Needed: More Thinking about Conceptual Frameworks for Analysis—The Case of Influence

Jason U. Manosevitz

> ***"The concept of influence is fundamental to policymakers trying to shape events, but it is only one of many conceptual frameworks that analysts could usefully develop and incorporate in their analysis."***

US policymakers want intelligence that helps them avoid surprise, understand evolving developments, and identify opportunities to advance US objectives or avoid risks to national security interests. How is China's power in Asia evolving? How can the United States influence political developments in Egypt? What can be done to shape Iranian and North Korean leaders' decisions about their nuclear programs? What public diplomacy efforts might overcome the appeal of terrorist ideologies? How can stability be brought to tumultuous regions in Africa?

Policymakers who must answer these kinds of questions expect Intelligence Community (IC) analysis to help tackle them. Many structured analytic techniques (SATs) that IC analysts use are well suited to exposing assumptions and to carrying out an analyst's first duty-which is to warn. The IC's overwhelming focus on SATs since 9/11 however has crowded out attention to conceptual frameworks that analysts and policymakers need in order to address many of our national security questions, such as those above.

This article reviews a framework for thinking about the concept of influence and suggests that conceptual frameworks can complement SATs to strengthen analytic tradecraft. The application of influence is fundamental to policymakers trying to shape events, but it is only one of many conceptual frameworks that analysts could usefully develop and incorporate in their analysis.[1] My goal in this discussion is to spark more attention to core conceptual frameworks in the course of IC analysis and generate debate about how to continue developing analytic tradecraft.

The Problem

SATs are simply methods for conducting analysis. Attention to them is understandable in the wake of 9/11 and the Iraq WMD debacle. In the postmortems of those events it has become common to speak of failure to "connect dots" or of inattention to basic assumptions as mistakes that would have been avoided had SATs been applied. Indeed,

[1] This article focuses on influence among states. The principles discussed here, however, can be applied to a wide range of actors, including international organizations, political parties, nonstate organizations, groups, and individuals.

All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed in this article are those of the author. Nothing in the article should be construed as asserting or implying US government endorsement of its factual statements and interpretations.

At the same time, single-minded attention to technique runs the risk of reducing analyses to mechanical processes.

many SATs are focused on rooting out flawed thinking or challenging existing analysis. SATs, such as Key Assumption Checks, What If Analysis, Red Team Analysis, and A Team/B Team exercises, focus on discrete questions, and many are tilted toward warning policymakers of dangers and threats to national security.[2]

The problem is that many SATs stunt broad thinking and the kind of analysis that busy policymakers want. At the same time, single-minded attention to technique runs the risk of reducing analyses to mechanical processes that require only the crunching of the "right" data to address policymaker needs. Diagnostic, Contrarian, and Imaginative Thinking SATs are useful for addressing specific questions but they do not go far enough in aiding policymakers make sense of world events or alert them to opportunities for advancing US priorities.

I contend that developing conceptual frameworks along side SATs-including the identification of the key components of the framework-will enhance analytic tradecraft. Without consideration of key concepts, SATs are unlikely to come to terms with bigger picture issues and the results will fail to provide policymakers with the tools they need to cope with their most bedeviling problems. Moreover since many policymakers receive raw intelligence reports on a daily basis and act as analysts themselves, IC analysts can add value by crafting conceptual frameworks that enable policymakers to make sense of daily reports, thereby reducing potential misperceptions as they try to understand unfolding events.[3]

With that preface, let me work through the key elements of a conceptual framework in which policymakers constantly work—influence. Academic work on the subject provides a useful starting point and helps bound the issue. Mainly I borrow from David A. Baldwin, a senior political scientist at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. Baldwin summarized the concept of influence in his contribution to the *Handbook of International Relations,* "Power and International Relations."[4]

What Is Influence?

Three days after 9/11, Pakistani leader Pervez Musharraf agreed to a list of US demands. These included closing Pakistan's borders with Afghanistan, providing a base of operations for US troops, and sharing intelligence to help defeat al-Qa'ida. Musharraf would not have agreed to these steps of his own accord.[5] Instead he was offered political and economic incentives to agree. In other words, US officials "influenced" Pakistan's actions. In this example, it may be easy to see influence at work, but defining it as a concept is less so.

Baldwin points out that there are many ways to convey the meaning of influence: persuasion, sway, manipulation, leverage, and pressure. All of these words share common elements of the core meaning of influence. Fundamentally, influence is getting people or organizations to do something they would not otherwise do.[6] This describes a *causal* relationship among at least two actors. In statecraft, this means state A takes some action to *cause* state B to act for A's benefit.

