



Kneading the Dough Together: The Application of Strategic Empathy Among American National Security Professionals

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Kneading the Dough Together:
The Application of Strategic Empathy Among American National Security Professionals

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A Thesis in the Field of Anthropology
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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Abstract

The term “strategic empathy” in national security affairs sounds appealing. Ask practitioners what it means, though, and they will all provide a different answer. Is it Sun Tzu’s “know your enemy?” Is it a tool for Machiavellian manipulation? Is it morally superior to empathize with the adversary? Is it ethically bereft to use that knowledge intentionally to gain advantage? These are questions that national security practitioners wrestle with when attempting to pin down a buzzword in a beltway. Yet, humanity’s history of conflict suggests that there may be a place for strategic empathy to create improved outcomes for national security practitioners when it is employed vis-à-vis a foreign counterpart. This research investigates how national security practitioners can effectively employ strategic empathy to create improved national security outcomes.

Six national security practitioners interviewed for this research shared their lived experiences engaging empathically with foreign counterparts through phenomenological interviews. The qualitative, interdisciplinary data they provided resulted in a process for how to conduct strategic empathy in two phases, analysis and implementation. Woven among the process are themes and best practices related to imagination, dialogue, intersubjectivity, and value salience. The strategic empathy process resulting from this research, along with its best practices, represents a starting hypothesis for national security practitioners to test during their own professional experiences, and a new venture for additional research.

Dedication

The thesis is dedicated to my co-student and partner in crime, Elodie. I started this master's program with her in utero, and she has sat in on lectures about Egyptian archaeology and seminars about popular devotion with the most patient and kind professors. Eventually, she moved around the world with me four times in 17 months to pursue my higher education and my own national security career. We've been fortunate to be surrounded by the most supportive and impressive colleagues, fellow students, family, and friends. They've been a godsend watching Elodie when I had to finish a late-night paper during a visit, or when I've had midnight Zoom interviews for this thesis thanks to the time zone differences. Even when her screams threatened to interrupt my interview, the next day I knew she would ask, "Mommy, are you done with your thesis?" She even wrote her own.

The hope I have for my field is that we can achieve more lasting peace by practicing strategic empathy, and the hope I have for my daughter is that she can live in a world where national security practitioners default to pursuing those more positive outcomes. As I've gone through this writing process, it's become clearer to me that my daughter will be more than a beneficiary of that better world I hope for. She will be part of creating it herself.

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I want to thank the Harvard professors who guided me through this research and writing process. Dr. Richard Joseph Martin helped me understand what professional research looks like and got me excited about the nitty-gritty. I will be forever grateful to my advisor Dr. Michael Miner for harnessing that enthusiasm and believing in my ability to teach. That motivation kept me going through some of the most exhausting months of my life, and every time I tapped back into my research and writing process, I left feeling more energized thanks to his encouragement. I will always be grateful for Dr. Miner's patience and grace while I attempted to tackle this thesis while moving my household overseas and single parenting a three-year-old as our neighboring country fell apart and I lost every free hour I ever thought I would have. Harvard's faculty and staff have showed me a new way to care about people and bring out their best, and I'm grateful not only for that support but for being able to see the world anew through the lens of care.

I also want to thank my professors at the U.S. Naval War College who encouraged me to thread anthropology and strategic empathy together in the first place. Col. Joe McGraw, Dr. Shahin Berenji, and Col. Becky Russo believed in my unconventional idea, held me to high standards, and lit the path I want to follow.

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Chapter I.

Introduction

The term “strategic empathy” in national security affairs sounds appealing. Ask practitioners what it means, though, and they will all provide a different answer. Is it Sun Tzu’s “know your enemy?” Is it a tool for Machiavellian manipulation? Is it morally superior to empathize with the adversary? Is it ethically bereft to use that knowledge intentionally to gain advantage? These are questions that national security practitioners wrestle with when attempting to pin down a buzzword in a beltway. Yet, humanity’s history of conflict suggests that there may be a place for strategic empathy to create improved outcomes for national security practitioners when it is employed vis-à-vis a foreign counterpart. This research investigates how national security practitioners can effectively employ strategic empathy to create improved national security outcomes.

In 2020, retired American General H.R. McMaster published a memoir of his time as National Security Advisor to the President of the United States calling for U.S. national security practitioners to end policies of strategic narcissism and begin implementing strategic empathy. McMaster parlayed his expertise as an historian, along with individual experiences in high-level statecraft, to provide unique empathetic insight into the motivations of key U.S. adversaries (McMaster 2020). His book *Battlegrounds: The Fight to Defend the Free World*, was published in 2020. Many of his assessments, for which he employed strategic empathy, were overtaken by world events by 2022. In direct contravention of McMaster’s predictions championing the contagiousness of democratic

values and civil liberties, Russia invaded Ukraine, the Taliban governed Afghanistan, pro-democracy movements in China and Iran were stifled. Had strategic empathy failed?

Strategic empathy went from a catchphrase to a concept in 2014 when historian Zachary Shore published his book *A Sense of the Enemy: The High Stakes of Reading Your Rival's Mind*. McMaster used the lens from this book to write *Battlegrounds*, and shared Shore's concept of strategic empathy, which seeks to identify an adversary's drivers and constraints by imagining how the adversary sees the world from its own perspective (McMaster 2020, 16; Shore 2014, 2-8; Shore 2012, 36). Shore and McMaster called on national security practitioners to imagine the world in the shoes of an adversary and creatively describe how that world would look and feel (Shore 2012, 36). Taken up by aspects of the U.S. defense community, scholars at the Army War College and U.S. Army officers in Japan sought ways to insert strategic empathy into their planning processes (Abbe 2023; Vowell & Evans 2022). Yet, these analyses maintained the narrow focus of their fields, which put them at risk of perpetuating recurring sins of statecraft such as mirror-imaging, assuming a cooperative adversary, and determinist post-enlightenment ideology.

These are some of the same sins for which the field of anthropology has sought to atone as a result of its own origin story. Perhaps the lessons anthropologists have learned about how to conceptualize those whom they research could help national security practitioners paint a more vibrant image of their counterpart's situation in the world. This conversation may be initially uncomfortable, but the two fields have been sliding closer together on issues of relationships, feelings, and objectives to the point at which political scientists have opened a door to discussing topics that had previously been derided as

non-rational. After two decades of U.S. national security efforts led to stalemate and defeat on several major national security priorities, the time is ripe to re-evaluate how a more complex understanding of societies can be leveraged to the benefit of international relations as conducted through national security policy.

That benefit is far from binary. First, Shore and McMaster both believe that the ultimate goal of strategic empathy is to generate policies that allow countries to act in concert in areas of mutual interest, thereby averting conflict (Shore 2014, 189; McMaster 2020). Second, the conversation about strategic empathy has moved beyond adversaries. Current discussions among political scientists and U.S. Department of Defense scholars assert that strategic empathy should be employed with all counterparts, including allies, to form a better working relationship that advances mutual goals (Abbe & Yorke 2023). For that reason, in this study the “target” of strategic empathy is referred to as a “counterpart,” not an adversary. Third, U.S. foreign policy no longer views conflict in binary terms as wartime versus peacetime and instead seeks to gain advantage in a continuum of strategic competition below the level of armed conflict. For that, national security practitioners will need an effective framework for engaging in strategic empathy to assess counterparts with the goal of strengthening and leveraging mutually beneficial relationships.

What can anthropology offer? In reckoning with anthropology’s own past, anthropologists have shattered antiquated colonial mindsets by adopting perspectival histories that bring in the subaltern, by re-defining how sacredness manifests, by imploding the subject-object relationship, and by articulating how relationships of mutual reciprocity become more than transactional. Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolphe

Trouillot (1949-2012) critiqued colonial histories written by conquerors and gave subaltern narratives multiple platforms for their unique perspectival histories (1995). Religious historian Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) critiqued scholars who simply listed characteristics of religious devotees and argued that true scholarship identified a sacred center and its manifestations (Eliade et al 1991). After being coined by philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), intersubjectivity became a preferred method for conducting ethnography by returning agency to the person being studied in a relationship that acknowledged positionality and attempted to counteract problematic power dynamics (Cooper-White 2014). Anthropologist Marcel Mauss's (1872-1950) theory of gift-giving gives a lexicon to the unquantifiable something else that pulls on partners who exchange in a way that transcends transactional relationships (Mauss 1954). Finally, anthropology gives space and vocabulary to affect, which is gaining authoritativeness in political science through the practice of empathy (Head 2015). Studies of empathy in philosophy, political science, and anthropology all draw on aspects of these same components, begging the question of how leveraging an understanding of these anthropological concepts can help national security practitioners better apply strategic empathy and avoid the sins of the past.

How does strategic empathy work in practice among national security practitioners? Are they already engaging with these anthropological concepts, and in what ways? What cognitive decisions are practitioners making in their interactions with foreign counterparts to reach their objectives? How does empathy play a role in those decisions? When practitioners empathically engage in these ways, do they create more desired effect vis-a-vis the counterpart? This thesis examines how concepts from

anthropology inform an effective process through which national security practitioners can practice strategic empathy. Through semi-structured phenomenological interviews with U.S. national security practitioners, this research examines how participants wittingly or unwittingly weave themes from anthropology (perspectival histories, sacredness, gift-giving, and intersubjectivity) with themes from empathy (affect, imagination, dialogue, and perspective-taking) when engaging with a foreign counterpart. By examining the resulting themes of what has been effective in practice, a process emerges by which strategic empathy can be employed and tested by future national security practitioners. Situated within the ongoing conversation about strategic empathy in national security circles, the flow of this process brings depth and finesse to the ways in which national security practitioners reach their objectives by employing strategic empathy.

Chapter II.

Literature Review

Strategic empathy circulates as a buzzword in national security circles, but digging deeper into its dimensions unearths a plethora of interpretations of what empathy is, could, or should be. In short, the term “strategic empathy” suffers from the fact that there are multiple competing yet valid definitions of empathy itself. This literature review examines the evolution of contemporary discussions on strategic empathy, determines an appropriate definition of empathy for the purpose of executing strategic empathy, and breaks that empathy concept down into themes that are explored as intersections between strategy and the socially constructed aspects of empathy.

Following Sun Tzu’s pithy observation about knowing one’s enemy in the fourth century BCE, scholarly literature on strategic empathy generated momentum with a 2012 article from historian Shore, where he called strategic empathy “a sharpened sensitivity to their enemy’s underlying drivers and constraints” (Shore 2012, 35). In his 2014 book on the topic, *A Sense of the Enemy*, Shore describes how strategic empathy shaped or doomed specific national security issues in history across the globe. Shore focuses on using strategic empathy to identify an adversary’s drivers and constraints. He uses narrative history lessons to demonstrate the value of those drivers and constraints, and he offers an analytic tool for evaluating those drivers and constraints. Shore argues against analyzing an actor’s patterns to predict what the actor will do in the future. He is more interested in where an adversary breaks its patterns. These instances, Shore contends,

believer where an adversary makes value choices that may otherwise be imperceptible to the national security practitioner studying the adversary (Shore 2014, 4-6). For Shore, accurate analysis using pattern breaks is an outcome of strategic empathy. That said, Shore's work houses his pattern break tool within the broader concept of strategic empathy. His analysis of the broader concept constrains the practice of strategic empathy to narrative storytelling, an output of combining facts and imagination (Shore 2012, 36). As an historian, Shore lives and breathes these narrative histories, and finds imaginative freedom in relaying compelling stories from history. His work, however, falls short of offering a tool for the non-historian to capture that same imaginative freedom in contemporary relationships.

Shore's book grounded the discourse of strategic empathy in the discipline of history, which is where McMaster, also a trained historian, picked up the thread in 2020. For McMaster, strategic empathy meant, "an appreciation for how historical memory, emotion, and aspiration drive and constrain the other" (McMaster 2020, 690). McMaster's advocacy for strategic empathy gained momentum in the national security community but lacked evidence showing how it achieved improved national security outcomes. In his memoir *Battlegrounds*, McMaster relies on the deep expertise of his advisors as well as interpersonal dialogues with adversary leadership to crystal ball his way to national security policy prescriptions (McMaster 2020). In time, however, several of his predictions were overturned, and his premise has been criticized as maliciously manipulative and ethically questionable. Yet, the concept of strategic empathy maintains its momentum in the national security community. On the one hand, there are plenty of policymakers and decision makers who mindfully share McMaster's worldview and

propagate his ideas. On the other hand, to the uninitiated strategic empathy simply sounds like a good idea. In an American society where citizens are prevailingly taught to love their neighbor, “strategic empathy” has a nice ring.

