event by which we make sense of current events. Seen over time, the analogy with the strongest impact on these choices is the failure to deter Hitler prior to World War II. The consequence is that there is a tendency to accord less weight to crisis management than to the risk of insufficient deterrence. Kahneman has identified a number of persistent cognitive biases, what he terms *persistent patterns of cognition and preference*, which favour military posturing over crisis management. Among these are:

- propensity to overestimate control over events;
- to assume larger risks in persisting in an option in which we have invested than in trying alternative options;

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, at 23, Ch. 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, at 64, 75–81.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, at 28–32.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, at 30.

<sup>20</sup> I first came across the idea that historical analogies constructs current political analyses by reading Henry Kissinger's book on the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. He posits that history teaches by analogy (Kissinger (1973), *supra* n. 6, at 1812–1822). I then found this idea elaborated in the theories of Daniel Kahneman. He finds that we think by associating with something we have processed in our minds, which provides context and reference point, in short, an analogy, although he does not use this term. The choice of analogy, in Kahneman's theory, is steered by cognitive accessibility; put in simpler terms, what is on top of our minds. The implication is that frequency of exposure enhances the cognitive accessibility, provided there is no emotional block. This is the central argument in my theory on strategic discourse. For a brief exposé of Kahneman's theories: Kahneman.

- failure to recognize that the behaviour by our opponent is reactive rather than aggressive, shaped as a response to a perception of a situation rather than the function a disposition or inherent intent.<sup>21</sup>

During the Cold War, the two most dangerous cases, the Cuban Missile Crisis<sup>22</sup> and the crisis of 1983,<sup>23</sup> follow this pattern. However, during the Cuban Missile crisis, President Kennedy's analogy changed. From a preoccupation with preventing failure of deterrence, he became more concerned about the need for crisis management. He read a bestseller of that time, Barbara Tuchman's *Guns of August*, on how the First World War, as opposed to the Second, was due to failure of crisis management.<sup>24</sup>

The mental model of deterrence worked as follows: The formative experience of the perceived failure to deter Hitler was interpreted into the core belief that failure of deterrence allows dictators to undermine democracies. This core belief compelled the superintendent assumption, or *grand strategy*, that deterrence must be sufficient to allow democracies to prevail over dictators when power and resolve is tested, which again translates into specific policy choices to raise military posture during crisis and confrontations.

The mental model of crisis management, on the other hand, is shaped by the formative experience of crisis management failure leading to World War I. This is translated into the core belief that war can come by inadvertence, as a failure of politics. This basic belief compels the superintendent assumption, or *grand strategy*, that political tensions must be addressed by dialogue and conflicts contained by compromise, which again turns into policy choices of negotiations.

Therefore, President Kennedy's evolving handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis shows two templates for mental models in the analyses of policy choices, deterrence versus crisis management.

The third stage in the model for cognitive behavioural therapy is the rules and assumptions we infer from our core beliefs.<sup>25</sup> As I have shown, in political analyses, these rules and assumptions form *grand strategies*, a formative idea of the relationship between problems, goals and means.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> D. Kahneman & J. Renshon, *Hawkish Biases*, <http://www.princeton.edu/~kahneman/docs/Publications/Hawkish%20Biases.pdf> undated paper received in email from Daniel Kahneman 12 Dec. 2013. P. 1, 3.

<sup>22</sup> G. T. Allison & P. Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Longman 1999).

<sup>23</sup> B. B. Fischer, *A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare* (CIA), undated <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/a-cold-war-conundrum/source.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> R. F. Kennedy & A. M. Schlesinger, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* 97 (W. W. Norton 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Wenzel, *supra* n. 9, at 26.

<sup>26</sup> H. Brands, *American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump* (Brookings Institution Press 2018). For a broad historical overview of grand strategies, J. L. Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (Penguin Books Limited 2018).

I infer from Kahneman's theories that grand strategies are inherent in our perceptions of political options. The analogy that forms the assumptions of the grand strategy is a reference point, an event as framed by the context in which we interpret it.<sup>27</sup> In Kahneman's terminology, a *frame* is *the decision-maker's conception of the acts, outcomes and contingencies associated with a particular choice*.<sup>28</sup>

When Waltz posits that political analyses are inherently prescriptive,<sup>29</sup> he for all practical purposes refers to the grand strategy stage of the theory. Therefore, strategic discourse must primarily engage strategy. This cognitive stage forms assumptions about policy as *agency*, its potential, pitfalls and limitations.

As will become evident in my subsequent discussion of the recent turn of US discourse on foreign policy, the first stage of the cognitive and process producing a policy, the analogy, will often form the core of identity, and hence the most affective, hence inflexible, part of the cognitive process that leads to policy. Shapiro, in his analyses of identity, defines identity as 'the story you tell yourself about yourself'.<sup>30</sup> A story, or narrative, is our minds default mode of constructing social and political reality. An event is attributed significance and sets the story in motion, the causality is simplified and individual submerged in roles, usually the three epic templates of hero, villain and victim.<sup>31</sup> The stories driving current US politics clearly fit this paradigm, as I will show.

Shapiro distinguishes between *core identity*, which is inflexible and as such impregnable by arguments, and the more flexible *relational identity*,<sup>32</sup> including our group identities that are dynamic, shaped by the nature of the inter-group processes.<sup>33</sup> His main point is that relating to others as individuals and groups inevitably generates concomitant emotions. In his terminology, conflict causes the 'tribes effect',<sup>34</sup> which is a rigid and confrontational story about us versus them. Therefore, he argues that to resolve conflict, we must engage group identities by

<sup>27</sup> Kahneman, *supra* n. 14, at 1454, 1458; A. Tversky & D. Kahneman, *Choices, Values, and Frames*, 34 *Am. Psychol.* (1984).

<sup>28</sup> A Tversky & D. Kahneman, *The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice*, 211(4481) *Science*, New Series 453 (1981).

<sup>29</sup> Waltz, *supra* n. 3, Kindle loc 374.

<sup>30</sup> D. Shapiro, *Negotiating the Nonnegotiable: How to Resolve Your Most Emotionally Charged Conflicts* 12 (Penguin Publishing Group 2016).

<sup>31</sup> Dr Vincent Covello, *Summary of the Risk and Crisis Communications Training*, Presented on Thursday 23 Oct. 2003 (Closed seminar, Brussels 1998).

<sup>32</sup> Shapiro, *supra* n. 30, at 13–16.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel L. Shapiro, *Relational Identity Theory. A Systematic Approach for Transforming the Emotional Dimension of Conflict*, 68(7) *Am. Psychol.* (2010).

