

Contributions to International Relations

Sebastião C. Velasco e Cruz

The United States in a Troubled World

Essays in Interpretation



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Preface

By the end of the second decade of the century (and of the millennium), perception that the international system is at a critical juncture transcends the boundaries of the specialist milieu and breaks into the conscience of the fairly informed ordinary man.

The contrast to the scenario envisioned at the turn of the century could not be more striking. Indeed, with the Cold War over and the indisputable win by one of the contenders, the preceding decade had seen what seemed to be the emergence of a new world order, unparalleled in history.

Founded on the incontestable supremacy of a single superpower, the emerging configuration heralded a new order, with the attributes of coherence and permanence proper to the concept. Marked by the ascendance of universalist ideas and values, the newly created unipolar order would find its emblematic expression in international organizations of a new kind: The World Trade Organization and the International Criminal Court.

The dramatic events that would take place soon after that – the 9/11 attack and its developments: the invasion of Iraq and the Global War on Terror – did not shake the recently formed convictions. On the contrary, at first, they seemed to confirm and strengthen the previous trends, showing that the Empire was the political physiognomy of that new order – the globalization order.

But those illusions would not last long. Five years later, they dissolved under the combined effect of three events: the global financial and economic crisis; the failure of the Doha round (after 8 years of intense negotiations); and the Russian military action in Georgia, interrupting that country's incorporation to NATO.

Those events were clear evidence of what some analysts had been signaling for quite a long time: that the situation outlined in the immediate post-Cold War was temporary; that sooner or later the defeated superpower would straighten up and once again claim its place on the podium; that the then ongoing reordering enabled the constitution of a new powerhouse in the world economy, with dramatic geopolitical implications, since it was not integrated with the "security community" built by the superpower after World War II.

Trump's rise and his administration's policies are incomprehensible out of that context. Indeed, one of the most salient features of the controversial American

president's rhetoric and action is precisely this: the explicit recognition that the place of the United States in the world is at stake.

The chapters put together in this volume were written as a response to the most varied stimuli throughout this process of decomposition of the post-Cold War conventional wisdom. Their publication together seems to be justified by the vision they provide of the evolution of the author's thought – a citizen of a country for most of the time apart from the great conflicts that characterized that critical period of world history – on multiple aspects of his subject.

Ordered according to thematic and chronological criteria, the collection's first chapter constitutes the theoretical part of an ongoing research project. It appears in this place because it reveals the more general assumptions of the reflection shaping the work as a whole.

The last one deals with the relations between the United States and Latin America in the context of renewed rivalry between the great powers, one of whose implications is the end of the region's – and of Brazil's in particular – relative geopolitical isolation as it tends to fully integrate itself in the space of great power strategic competition. Naturally, a part of this chapter is dedicated to analysis of the political crisis that culminated in the deposition of President Dilma Rousseff, in 2016. Taken together, the chapter suggests hypotheses as how that event is connected to changes under way at the international level.

Between one and the other, seven articles about the evolution of world politics, US foreign relations, and the domestic processes that paved the way for Donald Trump's dysfunctional presidency.

The second, and oldest, chapter was written in the heat of the events that led, in 2003, to the invasion of Iraq. A rationally controlled expression of outrage at the travesty played out for a worldwide audience, the chapter arose from the author's own need of understanding. The starting point of the reflection materialized in this book, despite all the time that has elapsed since then, it is still very much up to date.

The third chapter – the longest and most comprehensive – was written as part of project Brazilian Development Prospects, in the scope of an agreement between ECLAC and IPEA (Institute for Applied Economic Research) and reproduces, with minor changes, an unsigned chapter of the book *Inserção Internacional Brasileira: temas de política externa*, published in 2010 by the second of the institutions referred to in this paragraph.

The fourth and fifth chapters were prepared on an invitation by Alexandre de Gusmão Foundation, a body of Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 2008 and 2010, respectively.

The sixth chapter was written in 2011, especially for the publication of the Brazilian edition of this book.

