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*Published in:*  
Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy

*Publication date:*  
2020

*Document license:*  
[Unspecified](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Bueger, C., & Gadinger, F. (Accepted/In press). Making Grand Strategy in Practice. In T. Balzaq, & R. Krebs (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy* Oxford University Press.

## **Making Strategy in Practice**

*for Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy, edited by Thierry Balzaq and Ronald Krebs, Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2020.*

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[second draft, April 2020, 8.080 words incl. references]

## **Acknowledgements**

For comments and suggestions that have significantly improved this chapter we are grateful to Timothy Edmunds, Henrik Breitenbauch, Andrew Neal, Anders Wivel and the two editors. Christian Bueger acknowledges the support from the Economic and Social Research Council of the UK.

## **1. Introduction**

Concepts derived from social theory, such as culture, discourse or narrative are increasingly providing new resources for the understanding of strategy, how it is made, the sources that inform it, and the effects that it has (see Nexon, Balzaq, Kornprobst and Neal in this volume). Indeed, the renaissance of strategy studies and works on grand strategy provides ample opportunities for theoretical and methodological innovation. In this chapter we introduce and discuss scholarship on strategy that is inspired by ‘practice theory’. Across the social sciences, practice theory has become known as a family of theorizing that argues for the importance of basing our thinking in practical activities. Practices, understood as a nexus of doing and sayings, become the main unit of analysis. What are the consequences of practice theory for understanding strategy and grand strategy? What

does the perspective allow one to do and see? What kind of productive research perspectives can be developed on practice theoretical grounds? These are the questions we aim at addressing in this chapter.

In its widest sense, practices are sets or patterns of actions – doings and sayings – organized by shared forms of knowledge. Understanding strategy as practice is to argue that strategy is the outcome of patterns of actions, might be embedded in such patterns, and as such also has impact on them. The study of strategy becomes a study of activities, relations, and the larger patterns these may form. Practice thinking shifts emphasis to the myriad of activities involved in strategy making. Many of these activities are deliberate and conscious, others might be less grand, and more mundane. They might include analytical activities, such as the study of the state of the international system, or the quantitative analysis of a distinct threat that a strategy should consider. But what equally may matter are the ways how meetings among strategists are organized, who participates in such meetings, or what technology is used to agree on common phrases may influence the content of strategy. Also, the way a strategy is turned into a document that can be circulated, how it is designed, what pictures, graphs and tables are included and how it is circulated may well influence the effects that a strategy may achieve. Strategy making implies arranging the world in a particular manner, and understanding these practical arrangements and their effects on actions is one of the core goals of understanding strategy as practice.

The practice approach is an emergent and increasingly prominent way across the social sciences and international relations. It is gaining strong foothold in the study of strategy as well. In organization studies in particular a research direction has evolved that centers on practice to understand business strategy. This direction has become known as ‘strategy as practice’ research and in the meantime constitutes one of the prevalent ways of how organizational strategizing is investigated. It is a rather heterogeneous movement, as well documented in the leading handbook (Golsorkhi et al. 2010) and to some degree it has become an open intellectual space for the introduction of various practice-oriented theories. In the discipline of international relations practice theory has become since the late 2000s one of the most innovative research programmes with an increasingly strong voice in sub-fields including security studies, peacebuilding, diplomacy or international organization research (Bueger and Gadinger 2016; Bueger 2016). In strategy studies Iver Neumann and Henrikki Heikka (2005) are likely the first to have explored how practice

theory can contribute to the understanding of strategy and strategic culture in particular. This was since followed by a range of studies that draw on the innovation potential of practice theory to develop new takes for understanding the making of strategy in particular. For instance, Frederic Merand and Amelie Forget (2013) draw on the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu to conceptualise a field of strategy making.

Practice theory provides an innovative and diverse conceptual and methodological tool box, but not a unified approach that relies on shared generic principles. In consequence, practice thinking has variedly been understood as a ‘turn’ – that is a overall shift in perspective – or as a ‘family’ of approaches which have resemblance to each other but do not necessarily fully agree on each and every aspect (Reckwitz 2002). Several different related and overlapping lines of theorizing practice have been developed in international relations and security studies, which share a number of commitments, but tend to disagree over some fundamental questions such as how to conceive of order and change or the materiality of practice (Bueger and Gadinger 2018). While the objective of this chapter is not to discuss the foundations or the key commitments of practice theorizing, our goal in the following is to explore a range of avenues through which practice theoretical ideas can be employed to enrich our understanding of strategy. This reflects the fact that at the time of writing and in contrast to the wider international relations discipline, the practice turn has not fully reached strategic studies yet. The range of studies is still limited. Rather than taking a backward leaning perspective and conducting a stock taking exercise, this chapter provides an outlook and exploration of how practice theorizing has the potential to inform strategic studies.