<sup>34</sup> President Obama invokes the term «tribes effect» as an explanation of intractable conflicts causing foreign policy problems. He contrasts the 'tribes effect' with Scandinavian behaviour. J. Goldberg, *The Obama Doctrine*, *The Atlantic* (10 Mar. 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/press-releases/archive/2016/03/the-obama-doctrine-the-atlantics-exclusive-report-on-presidents-hardest-foreign-policy-decisions/473151/>.

communicating respect for their sense of *autonomy* by avoiding a sense of coercion or imposition, and generate a sense of *affiliation* by involvement building affinity.<sup>35</sup>

The problem for those that operate under the ‘tribes effect’ is that they forego the rational choice of pragmatic cooperation, which in most cases offers a better chance of resolving their problems, for an ‘emotional rationality’ in which defending core identity by confrontation takes precedent. The opening for dealing with ‘emotional rationality’, however, is that it does not deliver on its promises of solving problems by defeating ‘the others’. Therefore, to engage with the current US we must first cope with the ‘tribes effect’ of the current group identities by avoiding them and instead focus on problem solving. When in an effective mode, inter-group communication has worked as a key to open closed minds, rational arguments get a chance to bear by holding out the mutual benefits of cooperative problem solving.

In my theory on strategic discourse, I hold the grand strategy stage to be more *cognitively flexible* than the choice and interpretation of the formative event that form the analogy in the identity stories.<sup>36</sup> This is the stage where interventions can construct more flexible and pragmatic inter-group processes that in its turn can change the analogies that construct parties’ stories about their identities. There are three discernable, distinct types of grand strategies after the end of the Cold War.

First, the constructionist western grand strategy of social engineering by military force that led to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq can be termed *triumphalist*. A close aide to US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, has vividly described this grand strategy to me: *After the success in Afghanistan, we felt we could do anything and that we had an obligation to set things right.*<sup>37</sup> The NATO air campaign in Libya was clearly in this tradition. In his own way, President Trump also has a triumphalist grand strategy by his professed belief in his personal ability to first intimidate and then sway those he deals with.

Another grand strategy in the realist tradition can be termed *fatalist*. The assumption is that events unfold by their own inherent dynamic, and that, hence, attempted influence is self-defeating. This mindset replaced triumphalism in the Western countries facing the war in Syria, developing no viable strategy to persuade, compel or, as in Libya, remove the regime.

The third grand strategy, a synthesis of the constructionist and realist tradition, is the *pragmatist*. Influence is possible, but wrought with great difficulties; hence, that power be exercised with utmost constraint and applied to feasible goals while accepting failure and falling short of the purported goals. This is the essence of the

<sup>35</sup> Shapiro, *supra* n. 30.

<sup>36</sup> On the role of cognitive flexibility in adapting policy (on how personalities differ), Y. S. Aronoff, *The Political Psychology of Israeli Prime Ministers: When Hard-Liners Opt for Peace* (Cambridge University Press 2014).

<sup>37</sup> Closed seminar 2013 under Chatham House Rule.

theologian and philosopher Reinhold Niebuhr' teachings.<sup>38</sup> This is also the grand strategy espoused by President Obama most authoritatively at the beginning of his Presidency in his Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance speech<sup>39</sup> and towards the end term in the interview in *The Atlantic*.<sup>40</sup> This strategy is by his own admission greatly influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr.<sup>41</sup>

A pragmatist grand strategy was the concept Egon Bahr developed for Willy Brandt's policy of West Germany's rapprochement with the Eastern bloc in the 1960s and 1970s, *change by approaching*.<sup>42</sup> This is the most effective change of grand strategy ever since it produced lasting change after defying overwhelming odds.<sup>43</sup> By Bahr's own account, his strategy rested on three assumptions:<sup>44</sup>

- (1) Security must be shared to be secure;
- (2) Proposals are only realistic if seen to improve security of all parties;
- (3) Communication addresses only practical improvement of security, no attempt to challenge or persuade in extraneous issues, such as ideology or political system.

The understanding of agency, its potential, limitations and pitfalls, is the decisive difference between the triumphalist, fatalist and pragmatist grand strategies. A clear case of triumphalist grand strategy is the Western narrative between the end of the Cold War in 1989 and the war in Syria after 2011. The discourse was basically confined to intentions. The military intervention in Libya was the latest case of a clearly triumphalist grand strategy.<sup>45</sup> The perception of its failure led to a fatalist grand strategy in Syria, translating into a policy of inaction towards the regime, though brutal and murderous as the one NATO toppled in Libya. Western military intervention in Syria was confined to defeating the terrorist

<sup>38</sup> R. Niebuhr & G. Dorrien, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of Its Traditional Defense* (University of Chicago Press 2011); R. Niebuhr, C. West & L. B. Gilkey, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Westminster John Knox Press 2013).

<sup>39</sup> W. F. Felice, *President Obama's Nobel Peace Prize Speech: Embracing the Ethics of Reinhold Niebuhr*, 37(2/3) Soc. Just. (2010–2011); D. Brooks, *Obama's Christian Realism*, *The New York Times* (14 Dec. 2009), <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/15/opinion/15brooks.html>; B. Woodward, *Obama's Wars* 378 (Simon & Schuster, Limited 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Goldberg, *supra* n. 34.

<sup>41</sup> Felice, *supra* n. 39, 'I take away the compelling idea that there's serious evil in the world and hardship and pain. And we should be humble and modest in our belief we can eliminate those things. But we shouldn't use that as an excuse for cynicism and inaction.'

<sup>42</sup> 'Wandel durch Annäherung'.

<sup>43</sup> P. Merseburger, *Willy Brandt: 1913-1992. Visionär Und Realist* 430–657, 689 (Pantheon 2013).

<sup>44</sup> Interview with three previous advisors to Egon Bahr. Chatham House Rule.

<sup>45</sup> By way of example, see the memoirs of the previous Norwegian Prime Minister, now Secretary General of NATO, J. Stoltenberg, *Min Historie* 437–450 (Oslo Gyldendal Norsk Forlag 2016). For a more critical view, House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *Libya: Examination of Intervention and Collapse and the UK's Future Policy Options* (London 2016–2017).

organization of IS, with no real strategy to persuade, coerce or remove the regime. By contrast, Egon Bahr's discourse was a clear case of pragmatist grand strategy. The focus was on actual effect, hence his concept of security as shared.

Following the formative experience, core beliefs and rules and assumptions, or analogy and grand strategy, the final stage in the cognitive behavioural therapy model of our cognitive processes are the *coping strategies*, or, in political analyses, the specific *policies*. The series of Western military interventions from Afghanistan in 2001 to the bombing of Libya in 2011 and the ensuing inaction in Syria are all policies that follow from the preceding cognitive stages. So are the policies of those to whom the West relates. This recognition implies that it is ineffectual to try to change the policies without engaging the grand strategy of the mental models that produce them.

#### 4 MY METHODOLOGY: ABDUCTIVE REASONING BY INFERENCE FROM OBSERVATIONS

My methodology in this article follows the standard procedure in diplomacy. Analyses are abductive reasoning by inferring from the media, social media and private conversations.

This methodology offers a representative albeit imperfect and incomplete image of social reality. However, in my model for strategic discourse, as in the model I adapt in cognitive behavioural therapy, the conceptualization, by applying theory to case, is tentative. My methodology is basically the same as in cognitive behavioural therapy.<sup>46</sup>

Compared to systematic quantitative analyses, such as polls, that offer more reliable yet standardized, hence limited, data, the insight into mental models gleaned from the media, social media and private conversations is richer in its dynamic complexity. This methodology is as well more focused on my specific purpose, which is to find a way beyond the identity stories to engaging on practical political solutions.