The essay on populism in the United States reproduces a talk delivered to the Brazilian Academy of Letters in August 2017; the following one, on the rise of Donald Trump and the transformation of US politics, draws on a presentation at a seminar organized by the National Institute of Science and Technology for United States Studies (INCT-INEU, in its acronym in Portuguese), as the opening chapter of the book *Trump: Primeiro Tempo. Partidos, políticas, eleições e perspectivas*

[freely, Trump: First Half. Parties, policies, and prospects], published in Brazil in October of 2019.

Reference to INCT-INEU is not fortuitous: distinct in their motivations, the articles herein are all within the framework of an INCT-INEU research plan, an inter-institutional project staffed by researchers from more than ten Brazilian universities that has been in progress since January 2009, with the support of CNPq (National Research Council), a federal government agency, and FAPESP (São Paulo Research Foundation).

With deepest thanks to both institutions – and to all the others that contributed to the studies gathered herein – a special word of recognition to my colleagues and friends (too many to be named without being unfair) who participate actively at the INCT-INEU and strive to ensure the success of the undertaking.

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Chapter 1

A Problem of Method: The United States' Grand Strategy – Debate, Policies, and Implications for Brazil



Shifts in the International Arena and the Strategic Debate in the United States

It could not be otherwise. The decision by East Germany's government to tolerate the crowds demonstrating in Berlin, the fall of the Wall, and the spectacular sequence of events that have followed one another since then was witnessed by all – ordinary citizens, the military, politicians, and strategists – with expressions of incredulity. Unanticipated and disconcerting for the celerity of the process and its bloodless nature, the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc radically transformed the hard data that structured world politics for nearly half a century and called into question deeply rooted ideas. Indeed, the cognitive frames crystalized over the long conflict failed to capture what was happening nor provided any roadmap for estimating its consequences. What would the world look like without the balance of terror, without power bloc politics? What were the characteristics of the new international system that was emerging? What place were the different countries and regions to occupy in it? In particular, what role would the United States called to play?

Questions like these arose all at once everywhere. Without the confrontation between the two nuclear superpowers, the world would enter an era of peace and reconciliation, proclaimed the first to rush to a conclusion. Not a given, reacted the critics, we must wait to see how conflicts will evolve in this new historic juncture. Those were not just mere intellectual bets. Associated with the image of future projected by the grandiose events of the century that was ending, answers either way were given to pressing questions of a practical kind.

More than anywhere else, these questions erupted powerfully in the leading circles of the country called to act as a protagonist in conducting the transition process.

True, in the heat of the events, decisions could not wait. Bush, the father, and his team had to make far-reaching decisions without a reliable roadmap of the terrain they were stepping into. No wonder that, in those initial moments, the new world was still thought of, to a great extent, with the categories of the old world.

But bewilderment had set foot, and the attempt to escape it translated into outright controversy.

That moment of “opening” was short-lived. The Gulf War and, shortly afterward, the crumbling down of the Soviet Union seemed to give reason to one of the groups engaged in the debate. From then on, broad consensus is formed in the leading circles of the United States on the preservation for an unlimited time of the solar condition the country boasted in the immediate post-Cold War. This shared sense translated into a grand strategy unfolding along two main vectors: the universalization of the market economy, in its American version (globalization), and the deepening of the United States' military supremacy.

Coupled with the swift acceleration of the so-called BRICS, especially of China, the economic and political events that succeeded each other since the Asian crisis of the late 1990s – the highlights being the September 11 attacks and its developments, the war operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the 2008 global economic crisis – rattled the confidence in scenarios not so long ago taken for granted and reopened the debate on the country's grand strategy.

