

The Statecraft Handbook

The Statecraft Handbook

How Diplomacy, Trade, Sanctions, Intelligence,
Technology, and Force Shape World Affairs

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS LIBRARY 2

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*For the reader who asks what an instrument changes
after the announcement ends.*

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Before You Choose an Instrument

Foreign-policy language often begins with instruments. Impose sanctions. Send an envoy. Recognize a government. Offer aid. Move forces. Restrict technology. Bring the dispute to an institution.

The sequence should begin earlier: what behavior, capability, relationship, expectation, or political condition must change?

This book treats statecraft as a portfolio. An instrument has a mechanism, prerequisites, audiences, speed, reversibility, countermeasures, and exit problem. It also changes the meaning of the other instruments used beside it. A public military threat can narrow the space for private bargaining. Economic pressure can increase leverage and strengthen the target's domestic coalition. An intelligence claim can mobilize partners and become less credible if presented beyond its confidence.

For every portfolio, ask:

1. What is the exact objective?
2. Whose choice or capability must change?
3. Through which mechanism could the instrument produce that change?
4. Which legal, political, material, and coalition conditions make it usable?
5. How will the other side interpret and counter it?
6. What counts as output, behavior change, settlement, and strategic consequence?
7. What is the off-ramp?

The cases use public history and openly available records. Intelligence and covert action are discussed as institutions and policy problems, never as tradecraft. The purpose is to explain choice and consequence, not to teach harm.

An instrument is not a strategy.

The portfolio might become one.

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Part I

From Interest to Action

Statecraft Is a Portfolio

Statecraft is the attempt to align instruments with political objectives under resistance, uncertainty, law, domestic constraint, and limited time. The unit is not a sanction, summit, speech, deployment, or aid package. It is the portfolio those acts create.

Use the Instrument Card

For every instrument, record:

- objective and target behavior;
- mechanism;
- prerequisites and authority;
- primary and secondary audiences;
- speed and duration;
- reversibility;
- likely countermeasure;
- evidence of output and effect;
- cost, spillover, escalation, and exit.

This prevents a capability from becoming a recommendation merely because it exists.

Trace Interaction

Instruments can reinforce, enable, sequence, duplicate, interfere, or sabotage.

Diplomatic access can reveal whether an economic concession would matter. Institutional monitoring can make an agreement verifiable. A

public ultimatum can create leverage and remove the target's room to compromise. Export controls can slow capability acquisition and accelerate substitution. Military reassurance to an ally can deter abandonment and encourage risk-taking.

Map each pair. The portfolio effect may differ from the sum of instruments.

Separate Four Levels of Success

Output. The action occurred: resolution passed, assets frozen, forces moved.

Behavior. The relevant actor changed a decision or capability.

Settlement. A political arrangement became accepted or enforceable.

Strategy. The action improved the actor's position over the relevant horizon.

A successful interception can be a tactical output and a strategic loss if it fractures a coalition. A sanctions regime can impose cost without changing behavior. A negotiated agreement can stop violence and leave the underlying contest unresolved.

Reconstruct the Other Side's Desk

List the target's objectives, domestic coalition, alternatives, time pressure, beliefs, vulnerabilities, red lines, and expected countermeasures. Do not assume the target values costs and concessions as you do.

Pressure can increase the price of refusal and also increase the political price of compliance. The same action may be received as threat, proof of hostility, domestic opportunity, or invitation to bargain.

Use a Counterfactual Carefully

Effect requires comparison with what might have happened otherwise. That counterfactual is rarely observable. Use chronology, process evidence, comparison, statements, capability change, and rival explanations. State confidence.

Do not attribute every subsequent event to the most visible instrument.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Define the portfolio, not only its headline act.
- ☐ Complete one instrument card per component.
- ☐ Map reinforcement and interference.
- ☐ Separate output, behavior, settlement, and strategy.
- ☐ Reconstruct the decision from the other side.

The portfolio is coherent when every instrument has a job and none quietly makes another job impossible.

Define the Change You Want

Broad goals such as stability, influence, security, or international order can authorize almost any instrument because they do not specify an observable change.

Move from Interest to Objective

An interest describes a valued condition. An objective describes a change to be achieved within a political and temporal boundary.

Use:

Cause or prevent [behavior or capability] by [actor] in [setting]
by [time or condition], while protecting [critical constraint]
and preserving [required future option].

The formula does not make politics measurable in full. It exposes what remains vague.

Identify the Deciding Actor

The public target may not control the relevant choice. Authority can sit with a leader, cabinet, bureaucracy, military command, court, coalition partner, firm, creditor, legislature, electorate, or network.

Map who can authorize, implement, block, finance, legitimize, and reverse. An instrument aimed at public opinion may fail if the implementation bottleneck is a technical agency.

Separate Behavior and Capability

Behavioral objectives seek a decision: sign, withdraw, allow, stop, disclose, vote, or cooperate. Capability objectives change what an actor can do: access finance, acquire technology, deploy forces, maintain networks, or sustain operations.

Cost imposition does not automatically produce either. State how cost reaches the decision or capability.

Set Red Lines and Flexibility

A red line identifies an unacceptable condition and expected response. If it is vague, it may not deter. If it is public and absolute, it can create commitment without a usable response.

Define the prohibited act, evidence threshold, communicating channel, response range, and room for ambiguity. Credibility comes from capability, interest, prior behavior, domestic authority, and the target's belief, not rhetoric alone.

Recognize Symbolic Objectives

An action can signal identity, solidarity, condemnation, or domestic resolve. Symbolic objectives are legitimate when named. Trouble begins when a symbolic output is presented as behavioral effectiveness.

A resolution may clarify a norm and build a record even if immediate compliance is unlikely. Judge it on the claimed level.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Rewrite the interest as an observable objective.
- ☐ Map deciding, blocking, implementing, and legitimizing actors.
- ☐ Separate behavior change from capability change.
- ☐ Define red line and flexibility together.
- ☐ Label symbolic objectives honestly.