“Empathy,” however, could sound weak. Within the U.S. national security community, the general inclination to avoid feelings and affect has shifted the strategic empathy conversation out of the discipline of history and into the discipline of psychology, where U.S. Army War College Professor Dr. Allison Abbe reduced Shore’s concept of strategic empathy into the psychology practice of perspective-taking (Abbe 2023). Abbe examined McMaster and Shore’s interpretation of strategic empathy as an extension of the practice of empathy as defined in psychology. Psychology’s prevailing definition of empathy comprises “empathic concern, experience sharing, and perspective-taking” (Abbe 2023, 23). This definition of empathy views “empathic concern” as the tie of affect to an obligatory sense of concern for the counterpart (Abbe 2023, 23). In this way, empathy obligates the protagonist to feel in such a way that should compel the protagonist to act in a way that benefits the counterpart. Empathy becomes not only a way to conceptualize another, but an obligation for action on behalf of the other in response. Abbe argues that making empathy strategic strips away the obligation toward the counterpart. For that reason, she argues to remove the aspects of experience sharing and empathic concern from strategic empathy, and to instead think of strategic empathy as more akin to strategic perspective-taking (Abbe 2023, 33).

By removing the affect generated by experience sharing that obligates the protagonist to act out of concern for a counterpart, could empathy create more strategic outcomes? Abbe’s Department of Defense (DOD) compatriots applied a perspective-

taking model of strategic empathy to their area of responsibility, Japan, for the Indo-Pacific theater in 2022. These senior leaders, who served as the Commanding General of the U.S. Army Japan and the U.S. Army Japan Senior Intelligence Officer, used a strategic empathy approach to conduct their own planning process to analyze their operating environment, Japan. They identified three prevailing factors for operationalizing strategic empathy in Japan: geography, history, and domestic politics (Vowell & Craig 2022). This list of factors, though, does not look appreciably different from a typical DOD factor analysis exercise, which is designed to solve complicated problems in a linear fashion. Such processes break down in the face of complex, nuanced reality, a critical vulnerability in DOD planning that Shore and McMaster intended the concept of strategic empathy to solve. U.S. Army Japan's exercise results in a few nouns and fails to capture nuance or imagination. It does not paint the picture of a scene that a national security practitioner can manipulate to create a desired effect.

Reducing strategic empathy to perspective-taking without affect housed the concept within established planning practices rather than offering a novel conceptual model. Strategic empathy requires imagination, and imagination requires affect. One advocate of national security's return to affect, international relations scholar Dr. Claire Yorke, argues that analytic, data-driven approaches to national security fail to capture what an adversary is really fighting for and how it perceives U.S. actions. Yorke critiques even Shaw's pattern-break tool asserting that it is also too data-driven (Yorke 2023, 1085). Instead, she asks, "what does security feel like to different people?" (Yorke 2023, 1098). To Yorke, strategic empathy identifies how people attribute meaning to their environments, and what it means to them to feel secure. Emotions and perceptions

underpin Yorke's constructivist analysis (Yorke 2023, 1093; 1085-1086). Rather than distilling strategic empathy into a complicated problem with a linear solution, as U.S. Army Japan's analysts did, Yorke applies empathy to unexpected wicked problems that require navigating nuance (Yorke 2023, 1086).

Fortuitously, Yorke and Abbe teamed up to talk about strategic empathy, advancing the scholarly discourse into a post-McMaster era. Together, Abbe and Yorke address the challenges in McMaster's application of strategic empathy by emphasizing the affective, dialogic, and non-adversarial role that Yorke and Abbe believe strategic empathy should play in national security (Abbe & Yorke 2023). Their discussion on the U.S. Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute podcast "Conversations on Strategy" resolves some of strategic empathy's ethical critiques by expanding it from an adversary-focused practice to a counterpart-focused practice, a neutral tool to be applied to adversaries and partners alike with the intention of improving the outcomes of those interactions. While their podcast conversation calls for wider adoption of the concept of strategic empathy (Abbe & Yorke 2023), it fails to address how practitioners can effectively apply it. They recognize that future research is necessary to determine what difference strategic empathy makes in decision-making (Abbe & Yorke, 14:15), but they fall short of providing a manual. This research seeks to fill that void.

Abbe and Yorke have propelled the academic discussion of strategic empathy into a constructivist sphere where imagination can capture affect and drive improved national security outcomes. In order to operationalize strategic empathy, it is important to choose a definition of empathy that fits this goal. The discipline of philosophy offers a definition that aligns more closely to Abbe and Yorke's vision than the definition provided by

psychology. Contemporary philosopher Amy Coplan defines empathy as a “complex imaginative process in which an observer simulates another person’s situated psychological states while maintaining clear self-other differentiation” (Coplan 2011, 5). According to Coplan, empathy’s essential features are “affective matching, other-oriented perspective-taking, and self-other differentiation” (Coplan 2011, 13). This definition strips away psychology’s obligation to sympathize with the counterpart, instead situating empathy as a process of feeling without sympathizing, thanks to “self-other differentiation” (Coplan 2011, 16). It mirrors Yorke’s understanding of empathy, emphasizing feeling and intersubjectivity, and reflects the way in which Yorke applies empathy in the context of strategic empathy. For that reason, this definition of empathy baselines the following research.

Anthropologists Douglas Hollan and Jason Throop use a similar definition of empathy in their ethnographic research about empathy. In their book about empathy in ethnographic studies in Oceania, Hollan and Throop rely on a definition of empathy from ethicist Dr. Jodi Halpern as a “first-person perspective on another’s thoughts and feelings as if we were experiencing and understanding the world from his or her vantage point” (Hollan & Throop 2011, 3). Their research surfaced that empathy is a neutral tool that does not compel sympathy; rather, it is sometimes used benevolently and sometimes maliciously (Hollan & Throop 2011, 6). Hollan and Throop’s ethnographic research mirrors Coplan’s lexicon: empathy involves feelings, perspective-taking, and dissociated neutrality. For the purposes of this research, that makes anthropology a particularly rich source for analyzing themes that can contribute to creating a cognitive framework for strategic empathy. Holland and Throop bucketed their ethnographic findings on empathy

into three consistent aspects: empathy is an intersubjective encounter, it requires ongoing dialogue, and it incorporates imagination and emotion (Hollan & Throop 2008).

Likewise, this review on the academic discourse of strategic empathy surfaced several themes including intersubjectivity, perspective-taking, affect, imagination, value salience, narration, dialogic exchange, iteration, and differentiation. Broadly speaking, these concepts can be bucketed into the same broad categories surfaced by Coplan, Hollan, and Throop: perspectives, imagination, dialogue, and differentiation. The following section explores the literature on these themes.

Perspectives

The category of perspectives encompasses the themes of perspective-taking, intersubjectivity, and narrative perspectival histories. The perspective-taking aspect of empathy drives the literature of strategic empathy thus far. It is the primary mechanism that the U.S. national security apparatus has used to apply strategic empathy, thanks to Abbe's contribution to the field from the lens of psychology. It is also an important component of Coplan's empathy triad, and this research uses Coplan's definition of perspective-taking as "other-oriented perspective-taking" (Coplan 2011, 6). Defining perspective-taking as "other-oriented" situates the process of perspective-taking firmly in the lived experience of the counterpart. Coplan describes other-oriented perspective-taking as, "I imagine being the target undergoing the target's experiences rather than imagining being myself undergoing the target's experiences" (Coplan 2011, 13). Other-oriented perspective-taking requires suppressing one's own perspective. It is the opposite of mirror-imaging, a common practice in foreign relations where the protagonist imagines how its state would react and projects that assumption onto a counterpart. This is a

weakness in McMaster's memoir, which tends to assume that a counterpart's population will force the state's hand on issues of freedom of expression, for instance, leading to the eventual prevailing of liberal democratic values. McMaster assumes this can happen in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Iran because he believes so strongly in the salience of this value in American society. He fails to explore the ways in which another society might not gravitate toward the same value he holds dear (McMaster 2020).

How can a practitioner learn to shift from inadvertently filling the gaps in a counterpart's perspective with his or her own perspective? This requires a shift from a subject-object relationship to a subject-subject relationship using the concept of intersubjectivity. Inter-subjectivity is "the interchange of thoughts and feelings, both conscious and unconscious, between two persons, or 'subjects,' as facilitated by empathy" (Cooper-White 2014). Anthropologist Trouillot defines "subjects" as "voices aware of their vocality" (Trouillot & Carby 2015, 23). According to Holland and Throop, empathy is inherently intersubjective (Hollan & Throop 2011, 3). It requires the protagonist to view the counterpart as a protagonist in their own right, not as an object to be observed. York agrees that strategic empathy done correctly is intersubjective. It means understanding one another while being understood, ascribing each side dignity and respect (Throop & Zahavi 2020, 290; Head 2012, 34-35; Yorke 2023, 1087). According to Yorke, empathy accounts for the agency of others, how others experience security differently, and the fact that others have other goals (Yorke 2023, 1087).

Put simply, the enemy has a vote. In fact, the enemy has more than a vote. It has a framework of agency that lends three-dimensionality to its perspective, which can be inhabited by varying forces entirely unfamiliar to the protagonist analyzing the

counterpart. There is a Chicana feminist concept coined by writer/scholar/activist Alicia Gaspar de Alba that might express intersubjectivity better than other academic literature could: *re-conocimiento*. According to Gaspar de Alba, this dialectic concept is “knowing the Other by knowing the self, knowing the self by knowing the Other” (Gaspar de Alba 2014, 259). It captures the reciprocity of learning that takes place when one meets another individual and, as a result, learns more about oneself. It is more than seeing someone. It describes how people continually shape and reshape one another as they interact with equal amounts of agency, even if they have an unequal distribution of power.

The idea that intersubjective partners have equal agency refers more to the potentiality each subject has for agency. Power dynamics, especially in international relations, vary greatly. National interests often respond directly to those power dynamics. But that does not mean that a counterpart with seemingly less power cannot leverage what it has in a unique way that changes its disposition. In national security parlance this may be called seizing opportunities to asymmetrically attack critical vulnerabilities. In anthropology it is better known as the multiplicity of perspectival histories. States often make, remake, and leverage their identities via the stories they tell themselves, their histories. Every state contains both dominant and subaltern potentialities that can be accessed through perspectival histories. In *Silencing the Past*, Trouillot critiques dominant history narratives and offers an alternative way to conceptualize a nation’s history, or histories. Trouillot emphasizes the role of the subaltern in societies and asserts that to understand history one must understand the breadth of perspectival histories from different groups, including from artisans like “politicians, students, fiction writers,

filmmakers, and participating members of the public” (Trouillot & Carby 2015, 25). In doing so, scholars should look beyond textual sources produced by historians and to alternative forms of narrative in which subaltern histories perform continuously despite attempts from dominant forces to prevent them from being disseminated conventionally (Trouillot & Carby 2015, 2-25). National security practitioners must become familiar with non-dominant histories expressed through other cultural means, like art or music. Perhaps these are disseminated in a country’s media scene through memes or satire. When a national security practitioner can access a counterpart’s perspectival histories, levers of asymmetric agency come into focus. These levers have the potential to thwart realpolitik and are calibrated by value salience and affect.

How might the perspective theme be explored in practice? Ukrainian anthropologist Julia Buyskykh dresses the subject down in her critique of western anthropologists’ punditry on the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Buyskykh argues that the subjectivity of citizens in conflict zones, which includes their intellectual, psychological, and emotional experience, matters more than objectively rational decision-making analysis that is solely fact-based (Buyskykh 2023). Buyskykh asks the outsider to act intersubjectively, taking the perspective of the lived experience of Ukrainians in Ukraine, who surprised the world when their national identity, a construction that can be considered subaltern to Russia’s pan-Slavic narrative, achieved asymmetric effect on the battlefield against a superior power. Buyskykh asks national security practitioners studying geopolitical instability in Ukraine to access the affective perspective of the people experiencing the instability (Buyskykh 2023). This leads to the power of imagination.

Imagination

The category of imagination encompasses the themes of affect and value salience. How do feelings lead to improved outcomes in national security? Strategic empathy demands practitioners imagine the perspective of the counterpart. Anthropologists support with their own ethnographic research. Hollan and Throop assert that empathy is neither purely cognitive nor purely imaginative, but both. Emotion guides imaginative linkages of images and thoughts that are then mapped to cognitive experiences and perceptions (Hollan & Throop 2011, 3, 13, 14). Empathy, likewise, demands that the practitioner match the affect of the counterpart. Affect is a critical part of empathy, one of Coplan's triad of empathy aspects. She defines the empathic experience of "affective matching" as feelings and physiological arousal (Coplan 2011, 3). This definition is useful, as it provides a way to elicit and categorize the phenomenological experiences of research participants. People who practice empathy can physically and emotionally "feel" sensations in their mind and body as if they are counterparts. Often, this experience of affect is filtered out of an analytic process, as national security practitioners seek to ground their assessments and decisions in affect-free arguments. The affect part of the experience may have impacted decisions but may not be conveyed in the official explanation of the decision.

