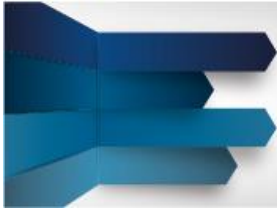


# STRATEGIC STUDIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Ambassador(r) Aydın NURHAN



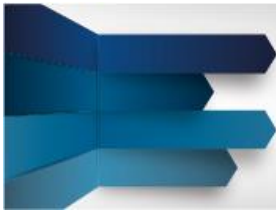
## **STRATEGIC STUDIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

# **Strategic Studies in Developing Countries**

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**Ambassador (r)**

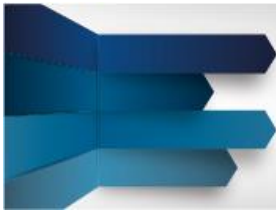
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# STRATEGIC STUDIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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# STRATEGIC STUDIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

## A. Definition

In classical sense, strategy is an effort to get rid of uncertainty, a long term policy planning based on realistic evaluation, solid resources at hand, to achieve desired goals. Lawrence Freedman, in his book *“Strategy-A History”* defines strategic approach as “an ability to look up from the short term and the trivial to view the long term and the essential, to address causes rather than symptoms, to see woods rather than trees.”

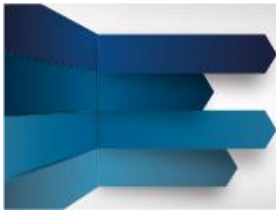
And the Strategic Research Centers are the governmental or non-governmental institutions to facilitate this effort. Their mission is to take the raw data and turn it into “**Processed information**” eligible for application by executives.

In information age, humans can reach so much data, yet, especially diplomats, military and intelligence services get lost in the environment of “information pollution”. Add to this the daily bureaucracy they have to deal with, they are not in the best position to read deeply, reflect and innovate doctrines or policies. Hence decision makers opt for powerful analyst brains and processed information of respectable think tanks.

Strategic Research is a very expensive, luxury activity, requiring millions of dollars, many a time to be spent for no substantial benefit in the short run. They are especially luxurious for developing countries which have not yet reached the level of **offensive, pro-active foreign policy**. It is a luxury field for them, because politicians and bureaucrats of **passive, re-active states**, (the intended customers), do not know how to use, or what to do with the processed information.

Many a time, developing states, for pride, spend hundreds of thousands of dollars for hosting international brainstorming panels. Creative ideas produced in these panels cannot be canalized into action by these countries. But using the creative ideas of these panels; the militaries, diplomats and intelligence services of powerful states can develop hostile ideas against these very hosting countries by swiftly and effectively turning the outcoming new ideas into action.

The greatest handicap of countries not advanced in strategic studies is the **clog in channels**, where processed information cannot reach the decision makers and put into action. In developing country bureaucracies and business circles, there is not yet an awakening to turn processed information into application and practice.



# STRATEGIC STUDIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

## B. Culture of Doctrine

Starting with the USA, Western administration mentality rather policies based on integrated, coherent doctrines. Doctrines are born out of solid, consistent ideas which have been distilled throughout years.

Western executives have the ease of choosing one of the doctrines proposed to them, harmonize it with their worldview, and assume it as state or corporate policy.

In strategic studies, some countries are taken under microscope as laboratory insects, observed and analyzed in all dimensions, and then taken into evaluation for manipulation in the interests of the observing state.

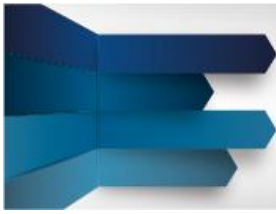
The most important factor in strategic studies is the awakening hunger in the brain of the decision maker. When we look at the issues back 10-15 years of Foreign Affairs magazine, we see the intellectual inquisitiveness and search of American policies practiced today.

When wise decision makers face vital decisions, they give the issue at hand to think tanks and have it elaborated by official and civilian thinkers. This tradition of referring to independent experts, saves executives from random, arbitrary decisions taken by a few persons behind closed doors.

Offensive, pro-active states, let us say looking for a 20 year perspective on a certain field;

- a- Give the issue to universities, allocate research and PhD scholarships,
- b- Spend millions of dollars to build networks among international strategic institutions. (Ad hoc networking for case studies or, continual networks for long term strategies),
- c- To exploit thinking brains of target countries, they establish branches of their think tanks in those countries. Through these brains, they also inject their manipulating ideologies into the targeted countries.