Instrument choice improves when the desired change becomes harder to hide inside a slogan.

Capability Is Not Usability

A state may possess an instrument and lack the conditions to use it effectively or lawfully. Capability must survive authority, readiness, geography, partners, domestic consent, time, information, escalation, and aftermath.

Check Authority

Identify domestic constitutional and statutory authority, international law, treaty or institutional rules, and the mandate of the acting body. Legal controversy should not be compressed into a slogan. State the competing arguments and current authority.

For force, the UN Charter's prohibition, Security Council powers, and self-defense provisions are central but not the entire body of law. For sanctions, trade, finance, data, and technology, multiple domestic and international regimes may interact.

Check Readiness and Access

Nominal capability can be unavailable because of maintenance, stock, basing, logistics, trained personnel, intelligence, network access, supplier dependency, or lead time.

Geography changes cost and political exposure. A deployment needs access and sustainment. Aid needs delivery partners. Export control needs jurisdiction and enforceability. Diplomacy needs a channel the other side will use.

Check Domestic Permission

Executives, legislatures, courts, firms, media, parties, and publics can enable, constrain, or reverse action. Domestic support is not fixed. Instrument design redistributes cost and can create a new coalition.

Do not treat an announced policy as implementation. Bureaucratic capacity and private compliance determine reach.

Check Partners

Coalitions widen capability and impose negotiation. Partners differ in threat perception, law, economic exposure, domestic timetable, intelligence confidence, and tolerance for escalation.

The instrument usable by the strongest member may be unavailable to the coalition. A narrower common instrument can be more effective than a broad measure implemented unevenly.

Check the Clock

Some instruments act quickly and decay; others accumulate slowly and are hard to reverse. A diplomatic message can arrive today. A standard, infrastructure loan, or technology ecosystem shapes dependence across years.

Match the instrument's clock to the objective. Pressure that acts after the target's decision window closes cannot compel that decision.

Check the Aftermath

Usability includes exit, monitoring, removal, replacement, settlement, and recovery. If a capability can begin an action but cannot sustain or terminate it politically, it is not fully usable.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Identify legal and institutional authority.
- ☐ Verify readiness, access, and implementation.
- ☐ Map domestic permission and private compliance.

- ☐ Test the coalition's actual common instrument.
- ☐ Compare the instrument clock with the decision clock.
- ☐ Design aftermath before action.

Power on paper becomes statecraft only after the path to use and exit is credible.

Signals, Commitments, and Credibility

A signal is an action intended to change another actor's belief. The receiver interprets it through history, interest, capability, domestic politics, and alternative explanations.

Specify the Audience and Belief

A message can target an adversary, ally, domestic public, market, institution, or bureaucracy. The same words can reassure one and alarm another.

State what belief should change: resolve, restraint, readiness, willingness to bargain, future policy, or the cost of a choice.

Choose Public or Private

Public communication can mobilize support, establish a record, coordinate allies, and create commitment. It can also increase audience costs and make compromise look like humiliation.

Private communication can preserve ambiguity and explore terms. It can lack reassurance for allies or be mistrusted as deniable.

Use channels in relation. Public principles and private terms may reinforce each other. Contradictory messages create uncertainty inside the portfolio.

Use Costly Signals Carefully

Deployments, mobilization, legislative acts, economic commitments, and other costly actions may reveal resolve because they are difficult to fake. Cost alone does not guarantee clear meaning. The receiver may interpret the same act as preparation for aggression or domestic theater.

Explain why this audience should read the action as intended.

Preserve Controlled Ambiguity

Ambiguity can leave room for deterrence, bargaining, coalition maintenance, or domestic adaptation. It can also invite miscalculation.

State what must be clear and what can remain flexible. A red line without an evidence threshold may create disputes over whether it was crossed. A response left completely open may appear empty.

Verify Reception

Do not judge a signal from the sender’s speech. Use response, private reporting, allied behavior, readiness, market action, and subsequent decisions. Distinguish public posture from internal interpretation.

Signal record
Audience. Belief to change. Channel. Cost or commitment. Alternative interpretation. Observed reception. Follow-up. Off-ramp.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Name the audience and belief.
- ☐ Decide what requires public and private channels.
- ☐ Explain why a costly act should carry the intended meaning.
- ☐ Keep essential clarity beside deliberate ambiguity.
- ☐ Observe reception before declaring credibility.

A signal succeeds in the receiver’s decision, not the sender’s transcript.

Part II

Persuasion and Agreement

Diplomatic Representation

Diplomacy is not only negotiation during crisis. Permanent representation maintains access, reports interpretation, protects interests, manages routine friction, and preserves channels before the moment they are needed.

Representation Creates Presence

Embassies, missions, consulates, special envoys, and permanent delegations represent governments in different settings. Their authority, privileges, access, and tasks depend on law and mandate.

Representation can communicate recognition and status. Opening, downgrading, withdrawing, or relocating a mission is both operational and symbolic.

Reporting Is Interpretation

Diplomatic reporting combines public facts, conversations, local context, and institutional judgment. Its value is not secret information alone. It explains how decisions are likely to be understood in the receiving political system.

Separate observation, source claim, assessment, confidence, and alternative explanation. Access can create insight and bias.

Maintain the Quiet Channel

Routine relationships allow clarification, deconfliction, prisoner and citizen issues, consular work, technical coordination, and early exploration. Closing a channel can signal condemnation and remove a route for managing consequence.

This does not mean every relationship must remain unchanged. It means loss of access is a portfolio cost.

Use Recognition Deliberately

Recognition can concern states, governments, claims, or representatives and carries legal and political complexity. It can confer access, legitimacy, resources, or institutional voice while changing relations with rivals.

Do not present recognition as approval of every action or as a costless declaration.

Judge Diplomatic Effect

Access, meetings, and communiqués are outputs. Ask whether the channel changed information, expectation, coordination, agreement, protection, or escalation. Quiet prevention may be hard to observe; use process evidence and avoid certainty.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Map the representation form and mandate.
- ☐ Separate observation from diplomatic assessment.
- ☐ Value routine channels before crisis.
- ☐ Include recognition's legal and portfolio effects.
- ☐ Judge diplomacy beyond meeting counts.

