

## NATIONAL STRATEGY – LINKAGE BETWEEN NATIONAL IDEAL AND NATIONAL INTERESTS –

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*The report examines the main factors, characteristics and elements of national power, the formulation of national interests and objectives, emphasizing the bridging role of national strategy. The national strategy articulates the ways to achieve national goals, where a connection is made with national power. Therefore, the article focuses on working definitions of national power and national strategy, as well as on the linkages between national power, national interests, and national strategy. In addition, the importance of defining the national interests and goals is depicted.*

*Keywords: national strategy; national ideal; goals; power; policy;*

### INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of the 21st century, numerous conflicts have unfolded, including a recent one on European soil. The underlying causes of these conflicts and the resulting armed confrontations (wars) echo Clausewitz's definition, which states that: "war is simply a continuation of political relations with the addition of other means" (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 605). Later in the same chapter, Clausewitz emphasizes that "we deliberately use the phrase <with the addition of other means> because we also want to make it clear that war does not in itself stop political communication or transform it into something entirely different" (ib.).

The conclusions to be drawn from these two quotes are that wars emerge as a consequence of pursuing political objectives within a strategic framework. In this framework, national interests are clearly articulated, national goals are explicitly defined, and the state's instruments of power and resources are identified and mobilized to achieve these objectives. National goals and interests are dynamic and continually evolving. Similarly, national power and security are intrinsically linked to these goals. Thus, it can be concluded that power serves both as a means to achieve national interests and as an end in itself.

An objective expression and primary manifestation of national power lies in the implementation of national strategy. Conversely, the strength and effectiveness of national power are significantly influenced by the quality of the national strategy.

To analyse the relationship between national strategy, national ideal, and national interests, a systemic approach has been employed. This approach uses a cyclical, reversed application of analytical and synthetic methods, relying on systemic decomposition and aggregation.

### WORKING DEFINITIONS OF NATIONAL POWER, NATIONAL STRATEGY, NATIONAL IDEAL, NATIONAL INTEREST

National power, as a geopolitical concept, affects the mass characteristics of the state, which represent the sum of their capabilities and potential. There are many definitions of national power, but we will use only three of them that reveal the connection between national power and national interests:

- **National power** consists of the material and spiritual capabilities that exist in a geographical and political unit called a state or government (Hafeznia, 2003, p. 51);

- **National power** means the ability, potential, and capacity of a nation and state to use its material and spiritual resources to impose its will to achieve its national interests and goals (Shuofeng, 1992, p. 102);
- **National power** can be defined as the country's ability to pursue strategic goals through purposeful action.

Taking into account the above-mentioned aspects, national power could be viewed through two distinct but related dimensions: an external dimension, which consists of the nation's ability to influence the global environment through its economic, political, and military potential, and an internal dimension, which consists of the nation's ability to transform society's resources into actionable knowledge (Angelov, 2018, p. 87).

Strategy (Wikipedia.org, 2023), derived from the Greek term *στρατηγία*, *stratēgia*, meaning “art of military leadership, office of military commander, command etc.”, refers to a high-level plan designed to achieve one or more objectives under conditions of uncertainty. Its importance stems from the limited availability of resources to achieve these goals. Strategy typically involves setting objectives, identifying actions required to accomplish them, and mobilizing the necessary resources. In essence, strategy outlines the approach to achieving final objectives by aligning actions with available resources. Similarly, in organizational studies, defining strategy is a key responsibility of management. A strategy may emerge as a template or model for activity. The process of creating a strategy involves complex practices such as strategic planning and strategic thinking.

Comparing the two definitions, it is evident that strategy shares several components with doctrine, such as establishing goals, determining methods to achieve them, and allocating resources. However, strategy is generally constrained by a specific timeframe and focuses on shorter-term objectives. Fundamentally, strategies serve as tools and approaches for realizing national interests and achieving overarching objectives. An example of this concept in practice is the “*Updated National Security Strategy*” adopted in 2018 (National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2024).