Another theme of imagination is value salience. According to anthropologists, the practice of empathy delineates which aspects of a subject's environment are more or less salient (Hollan & Throop 2011, 3). Which aspects of a counterpart's environment matter more than others? Conveniently, anthropologists and national security practitioners have a similar conceptualization of the term "environment." In national security planning

processes, assessing the operational environment is the foundational practice that underpins how decisions are made with a view to achieving an objective. There are a variety of planning processes that national security practitioners in and out of the military use, from linearly listing factors through the DIME (Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic) framework and its derivations to a Design Thinking process that moves a similar list through a Venn Diagram of overlapping cause and effect relationships. Foreign Policy Analysis taught in U.S. military senior schools does the same thing, listing types of factors and actors. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) identified this as a weakness in national security planning processes, and American and Romanian scholars sought to remedy this factor analysis weakness by developing a process to weigh factors individually and vis-a-vis one another (Eikmeier & Iova 2021).

Strategic empathy provides an heuristic to shortcut the process of weighing factors. It uses imagination to ascertain the salience of one value over another. Yorke refers to this as how the counterpart attributes meaning to its environment. She points out that nuance surrounding the relative value of that meaning impacts analysis (Yorke 2023, 1089). By employing empathy, national security practitioners can identify and articulate the relative meanings of values and factors to determine which aspects of a counterpart's environment may be mutable and which may not. The relative meaning-making that Yorke refers to is value salience by another name. By capturing value salience, national security practitioners also practice Shore's pattern break analysis. What causes a counterpart to act out-of-pattern? It must be something that the counterpart holds dear.

Religious historian Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) would call this a counterpart's sacred center. Perhaps surprisingly, Eliade ran into the same factor analysis problem that

NATO scholars did when he observed how religious historians described religious practices that were new to them. Eliade was frustrated by how other scholars simply aggregated descriptions of religious practices and artifacts but failed to elucidate a religion's human self-meaning (Eliade 1991, 38). This contributed to kitschifying foreign spirituality as "other" rather than facilitating an intersubjective understanding of what was meaningful to the population. Eliade argued that religious scholars needed to observe spiritual practices with an eye toward identifying the sacred center of the practice from which the spiritual practices emanated. Since religious historians could rarely study a spiritual practice from inside its initiative core, they had to rely on outward manifestations of that sacredness. Eliade recognized this conundrum, and identified what he called "hierophanies," manifestations of the sacred center in spiritual practice. These manifestations were observable by an outsider but tied directly back to the sacred center of the practice (Eliade 1991, 35-44, 50-51). This idea that there is something beyond a list of factors that matters more to national security is not new to the idea of strategic empathy. McMaster echoes the same concern in his memoir on strategic empathy, arguing that the failure to effectively imagine a counterpart's scenario from the counterpart's perspective leads to mis-guessing which factors actually drive or constrain the counterpart (McMaster 2020, 432).

The value salience parallel between strategic empathy's national security origins and Eliade's sacred center and hierophanies may help tease out strategic empathy techniques that allow national security practitioners to more easily access and engage with effective strategic empathy. In order to access these parallels, for the purposes of this research sacred center, or most salient value, refers to the core of a country's

existential motivation. Eliade's term hierophany describes how that most salient value manifests through the country's policy.

In practice, national security suffers when practitioners eschew their imagination for professional norms favoring dispassionate factor analysis. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for instance, provides an example of an intransigent situation that has suffered because the professionalized fields of political science and international relations eschewed both dialogue and affect (Head 2015). Dr. Naomi Head, an international relations scholar who studies the role of empathy, explored empathy's role among Israelis and Palestinians participating in non-violent conflict resolution elements of civil society and grassroots organizations from 2013 to 2014. She concluded that two key components of empathy in international relations were missing from national security practitioners' approach to this conflict: a space for affect, and dialogue (Head 2015).

Dialogue

The category of dialogue encompasses the themes of exchange, repetition, iteration, and dialogics. Like Head, scholars across the empathy and strategic empathy sphere all emphasize the key role that dialogue plays in effective empathy.

Anthropologists Hollan and Throop consider empathy to be inherently ongoing, dialogical, and intersubjective (Hollan & Throop 2011, 3). They and their colleague Dan Zahavi have found through ethnographic research that empathy is a bidirectional and reciprocal process (Throop & Zahavi 2020, 290). When it comes to strategic empathy, specifically, accuracy matters in order to achieve improved national security outcomes. Head's research also concludes that empathy's ability to produce accurate results decreases over cultural time and space (Head 2012, 43). This is a key weakness of

strategic empathy that is particularly evident in a hindsight review of McMaster's work on the subject, which occasionally relies on a handful of personal interactions with adversary leaders to draw conclusions (McMaster 2020). Yet, McMaster and Shore also knew that dialogue was a key component of engaging strategic empathy effectively. McMaster astutely identifies that dialogue with a counterpart provides data inputs for imagining how a counterpart would feel in its geopolitical situation (McMaster 2020, 25-154). For Shore, dialogue is a goal of the process of strategic empathy more than a piece of the process of strategic empathy. He believes that if national security practitioners practice strategic empathy, they will find mutually beneficial areas of interest and leverage them to promote dialogue that decreases violent conflict (Shore 2014, 189). This is supported by evidence from political science indicating that decreases in empathy underlie conflict while increases in empathy precede the lessening of tensions (Crawford 2014, 538).

The idea of dialogue conjures two concepts from anthropology. First is its etymological relative, dialogics. In his studies of collective ritual practices, Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) identifies that ritual dialogics enacted through cultural practices like dance take the practitioners outside of normative space and allow them to interact in ways where their power dynamics are stripped away and they can reverse roles (Bakhtin 1963). This aids in imagination and creates hypothetical worlds in which individuals can act subjunctively, generating social cohesion, or what anthropologist Victor Turner (1920-1983) calls "communitas" (Turner 1969). That communitas functions as a social glue that keeps communities and cultures together. It is an intangible product generated by ritual that diffuses conflicts created by adhering to

norms. In international relations, *communitas* can act as an unseen force that destabilizes balance of power realism. It creates alternative pathways for competing national interests.

The second anthropological conjuring of dialogue is anthropologist Marcel Mauss's (1872-1950) theory of gift exchange, which he defines as reciprocal mutual obligations created when one offers something to another (1954). Mauss studied potlatch rituals of Pacific Northwest Native Americans, in which communities gathered regularly to mutually exchange goods, competing for who could give more (Mauss 1954, 4-9). Mauss determined that the mutual economic exchange became *de facto* ritual in nature due to its iterative, dialogic nature. By laying down arms and exchanging goods, communities identified areas for mutual exchange, which led to areas of mutual satisfaction and the identification of specific areas of mutual interest. In so doing, communities found nonviolent pathways for opposing one another in order to preserve their ability to exchange with one another (Mauss 1954, 105-106). This ritual exchange became generative in nature. The repeated offering of one gift generated more than the equivalent exchange of another, but something more powerful that stabilized the relationship between the two exchangers (Mauss 1954, 105). It created an affective space that transcended the transactional gift exchange relationship. International relations is by definition a reciprocal exchange of obligation between and among states. What Mauss would argue is that this mutual exchange of obligation in fact generates intangible affective space that has the power to shift the decision-making calculus of the states. Perhaps it can be called a feeling of trust. If this affective space exists, it could be leveraged to create effect for the benefit of national security. Strategic empathy seeks to capitalize on this potentiality that dialogue and exchange can generate. In their Strategic

Studies Institute podcast episode, Yorke and Abbe advocate expanding strategic empathy beyond adversaries to partners, suggesting that mutual exchange can enhance allied engagement and mutually desirable national security outcomes when it is applied to partnerships (Abbe & Yorke 2023). This research captures the role that mutual exchange plays in strategic empathy, and how generating a space for affect (like the emotion of trust) through dialogue improves national security outcomes.

The importance of dialogue is not new to national security. In addition to being a component of empathy, dialogue is an identified tool that has been found to improve the outcomes of engaging in empathy. The empathy scholars examined so far emphasize that empathy's accuracy can be greatly improved through repeated, intentional encounters that create pathways across inter-cultural space. National security practitioners are also trained to consistently re-assess their counterparts and policies. According to political scientist Neta Crawford, repeated empathic engagements and listening to the counterpart help confirm or revise initial estimates about a counterpart (Crawford 2014, 543). However, re-assessment is difficult to remember to do. By engaging strategic empathy as a foundational national security practice, strategic empathy becomes an iterative and responsive tool to improve outcomes over time (Yorke 2023, 1083). It provides a baseline for practitioners with built-in re-assessment.

The academic literature suggests that dialogue may be key component to delivering improved outcomes through strategic empathy and refining its accuracy. This research explores the role that dialogue plays in refining and creating improved national security outcomes when employed as part of strategic empathy. It also becomes an imperative; perhaps strategic empathy only works with repeated dialogue.

Differentiation

Returning to the key components of empathy as identified by Coplan, empathy's aspect of self-other differentiation is more than a tool to dissociate empathy from obligating sympathy. It is an inherent aspect of empathy borne out of ethnographic research, demonstrating that empathy can leverage emotion without eliciting an obligation toward the counterpart (Hollan & Throop 2011, 2). Because differentiation is the aspect that makes empathy neutral, it is a critical component of strategic empathy. Differentiation is the theme that allows national security practitioners to imagine and experience a counterpart's situation while employing approaches that are situated squarely within the national interest of the protagonist state. Differentiation is the key to articulating strategic empathy in a professional way.

Ethnographic evidence challenges assumptions that strategic empathy would lead national security practitioners to take the counterpart's side, sympathize with them, and act in a way that is outside of the national interest. Anthropologists who study empathy in Oceania identified two diametrically opposed views of empathy's role in two separate communities in the same region. The Banaban community living in Fiji makes empathy a defining characteristic of their self identities and collective ethnic identity (Hermann 2011, 30). They are a diasporic population that has relied on hospitality generated by empathy, and they return that hospitality through empathy as part of their collective identity (Hermann 2011, 30). This Banaban community views empathy in a positive, bi-directional light, as a generator of goodwill. In contrast, another community on the outer Pacific island of Vanatinai views empathy negatively, as a tool to manipulate the mind of another. Community members in Vanatinai claim to eschew empathy in order to maintain

and respect their own psychological and physical autonomy and the psychological and physical autonomy of their counterparts. They claim that imagining a situation from a counterpart's perspective would violate the psychological and physical agency of the counterpart. In Vanatinai, empathy is reserved for malicious actors who seek to perform destructive magic on their counterparts (Lepowsky 2011, 43-49).

This shows that empathy is a neutral tool. Therefore, strategic empathy should not be seen as a tool biased toward the counterpart and the counterpart's national interests. National security practitioners can and should leverage strategic empathy to answer their core question of the counterpart. As phrased by anthropologist Clifford Geertz, empathy is the process of figuring out "what the devil they think they are up to" (Throop & Zahavi 2020, 289). That phrase should resonate with national security practitioners who wrestle with the same question daily.

Concluding Thoughts

Examining the academic discourse on strategic empathy surfaced several themes similarly unearthed by the academic discourse on empathy in international relations, political science, anthropology, sociology, and religion. These common themes were grouped into four categories: perspective, imagination, dialogue, and differentiation. Comparing the academic literature in these categories surfaced research tools that informed semi-structured interview questions designed to elicit themes that could be qualitatively measured from the data provided by research participants. The tools emerging from this thematic review act as a guide for this project's research. Moving forward, this research phenomenologically examines the lived experiences of national security practitioners engaging with foreign counterparts. Each research participant has

been interviewed in a semi-structured way, with interview questions guided by these themes, to ascertain the ways in which strategic empathy has informed improved outcomes in national security relations with foreign counterparts.

Chapter III.

Analysis Phase of Strategic Empathy

Six former U.S. national security practitioners provided phenomenological accounts of their lived experiences engaging with foreign counterparts empathically. Each interview drew on the themes identified above, and the data demonstrated that empathic interaction with counterparts led to improved national security outcomes. Some of the themes that emerged were anticipated, but not each anticipated theme resonated in the way that was expected. In addition, the interviews surfaced several unanticipated themes. Through analyzing the combination of the research participants' experiences, a process emerged resembling a funnel of strategic empathy flowing from an intentional mindset, inputting sought-after data through imagination and research, identifying a counterpart's leverage point, engaging with the counterpart in an intersubjective and dialectic way, using trial and error to test assessments, then leveraging the most appropriate avenue to adjust the counterpart's behavior and achieve the national security objective. The themes described below show how this approach led to success in terms of strategic gains and lives saved.