Diplomatic presence is infrastructure for political choice.

Negotiation

Negotiation is a joint decision process among actors whose interests overlap enough to make agreement possible and conflict enough to make terms matter.

Separate Position and Interest

A position is a stated demand. An interest is the condition the actor seeks to protect or obtain. Several terms may serve one interest; one position may conceal several interests.

Do not assume revealed interests are sincere or complete. Use behavior, constraints, authority, and alternatives.

Map Alternatives

Leverage depends partly on what each side can do without agreement. Map the best credible alternative, its cost, time, risk, domestic acceptability, and dependence on others.

An alternative is not credible because it is threatened. It must be usable.

Design the Sequence

Agenda order changes coalitions and information. Early agreement on principles can create momentum or postpone the hard trade. Technical talks can solve details or depoliticize what requires authority.

Choose single-text, package, parallel-track, incremental, or comprehensive forms based on the problem. No sequence is universally superior.

Protect Face Without Hiding Substance

Public identity and domestic legitimacy affect whether a concession can be accepted. Reciprocal language, phased action, private assurance, timing, and attribution can reduce the political cost of agreement.

Face-saving cannot substitute for a feasible settlement. It makes feasible terms politically usable.

Verify and Enforce

Define obligations, baselines, evidence, monitoring, dispute route, correction, consequence, and expiry or review. Verification should match the action and risk.

Perfect verification may be impossible. State residual uncertainty and design responses that do not make every ambiguity a trigger for collapse.

Know the Zone of Possible Agreement

Agreement requires overlap between acceptable outcomes, but parties may not know the range or may misrepresent it. Information, sequencing, side payments, issue linkage, and changed alternatives can create or reveal overlap.

Do not confuse a signed text with implementation or settlement.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Map positions, interests, authority, and alternatives.
- ☐ Choose sequence for information and political use.
- ☐ Design face and substance together.
- ☐ Specify verification, dispute, and consequence.
- ☐ Separate signature, implementation, and settlement.

Negotiation succeeds when the agreement is preferable, implementable, and politically survivable for the actors whose choices matter.

Mediation and Third Parties

A mediator can structure communication, supply process, carry messages, clarify options, mobilize expertise, connect guarantees, and help parties test terms. A mediator cannot manufacture political will from procedure alone.

Check Entry and Consent

Who invited the third party, who consents, and who remains outside? Consent can be partial, conditional, or tactical. Entry by one actor can alter status and legitimacy.

The United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation emphasizes preparedness, consent, impartiality, inclusivity, national ownership, law and normative frameworks, coherence, coordination, and quality agreements. These are conditions to manage, not a recipe that guarantees peace.

Distinguish Impartiality and Neutrality

A mediator can apply process fairly while remaining bound by law or normative limits. Perceived bias can reduce access; false equivalence can damage legitimacy.

State the mandate, principles, relationships, resources, and any leverage the mediator brings.

Build Inclusion Without Paralysis

The actors at the table may not represent people who bear the result. Inclusion can improve information, legitimacy, implementation, and durability. It can also increase complexity and be manipulated.

Map decision-makers, affected groups, implementers, spoilers, and excluded constituencies. Choose meaningful forms of participation rather than symbolic attendance.

Use Leverage and Guarantees

Third parties may offer monitoring, aid, security assurance, recognition, sequencing, sanctions relief, or other support. Each instrument creates dependencies and credibility questions.

A guarantee matters only if the guarantor can and will perform under the conditions likely to arise.

Test Ripeness Carefully

The idea of a mutually hurting stalemate helps explain when parties may seek an exit. Perceptions matter, and parties can disagree about whether time favors them. Do not wait for a mythical perfect moment or label failed mediation as proof that conflict was unripe.

Judge the Agreement and the Process

Assess violence reduction, participation, rights, feasibility, monitoring, implementation, dispute handling, and political ownership. An agreement can be signed under pressure and fail in implementation. A process can prevent escalation without producing a comprehensive text.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Verify entry, consent, and mandate.
- ☐ State impartiality and normative boundaries.
- ☐ Map meaningful inclusion and excluded interests.
- ☐ Test guarantees for real credibility.

- ☐ Judge process, agreement, and implementation separately.

Mediation works through the parties' choices; the mediator changes the conditions under which those choices are made.

Institutions and International Law as Instruments

Institutions and law are not external scenery. Actors use forums, rules, procedures, adjudication, monitoring, and legal argument to coordinate, delay, authorize, constrain, legitimate, and create records.

Choose the Venue

Venues differ in membership, voting, agenda, expertise, remedy, speed, transparency, precedent, enforcement, and legitimacy. Forum choice changes the coalition and the question.

A dispute framed as security, trade, human rights, technical standard, or regional concern enters different procedures and audiences.

Use Rules to Coordinate

Rules reduce uncertainty by defining expectations and information. They can make reciprocal action possible, create monitoring, and give domestic actors a legal basis for compliance.

Rules do not apply themselves. Interpretation, capacity, political will, and dispute procedures matter.

Use Law Without Legalism

Identify applicable source, jurisdiction, parties, obligation, exception, procedure, and remedy. Distinguish legal position from political preference and official claim from authoritative decision.

Legal argument can constrain an actor and mobilize support. It can also harden positions when every compromise appears to concede a legal claim.

Understand Delay

Procedure can slow escalation, gather evidence, or keep a dispute inside peaceful channels. Delay can also allow facts on the ground to change.

Judge whether time supports verification, negotiation, compliance, or strategic consolidation.

Measure More Than Compliance

An institutional act can clarify a norm, authorize collective action, delegate monitoring, coordinate partners, stigmatize behavior, or preserve a claim even without immediate compliance.