This chapter draws on practice theoretical scholarship to investigate what difference it might make to understand strategy as a practice. To do so we start from a brief review of some of the basic directions of practice thinking largely drawing on research from organization studies but also the more general international relations discussion. We then set out different directions for studying practices drawing on existing studies but broadening the outlook by indicating and speculating how the concepts of practice theorizing might illuminate strategy research. We start out from an exploration of how practice theorists have started to rethink two core concepts: security communities, and strategic culture. We then proceed in discussing how the controversial nature of strategy provides an interesting starting point for understanding strategy making as a social struggle. We then discuss how ideas from practice theoretical approaches known as actor-network

theory, narrative theory and new materialism provide new avenues for research. We conclude with a summary and an outlook of the potential of strategy as practice to enrich our understanding of foreign and security policy making.

### **Practice theorizing and strategy**

The introduction of practice thought in international relations and strategic studies is closely linked to the rise of culturalist and constructivist ideas (in strategic studies e.g. Neumann and Heikka 2005, van Apeldoorn and de Graaff 2014, Goddard and Krebs 2015). Practice theories offer partially complementary, and partially innovative answers to how strategy is produced and why it matters. They join culturalist and constructivist arguments that strategy as well as ‘grand strategy’ is the outcome and effect of the practices of strategizing actors. Such strategy makers include security policy makers, security experts, bureaucrats, or civil society actors (e.g. Pirani 2016, van Apeldoorn and de Graaff 2014). Practice theory, however, foregrounds much stronger practical activities (such as the everyday production of strategy documents, or public legitimation) as well as the role of material artefacts (e.g. strategy documents) or technologies (e.g. communication tools). It also argues that strategy should be seen from a processual perspective (and hence challenges any distinctions between ‘grand’ and ‘emergent strategy’, see Popescu 2018).

Such a perspective may fill some of the gaps that Balzacq, Dombrowski and Reich (2018: 22) identified in current debates on grand strategy. They argue that many important questions remain unresolved in existing literature, for example: “What drives strategic change or adjustment? How do we know when (and under what conditions) a grand strategy changes? Who is responsible for their formulation? Do heroic individual strategists (like George Kennan) develop grand strategies, or does it fall to what Williamson Murray refers to as ‘corporate bodies’?” (Balzacq et al. 2018: 22). Practice theorists do not have a definite answer to these questions, but they aim at foregrounding these inner-workings of strategy-making, that often do not receive full attention in the traditions of grand strategy.

The potential for starting out from practice has so far been best indicated in organization studies and their focus on organizational strategy. As Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009: 69) have phrased it in

an agenda setting contribution, the practice perspective is concerned with “the doing of strategy; who does it, what they do, how they do it, what they use, and what implications this has for shaping strategy”. Strategy as practice is an umbrella term that describes the myriad of activities that lead to the creation of organizational strategies. This includes strategizing in the sense of more or less deliberate strategy formulation, the organizing work involved in the implementation of strategies, and all the other activities that lead to the emergence of organizational strategies, conscious or not (Vaara and Whittington 2012: 3). As Jarzabkowski (2005: 4) summarizes it, the aim is “to understand the messy realities of doing strategy as lived experience; to go inside the world of strategy practitioners as they struggle with competing priorities, multiple stakeholders and excessive but incomplete information in an attempt to shape some coherent ‘thing’ that may be perceived as a strategy by markets, financial institutions and consumers. Strategy as practice is thus concerned with the detailed aspects of strategizing; how strategists think, talk, reflect, act, interact, emote, embellish and politicize, what tools and technologies they use, and the implications of different forms of strategizing for strategy as an organizational activity.” Several core tenets come through in this programmatic statement. For researchers the most important unit are practices within organizations (businesses and corporations), yet these practices include the relations to their environments (markets, financial institutions, consumers). Researchers in particular are concerned with a micro-level, in scrutinizing the activities of strategists, their cognitive and emotional states, bodily movements, and the tools and technologies they use. This often includes detailed ethnographies, such as on the organization of meetings (Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008), the use of PowerPoint (Kaplan 2011) or the movement of hands (Bürigi, Jacobs, and Roos 2005). In such studies, new methodological avenues are pursued that go beyond conventional interview strategies and engage in various forms of ethnography, ethnomethodology or action research (Bürigi, Jacobs, and Roos 2005, Eikeland and Nicolini 2011). In employing such methods, researchers attempt to seek proximity (‘to go inside the lifeworlds’), collaborate with and contribute to the work of strategists.