The strategic empathy experience can be broken up into two phases, the analysis phase and the implementation phase. This chapter focuses on the analysis phase, organizing the interview data by anticipated and unanticipated themes through the flow of the process identified above.

Getting Into the Counterpart's Head

As with empathy, the first step in strategic empathy is perspective-taking. Participants embraced this step in their own practice as an initial starting point. Often, they described perspective-taking as putting oneself in the counterpart's shoes or looking through the counterpart's eyes. They asked themselves, "how can I understand the counterpart's world?" In two cases, participants described how they thought about counterparts who were members of terrorist organizations. One of the participants framed his thinking by saying "you have to be able to understand the world that person comes from," colorfully adding that nobody grows up wanting to be a crackhead or, in the case he described, terrorist. This participant decided he could find common ground with his foreign terrorist counterpart by asking about the counterpart's in-laws, noting that solving the counterpart's problems with his wife at home could convince him to provide valuable information. Another participant asked himself, "Ok, so I am a Taliban fighter. What does my day look like?"

Two other participants who were engaging with non-adversarial counterparts started with the question, "how did the counterpart get into power?" as a starting point for perspective-taking. One noted that when she put herself in the shoes of a foreign counterpart who was visiting her organization's facility, she thought about whether the dignitary came up from the military or had power by decree. In that case the dignitary would have a more intense security team, and she would have to navigate regulations impacting that team such as forbidding firearms on federal property. Another participant who spent a career analyzing foreign leaders started her perspective-taking by asking what it meant to be president or a minister in the country she studied. How did that

person get the job, through rank or family relationships? She first traced the source of the counterpart's power, and found this approach helped her avoid filling gaps of knowledge with assumptions.

Interestingly, the responses on this topic were quite repetitive, with three instances each describing being in the counterpart's shoes and looking through the counterpart's eyes, and two instances each describing a day in the life of the counterpart and examining how the counterpart got into power.

Imagination

The next phase, imagination, included highly subjunctive data, suggesting that imagining "as if" plays an important role in practicing strategic empathy. However, each participant described the process of imagination in a different way. The only repeated data point was that participants would ask "if it were me" when they considered the experience of being the counterpart. Otherwise, participants offered a variety of tactics for how they, personally, went about imagining a counterpart's lived experience. These included: conducting "what if" brainstorming exercises by writing their thoughts on paper or white boards either alone or with colleagues; conjuring up a persona of one in his or her own environment; asking about the counterpart's drivers; using foreign language practice as a forcing function to role-play an imagined conversation; looking up the counterpart's customs; feeling and understanding the counterpart's emotions; budgeting time to think; engaging curiosity and a sense of wonder about the counterpart; correlating what happened in the lifetime of the counterpart with what happened in the counterpart's country's lifetime; asking what the counterpart wanted the U.S. government to know as well as what the counterpart wanted to conceal from the U.S. government;

analyzing the counterpart at the individual, group, and official entity level; and recognizing that human intelligence gathering is performance, suggesting it requires rehearsal as an actor would play a part.

The two participants who engaged the question “if it were me” both described intense, high stakes interactions between themselves and the counterpart. In the first case, the participant above who was attempting to obtain life-saving information from a detained member of a terrorist organization imagined the life that this counterpart had envisioned for his family and his in-laws. When the counterpart revealed that he had turned to terrorism after feeling like his country’s leader broke every promise to his people, the participant noted that he was not sure he would not push back in some way if he were in the same circumstances. That realization helped the participant reach an understanding with the counterpart and allowed them to have a real conversation.

Another participant was involved in relocating counterparts who were at risk from their home country’s government. She was in a position where she had to reveal that risk to the counterpart and then provide a time-sensitive solution to them. The counterparts were encouraged not to tell their family they were leaving their country for fear of putting their family at risk. This practitioner imagined what it would be like to expect to say goodbye to a spouse before fleeing home, then being told that she could not say goodbye and that after she left she would not be allowed to have any contact with her spouse. The practitioner imagined that she would react with specific emotions, questions, and rage, and this imagination prepared her to have those difficult conversations with the counterparts. This participant noted that if she could not feel and imagine the trauma of her counterpart, “then you’re probably not going to do the job to the degree you need to.”

Two participants also talked about segmenting counterparts in different ways. One tried to get into the head of a persona of one and would ask herself in the first person, “how old might I be? What are my core concerns and interests? Where are [my] problems?” She paid strong attention to practical day-to-day life and cultural nuance at this stage and found that this preparation as a persona of one allowed her to engage in conversation with anyone from that counterpart’s population group. It gave her a starting point. Another participant took a different approach to segmenting counterparts. She thought of them as an individual, then a member of a group such as nationality or ethnicity, then as a government official, meaning the context in and capabilities with which the counterpart was operating.

Two participants also likened aspects of the imagination phase to performing and rehearsing. When it came to foreign language, one participant found that using a second language became a forcing function for imagining her conversation with the counterpart because, “I had to figure out the words literally I was going to say.” She would mouth the words and responses she imagined she would need without saying them out loud. Sometimes she had the opportunity to rehearse with colleagues. Another participant who was a career intelligence officer noted that human intelligence was performing, harkening back to some examples of Shore’s initial suggestions on how to creatively engage the imagination process of strategic empathy through literature and the arts (Shore 2012).

Research participants engaged with the imagination theme the most out of all of the themes addressed. Imagination drew the highest number of unique data points, encompassing the 13 described above. This suggests that imagination, in addition to being subjunctive, is also highly subjective. Individuals cultivate unique methods for

imagining counterparts that may be specific to how these individuals process information. The diversity of responses may also indicate a lack of cohesive training on the subject. Whichever factor caused this uniqueness, the research resulted in many examples for practical application that national security practitioners can experiment with to see what helps them ignite their own imaginations.

The Minimal or Minimized Contribution of Affect

According to the research on empathy, affect should be a key element at this stage of the strategic empathy process. While participants referred to feeling and emotion as part of the imagination phase, when asked about their personal experiences ingesting that affect there was not a uniform or directly relevant response. Only one participant directly articulated a response, noting that counterparts who are experiencing trauma will feel the various stages of trauma. Part of her preparation was to think about what those stages were and imagine feeling them as the counterpart. Otherwise, participants either discussed how the stress of the participant's interaction with the counterpart manifested in strange somatic ways, or how the participant experienced butterflies at the thrill of having the opportunity to engage with the counterpart.

This reticence to discuss how the participant feels the counterpart's emotion appears to be embedded in the practice of national security, as will be noted in the implementation phase. One participant repeatedly reiterated feeling as understanding, noting that she did not find much of a place for emotion, saying, "I found emotions kind of a nuisance." Yet, she did speak at length about her "understanding" of the counterpart's emotion. Another participant seconded this reaction that emotions got in the way and could derail the participant from achieving their objective. Notably, much of the

code-switching that comes with strategic empathy's implementation, described later, is rooted in the negative view bureaucrats in Washington have of affect and its place in national security.

Research Inputs

The participants in this study were all experts in their specific fields, but not necessarily in the cultures and customs of their foreign counterparts. After or during the imagination phase, participants actively sought out and consumed specific types of data about their counterpart to expeditiously understand them better. Five of the six participants had something to say about perspectival histories. This was somewhat unexpected since predominant realist national security thinking frequently defaults to a “to the victor the spoils” attitude about history. These participants who engaged empathically, however, found it valuable to understand not only the dominant power brokers in the counterpart's society, but also subaltern, disenfranchised, and factionalized groups. That did not mean they always engaged with those groups, but their understanding of the subaltern nuance helped them display expertise with dominant society members as well. The participants implicitly understood that these subaltern groups lent themselves to potential leverage points to be applied in the implementation phase, so it was important for participants to include subaltern histories in their analysis.

That said, as with imagination, each participant contributed a different lens to the theme of perspectival histories, with two repeated data points. Participants described three instances of how reading the literature of a counterpart's society provided them access to the right mix of viewpoints that contextualized the counterpart. One participant, who became fluent in her counterpart's native language, described what she chose to read

to build her intuition about the counterpart and leverage that understanding to achieve an objective. She suggested reading firsthand accounts of people who lived through flashpoints and noted that it was as important to do that for any opposition or faction as it was to do for the dominant group in society. She found it helpful to recite the opposition's view in a factionalized society, even if she was engaging with a member of the dominant ruling group, because her depth of knowledge of the subaltern in that country demonstrated a level of expertise and understanding that made the counterpart trust her more. This participant recommended learning poetry, myths, children's stories, and songs from the counterpart's society to better understand their lived experiences. Similarly, another participant who analyzed foreign leaders relied heavily on biographies and autobiographies to understand the counterpart's leaders. She also maintained a hunch that one could get the best information about a counterpart by reading the counterpart's equivalent of the New York Times Top 10 Bestsellers.

The other repeated aspect of perspectival histories was open-ended questions, a topic that two participants seized on. "The phrase, 'help me understand,' is usually a good lead-in," one participant noted. Another recommended the practitioner state their understanding of a situation to a counterpart, then ask if that was the counterpart's understanding as well. According to these participants, open-ended questions demonstrated curiosity and familiarity. As a result, counterparts were more open about what they truly believed.

Participants also contributed eight unique ways in which they engaged perspectival histories to better understand a counterpart. These included: attempting to understand a culture that is antithetical to the practitioner's culture and objectives; asking

everyday people about their lives and watching the counterpart's local news to "vibe for what people thought was important;" being thoughtful in advance about how to approach people from different cultural backgrounds; going "behind the curtain" in societies where women are excluded in order to access the viewpoint and understand the influence of those women in their families and communities; examining which groups in a counterpart's society believe in the counterpart's institutions, and why; obtaining a window into society through polls, surveys, and focus group data; engaging visual references like movies and documentaries; and eliciting information during meals on the margins of official exchanges.

When asked how these participants developed a sufficient base of knowledge about the counterpart and its culture, responses centered on their experiences growing up in environments that valued diversity, religion, or exposure to other cultures. Participants talked about how they grew up in four instances when discussing how they built their knowledge base. One participant noted that her experience growing up with her own Irish-American extended family helped her manage relationships with a sometimes challenging Irish counterpart. She was able to work with the counterpart using the same tactics that she had used when she worked with her extended family, and she accomplished more with that counterpart as a result.

Another participant went a step further, noting that after she grew up in a diverse community she began working in an environment where many foreign nationals were employed. Her organization celebrated diversity in the workforce through international affinity days, and that made it easier for her to research and analyze counterpart's culture

because doing so was encouraged by the celebration of diversity within her place of employment.

Another participant noted that growing up in a religious household helped her relate to a counterpart because she could speak knowledgeably about religion to religious people, even though they practiced different religions. Because she had the vocabulary and spiritual acumen from her childhood, she could relate to people who still practiced a form of religion even as she herself had stopped. That helped her remain deferential to the counterpart, yet also in control.

This same participant also advised that to think about a counterpart's motivations and vulnerabilities, one must first accept one's own motivations and vulnerabilities. She found that to be a critical component for accepting others, and acceptance enabled the curiosity necessary to learn about the counterpart.

Another participant echoed how growing up in a foreign country taught him cross-disciplinary skills including how to avoid being offensive in other cultures. This became a strength later in life because it helped him manipulate people to achieve national security objectives. Another participant also highlighted how she was raised to avoid being rude. This inculcated sensitivity to how subjective rudeness is among cultures allowed these participants to leverage their counterparts to reach their goals.

All points in the discussion of developing a knowledge base grew from a sensitization to diverse lived experiences that was inculcated in participants as they grew up both personally and professionally. The impact of this unanticipated but highly repeated theme has potential ramifications for the employment of strategic empathy, and it contributes to the argument for embracing diversity in national security. Living and

working among people different from themselves helped participants leverage counterparts different from themselves.

Value Salience

Imagining the counterpart's perspective, then inputting the right data to make informed assessments, leads to the key question that strategic empathy seeks to ask: What are the counterpart's drivers and constraints (Shore 2014, 2-8)? For this study, participants were asked to discuss value salience, or how they determine what is the most sacred thing for the counterpart, in the tradition of Eliade. Each participant was given the example of Eliade's findings in his study of the history of religion, and each participant was able to connect Eliade's esoteric idea of the sacred center to their counterpart's most salient value. In the implementation phase, participants leveraged this most salient value, rather than a list of drivers or constraints, to achieve their national security goal.