State the intended level. Do not call a judgment useless because it lacks direct enforcement or effective because it exists.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Compare venues by membership, procedure, remedy, and audience.
- ☐ Identify how the rule changes coordination or authority.
- ☐ Trace primary law and competing interpretations.
- ☐ Ask who benefits from procedural time.
- ☐ Evaluate normative, institutional, behavioral, and strategic effects.

Law becomes an instrument when actors use authority and procedure to change the political field, but it remains law rather than a synonym for preference.

Part III

Economic and Technological Leverage

Trade Policy and Market Access

Trade instruments change prices, access, supply, standards, and domestic distribution. Their international effect depends on how those changes reach firms, workers, consumers, and political coalitions.

Name the Mechanism

Tariffs alter border prices. Quotas limit quantity. Standards and conformity rules shape entry. Procurement rules direct public demand. Export controls restrict transfer. Agreements exchange commitments and procedures.

Do not group them as economic pressure without tracing the transmission.

Map Domestic Distribution

An import restriction may protect producers and raise input or consumer cost. Export restriction may deny a target and harm domestic suppliers. Market opening creates winners, losers, adjustment, and political response.

The statecraft portfolio must include these domestic effects because they determine durability and partner support.

Use Standards as Access

Technical, safety, environmental, labor, and data standards can improve interoperability or protection and shape who can enter a market. They can also be contested as disguised restriction.

Trace the standard-setting process, evidence, compliance cost, recognition, and appeal. Standards create long-lived capability and dependence when ecosystems form around them.

Audit Export Controls

Identify jurisdiction, item or technology, destination, end use, end user, licensing, partners, enforceability, substitution, and spillover. Official regimes can be technically complex and change. Use current primary rules and qualified advice.

Controls can delay access and incentivize indigenous development, third-country routing, redesign, or alternative standards. Effect changes across time.

Judge Strategic Effect

Measure changed access, price, capability, substitution, coalition behavior, and domestic cost. A fall in bilateral trade can conceal rerouting. A successful restriction can accelerate a competing ecosystem.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Specify the trade instrument and transmission.
- ☐ Map domestic winners, losers, and inputs.
- ☐ Treat standards as institutions, not technical trivia.
- ☐ Audit jurisdiction, substitution, and partner enforcement.
- ☐ Judge immediate denial and long-term adaptation.

Market access is leverage because it connects international choice to domestic economic coalitions.

Sanctions

Sanctions restrict economic or political relations to change behavior, capability, cost, signal, or normative position. They are a family of instruments, not one measure.

Define Objective and Target

Separate compellence, deterrence, capability denial, constraint, signaling, punishment, coalition reassurance, and norm enforcement. One regime may pursue several, and those objectives can conflict.

Identify the deciding actor, affected sector, intermediary, and protected population.

Trace Transmission

Map legal rule, implementing jurisdiction, firm and bank compliance, transaction restriction, economic effect, political distribution, and decision mechanism.

Broad cost does not automatically reach the leadership's preferred choice. It may be shifted to households, rivals, regions, or private actors. The target can repress, subsidize, reroute, substitute, or use pressure politically.

Design Coalition and Enforcement

Coverage, market share, financial centrality, intelligence, legal compatibility, and private compliance affect reach. Overcompliance can exceed the rule and disrupt lawful humanitarian activity.

Publish clear scope, licenses, guidance, due process, and review where the regime allows. Sanctions evasion is discussed here only as an analytical countermeasure, not instruction.

Protect Humanitarian Space

Assess food, medicine, remittances, civil society, information, and essential services. Exemptions do not guarantee access when banks, insurers, shippers, and suppliers remain uncertain or unwilling.

Monitor actual transactions and effects, not only formal exemptions.

Connect Pressure to Bargaining

State what action produces relief, who can authorize it, whether relief is reversible, and how compliance is verified. Permanent pressure with an impossible removal rule may deny capability but offers little compellence.

Removal can be politically difficult for the sender. Design off-ramps at imposition.

Evaluate Over Time

Use output, economic effect, capability effect, behavior, coalition durability, humanitarian spillover, substitution, and settlement. State the counterfactual problem.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Name the sanction objective and target actor.
- ☐ Trace transmission through firms and politics.
- ☐ Audit coalition, enforcement, and overcompliance.
- ☐ Monitor humanitarian access in practice.
- ☐ Tie relief to verifiable change and an off-ramp.

Sanctions are effective only relative to the objective they can plausibly reach.

Finance, Currency, and Debt

Financial statecraft operates through access to payment, credit, reserves, liquidity, currency, insurance, and debt. Its leverage comes from network position and can produce systemic spillover.

Map the Financial Network

Identify currency, correspondent banks, clearing, settlement, messaging, custody, insurance, capital markets, lenders, and regulatory jurisdiction. Do not compress these functions into a single payment system.

An actor can lose one route and retain another at greater cost or lower scale.

Understand Reserve and Currency Power

Reserve assets and widely used currencies support liquidity, trade, and safety. Their statecraft value depends on trust, market depth, convertibility, institutions, and network use.

Restricting access can impose sharp cost and create incentives to diversify. Diversification is constrained by the qualities that made the network central.

Read Debt as a Relationship

Debt contracts distribute timing, currency, interest, collateral, governance, and default risk. Official lending can provide relief, development,

stabilization, or influence. Conditionality can support reform, impose social cost, or shift domestic authority.

Avoid reducing every loan to generosity or control. Inspect terms, alternatives, transparency, use, restructuring, and domestic ownership.

Trace Private Response

Banks, insurers, rating agencies, investors, and firms can amplify policy. Risk and uncertainty can produce withdrawal beyond the formal measure.

This can increase leverage and damage unrelated activity. Monitor both.

Judge System Effects

Ask whether the action fragments payments, changes reserve behavior, increases transaction cost, creates substitute infrastructure, affects allied exposure, or alters confidence in the rule system.

Short-term dominance can create long-term adaptation. Neither outcome should be assumed.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Map specific financial functions and jurisdiction.
- ☐ Separate immediate access from network confidence.
- ☐ inspect debt terms, alternatives, and ownership.
- ☐ Include private de-risking and overcompliance.
- ☐ Evaluate system adaptation across time.