Governments with offensive, pro-active policies do not make random symposiums, they develop projects which would answer their curiosities and needs, first formulate the target, then make the budget to attain that goal.



# STRATEGIC STUDIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

## C. Defensive Culture

Contrary to the doctrinaire approach, we have the defensive, palliative, “saving the day” approach of the developing states.

In the international game of chess, countries other than regional or global powers are in defense. They may try to be “Game-Breakers” against the strategies of “Game-Makers”. They are re-active, expect the offense always from across, try to predict and block or break the game of the offensive powers.

## D. Education Philosophy

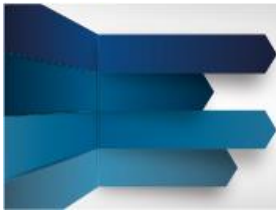
Root cause of the problem is the philosophy of education; that of memorization rather than conceptualization, submission rather than liberal spirit.

Decision-makers in many developing countries think money or rank brings wisdom with it. Their brains are not hungry for creative solutions yet. Hence do not feel the need for expert opinion. Neither do they read professional literature. Do not know how to use counselors and consultants. Their decisions are based on memorized, narrow information, moreover, sentimental, momentary, random, arbitrary choices.

In strategic studies, to get correct answers, correct, relevant questions have to be asked. And **correct questions evolve through concentration** in a field through years, **and a lot of reflection**. This concentration for an official who is in daily hurry is a luxury, and out of question.

## E. Liberal Atmosphere

Another characteristic of Strategic institutions is playing the devil’s advocate. Strategic studies, in a way, resemble vanity fashion shows with maverick ideas, many a time luxurious, impossible to apply to true life. Yet they usher decision makers to reflection, opening their visions and horizons.



# STRATEGIC STUDIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Another must for these institutions is the liberal atmosphere where brains who have been tested as responsible thinkers, can assert maverick, anti-status-quo, heretic ideas without fearing to be coined as traitors.

On the other hand, the delicate separating line in the training of the civil servant and strategy staff is neglected in many countries. **An official is required to memorize his topics well, give impeccable data to his seniors when asked, but keep his ideas to himself unless asked for.**

Whereas a **strategy staff is trained to give “ideas” rather than memorized data.** He is conditioned not to focus on individual data, rather synthesize them, dilute them with his wisdom and use this synthesis for creative thinking. The greatest mistake the executive would make is to ask for “impeccable data” from these special, expensive minds rather than ideas, rebuke them for snobbism, intimidate and deform their formation.

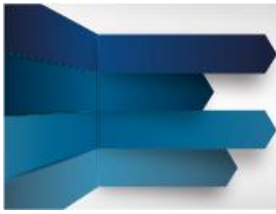
## F. “Les absents ont toujours tort - Absents are losers”

Strategists, like diplomats, are one international family, always together at international forums. Every major issue has its own clans within this family.

Developed countries in particular, make sure that their experts who are highly specialized and sophisticated in their fields, are present at all important international brainstorming sessions. Because they know the motto “Les absents ont toujours tort – Absents are losers”.

Powerful strategic minds of defensive countries, perpetually participating in the sessions of these clans, may gain clout throughout years as respectable members. In this long process, first they shall be affected by the prevailing international culture of these groups, join in spirit with them, then gradually start being taken seriously within the group. This is the point where they can convincingly sell their cause to the international community.

Yet, when developing countries establish strategic institutions, in the beginning, these new centers become the best source of intelligence for foreign powerful states. Because the brightest brains of these countries come to meetings with the best “processed information” and “pulse” of their countries and put them forward with enthusiasm and eagerness in a sincere manner.



# STRATEGIC STUDIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Unknowingly, they may be serving the interests of other countries, whereas they may also unknowingly fall into the trap of being the importers of the ideologies, becoming intellectual compradors of the foreign powers. Hence, in early phases of strategic studies, countries have to be alert to these dangers.

In reality, Strategic Brainstorming Sessions are games among States on who can turn the “Processed Information” produced in these sessions into practice for their national policies.

In this open game, every expert throws his expertise into the hat, then everybody gets what he needs from the hat and utilizes it. And the greatest point here is that the underdeveloped country cannot turn this processed info into action, utilization, not even aware of the game. Still yet, the developing countries have to join this game at a certain point.