This is a broad but bounded definition of influence. The concept sets up a dynamic between A and B intended to work to A's advantage. The outcome could be anything from B's buying a specific weapons system to agreeing to preferential trade terms to its leader arriving at an international conference early for a photo shoot to show unity. In some instances, A may simply want B to take no action that would harm A's interests. In other cases B may

---

[2] See, *A Tradecraft Primer: Structured Analytic Techniques for Improving Intelligence Analysis* (US Government, 2009), https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/publications-rss-updates/tradecraft-primer-may-4-2009.html, accessed on 27 December 2013,

[3] It is worth recalling that the "balance of power" was a key conceptual framework that policymakers used during the Cold War to interpret world events and inform decisions.

[4] David A. Baldwin, "Power and International Relations" in *Handbook of International Relations* (2004): 177–91. Baldwin has also made the case for conceptual frameworks, writing in "Success and Failure in Foreign Policy" that "The field of foreign policy analysis needs a common set of concepts and analytical frameworks to facilitate comparison of alternative policy options" (in *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 3, 2000).

[5] Oren Harari, *The Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell* (McGraw Hill, 2002).

[6] Robert Dahl, "The Concept of Power," *Behavioral Science* 2 (1957): 201–15.

choose a course of action without prodding or specific incentives from A simply because it fears possible reprisal.[7]

Influence as defined here does not necessarily mean getting one state to completely reverse its policies, act against its own interests, or change its core preferences. It also does not mean one state controlling another. If A truly controlled B, then B lacks free will, cannot form its own policies, and is unable to act independently of A, which thus has no need to exert influence over B's choices.

Looking at influence as a "relationship" is significantly different from seeing it in terms of capabilities actors possess, e.g., large militaries, nuclear weapons, oil, or other resources. As Baldwin points out, seeing influence in terms of relationships avoids ascribing influence to actors simply because they possess such capabilities.[8] This approach also alerts us to the fact that the capabilities actors possess may have little to do with their ability to influence. That is, "size" does not always matter because major powers do not always get their way, their capabilities notwithstanding. For IC analysts wishing to assess influence, this means addressing intelligence questions in terms of how, when, in what ways, and with what success actors attempt to use influence, not simply whether an actor possesses influence with others or not.

These examples show simple truths. Major powers are not always the most influential simply because they possess some resource.

Clean, neat examples of the successful use of influence in the real world are hard to find, but a few examples help illustrate the idea.

- In 1953, the British persuaded the Eisenhower administration to topple Iranian leader Mohammad Mossedegh and restore the shah because Mossedegh had nationalized Iran's oil sector at great loss to the British. US officials were initially not interested in removing Mossedegh, but UK officials persuaded their US counterparts by casting Mossedegh as a rabid communist, thus tapping into underlying American fears about the spread of communism.[9]

- During 1973–74, members of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), angry with the United States, Europe, and Japan for supporting Israel during the Yom Kippur War in October 1973, imposed an oil embargo against these states to force them to isolate Israel. In response, Japan renounced its recognition of Israel, and the United Kingdom and France refused to allow the United States to ship arms through their states to Israel. While the sanctions created significant economic problems for the United States, they did little to change Washington's foreign policy. The differing effects on different states, however, did demonstrate the significant differences in OAPEC's influence.[10]

- In the 1980s, the United States was unable to convince Japan to open its domestic markets even though Tokyo was militarily dependent on Washington. This left US officials scratching their heads trying to understand why they had so little influence over Japan.[11]

- In 1991, Washington convinced Israel not to respond to Iraqi Scud missile attacks, a clear threat to Israel's security, by telling Israeli officials it would undo the international coalition aligned against Saddam and by providing Tel Aviv additional military equipment to counter Iraq's rocket attacks.[12]

These examples show simple truths. Major powers are not always the most influential simply because they possess some resource. Different actors are able to influence others with varying effects across a range of diplomatic, military, and economic issues.

Naturally, these examples of influence do not tell the whole story. Analysts must recognize that in any situation a wide variety of actors

---

[7] Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (Yale University Press, 1966).
[8] Baldwin, "Power and International Relations."
[9] Stephen Kinzer, *All The Shah's Men: An American Coup And The Roots of Middle East Terror* (Wiley, 2003); Andres Etges, "All That Glitters is Not Gold: The 1953 Coup Against Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran," *Intelligence and National Security* 26, no. 4 (August 2011): 495–508.
[10] Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (Penguin Books, 2009).
[11] Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: US-Japanese Relations Throughout History* (W.W. Norton and Company, 1997); Michael Green and Patrick Cronin (eds.) *The US-Japan Alliance: Past, Present and Future* (Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1999).
[12] Michael Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East 1776 to the Present* (W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), 566.