Financial leverage is powerful because the network is useful. Statecraft must account for what happens if its use changes that usefulness.

Aid and Development Partnerships

Aid can relieve suffering, build capability, support public goods, stabilize partners, create access, signal commitment, and pursue influence. Those purposes overlap and can compete.

Name the Result

Distinguish humanitarian relief, reconstruction, service delivery, institution building, infrastructure, security assistance, budget support, and political partnership.

The appropriate time, partner, condition, and measure change with the result.

Map Ownership

Who defines the problem, chooses priorities, controls funds, implements, maintains, and evaluates? A technically strong project can fail if it lacks local authority, staffing, maintenance, or legitimacy.

National ownership does not mean treating the government as the only affected actor. Map communities, institutions, civil society, firms, and excluded groups.

Use Conditions for a Mechanism

Conditionality can protect standards, change incentives, or support agreed reform. It can also produce formal compliance, delayed disburse-

ment, loss of ownership, or harm to people with little control over the condition.

State what condition changes, who can meet it, how evidence is judged, and what happens to the underlying need if funds stop.

Avoid Input Success

Money committed, schools built, equipment delivered, or people trained are outputs. Measure service, capability, maintenance, access, behavior, and distribution where the objective requires them.

Attribution remains difficult. Use baselines, comparison, process evidence, and uncertainty.

Plan Exit and Continuity

Identify recurring cost, local revenue, skills, supply, spare parts, data, governance, and handoff. An aid project that works only while the donor operates it may create an unacknowledged dependency.

Exit can be phased, transferred, replaced, or linked to a durable institution. Name it early.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Separate relief, capacity, infrastructure, and influence.
- ☐ Map decision and maintenance ownership.
- ☐ Tie conditions to a plausible mechanism.
- ☐ Measure use and durability beyond disbursement.
- ☐ Design continuity and exit from the start.

Aid becomes partnership when the result can outlive the act of giving.

Technology, Standards, and Infrastructure

Technology statecraft shapes access to components, compute, networks, platforms, knowledge, standards, infrastructure, and the dependencies that connect them.

Map the Stack

Separate research, design, equipment, materials, production, software, data, networks, integration, maintenance, and skilled labor. Control at one layer may be decisive or easily bypassed depending on substitutes and complements.

Identify Chokepoint and Diffusion

A concentrated capability can provide leverage. Knowledge and production can diffuse. The relevant questions are time, performance gap, scale, cost, and which complementary inputs remain scarce.

Do not declare permanent denial from a present bottleneck.

Use Standards and Interoperability

Standards coordinate markets and can embed safety, values, compatibility, and access. Participation in technical bodies, reference implementations, certification, procurement, and ecosystem adoption can matter more than a public declaration.

Competing standards can fragment markets or create alternatives.

Inspect Infrastructure Dependence

Ports, cables, satellites, clouds, grids, networks, and platforms have long lives and switching costs. Financing, ownership, maintenance, data access, location, security, and governance shape dependence.

Avoid treating every foreign-built asset as automatic control or every domestic asset as resilient.

Include Private Actors

Firms own capability, intellectual property, platforms, data, and infrastructure. They respond to regulation, risk, market access, shareholder interest, and technical reality.

State power often depends on private implementation and partner jurisdiction.

Design for Time

Technology restrictions, subsidies, research alliances, talent policy, and infrastructure work on different clocks. One instrument can deny today while another builds in 10 years.

Portfolio coherence requires both.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Map the technology stack and complements.
- ☐ Test chokepoint duration and substitution.
- ☐ Treat standards as governance and market access.
- ☐ audit infrastructure ownership, maintenance, and switching.
- ☐ Align denial, protection, and creation across time.

Technology statecraft is a contest over pathways, not a list of advanced objects.

Part IV

Information, Intelligence, and Force

Public Diplomacy and Information

Public diplomacy seeks to shape understanding, relationship, legitimacy, and choice among foreign publics and institutions. Information action enters media ecosystems that already contain trust, identity, incentives, platforms, and domestic conflict.

Name the Audience and Outcome

Distinguish awareness, understanding, trust, agenda, participation, behavior, and durable relationship. Reach is an output. It is not persuasion.

Map language, media use, trusted intermediaries, political context, and the audience's ability to act.

Make Credibility a Portfolio Asset

Credibility comes from accuracy, consistency, transparency about uncertainty, source quality, past behavior, and alignment between message and policy.

A truthful message can fail. A misleading message can produce short-term effect and long-term loss. Treat trust as something other instruments consume.

Use Exchange, Not Only Broadcast

Scholarship, cultural programs, exchanges, public service, and institutional partnership can build relationship and knowledge across time.

They are not reducible to message reach.

Two-way reporting should change policy, not merely collect reaction.

Analyze Disinformation Without Amplifying It

Identify claim, source, network, audience, technique, reach, harm, and uncertainty. Correction, preemption, platform action, trusted messenger, law, and resilience have different mechanisms and rights implications.

Do not repeat harmful claims unnecessarily. Do not label disagreement as disinformation without evidence of falsity and relevant intent or manipulation.

Include Domestic Spillover

Foreign-facing messages are visible at home. They can affect minority communities, elections, press freedom, trust, and legal rights. Domestic and foreign audiences can read the same statement differently.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Define audience and outcome beyond reach.
- ☐ Audit credibility before messaging.
- ☐ Use exchange and listening as instruments.
- ☐ Analyze manipulation without unnecessary amplification.
- ☐ include domestic rights and trust effects.

Information becomes statecraft when it changes a political relationship without destroying the credibility on which future communication depends.

Intelligence in Policy

Intelligence reduces uncertainty through collection, evaluation, analysis, warning, and assessment. It does not eliminate uncertainty or make the policy decision.

This chapter addresses public institutional questions, not collection tradecraft.