Turkey through the revolutions of Presidents Ozal, Gul and Erdogan, has reached a considerable level in strategic institutions by now. Political parties’ and the private sector’s awakening for strategy has come to an encouraging point today.

Diplomatic missions of powerful states also get into effective communication with the local think tanks. Yet diplomats of passive countries are not even aware of the think tanks in the countries they work. They do not become members of these clubs, and if by chance they receive think tank reports, they would not know how to utilize that information, either.

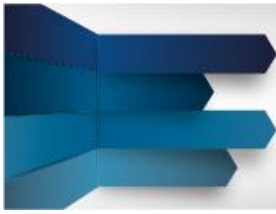
## G. Parallel (second track) Diplomacy

Considering that cold-relations among states sometimes take long years, leading to stalemates in relations, one of the efficient ways to overcome these clogs is to engage private or semi-official institutions into the game.

In modern, democratic societies, as public diplomacy comes on the stage, NGO’s play a very positive role both as mediating institutions and pressure groups on foreign policy.

As think tanks are one big international family among themselves, with their networks and international meetings, they may effectively be instrumental in finding solutions to bilateral and multilateral conflicts.





# STRATEGIC STUDIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

## H. Turkish Outlook

From the point of view of Strategic Culture, Turkey gives us two opposing images. On the one side, the country shows re-active, defensive reflexes of the dissolving Ottoman Empire, yet at the same time, it shows the pro-active, offensive reflexes of the rising Republic, catching all off guard and in surprises.

As Turkish economy is at the threshold of trillion dollar GDP, it is getting ready to enter among regional and global actors; parallel to this development, Republican administrations shall feel the need for offensive, pro-active policies, train multilingual experts in all fields of interest, and base their policies on doctrines developed on serious analyses and alternatives.

### a. Political Parties and Think Tanks

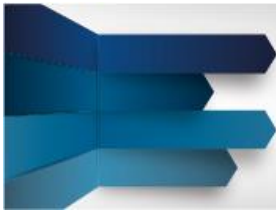
Considering the frequency of military coups in Republican history, it would be unrealistic to expect Turkish political parties having a sophisticated level of strategic culture in developing their policies. In this reality, civil servants cannot expect strategic decisions and direction from politicians yet.

Opposition parties establishing shadow governments and effective think tanks to feed and support their shadow ministers, and the maturity of this approach seems a bit distant yet...

### b. Bureaucracy and Think Tanks

Looking at the issue from bureaucracy, the information processed at think tanks does not seem to be effective on bureaucratic practice yet, either. Once upon a time, a general had said that they did not need the science of sociology to understand the nation...

Turkish think tanks, rather than working for lobbies and corporate interests, are at the level of supporting diplomacy, military, economy and social decision-making. But gradually, they also do "some" research for globalized private sector which has reached the maturity to need their services.



# STRATEGIC STUDIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

We can say that foreign diplomatic missions and corporations in Turkey take our think tanks more seriously and value their services more eagerly than our own...

## c. Corporate Sector and Think Tanks

As Turkish corporations open to global competition, they start feeling the need to enter the field of strategic plans and decisions, hence, both restructuring internally, and ordering research to Turkish and foreign think tanks.

To emphasize again, institutions at offensive, pro-active level feel the need for strategic studies on target institutions to manipulate or defeat them.

Business world not only needs research for competition among themselves, but also needs it to affect policies of governments for their vital interests.

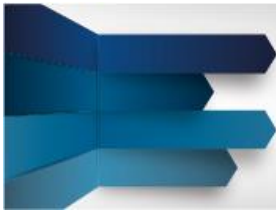
## d. Think Tanks as “Civil Pressure” Institutions

Especially in Western world, pressure groups like environmentalists, women’s rights groups etc. order research just like the corporate sector, to convince the public and the governments to follow their advice and requests. There is also awakening in this field in Turkey.

## I. Activities

### a. Research

Priority of Strategic institutions is to make research, or bid out researches. They have their own fellow researchers as well as guest researchers, and they give scholarships to academic studies in fields they seek light, etc.