Practice approaches make a number of dedicated claims. Firstly, they join other cognitive, culturalist and constructivist approaches in arguing that strategy cannot be explained by instrumental rationality, but instead needs to be approached as a collective process of meaning making and ordering the world. In consequence there is no optimal, most efficient strategy or a way to evaluate a strategy as such. Nor are there predefined sources of strategy. Secondly, rather

than a technical exercise driven by instrumental rationality, strategy making is a political process in which different strategists struggle over ideas and meanings. Instead of rationality the process is driven by taken for granted knowledge, routines, or the positioning of actors. Thirdly, although there is a set of actors that are more likely to participate in strategy making, who strategizes and is relevant, is largely an empirical question. It is not a predefined set of actors, such as military strategists that matter the most, given that strategy making is understood as a political process. Fourthly, the perspective attends to the myriad of practices through which strategy is made. As is explored in the following, some scholars summarize practices as larger patterns, such as the formulation of doctrines, civil military relations, and procurement, partnership programmes, military planning, or threat construction. Others aim at going micro, in investigating linguistic and bodily movements, or mundane activities such as the organization of meetings, handling of PowerPoints, or the processing and analysis of data. The next sections explore these themes in more detail.

### **Re-interpreting classical concepts through practice lenses**

One source for the introduction of practice theoretical ideas to the strategy debate was the debate on strategic culture. The strategic culture approach was introduced as a way to study how elites and decisionmakers interpret and assess the international system, and to understand how perceptions, ideas, beliefs or norms shape understandings of foreign and security policy as well as the use of the military instrument (Bloomfield 2012). The strategic culture debate hence draws on and is grounded in concepts known in the wider discipline as cognitivist, constructivist or sociological approaches.

As part of a special issue on the strategic cultures of the Nordic countries, Neumann and Heikka (2005) proposed a renewed conceptual framework taking practice theoretical ideas into account. The basis for this framework was Iver Neumann's argument (2002) to conceptualize culture as dynamic interplay between discourse and practice drawing on the insights of Ann Swidler's sociological theory of practice (1986). Neumann and Heikka (2005) argue for the need to go beyond a reified concept of culture in order to gather a dynamic and specific framework for empirical analysis. They suggest refashioning the concept of strategic culture as dynamic interplay

between the discourse of grand strategy and specific practices. For them grand strategy is a particular discourse, a broad agreement concerning the character of the international environment and which problems need to be addressed, that comes to assume a taken for granted quality and as such provides the preconditions for actions. Grand strategy is reconceptualized “from being a coverall term on a par with strategic culture, to being a coverall term for all *preconditions* for action” (Neumann and Heikka 2005: 13, emphasis in original). Grand strategy, then, “is seen as a set of preconditions for action, at a specific time and in a specific place, that may exist on more or less systematized form, and that is actualized in practices” (Neumann and Heikka 2005: 14). Stressing that discourse is dependent on actualization, they outline three particular practices through which grand strategy is actualized: doctrines, civil-military relations and procurement. Doctrines are formulations which set priorities among types of forces and how they might be used. Civil-military relations include those activities regulating the role between political and military leaderships, including, for instance, budgetary practices, or the military’s handling of information (Neumann and Heikka 2005: 16). Procurement refers to relations to the industry and the management of resources.