The theme of value salience had one of the largest number of repeat answers, suggesting that it forms a common base of understanding for national security practitioners engaging empathically with counterparts. In order of data density, the following themes emerged:

Time

It takes time and patience to figure out what drives a counterpart, or what is their most sacred thing. The first answer a counterpart may provide when asked, or the most obvious answer a practitioner might come up with, are mostly incorrect. Six responses centered on this aspect. One participant sought "what are the roots of what that person believes," noting that he had to ask a counterpart "why" at least three times to get past

their first immediate answer and identify their true motivation. He noted that identifying the counterpart's key motivation happens glacially, then all at once. Another participant noted that a counterpart, especially an adversary, will often create a perception of what is driving them in order to convey a specific message that they want people to believe. However, that was not their true motivation or driver. There was something more behind it. Another participant noted, "you go in with some very superficial ideas." She waited three months in a new assignment before making any moves. After three months she could identify a counterpart's issues with health, children, family, care, or pride, noting that these more touchy-feely issues could not be rushed. She lamented that tours in war zones tended to last only one year for her, so "you never really got the texture."

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Five responses emphasized that humans share the same basic needs, and these basic needs drive their motivations as key leverage points. Two participants mentioned that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs drives human nature's need for sustenance. Another participant identified common human drivers as self-preservation, safety, home, fear of death, and legacy. Finally, one participant took the idea of legacy one step further, noting that she could often identify the most salient value of leaders who were at the top of their careers and beginning to sunset by asking, "what do you think they want their legacy to be? (...) That's their strategic center."

Weighted Factor Analysis

Three responses noted that rather than drawing up a list of aspects of a counterpart's situation and demographics, they focus in on ideologies instead and rank

which aspects of the ideologies are most important. They ask what the core essential thing is that the counterpart needs to survive. One participant compared working with foreign dignitaries from Spain and Israel, highlighting that she ranked what mattered to each very differently. For Spain, media mattered, so she would prioritize accommodating a dignitary's media team and photo opportunities. For Israel, security and discretion were paramount, so she would focus on the opposite and not highlight that they were visiting. When it came to ranking factors, one participant put it most succinctly: "You don't want to be the fourth priority in a three priority fight."

Drivers

Two responses centered on the strategic empathy lexicon of drivers, with these participants asking what the counterpart's specific drivers are. They sought to understand which issues would move the counterpart in a specific direction, asking, "what is the core essential."

Strategic Objectives

Two responses framed value salience as the counterpart's strategic objective, the issue the counterpart is most interested in achieving. In the case of the People's Republic of China (PRC), one participant at a public-private national security initiative on space looked to the PRC's strategic objectives when identifying risks the PRC could pose to her employer's proprietary data security. She noticed that her organization focused on securing what it viewed as its most interesting work, but when thinking about the PRC this participant asked, "who cares about Mars?" She cautioned against mirror imaging after noticing repeated vulnerabilities in the security of her organization's oceanic and

atmospheric data near the South China Sea. Her colleagues did not understand why that data needed to be protected, but their PRC adversarial counterpart knew they could put minimal effort into maximizing their gain by acquiring that data due to the PRC's strong interest in the South China Sea. Mars may have been a point of pride had the PRC tried to steal information about that well-protected initiative, but meteorological data in the South China Sea was both easily available at scale and more useful for helping the PRC reach its strategic objective.

Other responses included identifying the counterpart's values, and what threatened the identity of the counterpart. One participant found from experience that threats to the identity of a counterpart were inherently existential, creating a "witch's brew" of fear and anger. This participant identified that his counterpart's adversary was attempting to rewrite the counterpart's history. He leveraged that threat to the counterpart's identity to spur action against the adversary, which was the participant's objective. Finally, one participant noted that even Afghan war lords pick up the phone when their mothers call. She leveraged her ability to connect with groups of women to empower their influence over their children and community members and sway communities away from violent radicalization.

Assuming Bi-Directional Empathy

With their strategic empathy analysis complete, the participants were almost ready to implement strategic empathy through engaging with the counterpart. First, however, a fulcrum issue surfaced in the research. After preparing themselves to engage empathically with the counterpart, half of the participants also made the intentional choice to assume that the counterpart would exhibit empathy with them as well. This

bidirectional empathy discussion surfaced primarily in exchanges with counterparts that had a risky security aspect. In two instances, the participant was engaging with someone who was from a counterpart that actively sought to kill U.S. national security personnel. These practitioners both chose to think of the counterpart as a person who was a part of a family unit when doing their initial analysis. They designed their approaches to their counterparts to demonstrate that they each saw the counterpart as a person, and they assumed that the counterpart would choose not to harm them as a result.

In one case, the participant was assigned to interrogate a detained counterpart who had access to life-saving information. The participant asked the guards to bring tea to the meeting room, and the guards brought one cup. The participant then refused to speak to the detained counterpart until the guards brought a second cup. The participant assumed, in sharing the culturally significant tea, that the counterpart would choose to reveal the life-saving information. The participant turned out to be right.

In a second case, a participant met one-on-one with individual members of organizations that sought to harm U.S. persons and interests. She noted that on the one hand she was always thinking of her personal security, but when she engaged these counterparts one-on-one for the first time she had to assume they would not want to harm her once they met her. If she took the opposite approach, she never would have been able to have the meeting and meet the objective. This participant noted that part of the planning for the meeting included assuming the counterpart would exhibit empathy. She acknowledged that it was as important that the counterpart assessed her intention as much as she assessed the counterpart's intention. Both participants achieved out-sized impact in national security objectives by assuming bidirectional empathy from the counterpart.

In a third case, in a conflict zone, a participant with extensive military experience would sit down with his counterparts and exchange stories of social movements in each of their countries, motivating each other as rebels working with fellow rebels. “We reached a point where they inspired me as much as I inspired them,” he noted, highlighting the importance of relating U.S. history like the Revolutionary War and the Civil Rights Movement to counterparts through visits to the U.S. He emphasized the foundational importance of bidirectional empathy, which transitions into the first stage of implementing strategic empathy: intersubjectivity.

Chapter IV.

Implementation Phase of Strategic Empathy

The implementation phase of strategic empathy is where the practitioner achieves his or her national security goal. The analysis phase focuses on preparation and research, then the implementation phase actively engages the counterpart. It comprises the themes of intersubjectivity, exchange and dialogue, testing assumptions, and leveraging the counterpart to achieve the goals. Sub-themes of listening, trust, and code-switching also emerged, leading to a robust set of best practices for practitioners engaging in strategic empathy.

A Mindset of Intersubjectivity

Intersubjectivity is another concept from sociology that is not necessarily well understood or conceptualized by non-academics in national security. That said, it had one of the highest rates of responses and commonalities in the data among participants, coming up repeatedly as they described their mindset when they interacted with foreign counterparts. On five occasions, variations of the term “non-judgement” was used to describe how participants approached counterparts. Participants advised engaging in “non-judgement,” “not pre-judging him,” trying to “remove judgement,” never thinking of oneself as better, and not judging people even when they did not agree.

The second most common themes, humanity and egalitarianism, were tied at three responses each. Respondents repeatedly noted that they looked at the counterpart as a

human being first and emphasized that the counterpart must be treated with dignity in order to achieve effective national security outcomes. In one of the most extreme examples, the participant above who was responsible for interrogating a detained counterpart was shocked to find the detained counterpart chained up like an animal when he was brought for their meeting. The participant refused to talk to the counterpart until he was unchained and had tea, and only then began to engage with the counterpart to the dismay of the guards. This practitioner emphatically relayed that despite the circumstances of their encounter, the counterpart was still a “human living being.”

The concept of egalitarianism was repeated as foundational to both practicing empathy and being an American national security practitioner. Those who employed that term also used it to refer to how they valued their own country’s background, values, and ideals. One participant focused on the egalitarian American outlook she was raised with in New England where trades jobs and public service were well-respected. She grew up learning not to shame or embarrass people based on their personal backgrounds or income level. Another participant described how even when Americans were the strongest members of a military coalition, he had to put that out of his mind when engaging with counterparts and recognize that every coalition member was equal.

On two occasions, participants highlighted the appropriate way to exercise dominance (or not) in a relationship with a counterpart. One former military participant noted that working in partnership meant sharing the risk burden in a conflict zone without overtly asserting dominance. He shared the story of a U.S. general who was riding in a helicopter with Afghan soldiers when he noticed that the Afghans did not have body armor. The general told them that if they did not have body armor then he did not have it

either, and he took his own body armor off. This burden-sharing story, which became well-known among Afghans at the time, demonstrated intersubjectivity and had a direct impact on the effectiveness of U.S. initiatives.

Another participant with a military background noted that, being a woman, she could not “alpha” her way through problems. As a woman in a society where women were subaltern, though, she was somewhat of a third gender as a western woman. She could ask questions that her male colleagues trying to assert dominance would not, especially if a male colleague was trying to use dominance to control the counterpart. This participant noted that she could be in control of a partnership instead of dominant, which created a different dynamic than some of the relationships created by some of her male colleagues. The idea of control without exercising dominance came up throughout the implementation phase themes. While national security objectives require the practitioner to be “in control” of a situation, the practice of strategic empathy highlights several ways to maintain control without overtly asserting dominance. Mainly, these create mutually enhancing partnerships vice vassal relationships of obligation.

Two additional responses centered on the subjunctive aspects of intersubjectivity, describing how a counterpart may feel “as if” they are a partner, “as if” they are welcomed, or “as if” they are not a spy. In each case, the participant accepted some friction with the bureaucratic components of their organization, which preferred to enshrine a lackey relationship of control with the foreign counterpart. This tendency to frame relationships solely in terms of what one side gives and another side gains was subverted by participants, who used code-switching to enshrine their relationships with counterparts in terms of intersubjective dignity. In another case, the participant made a

foreign counterpart feel welcome and taken care of despite being heavily monitored in a sensitive high-security space.

In addition to repetitive responses, the category of intersubjectivity had some of the highest number of unique responses, resulting in several other best practices that can be folded into strategic empathy. These included: holding a belief that the counterpart is subject to universal human experiences; recognizing that the counterpart might do things differently than Americans but that their way is not wrong; recognizing that inside the counterpart's country the practitioner is subordinate even when their country is stronger; and respecting the counterpart's values without imposing the practitioner's values.

Dialogue and Exchange

This stage in implementing strategic empathy establishes an ongoing, reciprocal dialogue with the counterpart, whether in person or cognitively. This may mean sitting across a table with the counterpart for coffee on a weekly basis, or it may mean steadily researching the counterpart's national security posture. This stage derives from the anthropology idea of gift exchange, in which Mauss asserts that gift exchanges result in intangible gains worth more than the value of the gifts themselves (Mauss 1954, 105).

However, the idea of literal gift exchange did not resonate with the participants, despite the fact that literal gift exchange remains a customary currency in the practice of foreign relations. For these participants, physical gifts tended to be useless or problematic, with two responses noting that physical gifts can be a waste. One participant noted that by giving physical gifts she was unable to get what she wanted from the counterpart. Another participant highlighted that it was essential to know what was important to the counterpart before deciding on a physical gift, highlighting that the

intentionality of the gift was the most important aspect. In addition, the counterpart's perception of the gift was important. It could either backfire or enhance the relationship depending on the counterpart's perception receiving the gift.

That said, every participant identified significant intangible gifts that were exchanged between themselves and counterparts repeatedly over time. One participant even captured the effect of this exchange of intangible "gifts" in a similar way as Mauss, noting that "it's the whole idea of one plus one equals three, right?" These intangible exchanges became the engine for the participants' empathy relationships with their counterparts.

This theme of exchange had the second highest rate of common responses following value salience and equaling intersubjectivity, making it stand out as one of the three main pillars of strategic empathy in practice. On five occasions, the "gift" exchanged was time. One practitioner noted that the biggest gift she could give to a counterpart was her own time; specifically, the opportunity to sit down with a U.S. official and talk about the counterpart's history, life, and struggle. This participant also experienced the thrill of being together with the counterpart, noting that she derived great pleasure out of the encounter. Typically, her goal was to obtain knowledge, and while she was circumspect about how useful that raw knowledge was for the U.S. government, she found it personally useful for herself and her professional objectives.

Another participant consistently described understanding a counterpart as piecing together a mosaic. She equated time filled by idle chitter chatter with grout securing the mosaic pieces together. For that reason, she always let her counterparts vent during the beginning of their meetings before diving into substance. While she observed some of her

male colleagues jumping straight to substance to control the counterpart's apparent focus, this participant filled knowledge gaps about her counterpart that she leveraged later on by taking the time to listen to the counterpart's off-topic venting. Finally, one participant who met regularly with a foreign counterpart developed a competition to exchange the best gossip about the foreign leaders they were following. This seemed trivial at the time, but the participant noted that the exchange of time and gossip stuck with her 25 years later. She believed it improved the sophistication of her analysis, describing it as, "you knead the dough with another person."