With this framework, analysts can detect when influence is at play and how it is being used.

may simultaneously try to influence actor B—and each other—and that how B responds thus may be the result of the actions of some combination of actors in addition to A's actions. In the case of states and organizations, this includes domestic factors and internal deliberations. Some academics have specifically pointed to the importance of focusing on domestic or substate actors to influence state policies.[13]

It is important to recognize that influence may take days or years to achieve desired outcomes, a consideration analysts should always bear in mind. In the Pakistan example above, the US exercise of influence took hold within days and arguably has been fraying ever since. US naval action against Iran during 1987–88 was a factor in compelling Iran to accept UN terms for ending the bloody Iran-Iraq War (1980–88),[14] but it took months for US action, gradually stepped up over that period, to influence Iran's actions.

Analysts must also be wary of prematurely concluding that actor A's attempts to influence B have been successful just because they have seen what appears to be a direct response by B. Put another way, analysts must keep in mind the distinction between *causation* and *correlation*. Simply because B took the action that A wanted does not necessarily mean that A *caused* B to act. Analysts should be ruthless in making sure they don't mistake correlation as causation, a mistake made all too often by the media and policymakers.

The Dimensions of Influence

Influence is not monolithic. It has several dimensions that define *in what way* and *with whom* an actor has influence as well as the *costs* of its application. A framework that includes d*omain, scope*, and *costs* will help analysts sort out these issues.[15]

- *Domain* refers to the issue areas in which one actor may be able to influence others.
- *Scope* defines the number of others an actor may be able to influence or the range of issues over which an actor might be able to exert influence.
- *Cost* addresses the fact that successful or not, attempts to influence others are not free either of tangible or intangible expenses.

Specifying the domain in which influence is exerted and the scope of that influence shows that actions that influence actors in one issue area may not be as effective in other issue areas or with other actors. The framework also sensitizes analysts to the idea that an actor's influence in one issue area may grow even while it remains unchanged or decreases in others. The framework also helps analysts alert policymakers to the *costs* of efforts to influence others and point out the risks that other states are taking through their own influence efforts.

With this framework, analysts can detect when influence is at play and how it is being used among actors. It can also enable them to show policymakers how to think about a problems they are confronting. For example, analysts can use it to highlight specific opportunities US policymakers might have to shape events, or analysts might, when necessary, use it to deliver the unwelcome news that policymakers have few means with which to affect developments in a given instance.

The Means of Applying Influence

Influence can be applied in multiple ways that can roughly be divided into positive and negative inducements—the familiar "carrot and stick" approaches. The actors involved and the context in which they are operating will determine whether rewards are more effective than punishments. Intelligence analysts can provide tremendous value to policymakers by laying out this context and its variables and by assessing how target states and their leaders are likely to react to US influence efforts. This approach helps avoid the demon of "policy prescriptive" analysis because it focuses on how target states might react to US influence efforts, even as analysts highlight opportunities for the advancement of US goals.

---

[13] Robert Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-level Games," *International Organization* 42 (Summer 1988).
[14] Steven Hurst, *The United States and Iraq Since 1979* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009).
[15] This framework is adapted from Baldwin.

A Conceptual Framework for Assessing Influence

Domain

Issue areas in which A can affect B's behavior... answers questions "In what way or on what kinds of issues can A influence others?"

A's ability to influence one aspect of B's behavior does not mean A can direct other aspects of B's behavior, however. Domain helps specify and quantify A's influence by drawing attention to the possibility that A's influence varies from issue to issue.

Common Domains: Politics, diplomacy, economics, and security. Domains can be subdivided, e.g., within the economic domain into trade, finance, labor, etc.

Examples: •Japan in the 1980s held tremendous economic influence over world finance and trade markets but it had virtually no influence on security issues.
•Israel has significant military capability with which to influence Middle East regional security but it has few direct diplomatic and economic resources with which to change regional states' attitudes or oil production.

Scope
The magnitude of A's influence in a particular domain or number of actors it can influence... answers the question "How many actors can A affect?" and "How big an effect can A have?"

Scope shows the range of A's influence and reveals that A's actions may not have an equal effect on all actors with a specific domain or sub-domain.

Examples:
•China and Iran are capable of exerting significant naval control of key ocean routes near them, Taiwan and Malacca Straits and the Hormuz Strait, respectively, but they have little naval influence beyond these areas. Thus they may be able to affect states that depend on these strategic waterways in economic and security domains, but the effect will vary according to the degrees other states depend on the waterways.