The concept of strategy is neither straightforward nor universally understood. Over time, the term “*strategy*” has become a cliché, often used casually in everyday conversations and media to refer broadly to plans, concepts, courses of action, or visions across personal, organizational, and governmental levels. However, it lacks specificity in defining the conditions under which the strategic development process begins, the foundation for analysing the security environment, and how these factors influence the identification of national interests, policies, goals, and the means to achieve them.

Simply put, strategy at any level is a framework of goals, resources, and action plans within acceptable risk boundaries, designed to create more favourable outcomes than would naturally occur or might otherwise benefit third parties. One definition describes strategy as “*the art and science of developing and using instruments of national power to synchronize and integrate ways to achieve national and multinational goals*”. While both definitions offer valuable insights, neither of them fully encapsulates the role and complexity of strategic thinking at the highest levels of governance. Strategy strives for synergy and balance among goals, concepts and resources to enhance the likelihood of success in government policies and amplify the impact of that success.

Additionally, strategy serves as a comprehensive plan to connect the present with a desired future. At the state level, it involves employing specific instruments of power – diplomatic, economic, military and informational – to achieve political objectives, often in collaboration or competition with other actors pursuing potentially conflicting goals. In essence, strategy is the application of state power, leveraging natural and societal resources, to fulfil political aims within a dynamic and competitive strategic environment.

A foundational assumption of national strategy is that all nation-states and non-governmental organizations have interests they seek to advance. These interests represent desired end states, often categorized as survival, economic prosperity, a favourable global order, or enduring national or group values. Derived from these broad categories, interests are shaped by the strategic environment and can be further refined in relation to specific issues. The elements of national power serve as the resources used to safeguard or promote these interests.

The national ideal for every nation and state expresses its great, supreme goal, which represents a kind of connection between past, present and future. The ideal is a dynamic category reflecting specific historical goals and objectives. The same directs the focus of the nation to the unity of specific national values, which largely reveal the historical aspirations and the aspirations of the nation, as well as to forming the idea of its own vocation.

The national ideal, on the other hand, is also the basis of the nation's political philosophy and culture, which is the basis for forming and preserving national self-awareness. It is a unique reflection of various aspects of the nation's life and activities in political, military, economic, cultural and social terms. The same, in addition to the possessed quantitative and qualitative characteristics, in different historical periods were carriers of different weight coefficients.

National interests are a rapidly changing (dynamic) function of the national ideal. They represent the general need of the nation to express its rights and claims by referring to its historical development. They could refer to territories, population, cultural monuments, preservation of historical memory, as well as to everything related to increasing its spiritual and material condition. Expectations from the realization of national interests are the receipt of certain benefits.

National interests, on the other hand, are the ways to achieve the national ideal. They are the active component that, depending on changes in the security environment, can be modified and shaped over time. On the other hand, national interests are perhaps among the most significant functions of the national power of the modern state.

The concept of national interest has been used for many years by politicians and statesmen as the main criterion in assessing threats to the existence and prosperity of the nation in any crisis situation caused by geopolitical, regional and local changes, as well as in the analysis and evaluation of the appropriate actions by the state. The concept dates back for centuries and is associated, in particular, with the formation and development of the nation-state in the 16th and 17th centuries. Moreover, there have always been difficulties in reaching agreement on a precise definition of the concept of national interest. Even today, we have political and military leaders, diplomats, and scientists who talk about the “*national interest*” in the emergence of various international situations, without defining its meaning or under what exact criteria they have reached their conclusions. In this aspect, Professor Frankel finds acceptable the Brookings Institution’s definition of “*national interest*” as “*the common and permanent ends for which a nation acts*” (Rosenau, 2006, p. 36).