The passage quoted below gives a good idea of the breadth of the questions raised and the perplexity they provoked:

If there's one common theme among foreign policy professionals and scholars, it's the transitional nature of our times. We don't need a single simple doctrine, but we do need a working understanding of the strategic context going forward. We're not even sure of the structure of the system in which we seek to exert leadership. It's not unipolar. It may have been for that “moment”, but not the enduring and encompassing new system neoconservatives envisioned. Nor is this just a matter of transitioning to a twenty-first-century version of nineteenth-century multipolarity, bringing China and India and a few others into the geopolitical hierarchy. (Jentleson, 2009, p. 77)

For intellectual and practical reasons, it is of great importance for the Brazilian researcher to understand in depth the controversy that is established in the United States about the country's role in the world and about how and what to do to ensure it. The compelling starting point for such an undertaking are the questions that a superficial observation suggests:

1. Who takes part in this debate, with what weight, and what degree of effectiveness?
2. How to characterize the interlocutors in the debate? What are their respective orientations, and how are these entrenched in American society?
3. How do the participants assess the trends that marked the post-Cold War world system? What are, in their view, the country's main vulnerabilities and the main threats it has to face?
4. What are the political coordinates advocated by the main positions confronting each other? Where do they converge, and what distinguishes them?
5. How do the diverse visions put forward in the debate fit in the tradition of the United States foreign policy?
6. To what extent do the general formulations present in the debate over the grand strategy of the United States translate into particular government policies (e.g.,

distinct actions in situations of international conflict, sectoral policies, and pattern of relationship with the various international organizations), and what reactions do they arouse?

7. Finally, what are the implications of the trends observed for the conduction of Brazil's development policies and for the country's relationship with the United States in terms both of areas of potential friction between the two countries and of new cooperation opportunities these trends present?

This is a lengthy research itinerary, but before seeking the empirical elements needed to answer them, an as-accurate-as-possible analytical framework has to be established, in the absence of which the investigation will be doomed to failure from the start.

Strategy, Grand Strategy, and State Action: Theoretical Elements to Frame the Investigation

From the Greek *strategos* (general) – and its derivative *strategika* (the general's functions) (Coutau-Bégarie, 2008, p. 51) – the word “strategy” was disseminated in the military lexicon at the end of the eighteenth century to designate the conduct of the entirety of war operations, in a given theater of operations, guided by a global conception and executed under the orders of a commander-in-chief. It is the breadth of its reach that distinguishes it from its conceptual pair, tactics, which designates “the conduct of elementary, localized operations of the several modules of units that constitute the armed forces” (Poirier, 1997, p. 32).

Since war is the continuation of politics by other means, as per Clausewitz's brilliant formula, military strategy plays a crucial role in the execution of the ends of war (Zweck) defined by politics. But the relationship between the two spheres is not resolved so simply. If politics establishes the objectives of war, strategy sets the objectives “in the war” (Ziel): the targets to be attained so that the ends dictated by political will are fulfilled. War is a conflict of wills conducted by means of weapons and constitutes a class of social phenomena in itself, endowed with observable properties and a grammar of its own that a politician can ignore only at his peril. The relationship between the two elements is not one of exteriority; it is mutually constitutive.

In Poirier's acute observation, the Clausewitzian formula is not an invention, but a discovery. Its truth was intuitively perceived by the practitioners, the great military commanders of the past who, although incapable of expressing it by means of abstract concepts, were guided by it. In the brutally eloquent example used by the author, it was not out of sheer vanity that Tamerlan or Genghis Khan made pyramids out of the heads of vanquished enemies. For them, as for those who came afterward, war was a means of what we modernly call “a political project” (Poirier, 1997, p. 51). It therefore comes as no surprise that, throughout time, strategic thought has formulated different definitions of its object.

These definitions do not need to be reviewed. But we must say a few words about the gradual alterations of the concept as military systems became more complex, and about its projection onto other semantic fields, originally strangers to it. In fact, current language today uses the term in the most varied domains of action. We speak very naturally about “business strategies,” “marketing strategies,” “strategies adopted for the resolution of a mathematical problem,” etc.

We can suggest many hypotheses to explain the stretching of the concept. One of them is that this process was driven by the transformations that come with the industrialization of war, one of which is a tendency to dilute the difference – crucial in European public law – between civil and combatant. But to carry on along these lines would be a detour. What we need is to distinguish as clearly as possible the cases in which the widening of the concept is legitimate from those that must be rejected because they deprive it of its characteristic features.