# STRATEGIC STUDIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

## b. Conferences, Seminars, Grassroots Strategy Culture

Meetings of strategic institutions in developing countries are generally elitist, closed circuit, do not rise on pyramids, do not get nourishment from democratic, grassroots participation. Their meetings are held in stiff, solemn atmosphere of spies, generals, diplomats and reliable academics without much liberalism for creativity. We may perhaps say that these meetings are a bit wider occasions for bureaucrats with the participation of trusted civilian brains, to widen horizons for decisions to be taken behind doors by a few.

Whereas conferences, especially keynote speaker luncheons and dinners are common grassroots events in the Western world, especially the USA. Friendly groups of about 20-30 persons eat together once a month, and call an expert as the guest keynote speaker.

This tradition is both a horizon widening, as well as reflection building practice, yet in Turkey, apart from Freemasons and Rotarians, not very many groups are in such practice. Yet, happily, when world class brains are invited by think tanks, interest is in speedy growth especially in business community in metropol.

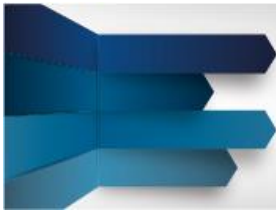
Think Tanks may play a constructive role in awakening intellectuals for such lectures; they can send their fellows to such events. Governors, mayors and NGOs, in cooperation with universities may also play a leading role to trigger the culture of strategic studies in rural locations.

## c. Cooperation with Foreign Institutions (Networking)

In parallel to their research, think tanks also organize seminars, conferences, round-table discussions and panels, or participate in invitations, and collect and produce knowledge.

As resources of weak institutions of developing countries are scarce, they can do local events, whereas financially strong institutions of rich countries can host international events costing hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Financially poor institutions are passive in international arena; they rather answer the initiative, intellectual inquiry and invitations of rich, powerful foreign institutions.



# STRATEGIC STUDIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Underdeveloped countries undermine their brains due to corruption, nepotism or negative selection, and do not ask their valuable opinions. When these brains are invited to international conferences, they run with utmost enthusiasm to give the best processed information about their countries to foreigners, not to betray their countries, but to prove their knowledge, art and science...

As strategic institutions invite each other to their conferences, they also, with bilateral and multilateral agreements, go into institutional cooperations. Advanced think tanks also release daily, weekly or monthly emails to promote their agendas and worldviews to their partnering institutions and the expert audience in their field.

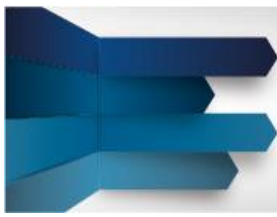
## d. “No produce without a buyer” NGO-Government Relations

Strategists are like artists. They are intellectual, creative artists. Just like any other artist, they would be too happy to see their innovative ideas spread to the community, to the masses. The greatest dream of a strategist is the adoption of his ideas by the Government and put into practice.

The mechanism of interface in turning the processed information of think tanks into Government practice are the Strategic Research Centers of the Foreign Ministries, Militaries, Intelligence Services, Interior and Economic ministries, etc.

These semi-official Strategic Institutions ideally work in close cooperation with civilian think tanks and play a bridge, catalyzer role, take the processed information of civilian institutions and help in transferring them into action by their bureaucracy.

In the case of polemically dangerous fields these government Strategy Centers, rather than doing research themselves, should bid out research to independent institutions. They may also financially and logistically support (provide airplane tickets and per-diems for important international symposia) and encourage civil institutions in the fields they are hungry for processed information, and help them become centers of excellence in specific fields of national requirement.



# STRATEGIC STUDIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Government Strategic institutions, alongside their official research, also take initiative in areas where they smell certain trends, do the necessary research, and this liberally processed information is also presented to the decision makers.

## J. Publications

Another important activity of Strategic Institutions is publishing periodicals and other publications of the articles of fellows and international experts. Serious think tanks publish serious, referee managed quarterly journals. Publications of NGOs prefer enlightening the public in their cause and try to create pressure on political authority to their demands.

## K. Library, Archive, Electronic Data Bank

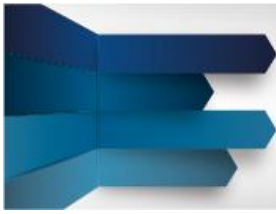
Power of a strategic research center, above all, is measured by the richness of its library. As it has general library in strategic studies, a good one has a library of specialization, special collections.