### ASPECTS OF NATIONAL IDEAL

The national ideal is, as mentioned, a reflection of the most representative aspects of the nation’s life and activities as follows:

❖ **The political aspects** of the national ideal express the desire for the development of the nation, its unification and generation of sufficient national power to declare itself to the world as a country with sufficient power. Moreover, the national ideal is its basis for guaranteeing the national independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state, as well as for the construction of an independent, sovereign and strong state. All this leads to an increase in the self-confidence of the nation, upgrading the dignity and pride of the citizens of the country, and subsequently, after the generation of sufficient power and self-confidence, to the increase in its international authority (Nejkova, 2022, p. 75);

❖ **The economic aspects** are an expression of the state’s ambitions to ensure the well-being of every individual citizen by improving working and living conditions, increasing employment for more and more people. The increase in the national capital also leads to the so-called economic nationalism, which is a consequence of an increase in the national production and therefore the gross domestic product (GDP), which in turn leads to an increase in the competitiveness and quality of the goods and services offered;

❖ **Military aspects** reflect the country’s national power and are a guarantor of the country’s sovereignty and independence. At the same time, taking into account the complex geopolitical situation in the region and the world as a whole, it is necessary for any country to maintain armed forces capable of dealing with possible challenges dictated by the rapidly changing security environment and to “*guarantee the sovereignty, security and independence of the country and to protect its territorial integrity*” (Parliament, 2007);

❖ **Geopolitical aspects** are the basis of the national ideals of each and every nation. In such a context, nationalism is a democratic factor as well as a factor for establishing peace and regional security.

❖ **The cultural aspects** of the national ideal are a direct reflection of the desire for continuous development of the nation in spiritual and intellectual terms. Culture and education are among the fundamental factors for the formation and strengthening of national identity, as well as for its preservation. Therefore, efforts to increase the education and culture of the citizens of the state are of utmost importance for achieving the national ideal.

When formulating the national ideal, it is necessary to approach it extremely carefully, taking into account the distinctiveness of the era to which it refers, in order to determine the ways and means of its achievement. On the other hand, in order to accomplish this ideal, it is necessary for the leaders to be nationally responsible and to define and achieve the short- and long-term goals of the state, as well as to formulate national interests.

### HISTORICAL APPROACH TO NATIONAL INTERESTS AND GOALS

From ancient times, national interests have determined relations between states in a given region or on a global scale. National interests are, as above-mentioned, a dynamic function of the national ideal, an active component that, depending on the changes in the security environment, can be modelled in time.

National goals and interests (Teodosiev, 2022) are not stagnant; therefore, they are active and changing. National power and national security are among

the national goals that state governments try to achieve with the tools used to increase national power. National interests are the main driving force of any nation and can be pointed for solving foreign and internal political issues.

Depending on their subject of action, national interests are rationally grouped as: political; economic; cultural; geopolitical etc. They must support the formulation of policies for implementing the set national goals. For example, the Bulgarian national interests from the liberation (1878) until today have not been developed correctly, systematically and consistently, in terms of not only their definition, development and formulation, but also their achievement. In the scientific development and formulation of national interests, it is necessary to pay particular attention to the historical development of issues of national importance (Zahariev, 2022) and to analyse the needs for solving these issues and the contributions they would bring to the nation after their realization. On the other hand, it is necessary to draw lessons not only from the successes and achievements, but also from the accumulated negative experience in their implementation. Our history is rich with such negative examples. These examples include those mistakes that have caused damage to the Bulgarian national cause. Today, we call many of them political absurdities leading to national catastrophe. They are political absurdities because they were formulated without deriving from the national ideal of Bulgaria and without defining the national goals. As mentioned above, national interests are the means of achieving the ideal of any country and therefore must be fully directed for its realization. In addition, the interests need to be derived from the national goals and therefore to be leading for the nation for a long period (at least twenty-five years).