In a not-so-well-known book, Erving Goffman uses the adjective “strategic” to qualify interactions that obey the pattern of games in which an individual’s situation is entirely dependent on the action of his opponent – the players are conscious of this fact and make use of the intelligence to promote their respective interests (Goffman, 1969). With some nuances, it is basically the same definition adopted by Schelling (1960), according to whom the object of strategy is the study of “interdependent action.”¹

Games of this type pose difficulties of an entirely diverse nature from those presented by “games of skill” (such as the resolution of a jigsaw puzzle) or by engineering works. In these cases, the solutions have permanent and universal validity, and the adaptation of means to ends can be made in a univocal manner. Not so in strategic action, for the obstacles that it seeks to vanquish are not created by inert matter, but by the opponent’s calculated action.

Strategic action is averse to common sense. Nothing, *prima facie*, is less rational than the attempt to cross over steep mountains using elephants. But it was this unexpected move that granted Hannibal spectacular victories in Italy and almost allowed him a final victory over Rome.

Generalizing Schelling’s observations, Luttwak (2001) sees in “paradoxical logic” the general distinctive element of strategy. This frequently disconcerting aspect is what Lenin had in mind when he sought in algebra, rather than in arithmetic, an adequate analogy for politics.

But that is not all. Strategic action unfolds over time. It is a dialectics of opposing wills, driven by the constant exchange of blows between the parties involved. It implies a permanent evaluation of the discrepancy between the objective aimed at and the result obtained (always present, given the “friction” inherent to the application of any complex plan of collective action and the adversary’s countermoves), with consequent adjustments. In this sense, strategic action is incompatible with

¹The idea is expressed in the paragraph that reads: “Both of these points – the neutrality of the theory with respect to the degree of conflict involved, and the definition of ‘strategy’ as concerned with constraining an adversary through his expectations of the *consequences of his actions* – suggest that we might call our subject the theory of interdependent decision” (Schelling, 1960, p. 16).

rigid plans. It evolves in a circular process, which in the real world has no end. Better still, it only ends when the difference between “the same” and “the other” is extinguished – through the annihilation of the enemy, or by his adhesion to the winner, at a point where the separation between the two entities ceases to exist (the absorption of peoples who were previously enemies of the Roman Empire, who were then granted citizenship rights, paradigmatically illustrates this process) (Poirier, 1997, p. 109).

The above observations, though extremely general and abstract, touch upon a clearly discernible class of objects. Now, the entity in question – “grand strategy” – is contained within its boundaries.

The term “grand strategy” is widespread in Anglophone countries due to the work of Liddell Hart. With it, the British scholar designated the general terms according to which military strategy would be set, terms that were oriented by the conception of what type of peace to seek as a result of conflict. In his words:

As tactics is an application of strategy on a lower plane, so strategy is an application on a lower plane of ‘grand strategy’. While practically synonymous with the policy which guides the conduct of war, as distinct from the more fundamental policy which should govern its object, the term ‘grand strategy’ serves to bring out the sense of ‘policy in execution’. For the role of grand strategy – higher strategy – is to co-ordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, toward the attainment of the political object of the war – the goal defined by fundamental policy. (Liddell Hart, 1967, p. 336)

The concept of “grand strategy” thus defined, Liddell Hart then lists the resources it employs in order to reach its ends:

Grand strategy should both calculate and develop the economic resources and man-power of nations in order to sustain the fighting services. Also the moral resources – for to foster the people’s willing spirit is often as important as to possess the more concrete form of power. Grand strategy, too, should regulate the distribution of power between the several services, and between the services and industry. Moreover, fighting power is but one of the instruments of grand strategy – which should take account of and apply the power of financial pressure, of diplomatic pressure, of commercial pressure, and, not least of ethical pressure, to weaken the opponent’s will. (Liddell Hart, 1967, p. 336)

