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Alasdair Roberts

## STRATEGIES FOR GOVERNING

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### BOOK ABSTRACT

The field of American public administration must be reinvented to meet the needs of the twenty-first century. For the last forty years, the field has focused too much on mid-level problems of public management. A new approach should concentrate on bigger, macro-level problems of governance. Leaders of states are concerned with the design, execution and adaptation of strategies for governing: that is, overall plans that describe national priorities and how they will be achieved. Public administration is concerned with the design and operation of institutions so that they give expression to strategy, and with crafting strategies that are administratively practicable. Strategies for governing should be effective, durable and normatively defensible. It is hard to achieve these three objectives in a complex and turbulent world. Strategy and institutions must be renovated constantly to keep up with new conditions and priorities. Experts in public administration should be realists, constantly on the lookout for new threats that may require adjustments in strategy. We must also recognize that the United States is in many ways not exceptional: it is possible to learn about strategy-making from the experience of other states.

### BOOK KEYWORDS

Public administration, public management, strategy, planning, governance, institutions, realism, research, teaching, practice, United States.

## CHAPTER ABSTRACTS AND KEYWORDS

### INTRODUCTION: TIME FOR A NEW APPROACH

*Abstract.* The field of American public administration has taken a wrong turn. For four decades, it has been preoccupied with middle-level problems of managing government programs. Increasingly, critics complain that big questions about the role and overall design of government are neglected. American scholarship has also become disconnected from the concerns of scholars and practitioners in other countries. A new approach to the study of public administration is needed, focused on how national leaders design and execute strategies for governing. This book describes this new macro-level approach and shows how it can improve research, teaching and practice in public administration.

*Keywords.* Public administration, public management, statebuilding, strategy, governance, research, teaching, practice.

### 1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSITIONS

*Abstract.* This book outlines a new approach to public administration, centered on challenges of designing and executing strategies for governing. The new approach can be distilled into sixteen propositions. These include propositions about the centrality of the state and the importance of national leaders in determining the architecture of the state. Leaders invent strategies for pursuing their priorities and try to design the state apparatus so that it gives expression to strategy. The design and execution of strategy is challenging for many reasons, including goal conflicts, turbulence in governing conditions, and uncertainty about cause-effect relationships.

*Keywords.* Public administration, strategies for governing, states, leaders, goals, uncertainty, turbulence, exceptionalism.

## 2. ACKNOWLEDGING THE STATE

*Abstract.* In other disciplines, the importance of the state is taken for granted. But the concept has been neglected in the domain of public administration in recent years. The main elements of a state can be identified. A state may be defined as a set of institutions that achieves effective control over a territory, whose right to exercise authority is acknowledged by other states and the governed population. A distinction must be drawn between states and nation-states. Recognition of the importance of states does not imply a commitment to statist philosophies of government.

*Keywords.* State, institutions, recognition, legitimacy, nation-state, statism.

## 3. STATES AND SOCIETIES

*Abstract.* States can be understood as entities that exist in relation to two forms of society. They are members of a society of states, which is largely regulated through diplomacy and international law, as well as through the threat or use of force. States also have a relationship with domestic society: that is, the governed population. The state is often portrayed as wielding absolute authority over this society, but the reality of governance is flatter and more equivocal. Leaders are engaged in a constant negotiation with subjects who often have substantial capacity to resist state power.

*Keywords.* States, society of states, world of states, international law, societies, legitimacy.

#### 4. LEADERS AND THEIR GOALS

*Abstract.* Within every state there is a group of people who have a large degree of control over state power. We can call these people leaders or rulers. We can define the set of goals that leaders are likely to pursue. These include survival in office, the extension of power and legitimacy within the state's territory, the extension of power and legitimacy within the state system, the increase of national prosperity, and ideally the advancement of human rights. Leaders engage in a distinctive form of reasoning, *raison d'état*, concerned with the advancement of these goals in a complex and turbulent world.

*Keywords.* Rulers, leaders, goals, power, legitimacy, human rights, *raison d'état*.

#### 5. STRATEGIES FOR GOVERNING

*Abstract.* Leaders develop an overall view about how state authority ought to be exercised, which can be called their strategy for governing. Every strategy includes an understanding about the relative priority of goals as well as the best methods of pursuing those goals. Governance strategies differ substantially between countries and over time. Strategies can be evaluated according to three criteria: whether they are likely to be effective on their own terms, whether they are likely to be durable, and whether they are normative defensible. The concept of a strategy for governing is broader and more realistic than the concept of grand strategy that is used in the field of international relations.

*Keywords.* Strategy, Strategies for governing, grand strategy, typologies of states, evaluation of strategy, international relations.

## 6. FACTORS AND FORCES

*Abstract.* Decisions about strategy are influenced by leaders' assessment of threats and opportunities within a particular set of circumstances. Early scholars of public administration often talked about environmental factors and forces. These are still useful concepts, albeit with distinct meanings. The most important factors include geography and climate, aspects of demography, economic structure, the inventory of available technologies, and the distribution of power within the state system.