Such a reformulation and provides a different research agenda. First, it entails to think about grand strategy not as a series of explicated statements but rather as located in the realm of preconditions for formulating such in the first instance. Second, grand strategy may or may not be consciously held, inasmuch as a grand strategy is a phenomenon that any polity has, at least potentially (Neumann and Heikka 2005: 13). Indeed, it is one of the intents of this practice-oriented notion of grand strategy to move away from a great power focus and state centrism and to argue that every state’s foreign and security policy can be analyzed through such lenses.

Neumann and Heikka’s innovative proposal, has at least partially, inspired a set of studies on European and African states (in particular Rasmussen 2005, Williams and Haacke 2008, Pirani 2010, Giegerich and Jonas 2012), research on European grand strategy (e.g. Edwards 2006, Rogers 2009), as well as further research exploring Swidler theory of practice to understand the change and continuity of a country’s strategic culture (Pirani 2016). Yet, their framework has been rather read as a contribution to the strategic culture debate, than as the outline of a genuine practice-theoretical take on strategy. As such, despite its analytical potential and its strong argument for

studying activities, it has suffered the same fate as the concept of strategic culture, and has fallen out of fashion.

A second discussion that aimed at revisiting core concepts of strategic studies are practice theoretical discussions of security communities. Security communities, such as NATO or the EU, provide a context and form of aggregate agency for grand strategy, an instrument in strategy, as well as a potential end. The security community literature is not only important in terms of the use of military force (or restraint thereof), but also concerning whether and how other political units other than the state, such as NATO, the EU or ASEAN, develop agency and a shared grand strategy. A wave of literature offers practice theoretical readings of security communities, arguing that it is not norms and values which provide for peaceful relations and coherence within communities, but shared patterns of practical interaction.

These re-formulations of security communities have been significantly influenced by the ‘community of practice’ framework as advanced in organization studies in particular by Etienne Wenger (1998). For Wenger (1998) a community of practice is bound together through relations in three dimensions: Mutual engagement among the members of a community, joint enterprises through which they negotiate what matters to the community and what to do, as well as shared resources, which includes routines, concepts or tools, which the community has developed over time. For Adler and Pouliot (2011: 18) such an understanding implies that communities of practices, are “social spaces where structure and agency overlap and where knowledge, power and community intersect”. They are hence “intersubjective social structures that constitute the normative and epistemic ground for action, but they are also agents, made up of real people, who – working via networks channels, across national borders, across organization divides, and in the halls of government – affect political, economic, and social events” (Adler and Pouliot 2011: 19).

The concept of community practice is open in scale and might hence refer to sub-national, national, or transnational entities. This understanding of community has been advanced in security studies by a range of scholars, including Emmanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot (Adler 2008, Adler and Greve 2009, Pouliot 2008).

Revising the concept of regional security communities through such lenses, Adler (2008; Adler and Greve 2009) suggests that understood as communities of practice, these are composed of a set

of intersecting repertoires of practices. Such practices including self-restraint, diplomacy, cooperative security practices, developing common enterprises and projects as well as practices of military planning, confidence building or policy coordination. Adler (2008) in particular analyses NATO through such lenses, and shows how the organization's enlargement process can be interpreted as an attempt to spread and diffuse these practices. The repertoire is learned and performed by NATO agents and new partners are learned and performed through practical activities, such as joint training and planning, common initiatives, such as the Partnership for Peace, and mutual exchange on an everyday basis (Adler 2008: 210). This practice-based view investigates how the emergence of shared practices influences the identity and ends of states and explains how transnational communities of strategy making evolve as in the case of NATO.

While not explicitly addressing grand strategy, it emerges from Adler's outline that the making of strategy can be interpreted as a joint enterprise and as a form of mutual engagement that forms security communities of practice. Communities of practices are both the context and the agent of making strategy. Security community building can be moreover an explicit strategic goal, as is the case for ASEAN (Adler and Greve 2009: 76), where developing the repertoire of practices through joint enterprises and mutual engagement provides the means to achieve them. In this line of research, the security communities of practice framework provides a rich tool to understand strategy making, in particular on a regional level. The security community of practice framework and Wenger's original framework, not the least since it is open in scale, has inspired a rich literature in particular on European security. So far it primarily has been adopted to understand security diplomacy in the European context (Bicchi and Bremberg 2017; Hofius 2016).

These practice theoretical revisions of the constructivist conceptions of strategy culture and security communities have breathed new air into established research programmes. The focus on practices here provides a different take on how culture and community is produced through everyday activities. We turn next to perspectives that take contestations around strategy as a starting point and offer a reading of the making of strategy as a field of practices or as a controversy.