On balance, therefore, exploratory conversations offer a better entry point for accessing individuals and their groups to explore how a strategic discourse can engage their mental models, a point of departure for a dynamic evolvement through involvement

#### 5 CURRENT US MENTAL MODELS AT WORK

To analyse what room for manoeuvre competing US group identities leave for a new strategic discourse by the EU/NATO Member States on grand strategies, I shall first discuss these identities and then the policy stories that respond to them.

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<sup>46</sup> Wenzel, *supra* n. 9.

The US is not a uniform monolithic polity. The prevailing European concern that US policies have taken an irrational and potentially dangerous turn is shared by many Americans, and the image of a changed US therefore not entirely accurate. However, on balance, the concern is not without basis. One authoritative US voice that shares the concern is Madeleine Albright, previous US Secretary of State under President Clinton and, as refugee from Nazis and then Communists in her native Czechoslovakia, a first-hand witness to fascism and communism. In her latest book, she is concerned that the wave of authoritarian movements in many countries including Russia and the US can evolve into fascism, which she defines as a political method that mobilizes people around strong emotions against someone attributed the role of 'the other' to oppress certain out-groups and suppress critical voices.<sup>47</sup>

Some Americans fear that America is turning fascist under President Trump and the strong financial interest groups that support him and other extreme or conservative politicians. Personally, I find these fears overstated. Admittedly, a very strong and large minority of voters are blind supporters of Trump and strongly aggressive towards Obama, Clinton and their defined out-groups, such as the 'Liberals', the 'Left', more often than not also racial and sexual minorities, Muslims and modern women. This is reminiscent of certain aspects of the fascist regimes and the other authoritarian regimes Albright analyses in her book.

However, there is a strong and growing alternative movement in the US. By way of example, a large number of voters affiliated with the Democratic Party and young voters now identify themselves as social democrats of the Scandinavian model.<sup>48</sup> There are also a large number of Republicans that embrace the US political heritage while critical of the style as well as many policies of President Trump. They see the heritage they embrace anchored in the Constitution and authoritatively interpreted by the Founding Fathers. For the same reason they strongly reject President Obama and Hillary Clinton for their purported lack of patriotism and their policies that they see undermine the American political heritage.

Taken together, my observations boil down to the following thesis: US identity stories are narratives of victimhood. The underlying causes are probably tensions generated by economic and social transformations, but the current US domestic politics seem to revolve almost exclusively around the contested images of the three controversial politicians Barak Obama, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Their entry on the national political scene as Presidents and a Presidential candidate form the significant event from which the identity stories evolve by

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<sup>47</sup> M. Albright, *Fascism: A Warning* (HarperCollins 2018). See especially Ch. 16.

<sup>48</sup> Democrats are more positive about socialism than capitalism, new Gallup poll says, CNBC, 13 Aug. 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/08/13/democrats-more-positive-about-socialism-than-capitalism-gallup-poll.html>.

simplified causality and rigid roles. The stories invoke anecdotes from which a superintendent image is generalized. Political positions seem overwhelmingly confined to contention over their alleged personal qualities, and only secondarily over their political differences.

The domestic issues derived from the identity narratives are primarily tax breaks to induce investments while boosting military expenditures, versus social benefits and public investment in infrastructure and education, and the trade barriers to protect US industries versus crisis in sectors hurt by retaliation, as of now, most significantly soybean farmers.

Foreign policy issues are mainly a projection of the domestic controversies over the purported personal qualities of Obama, Clinton and Trump and the derived domestic issues. Relations with Russia revolve around President Trump's personal relationship with Putin and Russian malign interference in US politics and elections. The issues of trade and the Iran nuclear deal revolve mainly around domestic politics and the respective US policies, and are only comprehensible as such. By consequence, relations with the outside world are therefore really not foreign policy issues. The issues' value as assets in the domestic power struggle count more than their actual effects on the international environment.

As a result, foreign policy issues are hardly considered on their own merits. Still, some of the political differences over foreign policy are not without a modicum of rational substance. When President Trump imposes punitive tariffs on China, he is right that China has long practiced trade barriers with the same effect, such as undervaluing their currency. When his adversaries accuse President Trump of an affinity for authoritarian leaders over democratic ones, which has implications for the democratic process and political culture in the US, they can compare how a series of encounters appear.

In my terminology, there are diverging and competing political mental models at work. The competing mental models construct conflicting group identities, currently in the 'tribal' mode of confrontation. For the tribal mode of group identities to work, a strong antithesis is necessary. In my observations, it struck me that conflicting mental models seemed to share the same antitheses in their identity narratives. These antitheses bear on foreign policy.

Republicans need to distance themselves from the accusations against President Trump that he and his campaign colluded with Russia. Therefore, Russia is now a universal antithesis in the competing and otherwise diverging US mental models. Relations with the NATO ally Turkey these mental models tend to perceive, if at all, as an extension of relations with Russia, especially over the conflict in Syria.

Iran is also a universal antithesis. Not only Republicans but also many Democrats now see Obama's nuclear deal with Iran as too flawed and support President Trump's efforts to negotiate a better deal. His pressure of North Korea is



widely, but not universally, perceived to have succeeded in defusing the crisis over nuclear arms and threats.

Encouraged by this perception of success, he is expected to follow the same tactic with Iran, intimidate to sway. However, Americans differ over the prospects for negotiated solutions, both in the trade war with China and with Iran and North Korea over their nuclear programs. While most Republicans see President Trump's confrontational style as a smart negotiation tactic, most Democrats do not.

## 6 FROM RATIONALIZATION TO RATIONALITY

The essential problem with the current US framing of foreign policy issues is that the arguments are rationalizations of identity stories. Rationality, by contrast, as reasonable behaviour in a consistent and persistent effort to maximize goal achievement, while minimizing costs and risks of unintended consequences, demands that we consider issues on their own merits. How can the EU/NATO Member States disentangle the rational discourse on problems and feasible options from the rationalizations in the narratives of identity?

Rationality in policymaking is most feasible by engaging on grand strategy. US grand strategy has evolved under the three most recent presidents, Bush, Obama and now Trump. The trajectory is from seeking to construct a world order to support US interests in international stability and prosperity to the current confrontational unilateralism.<sup>49</sup> However, the problems to US domestic interests caused by unilateral power projection can only be resolved by reverting to a more cooperative grand strategy. These problems comprise trade retaliation hurting soybean farmers, and costs of rearming at the expense of domestic programs.

Potentially even more serious to US citizens is the risk that their young women and men in the military could suffer and die by a new war. Current US strategy in the Middle East, as set out in the Posture Statement by the US Central Command, foresees projecting military force to coerce Russia and Iran, and possibly Turkey.<sup>50</sup>

Coercion by projecting military force translates into brinksmanship. This strategy entails the risk of an unintended consequence, by inadvertence and not design by any party to the conflicts, that the US can edge too close to a war with Iran, dragging in possibly Russia and Turkey, over Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and even Israel. The Posture Statement in my view reflects a need to reassure Saudi Arabia and Israel of US support against Iran. However, Saudi Arabia and Israel have long

<sup>49</sup> Brands, *supra* n. 26.