Costs
Answers the questions "What are the consequences of A attempting to influence B?"... and "Is it easy or hard for B to comply with A's demands?

Costs can be tangible or intangible, and measuring them requires understanding of context and multiple other factors. It helps reveal trade-offs A and B must make in dealing with each. *

Examples
•US provision of missile batteries to Israel during the first Gulf War to ensure Israel did not respond to Iraqi provocations could be calculated. The cost to Israel for not responding to provocations, however, is more elusive.
•Russia needed to expend little diplomatic or material resources to get Egypt to condemn US policy in the region In the 1970s because Cairo was predisposed to denouncing "Western" interference in the region. In complying with Russian requests, however, Egypt was probably able to extract handsome military and economic benefits.

** For a detailed analysis of the costs of influence, see Thomas Schelling, Arms and Influence (Yale University Press, 1966).*

Understanding where to focus influence efforts, whatever the means, is critical for analysts if they are to provide context in their analysis and highlight opportunities for policymakers.

The means by which influence is applied are central to assessing its effect. Baldwin outlines four means of influence: symbolic, economic, military, and diplomatic. In most cases, it is clear what these mechanisms are, although the symbolic and diplomatic means seem to overlap. It is relatively easy to identify economic and military means of influence because these means are often tangible and quantifiable. Diplomatic and symbolic means, however, generally are less quantifiable and share a great deal in common with idea of "soft power," making them more difficult to identify and assess.

Symbolic. This form of influence appeals to normative symbols or the provision of information. For example, Arab states may attempt to dissuade one another from engaging with Western states by warning of the dangers of imperialism or the presence of foreign troops. Similarly, states may attempt to influence one another by emphasizing obligations under international agreements and treaties such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Missile Technology Control Regime, or the Chemical Weapons Convention. They also may appeal to what is "just" or to other culturally specific norms, such as religion or ethnic identity.

Diplomatic. These means of influence include such actions as formal recognition of states, negotiations, and representation. But it has a heavy symbolic component. For example, negotiating parties often appeal to international norms, and if one party can suggest that another is failing to negotiate or is failing to do so in good faith, the accuser has introduced a kind of symbolic shaming effect. Similarly, when states employ public diplomacy to shape the preferences and perceptions of other states, they often aim to use or define international norms to achieve their ends or offer "symbolic" gestures they hope will induce target states to take the action they desire.

Military. The threat or actual use of military force is an obvious means of exercising influence. In addition to these, analysts should also consider the provision of arms and intelligence, joint military training, and the creation of formal alliances, e.g., NATO, the US-Japan Alliance, and the US-South Korea Alliance. And, as with all the other means, these devices can be used as positive or negative inducements.

Economic. Altering the flow of goods and services is an example of an economic measure to exert influence. Well-known examples include oil embargoes, sanctions, foreign direct investment, low-cost loans, trade barriers, or other special investments. Exclusive trade deals—such as the ASEAN-Japan Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the North American FTA—and adoption of common currencies also serve to influence economic decision making and the actions of participant states, particularly over the long term.

Additional Influence Mechanism. Understanding where to focus influence efforts, whatever the means, is critical for analysts if they are to provide context in their analysis and highlight opportunities for policymakers. Analysts should have little difficulty seeing where influence efforts can be applied directly and in straightforward ways, movement of military forces toward a nation threatening a military attack on another, for example.

Identifying indirect ways and the opportunities for applying such means requires more thought, but they can be extremely powerful. For example, in 1986 the US deftly defeated proposed European Community (EC) import barriers against feed grains, championed by France, by targeting the specific major farm products of EC members. Rather than take on the EC and directly attempting to influence all EC members in the same way, Washington tailored its approaches by hitting Italy on olives, France on cognac, Britain on whisky and gin, and the Netherlands on cheese. Efforts by the European Commission to support Paris quickly faded because of internal pressure from members who were worried about the effect of US countermeasures.[16]

Academics, such as Robert Putman, describe this as a "two-level"

[16] Andrew Moravcsik, "Integrating International and Domestic Theories of International Bargaining," in Peter Evans, Harold Jackson, and Robert Putnam eds., *Double-Edged Diplomacy* (University of California Press, 1993).

game, arguing that one way to influence an actor is "from below" by focusing on an actor's internal subcomponents. In the case of states, Putnam and others have explained this by looking at how one state can target another state's domestic population to influence the state's leaders.[17] This is a sophisticated framework that analysts can use to aid policymakers. It requires the ability to identify the people and organizations through which policymakers can operate when attempting to influence the actions of another state and its leaders.