As we can see, in spite of its great breadth, in its origin, the notion of a “grand strategy” directly referred to war. And it could hardly be otherwise. Liddell Hart presented the concept in a piece of work first published in 1954. Fruit of a long study, the author’s ideas were fueled by material collected directly from the experience of the two great wars of the twentieth century. However, at the very moment the book came into being, the advent of the atom bomb heralded an unprecedented situation in the world. “Balance of terror”; “neither peace nor war”; “deterrence.” The imperative of avoiding a nuclear holocaust, shared by the two confronting blocs, created the hybrid situation suggested by the expression “Cold War.” In this context, the meaning attributed to the notion of a “grand strategy” became more extensive. This can be ascertained in Paul Kennedy’s comments on the definition by the famous strategist:

A true good grand strategy was now concerned with peace as much as (perhaps even more than) with war. It was about the evolution and integration of policies that should operate for

decades, or even for centuries. It did not cease at a war end, nor commence at its beginnings. (Kennedy, 1991)

In general terms, it is what the great French theorist, Lucien Poirier, terms an “integral strategy,” but we shall not expand on this. For ease of communication, we have adopted the term “grand strategy” in this project. We will speak, as does Paul Kennedy, about “grand strategy – in peace and at war – of the United States.” But how do we study it?

Before attempting to answer, it is appropriate to go back a step in order to elucidate the nature of the difficulty contained in the question. This is rooted in the logic implicit in the concept of strategy, that is, in the model of action.

In effect, as is clear in the language used to define it, strategic interaction is conceived of as the action by rational subjects driven by clashing wills. The agents are rational because their behavior exhibits the properties postulated by the model: stable and coherent structured preferences; capacity to evaluate the direct and indirect consequences of the possible alternatives; and choice of the one that maximizes the gains obtained.² In each problematic situation, the agents define objectives and calculatedly employ the means available to attain them.

In real life, action never obeys such a simple scheme – as strategy theorists have always known, starting with Clausewitz, who reserves a prominent position for the “affective” elements in his pure conception of the phenomenon of war:

(...) war is (...) a wonderful trinity, composed of the original violence of its elements, hatred and animosity, which may be looked upon as blind instinct; of the play of probabilities and chance, which make it a free activity of the soul; and of the subordinate nature of a political instrument (...). (Clausewitz, 1955, p. 69)

In less eloquent form, the presence of irrational aspects in human behavior is widely recognized by the analysts who follow the model of action. But this is not of great importance; we understand the world better if we consider the agents “as if,” to all effects, they were rational. The model of action therefore operates with a stylized view of human behavior – an “ideal type,” worthy not by its adhesion to reality, but by its capacity to make it intelligible.

Seen from outside, a State’s policy can be interpreted based on the imputation implied in the model of action. The state of war creates ideal conditions for this operation to be fruitful, especially when it comes closer to the concept of “absolute war.” War is a “brutal simplification of the situation,” as per Bothoul’s incisive formula; it reinforces the State’s teleological action insofar as it subordinates state activities – in every sphere – to the supreme aim of beating the enemy. This is the argument that underlies Lippmann’s critique to proposals of centralized economic planning, disseminated throughout the whole world during World War II:

War (...) is incomparably appropriate to the creation of a collective sentiment, in which all minor purposes must be submerged.

²The sentence is deliberately allusive. For a systematic treatment of the question in the international relations literature, see Allison (1971, pp. 29–35).

We must have an objective able to be so concretely defined that it can decide questions such as how much we need to produce, and in what order of importance requirements must be arranged, says Soule.

A general planning and control of economic activity is feasible, because the plan is calculable. It is calculable because there is a specific purpose to be reached — the supplying of a military force of known size, with known requirements, taken from a known source of resources; and to this concrete objective all other requirements must adapt. (Lippmann, 1961, p. 87–89)

These conditions do not present themselves in situations of peace, and any attempt to create them artificially, aside from being disastrous in economic terms, is incompatible with democracy.

Lippmann is inspired by the debate on “economic calculation” in centrally planned economies, initiated in the 1920s by Ludwig von Mises.³ Later, the idea was made common by Hayek’s well-known pamphlet “The Road to Serfdom.” It is not necessary go along with the author and the extreme consequences he extracts from the argument to recognize the grain of truth that it contains.