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.centcom.mil/ABOUT-US/POSTURE-STATEMENT/> (accessed 27 Feb. 2018).

wanted more active US support in the showdown they appear to seek with Iran. Therefore, current US policy in the Middle East puts the US in jeopardy by the cognitive biases I have discussed that underestimate the risks of military posture at the neglect of crisis management.

The question is if a more traditional cooperative grand strategy is realistic anymore in the current climate of confrontation. Is there an interface between current US narratives and those attributed the role of ‘the other’ in foreign policy, such as Russia and Iran?

The narratives constructing identities and policies in Russia and Iran are roughly a mirror image of the US narratives of victimhood, with roles reversed. Especially Iran has a similar domestic power struggle revolving around individuals and groups.<sup>51</sup> In this power struggle stories of Iranian foreign policy, claiming Iranian victimhood at the hands of the US, is an asset for a story of identity in the domestic contest over power and economic interests.

However, in Iran, individuals and groups differ over the feasibility of negotiations with the US. Now the predominant Iranian view, I assume, is that the US again has betrayed them by denying them the normalization of economic relations the Iran deal promised in return for agreeing effectively to surrender their option of nuclear arms. Trusting the US in negotiating the nuclear deal was therefore a mistake by those in Iran that wanted to negotiate. Therefore, the Supreme Leader of Iran, the religious and political leader, has now expressly rejected any negotiations with the US.<sup>52</sup> The immediate effect of President Trump’s decision to pull out of the nuclear agreement is therefore to strengthen the wrong people in Iran in their internal power struggle.

On the other hand, just like the US needs a more cooperative grand strategy to solve the problems caused by confrontation, so does Iran. The new sanctions will hurt them noticeably, and any attempt to develop nuclear arms would expose them to a pre-emptive Israeli attack with likely US support. The predominant Iranian perception is also, in my view, that nuclear arms would jeopardize and not enhance Iran’s security because of the increased risk of pre-emptive attack from vastly superior forces.<sup>53</sup>

In Syria and Iraq, Iran has tried to fill the power vacuum left by the US, in Syria with Russia’s backing. However, in Syria Iran’s militias supporting Assad are

<sup>51</sup> A. Nader, D. E. Thaler, S. Chubin, J. D. Green, C. Lynch & F. Wehrey, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads. An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics* (2010), [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND\\_MG878.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG878.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> Mousavian, *supra* n. 1. ,

<sup>53</sup> My conversations with Iranian officials. Not unlikely, Iranian experts are familiar with pressures in 1983 for a Soviet preemptive nuclear strike. Kremlin seriously considered nuclear arms attack in response to their misinterpretations of Western motives. They feared a Western first strike, as would Israel if Iran had nuclear arms. To the competent analyst, the 1983 scenario is a formative historical experience that renders any nuclear arms strategy irrational. This is CIA’s account Fischer.

bled white and a military conflict with the US and Israel, possibly Saudi Arabia, must appear an extremely frightening possibility. In terms of the model I adapt from cognitive behavioural therapy, since coping strategies translated into policies are dysfunctional, so are the rules and assumptions translated into grand strategies.

Therefore, also Iran should see a more cooperative grand strategy to be in its best interest. The same holds true for the other states with stakes in the ongoing conflict. US' adversaries Russia and Turkey, like Iran, have the feasible room for their ideas of political solutions restricted by US resistance. US' allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia, pursue their confrontation with Iran at great cost to their regional room for manoeuvre. Even more seriously, they would suffer prohibitive costs and unintended consequences even with US backing in any war they may seek with Iran.

## 7 HOW EU/NATO MEMBER STATES CAN CHANGE GRAND STRATEGIES BY COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING

This picture of dysfunctional policies raises the question of interventions for cognitive restructuring. It follows from my analyses of identity that a strategic discourse should not challenge stories constructing core identity, even when highly unreasonable and offensive. When such stories bestow assets in domestic power struggles, as they do now, challenging them may even boost their value and thus strengthen the wrong parties in the domestic power struggle. Such stories are rigid and confrontational; when challenged, they will turn aggressive, even potentially dangerous.

Instead, an intervention needs to engage the more flexible relational identities by a process that generates a sense of autonomy while building a sense of affiliation by involvement and affinity.<sup>54</sup> How can EU/NATO Member States design a shared discourse in which all parties envision a solution beyond the current intractable conflicts instead of confronting and thus reinforcing each other's core identity narratives?

In a new European strategic discourse, the EU/NATO Member States can invoke a European experience of transformation that defied odds not much better than in the current confrontation. The most successful cognitive restructuring of grand strategy ever is probably Willy Brandt's and Egon Bahr's carefully engineered change in the 1960s and 1970s of West Germany's dysfunctional foreign policy. Their superintendent ideas I have quoted as an example of a pragmatist grand strategy. Seen as cognitive restructuring, they left *core identities* alone and focused exclusively on envisioning changes that all parties would consider to be in their interest. Brandt's and Bahr's efforts led to a conference comprising all concerned states – the Conference on Security and

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<sup>54</sup> Shapiro, *supra* n. 30, at 13–16.

Cooperation in Europe in 1975. The process that prepared and followed up this conference changed *relational identities*.<sup>55</sup> The comprehensive multilateral format generated a sense of *autonomy* by being part of a conference, and the procedures produced a sense of *affiliation* through involvement and affinity by generating a sense of shared interests.

In a new European strategic discourse, the EU/NATO Member States can invoke this experience for the current US conflicts with Iran, Russia and Turkey. An intervention for cognitive restructuring of grand strategy would be to propose a similar conference over a new political order that needs to arise out of the ruins of Iraq and Syria. As a point of departure for a new European strategic discourse, EU/NATO Member States should start consultations with all concerned states on a joint Russian – Iranian report that advocates cooperative strategies, also with the US, to all regional conflicts from Afghanistan/Pakistan to Libya.<sup>56</sup> The EU's vehicle for such initial consultations could be to revive and revitalize the *Permanent Partnership Council* between the EU and Russia.<sup>57</sup>

A rule of thumb is that a climate of low tensions induces political solutions. By way of example, following the end of the Cold War, a US/Russian cooperation succeed in removing Soviet nuclear arms from the new independent states, most significantly the Ukraine.<sup>58</sup> In the recent Middle East, US/Russian cooperation could achieve two significant results, the agreement to prevent Iranian nuclear arms and removing Syrian chemical arms.<sup>59</sup> In the current climate of confrontation, none of these significant achievements for peace and security would have been possible.

A common problem in traditional thinking on grand strategy is the cognitive limitation to options of unilateral application of power. Gaddis describes how the vintage theorists of grand strategy, most notably the still influential Carl Clausewitz and Sun Tzu, inferred general observations from practical experience to enable analyses of new events. This is an archetypal case of abductive reasoning by Kahneman's heuristics.<sup>60</sup> In Gaddis analyses, the purpose of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu is threefold: (1) restraint and caution, or match goals with capabilities, (2) recognize opportunities and dangers, (3) leverage power by smart moves to compensate for limitations.<sup>61</sup> However, their theories do not address cooperative

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Russian International Affairs Council and The Institute for Iran Eurasia Studies, *Russia-Iran Partnership. An overview and prospects for the future*, (2016), <http://russiancouncil.ru/common/upload/RIAC-IRAS-Russia-Iran-Report29-en.pdf>. Discussions with Russian and Iranian researchers that worked on the report.