## **Strategy as social struggle**

What constitutes ‘grand strategy’, what kind of object the concept refers to and whether a dedicated government ‘has’ grand strategy is often heavily contested. Nina Silove (2018: 28) rightly argues that despite the increasing popularity of the term, it is a slippery, fuzzy, and jumbled concept. Many foundational questions arise around the subject, as Silove (2018: 28) further argues: “Does grand strategy ‘exist’? Is grand strategy intentional? Do all states have grand strategies, or only great powers? And to what extent is grand strategy constant or flexible?” Balzaq, Dombrowski and Reich (2019: 67) similarly diagnose that definitions “refer to completely different activities and, hence, whose analytical merits are difficult to evaluate. Some authors focus exclusively on traditional military threats; others also include economic dimensions; and policymakers and official strategy documents often extend the analysis to nontraditional threats such as climate change, pandemics, and economic security. For Balzaq, Dombrowski and Reich (2019:67) this lack of conceptual rigor of the definition “trammels rather than facilitates communication and understanding among scholars (and indeed policymakers)”. Their resolution is to classify definitions into two traditions, a narrow classicist understanding and a wider International Relations one.

The de-essentialist understanding of strategy as practice challenges such proposals. It posits that the disagreement over the meaning of strategy and whether a country or government ‘has’ strategy is not a problem to be defined away, it presents an opportunity to learn about strategy making. The controversy over the meaning, content, and use of strategy becomes an object of research. Practice theory provides at least two promising directions to study the struggles of strategy making.

The Bourdieusian concept of a ‘field’ provides one of such avenues. A field is a social space of interaction. The concept aims at overcoming the division in which actors are seen as either driven by instrumental rationality, or by culture, that is the view that actors are the victims of context, beliefs, norms or rules and lack a strategic sense (Williams 2007: 3, Mérand and Forget 2013: 96). Through the concept of field, spaces such as the state, or international institutions such as the EU, have been re-interpreted beyond formal institutions and rules, and deconstructed as coherent actors (Mérand and Forget 2013, Berling 2012). In the most explicit attempt to understand strategy through such lenses, Mérand and Forget (2013) propose to study strategy as a field starting out from the question: how do certain sets of ideas become strategic policy? Addressing the question requires to reconstruct the strategic field, that is “the social space in which different actors who are interested in strategic policy vie to maintain and improve their position” (Mérand and Forget 2013: 102). This in turn allows to reconstruct the particular moves of those actors, how they position

themselves within the field, and aim to turn particular ideas into strategy. Such ‘moves’ include linguistic practices, through which threats are framed, bodily moves, such as assertive gestures, and social skills, such as putting people in touch with each other, or playing with timing in the right way (Mérand and Forget 2013). Paying attention to such moves provides understandings for how particular individuals and groups influence the formulations of strategy. Studying the struggle between strategists and their positioning also provides important clues why and how certain ideas become normalized and integrated in a strategy, while others are not.

Through its turn to the power struggles, the Bourdieusian field approach provides substantial analytical value to understand the making and content of strategy. Since it leaves the question of who the actors engaged in strategizing genuinely open it places significant empirical burden in the detailed reconstruction of fields of strategy. It might risk to over-emphasize the positioning of actors, and lead to a lack of attention for the substantive and normative issues that arise in the light of strategy making.

In a second take on strategy making as a social struggle, these substantive and normative elements come stronger to the fore. Here the concept of ‘controversy’ is central. This perspective derives from the pragmatist insight that controversies are social situations in which knowledge that often stays tacit and normative foundations become articulated (Bueger 2014). Controversies are hence dedicated windows into how problems and worlds are constructed and to reveal tacit practical knowledge. As Andrew Barry (2012: 330) notes, “the question of what problems or issues lie at the heart of controversies are rarely settled.” Instead, “participants in a controversy may not only disagree about what is known about a problem, and why it matters, but also about the existence of the very problem about which they disagree” (Barry 2012: 330). In controversies on grand strategy, actors – including academics and experts, who are after all also strategy makers – disagree over foundational principles of how the international system works, what the role of the state is, or what it can achieve by employing distinct instruments, such as military force. They are also struggles over which experts, non-experts and publics should have a legitimate voice. While any controversy around strategy might be an interesting starting point, controversies over what is grand strategy, public debates on whether a dedicated administration has a grand strategy, on what the content of a new strategy should be, or whether a new strategy is appropriate are particularly promising in this regards. Barry warns us, however, that we should not isolate controversies as single events,

but study them against the plane of its relations to a moving field of other controversies, conflicts and events, including those that have occurred in the past and that might occur in the future (Barry 2012: 330).