*Keywords.* Strategy, environment, factors, forces, geography, climate, demography, technology, economy, power.

## 7. LAWS, ORGANIZATIONS, PROGRAMS, AND PRACTICES

*Abstract.* The state is constituted by a set of institutions, otherwise known as an institutional complex, which can also be regarded as an expression of strategy. There is debate about how to define institutions. Some popular definitions are too broad to be useful. Four particular kinds of institutions are of interest: laws, organizations, programs, and informal practices.

*Keywords.* Strategy, state, institutions, laws, organizations, programs, practices.

## 8. ASPECTS OF INSTITUTIONAL STEWARDSHIP

*Abstract.* The attention of leaders is focused on institutions because institutions are the means by which life is breathed into governance strategies. Leaders must attend to four tasks: design of new institutions; consolidation or "locking-in" of new institutions; administration or management of existing institutions; and adaptation, which is the renovation of institutions in response to changing conditions. Renovation of the state complex is a never-ending project. A central question that

deserves more consideration is the extent to which institutions are “sticky” or malleable. There is also a tension between the drive to consolidate institutions and the need to preserve adaptability.

*Keywords.* Institutions, design, consolidation, administration, management, adaptation, reform.

## 9. CHALLENGES IN STRATEGY-MAKING

*Abstract.* Leaders encounter five difficulties while crafting strategies for governing. The first is conflict between goals. The second is uncertainty about the most effective techniques for achieving goals. The third is the management of cultural and institutional inheritances. The fourth is turbulence in the governing environment, which forces a constant recalibration of priorities and policies. The final challenge is that of managing analytic complexity – that is, the task of quickly acquiring knowledge and making decisions on large and complicated questions.

*Keywords.* Strategy, decision-making, priorities, uncertainty, complexity, institutional inheritances.

## 10. THE STRUGGLE FOR MASTERY

*Abstract.* Leaders in every state seek more control over circumstances, although liberal democratic states are designed to limit the ways in which leaders may pursue that objective. The first step in improving mastery over circumstances is improving knowledge over governed territory. The next step is deeper understanding of domestic and international systems. Leaders also need tools or technologies that will allow them to influence the behavior of these systems. Leaders build administrative capacities that are intended to extend their control. However, they frequently overestimate the extent of their control and are compelled to retreat from policies that over-reach and fail.

*Keywords.* Control, surveillance, systems, capabilities, overstretch, failure.

## 11. DANGER, STRATEGIC INSTABILITY, AND REALISM

*Abstract.* The concept of realism, familiar in international relations, should be used in public administration as well. Realists believe that the world is a dangerous place. Risks may be related to domestic as well as international affairs. Leaders attend to these risks as they craft strategies for governing: that is, they are engaged in the work of threat management. Leaders also understand that strategies are usually unstable or fragile. Strategies require constant reworking to preserve their effectiveness in managing risks to essential interests. Many early scholars in public administration thought this way and could be counted as realists.

*Keywords.* Strategy, realism, instability, fragility, Machiavelli.

## 12. TIME AND PROGRESS

*Abstract.* Researchers in public administration need to reconsider the timeframe that they apply in their analyses. Too much contemporary research relies on a short timeframe. Presentism skews our judgments about the malleability of institutions and blinds us to socio-economic forces that operate slowly. We should also reassess assumptions about progress. The idea that there must be continual progress is relatively new. A more realistic view is that progress will be punctuated by moments of stagnation or reversal, which may be caused by the exhaustion of specific strategies for governing as circumstances change.

*Keywords.* Timeframes, presentism, progress, institutions, reform.

## 13. UNEXCEPTIONALISM

*Abstract.* Another bias in American public administration is exceptionalism: the idea that there is something unique about governance in the American context. The notion that the United States is

an anomaly among western states is misguided. In addition, there are commonalities between American experience and that of many non-western countries. In fact, scholars in many countries tend to think that their national experience is exceptional. A more accurate view is that leaders in all states face a similar task – crafting effective strategies for governing – in circumstances that are varied but rarely unique.

*Keywords.* Exceptionalism, United States, Europe, strategy, circumstances.

#### 14. EFFICIENCY OR EXTRAVAGANCE

*Abstract.* We can identify a number of tensions that arise frequently as leaders craft strategies for governing. One of these recurrent tensions is between efficiency and extravagance in the design of policies. Since the 1970s, public management research has emphasized efficiency. But it often makes sense for leaders to apply more resources to a task than are strictly necessary to accomplish it. For example, this is true when states are attempting to establish control and deter challenges to their authority. Leaders may also use inefficient policies to obscure their actions, again with the aim of minimizing protest or resistance.

*Keywords.* Strategies, policy design, efficiency, authority, architecture.

#### 15. TIGHT OR LOOSE CONTROL

*Abstract.* Another dilemma in strategy-making relates to strictness of control. Leaders must choose whether to monitor and regulate behavior loosely or intensively. Considerations of principle – such as respect for fundamental rights – often weigh in favor of loose control. Necessity – for example, national emergency -- affects choices about the extent of control as well. So, too, does available administrative capacity. Centralized control may undermine legitimacy if there are sharp differences about what the substance of national policy should be.