On another four occasions, the gift exchanged was care. In some cases this meant physically providing something thoughtful or medical, such as routine physical exams that made the counterpart "feel like they were being taken care of." In other cases it meant providing something commemorative that showed the counterpart that the participant was thinking about them when they were apart.

Family was another common denominator of exchange mentioned in five responses. Participants often analyzed their counterparts from a strategic needs perspective, and found that helping a counterpart's family created a sense of loyalty and mutual obligation. One participant described an incident where his counterpart's livelihood was destroyed after his home office was attacked, preventing him from feeding his family. This participant replaced all of the technology that the counterpart had lost, meaning the counterpart could go back to work to feed his family. That gift became sacred to this counterpart, as it effectively gave him back his professional voice and fed his family.

Sometimes the family exchange centered on family conversations. One participant notably exchanged Oreo cookies from her mother for accountings from her counterpart. The cookies-for-accountings exchange became a running joke, but it was significant with a counterpart whose culture strongly valued the role of the family. This exchange helped bring levity during a stressful time for an already productive partnership. Interestingly, this same practitioner was the most critical about gift-giving; yet, this stand-in of simple Oreos represented family and enhanced her relationship with the counterpart. Finally, another participant actively sought out family similarities during informal conversations with counterparts, finding that family commonality always grew her relationships with counterparts.

The discussion of gifts also surfaced a high number of unique responses that illuminate and round out different ways practitioners seek to leverage exchange as the engine for a dialectic empathic relationship. One practitioner noted, “I think hope plays a really big role.” She described how when she was trying to ask individuals to make big decisions, she would focus on the hope she had for them. She would invite them to have hope together. She leveraged this hope exchange to convince counterparts to relocate for their safety. Sometimes participants exchanged other feelings like safety, security, and being valued. Sometimes the exchange was the dialogue itself that surfaced unexpected examples of solidarity between two individuals from very different backgrounds. When one participant found himself discussing visions of a new government with leaders in Libya he felt emotional, as though he was living through the founding of his own country, sitting with revolutionaries and intellectually imagining a future together through dialogue. When the gift was tangible, especially for official visits, two

participants ensured the gift reflected the rank and culture of the counterpart so that it could be more commemorative of the relationship and less like a souvenir.

Two sub-themes emerged in the discussion of gift exchange and dialogue. As physical gifts were cast aside and participants began talking about intangible exchange, they repeatedly spoke about listening and trust. These two themes resonated so strongly with participants that they came across as braided into the participants' use of strategic empathy. For participants, the goal of the dialogic exchange was trust and the method was listening. One participant tied her national security success to the fact that "I had the ability and the mandate to create relationships based on trust." Another participant highlighted that trust-building with a counterpart improved the sophistication of the analysis she provided to the policymaker. Participants spoke about trust and listening in the following ways:

Trust

Two participants noted that showing an effort to understand something from a counterpart's perspective builds trust, and two participants noted that leaving the formal office environment where people traditionally jockey for position builds trust and rapport. Other trust-building techniques that participants identified included mirroring the counterpart on personal issues, engaging in personal discussions, speaking openly about U.S. government mistakes, talking about religion with religious counterparts as if they shared a spiritual worldview, and engaging face-to-face with counterparts when possible.

Listening

The aspect of listening came up less frequently than trust, and with unique responses. However, several of these responses were poignant and illuminating to the practice of strategic empathy. For example, one participant captured this theme as having the tolerance to listen to the counterpart, not just hearing what they were saying, and to experience that listening somatically while observing the counterpart's reactions. Another participant noted that people are messy and do not share everything. They need time and grace. For another participant, listening meant simply asking what the counterpart needed and listening to what the counterpart said. This same participant developed a technique of being deferential while listening to the counterpart instead of assuming that the counterpart would listen to him because he was in charge. "You want to put them in the catbird seat and listen to them," he said.

The Role of Affect in Implementation

Affect fell on mostly deaf ears in the analysis phase, and many participants pivoted their responses to how they felt when interacting with the counterpart in the implementation phase. Yet, even in the implementation phase, affect remained a touchy subject. While this suggests that affect in strategic empathy for national security practitioners may be an unintended victim of the code-switching phenomenon, participants expressed key observations about how they did or did not leverage affect in their engagements with counterparts. Two respondents spoke about feeling their heartstrings pull during interactions with counterparts, and two believed strongly that engaging with their own emotions helped improve their final product.

In one humorous case, two of the participants, who were interviewed separately, had worked with each other in the past and maintained a collegial friendship. One of the two noted that “cold fish are ineffective” and provided a poignant story about how he leveraged his own experience of affect in an empathetic engagement to strategic national security success. The other participant, his former colleague, noted that in her experiences feeling emotions with a counterpart not only got in the way of what she was attempting to achieve, but often derailed her project away from its objective. In her experience, emotions were something to be kept at bay and managed; it was useful for a counterpart to display emotion, but the practitioner’s role in that moment was to solve the counterpart’s problem for them in a way that achieved the national security objective. In a way that is not different from what her anti-cold fish colleague did, but he let the counterpart’s emotion somatically move over him, giving him goosebumps.

In one example he provided, his influential counterpart in Afghanistan pointed to a building and told the participant how the counterpart’s father had been captured by the Soviets, imprisoned, and executed in that building. “I immediately went back and said we need to tear this down, get rid of it,” the practitioner said, noting, “I did have a strong visceral reaction to that.” The practitioner initiated a project to tear down the building, rebuild a new structure that could give back to the community, and purify the ground through a religious ceremony with a local imam. “I think we saved a lot of lives,” the participant said, describing how the influential community leader he did this for then leveraged his network to identify and eliminate improvised explosive devices before American convoys reached them. This secured U.S. military transportation corridors and prevented civilian and military casualties. When U.S. forces pulled out of Afghanistan

the participant called this same counterpart for help when Bagram Air Base came under threat. This counterpart sent reinforcements to immediately secure Bagram and prevented a strategic disaster.

Testing Assumptions

As practitioners established an ongoing dialogic relationship with the counterpart, they consistently tested the assumptions they had devised in the analytic phase. This unanticipated theme of testing assumptions was brought up by nearly all the participants with a high degree of commonality in the terms they used. Three responses referred to using trial and error methods to adjust their strategic empathy approaches. One respondent offered two similar phrases to illuminate his approach to trial and error: “wash, rinse, repeat,” and “do, observe, adjust.” These three responses highlighted that acknowledging approaches that did not work, cutting losses, and trying again was the key to their success.

Two responses similarly highlighted that if the counterpart is offering easy answers to the practitioner’s questions, the questions are not intense enough. They emphasized that time and repeated interaction are necessary to get an answer that is closest to the counterpart’s most salient value, which leads to points of leverage. This evidence strengthens Yorke’s argument that strategic empathy achieves better outcomes the more iterative and responsive it becomes over time (Yorke 2023, 1083). These responses recommended using open-ended questions grounded in the baseline analysis. One participant noted that she would still sometimes be surprised when a counterpart answered a question in the opposite way than she had expected. By asking open-ended questions, the participant dodged potential adverse reactions from the counterpart and

demonstrated a nonjudgmental interest to further the empathic relationship. These moments of divergence from an expected response mirror what Shore refers to as a pattern break. Shore suggests that these out-of-pattern answers from a counterpart reveal the counterpart's true drivers (Shore 2014, 4-6). The drivers, in turn, become leverage points in the next stage of strategic empathy. The connection between the assumptions testing phase and Shore's original work on strategic empathy highlights how critical it is to test assumptions, even though it takes time and repeated interaction.

Participants also offered two lessons learned from the assumptions testing phase. In one instance, a participant attempted to convince a foreign counterpart to leave their country due to threats to their security. She used an approach that was based on solid analysis, broached the issue in a way that was family-related and based in humanity, and was rejected. The participant noted that there was a higher chance of being rejected if the counterpart was blind-sided about the approach, which also highlights the utility of ongoing interaction that builds trust.

Returning to the story of the PRC's strategic objective to obtain oceanic and atmospheric data on the South China Sea, one participant was responsible for analyzing the PRC counterintelligence threat to her workplace, a public-private national security initiative on space. Coming from an American national security perspective, she observed that her organization defended the space-based programs it considered most sensitive against sophisticated clandestine attacks. However, she kept observing security lapses in atmospheric and oceanic data collection in Southeast Asia. This participant tested her assumptions that a state actor seeking to steal sensitive space secrets would prioritize clandestine attempts to steal space data. Instead, she identified a large number of non-

clandestine, direct approaches by PRC actors offering cash for seemingly non-sensitive data. She learned through testing her assumption that clandestinity is not a hallmark of sophistication.

Self-Other Differentiation

Among participants, the anticipated theme of self-other differentiation presented as the action arm of strategic empathy. In Coplan's definition of self-other differentiation, she notes that it is the ability of the participant to make detached decisions and act in their own self-interest in spite of feeling how the counterpart feels in their situation (Coplan 2011, 16). It is the participant's ability to avoid being overcome and swayed to act in the interest of the counterpart. This is a critical component when applying empathy in national security, and it is an aspect that is often overlooked by the national security apparatus. Even participants in this study who have careers full of empathic interactions with counterparts favored the self-other differentiation aspect of empathy over the affect aspect of empathy, with two participants highlighting the need to put emotions aside so that they do not derail their focus on the objective. One participant noted that she does not emote with counterparts, but rather shifts the lexicon to say that she understands her counterpart's emotions. Another described how emotion could up-end efforts to provide insightful analysis to policymakers, noting that she needed to ensure her own emotion, as well as the emotion of the policymaker reading the analysis, did not influence policy.

With such an importance placed on self-other differentiation by the national security mandate, there were a high number of responses on this topic. While participants did not independently use the philosophy term "self-other differentiation," they instead described it as the ability to give the counterpart what they need in order to achieve

national security objectives. This implies that there is a sliver of mutual interest between a counterpart and a national security objective, even if it is not obvious at first. That sliver of overlap can be leveraged to change a counterpart's behavior in the favor of the national security objective. Self-other differentiation is the ability of the practitioner to craft the connectivity between the national security objective and a goal that the counterpart has that is directly tied to its most salient value.

Interestingly, participants provided diverse commentary on self-other differentiation, which highlights the diverse facets of its implementation. Three aspects were repeated: in three instances, participants leveraged fulfilling a counterpart's own need to achieve the participant's national security objective. One participant noted that striking this balance was "cognitive dissonance at play." She said that she had two roles, protecting the U.S. and its allies, and putting counterparts into danger in order to do that. She described how she walked around with opposing thoughts while making empathetic and strategic decisions in an ambiguous environment. She observed that over-promising and under-delivering led to bad results, and she noted that she often had to walk the line between keeping the counterpart hanging on without setting expectations for the counterpart. Another participant described this as giving the counterpart what they need while keeping the train on track.

In two other instances, participants used their understanding of the counterpart's feelings to accomplish the objective while remaining self-aware. In two instances, participants highlighted that security, self-preservation, and self-control were foremost in their minds even in the face of compelling arguments from a counterpart or outright intimidation and pressure. This prioritization of self-awareness helped preserve the

participants' decision-making in such a way that it was differentiated from the interests of the counterpart. Interestingly, the participant who so disliked processing emotion herself masterfully described how she leveraged the counterpart's emotion to achieve her objective. She would distill one feeling that most motivated her counterpart, and then weave that same feeling into her plan to achieve the objective, tapping back into the counterpart's feeling to keep the counterpart on course.

Participants offered the following additional observations about self-other differentiation. They described a calculating mindset cohabiting with openness toward the counterpart. As a baseline, they observed that the job of accomplishing the national security objective is procedural. When engaging cognitively with a counterpart, self-other differentiation allowed participants to avoid becoming overwhelmed by the counterpart's adversarial success and coolly identify opportunities. Another participant noted that grievances represented wonderful opportunities. Finally, one practitioner observed throughout her career that empathy allowed her to provide better insight to a policymaker who was used to receiving simply information; she observed that empathy-fueled insight helped the policymaker look at something differently. By remaining detached from emotional overwhelm, practitioners were able to identify the behavior they wanted from a counterpart and pull the right a lever of the counterpart's salient value to meet the national security objective.

Eliade's hierophanies represent potential leverage points in this situation. During discussions about a counterpart's most salient values participants identified some instances of levers that tie back to or emanate from the counterpart's most salient value. In three instances, participants articulated that they pulled those levers to accomplish

their national security objective. One participant noted that he would articulate what he observed to be in a counterpart's head or heart, then would get the counterpart to articulate that same thing him or herself. Once the counterpart was articulating it in the participant's words, the participant knew he had hit on the core salient value and had a point of leverage he could pull.