Another indirect but powerful form of diplomatic influence is agenda-setting. In this case a state can attempt to circumscribe another's actions by narrowing issues under discussion or the options available through negotiation.[18] For example, North Korea has had some success influencing outcomes of negotiations over it nuclear program in the 1990s and 2000s by limiting talks about its nuclear program to specific nuclear facilities, while excluding discussion of its right to develop nuclear power generally or construction of other reactors.[19]

Other Instances of Influence

Inspirational. Some academics have argued that the actions of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1958 imbued young Iraqis with a new sense of Arab nationalism and led them to overthrow Iraq's British-controlled monarchy. In his actions and speeches Nasser undoubtedly wanted to cultivate Arab nationalism, but it is hard to say he consciously sought to have the British expelled from Iraq.[20]

Another indirect but powerful form of diplomatic influence is agenda-setting.

Still, analysts should always consider the potential effect of outside events or seemingly unrelated actions of leaders or the writings of distant luminaries on decisions in other places. Policymakers often see this kind of influence at work, and intelligence analysts should be ready to check their thinking when there is no causation apparent. For example, during the Cold War US policymakers were inclined to imagine a "domino effect" of countries in Southeast Asia falling to communism. Arguably a similar kind of thinking has taken place with respect to the Arab Spring.

Specifying the domain and scope of this form of "inspirational" influence might be useful for assessing its meaning and significance. A weak test for determining whether or not inspiration has provoked action is to ask counterfactual questions: Would the action being observed happen without the inspirational object? If the answer is yes, inspiration may only be a factor. If the answer is no, then the inspirational object is significant in causing the events being witnessed.

Analogy as Influence. Historical events and perceptions carried forward from those events can continue to affect behavior for decades and even centuries. For example, as insurgents became a particularly troublesome problem for the United States in Iraq, analogies with the US experience in Vietnam were quickly drawn to imply that the United States was falling into a quagmire and on the verge of failure in Iraq.[21]

Academics have argued that state leaders recall historical events that seemingly fit with current dilemmas and take action based on the lessons supposedly learned from the earlier experience.[22] Analysts can help policymakers by debunking inappropriate corollaries between past circumstance and present problems. Conversely, analysts with deep cultural knowledge can also offer policymakers options for influencing foreign actors or their people by explaining how culturally and historically appropriate analogies might fit with current circumstances and how drawing parallels to those analogies could be useful to achieving US goals.

---

[17] Ibid.
[18] Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, "Two Faces of Power," *American Political Science Review*, No. 56: 947–52
[19] Ralph Cossa, *The US-DPRK Agreed Framework: Is it Still Viable? Is It Enough?* Center for Strategic and International Studies, 9 July 1999; International Atomic Energy Agency, "Agreed Framework of 21 October 1994 between the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," Information Circular, 2 November 1994.
[20] Raymond Hinnebusch, "The Foreign Policy of Egypt" in Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami's *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 91–115.
[21] Jeffrey Record and W. Andrew Terrill, *Iraq And Vietnam: Differences, Similarities, and Insights* (Strategic Studies Institute, May 2004).
[22] Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War* (Princeton University, 1992).

Work is needed to identify and flesh out other key concepts that should be routinely considered in intelligence analysis.

The Case for Conceptual Frameworks to Supplement SATs

Structured analytic techniques are useful for organizing data and warning policymakers of dangers ahead, but they are not enough. Conceptual frameworks such as the one described here complement SATs. They enable analysts to better think through complex problems, to focus on difficult intelligence issues, and to provide additional value for policymakers trying to make sense of the world. By helping analysts to think beyond specific substantive issues, conceptual frameworks probably will help them offer policymakers more robust means to understand the problems they face and to see and judge among opportunities to advance national security interests.

Conceptual frameworks and SATs both sensitize analysts to the underlying assumptions in their analysis. By understanding the components of key concepts, such as influence, intelligence analysts will be better able to discover, assess, and explain the complexities of situations. Conceptual frameworks that use relevant examples, expose drivers, give context, show causal relationships, and use sound logic will be most useful because they will give specificity to abstract ideas and crystallize them in the minds of analysts and policymakers.

Work is needed to identify and flesh out other key concepts that should be routinely considered in intelligence analysis. A common set of conceptual frameworks would increase analyst and policymaker understanding of the world generally. They can then apply a framework to specific substantive issues of interest. Candidate frameworks are concepts of stability, alternatively governed spaces, and ideology. I believe that these and other frameworks not yet considered will help achieve a new level of analytic tradecraft, the kind needed to address today's dizzying problems.

v v v