<sup>57</sup> Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the European Union, *Permanent Partnership Council*, (2016), <https://russiaeu.ru/en/permanent-partnership-council>.

<sup>58</sup> W. Perry, *My Journey at the Nuclear Brink* Ch. 13 (Stanford University Press 2015).

<sup>59</sup> Goldberg, *supra* n. 34.

<sup>60</sup> Tversky & Kahneman, *supra* n. 14.

<sup>61</sup> Gaddis, *supra* n. 26, at 63, 65, 69, 115, 191, 197, 198, 201, 208, 2010, 2013, 2015.

options as a feasible alternative political strategy, such as shared security, which is Egon Bahr's grand strategy. Gaddis fails to discuss how Clausewitz and Sun Tzu by their abductive reasoning took for granted the primacy of unilateral power over cooperation. Therefore, their inferred principles become self-fulfilling by producing the very behaviour they purport to describe. They are still highly influential in the way they are perceived and interpreted, which is invariably at the cost of cooperative options in joint interest.

## 8 CONCLUSION

The predominant perception among EU/NATO Member States that the US under President Trump can no longer be a partner is not realistic since international solutions of consequence will not be sustainable without US cooperation. Therefore, there is no feasible alternative to engaging the US also under the current difficult circumstances. The challenge is to find an effective way to do so.

Policy is applied analyses. EU/NATO Member States should improve their analyses applied in policy by using theories derived from psychological theories as cognitive tools: a model from cognitive behavioural therapy for cognitive restructuring, and a theory on core identity versus relational identity for designing a new European strategic discourse. The strategic discourse should leave identity stories unchallenged, but design interventions for cognitive restructuring of grand strategies, the superintendent assumptions that shape specific policies.

An alternative grand strategy to the current confrontations is a comprehensive international conference on a new political order in Syria and Iraq. A joint Russian/Iranian report shows this would be realistic, and consultations should start on this report. This conference can emulate the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The historical record shows: low tensions, not confrontation, enable political solutions of dangerous problems, such as avoiding Iranian nuclear arms and removing poisonous gas from Syria.



# From the Fall of the Berlin Wall to the Fall of Aleppo. The Decline of Global Governance – and How to Restore it

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## Abstract

I was there at the end of the Cold War in 1989 when a vision of common security by global governance seemed within reach by multilateral diplomacy at the United Nations. This was a rational policy for all states. Then I watched with growing trepidation how the West led by the US undermined the practically universal acclaim of the Western Normative Project and power by moving from multilateralism to unilateral power and coercion. Today, an authoritarian project led by Russia, brokers political solutions in the regional conflicts left by Western policy failures. The article argues that theories on cognitive and emotional construction must upgrade the traditional methodology of diplomacy to understand why the West lost its position, and how it can be reclaimed. A strategic discourse must harness these theories to persuade more effectively by leaving contentious issues and instead evoke visions of common security by global governance.

## Strategic discourse

I was there in 1989 at the end of the Cold War when the promise of common security by global governance seemed within reach by multilateral diplomacy at the United Nations. Then I watched with growing trepidation how the West led by the US undermined the practically universal acclaim of the Western Normative Project and power by moving from multilateralism to unilateral power and coercion. Now, only by a Western *strategic discourse*, a method to persuade more effectively by shaping cognition and emotion, can the West reclaim its lost normative influence and power.

Policies are applied analyses. For Western policies to have more intended and less unintended effects, the applied analyses must improve significantly. The key to understanding the West's ominous trajectory and the way back is to grasp the concepts of *normative project* and *power*, as I will explain.

Common security by global governance, pooling power and resources for common purposes, is a vision. Evoking a vision that can be shared, I argue, persuades more effectively than by confrontations that, even when justified, cause intransigence and are therefore mostly, but of course not always, counterproductive. Visions for the future are more reconcilable than diverging perceptions of current conflicts.

Therefore, to forge convergence on substance, it is necessary to avoid current controversies and instead envision the desired alternative order. The now widespread inability to see the lost opportunities of global governance is due to the withering ability for critical analyses among politicians

and diplomats. By contrast, the dynamism unleashed by the end of the Cold War innovated also political thinking. Minds explored new solutions.

This article upgrades the standard methodology for diplomatic abductive reasoning,<sup>1</sup> exploring information from open sources in confidential private conversations. Analyses applied in decisions improve by upgrading the theories from which hypotheses about available options are inferred. These upgraded theories need to conceptualize cognitive and emotional construction.

The following analyses have emerged as my reflections on my professional experience with the multilateral diplomacy within the UN, then with the supranational European governance within the EU, and eventually the epicenter of conflict jeopardizing global stability, the Middle East.

I denote my methodology *exploratory conversation*. I have tested my theory in a series of encounters over the raging regional wars, especially the future of Syria, with a number of representatives all regional states and concerned external states. Since the conversations referred to in this article are confidential, I apply the Chatham House Rule.<sup>2</sup> The substance of the conversations may be quoted, but identity or institutional affiliation not revealed.

I observed feedback to my presentations, interventions and conversations. My inference from these encounters is that engaging on current controversies blocks an effort to forge convergence, while inviting parties to envision a desired new regional order enables a discourse on shared interests in common security. In the course of these experiences of interaction, reflection on feedback enabled me to develop my theory on *strategic discourse*. The purpose is to forge convergence on rational policy options.

### The case for rationality

The vision of global governance is a rational policy for several obvious reasons. The most important problems facing nations and groups within them are shared across fault lines of confrontation and conflict, hence, manageable only by forging a modicum of concert of concerned states and groups within them. This is above all true of security, which in all but a few exceptional cases is either common, shared, or unsustainable. As a rule of thumb, security either works for all, or not at all. Therefore, the vision of 1989, common security by global governance, makes great sense; actually the only sustainable way to protect national interests.

Without security, solving other pressing problems becomes virtually impossible. Power and resources are limited assets for problem solving. Conflict and war waste them. Conversely, pooling national resources enables synergies of creative problem solving. I was fascinated by how this worked within the EU, in a region that following World War I was the most violent region on Earth (Gerwarth, 2016), when, as a diplomat, I worked on Norway's issues in the Internal Market.

I see global governance as evolving in four stages:

- In its first stage, it is an idea structuring a discourse to mobilize power and resources for solutions in joint interest, typically within the UN (Schmidt, 2008).
- This discourse may emerge into specific agreements on norms and then codification. The oldest of such agreements that still makes a difference is probably to block the use of chemical arms, most recently put to a test in Syria (Price, 2019; Rosenau 1999).
- Beyond a discourse on the idea of global governance, national democracy may extend to a region, typically the EU (Wirsching, 2012).
- The ultimate vision of global governance is global democracy. (Held and Archibugi, 2011)

The only way to global governance is the cumbersome persuasion in multilateral diplomacy. At its moment of triumph, untenable ideas of righteousness and omnipotence seduced the West to try an easier way. This cause of Western hubris I denote as *triumphalism*.