Several practice theoretical frameworks provide interesting angles to understand strategy as controversy: *Problematization analysis*, for instance, draws on the work of John Dewey and Michel Foucault, and starts out from the claim that what requires social and political action and resources (and strategy), and as such constitutes a problem of the common, is not given or evolves naturally, but is the outcome of a collective construction process (Webb 2014). This is what is described as problematization. Taking the statements in controversies as an empirical starting point the goal is then to reconstruct what is required to articulate an issue as problematic in the first instance (Bacchi 2012). Such an analytical angle lends itself to reconstruct the broader issues that strategy is concerned about, such as the meaning of war and protection or the appropriateness of force. Another stance, is *Controversy analysis*. It is an attempt inspired by actor-network theory which aims at mapping different positions and arguments within a controversy in order to learn about conflicts, but also about the shared knowledge of a field and the different relations between science, technology and politics these entail (Venturini 2012). Another take is provided by a focus on the justifications in controversies, inspired by the sociology of Luc Boltanski. This approach is powerful in revealing the normative underpinnings of practices. Gadinger (2016: 199-200), for instance, analyses the controversy around the abuse of detainees in the Abu Ghraib prison, to shed light on the normative contestation and moral ambiguity of George W. Bush's approach to grand strategy of preemption. Public hearings in the US Congress, reveal how actors disagree over the limits of the war on terror. The controversy revolves over whether the war on terror undermines core democratic principles and contradicts national security in the long term, or, as the administration and military argued, technocratic normative principles drawing on short-term objectives apply. The controversy hence demonstrates how actors disagree over what constitutes the most significant common good for the American people, and whether civil liberty or effectiveness should prevail and be defended.

### **Arranging strategy, fabricating documents**

Another take on the making of strategy is developed by practice theories that emphasize process and relations. Here an understanding of strategy as an arrangement of heterogeneous elements is developed. Making strategy is understood as a process of arranging and assembling. Strategy is not only interpreted as representation of the state of the world and the objectives of actors involved, but as a broader attempt of world making. Actor-network theory provides an open framework to study such processes, while narrative theories in particular emphasize linguistic practices and understand arrangements as narratives.

Students of strategies have argued that the process of making strategy might be more important than the product, the strategy. Giegerich and Jonas (2012: 129) for instance argue that the process generates the basis for the implementation but also acceptance of a strategy. A view that is shared and emphasized by strategy makers, such as the EU's High-Level Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (Tocci 2016: 463).

Practice theories, such as actor-network theory provide interesting frameworks to understand why and how process matters. They suggest that strategy making can be interpreted as a process of assembling and arranging heterogeneous elements. Actor-network theory (ANT) is an approach that was initially formulated in Science and Technology Studies through empirical studies of laboratories and technological innovation processes. It has widely influenced practice research, and is increasingly promulgated in international relations and security studies research (Bueger and Stockbruegger 2017; Bueger and Gadinger 2018: 79-87). The core of ANT is to study practices as relations and how these are enacted, stabilized or contested. Through such relations actor-networks become formed between not only humans, but also non-human entities (e.g. technology, documents). The emphasis of research is the process of relating.

Such an assembling process starts with convincing actors that a strategy is required and needs to be produced in the first place. ANT scholars have coined the term 'interressement', to describe how actors become interested in the strategy and first relations are formed (Bueger and Stockbruegger 2017), that in other terminologies might be well conceived as initial communities or fields. Tocci (2016), one of the lead authors of the EU's 2015 grand strategy, for instance, describes the intricate process of ensuring that member states as well as the EU bodies are committed to the production process, and the myriads of meetings required to do so. Through mutual engagement the interested actors are increasingly given a role in the process of strategy