Separate Information and Assessment

Information may be true, false, incomplete, or deliberately supplied. Assessment integrates sources, context, alternatives, and confidence to answer a policy question.

Distinguish fact, source report, inference, assumption, and judgment.

Use Confidence Language

Confidence reflects source quality, consistency, corroboration, gaps, and analytical difficulty. Probability and confidence are related but not identical.

Agencies use different standards. Read the stated definitions. Do not convert moderate confidence into likely true without knowing the framework.

Protect Against Politicization

Policy sets questions and priorities. Politicization occurs when analysis is pressured, selected, framed, or suppressed to support a preferred decision.

Use alternative analysis, sourcing standards, dissent, review, separation of evidence from recommendation, and transparent confidence.

Design Warning

Warning identifies a possible event, indicator, time, consequence, and decision need. A warning can be accurate and not acted upon because it is too broad, arrives among many warnings, conflicts with belief, or lacks an actionable decision.

Evaluate both analytical and policy systems.

Use Liaison with Boundaries

Partners exchange access, expertise, corroboration, and warning. Liaison creates dependence, source-protection issues, differing law and oversight, and risk of manipulation.

State caveat, origin, confidence, and use authority.

Know the Decision Boundary

Intelligence can assess capability, intent, indicators, alternatives, and likely reaction. Policy decides objectives, acceptable risk, law, ethics, and action.

Do not let an intelligence gap become automatic caution or automatic aggression.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Label fact, report, inference, assumption, and judgment.
- ☐ Preserve confidence definitions and dissent.
- ☐ Separate assessment from policy preference.
- ☐ Connect warnings to decisions and indicators.
- ☐ audit liaison provenance and authority.

Intelligence serves policy best when it makes uncertainty more exact without pretending to make choice inevitable.

Covert Action as a Policy Problem

Covert action seeks political effect while concealing or limiting acknowledgment of the sponsor. It creates distinctive problems of authority, oversight, escalation, credibility, accountability, and historical evaluation.

This chapter contains no operational methods, targeting, concealment, evasion, or tradecraft.

Distinguish Secrecy and Deniability

Secret action protects knowledge of an operation. Covert action obscures sponsorship. Clandestine activity concerns the conduct itself. Legal definitions vary.

Precision matters because oversight and risk differ.

Ask Why Acknowledgment Changes the Instrument

Covert form may protect a relationship, reduce public commitment, preserve access, or manage escalation. It can also reduce coordination, democratic consent, legal review, and control.

If the policy would be unacceptable when revealed, that fact is a warning, not a complete test.

Audit Authority and Oversight

Identify domestic legal authority, authorization, legislative or judicial oversight, reporting, review, and international-law questions. These are jurisdiction-specific and often classified; public analysis should not invent certainty.

Model Exposure

Assume attribution may occur. Ask how exposure changes alliance trust, target response, domestic legitimacy, legal position, public diplomacy, and future access.

Deniability is not a binary property. Different audiences can hold different confidence.

Expect Blowback and Mission Drift

Partners, proxies, information, tools, and political effects can move beyond original control. Short-term tactical effect can create long-term hostility or institutional habit.

Map incentives and termination at the policy level. Do not provide actionable detail.

Evaluate Historically

Public records are incomplete, selective, and later declassified under varying rules. Separate documented authorization, claimed action, assessed effect, and disputed interpretation.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Use precise public definitions.
- ☐ State why covert form changes political effect.
- ☐ identify authority and oversight without speculation.
- ☐ Assume exposure and map portfolio consequence.
- ☐ Judge tactical effect against long-term position.

The central question is not whether an action can remain hidden. It is whether the policy remains defensible and strategically coherent if it does not.

Military Presence and Coercive Diplomacy

Military presence can deter attack, assure allies, gather information, protect access, prepare action, or compel change. The same deployment can be read as reassurance or preparation for war.

Name the Function

Distinguish deterrence, compellence, assurance, denial, punishment, defense, evacuation, deconfliction, and demonstration. A force package suited to one function may undermine another.

Connect Capability and Signal

Presence changes physical capability and belief. Assess readiness, location, protection, sustainment, command, rules, reinforcement, and ability to act.

A visible platform with little survivability can signal commitment and create vulnerability.

Separate Deterrence and Compellence

Deterrence seeks to prevent an action. Compellence seeks to make an actor begin, stop, or reverse one. Compellence often requires visible deadlines and action while the target bears the political cost of compliance.

Do not use the words interchangeably.

Manage Ally Effects

Reassurance can strengthen coalition resolve. It can also create fear of abandonment or entrapment, encourage local risk-taking, or generate domestic opposition to basing.

Consultation, command arrangements, burden sharing, and political messaging are part of the instrument.

Design the Off-Ramp

State what target behavior permits reduction, how compliance is verified, whether partial steps receive reciprocal action, and how forces withdraw without signaling abandonment.

Presence without a political route can become the strategy by default.

Account for Accident

Close operations create risk through collision, misidentification, unauthorized action, technical failure, and rapid interpretation. Deconfliction channels, disciplined command, and proportional response reduce but do not remove risk.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Name deterrence, compellence, assurance, or another function.
- ☐ Assess capability and interpretation together.
- ☐ Include allied permission and risk.
- ☐ Link reduction to verifiable behavior.
- ☐ Build deconfliction and accident response.

Military presence is persuasive only through the political choice the other side believes it creates.

The Use of Force

Force can destroy, deny, defend, occupy, protect, signal, and compel. It cannot by itself create a legitimate and durable political settlement.

State the Political Objective

Define who must do what, which capability must change, over what time, and what settlement is sought. Tactical tasks should connect to that objective.

A military objective can be achieved while the political objective fails.

Identify the Legal Argument

The UN Charter prohibits threat or use of force against territorial integrity or political independence and provides for Security Council action and individual or collective self-defense under Article 51. Other legal questions include consent, attribution, necessity, proportionality, reporting, occupation, human rights, and international humanitarian law.

State the asserted basis, counterargument, factual predicates, and authoritative sources. This book does not resolve contested cases.