### The disastrous seduction by triumphalism

We now know the utopia of global governance that emerged at the end of the Cold War was not to be. The underlying reason, this article argues, was the disastrous idea of Western triumphalism that seduced the Western states led by the United States gradually to abandon the cumbersome course of persuasion and resort to power projection, undermining multilateralism by unilateralism. (Perry, 2015) The predominant idea behind unilateralism is that you must escalate conflict by posturing and threats to induce cooperation and compromise.

By contrast, following the end of the Cold War in 1989, an evolving process towards global governance seemed feasible by multilateral diplomacy within the UN, guided by a

vision of forging joint solutions to shared problems. Today a process towards global governance appears close to impossible. However, it is only by a strategic discourse reviving the vision of common security by global governance that the West can reclaim its lost ability to forge a world order in our own image of democracy and human rights. The practically unchallenged Western power at the end of the Cold War in 1989 was not military but normative, the *persuasive* power of the Western Normative Project.

### Common security as a normative project

Common security by global governance is a *normative project* by evoking an idea, a vision of what should be. It is by entering the mind as broad ideas and visions that norms shape political behavior, by structuring the set of assumptions from which we infer our perceptions of available options. In Waltz's and Popper's theory, there are *no analyses without prescription* (Popper, 1966; Waltz, 2001). In other words, any set of assumptions about the nature of a political problem is inherently normative, while the effects of policies are inevitably at best imperfect.

The German historian Heinrich August Winkler has captured the tension between the vision of norms and the imperfections of political reality by his concept of the *Western Normative Project* (Winkler, 2011). This inherent tension he sees as the very driving force of evolving Western policies. The struggles for the ideals of democracy and human rights fall short of their goal but inspire efforts to overcome obstacles and counterforces, such as authoritarian or totalitarian ideas, typically fascism and communism, and racism, most notably the vintage idea of white supremacy. We see now how a sense of vulnerable supremacy, whether racist, cultural or masculine, feeds aggression against minorities and women. This aggression prompts irrational, self-defeating voter behavior, producing such aberrations as President Trump and various European populist revolts.

Sometimes, seismic political changes offer a window of opportunity for the Western Normative Project, most typically the end of the Cold War in 1989 and the Arab Spring in 2011. However, in between seismic change, most of the time, the normative projects work by *nudges* that may induce significant changes over time. Nudges, a concept conceived by the Nobel Laureate of Economics, Richard Thaler (Kahneman, 2003; Simon, 2013; Thaler and Sunstein, 2009),<sup>3</sup> are persistent cognitive stimuli that by incremental, often subconscious changes turn perceptions and hence political behavior in a certain direction. A strategic discourse harnesses nudges.

For nudges to work, they must get emotions right. To harness emotions, a strategic discourse needs to engage constructively the perceptions that, in Shapiro's *Relational Identity Theory*, affect inter-group relations along a continuum between confrontation and cooperation. In his theory, two *relational identity concerns* enable or block efforts to defuse conflicts. These relational identity concerns, if understood and harnessed for benign purposes, may induce pragmatism. The relational identity concerns are a sense of



*autonomy*, by avoiding a perception of coercion or imposition, and *affiliation*, a sense of involvement forging affinity (Shapiro, 2010, 2016).

The need to deal with emotions by relational identity concerns is also the case for multilateralism. As anyone who has engaged in a multilateral UN process has experienced, all countries participate on an equal basis, forging a sense of autonomy, while the deliberations, along with the informal banter, forge a sense of affiliation and mutual affinity. Harnessing nudges and emotions for the purpose of persuasion is *strategic discourse*.

I now turn to how strategic discourse can work in a particular difficult issue.

### The Libyan versus the North Korean analogy

My concept of *strategic discourse* is inspired by cognitive behavioral therapy. As therapeutic discourse, also diplomatic discourse should apply a tentative set of assumptions, a theory, to a problem to understand the cognitive representations, the mental models (Heuer, 1999) of reality that shape strategies for coping. The purpose of understanding is to employ effective language to reach the other for *cognitive restructuring*, which denotes a deliberate process of changing dysfunctional thoughts to change behavior (Ballou, 1995; Wenzel, 2013).

In my adapted model for cognitive behavioral therapy, the mental models are constructed by a formative experience and its interpretation, which turns into a specific historical analogy with an inferred grand strategy that guides policy choices (Gaddis, 2018; Jervis, 2017; Khong, 1992). At the root of disagreement over political options, we will typically find competing historical analogies. An obvious example is the current controversy over North Korean and potentially Iranian nuclear arms.

During my talks in Teheran, a senior official<sup>4</sup> vehemently rejected allegations of such Iranian plans as false by pointing out the obvious reason that it would expose Iran to attack by vastly superior nuclear forces, which of course is true for any minor nuclear power, including North Korea, Israel, Pakistan, India, the UK and France. The highest risk of nuclear war would be the preemptive strike, destroy the enemy before he strikes you.

In essence, this was the 1983 scenario that ended in a narrow escape from an all-out nuclear war (Fischer, 1997). In my view, Iran's experts were likely familiar with this crisis; hence, Iran's decisions to renounce the option of nuclear arms in the agreement was not a real concession because they, in my view correctly, saw nuclear arms as a threat to Iran's security, probably by the analogy of the 1983 crisis.

By contrast, the analogy of North Korea suggests that nuclear arms are a security panacea against the nightmare of forced regime change and also the ultimate asset for political clout. During my talks in Israel, experts<sup>5</sup> were concerned that the Western forced regime change in Libya and fate of its dictator would lead the regime in Teheran to emulate the North Korean guarantee against a Libyan scenario. In this analogy, Gadhafi had made himself vulnerable

by complying with Western demands that he should renounce the option of nuclear arms. Would this framing induce other vulnerable regimes to decide that only nuclear arms can stand between them and Western power?

Ominously, to a degree, both views are right, which is why the only ultimately effective way to deal with the security menace of nuclear arms proliferation is to change the conversation. Therefore, strategic discourse persuades by introducing an alternative attractive analogy, preferably the analogy of European transformation from violent confrontation to peaceful pragmatic – if imperfect – cooperation (Gerwarth 2016; Kershaw, 2015; Wirsching, 2012). For this to work there must be no emotional barrier that would block amenability by intransigence. The strategic discourse therefore avoids challenging existing narratives, in which parties are cognitively and emotionally invested, for two reasons: the current issues have no feasible solution, and the narratives construct our identity, the impregnable fortress at the core of our minds. Instead of attempting to 'set the record straight', the strategic discourse envisions a desired alternative political order.

We can all frame issues in any number of ways. My experience from multilateral diplomacy within the UN is that to persuade, you *invoke to evoke*. That means that to work, an idea must have a strong appeal. The specific wording at any given point in time of UN principles and codifications are but evolving appearances of an underlying idea. This idea, not the evolving appearances, is the reference to which member states relate.

To show why it is now necessary to reframe the issues facing Western policies at its low point of influence, from unilateralism back to multilateralism, I will now discuss the trajectory of the idea of global governance more in detail. At each critical crossroad, goals of erring policies were benign or even imperative, such as halting genocide or stopping terrorism, but, clearly, more effective policy options are conceivable than those confined by unilateralism.