It is therefore evident that it makes no sense to take the “unity of purpose” for granted when we speak about “grand strategy.” On the contrary, on a close inspection, what we always observe in the field of state action is the clash of interests and initiatives in a complex and fragmented system, which extends beyond the boundaries of government institutions to involve an inexhaustible multiplicity of organizations and groups from what we call “civil society.”

This is not a contingent characteristic, pertaining to one country or another. The most notable feature of modern societies is their high degree of functional differentiation, with growing complexity as its corollary. This pair is at the heart of Sociology’s intellectual project. Throughout time, sociologists from varying national traditions have coined different concepts to account for this phenomenon and have built their respective theories on them. We cannot examine them here. For the purposes of this project, it suffices to remark the universal character of the process and highlight that it operates in the state system and in each of its units.

With these conditions, how do we locate the agent? How do we identify it? And in its absence, how do we consider grand strategy in the terms of the model of action?

One of the possible answers consists in considering the State as a unitary actor, whose acting is governed by a general objective postulated by theory. For some of the analysts that follow this line of thought, this objective is the expansion of power; for others, it is security. From a logical point of view, the difference is irrelevant. With these two elements, we can explain the policy of States based on the analysis of the position they occupy in the international system.

This approach is frequently illustrated with a reference to the work of Kenneth Waltz. This is a mistake. In his seminal work, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical*

³ Simultaneously and along his own paths, Max Weber reached the same conclusion, as the following passage reveals: “The war economy is oriented to an end that (in principle) is univocal and is able to use the plenitude of power in a way that for the peacetime economy is only possible in case of ‘slavery’ of the subjects by the state” (Weber, 1964, p. 81). On this debate, see Blackburn (1991), pp. 5–66).

Analysis, Waltz highlights the heuristic potentials and the limitations of the three models considered – the explanation of international conflicts based on human nature, on the internal characteristics of the societies involved, and on the properties of the international system – to end by favoring a combination of elements of each of them in a substantive analysis, according to the nature of the problem in question.⁴ Later, as he worked on his positive theory, Waltz focused on the international system. But he took care to indicate that its object was international relations, not the foreign policy of States. In this conception, what the theory can legitimately intend to do is to elucidate the constraints that weigh on States in different configurations of the international system, much in the same way economics clarifies the pressures exerted on companies by competition, without the ambition to predict the conduct – be it successful or not – of individual companies in the contexts considered (see Waltz, 1986, pp. 322–445, particularly, pp. 331 and following).

This word of caution shows the analyst's acuteness, for venturing into the field of foreign policy would have been to compromise the integrity of his theory. The reason for this is implicit in many of Waltz's formulations and can be expressed in simple form: Except when there is an imminent risk to the existence of the State, the "signals" originating from the international system do not have a univocal meaning, and neither do they compel the State to follow a unique and necessary path. On the contrary, it regularly faces choices. An attempt to explain its options by international circumstances would be exposing the argument to the risk of tautology.

What this perspective provides is a praxeological criterion to assess the quality of the foreign policy of States endowed with distinct internal characteristics. This is the central issue of the revealing (but little commented on, et pour cause) book by Waltz dedicated specifically to this problem:

What we want in foreign policy is not a set of simple attributes but instead a nice balance of qualities: realism and imagination, flexibility and firmness, vigor and moderation, continuity of policy when policy is good and the ability to change direction when international conditions make new departures desirable, adaptability of policy without destruction of its coherence or dependability. (Waltz, 1967, p. 16)⁵

Thus, the realist tradition leaves us with two alternatives for dealing with the question formulated in this project: the first one ignores the complexity; the other takes it into account to evaluate its effect with reference to an abstractly defined norm of conduct. Neither of them deals with our problem.

Another widespread answer in the literature moves in exactly the opposite direction: directed to the issue of how to explain the choices actually adopted by the

⁴Consider this passage: "The prescriptions directly derived from a single image [term used by Waltz to designate approaches] are incomplete because they are based upon partial analyses. The partial quality of each image sets up a tension that drives one toward the inclusion of the others" (Waltz, 2004, p. 284).