making, but also in the strategy itself, as well as the world and activities it describes. With the concept of ‘translation’, ANT grasps how actors and their identities transform in the process, assume their new roles, and stable relations are formed (Bueger and Stockbruegger 2017). Tocci (2016: 467), for instance, emphasize the importance that “those who contributed would read themselves somewhere in the Strategy”. Strategies might significant redefine roles for agencies and their relations, as well as the distribution of resources between them. This is particularly the case if strategy making is not a routine process (as in the US), but a strategy is written for the first time, or a sub-strategy addresses a newly emerging issue. Scherrer (2012: 142), for instance, argues that in countries with weak security governance, strategy writing is best understood “as a key element of institution-building, in that such documents inform strategic decision-making on the development of effective and accountable security institutions while ensuring that competing needs and priorities are considered. [...]. Strategy making is a crucial component of a process “that seeks to form a common identity, ethos and culture”. This is also the case in emerging issue areas. For instance, the first National Maritime Security Strategy of the UK (UK Government 2014), not only redefines the role of the different agencies and ministries as they pertain to maritime space, but also created a new governance body to ensure oversight. Through the process of translation, hence a coherent whole, such as an institution or a national or regional security sector is stabilized, and security actors are made. Actors are inscribed into the network through the strategy. As Mälksoo (2016: 376) makes that point for the EU’s strategy, the strategy “powerfully [...] serves as a re-affirmation of the EU’s will to survive in the first place, to maintain its position as a relevant actor on the world stage while living through a major legitimacy crisis in its history”. For ANT advocates, building such relations, is an act of world making that goes beyond defining roles for the actors entangled in the network, it also performs the world in which the networks is situated and with which it interacts. There is a strong claim for performativity, that a strategy might not only describe the world, but also create it. Strategy making as such is an exercise “in ordering the world by establishing knowledge claims about ‘how the world works’ (Mälksoo 2016: 376).

As Klein (1994: 27) remarked, strategy is “dependent upon the articulation of a world view in which regions and people are parceled out, divided up, and presumed to be subsumed under a master narrative.” Narrative, an analytical concept originating in literary and cultural studies, is increasingly employed in both discourse and practice-oriented research on strategy. It is used, for instance, to analyze how collective sense-making unfolds in moments of crisis, such as major

terrorist attacks (Devetak 2009). Practice theory offers a dedicated reinterpretation of narratives and strategy. From the viewpoint of the practice-oriented version, making strategies is a process of story-telling and narrative arrangement to make sense of and act in the world. Narrative gives purpose to practices. Strategy than is the temporary fixation of a narrative, for instance, in a document. To have effect it however needs to be read, cited, or summarized in stories.

Such a perspective develops from the understanding of narratives as a configuration device that actors use to make sense of the world and order it in a specific way to allow for action. Narratives are “means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors. Strategic narratives are a tool for political actors to extend their influence, manage expectations, and change the discursive environment in which they operate. They are narratives about both states and the system itself, both about who we are and what kind of order we want” (Miskimmon et al. 2013: 2). Narrative constructions involve various practical judgements based on selective interpretation, personal experiences or sequencing of events. Narrative is the “main device for making sense of social action” (Czarniawska 2004: 11), but also a political device for generating legitimacy. Indeed, the successful legitimation of any kind of a political project, such as a grand strategy, relies on a narrative. Narrative is a way of giving meaning to practice by constituting an overall sense of direction or purpose, refocusing identity, and enabling and constraining the ongoing activities of actors (Fenton and Langley 2011: 1171).

The search for a common understanding through the construction of narratives is, however, an often complex and flimsy affair. Stories, such as national security narratives, need to be told and retold, are influenced by the cultural repertoires of distinct communities, and are hence instable and subject to change. Narratives have effect, as Schmitt (2018) and Krebs (2015) remind us, in relation to a particular context and prior myths and stories. Russia’s strategic narrative, as Schmitt (2018: 497-498) argues, works through the relation between a system narrative, that U.S. unipolarity is detrimental to a multipolar order, and an identity narrative, which pushes the story that Russia has been “humiliated” by the West after the end of the Cold War. Krebs (2015) makes a similar argument, when he sees U.S. national security narratives as embedded in more enduring identity narratives such as American exceptionalism.