### Two statues: the ominous difference of the stories they tell

The Western turn to unilateralism started in the late 1990s with the military interventions in former Yugoslavia in defiance and humiliation of Russia (Perry, 2015; Talbott, 2007). Turning the West into an enemy image of World Islam was the military intervention of 2001 in Afghanistan, especially some far-reaching initial misjudgments. Western countries led by the US set out defying the block of countries, including Russia and Iran, behind the indigenous anti-Taliban Northern Alliance and ignoring the Iranian invitation to cooperation (Rashid, 2008, 2010).

These clear misjudgments set the West firmly on its course towards declining influence on events. After the second US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the French initiated air campaign in Libya in 2011, the violent chaos in current Syria is the hitherto low point of Western influence.

Western ideas, universally acclaimed at the end of the Cold War, are now even within many Western countries

vulnerable by the rise of authoritarian, even pseudo-fascist forces (Albright, 2018). An authoritarian political project led by Russia has assumed the role once held by the Western normative project and now forges a nascent discourse on global governance.

Two statues tell this story from triumph to decline of Western influence, especially the rubble from which they are made.

My quest for more effective Western policies started with this statue outside the UN headquarters in New York City. I was there in 1990 when the Soviet Union, a short time before it turned into Russia and other states, such as the Ukraine, bequeathed it to commemorate the end of the Cold War. St. George slays the evil dragon (Figure 1). The most powerful symbolism of the statute is in the parts used for the dragon: scrap metal from the Soviet and US intermediate nuclear missiles abolished by the landmark agreement in 1987 after years of political confrontation and even danger of nuclear war, as the narrow escape in 1983 shows. To me, the statue was, and still is, a very powerful and emotionally stirring call to embrace the vision of *common security*.

We now know this was not to be. Western policies after the end of the Cold War gradually eroded the vision of common security by global governance. The Western foreign policy discourse moved away from the cumbersome multilateral process of the UN and became increasingly an extension of domestic politics, above all in the United States. A new discourse was dizzied by triumphant delusions of grandeur, superiority, infallibility and omnipotence. As a result, policies became increasingly detached from, and therefore unrestrained by consideration of the diverging perspectives that shaped other states' behavior. Misperceptions dulled sound discretion and seduced governments into one misjudgment after the other.

Foreign policy too easily became the purview of the military commands. My own personal formative experience of this malfunction of diplomacy is from my time at the UN in 1991 during the first Gulf War. The operational needs of the US military planning set the limits for attempts to negotiate non-violent solutions. The West won, whatever that means in light of subsequent events, but an estimated 100,000 Iraqi soldiers died.<sup>6</sup>

These staggering numbers of victims of the first Gulf War in Iraq did not deter the Western military intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 in response to the terrorist attacks on the US on 9/11 that year. The delusion of initial success in Afghanistan of the 2001 military intervention seduced the younger President Bush into the second invasion of Iraq in 2003, an easy military 'victory' with the disastrous consequences for the Middle East and beyond we now know. As a close advisor to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld put it to me: 'We felt we could do anything and had a responsibility to put things right'.<sup>7</sup>

However, the dilemma faced with atrocities and genocide, such as in Syria, is that a clear historical record shows: with few exceptions, force is only effective when looming as a credible option, while force inevitably fails when actually

applied. This is where Annan (1999) erred in his proposal for humanitarian intervention. His idea turned into the hubris of the global governance discourse that emerged within the UN following end of the Cold War.

By abandoning the vision of common security by global governance for the unilateral application of power, and leaving the gradual building of consensus by the cumbersome multilateral deliberations of the UN for the operational planning of the military commands, Western policy failed to produce the intended results. The unintended consequences have been dangerous. Instead of disappearing, conflicts have turned rigid and lethal on a grand scale. Terrorists and organized crime have thrived, turning into threats to Western societies much graver and harder to address than the stable confrontation of the Cold War.

This pattern of policy failure has grave implications. The activism bred by the optimism following the end of the Cold War has turned into a rather dark fatalism. In my view, the era of Western triumphalist unilateralism that evolved from the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 ended in the ruins of the Syrian city of Aleppo in 2016. Western military intervention to defeat the terrorist threat of ISIS left the regime in Damascus to go about its murderous business, while laying waste to the cities where the extremists had sought refuge with grave collateral damage to Syria's infrastructure and social sustainability.

This sculpture of the Statue of Liberty made from rubble in Aleppo by a Syrian artist forms the antithesis to the statue from 1990 (Figure 2). The two sculptures (Figure 1 and 2) represent the trajectory of Western influence from 1989 to 2016. When in 2009 I took a taxi from Beirut to Damascus, Syria was a brutal dictatorship. Its tentacles extended into the neighborhoods of Beirut where Syrian secret services had thugs beating up those challenging their power and even assassinating rival politicians. However, in 2009 I heard from various people I spoke to in the Middle East how they staked their hopes on Western policy putting pressure on the regime to improve its human rights record and cease its interference in Lebanon. Between the two cities of Beirut and Damascus, there was peace. In both cities, I walked the streets with throngs of locals going about their daily business. Then, 2 years later, the war started that turned Syria, and the Western policy of diplomatic pressure, into ruins, with suffering, death and destruction on an unimaginable scale.

The rubble of the two statues tells two stories that could hardly have been more different. The first, of St. George slaying the evil dragon of nuclear arms, tells the story of the end of the Cold War and emerging ideas of collective security; the second, of the Statue of Liberty, of the total breakdown of security.

How can we restore the story of the first statue, of common security, expressed by St. George slaying the evil dragon of nuclear arms?

### Restoring global governance

The rule-of-thumb we can infer from the decline of Western influence is that confrontation and power projection

**Figure 1.** ‘Good Defeats Evil’ presented by the Soviet Union in 1990, on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the United Nations. Created by Zurab Tsereteli, a native of Georgia.



undermines security while the low political tensions generated by a multilateral discourse on global governance enables common security by small but significant steps. The vision of common security expressed by the parts from the dismantled nuclear missiles in the statue of 1991 of St. George slaying the evil dragon is nurtured by some subsequent, even recent events.

Removing the old Soviet nuclear missiles from the territory of the new independent states starting in 1991 was the most significant project of US–Russian cooperation for common security (Perry, 2015). A simple question shows how this move vastly improved security. How would a nuclear-armed Ukraine have affected European security? More recently, the international cooperation to fight pirates in the Gulf of Aden in 2008 and onward involved the naval forces of a multitude of states.<sup>9</sup> Some of these, such as Iran and the US, were not otherwise conceivable partners in security. This was an archetypal common security project, as was the US–Russian cooperation in 2013 to remove chemical arms from Syria and the agreement of 2015 to block Iran’s ability to produce nuclear arms.

The nascent discourse on common security that enabled these cases of cooperation then derailed over Russian actions in the Ukraine and especially the annexation of the

Crimea. The ensuing confrontation now blocks a cooperation over the new political order in the Middle East. As a result, the nascent discourse of common security that enabled international cooperation to fight pirates off the coast of Somalia failed to forge a similar modicum of agreement to set differences and rivalries aside in fighting ISIS, although equally a shared threat, only much worse.