National interests should describe how the state would fulfil its strategic goals, which should be open and extend beyond the country's territory. The focus of interests should not be directed to territorial claims to neighbouring countries or to the acquisition of foreign resources, but to maintaining national self-awareness of all citizens located outside the territory of the state. The main goal of every country should be the preservation of its national and cultural identities, the protection of the rights and interests of citizens, as well as the assistance in supporting the country in all international institutions.

When determining national interests, it is necessary to approach them with moderate realism, excluding the extremes leading to unjustified maximalism or to nihilism, which in turn can be extremely harmful. Therefore, a balance must be found between the important needs and the possible harmful consequences that would arise from their realization.

The determination and realization of national interests should not be subordinated to the political biases of one party or a coalition of parties, because over the years politicization and political extremes have often left a negative imprint on the determination and realization of national interests. Moreover, in the implementation of national interests, it is necessary to ensure continuity and consistency for their realization. In order to achieve it, national consent is needed, putting the interests of the nation before the interests of individual parties, factions and groups.

In order to determine whether the national interests are formulated correctly, it is necessary to create and use criteria. These criteria should support the work of the ruling political elite to determine:

- whether they contribute to the realization of the national ideal;
- their contribution to the protection of the freedom and independence of the nation and the state;
- the degree of risk for the state in the consistent defence of the formulated national interests.

Therefore, from everything that has been mentioned so far, it can be concluded that national interests are the main driving force of every nation and state. They are based on the national ideal and the national goals of the state, determining the national and state policy. The implementation of the same should be the primary (main) task of all political leaders, politicians and public figures, whose duty is to ensure the well-being of each individual citizen of the state, as well as the prosperity of the nation.

### **THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN NATIONAL POWER, NATIONAL INTERESTS AND STRATEGY**

National power has the rare ability to develop and expand continuously, provoking states to permanently generate more and more power and, accordingly, improve their place in the system of international relations. Therefore, it can be concluded that national power is active in nature. It can often be seen as a national goal and can be used as a tool to achieve national goals as well.

When formulating a national strategy, one of the most important things is the correct determination and definition of goals. All too often, strategy development does not take sufficient time to consider appropriate objectives in the context of desired policy, national interests, and the security environment.

National goals and interests are also active and constantly changing. National power and national security are among the national priorities that state governments

try to realize using levels of national power. Therefore, national power could be seen as both a goal and as a means of government to achieve national goals and interests.

The national security strategy is both an objective form and a basic manifestation of the application of national power. The national strategy, on the one hand, is a strategic document of the state for presenting the ways to achieve the most effective model of national power, and on the other hand, its implementation is directly dependent on the level of national power.

Talking about strategy, it could be said that, in general, it is defined by the art of the political leaders of a country to consider the capabilities, opportunities and level of national power, on the one hand, and the achievement of its national interests and goals, on the other hand. As a next step, they must define and adopt policies to achieve national goals and interests using the level of national power reached.

The main motive for increasing national power is the lack of resources, because “the lack of sufficient available resources to achieve national goals activates the motivation to increase power to achieve these goals” (Seifzadeh, 1997, p. 144).

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it can be determined that national interests are gritty because of the assessment of the security environment (global and internal for the respective country). On the one hand, the assessment of national power is used to analyse the security environment and determine the place and role of the respective state in international relations and its influence internationally, as well as in the process of determining the desired end state (national interests and goals). On the other hand, the factors and elements of national power are also the means for realizing national interests and goals. Therefore, the national security strategy simultaneously uses the same for the assessment and analysis of the security environment, as well as for resource provision, the fulfilment of national interests. Moreover, it can be unconditionally concluded that strategy is the connecting link between national power and national interests.

Therefore, there is a threefold relationship between national power, national interests and national strategy. The quality of satisfying national interests depends on the level and quality of the national power of the country. To establish a relationship between these two variables, national interests and national power, strategy plays an important role as a link between these two phenomena – power and its instruments, on the one hand, and purpose, on the other hand. Therefore, it is assumed that strategy is the art of applying national power to achieve national goals (Ib., p. 302).

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