The concept of narrative is analytically promising to explore the cultural embeddedness of strategy making and explores why and how some interpretations of the world are included in a strategy and

others not. Strategy making becomes narrative construction and hence processes of collective sense-making, identity-building and giving purpose to (security and diplomatic) practices.

Both ANT and narrative theory stress the importance of inscription. The arrangement, whether though as actor-network or as narrative becomes inscribed in a material artefact. One of the core features of practice theories is their claim that practices are not only linguistic, but also material. They contain bodily movements, but also the handling of artefacts, objects and things. While we have discussed examples of bodily movements, also the artefacts that matter in strategy making require attention. Strategies are above all documents, and they are related to other documents. While, as the ANT perspective highlights, the process of drafting the strategy and making the document, might be more important, this doesn't imply that the strategy as document is not a powerful inscription device that has an important afterlife. Indeed, the document becomes part of other practices, becomes nested in other documents, and indeed might present the lead-up to new strategy making, when a new routine cycle of strategy writing begins. Documents might also be used as reference in new documents, for instance in order to indicate coherence or to legitimate certain claims. Strategies become part of a hierarchy of documents.

Much of the attention to documents has gone to either its production, or to its content. Documents are, however, one of the core artefacts of contemporary governance. While they are temporary fixations, one of the core features is that they enable governance at distance through their circulation. As Freeman and Maybin (2011:160) re-mark, "the physical properties of policy documents extend the scope and reach of governments in space and time. Their material inscription means that a standard message can be communicated to numerous public servants in numerous and often distant locations, coordinating their actions. And the same message can serve as a reference point for successive actors and actions over time. It is the very physicality of the document that gives its temporal power". Documents can be circulated to even the farthest distance. A strategy document can reach the diplomat in an embassy far away, as it can reach the officer in the field. Through their materiality they can travel and allow for the coordination of action. The power of a strategy hence lies in its physical properties. As actor-network theorists have proposed, documents can be also conceptualized as actors in their own right. As actors they become part of a network of action and establish certain relations to other actors. This is then an invitation to "examine how documents as vital objects can drive and shape political, economic [...] and scientific activities just as much as

humans do” (Prior 2008: 833). Such a perspective is hence an invitation to not only study of how the propositions within a strategy are implemented, but how a strategy becomes part of a repertoire of practices and allows to do things differently.

## **Conclusion**

Strategy making can be considered as one of the foundational international practices. Strategy has the potential to anchor other practices, such as war and diplomacy. To understand strategy making and the effect of it, recent practice theoretical ideas provide revealing analytical frameworks and concepts. In this chapter we set out the core premises of the practice theoretical view and their contribution to the study of strategy. We have explored several avenues for how practice theories can inspire the study of strategy. Practice theory allows us to revisit concepts such as strategic culture or security communities as phenomenon based on patterns of activities. Concepts such as ‘field’ and ‘controversy’ allow to study strategy as a social struggle of power and contestation of meaning and norms. Studying strategy as arrangement gives us insights into how actors become involved in strategy, how they are transformed in the course and how strategy has the power to reconfigure the world. Analytical tools, such as actor network theory, practice-oriented narrative analysis, problematization and controversy analysis, as well as materialist-oriented document analysis hold strong promises for further research on strategy making and rethinking existing debates and empirical material.

They offer a non-essentialist understanding of grand strategy that allow to turn the struggle over the definition of strategy into productive empirical questions. In their non-essentialist stances and turn away from instrumental rationality, they offer concepts and theorizing that aims at grasping process, interactions and uncertainty. They also return politics to strategy making in emphasizing that strategy is above all a political struggle between actors, but also an act of world making. Understanding strategy as a collective achievement of various types of actors, they allow to deconstruct the state, and to consider the diversity of strategy makers. In placing more burden on empirical analysis, rich contextual descriptions of strategy making practices such as meetings, they invite new methods, such as ethnography or action research to be tried out and tested. These might as well increase the practical relevance of strategy research and its contribution to the making of

strategy. Together these frameworks also open up new possibilities for dialogue with in security studies, providing in particular new remedies for the divisions and misunderstandings between strategic studies and critical security studies, which often agree on empirical results and share many more concerns than often considered. Understanding strategy making as a basic practice of international relations, moreover, brings strategy back to the larger disciplines of international relations. It might as well also open a further dialogue to other disciplines which are equally concerned about the production of strategy.

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