Protect Civilians

International humanitarian law includes distinction, proportionality in attack, precautions, and protections for civilians and civilian objects. The ICRC summarizes the customary proportionality rule as prohibiting expected incidental civilian harm excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.

Legal compliance is a minimum. Civilian harm also changes legitimacy, coalition support, recruitment, displacement, recovery, and strategic result.

Connect Action to Termination

Define success, pause, escalation, negotiation, withdrawal, and aftermath. Ask what happens after capability is destroyed or territory changes hands.

If termination depends on the target accepting an undefined political condition, the military plan contains a political gap.

Evaluate Across Levels

Assess mission output, military balance, target behavior, settlement, civilian consequence, regional reaction, coalition, domestic authority, and long-term strategic position.

Do not let battlefield clarity hide political ambiguity.

WATCH OUT

Nothing in this chapter is targeting or operational guidance. Analysis of force must remain within lawful public sources and foreground civilian protection and political consequence.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Tie military tasks to a specific political objective.
- ☐ Trace the legal claim and factual predicates.
- ☐ include civilian protection and strategic harm.
- ☐ design termination and aftermath before action.
- ☐ judge tactical, political, and strategic levels separately.

Force can change facts quickly. Statecraft is accountable for the politics those facts produce.

Cyber, Space, and the Gray Zone

Cyber and space operations act through networks and infrastructure shared by states, firms, and civilians. Effects can be persistent, reversible, cumulative, deniable, or difficult to attribute. Gray-zone competition exploits uncertainty below perceived thresholds.

This chapter provides policy analysis only, never intrusion or disruption instruction.

Define the Effect

Separate espionage, disruption, degradation, denial, manipulation, prepositioning, demonstration, and physical effect. In space, distinguish service, sensing, communication, navigation, interference, maneuver, and destruction.

Labels such as cyberattack can conceal important differences.

Treat Attribution as a Judgment

Attribution can combine technical, behavioral, intelligence, geopolitical, legal, and allied evidence. Public confidence may differ from classified assessment.

State who attributes, what is attributed, confidence, evidence disclosed, and alternative explanations. Attribution is not merely a technical output.

Map Private Infrastructure

Clouds, cables, satellites, software, platforms, and response capability are often privately owned or multinational. Policy depends on firms' legal duties, access, incentives, and technical capacity.

Public-private coordination creates authority, privacy, liability, and cross-border questions.

Understand Cumulative Effect

One incident may not cross a response threshold while repeated activity changes confidence, cost, readiness, and political freedom. Record frequency, persistence, adaptation, and systemic consequence.

Do not aggregate unrelated incidents without evidence of connection.

Design Response Across Domains

A cyber event does not require a cyber-only response. Diplomacy, law enforcement, sanctions, technical defense, public attribution, coalition, and other lawful instruments may fit different objectives.

Cross-domain response can create escalation ambiguity. Communicate objective and limit.

Protect Civilian Systems

Shared infrastructure means military and civilian effects can be entangled. Map essential services, safety, health, finance, communication, and recovery. Apply law and rights with qualified expertise.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Define effect rather than rely on broad labels.
- ☐ state attribution source, evidence, and confidence.
- ☐ include private ownership and jurisdiction.
- ☐ measure cumulative effect with disciplined grouping.
- ☐ choose a portfolio response and communicate its limit.

The gray zone is not a law-free zone. Its uncertainty makes disciplined objectives and evidence more important.

Part V

Building and Judging the Portfolio

Coalitions, Sequencing, and Exit

A portfolio becomes collective when partners contribute authority, access, markets, intelligence, finance, legitimacy, or capability. Collective strength requires negotiated coherence.

Map Partner Constraints

For each partner, record objective, threat perception, authority, economic exposure, domestic timetable, red lines, capability, required assurance, and exit concern.

Public unity can conceal different desired settlements.

Allocate Burden by Function

Contribution need not be identical. One actor may provide market weight, another access, another mediation, another monitoring, and another financing.

Fairness is political. State the principle: capacity, exposure, benefit, responsibility, or negotiated share.

Sequence for Effect

Instruments can precede, condition, trigger, overlap, or replace.

Diplomacy may test terms before pressure. Pressure may create urgency before negotiation. Monitoring may enable relief. Aid may follow

agreement and begin earlier for humanitarian need. Military assurance may protect the bargaining space.

Draw the sequence with decision points and feedback, not a fixed list.

Preserve Reversibility

Some actions can be paused or removed; others create sunk cost, precedent, dependency, or irreversible harm. Use reversible steps when learning is important and commitment remains uncertain.

Irreversibility can strengthen credibility and trap the coalition.

Design Off-Ramps

Define partial compliance, verification, reciprocal step, dispute route, settlement, review, expiry, and the action if compliance reverses.

An off-ramp is not capitulation. It is the route by which the objective becomes politically reachable.

Run Portfolio Review

At each review:

1. Has the objective changed?
2. What did the other side do and why?
3. Which instrument produced output and which affected behavior?
4. Where are instruments interfering?
5. Which partner constraint changed?
6. What new harm or adaptation appeared?
7. Which instrument should stop?

Put It to Work

- ☐ Map partner interests and required assurance.
- ☐ Allocate burden by function and explicit principle.
- ☐ Sequence instruments around decisions.
- ☐ preserve learning through reversible steps where possible.
- ☐ build relief, settlement, and stop rules.

A coalition portfolio survives when partners can explain not only what they oppose, but which settlement their instruments are trying to create.

Three Statecraft Files

These files show how to reconstruct portfolios from public sources. They do not claim that one instrument caused the outcome alone.

File 1: The Montreal Protocol

Objective

Reduce production and consumption of ozone-depleting substances through negotiated, verifiable, and adaptive international commitments.

Portfolio

Scientific assessment clarified mechanism and harm. Diplomacy created a framework. Differentiated schedules and financial support addressed capability and distribution. Trade provisions altered incentives for participation. Reporting, review, and adjustment allowed the regime to change with evidence.