If an institution attracts specialists from around the world, it may have two reasons. One; special, valuable collection, two; presence of respected global authorities among its fellows.

Technology is swiftly bringing all historical data into digits, still yet we are far away from finding the most valuable collections on internet yet.

Another serious factor to be an important center is to have a reliable and daily updated web page. If the web pages are not seriously updated and disciplined, we cannot speak about a serious institution. Links should have a special importance; they help researchers a lot in searching the correct info at correct directions.

In the age of information wars, and public diplomacy, another good idea for the web pages, may be to target grassroots audiences. A practical advice is to have different length reports for different needs, say (20 pages, 10 pages, 5 pages, 2 pages and half page) comprimise, executive info on every important cause, so that anyone in the world interested in the subject can choose the best length, fully furnished for his quick need, and make an easy empathy.



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These papers would give a synopsis to researchers, but more importantly, save the wide audiences the effort of going to forty, fifty internet sites to collect reliable, comprehensive data. Lastly, these summaries would give a pro-active stance for the country in affecting world audiences to its cause.

## L. Finances

As Think Tanks get open and secret funds from the governments, they also get orders from the business world, either in the form of commercial payments or sponsorship. Resources include the founders, foundations, sponsors, political parties, NGO or corporate donations, advisories and researches ordered by clients.

## M. Personnel

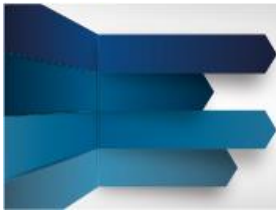
The top qualification for an expert to work at a strategic institution is the thirst, the hunger for knowledge and a passion for wisdom. Hence these institutions should cooperate with universities to follow brightest students with these qualities, support them for masters and PhDs in global universities, have them learn specific languages, and employ them with civilized salaries so that their brains would not be bothered by daily mundane needs.

As would be realized, this is an expensive and long term investment. And luxurious for developing countries.

As in capital accumulation and state enterprises in early phases of capitalism, it would be wise of the governments to pioneer by investing in strategic institutions.

These experts, after maturing up, may quit the government institutions, still yet they should be seen as national assets.

The western countries have pools of experts in a wide variety of fields. Especially televisions, when faced with a special agenda, go to the list in the pool, and ask the expert opinion of one of the authorities in the field.



# STRATEGIC STUDIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Whereas in developing countries, because there are no such relevant pools, the televisions interview the so called “mediatic experts” who neither know the subject in depth, nor the culture and language lets say of a country or a region in the agenda and give just surface evaluations.

As preparing strategists with PhDs for desks of specialization in the long run, and until they assume their desks, short term solutions for think tanks would be to cooperate with universities, use their academicians, and also employ foreign academics make researches on their own countries.

The important point here, is to have the desks of specialization with cell system, with no more than three experts, and make sure the number is not diluted in time. The aim here is to have the information concentrated in cells of a very limited core of specialists who are continuously busy.

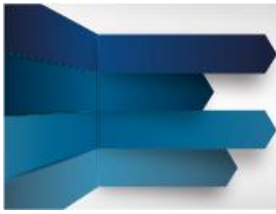
These few experts shall be the ones present in all international fora and well experienced in the long run as a member of this specialized family. To repeat again, think tanks do not need bureaucrats to save the day. They need enthusiasts, passionate, curious wisdom lovers hungry for knowledge, and once full, would like to pour over their unstoppable knowledge to wide audiences.

## **N. Translation/Interpretation Office**

One of the most valuable qualities of think tanks is “continuity”. Foreign office, Military, Intelligence, Police staffs are too mobilized, frequently moving to different posts in different geographies.

This mobility leads to lapses in corporate memory. Whereas strategic institutions have sedentary experts matured at the same post throughout years. Continuity and Memory would be correct qualifications for these institutions.

And with their continual knowledge accumulation, having experts who would know the culture and languages of their specific fields, they may also have a pool of translators for government and private sector needs and get revenue in return.



# STRATEGIC STUDIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

## Result

Strategic Studies start becoming a need for emerging powers that would be eager to have offensive, pro-active policies. The increase of strategic institutions in a developing country would give us the bright news that the era of random, unserious decisions behind closed doors based on daily psychological fluctuations of the executives are fading...

*\* Ambassador Nurhan can be reached at "anurhan76@gmail.com"*