*Keywords.* Control, decentralization, rights, capacity, legitimacy.

## 16. SEPARATION OR CONNECTION

*Abstract.* While crafting strategies for governing, leaders must decide how seriously they will take borders. The boundary lines of a state may allow greater or lesser flows of people, information, money, and goods. The question of whether to have hard or soft borders – impermeable or permeable – is shaped by many considerations, including national security, economic growth, internal cohesion, and human rights. American attitudes on this question have varied over the long run. Today, there are many reasons why American leaders must look beyond their borders: the challenge is to do this without appearing to abandon people back home.

*Keywords.* Strategy, borders, openness, growth, trade, security, human rights.

## 17. PRESENT OR FUTURE

*Abstract.* Leaders wrestle with another border as they craft strategies for governing: the temporal divide between present and future. Leaders constantly tinker with institutional design to strike the right balance between the interests of current and future generations. It is sometimes said that democratic systems are more prone to shortsightedness, but this claim deserves close scrutiny. Even authoritarian systems behave myopically in the drive to maintain legitimacy. Competition within the state system also encourage states of any type to focus on the short term.

*Keywords.* Planning, presentism, myopia, democracy, authoritarianism

## 18. COMMITMENT OR EQUIVOCATION

*Abstract.* In recent decades, experts have emphasized the need for leaders to demonstrate “credible commitment” to key policies. There are good arguments in favor of commitment: for example, it

encourages non-state actors to make socially desirable investments. But leaders may also have good reasons to avoid commitment. One is the desire to avoid being “locked in” to policies that may have to be abandoned when overall strategy changes. Leaders must wrestle with the conflict between commitment and equivocation on key policies. Several techniques may be used to manage this conflict.

*Keywords.* Strategy, Credible commitment, commitment devices, equivocation, compromise

## 19. PLANNING OR IMPROVISATION

*Abstract.* Leaders must make a decision about how much to plan: how comprehensively, and in how much detail. Enthusiasm for large-scale and detailed planning boomed and collapsed in the twentieth century. Planners ran into three difficulties in the latter part of the twentieth century: public resistance to detailed regulation; evidence that comprehensive plans were unworkable in practice; and lack of adequate knowledge about the social and economic systems that were being regulated. The backlash against planning may have gone too far. Leaders should plan while being realistic about the limits of planning.

*Keywords.* Planning, expertise, feasibility, unintended consequences

## 20. RESEARCH

*Abstract.* The new approach to public administration outlined in this book will have implications for research. Researchers need to focus on broader questions of governance using a wider range of methods. Fears that this will result in a loss of rigor or the production of less reliable knowledge are overstated. The reorientation of research will not be easy: it requires alterations in the way that graduate students are taught, in the behavior of leading journals, and in procedures for assessing academic achievement.

*Keywords.* Public administration, research, methods, rigor, relevance.

## 21. TEACHING

*Abstract.* This new approach to public administration will also require changes in the curricula of undergraduate and graduate programs. The required adjustment is not radical. Courses should be added that encourage students to think systematically about the big picture. A model is provided by programs in international relations, which often begin by providing students with a broad view of the forces that shape the content of foreign policy. Some variant of this approach is required in public administration.

*Keywords.* Public administration, teaching, curriculum, courses.

## 22. PRACTICE

*Abstract.* This new approach to public administration will influence professional practice in two ways. At higher levels of government, we can show leaders how to improve their skill in crafting, executing, and adapting strategies for governing. At lower levels of government, it is also helpful to understand how strategies are designed, executed and adapted. Strategy determines the boundaries of action throughout government: it determines which policies are politically practicable, and which are not. Experience gained at the frontline of government should also shape top-level decisions about the design and reform of overall strategy.

*Keywords.* Strategy, practice, reform, policy diffusion

## CONCLUSION: GRAND CHALLENGES

*Abstract.* In 2018, the National Academy of Public Administration solicited comment on “grand challenges of public administration” over the next decade. The Academy was responding to broad

confusion about governance strategy in the United States since the financial crisis of 2007-08. Unfortunately, the field of public administration is not adept in addressing grand challenges. We have lost the capacity to think systematically about this subject. The approach outlined in this book will help to remedy this problem. We will revive a way of thinking that was familiar to scholars of public administration decades ago. As in the early twentieth century, the task today is to design a strategy for governing that is effective, durable, and consistent with liberal democratic principles.

*Keywords.* Public administration, grand challenges, liberal democracy, authoritarianism.

## A GLOSSARY OF STATES

*Abstract.* Academics constantly identify new types of states. Their labels may refer to features or circumstances (for example, fragile states or frontier states) and sometimes to priorities and strategies of leaders (for example, developmental states or welfare states). This practice of labelling states is problematic, because no single adjective describes all of the conditions that influence strategy or all critical elements of the strategy itself. Still, it is useful to note the many state-types that have been identified over the last century. It shows that leaders can respond to circumstances in many ways, and that the form of states changes constantly.

*Keywords.* States, typologies, strategy, public administration.