Other Side's Desk

States differed in industrial dependence, technology access, cost, and development status. A uniform immediate ban would have distributed burden differently and could have weakened participation.

Success Levels

Treaty adoption and schedules were outputs. Changed production and consumption were behavior and capability effects. The continuing regime

and scientific assessments support a settlement-level judgment. Attribution should still include technological substitution, domestic regulation, and market change.

Lesson

Agreement worked as a portfolio of science, law, finance, trade, differentiated obligation, and revision. The instrument was not the treaty text alone.

File 2: The Cuban Missile Crisis

Objective

The United States sought removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba while avoiding nuclear war; the Soviet leadership sought to protect Cuba, alter strategic position, and manage risk.

Portfolio

Public military quarantine, readiness, diplomacy, private communication, intelligence, alliance management, and reciprocal terms interacted. Public and private positions were not identical.

Other Side's Desk

Each side faced domestic and alliance audiences, uncertainty about control, and fear that delay changed capability. Military pressure created urgency and danger. Private bargaining preserved a route that public ultimatum alone narrowed.

Success Levels

Missile withdrawal was a behavioral success for the immediate U.S. objective. Non-invasion assurance and later removal of U.S. Jupiter missiles from Turkey belonged to the settlement portfolio. The episode also exposed accident and escalation risk and later contributed to crisis-management measures.

Lesson

Coercion and negotiation cannot be evaluated separately when each changes the meaning and usability of the other.

File 3: The 2003 Iraq War

Objective Problem

Public objectives included disarmament claims, enforcement, regime change, security, and later political transformation. Ambiguity among objectives complicated the connection between military action and settlement.

Portfolio

Intelligence assessments and public claims shaped domestic and allied authority. Institutional diplomacy, inspections, coalition formation, force, occupation policy, aid, and political reconstruction interacted.

Output and Consequence

The regime was removed rapidly. That was a military and political output. It did not by itself create security, legitimate governance, or regional strategic advantage. Disputed weapons claims damaged credibility. Occupation decisions, institutional breakdown, violence, civilian harm, and regional effects changed the strategic judgment.

Counterfactual Boundary

No simple counterfactual is observable. Analysis must compare continued inspection, containment, alternative coalition choices, Iraqi behavior, and risks of each. The after-action record should separate what was known, claimed, assumed, and later learned.

Lesson

A portfolio can achieve its most visible output and worsen the position the strategy was meant to improve.

Use the File Template

For any case, record chronology, objective, deciding actor, instrument cards, interaction, other side, law, domestic and coalition constraints, outputs, behavior, settlement, strategic consequence, counterfactual, unintended effect, and confidence.

Put It to Work

- ☐ Reconstruct one case from dated primary records.
- ☐ attribute official claims rather than adopt them.
- ☐ Separate output from settlement.
- ☐ Include instruments that made others usable.
- ☐ State counterfactual and confidence.

Statecraft becomes visible when the case is reconstructed as a portfolio and judged at the level of the objective.

Part VI

The Statecraft Portfolio Workbook

Instrument Comparison Matrix

Instrument	Mechanism	Speed	Reversible?	Reply / exit
Diplomacy				
Institution / law				
Trade / fi-nance				
Sanctions				
Aid				
Technology				

Information				
Military presence				
Force				

Negotiation Preparation Sheet

Objective and deciding actor	
Our interests and positions	
Their interests and positions	
Our alternatives and constraints	
Their alternatives and constraints	

Possible packages and sequence	
Face and domestic authority	
Verification and dispute	
Off-ramp and settlement	

Sanctions and Economic-Statecraft Audit

Objective and tar- get behavior	
Legal authority and jurisdictions	
Transmission through firms and finance	
Target political mechanism	
Coalition and en- forcement	

Evasion / substitution risk	
Humanitarian and third-party effects	
Relief, verification, and removal	
Output, behavior, settlement, strategy	

Claims, Confidence, and Intelligence Language

Type	Claim	Source / basis	Confidence / alternative
Fact			
Source report			
Inference			
Assumption			
Assessment			

Dissent			
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Warning

Possible event, indicator, time, consequence, decision, and next review:

Statecraft Portfolio Worksheet

Interest and exact objective	
Deciding actor and audiences	
Other side's desk	
Legal, domestic, and coalition conditions	
Instrument cards	

Reinforcement and interference	
Sequence and decision points	
Off-ramp and aftermath	
Output, behavior, settlement, strategy	
Counterfactual and confidence	

Legal and Ethical Questions Before Action

- ☐ What domestic and international authority is asserted?
- ☐ Which facts must be true for that authority to apply?
- ☐ Which authoritative source, procedure, and counterargument exist?
- ☐ Who bears direct and indirect harm?
- ☐ Which civilians, rights, services, and protected objects are exposed?
- ☐ What discrimination, due-process, privacy, or humanitarian issue arises?
- ☐ Which private actors implement the instrument and under what duties?
- ☐ Which partner law and consent matter?
- ☐ What information is uncertain or classified?
- ☐ How will compliance, failure, correction, and remedy be verified?
- ☐ What changes if the action becomes public?
- ☐ What precedent or long-term dependency does it create?
- ☐ Which less harmful instrument could reach the objective?
- ☐ What is the stop condition and off-ramp?

Qualified Review Needed

Decision and Recorded Dissent

Source Notes

The portfolio framework, instrument card, success ladder, and after-action files are an original synthesis. The source ledger records official documents and established scholarship used for legal, institutional, historical, and analytical boundaries. Official claims are attributed as claims; public records do not remove uncertainty.

About the Author

Gaurav Tiwari writes and teaches through systems, mechanisms, and decision boundaries. This book applies that method to the instruments through which political actors try to convert objectives into international consequences.

He writes at gauravtiwari.org.

Continue the Work

The World Between States supplies the foundations beneath this book. *Power Without Certainty* continues from instrument choice to whole-strategy judgment under fragmentation, alliance constraints, and uncertainty.