Therefore, to start reclaiming the West’s lost ability to shape world trends, Western foreign policy discourse now needs to innovate by reframing security as common. In the model for cognitive behavioral therapy that I posit is relevant for constructing a discourse as policy intervention, the essential initial step is to *conceptualize* the problem by applying theory to case (Wenzel, 2013).

There is a significant historical precedent for seeing policy innovation as conceptualization. In the seminal change of German foreign policy that initiated the process leading up to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975, a significant step towards common security by global governance, the West German Chancellor Willy Brandt in his memoirs credited his close advisor Egon Bahr for being a good *conceptualizer*. (Brandt, 2013). Bahr’s reconceptualization of the irredentist and unrealistic West German foreign policy at the time was to abandon any attempt to defy or

Figure 2. 'Statue of Liberty' made from bombed rubble of Aleppo, by Syrian artist Tammam Azzam.



change the opposite side's political or ideological views, but only propose changes that would enhance the security of all concerned.<sup>9</sup> He brought this conceptualization of security to the 1982 Palme Commission on Common Security, which he strongly influenced (Bahr, 1996). The Palme Commission intended to defuse confrontations in the Cold War that was turning very dangerous. The Commission's argument was that there is no realistic alternative to common security, given the risks the alternatives entail.

The reconceptualized German strategy for common security also embraced the Western Normative Project. Brandt's and Bahr's strategy was denoted *change by approaching (Wandel durch Annäherung)*. Their idea was that by not engaging in incompatible normative issues, which would have provoked intransigence rather than compromise, a room for maneuver emerged. This enabled democracy and human rights to evolve, if slowly before the abrupt change of 1989. More significantly, the alleviation of human plight (*menschliche Erleichterung*) became possible, if incrementally and imperfectly. These issues were to form Basket 3 of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975.

Today, in a realistic, unprejudiced look at the current unilateralist policies that have mired Western states in intractable conflicts, in Afghanistan, the Middle East and Libya, security is shared or impossible. In the power vacuums left by disintegrating, failing or failed states, factions fight over power and control over economic assets, from heroin in Afghanistan to oil in Libya. Rather than forging a concert, external powers, such as the Western powers, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, China, India and Pakistan aggravate the conflicts by seeking proxies among the factions in an escalating rivalry.

The most authoritative and exhaustive statement on Western policy in these conflicts, the US Central Command Posture statement,<sup>10</sup> sets out a strategy that is an antithesis to common security, and therefore unrealistic, by foreseeing projecting military force to pressure major powers as Russia, Iran and Turkey to yield. By contrast, a discourse on common security by a concert with the US and the West is set out in a joint Russian/Iranian report calling for a broad international cooperation on what it sees as an emerging contiguous crisis from Afghanistan to North Africa.<sup>11</sup> Resurgence of ISIS or similar movements are a shared threat, as is disintegration of states.

Western diplomacy therefore needs to innovate by resuming a multilateral diplomacy within the UN by a strategic discourse on global governance guided by the Western normative project. This discourse has to revive the vision of common security as a global common good by global governance.

As a first step to revive the discourse on common security of the statue of St. George slaying the evil dragon of nuclear arms, the European powers, with or without those behind the US Central Command's Posture Statement, should initiate consultations with all concerned powers specifically on the practical proposals set out in the joint Russian-Iranian report. Such consultations should emulate Egon Bahr's approach that brought a degree of common security in

Europe. This process broke down by Western reactions to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, producing a dangerous climate of misperceptions resembling the current confrontation following Russia's annexation of the Crimea.

Since the effects of conflict, confrontation and military interventions cannot be reversed, Western policies need to forge a modicum of agreement on actions that are security *enabling*. A vehicle to forge such an agreement is a strategic discourse on *global common goods*, the assets that are either shared or lost communally. Traditional cases are climate change and other global environmental concerns, the air, the oceans, and preventing contagious diseases.

During the preparatory process 1999–2001 for the UN conference on the Financing of Development, in which I represented Norway, I experienced how the UN discourse on global governance still shaped member states' policies. This process was a crucible for benign ideas that diplomats struggled to forge into a workable consensus. Among these ideas was the Nobel Laureate of Economics, Joseph Stiglitz's argument reconceptualizing international finance as a *global common good* (Stiglitz, 2006). By the same reasoning, I argue in this article that international security should also be a global common good. Most obviously, in the case of uncontrolled migration, all states can be directly affected, by way of example Europe from the fallout of the Libya and Syria conflict. The fears among the voters in the affected Western states, whether the consequences of uncontrolled migration were founded, exaggerated or simply imagined, boosted domestic support for xenophobic, even racist authoritarian political projects that threaten the stability of the democratic states and hence the EU.

Only a discourse on global governance within the UN, its agencies and associated bodies, such as the World Bank, can cope with global common goods. The UN Millennium Development Goals<sup>12</sup> are a vision of global governance, a call for global action to alleviate the consequences of the dysfunctions that enable security threats, such as extremism and terrorism (Lia, 2016). Therefore, a discourse on global governance should set out social sustainability as means for common security.

## Conclusions

To restore the project of common security by global governance, the analyses applied in policy must set effects over intentions; in other words, rationality over rationalization. For this, foreign policy needs a level of analyses comparable to that of other important policy and therapeutic goals, such as financial policy and cognitive behavioral therapy. Analyses in these comparable fields form evolving models by applying theories to make sense of a problem. In foreign policy, actionable analyses need to understand the differing mental models that construct perceptions of social and political reality, and hence shape behavior. We follow our own mind, not that of others.

The world that counts is in our minds, and international relations are therefore inter-mind relations. Diverging mental models cause conflict, while convergence of mental models

enables communication and cooperation. The UN official that in 1988 negotiated the end of the war between Iraq and Iran, as well as the liberation of hostages in Lebanon, Giandomenico Picco, posits that to negotiate it is necessary to share part of each other's narrative (Picco, 2014).

Therefore, an innovative Western diplomacy by strategic discourse follows in two stages: first understand the differing mental models, and then have a strategy for inducing convergence. A strategic discourse that persuades effectively will increase the probability of a policy's intended effects.

## Notes

1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abductive\\_reasoning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abductive_reasoning)
2. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/chatham-house-rule>. Abbreviated CHR
3. This theory on nudges is a condensed version of complex argument. By his own account, Thaler is strongly influenced by another Nobel Laureate of Economics, Daniel Kahneman and his associate Amos Tversky, who posited that we infer from the *association* that is most *cognitively accessible*. Thaler's nudges boost the cognitive accessibility of an intended perception. Kahneman, in his turn, draws on the concepts of another Nobel Laureate of Economics, Herbert Simon, of *bounded rationality*, which is the intent of rationality within cognitive constraints, and *satisficing*, which denotes the irrational behavior of organizations to proceed within the confines of the initial assumptions without considering alternatives.
4. CHR
5. CHR
6. <https://www.military.com/undertheradar/2015/09/21-facts-about-the-first-gulf-war>
7. CHR
8. The observation on cooperation to fight piracy is based on my own professional experience
9. Conversations with three previous associates of Egon Bahr. CHR
10. <https://www.centcom.mil/ABOUT-US/POSTURE-STATEMENT/>
11. <https://russiancouncil.ru/upload/RIAC-IRAS-Russia-Iran-Report29-en.pdf>
12. <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

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