Strategy in the United States tends to overly fixate on threats and backwards plan from failure. When one couples this tendency with our obsession in the belief that degrees of violence lends strategic meaning, it leaves us with strategies that tend to be overly reactive and tactical in character, and superficial in nature.

Further complicating our perspective is, being very ideological as a nation ourselves and born of insurgency, we tend to be excessively paranoid of competing ideologies and the nations, VEOs and insurgencies that employ them. George Washington warned us about binning others out as being inherently friend or foe, but we tend to do so all the same. While this worked reasonably well for Cold War Containment, it has become increasingly problematic in the era since. Yet, as we lean forward with strategies focused on competition short of armed conflict, we combine all of these sins, backwards planning from war, binning by ideologies, and focusing on threats.

I take a different approach; primarily because I think the other ground is both well covered and not that particularly helpful.

My goal is to gain a fundamental understanding of a problem and to create context for particular situations. For me this is an art of thinking about constants and variables and how they interact with each other. I try humbly to apply an approach similar to how I understand Einstein approached complexity and trying to understand things that one can’t really measure. While his work was in the realm of physical nature, our work is in the realm of human nature.

For human endeavors, human nature is a constant. Not an absolute constant, but one that is “constant enough” to help form effective strategic frameworks. Geography is also a constant. There are always many variables, some important, some not. Our challenge is to appreciate those that are important and how they are most likely to interact with the constants in our nature.

In the current era I think the really fascinating variables are tied to the technologies that have served to empower populations relative to government; thereby shifting the relative balance of power. Everything human, however, is also shaped by physical factors, such as geography and climate. While the number factors and possible combinations of their interactions can be mind-numbingly complex; if we can step back a bit perhaps we can see patterns that help us focus on what is truly important.

The few slides I offer here, along with the diagrams, all poached from the internet, are intended to facilitate a discussion to that end. This is a simple journey to help re-blue our thinking on the role of geography in competition and governance. Climate change is one of those variables that demands our full consideration as we look at the competition between those revisionist nations currently operating from “the heartland” and those nations operating and living among “the Rimland” and “World Islands” who would prefer some semblance of the status quo.

Power is not just shifting from governments to populations, and between nations. But the relative power of geography is shifting as well.