⁵In this work, he concludes that the US political system proves superior to the British and that both – as political democracies, thus capable of generating more and better information, and more predictable behaviors on the authorities' part – turn out to be superior to totalitarian or authoritarian systems. See Chapter 11, "Foreign policy and democratic politics," pp. 298–311.

government in terms of international policy, the approach in question places all the emphasis in the State's structural complexity and in the fragmented nature of its decision-making processes. In this perspective, foreign policy decisions are understood as the non-anticipated result of the bargains made by actors situated in different parts of the State apparatus – rational actors, it must be said, but whose perspective does not go beyond the parochial interests corresponding to the positions that they hold in bureaucracy.

This is a very brief summary of the “bureaucratic policy model” canonically presented in the book *Essence of Decision*, by Graham T. Allison, and in other works by him and Morton Halperin (see Allison, 1971; Allison & Halperin, 1972; Halperin, 1974). In the words of his greatest exponent: “Positions define what players both may and must do. The advantages and handicaps with which each player can enter and play in various games stem from his position. So does a cluster of obligations for the performance of certain tasks” (Allison, 1971, p. 165). Or, in the famous epigram: “Where you stand depends on where you sit.”

The bureaucratic policy model was severely criticized from several angles. In a brilliant article, Krasner argues that he hugely underestimates the president's central role. Contesting Allison's interpretation of the behavior of the Kennedy government during the Missile Crisis – based on material presented in the author's own study – Krasner highlights the normative implications of the dilution of the president's non-transferable responsibility for strategic decisions, a fundamental element of the architecture of democracy in this system of government (Krasner, 1972). Not unaware of the obvious existence of intra- and inter-bureaucratic disputes, other critics have denied its relevance and sought to demonstrate its inappropriateness as an explanatory factor, even in the study of routine decisions (see Art, 1973; Rhodes, 1994).

We do not need to speak about merit of the issue. For the argument that we are developing here, what is important is to mention that even if this approach considers two of the elements of the issue raised – the complexity and the model of action – it has nothing to say about the third one: the theme of grand strategy.

It is, however, central to studies that seek to explain the foreign policy patterns of certain States from the analysis of structural characteristics and political dynamics in their respective societies. This type of argument, which pertains to a long intellectual tradition, is well illustrated in the passage below:

The policy of finance capital has three objectives: (1) to establish the largest possible economic territory (2) to close the territory to foreign competition by a wall of protective tariffs, and consequently (3) to reserve it as an area of exploitation for the national monopolistic combines. Such aims, however, were bound to come into the sharpest possible conflict with the economic policy which industrial capital carried to a state of classic perfection during its period of complete hegemony (in the double sense that commercial and bank capital were subordinated to it, and that it had absolute control of the world market) in England. (Hilferding, 1973, p. 387)

This passage was written by German social democrat Rudolf Hilferding in 1909. Five years later, World War I would break out in Europe. We cite this passage not because of its clear judgment, but because it exhibits in very crude form the logic of

the arguments developed in this model of analysis. Hilferding was a brilliant Marxist and, as such, considered society in terms of class and fractions of class. But for the purposes of our discussion, this aspect can be disregarded. Authors from many origins frame reality in another manner, but that does not mean that the logic of the argument is altered. In any case, an explanation for the political pattern observed is sought in the interaction of great social segments with contradictory collective interests. With an academic prudence alien to the German social democrat, this is the path followed by the author of an important book on the great cycles of US foreign policy, from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1980s. The following extract is from this book:

Conflict over foreign economic policy may arise between regions specializing in the production of raw material and agriculture and regions that dominant the key circulation sectors of finance, commerce, and transportation. The classic example is the struggle between North and south over the strategic power that northern traders, bankers, and shippers held over southern cotton producers in the Atlantic trade arena, which contribute to southern secession and Civil War. (Trubowitz, 1998, p. 17)

In this perspective, foreign policy is interpreted in the light of conflicts between social entities with contrasting interests, which form alliances or coalitions whose nature varies, according to the analysts. The analysts also differ in the manner in which they conceive the conversion of these interests into party programs and government policies.