Another practitioner observed that insurgencies need relevance to permeate society and grow. Since relevance is a public-facing concept tied to an insurgency's survival, this practitioner viewed relevance as an accessible lever he could pull to undermine the counterpart's existence as a functioning organization. This same practitioner also observed how the Taliban had effectively leveraged this approach against U.S. interests. He observed that the Taliban correctly identified that the Afghan people's trust in the U.S.-trained and backed Afghan Special Forces was the core element holding society and the government together in Afghanistan prior to 2021. The Taliban identified Afghan Special Forces as the hierophany leading to that core and undermined it with gruesome publicized attacks. This participant recognized that moment as the prelude to the fall of Kabul, since the Taliban had undermined the public's confidence in the most salient aspect of the U.S.-supported Afghan government.

Code-Switching

The practitioners interviewed for this study all pointed to specific strategic national security successes that they had obtained by employing strategic empathy. However, in the midst of their work, they found it disadvantageous to be forthright about their use of empathy when they communicated back to their parent organizations, often based in Washington. These cases are expounded on below, as they highlight the gap

between the larger national security apparatus and its practitioners who are utilizing strategic empathy at an individual level to accomplish the objectives of the larger apparatus.

Lives Saved by Empathically Engaging with a Detained Suicide Bomb Mastermind

In one case described earlier, a participant recounted the time when he was asked to debrief a detained counterpart who had orchestrated centralized suicide bombing campaigns. The counterpart was believed to have knowledge of future suicide bomb operations that could save lives. In devising his approach to the counterpart, the participant researched the counterpart's personal life and decided to engage with him in an intersubjective way about trouble at home with his wife. When the guards detaining the counterpart brought him to the practitioner, counterpart was chained. The practitioner refused to hold his meeting until the counterpart was unchained and both were given cups of tea. When the participant recounted his approach to Washington, he was criticized for being too soft, too kind, and too accepting. The practitioner noted, however, that harshness was not the goal. The goal was to get the counterpart talking, and by doing that he was able to stop market bombings that had been planned. As a result, he saved lives.

Making Headway Against a Strategic Priority by Engaging Disenfranchised Women

Another participant recounted a time when she was attempting to leverage her access to women in countries where they were disenfranchised. Washington once told her, "They're women and they don't matter," and her proposal to engage with the women was dismissed as not viable. Instead of being thwarted, this participant used the system against itself. "I would bend the bureaucracy," she said. "I weaponized the system." She

used discretionary funds, created spin-off initiatives, and gave fast turnaround timelines to engage with the disenfranchised women, whom she found had influence in their families. As a result, she observed tremendous headway in one East African region while her program leveraging access to women was running. This participant observed that metrics-based approaches in Washington clashed with empathy-based approaches in the foreign field.

What Happened with the Counterpart was not Conveyed to Washington

Another participant specifically noted that, “What I actually said and did in meetings was sometimes not what I wrote up.” She described her organization’s headquarters as clinical and incapable of engaging as a real human being. She noted that navigating this gap between a clinical headquarters and a human-facing practitioner was necessary in order to achieve success. “You have to have that room for humanity,” she found, but she also needed to get what she needed from her headquarters. She would not go so far as to do something wrong or misrepresent her actions, but she would refrain from adding details about her counterpart engagements that were not necessary to help her headquarters make its clinical decisions.

An Emotional Encounter Leads to an Infrastructure Project Resulting in Strategic Success

Finally, returning to the story of the building in Afghanistan, a participant had a powerful emotional experience hearing the story of an Afghan community leader’s father who was executed in a building that the participant was responsible for administering. The participant decided, based on the emotion of the story, that the building must go. In Afghanistan, he worked with the local community leader, local community, and a local

imam to purify the ground of the place that held so much trauma for his counterpart and, by extension, the local community. When he conveyed his plan to Washington, however, the participant completely avoided bringing up his emotional encounter and the religious and spiritual cleansing rites. Instead, he simply stated that he demolished an old Russian building used as a torture facility and replaced it with a structurally sound new building used for humanitarian purposes. He did not elaborate further to Washington, but in order to convince the local community that the U.S. government cared about them and their institutions, he had to go through a ritual process with them. He wanted to demonstrate that the U.S. cared about local culture, yet he avoided mentioning the culturally conforming actions he took in his communications with Washington. Crucially, the counterpart maintained significant influence in his community. As noted earlier, the counterpart subsequently leveraged his network to identify and prevent tactical and strategic attacks against soldiers, civilians, and infrastructure.

The codeswitching phenomenon highlights the need for a common understanding of strategic empathy in U.S. national security circles beyond the level of the field-based practitioner. If some of the unnecessary friction between the ways offered by practitioners and the means to effect them provided by the national security apparatus can be bridged, the U.S. could perhaps achieve more of its goals in a more streamlined way. What is troubling about this issue is the white space between the experiences of these practitioners who fought and won against the inertia of the system, and other practitioners who may have given up, failed to convince Washington, or failed to work empathically in the first place. This issue suggests that the U.S. national security apparatus is leaving potential successes on the table out of a fear of engaging with empathy, and a distrust that

its practitioners can use the self-other differentiation aspect professionally. Strategic empathy might be a nice buzzword in Washington, but it has a long way to go there before it can be leveraged at its full potential.

Chapter V.

Final Discussion

This study aimed to develop a cognitive framework for employing strategic empathy. Rather than a framework, however, a distinct process with specific inputs in specific places emerged. Unlike a set of step-by-step instructions, the process is not proscriptive in every detail. It functions more like a braid or a stream emanating from a source, fed by tributaries, and resulting in a waterfall leading to strategic success. Like a river, the process is not instantaneous. It flows and improves with time and repetition. Sometimes it rushes, sometimes it meanders. However, the process that emerged is fortunately not reliant exclusively on expertise. It can be nurtured and grown by generalists to achieve strategic effect on highly specific foreign topics of interest.

Headwaters of Intentionality

The national security practitioner identifies the national security objective he or she seeks to achieve, and the counterpart he or she will engage with to achieve it. The practitioner sets his or her mindset to take the perspective of the counterpart, preparing to see and feel the world through the counterpart's lived experience in order to identify leverage points through which the practitioner will achieve the objective.

Stream of Analysis

Taking the perspective of the counterpart, the practitioner spends time imagining who or what the counterpart is, what its day is like, and what its motivations are by brainstorming, role-playing, and wondering about what experiences shaped the counterpart to lead it to where it finds itself in life.

Tributaries of Research

The practitioner seeks and applies knowledge about the culture of the counterpart, drawing on previous experience and self-awareness to avoid making incorrect assumptions about the counterpart. The practitioner reads a wide variety of literature from the counterpart, from children's songs to autobiographies of leaders. He or she asks open-ended questions in non-official, informal interactions in order to elicit contextual information about the counterpart's life and engages with both dominant and disenfranchised sections of society in the counterpart country to attain nuance in understanding. The practitioner takes time to evaluate this research to identify the counterpart's most salient value, considering the role of universal human needs, weighting ideologies, and asking what issues will change the behavior of the counterpart. When the practitioner is working one-on-one with a counterpart, the practitioner assumes that the counterpart will approach him or her with empathy just as the practitioner is approaching the counterpart with empathy.

Rapids of Implementation

Having identified the counterpart's salient value, the practitioner seeks levers it can push and pull to achieve the desired national security objective. The first step in

doing this is to approach the counterpart in an intersubjective way by exercising non-judgement, always thinking of the counterpart as a human being with equal dignity. As a best practice, the practitioner leaves room to disagree with the counterpart's values or how it does things, and acts deferential to the counterpart when necessary in order to maintain control of the relationship without exercising dominance over the counterpart's identity.

River of Dialogue

The practitioner engages in a dialogue with the counterpart, exchanging time and information with one another. This intangible exchange emphasizes that the participant cares about what happens to the counterpart, and can leverage topics of family, hope, and security. The practitioner achieves this by listening in an intentional and demonstrative way, which achieves trust. Physical gifts are not necessary and should serve instead as a medium for intangible exchanges of time and shared experience or values. Any gifts given should serve as a vehicle for honoring the intangible exchange while being appropriate to rank and culture.

Confluence with Trial and Error

Based on dialogue and analysis, the practitioner makes assessments about levers that would move a counterpart in accordance with the objective. The practitioner tests those assessments to see if they resonate with the counterpart in a process of “do, observe, adjust.” When something does not work, practitioners cut their losses early and try again another way. If counterparts offer easy answers to hard questions, practitioners continue asking the hard questions until a truer motivation arises.

Waterfall of Leverage

Once the right levers are identified, the practitioner offers the counterpart what is desired to enhance its most salient value in exchange for an action or change in behavior that achieves the national security objective. The practitioner does not give in to the counterpart's demands but fulfills the counterpart's needs to the extent that the practitioner's national security objectives are met. This process runs into friction with the U.S. government national security apparatus, and the practitioner engages in appropriately accurate but unemotional messaging to obtain the necessary approvals and resources to enact a plan to achieve the objective by leveraging the counterpart.

Pool of Strategic Success

A policymaker obtains new insight about a problem that changes the way he or she frames possible solutions thanks to sophisticated analysis drawn from counterpart exchanges. U.S. and allied lives are saved after adversary attacks are thwarted thanks to tip-offs from counterparts. Segments of populations in areas challenged by poverty and high radicalization choose not to join terrorist groups after listening to their mothers who now have resources to support them. Sensitive U.S. data no longer leaks to adversaries after security measures inform the workforce about previously unforeseen risks to information security. A family's life is spared after they accept an offer to be relocated away from danger. What else is achieved? What successes have been left on the table when this process broke down?

This research set out to explore the use of strategic empathy in national security, and to come up with a method by which it can be applied. The resulting river method

described here can be tested as a hypothesis in future research on a larger scale to refine and enhance strategic empathy's utility and use in the national security realm.

Appendix 1.

Methods

This research represents an initial step toward a thorough investigation into how strategic empathy is, and can be, applied in national security. The scope of this initial research reflected limitations of time and resources, but provided an initial baseline for how national security practitioners employ strategic empathy. The resulting process can be tested in future ethnographic research on a larger scale, leading to refinement in the application of and instruction in strategic empathy.

Research Design

The goal of this research was to identify a cognitive framework for the application of strategic empathy in national security. The researcher conducted semi-structured phenomenological interviews with six national security practitioners about their engagement with foreign counterparts. Themes resulting from those interviews were analyzed, coding both themes anticipated by the initial academic research on empathy and unanticipated themes that arose during the interviews. The resulting process answered the question of how national security practitioners can use strategic empathy to achieve improved national security outcomes. The qualitative phenomenological research provided an in-depth look at nuance and context when it came to lived experiences engaging empathically with foreign counterparts. The resulting strategic empathy process can be tested in the future with larger-scale ethnographic research on its implementation.

The researcher carried out this research after gaining IRB approval through Harvard University and completing CITI training for conducting research on human subjects. The IRB approved the study protocol and recruitment strategy prior to data collection.

This research was conducted via semi-structured phenomenological interviews with individual national security practitioners. Semi-structured interviews, instead of non-structured or structured interviews, had two main attractions. First, the structured portion of the interview ensured that the researcher addressed common issues among all participants that could be thematically analyzed. Second, it allowed the researcher to ensure that each of the specific themes addressed in the literature was explored vis-a-vis the personal experiences of the participants. That said, these structured questions only guided the interviews. The participants interviewed contributed their own unanticipated themes, which were not previously coded based on academic literature on strategic empathy. By allowing the interviews to flow based on the participants' lived experiences, additional themes came to light that significantly informed the resulting strategic empathy process. The semi-structured interviews focused on the lived experiences of the research participants and explored how they empathically engaged with foreign counterparts in the context of their national security work. The semi-structured interview questions drew from aforementioned interdisciplinary concepts including intersubjectivity, perspectival history, sacredness, somatic and cognitive experiences of affect-sharing, and qualitative experiences of mutual exchange. Some of the themes analyzed in the data were deductively coded based on the themes that structure the interview questions, as derived from the literature review. At the same time, the thematic analysis of the interview narratives revealed additional themes in the empathic experience

of national security practitioners, resulting in reflexive coding. Qualitative thematic analysis of this combination of deductive codes and reflexive codes informed the resulting strategic empathy process.