Aside from the theoretical differences already referred to, this approach is affected by a problem hard to avoid: the multiple dimensions to consider in the study of social cleavages. The two examples given here convey only two possibilities – class differentiation and class fraction (in the case of the capitalist class) and spatial segmentation. But in principle, many others could be cited. To mention only those possibly relevant to the analysis of business politics: differentiation by sector of economic activity, degree of economic concentration, size of the units, etc.

This multiplicity of possible aspects is well illustrated by the passage cited below, taken from another sophisticated study of US grand strategy in a period roughly corresponding to the one considered in the book we have just cited:

Only two types of economic interest are broad enough to sustain a theory of grand strategy: class and sector. (...) Class is not, however, the main determinant of states' goals in the international system. Classes do not compete for survival in the international economy; sectors do. (...) Sectors (...) risk economic "death" in the form of bankruptcy in an adverse international economic environment. Given the different stakes of classes and sectors in the international economy, sector interest should be the key. (Narizny, 2007, p. 18)

And that is not all: these dimensions combine in many forms and, depending on the society considered, meet yet with divisions pertaining to other domains of social life – religion or ethnic groups, for example. Faced with this diversity, studies of this type tend to adopt two alternative procedures: (1) recourse to statistical analysis, in the context of which the dimensions mentioned above are categorized as variables, and (2) the treatment of the social subgroups outlined in each of those dimensions as real collectives.

We can now return to the issue raised in the beginning of this section: given the complexity of modern societies, how do we consider grand strategy according to the model of action?

Although the preceding examination is very brief, it allows us to affirm that the approach in question does not provide an answer to this problem.

In the first of the two alternatives mentioned – the statistical treatment of cleavages – it retains the first element (complexity), but sacrifices the other two. In the second – social subgroups as collectives – it preserves grand strategy and agency, but removes complexity.

Faced with difficulties of this order, an option would be to explicitly abandon the model, define the concept of strategy in another manner, and explicitly jettison the action paradigm. In this way, we would follow Herbert Simon, for whom strategy should be understood as “the series of ... decisions which determines behavior over some stretch of time” (Simon, 1957, p. 67). According to this perspective, organizations follow strategies, even if they do not have available a developed plan: Strategies do not result from the deliberate action by groups or individuals; they “emerge” as crystallized patterns of behavior.

The idea of strategy as a “pattern of behavior” was developed by Simon and other exponents of the “theory of organizations” and was assimilated by Schumpeter-inspired theorists, concerned predominantly with the study of the theme of innovation. For them, what we call strategies can be understood as “heuristics” – principles that guide the search for a solution for the organization’s problems. In this sense, innovative activity is an aspect of the “routines” that operate as the organizations’ “genes.” In the words of two authors representative of this current of thought:

We propose to assimilate to our concept of routine all of the patterning of organizational activity that the observance of heuristic produces, including the patterning of particular ways of attempting to innovate. To the extent that such patterning persists through time ..., it is part of the genetic mechanism underlying the evolutionary process. (Nelson & Winter, 1982, p. 133)

The application of this approach in the study of foreign policy decisions was stylized in Allison’s book as an “organizational process paradigm.” In this perspective, as in the bureaucratic policy model, the government is seen not as a unitary actor, but as a constellation of loosely articulated organizations that are functionally defined. Here, the role of the supreme political authority – in the case of the United States, the president – is also quite reduced. When problems come to his hands, they have already been processed by the relevant organizations and have been translated – through standardized and highly selective procedures – into packages of alternatives. However, different from the bureaucratic policy model, here the decisions do not result from bargaining between groups and self-interested individuals, but from organizations’ routines and their respective repertoires. Complex organizations carry out numerous activities simultaneously, each one of them involving a great number of individuals. The coordination required for this is ensured by observing standard procedures, combined in different “programs” according to the nature of the actions concerned. The organizations’ repertory contains a limited number of