Participants were recruited through multiple sources, taking into consideration the limitations of time and professional access inherent to this study. The researcher, who is herself a national security practitioner, relied on word of mouth referrals from her professional network in the U.S. government, U.S. Navy War College, and Harvard University, and LinkedIn. Due to time and resource constraints, the researcher elected to work with national security practitioners who no longer worked for the U.S. government. Instead, she accepted referrals from known contacts or recently separated former colleagues. This did not diminish the research, which was designed to examine past lived experiences. That said, the researcher ensured that her research participants had experience working in national security within the past 20 years. Working with former national security practitioners enhanced the reflective nature of the interviews and resulted in thoughtful responses that contributed greatly to the final conclusions. Each research participant expressed willingness to partake in the study, reviewed a consent form prior to participation, and agreed not to discuss any classified information. The participants who were beholden to agreements on having national security discussions about their previous employment pre-approved gave interviews based on pre-approved talking points that they had obtained from their former U.S. government place of employment. Since naming the research participants would not contribute to the research, the researcher instead had each participant provide a description of themselves and their national security background. The six participants included: a former national security

intelligence practitioner working in a dual-use national security technology start-up, a former national security professional working on influence and messaging, a former leadership analyst, a former national security practitioner with a background in intelligence and information operations, a former national security practitioner who works in a public-private partnership on space, and a retired senior intelligence officer.

Data Collection and Analysis

Each interview used the same set of questions to guide the discussion, Appendix ii. The questions delimited the research's definition of empathy to ensure that all subjects were using the same definition. At the beginning of the interview, the participants were also asked to provide their own definitions of empathy. The semi-structured questions explored the intersections of the baseline definition of empathy with concepts from anthropology as identified by recurring themes in the scholarly literature. Each theme was addressed in each interview, but the conversation of the interview was only guided by the questions, not structured rigidly. The goal of the guiding process was to uncover the phenomenological lived experience of each participant by asking them to describe specific situations in which they sensorially and cognitively engaged empathically with a foreign counterpart. I explored not only the outcomes achieved through empathic engagement, but the cognitive and sensory experience that the participants went through as they engaged empathically. Interviews were conducted via an internet-based video chat platform, such as Zoom or Signal, with each interview lasting approximately two hours.

Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher analyzed the narrative results for recurring themes. Some of the anticipated themes resonated strongly with participants

and were deductively coded, and others resonated weakly. The themes that resonated weakly contributed to the identification of unanticipated, reflexively coded, themes that were also coded and addressed with other participants in their interviews. The identified themes that resonated with participants showed a combination of two characteristics. Some highly resonant themes had large numbers of unique responses, and some highly resonant themes had a large density of similar responses. Some themes demonstrated a combination of both, and the results by number of instances of the theme were described in the research. The final analysis led not to a cognitive framework as predicted, but to a clearly defined process that the researcher hypothesizes can be applied by national security practitioners to test whether it achieves positive national security outcomes vis-à-vis foreign counterparts.

The researcher collected demographic information that directly pertained to the lived experiences of the research participants, including nationality, race, ethnic family background, languages spoken, field of expertise, professional acumen, gender, age, religious practice, and in some cases the context in which they grew up. The researcher intentionally aimed to interview at least 50 percent female participants in order to capture any unique lived experiences with regard to empathy that may differ based on gender. While this study did not surface any demonstrable difference in how male and female research participants employed strategic empathy, the cross-cultural lived experiences of female participants gave greater insights into techniques and potentialities of how to apply strategic empathy in cross-cultural contexts where gender roles are lived in highly differentiated ways.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

The research was bounded most significantly by time, which is why the researcher chose to take a phenomenological, qualitative research approach to explore how strategic empathy has been used by national security practitioners, resulting in a hypothesis that can be tested more thoroughly later. The limited time between IRB approval, expected in September 2024, and submission, in early 2025, left little room for ethnographic participant observation of how the national security community engaged strategic empathy. With this small scope to the research, the researcher also sought participants who would not be subject to additional approvals or restrictions on their ability to speak candidly about their lived experiences. For that reason, and to delimit the data in a way that would give it coherence, the researcher recruited only American national security practitioners. Their shared experiences in the context of working on American issues as Americans gave the narrative data a cohesive baseline.

Lived experiences in national security can be limited by classification as well as cognitive bias. In general, individuals who practice national security are cautioned against using affective responses to guide their decision-making and are steered toward objectively analyzing options of rational choices to be made by allegedly rational actors. A discursive hurdle with regard to emotion and empathy persists in relaying narrative lived experiences. This is where the researcher's positionality as a national security practitioner helped explore some of the "tough guy" stereotypes or tendencies among some national security practitioners. Instead of allowing the researcher to elicit somatic affective experiences, however, this shared positionality helped identify the unanticipated theme of code-switching. The ramifications of the code-switching theme help

demonstrate the necessity of future research, and potentially advocate for further investment in teaching strategic empathy as part of the professional acumen in national security.

This research was entirely unclassified, and participants were informed of that on several occasions throughout the selection process, consent form, and at the outset of the interviews. In addition, the researcher ensured that the participants would be able to draw from unclassified lived experiences when conducting the interviews. Some participants confirmed that they were speaking from notes that had undergone pre-publication classification review approval for separate unclassified initiatives that they conduct professionally in their role as former national security practitioners. Likewise, the researcher is a full-time employee as a Foreign Service Officer with the U.S. Department of State and has submitted the public-facing documents supporting this research for pre-publication classification review as required. The researcher did not include any of her personal experience in any of the narrative data collected in accordance with the research protocol. Conducting an unclassified study without the need to identify participants by name helped participants speak candidly about their more intimate phenomenological experiences.

The researcher faced some logistical challenges with the interviews as she moved to Ankara, Turkey for work in September 2024. For that reason, interviews were conducted on video chat platforms such as Zoom, with the participant contributing to the choice of which platform to use depending on their level of comfort with data privacy protections knowing that the researcher was located overseas. While most were done on Zoom, some were done on end-to-end encrypted platforms. Internet bandwidth

sometimes also proved a limiting factor, but this was resolved using different platforms or internet access capabilities. On the whole, the ability to conduct the interviews virtually rather than in person gave the researcher access to a global pool of subjects, and a larger range of experiences.

Finally, this research did not focus on a specific conflict or country. Since the aim of the research was devising a hypothesized process for later testing, the broader focus allowed the researcher to extrapolate a broader hypothesis that can be tested under narrower conditions in future research. Ultimately, this research drew from the lived experiences of national security practitioners from a variety of services who worked in conflict zones, competition zones, peaceful allied interactions, and at the nexus of public-private initiatives. Their experience covered Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Europe, South America, Oceania, and even outer space. By identifying themes across these broad swaths of experience, the resulting hypothesis will be able to be tested more readily in more specific contexts going forward.

Appendix 2.

Interview Protocol

I will use some of these questions, derived from the themes surfaced in my research, to guide each semi-structured interview. I will follow the course of the conversation to collect phenomenological descriptions from each participant.

Background Profile

Describe a snapshot of your national security career for me. What topics and countries have you worked on? Did you engage in face-to-face interactions with foreign counterparts, or did you engage cognitively on the topics of those countries?

Definitions

What does empathy mean to you?

For these purposes I'm using philosopher Amy Coplan's definition of empathy: "complex imaginative process in which an observer simulates another person's situated psychological states while maintaining clear self-other differentiation" (Coplan 2011: 5).

Coplan breaks empathy down into three parts: perspective-taking, affect, and self-other differentiation. For the purposes of this study, perspective-taking is imagining being the counterpart experiencing the counterpart's experiences, rather than imagining being myself undergoing the counterpart's experiences. (Coplan 2011: 13)

Perspective-taking and Imagination

Can you describe a time when you engaged in perspective-taking by imagining yourself as the counterpart? How did you imagine being them? What techniques did you use? What conclusions did this lead you to? What results did that produce, if any?

Alternately, did you imagine yourself being in the counterpart's situation?

Did you ever find yourself trying to translate what was occurring in your imagination into terminology acceptable to your national security peers?

How did you go about that?

What kind of language did you end up using, if any?

What amount of weight did you give to those conclusions that you drew from an imaginative process?

Did you interrogate the results of your imagination with other frameworks of logic or rationality? Please describe what that was like. What led to improved outcomes?

Affect and Emotion

The second category is affect-matching, or feeling emotions and/or physiological sensations in your body. Describe a situation in which you experienced emotional or bodily sensations when you were imagining the situation of a counterpart. For instance, did your heart twinge, or your chest clench, or your stomach sink? How did those manifest in your mind and body?

What conclusions did you draw and apply to your national security work from that experience? What analytical weight did you ascribe to it? Did you discount it, or apply another analytical framework or rationality to the situation? How did this experience affect your conclusions? Was it effective?

Self-other Differentiation

The third category is self-other differentiation. This is the ability to detach and make calculations based on one's own self-interest in response to the information gleaned from affect-matching and perspective-taking. It's a very pragmatic, morally neutral, thing to do in empathy. What role do you think self-other differentiation has in strategic empathy? Can you describe how you have employed it? How have you gone from imagining the position of a counterpart to deriving actions you could take that would advance U.S. interests vis-a-vis that imagination experience? What results of that process made you proud? What results made you uneasy? What role did repeated interaction with the counterpart play in your comfort level? In the effectiveness of your work? Alternately, were you left wanting more interactions? What was that negative space like? How did it impact your analysis?

Inter-Subjectivity

How did you conceptualize your relationship to your counterpart? What made you different from them, and them different from you? What weight did you ascribe to your counterpart's position in the world (for example, geopolitically)? What factors went into that? How did unpleasant information about a counterpart inform your ability to take their perspective? Likewise, how did unpleasant information about the U.S. and its interests inform your ability to take the counterpart's perspective?

As you mentally engaged with a counterpart, how did you think of the counterpart? As a geopolitical entity? As a person? As a group of people? As an objective? As something else? What was effective? What was ineffective? Why?

If you could come up with an analogy of your relationship with a counterpart, what would it be? For example, two friends sitting at a cafe gossiping.

Value Salience

Did you engage in factor analysis or a planning process vis-a-vis a foreign counterpart? How did you think about what the foreign counterpart valued? Did you weight or rank those values? How did you come up with the ranking or weighting? What were the dealbreakers or red lines that you came up with, and why did you choose those topics? How did you ascertain what was important to the counterpart?

Describe how imagination was or was not a part of that process.

How effective was it? Did you turn out to be right or wrong or to be determined?

If I asked you what is most sacred to a certain counterpart, what would you think about that question? How would it cause you to think about a counterpart in a specific situation? Would it change your conclusions, or how you came up with them?

There is a discussion in religious studies and anthropology about sacredness, and how sacredness manifests itself through what are called “hierophanies.” Taking the sacred thing that you identified, how would you see that manifesting in the counterpart? How did you use self-other differentiation to leverage that understanding to advance U.S. interests?

Does thinking about things in this way bring you to useful conclusions? Describe your thoughts. What strengths/pitfalls does such an approach have?

What would you need to know in order to answer the questions: “what is most sacred to the counterpart” and “how does it manifest?”

Does thinking about something in this way feel different to you than doing a more rational, linear process such as data or factor analysis? How so?

Perspectival History

When you are learning about a counterpart, what factors are most important to you to have depth of knowledge? Why? What factors are less important? Why?

What role does history play in how you interact with a counterpart? Can you give me examples of times when history informed an approach you took to an issue with a counterpart?

How did you think about that history? Was it from the viewpoint of the U.S., or from the viewpoint of the counterpart? Which faction within the counterpart? Describe how you have reckoned with considering factions or groups within the counterpart. How has wrestling with the impacted how you approached an issue? How did you articulate and leverage these competing histories or competing interests?

Gift Exchange/Dialogue

Research suggests that dialogue is an important part of empathy because it improves the accuracy of assessments. What has your experience been with dialogue with a counterpart?

What has your experience been with offering something to a counterpart? How has that been the same or different among different counterparts? How does value of an offering change depending on circumstances?

What offerings have been well received? Have you seen any backfire or have no effect? What has been the difference?

How have you thought of or employed the concept of “exchange” in your national security work?

How has that impacted the results achieved?

Describe a time when you had to ask something of a counterpart that was beyond the value of what you had tangibly exchanged with them. For instance, a project that incurred higher risk than U.S. interests were willing to bear. What did you do that made a difference in achieving the desired result? Alternately, what did not work? What would you have done differently?

Baseline

Describe a time when something made you make a face. How did that feel, and how did you go about articulating that to your peers? What role did empathy play in that situation?

Describe a time when you miscalculated or guessed wrong. What happened, and how did you recover from it? What did you do differently afterwards? What role did empathy play in that situation?

Describe a time when you felt as though you were concocting a rationale for something that did not feel genuine vis-a-vis a counterpart; where you felt as though you were forcing a square peg into a round hole. How did you articulate that? What ended up being the friction in that situation? What resolved the friction? What was the result? How did you and the counterpart feel about that? What role did empathy play in that situation?

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